The Creation of Original Cymbeline Companion Piece Lady Tongue for Professional Submission: Increasing Opportunity for Women in the Classical Theatre Sphere

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The Creation of Original *Cymbeline* Companion Piece *Lady Tongue* for Professional Submission: Increasing Opportunity for Women in the Classical Theatre Sphere

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Theatre from The College of William and Mary

by

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ABSTRACT
As a female theatre practitioner looking ahead to her career, I found myself frustrated that nearly any role I could play in the classical theatre sphere would have been written by a man, to be played by a man. Though Shakespeare gives us Regan, Gertrude, Innogen, Margaret, Ophelia, Rosalind—beautifully nuanced and complicated female characters—he still only gives us 1 for every 9 men (Packer 2015, xiv). Even now in academia I learn about non-male to male playwrights at about the same ratio. Devastatingly, records of theatre history have largely excluded non-males from the story, and the legacies of exclusion left behind are perpetuated still (Case 1983, 534). The American Shakespeare Center’s (ASC) playwriting competition, seeking fresh companion pieces to works of Shakespeare, caught my attention. I imagined a piece that celebrated the role of women+ in the classical sphere, that prioritized female+ casting, and that carved a space for female+ characters to face gritty challenges with agency and strong voices. I willed this original play script into being, and it became Lady Tongue.

Guided by the research question, “How can women’s voices be amplified in the western classical theatre sphere?” I have endeavored to write this full-length play in conversation with Cymbeline for submission to the Shakespeare’s New Contemporaries (SNC) playwriting contest, hosted by Staunton, Virginia’s ASC. Secondary research into the world of women in Shakespeare shaped the first draft of Lady Tongue. This play reimagines the vilified, unnamed Queen of Shakespeare’s text and the women her story pivots around—all of whom are dead before Cymbeline begins. I questioned what about the world these women lived in made it impossible for them to survive. Primary research conducted by seeing live theatre and visual as study of art in tandem with the study of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama at the London Academy for Music and Dramatic Arts sculpted the further development of the piece, heavily influencing the editing process. After the play script’s
submission to the SNC competition, a series of readings and feedback sessions culminated in a staged reading of the original play under my casting and direction to present the work to my educational and theatrical community.

This paper attempts to unwind the complexities and ambiguities of the creative writing process to support the quality and intentionality of *Lady Tongue*, following its genesis, the creation process, the influence of experiential research, the iterative revision process, and finally the future of the ply. The purposeful design of this project has yielded a play that enters the world of *Cymbeline* in its near mythic encounters, its teasing apart of Good and Evil, and its challenges of ‘what it means to be loyal’ that span family, nation, and faith. My play looks female characters in the eye and says earnestly, “I’m listening.”
CHAPTER I: THE GENESIS

Why this play now?

Innogen’s sexual life is the pivot point around which Cymbeline turns. Who will she marry? Who will she sleep with? The male-gaze world of Cymbeline takes a proprietorial ownership of Innogen’s body. We open the play and find that her pursuit of love in Posthumous has justified his banishment and her imprisonment. The Queen has promised Innogen as prop to her own brutish son Cloten, whose aggression goes unchecked. Posthumous’s rival, Iachimo, attempts to make the princess into an imperial conquest. Innogen’s own supposed lover and defender believes that unfaithfulness to him costs her the right to live. Her father, her husband, her suitors all believe they have authority over her world and her body, and she is repeatedly slandered despite showing nothing but honesty. The only hope of safety for Innogen in the world of predators is to shed her womanhood and pass as a male.

This fall, as I reread the play where my project began, I was filled with anguish. A four-hundred-year-old text has left us a document of female experience, authored by a male yes, yet painfully resonant. The knowledge that our bodies, simply for being non-male, are more likely to experience danger plagues half the world. In the ‘most democratic’ nation, in a country that boasts with pride a place where all people are entitled to equality allows an elite club of wealthy white men to legislate bodies they do not inhabit. To extort from these bodies, they colonize what is of value and abandon them when it is inconvenient. When I read a story about a well-respected, honorable princess who is cast down, called a liar and a whore, I hear Innogen’s pain echoing in my heart. This nation so recently watched a professor of psychology—an individual of economic, racial, and educational advantage over so many of this society too—be called confused, scheming, and the undoing of “a good man’s life.” All those who share her experiences were left to crowd outside the door. If it takes shedding all femininity and living as a man to understand safety and to be trusted,
believed, perhaps what it takes for the whole wide world’s elite men’s club to understand fear of the most intimate violation of dignity—the knowledge that the unspeakable could happen any time, most likely by someone you know, and that your aggressor will almost never see consequences—is to live as a woman.

**The Access Point: Women in the Classical Canon**

I am not alone to bemoan the deficit of female+ voices. Feminist theatre scholar Sue-Ellen Case defines the theatrical canon as such:

> The canon is constituted by the selection of major playwrights included in the histories of the drama, the anthologies of plays, the body of critical work on the drama and the history of major productions. Seemingly, this selection is based upon dramatic principles which identify a playwright as one who made a major contribution to the development of the drama. (1983, 534)

Case goes on to describe how the systems of theatre history construction fall under patriarchal biases that exclude women’s voices from this canon (534). Lack of representation in the canon spans all levels, from the educational to the commercial. Feminist theatre scholar Charlotte Canning confirms that women’s histories in theatre rarely appear in the classroom (1993, 52). Plays by Sophocles (496-06 BCE), Aristotle (382-22 BCE), and Shakespeare (1564-1616) are the standards of classical theatre taught, and therefore the plays that garner the greatest name recognition. Consequently, these plays with name value and high familiarity are more frequently staged in the commercial sphere. A resulting phenomenon is that the opportunities for female practitioners are saturated with dramatic works that were written by men to be performed by men, thus perpetuating a cycle of exclusion that diminishes women’s voices. This is not to say that non-females cannot produce content female+ artists can be excited by or satisfied with; it is to say that in a non-egalitarian society in which there is substantially less access to female+ created content, the ripples from generations of suppression are still felt. As Elizabeth Schafer writes in her book *Ms-Directing*
Shakespeare, even when women+ artists engage with Shakespearean content, “the work of a woman director is likely to be excluded from the patriarchal record we accept as history” (1998, 4).

Have the last 30 years yielded progress, though? In 2016, only two female playwrights showed work on Broadway, Lynn Nottage and Paula Vogel. Both women had already won the Pulitzer Prize for their work as writers. However, as noted then by the New York Times (2017), “The fact that these two writers are just now making their Broadway debuts raises uncomfortable questions for the theater industry, which season after season sees plays by men vastly outnumber plays by women in the all-important commercial spaces where money can be made, reputations burnished and Tony Awards won” (Paulson). Tina Packer, founding Artistic Director of Shakespeare and Company and professional classical theatre practitioner, expresses the gross imbalance of expressive freedom when she deduces, “I do believe artists of depth can portray both sexes—but as far as the history of theatre is concerned, it has been men writing, acting, producing, with women coming late into the game” (2015, xv). My own frustration caused by a tangible deficit of female+ representation on the classical stage is the fuel of this thesis project. In Shakespeare’s plays alone, “there are nearly a thousand men in the canon, to 160 or thereabouts women and girls” (Packer 2015, xiv). I challenged myself to grapple with this reality in a way that could make an effectual change in the classical theatre sphere and celebrate the voices of women in relationship to an existing canon of work. I was drawn to a theatre in my home state that shares similar artistic goals and hosts opportunities for practitioners like me: The American Shakespeare Center.

The American Shakespeare Center
The American Shakespeare Center (hereafter ASC) in Staunton, Virginia is home to a replica of London’s Blackfriars Monastery, a venue in which Shakespeare’s plays were originally
performed. The ASC stages productions in classical Shakespearean conditions still. These conditions include: live creation of sound effects and music, minimal scenic design elements, an audience that wraps around three sides of the stage action, actors addressing the audience directly, and casts consisting of a 10-12 actor ensemble doubling multiple parts as needed.

According to its mission statement (as of 2018), the ASC, “recovers the joys and accessibility of Shakespeare’s theatre, language, and humanity by exploring the English Renaissance stage and its practices through performance and education,” with a vision to be “Shakespeare’s American Home – a beacon for all to feel more alive through the experience of Shakespeare, changing lives one encounter at a time” (American Shakespeare Center, n.d.).

The American Shakespeare Center launched the ‘Shakespeare’s New Contemporaries’ (hereafter SNC) competition in 2017. The SNC competition invites playwrights to submit new plays that adhere to the performance conventions of Shakespeare’s works but are original in composition and thought, plays that will create a new canon of companion pieces. The competition strives to marry an appreciation of theatrical tradition to the social context of the day—a personal goal of mine as a theatre practitioner. One of the requirements for the SNC competition is that plays submitted be “inspired by or in conversation with” the plays slated for the season, in this case “Othello; Henry IV, Part 2; A Midsummer Night’s Dream; or Cymbeline” (American Shakespeare Center, n.d.). I was interested in getting to know a new play, and Cymbeline (1611) immediately caught my eye. I had never been exposed to its content before, as a student, actor, or audience member. Cymbeline is among Shakespeare’s less popularly explored plays, which appealed to me greatly; I believed there were fresh discoveries to be made.
Finding the ‘Way In’ to Cymbeline

Cymbeline (hereafter in citation “CYM”) awakened my curiosity. The play follows the story of Imogen, (in many publications ‘Innogen,’ the version I prefer and that research supports), daughter of King Cymbeline (Myklebost 2010, 21). Innogen has married the honorable yet low in status Posthumous, disgracing her father and step mother—who desires Innogen marry her own brutish son from a former marriage, Cloten. A banished Posthumous defensively falls into a bet with his friend Iachimo in Rome—if Iachimo can seduce Innogen into breaking her faithfulness to Posthumous, Posthumous must pay him 10,000 pounds; if he loses, Posthumous will take his life for this slander. Though Innogen remains true, Iachimo convinces Posthumous otherwise with details he learned about her body and her bed chamber while spying, and a love token of hers he has stolen. Servant to Posthumous, Pisanio, is charged by Posthumous to kill Innogen, while simultaneously the Queen deploys her plot to poison her. When Pisanio cannot fulfill this duty, he helps Innogen escape to Milford Haven dressed as a pageboy named Fidele. Innogen meets her long-lost brothers kidnapped as toddlers by accused traitor Belarius and is accepted as their brother. The Queen’s poison, substituted for sleeping potion by the suspicious physician Cornelius, casts Innogen into a slumber that her new family believes is death. Cloten is beheaded in his apish pursuit of Innogen and his body is mistaken by her to be that of Posthumous. After a bloody battle between the Roman army and the troops of Cymbeline, as well as an uplifting prophecy from the God Jupiter to Posthumous, the lovers are reunited and accepted by Cymbeline, the lost princes are restored to the royal family, and the court is rid of the evil Queen and her son.

18th century Shakespeare critic Samuel Johnson (1709-84) characterized Cymbeline’s tumultuous plot as “unresisting imbecility” (Updike 2006). My critiques are not of the plot, but of a different kind. My first response after reading the play was simply, where are all the women? Innogen is, with decisions about her well-being, passed between men who are not
painted particularly favorably. Her father rebukes her for her decision to marry Posthumous, casting him away after raising him as a father figure. Innogen is harassed by the widely disliked Cloten—even his kinsmen are transparent about his stupidity, yet no one stands between him and Innogen as she continuously denies his advances. In a particularly disturbing monologue, Cloten announces his plans to dress as Posthumous and rape Innogen in her lover’s clothes. Iachimo adds to the assault on Innogen’s privacy by making a crude bet on her sexuality, which her husband entertains. After violating the intimacy of her bedchamber and stealing her dearest love token of her husband, Iachimo convinces Posthumous there is truth in his slander. Despite Posthumous’s supposed undying love, his own insecurity and jealousy nearly cost the protagonist her life. Innogen’s life changes hands again to Pisanio, who though refusing to kill her, executes the plan that she shed all outward femininity in exchange for boys’ apparel.

As we watch Innogen passing between the lives of various men, we hear briefly from a lady in waiting, Helen. Other than Helen passing through, the only woman we hear from is the Queen. She is unnamed. She lies; she is transparent with the audience about this. She nearly kills the heroine. Over grief of Cloten’s death, she supposedly takes her own life—offstage.

Shakespeare has planted for his audience a triangle of women who have played critical roles in framing the world of the play—all of whom die before the play begins. Cymbeline is a widower; after the death of his first wife he quickly fell for the “crafty devil” that is the Queen (CYM 2.1.49). We know next to nothing about the woman who mothered Innogen. She left her daughter a “diamond,” and that is the only detail of her legacy (1.1.113). We hear briefly from Mother, to Posthumous, who did not survive his birth but visits her son in a dream sequence when the family ghosts plead to Jupiter to alleviate his pain (5.3). Mother is adjacent to her warrior husband and sons and a vessel for Posthumous to
enter the world. And finally we hear of nurse Euripile, the bold caretaker who flees with Belarius when he is accused of treachery, convinces him to take the two baby princes with them, and despite being the best mother they could have, dies in the mountains of Wales. We are left with the Queen; she is not granted the dignity of a name nor an onstage death. I wanted more.

Who are these women? The world they inhabit is unkind to them—so much so that it costs them their lives. The Mad Queen herself cannot survive the play. Innogen barely makes it, surviving a poisoning attempt by her step-mother, a death wish from her husband, a battle between Briton and Rome, and quite literally her own funeral. I imagined myself in this world, watching Innogen passed between the hands of men amidst her grapple to hold onto life. Despite being depicted as the primary villain in this story, I had difficulty faulting the Queen for her actions, operating in this world that is sculpted to keep her at bay. I saw that her efforts to put her only son on the throne would ensure the safety of the only family she had. I saw a woman studying the secrets of nature, scientifically even, to learn how to defend herself with plants and compounds. I saw someone who loved her son so much, that grief of his death consumed her. And I saw a woman who, when confronted with crisis, took agency over her own death. As an audience, we are expected to take reports of her death from physician Cornelius at face value.

He reports:

With horror, madly dying, like her life,
Which being cruel to the world, concluded,
Most cruel to herself. What she confessed
I will report, so please you. These her women
Can trip me if I err, who with wet cheeks
Were present when she finished. (CYM 5.5.38-43)

Cornelius goes on to say that the Queen confessed to a plan to poison Cymbeline, install Cloten on the throne, and poison Innogen who was forever “a scorpion to her sight” (5.4.45). If that was not damning enough, Cornelius tells Cymbeline further, “she confessed to never
loving you” (5.4.37). After Cornelius seeks a binary confirmation or denial from “her women” about hearing this confession, which they affirm, the king’s clumsy rebuttal amounts to, “Mine eyes / Were not in fault for she was beautiful,” as though her beauty blinded him to character and therefore absolves him of any responsibility (5.4.62-3). But what of the teary women, with “wet cheeks” at her deathbed? It is left to interpretation what the cause of their emotion is. It is possible we accept Cornelius’s convenient testimony, in which case this scene offstage must be traumatic to witness. More intriguingly, it is possible these women loved her and are sad to see her go. I postulate that Cornelius’s summation of the Queen is limited, lacking in truth and nuance. The Queen appeared to me as a person fighting to survive despite her odds—and ultimately losing the battle. Thusly begins my play.

The artistic statement I attached to my Lady Tongue submission to the ASC is as follows:

My goal is to give these female characters space to act upon their agency, gritty challenges to face, and voices that ring strong. Shakespeare has given me a wealth of characters to draw from who grew out of the pages to be tall, strong, impassioned women. I’ve nodded to a number of his works within my play and given quite a bit of space to Hrotsvitha of Gandersheim. Lady Tongue connects with Cymbeline’s characters and ignites its conflict with worthy backstory. . . . The play enters the world of Cymbeline in its near mythic encounters, its teasing apart of Good and Evil, and its challenges of ‘what it means to be loyal’ that span family, nation, and faith.

This statement describes the play that has been the cumulative product of an extensive, largely immaterial creative process. In the chapters to follow, I shall wade through the murky waters of experiential research and attempt to draw clear connections between my sources of inspiration and the messy path upon which they metamorphosed into artistic expression.

My theatrical mind is wired sensorially, producing images and emotional sensation from which I harvest language. To engage with the many ways I interact with theatrical content, and challenge my own abilities and notions of what that looks like, I exposed myself to a wide range of resources while keeping an eye toward this project and its goals. These resources include visitation to galleries of visual art, attendance of live theatre pieces, reading
play scripts that reflect themes related to my work, seeking out film and media content that challenges the female narrative, studying Shakespearean text as an actor, and reading critical scholarly essays of *Cymbeline* as a play. Through mindful submersion in inspiring stimuli, I created an environment to foster conversation between the intellect and the creative will. This critical connection is what elevates my work. *Lady Tongue* is grounded in scholarship, but scholarship that extends beyond that which can be accomplished in a library, and in a way that does not muffle the intangible voice of the muse. Allowing the artistic statement I composed to serve as a framework of analysis, I endeavor to trace the most fibrous connections between research and final product, communicating the roadmap of deliberate choices I made as a scholar and as an artist.
CHAPTER II: THE CREATION PROCESS

Exposure, Absorption, and Incubation

I treat the beginning phase of this process as one of exposure to stimuli, absorption of content, and incubation of ideas. On June 18th, I toured the National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C. with an interest in how women appear as subjects in art. The National Gallery features works from all over the world whose creation dates across hundreds of years. The goal of surveying the evolution of female subjects in visual art cross-culturally is incredibly wide in scope and does not serve my purposes; I took more of an interest in examining how key pieces affected me emotionally and allowing those images to stir my creativity. One such piece is the French painting “Breton Women at a Pardon” (1887) by Pascal Adolphe Jean Dagnan Bouveret. The painting features a cluster of women of the church, seated on the grass together (see Appendix A). Several of them lean together to read a sheet of paper, with the other women looking to those. Two men with shadowy faces stand observing them, but I was struck by how the women seemed unconcerned. The coloring of the sisters was greater in vibrance than the men beside them, or the churched landscape of the background. There was a lively energy between these women that transcended the setting. This image of the religious sisters, strong in their relationships with one another despite the dark world they inhabited resonates with me still. Bouveret’s painting in this way was influential on the ensemble of sisters present in Lady Tongue (hereafter in citation “LT”) Act II Scene 1. The sisters of Lady Tongue appeared to me with a radiance despite the oppressive world outside their walls that Euriphile falls into.

In search of immersion in Shakespearean content, I sought out as many opportunities to be an audience member as possible, including a production of Pericles performed by the Shakespeare Theatre Company’s acting conservatory, in Washington D.C. This production was under professional direction, presented by actors in training, in a minimal black box
theatre space. I was captivated by how the cast created immersive, believable, clear settings with few resources. For example, one of the most climactic scenes in *Pericles* is that in which the title character’s wife dies giving birth to their only daughter—in a ship sailing through a storm. The danger of the storm is critical to the drama of the scene. The ship’s captain convinces Pericles that the only way to please the gods and quell the storm is to throw the corpse overboard. Pericles would never consent to this were the storm not threatening the life of their entire crew, so the storm must be believably devastating. The cast created the rocking of the ship by throwing their bodies side to side across the stage, timed together. Members of the ensemble playing sailors climbed the rafters of the black box with rope pulleys, swinging from the ropes and transforming the rafters into sails. Live-played percussion became thunderous. The crux of Pericles’s decision to throw the body overboard was appropriately tragic because of the effective use of space and sound. This production shifted my perspective on minimal technical effects from limiting to inspiring. Without an electronic sound system and varied lighting instruments, the creative team of *Pericles* built settings out of bodies in space—a choice perhaps more thrilling than highly technical options. Because the SNC competition dictated similar ‘restrictions’ to my writing, I was able to reimage these opportunistically.

Furthermore, *Pericles* as a play awakened my curiosity in the subject of purity in women. The baby born at sea, Marina, grows to be a young woman who despite being sold into prostitution, emanates purity with so strong a force that she sways all men from having sex with her. Marina is a kind of sister to Innogen, their purity and faithfulness on trial.

Harriet Walter analyzes rebellious women of Shakespeare in her text *Clamorous Voices* (1989). Walter writes the following on female virtue:

> Male virtue is tested actively: men prove their honour, their virtue, by doing good deeds and fighting good battles… Female virtue is tested passively. Female virtue is a state of being, not doing: a woman is good. She doesn’t have to do anything, but she has to be unsoiled, untainted, preferably a blonde, definitely a virgin. (75)
Where the reading of Harriet Walter’s critical writing and being audience to Marina’s performance in *Pericles* intersected in my mind, I came upon a newfound determination to allow my female characters the freedom to be active. What is the opposite of docile, pure, ‘untainted’? According to Barbara Becker-Cantarino, in Early-Modern Europe, the contrasting image of the Shakespearean ingenue is the witch:

> Wicked witches—lewd, immoral, unruly, asocial women—were subversive or repressed women or groups, who in their antipatriarchal and unsubmitive attitudes or disruptive actions foreshadowed, facilitated, and eventually also contributed to the creation of feminist consciousness and feminist actions. (1994, 155)

I adopted the danger of being ‘lewd, immoral, unruly, asocial’ into the landscape of *Lady Tongue*. Protagonist Althea can exhibit all these qualities. She is sexually explicit toward her inexperienced husband, holds a moral code unlike any of her Christian or Roman companions, and breaks the expected social constructs of the court on her first visit. She is punished for this behavior; her own husband accuses her of witchcraft and can never allay the suspicion.

**What is it about women in Shakespeare?**

Founding Artistic Director of American classical theatre company Shakespeare & Company, Tina Packer is a lifelong scholar and practitioner of Shakespeare’s works. In her at once analytical and passionate book *Women of Will* (2015) Packer traces the progression of Shakespeare’s female characters from his first plays to the last, organizing their development into a five-act structure that mirrors his work. Packer’s examination of female characters through the lenses of scholar, actor, and director enriched my understanding of Shakespeare’s oeuvre with greater sensitivity to gender dynamics throughout the canon and provoked my preconceived notions as to how he writes femininity. Because *Women of Will* in its entirety
served as such a key resource to my endeavors, I will echo this model here to place my understanding of *Cymbeline* and its position in the canon in context.

In act one of a play, and of Shakespeare’s career, the beginnings of a plot are exposed, albeit without nuance. Packer calls this first act “The Warrior Women: Violence to Negotiation,” trekking through *Henry VI* Parts I and II and early comedies such as *The Taming of the Shrew*. Packer speculates at this point in his life, Shakespeare “knew hardly anything about women,” and that in the text “there’s a glimpse of his treating [women] like real human beings here and there, but that didn’t particularly interest him” (2015, 15). In act two however, the passion intensifies—or “The Sexual Merges with the Spiritual”—as Shakespeare’s female characters develop three-dimensionality. *Romeo and Juliet* emerges from this cycle, and Packer claims, “Shakespeare wrote about Juliet with as much insight, nuance, and detail as that with which he wrote about Romeo… They are equal,” which shows significant growth from the taming of Kate the Cursed (100).

Act three, or the third cycle of Shakespeare plays, begins to provoke the limited sphere that women are expected to operate in with a series of cross-dressing plots in plays such as *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*, in which Rosalind and Viola (of each play respectively) were originally portrayed by boy actors playing female characters impersonating men (Packer 2015, 173). Packer names this cycle “Living Underground or Dying to Tell the Truth,” the former identifying the trend of women going into hiding and experiencing greater freedom masquerading as men, but the latter title refers to the tragic heroines like Ophelia (*Hamlet*), Desdemona (*Othello*), and Cordelia (*King Lear*) which also come to life in this era. Their bodies are laid out in public, as examples. Thematically, these plays express a “painful truth Shakespeare arrived at: that women speak the truth at their peril” (189). Both of the key trends for which the act is named pave the way for Innogen. She intersects the comic elements and radical freedom of living as the boy Fidele but wears the
tragic burden of fighting to prove her innocence in a journey that nearly takes her life. Innogen’s body is laid out and funerated, and in the context of the Ophelias and Desdemonas that came before her, Innogen’s act of rising from death carries the significance of a break from pattern.

Where do the women of the canon go from here? They push harder still at the barriers between genders, such as Lady Macbeth exploiting advantages over her male counterparts where she can—in feminine wiles and sexual assertion. The framing of the fourth cycle is calamity, fittingly named “Chaos is Come Again: The Lion Eats the Wolf.” This is the era that gifts us Queen Gertrude, mother to Hamlet, equal partner and sexual companion of newly crowned Claudius (Packer 2015, 229). Packer’s interpretation of Gertrude and sexual energy has been foundational to building my protagonist. Hamlet and his father elevate her to a pedestal of celebrated purity. As Packer astutely captures, “If you are a woman, you know that a pedestal is lonely and drafty. Where you want to be is in a bed, knowing someone is mad about you and you about him” (229). To isolate female characters as holy beacons, imitating the imagery of Christianity’s Virgin Mary, deprives them of agency over sexual identity. In Queen Gertrude, Shakespeare critiques the male gaze of female sexuality through the lens of Hamlet’s hypocritical attacks on her (229). Packer’s observations hugely inspired the dynamic between Althea and Draco and the contrast between his expectation that she exhibit minimal sexual desire versus her enjoyment of her own sensuality.

As we enter the final acts, Shakespeare critic and scholar Marjorie Garber enforces Packer’s thesis when she writes, “Women, especially mothers, in the late romances of Shakespeare tend to be either alive and wicked, or good and dead” (2004, 808). Act five is the era of the romances, the era that births Cymbeline. This fifth act is the cycle of “The Maiden Phoenix: The Daughter Redeems the Father.” The archetype of a daughter figure embodying savior to the family that appears as Marina in Pericles and Perdita in The
Winter’s Tale appears again in Cymbeline’s Innogen. The “maiden phoenix” image is adapted from Persian literature but made distinctly feminine by Shakespeare to “give the bird the stamina to endure the fire, lie dormant, nurture the tiny sprigs of inconspicuous growth, let nature take its course, guard the nest, and see the world again, with new eyes” (Packer 2015, 268). Innogen embodies the image of the maiden phoenix in her depictions of unstainable purity, the conquer of death, and reunification to the family unit at the close of the play. This central idea of reclaiming death would come to be a tenet of Lady Tongue. We see Brona rise from the grave to deliver the death speech she was deprived of and Libitina born into the role of death itself. Althea is a phoenix figure, destroyed when her city is consumed in fire. The fire severs her from the repercussions of her ties with Draco and severs her from all familial ties except her unborn son, but she is reborn as an unstoppable force with nothing to lose.

In this vein, I was intrigued by the questions Cymbeline raises about family. As Garber writes, “…if Cymbeline is a foundation myth, it is also a family romance, embodying the fantasy of being freed from one’s family and discovering that one is a member of a family of higher standing” (2004, 805). Though Belarius creates a family unit with the two lost princes (and Euriphile briefly), and the Queen with her son Cloten join Cymbeline and Innogen as a unit, the true noble family of Innogen, her father, and her two blood brothers is ultimately restored, restoring balance. In response, I toy with the design of family in Lady Tongue. The image of the family unit is subverted in the first scene. Mother and Althea establish themselves as clearly autonomous women of the house. Following a series of references to Althea’s late father, Mother offers Althea a sedative she can use to avoid sex with her husband; Althea pieces together that her Mother frequently used the substance in her marriage. This revelation is staggering for Althea because in that moment she discovers the darker complexities of her own family history and what darkness her married life may one day host.
I further explore the idea of parenthood in Euriphile. Euriphile becomes essential to the dynamic of the royal family as a nurse to young princes Guiderius and Arviragus. She is given nearly parental authority to the noble boys, but her own daughter is taken from her and given to a couple seemingly fit to care for the child as their own. In the convent of Act I Scene 1 it is revealed that the couple acting as parents to this child is manipulating Euriphile for intelligence about King Cymbeline. Euriphile is unabashedly a mother; she asserts it in the following interaction with Belarius:

EURIPHILE    I’m a mother.
BELARIUS    I’m sorry.
EURIPHILE    Why? I’m not. (LT 3.2, pp. 95)

Euriphile sets her own life at risk as a traitor to Debilisium to keep her birth daughter alive; the bond of blood between she and her daughter is that strong. My curiosity so driven by the Mad Queen’s devotion to Cloten despite his outward violent, ignorant, and presumptuous behavior, I built Euriphile’s relationship to her daughter to be one that requires deep sacrifice. I designed a world in which Euriphile would betray her nation and god to protect her daughter, Libitina would sacrifice her life for Posthumous, Cymbeline would neglect the duties of a King to be near to his sons, and Belarius driven to the limits of his emotional landscape would kidnap two princes out of desire to better father them himself. I created a world in which parent/child relationships are so fierce, that we can better rationalize Althea’s protection of her son at all cost—even if that cost be the very thing her Mother tried to protect her from, sexual assault of a woman.

**Hrotsvitha of Gandersheim and Representation**

As I have established, there is a severe lack in female+ representation in the theatre history canon that is taught in classrooms. It was for a World Theatre History project previously in my educational experience that I first encountered Hrotsvitha of Gandersheim. Feminist
theatre critic Sue-Ellen Case laments in her piece “Re-Viewing Hrotsvit” (1983) that, “Hrotsvit von Gandersheim was the first woman playwright—an identity which has taken one thousand years to emerge and has yet to be placed within a critical and historical perspective” (533). As a student taking an active approach to seeking female+ created content, I was shocked that I had never heard of this writer.

I learned that Hrotsvitha was the canoness of Gandersheim Abbey in Saxony during the tenth century (935-73), where she wrote six plays in response to the Roman plays of Terence (185-59) with a distinctly female narrative, in which “women are the center of the action and it is their response to male aggression which determines the development of the plot” (Case 1983, 536). Hrotsvitha wrote in Latin, drawing stylistic components from Roman dramas (Wilson 2004, 3). An astutely aware writer, Hrotsvitha wrote with political agendas, be it to praise Christian role models and encourage her readers to imitate their virtues or to give support to the Ottonian family dynasty (Wilson 2004, 3-5). She even names herself “the strong voice of Gandersheim” in her work (Case 1983, 535). Hrotsvitha has become a role model of mine as a figure who wrote with a distinctly feminist voice, who engaged with contemporary issues of her time in her writing, and who paved the way for women+ writers to come.

As I embarked upon writing Lady Tongue, Hrotsvitha kept appearing to me. Though my play is set before the fall of the Roman Empire, several hundred years before Hrotsvitha wrote plays in the Abbey of Gandersheim, her work makes an appearance in the landscape of Britannia. When Euriphile visits the abbey of her youth in Act II Scene 1, the sisters are enacting Hrotsvitha’s play Dulcitius (between 935-73). This decision was deliberate and made for a variety of reasons. Firstly, I am honoring the way that Hrotsvitha has paved for female playwrights and opening a space for her work to breathe onstage, said aloud by women. Despite the generations that have omitted her from study of theatre histories, I have
created a forum through which her work can be seen and heard, albeit only in portions.
Secondly, I am nodding to Shakespeare’s trope of traveling players, such as the players of the
dumb show in *Hamlet*. The band of nuns conducting a play-reading is a representation of
Hrotsvitha and her sisters in the abbey, but through a device reflected in the Shakespearean
canon. Thirdly, *Dulcitius* is a piece about a trio of female martyrs who die at the hands of the
Romans when they refuse to denounce their Christian beliefs in God—but die victoriously on
the path to a desired Heavenly afterlife. The trio of martyrs reflects my triangle of women
who sacrifice their lives defending their personhood. Furthermore, *Dulcitius* depicts the
deadly tensions between Christians and non-Christians and the conceit that sacrifice in the
Christian belief system is rewarded. When we revisit the sisters in the abbey in Act V Scene 2
of *Lady Tongue*, now performing the final scene of *Dulcitius*, the sacrifice of the trio of
martyrs by fire echoes Draco’s rhetoric of holiness in sacrifice. The connection between the
two plays is strengthened by the double casting I have suggested, paralleling Draco and
Libitina to the persecutors, and Euriphile, Althea, and Brona to the sisters sacrificed.
Euriphile’s final line in Act V Scene 2 resolves the scene with a triumphant cry, “The greater
my pain, the greater my glory!” (LT pp. 160). Her cries of glory as she is sacrificed replaces
the power into the hands of the women who are lost in *Lady Tongue*, Euriphile, Brona, and
the people of Keely, communicating a sense of reward for their hardships.

**Creating Characters**
The anchor of my writing process remained for me The Triangle. I drew it over and over
again in my handwritten notes, recreated digitally here:
The spark of a play originated in this Triangle: Maid Euriphile kidnapper of princes, Late Mother of Posthumous in the family of warriors, and the Late Queen who left Cymbeline a widower; this triangle hung over the Mad Queen like a pyramid with her at the point.

I will begin with my vision of Euriphile. Shakespeare provides me few clues into her. The princes mourn at her grave in the mountains, she was at one time a mother to them, and she convinced Belarius to kidnap the princes with her when he was banished. From these facts sprouted a sparky, audacious woman. Who would dare take noble children from the King and Queen? The answer I offer is, someone whose highest loyalty does not lay with the crown in the first place. I created a woman with the lowest status in a room but the quickest wit. The race of her dialogue is countered by the measured speech of the Late Queen.

I reverse-engineered the Late Queen into Brona, her name meaning ‘sorrow.’ Collecting all the details we know of King Cymbeline before marrying again, we know his sons have been kidnapped, his wife has died, and he is a weak politician. He is quickly enraptured with the beauty and gravitas of the Mad Queen. Posing the question, then, if King Cymbeline needed someone commanding and sharp, who was his partner previously? I respond, a wife who was young and inexperienced as a leader. The Late Queen must be drowning in a sphere she is desperately trying to get a handle on. Brona emerged as a woman “very young, and very pregnant…the combination inspires unease, but it’s hard to look away” (LT 1.2, pp. 19). She is everything the Mad Queen is not. The world Brona lives in is built in a way designed to keep her on a shelf. She is watched by Cymbeline to the point of his own detriment, as if she is breakable. The shape of this man’s world is not one that she is meant to be heard in, yet she desperately fights to overcome. Her desperation to engage with the rule of her kingdom takes her to the only place she can—the dungeons, where she feeds her loyal soldiers unjustly imprisoned. This decision, however, ultimately causes her own death.
I pivot now to the point of the pyramid, the Mad Queen. Though I have named her the ‘Mad Queen’ here, it is more accurate to consider her character development as a woman who will become Queen and will in the eyes of her people grow mad. She is the cornerstone of *Lady Tongue*. In *Cymbeline*, she brings death, “[reversing] the pattern of healthy nature by taking flowers and turning them into poison” (Garber 2004, 816). Imagining her before she is driven to manipulate nature into death, I named her Althea, from the Greek verb for ‘to heal.’ Beginning with a trait as simple as a name, she sprung forth as a woman of inversions and contradictions. Many of Althea’s character flaws are deliberate inversions of negative aspects of female tropes that connect her to her fellows in Shakespeare’s canon.

Consider the notion of purity in brides of Shakespeare. Cordelia cries tears of holy water for her father (*King Lear*). Juliet is a pure spot against a backdrop of violence and hate (*Romeo & Juliet*). When Hero’s purity is slandered, it costs the entirety of her life and reputation before proven otherwise (*Much Ado About Nothing*). And of course, Innogen is unshakably faithful, the picture of loyalty at any cost to even herself (*Cymbeline*). Althea, alternatively, is sexually curious—unabashedly so. While Father Anthony makes the assuming claim that Althea is a virgin, we do not know this for certain, and it is not important. On the wedding night, it is her husband that is nervous while Althea is confident, leading him through the acct as she says, “Trust me,” the last spoken words before they make love for the first and only time. One of my readers who provided feedback on a later iteration of the play observed how, “In literature, we tend to see women put on a scale of emotionally expressive to cold and intelligent. It is rare to see a character exhibit both.” The reader went on to affirm how exciting it was to read Althea as a character who is emotional in her personal relationships and scathing in the throne room. She is a military leader of her own clan, and is concerned with the health of her marriage to Draco. These dualities fill her out to be a character who draws upon traits of Elizabethan drama, yet in combinations that are
uncommon, and challenge the binaries of characters like Hero, who is either the purest virgin, or a slut unworthy of love. Althea occupies a space between.

This brings me to the final third of the Triangle, the Mother of Posthumous, now named Libitina after a Roman goddess of funerals and burial. The quality I desired to complete this pyramid of balanced parts was drama of mythic proportion, heralding the death that comes when the pyramid falls out of balance. Libitina enters the story in mythic quality, introduced by a tale from the Voices that reads like epic poetry. Though I draw from the connotations of Roman influence and death, Libitina’s origin story featured in Lady Tongue is of my own creation. Drawing from Shakespeare’s evidence of Posthumous being born of a family of warriors, Libitina is born from war itself. This woman enters the story as a lightning character. She enters the story in a swirl of prophetic darkness, sets off the dominos that begin with destroying Althea’s home and lead to the many deaths that follow, and dies in childbirth herself. To borrow language from Dympna Callaghan, Libitina “becomes the instigator of the tragic action of human life by giving birth” (1989, 52). Libitina crosses through this play, leaving tragedy in her wake, but her voice lingers just as that—a Voice.

The first draft of the play, hitherto Draft 1, taught me about how these characters work. I learned the scope of my story by allowing them to take on opinionated voices in the writing. My approach to starting the writing of actual scenes was to place my characters in uncomfortable or complicated situations and to improvise how they would react. I let them teach me about the world they inhabited before I enhanced it.

**Building the World**

Discovering the world of Lady Tongue was an excavation. The first pieces to break through were the characters and their relationships, and next the ends I knew they would come to by the beginning of Cymbeline. Imagining the world this story thrived in bore an extensive
process. Knowing my story’s destination still left me massive possibility to explore. Draft 1 was noncommittal toward setting and context. *Cymbeline* is set in the First Century A.D., but research had piqued my interest in the Victorian era, particularly in the ties between spirituality and madness in England. From there I explored the history of religious spheres of influence in the United Kingdom, from the Romanization and then Christianization of Britannia, to the Protestant Reformation and rule of Bloody Mary. The wide net I cast into exploratory research yielded a first draft play featuring a Roman emperor, a 10th century dramatic text, and a handheld time piece—in a story with a supposedly singular timeline. William Shakespeare did not concern himself with historical accuracy if it was at the price of good drama. However, the setting of my play created a world that was chaotic to the point of distracting from my story.

At this point in my process, I had a disorganized draft that was without foundation; I overcame this hurdle by returning to the proverbial ‘drawing board.’ In my field notes of the spring semester, I uncovered a note written several months prior: “do not shy away from your own fears—religious doubt is fair game.” Thus began a fresh wave of exposure to content regarding spirituality. I turned to the podcast *Shakespeare Unlimited*, run by the Washington D.C. Folger Shakespeare Library, the place home to more first folio content than any other in the world. The Folger released an intriguing episode about the tumultuous nature of religion in England during Shakespeare’s lifetime which was mirrored in his creative work (Folger 2016). I considered how to engage with the themes of this tumultuous spiritual climate, while following my creative impulses. Drawing from my own Christian background, I was inspired to challenge Christian institutions. Challenging spiritual intolerance was content I felt I could write about truthfully and passionately, from the lens of my own experiences and with an eye toward research. In her book on playing madness in Shakespeare works, Carol Thomas Neely (1991) describes an era in which “spiritual doubt, caused by the sense of sin and
incomprehensible and inexpressible loss of God’s favor, is to be cured by penitence, prayer, and faith” (319). I was drawn to the possibilities of a character who turned to God for healing or fixing of all kinds. This collision of ideas would become my antagonist Draco’s manifesto.

Refraining from affixing myself to time and place in Draft 1 allowed me the freedom to develop my characters as individuals who can stand on their own outside of context, however, to find their depths and to flesh out the world of the piece, I needed to decide. I kept feeling drawn back to Britannia before the fall of the Roman empire, in which Rome had mandated Christianity, but the far reaches of the empire still practiced Roman paganism. In Britannia, however, these two spiritualities interacted with numerous local sects of paganism, including spiritualities of Celtic and Druid roots. I learned in an exhibit at the Museum of London, “The Romans had a business-like attitude towards their gods. They accepted that their beliefs would become mixed with local British ideas” (see Appendix B). I was interested in the ways these intersections of spirituality could be exciting, or even incendiary. The exhibit went on to postulate the importance of streams and waterways in spiritual tradition (see Appendix B). I found the parallels between Romans leaving offerings for the gods by the stream and Biblical imagery of baptisms in the river electric. I drew from Roman, Briton, and Celtic names and traditions (see Appendix C for reference). I made the leap to ground my play in this era, close to when Cymbeline would be set in history.

This decision transformed my play. The reimagining of time in Lady Tongue marks the delineation between major Draft 1 and Draft 2. Draft 1 only made it through about half the plot Draft 2 would come to have. The context required a heavy rewrite before I could pick up the plot, and it was not until after solidifying the setting that I could finish the story to a cohesive end. The most significant impacts of setting are the spiritual and political dynamics between character groupings. Althea and her husband Draco were originally written to be two Christians with different degrees to which they practiced religion. I reframed Althea as a
leader of a pagan Briton people, allying herself with a Romano-Christian society for strength against warring factions of peoples in the northern region of Britannia along the Roman built Hadrian’s Wall—physically marking Roman from non-Roman and aggravating tensions among Britons. Althea’s non-Roman and non-Christian identity became the instigator of the way she is othered throughout the play by her politically matched husband and by Cymbeline’s court.

I would like to note the historical accuracy of Lady Tongue, or rather lack thereof. It was most important to me to establish an otherness between Romans and non-Romans, and I achieved this by drawing upon traditions from a variety of sources. The setting of Lady Tongue remains ‘an imagined landscape of Britannia,’ because the traditions practiced by the people of my script do not necessarily represent historical accuracy. By refining the world of the play and its rules allows me break them deliberately by choice. Drawing traditions and references from multiple timelines in moderation further supports the imagined world of this play—the mystical sense I did not want to dampen by it becoming bogged down in historically accurate details; this play is not a history. The new setting of Draft 2 is successful because it drives story. This sense of otherness in Althea, in these circumstances, fuels her darkening as a character and magnifies the tragedy of losing her independence by the end of Lady Tongue, as she is forced to seek safety from Cymbeline.

The revisions between major Draft 1 and Draft 2 required thorough planning to execute properly. See Appendix D for a record as to the changes Act I Scene 1 alone has undergone that reflect the revision process. Additionally, see Appendix E for a photograph documenting the planning board I used to track my progress. Note the far left column lists the major characters and timelines: Althea, Euriphile, Brona, and Libitina/Tenantius, as well as plot points established in Cymbeline and a macrocosm timeline entitled War & World. Each of these corresponds with a row of notes following the action of that character or category.
and the other characters affected by that action. The color-coding is as follows: the plot points and information established by the text of *Cymbeline* is noted in bright pink. The top rung of the board is lined with pale pink sticky notes listing edits in progress. Green sticky notes express plot points I had already written or envisioned, pale pink notes appearing in these rows to represent new ideas. Finally, orange and blue arrow-shaped papers are notes on characters for my reference, on which I’ve expressed the characters’ greatest strengths and weaknesses to keep in consideration.

**Executing the Framing Concept**

In many ways, I built a world that is very contained. An ensemble of between 10 and 12 actors become every character, including the body of Voices that frame *Lady Tongue*. In the first scene I describe the Voices as passengers on this moving train with us, omniscient guides who blur the boundary between observer and participant in this story. This world is defined by the inevitably of the story unfolding, and that kinetic energy gives way to not only the Voices, but all the characters who inhabit this space. The Voices as an entity have been present since the first scene of this play I wrote and are the very backbone of this piece. Artistically, I find the lingual texture they bring to the stage thrilling, however, the presence of the Voices satisfies a number of practical purposes as well.

As the ASC competition guidelines dictate, submitted plays should make a conscious effort to engage with the constructions of Shakespearean drama, including direct audience address. I found direct address from my characters dissonant to the heart of my idea. The elevated speech of the Voices however is meant to be delivered straight to the audience. This manner of speech achieves the effect of an aside, by inviting the audience to join them in the action of the play and share the experience of its events together. Furthermore, the Voices provide me a vehicle to employ the textures of heightened language to color a scene without
sacrificing the snappy, relatively colloquial banter my characters speak with. These most poetic moments of story are perhaps my greatest nod to Shakespeare. Finally, the Voices support the success of this play as a minimally technical production. The ASC’s traditional staging conventions limit technical design for lighting, electronically produced sound, and scenic elements, therefore I challenged myself to establish the mood of a scene through powerful, communicative text. Take the Voice segment at the beginning of Act III Scene 4:

VOICE The walls tired of the same low voices Climbing up them in the afternoons.

VOICE The castle opened at the pores Waiting for the guests,

VOICE That would busy the stone annals Into a hive.

VOICE The walls are terrible gossips. Always whispering back the chatter To the ceiling. (pp.107)

We glean from this text the setting, a castle. We understand the literal context, that the castle is opening up to guests arriving for the blessing of baby Innogen, but we too understand the sense of anticipation for arrivals. This prepares the audience for change in this setting of Debilisium of which I have already established an understanding. Thematically, I plant the panic of the loss of privacy intensifying with the imagery of even the walls gossiping to the ceiling. All of these things can be communicated in an artistically satisfying method that requires only spoken text.
CHAPTER III: EXPERIENTIAL RESEARCH

LAMDA, London Academy for Music and Dramatic Arts

After spending five weeks studying a single sonnet through the lenses of leveraging sounds for meaning, building stamina of breath support, relating structure to meaning, acknowledging enjambment without sacrificing flow, scanning rhythm, punctuating purposefully—just about every angle I could imagine—my instructor concluded his lesson by saying, “At the end of the day, sense trumps academia.” The instructor took a moment to ensure I understood that while academia provided tools for analyzing text, the impulse of the artist will always supersede those interpretations in performance. This is the core reason why my development as an actor is critical to my development as a playwright. I received a similar lesson from monologue coach and professional actor Alex Waldmann. As he coached my peers and me through monologue preparation, he was explicit in his point that in our use of these tools, we should only ‘keep’ in performance what we like, and discard what we do not. Playwrights create text, but actors inhabit the world; the work lives transiently in their bodies. Understanding this fundamental reality of theatre, that performance is the end game of the playwright’s work, will and should affect that way that I write. The goal of this project as a whole is to create a play that a) can exist in the sphere of the classical canon, b) would create opportunities for female+ performers and their voices, and c) that I, as a female-identifying artist would be challenged, engaged, and interested by. Therefore, my development as a performer is hugely influential to the written product I create. To create a script in a vacuum is to create a script without the movement and breathability it will need to live onstage.

The curriculum I took in LAMDA’s Shakespeare Summer School program was a sample of the kind of rigorous, full-time training actors in conservatory institutions undertake. The scope of my research in London was heavily based in growing skills as a
performer. I spent 7 hours a day in training, taking two classes per day in the fields of text, voice, singing, historical dance, stage combat, and movement. The other half of the work day was spent in rehearsal for one of two productions. See Appendix F for a sample day-to-day schedule. The first four weeks of Elizabethan training culminated in a performance of scene selections from *Much Ado About Nothing* (c. 1590s) by William Shakespeare, and the latter four of Jacobean work in a 90 minute cut of *‘Tis Pity She’s a Whore* (1929) by John Ford. First, I will analyze how the primary body of this course, the rehearsal processes of these two productions, directly shaped how I built *Lady Tongue* before expanding my focus outward to lectures and performances I attended in London.

**How good an actor is your character?**

My acting professors asked me, “How good of an actor is your character?” I played Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing* (hereafter in citation “MA”) Act II, Scene 1 in which she is proposed to by Prince Don Pedro and makes the brash faux pas of immediately refusing him. Director Jenny Rich coached me through this moment by asking me how good an actor I thought Beatrice was. Would she hide her emotions? The text supports the possibility that she blurts her refusal: “No, my lord, unless I may have another for / working days,” before talking her way out of her blunt and likely offensive blunder, saying, “Your Grace is too costly to wear / every day. But I beseech your Grace pardon me. I / was born to speak all mirth and no matter” (MA 3.2.320-3). We learn how poorly Beatrice masks her feelings and how she copes when she reveals too much just from this one passage. Shakespeare has woven into the text that Beatrice is hot-tempered and “shrewd of… tongue” not only in how other characters describe her, but in her speech patterns (MA 2.1.19).

As a writer, it is my impulse to let my characters say what they are thinking. When I sculpt a character, is begins with only amorphous inner monologue. Draco serves as the
perfect case study for this. My imagined Draco was paranoid about his masculinity, lacked sexual confidence, and had difficulty untangling these thoughts from his religious beliefs. While it is tremendously helpful to me as a writer to articulate Draco’s thought, “I am not attracted to my wife, and I am afraid God is punishing me for marrying a pagan,” the transparency does not make for interesting drama. It was a challenge for me to learn how to let these motivations influence the character without betraying a nature of the character: a very guarded man who would have immense difficulty being publicly honest about his emotions. Through the lens of my Much Ado rehearsals then, how could I craft a scene that antagonized Draco enough for these emotions to show through?

I have placed Draco in the most uncomfortable position I could think of in the packing scene, (See LT 3.1). He begins the scene with two secrets. Firstly, he has found a sleep tonic that he suspects Althea has been using on him—and therefore may be causing his lack of physical attraction to her. Secondly, he did not uphold his promise to alert the King of their marriage, but they are about to show up at his home fully wed. Draco wants to leave, but he is faced with the personal obstacle of Althea’s pressure to wait and the elemental one of a terrible storm. I have placed opposite Draco a worthy adversary in Althea, who is so desperately trying to understand his pain that she will push him to tell the truth even if it means starting an argument. All of these variables are necessary to push the scene to its climactic end in which Draco’s emotional truth bursts out of him, “Then why don’t I want to sleep with you? Why do I hate touching you? Can you tell me why? If it’s so God-willing that we give the world a hundred heirs, can you tell me why?” (LT, pp. 85). This is the moment Draco’s ability ‘to act’ first truly slips.
**Every word is important.**

In the very same rehearsals for *Much Ado About Nothing*, there was a high level of attention paid to the accuracy with which we performed the text. Director Rich was known to stop a scene mid-run if an actor dropped even a single conjunction. “With Shakespeare, every word is significant,” Rich would say. While there are practitioners at the same academy who do not teach this level of reverence to the text, ideally, this principle stands. Regardless of the care Shakespeare actually took while constructing his plays, (which is a variable we may never know), actors and directors must accept a text as is and draw meaning from the pages. Why a character uses ‘and’ instead of ‘but’ at surface level seems non-critical. However, as an actor it is within your job description to discover what this choice of word indicates about your character’s mannerisms, speech patterns, or even thought processes.

I applied this principle to the creation of my play as a guiding force. Why would I ever haphazardly choose a word when I choose one with intentionality? I spent an afternoon of great thought editing Act IV Scene 5 of *Lady Tongue*, hung up on one line: “Do you care for me at all.” (151). Belarius says this to Euriphile immediately following Brona’s death, preceding their escape from Debilisium. I exchanged the words “care for” and “love” numerous times, very carefully assessing which one better communicated what I wanted that moment to achieve—Belarius exposing his vulnerability, while still avoiding the possibility of complete rejection. Ultimately, Belarius asks how she feels about him, and she rejects him outright. Using the word “love” tips the scale of vulnerability just too far. If he asks her “Do you love me at all?” and she replies, “No,” the rejection is absolute. “Do you care for me at all?” is softened just enough that he can justify her rejection in his mind as a deflection. But Belarius needed one more line of defense. He does not need a question mark; he needs a period to punctuate. This change, perhaps imperceptible to an audience member, can be telling to an actor playing the role. Belarius is not really asking her. It may sound like a
question, but he is making a statement, challenging her to deny him. Thus, the final iteration for the line becomes: “Do you care for me at all.” The attention I have paid to specificity of word choice in this play strengthens its intentionality hugely.

**Understand a play’s structure. Each beat should further action.**

Working with Director Dan Bird on ‘Tis Pity She’s a Whore is the best practical course I have had in play structure. As a cast, we combed through the play with extensive table work. Each scene was given a thematically-oriented title. Act I Scene 1 became “Giovanni Confesses.” Such a title communicates the plot, that Giovanni is in confession with a priest, admitting to being in love with his sister Annabella. The term “confesses” is an actionable verb. My peer first suggested “Giovanni Tells Father that He Loves Annabella,” to which Dan Bird replied, “let’s make that stronger.” Confessing has a stronger emotional consequence than telling, and therefore heightens the stakes for Giovanna and Father both—and makes for more interesting drama.

Next, the actors playing each character in the scene identified their objective (what they are trying to accomplish) in that scene. For example, Giovanni wants Father’s approval. He must go through the priest to get it; he cannot achieve approval on his own. These decisions lead into labelling beats within the scene. Identifying beats is a methodology that stems from Stanislavsky acting training, but there is great variability in approach. Dan Bird defined beats as new information in a scene that changes the way a character will try to achieve their objective. When the priest outright tells Giovanni to never see Annabella again, Giovanni must change the tactic by which he will win Father’s approval. Instead of trying to impress Father with his honesty, now he modifies by trying to make Father feel guilty for crushing him emotionally.
This methodology was repeated for each character in every scene of the play. By the end, we were all working from a fully scored script that we understood as a team. We could play the scenes moment by moment rather than thinking about “playing the ending.” This lesson is key. Giovanni truly believes he will find a way to be happy with Annabella until the moment he discovers Soranzo is planning to kill her. If Giovanni is played throughout the performance knowing he will eventually lose his love, the drama of the play deflates. See Appendix G for a fully scored scene under this exercise.

This lesson in structure from Dan Bird inspired a complete rewrite of Althea and Draco’s relationship. In the first iteration of Act I Scene 3, in which Draco first meets Althea under the guise of being Father Anthony, the kiss shared by them damns Althea in Draco’s eyes irrevocably. As I continued to flesh out the first half of the play, whenever Draco and Althea were on stage together, Draco was doing something to mock or shame her. I initially justified this decision with the subtext that Draco was trying to assert dominance over Althea by emotionally manipulating her. This idea only makes sense in theory. The confessional is the first time we as an audience meet Draco, then we spend an entire scene unsure if we are able to trust him. If he emerges from that scene a blatant antagonist, then where is the hope that Althea and Draco’s relationship will heal? I rewrote their dynamic through Draco’s eyes. I used Dan Bird’s method:

- What does Draco want right now?
- What does he want ultimately from Althea?
- How does each line she says to him affect how he tries to achieve that?

Through this lens of analysis I discovered a character trait of Draco that I had not developed at all—his sexual insecurity. Althea as a character is sexually curious, furious when her mother suggests her sexual life could be unpleasant (LT 1.1). In my mental sketches of Draco I understood his insecurity, but I had not written any content to share that
side of him with the audience and the other characters in the play. In Draft 1, Father Anthony served as a breath of comedic relief and as a tool to provide expostional information about Draco. As Act I Scene III currently stands, Father Anthony and Draco’s conversation is reimagined as toxically masculine banter, or colloquially, ‘locker room talk.’ Father Anthony makes an extended metaphor about entering a sea snail’s shell that doubles as grimy sexual innuendo. The two men stand on perceived high ground morally and socially, calling Althea’s mother “pretty for a Brit” and Father insinuating that they could only love a pagan woman if it was for the sexual pleasure (LT 1.3, pp. 29). The conversation sets up the context of the rest of the play: Draco is operating in a religious sphere that he clings to mightily, but we can see the cracks in its moral façade immediately. Perhaps even more critically, this conversation sets up the paradox of Draco’s character: sexual confidence is masculine, Draco wants to be masculine; sexual confidence is unholy, Draco wants to be holy. Draco fears he is neither masculine nor holy, and that will destroy him.

Therefore, in response to Dan Bird’s questions, what does Draco want right now? When Althea enters, he wants to assert dominance. He will attempt this intellectually and sexually. What does Draco want ultimately? Draco wants to convert Althea to his Catholic faith to “save” her. This will be the only way he finds victory in his goal. How does each line Althea says affect him? When Althea enters the scene, the pace of the banter is racing—and sexually charged.

ALTIEA I will answer you honestly, if you do the same for me.
DRACO These things tend to start with lying, stealing, and killing.
ALTIEA And of those, which will we do first?
DRACO The lying comes after the wedding.
ALTIEA The very night, in fact.
DRACO And stealing?
ALTIEA What can be taken from a body?
DRACO And killing. You can take life.
ALTIEA Or give a little death? (pp. 35-36)
As retained by my initial draft of this scene, Draco is still vying for power over Althea. However, since we begin this scene knowing Draco is sexually inexperienced and morally confused, the power dynamic between them is much more compelling. There are parts of Althea that Draco is entranced by, her freedom and confidence, but the world he was raised in—reflected by Father Anthony—taught him these qualities are wrong in a woman—a pagan woman at that. Draco seems to win the intellectual battle when he boxes Althea into a logical corner, forcing her to admit permission for her husband to act unfaithfully with the line, “Let him wander” (LT 1.3, pp. 39). He steers the conversation so that she must say this, or she must withdraw her previous arguments. Because of her pride, she sustains engagement and ‘loses’ the skirmish. However, she meets him in sexual prowess. Draco attempts a physically intimate act when he and Althea kiss the first time, but the intimacy in that moment is mutual. We have the narrative satisfaction much later learning Draco’s discovered in himself a hatred of physical intimacy since their wedding. Without setting up the paradox of Draco’s inner thoughts beat by beat in this scene, utilizing Bird’s method of play structure analysis on my own work, Draco’s character arc articulated here would not make sense.

**The construction of language is a tool, not a limitation.**

Rodney Cottier, the Head of Drama School at LAMDA, delivered a lecture about the construction of language in Shakespeare, examining Act I Scene 1 of *King Lear* (hereafter in citation “KL”) as a case study. Cottier discussed the socialized fear of Shakespearean text that perpetuates the idea that the language is an obstacle to understanding. Among the acting community, I have often heard performers say things as, “I have three weeks to learn my lines, but it’s Shakespeare!” Cottier challenged this fear, unveiling how the construction of the text is imbued with meaning helpful to its performer, rather than hindering. Let us approach Kent’s speech to Lear following the unjust banishment of Cordelia. In this moment,
Kent is in a rage. How do we know? The ‘f’ sound is a powerful vocal fricative when used at the front of a word, which becomes highly noticeable when you string many ‘f’ words together. The connotations of the four-letter ‘f’ word English-speaking people may spit out in frustration is no coincidence—it is absolutely deliberate. Kent, after a scene of near silence, spews at Lear:

> Let it fall rather, though the fork invade
> The region of my heart. Be Kent unmannerly
> When Lear is mad. What wouldst thou do, old man?
> Think’st thou that duty shall have dread to speak
> When power to flattery bows? To plainness honor’s bound
> When majesty falls to folly…
> Kill thy physician, and thy fee bestow
> Upon the foul disease… (emphasis added, KL 1.1.161-6, 187-8)

The actor portraying Kent has the gift of these ‘f’ sounds to better sell the frustration seething in this speech. The sound of the words communicates character.

I play with sound in my play most significantly in the Voice portions of text, but have deliberately woven the device into plain dialogue as well. Take the final appearance of the Romans in *Lady Tongue* (5.3). After discovering their plan—to force Cymbeline into monetary compensation by dismissing defensive troupes north of his kingdom—has failed, the two Romans storm into the throne room. Roman 1 says, “The proud King sits in his throne. How comfortable King? Quite content?” (emphasis added, pp. 162). The barrage of hard ‘k’ and ‘t’ sounds nearly requires the actor to bare her teeth. The saturation of the line with these hard sounds will guide the actor to the teeth-grinding restraint I imagine Roman 1 enters the scene with, while she is seething behind it. Find further examples of my strategic use of consonance in Libitina’s hissing ‘s’ and harsh ‘r’ sounds, such as when she says, “The goddess of death hiked her skirts / And climbed up into life, / With bloody boots and raven hair / Unraveling rapturous shrouds” (emphasis added, LT 4.3, pp. 131). This composition of sounds elevates her mythic proportions. In contrast, find a series of hallow, wide vowel sounds in the ensemble singing of “The River Wide” (LT 5.5, pp. 176). Words like “tomb,”
“crown,” “sky,” and the repeating “wide” emote the emptiness of grief, mirroring moaning sounds. The level of detail I have paid to sound in the text has provided me with a tool to sculpt this text, not a limitation.

**Flawed characters make for interesting theatre.**

The production of Nina Raine’s *Consent* I saw at the Harold Pinter Theatre was deeply intellectually stimulating (see Appendix H for locational photograph). The modern drama wrestles with the ideas of truth and blame surrounding sexual assault, the story pivoting around two couples in the legal field and their relationships to a rape case. Accusations of infidelity unravel the two marriages as the stories of homelife more and more closely mirror those of the courtroom. The technical aspects of the production were clean, highly modern, and minimalistic, the acting reaching high realism. The story was enrapturing, but almost painful to watch as the characters were strung through it. When the lights came up for intermission, I turned to my peers and said, “I feel grimy; I don’t know who to root for.” There was no clear hero of the story. *Hollywood Reporter* reviewer Stephen Dalton shared an experience similar to my own; he writes, “… Raine never resorts to scornful caricature, leaving the audience to play judge and jury toward her believably flawed protagonists” (2018). *Consent* inspired me to look at my characters critically in terms of their three-dimensionality. Upon considering how *Consent* lingered with me for days after seeing it, I turned my attention to Althea.

How could I blur the line between her redeeming values and the flaws that grow out of control to make her a full-out villain by the sequel? The primary variable in this is context; she is othered extensively, namely by her own husband. Her othering creates a pressure cooker so intense that she must erupt out of it, but when she does, it is deadly. Becoming wrapped up in context, I overlooked the necessary second variable: personal agency. Draft 1
Althea had opinions and was unafraid to express them, but she lacked active decision-making. Every time a character must make a choice, they have the potential to make the wrong one. That tension shadows two-dimensional characters into human beings.

One of Althea’s first established traits is her diplomacy. She is willing to marry a stranger if it means achieving a more advantageous political and militant position for her people. She eloquently greets Draco (whom she believes is Father Anthony) with a lavish invitation for peace: “I thank you for your support of peace / and your hospitality,” before she is interrupted (LT 1.3, pp. 33). However, when Althea truly comes to life it is when she acts against her own values. Draco instructs her to kneel. The diplomatic gesture of obedience would be to do so, yet fueled by a tenacity that in this moment overrules her commitment to diplomacy she drags a chair in front of her confessor and sits directly across from him.

Althea’s most contentious action is drowning her husband in the second to last scene of the play. At the October 9th read through (to be discussed further in Chapter IV), this moment was received wildly differently by the cast. Actor Rick Stevenson described the attempted baptism as a complete violation—a violation of body, of spirituality, and of will. Actor Alexandra Poirier, playing Althea, described the moment as a panicked fear of death. “Does Althea know what a baptism is?” she asked. This is a decision for the actor playing Althea and her director to make. At that moment, the text supports the claim that Althea believes she is drowning. She learns that Draco is complicit in the deaths of her people in Keely just before this aggressive act, and then her Mother appears as a Voice, singing about Althea’s death:

MOTHER

Lullaby, lullaby
Child of mine
Lullaby, lullaby
Washed up in the brine.

Lullaby, lullaby
Never enough time
Lullaby, lullaby
To spend with your shrine. (LT 5.3, pp. 145)

I imagine this moment as the eruption—Althea’s life is on the line, and she acts out of instinct to survive. However, she takes it further than escape. Propelled by the amassed grief, rage, danger, and his ultimate betrayal, she conquers him to end it all by holding him under the water until she knows he is dead. Poirier described this moment as “seeing the beginning of her pure evil,” and the act as “murder.” Stevenson responded, “I wouldn’t call it murder.” The discussion continued as to whether Althea’s act is justified, or right, and whether those concepts are different.

Modern theatre practitioner and author of A Director Prepares (2001) Anne Bogart says that a great play asks a question, and a play that endures asks a question it does not truly answer (21). The debate over Althea’s morality leads me to believe I have achieved my goal of suspending a question unanswered. The play as a whole explores the clashing of moral codes: Althea’s pagan spirituality and Draco’s Christianity; Roman elitism and Briton nationalism; Euriphile’s dishonesty of identity and Belarius’s dishonesty of ability. If I had depicted Althea with a transparent ethical identity, she would be a far less interesting character—and she would be out of place in the world of this play.
CHAPTER IV: THE ITERATIVE PROCESS

The Read-Through Process

On May 7th, 2018, I held a table reading of *Lady Tongue* Draft 1, casting each role with William and Mary student actors. One piece of feedback I received at this point was that the script was reminiscent of Netflix-created historical fiction. While entertaining at the very least, it was clear to me I had not reached the level of sophistication I was striving for. I agreed with the critique. Hearing the script aloud for the first time left me with the impression that there were interesting characters taking shape who were not doing many interesting things. Consulting my personal notes from this early stage of the process, I originally outlined the timeline of the play spanning into Althea’s later years, raising her son Cloten. In reflection, I believe a significant factor in why the piece lacked depth then was that I was trying to accomplish too much. This read-through helped me see that the real meat of the story resided in those days in Cymbeline’s court.

In contrast, on October 9th I held a read-through of *Lady Tongue* in its new form. While the initial read-through was an important mile-marker in the process, the purpose was vague. This second read-through served three distinct purposes. Firstly, I was able to hear the play aloud with its entirely reimagined stylization. Hearing a cast of actors interpret my lines made clear to me which were unnatural, or clumsy. At this point in the process I was ready to address that level of detail. Secondly, I was able to hear the perspectives of actors that were returning from the spring for a second read. Actor Alex Poirier played Althea from the beginning, and she shared that she was excited to see Althea grow so much in tenacity. Thirdly, I folded new cast members into the reading to hear fresh perspectives from actors with no preconceived notions of the play. One of the most interesting developments of the October read-through was hearing Andi Nealon’s portrayal of Euriphile.
Nealon’s perspective on Belarius and Euriphile’s relationship differed from mine. I imagined there to be a layer of attraction between the two. Their dynamic grows from a flirtatious banter into a familial attachment. Though I did not write the characters with a necessarily sexual attraction in mind, I wrote them with a magnetism perhaps surpassing that. When I posed the question to Nealon after the read-through as to whether she believed there was genuine attraction between them, she replied “no” with confidence. Nealon came to the character with an openly queer perspective, and shared an interpretation of Euriphile with no attraction to Belarius that could be supported by the text. I was excited that the character had been written with enough complexity to allow for such a different interpretation than what I had originally imagined. As I cast the final read-thru of the play, I kept this dynamic between Euriphile and Belarius. I cast actor Michael Williamson, who could be very physically imposing, but has a gentle energy. Williamson played opposite a petite in size but electric Andi Nealon. This dynamic heightened the fun in seeing Euriphile knock down Belarius.

**Rehearsal Process**

In preparation for the final staged reading of *Lady Tongue* November 19th, I cast eleven actors, drawing from the two previous readings and bringing in several new voices. See Appendix I for the full cast list. Three full-cast rehearsals made up the bare bones preparation for the staged reading, with additional meetings with small groups to discuss scenes. For example, I met with Sam Terry and Alex Poirier several times privately to discuss the very dense Draco / Althea scenes. It was in these rehearsals that I learned the most about the play I created. The actors challenged me, asking me deep questions about their characters I had not considered before—especially Sam Terry. Terry became the Draco I did not know I was seeking. Leading up to the October 9th reading, I was unsure of who to cast in the demanding
role that required an actor to play both extreme hardness and extreme vulnerability. My request to Terry to read for Draco was experimental, and I was delighted with the result.

Draco as a character is a male and a product of a toxically-masculine upbringing. Terry is a female actor with openly feminist views. She said to me a number of times how exciting is was to play a character that was her opposite in every way. The contrast of having a woman play a male character who displays sexist, abusive behavior played beautifully. Watching Terry and Poirier onstage, two women displaying an unhealthy heterosexual relationship, was to watch the narrative reclaimed by women. In this way commentary on Draco and Althea’s relationship is elevated. For example, Poirier, Terry, and I discussed the confession scene (LT 1.3) at length to uncover the unspoken story there. Terry and Poirier practiced reading the scene while physically circling one another, switching between who was doing the circling dependent upon which was winning the argument. We discovered in this exercise that Draco would rather be submissive to the relationship but has no reason to believe that he should do anything other than assert dominance. When Terry identified that internal struggle in Draco, she expressed that she had much greater empathy for the character. Though Draco rehashes the toxic masculine rhetoric he has presumably been raised by, in this casting choice we can find a level of empathy for Draco by seeing how he is a victim of his world’s patriarchal structure as well. Seeing Draco’s struggle to become the man society wishes him to be played in a female being was all the more powerful.

**How do women+ respond to the play?**

The greatest accomplishment of this play is the enthusiasm of the female actors working on it. As the origin of my project reveals, it is rare to work on a play that allows genuine and varied female narratives to live at the forefront. We segment media into categories of does / does not contain a ‘strong female lead.’ *Lady Tongue* is driven by the narratives of many
women with distinct goals and struggles, and many of the female cast members expressed to me how exciting it was to be working with these characters, such as the actor playing Brona, Zoë Smith. “I’ve been told I can only play children,” Smith told me, “that I look too young to play Ariel even, and she’s supposed to be sixteen” (personal interview, November 2018). Smith is 20 years old. Actor Alex Poirier described her work playing Althea as, “The most interesting, three dimensional, and flawed character I’ve had the privilege of playing” (Facebook comment, 20 November 2018). These reactions satisfy my goal in creating this play, so I will analyze further the choices I made to accomplish reactions such as these.

In a private rehearsal between Smith and Michael Williamson (playing Belarius), we discussed the ambiguous sexual backstory between Brona and Belarius that is woven into Act I Scene 2. Brona, though mother of three, is still in her teenage years—as I have specified in the Cast of Characters. Smith explained how she believed Belarius was a positive sexual awakening, in contrast to the relationship with King Cymbeline driven more by duty than passion. Williamson brought up concern as to how much romance should be perceptible in this scene, worried about portraying a Belarius that was taking advantage of Brona’s vulnerability. Smith, however, advocated for Brona’s agency. As a cast, we examined my word choice throughout the scene that indicates how Brona is driving the sexually tense layer of their relationship, initiating a tenderness in the sequence beginning with, “Belarius. Saying your name is like sliding over a hill…” (LT 1.2, pp. 23). Brona invites Belarius to stay with her longer. She decides to trust him with vulnerable information. Despite the friction in their dynamic by the end of the piece, which results in accusations of unfaithfulness before the gruesome act of Belarius climbing over Brona’s dead body to kidnap her sons, the writing communicates a genuine trusting relationship. Why is the instinct then to assume that Brona is the victim?
Harriet Walter theorizes that playing Shakespeare’s female characters is a loaded process. She writes the following about Helen and Innogen (Imogen) in her piece *Clamorous Voices* (1989): “The most frustrating thing about playing Shakespeare’s women is having to dislodge the audience’s preconceptions of who they are. Shakespeare’s men don’t have ‘reputations.’ His women do” (73). This sentiment was echoed by a colleague of mine, an actor named Deanna Drennan, who expressed to me, “I feel like I get pigeon-holed in Shakespeare plays” (personal interview, July 2018). Deanna played the tentative, pure ingénue Hero in *Much Ado About Nothing* in this summer’s LAMDA production. Though Beatrice battles with quippy humor and is outspoken even to a fault, she is an oddity even in the world of the play. Her verbal sparring partner Benedick complains after a particularly sour encounter, “I cannot endure my Lady Tongue,” disparaging Beatrice and gifting me the name of this play (MA 2.1.269-70). In *Much Ado*, there are two categories of women: pure and meek, or unmarriable and audacious. Director Jenny Rich reinforced the very Hero mold Drennan was frustrated by. Rich disparaged a production of *Much Ado* she attended on the grounds that Hero would never dance at a discotheque, because she “was supposed to be a virgin.” Considerations of how an audience will perceive the work despite what its artists intend is an unavoidable facet of theatre; Rich displays an extreme example by bringing the preconceived notion that a virgin cannot be seen at a club dancing. For Rich, that directing choice shattered the believability of the plot. Interested in this phenomenon, I made the active choice to push against preconceived notions of female characters even harder and to confront them directly.

*Lady Tongue* collapses the barriers between domestic and public spheres. In *Much Ado About Nothing*, Hero is a purely domestic figure. When she is with her cousin and maidens, she speaks freely, but in public, she almost never speaks. In Act II Scene 1 in which Hero is ‘given away’ to her love Claudio for marriage, she does not deliver a single line.
Contrast this with Brona. The young Queen’s family life, sexual life, and political life is present without boundary in her personal relationship to Belarius (LT 1.2). Brona and Belarius in conversation flicker between topics of appeasing the Romans, her marriage to King Cymbeline, and concern about her pregnancy within the same scene. Though Brona is already straying from convention in being a woman of state, family, and independence, I choose to escalate this further in the prison scene when Brona’s character enters a more public setting among foreign and domestic dignitaries (2.2, pp. 54). When the Romans threaten the lives of Brona’s soldiers, she steps forward and asks the aggressors to name their price of satisfaction. The visual dynamics of this scene in the final staged reading amplified Brona’s power to a degree that I could not accomplish in a seated table reading. The physically petite Smith stood behind a sea of physically imposing actors, to include Williamson, Adam Howard and Grace Helmick playing the Romans, and Gil Ososky playing Cymbeline. When Smith emerged from the crowd to take the strongest place on stage, down center, she instantly became the most powerful person in the room with the simple line, “Name it” (pp. 59). Textually, Belarius and Cymbeline attempt to divert the attention away from her, but physically Brona was able to hold it up until the end of the scene when she begins to give birth. Even at this moment of the bodily extreme, she still refuses to leave while negotiation is occurring. My decision to place Brona’s birth in this highly politically charged, aggressive setting is a direct challenge to the norms of female expression and expectations that private and public life remain separated.

Theatre artist Rachel Fensham reports findings on the norms of female expression in her article “On Not Performing Madness,” (1998) through the lens of treatment of madness in nineteenth century women. Fensham led a female troupe of actors in the creation of a performance piece, as part of the Absence of Evidence project, in response to the site of a nineteenth century asylum in which women were detained (149). As Fensham developed the
piece, her research uncovered “a tension between acceptable and unacceptable bodily codes for women that were further confounded by the many contradictory ideas that circulated in the nineteenth century about the relationship between emotional “sensibility” and the female body” (150). Fensham goes on to describe the widely believed paradox that women were valued for strong “sensibilities,” yet those qualities were the direct causal variable of making women the “weaker sex”:

The capacity to empathize, to maintain familial ties, to nurture children, was synonymous with the higher duties of womanhood, but an overexcitement of the emotions was considered a constant risk to a woman’s health… [women were] prone to ‘attack from emotions, imagination and all sorts of passions [in response to which] the female body writhed, its tendons shook, limbs cracked, and blood was carried to the head.’ (150)

Fensham’s research supports the notion that women straying from a balance in sensibility were prone to not only madness, but madness-induced physical danger. Furthermore, physical expression that strayed from outward “humility” and “docility” was treated as confirmable evidence of madness (150). Carol Thomas Neely’s research in Shakespeare Quarterly is in conversation with that of Fensham in its analysis of portraying madness in Shakespearean text. Neely describes how perceptions of madness in England developed over centuries of time, ranging from Wandering Womb, the belief that a woman’s uterus could migrate around the body and cause hysteria to “melancholy” and “fits of the mother,” the belief that madness was induced by sexual frustration and could only be cured by marital satisfaction (Neely 1991, 320). I drew upon these sources heavily developing Brona’s character and allowed Brona to confront these gross misconceptions directly. When Belarius tries to undermine her accusations of treachery in Act IV Scene 5, he says, “I think the fever is on you” (pp. 146). I considered madness as Elaine Showalter describes, as escape from the bondage of feminine constructions into an empowering state of freedom (1985, 14). Brona responds with that sense of empowerment and rebuttals, “The fever. Or perhaps my uterus has wandered to my
mind. Or I’m starved of loving and sleep and completely mad,” standing in solidarity with women throughout history being told they are mad for a variety of reasons constructed by men.

The collapse of spheres drove Libitina and Tenantius’s relationship as well. Both warriors, these two show a level of intimidation and authority onstage above that of any other characters in this play. No holds are barred in how we see these two operate, despite their comparative lack of stage time to protagonists like Althea, Euriphile, and Brona. We watch Libitina and Tenantius share a physically tender moment, grieve the loss of Libitina’s husband, Libitina attempt to persuade the General to take her to the battlefield in Keely, and then the two of them manipulate Draco into helping them burn the city. The next time we see Libitina, she dies gruesomely onstage in an act of complete physical openness—birth. Birth, war and sex in this play are lined up side-by-side; Brona’s birth scene takes place beside Althea and Draco’s first sexual encounter. My decision to make these experiences parallel in a brutal, visceral way is my celebration of the power of the female body and all of the extreme acts women undergo despite the rhetoric of old that Fensham and Neely bring to light. Actor Maz Rossert, playing Libitina, wrote to me the following (personal communication, Facebook message November 20, 2018, 7:32pm):

I think there was something extremely powerful in playing a character that both gave birth and played war. In a way the two contrast each other but require a similar level of perseverance and determination. I like to think Libitina channels what makes her a warrior as she is giving birth, which is part of what makes us root for her…

A woman can be the leader of sexual experience, can fight valiantly and make sacrifice in war, and can bring new life into the world through the courageous act of risking her own.

Lady Tongue: A Staged Reading

“It was magical,” an audience member told me; “That’s the only way I can describe it. I’ve never seen anything like it before, and I don’t think I will again” (Brielle Perry, William &
Mary student, personal communication). “Finally, a play with real women,” said fellow LAMDA scholar Maria Burns after attending the staged reading (Maria Burns, November 20, 2018, 8:41 p.m., comment on Sarah Marksteiner). The sentiment, “It sounded like you onstage,” was repeated to me by fellow theatre students at the College of William and Mary (to include Conor Wilson, William and Mary theatre student, personal communication). While compliments do not measure the quality of my work, I have isolated these responses for their merit according to my goals for this project. None of the persons I have quoted above have read any previous drafts of this play or attended any rehearsals, so their experiences are derived primary from viewing the play as it was at the staged reading. See Appendix I to find the program printed for the event with my artistic statement provided to the audience. These persons represent the perspective of a test audience. I acknowledge that these sources are limited by the positive post-show energy and obligation to praise, but I deduce that each of these responses given go above the social expectation and therefore may carry legitimacy in that.

Fellow student Perry expressing to me that the piece felt “magical” confirmed that the mystical elements of the world-building I believed myself to have accomplished were communicated to a nonaffiliated audience member. Burns, who studied alongside me in the Shakespeare Summer School LAMDA program and was therefore exposed to much of the experiential research that shaped this piece, expressed joy in watching the female characters I created operate. Burns represents the expert audience; she is familiar with the state of the American theatre industry and the disproportionate opportunity to female+ actors in the classical sphere. Because of this, Burns’ statement carries weight in that she is a significant sector of the target audience for me—a female actor and scholar of Shakespeare with the capacity to stage or perform in the piece—and she articulated that she would look forward to doing so. Finally, Wilson represents a biased audience member as a friend of mine, but a
discerning audience member as a person with whom I have worked with extensively. The
danger for me in drawing so much from Shakespeare was the fear of imitating a creative
voice rather than offering an original. Because Wilson is familiar with my personality and
mannerisms, his observation that my voice was uniquely present onstage quells that fear.
CONCLUSION

The Future of Lady Tongue

*Lady Tongue* as it has been originally performed is now dissolved, as the transient nature of theatre requires. Therefore, I now turn toward the future of this play. The American Shakespeare Center has congratulated me on becoming a semi-finalist, meaning that my work was among the top 26% of submissions in consideration of being staged, but was officially cut from the competition in November (see Appendix J). I can both be proud of the progress I made in Staunton and extend my gaze toward new opportunities for this play. See Appendix K for a list I have compiled of additional theatres and theatre companies in which I intend to submit *Lady Tongue*. By completing a full-length play in standardized submission format, I have equipped myself with a piece that could potentially be received by any of these companies—and given the circumstances under which I wrote it for the SNC competition, requires very minimal technical equipment to fully stage. This logistical ease of staging does increase the chances for this play to be picked up by smaller-scale companies with limited budgets and resources.

Ultimately, I have created a play where there was not a play before. In my field notes from the first month of this process, I wrote the question, “Has your story been told?” With pride, I can now respond to that question affirmatively. To Cymbeline, who asked during my first read of Shakespeare’s play, “Who is’t can read a woman?” I reply, a woman can read a woman (CYM 5.4.48). Althea’s final monologue is my praise of female power and will to survive. Althea uses that monologue to detail the way her sisters have been taken by death over the course of *Lady Tongue*. By comparing herself to the sun, she banishes the idea that she will suffer any of the same fates:

**ALTHEA**

The sun cannot be burned.  
The sun cannot be drowned.  
You cannot banish your own life light.  
And the sun is not killed by its
Bursting births of light,  
But grows stronger by its own bake.

Our sun draws orbits round herself,  
Not to be gazed at by thousands of eyes,  
Each planet, moon, and comet blinking;

The sun does not need the audience of moons.  
She sends them round her to keep watch.  
Each meteor standing guard.  
So when the fates crawl from the fathoms of far off stars  
To corrupt her skies,  
Bring her plagues ten,  
Or infect her earthly womb,  
She will see them coming,  
Raise the snuffer in her fist  
And cover her own raised eyes with a veil eternal—  
And her death will be by her hand alone. (LT 5.5, pp. 182)

This final line, though a dark allusion to the decision the Queen will make to take her own life in *Cymbeline*, is a reclamation of power—and a warning. Her voice will not be silenced. Out of my own emotional connection to this piece, I imagine that Althea finally finds peace, and that she can “fear no more the heat o’ the sun” (CYM 4.2.331).
References


Marksteiner, Sarah. 2018. “My name is Sarah Marksteiner and I’m a playwright. I’m incredibly proud of the piece I’ve created and of the dedicated, passionate cast for bringing it to life. To all those who say, “I cannot…” Facebook, November 20, 2018.


Appendix

Appendix A

Appendix B
Roman Empire Exhibit.
Museum of London, Photographs taken by Sarah Marksteiner 24 June 2018 at 11:00AM.
B1) Map of Britannia, 200s AD
B2) Spirituality or Superstition? Display Case

B1.
Appendix C
Key to Names and Meanings in *Lady Tongue*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original Character Names</th>
<th>Original Locations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brona: sorrow</td>
<td>Debilisium: from the root of ‘debilitated’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libitina: derived from Roman goddess of funerals</td>
<td>Iomagain: Scottish Gaelic for ‘anxiety’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Althea: healer</td>
<td>Keely: Irish meaning is ‘warrior,’ Gaelic meaning is ‘beauty/grace;’ Althea is both of these things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Draco: Latin for serpent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Roman Pantheon Gods</th>
<th>Pagan Pantheon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neptune: god of the sea</td>
<td>Eostre: appears in many cultural traditions, goddess of birth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jupiter: supreme god of pantheon</td>
<td>Damara: Celtic fertility goddess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturn: god of sewing seed</td>
<td>Aeronwyn: Welsh, goddess chooses battle victors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diana: goddess of chastity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manea: goddess of death</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix D
Iterations of *Lady Tongue* Act I Scene 1 from first draft to ASC Submission.

1) Note the character-based shifts between Version I and Version II, and the shifts in setting between II and III. Between Versions III and IV, I have refined the exposition and setting details to be character-driven, finding organic speech again in my characters with the new nuanced circumstances.

2) **Bold**-faced text indicates a significant edit from the previous draft.

3) Note that the introductory Voice text remains unchanged throughout the process.

4) Find full text of Appendix C on page 58.
Appendix E  
Tracking Board, created by Sarah Marksteiner.  
Photograph taken by Sarah Marksteiner, 14 June 2018 at 4:53pm.

Appendix F  
Screenshot of a Weekly Timetable at the London Academy for Music and Dramatic Arts Shakespeare Summer School.  
Courses in Movement, Alexander Technique, Applied Voice, Stage Combat, Singing, and Historical Dance shown here as well as 3 hour rehearsal blocks in Jacobean plays.  
Image captured by Sarah Marksteiner, 24 July 2018 at 8:48pm.
Appendix G
Scored Dan Bird Scene

Act I Scene I

Frater Bonaventura’s call

Bonaventura

Dispute no more in this, for know, young man, there are no school masters, nor philosophy, nor nothing whereby arguments, but Heaven only doth so; with that presume, or not too much by striving how to please; there was no God, with foolish grounds of art, Discovered first the reason why to Hille, and filled the world with devilish stücsses, Such questions, yea, are hard; for better ‘twas, To kiss the sea, thou knowest why it smokes; No more! I may not hear it.

Giovanni

Gentle Father,

To you I have unloosed my burdened soul, Emptied the storehouse of my thoughts and heart, Made myself poor of secrets, have not left another word unaid, which hath not spoke All what I ever knew, or think, or know; And yet I have the comfort I shall have?

Most I yet do what all men else may—

Love, and I too praise—

That luxury, which if feared anew, the gods Would make a jest of, if they had it there, And kind it to, as I do kind to them?

Bonaventura

Why, finish madman?

A customary form, from man to man, Of brother and of sister, be a far Twist my perpetual happiness and me? Say that we had one father, say one word (Close to my joys) gave body to life and death; Are we not therefore to each other bound So much the more by nature, by the links Of blood, of measure? may, if you will hew, Even of religion, to be ever join: One soul, one flesh, one love, one heart, one all?

Bonaventura

Have done, unhappy youth, for thou art lost.

Giovanni

Shall then, for that I am her brother born, My joys be ever banished from her bed? No, Father, in your eyes I see the change, Of pity and compassion, from your age, As from a sacred oracle, distills The life of crowned. Tell me, holy man,
Appendix H

Appendix I

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Cast</th>
<th>The Play</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alex Poirier</td>
<td>Althea of Keely, Sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam Terry</td>
<td>Draco of Iomagain, Sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andi Nealon</td>
<td>Euriphile of Debilisium, Soldier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah Brown</td>
<td>General Tenantius of Debilisium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoë Smith</td>
<td>Queen Brona of Debilisium, Sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace Helmick</td>
<td>Mother, Cornelius, Roman, Music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maz Rossert</td>
<td>Libitina of Debilisium, Sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam Howard</td>
<td>Roman, Edward, Music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rick Stevenson</td>
<td>Pisanio of Debilisium, Soldier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael Williamson</td>
<td>Belarius of Debilisium, Soldier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gil Ososky</td>
<td>Father Anthony, King Cymbeline</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thanks and Dedication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sarah would like to thank the Catron Scholarship as well as the Charles Center for supporting her research at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She would like to thank Dr. Laurie Wolf for her ongoing support and feedback. With pride, she thanks Nanny and her parents for believing that yes, she could do it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A Note From the Writer

As a theatre practitioner I found myself frustrated.

I fell in love with Shakespeare at 17 when I played Banquo in an amateur production of Macbeth (ironically, a ‘man’s role’). As a female practitioner looking ahead to her career, I realized that nearly any role I could play in the classical theatre sphere would have been written by a man, to be played by a man. Though Shakespeare gives us Regan, Gertrude, Innogen, Margaret, Ophelia, Rosalind—beautifully nuanced and complicated female characters—he still only gives us 1 for every 9 men. Even now in academia I learn about non-male to male playwrights at about the same ratio. Devastatingly, records of theatre history have largely excluded non-males from the story, and the legacies of exclusion left behind are perpetuated still.

I saw this, and I felt this, and I got frustrated.

The American Shakespeare Center’s playwriting competition, seeking fresh companion pieces to works of Shakespeare, caught my attention. I imagined a piece that celebrated the role of women+ in the classical sphere, that prioritized female+ casting, that carved a space for female+ characters to face gritty challenges with agency and strong voices. I decided to create the play that I wished would exist, and Lady Tongue was born.

My play draws from Cymbeline, reimagining the vilified, unnamed queen and the women her story pivots around—all of whom are dead before Cymbeline begins. I questioned what about the world these women lived in made it impossible for them to survive if they were any less unrelenting than the one dubbed the Wicked Queen in the characters list. Shakespeare gave me a wealth of characters to draw from who grew out of the pages to be resilient, impassioned women.

My play enters the world of Cymbeline in its near mythic encounters, its teasing apart of Good and Evil, and its challenges of ‘what it means to be loyal’ that span family, nation, and faith. My play looks female characters in the eye and says earnestly, “I’m listening.”

Lady Tongue is the capstone of the most significant scholarly and creative undertaking of mine yet. I am incredibly grateful for the support I’ve had bringing her into the world. And she makes me feel a little less frustrated.

-Sarah
Appendix J

Email Correspondence with the American Shakespeare Center

A) Semifinalist Announcement, Received 11 September 2018.
B) Status Update, Received 05 November 2018.

Shakespeare's New Contemporaries - Semifinalist

September 11, 2018

Dear Sarah Marksteiner,

Thank you for submitting Lady Tongs to Shakespeare's New Contemporaries at the American Shakespeare Center. Today I write with good news - Lady Tongs is advancing to the semifinal round of consideration.

No action is required of you at this time; you will be notified in mid-November if your script becomes a finalist. If you have made significant changes to your play since submitting it, you are welcome to share the updated draft with us. Any revised drafts must be received within the next two days (from Friday, September 14 at the absolute latest) and follow the same formatting as your original submission (author attribution removed, cast breakdown included, etc.).

Lastly, our process is a rolling one and, as a result, we ask that you not publicize this news for another week or so while we notify the rest of our applicants about their status.

Congratulations and thank you for sharing your work with us!

Best,
Anne G. Morgan
Literary Manager

Shakespeare's New Contemporaries - Status Update

Thank you for submitting Lady Tongs to Shakespeare's New Contemporaries. Unfortunately, after much consideration, your play is no longer in consideration for production at the American Shakespeare Center.

We appreciate the hard work that has gone into writing this play and appreciate your sharing it with us. The selection process was a competitive one; know that your play was read from covers to cover several times during the process. You are to be congratulated for being among the top 26% of the plays in consideration.

We are grateful to you for sharing your work with us and hope to see more of your writing in the future. Best of luck with your artistic endeavors!

Sincerely,
Anne G. Morgan
Literary Manager

Appendix K

Index of Classical Theatres to send Lady Tongue

Shakespeare & Company Lenox, MA
https://www.shakespeare.org/contact/professional-development
Royal Shakespeare Company Stratford-Upon-Avon, UK
https://www.rsc.org.uk/about-us/how-we-make-theatre/how-we-develop-new-ideas
Utah Shakespeare Festival Cedar City, UT
https://www.bard.org/words-cubed-submission/?rq=submission
Manhattan Shakespeare Project Manhattan, NY
http://manhattanshakes.org/contact/contact-us/
Prague Shakespeare Company Prague, Czech Republic
http://www.pragueshakespeare.com/contact.html
Appendix C, Full Content

Iterations of Act I Scene 1, from first to July 31, 2018 drafts

**Version I: April 03, 2018**

*(AT RISE: the dressmaker is buttoning our lady into a gown, the kind made for weddings. It might not be white. She wears a veil that covers her face. Her mother is just outside, collecting various things from the garden. The VOICES of poetry are the other characters we will come to know. There is no need to take on a Narrator persona; they are observers just as we are. They are holding plant life in some capacity.)*

**VOICE** They say if a house made by humans is abandoned for long, nature will reclaim it.

**VOICE** That the barriers constructed to keep outside from in will slip or crumble, And crawling things will come in Biblical bravura to seep into cracks.

**VOICE** That spiders will weave new curtains to catch wind And sunlight in sunlight’s sliverest strands

**VOICE** Before the ivy will tuck the home into the hill with smooth covers.

**VOICE** This is what our lady mused of, cloaked by the veil,

**VOICE** Now musty with years of her own mother’s trunk,

**VOICE** As the veil like kudzu climbed from the dress And threatened to claim her into the lace.

**VOICE** This veil melted like wax over her, so thick That not even her breath could escape.

*(ALTHEA lifts the veil, breaking the spell. The poetry slips away, and we find her simply here, her mother’s garden just outside.)*

**ALTHEA** It’s strange we should be married in something new isn’t it?

**MOTHER** Hm?


**MOTHER** *(Calling inside)* Makes it easier for him to carry you away.

**ALTHEA** I’d like to see him try to carry me.

**MOTHER** Or harder for you to run for the tree line. *(maybe laughing to herself)*

**ALTHEA** Mother.
MOTHER Althea.

DRESSMAKER Hold still.

MOTHER (looking at a plant) You killed the valerian.

ALTHEA (to the DRESSMAKER) It’s lovely, of course. Just I always feel strange in a new dress. Like it isn’t mine. If I am to marry someone, shouldn’t I wear something that is mine?

DRESSMAKER Hold still.

MOTHER I told you this fountain would block too much sun. God knows if it will come back.

ALTHEA And with my face covered, how would he even know it's me under here—

DRESSMAKER Still, please.

MOTHER I knew you’d forgotten to cover the flowers when it stormed. You remember that, Althea, when I said, ‘the valerian’s got to be covered,’ and you said, ‘I already covered them,’ and I told you, ‘I’m looking at the baskets right now Althea and they are not over my valerian,’ you remember that? (waits for ALTHEA to defend herself) Althea?

ALTHEA (gestures to the DRESSMAKER)

DRESSMAKER Why are you holding your breath?

ALTHEA I’m not. I’m just holding still—

DRESSMAKER Do you want to breathe during your wedding? I make the dress thin, now, when you’re holding your breath and you know what will happen? You won’t breathe next time you wear it and you’ll faint. End up on the ground wearing a filthy, new gown.

(MOTHER enters the room, sees her daughter.)

MOTHER You didn’t cover the valerian. You’re lucky I took root clippings to dry last week. (covers her with the veil) It must be covered.

DRESSMAKER Thank you…

MOTHER I don’t know that this veil looks right on you.
ALTHEA    Well it is yours.

(She takes it and drapes it over her own head.)

MOTHER    (to the DRESSMAKER) That’s better, right?

DRESSMAKER   Yes.

ALTHEA    How can you see yourself.

(She removes it.)

MOTHER    My Lord it’s stuffy. We’ll pray the priest is expeditious.

ALTHEA    So we’ll pray Father Anthony is away.

MOTHER    Althea, what did I say—

ALTHEA    He’s not here, Mother.

MOTHER    Your tongue wanders where it pleases now, who’s to keep it behind your lips if he is in the room?

ALTHEA    I would never speak an unkind word about Father Anthony with him in the room.

MOTHER    Oh, certainly. Or your father. Or cousin Mary, or Count Draco heaven forbid.

(DRESSMAKER is now helping ALTHEA out of the dress, into her petticoat. MOTHER is grinding bits she’s collected with a mortar and pestle.)

ALTHEA    And I don’t suppose Draco has ever uttered an unkind word about me.

MOTHER    That’s not what I said.

ALTHEA    (with a bit of wry humor) Nothing about my flapping tongue, whipping like hanging laundry. Or the way the bluebird nests keep together better than my hair after it’s rained, and the air is thick and humid. Or his fear that my wrist bones, protruding so, might give someone a nasty cut. (to the DRESSMAKER, as she climbs out) So be wary, Martha.

MOTHER    That is… different.

ALTHEA    Why is it different? If I am to endure his fire, he may endure my kindling.

MOTHER    Thank you Martha.

(DRESSMAKER exits.)
ALTHEA  (*tugging at her own corseting*) Won’t he have trouble with this?

MOTHER  I wouldn’t bother giving you *bad* advice, my daughter.

ALTHEA  There’s no way he’ll know how to—

MOTHER  Your maids will be there to help you.

ALTHEA  What do you mean they’ll be there?

MOTHER  Everyone will be there.

ALTHEA  In our bedchamber?

MOTHER  At first, yes.

(*beat*)

ALTHEA  Father Anthony?

MOTHER  We can hope it won’t be Father Anthony, but—

ALTHEA  I’ll need to pray harder.

MOTHER  They will be there to bless your fertility.

ALTHEA  (*darkening, somehow*) My fertility, I know. My bounty, my…

MOTHER  Kindling. (*beat*) He is a Count.

ALTHEA  And I to be Countess. And all will promptly begin counting our heirs; I am aware.

(*MOTHER measures a leather strand around ALTHEA’s neck, like a low-hanging necklace.*)

MOTHER  It needn’t be a *long* night.

ALTHEA  What night? (*a touch of embarrassment*) My wedding night?

MOTHER  Why are you getting hot?

ALTHEA  I’m not upset.

MOTHER  Looking forward to it?

ALTHEA  I—Shouldn’t I be?

(*MOTHER is pouring the powder from the pestle into a leather pouch, on the string.*)
MOTHER Perhaps. Until you aren’t.

ALTHEA I think that is for me to figure out, Mother.

MOTHER Of course, of course. (hangs the necklace around ALTHEA, tucks it into the petticoat) Out of sight.

(ALTHEA pulls it out, smells the contents.)

ALTHEA Oh God, smells like… (sniffs again) Father’s tea. I always hated that smell. Shall I guess, enhances fertility? And I’ll gather all my maids and Draco his servants, and we’ll all get cozy in the bedchamber for a nice evening brew. Gather everyone around just like a Sunday tea. I’ll sit you right next to cousin Mary, and you know she won’t stop asking questions in that voice of hers, and we’ll sip it all together brainstorming names.

(it’s funny)
Dear Lord, maybe everyone getting all riled up together is not the best idea. Right there with the priest, imagine! Draco and I will wait until our company leaves for the night before I put the kettle over the fire.

(but it’s so funny to her, laughing)
Is this before or after the maids help me with the corset? (new thought) Oh! Oh Lord, Mother, Father was always drinking this tea, I mean really.

(Something in MOTHER softens, almost imperceptibly.)

MOTHER It’s for Count Draco, no one else.

ALTHEA … It’s not for me. Fertility is rather a two-way—

MOTHER It is for your husband.

(it’s not funny anymore)

ALTHEA Mother?

MOTHER In case it’s a long night. And you would rather he just… sleep.

(long beat)

ALTHEA That’s not going to help me.

MOTHER It might one day.

ALTHEA I don’t want it.

MOTHER Then don’t use it.

ALTHEA Why are you giving me this; I don’t need this.

(ALTHEA tries to hand over the pouch.)
MOTHER  Keep it.

ALTHEA  Why are you giving me this?

MOTHER  Sleep tonic, nothing more. Fast, deep sleep. He won’t even remember drinking it.

ALTHEA  I don’t… I mean Draco is, but he’s not a… What are you even saying?

MOTHER  Althea. Just take it.

ALTHEA  He’s not… I’m not worried about that.

MOTHER  You don’t need to be worried, but you need to prepare.

(beat)

ALTHEA  I did cover the valerian. You moved the baskets around because the mint was over-watered. You came inside to get more, but never brought them out because Miss Dorothy came to the door.

MOTHER  Then why didn’t you do it?

ALTHEA  I don’t know.

(MOTHER exits. ALTHEA takes the necklace off. She puts on a robe, and goes to exit. She snatches the pouch before she leaves.)

END SCENE

**Version II: May 07, 2018**

(AT RISE: the dressmaker is buttoning our lady into a gown, the kind made for weddings. It might not be white. She wears a veil that covers her face. Her mother is just outside, collecting various things from the garden. The VOICES of poetry are the other characters we will come to know. There is no need to take on a Narrator persona; they are observers just as we are.)

VOICE  They say if a house made by humans is abandoned for long, nature will reclaim it.

VOICE  That the barriers constructed to keep outside from in will slip or crumble, And crawling things will come in Biblical bravura to seep into cracks.

VOICE  That spiders will weave new curtains to catch wind And sunlight in sunlight’s sliverest strands

VOICE  Before the ivy will tuck the home into the hill with smooth covers.

VOICE  This is what our lady mused of, cloaked by the veil,
VOICE Now musty with years of her own mother’s trunk,

VOICE As the veil like kudzu climbed from the dress
And threatened to claim her into the lace.

VOICE This veil melted like wax over her, so thick
That not even her breath could escape.

(ALTHEA lifts the veil, breaking the spell. The poetry slips away, and we find her simply here, her mother’s garden just outside.)

ALTHEA It’s strange we should be married in something new isn’t it?

MOTHER Hm?


MOTHER (Calling inside) Makes it easier for him to carry you away.

ALTHEA I’d like to see him try to carry me anywhere.

MOTHER Or harder for you to run for the tree line. (maybe laughing to herself)

ALTHEA Mother.

MOTHER Althea.

DRESSMAKER Hold still.

MOTHER (looking at a plant) You killed the valerian.

ALTHEA (to the DRESSMAKER) It’s lovely, of course. Just I always feel strange in a new dress. Like it isn’t mine. If I am to marry someone, shouldn’t I wear something that is mine?

DRESSMAKER Hold still.

MOTHER I told you this fountain would block too much sun. God knows if it will come back.

ALTHEA And with my face covered, how would he even know it’s me under here—

DRESSMAKER Still, please.
MOTHER    I knew you’d forgotten to cover the flowers when it stormed. You remember that, Althea, when I said, ‘the valerian’s got to be covered,’ and you said, ‘I already covered them,’ and I told you, ‘I’m looking at the baskets right now Althea and they are not over my valerian,’ you remember that? (waits for ALTHEA to defend herself) Althea?

ALTHEA     (gestures to the DRESSMAKER)

DRESSMAKER  Why are you holding your breath?

ALTHEA      I’m not. I’m just holding still—

DRESSMAKER  Do you want to breathe during your wedding? I make the dress thin, now, when you’re holding your breath and you know what will happen? You won’t breathe next time you wear it and you’ll faint. End up on the ground wearing a filthy, new gown.

(MOTHER enters the room, sees her daughter.)

MOTHER      You didn’t cover the valerian. You’re lucky I took root clippings to dry last week. (covers her with the veil) It must be covered.

DRESSMAKER  Thank you…

MOTHER      I don’t know that this veil looks right on you.

ALTHEA      Well it is yours.

(MOTHER takes it and drapes it over her own head.)

MOTHER      (to the DRESSMAKER) That’s better, right?

DRESSMAKER  Yes.

ALTHEA      How can you see yourself.

(SHE removes it.)

MOTHER      My Lord it’s stuffy. We’ll pray the priest is expeditious.

ALTHEA      So we’ll pray Father Anthony is away.

MOTHER      Althea, what did I say—

ALTHEA      He’s not here, Mother.
MOTHER If you get in the habit of letting your tongue wander when you’re in private company, you’ll have no inhibitions letting it go where it pleases in… less private company.

ALTHEA I would never speak an unkind word about Father Anthony with him in the room.

MOTHER Oh, certainly. Or your father. Or cousin Mary, or Count Draco heaven forbid.

(DRESSMAKER is now helping ALTHEA out of the dress, into her petticoat. MOTHER is grinding bits she’s collected from the garden with a mortar and pestle.)

ALTHEA And I don’t suppose Draco has ever uttered an unkind word about me.

MOTHER That’s not what I said.

ALTHEA (with a bit of wry humor) Nothing about my flapping tongue, ‘whipping like hanging laundry.’ Or the way the bluebird nests are better kept up than my hair after it’s rained, and the air is thick and humid. Or his fear that my wrist bones, protruding so, might ‘give someone a nasty cut.’ (to the DRESSMAKER, as she climbs out) So be wary, Martha.

MOTHER That is… different.

ALTHEA Why is it different? If I am to endure his fire, he may endure my kindling.

MOTHER Thank you Martha.

(DRESSMAKER exits.)

ALTHEA (tugging at her own corseting) Won’t he have trouble with this?

MOTHER Your maids will be there to help you.

ALTHEA What do you mean they’ll be there?

MOTHER Everyone will be there.

ALTHEA In our bedchamber?

MOTHER At first, yes.

(beat)

ALTHEA Father Anthony?

MOTHER We can hope it won’t be Father Anthony, but—

ALTHEA I’ll need to pray harder.
MOTHER They will be there to bless your fertility.

ALTHEA (darkening, somehow) My fertility, I know. My bounty, my…

MOTHER Kindling. (beat) He is a Count.

ALTHEA And I am to be Countess. And all will promptly begin counting our heirs; I am aware.

(MOTHER measures a leather strand around ALTHEA’s neck, like a low-hanging necklace.)

MOTHER It needn’t be a long night.

ALTHEA What night? (a touch of embarrassment) My wedding night?

MOTHER Why are you getting hot?

ALTHEA I’m not getting—

MOTHER Looking forward to it?

ALTHEA I—Shouldn’t I be?

(MOTHER is pouring the powder from the pestle into a leather pouch, on the string.)

MOTHER Perhaps. Until you aren’t.

ALTHEA I think that is for me to figure out, Mother.

MOTHER Of course, of course. (hangs the necklace around ALTHEA, tucks it into the petticoat) Out of sight.

(ALTHEA pulls it out, smells the contents.)

ALTHEA Oh God, smells like… (sniffs again) Father’s tea. I always hated that smell. Shall I guess, it enhances fertility? And I’ll gather all my maids and Draco his servants, and we’ll all get cozy in the bedchamber for a nice evening brew. Gather everyone around just like a Sunday tea. I’ll sit you right next to cousin Mary, and you know she won’t stop asking questions in that voice of hers, and we’ll sip it all together brainstorming names.

(she’s loving her own bit)

Dear Lord, maybe everyone getting all riled up on fertility tea together is not the best idea. Right there with the priest, imagine! Draco and I will wait until our company leaves for the night before I put the kettle on.

(but it’s so funny to her)

Is this before or after the maids help me with the corset? (new thought) Oh! Oh Lord, Mother; Father was always drinking this tea, I mean really.

(Something in MOTHER softens, almost imperceptibly.)
MOTHER: It’s for Count Draco, no one else.

ALTHEA: … It’s not for me? Fertility is rather a two-way—

MOTHER: It is for your husband.

ALTHEA: Mother?

MOTHER: You have enough fertility blessings from everyone else. *This*, this is in case it’s a long night. And you would rather he just… sleep.

*(long beat)*

ALTHEA: That’s not going to help me.

MOTHER: It might one day.

ALTHEA: I don’t want it.

MOTHER: Then don’t use it.

ALTHEA: Why are you giving me this; I don’t need this.

*(ALTHEA tries to hand over the pouch.)*

MOTHER: Keep it.

ALTHEA: Why are you giving me this?

MOTHER: Sleep tonic, nothing more. Fast, deep sleep. He won’t even remember drinking it.

ALTHEA: I don’t… I mean Draco is, but he’s not…

MOTHER: Althea. Just take it.

ALTHEA: He’s not… I’m not worried about that.

MOTHER: You don’t need to be worried, but you need to prepare.

*(beat)*

ALTHEA: I did cover the valerian. You moved the baskets around because the mint was over-watered. You came inside to get more, but never brought them out because Miss Dorothy came to the door.

MOTHER: Then why didn’t you finish?

ALTHEA: I don’t know.
(MOTHER exits. ALTHEA takes the necklace off. She puts on a robe, and goes to exit. She snatches the pouch before she leaves.)

END SCENE

Version III: June 31, 2018

(AT RISE: the dressmaker is buttoning our lady into a gown, the kind made for weddings. It might not be white. She wears a veil that covers her face. Her mother is just outside, collecting various things from the garden. The VOICES of poetry are the other characters we will come to know. There is no need to take on a Narrator persona; they are observers just as we are.)

VOICE
They say if a house made by humans is abandoned for long, nature will reclaim it.

VOICE
That the barriers constructed to keep outside from in will slip or crumble,
And crawling things will come in Biblical bravura to seep into cracks.

VOICE
That spiders will weave new curtains to catch wind
And sunlight in sunlight’s sliverest strands

VOICE
Before the ivy will tuck the home into the hill with smooth covers.

VOICE
This is what our lady mused of, cloaked by the veil,

VOICE
Now musty with years of her own mother’s trunk,

VOICE
As the veil like kudzu climbed from the dress
And threatened to claim her into the lace.

VOICE
This veil melted like wax over her, so thick
That not even her breath could escape.

(ALTHEA lifts the veil, breaking the spell. The poetry slips away, and we find her simply here, her mother’s garden just outside. When she breathes so can we.)

ISOLDE
Hold still.
ALTHEA
Never been my best skill.

MOTHER
(calling inside, not necessarily heard)
Do you think they’ll make you wade through the river?

ISOLDE
If you don’t hold still, it won’t look right.

ALTHEA
I think we’re beyond that. Are you sure this is how they make them?

ISOLDE
Am I a Christian?

ALTHEA
No.

ISOLDE
Then no.

MOTHER
(continuing her musing)
It would be a waste of a new dress.

ALTHEA
It’s close though.

MOTHER
And this time of year, your tits will freeze off.

ALTHEA
(calling back)
I’ve yet to see it happen, Mother.
(to DRESSMAKER)
But we’re trying. I must believe that will count, for the Count.

ISOLDE
Hold still.

MOTHER
(looking at a plant)
You killed the valerian.

ALTHEA
(to the DRESSMAKER)
It’s strange though, isn’t it? I feel strange. Like it isn’t mine. If I am to marry someone, shouldn’t I wear something that is mine?
ISOLDE
Hold still.

MOTHER
I told you these trees would block too much sun. God knows if it will come back this late in the season…

ALTHEA
Not that I’m marrying him. I’m marrying his army.

ISOLDE
Still, please.

MOTHER
I knew you’d forgotten to cover the flowers when it stormed. You remember that, Althea, when I said, ‘the valerian’s got to be covered,’ and you said, ‘I already covered them,’ and I told you, ‘I’m looking at the baskets right now Althea and they are not over my valerian,’ you remember that?

ISOLDE
Why are you holding your breath?

ALTHEA
I’m holding still.

ISOLDE
If you don’t breathe now, I will wrap up your chest like a wound. When you’re up there, being bound together and your heart wants to pound, it will have nowhere to go. And you’ll faint.

MOTHER
(coming inside)
You didn’t cover the valerian. You’re lucky I took root clippings to dry last week.
(covers her with the veil)
It must be covered. Why do they wear these?

ISOLDE
In case she’s terrible to look at. He can’t change his mind then.

ALTHEA
Or if he’s terrible to look at, and he won’t see me grind my teeth.

MOTHER
Althea.

ALTHEA
Mother.

DRESSMAKER
Hold still.

(MOTHER takes the veil and drapes it on herself.)

MOTHER
Do I look like a willow tree?

ALTHEA
No. Willow trees can breathe.

MOTHER
I think it’s rather elegant.

ALTHEA
Then keep it.

(SHE removes it.)

MOTHER
It is stuffy. We’ll pray this... holy man is expeditious.

ALTHEA
So we’ll pray that Father Anthony is away.

MOTHER
Althea, what did I say—

ALTHEA
You told me when he came to make the arrangements, he sat right there and took a full evening to drink one class of wine. I’d prefer not be a Lady of the Tourniquet from dawn to dusk.

MOTHER
You needn’t share your every whim.

ALTHEA
He’s not here, Mother.

MOTHER
You’d say the same thing if he were.

ALTHEA
There is a pair of lips under here.

MOTHER
You let your tongue ran faster than your head.

ALTHEA
(with mock seriousness)
When I meet Father Anthony, I swear never to tell him he’s insufferable.
MOTHER
Oh, certainly. You’d never say such a thing to your father either. Or cousin Evelyn. Or Count Draco, gods forbid.

(DRESSMAKER is now helping ALTHEA out of the dress, leaving her in an under layer. MOTHER is grinding bits of plant she’s collected from the garden with a mortar and pestle.)

ALTHEA
As he will never utter an unkind word about me.

MOTHER
That’s not what I said.

ALTHEA
(with a bit of wry humor)
Nothing about my flapping tongue, ‘whipping like hanging laundry.’ Or the way the bluebird nests better than my tresses. Or the fear that my wrist bones, protruding so, might ‘give someone a nasty cut.’
(to the DRESSMAKER, as she climbs out)
So be wary, Isolde.

MOTHER
I’m only asking you to be careful.

ALTHEA
No you’re not, you are asking quite a bit more.

MOTHER
Thank you, Isolde.

(DRESSMAKER exits.)

ALTHEA
I’m sorry.

MOTHER
You decided to engage their clan, not me.

ALTHEA
Draco’s clan will make strong allies.

MOTHER
I know this is a sacrifice for you, but you don’t get to blame me. Blame the north that bleeds us on our own soil. Or blame the sea that carries boats with death aboard. Blame the whims of an emperor who believes the earth from which our bones are sculpted belongs to him before it belongs to our gods. But your blame does not belong on my heart.

ALTHEA
No. Of course not; I don’t. But I think I’m being more than diplomatic. I’ll dress like them, I’ll learn their god and their lives and their land but my words are my own. If I am to endure his fire, he may endure my kindling.

*(tugging at her own corseting)*
Won’t he have trouble with this?

MOTHER
Your ladies will be there to help you.

ALTHEA
What do you mean they’ll be there?

MOTHER
Everyone will be there.

ALTHEA
In our bedchamber?

MOTHER
At first, yes.

*(beat)*

ALTHEA
Father Anthony?

MOTHER
We can hope not, but—

ALTHEA
[[God evocation.]]

MOTHER
They will be there to bless your fertility.

ALTHEA
*(darkening, somehow)*
My fertility, I know. My bounty, my…

MOTHER
Kindling.
*(beat)*
He’s important to the King of York. He’ll want heirs.

ALTHEA
What am I mother, who says I don’t want heirs?

*(MOTHER measures a leather strand around ALTHEA’s neck, like a low-hanging necklace.)*

MOTHER
It needn’t be a long night.

ALTHEA
What night? My wedding night?

MOTHER
Why are you getting hot?

ALTHEA
I’m not getting—

MOTHER
Looking forward to it?

ALTHEA
I—Shouldn’t I be?

(MOTHER is pouring the powder from the pestle into a leather pouch, on the string.)

MOTHER
Maybe now, but later on—

ALTHEA
I think that is for me to figure out, Mother.

MOTHER
‘Until death’ is a long time.
(hangs the necklace around ALTHEA, tucks it into her under layer)
Out of sight.

(ALTHEA pulls it out, smells the contents.)

ALTHEA
Oh augh, smells like… (sniffs again) Father’s tea. I always hated that smell. Is this to bless my fertility? And I’ll gather all my ladies and Draco his servants, and we’ll all get cozy around our bed for an evening brew. We’ll put Father Anthony right in the middle, really get that fertility excitement up. (she’s loving her own bit)

What do you think their god says about that? It’s one way to ingratiate me to the clan, Mother, all of us sharing a special, fertile, night.
(but it’s so funny to her)
Is this before or after the ladies help me with the corset? (new thought) Oh! Oh Lord, Mother; Father was always drinking this tea, where are all my brothers or sisters, huh?

(Something in MOTHER softens, almost imperceptibly.)

MOTHER
It’s for Count Draco, no one else.

ALTHEA
... It’s not for me? Fertility is a two-way—

MOTHER
*(sharply)*
It is for your husband.

ALTHEA
Alright.

MOTHER
You have enough blessings from everyone else. *This*, this is in case it’s a long night. And you would rather he just… sleep.

*(long beat)*

ALTHEA
I don’t need that.

MOTHER
You might one day.

ALTHEA
I don’t want it.

MOTHER
Then don’t use it.

ALTHEA
I don’t need this.

*(ALTHEA tries to hand over the pouch.)*

MOTHER
Keep it.

ALTHEA
No.

MOTHER
Sleep tonic, nothing more. Fast, deep sleep. He won’t even remember drinking it.

ALTHEA
Count Draco may sound like a bit of a prick but I don’t think he’s…

MOTHER
You don’t *think* so. Just take it.

ALTHEA
I’m not worried about that.
MOTHER
You don’t need to be worried, but you need to be prepared.

(beat)

ALTHEA
I did cover the valerian. You moved the baskets around because the mint was over-watered. You came inside to get more, but never brought them out because someone came to the door.

MOTHER
Then why didn’t you finish it for me?

ALTHEA
I don’t know.

(MOTHER exits. ALTHEA takes the necklace off. She puts on a robe, and goes to exit. She snatches the pouch before she leaves.)

END SCENE

Version IV: July 31, 2018
Submitted to ASC Round 1

ACT I

Scene 1

SETTING: The imagined Briton city of Keely, northern Britannia. We are in a very nice bed chamber—of a chieftain.

AT RISE: The dressmaker ISOLDE is buttoning our lady ALTHEA into a gown, the kind fit for weddings. It might not be white. She wears a veil that covers her face. Her mother is just outside, collecting various things from the garden. The VOICES of poetry are the other characters we will come to know. There is no need to take on a Narrator persona; they are observers just as we are.

VOICE
They say if a house made by humans is abandoned for long, nature will reclaim it.

VOICE
That the barriers constructed to keep outside from in will slip or crumble, And crawling things will come in Biblical bravura to seep into cracks.
VOICE
That spiders will weave new curtains to catch wind
And sunlight in sunlight’s sliverest strands

VOICE
Before the ivy will tuck the home into the hill under smooth covers.

VOICE
This is what our lady mused of, cloaked by the veil,

VOICE
Climbing like kudzu from the dress
And threatened to claim her into the lace.

VOICE
This veil melted like wax over her, so thick
That not even her breath could escape.

(ALTHEA lifts the veil,
breaking the spell. The poetry
slips away, and we find her
simply here, her mother’s garden
just outside. When she breathes
so can we.)

ISOLDE
Hold still.

ALTHEA
Never been my best skill.

MOTHER
(calling inside, not necessarily
heard)
Do you think they’ll make you wade through the river?

ISOLDE
If you don’t hold still, it won’t look right.

ALTHEA
I think we’re beyond that. Are you sure this is how they make them?

ISOLDE
Am I a Roman? A Christian?

ALTHEA
No.

ISOLDE
Then no, I’m not sure.
MOTHER  
(continuing her musing)  
It would be a waste of a new dress.  

ALTHEA  
It’s close though.  

MOTHER  
And this time of year, your tits will freeze off.  

ALTHEA  
(calling back)  
I’ve yet to see it happen, Mother.  
(to ISOLDE)  
But we’re trying. I must believe that will count, for the Count.  

ISOLDE  
Hold still.  

MOTHER  
(looking at a plant)  
You killed the valerian.  

ALTHEA  
(to ISOLDE)  
It’s strange though, isn’t it? I feel strange. Like it isn’t mine. If I am to marry someone, shouldn’t I wear something that is mine?  

ISOLDE  
Hold still.  

MOTHER  
I told you these trees would block too much sun. Who knows if it will come back this late in the season…  

ALTHEA  
Not that I’m marrying him. I’m marrying his arsenal.  

ISOLDE  
Is that what you’re calling it?  

ALTHEA  
No—  

ISOLDE  
Still, please.  

MOTHER
I knew you’d forgotten to cover the flowers when it stormed. You remember that, Althea, when I said, ‘the valerian’s got to be covered,’ and you said, ‘I already covered them,’ and I told you, ‘I’m looking at the baskets right now Althea and they are not over my valerian,’ you remember that?

ISOLDE

Why are you holding your breath?

ALTHEA

I’m holding still.

ISOLDE

If you don’t breathe now, I will wrap up your chest like a wound. When you’re up there, being bound together and your heart wants to pound, it will have nowhere to go. And you’ll faint.

MOTHER

(coming inside)

You didn’t cover the valerian. You’re lucky I took root clippings to dry last week.

(covers her with the veil)

It must be covered. Why do they wear these?

ISOLDE

In case she’s terrible to look at. You don’t take it off until after he makes the promise. He can’t change his mind then.

ALTHEA

Or if he’s terrible to look at, and he won’t see me grind my teeth.

MOTHER

Althea.

ALTHEA

Mother.

DRESSMAKER

Hold still.

(MOTHER takes the veil and drapes it on herself.)

MOTHER

Do I look like a willow tree?

ALTHEA

No. Willow trees can breathe.

MOTHER

I think it’s rather elegant.
ALTHEA
Then keep it.

(SHE removes it.)

MOTHER
It is stuffy. We’ll pray this… holy man is expeditious.

ALTHEA
So we’ll pray that Father Anthony is away.

MOTHER
Althea, what did I say—

ALTHEA
When he came to negotiate, he sat right there and took a full evening to drink one cup of ale.

MOTHER
You weren’t there.

ALTHEA
You complained about it plenty. I’d prefer not be a Lady of the Tourniquet from dawn to dusk.

MOTHER
You could afford to keep some things that fly through your mind to yourself.

ALTHEA
He’s not here.

MOTHER
You’d say the same thing if he were.

ALTHEA
There is a pair of lips under this veil. They tend to make sound.

MOTHER
You let your tongue run faster than your head.

ALTHEA
(with mock seriousness)
When I meet this Holy Man Anthony, I swear never to tell him he’s insufferable.

MOTHER
Oh, certainly. You’d never say such a thing to your father either. Or cousin Evelyn. Or Count Draco, the gods forbid.

(ISOLDE is now helping
ALTHEA out of the dress,
leaving her in an under layer.
MOTHER is grinding bits of
plant she’s collected from the
garden with a mortar and pestle.)

ALTHEA
As he will never utter an unkind word about me.

MOTHER
That’s not what I said.

ALTHEA
(with a bit of wry humor)
Nothing about my flapping tongue, ‘whipping like hanging laundry.’ Or the way the
bluebirds nest better than my tresses. Or the fear that my wrist bones, protruding so,
might ‘give someone a nasty cut.’

(to ISOLDE, as she climbs out)
So be wary, Isolde.

MOTHER
I’m only asking you to be careful.

ALTHEA
No you’re not, you are asking quite a bit more.

MOTHER
Thank you, Isolde.

(ISOLDE exits.)

MOTHER
You wanted to engage their clan, not me. / It was your decision—

ALTHEA
You negotiated in my absence. Kept me out of the room.

MOTHER
As they kept Draco from the room. Would you prefer we look desperate?

ALTHEA
We are desperate.

MOTHER
Blame the north that bleeds us on our own soil. Or blame the sea that carries boats
captained by foreign death. Blame the whims of an emperor who believes the earth
from which our bones are sculpted is his to piss on more than our gods’ to rain on.
But do not blame me.

ALTHEA
**Draco’s clan will make strong allies to us. Roman allies.** But I think I’m being more than diplomatic; I’ll dress like them, I’ll learn their lives and their land and their god, but my words are my own. If I am to endure his fire, he may endure my kindling. (tugging at her own corseting)

Won’t he have trouble with this?

**MOTHER**

Your ladies will be there to help you.

**ALTHEA**

What do you mean they’ll be there?

Everyone will be there.

**ALTHEA**

In our bedchamber?

**MOTHER**

At first, yes.

(Beat.)

**ALTHEA**

Father Anthony?

**MOTHER**

We can hope not, but—

**ALTHEA**

**Telesphorus help me.**

**MOTHER**

They will be there to bless your fertility.

**ALTHEA**

(darkening, somehow)

My fertility, I know. My bounty, my…

**MOTHER**

Kindling.

(Beat.)

He’s important to Debilisium. He’ll want heirs.

**ALTHEA**

What am I? Who says I don’t want heirs?

(MOTHER measures a leather strand around ALTHEA’s neck, like a low-hanging necklace.)
It needn’t be a long night.

What night? My wedding night.

Why are you getting hot?

I’m not getting—

Looking forward to it?

I—Shouldn’t I be?

(MOTHER is pouring the powder from the pestle into a leather pouch, on the string.)

Maybe now, but later on—

I think that is for me to figure out, Mother.

‘Until death’ is a long time.

(hangs the necklace around ALTHEA, tucks it into her under layer)

Out of sight.

(ALTHEA pulls it out, smells the contents.)

Oh augh, smells like…

(Father’s tea. I always hated that smell. Is this to bless my fertility? And I’ll gather all my ladies and Draco his servants, and we’ll all get cozy around our bed for an evening brew. We’ll put Father Anthony right in the middle, get that fertility fervor up.

(she’s loving her own bit)

What do you think their god says about that? It’s one way to ingratiate me to the clan, Mother, all of us sharing a special, fertile, night.

(but it’s so funny to her)
Is this before or after the ladies help me with the corset?

(new thought)

Oh! Oh Mother; Father was always drinking this tea, where are all my brothers or sisters, huh?

(Something in MOTHER softens, almost imperceptibly.)

MOTHER

It’s for Count Draco, no one else.

ALTHEA

… It’s not for me? Fertility is a two-way—

MOTHER

(sharply)

It is for your husband.

ALTHEA

Alright.

MOTHER

You have enough blessings from everyone else. This, this is in case it’s a long night. And you would rather he just… sleep.

(Long beat.)

ALTHEA

I don’t need that.

MOTHER

You might one day.

ALTHEA

I don’t want it.

MOTHER

Then don’t use it.

ALTHEA

I don’t need this.

(ALTHEA tries to hand over the pouch.)

MOTHER

Keep it.

ALTHEA

No.
MOTHER
Sleep tonic, nothing more. Fast, deep sleep. He won’t even remember drinking it.

ALTHEA
Count Draco may be a prick but I don’t think he’s…

MOTHER
You don’t think so. You haven’t met him. Just take it.

ALTHEA
I’m not worried about that.

MOTHER
You don’t need to be worried, but you need to be prepared.

(Beat.)

ALTHEA
I did cover the valerian. You moved the baskets around because the mint was over-watered. You came inside to get more, but never brought them out because someone came to the door.

MOTHER
Then why didn’t you finish it for me?

ALTHEA
I don’t know.

(MOTHER exits. ALTHEA takes the necklace off. She puts on a robe, and goes to exit. She snatches the pouch before she leaves.)

(END OF SCENE)