

Constance – ‘Goodnight Desdemona, Good morning Juliet’

Boy, Shakespeare really watered her down, eh?...
I wish I were more like Desdemona.
Next to her I'm just a little wimp.
A rodent. Road-kill. Furry tragedy
all squashed and steaming on the 401
with 'Michelin' stamped all over me. It's true:
people've always made a fool of me
without my even knowing. Gullible.
That's me. Old Connie. Good sport. Big joke. Ha.
Just like that time at recess in grade five:
a gang of bully girls comes up to me.
Their arms are linked, they're chanting as they march,
'Hey. Hey. Get outta my way!
I just got back from the I.G.A.!'
I'm terrified. They pin me down,
and force me to eat a dog-tongue sandwich.
I now know it was only ham...
O, what would Desdemona do to Claude?
Had she *the motive and the cue for passion*
that I have? She would drown all Queen's with blood,
and cleave Claude Night's two typing fingers from
his guilty hands. She'd wrap them in a box
of choc'lates and present them to Ramona.
She'd kill him in cold blood and in blank verse,
then smear the ivied walls in scarlet letters spelling 'thief!'
To think, I helped him use me: a gull, a stooge,
a swine adorned with mine own pearls,
a sous-chef, nay! A scull'ry-maid that slaved
to heat hell's kitchen with the baking stench
of forty-thousand scalding humble-pies,
O Vengeance!!!

Antigone – 'Antigone'

Tomb, bridal chamber, prison forever
Dug in rock, it is to you I am going
To join my people, that great number that have died,
Whom in their death Persephone received.
I am the last of them and I go down
In the worst death of all-for I have not lived
The due term of my life. But when I come
To that other world my hope is strong
That my coming will be welcome to my father,
And dear to you, my mother, and dear to you,
My brother deeply loved. For when you died,
With my own hands I washed and dressed you all,
And poured the lustral offerings on your graves.
And now, Polynice, it was for such care of your body
That I have earned these wages.
Yet those who think rightly will think I did right
In honoring you. Had I been a mother
Of children, and my husband been dead and rotten,
I would not have taken this weary task upon me
Against the will of the city. What law backs me when I say this?
I will tell you: If my husband were dead, I might have had another,
And child from another man, if I lost the first.
But when father and mother both were hidden in death
No brother's life would bloom for me again.
That is law under which I gave you precedence,
My dearest brother, and that is why Creon thinks me
Wrong, even a criminal, and now takes me
By the hand and leads me away,
Unbedded, without bridal, without share
In marriage and in nurturing children;
As lonely as you see me, without friends;
With fate against me I go into the vault of death
While still alive. What law of God have I broken?
Why should I still look to the gods in misery?
Whom should I summon as an ally? For indeed
Because of piety I was called impious.
If this proceeding is good in the god's eyes,
I shall know my sin, once I have suffered.
But if Creon and his people are the wrongdoers
Let their suffering be no worse than the injustice
They are meting out to me.

The Jewish Wife – ‘Fear and Misery in the Third Reich’

Yes, I'm packing. Don't pretend you haven't noticed anything the last few days. Nothing really matters, Fritz, except just one thing: if we spend our last hour together without looking at each other's eyes. That's a triumph they can't be allowed, the liars who force everyone else to lie. Ten years ago when somebody said no one would think I was Jewish, you instantly said yes, they would. And that's fine. That was straightforward. Why take things in a roundabout way now? I'm packing so they shan't take away your job as senior physician. And because they've stopped saying good morning to you at the clinic, and because you're not sleeping nowadays. I don't want you to tell me I mustn't go. And I'm hurrying because I don't want to hear you telling me I must. It's a matter of time. Principles are a matter of time. They don't last for ever, any more than a glove does. (There are good ones which last a long while. But even they only have a certain life.) Don't get the idea that I'm angry. Yes, I am. Why should I always be understanding? What's wrong with the shape of my nose and the colour of my hair? I'm to leave the town where I was born just so they don't have to go short of butter. What sort of people are you, yourself included? You work out a quantum theory and the Trendelenburg test, then allow a lot of semi-barbarians to tell you you're to conquer the world but you can't have the woman you want. The artificial lung, and the dive-bomber! You are monsters or you pander to monsters. Yes, I know I'm being unreasonable, but what good is reason in a world like this? There you sit watching your wife pack and saying nothing.

Anne – ‘Anne Boleyn’

Do you want to see it? Who wants to see it? Do you? You? I'll show then. Are you ready? No, I won't. I won't! I cannot see the advantage in it, and that was what I was taught by Margaret of Burgundy when I was thirteen. 'Know the advantage of everything, Anne' And you won't like me for showing you, you'll say it's boastful, overweening. And why should I want you to love me? Did anyone around me ever love me, but for the King? So, you can't see. You can't! Or would it be fun? Would it be a scandal? Better: would it make you laugh? Oh...that's all right then, here...Ready? Look! It's my Bible! Why? Don't you realize? This killed me! This book! This put me in the Tower, this made the sword, the sword, the sword...they played a trick. As I was kneeling they made me look one way. And from the other way the sword...sang. In the air. For a second I heard it sing and...What you think I was going to show you? This? *Pulls out her severed head* This? This? Funny, a heads smaller than you think. Heavy little cabbage, that's all. Let me show you something. Eyes closed see? For a moment I saw my body lying in the straw. And I closed my eyes. And it was I, closing them. And now I'm with Jesus! I am! I'll bring you all to Jesus!

Amanda – ‘The Glass Menagerie’

I went to the typing instructor and introduced myself as your mother. She didn't know who you were. Wingfield, she said. We don't have any such student enrolled at the school! I assured her she did, that you had been going to classes since early in January. 'I wonder,' she said, 'if you could be talking about that terribly shy little girl who dropped out of school after only a few days' attendance?' 'No,' I said, 'Laura, my daughter, has been going to school every day for the past six weeks!' 'Excuse me,' she said. She took the attendance book out and there was your name, unmistakably printed, and all the dates you were absent until they decided that you had dropped out of school. I still said, 'No, there must have been some mistake! There must have been some mix-up in the records!' And she said, 'No – I remember her perfectly now. Her hands shook so that she couldn't hit the right keys! The first time we gave a speed-test, she broke down completely - was sick at the stomach and almost had to be carried into the wash-room! After that morning she never showed up any more. We phoned the house but never got any answer' – while I was working at Famous and Barr, I suppose, demonstrating those – Oh! I felt so weak I could barely keep on my feet! I had to sit down while they got me a glass of water! Fifty dollars' tuition, all of our plans – my hopes and ambition for you – just gone up the spout, just gone up the spout like that.

Harper – 'Angels in America'

Night flight to San Francisco. Chase the moon across America. God! It's been years since I was on a plane. When we hit 35,000 feet we'll have reached the tropopause, the great belt of calm air. As close as I'll ever get to the ozone. I dreamed we were there. The plane leapt the tropopause, the safe air and attained the outer rim, the ozone which was ragged and torn, patches of it threadbare as old cheesecloth, and that was frightening. But I saw something only I could see because of my astonishing ability to see such things. Souls were rising, from the earth far below, souls of the dead of people who'd perished from famine, from war, from the plague, and they floated up like skydivers in reverse, limbs all akimbo, wheeling and spinning. And the souls of these departed joined hands, clasped ankles and formed a web, a great net of souls. And the souls were three-atom oxygen molecules of the stuff of ozone, and the outer rim absorbed them, and was repaired. Nothing's lost forever. In this world, there is a kind of painful progress. Longing for what we've left behind, and dreaming ahead. At least I think that's so.

Abigail Williams – 'The Crucible'

I cannot bear lewd looks no more, John. My spirit's changed entirely. I ought to be given Godly looks when I suffer for them as I do. Look at my leg. I'm holes all over from their damned needles and pins. The jab your wife gave me's not healed yet, y'know. And George Jacobs comes again and again and raps me with his stick - the same spot every night all this week. Looks at the lump I have. Oh John, the world's so full of hypocrites! They pray in jail, I'm told they pray in jail! And torture me in my bed while sacred words are coming from their mouths! It will need God Himself to cleanse this town properly. If I live, if I am not murdered, I will surely cry out others until the last hypocrite is dead! But John, you taught me goodness, therefore you are good. It were a fire you walked me through and all my ignorance was burned away. It were a fire, John, we lay in fire. And from that night no woman called me wicked any more but I knew my answer. I used to weep for my sins when the wind lifted up my skirts; and blushed for shame because some old Rebecca called me loose. And then you burned my ignorance away. As bare as some December tree I saw them all – walking like saints to church, running to feed the sick, and hypocrites in their hearts! And God gave me strength to call them liars and God made men listen to me, and by God I will scrub the world clean for the love of Him! John, I will make you such a wife when the world is white again! You will be amazed to see me every day, a light of heaven in your house!

Carol – ‘Oleanna’

How can you deny it. You did it to me. Here. You did... You confess. You love the Power. To deviate. To invent, to transgress ... to transgress whatever norms have been established for us. And you think it's charming to "question" in yourself this taste to mock and destroy. But you should question it. Professor. And you pick those things which you feel advance you: publication, tenure, and the steps to get them you call "harmless rituals." And you perform those steps. Although you say it is hypocrisy. But to the aspirations of your students. Of hardworking students, who come here, who slave to come here – you have no idea what it cost me to come to this school – you mock us. You call education "hazing," and from your so-protected, so-elitist seat you hold our confusion as a joke, and our hopes and efforts with it. Then you sit there and say "what have I done?" And ask me to understand that you have aspirations too. But I tell you. I tell you. That you are vile. And that you are exploitative. And if you possess one ounce of that inner honesty you describe in your book, you can look in yourself and see those things that I see. And you can find revulsion equal to my own. Good day