Underwater Women in Shakespeare Films

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Abstract: In his paper, "Underwater Women in Shakespeare Films," Charles Ross looks at the film tradition of representing the social oppression of women by scenes submersion, a trope that has its literary roots in the classics, the French Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the novel. Ross argues that unlike classic directors such as Kurosawa, Kozintsev, and Polanski, modern filmmakers not only like to enhance the female body, but also to draw on this trope as a cinematic shorthand to symbolize the oppression of women by various forces. Hollywood films made in the 1990s often go overboard in their attempts to make women wet in the movies. Jane Campion's *The Piano* probably influenced Kenneth Branagh and Michael Almereyda, which soak Ophelia perhaps more than is necessary. Despite pandering to his audience, Baz Luhrmann obtains some significant effects by putting both Romeo and Juliet underwater, while Julie Taymor's *Titus* also uses and overcomes the convention.

Charles ROSS

Underwater Women in Shakespeare Films

Underwater women have long been a symbol of social oppression in Western literature and more recently in film. I have in mind scenes in films based on Shakespeare's plays, mainly from the 1990s, where a figure, usually a woman, floats underwater, silently and in slow motion, and then emerges, often as a changed person or in different circumstances. This symbolic immersion and miraculous release is used to represent what Hélène Cixous calls the woman's "inevitable struggle against conventional man" (309). The symbolism of social oppression is not specific but general, what Diane Price Herndl calls the "systemic nature of women's oppression" (3). In other words, the immersion and surfacing of a woman does not express a complaint about a specific man, but a more general grievance about the way women are forced to exist in the world. I will start by discussing how the use of water as a symbolic sign characterizes the transition from stage to screen. I will then suggest the literary history behind this cinematic trope and, finally, show how the use of water imagery can also help us compare and contrast Anglophone and foreign versions of Shakespeare on film.

The addition to Shakespeare's text of water images is one of the ways that film makers substitute visual imagery, silence, or movement in space for the shifting effect of an actor's oratory. The Soviet director Grigori Kozintsev (*King Lear* 1970) sums up the problem of filming Shakespeare as shifting the stress from the aural to the visual (see in Willems 72). Directors generally hesitate to add words to Shakespeare, but few feel constrained not to employ normal cinematographic techniques. Filmmakers assume that cinema is a visual medium and that wherever possible images should reinforce if not replace dialogue. Long tracking scenes, for example, establish one of the main differences between theater and cinema. Despite movement up, down, and across stage, revolving sets, scrims, lighting changes, and other tricks, a stage is essentially a static place during a scene. A camera, by contrast, can move from place to place, and much of the art of cinema seems to be in making the most of that advantage (Kracauer 295). Thus minute after minute is spent tracking characters across a landscape in Lucentio's descent through the rain to the sunshine of Padua in Franco Zeffirelli's *Taming of the Shrew* (1968), or, perhaps most spectacularly, the endless streaming of warriors across the a dry Japanese landscape in Akira Kurosawa's *Ran*. Yet movement is not a value in itself; it must be associated with something to have meaning: the countryside, city streets, the rooms of a house, or faces. Water scenes operate in a similar way. Often silent and in slow motion, they provide a visual mode of denotation (Metz 72).

The use of water or drowning as a metaphor for whatever oppresses women can be found as early as Homer's *Iliad*. At the beginning of the sixth book, Helen uses an image of waves sweeping her under to indicate her own innocence of the war that she brings to Troy. Conjuring a watery scene to express her alleged wish that she had never been born, or that she had been left exposed to die as an infant, she says that she would prefer that she had been cast "into the surf where the roaring breakers crash and drag / and the waves had swept me off before all this happened" (6.274 ff. Trans Fagles). This image culminates an amazing speech in which Helen anticipates Hector's argument that she causes Troy's suffering. To meet his objection before he can raise it, she calls herself a bitch and slut, thereby establishing her ethical appeal as a victim. This self-portrait allows her to persuade Troy's greatest warrior to continue defending her, an action that illustrates what Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* (1992) calls the performance of gender. Helen then asks Hector to sit by her, a physical gesture that is both submissive and manipulative: "But come in, rest on this seat with me, dear brother." Although Hector understands the power of her performance and refuses to join her mini-drama, Helen's speech and acting establish a connection for women between drowning in the sea and survival.

Oppressed by their social position, women were often located underwater during the middle ages. In the thirteen-century *L'Atre perilleux*, Brun sans pitié (Brun the Pitiless) obliges his damsel to im-

merse herself naked in a fountain, and then cuts off the heads of all knights who try to rescue her. He is jealous of the knights of the Round Table, whose merit, according to the damsel, is greater than his. Sir Gawain eventually defeats her terrible companion and liberates her. The scene was common, and we see it again in *Le Haut livre du Graal*. In one of the episodes of this version of the Grail story, Marin the Jealous, believing his wife has deceived him with Gawain, forces her to jump into the cold water of a lake before he savagely whips her. She is released only by death, as Marin kills her while fighting Gawain. Another version occurs in the *Continuation de Perceval* by Gerbert de Montreuil. Another jealous man, Brandin Dur Cuer (Brandin the Hard Hearted) makes his lover Dyonise, the most beautiful woman in the world, dwell nude in a fountain, submerged up to her neck. He castigates her because she says that Perceval is wiser, more valiant, more courteous, and more generous, than he is. Perceval frees her from her icy penitence, but in a surprise move that may register what her oppression has done to her, she turns around and tries to cut off Perceval's head (James-Raoul 388). In each case the women are dominated not just by men but feudal codes of behavior.

Water continued to be a sign of sensuality and oppression throughout the Renaissance. One has only to think of Cleopatra's association with sexuality, overflow, excess, and the Nile (Hall *Things* 157) or the imprisonment of Florimel undersea in Spenser's *Faerie Queene* (1596). Despite these and other examples, near drowning is not confined to women. Both Viola and her brother are nearly drowned before *Twelfth Night* begins, and Ferdinand's father lies full fathom five before he changes his evil ways in *The Tempest*. Prospero not only washes his enemies clean, but the play suggests a new, more tolerant worldview, if not a new way of thinking: "Nothing of him that doth fade / But doth suffer a sea-change / Into something rich and strange" (1.2.397), according to Ariel's song. Mind, for Andrew Marvell, was "that ocean where each kind / Does straight its own resemblance find" ("The Garden"), a place of expression and containment. Male authors seem to have felt as socially oppressed as women do today.

For the next three centuries, illness as well as near drowning provided images of female debility. There are few books where water is more oppressive than Charles Dickens's *Bleak House*, which confirms the link. The great fog in London represents the impenetrable ways of the Court of Chancery, which oppress male and female alike, but the center of the book is a woman, Esther Summerson. Rain dripping on the eaves of the country house of Esther's mother represents both boredom and the social constraints that separate her from her daughter. The use of water as a sign of the social oppression of women will become more powerful due to its association with mortal illness, as occurs when Esther takes sick and nearly dies during a period of transition from ward to recognized heiress. She herself connects her illness to the social limitations and difficulties that weigh her down, while Dickens's wet image of confinement prefigures -- to take just one more example out of many -- the boredom of the English countryside in Evelyn Waugh's *A Handful of Dust*. In this novel a dark and dank countryside forebodes the death, in a riding accident, of the heroine's young son John Andrew. This loss of a son adds to marital strains that Waugh represents by an underwater image. When her husband enters her separate bedroom and Evelyn kisses him, she is compared to a "Nereid emerging from fathomless depths of clear water" (16). In the time between Dickens and Waugh, one of the most influential examples of water as a symbol of social oppression appeared in Kate Chopin's novel *The Awakening*. First published in 1898 and reprinted in paperback during the 1970s, the novel had become one of the major additions of women's literature by the 1980s, partly due to Annette Kolodny's 1980 essay "Dancing through the Minefield," which told how in 1979 an Oxford-trained colleague voted against letting her give English-department credit for teaching a seminar on the book. Today *The Awakening* has become a staple in American high school English classes. Throughout the United States, younger generations now read a novel in which learning to swim is Chopin's metaphor for a woman's gaining confidence to overcome her marital unhappiness.

The title of Chopin's novel refers to its heroine Edna's awakening to her own sense of self, which is also compared to giving birth, "an awakening to find a little new life to which she had given being"

(182). Much of *The Awakening* is set on the Gulf of Mexico, where the heroine's inability to swim is connected to her sense of oppression. Edna Pontellier's outer conformity belies her inner disturbances. Eventually she awakens to how her husband and children suffocate her. She expresses her new self-mastery by taking a few strokes during a midnight excursion to the Gulf: "A certain ungovernable dread hung about her when in the water, unless there was a hand near by that might reach out and reassure her. ... But that night she was like the little tottering, stumbling, clutching child, who of a sudden realizes his powers, and walks for the first time alone, boldly and with over-confidence. She could have shouted for joy. She did shout for joy, as with a sweeping stroke or two she lifted her body to the surface of the water. ... As she swam she seemed to be reaching out for the unlimited in which to lose herself" (46-47). Having learned to swim -- a metaphor for her new-found independence -- Edna gives up keeping house and trying to please her husband. At the end of the novel, perhaps because she no longer fears water, Edna drowns herself. It somehow seems natural, just as Chopin defines oppression as the *inevitable* suffering of women in childbirth or in marriage. The influence of Ophelia's death is palpable and helps explain the readiness with which recent directors of *Hamlet* have embraced the trope of the underwater woman. Thus, the cumulative impact of new additions to the canon and feminist scholarship during the 1980s coincides with the cinematic deployment of the underwater woman trope, despite its artistic limitations. Films like *Sleeping with the Enemy* (1991), starring Julia Roberts, and Jane Campion's *The Piano* (1993) repeat motifs found in feminist works such as Margaret Atwood's *Sanctuary* (1972) or Adrienne Rich's *Diving into the Wreck* (1973). These were far from the first films to illustrate the oppression of or danger to women through water imagery. One thinks of the threatening showers in *Psycho* or *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* or Hollywood's use of an underwater scene to represent psychic imbalance, as in Dustin Hoffman's submergence in the family pool in *The Graduate*. *Sleeping with the Enemy* and *The Piano* illustrate how the convention of the underwater woman became a cliché, as later directors told stories that overtly sympathize with women who suffer from controlling husbands, fathers, society, or nature, or themselves.

Based on a novel by Nancy Price but written and directed by men, *Sleeping with the Enemy* illustrates the topos of the underwater woman when a woman named Laura (Julia Roberts), cruelly mistreated by her husband, escapes her entrapment in marriage by jumping off a sailboat, a move for which she has prepared by taking swimming lessons, despite her fear of water. In a scene so unrealistic that it must be symbolic, the film shows Laura clinging to a buoy in Long Island sound after she jumps off her husband's sailboat. Her escape illustrates two essential features of the Hollywood trope, the near drowning of a woman and her subsequent release to represent her entrance to a new and better world. The actual underwater shot is a flashback to her lessons at the YWCA, which serves the dual purpose of symbolizing a woman's entrapment and showing off Julia Robert's legs. Equally unrealistic and symbolic is the underwater scene near the end of Jane Campion's *The Piano*. This Academy Award winning film tells the story of a mute woman named Ada (Holly Hunter) who joins a man in New Zealand because he has agreed to marry her even though she has a daughter born out of wedlock. Ada is mute, and her inability or unwillingness to speak symbolizes her inner rebellion at the way society punishes her. To establish her identity, she hauls a huge piano through sea, beach, and jungle to her new home. This Victorian relic expresses her private sensuality and problems. She plays it beautifully, but its stolid and heavy mass symbolizes the way society appropriates and represses her sexuality. Cold toward her condescending and rather impotent husband, she soon has an affair with a Maori half-breed named Baines (Harvey Keitel). We wait for some horrible to happen to her, and it does when her husband chops off one of her fingers, symbolically castrating her (Campion uses psychoanalytic terms in her interviews).

Ada's redemption comes in three parts, and each relies on water imagery in ways that will be duplicated by Shakespeare films during the 1990s. Having lost her finger, Ada gazes upward into the rain even as her Victorian skirts drag her into the mud. The imagery suggests that she has been forced into the mud of illicit love before she can find true happiness, represented by her upward gaze.

In the next scene, we see someone washing a pair of angel wings that are part of a costume her daughter wears, symbolizing Ada's moral innocence. After failing once again to experience arousal except when he is violent with her, Stewart tells Baines, the Maori lover, that he wants Baines to take away his wife. Ada's release is then represented by a third drenching, when she nearly drowns in the ocean, in Jane Campion's lyrical ending for *The Piano*, a victim of society, Ada finds herself under the ocean before her release (see picture).

Here we see Ada as she struggles free from what drags her down:

And here Ada surfaces to a new life:

This final and most egregious use of water imagery occurs near the end of the film in a scene that seems to have been added to a late draft of the screenplay. Campion was looking for what she calls a "poetic or lyrical conclusion" rather than the "original ending with a classical settlement." As she is ferried away to a new life with Baines, Ada allows the crew of the Maori war canoe to slide her piano into the sea. At the last second, she reasserts her attachment to this clumsy reminder of her passion by allowing a trailing coil of rope to catch her foot. The piano drags her under the sea, where she stays for far longer than is humanly possible. The scene is silent and filmed in slow motion. Ada then does not so much struggle to escape from the rope knotted around her ankle as find herself miraculously freed and floating to the surface. She rises to the light of day and a happy life with her lover Barnes. The visual cliché of Holly Hunter serenely submerging in silence and then surfacing with equal serenity illustrates the topos of the underwater woman as a sign of social oppression and release (even if to death) from Helen of Troy to Sylvia Plath.

With its long literary history, it is natural that rain developed as a cinematic signifier and that directors of Shakespeare films often add rain where there is none in the text. Rain is a natural equivalent to tears, although it can be made to serve other purposes. Baz Lurhmann is said never to have met a scene he did not think would be improved by rain (*Romeo+Juliet* DVD). Cinematically, at least, there is nothing unusual about the thunder and rain that Welles added when Iago volunteers to kill Cassio (1952) or the puddles that Grigori Kozintsev's Russian *King Lear* (1971) adds to the king's funeral procession. In Shakespeare's play, a doctor orders music to soothe Lear's mind, but the film lingers over Lear's head as he is carried beside a stream, which flows turbulently and in the same direction as Lear is carried. The river suggests -- and here as so often one can only make an educated guess as to the director's intentions -- the flow and turbulence of his life, the swelling chaos of Lear's mind, and his movement through time toward death. The films Roman Polanski made in Poland before he directed *Macbeth* (1971) make full use of the element to find cinematic ways to express the position of women. *Knife in the Water* (1963), Polanski's first international success, associates a subservient woman with the placid lake on which she and two men sail and contrast her to the violence of the two men, whose struggle for power, often physical, is represented in the film by a knife. In *Repulsion* (1965), Polanski featured a woman who, having gone mad after she is raped, keeps her tormentor's body in a bathtub. Akira Kurosawa's explicit avoidance of rain in *Ran* (1985), by contrast, indicates a difference between the work of a Japanese artist and the standard semiotics of Western cinema. Hidetora (Lear) has sons instead of daughters to suit the earlier Japanese culture in which Kurosawa sets the scene and the dryness of most of the film alters the play as much as this male world alters Lear's daughters. When Hidetora (Lear) leaves the castle of his second son, Jiro, he goes out not into a storm but into parching heat and famine. In Shakespeare's play, the storm on the heath explicitly represents the mental chaos Lear experiences. Kurosawa, however, makes his film nearly waterless. Several times the director shows fluffy white clouds, and as these become ominously dark as Lear shows his bad judgment early in the film, but it never rains, as illustrated in the next two pictures. In the context of a Samurai world: Kurosawa avoids feminine water images and darkening clouds signal the impending storms that Hidetora faces in *Ran*:

By contrast, non-textual rain soaks Callista Flockhart (Helena) as she pushes her bicycle after Demetrius, who scorns her in the 1999 *Midsummer Night's Dream*:

The scene seems to have been based on a metaphor in the text, which mentions Demetrius's "showers of oaths." Equally symbolic but less hoary are underwater scenes set in swimming pools. Most of the half a dozen or so scenes that show women moving slowly underwater in Shakespeare films take place in pools. These include Juliet's falling into her father's pool in Baz Luhrman's *Romeo+Juliet* (1996), the 1930s water ballet in Branagh's *Love's Labors Lost* (1999), where the female visitors to Navarre find themselves underwater as soon as they are denied entrance to Ferdinand's court (see figure), and Ophelia's swimming in Claudius's high-rise in Michael Almereyda's *Hamlet* (2000):

The conventionality of the underwater scene reminds us of Vladimir Nabokov's disapproval of the ordinariness of sex scenes in cinema during the 1950s: "The scene with the water-ski girl, gulping and giggling, is exceptionally successful," wrote Nabokov. "But I was appalled by the commonplace quality of the sexual passages. I would like to say something about that. Clichés and conventions breed remarkably fast" (137). As if to illustrate Nabokov's point, Kenneth Branagh (1996) and Michael Almereyda seize every opportunity to make Ophelia as wet as possible in their films, in part to foreshadow Ophelia's death by drowning but also to symbolize the forces that constrain her. The brook where Gertrude says Ophelia drowns is already symbolic in the text, since apparently no one witnessed the event, or they would have assisted her, and Gertrude's lovely description of the drowning may be just a way the queen calms Ophelia's choleric brother. This symbolism lends itself to cinematic expansion, however, since Ophelia is already an underwater woman in the text. Earlier directors kept Ophelia dry, but by the 1990s Hollywood had created associations they both directors enlist.

Branagh's water images are both clever and absurd. Laertes himself makes his sister an underwater woman by comparing Ophelia's youth and maidenhood to a dewed flower liable to rot before it blooms: "Too often before their buttons be disclos'd, / And in the morn and liquid dew of youth, / Contagious blastments are most imminent" (1.3.40-42). Consciously or not, the film draws on the trope when it sets Laertes' conversation with Ophelia against the fountains of a geometric garden. If we credit the camera with providing a visual image that expresses the core of this difficult line, it is nonetheless odd to see fountains full of water in winter, to judge by the snow on the ground. Real fountains would be drained to prevent their cracking. (Shot at Blenheim Palace near Oxford, the film probably used fake snow.) Such absurdities often indicate symbolism, and here it seems that Branagh not only represents Laertes' words and foreshadows Ophelia's watery demise, but also suggests a relationship between the water that will kill her and the oppressive social conventions that prevent her from loving Hamlet. Later, the symbolism of the underwater woman carries Branagh away when he has guard aim a fire hose at Ophelia and soak her in her padded cell. Having overlooked the absurdity of an unfrozen fountain in winter, Branagh at first seems alert to the practical problem that Ophelia cannot possibly drown outdoors during the dead of a Danish winter. She accepts, or provokes, a hosing at the same time as she mouths a key that presumably allows her to escape from her cell. The soaking of an oppressed woman whose madness may be socially induced carries with it images of the New England ducking stool for witches and scolds. Branagh could have let us imagine Ophelia freezing to death, but he inserts a quick clip of Ophelia underwater during Gertrude's speech. This addition to the play, where Shakespeare never shows Ophelia actually drowning, owes its existence to the trope of the underwater woman. Michael Almereyda is equally intent to use water to express Ophelia's tragedy. He associates her watery conditional with Hamlet's "To be or not to be" speech by intercutting frames of Ophelia beside a fountain in New York City with Hamlet (Ethan Hawke) as he replay lines from the speech on various digital devices. This montage suggests that Hamlet is meditating not on death or suicide, the usual interpretations, but on his relationship with Ophelia. Later, as Hamlet views retrospective DVDs of his father, Ophelia shows up, not Gertrude (the wife who betrayed Hamlet Sr.), and when the speech is over, the film cuts back to Ophelia at the fountain. She balances on the fountain's edge of the fountain, an action meant to connote her mental instability, before the film cuts again to Hamlet at home. Hamlet's meditation on a "sea of troubles" is focused almost exclusively on Ophelia in this film, which constantly associates water with the constraints that people and society place on Ophelia: Scorned by Hamlet and oppressed by her father, Ophelia imagines herself underwater in Almereyda's *Hamlet*:

A later scene also associates the men in Ophelia's life with the waters that will kill her. It takes place in a high rise building where Polonius and Ophelia find Claudius swimming laps. Claudius's pool reflects Ophelia's red jacket as she listens to her father and Claudius discuss her impact on Hamlet. She stares in the pool while they talk, then, in what turns out to be a mental fantasy, she jumps in just as

her father is saying that her relationship with Hamlet "must not be." Between her moment of reflection and fantasy of immersion, Ophelia walks as if she is having trouble keeping her balance, again fitting Hollywood's association between mental imbalance and being underwater. Ophelia seems to jump in and cover her face, to experience a wave of madness, but she recovers, this time, and only *feels* like she has been underwater and Hollywood takes full advantage of Ophelia's drowning as an image of her lack of power (see picture).

The lights of an urban waterfall illuminate Ophelia as the film once again creates a montage out of Hamlet muttering "to be" while Ophelia delivers Hamlet his remembrances of her. The water seems to fall in slow motion, an image of Ophelia's reluctance, sadness, and powerless condition. Her movements are suggestive, and ominous, like Garbo's in *Anna Karenina* (Panofsky 288). There is textual warrant and perhaps cinematic necessity for having fountains foreshadow Ophelia's madness and death. We are never clear, in this film of *Hamlet*, exactly how Ophelia dies. We see her lying in the pool of a fountain. She may have jumped, not drowned. No one understands her, but the images make the terrible pressures that drove her to her death plain enough.

Where Ophelia escapes the pressures of the world by death, Juliet's deliverance is meant to be Romeo, but in both cases directors use water to symbolize the heroine's oppression. Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo+Juliet* (1997) establishes baths as a sign of male power that endangers women. According to the director's conversation on the DVD, it was an afterthought, but

the film crew set the second half of a meeting between Juliet's shady father and Paris in a steam bath because the heli-pad on top of Capulet's building that the script called for was not available. Nonetheless, the steam bath reinforces the themes of the first half of the conversation between Capulet and Paris. The two men smirk as they discuss Juliet's sexuality, her readiness for marriage, and her future motherhood. They wink and nod about the fresh young buds who will attend Capulet's party. The steam extrapolates their heated state. This association between water and male sexuality is reinforced by the first shots of the Capulet mansion, set behind a vertically gushing fountain whose bubbling spills onto our first view of Lady Capulet, who wears provocative underwear. She looks hideous without her wig or make-up, the image of a woman who defines herself by her attractiveness to men. By filming Capulet and Paris in a steam bath as they discuss Juliet's future, the film figures the way the male world of the Capulets skews Juliet's personality. Here is how Luhrmann films Juliet in her bathtub after showing her male oppressors in a steam bath. Although a sign of Juliet's oppression, the underwater shot also follows the symbolic pattern of signaling a woman's release. The first time we see Juliet, she is underwater, smiling, as her nurse runs through the house at the bidding of Lady Capulet yelling for "Hooliet." There is no bathtub in Shakespeare's text, and it is almost imperceptible in the film. Juliet smiles as she holds her breath; her hair floats about her, stressing her symbolic freedom. The theory of semiotics is that anything can represent anything (Elam 14). According to meanings attached to the underwater woman by the 1990s, this scene suggests that Juliet, however confined, is an independent thinker. She will escape her parents' plans. She will not marry Paris. And here is how the hint of the ominous is suggested: Romeo first sees Juliet through a fishtank of water: Luhrmann uses water imagery to establish a symmetry between Romeo and Juliet since both are trapped by social forces and both seek a clearer, better world. This symmetry lets Romeo take on the role of the underwater woman, just as in the text he worries that his association with Juliet makes him effeminate. We see him underwater when he must wash his face before meeting Juliet to cleanse himself of the drug that Mercutio has given him on the way to the ball, and later when he leaves Juliet the morn-

ing after and falls into her swimming pool. The lovers first see each other through a fishtank that separates the washrooms for men and women in Capulet's mansion. In the film, after Romeo leaves the mask he had been wearing in the basin of water where he has washed away Mercutio's drug, he looks in a mirror; then he turns to stare at the fish. In three steps he leaves behind his false self, the one who loved Rosalind and lived in a world of misguided and immoral sexuality. He stops to see his true self in a mirror (figured in the film by the way DiCaprio moves his hair

back into place), then he looks with awe into the medium that will first reveal Juliet. The way water is photographed provides a visual icon of social oppression, for the lovers lived in a world of hopeless

taste, immoral behavior, and parental bickering and control that they cannot escape. Commenting on the fish tank through which Romeo and Juliet meet underwater, Lurhmann mentions that the water provides a transition to tragedy, which is similar to his comment on the beach scene after Romeo and Juliet are married, where the filmmakers added clouds to suggest the ap-

proaching storm. Lurhmann also says that the fish tank provided an excuse for silence as well as a way to create surprise. What distinguishes Hollywood's scenes of underwater women is the way women immerse slowly and then ascend as if somehow transformed or released of some social weight. Af-

ter Danes and DiCaprio fall into the Capulet pool that replaces Juliet's balcony as the place of their colloquy, they are first shown on security monitors in the room of a guard, then underwater, where Romeo turns in slow motion and faces a staring Juliet. Her arms make an angel-wing movement over her head, not to embrace Romeo but to move her to the surface. In

Shakespeare's text, Juliet is always cleverer than Romeo, although he is not dull. In Lurhmann's film, she seeks the surface more openly than Romeo but then emerges more slowly, lingering, as it were, underwater, to stress her symbolic release. The ability of Juliet and a Romeo to wash themselves from their social conditions lies at the heart of the balcony scene that Lurhmann transfers into Capulet's swimming pool. The pressures on Juliet (married, engaged to marry, lying to her parents) are again signaled by a bath: When Juliet is once again trapped by her father's insistence that she marry Paris, Lurhmann once again turned to a bath to symbolize her oppression. As soon as Juliet seems to relent and agree to marry Paris (we know from the text that she is lying), her nurse draws a bath for her. For Angelica, water is a cleansing agent that symbolically allows Juliet to deny her marriage, but for Juliet and the audience, it is a sign of Juliet's oppression. To restate my point as clearly as I can: there is no bath in the text, and in the film we only catch a glimpse of it, but that glimpse suffices to establish how this modern Hollywood trope influences the cinematic representation of Juliet's quandary. Instead of a complicated set of double-entendres, which start when Juliet weeps for Romeo but pretends, to her mother, to be weeping for Tybalt, the film cuts most of dialogue and instead finds an equivalent for Juliet's duplicity in a her bath. At the very end of the film, a series of flashbacks of Juliet underwater establishes a connection between her surfacing in a swimming pool and her death as some kind of release from the world that lead her to suicide. Less obvious that Ophelia's water imagery, more complicated than Juliet's sensual swims, perhaps the most complex example of the link between pools and social evils occurs in Julie Taymor's *Titus* (1999). Taymor stages an orgy set in a Roman pool that she adds to the text, and she pays special attention to the oppression of Tamora. The result is a schematic but brilliant twist on the Hollywood trope of the underwater woman. In an interview with Dan Kleinman, Taymor admits to using images and influences from her own time: "I'm a person of this day and age, so my approach to the material is quite naturally influenced by all the movies, plays and paintings I've absorbed. You can't run away from all of them. It's how you twist and turn

those influences that makes the work interesting" (Taymor disc 2). She admits the orgy does not come from the play, but argues that it opens the play, replacing the "elegant beauty of stylization" of theater with a "visceral reality" characteristic of TV or cinema. *Titus Andronicus*, for Taymor, is a dissertation on violence, and the swimming-pool orgy is meant to be decadent.

Taymor has a complex and studied understanding of ritual. A bath that resembles the pouring of boiling oil from a rampart ironically cleanses Titus and his sons when they return from war. Swamps and rain surround the raped Lavinia, suggesting both tears and life-giving moisture. Bell jars encase the heads of Titus's sons, as if to ungender Sylvia Plath's image of despair; Titus retreats to his bath, like the dying Marat, but arises to take his awful revenge on Saturninus. Taymor drowns Virgo (Justice) in the emperor's pool and then releases Tamora, her double, to her wickedness and, ultimately, her death. Taymor uses the orgy, then, not simply to signal Tamora's mistreatment as a Roman captive and mother, but to salute Shakespeare's freedom to envisage Tamora as a monster of revenge. As Taymor says in her interview with Dan Kleinman, Tamora is beautiful and smart, but she changes into a monster because "vengeance destroys her, it eats her up inside" (Taymor disc 2) and Taymor creates a watery equivalent for Tamora, the Goth victim of Roman power.

The film uses a Roman pool to combine into one scene the arrows of justice that Titus shoots toward heaven and Tamora's deception of the emperor. A large-breasted figure floats in a pool among couples engaged in a silent caricature of sex. And in an adjoining area, Saturninus lies exhausted, clutching Tamora's naked breast: Outside, Marcus tells Titus's followers, who are supposed to be petitioning heaven for the return of Justice, to shoot into the atrium where the orgy takes place. Their arrows disperse the participants, and one hits the floating balloon, dousing whoever has been received oral sex on its back (see Blumenthal 225). Outside, Titus says he has shot an arrow into Virgo's lap (Virgo is another name for Astraea, the goddess of justice who left the earth). The statue that receives the arrow is therefore an image of Justice. She deflates, as if returning to earth, but in this case into the water. The collapse of this figure of a woman signals the end of Saturninus's misrule and the start of Tamora's revenge on Rome, for which she has been coddling the emperor all this time and deceiving him while having Aaron's baby (for Tamora is horribly oppressed by Titus, who has murdered her son, by the emperor, who marries her to spite Titus and to indulge his perverse need to be mothered, and by society whose racial codes condemn her liaison with Aaron the Moor): Tamora under the emperor in Taymor's *Titus*.

Properly tragic in Aristotle's terms, neither better nor worse than we are, Taymor's Tamora is the equivalent of Julie Taymor herself. The bosomy balloon that floats on the pool is the same golden color and as the same large breasts as Tamora, especially when her sons join her, while the name Tamora is uncannily close to Taymor. The balloon statue, designed by Dante Ferretti, is based on a work of art owned by Taymor herself: "Her cheeks and breasts distressed as if from years of sea winds, a giant figurehead labeled 'The Havoc' greets visitors to Julie Taymor's New York apartment" (Blumenthal 7). First published in 1995, before Taymor made *Titus Andronicus*, Blumenthal's book includes a photograph of this figurehead. Material added in 1999 includes a still photo of the floating figure from the film. The balloon is Taymor's personal signature, a testimony the vitality of Tamora as a character capable of both good and evil. For Taymor goes beyond the Hollywood cliché by insisting that Tamora's actions are not justice, but revenge:

The trope of the underwater woman offers a generalized symbol of oppression that goes beyond a specific problem -- often a domineering husband -- to suggest a wider need for women to move out-

side the confines of the world in which they find themselves. The trope itself is a variation of the ritual of bathing to rid one of one's earlier self or the stigma of the world. Yet shots of women moving slowly underwater, caressed by the camera, their hair moving in slow Medusa motions, strike one as distractions. Part of the problem is that the scenes are often clumsily inserted. Still, the trope has a powerful grip on Anglophile filmmakers looking for visual equivalents to Shakespeare's text. It accounts for the variety of ways that films have found to moisten Ophelia, Juliet, Viola, Miranda (who is first seen by a swimming pool in *Forbidden Planet* 1956), Tamora, and Titania's fairies. If the trend continues and is not co-opted as a sign of queerness (as it is when Kevin Kline, playing a nineteenth century Bottom, is otherwise inexplicably soaked by a flagon of Chianti [1999]), we may expect to see submerged Cordelias and Desdemonas in future films.

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