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Harpies: Protest, Performance, and the Horror of Feminine Rage

"All along I fear she needs cruelty to soothe her rage" – Nurse, "Medea"

"Give me the poniard! You shall know, my boys, your mother's hand shall right your mother's wrong." – Tamora, Titus Andronicus Act II, Scene III

"Humans had a saying. Mess with the bull and get the horns. Well Harpies had a saying too. Mess with a Harpy and die." – Gena Showalter, "The Darkest Whisper"

Whose anger is deemed acceptable and justified in the eyes of society? Why is it that when women show their rage and anger, they are defined as monstrous and horrific? In the past few years, we have seen concept of female driven revenge, retaliation, and rage rise in popularity in shows such as *Game of Thrones, American Horror Stories,* and *The House of the Dragon,* in movies such as *Promising Young Woman, Ready or Not,* and *The Invisible Man*, and in protests across the nation and the globe. But why now? What has happened that has brought feminine rage to the forefront of entertainment? And why does it feel as if feminine rage has become a product to be sold rather than a valid emotional feeling to be listened to and seen?

In this study, I will use case studies to draw connections between two horror plays of Western theatre from different eras (*Medea* by Euripides, and *Titus Andronicus* by William Shakespeare) that emphasize the effects, horror, and fallout of feminine rage to a "Good for Her" horror film (in this project 2009's *Jennifer's Body*), and use those connections to analyze the cultural effect of the monstrous feminine and the historical performance of feminine rage in

women-led protests (#MeToo, and the 2022 Summer of Rage). I will discuss the influence that *Medea* and *Titus Andronicus* have had on the recent rash of "Good for Her" movies that have seemed to explode over the last few decades, the prevalence of women's rage, and its connection to the monstrous feminine. I will argue that feminine rage has historically been portrayed and performed as a spectacle, and thus has transformed from a taboo subject to inspire feelings of disgust and horror, into a commercialized and fetishized product by a modern-day audience, as proven by the wild success of the "Good for Her" horror genre both in film and on stage.

I am drawing these connections between *Medea, Titus Andronicus,* and *Jennifer's Body* because they all have the same elements of fear, revenge, and a heavy focus on the concept and consequences of feminine rage in their performances and in terms of their perspective. *Titus* differs from the other two in the fact that the central "monstrous woman" is the antagonist, while the protagonist is just as if not more monstrous than the antagonist. As American film professor Carol J. Clover states "Although many folklorists dismiss horror movies as products too mediated by technology, authorial intention, and the profit motive to be seen as folklore in any authentic sense, the fact is that horror movies look like nothing so much as folktales – a set of fixed tale types that generate an endless stream of what are in effect variants: sequels, remakes, and rip-offs" (Clover 10). Clover goes on to say that "Audiences may thrill to the killer's particular schtick… or to the special effects that show the bloody stump up close… but the structure, functions or subject positions, and narrative moves are as old as the hills" (Clover 10).

Here, Clover offers that horror films are in the same vein as folklore and hold equal value to folklore and folk tales by stating that folklore and horror films share similar conventions regarding character arc, thematic structure, and moral messaging. I would like to apply this concept by putting film history in conversation with theatre historiography (through the lens of

feminine rage and the monstrous feminine) via my analysis of the above stated works of horror theatre and the film stated in the "Good for Her" genre.

First, I think it would be prudent to define some terms that are important to this thesis, such as "horror", "spectacle", "feminine rage", and "the monstrous feminine". According to Jolene Richardson, noted art philosopher Noel Carroll states that there are two types of horror: "natural horror", and "art horror" (Richardson 5). Jolene Richardson goes further, defining natural horror as something that occurs in the natural world, "apart from any contrived artistic setting", while "art-horror is a particular emotional and physical response evoked by horror fictions." (Richardson 5). Natural horror therefore has effects on art-horror that we can actively see in life and society. For example, the horrors of rape and sexual assault in real life would be defined as natural horror, while seeing it in a film or on stage would be considered art-horror. While natural horror has influenced the development of the "Good for Her" genre, for the purposes of this project, I will be focusing on art-horror, which will more accurately encompass the case studies I present in *Medea, Titus Andronicus,* and *Jennifer's Body.* These examples of feminine rage and art-horror all demonstrate the spectacular in the definition of art-horror. I would like to next define what I mean by "the spectacular in art-horror".

What is spectacle, and how does it fit into art-horror? In *Spectacles of Reform: Theater and Activism in Nineteenth Century America,* Amy E. Hughes defines spectacle as a methodology of reform and activism. She states that "Spectacle capitalizes on the sensational and the profane, embracing what is deliberately hidden or secretly imagined and giving it material form. In essence, it renders visible the invisible; it makes sensation seen" (Hughes 4). In other words, spectacle is something that is bodily present. It focuses on the sensations that it makes one feel. As previously established, the definition of art-horror is derived from the sensation of

the physical and emotional response it evokes from its audience. I am arguing here that art-horror in and of itself is a form of spectacle, based on the sensations one feels when engaging in art-horror content. I would like to use Hughes' definition as a jumping off point in the context of the horror genre, both in film and theatre.

Hughes goes on to say that "Consequently, spectacle plays an instrumental role in the public and private spheres because of its potential to destabilize, complicate, or sustain sedimented ideological beliefs" (Hughes 4). What Hughes is getting at here is the ability of spectacle to influence activism and inspire the questioning of dominant ideologies. Historically, the horror genre has reflected the anxieties of the culture they are produced in at the time they are produced. These aspects of cultural relevance are also seen in *Medea, Titus Andronicus,* and. *Jennifer's Body* which fit the definition of spectacle that Hughes has provided for us above, by attempting to destabilize and complicate the ideological beliefs of the popular culture at the time of the film's release.

At this point, we have defined how horror is spectacle, but we have yet to define "feminine rage" and the "monstrous feminine". According to Soraya Chemaly, "When a woman shows anger in institutional, political, or professional settings, she automatically violates gender roles. She is met with aversion, perceived as more hostile, irritable, less competent, and unlikeable – the kiss of death for a class of people expected to maintain social connections" (Chemaly 13). Here Chemaly is stating that the very idea of an angry, rageful woman goes against the norm and upsets the social hierarchy. This attitude is seen in our theatrical heritage in plays such as *Medea* and *Titus Andronicus.* In both classic works of horror theatre, the feelings of horror are supposed to be derived not from the treatment of these women at the hands of men, but from their expression of anger and desire for vengeance; this theme is also front and center in

Jennifer's Body, but men are no longer safe from receiving blame; in this film, when the central characters are harmed by outside forces, it is made clear that those outside forces are responsible for the rage the characters express.

Drawing off the idea of "feminine rage", we have the idea of the "monstrous feminine", or the woman-as-monster. In her seminal work *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism and Psychoanalysis,* Barbara Creed defines the "woman-as-monster" theme of the horror genre and discusses the difference between the "woman-as-victim" and the "woman-as-monster". While there are many different flavors of "woman-as-monster", one thing ties them together; according to Creed, "… the concept of the monstrous-feminine, as constructed within/by a patriarchal and phallocentric ideology, is related intimately to the problem of sexual difference and castration" (Creed 31). She argues that "… when woman is represented as monstrous, it is almost always in relation to her mothering and reproductive functions" (Creed 48). These quotes discuss the concept that woman in and of itself is monstrous and terrifying to men because (in this binary definition) women are not and do not resemble men. In this idea, men see women as men who are lacking a penis, as men who have been castrated from birth, and thus are lacking power. It is the very idea and definition of "penis envy". This idea of the monstrous feminine claims that women are presented as monstrous in film simply by existing as a woman or mother. This is especially clear in *Medea, Titus Andronicus,* and *Jennifer's Body.* In all these works, the central "monstrous" woman at the heart of the story is either already a mother or is going through puberty to begin the reproductive cycle.

And now to sum up the definitions previously discussed, we have the culmination of all these factors, the "Good for Her" horror genre. In a "Good for Her" movie or play, our protagonist is a woman who has been wronged by a man or by a patriarchal society in general.

She seeks revenge or justice through morally ambiguous means that utilizes or highlights their femininity, and often claims their revenge and justice violently.

According to Tara Heimberger, the genre truly started to emerge after the inauguration of Donald Trump in 2016 and start of the #MeToo movement in 2017, which gained traction after the arrest of Harvey Weinstein and the Brock Turner trial (Heimberger 9-12). This is a significant marker of time because these events illustrate effects of toxically masculine patriarchal logics in the United States. The election of Donald Trump after his sexist comments, which I will refer to later in this project, and the treatment of his opponent, Hillary Rodham Clinton, showed the implicit bias of a patriarchal society. In Heimberger's discussion of the "Good for Her" genre, she defines the genre as "an offshoot of rape-revenge films," (Heimberger 11), and she also states that "The "Good for Her" genre offers a temporary safe and fictionalized space to explore those valid fears and rage that accompany existence as a woman in a patriarchal society" (Heimberger 9).

These quotes sum up the genre in a way that perfectly describes the appeal of it. Historically, rape-revenge films focused on the lost "value" of the woman raped. For example, in *The Last House on the Left,* the girl's parents are the ones who seek vengeance for their daughter's rape and murder, while the daughter is sexually assaulted and murdered before the end of the first act. However, in *Jennifer's Body,* after her brutalization and attempted murder, Jennifer seeks her own form of vengeance and claims her power back through violence, and Needy claims her power after her boyfriend's murder through murdering Jennifer.

The name of the genre came from a popular meme of Lucille Bluth (portrayed by Jessica Walter in *Arrested Development)* commenting on a story about a stressed mother allowing her car to roll backwards into a lake in the episode "Cabin Show". This screengrab (see figure 1)

began to circulate on the internet, particularly on stories about women taking revenge on their cheating or abusive husbands (Heimberger 3).

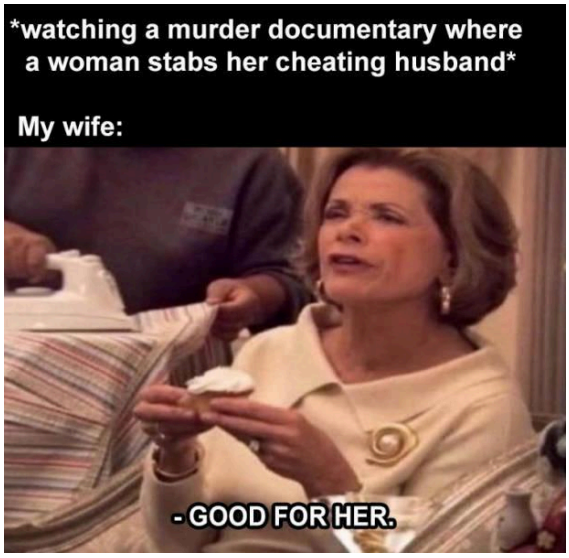

Figure 1: A screengrab of Lucille Bluth in the TV show *Arrested Development* holding a cupcake and saying, "Good for her", while someone irons in the background. Above her is a black box with white text stating:
"*watching a murder documentary where a woman stabs her cheating husband* My wife:"
(Heimberger)

According to Heimberger, "On August 7, 2020, the *Twitter* account @cintematogrxphy combined the implication of the Bluth meme as championing the immoral actions of female rage with popular films that exemplified this quality, resulting in the genre-defining tweet" (Heimberger 4). Pictured is a tweet of the so called "Good for Her cinematic universe" from the Twitter account cited by Heimberger previously (see figure 2).

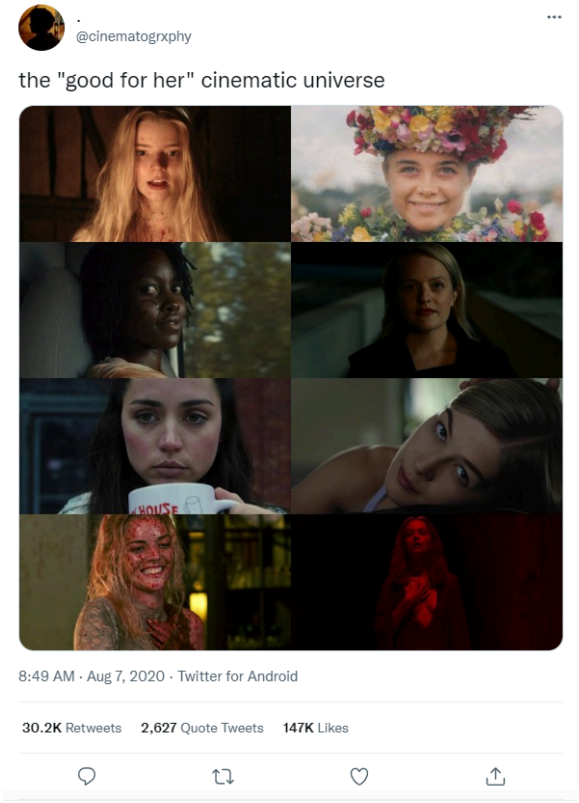

Figure 2: A screen grab of a tweet from Twitter handle @cinematogrxphy. The tweet is captioned "the "good for her" cinematic universe" and has 8 screen grabs from the movies (left to right, top to bottom) *The Witch, Midsommar, Us, The Invisible Man, Knives Out, Gone Girl, Ready or Not,* and *Suspiria* (Heimberger)

Now that we have examined the origins of the "Good for Her" genre, I would like to start analyzing the influence that our theatrical heritage in *Medea* and *Titus Andronicus* has had on the genre.

Medea and Feminine Rage as Spectacle

The central plot of *Medea* focuses on the crumbling marriage of Jason (of the Argonauts and the Golden Fleece myth) and Medea, who is a princess of Colchis, a devotee of the goddess Hecate, the goddess of magic and witchcraft, and is considered a barbarous woman by the Corinthians. Jason decides to marry the younger princess of Corinth to get his chance at a crown, and in doing so he renders the vows and oaths he made to Medea useless. Medea must then decide what she will do; will she accept her new fate, take her children, and go into exile as decreed by her husband's new father-in-law? Or will she take revenge on her unfaithful husband? In this section, I will focus on the *Medea* as a case study where we can see the presentation of feminine rage and the monstrous feminine as spectacle.

Euripides' *Medea* was first produced in 431 BC at the City Dionysia festival. Euripides won third place that year, losing second place to Sophocles and first place to Euphorion, the son of playwright Aeschylus. The other three plays Euripides presented (*Philoctetes, Diktys,* and *Theristai)* have since been lost to time (Burian 6). According to Peter Burian and Alan Shapiro, each playwright and producer would present three tragedies and a satyr play. They would be acted by a chorus of fifteen men, and there would be three separate actors that would play the rest of the characters via a variety of masks to represent each character. It is important to note that this idea of divine feminine rage would be portrayed and acted by men; women were not considered true citizens in Athens, and so they had very little rights compared to men (Burian 3).

Much like in Shakespearean theatre, women were certainly not allowed to act, which reflects the idea of feminine rage in a way that we wouldn't see it today. By having men act out feminine rage, it turned the very thought of female anger into a spectacle; it becomes an oddity to be observed and critiqued, not a valid emotion to be taken seriously. I would like to put this idea of spectacle against Aristotle's ideas of spectacle. Aristotle defined spectacle as "…one of the six components of tragedy, occupying the category of the mode of imitation. Spectacle includes all aspects of the tragedy that contribute to its sensory effects: costumes, scenery, the gestures of the actors, the sound of the music and the resonance of the actors' voices" (Aristotle: Poetics - Terms). Aristotle classified spectacle as the lowest element of tragedy, as he believed that tragedy should not need to be performed to speak to an audience, but that reading the text would have sufficient impact. (Aristotle: Poetics - Terms). This directly conflicts with Hughes' definition of spectacle that we have utilized. I disagree with Aristotle's view on spectacle because I feel that, based on Hughes' definition as outlined prior, spectacle is an essential part of the theatrical experience. I believe that theatre in and of itself is spectacle, something that makes one feel present in their body, like Hughes stated in her definition of spectacle. The reception of *Medea* at the City Dionysia festival proves that it was not favored by the judges of the competition. I would like to argue that there was already a bias against *Medea* from the moment the play started due to Aristotle's definition and view of spectacle. I think that because of the era *Medea* was produced in, one that was heavily influenced by the thoughts of Aristotle, it was received poorly at the festival due to its utilization of and reliance on spectacle, in addition to the fact that Medea, a woman who behaves outside of expected gender norms, gets away with every murder she has committed at the end, and she seems to have the gods' blessing as she makes her escape to her safe haven in Athens.

The fact that *Medea* is set in Corinth is surely not a coincidence; during this time, the Peloponnesian War was beginning; Sparta had declared war months prior, and Corinth has declared themselves an ally of Sparta, thus making them an enemy of Athens. Corinth had a strong navy and maritime presence, and the Athenian citizens were certainly scared and worried about the possibility of Spartans landing for war in Athens. The king of Corinth, Creon, and his daughter are portrayed as heartless and cruel people; Creon is the one who gives Medea only one day to secure a safe exile for herself and her sons. She points out that nowhere is truly safe, as she made so many enemies helping Jason succeed in securing the Golden Fleece, but Creon doesn't show any mercy to her or her children (Burian 10).

The very start of the play, the prologue, is unusual based on the method of delivery; an old slave woman gives the prologue:

> By her very appearance on stage, she immediately reoriented their expectations toward the background of the action about to unfold, toward the immigrant population growth and mixing up of peoples and status maritime supremacy had brought in its wake… Almost always, a god or hero speaks his prologues; she is an immigrant's slave. Oh yes, she is an aristocrat among servants, but a servant nonetheless, and there she stands in that great empty circle of empty space and, like any free Athenian citizen, addresses the rulers of the sea, a symbol perhaps of the recognizable confusion of daily life in democratic Athens, where the base-born lord it over their betters and slaves and foreigners cannot be distinguished from freemen (Burian 11).

This quote is important to my argument of *Medea* being seen as spectacle, because due to the culture and traditions of the time, Greek audiences were used to prologues being delivered by not only men, but gods and heroes. To subject them to a lowly slave woman tips off the audience that this play is not following a similar structure to other Greek tragic plays.

Medea decides to kill her husband's new bride and father-in-law, as well as her twin sons with Jason. What is interesting about this is that the chorus, made up of Corinthian women, do not try to stop Medea from killing the bride and Creon, the king of Corinth. In fact, they condemn Jason for his unfaithfulness and empathize with Medea.

> Medea, now I understand your grief
>
> And why your husband's treachery
>
> Must be avenged. Go ahead, I won't tell (Euripides & Collier 45).

At the end of the play, Medea is carried away with the corpses of her murdered sons in a chariot gifted to her by her grandfather, Helios, the sun god. This kind of mechanic for production on the ancient Greek stage was typically reserved for the gods (Burian 106), so the fact that Medea, a woman who takes revenge on her husband by murdering his new bride, father-in-law, and his sons, is given this treatment is indicative of the power of justified feminine rage. Movies in the "Good for Her" genre often end in this way, with the protagonist taking their (often violent) revenge and centering on their satisfied lust for vengeance. Having examined feminine rage in *Medea,* I would now like to focus on the influences of the monstrous feminine that we see in *Titus Andronicus.*

Titus Andronicus and the Monstrous Feminine as Spectacle

The recorded stage history of *Titus Andronicus* is a sordid one; we have had two copies of the work passed down to us from the annals of history. According to John Dover Wilson in the Cambridge Dover Wilson printing of *Titus Andronicus,* the first printing came from a quarto that was printed in 1594, and the second came from the First Folio that was printed in 1623 (Dover Wilson vii).

Theatre scholar J.A. Symonds argues the play is most likely was a response to the Elizabethan "Tragedy of Blood" as it fits right in with *The Jew of Malta, The Spanish Tragedy,* and *Alphonsus Emperor of Germany* (Dover Wilson viii). The play is an odd one out of the rest of Shakespeare's tragedies; it is by far the most gruesome in his repertoire[1], Throughout the play we witness 15 executions and deaths, the rape and maiming of Titus' daughter, Lavinia, dismemberment, and cannibalism. Dover Wilson notes that the play "seems to jolt and bump along like some broken down cart, laden with bleeding corpses from an Elizabethan scaffold, and driven by an executioner from Bedlam dressed in cap and bells" (Dover Wilson xii). This quote seems to classify the play as a spectacle; something to behold and gawk at, something to be looked down on as nothing but spectacle.

The story of *Titus Andronicus* follows the title character, Titus Andronicus, after he conquers the Goths and returns to Rome, holding Tamora, the Queen of the Goths, prisoner. Titus murders Tamora's eldest son, and Tamora swears revenge on Titus and his whole family, determined to make him feel the pain she has been made to feel by him. She later marries the

[1] . In fact, it is so unlike the rest of his tragedies that several Restoration dramatists (led chiefly by Edward Ravenscroft) insisted that it wasn't written by Shakespeare at all, but it was the work of a lesser playwright that was incorrectly attributed to Shakespeare. However, according to Dover Wilson, "Ravenscroft was not a very reliable person, and the words, chiefly inspired by a desire to advertise his own 'improved' version, are no value as evidence." (Dover Wilson xiii)

emperor of Rome, Saturninus, and becomes the Empress of Rome. She uses this power to wreak havoc and destroy the Andronici family, by any means necessary. After Lavinia takes her revenge, which includes arranging the murders of two of his sons, the rape and mutilation of his daughter Lavinia, and the loss of his hand, Titus responds in kind by killing her other sons and baking them into a pie and forcing Tamora to eat them. Titus kills Lavinia and Tamora. Saturninus, the emperor of Rome and Tamora's husband, then kills Titus before succumbing to wounds he sustained in his battle with Titus.

After Demetrius and Chiron rape Lavinia, something occurs with Tamora; we see no mention of her plotting until she has the idea to dress up as the spirit of Vengeance, with her sons Demetrius and Chiron dressing up as the spirits of Rape and Murder, to attempt to drive Titus mad. Priyanka Roy says this about the scene:

> Tamora teasingly appeals to Titus' lust for revenge. Tamora knows that Titus would be looking to exact revenge for what she did to his daughter and Bassianus. Here, her tone is mocking, and indicative of her own desire to get justice. The 'gnawing vulture' of rage is eating Tamora from the inside and it wants to avenge the injustices Titus has wrecked on her (Roy 115).

This is important to note because these same qualities are found later in Titus' revenge on Tamora, and are ignored by his son after his death, while these qualities in Tamora further condemn and identify her as a villain.

At the end of act 5, sene III of *Titus Andronicus,* Lucius, Titus' last living child, decrees the following:

> Some loving friends convey the
> emperor hence,

> And give him burial in his father's grave:
> My father and Lavinia shall forthwith
> Be closed in our household's monument.
> As for that ravenous tiger, Tamora,
> No funeral rite, nor man in mourning weed,
> No mournful bell shall ring her burial;
> But throw her forth to the beasts and birds of prey.
> Her life was beastly and devoid of pity,
> And being dead, let birds on her take pity (Shakespeare 90).

This is important to discuss because it shows the gendered double standard that is present regarding the expression of rage; notice that Titus, the man who started all of this by conquering the Goths and murdering Tamora's eldest son in cold blood after the war was over, who had murdered his own son, two more of Tamora's children, his own daughter, and Tamora herself, is given a full funeral and mourned, but Tamora, who lost everything (her home, her country, her son, and her life), is left to decay and be eaten by "beasts and birds of prey". Titus's anger and revenge is righteous and justified simply because of his gender, while the very opposite is true for Tamora; her anger and desire for revenge goes against the societal expectations of her gender, and thus the very expression of them at the beginning of the play signal to the audience that she is a villain. Even the emperor who empowers her to take this revenge is given a respectful burial and funeral, but his queen is left to rot in the elements.

It is also important to note here that Tamora and Lavinia would have been portrayed by men; feminine rage would again be embodied in a male body, and it shows in the writing. Tamora's rage and revenge turns her against Lavinia, an innocent and helpless victim as a woman in Roman society, when she allows her sons to rape and main her to destroy Titus. Her feminine rage is displayed as misguided at the innocents surrounding Titus, rather than at Titus himself. However, Tamora lashes out at Titus' loved ones because he did the same to her; he murdered her

son in cold blood, destroyed her home, and humiliated her in a foreign land after taking her prisoner, so she responds in kind.

Lavinia herself is shown to be the perfect Roman woman; passive, virginal, obedient, and compliant to the men in her life. Even after her maiming and rape, she is shown to be docile. She shows no rage at her treatment, and even carries her father's dismembered hand in her mouth when he tells her to. Her murder at her father's hand meets no resistance, and Lucius even blames Tamora for the murder instead of Titus. Now that I have examined the elements of feminine rage, the monstrous feminine, and spectacle in our western theatrical heritage, I would now like to examine the influences of *Medea* and *Titus Andronicus* on the film *Jennifer's Body.*

Jennifer's Body: The Monstrous Feminine and Feminine Rage Embodied

In the 2009 film *Jennifer's Body,* directed by Karyn Kusama and written by Diablo Cody, Jennifer Check (played by Megan Fox) is a high school girl in a tight knit American small town in Michigan. Her best friend, Needy Lesnicky (played by Amanda Seyfried) is a girl who seems to be the opposite of Jennifer, but they have been friends since childhood. Jennifer and Needy attend a Low Shoulder concert at a bar, but the bar burns down during the concert. The band abducts Jennifer, believing her to be a virgin, and attempts to sacrifice her to gain fame and glory, but the sacrifice backfires; instead of dying, Jennifer is transformed into a succubus, who needs to feast on people to live.

Jennifer after the sacrifice is like Jennifer before the sacrifice in some ways, but Needy notes that she's more aggressive and meaner than she used to be. Jennifer picks her targets carefully; she always goes after boys. After Needy confronts her saying "You're killing people", she replies "No, I'm killing boys" (Kusama). Jennifer's murder spree is directed entirely at the

boys who have sexualized her for her whole life. Her feminine rage is inherently sexual, using the body that was used against her to lure in her victims. This is her way of taking back control of her body after she has been victimized by almost every man she's ever encountered.

Here, I would like to draw some connections between *Titus Andronicus* and *Jennifer's Body* to illuminate how feminine rage has been performed as spectacle. Jennifer, like Tamora, uses her body to gain control of the situation she has been dealt. Much like Tamora uses her body to gain favor with the emperor, Jennifer kills boys to gain the power she needed to take her revenge. Contrasting this, killing gives Jennifer a new life; it keeps her alive and makes her nearly invincible. Like Tamora, Jennifer takes pleasure in playing with her food, and this is what ultimately gets her caught and killed by Needy. However, we can also see traces of Lavinia, Titus' daughter who is raped and mutilated by Tamora's sons, in Jennifer; we see Lavinia in Jennifer's brutal assault and torture at the hands of Low Shoulder. They torture Jennifer in the woods, sexualize her body, and turn her into an object, much like Demetrius and Chiron did to Lavinia. Now that we have discussed the elements of Tamora and Lavinia in Jennifer, I would like to discuss the influence of Tamora and Lavinia on the character of Needy.

Needy, like Lavinia, is victimized and attacked by Jennifer after Jennifer kills her boyfriend. Needy then takes her revenge, like Tamora, and kills Jennifer by stabbing her in the heart with a box cutter and is locked away in a mental institution. However, Jennifer's attack left Needy with some powers of her own, including enhanced strength, the ability to levitate/fly, and an intense desire for vengeance against the actual villains of the story, the band Low Shoulder. We see in the credits that Needy takes her revenge against the band in a hotel after one of their shows, through a montage of crime scene photos, security tape footage, and cell phone footage from the band members themselves. Needy's rage, like Tamora's and Lavinia's, empowers her to

release her best friend from the torment of being a succubus, and it empowers her to take revenge on her assaulters. However, this also turns Jennifer back into a victim, like Lavinia, and ultimately like Tamora. I would now like to point out some connections we see between Needy Lesnicky and various characters such as Medea, the Nurse, and the Chorus of Corinthian women in *Medea.*

In the film, Needy is our narrator, much like the nurse and the chorus of Corinthian women in *Medea.* She starts off the narrative in her present, showing her in a mental institution. Needy fills us in on the details of the story and tells us what happened to Jennifer. Needy is for all intents and purposes our point of view character; everything we see in the film is through her eyes, much like the servant and the Corinthian chorus. However, by the end of the film Needy is actively transformed from a humble narrator into a Medea figure. Even after Jennifer's murder, Needy continues her path of vengeance and gets away with the murders of Low Shoulder, escaping into a car seemingly appearing out of nowhere, her own personal Deus ex machina.

Having discussed how our theatrical heritage influences our current media landscape in the elements of feminine rage, spectacle, and the monstrous feminine, I now want to discuss the influences of these pieces of media that can be seen in the #MeToo Movement and the 2022 Summer of Rage protests. In 2006, the "Me-Too" movement was founded by Tanara Burke. According to Burke, the organization was started to "… bring resources, support, and pathways to healing where none existed before. And we got to work building a community of advocates determined to interrupt sexual violence wherever it happens" (Burke). The movement went viral in 2017 after the high-profile arrest of film producer Harvey Weinstein, who has since been found guilty of a first-degree criminal sex act and third-degree rape. Actresses in the industry came forward with their stories of how Weinstein had forced them to engage in sexual acts for

professional favor in the industry, using his power as one of the biggest producers in Hollywood to intimidate them into doing what he wanted (Burke).

According to Tara Heimberger, another contributing factor to the movement going viral was the election of Donald Trump, who had openly admitted to sexual misconduct and assault in a taped conversation with *Access Hollywood* star Billy Bush and made very sexist remarks regarding women (Heimberger 9-11). Donald Trump was also a close acquaintance with known sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, and was himself accused of rape, sexual assault, sexual misconduct, and sexual harassment by at least 25 women, one of the victims being only 13 years old at the time (Heimberger 9-11). In addition to this another prominent factor to the hashtag going viral was the 2016 Brock Turner case, in which a young woman was found raped and assaulted by Brock Turner, who was a student athlete at Stanford in California at the time. Turner was convicted on three charges of felony sexual assault, but the judge sentencing him, Aaron Persky, expressed concern that sentencing to a federal prison would ruin his future, and thus only sentenced him to six months of prison with three years of probation after (Heimberger 11-13).

This shockingly lenient sentence outraged the public, and the Me-Too movement (#metoo) became increasingly popular on social media, with survivors of sexual assault and rape expressing their rage at the sentencing and the trend of male perpetrators' futures being perceived as more important than victims' futures. Those who shared their rage on social media lit the Twittersphere ablaze; like Medea, Tamora, Jennifer, and Needy, these women took control of their bodies back through a revenge of sorts; they burned down the Weinstein Company (and ended Aaron Persky's term as a judge early) with their accusations, brought attention to the widespread epidemic of sexual assault, and the world would never be the same. This movement helped to set the stage for the 2022 Summer of Rage protests.

In 2022, the United States Supreme Court struck down Roe v. Wade, which gave women a constitutional right to medical privacy, and had protected abortion rights since the 1970's. This monumental decision came after a draft opinion leak, which sent women's rights groups into a frenzy of protests and activism. The Women's March organization called for a "summer of rage", which launched protest after protest across the country (Women's March Calls for Summer of Rage After SCOTUS Decision to Overturn Roe v Wade). These protests were heavily covered by the media, and the rage women showed was deemed "hysterical" by far-right media outlets such as Fox News, calling those on the side of pro-choice "bullies" (Hawkins). Again, like Tamora and Jennifer, women's rights were stamped on; control of their bodies were taken away, and they were framed to be villains for expressing outrage at this treatment. Also, like Tamora and Jennifer, these women plotted their revenge, but not through violence; they voted in record numbers and marched in protests. In 2020, during the presidential election between Joe Biden and Donald Trump, there was a 5.6% rise in women voter registration (Center for American Women and Politics).

In her book *Women and Other Monsters: Creating a New Mythology*, feminist theorist and author Jess Zimmerman discusses various feminine figures of Greek mythology, including Furies and harpies. In her chapter on the harpy mythology, she says "And yet it makes no difference, in the end, that the men were trespassers and thieves, that the Harpies belonged on the island and owned the cattle. As soon as the ship touched down, as soon as the men spied turf they could rest on and meat they could chase down, any woman's attempt to snatch it back became a monstrous overreach. A man who lays claim to unguarded property is a hero. A woman who grasps for her share is abomination" (Zimmerman 95).

As we have seen in *Medea* and *Titus Andronicus,* women who show the same emotions and desire for vengeance as men are seen as villainesses and monsters. The same thing happened to Jennifer, although there was a slightly more sympathetic lens applied to her story. If you turn on any right-wing media outlet, you can hear men refer to women in power and female politicians (such as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Hillary Clinton, and Elizabeth Warren) as "harpies", spitting out the name with ferocity and disgust. They refer to women who seek to express the same emotions and desires as men in such a way to dehumanize them and turn them into a spectacle to be mocked, belittled, and scorned. However, the opposite effect has happened; women are starting to reclaim the term. As feminist theorist and author Kate Hodges has said, "We will not wait to be offered the leftovers of the feast. We will arrive in a whirl of wings and talons and pick off what belongs to us. Yes we are angry, yes we are making a noise about it, and yes we are hungry for change. We are harpies" (Hodges).

As I have argued through this project, feminine rage has been viewed and treated as spectacle, on stage, in film, and in everyday reality; it has been viewed with horror and disgust going all the way back to Ancient Greece, as we have seen with the reception of Medea, through the Elizabethan Era as we saw in *Titus Andronicus,* and is still being viewed with disgust by right wing media outlets. Women who express their rage, anger, or fury are likened to mythical monsters and villains, while men historically have been allowed to play both masculine and feminine rage due to it being viewed as spectacle.

However, as we see in the perspective of *Jennifer's Body,* and in the Me-Too and Summer of Rage movements, the idea of feminine rage is becoming more palatable to modern consumers. The "Good for Her" genre has brought feminine rage to the forefront of the public conscious through frequent box office successes in films such as *Midsommar, Promising Young*

Woman, The Invisible Man, Knives Out, and *Ready or Not.* The spectacle of feminine rage in horror theatre and in horror films has brought us to this point in the cultural hemisphere, where feminine rage is written off as spectacle and a product to be sold and consumed, but we are on the cusp of it becoming something more respected and validated, if only women and femme-identifying individuals actively seek to own and reclaim the title of harpies in earnest.

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