

Original (4.2.56-69):

GONERIL

... Where's thy drum?

France spreads his banners in our noiseless land;

With plumed helm thy state begins to threat,

Whilst thou, a moral fool, sits still and cries,

'Alack, why does he so?'

ALBANY

See thyself, devil:

Proper deformity shows not in the fiend

So horrid as in woman.

GONERIL

O vain fool!

ALBANY

Thou changed and self-covered thing, for shame

Be-monster not thy feature. Were't my fitness

To let these hands obey my blood,

They are apt enough to dislocate and tear

Thy flesh and bones. Howe'er thou art a fiend,

A woman's shape doth shield thee.

GONERIL

Marry, your manhood, mew! –

*GONERIL and ALBANY standing opposite one another.*

*GONERIL, bending legs for maximum movement, makes wide sweeping gesture with left arm and brings right arm up above head and then directly down in violent/"explosive" drumming motion. Stands up again, slowly but a bit jerkily, with body tense; does not stand up with normal (straight) posture but with some contortion in hands, torso, limbs, and leaning slightly forward towards ALBANY.*

*ALBANY, at this point, begins to mirror GONERIL, although his movements are less jerky.*

*GONERIL, still in contorted pose, with increasing shaking. A few violent motions (sudden change of position, stabbing motion toward ALBANY, simulating gasping for air). Then GONERIL straightens up, maintaining eye contact with ALBANY, leans back against wall if possible and crosses legs, tilts head to one side, hand on chin, looking at ceiling.*

*ALBANY does not follow GONERIL as she stands up straight but maintains last contorted pose.*

*GONERIL throws both arms out to the sides, slowly (more slowly than ALBANY's movements have been so far) and then brings the back of one hand to her forehead in exaggerated gesture of distress. Holds pose.*

*ALBANY, still in contorted pose simulating deformity, continues to stand opposite GONERIL for a moment and then stands up abruptly while taking a step back from GONERIL and turning head away.*

*GONERIL stands up extremely straight and tense, chin lifted in haughty expression*

*ALBANY reaches out and pushes GONERIL to turn her head slightly (aggressive intent, but still relatively fluid); begins to walk slowly in a circle around GONERIL. Gradually*

*raises hands and begins to mime tearing, biting movements. Sudden stop face-to-face with GONERIL; maintaining eye contact, ironically reaches for GONERIL's hand as if to kiss it.*

*GONERIL's hand/arm is limp during this process. Shoulders slumping/sinking backward a little. Suddenly averts eyes and pulls hand away (still without conviction), turning away, looking generally dissatisfied.*

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I chose to “choreograph” the argument between Albany and Goneril in which Goneril derides Albany for not being more warlike; Albany calls his wife a demon/monster hiding behind the disguise of a woman, maintaining that he will not harm her because of her gender and being further mocked at the end by Goneril. I wanted to attempt to portray this without words, in part because this seemed liable to turn into more or less ‘mere’ staging, given that the words already produce rather forceful visual images and, by encouraging the reader to formulate an equation of the sort “Goneril = devil,” tend to bring the whole episode closer to the structuring element of “propositions” as identified by Johnson.

This is not to say that I wanted to get rid of the identification between Goneril and a demon entirely—the “choreography” remains quite representative or literal on the whole—but I did want to think about how to enact such a statement on the level of the body. Thus I wanted to start with the end of Goneril’s speech, giving her very forceful and sudden (“explosive,” for Johnson) movements that would seem aggressive but also unpredictable and, in a particular sense, uncivilized (Goneril does not follow the sort of codes that might govern aggressive rituals between men; however, she also does not obey—at least at the opening of the passage—the constraints on motion typically learned by women (again mentioned by Johnson) and ideally should be using a fairly large range of motion). In order for Albany to criticize her for what he saw in her behavior, I then had Albany begin, even before Goneril finished ‘talking,’ to mirror back her gestures, at least until she gets to the part where she straightens up and attempts to do a caricature of her husband’s passivity. (This causes some interesting synchronicity in their criticisms of each other, with perhaps more potential for synchronicity than the original text, although I’m not entirely sure there is a great difference between the two.) The idea is, of course, that mirroring Goneril’s movements as she does them allows Albany to identify his wife directly without recourse to language (or just pointing); another possibility would have been to make Albany contort the poses further in order to exaggerate the accusation he is making, although even as the scene is, it might already be a little close to comedy for a representation of an argument.

Upon being imitated, Goneril becomes cold rather than aggressive, and Albany proceeds to draw limits around her by walking in a circle, reasserting the potential for violence on his part while also potentially reinforcing the existence of limits on her motion (i.e., gendered restrictions on motion). This behavior does also become fairly aggressive, like Albany’s original lines, but ideally his movements are still relatively fluid and controlled, differentiating his more ‘civilized’ aggression from Goneril’s cruelty. The kiss on the hand might be a bit much, but is also intended to underline the way in which Albany insists upon remaining within certain (gendered) social norms of behavior, even if there is a certain amount of insincerity involved. Goneril refuses the gesture, in keeping with her final verbal stab at Albany in the original passage, but as in those lines, she nonetheless seems to have been in a certain sense defeated: she can mock her husband, but in the end, she can’t do much more.