Just Another Angry Woman: Adaptations of Female Rage through Euripides, Shakespeare, and Whedon

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Emotions are a normal part of life. Every single day, we experience emotions that feel understandable and even universal, whether positive or negative. It is reasonable that if someone treats you well, you feel joy or contentment. It is equally reasonable that if someone wrongs you, you feel sadness or anger. Euripides, William Shakespeare, and Joss Whedon all present female characters who feel strong emotions in response to serious transgressions, yet their societies all try to subdue their anger.

Euripides' Medea, Shakespeare's Queen Margaret, and Whedon's Willow Rosenberg are all victims of various wrongdoings in their stories, and all three women are belittled for the emotions that they feel and try to express. Often, the individuals who do the most harm are the ones responsible for the silencing, which highlights questions about the power dynamic present in civilization. As Elyce Rae Helford explains, there must be a "willingness to offend" because there is a high

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price associated with females displaying anger (18). While these characters may initially receive support, Medea through the Chorus, Queen Margaret through co-conspirators, and Willow through her friends, their societies ultimately do not support their emotions; to do so would mean acknowledging that they have reason to feel angry with the current structures.

Over two thousand years have passed between Euripides' *Medea* and Whedon's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, yet the minimization of female emotion is as present in Euripides' writing as it is in Shakespeare's and Whedon's stories. These three characters, Medea, Margaret, and Willow, are not direct adaptations of one another, but in retelling similar stories of silenced female emotion, show that there is an unfortunately "timeless or universal significance" (Stephens 93). Comparing the representations of anger and grief in Euripides, Shakespeare, and Whedon, despite obvious differences within the specific characters and stories, presents the notion that strong feminine anger or mourning has always been mitigated, which denies women a voice and power within their society.

Euripides' *Medea* (431 BCE), Shakespeare's *The Second Part of Henry the Sixth* (1591), *The Third Part of Henry the Sixth* (1595), and *The Tragedy of King Richard the Third* (1594), and the sixth season of Whedon and company's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (2001-2002) present situations and offenses that drive these three women to their breaking points, where they can no longer display "proper" emotional control that is "contained" or that presents "an appearance of calm" (Helford 22). For each of these characters, this is a place where they are forced to take on angry roles and fully display their emotions in order to establish power and get what they need and want, not because they want more than what they already have, but because they need to protect what is currently theirs. While they are expressing self-

determination, it is not self-indulgent: Medea, Margaret, and Willow all try to fight back against the systems in place that attempt to subdue and wrong them. Although adaptations and recreations of stories often work to reproduce culture as it evolves (Dean), the continued representation of the same story of silenced and angry women indicates a flawed system that dictates who is allowed to be angry, resulting in a society that often labels female anger as irrational and emotional. Culture does not necessarily always evolve; however, adapting the same story attempts to "challenge the cultural hegemony" that shapes society (Stephens 94). An analysis and comparison of these three representations can help emphasize the silenced voices, showcasing the empowerment that is found through expressing emotions that society tries to subdue.

Euripides' portrayal of Medea, William Shakespeare's dramatization of Queen Margaret, and Joss Whedon and company's creation of Willow Rosenberg all work to depict the silencing of female emotion. Yet these characters all use that stereotypical "female" emotion to their advantage, expressing grief and anger as a means of empowerment. At the breaking point of multiple wrongdoings, Medea, Margaret, and Willow all defy their expected silence in order to display the full power of their voices to make their anger heard, refusing to submit to gendered expectations despite society's attempts to vilify them for making necessary noise. But with these continued representations, a deep-rooted and inescapable destructive limitation at the hands of society becomes apparent.

Medea

Euripides writes his version of Medea, a character from Greek mythology, as a woman who takes her strong emotions after her husband betrays her and turns them into her strength.

In the course of getting vengeance against her husband, Medea kills her own children. This element divides audiences, creating disagreements about the level of justification and sympathy they are willing to grant Medea. In vilifying her, however, audiences and critics fail to fairly consider Medea's position as a female and an outsider in a patriarchal society. Just as Jason, Creon, and the Chorus eventually try to quiet Medea and ignore her misery, audiences who reduce Medea to a murderer negate the hopeless corner into which she has been forced. While she does seem to lose her sense of morality in the act of killing her children, it can be argued that Medea remains justified in her actions as she acknowledges and mourns all that she has lost, and she does not lose sight of the true cause of that loss.

Medea begins with the titular character mourning alone, but she takes this sadness and transforms it into power. Her tragic situation of loss is one that evokes strong emotion: Jason, her husband, is abandoning their marriage oath in favor of marrying the princess of Corinth, King Creon's daughter. A large element of Medea's grief consists of all that she has lost in initially marrying Jason; she has used her magic and her wit to help Jason gain status (and the Golden Fleece), but in doing so, she had to abandon her home and her family outside of Greece. Through Jason's betrayal, Medea has lost her husband and her place in Greece, but more importantly, she has lost reputation and honor. Already a foreigner, an outsider, she becomes an outcast. Yet she does not accept Jason's wrongdoing in silence; her initial anger is loud and heard as she contemplates how to enact vengeance against Jason. Elizabeth Bryson Bongie argues that Medea's actions align with that of the heroes presented in Greek literature due to the extent that Medea is willing to go to in order to defend her reputation; Greek heroes constantly want to maintain and defend their *arête*, or excellence, which means

that they will go to great extremes to protect their honor (27). Bongie explains that, for the most part, these characters were male; male heroes were active while female "heroes" were passive and obedient to their husbands (31). Medea is not a passive individual, as evidenced by her constant actions to ensure that "Not one of them shall rack my heart with pain and get away with it" (Euripides 397). Euripides creates a character who stands up for herself and fights back, establishing her power and countering passive female expectations. Even if audiences do not classify her as a hero, Medea is an active and empowered female character fighting boldly for her reputation.

However, it is necessary to consider the context of Medea's actions and the breaking point that she has reached. Further harming her perceived place in society, as S. Georgia Nugent contends, Jason damages Medea's reputation as "he makes the decision and acts upon it, really, for Medea's own good, since his royal connections will improve the status of her (and his) children. Medea, somehow, doesn't see it that way" (309). This reasoning shifts the blame entirely onto Medea as it mirrors Jason's logic and mocks Medea for not seeing the benefit of what is arguably his betrayal. If he has not been loyal to their marriage oath, there is no guarantee that he will be loyal to his promise to help Medea and their children; his actions are selfishly motivated. This treatment, unfortunately for Medea, is a common occurrence for women. In her discussion of women's anger, Rebecca Traister reminds readers that women often are mistreated and disregarded because men do not think of them as equals (181). Jason even goes as far as to blame Medea for the exile King Creon imposes on her because of her "demented rant" and "refus[al] to curb [her] stupid tongue" (Euripides 450, 457). While Jason abandons and demeans Medea, the Chorus questions "Where on earth can you [Medea] turn? / to what

protector, to what home, to what land / to save you from your troubles?" (359-61). She is out of options and disgraced for her anger; everything escalates until Medea feels the extent of her desperation. This ultimately leads her to find the true extent of her power via her rage.

Medea does not sulk in her misery; her grief morphs into anger, and she contemplates how her emotions can enable her to get justice for Jason's wrongdoings. Loss of honor is not something that can merely be ignored or brushed aside (Bongie 28). At first, the Chorus even supports her, saying that she is "justified inflicting punishment . . . I am not surprised you feel such pain" (Euripides 268-9). In the Chorus's initial support, there is recognition of her heartbreak. Medea wastes little time in creating a plan to get vengeance. In doing so, for Bongie, her actions become reminiscent of a Greek hero because she is "defying the limits" established by self or society "no matter what the consequences to others and to himself" (52). This seems like a reasonable path for someone in Medea's position to follow; when someone wrongs us, we want fair treatment at any cost. As Audre Lorde asserts, "Anger is a source of empowerment we must not fear to tap for energy rather than guilt" (283). Medea refuses to feel guilty for her actions because she is not responsible for Jason's treachery. Her grief and her anger enable her to tap into the power necessary to defy the gendered expectations that society enforces; she will not quietly accept betrayal and subdue her emotions. With the one day that she is given before Creon exiles her, she plans to "make dead meat of my enemies– / all three: the father and his daughter and my husband" (Euripides 374-5). Her initial plan is to get vengeance against those who have wronged her; she is not trying to elevate her position or indulge her desires. She knows what she wants, and she will do anything to make it happen.

Unfortunately, in this pursuit to rectify the wrongs that Jason has wrought upon her, Medea will truly stop at nothing. She notes that "passion is such a deadly ill for humankind!" (Euripides 330). But after experiencing such severe anger and frustration from Jason's wrongdoings, Medea's passion seems justified, regardless of its implications for humankind. She wants to get justice and make Jason suffer as she has suffered. Therefore, in an effort to bring about that anguish, Medea must make terrible decisions, elevating her anger to what she herself deems a "deadly ill." She does not immediately set out to kill her children, but she needs them to carry poisoned gifts to Jason's new bride, and in doing so, they will also be poisoned (780-4). Her plan is intended to kill the princess of Corinth, not necessarily to kill her sons. However, her children become collateral damage as they act as pawns in her plan. It is at this point that the Chorus's support starts to shift to pity and disapproval: "You would become the wretchedest of women" (818). Yet Medea continues. Her sons' deaths seem like a bonus for Medea because Jason will suffer immensely. But as Marianne Hopman notes, it is when Medea acknowledges that her plan involves killing her children that everything changes (170). This is the point of divide where audiences hesitate to sympathize with Medea and instead view her as a monster, similarly to Jason. It is a moment that shows the dangers of submitting to fury.

In fact, this moment even gives Medea reason to pause and contemplate her actions. Contrary to Nugent's assertion that "the children of this marriage are simply done away with, wiped out or erased" when they become "insignificant" casualties (311), Medea dwells on their impending doom. Medea notes that her "passion has all melted" when she looks at her sons, recognizing that she will suffer alongside Jason due to her

sons' deaths (Euripides 1042). For Medea, the deaths of her sons are anything but "insignificant." However, Medea cannot stop and let her "enemies get off scot-free" (1050). She "realize[s] what evil things I am about to do, / but it's my anger dominates my resolution—anger, / the cause of all the greatest troubles for humanity" (1078-80). Medea's actions stem from anger, which she deems a large source of society's problems. But in recognizing that she cannot lose sight of her intended vengeance, Medea seems to solidify Traister's analysis of the toxic roles for women: "to be fearsome is to be vilified and unpalatable, unnatural, and monstrous" (66). The Chorus, then, emphasizes how fearsome women are viewed. Medea knows that society will vilify her and resent her, but she cannot turn back now; she must defend herself and her honor. She will be alienated instead of sympathized with (Hopman 172), but it is a necessary action from Medea's perspective because her wrongdoers ignored and belittled her grief from its origin. Jason's final insults are "wasted in air" as Medea flies away in Helios' chariot, showing that the Greek gods support her (Euripides 1404). Jason's attempt to make Medea feel guilty is entirely pointless because Medea is liberated from society's restrictions and judgments; she finds strength in the power of her anger.

Critics such as Hopman might argue that Medea's revenge will not bring honor to women, but their actions will make their voices heard (169). As Soraya Chemaly explains in *Rage Becomes Her*, when society looks at anger in a vacuum, it fails to fully consider and understand the whole picture (xii). If audiences merely look at the death of Medea's sons in a vacuum, they fail to see everything that led to that moment. Medea is not encouraging others to follow her exact path; she even acknowledges anger as a "deadly ill" and "the cause of all the

greatest troubles for humanity," but she believes it is her only option (Euripides 330, 1080). When forced into this position, when silenced, ignored, and exiled, individuals must go to extremes. Those extremes, through the power of anger, can change the world and highlight flaws in society (Traister 211). Medea forces audiences to recognize that her hope and life are squandered solely because men acted selfishly, and it is because she is angry and acts upon that rage that we take note of her actions. Regardless of Medea's possible status as a hero, as Bongie names her, or if she divides audiences, her power is undeniable; it is because of her anger that she is ultimately heard.

Margaret

Telling a drastically different story, William Shakespeare creates a similar representation of ignored female voice through various appearances of Queen Margaret within *The Second Part of Henry the Sixth, The Third Part of Henry the Sixth* , and *The Tragedy of King Richard the Third* . Like Euripides and his character Medea, Shakespeare did not invent Margaret, but he did take her existing story in history, editorializing and dramatizing some elements of her character. At various points throughout the plays in which her character is present, Margaret endures and fights back against corruption and betrayal, and at times, it becomes easy to reduce her character to her anger. However, as with Medea, it is important to note the events that have led to her rage-fueled actions; Margaret is trying to protect herself and her place within society, and at times, survival is a key motivator for her actions. Through a disillusioning marriage, multiple deaths, and near-constant opposition, Margaret shows the power of her voice as she forces others to listen to her rage, ultimately highlighting that anger is

"not a luxury, but a necessity" (Chemaly 155). It is necessary for Margaret to express her emotions, rather than subduing them, to establish power and make society listen to her suffering.

Margaret, from the start of her marriage to the English King Henry, makes evident her motivation to protect her place within royal society. However, this is not an easy task because she has been captured as a prisoner and taken from her home in France, forced unknowingly into a marriage with a weak-willed king. As with Medea, if Margaret loses her place within her current society, her options for security are limited as both a foreigner and a woman. Therefore, Margaret wants to maintain her current role and the reputation and power that comes with it. When she observes the role that the Duke of Gloucester takes as Protector in *Henry VI, Part 2* , Margaret is quick to point out his excessive influence: "What, shall King Henry be a pupil still . . . Am I a queen in title and in style, / And must be made a subject to a duke?" (Shakespeare 1.3.49, 51-2). She wants to ensure that Henry actually holds the power tied to being king, but she is also concerned with protecting her own power. Margaret's agency is initially tied to her role as queen; however, her actions go far beyond those acceptable in a society where females are subjugated. Gloucester responds to her vocal protests by reminding her of socially expected norms: "These are no women's matters" (1.3.120). She is willing to speak up, showing that she is a powerful individual who will not be forced into the role of a silent or subservient wife, yet her society is not accepting of her agency.

This agency is further established as she works to protect not only her own place, but also her son's future in *Henry VI, Part 3*. King Henry, in an attempt to protect his kingship and avoid fighting with the Duke of York, agrees to give up his throne at his death. However, this agreement removes his son's,

Prince Edward's, claim to kingship. After King Henry states that the Earl and Duke forced him to make this agreement, Margaret calls out Henry's self-interested behavior, highlighting his weak actions: "Art thou king and wilt be forced? / I shame to hear thee speak" (Shakespeare 1.1.231-2). While Henry is a king and her husband, and thus has political and societal power over her, Margaret shifts from her role as a wife to a "mother vehemently defending her son's right" to the throne (Liebler and Shea 87). She speaks the truth, even if it is "inherently risky" (Alfar 789). She cannot passively allow this loss of power at the hands of her shameful husband. While Chemaly observes that "anger puts status, likeability, and relationships at risk" (16), Margaret believes she cannot concern herself with the risks of truth or anger because she must protect her son and provide necessary criticism about Henry's selfishness and cowardice She must draw power from her emotions, and she will not allow her role as a female to silence her anger.

At this point, Margaret does have support from some co-conspirators to keep King Henry in power, but the Duke of York and Richard remove these characters, leaving Margaret alone in her anger. In berating York in *Henry VI, Part 3*, Clifford and Northumberland validate Margaret's actions and physically hold York in place as she mocks the crown he has taken from King Henry (Shakespeare 1.4.95-99). They both understand and agree with her anger, acting accordingly and allowing her to speak her rage. This is similar to the Chorus in *Medea*, but while the Chorus's opinion shifts with Medea's growing rage, Margaret's support is removed not because of her actions but because of outside forces. York's spoken grief in this scene sways Northumberland, who claims that he "weep[s] with him, / To see how inly sorrow gripes his soul" (2.4.171-2). In this,

York's sorrow is seen as moving and justifiable, causing Margaret to lose Northumberland. Clifford, however, helps Margaret kill York. This, unfortunately, leads to York's son Richard seeking vengeance and killing Clifford (2.4). Margaret is left alone to endure her anger from the political turmoil that threatens her security and her subsequent grief from the deaths of her loved ones. She has used her words and her actions to emphasize her injustices, and yet she is isolated.

The final moments that truly solidify Margaret's anger and grief are the deaths of her son and her husband, which occur in *Henry VI, Part 3*. While she is not present for King Henry's death, Margaret does witness her son's murder. She is an undeniably devoted mother, immediately begging Richard to "kill me too" after he kills her son, lamenting that "her heart will burst an if I speak" (Shakespeare 5.5.41, 58). At the death of the man that she truly loves, Suffolk, in *Henry VI, Part 2,* Margaret notes that she has often "heard that grief softens the mind / And makes it fearful and degenerate. / Think therefore on revenge, and cease to weep" (Shakespeare 4.4.1-3). Unfortunately, when Suffolk is killed, Margaret cannot "cease to weep" and feels that her "hope is gone" (4.4.4, 57). She wants vengeance, but her grief is all-consuming and makes her feel hopeless. When her husband and son are later killed, she can recognize that grief is associated with a weakened mind and turn to other feelings, namely anger and vengeance. However, when her son dies, she is not given the chance to truly mourn and express grief, nor turn to anger. Instead, King Edward almost immediately exiles her before she can be heard, silencing her before she can use her anger and power to reveal the terrible injustice of her losses. While the males in power do try to use exile to marginalize her role and destroy her, Margaret endures all, bolstering her need for vengeance. As Cristina

Leon Alfar comments, "Even when she is deprived of her husband and son by their deaths, [Margaret] uses this deprivation as a means of empowerment" (801). This empowerment, as seen through both Medea and Margaret, exemplifies Chemaly's earlier stated idea that using anger is a "necessity" for survival. Neither woman can sit in silence as passive players in their own stories as their lives are ruined; they must make noise and be heard.

Despite their strong resolve, forces still try to silence both Medea and Margaret; for both characters, male sources attempt to do this out of fear. In *Richard III*, Richard might not fully understand the true power of Margaret's anger, but he knows enough to understand that she has the capability to reveal truths that could weaken his support and thwart his plan for taking the crown. Similarly to Jason and Creon in *Medea*), Richard will not take accountability for his crimes against Margaret. Instead, he shifts the blame, denying his hand in the deaths of Margaret's husband and son: "I was provoked by her sland'rous tongue, / That laid their guilt upon my guiltless shoulders" (Shakespeare 1.2.103-4). By belittling her and insulting her, Richard garners support for others to alienate her also. Further characters, such as one of Queen Elizabeth's sons, urge those around to "Dispute not with her; she is lunatic" (1.3.251). She becomes "loathsome" because "she is a woman who violates ways of speaking that are acceptable at Court" (Alfar 803). Thus, Margaret's exile is confirmed, and she is denied any possibility of support. In turn, Margaret is made to realize that her only option is her rage and the power that accompanies it.

Margaret's exile, meant to diminish her power and character, works to strengthen her anger and her need for vengeance. While Medea uses her sorcery to create poison and

secure her vengeance, Margaret uses her voice to curse those who have wronged her. Margaret's curses are directly aimed and immediately heard by her intended audience; there is no mediator meant to deliver her poison. Naomi C. Liebler and Lisa Scancella Shea argue that while she might technically be defeated in her exile, Medea will not be disempowered (91). The inherent risks associated with truth and anger mentioned previously seem insignificant now; she is unconcerned about likeability or status because she has already lost everything. Margaret takes the initiative necessary to actively fight against her antagonists. In *Richard III*, she makes it known that "A husband and a son thou ow'st to me; / And thou a kingdom," placing clear blame because "This sorrow that I have by right is yours, / And all the pleasures you usurp are mine" (Shakespeare 1.3.175-8). After cursing all of the active and passive transgressors, clearly outlining their injustices, Margaret turns to Richard. While the others are blind to his actions, Traister explains that fury is a "lens through which to see and understand the world and its inequities anew" (209). Much like Medea, Margaret can discern the wrongdoing of her transgressors because she is seeing it through her fury. Because of this, Margaret knows that Richard's evils are not finished, so she wishes that heaven would hold its curses "till thy sins be ripe / And then hurl down their indignation" (Shakespeare 1.3.227-31). Margaret wants to make sure that the truth of his actions is known because her fury enables her to clearly see the situation. She might lack physical and political strength now, but "Margaret's power comes entirely from her words" (Alfar 800).

Ultimately, when other women understand the corrupt and vile actions that Richard took to gain the crown, they beg Margaret to teach them how to use their anger and their voices

to curse as she does. Up until this moment, Margaret is denied a community to "validate and share [her] anger," which prevents meaningful change from happening (Chemaly 276). When she first sees the wronged women, Margaret is "hungry for revenge" (Shakespeare 4.4.63). She tells them that "Now thy proud neck bears half my burdened yoke, / From which even here I slip my weary head / And leave the burden of it all on thee" (4.4.114-6). She knows that her curses against King Richard have come true, and because the women failed to heed her anger and grief, they also suffer. This does not restore any of her losses or reinstate her place in society, but Margaret passes on the burden and is seemingly able to rest now that she has seen the fruition of her curses. Margaret draws from supernatural powers, similarly to Medea and Willow, to harness her rage and establish her own justice. Even now that the other women understand Margaret's anger and wish to find the same empowerment, Margaret is ultimately alone in the endurance of her suffering.

Attitudes and beliefs that silence female emotion have been present since the start of Western civilization, as seen through many of the tragedies and literature meant to depict society (Beard). Women must find ways to fight back against subjugation in order to survive in their societies. In order to do this, however, women often must harness their fury as a tool to bring about change (Traister 209). From the start, it is necessary for Margaret to use her power, and subsequently her anger, to ensure that she protect her position as queen. While she can control her husband to a degree because of his weak character, she loses the fight against stronger individuals who have support from the majority of society. For Margaret, her opposers choose to exile her and silence her instead of listening to the injustices she is faced with; they only realize their

mistake, and Margaret's truth, when it is too late to change anything.

Willow

Shifting over 350 years after Shakespeare's plays and almost 2,500 years after Euripides' play, Joss Whedon and company create the powerful witch Willow Rosenberg in the television show *Buffy.* Despite the large gap in time from when Euripides and Shakespeare wrote, within the show's sixth season, Willow's character development and treatment reiterate the same harrowing tale of female emotions ignored or diminished at the hands of society. After the murder of her girlfriend, Willow seeks vengeance, becoming a dark version of herself, shifting from the sidekick best friend to the villain that the hero must defeat. Unlike Margaret wanting vengeance after Suffolk's death, Willow immediately moves beyond mere grief to fury. As with Medea and Margaret, it is important to analyze the path that led Willow to this position, despite the fact that she is clearly set up and viewed as evil in the final episodes of the sixth season. In doing so, it becomes clear that Western civilization has always enforced structures and attitudes that do not accommodate for or allow female power, nor do they pay attention to the injustices that women face. Willow, like Medea, shows the terrible power and impact that rage can have, but as is true for all three of these female characters, that anger becomes the only option in a society that silences female emotion, raising the same question about who has a right to be angry.

From the start of the series, Willow is established as a nerdy best friend, meant to accompany Buffy in her fight against monsters and demons that threaten society. Willow's entire existence is defined relationally—as is to be expected,

according to Chemaly, in a world that subdues and minimizes women (77). Buffy is presented as a hero who can defy set feminine norms, but Willow, as a sidekick, does not have the same freedom; the story predominantly constructs her role as a supporting character defined in relation to the Scooby Gang. She is often willing to take extreme measures to help Buffy and the Scooby Gang, even if it presents risk for herself. This behavior fulfills a societally expected feminine role because Willow is caring for others over her own safety (Chemaly 77). Through this, Willow can use her magic to aid Buffy and their friends, which establishes her as one of the most moral and supportive members of the group (Kennedy and Dworschack-Kinter 120).

However, after gaining assurance in her magical ability, Willow starts to deviate from that expected sidekick role; she starts to enjoy her power, becoming reckless through that gratification. Rob Cover explains that magic is what gives Willow her confidence and power, and this is something she has not previously had (93). Yet that confidence quickly turns into a costly boldness. As Mary Beard explains, women in Greek tragedy "are portrayed as abusers, rather than users of power" (59). The same is true for Willow. As she starts to use increasingly more magic, the Scooby Gang notices that she grows increasingly less cautious. Instead of being praised for her use of power in relation to helping Buffy, Willow is criticized for her abuse of her literal magical powers. Giles, a mentor of the group, chastises Willow for bringing Buffy back to life, calling her a "rank, arrogant amateur" ("Flooded" 6.4, 00:31:50). But Willow's newfound confidence means that she is unafraid to counter him because she is "very powerful, and maybe it's not such a good idea for [him] to piss [her] off" (00:31:57-32:02). She takes pride in her ability and wants others

to see the power that she has. But from perspectives outside of Willow's, this behavior is often analyzed in terms of addiction, and Cover even describes her relationship with magic as "compulsive" and "irresponsible" (90-1). Willow notes that between "plain old Willow or super Willow," the version with power is more appealing ("Wrecked" 6.10, 00:39:24). Her strengthening abilities are enticing and enjoyable, so she disregards potential repercussions.

But because she is unable to control her use of magic, consequences inevitably follow, and Willow must work hard to redeem herself. Some of these consequences include Tara's ending their relationship because of Willow's recklessness and Willow's hurting Dawn as the result of her misuse of magic ("Smashed" 6.9 and "Wrecked" 6.10). Yet these consequences do not incite Willow's rage. Rather, she seems receptive to the criticism, admitting that she tried to stop using magic, but could not ("Wrecked" 6.10). Willow spends the next few episodes consciously attempting to stop using magic and return to her previous role as the helpful, unmagical, nerdy sidekick. In turn, Tara notices and appreciates Willow's effort, and they reconcile. Willow shows important depth and growth as she works through her addiction to magic and proves that she is worthy of the compassion and respect of herself and Tara, which also works to garner sympathy from audiences.

Willow's change signifies a clear shift in her character and character arc; she manages her addiction but is then forced to a breaking point that incites her fury. Despite Willow's growth and endearing reunion with Tara, everything is taken away in an instant, which ultimately leads to Willow's inconsolable rage. In the final minutes of "Seeing Red," Warren, the antagonist of the season, haphazardly murders Tara with a stray bullet intended for Buffy, and Willow's rage and grief are

immediate and heart-wrenching (6.19). This killing starts Willow on a path similar to Medea's, from which it seems nothing will stop her. From a commonly accepted critical perspective, Gwynne Kennedy and Jennifer Dworschack-Kinter analyze Willow's actions: "Driven by grief and desire for revenge against Warren, a raging and out-of-control Willow who sees no reason to discipline her emotions threatens the world with destruction" (120). Willow's actions are fearsome as she attempts to get vengeance, driven by her rage and loss, but as Traister suggests, for women, "to be fearsome is to be vilified" (66). The connotation of Willow's action is that she is becoming the villain. With her one-track mind set on revenge, her rage becomes all-consuming and powerful.

Even though her terrible loss evokes sympathy, Willow's friends still try to silence her subsequent rage, viewing her actions as horrific. Initially, Willow has some support as Dawn and Xander consider the fact that Tara's murderer "needs to pay" and is as awful as any of the monsters and demons that Buffy has killed without question in the past ("Villains" 6.20, 00:23:49). However, once the Scooby Gang sees how Willow has changed, physically becoming a dark version of herself and emotionally becoming hell-bent, they change their opinions. This is similar to Medea's experience with the Chorus as they initially take pride in her rage but then fear her actions when Medea's sons become involved in her plan for revenge. Kennedy and Dworschack-Kinter argue that Willow's emotions control her magic, and she does not have control over her emotions; they argue in favor of "appropriate emotion management," explaining that Willow "has no built-in monitoring system . . . to oversee and police her actions" (104, 114). Buffy and Dawn are now both concerned that Willow is "only going to make things worse" and attempt to "help [her]

stop" ("Two to Go" 6.21, 00:25:03, 00:39:35). They want Willow to come back to the "good" side and control her emotions because they want her to fit into their systems of morals. Buffy can slay demons and monsters, but humans are out of the question, regardless of their deadly actions; the same expectations apply to Willow, so Buffy tries to stop her from getting vengeance against Warren, a mere human. However, just as Medea and Margaret each kill people that have wronged them, Willow ultimately kills Warren, despite the Scooby Gang's disapproval ("Villains" 6.20). No one offers actual solutions to help Willow grieve or have true closure for her rage. The Scooby Gang focuses on controlling and subduing Willow's grief, which does not acknowledge the immense pain she feels. But as Traister explains, "anger should not *need* to be transformed in order to count as worthy" (209). Willow's emotions are valid, and for once, she is in complete control. She is not relying on her power solely because she is addicted to it, as some critics might argue, but because the death of Tara has reduced her to her grief.

Ultimately, condemnation at the hands of Willow's friends and critics alike often ignores that the root of Willow's rage is her grief, focusing on her actions before Tara's death as an indicator of subsequent reckless abuse of power. This is similar to the condemnation of Queen Margaret; instead of recognizing her sorrow when everyone she loves is killed, her society solely focuses on her anger and her vocal opposition. Kennedy and Dworschack-Kinter argue that in *Buffy*, female enjoyment of power "produces self-deception and arrogance, because they overvalue their abilities," and this is the "wrong use of magic [i.e., power]" (104, 120). However, Willow's actions after Tara's murder are not a result of "arrogance" or "overvaluing her abilities." At the start of the season, her

behavior is reckless, but she makes strides to change her ways. Once Tara dies, it is her grief that drives Willow's power, and she is not being selfish or even enjoying this power. It stems from a place of hopelessness. Similarly to Medea, when Willow is pushed to the absolute breaking point, the result is rage. And similarly to Margaret, Willow wants to make sure that others hear her grief and anger. One of the powerful warlocks in the show notes that Willow "is running on pure fury. I've never felt anything like it" ("Villains" 6.20, 00:14:01-07). Willow is not driven by hedonism or enjoyment, but by unbridled and unheard-of fury. As Chemaly explains, anger does not retreat (5); it faces the problem directly because there is no other option when no one listens to injustices. Instead of being a subservient and mild character who hides her pain and emotion, Willow is doing everything she can to avenge Tara's death.

Unfortunately, to achieve this level of rage, Willow completely abandons her sense of self, which in part stems from the fact that Willow feels as though she has already lost everything good with Tara's death. In building the argument that Willow overvalues her power, Kennedy and Dworschack-Kinter claim that "anger at the injustice or injury, then, involves a recognition and assertion of self-worth" (105). In the midst of her rampage, Willow takes a moment to criticize her past self for being a "loser" and "mousy" ("Two to Go" 6.21, 00:31:31, 00:31:43), which seems to imply that in this moment, she is about to recognize that her actions against the injustice are valid because she had self-worth and deserves to be angry. However, she instead says that "the only thing Willow was ever good for – the only thing I had going for me – were the moments, just moments, when Tara would look at me and I was wonderful. And that will never happen again" ("Two to Go" 6.21, 00:31:50-32:13). In her description, Willow is speaking in third person,

allowing her current self to create distance from her past self. She initially starts out criticizing her prior self, but then shifts to start to think about what Tara meant to her. She abandons the third-person description to candidly recognize that she feels she has lost all worth with the death of Tara; Tara was the only redeeming thing in her life. There is no pleasure or joy in her actions, as Kennedy and Dworschack-Kinter argue (108). Rather, it is true desperation and hopelessness.

This abandonment of self is furthered in the final episode of the season when Willow makes the decision to end the entire world. Cover argues that Willow gets a taste of power and misunderstands empowerment, choosing to abandon ethics that are in place for other characters, such as Buffy (97). Similarly, Kennedy and Dworschack-Kinter argue that "a raging and out-of-control Willow who sees no reason to discipline her emotions threatens the world with destruction" (120). However, these arguments fail to address the true reason behind her final actions. In an attempt to stop her, Giles fights with Willow, resulting in Willow's draining Giles of all of his magic, which he borrowed from a coven of witches. But it proves to be overwhelming for her: "It's like I'm connected to everything. I can feel . . . all the emotion and the pain. No, it's too much. It's just too much . . . I have to stop this. I'll make it go away . . . Your suffering has to end" ("Grave" 6.22, 00:19:02-20:06). Her decision to end the world is a result of seeing the emotion and pain of humanity outside of herself. In a world where suffering happens without solution or a clear end in sight, Willow, in a perverted way, thinks that she is ending the suffering of the world. In fact, she is willing to die for this. She is in complete control as she recognizes that there is an exorbitant amount of pain and neglected emotion in the world, the knowledge of which specifically stems from the coven of

witches who temporarily endowed Giles with their power. As Beard argues, "You cannot easily fit women into a structure that is already coded as male; you have to change the structure" (87). Willow, and all of the witches' emotions that she experiences, do not fit into this society that constantly silences and ignores women. Instead of trying to make it work, she decides to wipe the slate entirely clean through its destruction.

Tara's murder is heartbreaking, and Willow's anger is justified. She loses sight of her original mourning, but in a way, mourns the humanity of the world itself. The Scooby Gang tries to hinder her grieving what she sees as one of the best things in her life, and they only see the true impact on her when she loses herself to her rage. Richard Hall describes "Dark Willow" as a representation of "the darkness that exists deep within even the kindest of people; just one event of unspeakable heartbreak may be enough for anyone to tap into their darker selves and unleash their own level of destruction on the lives of those around them" (121). This "unspeakable heartbreak" leads her down a dark path with the potential to end the world. But while the show constructs Willow as the "Big Bad" of the season, her grief and actions show how truly unheard female emotion is. The emotions that Willow experiences are so substantial and all-consuming that she is willing to destroy the world, with her in it, to end that suffering, which is present even within ancient Greek stories. There is no other option in Willow's eyes. There is no selfish intent in her actions. And while ending the world is a terrible thing, from Willow's perspective, ignoring and silencing legitimate grief is worse.

The Necessity of Female Anger

Despite the two-thousand-year difference, Medea, Margaret, and Willow all work to emphasize the power and

necessity of female emotion. While their stories are not the same, the adaptation of ignored female emotion produces the same result of women forced into angry roles to make their societies hear them. For each of these characters, they must use their anger to fuel their action, understanding it as a tool for empowerment as opposed to an irrational emotion (Traister 209). Even when friends and enemies alike try to trivialize or minimize their emotions, Medea, Margaret, and Willow do not easily relinquish their justified anger. To do so would be to submit to the structures in place that ignore the injustices that they have faced.

This silencing, unfortunately, is a recurring trend and an expected outcome; society degrades female emotion and expects women to passively accept the world. Medea's, Margaret's, and Willow's societies are not structured to accommodate female grief, rage, or power. Jason berates Medea for "refus[ing] to curb [her] stupid tongue" (Euripides 457); Richard criticizes Margaret for being "stern, obdurate, flinty, rough, and remorseless" when "women are soft, mild, pitiful, and flexible" (Shakespeare, *King Richard* 1.4.143, 142); and Giles sees Willow's grief as "clearly . . . abusing the magicks" ("Grave" 6.22, 00:06:17). These characterizations all create a negative connotation for their actions and the intentions behind those actions. However, when understood from Medea's, Margaret's, and Willow's perspectives, the implications shift. Medea uses her voice and avoids giving in to meek and mild behavior. Margaret fights for what she needs and deserves, refusing to feel guilty for resisting societal constructs. Willow defies the set structures that police other characters and mourns humanity's suffering. In all three stories, civilization operates with gendered constructs that attempt to create well-behaved women. When women fear the systems that negate their anger,

as Audre Lorde notes, they settle for disempowerment (281). But when those women refuse to be silent, stick to their beliefs, and fully embrace their power regardless of how society views them, their injustices can finally be heard.

However, the level of success varies between Medea, Margaret, and Willow. Medea's ending is the most self-satisfying of the three; even if the majority of her society disapproves of her actions and emotions, she achieves her vengeance and has the support of the gods. Her anger became "liberating and strengthening" (Lorde 280). Medea disregards the opinions of Jason, Creon, the Chorus, and society, ensuring that her needs are met and that her anger is satiated. She rejoices in the deaths of Creon and his daughter, defying the expected fearful or apologetic reaction (Euripides 1126). She is unafraid to speak openly and honestly about Jason's arrogance and façade of mourning the death of their sons, much as Margaret speaks the truth against King Richard despite the inherent risks (Alfar 789). Medea will not be held back or falsify her feelings because she knows the strength and validation of her voice and her anger.

Margaret, on the other hand, is forced into exile; her rage is mitigated and demeaned until her final appearance in *Richard III*. It is only when other female characters have experienced the same tragedies at the hands of Richard that they see through the same lens of anger that Traister details (209). This new perspective allows them to fairly see the injustice, leading them to understand Margaret's anger. Margaret eventually gains this support from other wronged women while Medea only receives support from unseen Greek gods, yet their sympathy for Margaret comes too late to truly benefit her place in society or her reputation; those in power have forced Margaret into exile without any hope of return. Despite the social banishment,

Margaret's unyielding anger is finally heard, and her fellow characters alongside audiences can build up their understanding of her necessary rage.

In the sixth season of *Buffy*, Willow, unfortunately, has the bleakest ending as she is forced into submission. While Warren is the one who murdered Tara, which sets Willow on her rage-filled path, it is ultimately Buffy and the Scooby Gang that act as the true opposers who disregard her emotions and try to silence her rage. It seems that there is a happy ending as Willow is brought back to her prior self through Xander's humanity and compassion ("Grave" 6.22). The world will not end, and Xander's love surrounds Willow. However, as one of the main differences between the earlier examples of feminine rage and this more modern representation, this conclusion is presented as a way to quiet the rage, subduing a powerful female voice into a role that is more easily managed. By separating Willow from her power and bringing her back to her prior "mousy" self, Willow's friends are enforcing the idea that "a sedated patient is quiet and docile" (Chemaly 61). Emotional pain is glossed over in favor of silence and obedience, which is easy to control.

The logic seems backwards. *Medea*, produced in 431 BCE, allows for female empowerment and autonomy. Shakespeare's plays, written throughout the 1590s, provide space for female voice and sympathy, despite society's eventual banishment of that female. Yet the sixth season of *Buffy*, aired in the early 2000s and praised for its female empowerment, presents a female character who does not display her emotions within "proper" and calm boundaries (Helford 22). While the show recognizes the true extent of the power derived from her fury, Willow is ultimately made docile and controllable. Even though society has slowly made improvements to the universal issue of

subjugation of female emotion (which in part appears throughout literature and media), there seems to be a limit to the extent of power that society is willing to accommodate . As Maya Philips writes of women who rage in television today, "[t]hese scenes and storylines are not about the anger itself but rather what has led a woman to speak, to act, to defend herself and others, to have the autonomy to express an unpalatable emotion. To be unattractive and merciless." Yet throughout Medea's, Margaret's, and Willow's stories, it becomes evident that these "attitudes, assumptions, and prejudices are hard-wired . . . into our culture, our language, and millennia of our history" (Beard 33). Modern media continue to represent angry women, and while some are presented as heroic, others are still reduced to their "unattractive" fury. As Lorde explains, fearing anger will not teach society anything (278). Instead, society must hear the voices that speak up about their emotions, listening at all stages to avoid forcing their emotions to turn into anger. The anger depicted must act as a "barometer of what's gone horrendously wrong in a world that has taken women for granted" (Philips). When society actually listens to the voices that they have previously silenced instead of labeling them as "just another angry woman," changes can be made to help break down the structures that perpetuate injustices.

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