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An Architectural Reading of Kristeva, Woolf, and Shakespeare

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Introductory Essay

Overview

Julia Kristeva's seminal theories of the signifying process and the abject illuminate texts that challenge readers' expectations. Kristeva's psychoanalytic and linguistic ideas build analytic links between texts as seemingly disparate as Virginia Woolf's 1928 novel *Orlando* and William Shakespeare's late 1590s play *Titus Andronicus*. In this portfolio, I will apply Kristeva's distinction between the semiotic and the symbolic to elucidate the multiple meanings of nature in Woolf's *Orlando*, as well as utilize Kristeva's notion of the abject to analyze the narrative breakdown of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*. In doing so, I will trace the development of Kristeva's ideas since their publication and situate them in a modern critical context.

Although Woolf and Shakespeare may seem to have little in common, these outwardly mismatched texts share an important element: they defy narrative convention. *Orlando* and *Titus Andronicus* both challenge readers' expectations of how a narrative should be shaped. *Orlando* is labeled a biography but is really a novel based loosely on Woolf's friend and lover Vita Sackville-West. The title character lives for three hundred years but is only age thirty by story's end, and starts life as a man but wakes up one morning suddenly and without surprise as a woman. *Titus Andronicus* is famous for its seemingly gratuitous gore: rape, dismemberment, cannibalism, and more murders than any other Shakespeare play. The action revolves around horrific violence and lingers uncomfortably on the wordplay surrounding it. The story leaps the boundaries of what should be shown on stage and how it should be discussed. Each of these texts, despite vast differences in authorship, time period, genre, and theme, refuses conventional narration, forcing the reader into active, curious participation. Kristeva's psychoanalytic framework provides an entry point to explore these unexpected narrative structures.

Theory

In my analysis of Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, I am concerned with Julia Kristeva's ideas on the semiotic and symbolic language. She proposed these ideas in her 1973 doctoral dissertation, sections of which have been published as *Revolution in Poetic Language*. Kristeva proposes a poststructuralist, psychoanalytic, feminine model of the signifying process by which we create and use language. Her main contribution to academic discourse is the idea of the semiotic: "the operation that logically and chronologically precedes the establishment of the symbolic and its subject" (41), which rests on a foundation of what Kristeva calls the *chora*: "a nonexpressive totality formed by the drives and their stases in a motility that is as full of movement as it is regulated" (25). This *chora* is the inexpressible center of the wordless realm of the semiotic. A child has fundamental drives before they acquire language, and these needs for food, excrement, sleep, companionship, and so on are continually changing in their connection and relation to one another. As soon as one drive stops, another begins, but always in patterns. This rhythm of motion and stillness, need and satiation underlies any conceptualization of subject and object. Even when a child enters language by positing themselves as "I," the fundamental drives remain, inaccessible to that language. The *chora* is a rhythmic space that is always out of reach of the language it gave birth to.

The point of cleavage between the wordless, rhythmic semiotic and symbolic language, in which a word carries a meaning, is what Kristeva terms the *thetic* phase. *Thetic* refers to naming or identifying. The crux of the *thetic* phase is positing oneself as a subject separate from the world of objects. "All enunciation, whether of a word or of a sentence, is *thetic*. It requires an identification; in other words, the subject must separate from and through his image, from and

through his objects,” according to Kristeva (43). Even for a child to point to a dog and name it “woof-woof” requires the child to know himself as a subject separate from the object of the dog (43). Kristeva situates herself in the context of Edmund Husserl and Louis Hjelmslev’s philosophies of meaning and of Lacan’s mirror stage, which describes the process of naming oneself as a subject, but her true radicalism lies in naming this thetic phase as the “threshold of language” (45). She maintains that “all enunciation,” from a baby’s holophrastic enunciations (pointing to an object with a sound) to this very sentence, “is thetic,” and that something must have come before. She makes her revolution clear: “The thetic phase marks a threshold between two heterogeneous realms: the semiotic and the symbolic. The second includes part of the first and their scission is thereafter marked by the break between signifier and signified” (48). Not only is the process of creating oneself as a subject a psychological concern but a linguistic one as well. The positing of self as subject is the “rupture and/or boundary” (43) between symbolic language and the inarticulate drives that lurk before and around it.

Kristeva describes symbolic language in explicitly positional and grammatical terms. Moving from the thetic phase, she describes symbolic language as follows: “Even if it is presented as a simple act of naming, we maintain that the thetic is already *propositional* (or syntactic) and that syntax is the ex-position of the thetic. The subject and predicate represent the division inherent in the thetic; they make it plain and actual” (54). The most basic sentence, “I am,” illustrates this division. “I” is the subject: to name I as a subject, one must have crossed the thetic boundary and be able to separate self from the world. “Am” is the verb: it predicates existence within a space and time. The verb and its predicate positions the subject within the world and in relation to objects. Kristeva then links this duality back to the untouchable semiotic: “When the semiotic chora disturbs the thetic position by redistributing the signifying order, we

note that the denoted object and the syntactic relation are disturbed as well” (55). When the comfortablethetic naming of subject as separate from object is shaken, the syntax of symbolic language crumbles as well. Kristeva highlights the changes in syntax that illustrate the positionality of subject, object, and the elusive semiotic.

The second major theory of Kristeva’s that I will focus on is that of the abject. Kristeva explicated this in her 1980 book *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Following from her psychoanalytic and linguistic work, the concept of the abject addresses taboos like bodily excrement, sex, and death. It is used as a noun and a verb. As a noun, the abject is something transgressively awful: it literally or figuratively crosses a line. In doing so, it calls attention to that line, which is revealed to be a permeable boundary instead of a wall. The noun form of the abject is imbricated with the boundary it crosses: “There is nothing either objective or objectal to the abject. It is simply a frontier [...] We may call it a border; abjection is above all ambiguity” (9). Boundaries, by nature, are both joint and division, and they touch both sides of what they cleave. The abject as a thing is both what crossed the line and the line that was crossed.

But Kristeva also uses the word as a verb. In a vivid image, she describes gagging on a skin of milk: “I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which ‘I’ claim to establish *myself*” (3). Abjection is a process as well as the results of that process. Kristeva defines the abject as “something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object” (4). It “has only one quality of the object—that of being opposed to I” (1). It “harries me as radically separate, loathsome. Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either. A ‘something’ that I do not recognize as a thing” (2). As a verb, abjection is the psychological process of rejecting the unbearable but still being forced to bear it. It is self-creation through excision, only one never escapes the abjected idea. It is here that the

verb form turns into the noun. You abject something that is horrible: a corpse or rotten milk. In this abjection, you try to utterly reject both that object and the ideas that accompany it: death, corruption. As a noun, the corpse and the rotten milk are now the abject, since they have been abjected. But the ideas and the psychological drives attached to those objects cannot be eradicated. The theoretical boundary of life and death that the corpse has crossed is represented in the object itself. The thing that crossed the boundary and the boundary itself have both been abjected; they are the abject.

Contexts

Scholarship on Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* approaches the text from many angles, but the most common include gender and queer theory, appearance, race, and history. No matter which facet of the text a critic may focus on, one commonality stands out: Woolf subverts almost every societal expectation. Many critics have explored the intermingling of fact and fiction inherent in a "biography" of a clearly fantastic figure who is also well-known to be modeled on a real person. Woolf's playfully slippery genre elucidates the feminist, queerly sexual, and racial connotations of the story, all along a historical line. Feminist readers like Victoria Smith read the in-between state of the text as essential to telling a woman's story. Beth Boehm aligns gender and genre and, along with critics such as Christy Burns, Esther Sanchez-Pardo Gonzalez, and others, Boehm links *Orlando*'s queer feminist stance to its playful refusal of gender and genre norms, and follows this political line through to *A Room of One's Own*.

The queering of gender in *Orlando* is directly connected to Orlando's fluid use of clothing to express their identity throughout the centuries (see Cervetti and Burns). Critics such as Fourinaies and Humm explore the photographs scattered throughout *Orlando*, and several

authors have investigated Sally Potter's film version of *Orlando*. Drawing on the visual aspects of the novel, D.A. Boxwell steers the queer conversation into politics and race with "(Dis)orienting Spectacle: The Politics of *Orlando*'s Sapphic Camp." They situate the novel stylistically as camp, which often distinguished 1920's gay and lesbian culture. Tellingly, *Orlando*'s over-the-top, drily unimpressive sex change occurs in the Orient. Boxwell joins critics like Jaime Hovey and Celia Daileader in articulating the connections between sexuality, queerness, and race throughout the book. Hovey's influential article "Kissing a Negress in the Dark: Englishness as Masquerade in Woolf's *Orlando*" ties gendered national identity to its "half-hidden or forgotten others," sexuality and race (393). As these authors point out, Woolf's subversion of societal expectations draws heavily on gender, self and other, and language. Kristeva's theory of the semiotic and symbolic illuminates these links in *Orlando*, and her theory of the abject clarifies the connection between violence and narrative in *Titus Andronicus*.

Criticism of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* interprets the violence and horror of the plot in many ways. The most salient critical threads are political (with many ties to disability studies), allusive, and psychological. Much work has also been done on determining the authorship and revisions of *Titus Andronicus*, which I will not go into. The grotesque politics and power of *Titus Andronicus* are explored by authors such as Ray Sid, Bernice Harris, Katherine Rowe, and Caroline Lamb. Politics, power, language, and disability studies bleed into one another in this play. For Sid and Harris, Rome is the body politic embodied by Lavinia, with echoes of Queen Elizabeth I. Sid focuses on Lavinia's injuries as emblematic of Rome's lack of political consent, while Harris examines Lavinia more broadly in the ways she is used to transfer male power. Rowe follows the dismembered hands of Titus and Lavinia through their significance as emblems of martial, marital, and genealogical agency, and Lamb presents a hopeful reading of

the adaptability of the physically and politically traumatized characters. Gillian Murray Kendall's exploration of "Metaphor and Mayhem in *Titus Andronicus*" linguistically ties the characters' actual lopped limbs to the metaphoric political ones.

The layers of allusive myth and history, like Lavinia's name and rape, are another strand of criticism. Authors including Thomas P. Anderson, William Weber, Maurice Hunt, and Bethany Packard have unpicked the tapestry of allusions that Shakespeare weaves into *Titus Andronicus*. Anderson focuses on the bloody vows of the play, asserting that they illustrate the ways Elizabethan England does not have to follow Rome's example. Weber and Hunt both examine the characters' use of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*; Weber isolates Marcus's useless lament as Shakespeare's argument that unless one recognizes authorial intent in allusion, it offers nothing new, and Hunt reads the end of the play as characters obsessively applying art to life to try to mitigate their own chaos. Packard views *Titus Andronicus* as a weaving of hybrid narratives. Once Lavinia survives rape she refuses the expected suicide narrative. Packard argues that Lavinia opens the story to multiple narratives, twisting the older generation's unworkable fixation on purity and univocalism into a new collaborative story.

The final thread of scholarship I investigated focuses on the psychology behind this horrific play. Deborah Willis, viewing *Titus Andronicus* through the lens of trauma theory, sees the exponential violence as a perverse form of therapy that attempts to contain and assuage trauma, but causes the same trauma for the other party.

Major Themes

In both of these essays, I examine the structure of the plot through the language characters use. My conclusions are informed by theory and critical context but drawn from close

single-text analysis. I am interested in the slipperiness of words, which are the building blocks of the narrative's architecture as well as the carriers of emotional and narrative content. Julia Kristeva's theories, centered on language and psychoanalysis, offer useful ways of discussing the world-building nature of words.

My analysis of *Orlando* centers on the duality of the word "nature." As the scholarship repeatedly highlights, the book sets up and problematizes duality after duality: sex, genre, self / other. Nature, as both wild nature and personal nature, illustrates this same pattern, which in turn echoes Kristeva's theorization of language as the semiotic underpinning symbolic expression. I argue that Woolf's structure of Orlando's loves – stable failed love with a woman at the beginning, stable successful love with a man at the end, and a cyclic recurring love of language and nature throughout – dramatizes the process of signification that flows between the semiotic and the symbolic, especially through the dual meaning of the word nature.

My analysis of *Titus Andronicus* follows Lavinia, who functions as the catastrophe that contorts the narrative into a complete collapse of abject revenge. The narrative twists this way to avoid facing the deep human emotions of grief and shame. As many other critics see Lavinia's centrality to the play, I read her in Kristevan terms as a "deject", "one by whom the abject exists" (8). Her rape and her and her father's shared vengeance for it are the two most repulsive scenes in the play; the rape is the only violence heinous enough to be literally obscene, or offstage. But as the horror increases, the language and narrative fall apart. The contortion of the play's narrative from political to the personal, from justice to revenge, happens because grief and shame are abjected (not me, not that) into horrific revenge, and I follow this through the echoed twisting of language.

The Language of Nature and the Nature of Language in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*

Bailey Graham

Virginia Woolf's *Orlando: A Biography* often confounds its readers. Although it is labeled a biography, it is really a novel based in part on Woolf's real friend and lover Vita Sackville-West. The title character lives for three and a half centuries but is only age thirty-four by story's end, and starts life as a man but wakes up one morning suddenly and without surprise as a woman. Clearly the book does not always say what it means. Woolf's linguistic play throughout the novel particularly frolics in the turn between two definitions of nature: the natural world and the nature of a person. Orlando's nature is anchored to the text through three foundational relationships. First, Orlando's love for the natural world, which recurs throughout the book and is exemplified in the poem "The Oak Tree;" second, as a young man, his sweeping passion for the Russian princess Sasha; and third, as a mature woman, her grandiose marriage to Marmaduke Bonthrop Shelmerdine, called Shel. Orlando's passions each relate in some way to a mysterious, wild nature, but Orlando's relationships ultimately depend on language. The nature of language, despite its intent to capture reality, is to expose the gap between reality and its representation. Orlando and Sasha's affair fails through a reliance on symbolic language and vital misunderstanding of one another's self, while Orlando and Shel's marriage succeeds because they communicate by understanding one another's semiotic nature as well as through symbolic language. Orlando's lifelong passion for poetry and nature links language, identity, and the natural world across the novel. These three defining relationships anchor Orlando's identity, and since the self is always understood and expressed through language, we see that the linguistic play between wild nature and personal nature is central to *Orlando*.

Before I begin, I must address a stylistic choice I will adhere to throughout this paper. *Orlando* is a difficult novel for pronouns. When Orlando is specifically male or female I will refer to that sex, but when discussing the novel as a whole the question becomes more difficult. Because English lacks a gender-neutral singular pronoun, I have chosen to use “them / they / their” to refer to Orlando’s character across the book. First of all, this is the pronoun most non-gender-normative people choose for themselves when they do not wish to use “he” or “she.” Secondly, a major theme of the novel is Orlando’s exploration of self. To begin Orlando’s climactic final introspection, the narrator observes that “she had a great variety of selves to call upon, far more than we have been able to find room for, since a biography is considered complete if it merely accounts for six or seven selves, whereas a person may well have as many as a thousand” (226). Referring to Orlando as “they” helps to convey the plurality of their sex; they are not simply male or female but both, as well as many variations on each. The multiplicity of Orlando’s nature makes “they” a particularly appropriate grammatical choice.

Orlando is very much a novel about how one communicates identity. Many critics have explored the intermingling of fact and fiction inherent in a “biography” of a clearly fantastic figure who is also well-known to be modeled on a real person. Woolf’s playfully slippery genre elucidates the feminist, queerly sexual, and racial connotations of the story. Feminist readers like Victoria Smith read the in-between state of the text as essential to telling a woman’s story. Beth Boehm aligns gender and genre and, along with critics such as Christy Burns, Esther Sanchez-Pardo Gonzalez, and others, Boehm links *Orlando*’s queer feminist stance to its playful refusal of gender and genre norms, and follows this political line through to *A Room of One’s Own*. The queering of gender in *Orlando* is directly connected to Orlando’s fluid use of clothing to express their identity throughout the centuries (see Cervetti and Burns). D.A. Boxwell steers the queer

conversation into politics and race with “(Dis)orienting Spectacle: The Politics of *Orlando*’s Sapphic Camp.” They situate the novel stylistically as camp, which often distinguished 1920’s gay and lesbian culture. Tellingly, Orlando’s over-the-top, drily unimpressive sex change occurs in the Orient. Boxwell joins critics like Jaime Hovey and Celia Daileader in articulating the connections between sexuality, queerness, and race throughout the book. Hovey’s influential article “Kissing a Negress in the Dark: Englishness as Masquerade in Woolf’s *Orlando*” ties gendered national identity to its “half-hidden or forgotten others,” sexuality and race (393). *Orlando*’s internal conversation on identity sounds different notes across different strands of critical inquiry, but critics play on a common theme of identity.

What is missing is the role nature plays in *Orlando*’s identity. With the rise of ecofeminism, more critics are starting to discuss Woolf’s fascination with nature, but most focus on her scientific tendencies (see Alt, Westling) or this view’s broad philosophical implications (see Schisler, Swanson, Westling). While Westling presents a convincing view of Woolf’s career portraying “human ambitions and systems of meaning against the backdrop of enormous geological forces and vast reaches of time,” in conjunction with the scientific revolutions of her day, I am interested in exploring how Woolf’s acute natural sensibilities flourish in the details of a single story (857). Similarly, although Swanson ties her wide-reaching argument directly to Woolf’s early short stories and Alt supports her book-length study of Woolf’s place in scientific nature writing with close readings, I prise apart the language of only a single text. Ecocritical readings of Woolf tend to cast wide nets and draw rather austere conclusions. I do neither. *Orlando* is a joyful book that deserves serious consideration, as its dual nature demands. The complex concepts of wild nature and personal nature recur throughout the text and are tightly knotted through language to the expression of identity.

Julia Kristeva's theory of semiotics is uniquely suited to shed light on Woolf's complex novel. Identity and communication are cornerstones of Kristeva's theory, which combines linguistic, psychoanalytic, and sociocultural approaches. She emphasizes language as a signifying process that moves fluidly between two realms, which she calls the semiotic and the symbolic, across a thetic break. Kristeva emphasizes that "because the subject is always *both* semiotic *and* symbolic, no signifying system he produces can be either 'exclusively' semiotic or 'exclusively' symbolic, and is instead necessarily marked by an indebtedness to both" (24). Woolf's complex treatment of identity and expression showcases this dialectic. The symbolic is "language that serves to communicate" (Kristeva 87) and includes every signifying gesture from a baby's first holophrastic phrases (pointing at a dog and saying "woof-woof" [41]) to this very sentence. The semiotic is "the operation that logically and chronologically precedes the establishment of the symbolic and its subject" (41) and is therefore not language. One can only point to it through prepositions: outside language, before language, between language. As Kristeva explains, even before a child begins to speak they organize the world by need. As soon as one drive for food or sleep or companionship is satisfied, another begins, but always in patterns. This rhythm need and satiation, motion and stillness underlies any conceptualization of subject and object, and is Kristeva's concept of the chora. She defines the chora as "a nonexpressive totality formed by the drives and their stases in a motility that is as full of movement as it is regulated" (25). It is the inexpressible center of the wordless realm of the semiotic. However, "[a]lthough originally a precondition of the symbolic, the semiotic functions within signifying practices as the result of a transgression of the symbolic. [...] It exists in practice only within the symbolic" as part of the signifying process (68). One can never express

the semiotic without the symbolic. Conversely, when the symbolic begins to unravel, the semiotic remains.

Kristeva identifies the threshold between the semiotic and the symbolic as the thetic break. As soon as a child begins to position themselves as a subject separate from objects in the world, they enter the symbolic realm. The child's identity is marked by a name as are the objects of its world. Kristeva complicates Lacan's conceptualization of the mirror phase by reconsidering the relationship across the thetic break that separates the wordless semiotic from the symbolic "realm of positions" (43). Whereas Lacan's mirror phase emphasizes a definitive break, Kristeva suggests a junction between the wordless semiotic and the symbolic. This is particularly expressed through grammar: "Even if it is presented as a simple act of naming, we maintain that the thetic is already *propositional* (or syntactic) and that syntax is the ex-position of the thetic" (54). For Kristeva, names and grammar are exposed evidence of the connection between the wordless semiotic and the symbolic. Identity and the formation of the self are tightly linked to linguistic expression. Kristeva's conceptualization of the relationship between the symbolic and the semiotic illuminates Woolf's complicated treatment of identity and expression through Woolf's use of the single word "nature." In *Orlando*, the struggle to express inner nature, or identity, is explicitly tied to wild nature. Names, the most basic unit of the thetic break, are constantly emphasized and linked to wild nature. The shifting dialogue between both meanings of nature mirrors the dialectic between the inexpressible semiotic and the primary tool of human communication, symbolic language.

"Nature" derives from the Latin verb "nasci": to be born. In modern usage, nature has two primary meanings. It can refer to the physical world, separate from humans, but including plants, animals, and the landscape, which I term wild nature, or it can denote the essential

character or qualities of something, which I call personal nature. Wild nature is often personified as Mother Nature, which is evocative of Kristeva's notion of the chora. Kristeva characterizes this space as "nourishing and maternal" (26) and "enigmatic and feminine" (29) but emphasizes its lawlessness. Law belongs to the symbolic. The chora is ordered and regulated, but not by man's decree. It follows natural rhythms in a process of generating and negating the subject in drives toward life and death. Humanity's essential dependence on and its inability to control wild nature may explain the personification of nature as a mother. For these same reasons, the rhythms of the chora are also characterized as maternal. This chain of association, nature is a mother is the chora, underlies my analysis of the "nature" in *Orlando*. As *Orlando* is the story of Orlando's life and Woolf's aim is to examine the unwritten psychological aspects of a life's formation, both definitions of nature permeate the book. The stability and change of Orlando's personal nature across three and a half centuries and two sexes is a driving question, always anchored to Orlando's relationship with the English natural world: "Yet through all these changes she had remained, she reflected, essentially the same. She had the same brooding meditative temper, the same love of animals and nature, the same passion for the country and the seasons" (173). Orlando's identity is inextricable from the natural world, and throughout their long life, Orlando struggles to express in language this mystical union that seems beyond words. Just as Orlando's beloved oak tree changes its appearance with the seasons and centuries but stays the same tree, Orlando's essential self is unchanged by the fashions and sexes that have come and gone through their centuries of life.

Orlando's lifelong passion is their poem "The Oak Tree." This poem epitomizes Orlando's quest for expression in the form of poetry and most closely mirrors their identity in the language of nature. He starts writing the poem as a young man in the late 1500s and publishes it

as an adult woman in the early 1900s. A backbone of oak roots anchors the book at every juncture: as a teenage boy, he “flung himself—there was a passion in his movements which deserves the word—on the earth at the foot of the oak tree. He loved, beneath all this summer transiency, to feel the earth’s spine beneath him” (15). Coming back after betrayals by woman and poet, “he sank into a quiet mood, under the oak tree, the hardness of whose roots, exposed above the ground, seemed to him rather comfortable than otherwise” (77). More than three centuries later, “flinging herself on the ground, she felt the bones of the tree running out like ribs from a spine this way and that beneath her” (237). Orlando always remains tied to the natural world, and specifically to English nature. In her time with the gypsies in Turkey, Orlando loves the bare hills and vast spaces, but England imposes itself on the Eastern landscape and calls her home. The oak tree, like Orlando, is rooted to her ancestral land. In all Orlando’s recurring attempts at poetry through the centuries, trying to express the inexpressible, “The Oak Tree” is the conversation that Orlando cannot stop having. From the first scene of *Orlando*, when he tries to accurately describe leaf green in poetry (14), Orlando yearns to express a communion with and love for the languageless semiotic symphony of nature. But the nature of language means that such a task is impossible, as the many changes to the poem suggest. It is the rhythm of attempt and failure to capture nature in language, and particularly this English oak tree, with its connotations of root and leaf, stability and change, and irrefutable belonging to one patch of land, that anchors Orlando’s identity through their centuries of life. The poem “The Oak Tree” most clearly defines the central role of both types of nature in *Orlando* and points toward Woolf’s connection between identity and expression.

Early in life, Orlando is swept away by his first human love—he falls in love with a Russian princess he calls Sasha and his love is characterized, not unlike “The Oak Tree,” by a

desire to capture her essence in language. Woolf constantly links Sasha's personal nature to the wild nature of her Russian home. The symbolic metaphors Orlando uses to describe her showcase the mismatch in personal nature between Orlando and Sasha. When Orlando first sees Sasha, "[i]mages, metaphors of the most extreme and extravagant twined and twisted in his mind. He called her a melon, a pineapple, an olive tree, an emerald, and a fox in the snow all in the space of three seconds" (28). These metaphors, especially the emerald and the fox, recur and grow throughout the brief, passionate affair. "He... would try to tell her... what she was like. Snow, cream, marble, cherries, alabaster, golden wire? None of these. She was like... nothing he had seen or known in England. Ransack the language as he might, words failed him. He wanted another landscape, and another tongue" (35). Orlando yearns to express the wild feelings the exotic Sasha makes him feel, and he captures his passionate drives in metaphor. Unfortunately Orlando relies so heavily on these metaphors of his own creation that he interprets them as Sasha's true nature, ignoring her own interpretation of her identity. He is so caught up in expressing himself that he does not listen to Sasha or see her as a whole person. What should be a dialogue of love becomes heavily one-sided as Orlando talks and Sasha refuses to speak.

Sasha's very name is Orlando's own invention and a very telling metaphor. Although her full name is the Princess Marousha Stanilovska Dagmar Natasha Iliana Romanovitch (29), Orlando calls her the popular diminutive Sasha for short, "because it was the name of a white Russian fox he had had as a boy—a creature soft as snow, but with teeth of steel, which bit him so savagely that his father had it killed" (33). This repeats Orlando's first image of her as a "fox in the snow" and subordinates her self-characterization as an independent, strong-willed woman to that of a beloved but dangerous pet. In this thetic metaphor, Sasha is not her own person but Orlando's property. In the signifying process, naming an object is the thetic break that joins the

semiotic and symbolic. Orlando's pet fox did not take kindly to being caged, and the metaphor hints that the human one will not either. Positive and negative connotations of "wild nature" mingle in this metaphor. Wild, in terms of the natural world, means undomesticated and connotes freedom, clarity, and purity. Wild, in terms of personality, means uncivilized, out of control, dangerous. These opposing dimensions leap out in metaphors within the metaphor: soft as snow, teeth of steel. Sasha the woman indeed shares many characteristics with Sasha the fox. Both are beautiful, exotic, and out of Orlando's control. The danger of naming Marousha Sasha is that Orlando repackages the woman in front of him into the romanticized version he wants to see, curtailing communication between the two real people in the relationship.

It is useful here to note Catherine Brown's convincing exploration of Woolf's engagement with Russian literature and the concept of the soul, which is a word Woolf gives to Sasha's dialogue. The Russian word translated into English as "soul" is not quite the same concept as the English "soul." Brown, paraphrasing a study of its use, explains: "It could be associated with nature, expanse (dating from eighteenth century pride in the great and ever-increasing size of Russia), profundity, elevation, heart, [...] defiance, self-expression, art, ... femininity, ... hyperbole, and inexplicability" (136). Brown links the influx of translated Russian literature in the late 1800s to an increase in the word's popularity in English literature and the concept of "the Russian soul." Brown also characterizes Woolf as "foremost amongst enthusiasts for Russian soul during the Bloomsbury-centered Russian craze that reached its height during the First World War" (133). So when Woolf writes indirect dialogue for Sasha saying, "In Russia they had rivers ten miles broad on which one could gallop six horses abreast all day long without meeting a soul" (32), the reader should take notice. Sasha's use of the word "soul" adds to her

foreignness in a way specifically coded as Russian to Woolf's audience, adding layers of connotation to Sasha's nature.

Sasha is always emphatically Other. She is the Russian princess, the Muscovite, the foreigner. Her soul is not English. Sasha continually speaks of the wild, savage solitude of her home. In one of the only attempts the narrator makes to focus on Sasha's point of view throughout the affair, he notes that

Sasha who after all had no English blood in her but was from Russia where the sunsets are longer, the dawns less sudden, and sentences often left unfinished from doubt as to how best to end them—Sasha stared at him, perhaps sneered at him, for he must have seemed a child to her, and said nothing. (34)

Sasha's personal nature, like Orlando's, is inextricably bound to the wild nature of her home. But where Orlando's nature is soft and pastoral, Sasha's is expansive and defiant. Woolf explicitly ties this wilder nature to language: like the Russian landscape that cannot be contained, Russian sentences themselves often fail to hold together. Sasha's pointed silence is important as well. While Orlando talks and talks and talks, Sasha uses silence for her own ends, although the reader never learns exactly what those ends are. Orlando pours forth a torrent of symbolic metaphors into Sasha's wordless feminine silence. If this mirrors the dialectic between the symbolic and the semiotic, it is a one-way mirror. Orlando sees only himself in his outpourings of images, and the reader has no idea what Sasha experiences. She refuses to speak. When Orlando gushes to her about how he adores her metaphoric qualities, "Sasha was silent" (35). Although they talk of "everything under the sun" (33), when it comes to describing the nature of their relationship, Orlando speaks and Sasha does not. These two talk in symbolic language all the time, but they fail to communicate.

It takes a breakdown in symbolic language for Orlando to see Sasha briefly as someone other than his romanticized ideal. On a visit to Sasha's ship (which by ambassadorial privilege is Russian territory) Sasha disappears in the company of a handsome young sailor for over an hour. Finally Orlando realizes how long she has been gone and goes into the ship to find her. He sees her, maybe sitting on the knee of the sailor, embracing him; bad lighting and jealous rage blur the event. Sasha cajoles Orlando into believing that he is mistaken,

yet, when they were going down the ship's side, lovingly again, Sasha paused with her hand on the ladder and called back to this tawny wide-cheeked monster a volley of Russian greetings, jests, or endearments, not a word of which Orlando could understand. But there was something in her tone (it might be the fault of the Russian consonants) that reminded Orlando of a scene some nights since, when he had come upon her in secret gnawing a candle end in a corner, which she had picked from the floor. True, it was pink; it was gilt; and it was from the King's table; but it was tallow, and she gnawed it. (38)

Sasha is finally speaking on her own terms, and Orlando does not like what he hears. Sasha is not speaking to him in his own language about himself. She is speaking in her language to someone she knows about what she wants to say. Unable to understand her words, Orlando flashes to a visual image that fits his new version of Sasha: not his jeweled vulpine lover but a woman secretly gnawing tallow in a corner. Shameful, poor, savage. Orlando flips his idea of Sasha's nature from an alluring wildness to a vulgar barbarism, based on jealousy and "the Russian consonants." The nature of Sasha's language is not the nature of Orlando's language. Here as a young man, Orlando uses language to try to capture the world around him as he sees it but can never succeed. He romanticizes Sasha's wild tendencies to the point of excluding the real person.

His metaphors, reflected back at him from Sasha's silence, tell him what he wants to hear. When Sasha uses her own language, Orlando is jarred by the realization that she has one, and he and the reader are excluded from that language. The nature of Sasha's language is unknown, and stays that way. a

After the tumultuous end to his affair with Sasha, Orlando and his broken heart return to his passion for writing. At first questing for fame and immortality through poetic genius, Orlando is ridiculed by a poet and tries to give up his love for language. In humiliation and hurt, "he burnt in a great conflagration fifty-seven poetical works, only retaining 'The Oak Tree,' which was his boyish dream and very short." He then retreats back to nature and "[flings] himself down under his favorite oak tree" (71), and spends the next "day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year" (72) under the tree contemplating life's great questions, a vigil that finally ends in the declaration that, "Bad, good, or indifferent, I'll write from this day forward, to please myself!" (76)!. Betrayed by a woman and by the fickleness of fame, Orlando comes back to wild nature and reconnects with his personal nature through the medium of language. In saving "The Oak Tree" from the flames, Orlando has already indicated his understanding of his truest expression of poetic identity: a slim volume with a simple title that remains his constant companion. Orlando keeps this work with him when he travels to Turkey as ambassador, mysteriously changes sex, and runs off with the gypsies. In the Turkish desert, longing for somewhere to write her love of the desert, Orlando "made ink from berries and wine; and finding a few margins and blank spaces in the manuscript of 'The Oak Tree'" (107) she adds new poetry, inspired by a new nature, on her beloved palimpsest. The "Oak Tree" that Orlando works on in the middle of her life is not the same poem that they started when he was fifteen. Orlando has

been continually changing and revising the document, but its nature, like its namesake and its author, retains a fundamental identity.

As a woman and returned to England, Orlando finally experiences a human love that resonates with the love expressed in “The Oak Tree.” Orlando’s second great human love is her husband, Marmaduke Bonthrop Shelmerdine. Like Sasha, he is mysterious, androgynous, and alluring, but unlike Sasha, his nature and Orlando’s nature are much the same. Both are deeply rooted in English soil, although both need to roam. Shel has a taste of the exotic about him, but in smaller proportions: “He had a castle in the Hebrides, but it was ruined, he told her. Gannets feasted in the banqueting hall. He had been a soldier and a sailor, and had explored the East” (184). Like Orlando, he comes from old noble blood. He is from the farthest reaches of the Scottish coast; independent and famously barbaric, but familiarly so. He has left his estate to the shorebirds, who are fitting heirs for a roving sea captain. He, like Orlando, has tasted the delights of the Orient. Shel is the right kind of other: different enough to be exciting, but close to Orlando in essential experiences.

Shel is nearly always described in the context of wild, solitary nature. Orlando first meets him while she is lying on the moor, having declared herself to be nature’s bride after despairing of finding a husband, as the spirit of the Victorian age demands she do. Suddenly, “towering dark against the yellow-slashed sky of dawn, with the plovers rising and falling about him, she saw a man on horseback. He started. The horse stopped” (183). After this mysterious stranger and Orlando become engaged (a few minutes later), it comes out that “his life was spent in the most desperate and splendid of adventures—which is to voyage round Cape Horn in the teeth of a gale” (185), where one sees “the phosphorescence on the waves, the icicles clanking on the shrouds” (189). Shel’s nature is full of poetic beauty. He understands and values nature, notices

its details. To sail a ship through the Southern Ocean, one must commune with nature. Shel must know the winds and tides and currents and wave patterns, pay attention to clouds and icebergs and fish and birds if he is to survive his adventurous calling. But he clearly appreciates nature for its beauty as well: the eerie glow of foam-whipped seas and dangerous music of iced sails are details of a poetic mind, not necessarily a captain's. Shel's love for the silence of solitude in nature, so similar to Orlando's enduring bond with the oak tree, seems to give both of them a linguistic freedom unlike any other character in the novel.

Shel and Orlando communicate like nobody else in the book. On first meeting, each somehow knows the other's name without the benefit of symbolic language:

“I knew it!” she said, for there was something romantic and chivalrous, passionate, melancholy, yet determined about him which went with the wild, dark-plumed name – a name which had in her mind, the steel blue gleam of rooks' wings, the hoarse laughter of their caws, the snake-like twisting descent of their feathers in a silver pool, and a thousand other things besides, which will be described presently.

“Mine is Orlando,” she said. He had guessed it. For if you see a ship in full sail coming with the sun on it proudly sweeping across the Mediterranean from the South Seas, one says at once, “Orlando,” he explained. (184)

Orlando sees this man, recognizes his vivid, romantic, passionate nature, and easily fits steel, rooks, laughter, snakes, and silver together with the “dark-plumed” name Marmaduke Bonthrop Shelmerdine. Shel, for his part, knows that Orlando is a bold, regal, glittering, exotic sunshine ship of a woman, always coming home. If naming is the “rupture and/or boundary” (Kristeva 43)

between the semiotic and symbolic, Orlando and Shelmerdine's perfect comprehension of each other's names without needing to speak of it first indicates a joining of the two realms. The vivid emotional images each attributes to the other point back toward things that cannot be said in words, communicated in the grand poetic sweeps of symbolic language.

Woolf continues to emphasize the importance of names to expressing nature. Each of Marmaduke Bonthrop Shelmerdine's three names gets a separate paragraph of explanation on all the emotional and intellectual connotations that version of the name holds for Orlando (188-191). The excessive attention paid to each name indicates, on the one hand, Orlando's deep interest in and desire for her new husband, and on the other, the inadequacy of language to express her desire or Shel's complex nature. Additionally, the paragraph for each name highlights how Orlando's perception of Shel's identity depends on her own emotional state:

When she called him by his second name, 'Bonthrop,' it should signify to the reader that she was in a solitary mood, felt them both as specks on a desert, was desirous only of meeting death by herself, for people die daily, die at dinner tables, or like this, out of doors in the autumn woods; [...] and should also add, the better to illumine the word, that for him too, the word signified, mystically, separation and isolation and the disembodied pacing the deck of his brig in unfathomable seas. (190)

Orlando embraces her death-drive and desire for solitude, connected with vast wild nature through the name of her husband. Tellingly, Shel feels similar desires attached to the same word, although they do not talk to each other about these connotations. Although the characters do not speak, Woolf paints these feelings in poetic language redolent with nature. The grammar of this overburdened sentence, crouched at the thetic "threshold of language" (Kristeva 45), nearly falls

apart with the weight of the semiotic drives functioning within its symbolic structure. Names, nature, and poetry coalesce in Orlando and Shel's communication with one another.

Orlando and Shel's personal natures are so closely connected that to adequately express themselves they must create their own language and thus resist some of the limitations of conventional language use. In the leadup to the climax of the book, Orlando again meets Nick Greene, the poet whose ridicule drove Orlando to burn all of his poetry but "The Oak Tree" after Sasha left. This time Sir Nicholas praises Orlando's "Oak Tree" and sends it off for publication, fulfilling Orlando's lifelong dream. Orlando immediately goes to the nearest telegraph office to inform Shel:

"My God Shel," she wired; "life literature Greene today—" here she dropped into a cypher language which they had invented between them so that a whole spiritual state of the utmost complexity might be conveyed in a word or two without the telegraph clerk being any the wiser, and added the words 'Rattigan Glumphoboo,' which summed it up precisely. (208)

Mere English is no longer enough for Orlando and Shel. They must create entirely new signifiers to encompass the complexity of the semiotic drives and desires they both feel. Woolf sets the couple apart from the rest of the world through their personal language. Whatever spiritual state Orlando means by "Rattigan Glumphoboo" is inaccessible to the telegraph clerk (and the reader) but perfectly clear to Shel. The couple entirely ignores standard language and grammar yet communicate between themselves states "of the utmost complexity" (208). Kristeva notes that "when the semiotic chora disturbs the thetic position by redistributing the signifying order, ... the denoted object and the syntactic relation are disturbed as well" (55). The nonsensical grammar and syntax of "Rattigan Glumphoboo" nonetheless denote some object to Orlando and

Shel in their private, internal state. Kristeva's theory of the interplay between an internal nature and the language of communication pays particular attention to the failure of language to express internal nature. Orlando and Shel, by fashioning a new symbolic system, represent the possibility of a creative intervention in the thetic break. Their interior natures are organized so alike that, when their complicated internal choras must burst through the thetic break and redistribute the entire symbolic order, Orlando and Shel agree on the same denotation and connotation. This fluency in expressing their semiotic nature through a personal symbolic language sets Orlando and Shel apart from the world, together.

At the end, as at the beginning, Orlando returns to the oak tree. "The tree had grown bigger, sturdier, and more knotted since she had known it, somewhere about the year 1588, but it was still in the prime of life" (237) like Orlando herself in the year 1928. She has come to the tree to ceremoniously bury a copy of her published poem "The Oak Tree," "but Lord! once one began mouthing words aloud, how silly they sounded!" she reflects.

She was reminded of old Greene getting up on a platform the other day, comparing her with Milton (save for his blindness) and handing her a cheque for two hundred guineas. She had thought then of the oak tree here on its hill, and what has that got to do with this, she had wondered? What has praise and fame to do with poetry? [...] Was not writing poetry a secret transaction, a voice answering a voice? [...] What could have been more secret, she thought, more slow, and like the intercourse of lovers, than the stammering answer she had made all these years to the old crooning song of the woods, and the farms and the brown horses standing at the gate, neck to neck, and the smithy and the kitchen and the

fields, so laboriously bearing wheat, turnips, grass, and the gardens blowing irises and fritillaries? (238)

After all her lifelong obsession with representation and appearances, Orlando here contemplates her identity and true nature. The poetry of Orlando's soul expresses itself in answer to the song of the woods and English countryside. Nature's song is not part of the symbolic realm: it is not "language that serves to communicate" (Kristeva 87) an idea between people. The poetry that Orlando has always yearned for has nothing to do with capturing it in symbolic language, as Orlando struggled to do with Sasha. Rather, the true intercourse of lovers' souls requires conversation and real communication. For poetry to express one's true nature, the symbolic must include the semiotic, as the linguistic relationship between Orlando and Shel does. When poetry "crack[s] the socio-symbolic order, splitting it open, changing vocabulary, syntax, the word itself, ... *jouissance* works its way into the social and symbolic" (Kristeva 80). Orlando feels this quiet joy with each return to the oak tree, Woolf's recurring emblem of nature's power for expression and identity. Nature, both wild and personal, is wordless but still communicates. Nature always changes but remains itself. Within language, the dual meaning of nature forms a dialectic much like the dialectic of the signifying process. Wild nature and personal nature form a "heterogeneous contradiction between two irreconcilable elements—separate but inseparable from the *process* in which they assume asymmetrical functions" (Kristeva 82). The sliding interplay of the dual meanings of nature throughout *Orlando* reflects Woolf's engagement with the foundations of language throughout this novel.

Wild nature and personal nature express Woolf's thematic exploration of identity in *Orlando*. The duality of this single word mirrors the duality of all language: not just two meanings but a process of signification that flows between both. Identity, too, is multiplied.

Orlando, Sasha, and Shel each contain multitudes of selves that change and stay the same. Each character's personal nature is inextricably wound with the wild Mother Nature that shapes them. The lawless, maternal connotations of nature link it to Kristeva's notion of the chora, the inexpressible heart of the wordless semiotic. And thus we are led back to language through the signifying process, pausing at the thetic boundary between the semiotic and the symbolic. Woolf continually highlights the power of names to express identity and firmly entrenches them in the play between personal and wild nature. Like Orlando and *Orlando*, the oak tree and "The Oak Tree" rest on the dividing line between worlds. The name is both the real, inexpressible thing and the linguistic, symbolic art. Orlando / *Orlando* and the oak tree / "The Oak Tree" are Woolf's questions and answers: How can one person change so much throughout their lifetime and yet remain the same? How can an artist communicate the things that elude language; things that are bigger than words, or older than speech, or beyond expression? By doing it. *Orlando* is a love poem in action, not only from Virginia Woolf to Vita Sackville-West, but from Woolf to the complex, beautiful, (n)ever-changing language of nature and the nature of language.

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**“The Violence of Poetry, and Silence”: *Titus Andronicus* as the Subject Collapse of
Narrative**

Bailey Graham

Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* is a textbook example of the concept of abjection. To start the play, the eponymous Titus Andronicus sacrifices the son of Tamora, the defeated Goth queen who is newly come to Rome. To revenge this act, Tamora has her sons rape and mutilate Titus's daughter Lavinia and frame his sons for murder. This prompts Titus to murder Tamora's remaining sons, grind their bones to powder held together with their drained blood, and force Tamora into unwitting cannibalism as she eats her sons' heads in a pie. All this is wrapped up by the brutal slaughter of four main characters in twenty lines, and the play closes with the promise of a man buried alive and slowly starved, while Tamora's body will be left to rot and be consumed by beasts. *Titus Andronicus* is often criticized for its gratuitous violence and strange plot devices. Horrible things happen both on and off-stage, and as the revenge plot reaches its climax the bodies pile up like discarded toys and the language careens into near-incoherence. Looking at the play through the lens of Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject clarifies these incongruities. First, I will summarize the theory of abjection and its applications to narrative. Next, I will examine two scenes that embody revenge's abject twisting of the narrative. Finally, I will explain why the contorted language matters to the audience. The distorted narrative of *Titus Andronicus* vividly illustrates how abjecting one's emotions leads to suffering, horror, and silence.

Kristeva explicated her theory of the abject in the book *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Following from her psychoanalytic and linguistic work, the concept of the abject

addresses taboos like bodily excrement, sex, and death. It is used as a noun and a verb. As a noun, the abject is something transgressively awful: it literally or figuratively crosses a line. In doing so, it calls attention to that line, which is revealed to be a permeable boundary instead of a wall. The noun form of the abject is imbricated with the boundary it crosses: “There is nothing either objective or objectal to the abject. It is simply a frontier [...] We may call it a border; abjection is above all ambiguity” (9). Boundaries, by nature, are both joint and division, and they touch both sides of what they cleave. The abject as a thing is both what crossed the line and the line that was crossed.

But Kristeva also uses the word as a verb. In a vivid image, she describes gagging on a skin of milk: “I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which ‘I’ claim to establish *myself*” (3). Abjection is a process as well as the results of that process. Kristeva defines the abject as “something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object” (4). It “has only one quality of the object—that of being opposed to I” (1). It “harries me as radically separate, loathsome. Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either. A ‘something’ that I do not recognize as a thing” (2). As a verb, abjection is the psychological process of rejecting the unbearable but still being forced to bear it. It is self-creation through excision; thus one’s identity depends on that which is abjected. It is here that the verb form turns into the noun. In *Titus Andronicus*, Lavinia’s family initially abjects her rape. They try to utterly reject both the fact of its existence and the ideas that accompany it: violation, loss of power. But the psychological drives attached to rape cannot be eradicated. The theoretical boundary of power that was crossed is represented in the object that was violated, which is Lavinia. The thing that crossed the boundary and the boundary itself have both been abjected; they are the abject.

In *Titus Andronicus* the boundary line that is violated again and again is the boundary between justice and revenge. Francis Bacon famously formulated revenge as “wild justice,” and this play revels in the connotations of wild. The Rome of the play is a “wilderness of tigers” (3.1). Wild implies something natural and free, but perhaps dangerous and out of control. Revenge is both a natural impulse and a dangerous boundary to cross. Justice suggests equality, but with revenge the wronged party always feels the need to both pay back the original wrong and to inflict more suffering in revenge for their pain, multiplying the trauma. Deborah Willis, viewing *Titus Andronicus* through the lens of trauma theory, points out that while Tamora sees the rape of Lavinia as repayment for Titus’s sacrifice of her son Alarbus, Lavinia’s suffering places Titus in the same position as Tamora: wronged parent who must take revenge. Each parent sees their own actions as justice, with the layers of horror being payment for emotional pain. But as Titus seeks revenge on Tamora while she continues to persecute him, the emotional scales do not balance. In *Titus Andronicus*, Shakespeare explores what happens when the natural impulse of revenge turns monstrous. Revenge crosses the line of right and wrong. The revengers in the play wish to reject the actions done to them, including the mental and emotional pain they suffer. But like Kristeva’s vomiting up skinned milk, in doing so they try to expel their own pain, spit *themselves* out; they abject *themselves* by the same action through which they claim to establish *themselves* (9). Revenge is the action and object that is abjected and abject throughout the play.

Titus Andronicus is a particularly fascinating story in which to study the abject because the entire narrative twists out of shape to avoid dealing with the deep emotions at its heart. In her explication of the concept, Kristeva specifically ties extreme abjection to a rupture in narrative form.

[T]he narrative web is a thin film constantly threatened with bursting. For, when narrated identity is unbearable, when the boundary between subject and object is shaken, and when even the limit between inside and outside becomes uncertain, the narrative is what is challenged first. [...] In other words, the theme of suffering-horror is the ultimate evidence of such states of abjection within a narrative representation. If one wished to proceed farther still along the approaches to abjection, one would find neither narrative nor theme but a recasting of syntax and vocabulary—the violence of poetry, and silence. (141)

Titus Andronicus is clearly filled with the abject; that does not need reiterating. However, the suffering of the characters and the horror they inflict not only contorts the language they use but also wrenches the entire narrative out of the world's usual shape. At the beginning of the play it looks like it will be a Roman history play about the struggle for power between Saturninus, Bassianus, and Titus. But one act of casual violence by Titus, prompting overtopping revenge from Tamora, spins a different narrative web. The shifting subjectivity of revenge places both families in the borderlands of right and wrong, wronged party and revenger. The abject vengeance that drives the plot turns the narrative inside-out and exposes the suffering-horror lurking silently within.

I will examine two scenes to demonstrate how this abject revenge contorts the language and the narrative around it. First, I will focus on the scene before Lavinia is dragged off stage to be raped and mutilated. Her final line is especially evocative of “the violence of poetry, and silence.” I will examine how Lavinia functions as a catalyst in the narrative and why her rape is particularly obscene. Second, I will skip to the end of the play and closely read the final banquet. Titus's shocking murder of Lavinia is the catastrophe that sets off the rapidly disintegrating

rhyiming scene, in which four main characters die in twenty lines. Finally, I will discuss the impact of these characters' abjected emotions.

My first example comes from Act 2, scene 2. Lavinia and her new husband Bassianus encounter Tamora and her lover in the woods. By pre-arrangement, Tamora's sons Chiron and Demetrius also appear, ready to rape Lavinia and kill her husband. The murder of Bassianus is swift and brutal. Chiron advises his brother to "Drag hence her husband to some secret hole / And make his dead trunk pillow to our lust" (lines 129-130). This shocking combination of sex and death, pleasure and pain, enacted on a fresh corpse, tilts the scene from tragedy to horror and enters the abject. Lavinia begins to plead with Tamora.

LAVINIA: O Tamora, thou bearest a woman's face –

TAMORA: I will not hear her speak; away with her! (lines 136-137)

Lavinia appeals to their shared womanhood, trying to make Tamora feel her feminine horror of rape, an abject violation of the boundaries of the body. Tamora refuses to hear Lavinia's plea and rejects her with a wall of silence, a boundary separating Tamora's whole feminine self from Lavinia's terrifyingly similar about-to-be-violated self. Remember that Tamora is the captured queen of an enemy nation, brought to Rome at the beginning of the play in the grip of soldiers. Even if she was not raped in the looting of her kingdom, that threat was always present. Lavinia's trembling, pleading figure, perhaps kneeling, recalls Tamora's blazon of herself from Act 1: "And make them know what 'tis to let a queen / Kneel in the streets and beg for grace in vain" (lines 459-460). Lavinia's echo of Tamora's helpless pleas reminds Tamora of the shame she felt then and why she is seeking revenge. Tamora abjects the powerlessness of being a captured woman, abjects her grief and shame, and abjects the captured Lavinia as bearing those same burdens.

Lavinia tries again. Begging Tamora for mercy, Lavinia pleads:

LAVINIA: O be to me, though thy hard heart say no,

Nothing so kind, but something pitiful.

TAMORA: I know not what it means; away with her! (lines 155-157)

Lavinia begs now for pity. She does not rely on kindness or the bonds of one woman to another, but asks the lofty Tamora to stoop in pity to save one weaker and lower than herself. Lavinia's repeated "O" points toward the "maximal stylistic intensity" (141) Kristeva notices in depictions of suffering-horror. With Lavinia's continued useless entreaties, so similar to Tamora's own, Tamora's psychological barriers begin to erode. In Kristeva's terms, "the boundary between subject and object is shaken" (141). Tamora begins to lose control of her narrative that letting Lavinia be raped is the right thing to do. This confusion is echoed in her syntax. "I know not what it means!" she exclaims. What is 'it'? Has Tamora abjected Lavinia so far as to deny her sex and humanity? Is Tamora referring to the pity that Lavinia begs; Tamora does not know what pity means? In that case Tamora is denying her own humanity. Is Tamora simply crying out in suffering and horror that her narrative does not make sense; she does not know what anything means? In desperation, Tamora's only recourse is to command that Lavinia be taken away.

In Lavinia's final line, Kristeva's "violence of poetry, and silence" (141) is most awfully expressed. Denied mercy, pity, and "present death" (l. 173), Lavinia storms at Tamora:

No grace? No womanhood? Ah, beastly creature,

The blot and enemy to our general name,

Confusion fall— (lines 182-184)

But before she can finish, Lavinia is gagged by her rapist and dragged offstage. She next appears with "her hands cut off and her tongue cut out, and ravished" (2.3sd). Listen again to that final

line: “Confusion fall—” (line 184) The stress on the short, plosive “fall” leaves the line achingly unfinished, and the fragment lacks a direct object. Where, or on what or whom, should the confusion fall? Confusion does nothing on its own. It is an abstract noun; “the confusion” is either a soundless muddle in one’s own head or a cacophony of noise and motion made by many people. By leaving it untethered, Shakespeare forces both meanings into simultaneous expression and makes the word mean itself. Lavinia’s rage and grief and shame resound without resolution. This haunting, nonsensical fragment is surely one of the farthest approaches to abjection in literature, and true to Kristeva’s prediction, syntax and vocabulary are warped almost beyond recognition, and the only way to finish it is with silence.

With Lavinia’s rape, the narrative careens into chaos. It falls at the halfway point of the script but only a third of the way through the body count. After this point, nine people are killed, three hands, a tongue, and two heads are chopped off, and Titus tricks Tamora into eating her own children. The rape scene is a catalyst for the narrative, turning it from violent to incoherently abject. After this scene come the most nonsensical points of the plot: Titus shooting message-arrows to the gods, the clown’s random hanging, and Tamora, Chiron, and Demetrius appearing to Titus dressed as Revenge, Rape, and Murder. The rape is literally obscene: a scene that is obscured or not shown on stage. Each audience member makes their own personal narrative for it. Shakespeare is not the author of Lavinia’s rape; we all are. When Lavinia reappears on stage she personifies the abject. Her uncle Marcus repeatedly describes her as a fountain of blood (2.3). Lavinia’s insides are dripping down her outsides, proving her sexual violation as well. She tips the balance of the narrative. She is made a deject, “one by whom the abject exists” (Kristeva 8), and being on both sides of the border of abjection, she can never mean only one thing again. After surviving rape and mutilation, she cannot be only Titus’

beloved daughter and carrier of the lineage. She must also be a shameful reminder of violence and loss. But she is never just that either: the Andronici listen to her, care for her, and involve her in their plans after her rape. Like Philomela, to whom she is constantly compared, Lavinia participates in her own revenge. But as Bethany Packard points out, once Lavinia survives rape she refuses the expected suicide narrative. Packard argues that Lavinia opens the story to multiple narratives, twisting the older generation's unworkable fixation on purity and univocalism into a new collaborative story. I add that Lavinia is able to do this, not in spite of, but through abjection. While Packard views *Titus Andronicus* as a weaving of hybrid narratives, I emphasize the contortions of those narratives and the unsettling gaps between them. In both readings, Lavinia functions as the catastrophe, the sudden change or turn in the plot that leads to resolution.

My second close reading focuses on Act 5, Scene 3. The catastrophic string of four major deaths in twenty lines begins with Titus' sudden murder of Lavinia.

TITUS: Die, die, Lavinia, and thy shame with thee,

And with thy shame thy father's sorrow die. *He kills her.* (ll 45-46)

Titus's lines make his thought process very clear. He is attempting to stop shame and grief by killing Lavinia. Ostensibly the shame that will die is Lavinia's, but the entire Andronicus family's honor is bound to hers. By killing Lavinia and her shame, Titus wants to restore the pride of the Andronici. He also explicitly wants to stop his own suffering. When Lavinia, the cause of her father's sorrow, dies, the sorrow will go away as well, right? Of course not. Titus is trying to reject his unbearable pain and the horrific things he has done for the sake of revenge, but it is impossible. In this catastrophic moment, by trying to return his personal narrative to the way things used to be, Titus bursts his narrative boundaries. He murders his beloved daughter,

for whom he has butchered and cannibalized. Refusing to face abjection within himself, Titus contorts his narrative completely out of sense. He only gets four more lines that do not read like madness:

SATURNINUS: What hast thou done, unnatural and unkind?

TITUS: Killed her for whom my tears have made me blind.

I am as woeful as Virginus was,

And have a thousand times more cause than he

To do this outrage, and it now is done. (ll. 47-51)

Titus accepts his grief, states his actions, labels his filicide as an outrage, and heaves out a final sigh of “it now is done.” This is the end of Titus Andronicus. His sorrow has not been appeased. Instead of killing his grief, he has killed his daughter. This end of his revenge does not fit his story. It is “radically separate, loathsome. Not me. Not that” (Kristeva 2). With Titus’s breakdown of narrative, the play *Titus Andronicus* loses its narrative and finds only the violence of poetry and silence.

The bloody banquet continues, but the final fourteen lines and three deaths are entirely rhyming couplets that disintegrate into “maximal stylistic intensity” and death (Kristeva 141).

SATURNINUS: What, was she ravished? Tell who did the deed.

TITUS: Will’t please you eat? Will’t please your highness feed?

TAMORA: What, hast thou slain thine only daughter thus?

TITUS: Not I, ‘twas Chiron and Demetrius:

They ravished her and cut away her tongue,

And they, ‘twas they, that did her all this wrong.

SATURNINUS: Go, fetch them hither to us presently.

TITUS: Why, there they are, both baked in this pie.

Whereof their mother daintily hath fed,

Eating the flesh that she herself hath bred.

'Tis true, 'tis true, witness my knife's sharp point.

He stabs the Empress.

SATURNINUS: Die, frantic wretch, for this accursed deed.

He kills Titus.

LUCIUS: Can the son's eye behold his father bleed?

There's meed for meed, death for a deadly deed.

He kills Saturninus. (ll. 52-65)

The singsong rhythm of the rhyming couplets clashes absurdly with the speech content and the actions on stage. The scene is so jarring that it is almost farce, but the humor is missing. Titus's contorted answers form the basis of the rhymes and drive the scene, and his emotions are rage, hatred, and despair, not humor. In Titus's lines we hear, "the unbearable identity of the narrator [which is] ... no longer be[ing] narrated but must be *cried out* or *descried* with maximal stylistic intensity" (Kristeva 141). In response to Saturninus's charge to "Tell who did the deed!" of raping and mutilating Lavinia, Titus can only reply, with maximal stylistic verve and minimal personal engagement, "Will't please you eat? [the heads of the perpetrators] Will't please your highness feed?" Similarly, when Tamora asks in shock if he has really killed Lavinia, Titus's quick rhyme of "Not I, 'twas Chiron and Demetrius!" is a clever deflection that sounds fantastic and denies all personal responsibility. The final paroxysm of three deaths in four lines flays the language close to nonsense; the rhymes are 'deed' 'bleed' 'meed' 'meed' 'deed.' Most of the rest of those lines are devoted to death: 'die,' 'death,' and 'deadly,' with 'stabs,' 'kills,' and 'kills' in

the stage directions. The language disintegrates as the narrative does. The burden of grief and horror the Goths and Andronici have tried to excise by mutilation and murder has not been appeased. Each participant in this final bloody feast is an actor of suffering-horror. Each feels the pain of watching a loved one die in front of them and the horror of realizing what Titus has done, as well as the combined suffering-horror of watching four people die within five minutes and being powerless to stop it. As *Titus Andronicus* lurches to its gruesome climax, the narrative, psychology, and language grind themselves to bones, and then to dust.

Titus Andronicus is obviously filled with abjection; why does it matter? The way Shakespeare has made the narrative twist and contort like a body in pain is fascinating. The language of the play mirrors the faces of the audience. The more horrific the action, the more malleable the faces, the more convoluted the language. Lavinia's final line echoes into the blankness of the audience's shock; her forced silence matches their horrified wonder. The uncanny singsong back-and-forth of the last banquet, slightly too awful for farce, and sliding quickly from rhyming couplet to word salad, encapsulates the audience's awed confusion. The narrative is made of events acted by characters and entirely created by words. The vast majority of the events of *Titus Andronicus* are abject: actions rejected by their actors at the same time they do them, tied inextricably to the objects implicated in those actions. So the narrative of *Titus Andronicus* is a string of psychological choices, told in words. The words used to tell those choices twist away from the facts, because the characters cannot bear to face them, and the shape of the entire story becomes twisted through this linguistic aversion.

Shakespeare wrote those words and chose these horrible actions because the convoluted narrative of *Titus Andronicus* shows us out of the corner of our collective eye what we as humanity don't want to look at. We can watch the murder and dismemberment and butchering

and cannibalism, but rape is obscene. And when we look closely at the structure of the final banquet we see that the narrative disintegrates once Titus kills Lavinia. The abject, layered so thickly throughout this play, is “something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object” (Kristeva 4). The spectacular horrors of this play, driven by the revenge of the Goths and Andronici, are rooted in deep, universal emotions that most of humanity tries to reject but cannot get away from: grief and shame. This grief and shame cries out from Lavinia’s final lines and leads Titus to kill Lavinia. Grief for his lost sons prompts Titus to sacrifice Tamora’s son, and grief and shame at “beg[ging] for grace in vain” causes Tamora to take her revenge. Where the Goths and Andronici differ from most of humanity is in distilling their grief and shame into weapons of suffering-horror. In *Titus Andronicus*, Shakespeare shows the monstrous consequences of not accepting these emotional facts of life. In rejecting their suffering and turning it outward to revenge, the characters inflict exponential horror. The boundaries between emotion and weapon are terrifyingly permeable. Grief and shame can so quickly turn outward to suffering and horror, and *Titus Andronicus* proves how crossing that line collapses a narrative into violence and silence.

Works Consulted

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Annotated Bibliography

Orlando

Alt, Christina. *Virginia Woolf and the Study of Nature*. Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Exploration of what Woolf knew about the science of nature and how she presented it in her writing. Begins with an overview of the natural sciences from Woolf's youth, then moves into instances in her published works, and finishes with the scientific theories flourishing in Woolf's adulthood. Main text of study is *The Waves*, although *Orlando* and other works get some mention. Useful for book-length study of Woolf and nature, although on a track different from my own.

Boehm, Beth A. "Fact, Fiction, and Metafiction: Blurred Gen(d)res in 'Orlando' and 'A Room of One's Own.'" *The Journal of Narrative Technique*, vol. 22, no. 3, 1992, pp. 191–204. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/30225368.

Both *Orlando* and *A Room of One's Own* deliberately blur the boundary between fact and fiction to say things about women that can't be said in either genre alone. Boehm and Burns both make the argument that Woolf outlines in fiction in *Orlando* the major arguments of the nonfiction *A Room of One's Own*. Boehm specifically traces the revisions of the essay that formed the backbone of *A Room of One's Own* in conjunction with the writing and publication of *Orlando* and Woolf's diary and letter writing about her thoughts and revisions.

Boxwell, D. A. "(Dis)Orienting Spectacle: The Politics of Orlando's Sapphic Camp." *Twentieth Century Literature*, vol. 44, no. 3, 1998, pp. 306–327. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/441812.

Boxwell describes *Orlando* in terms of camp: performative, over the top, funny, but meaning what it jokes about, and fuses this discussion with one of the spectacle of the Orient from both Vita Sackville-West's (*Passenger to Teheran*) and Woolf's pen. This brings together all the major strands of my *Orlando* research: visual, sexual, boundary blurring, and race. Boxwell articulates their points clearly, but still leaves me thinking there is more to this subject that I won't explore in this paper.

Brown, Catherine. "The Russian Soul Englished." *Journal of Modern Literature*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2012, pp. 132–149. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/10.2979/jmodelite.36.1.132.

Fascinating piece explaining the differences between the Russian word translated as "soul" and the English version, pinpointing Woolf's exposure to the broader Russian version in Tolstoy and other Russian authors gaining popularity in English translation (with Woolf's publishing help), and arguing that Woolf's writing was specifically influenced by this concept. Since the Russian concept is bigger and has connotations of "nature, expanse, profundity, elevation, heart, wild generosity and lack of pragmatism, holy foolishness, miracles, hope, defiance, self-expression, art, music, gifts, femininity, hyperbole, and inexplicability," this weirdly applies to my argument about Sasha's Russian nature (soul).

Burns, Christy L. "Re-Dressing Feminist Identities: Tensions between Essential and Constructed Selves in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*." *Twentieth Century Literature*, vol. 40, no. 3, 1994, pp. 342–364. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/441560.

Subjectivity in *Orlando* centers on the flipping of truth and parody in the novel's fascination with clothes, cross-dressing, and fashion. Do the clothes make the (wo)man, or the other way around? Does society make a person who they are, or is there an

essential self all along? Burns reads Woolf as processing this debate in terms of the clothes the characters choose to wear throughout *Orlando*. Self is both an essential trait and a construction, and each influences the other (the skirts Orlando wears change the way she moves and is perceived and acts). Burns is another who sees Woolf's arguments from *A Room of One's Own* processed in fiction in *Orlando*, like Boehm and Cervetti.

Cervetti, Nancy. "In the Breeches, Petticoats, and Pleasures of 'Orlando.'" *Journal of Modern Literature*, vol. 20, no. 2, 1996, pp. 165–175. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/3831473.

Orlando does not so much cross-dress as dress. Orlando is equally at home in both sexes, so the putting on of a skirt or pants is for function rather than form. Cervetti emphasizes this whole fluidity, distinct from many counterparts who emphasize the boundary blurring aspects of the clothing and fashion of the book.

Daileader, Celia R. Caputi. "Othello's Sister: Racial Hermaphroditism and Appropriation in Virginia Woolf's 'Orlando.'" *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 45, no. 1, 2013, pp. 56–79. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/23406584.

Points out the many allusions to Othello, especially in the first section of the novel, and argues that Woolf uses allusions of interracial love, especially from Shakespeare, to stand in for same-sex love. Daileader describes Sasha's part of the novel as an "anti-Othello," where Desdemona escapes Othello's jealous rage before it can begin.

Hovey, Jaime. "'Kissing a Negress in the Dark': Englishness as a Masquerade in Woolf's *Orlando*." *PMLA*, vol. 112, no. 3, 1997, pp. 393–404. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/462948.

This influential article, cited by many of my other sources, looks at how Woolf both establishes and destabilizes sex and race to explore the concept of English nationalism in

Orlando. Hovey claims that Woolf is claiming a space for the queer white woman in her class and nation, one that must perform a not-quite-joking masquerade with the accepted boundaries of sex. Racial inclusion does this as well, and Hovey shows how *Orlando* imbricates masculinity with whiteness and femininity and queerness with not-whiteness throughout the book.

Kristeva, Julia. *Revolution in Poetic Language*. Columbia University Press, 1984.

My primary theoretical text. Originally published in French in 1973 as Kristeva's doctoral dissertation, this abridged version removes her close reading and retains the theory. The book is divided into four parts: The Semiotic and the Symbolic, Negativity: Rejection, Heterogeneity, and Practice. The first part lays out her theory on the signifying process, the semiotic and the chora, the thetic break that divides semiotic from symbolic, and representations of the semiotic in the symbolic of religion, art, and literature. This section also places her theory within a broad philosophic, psychoanalytic, sociohistoric context, examining similarities and differences between her ideas and those of Freud, Lacan, and Husserl. The sections on negativity and heterogeneity follow a similar pattern, exploring Kristeva's theories in tandem with those of Hegel and Freud. The final section on practice does exactly that, applying Kristeva's theories to her definition of a text in a psycho-socio-historical context.

Schisler, Rebecca D. "Toward a Theory of Violence: Nature, Ideology, and Subject Formation in Virginia Woolf." *Virginia Woolf Miscellany*, vol. 81, 2012, pp. 18–20. EBSCOhost, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mzh&AN=2012583616&site=ehost-live.

A short piece arguing that for Woolf, man and nature are locked in a cyclical pattern of violence. People (usually men) are violent against nature, just as nature / society is violent to them in return. Boys “naturally” learn societal violence in and through nature, and language complicates this relationship by maybe leading man to martial violence (conquering nature, etc).

Smith, Victoria L. “‘Ransacking the Language’: Finding the Missing Goods in Virginia Woolf’s ‘Orlando.’” *Journal of Modern Literature*, vol. 29, no. 4, 2006, pp. 57–75. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/3831880.

The undecidability of the text (biography / fiction, history / fantasy, man / woman, etc) and its thematic focus on the inability of language to say what it means is specifically because it’s working to tell the untellable story of a woman, who is both Vita and Virginia and neither. Similarly, for a woman to tell her story, she must double herself to tell the story of her self. Smith shows how Woolf gave the fictional Vita recompenses she couldn’t have in reality, like her ancestral home Knole, while simultaneously giving herself treasures she couldn’t keep in reality, like Vita’s attention. Smith does not stay explicitly biographical but draws parallels and conclusions from facts to the fiction, much like the book.

Swanson, Diana L. “Woolf’s Copernican Shift: Nonhuman Nature in Virginia Woolf’s Short Fiction.” *Woolf Studies Annual*, vol. 18, 2012, pp. 53–74. EBSCOhost, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mzh&AN=2012581271&site=ehost-live.

Argues that in Woolf’s early short fiction, one can trace her shifting views from man as the center of the universe to man as a tiny part of the universe.

Westling, Louise Hutchings. "Virginia Woolf and the Flesh of the World." *New Literary History*, vol. 30 no. 4, 1999, p. 855-875. Project MUSE, [doi:10.1353/nlh.1999.0055](https://doi.org/10.1353/nlh.1999.0055).

Main claim is that Woolf perceived and wrote about humans as embedded within the flesh of the world, acting and acted on. Westling argues for similar cultural mindsets between Woolf and her contemporary thinkers Einstein (scientist) and Merleau-Ponty (philosopher).

Woolf, Virginia. *Orlando: A Biography*. Annotated by Maria DiBattista. New York, Harcourt, Inc., 2006.

Titus Andronicus

Fawcett, Mary Laughlin. "Arms/Words/Tears: Language and the Body in Titus Andronicus." *ELH*, vol. 50, no. 2, 1983, pp. 261–277. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/2872816.

Graphic ruminations on the connections between language and the body evidenced in *Titus Andronicus*. Fawcett explores both speaking (tongue) and writing (hand) and follows the chains of signifiers from body part through culture and how each functions symbolically and actually in speech-acts.

Harris, Bernice. "Sexuality as a Signifier for Power Relations: Using Lavinia, of Shakespeare's 'Titus Andronicus.'" *Criticism*, vol. 38, no. 3, 1996, pp. 383–406. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/23118107.

Instead of arguing that Lavinia is a signifier for power relations, as most scholarship does, Harris examines how that chain of signification is created and how Lavinia shows

the transactions of power, in conjunction with a 1589 pamphlet defending women's rights (such as they were).

Kendall, Gillian Murray. "‘Lend Me Thy Hand’: Metaphor and Mayhem in *Titus Andronicus*."

Shakespeare Quarterly, vol. 40, no. 3, 1989, pp. 299–316. *JSTOR*,

www.jstor.org/stable/2870725.

Very useful analysis of the links between violence and rhetoric, especially through metaphor, in the play. Kendall argues that "language engenders violence, and violence is done to language" and focuses on figures of speech, literary patterns, and Lavinia's troubling silence and objectivity. She focuses on the way language and literary allusions trap characters in certain ways of thinking. Strong analysis of Lavinia's rape and the metaphors surrounding it, as well as the textual fascination with violence, silence, and narrative incoherence.

Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Translated by Leon S. Roudiez.

Columbia University Press, 1982.

My primary theoretical text. I rely especially on the first chapter, which delineates Kristeva's theory of the abject, and the introduction to Chapter 7, "Suffering and Horror," from which I take my paper title. In both chapters, I focus on Kristeva's explication of her theory, rather than her application to a specific text.

Lamb, Caroline. "Physical Trauma and (Adapt)Ability in 'Titus Andronicus.'" *Critical Survey*,

vol. 22, no. 1, 2010, pp. 41–57. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/41556344.

Drawing, like Harris, Rowe, and Sid, on the "body politic" metaphor so potent in the play, Lamb examines how the physical traumas of Titus and Lavinia (originally bad things) are actually the means by which they enact revenge, lending a positive spin to

their supposed disabilities. When they put themselves back together, as the body politic must, they succeed.

Mohler, Tina. ““What Is Thy Body but a Swallowing Grave ...? ”: Desire Underground in Titus Andronicus.” *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol. 57, no. 1, 2006, pp. 23–44. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/3844217.

This article, which reads the scene of Lavinia’s rape in terms of a sublimated staging of the rape of Bassianus, offered me an excellent close reading of this pivotal scene.

Although the essay’s main argument was tangential to my interest, Mohler’s exploration of the graphic, transgressive violence and horrifying imagery helped me place the scene in my own argument.

Packard, Bethany. “Lavinia as Coauthor of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*.” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, vol. 50, no. 2, 2010, pp. 281–300. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/40658431.

Packard begins with similar base material as me, but we employ different theoretical lenses and draw nearly opposite conclusions. She argues that Lavinia’s rape does not abject her but casts her as coauthor of the play’s hybrid repeating narratives. We agree that Lavinia is pivotal to the narrative and that her rape acts as a catalyst, but while Packard emphasizes the positive multiplicity of allusions and narratives, I focus on the horrifying disintegration of the characters’ personal identities.

Ray, Sid. ““Rape, I Fear, Was Root of Thy Annoy’: The Politics of Consent in Titus Andronicus.” *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol. 49, no. 1, 1998, pp. 22–39. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/2902206.

Ray argues that Lavinia's injuries and rape hint that political consent is as much at issue in the play as sexual consent. The "body politic" metaphor ties Lavinia's handless and tongueless form, traded so easily at the beginning of the play, to Rome's political fate that bookends the plot. Rome is linked to England, where political rights were in question at the time, as was their queen's hand in marriage.

Rowe, Katherine A. "Dismembering and Forgetting in *Titus Andronicus*." *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol. 45, no. 3, 1994, pp. 279–303. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/2871232.

Excellent analysis of how the dismembered hands of *Titus Andronicus* function as symbols and how they gain new significance as props. Based on emblem books, heraldry, and other visual representations of hands, Rowe, illustrates how hands connote agency of personal, genealogical, and political power.

Shakespeare, William. *Titus Andronicus*. Edited by Jonathan Bate. Arden Shakespeare, 1995.

Weber, William W. "'Worse Than Philomel': Violence, Revenge, and Meta-Allusion in 'Titus Andronicus.'" *Studies in Philology*, vol. 112, no. 4, 2015, pp. 698–717. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/43921866.

Weber argues that Shakespeare makes a point with his plethora of allusions in *Titus Andronicus*: going back over the same story traps one in a destructive cycle. Weber also proposes that intent matters when making allusions. Marcus notably points out the clear similarities between Lavinia's condition and Philomela's but does not attach any intent to this idea and so misses the point. Only by seeing authorial intent in the action does the allusion add meaning to the obvious.

Willis, Deborah. "'The Gnawing Vulture': Revenge, Trauma Theory, and 'Titus Andronicus.'" *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol. 53, no. 1, 2002, pp. 21–52. *JSTOR*, *JSTOR*,

www.jstor.org/stable/3844038.

Willis' central idea of revenge as a container for trauma led me towards Kristeva's obsession with boundaries. Willis brilliantly repositions *Titus*'s horrific acts of revenge as an attempt to reconstitute the characters' self-image. This reminded me that the abject is all about the breaching of containers and made me think about the psychoanalytic ramifications of Titus and Lavinia's evident abjection.