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REPRODUCTIVE POLITICS AND PARENTAL ECONOMIES IN *TITUS ANDRONICUS*[1]

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ABSTRACT

Tamora, Queen of the Goths in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* (1594), belongs to a relatively substantial canon of pregnant characters in English early modern drama. Her pregnant embodiment has generated less critical interest than the pregnancies and maternities of later tragic heroines. In this paper I wish to reread Tamora's non-normative pregnancy and her maternal authority against a tenuously established consensus on reproduction and maternity in the period. Thus, my primary aim is to trace Tamora's monstrous gestational body as a locus of the discursive triangularity of gender, race, and reproduction. Tamora is a devoted and passionate mother to her adult sons but her mothering is complicated by her pregnancy and a problematic child product, a result of her relationship with Aaron. I wish to look at Tamora's pregnancy in conjunction with her maternal practices, albeit keeping the gestational experience as distinct and separate from her motherhood. Tamora's pregnant embodiment is further complicated by the birthing ritual glimpsed in the play. I argue that by materializing the dreaded fruit of miscegenation in and through the reproductive body, the play demonstrates the threatening porosity of the emerging gender-race system. By circumventing maternal authority, the play also unveils the vulnerability of the supposedly sacrosanct, female-exclusive ritual to external male violations. Rather than confirming the ritual's universality, the play problematizes maternal and paternal authority at the backdrop of deep-seated fears of racial bodily difference.

Keywords: *Titus Andronicus*; maternal authority in Shakespeare; pregnant embodiment in English early modern drama; paternal authority in Shakespeare; race and gender in reproductive discourses in early modern England; reproductive and paternal economies in Shakespeare.

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1. Introduction

Tamora, Queen of the Goths in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* (1594), belongs to a relatively substantial canon of pregnant characters in English early modern drama. However, her pregnant embodiment has generated less critical interest than the pregnancies and maternities of later tragic heroines, e.g., Webster's Duchess or Ford's Anabella. *Titus Andronicus* can be categorized as the subgenre of a "pregnancy play"[3] but its status as such is problematized by Tamora's (un)graspable embodiment, which Thiel (2018: 144) terms "gestational erasure". Although her pregnancy leads to a sensationalist finale, its commencement and progress are documented in-between the lines, further obscured by Shakespeare's recurrent womb-tomb metaphors.[4] As I intend to argue, Tamora's pregnancy can be recovered from the text by reading the play's non-normative, reproductive scripts against the contemporary, tenuous consensus on reproduction and maternity. Tamora's reproductive body emerges as a site of an explosive collision of misogynist, ableist, and racist early modern discourses. As Hall (1995: 2–6) has poignantly argued, the threat of identity pollution or identity loss is a recurring theme of multiple early modern texts, where the dark/light binary goes beyond the merely aesthetic and becomes a building block of the nascent nationalist, imperialist, transparent identity of a white male, at once identified against and threatened by unruly women's bodies. Thus, my primary aim is to trace Tamora's monstrous gestational body as a locus of this discursive triangularity of gender, race, and reproduction.

Secondly, I wish to look at Tamora's pregnancy in conjunction with her maternal practices, albeit keeping the gestational experience as distinct and separate from her motherhood. Following Scuro's (2017: ix) call of "disentangling the phenomenon of pregnancy from the phenomenon of childbearing", I read Tamora's pregnancy as distinct from her intense and authentic mothering of her adult sons. Extant research on pregnancy and maternity often collapses the boundary between pregnant women and mothers. This happens for obvious reasons — pregnant women usually become mothers.

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3 In "'Cushion Come Forth': Materializing Pregnancy on the Stuart Stage" Thiel investigates the development of a separate genre of a "pregnancy play" on the Elizabethan and Stuart stage. Before childfree Elizabeth I's death pregnancy plays were uncommon. After James I's ascension the stage witnessed a proliferation of plays centralizing a pregnant character (Thiel 2018: 144–145). As I am revising this article Thiel's book *Performing Pregnancy on The Early Modern English Stage, 1603–1642* is forthcoming in Routledge's Studies in Performance and Early Modern Drama Series.

4 For more on womb metaphors in *Titus*, see Wynne-Davies (1991: 129–151), who investigates the sharp divisions between the feminine (earth) and the masculine (the sea) in the tragedy to illustrate the ways in which female agency is gradually diminished and finally canceled for both Lavinia and Tamora.

However, Tamora's case glaringly demonstrates that such an unreflective fusion of boundaries not only blurs our understanding of pregnancy in the period but also victimizes women who are implicated in "the scripts and rituals that underwrite sociopolitical, gendered, and embodied expectations about pregnancy while overwriting and erasing the existentialia implied by the pregnant body" (Scuro 2017: 189). The existentialia of Tamora's laboring and postpartum body are indeed obscured, while her status as a pregnant mother is complicated by the problematic nature of the child-product, a black baby that threatens her and her family's survival at court. Simultaneously, time and again, Tamora demonstrates her intense maternal devotion and forceful authority. Her bloody revenge is orchestrated for her dead and living sons, but she cruelly refuses to mother Aaron's baby, sending it to its death. Rather than relegating her to the category of monstrous mothers,[5] her decisions illustrate a wider phenomenon of "maternal ambivalence"[6] and a distinct rift between willing maternal identifications and non-normative, and thus unwilling, pregnancy and postpartum experiences.

Finally, Tamora's pregnant embodiment is further complicated by the birthing ritual glimpsed in the play. By materializing the dreaded fruit of miscegenation in and through the reproductive body, the play demonstrates the threatening "porosity"[7] of the emerging gender-race system. By circumventing maternal authority, the play unveils the vulnerability of the supposedly sacrosanct, female-exclusive ritual to external male violations. Rather than confirming "the universality and hegemony of the ritual" (Wilson 2013: 83), the play problematizes maternal and paternal authority at the backdrop of deep-seated fears of racial bodily difference. Tamora's postpartum period is highly non-normative,

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5 For analyses inscribing Tamora within scripts of monstrosity, see Adelman (1992: 9) or Wynne-Davies (1991: 129–151). Earlier research often unveils the binary of female animal-like maternal and sexual insatiability and the more orderly, paternal model encapsulated by Titus. Pitt (1981: 71) claims that Tamora is "a cardboard cut-out", who is "so wooden, so lacking in human compassion, self-doubt and guilt, that we cannot be truly moved, even by her harsh treatment of Lavinia". Pitt's sentiment is shared by many researchers who usually dismiss Tamora as an embodiment of evil forces and suspect, lustful femininity; or an exotic alien outside the civilized world of Rome.

6 "Maternal ambivalence" as a term comes from Adams (2014: 7), who sees it as a widespread maternal phenomenon rather than an "atypical problem". As she explains: "In care ethicists' emphasis on interdependence, they sometimes ignore the need for individual flourishing and conflicts of interest between mother and child" (Adams 2014: 6). Pregnancy and maternity under patriarchy, seen as default female conditions, are nevertheless plagued with conflicts; Tamora, with her conflicting impulses, is an embodied image of "maternal ambivalence".

7 For more on the "porosity" of early modern bodies, see Paster (1993, 2004). Paster investigates early modern humoralism as a foundation for the gendered conceptualizations of selfhood. In *Humoring the Body* Paster (2004: 137) argues that pre-Harveyesque "humoral subjectivity" is "open, penetrable, fluid, and extended". For more recent reinvestigations of humoralism in connection with Shakespeare's use of womb imagery, see Kenny (2019).

serving to highlight her unnaturalness and monstrosity, but it may also signal a wealth of maternal/pregnant experiences that threaten the strained (pseudo) medical consensus on reproduction through their non-conformity. First, I will provide a brief account of available research on the maternity experience in the period, with emphasis on Shakespeare's maternal presentations. Only then will I proceed to my analysis of Tamora's pregnant and maternal presence.

2. Conflicting maternities in the period

Early modern women's identities were tied first to their fathers and later on to their husbands. Both the discourses of religion and science repeatedly reiterated their inferiority. As objects of scientific inquiry they were seen as inherently faulty, with the greatest ancient authority, Aristotle (1943: 175) imprinting the image of the female as "a deformed male" onto early modern minds. Following Aristotle, Helkiah Crooke (1576–1648), James I's court physician, wrote in *Mikrocosmographia* (1615): "a Female is a thing more imperfect then [sic!] a Male" (Crooke as quoted by Eccles 1982: 26).[8] As daughters of the biblical Eve women were held culpable for man's original sin and subsequent fall from God's grace. Hence, both "theology and physiology" complemented each other in the justification of the systemic cancellation of female subjectivity (Aughterson 1998: 418–419). Through a complex system of patrilineal laws, early modern women were deprived of prerogatives over their bodies and "constantly scrutinized for violations in conduct" (Belsey 1991: 149–150). Sexual difference in the period was established on the basis of "the reproductive process" (Belsey 1991: 148). In the absence of effective contraception, pregnancy and maternity under patriarchy emerge as default and naturalized conditions, but they also offer limited space for agency and subjectivity. If female identity is tied to the husband and household, motherhood becomes a central identifying role for women.[9]

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[8] Undoubtedly, a more systematic approach to the intersection of the medical discourse and culture goes back to Laqueur's (1992: 25–26) influential, though also heavily criticized, account of the "one-sex/one-flesh model", a prevalent theory of sexual discourse from Antiquity to the end of the seventeenth century, according to which women are inverted males.

[9] Early modern discourse surrounding pregnancy and maternity follows the authority of the Bible, in which women are defined through their motherhood (Crawford 2013: 8). In Timothy one reads: "Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety" (*King James Bible*, 1 Timothy 2:15). Bringing children to the world, thus, is a condition of salvation, while the hardships of pregnancy and labor are taken for granted as a consequence of Eve's original transgression. In Genesis, when exiling the first people from Eden, God directs the following words to Eve: "I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire *shall be* to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee" (*King James Bible*, Genesis 3:16).

Female physiology as described by humoral medicine makes women cumbersomely tied to their reproductive bodies, often at the mercy of suspect, threatening cyclical changes and biological contingencies. With the onset of menstruation a woman was believed to be in constant need of conception as seed was produced in her blood, while her womb was "hungry" for semen (Crawford 2013: 6). Medical texts available in early modern England often present the female womb as a ravenous animal craving male seed.[10] Crooke (1615: 315) frequently presents the womb as a separate being, with intention and agency: "Most certaine it is that the wombe is so greedy of seede, that after Conception it is so contracted that there is no void space left in it". Guillemeau (1612: 156) explains that conception takes place "[i]f … he find in Copulation that his Yard is sucked and drawn by the womb…". The conceptualization of the womb as a threatening, uncontrollable animal goes back to Plato and Aristotle. It also justifies and solidifies "stereotypes of feminine error and changeability" as well as "the unsettling power of female sexual desire" (Miller 2000: 6). Hence, although maternity is an expected, social role for a woman, female reproductive bodies, chained to conflicting early modern conceptualizations of reproduction, become objects of obsessive scrutiny. The convergence of motherhood and sexuality encourages beliefs in female fallibility and uncontrollability, casting a long shadow of suspicion on women's maternal authority.

Contrasting William Gouge's (1575–1653) account of maternal roles in *Of Domesticall Duties* (1622) with the classic Catholic presentation of ideal femininity in Juan Luis Vives' *The Education of a Christian Woman* (2000), Rose (1991: 308) unveils inconsistencies in the Protestant maternity discourse, which systematically pinpoints conundrums of "maternal authority" only to strategically drop them, failing to provide adequate solutions. So, Gouge's parents are equal in their authority, but the woman is subservient to her husband. In conflict situations over parental authority, Gouge's resolutions are slippery at best. Protestant maternity discourse presents a spectrum of maternal stances, ranging from positions of authority to total submission but, according to Rose (1991: 308), Shakespearean representations emerge as conservative. Belsey (1991: 154–155) argues for "the unfixed character of the woman's position" and claims that "mothers unsettle the discourse to the point where the price of coherence is their repeated elimination". Finally, Adelman argues that in most of Shakespeare's plays the disruptive maternal influence is either destroyed or neutralized. In the romances, Shakespeare offers his audiences supposedly happy endings with a

[10] See, e.g., Nicholas Fontanus's *The Womans Doctour* or Levinus Lemnius's *The Secret Miracles of Nature*. These Dutch physicians' works were printed in English in London in 1652 and 1658 respectively. For more on the female womb in early modern medical discourse, see Eccles (1982: 28); Miller (2000: 5–6); Crawford (2013: 6).

blunt image of maternity; for instance, "*The Winter's Tale* ends with the return of a masculine authority grounded in a benignly generative maternal presence" (Adelman 1992: 194). Rose in *Plotting Motherhood* reiterates such claims by delineating the trope of a "dead" or "dying" mother in canonical literary texts. The mother's authority is founded on paternity knowledge, but this does not indicate that maternal figures are any more empowered by the possession of such knowledge (Rose 2017: 5, 3).[11]

Tamora's maternal authority is complicated by her tenuous grasp of paternity knowledge, which lends credence to early modern beliefs in women's bodily uncontrol. Not only is her lust for Aaron indicative of her barbarity but so are her pregnancy, labor, and postpartum period, throwing a spanner in the works of early modern medical orthodoxy. However, Tamora's nonnormative gestational patterns do not stand in the way of the exercise of her maternal authority over her adult sons. What actually makes her a compelling and original character in the early modern canon is the fact that she is already a mother to two adult sons when she conceives again, pointing to the aforementioned shifting fusion/separateness of pregnancy and maternity as well as a degree of experience and control over these separate but often overlapping processes.[12] What would nowadays be called a geriatric pregnancy[13] is subversive in its (in)visible performance as much as in its deeply transgressive origin. Loomba famously claims: "Surely the paranoid and violent attempts to control female independence, property rights, movement and sexual autonomy indicate that the fears generated by the possibility of female transgression are *real* and *actual*, even where such subversion is only potential"

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11 Rose's book has a very wide historical and cultural range as she explores maternity from Antiquity to modernity. Her analysis focuses on "the conflicted representations of [maternal] authority as it is coded in western literary plots" (Rose 2017: 4). Krier's analysis of maternity has an equally far-reaching range but it seems to have a more optimistic vision of maternal presence in Western culture. Krier (2001: 4) sees "topics and tropes of generation" as indicative of "nostalgia for a lost merger with the mother". Dunworth (2010: 2) reads maternal presences in terms of emblematic embodiments of the narrative structure, according to which mothers "complicate, destabilise and mediate". For more on Shakespeare's absent mothers, see Kahn (1992: 95) who argues that maternal absence in plays such as *King Lear* illustrates "a patriarchal conception of the family in which children owe their existence to their fathers alone". Following Chodorow's psychanalytic account of male/female identification against the mother, Kahn demonstrates the failure of subjectivity built on the denial of the maternal.

12 Helena in *All's Well That Ends Well*, Juliet in *Measure for Measure*, Anne in *Henry VIII*, Thaisa in *Pericles*, or Anabella in Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* are all virgins before they conceive in the plays. The same could be surmised about Middleton's pregnant characters. Hermione in *The Winter's Tale* and the Duchess in Webster's tragedy are the exceptions to this observation but the degree to which they are punished for their supposed transgressions mirrors the annihilation of Tamora.

13 Pregnancies are categorized as geriatric for women over 35. Given the fact that Tamora has two adult sons she must be well over 30–35. I believe the topic of older pregnancies in the period and in drama certainly deserves further discussion.

(1989: 82, emphasis original). Tamora certainly embodies this frightening possibility when she enters a sexual liaison with Aaron.[14] In the finale, her maternal authority is supposedly restrained, while paternal authority is reinstated with Lucius's victorious return to Rome, but the fruit of her union with Aaron lives on, permanently actualizing fears of alien pollution and threat to the tenuous white identity.

3. "I poured forth tears in vain" (*Titus Andronicus* 2.2.163)[15]: Tamora's reproductive body, Tamora's mothering

Tamora is the only physically present mother in the play. Neither Lucius's wife, young Lucius's mother, nor Marcus's wife, Publius's mother, are ever mentioned in the play (Carter 2010: 38). Titus's wife, mother to his many sons, is conspicuously absent. Titus's family illustrates "the phenomenon of absent mothers" (Rose 1991: 292). Instead, the play offers an image of an open tomb, which uncannily resembles a female womb gorging on its children's life: "O sacred receptacle of my joys, / Sweet cell of virtue and nobility, / How many sons hast thou of mine in store / That thou wilt never render to me more?" (*Titus* 1.1.95-98). Although Titus returns victorious, he is humbled by the spectacle of death; a reversed birth or a return to the earthly womb. In a not so subtly sexual language, the "sword" is returned to its "sheath" (*Titus* 1.1.88). Read with the benefit of hindsight, this spectacle of the voracious maternal womb prefigures the cannibalistic feast in which Tamora unwittingly feeds on her dead sons' flesh.[16] It is also the first of several images of the ravenous womb: "unhallowed and bloodstained hole", "devouring receptacle" or "swallowing womb" (*Titus* 2.2.210, 235, 239). However, the tragedy's opening signals an equalization of sorts; whether a woman is honest and "sacred" as, one can assume, Titus's wife was or unruly and lecherous as Tamora — her female threatening, earthly, voracious appetite will manifest in some way or another. De Beauvoir (2011 [1949]: 615–616) sees pregnancy as "a prefiguration of [one's] death", while the physical experience as a dangerous parasitic relationship. Mothering, under patriarchy, often means that a woman wants to "possess" her sons, through whom "she will possess the world"

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14 Loomba (2002: 1056) inscribes Tamora, along with Cleopatra, within a trope of an exotic woman but she also sees her as a "lusty widow", an older authoritative woman.

15 All quotations from *Titus Andronicus* come from William Shakespeare. 2018. *Titus Andronicus: Revised Edition*. Edited by Jonathan Bate. Bloomsbury Publishing, unless otherwise indicated. The parenthetical citation includes the act, scene, and line number(s). The title of the play will be abbreviated to *Titus.*

16 For more "reversals of expected linguistic and behavioural codes" as well as links between womb imagery and female sexuality, see Bate (2018: 5–9).

(de Beauvoir 2011 [1949]: 639). Although the imagery suggests maternal uncontrol and voracity, from the start, Shakespeare problematizes both maternal and paternal economies. He centralizes Titus, a lonely patriarch with an army of dead sons, but he contrasts him with Tamora, already a mother and soon-to-be mother to Aaron's baby.

Unmentionable dead mothers and womb-tombs starkly contrast with the fertile widow who, for all we know, might already be pregnant. Although Tamora, Titus's captive, arrives in Rome defeated and in chains, her physical presence on stage is felt from the start.[17] She first emerges as a mere object to be gazed at, but she effectively breaks away from the immanence[18] of objectivity into full-blown subjectivity when she delivers her persuasive supplication to Titus. Before Tamora is turned into a "ravenous tiger" (*Titus* 5.3.194), she is given the spotlight to demonstrate her maternal devotion in an attempt to save Alarbus's life. Contrasted with the somber death procession, there on her knees is a woman who pleads for life:[19]

> Stay, Roman brethren! — Gracious conqueror,
> Victorious Titus, rue the tears I shed,
> A mother's tears in passion for her son.
> And if thy sons were ever dear to thee,
> O think my son to be as dear to me.
> Sufficeth not that we are brought to Rome
> To beautify thy triumphs and return
> Captive to thee and to thy Roman yoke,
> But must my sons be slaughtered in the streets
> For valiant doings in their country's cause?
> O, if to fight for king and commonweal
> Were piety in thine, it is in these!
>
> (*Titus* 1.1.107–122).

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17 History offers scholars an unprecedented chance to visualize and localize Tamora within actual physical space as she is the key figure in the Peacham Drawing, with some scholars arguing that she is already visibly pregnant at the start of the play, e.g., Breira (1997). For more on the Peacham Drawing, see Schlueter (1999).

18 I am borrowing the term "immanence" from Beauvoir's key argument in her discussion over female subjectivity in *The Second Sex*. Female existence is grounded in the central tension between immanence and transcendence. The tension was crucial for the existentialists and later taken up by phenomenologists. As a result of women's historical enslavement within the patriarchal system a woman is tied to immanence more than a man. Also, according to Beauvoir, female biology, grounded in corporeality, ties her to immanence more strongly. Interestingly, Beauvoir first introduces transcendence/immanence dynamics when talking about the ovum (as representing immanence) and sperm (as encapsulating transcendence) (de Beauvoir 2011 [1949]: 46).

19 Analyzing the Peacham Drawing, Breira (1997: 20) argues that Tamora is already visibly pregnant in the opening scene, which would add more layers of irony — a woman teeming with new life is contrasted with the womb-tomb of Titus' family. Moreover, she is denied, which further highlights Titus's cruelty.

Tamora appeals to Titus on the grounds of her maternal devotion for her firstborn son. She is bright enough to stroke Titus's and Rome's vain ego. When that fails, she points out the relativity of manly valor, trying to strike at some universality of masculine courage in battle, in defense of one's country. Finally, she returns to the value of mercy, which helps men to approximate gods but not to usurp their power. Tamora's speech is powerful and unquestionably maternal, proving her capacity for compassion and seeing other perspectives.

Tamora clearly refuses to comply with the image of a benign, sexless, and silent maternity that Kristeva (2002: 308) in "Stabat Mater" attributes to the Virgin Mary: "we live in a civilization where the *consecrated* (religious or secular) representation of femininity is absorbed by motherhood". The ideal of maternity "gratifies a male being" but "ignores what a woman might say or want" (Kristeva 2002: 309). Protestant maternal imagery is emptied of the image of the Virgin (Crawford 2013: 9). Yet Protestant ideology offers a conflicting image of maternal authority, with a woman required to submit to her husband and commit to silence and obedience. As a widow Tamora is not obliged to submit to anyone, as a mother she plucks all the powers of rhetoric to save her eldest son.[20] She is met with the cold and bloody logic of an eye for an eye, where Titus, spurred by Lucius, performs another perverse reversal. Unlike in a female womb, where the fetus is formed gradually, here Alarbus's body is dismembered before he is killed and burned; life is drained slowly and with perverse physiological precision.

If, as Bate (2018: 5–9) persuasively argues, the play is intricately built on a foundation of numerous "reversals", it makes sense to visualize Tamora as already visibly pregnant in Act 1.[21] Such a depiction would definitely mark a starker contrast with the imagery of dead wombs in Titus's family and further underscore Andronici cruelty. Tamora's passionate speech with its conflicting implications for female/maternal authority helps to underscore her earthy, lusty allure that immediately sucks Saturninus in. Saturninus praises Tamora's "hue", which Royster (2000: 432) connects with the play's presentation of "enhanced miscegenation, ultrablack crossed with ultrawhite" implicit in Tamora's union with Aaron. Saturninus, opting for Tamora's "ultrawhite" hue, instead of Lavinia's moderate white, may be read "as an abandonment of moderation",

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[20] Kehler (1995) provides an excellent reconsideration of early modern stereotypes about widows and how they are presented in *Titus*. For a detailed historical analysis of widows in the early modern England, see Todd (2004).

[21] Both the timing of conception and progress of the pregnancy are up for a debate; either one assumes that Tamora is already pregnant when she marries Saturninus or one allows for a temporal framework that exceeds nine months. The latter, in my view, does not necessarily agree with the spirit of a revenge tragedy where vengeance is imminent and swift. What is certain is that Shakespeare's indeterminacy parallels the period's conceptualization of pregnancy as fluid, ungraspable, and abstract until its physical manifestation in the form of a living child materializes. For more on pregnancy's fluidity, see Gowing (2013: 112–114, 139–140).

a fundamental Roman value (Royster 2000: 441). Following the Spanish interpretative path, Ndiaye argues that the play codes Tamora as African. Her name read as "*'esta mora'* — literally, 'that Moorish woman' in Spanish — … overbrims with Moorishness, even if that Moorishness is not physically visible" (Ndiaye 2016: 63). So, Tamora's whiteness is sexually enticing and simultaneously dangerously deceptive, signaling a threat of dissemblance lurking inside. Read quite literally, this internal dissembling may already be forming in Tamora's womb, threatening the body politic of Rome. Tamora's irresistible appeal encapsulated in her white "hue" may be heightened by her pregnancy glow. Modern medicine recognizes the phenomenon in which fluctuations of hormones and greater blood volume result in the skin looking shinier and flushed. Even the early moderns recognized that pregnant women, especially those expecting sons, may look more radiant; "They which be with child of a boy are more quicke and nimble in all their actions, and be in better health of body" (Guillemeau 1612: 10–11).[22] Fonteyn (1652: 130) in *The Womans Doctour* (1652) identifies fertile women as "fresh coloured, and of a rosie complexion". Burning with desire, when Saturninus first sets eyes on Tamora, he compares her to Phoebe (Diana/Artemis) and announces that she "Dost overshine the gallant'st dames of Rome" (*Titus* 1.1.322). Once Saturninus picks Tamora as his Empress, Marcus wonders: "How comes it that the subtle Queen of Goths / Is of a sudden thus advanced in Rome?" (*Titus* 1.1.397–398). Partly in disbelief, partly in hope that this turn of events would prove beneficial to the Andronici, Marcus cannot fathom Saturninus's overpowering attraction. If Tamora is (in)visibly pregnant, her mysterious appeal may be grounded in her pregnancy, giving credence to modern findings, according to which some men find pregnant, lactating and even ovulating women more attractive.[23]

Yet Tamora is more than her glowing white face or mysteriously fecund body. She immediately sets out to demonstrate to Saturninus that his choice was worthwhile as she promises to be a "handmaid to his desires, / A loving nurse, a mother to his youth" (*Titus* 1.1.336–337). Along with a promise of sexual gratification she offers her maternal authority, which is subsequently utilized in solidifying his rule in an act of phony reconciliation with Titus and his sons;

> My lord, be ruled by me; be won at last.
> Dissemble all your griefs and discontents.
> You are but newly planted in your throne.
> Lest, then, the people, and patricians too,
> Upon a just survey take Titus' part

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22 Quite predictably, early modern midwifery manuals' authors are biased because women expecting daughters are believed to lack "nimbleness" and good health in pregnancy.

23 See research on sexual imprinting in humans in Aronsson (2011).

> And so supplant you for ingratitude,
> Which Rome reputes to be a heinous sin
>
> (*Titus* 1.1.448–454).

As opposed to gullible Titus, she is a formidable political strategist. Her political acumen can be directly derived from her experience of mothering haughty boys. Similarly to her fused roles of wife/lover/mother to Saturninus, her function as a political mediator in the finale of act 1, scene 1 combines care with the disciplined sternness required of mothers. Tamora is ordering spoilt and boisterous boy-men around and orchestrates reconciliation amidst immature sulking and pouting. When Saturninus wishes to turn away from Marcus and Lavinia's abductors she says: "Nay, nay, sweet emperor, we must all be friends. / The tribune and his nephews kneel for grace. / I will not be denied. Sweetheart, look back." (*Titus* 1.1.484–486). She sweetly enforces Saturninus's compliance, thereby reducing Lavinia's abduction to the taking away of a toy that the new Emperor had not had any use for anyway.

As much as her abilities to double cross Titus seem to grow out of her experiences as Queen, her understanding of uncouth men stems from her mothering experiences under patriarchy. When she hails herself as "incorporate in Rome" (*Titus* 1.1.466), she encapsulates "the confrontation of the stranger or foreigner from within and, as a result, a more complicated vision of Rome as the cornerstone of England's national identity" (Royster 2000: 434). She also embodies an alien, threatening model of maternal authority, which mocks patriarchal masculinity by rendering adult men infantile and helpless. The scene where Tamora utilizes her exquisite maternal abilities is only punctuated by Aaron's soliloquy and followed by Aaron's paternal intervention into Chiron and Demetrius's quarrel.24 Like Tamora with Saturninus and other Roman lords, here Aaron cunningly reigns in his foster sons' explosive tempers and brings about the siblings' reconciliation. Maternal/paternal disciplining and negotiating practices are used for perverse ends but they are, unquestionably, effective. Given Aaron's bigger-than-life persona one could suspect that he has an overpowering influence over Tamora's sons, but he actually uses the threat of her maternal anger to discipline them: "Young lords, beware! And should the Empress know / This discord's ground, the music would not please" (Titus 1.1.568–569). This in itself testifies to the resounding force of Tamora's maternal authority.

Tamora's confluence with the goddess of hunting — Diana/Phoebe — reappears when Bassianus accusingly salutes Tamora in the forest in act 2, scene 2, to which she responds by invoking the myth of Acteon (*Titus* 2.2.60–65).

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24 For more on the ways in which *Titus Andronicus* reworks "the various kinds of familial or domestic models", see Brown (2019: 115).

Bate argues for Shakespeare's irony in the parallel; Diana was a virgin-goddess of hunting (Bate 2018: 188). Tamora is not a virgin. Not only is she married, but she came to the spot with an intention of having sex with Aaron. Comparing potentially pregnant, certainly lascivious Tamora to a virgin-goddess must then be a jest. Yet Diana was also a goddess of fertility, invoked to ease labor pains. As the only ancient goddess whose presence lasted in folk culture beyond Antiquity, her links with witchcraft possibly translate to monstrous Tamora. Moreover, the recurring comparison brings out multivalent cultural references to other mythical reproductive bodies. Acteon, a young man who was punished for spying on naked Diana in her bath, was turned into a stag and devoured by his own hounds. Diana/Artemis's cruelty links her to Tamora, while the trope of devouring hounds subtly signals the play's later scenes of cannibalism.[25] Moreover, Diana/Artemis and her brother Apollo were the children of Leto/Latona, whose pregnancy — plagued with fear and anxiety — culminated in a grueling four-day long labor on the island of Delos, elevated by Poseidon specially for the event, as Hera, in an act of jealousy, had forbidden Leto to give birth on solid ground. Despite the circumstances of her birth, Diana/Artemis is further immortalized in mythology as a goddess brutally policing other women's reproductive bodies and lives, with the case of Niobe as the most famous.

Niobe was punished by Artemis/Diana and Apollo, with the violent deaths of all her children for the audacity of questioning Leto/Latona's reproductive potential.[26] The way the siblings readily offer to defend their mother's honor recalls Tamora's sons standing against Bassianus and Lavinia's taunts. Despite the horrid nature of Lavinia's rape and mutilation, the bond Tamora has with her sons is unquestionable. In fact, her actions further underscore her total devotion to her sons as well as her conviction that they should repay her love in kind just like Leto's divine children:

> Hadst thou in person ne'er offended me,
> Even for his sake am I pitiless. —
> Remember, boys, I poured forth tears in vain
> To save your brother from the sacrifice,
> But fierce Andronicus would not relent.
> Therefore away with her, and use her as you will;
> The worse to her, the better loved of me
>
> (*Titus* 2.2.161–167).

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25 The more obvious reference is of course to the myth of Philomela and Procne from Ovid's *Metamorphosis*. For an analysis of mythological tropes of maternal revenge, see Carter (2010: 37–49). For more on the intersection of Shakespeare and Ovid, see Bate (1994) or Enterline (2000).

26 Both references to Latona and Niobe can be found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* Book VI.

Tamora clearly delineates her personal humiliation and pain suffered for her children and conditions her sons' love on their willingness to act on her behalf. The greater the cruelty inflicted on Lavinia, the more the proof of love and devotion her sons can demonstrate to their mother. With a 'divine', mythological precedent, Tamora's maternal authority now approximates Titus's opening cruel logic. However, even in an act of brutal retribution she differs from solipsistic Titus by always having her children's desires in mind. In act 2, scene 3 she wavers, from her initial impulse to kill Lavinia on the spot to her final decision to leave Lavinia at her sons' mercy. Tamora's final words before Demetrius and Chiron hurl Lavinia away are: "So should I rob my sweet sons of their fee. / No, let them satisfy their lust on thee" (*Titus* 2.3.179–180). Tamora's wish to satisfy her sons makes her abandon her initial instinct for instant revenge. In her role as a mother she is willing to satisfy her children's whims as long as they pay her due devotion and respect. De Beauvoir (2011 [1949]: 308) argues that "ordinarily, maternity is a strange compromise of narcissism, altruism, dream, sincerity, bad faith, devotion, and cynicism". Tamora's maternal model, far from a self-sacrificing ideal inscribed in "the patriarchal institution of motherhood",[27] involves a fusion of altruism, narcissism and devotion. She has demonstrated that she is ready to endure humiliation and suffering for her sons but she also requires them to serve her in order to avenge her pain. In an act of perverse altruism or maternal benevolence, she will then repay their obedience by letting them satisfy their desire. Tamora's mothering mocks socially constructed expectations of maternity but it is built on an intense, mutual understanding of mother-sons desires.

Finally, the oft-repeated comparison of Tamora to Diana recalls the myth of Callisto,[28] one of Diana's followers, who was raped by Jupiter in the guise of Diana herself and got pregnant. She managed to hide her growing belly for a while before she was found out and expelled from Diana's circle. She was then transformed into a bear by jealous Hera/Juno. Years later, she avoided being killed by her own son during hunting when Jupiter/Zeus intervened and transformed both of them into the constellations Ursa Major and Ursa Minor. Tamora's sons are referred to in the play as "bear-whelps" (*Titus* 4.1.96). In the early modern period she-bears were believed to be sexually promiscuous as a result of which their cubs were born deformed and had to be "licked" into shape by their mothers (Carter 2010: 38). In this rich mesh of possible mythological allusions, Shakespearean Tamora emerges as a pregnant mother-bear. However,

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27 The term "patriarchal institution of motherhood" comes from Rich's *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (Rich 1995: 34). For a brief but systematic historical account of institutionalized maternity, see (Greenfield 2015: 1–33).

28 The myth can be found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in Book II, lines 405–531.

in her indifference to Lavinia's plight she once again resembles cruel Diana who failed to show compassion to Callisto, a rape victim who had got pregnant as a result of her violation. Quite symbolically, Callisto is raped by Jupiter in Diana's bodily shape, metaphorically underscoring the double nature of her victimization – Jupiter's rape and Diana's second rape of banishment. Since the rape of Lavinia is plotted by Aaron, it can be read as "rape by proxy" (Ndiaye 2016: 60). If this is the case, then Tamora, as much as Aaron, is the proxy – similarly to Diana in Callisto's case. Pushed further, this parallel frames Lavinia's violated body as potentially pregnant.

4. "To wait, said I? To wanton with this queen" (*Titus* 1.1.520): Aaron's reproductive interventions

It is through the female reproductive body that the Roman body politic is violated. From the start, Aaron effectively maintains his liminal position in between the Goths and the Romans only to demonstrate that his loyalty to Tamora can only last as long as it serves him and his legacy – as he sees his son. Aaron's position as a double agent of chaos is perfectly captured in the scene when he buries gold to frame Titus's sons. This act is blatantly sexual as this planted seed "will beget / A very excellent piece of villainy" (*Titus* 2.2.6–7). The "alms out of the empress' chest" (*Titus* 2.2.9) are not only an ironic perversion of the imperial charity but a literal prefiguration of Tamora's bodily fruit. The image of conception as planting a seed in fertile ground is a staple pregnancy metaphor in early modern texts. Here the image is made more potent by exchanging seed for gold, by which Shakespeare is possibly making a comment on England's imperial and colonial ambitions. Hall (1995: 84) persuasively argues that the disdain for material wealth over spiritual matters in English Renaissance sonnet sequences "masks a pan-European avarice" and "the desire for foreign gold". When Aaron gleefully buries the gold so that its theft will be attributed to Titus's sons, he performs a genius act of subversion. He also brutally unmasks the imperialist Roman project. If, as Hall argues, Titania and Oberon's argument over the pregnant Indian maid in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a "gendered contest over proper control of foreign merchandise" (Hall 1995: 85), then Aaron's subversion also marks a power struggle in which the reproductive body is a means of infiltrating and deconstructing an imperialist, colonialist enterprise.

Aaron will bury or has already buried his seed in Tamora's fertile soil. More ominously, since he is preparing ground for the rape on Lavinia, he signals a specter of pregnancy resulting from the impending rape. Such a possibility is confirmed by Titus in act 5, scene 2 before he executes her: "Here stands the spring whom you have stained with mud, / This goodly summer with your winter

mixed" (*Titus* 5.2.169–171). The threat of miscegenation is captured in "the union of the wintry Gothic north and the summery Roman south", a contrast of Lavinia's southern darker complexion and Gothic ultra-whiteness (Royster 2000: 449). The imagery of mud mixing with spring water recalls reproductive fluids, with the male seed conceptualized in medical treatises as thicker and more potent, and the female fluids as watery and tractable. Aaron's double assault on the Roman body politic is first signaled in his subversive, self-defining soliloquy, which provides a climactic moment of act 1:

> Now climbeth Tamora Olympus' top,
> Safe out of Fortune's shot, and sits aloft,
> Secure of thunder's crack or lightning flash,
> Advanced above pale Envy's threat'ning reach.
> As when the golden sun salutes the morn
> And, having gilt the ocean with his beams,
> Gallops the zodiac in his glistering coach
> And overlooks the highest-peering hills,
> So Tamora.
> Upon her wit doth earthly honor wait,
> And virtue stoops and trembles at her frown
>
> (*Titus* 1.1.500–510).

Like a Renaissance sonneteer Aaron utilizes the imagery of natural light – the lightening flash, golden Sun beams heightened through their reflection in ocean waters and a glistening coach. Ultra-white Tamora's advance even makes Envy's visage look pale.

As Hall (1995: 227) demonstrates, in English early modern portraiture the contrast between black and white points to "the organization of property and gender", according to which white female bodies enable a delineation of national identity by being offset by commodified black bodies. Seventeenth-century portraits featuring Africans become indicative of England's growing dependence on "an involvement in Africa for economic expansion and symbolic definition" (Hall 1995: 227). Aaron's vision prefigures the rise of such portraiture when he visualizes himself next to his "imperial mistress", adorned in costly jewels, the direct fruits of colonial expansion and international trade: "I will be bright, and shine in pearl and gold / To wait upon this new-made empress" (*Titus* 1.1.518–519). However, his musings have a twist; "To wait, said I? To wanton with this queen, / This goddess, this Semiramis, this nymph, / This siren that will charm Rome's Saturnine / And see his shipwreck and his commonweal's" (*Titus* 1.1.520–524). Rather than serving her, Aaron more readily sees her dependence on him. He is not a benign, innocuous black child-slave of the English seventeenth-century portraiture but a rock to which Tamora's

body is chained like "Prometheus to Caucasus" (*Titus* 1.1.516).[29] Far from being an equal partnership, this is a total reversal of the bodily economy of white and black bodies in the period.

When Aaron imagines Tamora's rise to power he sees it in terms of bodily expansion; the higher she is the more untouchable she becomes. When he delivers his soliloquy he may know that Tamora is swelling with his baby. Her position as Empress in patriarchal Rome would be solidified through the birth of the Emperor's son but, in this case, it is Aaron who metaphorically and literally plants his seed in, what is now, the Roman fertile land. It is this seed that will bring about Saturninus's "shipwreck and his commonweal's" (*Titus* 1.1.524). Aaron verbalizes a direct threat of destruction to the Empire resulting from its expansionist and imperialist policies. There seems no better person to actualize English fears of white identity's possible dissolution through miscegenation than Aaron, the Moor.[30] Against the military might of Rome, Aaron weaponizes his own sexual appeal, turning Tamora's reproductive body into a Trojan horse threatening the empire. So far an authoritative maternal figure in control of her newly found power and status, manipulative rather than manipulated, Tamora is nevertheless helpless in the face of her desire for Aaron. If one assumes that Tamora is already pregnant, then her phantasy of love-making amidst the hunting in the forest is a memory of previous risky encounters. Tamora parallels the violent pursuit of the hunt with her own hunger for climax: "Under their sweet shade, Aaron, let us sit, / And whilst the babbling echo mocks the hounds, / Replying shrilly to the well-tuned horns, / As if a double hunt were heard at once, / Let us sit down and mark their yellowing noise" (*Titus* 2.2.16–20). Interestingly, Tamora frames herself as Dido, the African Queen, who became Aeneas's lover and was left heartbroken when he left her to establish Rome (*Titus* 2.2.22). As Hall argues, "[t]he story of Aeneas, the founder of imperial Rome and Dido, the African Queen, provides yet another cautionary tale of the threat of female sexuality to colonial expansion when Dido's passion is read as diverting Aeneas from the task of empire" (Hall 1995: 153). Tamora's sexuality indeed emerges as disruptive and threatening to the empire. Her "African-ness" is coded here through her sexual union with Aaron. Ironically, Aaron, as opposed

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29 As a side note, it is worth mentioning that the Lesser Caucasus Mountains are mostly of volcanic origin, so they are black rocks. Shakespeare could not have known that but he possibly visualized a white body at the backdrop of black rocks.

30 Elsewhere, Loomba (2002: 41) enumerates Shakespearean interracial liaisons and comments on the contentious nature of these relationships by saying: "Sexual contact across races and cultures is scandalous: thus the actual or potential liaisons between Othello and Desdemona, Cleopatra and Antony, Caliban and Miranda, Claribel and the king of Tunis, Morocco and Portia, Launcelot and the Moorish woman, and Aaron and Tamora are all regarded with horror by several, if not all the characters in the plays". For more on interracial relationships in the early modern context, see Seed (2000: 211).

to the empire-building Aeneas, is an artful dissembler. Yet his son will get to live amongst the Romans, leaving a lasting presence in and possibly enforcing a new definition of "Roman-ness".

Following Lawrence, Loomba (1989: 52) argues: "…what is especially threatening for white patriarchy is the possibility of the complicity of white women; their desire for black lovers is feared, forbidden, but always imminent. The spectre of combined black and female insubordination threatens to undermine white manhood and the Empire at a stroke …. The effort then becomes to project the white woman's desire as provoked by the animalistic lust of the black man…". Countering stereotypical portrayals of black sexuality, Aaron, as opposed to Tamora, can control his desire (Royster 2000: 447). However, he stirs uncontrollable lust in Tamora and thus their union is unavoidable. When Bassianus verbally assaults Tamora in the forest, he has no illusions as to the nature of Tamora and Aaron's encounter: "Believe me, queen, your swarthy Cimmerian / Doth make your honor of his body's hue, / Spotted, detested, and abominable. / Why are you sequestered from all your train, / Dismounted from your snow-white goodly steed, / And wandered hither to an obscure plot, / Accompanied but with a barbarous Moor, / If foul desire had not conducted you?" (*Titus* 2.2.72–79). Tamora's whiteness is once again heightened, this time by a comparison to her "snow-white" horse. The repository of racial slurs also comes from the animal world, since Aaron's hue is "spotted", while his union with Tamora is referred to as "raven-coloured love" (*Titus* 2.2.82).

By entering a sexual union with Aaron, Tamora withdraws from the world of men into the world of beasts. Lavinia quite directly accuses Tamora of infidelity; "Ay, for these slips have made him noted long. / Good king to be so mightily abused!" (*Titus* 2.2.86–87). Interestingly, Lavinia's horticultural metaphor points to the gradually-forming fetus in Tamora's womb. "Slips" understood as horticultural manipulations are often used in early modern drama to discuss misalliances.[31] Here "slips", besides a more literal meaning of moral missteps, may refer to parts of a plant cut to propagate a new plant through rooting or grafting. The multiplicity of meaning in Lavinia's accusation ominously fuses the threat of miscegenation with the moral outrage resulting from its materialization. Tamora's union with Aaron is then seen as an unnatural manipulation that goes beyond the socially accepted codes – the result of such human manipulation can only result in monstrosity. Pregnancy then becomes a sight of a discursive collision of racial and gender discriminatory formulations.

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[31] See Perdita's famous discussion of grafting with Polixenes in *The Winter's Tale* (4.4) or The Duchess's insights into grafting in her conversation with Bosola in Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* (2.1).

5. "Have I not reason, think you, to look pale?" (*Titus* 2.2.91): Tamora's pregnant embodiment

Although heavily immersed in communal female culture, pregnancy is most often described by male early modern authors against the world of nature.[32] Women's behaviors are filtered through observations on animal generative patterns. For instance, Guillemeau writes:

> Some women when they be with child hate the companie of their husbands: which quality is said also to be in brute beasts when they be great with yong, who commonly shun the company of the Male. And surely there be certaine times and seasons of the yeare proper for brute beasts to couple, but man (as *Pliny* saith) hath neither time nor season limited him, neither day nor howre appointed him, that so he might haue his desire at all times: which hath been thus ordained by nature, as being more fit, and necessary for man to multiplie in his kind he being (the liuely image of God, and made to behold his glory) then for brute beasts, which were created onely for the vse of man (Guillemeau 1612: 7).

Guillemeau compares a pregnant woman who shuns her husband's company to a beast. At the same time, he observes that men have no mating season so their desire might and should be satisfied at any time. Tamora indeed withdraws from the company of her husband but her proximity to beasts is underscored by her willingness to be with Aaron.[33] Given conflicting opinions on intercourse during pregnancy, with early modern physicians claiming that even animals refrain from sex while pregnant,[34] Tamora lusting for Aaron, at the same time carrying a baby, might have seemed particularly beastly to the early moderns. In the eyes of Lavinia pleading for mercy, Tamora is beyond ordinary animal bestiality. Even animals find reserves of maternal compassion:

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32 The founding scientific texts of the early modern period – Aristotle's *Generation of Animals* or Galen's work on generation and reproduction – are ancient precedents to the presentation of female pregnancy against the reproductive patterns of animals. Such a procedure seems natural at a first glance, but it often has an ideological ulterior motive: presenting women as inferior, beastly and animal-like. For more on pregnancy and female relations with animals, see Gowing (2013: 131).

33 Tamora's 'beastly' nature is explored by numerous scholars, though it is rarely connected with her pregnancy. Carter (2010: 48) contrasts Tamora with her mythological counterparts – Hecuba, Medea, or Procne – and discusses the early modern reception of these characters as beastly and animalistic, not dignified and driven as they would be in original ancient works.

34 For an interesting discussion on sexual activity during pregnancy and breast-feeding in early modern England, see Crawford (2015: 61) who writes: "The widespread belief that the effects of sex on both pregnancy and lactation were harmful created a competition between a husband and his child for access to woman's body".

> 'Tis true; the raven doth not hatch a lark.
> Yet have I heard — O, could I find it now! —
> The lion, moved with pity, did endure
> To have his princely paws pared all away.
> Some say that ravens foster forlorn children,
> The whilst their own birds famish in their nests
>
> (*Titus* 2.2.149–154).

The coding of Tamora as a raven points to an inner, moral blackness, but it also signals the taint of her relationship with Aaron. Tamora-the-mother will definitely not allow her own children to be wanting for the sake of others. Rather than self-sacrificing and altruistic, hers is a self-centered and all-encompassing maternity. This is an image so radically opposed to the conventional, patriarchal conceptualization of motherhood that confounded Lavinia calls out "No grace, no womanhood? Ah, beastly creature, / The blot and enemy to our general name, / Confusion fall—" (*Titus* 2.2.182–185).

Through her unconformity Tamora embodies a radical defiance to conventional conceptualizations of motherhood. However, the repeated references to her moral black taint frame her as lacking the self-restraint and control of the male, apparently reasonable characters. If Tamora is pregnant, then her agency and subjectivity are split and she is at the mercy of physiological impulses that cannot be contained.[35] The changes taking place within her body are visible enough to be spotted by Demetrius who worryingly asks: "How now, dear sovereign and our gracious mother, / Why doth your Highness look so pale and wan?" (*Titus* 2.2.89–90). Possibly, she looks pale because of her anger at being verbally abused by Bassianus, but the word "wan" suggests paleness as a result of an illness.[36] Pregnancy was seen in the period as a state of disease, an aberrant condition starkly contrasting with that of good health (Pollock 2013: 46–47). So, Tamora's paleness may indicate faintness or weakness directly resulting from her pregnant embodiment. Faced with her sons' worry, Tamora offers a lengthy explanation:

> Have I not reason, think you, to look pale?
> These two have 'ticed me hither to this place,
> A barren, detested vale you see it is;
> The trees, though summer, yet forlorn and lean,
> Overcome with moss and baleful mistletoe.

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35 I am borrowing the term "split subjectivity" from Kristeva's conceptualization of pregnancy in "Motherhood According to Giovanni Bellini — The Maternal Body". Kristeva (2002: 301) observes that pregnant embodiment is "split" and therefore a woman is no longer in full control of her body; "'It happens, but I'm not there.' 'I cannot realize it, but it goes on'".

36 Paradoxically, the word's original meaning is 'dark' (*Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*).

> Here never shines the sun, here nothing breeds,
> Unless the nightly owl or fatal raven.
> And when they showed me this abhorred pit,
> They told me, here at dead time of the night
> A thousand fiends, a thousand hissing snakes,
> Ten thousand swelling toads, as many urchins,
> Would make such fearful and confused cries
> As any mortal body hearing it
> Should straight fall mad, or else die suddenly
>
> (*Titus* 2.2.91–104).

The audience knows that the bulk of what Tamora tells Demetrius and Chiron is not true, after all, she came to the pit with Aaron willingly. Moreover, she had a somewhat different vision of the place before Lavinia and Bassianus arrived. Yet Tamora's monologue may be indicative of a larger fear lodged in her now that she has been directly confronted about her affair and its fruit developing in her belly. If this is the case, this is the only glimpse one gets into Tamora's experience of her pregnancy. Tamora's frightening vision of a "detested vale" and "abhorred pit", like other references to pits and receptables, clearly recalls womb imagery. Hers is a vision of abundance and excess "overcome with moss and baleful mistletoe"; with mistletoe being an obligate parasite, unable to fulfill its lifecycle without exploiting its host – a frightening vision of pregnancy economy indeed.[37] Confronted with the fetus's threatening materialization Tamora may now realize that the baby is Aaron's. The threat of the interracial issue is communicated through the imagery of darkness and night birds like owls and ravens. The hellish phantasm of snakes and urchins may be a projection of Tamora's paralyzing fears of labor, possibly death in childbirth or death as punishment for her socially condemnable affair. On the point of fainting, with her agency impeded now that she is growing paralyzed by her stifling pregnancy, Tamora takes advantage of her maternal authority and conditional love. She calls on her children to take over her vengeance plan: "Revenge it as you love your mother's life, / Or be you not henceforth called my children" (*Titus* 2.2.114–115).

6. "But let her rest in her unrest awhile.—" (*Titus* 4.2.31): Tamora's labor, postpartum period, and monstrous issue, Aaron's rewriting of reproductive scripts

With her growing belly, Tamora's agency gradually diminishes until the moment when she disappears behind the closed doors of her birthing room, while the atmosphere of descent into ravenous bestiality is communicated through the

[37] See de Beauvoir's (2011 [1949]: 615–616) conceptualization of pregnancy as hosting a parasite in one's body.

recurring image of "the loathsome pit" (*Titus* 2.2.193). In her own speech following Demetrius and Chiron's arrival to the scene, Tamora mentions "this abhorred pit", which will later become the grave for Bassianus, and "the swallowing womb" that will devour Martius and Quintus (*Titus* 2.2.98, 239). The female womb gorges on life, rather than forms a new one. Young (2005: 10) argues that "[f]rom the point of view of dominant discourse, pregnancy is a deviant condition, a temporary inconvenience instrumental to the social value of babies". Tamora's baby emerges as a highly problematic issue for all involved, as a fruit of an illicit and interracial relation it emerges as a monster in its own right. Yet Tamora's decision to have it killed, rather than let it be a living embodiment of her shame, is meant to underscore her perverted maternity. There is an inherent contradiction here. On the one hand, the baby is a living proof of Tamora's descent into bestiality. On the other, any attempts at fixing the broken social mores only serve to highlight Tamora's further degeneration, even if her attempts are meant to save her living children.

Tamora's elusive, only partially recognized pregnancy fully materializes only when Aaron expresses his regret at not having her by his side to praise his machinations: "But were our witty empress well afoot, / She would applaud Andronicus' conceit. / But let her rest in her unrest awhile.—" (*Titus* 4.2.29–31). Even then the nature of Tamora's incapacity is not entirely clear, while Chiron and Demetrius muse on their sexual exploits. The lack of Tamora's authoritative presence is sorely felt by Aaron and ironically commented on: "Here lacks but your mother for to say amen" (*Titus* 4.2.44). The male reactions to Tamora's labor are inconsistent. Demetrius calls for prayers, acknowledging the seriousness of Tamora's condition: "Come, let us go and pray to all the gods / For our beloved mother in her pains" (*Titus* 4.2.46–47). Despite the prevalent beliefs in the seriousness of childbirth,[38] for Aaron Tamora's labor is indeed a momentary inconvenience. Neither the immediate threat to her life nor the potential ramifications of the birth are acknowledged by the male witnesses waiting outside the birthing chamber. Only in an aside does Aaron confirm that he is expecting bad news, though, as it transpires, his worry revolves around the baby, not Tamora herself: "Pray to the devils; the gods / have given us over" (*Titus* 4.2.48). When the Nurse announces: "She is delivered, lords, she is delivered", Aaron's pointed question "To whom?" signals his full understanding of his potential paternity (*Titus*, 4.2.62, 63). The Nurse, very much like the Old Lady in

[38] According to Crawford (2013: 22) between 6–7% of women died in childbed. One can assume that pregnancy and labor were treated by many women as a deeply worrying and existential prospect. As Pollock (2013: 47) claims: "Notwithstanding the relatively low maternal mortality rate, it is still possible that childbirth was imbued with dread. Childbirth was a very conspicuous single cause of mortality and a fate which a prospective mother had several long months to contemplate".

Henry VIII is reluctant to disclose the full truth and prevaricates: "I mean she is brought abed" (*Titus,* 4.2.71). Rather than demonstrating maternal authority encapsulated in the female exclusive birthing ritual,[39] the Nurse's fearful entrance and juggling of the truth unveils Tamora's radical diminishment and her attendants' vulnerability. The birthing room becomes a contested space where race and gender discourses clash with maternal and paternal economies.

In an act of naming paternity, the Nurse hands the baby to Aaron and announces: "A joyless, dismal, black, and sorrowful issue! / Here is the babe, as loathsome as a toad / Amongst the fair-faced breeders of our clime / The empress sends it thee, thy stamp, thy seal, / And bids the christen it with thy dagger's point" (*Titus* 4.2.69–73).[40] The nurse's extreme condemnation clashes with Aaron's forceful defense of the baby's physicality, laying bare the relativity of perception or, more precisely, social constructiveness of both race and able-bodiedness. Aaron's son is "black" and therefore "dismal" and "sorrowful" but his blackness is coded as deformity. The diagnosis of "toad" signals some perceived physical deformities. Paré in his *Des Monstres et prodiges* recalls the following story:

> In the year 1517, in the parish of Bois-le-Roy, in the forest of Bièvte, on the road to Fontainebleau, a child was born having the face of a frog. He was seen and visited by Maistre Jean Bellanger, surgeon to the King's artillery, in the presence of gentlemen from the Court of Harmois… The aforementioned Bellanger, a man of good sense, wanting to know the cause of this monster, inquired of the father what could have been the cause of it. The father replied that he thought it was because his wife, who was suffering from fever, had followed a neighbour's advice that she should hold a live frog in her hand until it was dead. That night, she went to bed with her husband, still having the frog in her hand; her husband and she embraced and she conceived; and by the power of imagination, this monster had thus been produced (Paré quoted in Huet 1993: 16).

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39 For more on the early modern birth ritual, see Wilson (2002, 2013) and Bicks (2003). The early modern birth ritual has frequently been read as potentially disruptive to dominant patriarchal ideology. Men were excluded from it and had to depend on the midwife's testimony for the truth about paternity. The exclusivity of the ritual opens up possibilities for female subversion of the dominant ideology. As Bicks (2003: 8) argues: "the unusual freedom women had during the time of childbirth and recovery, has led to another kind of marginalization: the private world of the birthroom becomes a limited space of female dissidence formed in reaction to a public, central male sphere. Building in part on Bakhtin's analysis of carnivalesque births as expressions of resistance, critics posit that the rituals surrounding birth challenged social norms — but only temporarily — by putting women on top during the time of labor and recovery". Bicks follows the argumentation first outlined by Davis (1975: 131) in her article "Women on Top", where she analyses various forms of dissidence, e.g., cross-dressing, skimmington, and unprecedented power that women held during pregnancy and lying-in.

40 Loomba (2002: 52) comments on the contentious presence of the baby: "By bringing this baby on stage, Shakespeare was doing something entirely unprecedented, but it was also a scene he never repeated. Aaron's son is the only child of an interracial couple that we actually see on the early modern stage in England".

Shakespeare subtly reworks the discourse of the maternal monstrous imagination, according to which women's unruly imaginations lead to their babies' deformities,[41] in order to reinvestigate the paternal and maternal contribution to the generative process and to interrogate the social demonization of blackness. So, on the one hand, Tamora's previous actions as well as her monstrous fantasy found in act 2, scene 3 where she talks of her imminent death and, surprisingly, "swelling toads", provide a subtle link to the monstrous imagination theme (*Titus* 2.3.101). Demetrius, attempting to kill the baby on the spot, refers to it as "tadpole", hinting at the child's abnormal, underdeveloped, or fetus-like form (*Titus* 4.2.87).

On the other hand, Aaron's defense of the baby questions the Nurse's and Demetrius's exaggerated visions of monstrosity. Aaron angrily snaps at the nurse: "Zounds, ye whore, is black so base a hue?", while sweetly addressing the baby "Sweet blowze, you are a beauteous blossom, sure" (*Titus* 4.2.72). For Aaron, the child's only distinctive quality is its "hue", though even the child's apparent blackness is questioned by the ironic "sweet blowze". As LaPerle (2019: 147) argues "Aaron mounts an inspired argument for the constancy and vigour of the black body". When Aaron calls Chiron and Demetrius "white-limed walls, … alehouse painted signs", simultaneously celebrating "coal-black" he reverses the early modern idea that whiteness is somehow original, while blackness "an aberration" of the norm (*Titus* 4.2.108, 109).[42] Blackness becomes "a sign of permanence and constancy" (Royster 2000: 443).

The concept of maternal impression, hinted at by the Nurse, conceptualizes the baby's blackness in terms of an aberration, mobilizing the early modern medical discourse to uphold this view. The Nurse sees the child's blackness as Aaron's "stamp" and "seal" (*Titus*, 4.2.72). Her vocabulary very much recalls the discourse of maternal impression. In *The Tragical History of Titus Andronicus* (1594), a chapbook fictional history – either a source text for Shakespeare or a

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41 For more on the female monstrous imagination, see Huet (1993), Finucci (2001), or Crawford (2012). Most early modern scholars reference Empedocles, credited with the origin of the enduring view that progeny might be transformed in a woman's womb by the images she studies (Huet 1993: 4–5). In 1573 Paré published *Des Monstres et prodiges* in which he followed Aristotle, Hippocrates, and Empedocles in blaming woman's unruly imagination for deformities in newborn babies (Huet 1993: 14). No wonder then that his pupil Guillemeau (1612: 26) writes in his midwifery book: "A woman with child must haue a setled and quiet mind, which Auicen also counselleth, that those which haue conceiued, ought to be preser|ued from all feare, sadnesse, and disquietnes of mind, without speaking or doing any thing that may offend or vexe them; so that discreet women, and such as desire to haue children, will not giue eare vnto lamentable and fearefull tales or storyes, nor cast their eyes vpon pictures or persons which are vglie or deformed, least the imagination im|print on the child the similitude of the said person or picture". Guillemeau's advice, although disguised as care, provides in reality the grounds for the policing of not only women's bodies but also their minds.

42 For more, see Hall (1995: 13).

derivative text[43] – Attava, Queen of the Goths, manages to convince the Emperor that her baby was legitimate and turned black due to the forces of imagination:

> She had a Moor as revengeful as herself, whom she trusted in many great affairs, and was usually privy to her secrets, so far that from private dalliances she grew pregnant, and brought forth a blackamoor child. This grieved the Emperor extremely, but she allayed his anger by telling him it was conceived by the force of imagination, and brought many suborned women and physicians to testify the like had often happened (Anonymous 1988 [1594]: 199).

Summoning doctors and midwives in order to defend her against accusations of infidelity, Attava takes full advantage of the pseudoscientific consensus on the female faulty imagination and manages to persuade her husband that the very proximity of her black servant resulted in fetal degeneration. That blackness is coded as a deformity in the period is very poignantly illustrated by the frontispiece of *Aristotle's Masterpiece*, a midwifery manual first published in 1684. The image presents two monsters: a hairy woman whose mother spent too much time looking at an illustration of St. John the Baptist in animal skins and a black child born to white people who had a picture of a black man in their bedroom (Fissell 2003: 44). Medical consensus places the blame for monstrous births on the female imagination, whereby it is the female body (and mind) that become imperfect sites of generation. Although the medical authority of female birth attendants and midwives helps to save both Attava and her baby, impressing blackness is nevertheless seen as an abnormality.

The chapbook clearly signals the conventional female dominance of the birthing process. Shakespeare replicates the solidarity that the female medical attendants demonstrate in aiding Attava, as Tamora's gossips loyally do her bidding. Although fearful, the Nurse communicates Tamora's wish to "christen" the baby with the "dagger's point" (*Titus* 4.2.71).[44] Backed by her experience as

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[43] Waith provides a brief outline of the scholarly debate on the texts' chronological order with Adams claiming that the chapbook history had to be a source for Shakespeare and Mincoff challenging him and arguing that both the history and the ballad were derivatives of the play. For more on the debate, see Waith (1988: 28–32). The play's newest editor, Bate (2018: 82–84) argues for Shakespeare's originality in shaping the key conflicts of the tragedy, definitively claiming that the chapbook is a derivative.

[44] The birth attendants' behavior in the play is quite confounding. They definitely go against the good professional practices. Historical research concerning infanticide in early modern England confirms that many single women who found themselves pregnant had to conceal their pregnancies, give birth in secret and resort to murder when faced with the prospect of being found out (Gowing 1997: 90). However, as Gowing (1997: 105) argues, "[i]n more public births, the role that witnesses played marked the stark difference between legitimate and illegitimate labour. For single women in labour, other women featured not as support, but as threats. Midwives were there not just to give help but examine the truth and to withhold, if necessary, their help until the mother confessed the father's name". Due to Tamora's position as the

a medical practitioner, the Nurse first relies on the received knowledge of maternal impressions to categorize the baby's appearance as deformed only to call for its death. Aaron obviously recognizes characteristic features of black bodies when he talks of his own "fleece of woolly hair" and describes his son as "a young lad framed of another leer" and a "thick-lipped slave" (*Titus* 2.2.34; 4.2.121, 177).[45] However, in the Nurse's eyes, the child's distinctively racialized bodily markers are signs of monstrosity. Met with Aaron's forceful "It shall not die", the Nurse coldly announces: "Aaron, it must: the mother wills it so" (*Titus*, 4.2.83, 84). Given that the midwife's oath criminalizes any attempts at a subversion of the ritual – explicitly warning midwives against endangering babies in any way[46] – the Nurse's faithful relaying of the command to kill the infant signals the highest state of alarm and disgust, justifying the monster's death. Although the child's death is the mother's "will", it is the medicalized coding of blackness as an aberration that justifies violence on the black body of a child.

Aaron's paternal intervention is not only meant to be a single redeeming quality of the Machiavellian villain.[47] Neither is Aaron's self-sacrificing fatherhood merely shaped to strategically contrast with Tamora's opportunism. Rather Aaron challenges both the prevalent medical notions of the generative patterns in the period and the tenuously established maternal authority. Although stepping into a female-exclusive domain and threatening female generative authority, Aaron, in fact says much to democratize and normalize both the female and male contribution to generation. Stopping Demetrius and Chiron's murderous designs, he patiently explains: "He is your brother, lords, sensibly fed / Of that self blood that first gave life to you, / And from that womb where you imprisoned were / He is enfranchised and come to light. / Nay, he is your brother by the surer side, / Although my seal be stamped in his face" (*Titus* 4.2.121). Unlike a voracious animal of the early modern medical texts, Tamora's womb has sensibly and democratically fed all her children. In Aaron's account, each pregnancy has meant

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Empress of Rome and the wife of Saturninus, her pregnancy and subsequent labor are very much public affairs. She is not a single, pregnant woman who defies the only available roles for women; of a maid or wife. However, her infidelity to her husband does expose her to the same risks as early modern unmarried expecting women. Still, her birth attendants follow her instructions, which may be one more argument in favor of her overpowering maternal authority.

45 Ndiaye argues that "Aaron might see his own image in his child for affective reasons, and because he is, at that moment, engaging in a defense of blackness per se (this hypothesis is strengthened by the greater sensitivity to racial nuances and hybridity that Aaron manifests when he calls his son a 'tawny slave, half me and half thy dam' at 5.1.l.28)" (Ndiaye 2016: 69). It is very probable that the baby is similar to both his mother and father.

46 For the whole text of the midwife's oath from 1567, see Cressy (1999: 64–66).

47 Critics have long seen Aaron's saving of his son as just that. See, e.g., Boyd (1997: 494) who argues: "the birth of Aaron's own child, which has long been seen as the most Shakespearean touch in *Titus Andronicus*, not only adds new conflict and enriches Aaron's character but also introduces a complex structural contrast".

a momentary, mutual imprisonment for the fetus and, possibly, Tamora, too. The mother's side is a "surer side", free from the patriarchal paranoia of paternity unknowability.[48] Rather than a script of monstrosity or degeneration, Aaron offers a tale presenting one possibility on the spectrum of the reproductive norm. Simultaneously, the child resembles the father. As Finucci (2001: 48) outlines: "[g]iven men's 'stronger' semen and 'hotter' nature, children were supposed to resemble their fathers more than their mothers, especially, of course, boys, because like generates like. Paternal imagination was a plus in forming 'perfect; offspring". Boose (1993: 44–45) argues that although the black baby's birth illustrates a threatening "dominance of black pigmentation", it confirms "the deepest patriarchal fantasy of male parthenogenesis".[49] Following Boose, Royster (2000: 451) believes that "Aaron erases the mark of Tamora's influence". Although Aaron defies Tamora's maternal authority, he is far from ignoring her generative contribution. On the contrary, he repeatedly capitalizes on the baby's maternal origin.

In Aaron's own words reproduction is far from a contest over a decisive contribution but a matter of democratic give and take. The soldier who captures Aaron with the baby recalls the words he had eavesdropped:

> … suddenly
> I heard a child cry underneath a wall.
> I made unto the noise, when soon I heard
> The crying babe controlled with this discourse:
> "Peace, tawny slave, half me and half thy dame!
> Did not thy hue bewray whose brat thou art,
> Had nature lent thee but thy mother's look,
> Villain, thou mightst have been an emperor.
> But where the bull and cow are both milk white,
> They never do beget a coal-black calf.
> Peace, villain, peace!" — even thus he rates the babe —
> "For I must bear thee to a trusty Goth
> Who, when he knows thou art the Empress' babe,
> Will hold thee dearly for thy mother's sake.
>
> (*Titus* 5.1.23–36).

There is no reason to think that Aaron's words are political doublespeak as he does not know that he is being heard. He does not have any reasons to defend his child's "royal blood" as yet, but still he decidedly sees the baby as "half" him and

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48 On the instability of paternity and attempts at fixing paternity narratives, see Bicks (2000: 50–52; 2003: 10–11, 24–25), and Finucci (2001: 59–60).

49 Adelman (1992: 9–10) also argues that the construction of masculine identity in the period is possible through a violent "containment of maternal power", which is inescapably contaminated and threatens to engulf the male subject.

"half" the mother. Moreover, Aaron's prefigurative and hence revolutionary understanding of genetics starkly contrasts with early modern patriarchal orthodoxy that would praise the paternal generative contribution over the maternal or see the child's blackness as indicative of unfulfilled desires or sin. The child's blackness is rather an effect of chance, with the story of a "fair" child born to Aaron's black "countryman" Muliteus and his white wife confirming the fickleness and haphazardness of heredity (*Titus* 4.2.150–163).[50] As much as Muliteus's child can pass as white, Aaron's baby is evidently too black. It is only chance that stands in the way of Aaron's son; the budding gender and race ideology is to blame, not any natural, biological contingencies. Aaron radically dismantles the theory of maternal imagination as "milk white" bull and cow can never have a "coal-black" calf; both parents' contribution influences the child's hereditary make-up.

Since human control over the physiological workings of reproduction is limited, the one thing Aaron can try to shape is the politics of the birthing chamber and maternal prerogative. For this reason Aaron promptly kills the Nurse; "O Lord, sir, 'tis a deed of policy. / Shall she live to betray this guilt of ours, / A long-tongued babbling gossip? No, lords, no" (*Titus* 4.2.150–152). As Detmer-Goebel (2015: 83–84) argues, "Aaron denies Tamora's legal right based on the gender imperative that gives the fathers power over their own". Aaron's rash murder also prevents the reliance on the supposedly female-exclusive narrative surrounding the imperial son's paternity. Aaron unveils male anxieties over the female control of paternity, "a growing concern of men that it is up to a woman to define masculinity" (Bicks 2003: 24), but his actions unveil a more complex set of ideological dependencies. As demonstrated, the so-called female narrative is already burdened with patriarchal contingencies like the male-generated paranoias: female monstrous imagination, female biological fallibility, or female inherent guilt in cases of fetal abnormalities. What Aaron's decisions illustrate, then, is the potency of the ideology behind seemingly female-exclusive birth narratives along with its female agents' total vulnerability in the face of blunt force. "The babbling gossip" or "the ladies" that "tattle" predominantly serve white males (*Titus* 4.2.169). In reality the potency of the birthing narrative

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[50] Although all quotations in the main text come from Bate's edition of the play, I decided to keep Muliteus' name as it was printed in the original Quarto 1 from 1594. The one time Muliteus is mentioned in the text, Bate opts for "Muly lives" in line 154 instead of Muliteus of Quarto 1. Bate believes that Muliteus is a transcriber's misspelling, whereas Muly is a more believable name for an African. He uses Peele's *Battle of Alcazar* and its Muly Mahomet as a precedent (Shakespeare 2018: 269). However, Kunat (2019: 108) believes this interpretation to be Eurocentric: "the Latinized form of the name appears deliberate and raises the possibility that Muliteus has been assimilated into Roman society". I follow Kunat's interpretation and the original Quarto spelling. Since part of my argument is that Aaron effectively infiltrates Roman society it makes more sense to argue that Muliteus is also a well-assimilated Roman citizen.

is delineated by how much men are ready to concede. Aaron's assault on the institution of the birth ritual unveils white patriarchy's power underpinning reproductive scripts. Rather than drawing sharp lines between male and female loyalties Aaron's bloody resolution to the birth ritual undercuts a mesh of ideological interdependencies that undermine two sites of threatening difference in the play: reproductive, non-conformist Tamora and black Aaron.

Contrasted with Aaron's ultimately self-sacrificing fatherhood, Tamora's attempted infanticide casts a shadow on her already tarred maternal record. If Tamora so fiercely loves her adult sons, her decision to send away her newly-born son complicates her otherwise passionate mothering. Maternal love in the early modern period was believed to be natural and treated as a given: "A mother who claimed that she could not love her children was diagnosed as insane" (Crawford 2013: 12).[51] Badinter in *The Myth of Motherhood: An Historical View of the Maternal Instinct* deconstructs the myth of universal maternal love in early modern France. Following statistical data on infant mortality, she illustrates how the widespread practice of wet-nursing was a socially sanctioned form of infanticide, with a passing of a child in early modern France seen as an almost banal occurrence (Badinter 1982 [1981]: 112). Badinter (1982 [1981]: xx–xxii) argues that the widespread, unquestioning acceptance of the phenomenon demonstrates that maternal love is not automatic or instinctive but rather a product of the care and time a mother devotes to her children. In their absence maternal indifference becomes more comprehensible. Because Tamora's baby's supposed monstrosity is communicated by the Nurse, there is no access to her actual feelings about her newborn. What is clear, though, is that the baby's existence threatens not only her but also her living sons. She sends the baby away immediately before any attachment is possible. Tamora's maternal bond with her adult sons is grounded in the long process of nursing and bringing them up, which is referenced by Lavinia when she talks of "The milk thou suck'st from her…" (*Titus* 2.3.144). Tamora may have inverted the socially expected model of mothering as in her nursing she had passed onto her sons the propensity for violence, but the bond resulting from postnatal care is unquestionable. It appears that, for the sake of her adult sons, Tamora prevents herself from forming a similar attachment to Aaron's son. She attempts to distance her motherhood from the generative process, thereby 'disentangling' her maternity from her childbearing. However cruel her actions seem, the fact remains that she has to do something to resolve her maternal conundrum. Moreover, whatever she does, in the face of the patriarchal institution of motherhood, it can only confirm her apparent monstrosity.[52]

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[51] Crawford follows MacDonald (1983: 83–84), who investigates instances of women treated as mad due to their lack of maternal feelings.

[52] For a brief but comprehensive account of female "monstrosity", "othering" techniques,

The aftermath of Tamora's labor only reaffirms the problematic entangling of pregnancy experiences and expected productive, self-sacrificing motherhood. In the face of the problematic child-product, in a bizarre post-labor scene, Tamora's pregnancy and labor become non-facts. Rather than being cloistered away in her lying-in chamber, in act 4, scene 4 she appears to be her old commanding self, accompanying Saturninus and influencing his political decisions.[53] There is no indication as to the success of Aaron's plan to supplant his biological son for Muliteus's boy or if Tamora is aware of Aaron's defiance of her command. In an aside she cryptically says: "if Aaron now be wise, / Then is all safe, the anchor in the port" (*Titus* 4.4.37–38). She may be expressing her wish that Aaron would follow her original command, but these words may very well indicate her knowledge of alternative plans, including sequestering the boy among the Goths. Quite tellingly, neither Saturninus nor any other Roman inquires about the Emperor's son. The problematic issue is momentarily erased. So is Tamora's generative experience, stacking up yet more arguments in favor of her unnaturalness.

In order to distance themselves from enslaved African laborers, Europeans used "othering" and "animalizing" techniques "through manipulating symbolic representations of African women's sexuality" (Morgan 2011: 7–8). White European men perpetuated visions of pain-free labors, arguing that black women did not share Eve's curse. The denial of a shared origin was further illustrated by the supposed ability of African women to concomitantly perform hard field work and birth a child. Hence, black women's reproductive bodies were framed into sights of "an immutable difference between Africans and Europeans, a difference ultimately codified as race" (Morgan 2011: 8). Tamora's monstrosity is first coded through her relationship with Aaron, which relegates her to the realm of beastly lust.[54] Then, through the birth of their interracial child she is further denaturalized. The aftermath of labor fossilizes earlier perceptions; Tamora's presence among the

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and inferiorizing the female reproductive body, see Ussher (2005: 1–17).

53 The aftermath of birth was known as the "lying-in" period and lasted about thirty days. As Wilson (2002: 138) points out "lying-in" was most often referred to as "the month", or as "her month". For the first week after birth women were expected to stay in bed and not engage in any activities. All this time they were surrounded by their female companions who drank caudle and ate food brought specially for the occasion. Only after about ten days after birth were women allowed to get out of bed and move around the chamber. The period of lying-in was only ended after about thirty days by a ceremony of "churching", where a new mother would go to church in the procession of her female friends and relatives to give thanks for a safe delivery (Wilson 2013: 75–76).

54 Loomba (2002: 84) argues that it is her status of "an ambitious woman" and her relationship with Aaron, not "any racial difference" that mark Tamora as "alien". However, Royster (2000: 444) argues that "a sexually insatiable Gothic whiteness" defines Tamora as different. Ndiaye (2016: 63) believes Tamora is "Africanized".

Romans soon after giving birth strengthens the impression of an unnatural femininity since the early moderns believed women needed the period of lying-in in order to recuperate. Rather than being incapacitated, Tamora engages in a performance of Revenge, Murder, and Rape before Titus, which almost becomes a grotesque inversion of her lying-in feast. Although she is engaged in fixing the situation, whatever she does only underscores her non-conformity and defiance of patriarchal expectations of reproductive and maternal scripts.

7. Conclusion

Titus Andronicus leaves one with an inconclusive assessment of maternal identity. Tamora's intense maternal affection towards her adult sons starkly contrasts with her indifference to Aaron's son. Her "maternal ambivalence" illustrates how generative experiences simultaneously collide with and deviate from actual mothering practices. Tamora's options are heavily compromised by white patriarchy's expectations of the so-called natural reproduction. In the face of non-conformity, Tamora is rendered unnatural, monstrous, and animalized. The tragedy's coda brings the reinstatement of the patriarchal rule of the Andronici, while Tamora becomes "the horrific devouring mother" (Adelman 1992: 9). In the final scene, in which she is tricked by Titus into eating her sons' flesh, Shakespeare reverses the Ovidian original, in which the female avengers Procne and Philomela dupe Tereus into eating his son, mocking patriarchy and restoring some sense of justice and dignity to the women wronged by Tereus. Following the cannibalistic banquet, Shakespeare's Tamora is thrown "to beasts and birds to prey" (*Titus* 5.3.197). This seems to be the final victory of the fathers' rule, illustrating the maternal exclusion. Tamora fulfills the metaphor of "the swallowing womb" by devouring her own flesh and blood. Yet the son she had rejected survives thanks to Aaron's intervention.

Aaron's paternal authority is equally fraught with problems. His instant affection towards the baby is heart-warming and offers a radically different perspective to Tamora's rejection. His trampling of Tamora's maternal sentence saves his son, but his "mothering" practices subtly signal a specter of parental failure. Aaron paints a fantasy of sustaining the infant "on berries and on roots", "curds and whey", and goat's milk to bring him up to be a warrior (*Titus* 4.2.179,180).[55] It is highly improbable that any wet nurses would be on hand in a military camp so Aaron offers his son the best he can hope for. Still, an infant's

[55] Alternatively, Aaron's vision harks back to mythological stories of Romulus and Remus who were saved by a she-wolf. Either way some female intervention is necessary for the baby's survival – even if it comes from a non-human mother.

survival in any period before modernity always depended on a woman – its own mother or a wet nurse. Aaron's planned journey from Rome to the Goths' camp seems stretched. The circumstances of his capture illustrate as much; it is the baby's incessant crying that betrays Aaron's hiding place. Tamora's body, pregnant with an interracial and illegitimate baby did not betray her, but Aaron is now betrayed by a hungry and cold infant that would not be "controlled with this discourse" (*Titus* 5.1.26). Paradoxically, Aaron's previous violent rewriting of the paternal narrative catches up with him. It is not the female, dissembling body that is caught but a "babbling", "tattling" father.

Aaron attempts to rewrite white patriarchy's paternity script by the sheer force of his will – through the physical violence done to female birth attendants and, what seems to be, the betrayal of Tamora. Rather than solidifying female power over reproduction, the birth ritual is stripped of its sanctity, while its agents are utterly vulnerable and at Aaron's mercy. Simultaneously, the laboring woman, the midwife and the nurse – rather than independent agents – emerge as instruments of white patriarchal power in the first place. The baby's monstrosity is first diagnosed through the compliance with the white (pseudo)medical consensus that inferiorizes the child's skin color. It is the child's complexion that allows to pass the sentence of death, not merely the shame of illegitimacy. As Loomba (2002: 85) writes: "The baby is a living reminder of the fate of its parents, a symbol of that which both Romans and Goths find most distasteful, and Marcus displays him in order to rally the Romans behind Lucius". Simultaneously, Aaron's death by being buried alive may be read "as Aaron ironically taking root in the Roman soil" (Ndiaye 2016: 72). Although the parents are dead, Aaron and Tamora's son is the fruit that memorably falls on the Roman soil and lives on. Possibly, the audience still has the memory of Aaron's radical equalization of maternal and paternal contribution fresh on their minds; "half me and half thy dam" (*Titus* 5.1.27).

In this sense, the threat of pollution encapsulated in early modern texts codifying racial and gender difference manifestly materializes before the audience's eyes. As much as the issues of maternal and paternal authority or the opacity of the pregnant body remain malleable and open for (re)interpretation, the presence of the child diffuses, if not mocks, obsessive fears of difference. Tamora's pregnant body, embodying the clash of misogynist, racist, and ableist discourses, ultimately leaves a lingering question mark behind – how will England (dressed as Rome in the play) accommodate a materialization of its deepest fears in the body of an innocent child? Will it accept a shared humanity between this child and the English or keep on denying it? As Hall demonstrates, in later Jacobean plays female bodies encapsulate "the desire for well-recognized boundaries between self and other" and so "interracial or 'racialized' couplings" are condemned, with women being admonished especially harshly (Hall 1995:

125). Given the gradual and intensified commodification of black bodies in the expanding colonial project and the rise of racially-charged discourses after James I's ascension, Shakespeare's late Elizabethan investigation of an interracial pregnancy and parenthood remains his one-time experiment. Nevertheless, it is an early account of the budding, colonialist, white male's identity, struggling to find a stable definition against a threating site of difference; a reproductive body of an unruly woman and her uncompromising, black lover.

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