Chapter 4

Authority, Power and the Female Grotesque

In this chapter I discuss the female grotesque with special reference to the figure of the disorderly ‘woman-on-top’ in the context of power and authority in early modern patriarchy. The chapter is divided into two main sections; in the first section, I focus on the ‘problematic’ of the gendered discourse of monarchy in the Tudor and Stuart regimes, and the theatrical representation of ‘monstrous’ female characters in Shakespeare’s early history play, 1 Henry VI and his two Jacobean tragedies, King Lear and Macbeth. John Knox’s infamous treatise regarded women’s rule as ‘monstrous’ because it went against the law of God and that of nature. Taking a cue from Knox’s description of female monarchs as the ‘monstrous regiment of women’, I argue that patriarchy encodes certain forms of female behaviour as ‘monstrous’—unnatural and abnormal—when women lay claim to political power, become politically ambitious and challenge masculine authority. However, it was not only claims to political authority that made a woman unnatural and masculine. As feminist critics have pointed out, early modern patriarchy regarded women’s speech as ‘dangerous because it is perceived as a usurpation of multiple forms of authority, a threat to order and male sovereignty . . . to a desired hegemonic sexuality.’¹ Thus in Jonson’s Epicoene, the Collegiates, ‘an order between courtiers and country-madams’ who gad about the town, voicing their critical opinion are described as possessing ‘masculine or rather hermaphroditical authority.’ (Epicoene, I. i. 68-74).²

In the second section, I explore this aspect of female monstrosity by examining early modern discourses on the shrew as the unruly wife. I draw attention to the gendered implication of the tongue’s somatic signification in these discourses, relating it to patriarchal anxiety about women’s possession of the unruly member. Finally, I argue that despite the popularity of shrew-taming stories, there are examples in the drama of the period of how female loquaciousness could also ‘widen behavioural options for women within and even outside marriage’.³ This section on the shrew as female grotesque focuses on Emilia in Othello and Paulina in The Winter’s Tale and I argue that these plays allow a positive space for the shrew to challenge patriarchal authority.
I. The Monstrous Regiment of Women in Shakespeare’s Plays

To promote a woman to bear rule, superiority, dominion, or empire above any realm, nation, or city, is repugnant to nature; contumely to God, a thing most contrary to his revealed will and approved ordinance; and finally, it is the subversion of good order, of all equity and justice.

John Knox, *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*

It may seem a curious coincidence that Elizabeth I was the monarch of England when John Knox’s infamous and controversial book, *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* was published in 1558. In order to amplify why the rule of women is repugnant to nature, Knox takes recourse to a set of traditional sexist binaries that are based on *a priori* assumptions about feminine and masculine nature:

For the causes are so manifest, that they cannot be hid. For who can deny but it is repugnant to nature that the blind shall be appointed to lead and conduct such as do see? That the weak, the sick, and impotent persons shall nourish and keep the whole and strong and finally, that the foolish, mad, and frenetic shall govern the discreet, and give counsel to such as be sober of mind? And such be all women, compared unto man in bearing of authority. For their sight in civil regiment is but blindness; their strength, weakness; their counsel, foolishness; and judgment, frenzy, if it be rightly considered.

Though John Knox presents a rather extreme case of vituperation against women’s rule, he was not alone in denouncing female monarchy. The Catholic Mary Tudor had unleashed a reign of terror with the bloody persecution of Protestants. This had resulted in an equation of woman’s rule with ruthlessness and cruelty. The debate about women’s capabilities as monarchs gained a topical relevance in the 1550s. As Caroline Levin points out, between 1542 and 1558, Protestants like David Lindsay, Thomas Becon and Christopher Goodman, ‘presented hostile arguments against women’s rule.’ Indeed, Knox’s infamous treatise was unfortunately timed and was not meant to target Queen Elizabeth but to denigrate the reigns of the Catholic Mary Tudor and also, probably, of Mary Queen of Scots. However, even in the ‘apology’ that Knox sent to Elizabeth he was not willing to ‘retract or call back any principall point, or proposition of the same, till treuth and verritie do farder appeir.’
Knox’s harangue against female rule has gained notoriety and publicity as the official voice of early modern misogyny. However, his position was refuted by his contemporaries like John Aylmer who had gone into exile during Mary’s reign and returned on the accession of Elizabeth. Aylmer challenged Knox’s polemics in his *An harborowe for faithfull and trewe subjects* (1559) stating that he ‘thought it more than necessary to lay before men’s eyes the untruth of the argument, the weakness of the proofs and the absurdity of the whole’. Since Knox had evoked God in his condemnation of women’s rule Aylmer refuted the former on those very same grounds:

But when God chooseth himself by sending to a king, whose succession is ruled by inheritance and lineal descent, no heirs male: it is a plain argument that for some secret purpose he mindeth the female should reign and govern.

The queen also had her allies in men who felt deeply relieved at the return of a Protestant Queen and were reassured by her role as the defender of the true reformed Church. John Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments* (1563) was dedicated to Elizabeth in order to praise as well as instruct her in the duties and obligations of the monarch. Though he celebrated Elizabeth’s accession to the throne of England, Foxe was ambivalent about the rule of women in general. The root of this ambivalence lay in the conflict between patriarchy’s ideology of ‘femininity’ and a woman’s political authority. As Carole Levin sums up succinctly:

If a queen were to demonstrate the strong attributes of kingship, she would not be acting in a womanly manner; yet approved womanly behaviour would ill-fit her for the rigors of rule.

The queen regnant could marry and thus solve the problem. Elizabeth, however, refused to capitulate to the plea of the Parliament and her advisors to get married. In order to palliate her subjects’ anxiety about her reign Elizabeth represented herself as, and encouraged her subjects to see her as, an embodiment of mythicized chaste femininity; she was a secularized Virgin Mother, Astraea, a new Deborah, Diana and Cynthia. On the other hand she also claimed to be married to her kingdom, and on one occasion ‘held up her hand bearing her coronation ring, seeming to portray herself symbolically as the nation’s wife.’ Significantly enough this gendering of her role
vis-a-vis the kingdom was not consistent; in the later period of her reign she referred to herself also as the husband of the nation.15

By assuming masculine identity Elizabeth showed her understanding of the gendered discourse of monarchy, which was premised on the identity of the ruler as a male. Drawing upon the medieval notion of the king’s two bodies, Elizabeth appealed to her composite nature; thus while her ‘body natural’ was the body of a frail woman her ‘body politic’ was the body of a king.16 This dual corporeality split across gender lines, created the powerful myth of an androgynous monarch who was an exception to political tradition. The queen’s most memorable use of such political androgyny was the Armada Speech at Tilbury in 1588, in which Elizabeth referred to her body as that of a ‘weak and feeble woman’, but nevertheless claimed that she possessed the ‘heart and stomach of a king.’17

According to Thomas Heywood’s later account of the event, on this occasion, Elizabeth was ‘habited like an Amazonian Queene, Buskind and plumed, having a golden Truncheon, Gantlet and Gorget.’18 Not only was Elizabeth an Amazonian queen, but the splendour of her armour also evoked the iconography of Pallas Athena, the classical goddess of war.19 At Tilbury, the sight of the queen, clad in armour, riding through her squadron of army on the eve of the battle, was a brilliant theatrical event. Within three years of Elizabeth’s appearance as a martial queen, English audience witnessed a cross-dressed virago on stage in Shakespeare’s 1 Henry VI (1591).20 Referring to Joan’s spectacular stage entry ‘in armour’ (1 Henry VI, I. ii. 63, stage direction) as a ‘stunning coup de theatre’, Gabriele Bernhard Jackson makes explicit connections between the cross-dressed Joan and the Amazonian English queen at Tilbury.

I would now like to explore the multiple significations of the cross-dressed Joan la Pucelle in 1 Henry VI. Clearly, there are differences between the representations of Joan and the cross-dressed heroines of Shakespeare’s comedies. The latter may be related to theatre’s negotiation with a contemporary cultural practice in sixteenth century London, when women took to wearing male attire and flaunting themselves in public.21 Linda Woodbridge has observed that this phenomenon created a great outrage, with sermons, marriage manuals and pamphlets almost unanimously denouncing the cross-dressed ‘manly woman’ as ‘monstrous’.22 Joan, who functions as Elizabeth’s ‘shadowy double’, exacerbates the anxieties evoked by the figure of the
cross-dressed woman. Marked out as the threatening alien, Joan is the grotesque and monstrous ‘other’ of the androgynous female monarch.

‘A maid? And be so martial?’: The virago and gender trouble in 1 Henry VI

Joan’s cross-dressing spells gender-trouble from the moment of her entry. Her gender indeterminacy is distinct from the playful androgyny of the heroines of Shakespeare’s ‘happy’ comedies—The Merchant of Venice (1598), As You Like It (1600) and Twelfth Night (1601). When Portia, Rosalind and Viola don male attire, they simultaneously assume the temporary male identities of Balthazar, Ganymede and Cesario respectively,\(^23\) that is, they are women disguised as men. By contrast, Joan in masculine garb presents a unique instance of a cross-dressed woman on stage.\(^24\) By refusing to treat male attire as ‘disguise’ Joan violates the regulations of dress. As Howard notes, ‘Dress, as a highly regulated semiotic system, became a primary site where a struggle over the mutability of the social order was conducted.’\(^25\)

Not only does Joan wear masculine garb, she also displays remarkable martial prowess. In her very first appearance, she challenges Charles to a duel, confidently asserting, ‘And thou shall find that I exceed my sex’ (1 Henry VI, I. ii. 90) and defeats him. As Jackson notes, ‘Like Spenser’s Britomart and countless others, she deflates male boasts and engages in a validating duel with a would-be lover.’\(^26\) Unlike Rosalind and Viola whose frail femininity peeps through their male attire,\(^27\) Joan, the self appointed ‘English scourge’ (I.ii.129) displays military strength; she beats back the English army (I. v. stage direction) and has French flags flying over Orleans (I. vi. 1-3). Jane’s presence as a virago disrupts the naturalized relationship between masculinity and the male body, threatening the very basis of patriarchal order. As Jean E Howard points out,

Then, as now, gender relations, however eroticized, were relations of power, produced and held in place through enormous cultural labour in the interests of the dominant gender.\(^28\)

Feminist critics have argued that the temporary ‘empowerment’ of Shakespeare’s comic heroines is integrated into the comedy’s pattern of carnivalesque topsy-turvy. The transvestite disguise of the heroines of Shakespeare’s comedy, the playful gender reversal or inversion, is endorsed in the comedies by the festive
atmosphere of the holiday. ‘Misrule’ provides a more effective means of social organization and control.  

The generic imperative of Shakespeare’s first tetralogy provides no enabling condition for carnivalesque misrule. Joan’s presence in 1 Henry VI is threatening and disruptive; as Jean E Howard and Phyllis Rackin argue, that the history-play is a ‘specifically masculine genre.’ They further point out that ‘its masculinity was identified with its function as an ideological apparatus for the construction of an emergent national consciousness.’ The merging of the masculinist and nationalist ideologies in the history plays increases the imperative of women’s feminization within what the ‘sex / gender system’ of society. As discussed earlier, the ‘sex/gender system’ posits that kinship structure and social system are dependent on the ‘exchange of women’ as gifts. Since women operate not as partners but as objects of exchange between men, the ultimate impact of such ‘traffic in women’ is to strengthen bonds between men.  

In the ‘homosocial universe’ that dominates the specifically masculine history plays, women’s roles get defined in terms of their ability to forge alliances between men who fight for or because of them. Joan la Pucelle disrupts the very basis of this homosocial world of martial masculinity by ‘entering into the play’s privileged masculine terms through the condition of masculinity itself.’ Bedford’s question, ‘A maid? And be so martial?’ (II. i. 21) echoes through the play. Joan is not merely disruptive and threatening but also puzzling; in the play the puzzle of Joan is summed up in Talbot’s sexualized pun ‘Puzzel or Pucelle’ (I. iv. 106).  

The representation of Joan was particularly puzzling for the play’s contemporary audience. It is not merely the visual spectacle of a cross-dressed warrior woman that links Joan and the monarch of England. As Jackson points out in her brilliant article, the play’s allusions to Joan—as ‘an Amazon’ who fights ‘with the sword of Deborah’ (I. ii. 104-5) and as ‘Astraea’s daughter’ (I. vi. 4)—evoke the growing iconology of Elizabeth. Leah Marcus similarly notes that Joan ‘collects about her a markedly similar set of idealized symbolic identities.’ Yet, these similarities between Joan and Elizabeth appear to be deeply disquieting. The connections between the two women seem daring, bordering on blasphemy, especially in the light of the accounts of Edward Hall, the source of Shakespeare’s play.
According to Hall, Joan is a ‘monster’, ‘an organye of the deuill’ a ‘wytych or manly woman’ who,

contrary to Goddes lawes, and the estate of woman had been clothed in a mannes apparel, a thing in the sight of God abominable . . . Besides this she usurped a cote of armes and displaid a standard whiche thynges, be apperteinyng only to knightes and esquires.³⁸

How do feminist critics reconcile the play’s vilification of Joan, especially in the play’s final act, with her glorified images that strikingly resemble those of Queen Elizabeth? According to Leah Marcus, Joan ‘brings into the open a set of suppressed cultural anxieties about the Virgin Queen, her identity and her capacity to provide continuing stability for the nation.’³⁹ Elizabeth Jackson, who emphasizes that *1 Henry VI* shares with other Shakespearean plays qualities of ‘unexplained and suggestive discontinuities’,⁴⁰ argues that Joan’s representation is self-consciously disjunctive. According to Jackson, Joan’s final demonization (in Act V) does not invalidate her initial impact as a ‘numinous’ presence because Shakespeare is interested in exploiting the ‘varied ideological potential inherent in the topically relevant figure of the virago.’⁴¹

However, there seems to be another interpretative possibility, which is ideological rather than ‘occasional’ or topical (this does not necessarily cancel out the powerful and nuanced historicized readings made by Marcus and Jackson). My submission is that the representation of Joan in *1 Henry VI* is significantly like the production of, and response evoked by, the grotesque figure. Represented by images that simultaneously glorify and vilify her, she is a curious jumble that characterizes the grotesque in the vocabulary of aesthetics and in theories of the grotesque.⁴²

Jonathan Hall’s perceptive analysis of the politics of the grotesque and monstrous seems particularly appropriate in this context. According to Hall, ‘the monologizing aesthetics of centralism paranoically *produces* the ‘grotesque’ body as its monstrous other.’⁴³ Drawing upon this analysis, my submission is that *1 Henry VI* produces the grotesque Joan as the ‘distorted image’⁴⁴ of Elizabeth, posits her as the queen’s monstrous ‘other’.⁴⁵ If Joan is produced as the threatening alien whose vilification is meant to establish the glory of authority then she also embodies the potential and perilous slippage between the two. As Stephen Greenblatt points out, the
relation between authority and alien is such that ‘power generated to attack the alien in
the name of the authority is produced in excess and threatens the authority it sets out to
defend.’ Hence the excess through which Joan is demonized and punished in the play
symbolically destroys the figure of authority, the androgynous female monarch. As
Steven Mullaney has argued, the Renaissance public theatre and stage served as a
‘prominent affective arena in which the significant cultural traumas and ambivalent
events . . . could be directly or indirectly addressed, symbolically enacted and brought
to partial and imaginary resolution.’

Ironically enough, Joan gains a stable identity only through her demonization in
Act V. The history play’s teleological compulsion to discredit the entire French cause
works through the portrayal of Joan as an agent of demonic forces. Her
whorishness—insisted upon by almost all the male characters in the play—is
established through her own claims of sexual liaisons with several men. Joan makes a
desperate bid to save her life by claiming to be pregnant (V. iv. 60-4). As York and his
men cruelly mock and jeer: ‘Now heaven forfend! The holy maid with child!’/ The
greatest miracle that e’er ye wrought’ (V. iv. 65-6), she shifts the responsibility of
paternity from the Dauphin to Alençon and then to René, the king of Naples (V. iv. 73,
77-78). Schwarz reads this as her doomed attempt to ‘enter into the system of male
bonds in conventionally feminine terms, to literally embody the condition that connects
men to one another.’ As a peasant who dares to appropriate a coat of arms, as a
woman who wears men’s apparel, Joan subverts both social and gender hierarchy. An
upstart, cross-dressed, French peasant girl, Joan is doubly transgressive: she is an
epitome of the unruly ‘woman-on-top’ and Talbot’s appellations for Joan—a ‘Devil or
devil’s dam’ (I. v. 5), a ‘witch’ (I. v. 6 and I. vii. 20) and a ‘high-minded strumpet’ (I. v.
12)—indicate how patriarchy perceives a woman who usurps masculine authority and
marks her out as the ‘alien’. Indeed, it is not only the male characters (the English, their
supporters and occasionally the French) who vilify Joan; at the play’s close (Act V) it is
the ‘patriarchal bard’ who authorizes Joan’s demonization. Through her ‘charming
spells and periapts’ (5. iii. 2), Joan conjures the ‘familiar spirits that are culled / Out of
the powerful regions under earth’ (V. iii. 10-11). In a desperate bid to make the silent
spirits aid her in the enterprise of France’s war against England she promises the
sacrifice of blood, body part, body and soul (V. iii. 15-22). As Greenblatt puts it ‘the audience can see as theatrical representation what the witch mongers could only deduce
or extract through torture as confession. Represented as an imposter whose claims to divine connection are revealed as diabolic (V. iii), a woman who admits to sexual liaisons with the entire French camp during the trial (V. vi), and is condemned to be burnt at stake as a witch, Joan’s fate seems to re-enact early modern culture’s misogynist fantasies of exterminating unruly women who assume authority and power. Even as Joan fails to protect herself by entering into the system of male bonding by claiming pregnancy, another French maiden takes her place. *I Henry VI* establishes the link between Joan and Margaret of Anjou through another *coup de théâtre* of juxtaposed scenes. Immediately after Joan La Pucelle is led away by York (V. iii. 30-32) to be tried as a witch, Suffolk enters holding Margaret by her hand (V. iii. 44, stage direction) Drawing attention to the ‘thematic suggestiveness of the two events’, Joseph Candido comments: ‘one duplicitous Frenchwoman emerges to take the place of another and this newest female scourge is to be lodged at the head of the state.’

The mannish ‘unruly’ virago and the ruthless Amazonian female monarch of Shakespeare’s first tetralogy stage a return in *Macbeth* (1603) and *King Lear* (1608) Shakespeare’s tragedies written after the accession of James I in 1603. Scholars have pointed out that for some subjects, the death of Elizabeth was an occasion not so much of mourning as of jubilation, primarily because it marked the return of a male monarch to the throne. As Steven Mullaney remarks, the celebration has to be understood as a response to a ‘significant transformation of the body politic, a reincorporation and regendering of monarchy.’ The actual event of such re-gendering received a greater impetus through the king’s own discourses about monarchy.

In James’s *The True Law of Free Monarchies* (first published in 1598 and then again in 1603), the commonwealth replicates the family and the king is the father of his subjects. James I had clearly established the equation between the commonwealth’s good governance and the reign of a male monarch. He had stated: ‘And for all other well ruled commonwealths, the rule of *pater patriae* was ever, and is, commonly used to kings.’ In his first address to the parliament in England, the new monarch declared, ‘I am the Husband, and all the whole Isle is my lawfull wife; I am the Head, and so it is my Body.’ Combining the roles of husband and father, resolving the split between the ‘body natural’ and the ‘body politic’, James seemed a perfect and natural embodiment of patriarchal authority. In his magisterial work, Lawrence Stone points out that the seventeenth century witnessed a reinforcement of patriarchy. According to Stone:
Both Church and state provided powerful new theoretical and practical support, while the two external checks on patriarchal power declined as kinship ties and clientage weakened. At the same time, a new interest in children, coupled with the Calvinist premise of Original Sin, gave fathers an added incentive to ensure the internalized submissiveness of their children.\(^5^7\)

Though he cautions against reading these changes as conclusive proofs about drastic and dramatic shifts in the parent-child, or husband-wife relation in the upper and middle ranks of society, Stone nevertheless stresses the power of dominant ideology expressed through discourses on women.\(^5^8\) Thus, homilies and sermons and conduct books—the apparatus of ideological control—played key roles in increasing patriarchy’s stranglehold on women, by reiterating the moral and theological necessity of the submissiveness of wives and daughters. This paranoia, exhibited in early modern culture’s policing of women, was based on patriarchy’s assumption that women’s bodies were ‘naturally grotesque.’\(^5^9\) By ensuring women’s enclosure within the ‘patriarchal territory’ of home these discourses were also ensuring political control. Since James’ patriarchalism collapsed the boundaries of the commonwealth / state and the family, women transgressing feminine codes of behaviour could be construed as politically subversive. Patriarchal anxiety about female transgressions was exacerbated in contexts where women could wield direct political authority or indirect control.

Though the relationship between theatre and discourses of patriarchy may be deeply fraught and problematic, it is not entirely implausible that the shrill and strident misogyny of Knox’s polemical work assumed a new valence almost forty-five years after its publication. The spectre of female rule haunts *Macbeth* (1606) and *King Lear* (1608 Quarto), two of Shakespeare’s Jacobean tragedies. These tragedies portray women as malevolent agents responsible for the catastrophic fall of the tragic heroes; Cordelia is a notable exception to this rule. They bring about chaos and disorder, not only in the little world of man, but also within the commonwealth. In the next section, I examine *Macbeth* and *King Lear* in the light of such ideological concerns.

In *Macbeth*, regicide may be viewed as resulting directly from the hero’s capitulation to female control. Lady Macbeth’s ambition that her husband acquire the crown makes her exercise her emotional power over her husband. Her invocation of supernatural aid links her directly with the demoniacal. By equating masculinity with
aggression and brutality, she provokes Macbeth to murder a frail and saintly old king. Lady Macbeth commits a crime against nature in her strenuous attempts to suppress and subvert the feminine impulses of pity, tenderness and nurture. She is fittingly punished through a neurosis where she has no control over her speech and actions. In *King Lear*, women do not merely provoke and instigate men; they usurp the masculine prerogatives of aggression and brutality. Goneril and Regan wield direct political authority and control as female monarchs.

*The horror of female power: King Lear, misogyny and feminist criticism*

Goneril and Regan assume political authority through a legitimate transfer of rule—it is Lear who divides his kingdom between his daughters. However, once they are in power Lear’s ‘pelican daughters’ (III. iv. 74) forget all ‘The offices of nature, bond of childhood, / Effects of courtesy, dues of gratitude’ (II. iv. 176-7). They bandy words with their father, commit acts of ingratitude by trying to cut down on the number of his followers (II. iv. 199-262) and feel no compunction about letting him out into a raging storm at night when ‘bleak winds do sorely ruffle’ (II. iv. 298-9). When Gloucester tries to ‘incline to the King’ (III. iii. 14), he is tried for treason and tortured. Regan participates actively in gouging out Gloucester’s eyes (III. vii. 65-92). Goneril, Lear’s ‘unnatural’ eldest daughter, feels contempt for her husband Albany, calling him a ‘Milk-liver’d man’ (IV. ii. 50). She compares him to Gloucester’s bastard ‘natural’ son, Edmund whom she lusts after: ‘Oh! The difference of man and man / To thee a woman’s services are due: / A fool usurps my bed’ (IV. ii. 26-8). The sisters become rivals competing with each other for Edmund: Goneril poisons Regan and kills herself. Their unbridled sexual desire, resulting in their deaths, fulfill Albany’s apocalyptic vision ‘Humanity must perforce prey on itself / Like monsters of the deep’ (IV. ii. 48-9). A cursory account of their roles in the tragedy seems to vindicate Knox’s paranoia about the ‘monstrous regiment of women’. Indeed, the denigration of Goneril and Regan is not a matter of early modern misogyny; twentieth century Shakespearean feminist critics have also violently condemned the roles of King Lear’s two elder daughters.

In her famous polemical essay, ‘The patriarchal bard: feminist criticism and Shakespeare: *King Lear* and *Measure for Measure*,’ Kathleen McLuskie argues that Shakespearean tragedy creates subtle snares for feminist critics; feminists find it difficult to deny the ‘emotional, moral and aesthetic satisfaction afforded by tragedy.’
Thus the aesthetic and ethical appeal of *King Lear* is contingent on a violent condemnation of Goneril and Regan’s behaviour and action; tragedy and its powers of misogyny assert their control over feminist criticism. Goneril and Regan have been viewed as evil, ‘nightmare females’ whose evil is ‘inseparable from their failures as women’ or as ‘sociopaths’ who are ‘motivated only by power and appetite.’ The term ‘monstrous’ occurs conspicuously; Goneril and Regan ‘develop into monsters’, their autonomy signals an annihilation of men. Kathleen McLuskie points out that asserting the rights of Goneril and Regan would equate feminist ideology with, ‘atavistic selfishness and the monstrous assertion of individual wills.’ Indeed, so pervasive is the use of the term ‘monstrous’ in this opprobrium that one often loses the wide range and connotations of the term. According to the OED, among the several meanings of the term ‘monstrous’ are:

1b. Of persons: Strange or unnatural in conduct or disposition
3a. Having the nature or appearance of a monster
5. With emotional sense, expressing indignation or wondering contempt, outrageously wrong or absurd
6. Like or befitting a monster of wickedness, atrocious, horrible

My submission is that feminist criticism can interrogate ‘the moral judgments which define Goneril and Regan as monstrous’ by examining the specific occasions on which the term ‘monster’ is applied to the two women in *King Lear*. It argues that a deconstructive reading may open up new possibilities for feminist intervention in interpreting the work of the ‘patriarchal bard.’

‘Women will all turn monsters’: Goneril and Regan in *King Lear*

In *King Lear*, there is a single instance in which women are imagined as having the ‘appearance of a monster.’ On the heath, Lear’s disorientating experience of the ‘sulphurous . . . fires’ (III. ii. 4) of the storm, and the darkness of the heath infested with Tom’s foul fiends fuse with the sense of betrayal at his daughters’ rejection and create a mind-forged underworld of female genitalia in which he feels trapped. His loathing of aggressive female sexuality expresses itself in a grotesque image of the female body:
Down from the waist they are Centaurs,
Though women all above.
But to the girdle do the gods inherit.
Beneath is all the fiends’; there’s hell, there’s darkness,
There’s the sulphurous pit, burning scalding,
Stench, consumption; fie, fie, fie! Pah, pah!

(IV. vi. 123-8)

The Centaur, part-man, part-horse hybrid, is transformed into an image of hybrid grotesque femininity. Claudette Hoover points how the classical icon of male lust and virility is feminized and conflated with the Christian association of the Devil (the reference to the cloven hooves) and women.68 It must be admitted, that the word ‘monster’ is not actually used in the passage but the negative associations of the monstrous are evoked through the representation of female genitals as the infernal, lower regions.

When the terms monster or monstrous are used in the play, they are aimed directly at Regan and Goneril. Here the contexts are markedly different. Gloucester’s on-stage blinding (III. vii. 65-82) is the play’s most vivid representation of Regan’s participation in acts of physical and psychological atrocity and violence. It provides an instance of the play’s usage of ‘monstrous’ as ‘befitting a monster of wickedness, atrocious, horrible.’ The scene is crucial for an understanding of what Alfar identifies as the problematic position of female monarchs ‘in a system of power relation which values mercilessness, vengeance and cruelty to defend its interests.’69 As Cornwall orders his servants to ‘Seek out the traitor Gloucester’ (III. vii. 3), Goneril suggests the form of torture: ‘Pluck out his eyes’ (III. vii. 5). Indeed, Gloucester’s gruesome ‘punishment’ literalizes the play’s images of blindness—the Gentleman’s description of ‘the eyeless rage’ (III. i. 8) of the storm in which Lear tears his white hair and wishes to blind himself—Lear desiring to punish himself for shedding woman’s tears by plucking out his ‘Old fond eyes’ (I. iv. 299); Gloucester telling Regan that he has sent the King to Dover, ‘Because I would not see / Thy cruel nails pluck out his poor eyes’ (III. vii. 54-5). By acknowledging that he has attempted to ensure Lear’s safe passage to Dover where the French army is all set to attack England, Gloucester admits to treason.70 His possession of the letter revealing France’s imminent arrival is proof of his role as a traitor.
In early modern England, a person found guilty of treason or rebellion was subjected to gruesome torture. By this logic, Gloucester’s fate is unexceptional. Through her active participation in interrogation and torture Regan merely enacts her role as a ruthless ruler committed to punishing acts of treason. Yet, Regan’s behaviour in this scene is not exactly that of a female monarch forced by her political role to rebel against traditionally sanctioned feminine roles and become a cruel tyrant. Like Margaret, who expresses her feminine pique by boxing the ears of Eleanor, the Duchess of Cobham (2 Henry VI, I. iii. 138, stage direction) Regan too becomes a figure of specifically feminine spitefulness when she plucks his beard (III. vii. stage direction). As Gloucester points out, Regan not only humiliates him (III. vii. 35-6), she also violates traditional notions of hospitality (III. vii. 39-41). Her final order to the servants to throw out the blind Gloucester is accompanied by a sting in the tail, ‘and let him smell / His way to Dover’ (III. vii. 91-2). The horror of female power cuts both ways: if the brutal nature of kingship ‘unsexes’ the female monarch, then the specifically feminine mockery, sadism and spite also grotesquely feminizes the very institution of monarchy.

It has been argued that Shakespeare’s choice of setting the blinding on stage is meant to arouse abhorrence in the audience; its intention is to critique the violence of kingship conducted in the name of political security. However, it is not only theatrical representation that deconstructs ruthless political power. Cornwall’s servants play a crucial role in critiquing their masters. The First Servant attempts to actively restrain Cornwall, (III. vii. 70-3), takes up arms against him (III. vii. 75, stage direction), and delivers him a mortal blow before he is killed by Regan who takes a sword and runs at him behind (III. vii. 78, stage direction). The scene ends with the other two servants explicitly condemning Cornwall and Regan. While Cornwall is deemed wicked (III. vii. 97-8) Regan is viewed as monstrous:

If she live long,  
And in the end meet the old course of death,  
Women will all turn monsters

(III. vii. 98-100)

The position from which the Third Servant speaks, complicates matters for the feminist critic. He is not a patriarchal authority figure threatened by the image of the unruly ‘woman-on-top’; his marginal and subordinate status makes him the voice of common
man who has no stakes in the politics of power. Yet he has internalized the play’s
gender politics that inevitably constructs certain forms of female behaviour as
monstrous. Attempts to claim *King Lear* as a ‘potential feminist text’ are undermined
by such instances of bias.

Unlike Regan, Goneril is accused of being a ‘monster’ by male authority
figures, Lear and Albany. Towards the middle of Act One, Scene four, Lear prepares to
leave the house of Goneril, the ‘Degenerate bastard’ (I. iv. 251), in high dudgeon. The
image of the monster is evoked for the first time in connection with filial ingratitude:

Ingratitude, thou marble-hearted fiend,
More hideous, when thou show’st thee in a child,
Than a sea-monster

(I. iv. 257-259)

Lear’s sense of humiliation and anger stems from special features in the early modern
practices of property transfer. In his formal speech investing his two elder daughters
with the ‘power/ Pre-eminence, and all the large effects / That troop with majesty’ (I. i.
129-31) Lear had reserved for himself the right to retain his train of ‘an hundred
knights’ (I. i. 132) to be maintained by his daughters in turn. Lear’s display of power
and authority as well as his maintenance agreement with his daughters has to be read in
the context of the contradictions that marked what Greenblatt terms the period’s
‘gerontological bias’. While the authority of the old was established as sanctioned by
natural and divine law, sermons and homilies expressed the anxiety that children were
likely to abuse or ill treat parents who handed down property or power to them. This
fear was reflected in the elaborate contracts and legal deeds that were drawn up to
ensure that children provide food and shelter to aged parents.

When Goneril suggests that her father, who is ‘old and reverend’ and should
thus be ‘wise’ (I. iv. 237), should cut down on the number of knights and squires who
form his retinue (I. iv. 244-9), she violates the original maintenance contract. Since
Lear is a patriarch in King James’ sense, Goneril’s filial ingratitude becomes a sign of
political insubordination; it threatens the very premise of Lear’s royal authority, which
Lear had termed, ‘The name and all th’addition to a king’ (I. i. 135). Later, in his
complaints to Regan about the ‘sharp-tooth’d unkindness’ (II. iv. 132) of her sister,
Lear hopes ‘the tender-hefted nature’ (II. iv. 169) of his second daughter will remember
the ‘dues of gratitude’ (II. iv. 177). And he reminds her, ‘Thy half o’th’ kingdom thou hast not forgot / Wherein I thee endow’d’ (II. iv. 178-79). When the two ‘pelican daughters’ continue to strip their father’s retinue from fifty to twenty-five (II. iv. 230-246), Lear’s amazed response is, ‘I gave you all’ (II. iv. 247); and then again, ‘Made you my guardians, my depositories’ (II. iv. 249). Lear is not only shocked by the behaviour of his daughters; his interpellation in the dominant ideology makes him regard Goneril’s conduct as monstrous. In his The True Law of Free Monarchies James I had used the monster image, there applied to sons rather than daughters, to convey the horror of filial insubordination and dereliction of duty:

And now first for the father’s part . . . consider I pray you, what duty his children owe to him, and whether upon any pretext whatsoever, it will not be thought monstrous and unnatural to his sons to rise up against him, to control him at their appetite, and when they think good, to slay him or cut him off.80

However, Lear’s exchange with his daughters also brings into the open the process through which Goneril’s monstrosity is produced; in other words it demystifies the ideology that produces it. As Goneril tells Lear, ‘All’s not offence that indiscretion finds / And dotage terms so’ (II. iv. 194). If Goneril’s behaviour is monstrous then its roots lie in the play’s troubled relation between transfer of property and what Lear terms ‘Propinquity and property of blood’ (I. i. 113).

Towards the end of the play Albany becomes the voice of patriarchy, denouncing Goneril as unnatural. Lear’s invocation to Goddess Nature (I. iv. 273) to turn Goneril sterile, his curses that his daughter be transformed into an unnatural woman lacking reproductive and nurturing ability (I. iv. 274-9) reverberate through Albany’s warning to Goneril:

That nature, which contemns it origin,
Cannot be border’d certain in itself;
She that herself will sliver and disbranch
Fro her material sap, perforce must wither
And come to deadly use

(IV. ii. 31-6)
Like Lear who evokes the image of the ‘detested kite’ (I. iv. 260) and refers to Goneril and Regan as ‘Pelican daughters’ (III. iv. 74) who have sucked his life-blood, Albany employs the imagery of ravenous animals. Goneril and Regan are ‘Tigers not daughters’ (IV. ii. 40) worse than the ‘head-lugged bear’ (IV. ii. 42). However, most significant is Albany’s moral outrage; he identifies Goneril as ‘vile’ and filthy (IV. ii. 38-9). As Mary Douglas observes, dirt fills us with abhorrence because it is a sign of disorder; Goneril thus becomes a pollutant, an abject figure, which has to be expelled so that moral and social order may be re-established. Albany’s horror of filial ‘vild offence’ (IV. ii. 47), stemming from perverse femininity expresses itself in an apocalyptic image:

It must come

Humanity must perforce prey on itself

Like monsters of the deep

(IV. ii. 46-9)

Yet, when he uses the term ‘monster’ again—‘Thou changed and self-cover’d thing, for shame / Be-monster not thy features’ (IV. ii. 62-3)—the position from which he speaks has undergone a subtle shift. Goneril has assaulted his manhood by abusing him as a ‘Milk-liver’d man! / That bear’st a cheek for blows, a head for wrongs’ (IV. ii. 50-1) and interpreted his pacifism as a sign of cowardice by contemptuously calling him a ‘moral fool’ and a ‘vain fool’ (IV. ii. 59, 63). Albany responds with a misogynist attack: ‘Proper deformity shows not in the fiend / So horrid as in a woman’ (IV. ii. 60-1). Albany who has so far played a passive role allowing his wife to dominate, begins to assert his prerogative as a husband. The aggression and brutality that Goneril takes to be signs of masculinity—and which she found lacking in Albany—are finally used to control the unruly woman on top:

Were’t my fitness
To let these hands obey my blood,
They are apt enough to dislocate and tear
Thy flesh and bones

(IV. ii. 63-6)

Albany too needs to produce Goneril as the monstrous female ‘other’ in order to fashion his true masculine ‘self’; he promises to avenge the blinding of Gloucester
(IV. ii. 95-6) and arouses himself from what Goneril had mockingly called the ‘cowish terror of his spirit’ (IV. ii. 12) to take up arms against the invading French army (V. i. 23-25). It is Albany who emerges as the patriarchal authority-figure towards the end of the play. However, he fails to bring the ‘gilded serpent’ (V. iii. 84) to an arraignment. Goneril remains defiant till the end (V. iii. 159) circumventing the law of the patriarch by poisoning her sister Regan and killing herself (V. iii. 225-6). Un-mourned by her husband, who sees in this a ‘judgment of the heavens’ meant to arouse fear and not evoke pity (V. iii. 230-1), Goneril reminds us, in the end, of Lady Macbeth.

**Fiend-like Queens in Shakespeare’s History Plays and Jacobean Tragedies**

In *Macbeth*, Malcolm in his last speech provides a gratuitous piece of information about Lady Macbeth—it is believed that she ‘by self and violent hands / Took off her life’ (V. iii. 36). Suicide seems to be the most fitting end for both Goneril, a fiend in the shape of a woman (*King Lear*, IV. ii. 66-7) and Lady Macbeth, ‘the fiend-like queen’ (*Macbeth*, V. ix. 35) of Macbeth. However, they are linked by more than the manner of their deaths. Both women endorse and articulate a notion of masculinity based on aggression and brutality. They virtually echo each other in their discontent about their husband’s lack of courage—Goneril chastises her husband’s ‘milky gentleness’ (*King Lear*, I. iv. 340) and calls him a ‘Milk-liver’d man’ (IV. ii. 50) and Lady Macbeth fears that her husband’s nature is ‘too full o’ th’ milk of human kindness’ (*Macbeth*, I. v. 17). Lady Macbeth’s manipulation of what she understands as Macbeth’s effeminate nature is deeply subversive. She takes recourse to attacks on Macbeth’s manhood—‘When thou durst do it, then you were a man’ (I. vii. 49)—as he attempts to withdraw from the plot of murdering Duncan: ‘We will proceed no further in this business’ (I. vii. 31). He tells Lady Macbeth that he has been honoured by Duncan (I. vii. 32) and has bought ‘Golden opinions from all sorts of people’ (I. vii. 33). In his famous soliloquy debating on the consequences of regicide (I. vii. 1-28), Macbeth cannot forget that Duncan: is ‘here in double trust: / First as I am his kinsman and his subject, / Strong both against the deed’ (I. vii. 12-14). Macbeth’s views against regicide echo those of the Duke of Gloucester in *2 Henry VI*. When the Lord Protector is similarly tempted by his ambitious wife he stresses his feudal allegiance and bonds of kinship with Henry: ‘And may that hour when I imagine ill / Against my king and nephew, virtuous Henry / Be my last breathing in this mortal world!’ (*2 Henry VI*, I. ii. 19-21). He sternly reprimands his wife for the ‘hammering treachery’ that will result in
tumbling them ‘From top of honour to disgrace’s feet’ (2 Henry VI, I. ii. 49). Lady Macbeth’s attempt to goad her husband into treason and regicide is both a re-enactment and a re-vision of the role of Eleanor of Cobham, the Duchess of Gloucester in 2 Henry VI. The desires of Eleanor and Lady Macbeth are not only illegitimate but also unnatural; they function as an extra-systemic force, threatening the natural dynamics of the entire political system. The plays resolve this anomaly by condemning the figure of this woman to the sphere of the supernatural and the ‘other’.

‘To play my part in fortune’s pageant’: Eleanor of Cobham

Eleanor’s first speech marks her out as a potentially transgressive woman; she tempts her husband the Duke of Gloucester with visions of sovereignty:

Why are thine eyes fix’d to the sullen earth,
Gazing on that which seems to dim thy sight?
What seest thou there? King Henry’s diadem,
Enchased with all the honours of the world?

(2 Henry VI, I. ii. 5-8)

Urging Gloucester to ‘Put forth thy hand, reach at the glorious gold (2 Henry VI, I. ii. 11), Eleanor promises to be an active partner in this overreaching: ‘What, is’t too short? I’ll lengthen it with mine;’ (2 Henry VI, I. ii. 12). Though, as the wife of the Lord Protector, she enjoys the status of ‘the second lady of the realm’ (I. ii. 43), her mind is full of ‘the canker of ambitious thoughts’ (I. ii. 18). In her dream it is her head that wears the diadem (I. ii. 40). By narrating this dream to Gloucester Eleanor invites him to participate in and act upon her subversive fantasies, in which ‘Henry and Dame Margaret kneel’d to me’ (I. ii. 39). Sternly rebuked by Gloucester, the ‘presumptuous’ and ‘ill nurtur’d Eleanor’ (I. ii. 42) peevishly agrees to ‘keep my dreams unto myself’ (I. ii. 53). Once she is alone, Eleanor gives vent to her frustrations:

Were I a man, a duke, and next of blood,
I would remove these tedious stumbling blocks
And smooth my way upon their headless necks.

(I. ii. 63-5)

In equating power with an aggressive, bloody and brutal masculinity, in fantasizing about symbolic ‘unsexing’ Eleanor pre-figures not only Lady Macbeth but also the
‘female heroes’ of Jacobean revenge tragedy who see their femininity as impediments to their desires.85

The ambitious Duchess of Gloucester is, however, not content voicing her transgressive desires; she actively seeks the aid of necromancy when she summons the priest John Hume and asks him to confer with the conjuror Richard Bolingbroke and the witch Margery Jordan, to find out whether they will ‘undertake to do me good?’ (I. ii. 74-7) Eleanor watches (I. iv. 12, stage direction) as Bolingbroke uses the witch Jordan to conjure the spirit Asnath and gain fore knowledge of the deaths of King Henry VI and his powerful allies (I. iv. 25-39). She thus commits the culpable offence of treason. This is made clear by York’s sarcastic comment to the Duchess:

What madam are you there? The king and
common weal
Are deep indebted for this piece of pains:
My Lord Protector will, I doubt it not
See you well guerdon’d for these good deserts.
(I. iv. 41-5)

In England the relation between treason and witchcraft had a history stretching back to the fourteenth century. It was discovered in 1324 that certain rich and influential burghers had consulted a necromancer called Master John and paid him large sums of money to bring about the death of Edward II. In 1419 Henry V prosecuted his stepmother Joan of Navarre for attempting to kill him by witchcraft and during the reign of his son Henry VI, Eleanor Cobham, the Duchess of Gloucester, was arraigned for conspiring with Roger Bolingbroke, and using necromancy to procure the death of the young monarch.86 The links between witchcraft and treason had gained a special, topical relevance in 1591 (the probable year of the composition of 2 Henry VI). As Jackson points out:

It brought to London the pamphlet News from Scotland, a full account of
the spectacular treason-cum-sorcery trials that King James had supervised there in the winter of 1590-1.87

However, there is a twist in the play’s representation of Eleanor’s role in treason and witchcraft; John Hume, the priest whom Eleanor has paid to confer with
Bolingbroke and Jordan, has been hired by Suffolk and the Cardinal ‘to undermine the Duchess / And buzz these conjurations in her brain’ (I. ii. 98-9). As Nina Levine notes, Eleanor is the victim of what we might call political entrapment: her ambitions are exploited and even manipulated by her husband’s enemies to further their own power over the Lancastrian state.88

Eleanor’s susceptibility to political intrigue stems from her ambition as well as her conviction of the crucial force of her agency: ‘I will not be slack / To play my part in Fortune’s pageant’ (I. ii. 66-7). Ironically, it is Suffolk and the Cardinal who have already scripted her ‘part’, thus proving that Eleanor’s notion of her own empowerment was an illusion. Gloucester’s warning to Margaret, ‘These are no women’s matters’ (I. iii. 117), rings true for his wife. Within the history play’s ideology, with its strong masculinist bias, it is men in power who organize ‘fortune’s pageant’. This is brought out tellingly in the theatrical representation of the punishment meted out to Eleanor for her role in the conspiracy:

*Enter the Duchess, Eleanor of Cobham, barefoot, with a white sheet about her, written verses pinned on her back, and carrying a wax candle in her hand; she is accompanied by the two Sheriffs of London, and Sir John Stanley, and officers with bills and halberds*

(II. iv. 17, stage direction)89

The turn of the wheel of fortune transforms Eleanor’s former glorious ‘pageant’ into its carnivalesque, mocking parody. Eleanor is punished for daring to stake a claim in the strongly gendered discourse of fortune’s play. It is Gloucester’s empathetic and poignant account of his wife’s mental torture and suffering that captures the impact of Eleanor’s reversal of fortune:

Sweet Nell, ill can thy noble mind abrook
The abject people gazing on thy face
With envious looks, laughing at thy shame,
That erst did follow thy proud chariot wheels
When thou didst ride in triumph through the streets.

(II. iv. 10-14)

Thus even while the play problematizes the issue of Eleanor’s culpability in treason and regicide by presenting her as a victim of court or political intrigue it nevertheless
subjects her to a penance in the form of ritual public humiliation. The spectacle of Eleanor—‘Mail’d up in shame’ (I. iv. 31) accompanied by a jeering rabble that rejoice in her pain (I. iv. 32-3)—evokes pity no doubt but at the same time the very spectacle functions as an acts as an endorsement of the patriarchal imperative to discipline and punish the unruly woman. Though Eleanor is ostensibly judged for committing treason—a crime against the king and the commonwealth—she is also ideologically condemned for her transgressive desires, desires that exceed her womanly status. By articulating her dream of wearing the diadem and giving vent to her fantasy about ‘unsexing’ herself, Eleanor transgresses codes of class and gender. When Eleanor turns to the damned art of witchcraft, she moves inexorably to the category of the threatening, dangerous ‘other’. In 2 Henry VI the patriarchal imperative to remove the deviant female ‘other’ from its territory takes the shape of an actual or physical banishment: Eleanor’s fate is to spend the rest of her life in the Isle of Man.

The representations of the Duchess of Gloucester and Lady Macbeth are markedly similar; they draw upon and feed into early modern notions of female insubordination and unruliness especially as they display the usurpation of masculine prerogatives. Ambitious and subversive, both women contemplate regicide in order to acquire political power; they feel trapped by their femininity (as a social condition that imposes weakness and passivity) and consequently wish to ‘unsex’ themselves. The differences between them are also clearly marked in terms of the success and failures of their subversive desires; Eleanor fails to tempt Gloucester with her dreams and fantasies of sovereignty while Lady Macbeth fulfills her role as her husband’s ‘dearest partner of greatness’ (I. v. 11) in being able to goad her husband into committing regicide.

The crucial difference between 2 Henry VI and Macbeth lies in the very conception and location of female deviance. In the history play, the figure of the deviant or abnormal woman remains firmly located in the social space. Eleanor commits the social and political crime of treason (by eliciting the aid of necromancers to gain foreknowledge of the king’s death) and is consequently subjected to social forms of punishment. In 2 Henry VI both female crime and its punishment are exteriorized because the categories of the ‘normal’ and the ‘abnormal’ can be kept separate, contained with clearly defined boundaries. In Macbeth the boundaries separating the normal and the deviant are blurred. Female deviance is not located
outside— in aberrant forms of behaviour or conduct— but within the psyche; it is this inwardness that accounts for the terrifying nature of Lady Macbeth’s success as well as her failure, her crime and her punishment.

‘Come you spirits / That tend on mortal thoughts’: Lady Macbeth

Lady Macbeth’s first soliloquy (an address to the absent Macbeth) marks her out as mannish and virile in the specific sense of assuming sexual initiative and aggression. She awaits his return to the castle with great impatience:

Hie thee hither
That I may pour my spirits in thine ear,
And chastise with the valour of my tongue,
All that impedes the from thee from the golden round,
Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem
To have thee crown’d withal

(I. v. 25-30)\textsuperscript{90} [emphases mine]

In this passage Lady Macbeth tropes temptation to treason as sexual intercourse; she is the dominant and aggressive sexual partner whose phallic tongue penetrates her husband’s receptive ears (26-7).\textsuperscript{91} Lady Macbeth’s interpellation in this phallocentric discourse empowers her to ‘chastise’ her husband; it is from within this discourse that she constructs her image of Macbeth’s effeminacy: ‘Yet do I fear thy nature / It is too full o’th’ milk of human kindness’ (I. v. 16-17). She evokes this image of Macbeth’s effeminate nature again in her assault on his manhood (I. iii. 35-8); the reference to his drunken hope as ‘green and pale’ (I. vii. 37) carries resonance of greensickness associated with timid young virgins.\textsuperscript{92} Indeed, as critics have observed, Lady Macbeth persuades her reluctant husband into committing regicide through an attack on his maleness.\textsuperscript{93} Even as she taunts him about his failure to keep his word, castrating him psychologically, she feeds him her fantasies of masculinity: ‘When thou durst do it, then you were a man; / And to be more than what you were, you would / Be so much more the man’ (I. vii. 49-51). Finally, Lady Macbeth asserts the power of promise by evoking a vivid and terrifying image of maternal malevolence:

I have given suck, and know
How tender ‘tis to love the babe that milks me:
I would, while it was smiling in my face,
Have pluck’d my nipples from his boneless gums,
And dash’d the brains out, had I so sworn
As you have done to this

(I. vii. 54-9)

Lady Macbeth exploits early modern patriarchal anxiety that stems from male vulnerability to maternal control during infancy. She secures her control over Macbeth by preying on his infantile insecurities, making him ‘imagine himself as an infant vulnerable to her’. The horror of infanticide is magnified through its associations with early modern beliefs in continental witch practices, which made the infant particularly prone to its diabolism; as Adelman argues, Lady Macbeth and the witches fuse through the ‘image of perverse nursery.’ The patriarchal imperative to read female deviance as demoniacal is expressed most powerfully in Lady Macbeth’s invocation to the ‘murth’ring ministers’ who in their ‘sightless substances’ ‘wait on Nature’s mischief’ (I. v. 48-50):

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

(I. v. 40-3)

As critics have noted, Lady Macbeth’s invitation to the spirits to ‘make thick my blood,/ Stop up th’access and passage to remorse; / That no compunctious visitings of Nature / Shake my fell purpose’ (I. v. 43-6) have specific gynecological associations especially as they obtain in contemporary treatises on reproduction and mothering. Through its continued emphasis on the spirits’ ability to pervert the hidden (hence ‘uncanny’) and frightening process of female reproduction Lady Macbeth’s speech locates the diabolic inside the body.

Unlike Eleanor’s desire for gender transgression—premised upon acquiring ‘masculine’ traits of aggression and brutality—Lady Macbeth’s ‘unsexing’ speech turns violence and violation inwards, towards her own body. She imagines her body as an open entity that allows free passage to the demonic forces; thus her speech moves effortlessly from the image of suckling the ‘murth’ring ministers’ (I. v. 47-50) to imagining herself as a murderer who wields a ‘keen knife’ that is blind to ‘the wound it
makes’ (I. v. 52). Lady Macbeth’s body becomes a dangerously unstable zone dissolving the boundary between the unfamiliar the strange, the demonic ‘other’ and the familiar, domesticated ‘self’ which fuse in a grotesque hybridization.

It is this terrifying inwardness of Lady Macbeth’s ‘crime’ that provides a clue to her ‘punishment’ in the first scene of Act V. The strong willed woman, who in her last public appearance in the banquet scene maintains the veneer of sanity, offering a rational explanation of Macbeth’s behaviour to the attendant lords (III. iv. 53-8), is bafflingly transformed into a pitiful vulnerable creature. The uncanny unheimlich infiltrates into the heimlich, literally the space of the home; Lady Macbeth is not turned into a public ‘spectacle’ but trapped into an inner private world of hallucination and somnambulism, rambling about the horrors of the past. Unlike Eleanor who is made a ‘wonder and a pointing stock / To every idle rascal follower’ (2 Henry VI, II. iv), Lady Macbeth walks at night in her chamber watched over by a gentlewoman and a doctor. For the latter she is an unusual case history to be recorded in his notebook, literally a ‘document in madness’ (Hamlet, IV. v. 178):

Hark! She speaks. I will set down what comes from her, to satisfy my remembrance the more strongly (V. i. 31-3).

The presence of the doctor is probably an oblique reference to the experiments carried out by contemporary physicians like Marescot and Edward Jordan to prove that cases of demonic possession were actually hallucination or hysteria or fraud. In this case, however, the doctor is baffled in his attempts to understand and interpret Lady Macbeth’s condition; unlike the women encountered by Marescot or Jordan or Cotta, Lady Macbeth defies any rational medical explanation. Even as he observes her, the doctor is struck by the intensity of her moral anguish and feels the inadequacy of his medical skills in curing her or providing a sense of relief:

This disease is beyond my practice: yet I have known those which have walk’d in their sleep, who have died holily in their beds (V. i. 56-8).

The doctor’s comments indicate that Lady Macbeth’s state is one of spiritual melancholy and religious despair. Lady Macbeth is turned into a ‘monster’ in its archaic etymological sense of a divine portent or warning (O.E.D).
Unnatural deeds
Do breed unnatural troubles: infected minds
To their deaf pillows will discharge their secrets.
More needs she the divine than the physician—
God, God forgive us all!

(V. i. 68-72)

Carol Thomas Neely notes that madness in Shakespeare’s tragedies is
dramatized through a peculiar language ‘characterized by fragmentation, obsession and
repetition’ and most importantly by ‘quotation’. In her perceptive, detailed reading of
the sleepwalking scene, Neely lists the wide range of Lady Macbeth’s ‘quotations’ and
suggests that it has the effect of ‘distancing this alienated discourse from its speaker and
inviting a reading.’

My submission is that the text both invites a ‘reading’ of Lady Macbeth’s
‘discourse’ of madness and frustrates such attempts. Made up of a monstrous jumble of
‘quotations’—of speech and action—this grotesque hybrid ‘discourse’ challenges the
hermeneutic process itself. Unlike the audience who can identify the disjointed phrases
of Lady Macbeth’s hallucinatory ramblings and locate them in their specific moments
of origin, for the doctor and the gentlewoman, Lady Macbeth is baffling and enigmatic,
a notoriously muddled signifier. Lady Macbeth is ‘uncanny’ in that specific sense in
which, as Freud points out, the German term ‘unheimlich’ comes to mean the same as
‘heimlich’; it signifies ‘that which is concealed and kept out of sight.’ Her neurotic
disorder leads to a progressive alienation from her husband and from the business of
state, and when she finally kills herself the event is not so much tragic as banal. Her
‘monstrous’ attempt to arrogate to herself the power of the male, and to convert her
gentle and ‘unmanly’ husband into a ruthless killer, results in a parodic excess of
gender stereotyping in their subsequent roles: she becomes frail and ‘womanly’, he
becomes brutal and ‘manly’. The play reads her transgression as a grotesque violation
of natural order.

My analysis of the unruly female grotesque in relation to patriarchal power has
explored the representation of ‘monstrous’ women in Shakespeare’s early history play
and two of his Jacobean tragedies. I have tried to argue that the representation of
Goneril, Regan, Lady Macbeth and Eleanor as aggressive, ruthless, cruel women whose
actions indicate their monstrosity is an expression of early modern culture’s dread and
revulsion of unruly women who lay claim to political authority and power. Their
demonization is necessary for patriarchy to justify its imperative to discipline and
punish the ‘woman on top’. Denigrated as abnormal or perverse, they constitute the
‘other’ necessary for the fashioning of the ‘self’ of the authority. In each case they have
to be violently expelled from its project of nation building. Their fates, to be burnt at the
stake (Joan la Pucelle), destroy each other (Goneril and Regan) to be doomed to
somnambulistic hallucination (Lady Macbeth) are over-determined. The workings of
an ideology that ‘mobilizes the patriarchal fear of un-subordinated woman’ manifests itself most powerfully in their deaths.

It may be interesting to observe that the transgressive and deviant ‘monstrous’
female grotesque is also the possessor of a phallic tongue. Lady Macbeth imagines her
tongue as an active agent when she expresses her desire to pour her spirits into
Macbeth’s pliant and passive ear. Lear complains that Goneril, ‘struck me with her
tongue / Most serpent-like, upon the very heart’ (KingLear, II. iv. 157-8). In my next
section, I explore the gendered implications of the tongue’s somatic significations in
relation to early modern discourses on the shrew.

II. The Untamed Shakespearean Shrew: the power of the female grotesque

The veritable prototype of the female offender of this era seems to be, in fact, the
woman marked out as a ‘scold’ or ‘shrew.’

–Lynda E Boose, ‘Scolding Brides and Bridling Scolds: 
Taming the Woman’s Unruly Member’

This section begins with a brief survey of early modern discourses about the shrew. While wifely conduct was generally brought under more strict vigilance in the sixteenth century, there was an increase in the attempt to monitor and control female speech in particular. It is necessary to ask why women’s speech was regarded as a particularly threatening form of insubordination, and to look therefore at the early modern discourses about the tongue’s somatic significations and its gendered implications. I would argue that though shrew-taming tales dominate the literature of the period, there are some notable exceptions that allow a positive space for the scold. I focus on Emilia and Paulina in Othello and The Winter’s Tale respectively, arguing that their functions can be understood as ‘the rejection of enclosure and the validation of the female grotesque.’

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**Discipline and punish: Early modern discourses about the shrew**

A scold, in a legal sense, is a troublesome and angry woman who, by her brawling and wrangling amongst her neighbours, ‘doth break the publick Peace and beget, cherish and increase publick discord.’ The legal definition of the shrew clearly indicates that contrary to the received opinion of the shrew as a woman whose harangues are directed at the husband or other members of the family, shrewishness was viewed as a public form of offence that posed a threat to the patriarchal social order. Consequently it became the state’s prerogative to subject the female body to ritual and social forms of punishment.

The punitive measure used most frequently was ducking or cucking; it involved a see-saw apparatus, with the offender strapped into a chair at one end, to be dunked into water that was most likely to be a horse-pond. Before the actual event of being ducked into the pond the offender was often ridden or carted through the town to the accompaniment of loud music before a mocking and jeering crowd. The ritual ceremony of the shrew being paraded before a public brings out the carnivalesque quality of a specifically gendered form of disciplining and punishment. Shrew-taming stories, popular during the period, invariably involve episodes of the woman’s public shaming and disgrace as effective means of enforcing submission. Since such tales are almost always generically classified as comedy the rituals of degradation and humiliation that the woman is made to undergo are presented as inherently amusing. For the ‘taming’ to be culturally accepted and endorsed, the shrew has to be presented as an object of ridicule. From Noah’s wife of the Mystery plays to Katherine in Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew*, the scold’s speech and behaviour are always shown as excessive, exaggerated and thus a subject of mirth. It is evident that patriarchy attempts to dispel its fear of the scold by inscribing her into the space of the comic.

Yet the problematic of the shrew and her taming is borne out by the gap that exists between the actual forms of physical and psychological brutality involved and its ideology of the comic. This is perhaps best brought out in the like the anonymous *A merry Ieste of a Shrewde and curste Wyfe lapped in Morrelles Skin* in which the groom drags the allegedly shrewish bride into a cellar, tears her clothes, beats her with birch rods and finally wraps her in the salted hide of Morel, a horse that he has killed for this purpose. Not content with actual physical abominations the groom subjects his bride...
to further humiliation and shaming by parading her before the wedding guests who treat this display of wifely ‘subjection’ with great mirth. The misogyny of the tale is accentuated by its inclusion of the voyeurism of the bride’s mother, who comes in to check the defloration of her daughter. The mother’s sado-masochistic comment that she had enjoyed the pain that was inflicted her during her wedding night performs the ideological function of turning an otherwise bizarre and gruesome incident into an inevitable and common marital practice. This represents female sexual and social subjection as part of a larger continuum of gender oppression.

The reference to the horse’s hide in the *A merry iese of a Shrewde and curste Wyfe lapped in Morrelles Skin* draws attention to the implicit connection between the breaking andbridling of a horse and the bridling of the shrewish bride that forms the crux of Petruchio’s taming of Kate in Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew*. As Lynda Boose notes:

In shrew-taming folktale plots in general, the taming of the unruly wife is frequently coincident with the wedding trip home on horseback. The trip, which is itself the traditional final stage to the ‘bridal’ is already the site of an unspoken pun on bridle.

In Grumio’s recounting of the incident to Curtis, Kate’s humiliation and shaming is a form of ‘horse play’ that Petruchio has devised:

thou shouldst have heard how her horse fell and she under her horse;  
thou shouldst have heard in how miry a place, how she was bemoiled,  
how he left her with the horse upon her . . . how the horse’s ran away,  
how her bridle was burst . . .

(*The Taming of the Shrew*: IV. i. 65-72)

The syntactical elision of ‘horse’s’ puts the ‘bridle’ on Kate as the crowning moment of her ‘bridal’ shaming and humiliation that has been initiated by Petruchio. Earlier, during the wedding ceremony he had arrived late and in a fantastically outlandish attire that debunked and mocked the bridal rites (*The Taming of the Shrew*, III. ii. 1-70). The clever punning on ‘bridle’ also allows the dramatist to allude—without ever making direct use of it in his shrew-taming story—to the ‘scold’sbridle’ a contraption that was used to literally ‘tame’ and silence the shrew’s tongue. According to the testimony of
Dorothy Waugh who was punished by the Mayor for subversion of local authority with the scold’s bridle, it was a ‘steele cap’ with ‘three bars of iron’ that was locked to her head with a ‘peece’ which was put into her mouth. T N Brushfield, the nineteenth century antiquarian who was also a member of the Chester Archaeological Society in the County of Chester, and a Medical Superintendent of the Cheshire Lunatic Asylum, provides detailed descriptions of the device known as the ‘scold’s bridle.’

The origins of this specifically gendered form of punishment may be traced to the very nature and meaning of the tongue in the discourses of the early modern period. The most crucial of these was the tongue’s ontological significance; like the Latin *lingua* and Greek *glossa*, it also meant language and thus encoded ‘a relation between word and flesh, tenor and vehicle, matter and meaning.’ Anxieties about the ambivalent power of language—that it could be both harmful and benevolent—got displaced on to the tongue whose inherent slipperiness was understood as the source of the duplicitous power of speech.

Writers of the period were acutely sensitive to the disruptive potential of what Erasmus termed the ‘flabby little organ.’ It would be interesting to note the recurrence of terms like ‘taming’ and ‘governance’ with regard to the tongue in the numerous tracts, homilies and sermons of the period. To cite just three examples, Thomas Adams’ sermon was entitled *Taming of the Tongue* (1619), William Gearing and Richard Allestree’s treatises were called *A Bridle for the Tongue* (1663) and *The Government of the Tongue* (1674) respectively. Referred to variously as the ‘unruly’ or ‘wild’ member, the ‘insubjectible subject’, the tongue was the ‘somatic manifestation of all that resists containment.’

From the perspective of the culture’s sexual politics, the most significant implications of the somatic peculiarities of the tongue are to be found in anatomical and medical texts. By focusing on the tongue’s muscular structure, mobility and apparent will of its own, such discourses compare it with the other ‘unruly’ member—the penis. The ‘gendering’ of the tongue had distinctly different ideological ramifications for men and for women, often brought out through its loss. The plays of the period have several cases of wounding and violent severing of the tongue of male characters. Hieronimo’s mutilation of his own tongue in *The Spanish Tragedy*, the nailing up of the Duke’s poisoned tongue in *The Revenger’s Tragedy* and the incident of Antonio chopping off and displaying the tongue of Piero in *Antonio’s Revenge* are examples of spectacular
corporeality that mark revenge tragedy. If the heart was imagined as the locus of interiority then the tongue may have been the locus of exteriority, ‘the site where the self was performed.’ In the case of the male hero—Hieronimo for example—the moment of the tongue’s mutilation thus marks the loss of the self, which is signified through the closure of performance itself. The locus classicus of the loss of female lingua is that of Philomel in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Book VI. As I have discussed earlier, Shakespeare not only represents female lingual dismemberment in his theatrical appropriation of the Ovidian tale but produces vivid description of the mutilation in a remarkable ‘purple’ passage in *Titus Andronicus*:

O, that delightful engine of her thoughts
That blabbed them with such pleasing eloquence,
Is torn forth that pretty hollow cage
Where like a sweet melodious bird, it sung
Sweet varied notes, enchanting every ear.

(III. i. 83-7)

The tongue’s location within the larger discourses of gender and power was problematized by women’s possession of the ‘unruly member’. In *The Duchess of Malfi* Ferdinand’s parting shot to his sister the Duchess of Malfi—‘And women like that part, which, like the lamprey / Hath nev’r a bone in it . . . Nay, / I mean the tongue’ (I. ii. 58-60)—draws upon the isomorphism of the tongue and the penis. It expresses how early modern patriarchal culture constructed women’s orality as sexually and politically transgressive. Immediately before this exchange Ferdinand makes an overt threat to his sister through the reference to his father’s sword—an obvious phallic symbol:

You are my sister
This was my father’s poniard: do you see,
I’ld be loath to see’t look rusty, ’cause ’twas his

(I. ii. 52-4)

The phallic connotations of the tongue and the sword and the continual slippage between the two are ironically underscored in the scene in the Duchess’s bedchamber at night. The Duchess’ somewhat vexed question to the absent Antonio, ‘Have you lost
your tongue?’ (III. ii. 68) is offset by the sight of her brother Ferdinand in her bedchamber holding a poniard. Ferdinand’s entry into his sister’s bedchamber at night with a sword is both an attempt to carry out his initial threat and also a symbolic gesture of his desire and power to penetrate and possess her.

The most significant aspect of the tongue’s somatic peculiarities was that unlike other parts of the body, the tongue possessed the dangerous and paradoxical potential of being able to move in and out of the body thus extending both the linguistic as well as the material boundaries of the body itself. This particular ability of the tongue to dissolve the boundaries between the self and the ‘other’ made it an embodiment of the grotesque. In this context it would be pertinent to remember that the closed mouth functioned as metonymy for the classical body—monumental, smooth and sealed off from the world outside; conversely the gaping mouth signified the grotesque body which transgressed its material bodily limits through its orifices and protuberances. In connection with women, the potential of the grotesque body to transgress limits evoked a special kind of horror for patriarchy. The garrulous woman was lascivious; her open mouth functioned as the sign of her open and inviting female genitalia. As Stallybrass points out:

> The connection between speaking and wantonness was common to legal discourse and conduct books. A man who was accused of slandering a woman by calling her ‘whore’ might defend himself by claiming that he meant ‘whore of her tongue’ not ‘whore of her body’.\textsuperscript{121}

The links between verbal and sexual intercourse are brought out in the sermons and homilies that posit silence as the highest form of female virtue. Barbaro in his treatise \textit{On Wifely Duties} points out that:

> It is proper . . . that not only arms but indeed also the speech of women never be made public; for the speech of a noble woman can be no less dangerous than the nakedness of her limbs.\textsuperscript{122}

The woman’s possession of the phallic tongue was also symbolic of her unlawful attempt to usurp male authority and become the ‘woman on top’. As Lynda Boose, succinctly puts it:

> A discourse that locates the tongue as the body’s ‘unruly member’ situates female speech as a symbolic relocation of the male organ, as
unlawful appropriation of phallic authority in which symbolics of male castration are ominously complicit.\textsuperscript{123}

Anxieties and fantasies of women possessing the virile, ‘unruly member’ and thus establishing their social, political and sexual dominance is explicitly staged in Thomas Tomkis’s university play \textit{Lingua: Or the Combat of the Tongue and the Five Senses for Superiority} (1607). Lingua, or tongue, is represented as a woman in scarlet dress flitting in and out of the cosmic mouth. Her words and actions—she wants to be granted the privilege and dignity of one of the senses—call attention to her status as a flamboyant and flagrantly subversive member whose status is in the final indictment is that she is ‘non sense’. Moreover, the dramatist foregrounds her sexual transgressiveness by playing on the word \textit{lie}; Lingua follows her initial tall claims about her unspotted chastity with the admission that she is ‘wont to lie.’\textsuperscript{124}

Lingua’s pun on ‘lie’ is the crux of Desdemona’s tragedy in \textit{Othello}\textsuperscript{125}, which explores the dangerous potential of such double entendre. The play on ‘lie’ is introduced in a light comical vein in Act III Scene IV with Desdemona asking the clown if he knows ‘where the Lieutenant Cassio lies?’(III. iv. 1). The ensuing banter (III. iv. 2-11) that functions as a comic interlude ends with the clown’s summing up:

> I know not where he lodges, and for me to devise a / lodging, and say he lies here, or he lies there, were / to lie in my own throat (III. iv. 9-11).

The clown’s wisecracks look forward to the pernicious play on ‘lies’ that constitutes Iago’s modus operandi in Act IV, Scene i, as he torments Othello about Cassio’s disclosure in his dreams about his sexual liaison with Desdemona. To Othello’s question regarding what Cassio may have said (IV. i. 31) he embarks on a strategy of pauses and omissions, with a hint that certain things are unutterable (IV. i. 31). To Othello’s anxious query, ‘But what?’ he replies with a single enigmatic word, ‘lie’ (IV. i. 33), intended to tease Othello and further arouse his jealous suspicion. Though Othello strenuously attempts to stress the crucial distinction between ‘Lie with her’ and ‘lie on her’ (IV. i. 35-6), it is clear that the bewitching power of Iago’s rhetoric is his equivocation, ‘With her, on her, what you will’ (IV. i. 34). This exchange between Iago and Othello establish that the former’s famous slipperiness stems from what early modern writers understood as the dangerous potential of the slippery tongue.
Writers of the early modern period were acutely sensitive to the omnipotence of the tongue (language) in its ability to literally affect lives from a distance. As Thomas Adams puts it:

The hand spares to hurt the absent, the tongue hurts all . . . The hand reacheth but a small compasse, the tongue goes through the world.\textsuperscript{126}

Richard Allestree similarly draws attention to the power of the tongue to pervade and affect almost anything in the universe:

So unboundedly mischievous is that petulant member, that heaven and earth are not wide enough for its range, but it will find work at home too.\textsuperscript{127}

In this context, it is also interesting to note that in the discourses of the period, the power of the mobile tongue was linked to its ability to disturb social and political order—an idea expressed through the personification of tongues as porters, midwives, footmen, horses and women. These were groups whose function was to serve the members of the upper echelons of society, but which were potentially unruly. The rhetorical strategy thus emphasized the always-already subversive quality of the tongue.\textsuperscript{128}

As Othello’s ‘ancient’ or ensign, Iago not only belongs to this socially subordinate group; his speech curiously evokes images of midwifery. He refers to his lies / concoctions as ‘monstrous births’ that he, as an agent of ‘hell and night’, will assist in bringing ‘to the world’s light’ (I. iii. 401-2). Later at the quayside he refers to his ‘inventions’ (II. i. 125) as the birth pangs of his ‘labouring muse’ who delivers his acerbic witticisms (II. i. 127-8). The allusions to a midwife serve as a pointer to Iago’s role as a ‘gossip’ in the play. Like the midwife the gossip denoted a woman whose unbridled tongue had great subversive potential. The section argues that Iago’s obsessive concern with the fabled linguistic wantonness of the female tongue is linked to his own perception of social powerlessness. His status as a malcontent aligns him to the feminine and his own revulsion at this feminization expresses itself through a virulent misogyny.

\textit{A gossiping husband and a silent shrew: reversing gender roles in Othello}

In the early modern period the one condition of female loquaciousness that was acknowledged as socially necessary (though not entirely approved) was that of the
gossip. The Concise Oxford English Dictionary notes that the etymology of the term ‘gossip’ is the Old English ‘godsibb’ which meant ‘godfather or godmother’, ‘literally a person related to one in God’. However, by the sixteenth century it became a thoroughly gendered, and slightly pejorative term, used exclusively in connection with women. In their marital conduct book Robert Dod and John Cleaver recognize gossiping as a form of feminine social networking necessary for the ‘law of good neighbourhood’, but warn explicitly against its excesses:

She that much frequenteth meetings of gossips seldom cometh better home. Some count it a disgrace to come much abroad, lest they should be counted gossips, which name has become odious: but they must have tattlers come home to them to bring them news and to hold them in a tale, least they should be thought to be idle without a cause.¹²⁹

‘To hold them in a tale’ seems to sum up Iago’s function vis-à-vis the characters in Othello. However, unlike Dod and Cleaver’s gossips, who bring tales home to housewives, Iago is ubiquitous. Like his mobile tongue that darts in and out of his mouth, Iago’s tales also negotiate the dialectics of the home and the world. In the famous opening scene of Othello it is in the street of Venice that Iago gossips about the mishap within Brabantio’s household. He instructs Roderigo to raise a noisy outcry, create a carnivalesque charivari¹³⁰ beneath Brabantio’s window (I. i. 67-77) and produces voyeuristic fictions of an ‘old black ram’ ‘tupping’ Brabantio’s ‘white ewe’ (I. i. 88-9). He arouses Brabantio’s racist and patriarchal anxieties: ‘you’ll have your daughter cover’d with a Barbary horse’ (I. i. 110-11). Towards the end of the play, he gossips to Cassio about Bianca, telling him, ‘She gives it out that you shall marry her’ (IV. i. 115); he doesn’t fail to add that this is the talk of the town in Cyprus, ‘Faith, the cry goes, you shall marry her’ (IV. i. 123). In between, he re-presents the Othello-Desdemona relationship to the gullible and heartbroken Roderigo as an exotic tale about ‘an erring barbarian’ (I. iii. 356) and a sexually insatiable ‘super-subtle Venetian’ (I. iii. 357), assuring him that the marriage will not last. To Othello he plays the role of a gossip, who has intimate knowledge of how sexually lascivious Venetian wives conduct themselves:

I know our country disposition well;
In Venice they do let God see the pranks
They dare not show their husbands; their best conscience
Is not to leave undone, but keep unknown.

(III. iii. 205-8)

The subversive potential of the gossip, licensed to infiltrate the enclosed space of the home, is underscored by Dod and Cleaver who note that the ‘great tale bearers be as great carriers’ and their occupation is ‘but to mark and carry’. In the senate Iago is quick to ‘mark’ Brabantio’s misogynist warning before he departs: ‘Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see / She has deceiv’d her father, and may thee’ (I. iii. 292-3). He ‘carries’ this almost verbatim to Othello:

She did deceive her father, marrying you;
And when she seem’d to shake and fear your looks,
She lov’d them most

(III. iii. 210-12)

If gossiping, or carrying tales, is indeed a feminine occupation, then what are the implications of Iago’s monstrous appropriation of this role? Why, indeed, does Iago need to play what Dod and Cleaver term, ‘such games of carrying and recarrying’? My submission is that Iago’s preoccupation with ‘gossiping’—a specifically feminine attribute—has to be understood in the light of the gendered dimension of the malcontent’s lack of power.

Iago’s status as the stage malcontent is established in the opening scene of the play; he is a man who knows his price and is confident that he is ‘worth no worse a place’ (I. i. 11) than that of a lieutenant. He has given ‘proof’ of his military abilities to his master by accompanying him to battlefields, ‘At Rhodes, at Cyprus, and on other grounds, / Christian and heathen’ (I. i. 28-30). Yet, the Moor has elected Michael Cassio, a man, ‘That never set a squadron in the field, / Nor the division of a battle knows, / More than a spinster’ (1. i. 22-4) as his lieutenant. Relegated to the rank of ‘his worship’s ancient’ (I. i. 33) Iago despises Othello and expresses his resentment through a mocking mimicry of the Moor’s voice of power (I. i. 16-17).

Following Peter Stallybrass’ observation that the malcontent is ‘the most notable practioner of the artifices of the powerless’, it may be argued that Iago’s appropriation of the function of the gossip—the familiar, intimate but deeply subversive feminine role—is an expression of his powerless condition as a malcontent. Indeed his continual ‘improvisation,’ his relentless role-playing and manipulation of
others may be understood as the ‘artifices of the powerless’. Stallybrass draws attention to the ‘structural dependency’ that the malcontent shares with the lady: ‘For like the woman he despises, he is bought by the highest bidder; like them his only role is service.’ The observations are particularly pertinent for malcontents like Bosola and Iago. Iago interprets his marginalized status not as exceptional but contingent on the very nature of service, its ‘curse’ where ‘Preferment goes by letter and affection’ (I. i. 35-6). Consequently, Iago subversively undermines the ideology of service: ‘I follow him to serve my turn upon him’ (I. i. 42). He expresses contempt for the ‘duteous and knee-crooking knaves’ (I. i. 45) and upholds those who throw ‘shows of service on their lords’ (I. i. 52) and ‘Do themselves homage’ (I. i. 54). Early in the play, Roderigo’s peevish accusations to Iago of not fulfilling his part of the deal clearly indicate that one of Iago’s roles is as that of a paid informant:

Tush, never tell me! I take it much unkindly
That thou, Iago, who hast had my purse
As if the strings were thine, shouldst know of this.

(I. i. 1-3)

His revulsion at his own feminized powerlessness is expressed through the displaced abjection of women. His contempt for the artifices practiced by those who lack power leads him to denounce women’s ability to deceive and dissemble, to hide their sexual lasciviousness. Hence he creates a fiction of Desdemona having practiced witchcraft to ensnare Othello:

She that so young could give out such a seeming,
To seal her father’s eyes up, close as oak,
He thought ‘twas witchcraft

(III. iii. 213-215)

In a perverse twist of logic, Iago incriminates Desdemona as the witch who is at heart a whore. The effectiveness of Iago’s ‘scripting’ of Desdemona as a whore is expressed in Othello’s later anguished question to his wife: ‘Was this fair paper, this most goodly book / Made to write ‘whore’ upon?’ (IV. ii. 73-4). Indeed, it is crucial to Iago’s own project of financial gain that Desdemona be constructed as a whore. Thus he assures Roderigo that ‘thou shalt enjoy her’ (I. iii. 358-9). His power to ‘trash’ Roderigo, ‘this poor trash of Venice’ (II. i. 298) is that he can convince Roderigo that Desdemona,
whom he idealizes and adores, is available for sexual purchase. Roderigo, whose conception of his aristocratic ladylove oscillates between her role as a goddess and a whore, sends Desdemona jewels through Iago. Firm in his conviction that such gifts would corrupt a votarist (IV. ii. 189), he believes Iago’s lies that ‘she has receiv’d ’em’ (IV. ii. 190) and hopes in return to gain her sexual favours (IV. ii. 191-2).

Iago’s ability to manipulate others through his fictions is fascinating also because of the paradoxical position that he occupies in the play. As a malcontent he shares the status of other Shakespearean lower-order characters like Shylock, Malvolio, Edmund, or Caliban, yet, his is a particularly dangerous and powerful ‘scripting from below.’ As Peter Stallybrass has observed, Iago is convincing—not merely to Othello, but to Brabantio, Roderigo and Cassio—‘because his is the voice of ‘common sense’, the ceaseless repetition of the always already known, the culturally given.’

He voices Venetian society’s deeply racist and sexist ideology of power. Iago’s strategies of fiction-making are based on his acute perception of what constitutes culture’s ‘common sense’—that black men possess excessive and monstrous sexual drives, that women are inherently deceitful, sexually lascivious and inconstant.

At the quayside in Cyprus, Iago’s riddles about female nature end with the sly formulation that even the paragon of virtue and beauty (II. i. 147-57) is fit only ‘To suckle fools and chronicle small beer’ (II. i. 160). Iago’s fictions of feminine sexual frailty, folly and duplicity are pernicious because they are not merely an acerbic individual’s warped notions of women. Using the rhetoric of proverbial sayings, delivered as couplets, Iago’s ‘invention’ (II. i. 125) constitutes the culture’s prevailing common sense ‘truths’ about female nature and character. When Desdemona dismisses Iago’s words playfully as ‘old paradoxes, to make fools laugh i’ the alehouse’ (II. i. 138-9), she underestimates the damaging, indeed, lethal power of such prattle. It is because Iago is aware that his subversive power lies in his ability to manipulate others through the use of his tongue that his anxious misogyny expresses itself, transferring its power to women, by categorizing his wife as a ‘shrew’.

Emilia’s first appearance in the play, at the quayside in Cyprus, presents the audience with a puzzle: is this woman a shrew or a submissive wife? It is Iago, authorized to label almost all the characters in Othello, who categorizes his wife Emilia as a shrew—the culture’s most enduring stereotype of female ‘unruliness’. In a lewd sneering comment addressed to Cassio, Iago says:
Sir, would she give you so much of her lips  
As of her tongue she has bestow’d on me,  
You’ld have enough  

(II. i. 100-2)

Iago’s crass misogynist joke—the first of a long series that will ensue—is in response to Cassio’s disclaimer as he kisses Emilia welcome (II. i. 97-99). Even when Desdemona points out that Emilia hardly speaks (II. i. 103) Iago stresses his husbandly prerogative, insisting that he alone has privileged access to the truth about Emilia’s behaviour:

I know, too much:  
I find it, I; for when I ha’list to sleep—  
Marry, before your ladyship, I grant,  
She puts her tongue a little in her heart,  
And chides with thinking.  

(II. i. 102-7)

Iago’s vignette of his marital discord is pegged exclusively on his wife’s use or misuse of her tongue. It both derives from and feeds into early modern patriarchal discourses that regard female speech as the ultimate locus of insubordination. According to the same logic a liberal or ‘loose’ tongue also tropes an incontinent female body. Singled out as a shrew or scold, Emilia also becomes a ‘common’ woman or a potential whore. Iago’s punningly pronounced ‘Come on come on’ in his four line misogynist type-casting of women drives home this point; possessing ‘common’ frailties, women are by implication sexually available or ‘common’ (II. i. 109-12). Throughout this scene, while Iago humiliates Emilia by attempting to turn her into the comic stereotype of the shrewish wife, she protests just twice: You ha’ little cause to say so’ (II. i. 108) and ‘You shall not write my praise’ (II. i. 116). Emilia’s tongue-tiedness confirms the truth of Desdemona’s observation, ‘Alas! She has no speech.’ (II. i. 102).

What, one wonders, are the implications of Emilia’s reticence? Is it meant to expose Iago’s accusations of her shrewishness as his ‘invention’ (II. iii. 125)? Or is Emilia’s silence an indication that she is the submissive, obedient, good wife, modeled
on the ideal created in homilies on marriage and domesticity? Perhaps the conspicuous
disjunction between Iago’s insistence on Emilia’s role as a shrew and her reticence
drives home the double-bind of the calumniated wife; for Emilia to speak at this
juncture would merely confirm Iago’s slander—that she is indeed the scold—yet by not
protesting she ends up colluding in Iago’s myths about herself. Indeed Emilia’s
function in this scene seems to fulfill the ultimate masculine fantasy of controlling
women’s tongues. Even the classic shrew-tamer Petruchio in The Taming of the Shrew
can only display his ‘aweful rule and right supremacy’ (The Taming of the Shrew, V. ii.
114) by making Katherine discourse at length on her wifely submission (V. ii. 141-84).
This articulation problematizes the issue, since the very act of voicing subversively
undermines the very project of silencing the shrew. In contrast Iago’s strategies
effectively reduce Emilia into an oxymoron: the silent shrew.

‘Alas! She has no speech’ and ‘I am bound to speak’: The enigma of Emilia

In the first half, the play casts Emilia as a woman who has subdued her critical faculties
and will to her abusive and wily husband; the apotheosis of this is Act II, Scene iii,
when she picks up the handkerchief that Desdemona has dropped. In a telling passage
that reveals her willing suspension of disbelief, coupled with an attempt to absolve
herself of the responsibilities of an active knowing agent, she says:

What he’ll do with it
Heaven knows, not I,
I nothing know, but for his fantasy.

(III. iii. 301-3)

The sequence of words ‘not I / I nothing’ is a fascinating chiasmus linking disavowal of
knowledge with female self-effacement although the repeated I’s inscribe the self as a
repressed moral agent.140 Yet in the last scene of the play the very same Emilia, despite
her husband’s command to be silent, defiantly declares, ‘I will not charm my tongue, I
am bound to speak’ (V. ii. 185). She emerges as the play’s most powerful voice
critiquing the patriarchal ideology of wifely behaviour: ‘But I do think it is their
husband’s faults / If wives do fall’ (IV. iii. 86-7). This section on the female grotesque
in Othello attempts to explore the enigma of Emilia—her transformation from a silent
submissive wife to a woman who is all speech.141
Emilia’s behaviour is all the more striking in contrast to Desdemona’s transformation. The latter becomes more and more ‘enclosed’ within the ‘patriarchal territory’—she endures Othello’s insult and physical abuse (IV. i. 235), his accusation that she is a whore (IV. ii. 73-88) and yet states that her love ‘doth so approve him’ that even ‘his checks and frowns’ ‘have grace and favour in them’ (IV. iii. 19, 20, 21). Emilia on the other hand plays a crucial role in the play’s denouement by unmasking her ‘honest’ husband and denouncing him as a liar: ‘You told a lie, an odious damned lie; / Upon my soul, a lie, a wicked lie!’ (V. ii. 181-2.) In the last scene of Othello, Emilia’s act is clearly transgressive—she challenges the patriarchal injunction to maintain wifely obedience and silence: ‘Good gentlemen, let me have leave to speak / ’Tis proper I obey him, but not now’ (V. ii. 196-7).

Any attempt to read the Emilia of Act IV and V in terms of plausibility and causality, fails totally just as Desdemona’s transformation from the spunky assertive and self-confident young woman into a calumniated and submissive wife does not follow the dictates of psychological consistency of character development. In his reading of Desdemona’s role in Othello, Stallybrass writes:

Desdemona . . . fulfills two different functions. The Desdemona of the first half of the play is an active agent . . . She is accordingly given the freedom we tend to associate generically with the comic heroine . . . It is only when Desdemona becomes the object of surveillance that she is reformed within the problematic of the enclosed body. In other words the play constructs two different Desdemonas: the first a woman capable of ‘downright violence’ (I. iii. 249) and the second ‘A maiden never bold’ (I. iii. 94). 142

The play likewise constructs two different Emilias: the first a woman who ‘has no speech’ (II. i. 103) and the second who ‘is bound to speak’ (V. ii. 185) despite her husband’s injunctions, ‘charm your tongue’ (V. ii. 184). The shift parallels that of the two different Desdemonas but in the exactly opposite direction. It is therefore crucial to examine those occasions in which the audience can sense the emergence of Emilia’s subversive agency and explore the possible sources of oppositional selfhood. Feminist critics like Carol Neely have argued that the women’s agency stem from their participation in ‘female discourse’, which emerges from social interaction amongst women. 143 The only occasion in the play when Desdemona and Emilia participate in the
production of an exclusively ‘female discourse’ is in Act IV Scene iii, the famous ‘willow scene’ in Othello.

Desdemona and Emilia: A tale of two housewives

As Emilia ‘unpins’ Desdemona, the two women engage in feminine chitchat that provides the play’s counter-discourse on heterosexual relationships. The scene has been read as a celebration of the quotidian, and an affirmation of female bonding made all the more poignant since the two women are soon to be murdered by their respective husbands. Yet a close reading reveals that Desdemona, the anxious and melancholy mistress, and Emilia, the aggrieved female attendant, speak in entirely different registers on issues of marital fidelity, female chastity and honour. As a Venetian lady who has led a cloistered existence Desdemona fails to conceive of the possibility of the infidelity of wives: ‘Dost thou in conscience think, — tell me, Emilia, — / That there be women do abuse their husbands / In such gross kind?’ (IV. iii. 59-60). Emilia, evidently a woman of the world, affirms the existence of such wives: ‘There be some such, no question’ (IV. iii. 61). To Desdemona’s query ‘Wouldst thou do such a deed for all the world?’ (IV. iii. 62) Emilia does a tongue-in-cheek debunking of women’s chastity and marital fidelity: ‘The world’s a huge thing; it is a great price / For a small vice’ (IV. iii. 67-8) and then, ‘Ud’s pity, who would not make her husband a cuckold, to make him a monarch?’ (IV. iii. 74-5.) Desdemona responds with a moral recoil (IV. iii. 75-6). The scene, which ends with Emilia’s impassioned speech vindicating female frailty (IV. iii. 84-103) widens the chasm that separates the two women. Instead of being united in their gender identities—women as same—they are deeply divided in terms of their class positions—emphasizing patriarchy’s construction of women as different. In his reading of the scene, Kenneth Burke suggests that Emilia occupies a ‘low’ position vis-à-vis Desdemona high and ‘noble’ status; she serves as a contrast to highlight Desdemona’s role as a tragic heroine who will always choose the more difficult path.

Clearly, this scene raises doubts about Emilia’s oppositional female selfhood, a role resulting from a shared discourse among women. An alternative would be to trace the roots of Emilia’s dissidence to her low marginal position both in her marriage and within the play’s social structure or system. Indeed Emilia is a perfect counterpart of her husband Iago in sharing the structural position of the malcontent. Emilia’s impassioned defense of the frailties of wives is strongly reminiscent of Shylock’s retort to the Christians when he is asked to show mercy in court; reminding them that they
treat their slaves as abjectly as their asses, dogs and mules because ‘you bought them’
his logic is that Antonio’s ‘pound of flesh’ is similarly ‘dearly bought’ and ‘he will have
it’ (The Merchant of Venice, IV. i. 90-100). Emilia’s role as the play’s female
malcontent is evident in the several instances in which her subversive rhetoric
uncannily echoes those of Iago. As an example, one could cite her speech about
demystification of desire in marriage:

'Tis not a year or two shows us a man;
They are all but stomachs, and we are all but food;
They eat us hungerly, and when they are full,
They belch us

(III. iv. 100-3)

The metaphorical transformation of women into food for male sexual appetite is
reminiscent of Iago’s debunking account of the ‘changeable’ Moor who will soon lose
his appetite for Desdemona: ‘The food that to him now is as luscious as locusts, shall be
to him shortly as acerb as the coloquintida.’ (I. iii. 349-50). Like Iago it is Emilia who
introduces the motif of sexual jealousy to Desdemona. Attempting to assuage
Desdemona’s anxiety, Emilia evokes the ‘monster’ image to refer to the irrationality of
male sexual jealousy: ‘They are not ever jealous for the cause, / But jealous for they are
jealous: ‘tis a monster / Begot upon itself, born on itself” (III. iv. 155-6), reminding the
audience / reader of Iago’s mock warning to Othello about jealousy: ‘O beware, my
lord, of jealousy / It is the green-eyed monster which doth mock / The meat it feeds on’
(III. iii. 167-9). Speaking in the same linguistic register of common sense, sharing the
malcontent’s ideological demystification of erotic relationships, it is Emilia who
ceaselessly deconstructs, from within, Iago’s language ‘that is continuous with the
power structures that sustain the social order.’

‘Woman’s poor revenge / That lies in her tongue’: The turn of the shrew

Following this, my final submission is that Emilia’s transformation into the powerful
female grotesque can best be interpreted in terms of what Patricia Parker identifies as
the play’s preoccupation with the complex and multivalent usage of ‘dilation.’
Parker notes that during the Renaissance the term ‘dilate’ was a ‘curious combination
of . . . dilation, expansion, or dispersal . . . but also postponement in time,’ hence
narrative dilation (especially in romance) was also connected with ‘delay.’ She also
draws attention to the close links in Renaissance rhetoric between ‘dilation’—‘to speak at large of anything’ and ‘delation’—‘occult and secret accusations’ especially as it pertained to indictments. Since ‘to delate’ is used in dictionaries as a variant spelling of ‘to dilate’ dilation could also be read as delation. Thus Parker postulates that ‘dilation’ was a ‘freighted term suggestive of amplification, accusation and delay’ and is integral to the play’s much-debated issues of gender and power and the unfolding of the tragedy. Parker’s essay draws attention to the ‘crossing of rhetorical, judicial and temporal within the structure of ‘dilation’ in Othello through a brilliant close reading of the play. However, it does not explore the feminist potential embedded in such textual deconstructive reading. Yet, as Parker herself points out, the term dilation has strong associations with the ‘figures of the feminine’ since the Latin dilatio or dilation is a translation of the Hebrew Rahab, the name of the biblical harlot of Jericho, which means ‘wide’ or ‘broad’. Drawing heavily upon Parker’s analysis, my thesis argues that Emilia’s enigma—her initial silence which is transformed into a powerful voice critiquing patriarchal sexist ideology—may be related to the gendered implication of the multiple meanings of dilation / delation in Othello.

Like Iago’s wit, which depends on ‘dilatory time’ (II. iii. 363) the dramatist employs the ‘dilatory’ tactics of delay to exploit the effectiveness of Emilia’s presence. The play begins with an amplification or dilation of Emilia only after it is more than half way through. This meaning of amplification as an ‘unfolding’ of something at first hermetically ‘wrapt up’ or closed is connected to the delayed opening-up of the silent shrew’s mouth. Thus though there are sporadic instances of Emilia’s voice in the play during Act III, the first major instance of the specifically feminine implication of ‘dilation’—of women’s proverbial copia verborum invoked by Iago in the beginning of the play—is Emilia’s discourse on female chastity, honour and the role of husbands in marriage (IV. iii. 82-99).

Henceforth, Emilia’s narrative dilation reflects primarily its meaning as delation, or legal accusations deployed to defend Desdemona against Othello’s slander that his wife is a whore. In Act IV Scene ii after Othello has hurled accusations of sexual promiscuity and infidelity at her Desdemona’s response is one of shocked incredulity: ‘Am I that name Iago?’ (IV. ii. 117.) Othello’s slander becomes a kind of unutterable horror, ‘Such as she says my lord did say I was?’ (IV. ii. 118.) In contrast to the tongue-tied Desdemona Emilia gains a linguistic fulsome...
He called her a whore; a beggar in his drink
Could not have laid such terms upon his callat

(IV. ii. 119-20)

In a moment of dramatic irony Emilia dilates upon the very ‘circumstances’ that Iago had earlier used to convince Othello of Desdemona’s erring nature (III. iii. 232-37). As proof of Desdemona’s commitment and fidelity:

Hath she forsook so many noble matches,
Her father, and her country, all her friends,
To be call’d whore? Would it not make one weep?

(IV. ii. 124-6)

She goes on to pose crucial queries about the plausibility of Othello’s charges against Desdemona, demanding that he produce the ‘circumstances’ of such accusations. What Emilia is demanding are proofs or what in legal rhetoric is called ‘circumstantial evidence’:

Why should he call her whore? Who keeps her company?
What place, what time, what form, what likelihood?

(IV. ii. 139-40)

In stating that it is not enough merely to accuse a woman of sexual infidelity, but one must have adequate reason and proof for doing so, Emilia is using the strategy of delation as legal indictment. Emilia’s intuitive understanding of human nature, in particular Othello’s character, and the probable scenario of his having been duped is brought out in her astute assessment, ‘The Moor’s abus’d by some outrageous fellow; / Some base notorious knave, some scurvy fellow’ (IV. ii. 141-42). Immediately after this she pronounces the punishment fit for such creatures:

And put in every honest hand a whip,
To lash the rascal naked through the world
Even from east to the west.

(IV. ii. 144-6)

In the play’s last act dilation and delation are explicitly linked to what patriarchal discourses qualified as acts of female transgression. Emilia’s resolution to speak in public is in defiance of patriarchal norms of proper feminine behaviour; if silence (the closed mouth) and containment within the household are signs of the
obedient woman than Emilia epitomizes the transgressive and grotesque wife. It is the
dilation of her mouth (her refusal to be silent) and her delation (accusations and
charges) that frustrate Iago’s attempts at ‘keeping dilation—in both senses—under
strict control.’ Indeed the narrative and dramatic ‘closure’ that Iago attempts to
ensure for his plot is continually thwarted by female ‘disclosures’.

Charging Iago with telling a ‘lie, an odious damned lie’ (V.ii.180) about
Desdemona’s sexual liaison with Cassio, Emilia declares ‘I will not charm my tongue; I
am bound to speak’ (V.ii.183). Iago’s angry and exasperated injunction ‘What are you
mad? I charge you get you home’ (V.ii.193) is an attempt to put his unruly wife back to
the place where she rightfully belongs, to have her silenced and enclosed within the
household. Emilia’s awareness that she is committing a willful act of transgression with
dangerous consequences is clear in her acknowledgement, ‘’Tis proper I obey him, but
not now/ Perchance Iago, I will ne’er go home’ (V.ii.195-6). In response to Iago’s
‘Zounds, hold your peace’ (V.ii.217) she declares:

‘Twill out, it will: I hold my peace sir, no,
I’ll be in speaking, liberal as the air,
Let heaven, and men, and devils, let ‘em all,
All, all cry shame against me, yet I’ll speak.

(V.ii.220-223)

In proclaiming that she will be ‘liberal’ Emilia subversively appropriates a term
used to denote women’s lasciviousness in sexist discourses. As Othello tells
Desdemona, her hot and moist hand is a sign of her sexually fallible nature—her
‘liberal heart’ (III.iv.34)—and it requires ‘A sequester from liberty’ (III.iv.36).

Emilia not only refuses to be contained within patriarchal ‘closures’ but also
plays a crucial role the play’s two most significant public ‘disclosures’. The first
concerns Desdemona’s murder: ‘I care not for thy sword— I’ll make thee known, /
Though I lost twenty lives. Help, help, O help!/ The Moor has kill’d my mistress.
Murder, murder!’ (V.ii.164-6) The second is the revelation of the ‘truth’ about the
Desdemona’s lost handkerchief:

O thou dull Moor, that handkerchief thou speakest of
I found by fortune and did give my husband,
For often with a solemn earnestness—
More than indeed belonged to such a trifle—
He begged me to steal it.

(V.ii.223-7).

Emilia’s courage and outspokenness—she is acting as a kind of witness for the state—does not guarantee her immunity; she is stabbed by Iago from behind in the scuffle that ensues. Though Emilia dies by her husband’s hand to protect the honour of her calumniated mistress the difference in the manner of their deaths is marked. Othello strangles the chaste and silent Desdemona in the privacy of a bedchamber—the ultimate locus of patriarchal territory. Iago murders his unruly, ‘liberal’ wife in a public space, in full view. While Desdemona’s death valorizes her status as the tragic victim Emilia’s ignominious murder a fitting end for the transgressive female grotesque who breaks the boundaries of the patriarchal territory.

From her position as the repressed and silent ‘shrew’ Emilia is transformed into the play’s unruly female with an unbridled tongue. Displaying character traits of the malcontent licensed to critique ‘dominant’ ideology, she critiques patriarchal constructions of female lasciviousness, openly chastises Othello for his folly of murdering his chaste wife and denounces her own husband Iago. This thesis has argued that Emilia’s transgressions are those of linguistic fulsomeness and are linked to the text’s pervasive engagement with the strategies and multiple meanings of dilation. By overturning the misogynist stereotype of female loquacity Emilia embodies the power of the female grotesque.¹⁵⁶

Moments before she dies, Emilia re-enacts for the public the melancholy and tragic song sung by Desdemona in the bedchamber: ‘What did thy song bode lady? Hark, canst thou hear me? I will play the swan / And die in music [Sings] ‘Willow, willow, willow’ (V. ii. 244-6). This performative speech-act draws attention to the potential of affective female bonding that gets thwarted in the play. Perhaps it is not entirely fortuitous that the female attendant who accompanies Hermione—the calumniated heroine of The Winter’s Tale—to the prison is Emilia. William H. Matchett remarks that this is an ‘unconscious detail’ that indicates that Othello is in the back of the dramatist’s mind when he wrote The Winter’s Tale.¹⁵⁷
Whatever be the authorial intent or the unconscious, *The Winter’s Tale* is curious in its departure from the trend of Shakespeare’s romances that highlight the isolation of their heroines from the company of women. The potential of female bonding is explored in the relationship between Paulina and Hermione. When she is denied access to the imprisoned Hermione, Paulina asks the Jailer to send for the queen’s female attendant Emilia. It is this Emilia who recognizes the importance of Paulina’s visit, expressing her trust in her ability: ‘There is no lady living / So meet for this great errand’ (II. ii. 45-6). She assures Paulina that she will ‘Acquaint the queen of your most noble offer’ (II. ii. 48). Hermione’s attendant who presumably conveys to the queen that support is finally at hand reminds the audience / reader of the Emilia who died for her mistress with the words ‘Ay, ay, O lay me by my mistress’ side!’ (Othello, V. ii. 244.)

‘*The office/ Becomes a woman best*: Paulina in *The Winter’s Tale*

Paulina’s first appearance marks her out as a figure of female authority. Not only does Paulina come to the assistance of the distressed queen but she also expresses her opinion that by suspecting Hermione of adultery and having her imprisoned the king has acted like a lunatic in his jealous rage: ‘These dangerous, unsafe lunes in th’ King, beshrew / them! (II. ii. 29-30.) Insisting that the king ‘be told on’t’ (II. ii. 31), she takes upon herself this task. Her argument is that, ‘the office / Becomes a woman best’ (II. ii. 31-2). The phrase is richly ambiguous; in early modern culture the ‘offices’ of speech connected typically with women are those of the shrew and the gossip. Paulina challenges the derogatory associations of shrewishness as a public offence and simultaneously reclaims the ‘shrew’ as a figure of female authority and justice. Similarly, when she refers to her ‘foolishness’, she uses the term in the carnivalesque context where female folly has positive connotations. In a remarkable feminist appropriation of the stereotype of the ‘shrew’ Paulina valorizes her tongue as an instrument of chastisement:

> If I prove honey-mouthed, let my tongue blister
> And never to my red-looked anger be
> The trumpet any more.

(II. ii. 33-5)
True to her word, Paulina gives vent to her anger against the king’s tyranny during Hermione’s arraignment in the court. Paulina’s speech (III. ii. 175-201) is a passionate moral indictment of the king, but its remarkable quality is the masterly application of rhetorical skills of indirection. Itemizing Leontes’ various offences, and interlacing them through a series of negatives ‘twas nothing’, ‘nor was’t much’, ‘To be or none or little’, ‘Nor is’t directly laid to thee’ (III. ii. 185,187, 192,194) Paulina concludes with an affirmative:

But the last—O Lords,  
When I have said, cry ‘woe’!—the queen, the queen,  
The sweet’st, dearest creature’s dead: and vengeance for’t  
Not dropp’d down yet.  

(III. ii. 198-201)

Even if one were to concede the possibility of Paulina’s dissimulation of fury,159 (after all she knows that Hermione is not dead) the implications of her speech extend beyond the purpose of driving home a moral judgement on Leontes. Crucially important is the specifically public expression of what she had earlier referred to as her ‘red-looked anger’. It is worth noting that though Leontes’ counsellors and courtiers—Antigonus in particular—had earlier pleaded with him on behalf of Hermione, requesting him to revoke his rash judgement (II. i. 126-72), it is Paulina who brings up the issue of Leontes’ tyranny in the court. It is of course ironic that Hermione’s arraignment, set up with the express purpose that Leontes be ‘cleared / Of being tyrannous’ (III. ii. 4-5) does indeed ‘openly / Proceed in justice’ (III. ii. 5-6). Apollo’s oracle declares him a ‘jealous tyrant’ (III. ii. 133), and Paulina openly denounces him as a tyrant capable of inflicting gruesome torture on those who dare raise their voice against him (III. ii. 175-80).

Paulina’s behaviour in court takes on special significance in the context of the early modern social and political strictures against feminine anger. Karen Robertson notes:

Tudor prohibitions against feminine anger and participation in the operations of justice [were] clearly articulated in the homiletic injunctions against female anger and in the absence of women’s
participation in the Bond of Association, a major loyalty oath and pact for vengeance.\textsuperscript{160}

The prohibition on anger implied the exclusion of women (as well as men of inferior status) from participation in public life, especially in cases of justice; it established that the right to anger and judgment was the prerogative of the aristocratic male. Paulina’s assertion that she has the right to a public expression of anger (indicated in the use of the word ‘trumpet’) and her fiery speech in court is clearly in defiance of such moral and legal prohibition. Yet in so speaking Paulina is also expressing her folly; like the anger to which she is not entitled Paulina also appropriates the role of the male Fool in Shakespearean drama.

‘The rashness of a woman’: Paulina and female folly

In her decision to speak to Leontes about his rash and foolish conduct, Paulina seems to be usurping the prerogative that is traditionally the preserve of the Fool, a person both morally and politically licensed to critique the king. However, such privilege is exclusive to the male Fool and there are no female counterparts of Lear’s wise Fool in Shakespeare’s theatre. The role of female fools in the plays of the period is largely circumscribed; their function is to arouse mirth and ridicule among men through a display of lewd and provocative behaviour that is often linked to madness.\textsuperscript{161}

Stage representations of the female fool in spectacles that regaled and entertained the male audience derive from and reflect the practices of the European courts. Mathurine was one such female fool who provided mirth for the French court with her eccentric behaviour.\textsuperscript{162} Innocent Jane, a part of Henry VIII’s court, had her hair shaven and was made a part of court games.\textsuperscript{163} The Italian court fool Caterina Matta, who belonged to Isabella d’Este, would disport herself indecently whenever requested.\textsuperscript{164}

Cultural practices involving the representation of the female fool—both in the court and on the stage—are pegged on the construction of femininity in western philosophical, religious and medical discourses which associated women with unreason, materiality and sexual wantonness. The connections between women and unreason are reinforced through the Christian myth of the Fall. It is Eve who succumbs to Satan’s temptations in her foolishness and seduces Adam, thus leading to the
corruption of human reason. Eve is an embodiment of fallibility and through her all women become agents of folly and unreason.

The classical and Christian tradition that constructs women as naturally irrational and thus associates femininity with folly is continued in the writings of the early modern period. The classic early modern text that links folly with femininity is Erasmus’ *The Praise of Folly*. As the subtitle of the text—‘An oration, of feigned matter, spoken by Folly in her own person’—indicates, Folly is personified as female. Early in the text Folly makes a bilingual pun that encapsulates much of the mock encomium’s irony. Joining the Greek words for fool and lover of wisdom (‘morosoph’) she creates a hybrid word, which Thomas Chanoler in his 1549 English translation rendered as ‘foolosopher’. This linking of feminine folly and wisdom marks Paulina’s role in *The Winter’s Tale*. Paulina’s decision to throw caution to the winds and do some plain speaking to the king can be linked to Dame Folly’s mocking praise of the fool’s lack of prudence. As Dame Folly puts it:

> And first if prudence depends upon experience, to whom is the honor of that name more proper? To the wise man, who partly out of modesty and partly distrust of himself, attempts nothing; or the fool, whom neither modesty which he never had, not any danger which he never considers, can discourage from anything? . . . For there are two main obstacles to the knowledge of things, modesty that casts a mist before the understanding, and fear that, having fancied a danger, dissuades us from the attempt. But from these folly sufficiently frees us, and few there are that rightly understand of what great advantage it is to blush at nothing and attempt everything.

However, unlike the sexually wanton Dame Folly, Paulina is associated with a different tradition of discourses on folly marked by spiritual unworldly innocence. Thinkers like Giovanni Michele Bruto prescribed this form of innocence for women, suggesting that it would align women to the holy fools and thus make them wiser than men. It is worth noting that lip-service to women’s apparent superiority conceals the patriarchal strategy of female disempowerment by circumscribing women within the sphere of the domestic.
Though Paulina is a holy fool embodying a kind of wisdom that makes her superior to men she also challenges the politics of female containment implicit in Bruto’s prescription. When she first refers to herself as a ‘foolish woman’ (III. ii. 227) begging the king’s forgiveness it is in the public space of the court. Paulina’s reference to her own folly is ambiguous to say the least, and may be understood as a strategic application of the Socratic ironic mode. Paulina stresses that her foolishness stems from the love she owes to Hermione (III. ii. 228), who though not a kin is linked to her in a kind of female affective relationship. In a world dominated by the destructive ‘justice’ of the male monarch Paulina’s feminine ‘folly’ raises crucial questions about the masculinist ethics of authority.

*The female courtier and the dangers of truth-telling*

Paulina’s decision to champion Hermione’s cause is initiated through her declaration that she will take the infant to the king ‘and undertake to be / Her advocate to th’loudst’ (II. ii. 38-9). The term ‘advocate’ with its legal and juridical associations indicates that Paulina envisages her role as that of the courtier or counsellor. Later on, in her encounter with Leontes she spells this out in most unambiguous terms:

Good, my liege, I come—
And I beseech you hear me, who professes
Myself your loyal servant, your physician
Your most obedient counsellor;

(II. iii. 52-5)

In this sense Paulina is the perfect companion of her husband Antigonus, who had earlier attempted to advise Leontes about the rashness of his judgement in indicting Hermione as an ‘adultress’ and a ‘traitor’ (II. i. 90-1). Antigonus’ willingness to jeopardize his marriage (II. i. 134-9) and take the cruel measures of gelding his young daughters (II. i. 147-50) if Hermione prove to be ‘honour-flawed’ (II. i. 143) are intended to instill reason into the king. In this context it may be worth noting that to geld means to castrate, and Antigonus’s implication is that he is willing to make his daughters barren. Shakespeare’s contemporary audience would no doubt see the parallels between Antigonus and Paulina, and the Humanist counsellors of Henry VIII. Like Henry VIII, Leontes arrogates more power to himself turning a deaf ear to the sage
counsel of his courtiers (II. i. 167). Critics have noted that Hermione’s violent unqueening and her trial ‘resonates with that of Henry VIII’s wives.’

Paulina is simultaneously the physician who seeks to restore the king’s mental health. When denied access to the king’s chamber, she tells the servant:

I
Do come with words as medicinal as true,
Honest, as either, to purge him of that humour
That presses him from sleep.

(II. iii. 37-9).

In her attempt to restore the balance of humours in the king’s diseased body politic Paulina performs a crucial political role. Her apparent rebellion against the king—like that of Kent in King Lear—is thus paradoxically an expression of her obedience, because as Camillo argues the king is in ‘rebellion with himself’ (I. ii. 355). Paulina’s behaviour is intended to drive home the distinction between obedience based on reason and the unquestioning servility that is expected of women both in the private as well as the public sphere. Paulina’s violation of this code of ideal feminine conduct, her refusal to hold her peace and her tongue is thus legitimized in the play’s context of patriarchal authoritarian behaviour that runs counter to good governance.

The political implications of Paulina’s actions extend beyond the historical context of the excesses of Henry VIII’s reign. It is an active public virtue whose purpose is to challenge the despotic rule of Leontes and restore good governance. As Anthony Gash remarks,

Paulina becomes the commonwealth’s and a fortiori the audience’s, representative at court, turning the public theatre into something more like a parliament than an extension of monarchial pageantry.

Paulina’s insistence on speaking the truth may be linked to parrhesia, the Greek term which translates as ‘free speech’. As Michel Foucault expounds, etymologically parrhesia, derived from parrhesiazesthai means to ‘say everything’; the parrhesiastes—one who practices parrhesia—‘opens his heart and mind completely to other people through his discourse.’ However, this frankness of speech has to be understood in a specific social and political context of utterance; one can qualify as a parrhesiastes only when he speaks something that ‘is dangerous to himself and thus
involves a risk.’ The danger for the parrhesiastes arises from the fact that his truth is capable of hurting or angering the interlocutor because the function of parrhesia ‘is not to demonstrate the truth to someone else, but has the function of criticism: the criticism of the interlocutor . . . in a situation where the speaker ‘is in a position of inferiority with respect to the interlocutor.’ The example that Foucault cites—the political and social positioning of the parrhesiastes vis-à-vis the interlocutor, the risk that the former runs by incurring the wrath of the tyrant who he criticizes—could be used to argue Paulina’s case as a parrhesiastes. When Paulina forcibly enters Leontes’ bedchamber hoping that the sight of the new-born baby will arouse paternal affection in the king and make him relent, she is well aware that her truth-telling is a considerable risk to her own safety. When Leontes abuses her as a ‘gross hag’ (II. iii. 108) threatens that he will have her burnt Paulina scornfully replies: ‘I care not / It is an heretic that makes the fire / Not she which burns in’t’ (II. iii. 113-15).

Though Paulina cannot lay claim to parrhesia because she is a woman, her aristocratic status does mark her out as extraordinary. Thus, though Paulina’s gender disqualifies her both as a parrhesiastes as well as that of the licensed fool, the nature of her resistance and challenge to authoritarianism and tyranny clearly indicates that such potentials are embedded in her character. It is indeed ironical that the only sanctioned role available to Paulina is that of the unruly or disruptive woman. Her representation as the unruly shrew bears out Natalie Zemon Davis’ observation that the disorderly woman, or the woman-on-top figured prominently in the carnivalesque practices of the culture and embodied a whole range of subversive potentials.

‘A callat / of boundless tongue’: The shrewish ‘woman on top’

Paulina’s forcible and noisy entry into Leontes’ bedchamber may be regarded as a sort of carnivalesque uprising. She appears as the archetypal disruptive woman, whom the servant and courtiers (including Antigonus) fail to restrain. Paulina’s behaviour—simultaneously comical and critical—draws upon the carnivalesque tradition of unruly women. Natalie Zemon Davis argues that the topos of the woman-on-top occupied a privileged status in the carnival’s topsy-turvy or world-upside-down. According to Davis, the image of the disorderly woman was multivalent; at one level it ‘widened behavioral options for women within and even outside marriage’ and on the other hand it could ‘sanction riot and political disobedience ‘for both men and women in a society that allowed that lower orders few
formal means of protest."¹⁷⁷ Thus, the unruly and shrewish, ‘woman on top’ could retaliate against various forms of injustice.

As discussed earlier, the ‘misrule’ of the carnival is also a punning allusion to the ‘rule of the miss’.'¹⁷⁸ In the carnivalesque festive rituals women (or men in women’s garb) often assumed the role of ‘officers of Misrule’ calling themselves Princesses, Dames or titles as Mere Folle, Mere Sotte and Mere d’Enfance.¹⁷⁹ Paulina’s conduct in Leontes’ bedchamber is an appropriation of these ritually sanctioned forms of carnivalesque female unruliness. Its purpose is to mimic the center of authority and reveals that folly and transgression are the covert reality of rational government'.¹⁸⁰ Anthony Gash points out that Paulina’s noisy intrusion into Leontes’ bedchamber is reminiscent of the carnivalesque charivari that mocked the couple who failed to play expected social marital roles.¹⁸¹ It is Leontes who first evokes the image of a charivari when he refers to the ‘contempt and clamour’ that will be his knell (I. ii. 188-9) once the world knows that he has been cuckolded by his wife. Paulina’s entry with the infant—who Leontes is convinced is Polixenes’ bastard—would therefore appear to Leontes as a charivari, turning him into an object of mockery and ridicule. Paulina’s middle-of-the-night clamour may recall the modes of charivari but its purpose is to create a parody of charivari itself, to drive home the point that Leontes’ obsession with cuckoldry is merely a delusion.

Leontes reacts with a misogynist tirade against the ‘audacious lady’ (II. iii. 43) abusing her as a ‘mankind witch’ (II. iii. 68), ‘a most intelligencing bawd’ (II. iii. 69) and ‘A callat / Of boundless tongue’ (II. iii. 90-1) who is also a husband-beater (II. iii. 92). The slippage from charges of audacity or boldness of speech to witchcraft and whorishness is nothing if not typical. Leontes’ invectives against Paulina demonstrate how patriarchal anxiety and dread of the unruly ‘woman-on top’ operates by clubbing together various categories of female offence or transgressive behaviour. The records of Essex witch trials bears testimony to the commonly held belief that a scold or shrew, ‘devilish of her tongue’ was most likely to practice witchcraft.¹⁸² Predictably enough, Leontes’ rage is directed also at Antigonus. Unable to rule his wife he cuts a sorry figure of a foolish emasculated man.

    Thou dotard! Thou art woman-tir’d, unroosted
    By thy dame Partelet here.

    (II. iii. 74-5)
Antigonus has already admitted his failure to control Paulina (II. iii. 44-6), but remains unprovoked even when he is derogatorily termed a hen-pecked husband. Antigonus serves as a foil to the Leontes whose initial shocked and enraged response to Paulina’s entry is, ‘What canst not rule her?’ (II. iii. 47.) Before Antigonus can reply, it is Paulina who points out that her husband has the right to prevent her from ‘dishonesty’ but ‘He shall not rule me’ (II. iii. 49). Antigonus’ good-humoured acceptance of his subordinate status in the carnivalesque gender topsy-turvy allows ‘misrule’ to dominate; he wittily retorts, ‘When she will take the rein I let her run’ (II. iii. 51). This alludes to and playfully inverts the image of the shrew-taming husband who (like Petruchio) holds the bride’s bridle.

Paulina’s entry, carrying the infant for whom she has pledged to be the ‘advocate to the loudest’ invokes the traditional image of the midwife. She refers to her as a ‘gossip’, a term which etymologically denotes a godsibb or godparent. Her rationale is that the king will be moved by the image of his own likeness. Indeed, Leontes’ bitterly refers to Paulina as ‘Lady Margery, your midwife there’ (II. iii. 159). Bakhtin in his thesis on Dostoevsky points out that according to Socrates truth has a carnivalesque, dialogic origin in which Socrates refers to himself both as a pander and a midwife who assisted in the birth of truth. Anthony Gash perceptively remarks that Paulina’s role—like those of Socrates (and Diotima)—is to act as the spiritual midwife to Leontes.

The powers of the female prophet

In her fiery public denunciation of Leontes as a ‘tyrant’ and angry proclamations that even the most severe form of penance is unlikely to grant him divine forgiveness (III. ii. 209-13), Paulina is also assuming the role of the female prophet. According to Kate Chedgzoy, women’s assumption of the role of the female prophet in the early modern period/culture may be understood as their ‘conscious and critical use of the discourse of carnival.’ Lisa Jardine similarly observes that in prophecy ‘unruliness and disruptiveness of the female voice achieves a kind of authenticity’; and that the female prophet acquired a symbolic independence from authority.

The fifth Act constructs Paulina as female figure whose powers—especially vis-à-vis her influence on the king—are on the ascendant. In the absence of Camillo and Antigonus she functions as the king’s confessor, his aide and adviser. This privileged
status through the magical and sacred nature of her function in the play brought out prominently in the statue scene. Like a priestess she presides over the unveiling of the ‘dead likeness’ (V. iii. 15) of Hermione enjoining the beholders:

To see the life as lively mocked as ever
Still sleep mock’d death

(V. iii. 19-20)

Paulina not only preserves the memory of Hermione for Leontes but also takes care of the queen herself for sixteen years in seclusion. As Ruth Vanita argues, ‘female fictive kinship’ and idealized ‘same-sex community’ that challenge the power of the patriarchal family play a crucial role in *The Winter's Tale* and *Henry VIII*. In a topical reading of the play, she traces the roots of these theatrical representations of bonds between women who are not biologically related to the community’s collective memory of Marian cults. Vanita notes that powerful female recusants like Margaret Clitherow and Mrs. Wiseman were possible models for Paulina. Paulina assumes the role of the female magus whose lawful spells can ‘make the statue move indeed’ (V. iii. 88). The moment is also associated with the Christian Eucharist and its avowed purpose is to awaken the faith of Leontes (V. iii. 95) Paulina’s words, ‘Be stone no more’ (V. iii. 99) that create the marvel of making the statue of Hermione descend from the pedestal are strongly associated with resurrection:

Come,
I'll fill your grave up. Stir. Nay come away.
Bequeath to death your numbness, for from him
Dear life redeems you.

(V. iii. 100-3)

She had prepared for this moment of revelation that would result in the reconciliation between Leontes and Hermione by insisting that the former maintain absolute obedience to Apollo’s oracle against the advice of Dion and Cleomenes that the king should remarry. She makes Leontes take an oath that he should not marry except by her free leave (V. i. 70) and that would not happen

Unless another
As like Hermione as is her picture
Affront his eye

(V. i. 73-4)
Earlier it was Paulina who had created the myth of Hermione’s death when the latter had fainted in the courtroom during her arraignment on hearing the news that her son prince Mamillius had passed away (III. ii. 202-6). Equally important is the fact that since the ‘myth’ of Hermione’s death is maintained for Leontes and audience alike, there is no representation of her suffering or reports of it off stage. This departure subtly subverts the model of patient female suffering that form the crux of the Griselda myth and which according to Jardine informs the representation of Hermione in *The Winter’s Tale*.191

Instead it is Leontes who, true to his ‘vow’ (III. ii. 241), undergoes penitential suffering for sixteen years. Cleomenes appeals to the king to remarry on grounds that he has ‘paid down/ More penitence than done trespass’ (V. i. 3–4). Leontes’ treatment of his wife is not merely an expression of irrational jealousy but becomes an error against a moral and divine law when he refuses to pay heed even to Apollo’s oracle. The play traces his transformation from a tyrannical patriarch to a man who humbly acknowledges the authority of the very woman he had once derided as a witch. The suffering of the older male protagonist who has sinned through his hubris forms an integral part of the moral pattern of sin-suffering-regeneration that characterizes Shakespeare’s last plays. *The Winter’s Tale* moulds this pattern around an inversion of gender roles and expectations in its representation of male suffering and penitence in terms that were regarded as the special province of widows.192 Moreover, the hierarchy of power that characterizes gender relations in patriarchy—prominently displayed in the first of the play—is inverted towards the end when Leontes expresses his regret to Paulina: ‘O that ever I / had squar’d me to thy counsel’ (V. i. 51–2). The play makes the male monarch acknowledge his folly and willingly submit to the counsel and moral authority of a woman.

Indeed the most significant alteration that Shakespeare makes in his source material—Greene’s *Pandosto: The Triumph of Time*—is the introduction of Paulina, the wife of Antigonus. Paulina’s behaviour, from the very beginning, is that of the ‘woman on top’ who refuses to be contained within the patriarchal territory. Yet unlike the representation of unruly women in the early modern culture’s misogynistic tradition Paulina cannot be typecast as wholly comic or negatively disruptive. She is a Socratic ‘Silenus’ figure—a symbol of doubleness whose comically ugly exterior opens to reveal a beautiful god; her ‘comic and garrulous mask, like her name, at first hides and
then reveals a sacred identity.’ A shrew and a shrewd female fool who is simultaneously an extraordinarily courageous woman Paulina is also a female saint invested with the powers of redemption and absolution. Taking a cue from Lisa Jardine, it may be argued that Paulina is the ‘female hero’ of The Winter’s Tale, a play that is unique not only in its empowerment of the unruly woman but also in its endorsement of her moral and political authority. Paulina’s challenge and critique of male despotism serves the purpose of establishing order and good governance.

Lisa Jardine has pointed out that Shakespeare’s comedies are memorable for their spunky ‘shrewish’ heroines like Beatrice, Kate, and Helena who engage in witty verbal sparring with men. However, all these characters are young unmarried women and it is more than likely—as The Taming of the Shrew demonstrates—that the power of their tongue will be curbed or tamed when they are married. This is the rationale of my focusing on Emilia and Paulina, the married shrews in Othello and The Winter’s Tale respectively. By refusing to be ‘tongue-tied’ these women defy codes of submissiveness and silence that is specifically enjoined upon the wife. As female confidants of the plays’ heroines they risk not only their own reputation but also their own lives. Both these married women hold centre stage in their confrontation with patriarchal and royal authority. Paulina effectively calls Leontes a tyrant to his face (II. iii. 115-19) and Emilia can dare to call Othello: ‘O gull, O dolt / As ignorant as dirt’ (Othello, V. ii. 164-5).

It is these transgressive acts of refusal to hold their tongues that make these women the grotesque obverses of the heroines who remain enclosed within ‘patriarchal territories’. In this last section my thesis has attempted to explore the possibilities of feminist recuperation of the transgressive ‘unruly’ shrewish woman in Shakespeare’s Jacobean tragedy and one of his last plays. It is indeed a pity that The Winter’s Tale is not the last play in Shakespeare’s oeuvre. It could then be argued that the spectres of the monstrous women who haunt his first tetralogy and Jacobean tragedies are finally exorcised in The Winter’s Tale through the figure of the female grotesque.
Notes


2 Ibid. p. 135.

3 Davis, ‘Women on Top’, p. 162.


5 Ibid. p. 138.


7 Quoted in Levin, ‘John Foxe’, p. 117.


9 Ibid. p. 141.


11 Ibid. pp. 120-2.

12 Ibid. p. 115.


14 Ibid. p. 141.

15 Ibid. p. 142.


20 All textual citations from Andrew S Cairncross ed. The First Part of Henry VI, The Arden Shakespeare (London and New York: Methuen, 1981). This is also the first instance in the Shakespearean oeuvre of the cross-dressed woman. The Two Gentlemen of Verona Shakespeare’s first comedy to introduce a heroine (Julia) in transvestite disguise is a later composition.

21 In this context see Howard, ‘Crossdressing’, p. 418. Howard points out the dangers of conflating cross-dressing as a social practice with cross-dressing on stage mediated by ‘the conventions of dramatic narrative and Renaissance dramatic production.’

22 For details on the hic mulier debate, see Chapter 1 of this thesis.

23 The transvestism of the comic heroines, especially those of Rosalind and Viola, provide them with opportunities to display a witty vivacity and charm whose erotic appeal extends to both male and female characters in the plays and presumably, as Rosalind’s epilogue seems to indicate, to men and women in the audience. However, as Howard points out, Viola’s function is also to control and humiliate the sexually and economically independent unruly Olivia. See Howard, ‘Crossdressing’, p. 431.


27 Ganymede faints at the sight of the bloody handkerchief while Viola / Caesario gets into a nervous fit when Sir Toby and others challenge her in a duel.


32 Ibid. p. 542.
33 Ibid. pp. 542-3.


35 Ibid.

36 Jackson, ‘Topical Ideology’, p. 152. Jackson supports her reading with references to Spenser’s treatment of Britomart in *The Faerie Queene* which clearly established links between the female knight in armour and Queen Elizabeth. Moreover, in the early modern formal controversy about women, female military heroism received endorsement and sanction of humanists like Agrippa, More, Elyot and Hoby; the Amazon and warrior woman were two of the most valued positive exempla of the controversy over women. Penthesilea and Hippolytē were two of the most revered and admired Amazon figures in the early modern period.


38 Edward Hall, *The Vnion of the two noble and illustrate familie of Lancastre and Yorke* [1548], quoted in Schwarz, *Fearful Similie*, p. 140.


41 Ibid. p. 159.

42 See Harpham’s theory of grotesque in the first chapter of this thesis.


45 See Schwarz, ‘Fearful Simile’, pp.151-2. Schwarz argues that ‘Henry VI Part I ultimately resists the identification of Queen Elizabeth with Joan, or at least distorts the mirror image to the point of unrecognizability.’


48 When the play was performed in 1591/92, English troops were in France supporting the claims of Henry of Navarre to the French crown, and as Bullough points out, ‘A play recalling
the gallant deeds of the English in France at an earlier period would be topical.’ See Geoffrey


50 Greenblatt, ‘Shakespeare Bewitched’, p. 28.


52 Mullaney, ‘Mourning and Misogyny’, p. 139.

53 Ibid. p. 139.


57 Ibid. p. 109.

58 Ibid.


61 Ibid. p. 98.


68 Claudette Hoover, ‘Women, centaurs and devils in King Lear’, Women’s Studies, Vol. 16, 1989, pp. 349-59. The Centaur also represents an image of bestiality and alludes to the narratives of bedevilled women and witches copulating with animals.

69 Alfar, ‘King Lear’s Immoral Daughters’, p. 169.

70 Ibid. p. 166.


72 Alfar, ‘King Lear’s Immoral Daughters’, p. 166.

73 Ibid. p. 169. Alfar argues that, ‘They cannot rule within the limitations of their gender but must subscribe to the brutal nature of kingship The logic of the play requires Goneril and Regan to rebel against traditional feminine passivity to become cruel tyrants, to become monarchs.’

74 See Schwarz, ‘Fearful Similie.’

75 See Chakravarti, ‘Renaissance discourses on folly’, p. 332. According to Chakravarti, Regan’s behaviour with Gloucester represents ‘a multiple inversion of traditional hierarchies—guest scorning host, youth deriding age, woman assaulting man.’


77 Alfar, ‘King Lear’s Immoral Daughters’, p. 169.


81 Albany exercises his magisterial powers to arrest Edmund ‘On capital treason’ (V. iii. 84), exposes Goneril’s adulterous liaisons with Edmund to Regan (V. iii. 85-9), engages in chivalric heroic mode first by challenging Edmund to a duel (V. iii. 94), and then by arranging for the three trumpet calls that allows Edgar to make a dramatic entry and slay his bastard brother.

82 Andrew S Cairncross ed. *King Henry VI Part 2* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994). All textual citations, unless otherwise mentioned, are from this edition.

83 This marks her difference from Lady Macbeth, who, as her husband’s ‘dearest partner of greatness’ (I. v. 11-12), is concerned primarily with removing the obstacles from Macbeth’s path: ‘All that impedes thee from the golden round’ (I. v. 28).


86 Kramer and Sprenger, *Malleus Maleficarum*, p. v. In 1558, Sir Anthony Fortesque was arrested for sorcery, having cast a horoscope, which stated that the Queen ‘should not live passing the next spring’ and in 1580, Nicholas Johnson was accused of ‘making her Majesty’s picture in wax.’ The last incident precipitated the passing of the Act in 1580, which attacked all those persons, who, ‘by any prophecying witchcraft, conjurations or other like unlawfull means whatsoever’ attempted to harm the monarch. See Peter Stallybrass, ‘Macbeth and Witchcraft’, p. 26.


91 Critics have noted that the regicide is imagined as a sexual act. See for example, Dennis Biggins, ‘Sexuality, Witchcraft and Violence in Macbeth’, *Shakespeare Studies* 8, 1975, pp. 255-77; and James Greene, ‘Macbeth: Masculinity as Murder’, *American Imago* 41, 1984, pp. 55-80.


95 Ibid. p. 112.


97 Jordan’s *A Briefe Discourse of a Disease called the Suffocation of the Mother* was published in (1603). In his work Jordan identified almost all of those symptoms that had been traditionally identified with demonic possession and witchcraft, especially insensibility, convulsions, and fits brought on by the presence of particular persons or artefacts, with symptoms of hysteria. Similarly, John Cotta’s work, *The Triall of Witchcraft, Showing the True Methods of the Discovery with a Confutation of Erroneous Ways* (London, 1616) attempted to prove that questions of demonic possession were often cases of hysteria or suffocation of the mother. The works of Jordan and Cotta thus attempted to re-inscribe witches and the bewitched into medical discourse.

98 Neely, ‘Documents in Madness’, p. 84.

99 Ibid. p. 80.

100 Ibid. p. 85.


105 See, Underdown, ‘The Taming of the Scold’, pp. 123; and Boose, ‘Scolding Brides’, p. 245. Boose observes that the cucking stool, which had been used in connection with marketplace offences became a gender specific punishment reserved for women in England in the fifteenth century.

106 Boose, ‘Scolding Brides’, p. 245.

107 Ibid. p. 249. Boose also notes that the punishment meted out to the male offender—being pilloried in the town square—though physically more harsh ‘did not spectacularize or carnivalize the male body so as to degrade it to nearly the same extent.’

108 M C Bradbrook, ‘Dramatic Role as Social Image: A Study of The Taming of the Shrew’, *Shakespeare-Jahrbuch* 94, 1958, p. 134. According to Bradbrook, ‘the shrew is the oldest and indeed the only native comic role for women.’


110 Ibid. p. 201.

111 Ibid. The bride’s mother comments: ‘so was I dealt with the fyrst night / . . . Me thought neuer night so good / As that the same was, when I took such payne.’

112 See Woodbridge, *Women and the English Renaissance*, p. 206; and Boose, ‘Scolding Brides’, p. 258. Both Woodbridge and Boose draw attention to the close links between *A Merry Jeste* and Shakespeare’s play, though the latter is less offensive than the earlier shrew-taming tales in its omission of physical brutality.

113 Boose, ‘Scolding Brides’, p. 258.

114 Quoted in Boose, ibid. p. 265.

115 Ibid. See p. 245 and p. 265 for details.

116 Mazzio, ‘Sins of the Tongue’, p. 54.

117 Ibid.

118 Erasmus, *Lingua*, p. 323.

120 Mazzio, ‘Sins of the Tongue’, p. 63.
122 Ibid. p. 127.
123 Boose, ‘Scolding Brides’, p. 263.
124 Quoted in Mazzio, ‘Sins of the Tongue’, p. 66.
126 Ibid. p. 57.
127 Ibid.
128 Ibid. p. 58.
129 Robert Dod and John Cleaver, A Godly Form of Household Government (1598); Aughterson quotes from the 1614 edition of this text in her Renaissance Woman, p. 79.
132 Ibid.
134 Greenblatt, Renaissance Self- Fashioning, pp. 233-5.
136 Ibid.
138 Ibid.
139 Stallybrass, ‘Patriarchal Territories’, p. 139.


Sinfield, ‘Cultural Materialism’, p. 809.


Parker, ‘Shakespeare and rhetoric’, p. 55.

Ibid. p. 56.

Ibid. p. 58


Parker, ‘Shakespeare and rhetoric’, p. 59.

Ibid. p. 68.


Robertson, ‘Rape and the Appropriation of Progne’s Revenge’, p. 204.

Chakravarti, ‘Renaissance discourses of folly’, p. 295: ‘The she-fool is at once attractive in her pliancy to the male will and her conformity to the patriarchal stereotype of foolish femininity yet threatening in her unabashed sexuality. She is vulnerable and pretty as well as
dangerous and unpredictable; she is both sexualised object and beautiful and helpless waif; she presents a spectacle that is titillating but also heart-rending and frightening.’


165 Elizabeth D Harvey, *Ventriloquized Voices: Feminist Theory and English Renaissance Texts* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 54-5. Harvey comments on the importance of Erasmus’ female Folly and the cultural implications it has for the construction of femininity and female sexuality as well as the gendering of irrationality: According to Harvey Folly’s gender expresses a cultural construction of woman that makes the feminine voice particularly suitable to Erasmus’ purposes, especially as that voice seems to emerge from a female body that clearly manifests an uncensored female sexuality and as it is associated with marginalised and repressed aspects of culture (madness and folly).


168 Ibid. For a discussion of Bruto’s position on female education.


172 Michel Foucault, ‘Discourse and Truth: The Problematization of Parrhesia’, Notes to the Seminar given by Foucault at the University of California, Berkely, 1983, p. 2.

173 Ibid. pp. 4-5. According to Foucault: When a philosopher address himself to a sovereign, to a tyrant, and tells him that his tyranny is disturbing and unpleasant because tyranny is incompatible with justice, then the philosopher speaks the truth, believes that he is speaking the
truth, and, more than that also takes a risk (since the tyrant may become angry, may punish him, may exile him, may kill him).

174 Ibid. p. 6.
175 Davis, ‘Women on top’, p. 162.
177 Ibid. p. 162.
178 Laroque. ‘Shakespeare’s ‘Battle of Carnival and Lent’, p. 86.
188 Vanita, ‘Mariological Memory’, p. 311.
189 Ibid.
190 Ibid. p. 321.
195 Ibid. p. 104.