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The Metamorphosis of Classical Allusions: William Shakespeare's Titus Andronicus

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To those whose hearts and souls are soothed by literature

"Der einzige Weg für uns, groß,
ja, wenn es möglich ist, unnachahmlich zu werden,
ist die Nachahmung der Alten […]*".*[1]

"The only way for us to become great, or even imitable,
if possible, is to imitate the ancients […]."

[1] J.J. Winckelmann, Gedanken über die Nachahmung der Griechischen Werke in der Malerei und Bildhauerkunst (Dresden 1775).

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Foreword

The following work emerges from a firm desire to merge my interest in ancient languages with my passion for English literature. William Shakespeare's earliest tragedy, *Titus Andronicus*, is theatre of unimaginable horrors, appalling violence and at the same time it is replete with refined classical allusions. This thesis aims to explore the relationships and connections between *Titus Andronicus* and its literary sources, that include authors such as Ovid, Seneca, Virgil, Livy, and Horace. The methodology adopted for this project emphasizes close reading and analysis of classical quotations, with a particular focus on the original Latin excerpts.

The first chapter offers an introduction to the historical context in which the play was produced. I will provide a thorough synopsis of the plot, as well as a comprehensive discussion on the date of composition of the play. Section 1.3 delineates the audience Shakespeare had in mind when writing *Titus*. Specifically examined is the role of death and public executions in Elizabethan England, providing insights into why such a gruesome play would resonate so profoundly with contemporary audiences. The last section of the chapter is devoted to a delineation of the genre of revenge tragedy; furthermore, it describes the role revenge had for Elizabethans in sixteenth-century England and analyses the cause that sets the inexorable circle of revenge and sparked the downfall action of the Andronici, and by extension, of the entire play.

Chapter two focuses on the relationship between the play and its main literary source, book 6 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. It will try to examine Shakespeare's Rome, whose fragile values and morals will soon crumble, rooted in their barbaric literary precedents. After recounting the main events of the Ovidian myth, section 2.1 explores the way in which Shakespeare refashions Ovid's Philomel through his Lavinia. This analysis will be supported

by a meticulous examination of the play's quotations and a comparison with the most significant passages of its Latin source. The following section is devoted to two other myths Shakespeare makes use of to describe Lavinia's metamorphosis, namely the myth of Daphne and that of Io, both present in the *Metamorphoses*. Section 2.3 focuses on the connection the play has with the metaliterary dimension. It will not only analyze the importance reading and writing have in the play, but it will also explore the intricate and dependent relationship the characters have with the literary precedents, which are not understood, twisted and outdone.

The last chapter is devoted to the analysis of the two conclusive acts of *Titus*. Section 3.1 will try to delve deeper into the character of Titus and, through the study of the episode of Verginius drawn from Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita*, understand the events that have led him to lose his sanity and justify his daughter's murder. The chapter closes with the analysis of the infamous banquet, whose literary precedent is Seneca's revenge tragedy *Thyestes*.

CHAPTER I

AN INTRODUCTION TO TITUS ANDRONICUS

1.1 The date of composition of the play

Although no unanimous consensus exists regarding the date of composition of *Titus Andronicus,* two different sets of perspectives can be identified, leaning towards 1589-90 and 1593-94 respectively.[1] The years 1592-1594 had been harsh on the London theatres: an epidemic of bubonic plague, which reached its peak in the year 1593, began to be felt in London in the autumn of 1592 and is said to have caused 2,000 deaths before the end of the year.[2] Being confronted with this significant health risk, in order to try and mitigate the potential for disease propagation, the Privy Council issued the order to temporarily suspend all theatrical activities that would have drawn large audiences together, stating that the number of infections were increasing and that they thought "yt fytt that all manner of councourse and publique meetinges of the people at playes, beare-baitinges, bowlinges and other like assemblyes for sports be forbidden".[3] After nearly a year of interruption, the plague deaths started to decrease with the arrival of harsh winter temperatures, and the accounts of

[1] Metz, G. Harold, *Shakespeare's Earliest Tragedy: Studies in Titus Andronicus*, London: Associated University Presses, 1996, p. 197.
[2] Creighton, Charles, "A History of Epidemics in Britain: from A.D. 664 to the Extinction of Plague", https://archive.org/details/historyofepidemi01crei/page/n5/mode/2up, accessed on 28 October 2023.
[3] Chambers, quoted in Jonathan Bate, "Introduction" in William Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus*, ed. by Jonathan Bate, The Arden Shakespeare, London: Routledge, 1995, p. 68. This is the edition I will use throughout this thesis.

Philip Henslowe[4] inform us of a brief season from 27 December 1593 to 6 February 1594 played by "th*e* earle of susex his men" probably at the Rose theatre.[5]

The detailed records of the plays and the payments are found in Philip Henslowe's account-book, known as his *Diary*. Between the lines of these records, we find the earliest known reference to *Titus Andronicus*. As attested by the *Diary*, Henslowe recorded the notation of the play as "titus & ondronicus", performed on the "2[4] of Jenew*a*ry".[6] The same day the Rose theatre was closed a second time due to rising plague infections, on 6 February 1594, the printer John Danter entered "a booke intituled A Noble Roman Historye of Tytus Andronicus" in the Stationer's Register,[7] and before long the text of the play was printed. The velocity at which events unfolded – the presentation of the play and the subsequent printing – can most likely be attributed to the shutdown of all theatres in such close proximity to the debut of the new play: sensing the imminent closure of theatres the players may have decided to profit from the success of the play by selling it to Danter, who provided the public with the opportunity to enjoy part of the theatre experience from home. As Bate observes: if

[4] Philip Henslowe was a theatre manager, owner of the Rose and the Fortune playhouses, and had personal and financial ties with the actor Edward Alleyn and the Admiral's Men, who were the chief rivals of the Chamberlain's Men, Shakespeare's theatrical company. As an entrepreneur and an artful man of business, he regularly recorded advance payments to playwrights: after presenting the acting company to a rough layout of a potential play, if the company was interested in the proposal, they would secure a down payment to the playwright and work jointly on the development of the script. Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Philip Henslowe", https://www.britannica.com/biography/Philip-Henslowe, Accessed 29 October 2023; Gary Taylor, "Shakespeare Plays on Renaissance Stages" in Wells, Stanley, Stanton, Sarah, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Stage*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 2.

[5] Bate, p. 69.

[6] Henslowe, 21. Recorded as 23 Jan., but as the 4th play of the week, therefore corrected to Thurs. 24th on assumption that there was no performance the previous Sunday. To complement the title, Henslowe noted a "ne", which typically signifies "new". While this association might initially seem straightforward, it may need some form of reevaluation since we know that not all the plays Henslowe marked as "ne" were necessarily new, so it is possible that he may have been referring to a play that had "*n*ewly *e*ntered [the repertoire]" or a newly revised one. See note 1 in Bate, p. 69.

[7] The Stationer's Register was a system implemented to protect and regulate the publication of books, plays and other printed work. From 1557, one was only allowed to print In England if they were a member of the Stationer's Company. This protected the work from being reprinted or commercially threatened by other members without permission. See Gadd, Ian, "Plays in the Stationer's Register", https://shakespearedocumented.folger.edu/resource/playwright-actor-shareholder/plays-stationers-register, Accessed 29 October 2023.

the audience could not see the play, "at least they could read it".[8] In the Stationer's Register Danter also entered "a ballad thereof", namely a ballad based on the content of the play, which worked as a preview and would draw the attention of a larger clientele which, if intrigued by it, would ultimately purchase the play.[9] It is apparent from Ben Jonson's comment in the Induction to his latest play*, Bartholomew Fair*, that the audience of 1614 still retained a vivid memory of *Titus*. In fact, Johnson draws a parallel between *Jeronimo*[10] and *Titus,* claiming that the latter was twenty-five years old by the time he was presenting his play.[11] If *Titus* was new in 1594 and *The Spanish Tragedy* was probably written around 1589, this would mean that the two plays would have been twenty and twenty-five in 1614, not twenty-five or thirty as Jonson stated. Therefore, if Jonson's satirical remark were to be interpreted literally, it would suggest moving the date of composition of *Titus* back to approximately 1589.[12] However, the playwright's comment need not be interpreted *verbatim*, since his focus is on exaggerating the old-fashioned tastes of the spectators and the age of the plays, to make them perceive as pertaining to an older generation and consequently highlight the new theatrical material he had to offer. The purpose of Jonson's lines is not to inquire on the actual date of composition of the plays, but to lament the fact that the audience "maddingly" still preferred those "hopelessly old-fashioned plays".[13]

Alongside Jonson's Induction, there are other contributing factors that suggest an early date of composition for the play. Among these elements there is a supposed mention of *Titus*

[8] Bate, p. 69.
[9] Bate, pp. 69-70.
[10] The play Ben Jonson refers to is *The Spanish Tragedy: or, Hieronimo is Mad Again* by Thomas Kyd (1558-1594).
[11] The Induction began with the declamation of some Articles of Agreement between author and audience, one condition of which was that the audience should be "fixed and settled" in their judgments and should follow the example of those who "will swear *Jeronimo*, or *Andronicus* are the best plays yet" and "whose judgment shows it is constant, and hath stood still these five and twenty, or thirty years". Quoted in Bate, p. 70.
[12] Bate, p. 70.
[13] Hughes, Alan ed., *Titus Andronicus*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 4.

Andronicus in an anonymous play called *A Knack to Know a Knave,* published in 1594 but presented in Henslowe's *Diary* as "ne[w]" in 1592. In the passage containing the apparent reference to *Titus*, King Edgar is welcomed to court "as Titus was unto the Roman Senators" and "as [Rome] in Titus" Earl Osric considers him "the perfect figure of a Princelie mind".[14] The anonymous playwright tells the audience that Titus was welcomed by the Roman Senators, had won over the Goths and that representing "the perfect figure of a princely mind" he was offered the imperial diadem, symbol of the respect and admiration the general raised among the Roman people who "have by common voice, / In election for the Roman empery, / Chosen Andronicus" (*Titus Andronicus*, 1.1.21-23). It must be specified that three versions of the story of Titus Andronicus were circulating at that time: the prose text *History of Titus Andronicus*, the ballad, and the play.[15] However, only in the play is Titus welcomed by the Tribunes and Senators, as the stage directions show: "Flourish. Enter the tribunes […] and Senators aloft" (*Titus Andronicus*, 1.1). In neither of the other versions Titus is welcomed, except by the Emperor, and following the view of Spencer, the depiction of Titus as the "perfect figure of a princely mind" was in line with how the Elizabethan audience would have described the austere and rigorous traits of the Roman general.[16] These conclusions corroborate the hypothesis of *Titus* being the play to which *A Knack to Know a Knave* referred. Chambers supports this theory by asserting that: "the allusion in *Knack to Know a* Knave … points to a knowledge of Titus and the Goths … in 1592, and no such combination is known outside of *Titus Andronicus*".[17]

Even so, not all theories on the reliability of the extract from *A Knack to Know a Knave* are unanimous. Some scholars have suggested that the allusion cannot be relied on since the

[14] Quoted in Bate, p. 71-2.
[15] Bate, pp. 69-70
[16] Quoted in Metz, p.191.
[17] Quoted in Metz, p.192.

actors were simultaneously learning the lines for the new Titus – if the 1594 version were to be considered the first one to appear – and remembering the lines of the *Knack* (1592), situation in which contamination would have been a feasible outcome.[18] There may have been an overlapping between a *Knack* and a lost play called *Titus and Vespasian*,[19] plays which centre around a similar storyline[20] and were both performed within a short distance from each other in June 1592 and January 1593. It has been argued that this piece of evidence, however, does not confirm that *Titus* was in existence by June 1592, but that it was in early 1594, when *A Knack* was "Newlie set foorth".[21] Instead, Metz has no doubts about the authenticity of the passage in *A Knack to Known a Knawe* and believes there are no grounds to question its identification with *Titus*.[22] Considering the signs of revision we can observe in *Titus*, and Henslowe's additional comment "ne[w]" which suggests the play had been newly revised, some scholars have proposed the possibility that *Titus and Vespasian* may have been an earlier version of *Titus Andronicus*, but the evidence in support of this hypothesis is too little to assert it with certainty, also in light of the fact that no text of *Titus and Vespasian* is still in existence.[23]

Alongside Jonson's Induction, there are other contributing factors that suggest an early date of composition for the play. The title page of Danter's 1594 edition, namely the first quarto, reads as follows:

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[18] Bate, p. 72. Moreover, Paul Bennet does not believe the extant copy of *A Knack to Know a Knave* to be reliable, deeming the 1594 quarto "garbled, mutilated, corrupt [...] unplayable, incoherent, and downright unintelligible in spots". See Bennet, Paul, "An Apparent Allusion to *Titus Andronicus*", *Notes and Queries* 200*,* (1955), p. 423.

[19] The only known information to this day is the title and the fact that it was performed ten times between 11 April 1592 and 25 January 1593. Metz, p. 191.

[20] *Titus and Vespasian* centred on the two Roman emperors and the siege of Jerusalem in AD 70, following Titus' triumphant return to Rome he was jointly made emperor with his father Vespasian, in front of the eyes of the Senate. See Bate, p. 72. The possibility of confusing some details seems inevitable, given the similarities between the two works.

[21] Bate, p. 72.

[22] Metz describes the passage as "unequivocal, shows no signs of corruption, and can be accepted at face value even though elements of the rest of the play may be suspect". See Metz, p. 191.

[23] Metz, p. 192.

The Most Lamentable Romaine Tragedie of Titus Andronicus: As it was Plaide by the Right Honourable the Earle of *Darbie*, Earle of *Pembrooke*, and Earle of *Sussex* their Seruants.[24]

These lines suggest that *Titus Andronicus* was staged by three different theatrical companies. Starting with Lorde Strange's Men (Strange became Earl of Derby in 1593), the play was then passed on to Pembroke's Men and ended with the Earl of Sussex's Men. Records of Strange's Men's theatrical activity inform us that their 1592 repertoire – from 19 February to 23 June 1592 – does not include *Titus*, this may give grounds to push back the date of composition of the play before 1592. There is even less available information on Pembroke's Men: the company seems to have concentrated their activity in the provinces before declaring bankruptcy by September 1593.[25] As mentioned at the very beginning of this chapter, the plague pandemic, which stretched over the two-year period from 1592 to 1594, had taken a heavy toll on the actors of the London playhouses: since the theatres had to be closed for extended periods of time, companies had to face many difficulties and in order to continue their performances, they either merged or had to interrupt their activities completely as a last resort. This had been the case for Pembroke's Men, who were "in a process of dissolution" since they had been unable to sustain all their expenses while on a provincial tour.[26] As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, in his *Diary* Henslowe noted that a new or revised version of *Titus* was performed on 24 January 1594 by Sussex's Men and Bate ultimately believes that the play passed through the hands of three companies over a two-year period, postulating the following sequence: pre-1592 Strange's *Titus*, 1592-3 Pembroke's tour of *Titus* on the outskirts of the city, and finally 1594 Sussex's *Titus*. Another hypothesis, first proposed by David George, offers a different view of the dating problem, arguing that the

[24] Bate, Fig. 14 p. 97.
[25] Bate, p. 73.
[26] Henslowe informs of the company's financial difficulties in a letter written in 1593 addressed to his son-in-law Edward Alleyn. See Metz, p. 190.

various mutations that the companies underwent between 1592 and 1594 brought together actors from different companies:

> the 1594 title-page refers to performances not by three companies in a sequence, but by one company which included actors who had previously worked for the other two. Elements of Strange's and Pembroke's Men may have been absorbed into Sussex's for this season.[27]

Up to this point, the only piece of information that has been analyzed supports the hypothesis of an early composition date, as we have seen, perhaps even earlier than 1592, but some other details support a composition date of late 1593 to 1594. The first element which corroborates this thesis is a parallelism between *Titus* and an image in Thomas Nashe's (1567-1601) picaresque novel *The Unfortunate Traveller*. The graphic picture of Bassianus' body described as a "dead trunk", dragged "to some secret hole" by the brothers Chiron and Demetrius and being used as a "pillow to [their] lust" (*TA*, 2.2.129-130) while raping Lavinia, mirrors a detail in *The Unfortunate Traveller*, in which Nashe narrates the story of Heraclide, raped by an outlaw who murdered her husband, whose "dead body he made a pillow for his abomination".[28] This striking similarity may give grounds to the hypothesis of *Titus* being completed in late 1593. On this note, Maxwell, although leaning towards an earlier date of composition – between 1589 and 1590 – affirms that:

> those who believe in a late date for Titus may be conceded the point that it is odd that such a popular play should not have been put on in 1592, if it were already in existence and in the company's repertoire.[29]

Considering all the available evidence, it can be pointed out that 1594 is the only date we can rigorously accept according to Henslowe's comment. Trying to tie together all the various hypotheses, Bate suggests the play was written in late 1593 and first performed in January 1594, arguing that it may have been either new or a revision of an earlier version of

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[27] Bate, p. 73.
[28] Nashe, Thomas, *The Unfortunate Traveller or the Life of Jack Wilton*, London: printed by T. Scarlet, 1594, p. 49.
[29] Shakespeare, William, *Titus Andronicus*, ed. by Maxwell, J.C., London: Methuen, 1953, p. xxiii.

the play in existence before June 1592.[30] However, the possibility that the actual composition of the play might have been earlier should not be dismissed, and even though we are presented with numerous testimonies regarding the date of composition it should be borne in mind that we can only conjecture.

1.2 The action of *Titus Andronicus*

The opening scene sees the Roman general Titus Andronicus returning to Rome after having defeated the Goth army. Following the death of twenty-five of his sons in battle, "half of the number that King Priam had" (1.1.84), Titus, although described as "Rome's best champion" (1.1.68) sacrifices the eldest son of the Goth Queen Tamora, Alarbus, so as to appease the spirits of his deceased sons. The scene then shifts to the political preoccupations of Rome: Titus declines the throne stating that after forty years of serving his country "a better head [Rome's] body fits" (1.1.190). "Noble Andronicus" (1.1.67) then endorses his older brother Saturninus for the throne. The new Emperor offers to marry Titus' daughter Lavinia, who however is already betrothed to Bassianus. Titus accepts Saturninus' marriage and also gifts him the Queen of the Goths as a war prisoner. Bassianus kidnaps Lavinia with the help of Titus' son Mutius who is killed by his father, outraged by his son's treason. Eventually Saturninus agrees to Lavinia and Bassianus' marriage and leaves with Tamora, but not before accusing Titus of secretly being part of this upheaval. Tamora convinces Saturninus to pardon Titus' family, but the human sacrifice has ignited Tamora's spirit and now, being "incorporate in Rome" (1.1.467), she starts plotting revenge against the Andronici together with her husband, Emperor Saturninus.

[30] Bate, p. 77.

Act 2 scene 1 opens with a hunting trip being arranged and this scene also introduces Aaron the Moor, the Queen's counsellor and secret lover, who delights in his new status. His intentions are revengeful and scheming, "vengeance is in [his] heart, death in [his] hand" (2.2.38). Aaron suggests Chiron and Demetrius, the two surviving Goth brothers, rape Lavinia during the hunt, conscious of the fact that by hurting Titus' daughter he and Tamora can strategically target the entire Andronici family. In act 2 scene 2, during the morning of the hunt, Chiron and Demetrius proceed to rape and mutilate Lavinia. To prevent her from identifying the culprits of the dishonourable action, the Goth brothers cut out Lavinia's tongue and sever her hands, after torturing and killing her betrothed Bassianus and leaving him in a pit. Aaron leads in Quintus and Martius claiming to have found "a panther fast asleep" (2.2.194), an expedient to lure the brothers into the "loathsome pit" (2.2.192). Martius finds Bassianus' body and Quintus falls into the "very fatal place" (2.2.202) himself after trying to help his brother. Tamora enters the scene with Titus and his son Lucius and hands Saturninus a letter – skillfully forged by Aaron – which promises gold to Bassianus' assassin, which makes the brothers, deceivingly referred to as "sweet huntsmen" (2.2.269), appear guilty of the murder. After Martius' and Quintus' arrest, Marcus, Lavinia's uncle, discovers the bleeding body of his niece in the woods and pronounces a lengthy monologue in which he points out the similarities between Lavinia's disgrace and the Ovidian myth of Philomel and Procne, addressing his niece as "Fair Philomela" (2.3.38).

In Act 3 Scene 1, Martius and Quintus are about to be executed for murder and this is followed by their father's pleas to "be pitiful to [his] condemned sons" (3.1.8). Titus' son Lucius who had been banished in Act 1 for defending his sisters' right to marry her "lawful promised love" (1.1.303) and for confronting his father about the "wrongful quarrel [in which Titus had] slain [his] son" (1.1.298), reappears on stage "to rescue [his] two brothers from their death" (3.1.48). The despair of the scene is further heightened by the entrance of Marcus

and mutilated Lavinia, at the sight of which Titus' grief overflows "now like Nilus […] disdaineth bounds" (3.1.72). Aaron promises Martius' and Quintus' lives will be spared if a member of the Andronici cuts off their hand and sends it as a "ransom for their fault" (3.3.157). Titus promptly obeys but is instead repaid with his sons' heads. He initiates his revenge and not having "another tear to shed" (3.1.280) madly laughs at the bloody spectacle. Titus "swears unto [his] soul to right [his sons'] wrongs" (3.1.279) and instructs Lucius to raise an army of Goths to march onto Rome. Titus' descent into madness is highlighted in Act 3 Scene 2 where he frantically promises to "learn [Lavinia's] thought" (3.2.39) although he is not actively helping her to identify her persecutors, instead is only indulging in verbose monologues. Horrified when Marcus kills an innocent fly, Titus then rages against the dead fly and strikes it with his knife when he learns that it "was a black-ill favoured fly / Like to the empress' Moor" (3.2.68).

Act 4 Scene 1 sees Lavinia running after young Lucius, Lucius' son, who in fear runs away from her, not knowing what his aunt is trying to communicate. He fears she "ran mad for sorrow" (4.1.21) as Hecuba of Troy did. Lavinia takes one of young Lucius' books, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and opens it to the tale of Philomela's rape at the hands of Tereus. The Andronici soon notice the parallels with the tale and by using gestures Lavinia communicates to her family that she was attacked in the woods. Ultimately, by holding a staff in her mouth and guiding it on the "sandy plot" (4.1.69) with the stumps of her hands the names of the culprits are revealed. The family swears revenge and Marcus begs the Gods to "revenge the heavens for old Andronicus" (4.1.129). In Act 4 Scene 2 young Lucius arrives at the palace and by order of Titus gifts Chiron and Demetrius some weapons wrapped in scrolls on which some lines of Horace's *Odes* are written. Translated, they read "the man of

upright life and free from crime does not need the javelins or bows from the Moor"[1] and Aaron guesses Titus knows their culpability. Tamora gives birth to a baby whose black skin is a sign of her secret relationship with Aaron. Tamora requests the child be killed so that Saturninus would not find out her affair, but Aaron refuses to kill his own son and threatens everyone who might hurt his baby. Aaron arranges for a fair skinned baby to take his son's place as Saturninus' heir to the throne and takes his son to safety. Titus and his family shoot arrows towards the sky, to which messages to the Gods are attached, begging that Justice, embodied by the goddess Astraea, be returned to Earth. The Gods, however, do not yield to their prayers. Act 4 closes on an enraged Saturninus, who realizes that Titus is turning Rome against him, and that Lucius has sided with the enemy by leading a Goth army against the city. Tamora reassures him she will "enchant the old Andronicus with words more sweet and yet more dangerous than baits" (4.4.88-9): Tamora and Aaron continue to plot revenge against the Andronici and Saturninus is convinced to "bury all [his] fear in [her] devices" (4.4.111).

Act 5, Scene 1, sees Lucius outside Rome at the head of an army of Goths and Aaron being captured together with his child, whom Lucius threatens to hang together with his father. In return for sparing his son's life, Aaron promises to reveal to Lucius "wondrous things that highly may advantage [him]" (5.1.55). Aaron admits to his influence in Bassianus' death, Lavinia's rape and the unjust framing of Quintus and Martius as well as Titus' severed hand. The rest of the scene consists in Aaron's litany of wickedness and lack of regret: the Moor's only remorse is "that [he] cannot do ten thousand more [dreadful things]" (5.1.144). Tamora and her sons, disguised as Revenge and Rape and Murder respectively, open Act 5, Scene 2. Tamora, convinced that Titus has gone mad from grief, wants him to believe that

[1] Horace, *Odes and Epodes*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. Ode ,1.22.1-2.

she has come to his aid and that if he invites Lucius to a feast, she will bring Tamora and Saturninus so that Titus can avenge himself on them. Titus, aware of the deceit, convinces Tamora-Revenge to "let Rape and Murder stay with [him]" (5.2.133). Titus then cuts Chiron and Demetrius' throats and collects their blood, which he will mix with their ground bones into pastry for a pie to be served to Tamora at the banquet she suggested to organize. The climax of atrocious events that have been building up during the course of the play reaches its height in the last scene of the play. In Act 5 Scene 3 Lucius, the Goths and Marcus all arrive at Titus' house with Aaron as their prisoner. Saturninus and Tamora join the banquet and are welcomed by Titus, dressed as a cook since he has helped prepare the feast. At the dinner table, Titus asks Saturninus if he is familiar with the story of "rash Virginius [who slew] his daughter with his own right hand, because she was […] stained and deflowered" (5.3.36-7) and whether he agrees with Virginius' decision. Saturninus endorses Virginius' action, and promptly Titus stabs his daughter Lavinia and informs Tamora that the pie she has been eating all along contains her sons' dead bodies and proceeds to kill her. Saturninus kills Titus and Lucius kills Saturninus. Marcus and Lucius speak to the remaining guests explaining the true unfolding of events stating that it was Chiron and Demetrius who killed Bassianus and that they, along with Aaron and Tamora, were responsible of the injustices against the Andronici. Lucius is proclaimed new emperor of Rome, Aaron is sentenced to be buried up to the neck and starved to death, while the dead body of Tamora is to be fed to the birds. The play ends with Lucius' promise to bring order to Rome, so that these events are never repeated.

1.3 Theatre and life: Shakespeare's audience

Before venturing into an in-depth analysis of the play, it is necessary to have an understanding of the audience whom Shakespeare wrote *Titus* for. This preliminary knowledge will allow a better visualization of the Elizabethan audience, capable of bearing a theatrical experience characterized by an extreme intensity of violence and bloodshed. Despite the harshness that characterized the evaluation of *Titus* since the eighteenth century, it enjoyed a remarkable success in its day, not solely with its staging, but with the ballad and the written version[1] of it as well. Although there is a kernel of objective truth in declaring *Titus*' actions brutal, visualizing the historical context of the play is vital to understand the art lying behind the tragedy and torment. After all, art is moved by the needs and tastes of the audience it is written for. It must not be ignored that the fashions in taste are part of a dynamic and evolving landscape.

The reason for renewed interest in *Titus*' scholarship, notably beginning in the latter part of the twentieth century, and spanning the 70s, 80s, and 90s, might stem not solely from the constantly mutating society, and the inherent shifts in literary and theatrical tastes, but also because in dealing with serious and important issues, *Titus* approaches these themes in a varied, "shocking and playful"[2] way or at least in what could be perceived as "shocking". Given that the period in which modern readers and theatregoers live routinely presents violent and crude content, easily made available online or in films, a critical reevaluation of the play seems necessary. I therefore find myself very much in agreement with Bate's assertion when he writes that "our culture resembles that of the Elizabethans" more than we may initially think, adding that:

[1] Bate, pp. 69-70
[2] Bate, p. 1.

audiences may still be disturbed by the play's bloody revenge, dismemberment, miscegenation, rape and cannibalism, but theatregoers who are also moviegoers will be very familiar with this kind of material.[3]

Generally, the sight of blood did not create disgust among Elizabethan citizens since it was an integral part of everyday life and frequently experienced firsthand. During Elizabeth's reign, attending public executions was a rather common practice. I believe it may also have functioned as a means of exorcising the widespread fear of death, an ordinary and prevalent reality in the Elizabethan period. Surely, death is part of every reality, a certainty that transcends space and time, but the dimension of physical death, especially the sight of the dead body, was far more present then than it is today. Nowadays, at least in the western world, death represents a taboo, and it mainly tends to be relegated to a few commemorative words and hidden behind flowers so as to render it as pleasant or manageable as possible. Death may be overflowing on screen, but when confronted with blood and suffering without the digital fourth-wall filter, modern audiences are far more impressionable and susceptible than Elizabethan theatregoers.

The contrast in public reaction is exemplified by the audiences' reaction during the 2014 revival of Lucy Bailey's 2006 production of *Titus Andronicus* at the Globe Theatre. The level of gore was unbearable for many. Ambulances and first aiders were an integral part of the production, standing by at every performance just in case someone felt unwell. After the performances, some articles of prominent newspapers read as follows:

The Bard's bloodiest drama may have achieved a new record after more than 100 people fainted during recent performances at Shakespeare's Globe. The production of *Titus Andronicus*, which ran for 52 performances, spilt 156 liters of stage blood, and caused an average of two people to pass out during each show.[4]

[3] Bate, p. 1.
[4] The Times, https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/gore-causes-100-to-faint-during-globes-titus-andronicus-bdqrmdgvwf8#:~:text=The%20Bard's%20bloodiest%20drama%20may,pass%20out%20during%20each%20show, (Accessed 20 January 2024).

Theatre-Goers In Shock Over Gore At The Globe. Nine theatregoers have fainted in the first fortnight of The Globe's blood-soaked production of *Titus Andronicus*.[5]

In the interview for Sky News, director Lucy Bailey comments on the events saying that:

People take the blood - which is obviously stage blood - at face value. So, when they see blood come out of the mouth and they can't understand how it has got there, they understand it as real at that moment.

Indeed, theatre leaves no space for hiding. Whereas moviegoers can freely decide to turn off the screen or lower the volume, theatregoers may be able to turn their gaze away from an upsetting scene, but will still be confronted with screams, growls, and the whole dimension of physicality the stage is so special in providing. Bailey continues on the difference between the contemporary and the Elizabethan audiences:

People were coming to these theatres to see bears being ripped apart by dogs and on an alternate day there would be a play. So, the play itself in some ways highlights the bloodlust that was very present for the Elizabethan audience.

In fact, street performances, bearbaitings, brawls and executions were not only deemed spectacles, but also as an almost apotropaic means to contain and channel violence, offering the public an outlet concentrated only at specific times in a supervised setting. It is fair to say that in London, spectacle and death went hand in hand right from the moment of the construction of the stage and scaffold, which is almost contiguous. In order to explain this, is may be useful to provide an example: the first permanent structure for hangings in London, known by the name of Triple Tree, was erected at Tyburn in 1571 and only five years later, in 1576, Londoners would have seen the construction of the first public theatre, located in the parish of St. Leonard's, Shoreditch.[6] At public hangings the crowd was actively involved in the macabre spectacle: seats at Tyburn could be paid for[7] just as seats at the theatre, and

[5] Sky News, https://news.sky.com/story/theatre-goers-in-shock-over-gore-at-the-globe-10405985, (Accessed 20 January 2024).
[6] Encyclopedia Britannica, "The Theatre", 25 Oct. 2013, https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Theatre, Accessed 15 November 2023.
[7] Smith, Molly, "The Theater and the Scaffold: Death as Spectacle in The Spanish Tragedy", *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 32, (1992), p.218.

executions became an occasion for public meetings. A juxtaposition exists between public executions as forms of meta-theatre and violence enacted on stage as mirror of an ordinary reality for the spectators, that is why "executions […] where festivity merged so fully with the enactment of terror may be especially important to an understanding of the drama of death on the Renaissance stage".[8] The presence of the audience was essential for the proper functioning of the spectacle: the public either cheered or complained, their voice being a measurement for the successful outcome of the activity, may it be on stage or on the scaffold.

To exemplify the theatricality of public executions, consider a typical sentence passed on a nobleman found guilty of treason in 1589:

> That he should be conveyed to the Place from whence he came, and from thence to the place of Execution, and there to be hanged until he were half dead, his Members to be cut off, his Bowels to be cast into the Fire, his Head to be cut off, his Quarters to be divided into four several parts, and to be bestowed in four several Places.[9]

These lines show the suggestiveness and drama that lay behind a sixteenth-century death sentence, especially the fact that the body parts of the nobleman had to be set on fire and scattered around different places of the town very much resembles the dismemberment taking place in *Titus Andronicus*. Such a gory spectacle would not have been new to the Elizabethan audience who were "quite familiar with the spectacle of the hanged body and disemboweled and quartered corpse", given that just over the course of Elizabeth's reign "6160 victims were hanged at Tyburn"[10]. I suppose that the overlapping of festivity and death may have led to the blurring of these two dimensions, making it ultimately more difficult to draw a clear separation between them. Comparing the similar features of theatre and executions, Molly Smith postulates that:

> the influence of the scaffold may also account for a general dramatic fascination with the spectacle of death evident throughout the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. In fact, the close alliance between theatre

[8] Smith, p. 221.
[9] Quoted in Bate, p. 23. "The Tryal of Philip Howard, Earl of Arundel, the 18th day of April, 1589[,] and in the 31st Year of the Reign of Queen Elizabeth", in *State-Trials*, 1.140-4.
[10] Smith, p. 217.

and public punishment frames a great age of drama in England; after all, the period culminates with the greatest theatrical spectacle of all, the public execution of King Charles I.[11]

To sum up, the historical and spatial context in which Shakespeare wrote his *Titus Andronicus* is essential for identifying its potential public and audience, and for appreciating the literary and theatrical choices of the Bard. While acknowledging the evident influence that classical sources such as Seneca's revenge tragedies – to be analyzed later in this thesis – had on the play, equally noteworthy is Shakespeare's awareness of the impact that the "ritualized violence"[12] of public executions had on Elizabethan playgoers as well as of the transformative effect it could have on their reception and interpretation of the play.

1.4 Revenge tragedy and the role of revenge in the sixteenth century

Replete with bloodshed, mutilations and death, *Titus Andronicus* is commonly regarded as Shakespeare's earliest and bloodiest tragedy. The play portrays a sequence of violent and appalling actions. In Aaron's words, the play tells of:

murders, rapes and massacres,
Acts of black night, abominable deeds,
Complots of mischief, treason, villainies,
Ruthful to hear yet piteously performed. (5.1.63-66)

Revenge is the motivating factor behind every gruesome action, the binding force that fuels the plot's action and eventually leads it to escalate into a chain of horrors. Since revenge is the central aspect around which the entire play orbits, the theatrical genre to which the play is generally ascribed is revenge tragedy, the characteristics of which will be outlined in the following lines. First, it is important to note that despite revenge tragedies being in vogue at the time *Titus* was first performed, the Elizabethan audience would not have been aware of

[11] Smith, p. 220.
[12] Bate, p. 23.

this formal classification. The term "revenge tragedy" was formally coined at a later point in time:

> When we speak of 'revenge tragedy,' we are often unaware of the extent to which our approach to these important Renaissance plays has been conditioned by the name we have given them. Elizabethans themselves recognized no distinct dramatic type called revenge play. The term is a modern one.[1]

In fact, at the dawn of the twentieth century, Ashley H. Thorndike defined the genre of the revenge tragedy as:

> a distinct species of the tragedy of blood [which] may be defined as a tragedy whose leading motive is revenge and whose main action deals with the progress of this revenge, leading to the death of the murderers and often to the death of the avenger himself.[2]

Compared to the "tragedy of blood", revenge tragedy is interested in exploring the chief motivations behind the enacted brutalities and how the revenger perpetrates and achieves their *vendetta*, whereas the tragedy of blood's focus centres around mere acts of violence and the spectacularisation of pain. Although the difference may appear subtle, we may not exclude elements of one to coexist in another.

When researching the topic of revenge, the reader is inevitably faced with Francis Bacon's famous assertion of revenge being "a kind of wild justice, that the more men's nature runs to, the more ought the law to weed it out".[3] Bacon recognized the pivotal role the State had in maintaining peace and order among the citizens and condemns private justice, which needed to be eradicated by law. The concept of crime presupposes the existence of a set of rules which are breached and therefore, before the existence of a State, an act of violence was not deemed a crime but only a personal injury and the revenge for it "was the first manifestation of a consciousness of justice".[4] Despite that, private blood-revenge had no

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[1] Broude, Ronald, "Revenge and Revenge Tragedy in Renaissance England", *Renaissance Quarterly*, 28, (1975), p. 38.
[2] Thorndike, Ashley, "The Relations of Hamlet to the Contemporary Revenge Play", *PMLA*, 17, (1902), p.125.
[3] Bacon, Francis, et al., "Of Revenge", *The Essayes or Counsels, Civill and Morall*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985.
[4] Bowers, Fredson, "*Revenge Tragedy 1587-1642*", Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966, p.3-11.

legal place in Elizabethan England and punishing any wrongdoings was a prerogative of the State. The *vendetta* obtained through blood feuds or through the law of *talion* was thus eradicated by the consolidation of a central power. However, authorities were still conscious of the Elizabethan inheritance of private justice from earlier ages and recognized that their own times still held the possibilities of upheaval.[5] "The nature of our Nation is free, hault, prodigal of life and blood"– wrote Sir Thomas Smith in *The Commonwealth of England* also known as *De Republica*, published in 1583.[6] His words exemplify the presence of violence as part of daily existence. The spectacle of blood did not elicit disgust, on the contrary, Elizabethan citizens "would demand it".[7] Shakespeare's stance on whether "no private revenge could ever partake of justice"[8] remains unknown; neither do we know if he endorsed any type of vigilantism. Be as it may, it is highly plausible that he must have been aware of these two coexisting dimensions during the Elizabethan age. Through his play, he artfully demonstrates an understanding of how severe the consequences are when individuals take justice into their hands and do not entrust themselves to institutions.

The importance set on learning and the revival of the classics were core elements of the Renaissance and tragedy was regarded as one of its highest artistic expressions.[9] In his seminal study on Elizabethan revenge tragedy, Bowers outlines some of the key features of the genre. Revenge may be envisioned by either a hero or a villain: the reasons for revenge are not fixed and can space from blood-vengeance to jealousy or resentment, as is the case with Titus when he learns of his daughter Lavinia's rape and mutilation. In addition, revenge must be carried out by the avenger themselves or their interested accomplices. The opponents of the revenger are rarely spared from being killed and even the innocents are bound to be

[5] Bowers, p.5.
[6] Quoted in Bowers, p. 16.
[7] Bowers. p. 16.
[8] Bowers. p. 14.
[9] Bowers. p. 74.

harmed. Deaths are numerous and generally gruesome in their nature. Revenge is at the core of the plot's unfolding, and it may plant its seed by portraying the ghosts of the murdered urging revenge.[10]

In *Titus Andronicus*, the characters' downfall is sparked by the sacrifice of Tamora's son Alarbus in the name of Titus' deceased sons. Nonetheless, a difference from the conventional norms of the revenge tragedy is observable at the beginning of the play. It is interesting to note that the shadows of Titus' sons never appear on stage nor are their voices heard. Confronted with the pain inflicted by the Goths on "Rome's best champion" (1.1.68), Lucius, unable to bear the sight of Titus mourning at his sons' tomb, demands the enactment of "justice":

Give us the proudest prisoner of the Goths,
That we may hew his limbs and on a pile
Ad manes fratrum sacrifice his flesh
Before this earthly prison of their bones,
That so the shadows be not unappeased. (1.1.99-103)

To these words, in response to Tamora's desperation for the imminent death of Alarbus, Titus hardheartedly adds that:

Religiously they ask a sacrifice.
To this your son is marked, and die he must,
T'appease their groaning shadows that are gone. (1.1.127-129)

The inexorable circle of revenge has been set into motion, but the "justified" act of violence has not been fuelled by the deceased. The adverb "religiously", employed by Titus, assumes a strong ironic connotation. It is being implied that Titus' sons, now deceased in war, would expect their father to sacrifice an innocent Goth warrior to revenge their death and level out the losses on both sides of the army. The brothers' *manes* – Latin for shadows – are invoked, their "groaning" serving as the catalysts for the downward spiralling events. But no groan, no sound has ever been uttered. The brothers' *manes* never reveal themselves on stage, and

[10] Bowers, pp. 64-5.

thus cannot be identified with the cause at the core of the tragedy. The action is orchestrated solely by the living, who act in pursuit of their desires and self-interest hiding them behind the wishes of the dead. The latter are relegated to the role of scapegoats invoked to justify the upcoming bloodshed. It can be argued, however, that the reason which fuels revenge and the underlying motivation for the human sacrifice does not simply stem from the death of Titus' sons, a plausible outcome in battle. Instead, the sacrifice may represent the Andronici's assertion of power, an inhumane yet inevitable act done to maintain the family's name in high regard. In fact, according to the mechanism of retribution "who offends a single member of the family […] offends all",[11] and it is in this context that the sacrifice assumes a pivotal role in upholding the reputation and honour of the Andronici.

[11] Bowers, p. 4.

CHAPTER II

REWRITING OVID: CLASSICAL ALLUSIONS IN TITUS ANDRONICUS

Know that the people of Rome, for whom we stand
A special party, have by common voice
In election for the Roman empery
Chosen Andronicus, surnamed Pius
For many good and great deserts to Rome. (1.20-24)

Marcus' words mark Titus' grand entrance into Rome after having defeated the Goth army. It is the audience's first contact with the Roman general and Shakespeare chooses to pair the name Andronicus with "Pius". This epithet immediately evokes the legendary founder of Rome, the "Pius Aeneas" of Vergil's *Aeneid*. This connection allows Shakespeare to play with the audience's anticipations by attributing values such as devoutness to *familia* and *patria* – family and motherland –, godliness and mercifulness to a character that will ultimately not live up to the expectations set by the name he was introduced with. This seemingly small addition of the word "Pius" lays the foundation for the numerous classical allusions present from this point onwards in the play. On the connection of Titus to the legendary founder of Rome, Miola writes: "Titus embodies *Romanitas* here defined as a military code of honour […]. [He] does not weep tears of sorrow for his dead sons, but tears of joy for his return to Rome".[1] Latin literary influences are disseminated throughout *Titus Andronicus*. The name "Lavinia"[2] and Titus' *cognomen* drawn from Vergil's *Aeneid*, the rape and mutilations of Lavinia from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Titus' banquet that recalls Seneca's *Thyestes* are included amongst the most immediate classical allusions. But the play

[1] Miola, Robert S., *Shakespeare's Rome*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, p. 46.
[2] According to the legend, Lavinium, a city near Rome, was founded by Aeneas after his escape from Troy and named after his wife Lavinia.
https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.04.0006:entry=lavinium (Accessed on February 2024)

also explicitly mentions the parable of Virginius and the rape of Lucrece, which pertain to Livy's *History*, along with direct quotations from Horace's *Odes*.

This chapter aims to analyze the relationship the play's central action has with one of its underlying sources, book 6 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. It will further try to underline the fact that even though the action takes place in Rome, the supposed cradle and protected space of Latinity, the characters' extreme actions are distant from the polished language they employ. They quote and recall passages from classical authors, not understanding, altering – or exaggerating – their meaning. The characters' garbled memory is a symptom of a Rome that exists merely as a faint memory of the Eternal City, a battleground between Goths and Romans, past and present, its glory doomed to oblivion due to its own people's inability to uphold the ancient values of the *mos maiorum*. The characters' *romanitas* is presented as an external casing rather than an inherent dimension they belong to, and this might be the motive behind the characters' failure to live up to the ideal societal norms and values of ancient Rome. The lack of historical topicality lingers in the city Shakespeare built.[3] The various events and elements presented in the play are an "eclectic synthesis" of different time periods.[4] On this conglomerate of ancient and modern, T.J.B. Spencer comments:

> The play does not assume a political situation known to Roman history; it is, rather, a summary of Roman history. It is not so much that any particular set of political institutions is assumed in *Titus*, but rather that it includes all the political institutions that Rome ever had. The author seems anxious, not to get it all right, but to get it all in.[5]

Further proof of the contamination of different ages can be found in the "Peacham drawing" (fig.1), the only contemporaneous illustration we have of a Shakespearean play: it consists

[3] Barret comments on this issue stating that the representation of a non-in-time-defined Rome presents the possibility for Shakespeare to critique the current political situation. Barret, J.K., "Chained Allusions, Patterned Futures, and the Dangers of Interpretation in *Titus Andronicus*" *English Literary Renaissance*, 44, 3 (2014), pp. 452–85, p. 453.
[4] Holderness, p. 94.
[5] T. J. B. Spencer, 'Shakespeare and the Elizabeth Romans', *Shakespeare Survey,* 10 (1957), pp. 27-38, p. 32.

of a single folio sheet displaying a drawing of Tamora's plea for her son's life in front of Titus. The Goth queen and her sons Chiron and Demetrius are kneeling in front of Titus and two of his soldiers. On the right-side stands Aaron, seemingly indicating towards the centre of the illustration. The drawing is complemented by forty lines preceded by the caption: "Enter Tamora pleadinge for her sonnes going to execution".[6] Bate holds that: "as the play addresses issues in contemporary history via Roman setting, so the costumes mingle ages. Titus wears a toga, but his soldiers are Elizabethan men-at-arms with halberds, while Tamora's dress is vaguely medieval."[7] Holderness adds that:

> the evidence of the 'Peacham drawing', […] shows Titus displaying a hybrid of antique and contemporary sartorial codes, to demonstrate that the play uses Rome as a porous medium penetrated by urgent matters of Shakespeare's present.[8]

Figure 1: The Peacham Drawing (The Marquess of Bath, Longleat House, Warminster, Wiltshire)

An analysis of the drawing suggests that the characters' *romanitas* is neither fixed nor stable. Like a piece of clothing, as it were a cloak or toga, it can be removed and readapted to the most suitable context. Clothing plays a heavy role in shaping identity, which cannot be refashioned depending on how it may best fit a situation. The very fact that the characters are

[6] For further information on the Peacham Drawing see Bate, *Introduction*, pp. 38-42.
[7] Bate, p. 42.
[8] Holderness, p. 94. For more information on the theory of the *translatio imperii* see Bate pp. 17-21.

dressed in garments that do not belong to their own time is an important indicator of the process of corruption and contamination of their identity and principles.

Ovid (43 BC - 18 AD) was "Shakespeare's master of poetry […] no other poet ancient or modern receives such attention"[9] and the *Metamorphoses* is considered his most influential work. Ovid was one of the most widely read classical authors in the Elizabethan period, in fact, "Latin was the substance of the grammar-school curriculum; and within that curriculum, Ovid occupied a very special place".[10] In addition to being particularly suitable for grammatical and rhetorical studies, the *Metamorphoses* was a text of pivotal importance for the study of classical myths, as "mythological allusion pervades Elizabethan and Jacobean writing and for Elizabethan culture, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* constituted the richest storehouse of that mythology".[11] Shakespeare's knowledge of the *Metamorphoses* derived from Arthur Golding's (1536-1606) translation of Ovid's text. This translation was of fundamental importance during the Elizabethan age, as Bate asserts: "if Shakespeare and his contemporaries owed their intimacy with Ovidian rhetoric to the grammar schools, their easy familiarity with Ovidian narrative was as much due to Golding".[12] The first four books were published in 1565 and two years later, in 1567, Golding produced the complete translation of the *Metamorphoses*.[13]

The central action of the play is drawn from book 6 of the *Metamorphoses*, that is to say the myth of Philomela and Procne, the play's "main structural model"[14] in Bate's words. The myth provides the reader with a "stock of archetypes",[15] a mythical and narrative

[9] Baldwin, quoted in Martindale, "Shakespeare's Ovid", *Shakespeare and the Uses of Antiquity: an Introductory Essay*, London: Taylor & Francis, 1994, p. 45.
[10] Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993, p. 13.
[11] Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid*, p. 12.
[12] Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid*, p. 29.
[13] Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid*, p. 29.
[14] Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid*, p. 102.
[15] Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid*, p. 90.

structure which serves as a paradigm for author and audience. *Imitatio* and *aemulatio* are core concepts of the Renaissance, a period characterized by a profound longing for the revival of the classics: "there is no more typical Renaissance intellectual activity than the quest for parallels between the present and the past, the modern and the ancients".[16] However, Shakespeare does not blindly follow his source, but he reinvents the text by modifying or adding several details to it. To understand the similarities and differences between the play and Ovid's tale of Philomela, I will provide a brief account of the events of book 6.

The narrative begins with the liberation of Athens at the hands of the Thrace tyrant Tereus, who in return for his help is given Procne as spouse. The Latin text records that during the wedding night "non pronuba Iuno […] non illi Gratia lecto: Eumenides tenuere faces de funere raptas" (*Met*. 6, 428-430).[17] The dark auspices that complement the newlyweds' wedding night give way to the subsequent series of tragic events. Tereus is "inflamed"[18] at the sight of Procne's sister, Philomela, and starts fantasizing about the girl, whom he calls "mea vota" (*Met*. 6, 513) – my dream, or literally "[the one] I have desired". He proceeds to incarcerate and rape Philomela, who courageously threatens Tereus to reveal the truth, screaming it into the woods and sky, in the hope to be heard even by the Gods. More afraid than enraged, Tereus decides to cut off Philomela's tongue, so as to silence her forever. In tears, Tereus lies about the fate of Philomela, saying she has been killed. However, Philomela keeps her promise of revenge and reveals her story by weaving it onto a web and having it sent to Procne. The latter saves her sister from captivity and starts plotting revenge. Still undecided on how to punish Tereus, Procne is joined by her son Itys, whose only fault is to resemble his father, and it is this similarity that will lead Procne to commit filicide.

[16] Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid*, p. 190.
[17] The edition I use throughout is: Ovidio, *Le Metamorfosi*, ed. by Piero Bernanrdini Marzolla, Torino: Einaudi, 2015. "Nor Iuno, protector of the weddings, nor the Graces attended their bed: the Eumenides (the Furies) held torches taken from a funeral." All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.
[18] *Met*. 6, 455: "exarsit conspecta virgine Tereus".

Filled with fervour, she drags him away "veluti Gangetica cervae lactentem fetum per silvas tigris opacas".[19] After striking and cutting Itys' throat, the sisters dismember him together and proceed to cook him and serve Tereus his son's body disguised in a rich banquet. Tereus despairs and madly pursues the sisters to kill them, but they manage to escape by turning into birds. Tereus too metamorphoses into a bird, specifically a hoopoe, whose "facies armata videtur",[20] in an eternal quest for vengeance.

In *Titus Andronicus*, the tragedy of the myth is heightened:

> What is horrible in Ovid's Tereus story Shakespeare makes twice as horrible in *Titus Andronicus*. Not one rapist, but two, not one murdered child, but five, not one or two mutilated organs but six, not a one-course meal but a two.[21]

It seems plausible that Shakespeare did not simply want to imitate his source, rather to exceed the precedent. The tragedy unfolds with the aim of surpassing the brutalities of its source, so that the knowledge based on the classics turns into the negation of the values inspired by that same classical learning.[22] Through the myth of Philomela Shakespeare is able to create not only a different text, but he also stirs up a vast array of emotions given that the story is not written to be read, rather to be acted out, and this mixture of horrors and tragedy is difficult to ignore on stage. In his seminal study "The Metamorphosis of Violence in *Titus Andronicus*", Eugene Waith underlines the apparent incompatibility between the stylistic features of the *Metamorphoses* and the cruelty of the events it describes. He believes that the metamorphoses Ovid describes are mainly psychological and that their aim is to underline how extreme and uncontrolled emotions may lead to different types of transformations:

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[19] *Met*. 6, 636-7: "as a Gangetic tigress [drags away] a newborn unweaned fawn across the dark woods". It is interesting to note that Ovid does not use the noun "hinnuleus" to describe the fawn, but he specifically employs the expression "fetus cervae". In my reading, this additionally underlines the frailty and defencelessness of the newborn creature.

[20] Met. 6, 674: "[its] appearance looks as if he were armed", probably due to the bird's sharp crest.

[21] Barkan, quoted in Kahn, Coppélia, *Roman Shakespeare: Warriors, Wounds, and Women*, London: Routledge, 1997, p. 46.

[22] On this topic, Chaudhuri argues that: "The play has been seen as an exercise in competitive emulation, as a satire of roman and by extension, humanist education". Chaudhuri, Pramit, "Classical Quotation *in Titus Andronicus*", *EHL*, 81, 3 (2014), pp. 787.

What may seem at first an incongruous elegance is perfectly suited to the process of transforming a character into an emotional state. Violence, as Ovid describes it, is an emblem of the transformation. In a sense, it is itself transformed in the process into an object of interested but somewhat detached contemplation.[23]

In Ovid's narratives, highly rhetorical language may help the reader to picture the scenes more vividly. However, Waith argues that metaphorical speech on stage, while it may be effective on paper, highlights the incongruity and incompatibility between the horror of the events and sweet-sounding words:

This technique of description is not inappropriate to this sort of situation. The trouble is that it is a narrative rather than a dramatic device. […] The Ovidian borrowing in *Titus Andronicus* has more significance than the mere application of decorative detail. In taking over certain Ovidian forms Shakespeare takes over part of an Ovidian conception which cannot be fully realized by the techniques of drama.[24]

The next section will elaborate on Marcus' meticulous description of the mutilated Lavinia, which best exemplifies the powerful role violence has in the transformation of a character who is so dehumanised, her suffering so dematerialised and poetically isolated that she is reduced to the status of an object.

2.1 The metamorphosis of revenge: refashioning Ovid's Philomel

In his long monologue, that takes up almost the entirety of Act 2, Scene 3 (2.3.11-57), Marcus is able to decipher the mythical model from which Lavinia's torturers drew their inspiration for their crime from his niece's tortured body. In addition, he notes how much the model was outdone:

But sure some Tereus hath deflowerd thee
And, lest thout shouldts detect him, cut thy tongue.

[…]

Fair Philomela, why she but lost her tongue,
And in a tedious sampler sewed her mind;
But, lovely niece, that mean is cut from thee.
A craftier Tereus, cousin, hast thou met,

[23] Waith, Eugene M., "The Metamorphosis of Violence in *Titus Andronicus*" in *Critical Essays* edited by Philip C. Colin, 1995, New York: Routledge, p. 104.
[24] Waith, pp. 110-111.

And he hath cut those pretty fingers off,
That could have better sewed than Philomel. (2.3.26-27; 38-43)

Marcus mentions "Tereus" twice. He recalls Ovid's myth and the sight of that particular type of mutilations immediately allows him to draw a connection to the Thracian tyrant. The "Tereus" of Lavinia's story, however, is "craftier". The brothers did not limit themselves to severing the twice mentioned "tongue", but instead, cowed by Ovid's lesson, "they have attempted to improve on the story" [1] by "cut[ting] those pretty fingers off".

Instead of offering his niece some words of comfort, being outraged, or calling for help, Marcus proceeds to describe the scene calmly and thoroughly thanks to a series of elaborate metaphors drawn from the natural world. I have underlined the words belonging to the lexical cluster of nature so as to facilitate their identification in the text:

What stern ungentle hands
Hath lopped and hewed and made thy body bare
Of her two branches, those sweet ornaments

[…] [*Lavinia opens her mouth*]
Alas, a crimson river of warm blood,
Like to a bubbling fountain stirred with wind,
Doth rise and fall between thy rosèd lips,
Coming and going with thy honey breath.
But sure some Tereus hath deflowered thee

[…]

Ah, now thou turn'st away thy face for shame
And notwithstanding all this loss of blood,
As from a conduit with three issuing spouts,

[…]

O, had the monster seen those lily hands
Tremble like aspen leaves upon a lute
And make the silken strings delight to kiss them,
He would not then have touched them for his life.

(2.3.16-18; 22-25; 28-30; 44-47)

Time appears to come to a standstill while reading this passage, leaving the audience to come to terms with the profound consequences of the events. It seems as if Marcus attempts to

[1] Weber, William W., "Worse Than Philomel: Violence, Revenge, and Meta-Allusions in *Titus Andronicus*", *Studies in Philology*, 112, 4 (2015), pp. 698-717, p. 707.

substitute Lavinia's suffering with a parenthesis of metaphorical speech; his "response is that of the aesthete, struggling to take shelter in his poetry".[2] Jonathan Bate recognizes that Marcus' speech "might be considered to be a public humiliation, an insult added to Lavinia's injury", pointing out the immobility language without action may lead to:

> Read in terms of the critique of humanism, the speech could be said to show that having all the rhetorical tropes at your fingertips doesn't actually help you to *do* anything. […] As audience members, we need Marcus' formalization just as much as he does himself in order to confront the mutilated Lavinia.[3]

According to this interpretation, Marcus' words would serve to express his sympathy towards his niece. The utilization of classical rhetoric, in this case, represents a constructive application which contrasts with the destructive tendencies exhibited by other characters in the play who misused the lessons derived from classical texts.

The author uses the terms "lopped and hewed" to describe the girl's mutilated hands. The verb "lopped" is rather specific and already recurred in Act 1, in connection to Alarbus' death:

> LUCIUS
> See, lord and father, how we have performed
> Our Roman rites: Alarbus' limbs are lopped
> And entrails feed the sacrificing fire. (1.1.145-147)

I believe the repetition of this verb to be deliberate, as if revenge were also nourished through a specific lexical choice. By emphasizing the link between words and actions, Shakespeare hints at a circular structure of revenge, where two children, Alarbus and Lavinia, despite their differences – a Goth man and warrior on one side, a Roman noblewoman on the other – are punished in the same manner, both in deeds and through language.

Lavinia's hands are compared to "branches", and they "tremble like aspen leaves". It might be interesting to note that the Latin name for the aspen tree is *populus tremula*. The

[2] Marshall, Cynthia, "'I Can Interpret All Her Martyr'd Signs': *Titus Andronicus*, Feminism, and the Limits of Interpretation", *Sexuality and Politics in Renaissance Drama*, Lewiston NY: Mellen, 1991, pp. 193-209, p. 199.
[3] Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid*, p. 112.

linguistic pun is not hard to identify. The aspen inherently and etymologically "trembles", as Lavinia does.[4] This is her "most Ovidian" metamorphosis. Waith maintains that Lavinia undergoes two metamorphoses, the first one taking place right before her assault, when speaking to Tamora in the woods:

> her proud self-confidence with Tamora clearly points up the shocking suddenness of her change to a weeping suppliant—an initial metamorphosis somewhat comparable to Niobe's. Lavinia's second metamorphosis is accomplished in a description which has proved to be the most unpalatable passage in the play. It is also the most Ovidian.[5]

The representation of Lavinia as a tree losing its branches is part of a process of personification of nature that Shakespeare introduced when the girl was assaulted in the forest. Especially in Act 2, the forest comes to life only to be revealed as a place of subterfuges: the pit in which Bassianus, Lavinia's betrothed, is thrown is defined as "hateful as Cocytus' misty mouth" (2.2.235), "bloodstained hole" (2.2.210), "blood-drinking pit" (2.2.224), "swallowing womb" (2.2.239) and "devouring receptacle" (2.2.234). Especially the last two terms highlight some anthropomorphic traits attributed to the pit, and to the surrounding nature by extension. The forest is not a space of protection, rather it swallows, deceives, and kills. It is worthwhile mentioning another element that adds to the process of transformation into natural elements the characters undergo. Before throwing Bassianus' body into the pit, Chiron speaks these words:

> Drag hence her husband to some secret hole,
> And make his dead trunk pillow to our lust. (2.2.129-130)

Later in the play, Lucius weeps over his uncle Titus' body and says:

> Stand all aloof, but, uncle, draw you near
> To shed obsequious tears upon this trunk. (5.3.150-151)

Both men belonging to the Andronici family are referred to as "trunks". The fact that they are associated with the strongest and most resistant part of the tree clearly demonstrates how

[4] *Populus tremula*, https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/trees-woods-and-wildlife/british-trees/a-z-of-british-trees/aspen/ (Accessed on February 2024)
[5] Waith, p. 109.

they are perceived, both by their enemies and the people of Rome, namely as foundational elements for the Roman society – a token of great importance for honouring the lineage and continuation of the family name. In my reading, Lavinia, on the other hand, being identified with the leaves of a tree, evokes an image of frailty and expendability. Like the leaves, being at the extremity of the plant, she is more prone to being exposed and hurt, the most expendable part of it – and of her family metaphorically. A tree does not die without its branches, but the latter do not survive without the protection of the trunk they are attached to. Despite that, leaves still are by and large the most attractive and appealing part of a tree. Likewise, Lavinia may have been the least important component in the Andronici family from a political and societal standpoint, but at the same time she was also treated as a decorative piece by the family, as evidenced by Marcus' description of his niece's "ornaments" (2.3.18). Also, "Rome's rich ornament" are the words associated with Lavinia in Act 1 (1.1.55).

Marcus continues to list all the ornamental elements missing from his niece's body.[6] She is no more. Like a temple that has been vandalized, she has no inherent value. Lavinia *is* as long as she *has*. She ceases to exist as a person once she has been stripped of those elements which made her useful:

MARCUS
O, that delightful engine of her thoughts,
That blabbed them with such pleasing eloquence,
Is torn from forth that pretty hollow cage
Where, like a sweet melodious bird, it sung
Sweet varied notes, enchanting every ear. (3.1.83-87)

Lavinia is described through what she is/has *not*: her mouth is now a "hollow cage" from which the tongue, "delightful engine", has been torn out. Through the use of the past "sung",

[6] Bate suggests that Marcus' "perversely Petrarchan display" of Lavinia's losses might be regarded as a "second rape upon her". See Bate p. 35.

Marcus implies that Lavinia's "tongue had the qualities of a nightingale *before* she was ever attacked".[7] Lavinia had no chance of transformation or of pursuing another fate since her destiny was already written out. Scholar J.K. Barret suggests this pre-patterned ending draws from the Ovidian narrative technique according to which there is a strong bond between past and present, since the myths recounted nearly always analyse the origins of an already existing element, event, animal etc. In Barret's words: "Lavinia always was what she becomes; the etiological narrative paradigm reveals a circularity to her fate that exists fundamentally in the past. Shakespeare's text-obsessed characters are terminally stuck in a weblike past".[8] The elaborate language serves only as a temporary refuge for Marcus, who hides behind his embellished metaphors, but ultimately fails to conceal the raw brutality of the scene.[9] Indeed, although the association of Lavinia's pain with natural elements such as a "crimson river" and a "bubbling fountain" tries to disguise the girl's suffering, conversely the latter is heightened exactly by the effort to keep it hidden:

> These pleasant and familiar images of trees, fountains, and conduits bring the horror that has been committed within the range of comprehension. They oblige us to see clearly a suffering body, yet as they do so they temporarily remove its individuality, even its humanity, by abstracting and generalizing. Though not in themselves horrible, they point up the horror; though familiar, they point up the strangeness. The suffering becomes an object of contemplation.[10]

The narrative technique of sublimating pain through metaphorical language was in fact not new to Shakespeare. In book 6, Ovid builds a highly suggestive image which sees Philomela's tongue compared to the severed tail of a snake:

radix micat ultima linguae,
ipsa iacet terraeque tremens inmurmurat atrae,
utque salire solet mutilatae cauda colubrae,

---

[7] Barret, J.K., "Chained Allusions, Patterned Futures, and the Dangers of Interpretation in *Titus Andronicus*" *English Literary Renaissance*, 44, 3 (2014), pp. 452–485, p. 463.
[8] Barret, p. 463.
[9] In Waith's words, "the combination of crude violence with this sort of fanciful description [...] has troubled every critic", so much so that the possibility of Shakespeare mocking his contemporaries has been advanced, pp. 99-100.
[10] Waith, p. 110.

palpitat et moriens dominae vestigia quaerit.[11]

A familiar yet distorted situation or object is far more appalling than one that is completely foreign to the audience. No crudity is spared, but there is surely an attempt to veil it. Philomela's tongue is subject to a process of animalisation, causing the reader to overlook the presence of a real suffering person on the other side of the analogy:

> In every case the visual image is exact and thus the horror more vivid, yet at the same time our minds are turned away from the individual as a whole to a minute contemplation of what has happened to one part of his body. Looking thus through the microscope, as it were, we momentarily forget the sufferer in the overwhelming reality of the wound.[12]

The next section will explore two additional examples of how Shakespeare refashioned Lavinia and her experience through Ovid's mythical anthology.

2.2 The cases of Daphne and Io

To describe Lavinia's metamorphosis Shakespeare did not only use the myth of Philomela, but also that of Daphne (*Met*. 1, 452-567). As punishment for his haughtiness towards Cupid, Apollo is by the former made to fall in love with Daphne. The nymph is not interested in pursuing any relationship, enjoying the freedom of her home, the forest. But soon the woods turn into a scenario of violence: Apollo attempts to rape Daphne, but she is saved by her father Peneus who turns her into a laurel tree. Apollo does not give up the idea of possessing her and therefore makes of the laurel tree his distinctive symbol. Distraught and exhausted after being chased by the fervent Apollo, Dafne begs her father, the river Peneus, to alleviate her suffering. Ovid describes Daphne's transformation into a laurel tree as follows:

> "Fer pater" inquit "opem! Si flumina numen habetis,
> Quam nimium placui mutando perde figuram!"

[11] *Met*. 6 557-560: "The root of the tongue throbs on the floor; [the tongue] lies quivering on the dark ground [it is interesting to note that *ater* also refers to a symbolic "dark" meaning, including "woeful" and "violent" among its definitions: the ground on which the deed is committed is inherently baleful]. And like the severed tail of a snake, it skips and palpitates moribund looking for its owner's traces".
[12] Waith, p. 104.

Vix prece finite, torpor gravis occupant artus:
Mollia cinguntur tenui praecordia libro,
in frondem crines, in ramos bracchia crescunt;
pes modo tam velox pigris radicibus haeret,
ora cacumen obit: remanet nitor unus in illa.[1]

Titus Andronicus and the *Metamorphoses* both display female bodies compared to trees, and in both cases this scenario of transformation is heavily characterized by violence. However, while Daphne's suffering is mitigated by her metamorphosis into a plant, in Lavinia's case there is no space for relief, her "lily hands" are removed without any transformation nor hope for regeneration. So, it seems that the only way for Marcus to grasp and elaborate this immense tragedy is to erase the one who suffered it. Lavinia is what has happened to her. Almost reduced to a past memory, the men of her family speak of her as she were already dead:

MARCUS
This was thy daughter. […]

LUCIUS
Ay me, this object kills me.[2] (3.1.63, 65)

In contrast to Daphne, Lavinia is denied escape from pain. If there ever was a glimpse of redemption through the metamorphoses of Daphne into a plant and Philomela into a bird, this is not the case for Lavinia. Her identity is erased: "this was thy daughter", says Marcus, explaining the nullification of any hope of transformation through the past tense "was". Lavinia is not someone "different" after what has happened to her, but she simply is *not*. Her experience, body and daughterhood are denied all at once. Waith suggests that the absence

[1] *Met*. 1, 545-552. "Help me, father! – she says – if you rivers have any power, dissolve, by transforming it, the figure for which I am so yearned for. She has just finished her prayer, and a numbness pervades the limbs, the soft breast is enclosed by a fine bark, the hair grows into leaves, the arms into branches; the foot, that had been so fast moments before, is now caught by listless roots, her mouth fades into the top of a three: only her brightness persists.
[2] "Object", uttered by Lucius, means "spectacle". See Bate, p. 243. I suppose a second meaning hides behind Lucius' words: Lavinia's image as he knew it is so disfigured that the only way to process this sight is to take distance from it. What he sees is not his sister but an object he can fail to empathize with.

of metamorphosis is primarily due to practical stage implications. He states that: "In the presence of live actors the poetry cannot perform the necessary magic. The action frustrates, rather than re-enforces, the operation of poetry".[3] While I agree with this argument, I could not help but think that the absence of a physical metamorphosis is not only bound to scenic impediments, but that Shakespeare sought to create this effect of void, of no hope for rebirth. There cannot be a positive outcome in a Rome that is already corrupt from the beginning of the play: in this space there is no transformation awaiting after a crime, but only loss and sorrow. Shakespeare shows a picture of Rome on the verge of collapsing, which purposefully "[mocks] *romanitas* itself and the function of classic authors whose quotations become instruments of death".[4]

Another common element that crosses the play and the two aforementioned episodes of the *Metamorphoses* is the fact that the events that lead to the three assaults are narrated through hunting metaphors, and they are all set in the woods, which, unlike the emperor's "palace full of tongues, of eyes and ears" (1.1.627), are "ruthless, dreadful, deaf and dull" (1.1.628); a place with "many unfrequented plots […] fitted for rape and villainy" (1.1.615-616) in Aaron's words. Miola underlines how the linguistic pun on "plots", meaning both mental schemes, conspiracies, and physical locations, is connected to the similar use of "path" (1.1.611), that could refer to the plan of rape but also to the place of execution:

> Both puns express Aaron's view of the forest as a region of lawless freedom where one can transform imagined schemes into reality. Unlike the court, the forest has no laws of civilization, no obstructions of custom, no censuring public voices to regulate actions.[5]

The following lines highlight the language employed by Aaron and the Goth brothers to describe Lavinia:

AARON

[3] Waith, p. 111.
[4] Antonucci quoted in Holderness, Graham, "*Our Troy, our Rome*: Classical Intertextuality in *Titus Andronicus*", *Critical Survey*, 34, 4 (2022). pp. 93-112, p. 109.
[5] Miola, Robert S., *Shakespeare's Rome*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, p. 51.

What, hast not thou full often struck a doe
And borne her cleanly by the keeper's nose?

[…]

Single you thither then this dainty doe
And strike her home by force, if not by words.

DEMETRIUS
Chiron, we hunt not, we, with horse nor hound,
But hope to pluck a dainty doe to ground. (1.1.593-594; 612, 617; 2.1.25-26)

Lavinia is bound to be hurt from the moment she is defined as a doe. The image of this animal evokes an idea of fragility and helplessness that is "single[d]" out of the herd by the huntsmen and "struck home",[6] with no possibility of defending herself. Ovid depicts a similar hunting scenario, building a metaphor in which Daphne is assimilated with animals typically considered prey, while Apollo assumes the role of a predator:

APOLLO
nympha, mane! Sic agna lupum, sic cerva leonem,
sic aquilam penna fugiunt trepidante columbae.[7]

The hunting wordplay is once again presented when Tereus is about to violate Philomel, "virginem et unam".[8] The girl is depicted as a helpless animal hunted down by her predator:

Illa tremit velut agna pavens, quae saucia cani
ore excussa lupi nondum sibi tuta videtur,
utque columba suo madefactis sanguine plumis
horret adhuc avidosque timet, quibus haeserat, ungues.[9]

As demonstrated, Shakespeare uses pre-patterned schemes drawn from Ovid both to describe Lavinia's storyline, heavily inspired by Philomela, and to define the way events are recounted, namely through the transformation of the girl into natural elements and the

[6] The hunting metaphor is further fuelled: to "strike home" means making an effective thrust with a weapon or tool. See Bate, note 618, p. 206.
[7] *Met*. 1, 505-506. "Nymph, wait! Thus, the lamb flees the lion, thus the deer the lion, thus the doves flee the eagle with trembling feathers."
[8] *Met*., 6, 524. Lavinia is described as "virgin and alone". These two terms combine heighten the image of frailty and purity of the girl, conveying an eerie feeling of solitude and fear that accompany the events that are about to happen.
[9] *Met*., 6, 526-530. "She shivers like a terrified lamb, who [even though it is] freed from the wolf's mouth, injured, does still feel unsafe, as a dove with blood-soaked feathers is still horrified and fears the greedy claws it was attacked by."

narrative frame provided by the hunting metaphor. It might be useful to stop our analysis for a moment to appreciate how the hunting vocabulary is not only confined to Lavinia. In Act 4 Shakespeare establishes a parallel between the "traitorous Goths" (4.1.92) and "these bear-whelps" (4.1.95), Marcus is the "young huntsman" (4.1.101) who will strike and punish them for their crime. The typification of the Goth brothers as bear cubs is to not be overlooked: in Act 2, emperor Saturninus referred to Titus' sons as "two of thy whelps" (2.3.282). Since Martius and Quintus were later condemned to death by Saturninus, it can be inferred that, especially in this context, language is pivotal to the understanding of future events of the plot: lexicon and intertextual references work as a premonition, with the sole difference that now the chased whelps are not the Andronici, but the Goths Chiron and Demetrius. The metaphor opens up with the term "bear-whelps" and concludes with "huntsman", creating a circular structure which emphasises the fact that the roles between "barbarous Goths" (1.1.28) and the "gentle Romans" (5.3.149) have been reversed: the Andronici are now the huntsmen, the ideal Roman order has been undermined, and as Loomba says, "by the end, the opposition between barbarism and civility has been so rearranged that the Goths become crucial agents in the rightening of the Roman order".[10]

Besides the myths of Philomela and of Daphne, Lavinia's cruel destiny shares some similarities with another episode narrated in the *Metamorphoses*: the myth of Io (*Met*., 1, 568-747). The nymph Io is lured into the woods by Jupiter, who proceeds to rape her – "rapuitque pudorem" (v. 600) – in the fog he crafted to hide his deed. To prevent his wife Iuno's suspicion, Jupiter transforms Io into a cow and gifts her to the goddess. Io is plunged into despair when she realizes what her new body looks like. She follows her father Inachus and her sisters in a desperate attempt to be recognized. Ultimately, she reveals her true nature

[10] Loomba, Ania, "Wilderness and Civilization in *Titus Andronicus*", in *Shakespeare, Race, and Colonialism*, Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 75-90, p. 83.

by scratching letters into the sand with her hoof. Io's metamorphosis prevents her from revealing she has been raped by the god. Ovid highlights Io's inability to communicate with her family and reveal her identity through these words:

Si modo verba sequantur,
Oret opem nomenque suum casusque loquatur.
Littera pro verbis, quam pes in pulvere duxit,
corporis indicium mutati triste peregit.[11]

While Philomela sent her sister Procne a web on which she had weaved her story, Lavinia imitates Io by writing on the ground,[12] holding a staff in her mouth and between the stumps of her hands:

Shakespeare's variations on this theme are more illustrative than his inventive *copia* […] the recourse to sewing in foreclosed and a new method of revealing the rapists has to be introduced. […] Lavinia's writing on the ground is an *imitatio* of the transformed Io's hoof-scratchings after Jupiter has raped her.[13]

As silenced as Lavinia will be, Io's last resource is to reveal her rapist's name by inventively scratching *littera pro verbis* with her hoof, since she has no arms or hand to write with,[14] nor can she communicate with her voice.

Another element the *Metamorphoses* and *Titus Andronicus* share is the reaction that family members have to the disgraces experienced by the young women. The next excerpt (*Met*., 1, 651-659; 661-663) sees Inachus' desperate reaction in acknowledging his daughter Io's new appearance:

« Me miserum! » exclamat pater Inachus, inque gementis
cornibus et niveae pendens cervice iuvencae,
« Me miserum! » ingeminat « tune es quaesita per omnis,
nata, mihi terras? tu non inventa reperta
luctus eras levior. Retices, nec mutua nostris
dicta refers; alto tantum suspiria ducis
pectore, quodque unum potes, ad mea verba remugis.

[11] *Met*., 1, 647-650. And if there had been the possibility of uttering words, she would have cried for help and revealed her name and misfortune. Instead of words, it was letters [singular in the original text] the hoof traced in the sand, to sorrowfully reveal the cause of the transformation [lit. "the testimony of the mutated body"].
[12] There is a difference in the way in which the abusers are identified by Philomel and Lavinia. Bate talks about "*similitudo* and *dissimilitudo* in the treatment of the Philomel pattern". Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid*, p. 113.
[13] Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid*, p. 115.
[14] *Met*., 1, 636. "Non habuit quae bracchia tenderet."

At tibi ego ignarus thalamos taedasque parabam
spesque fuit generi mihi prima, secunda nepotum
[…]
Nec finire licet tantos mihi morte dolores;
sed nocet esse deum praeclusaque ianua leti
aeternum nostros luctus extendit in aevum ».[15]

It might be interesting to underline a second meaning of the verb *remugio*: the first meaning indicates the act of bellowing in a narrow sense, while the second figurative meaning translates as "echoing", "resounding".[16] In this double meaning I read a further proof of Io's inability to communicate. Even if her cries are heard and echo in the woods, she is not understood. We witness what could be defined an oxymoronic multiplication of silence.

Let us observe Inachus' speech in comparison to Marcus' and Titus' reaction upon seeing Lavinia:

MARCUS
If I do dream, would all my wealth would wake me.
If I do wake, some planet strike me down
That I may slumber an eternal sleep.
Speak, gentle niece, […].

Come, let us go and make thy father blind,
For such a sight will blind a father's eye.
[…]
What will whole months of tears thy father's eyes?
Do not draw back, for we will mourn with thee.
O, could our mourning ease thy misery!

TITUS
My grief was at the height before thou cam'st,
And now like Nilus it disdaineth bounds. (2.3.13-16; 2.3.52-53,55-57; 3.1.71-72)

The initial reaction of both men consists in highlighting their astonishment and pain. This is detectable in Inachus' twice repeated "Me miserum" and in Marcus' initial anaphora of the

[15] "Poor me!" cries out father Inachus and, while grabbing on to the horns and neck of the wailing snow-white heifer. "Poor me" – he repeated – "is this you I was looking for in the whole world, daughter? Grief would have been less heavy than finding you. You are silent, you say nothing in response to my words; from the bottom of [your] heart you just breathe out sighs and the only thing you can do is bellow at my words. Oblivious, I prepared your wedding and the marriage torches, hoping for a son-in-law first and then for grandchildren. […] Not even death can grant an ending to my immense sufferings: it is a curse being a god whom the door of death is precluded, my grief will endure for eternity".
[16] "Remugio", Oxford Online Latin Dictionary, 1968, *subvoce.* (https://archive.org/details/aa.-vv.-oxford-latin-dictionary-1968/page/1612/mode/2up, Accessed March 2024)

construction "If I do [+ infinitive]" further strengthened by the two object pronouns "me" and the last "I may slumber". The focus, both in terms of content and grammatically, is entirely shifted away from the victims. Inachus is preoccupied with the idea of having to renounce to a hypothetical son-in-law and grandchildren rather than standing by his daughter. Marcus proceeds to underline how much suffering Lavinia's condition will cause Titus: "father" appears three times, exemplifying the fact that Lavinia is not the subject in this scenario. As Inachus uttered "refers", so Marcus encourages Lavinia to "speak": but it is the silence that speaks for the young women. The urge to hear them speak points out what they *cannot* do, heightening their already insufferable pain. Ultimately, both excerpts contain words belonging to the lexical cluster of death and mourning: Inachus identifies his daughter's metamorphosis with an extreme "luctus" (*Met*., I, 655; 663) that even transcends eternity. Titus' *luctus* is – literally – overflowing too, in fact his "grief" (3.1.71) overpowers him and "like Nilus it disdaineth bounds" (3.1.72). Marcus and Titus express – at least with words – how they will mourn with Lavinia, but in my reading the choice Shakespeare made to use the verb "mourn" is indicative of the fact that Lavinia is already dead in their minds, and if it is true that thoughts shape the way we speak, so is Io in her father's eyes. To conclude, it has been seen how the fathers' suffering is put in front of their daughters. The self-centred pain on the men's part is palpable. The pronouns "we" (2.3.56) and "our" (2.3.57) are not representative of a collective and shared pain *with* Lavinia, rather, the grief and mourning the Andronici feel is for the damaged and undermined honour of their family, they "erase Lavinia as subject, through a psychological defense mechanism akin to that by which torturers deny the humanity of their victims".[17] The next section will analyse Lavinia's attempt to regain agency over her life and the relationship the characters have with literacy.

[17] Marshall, Cynthia, "'I Can Interpret All Her Martyr'd Signs': *Titus Andronicus*, Feminism, and the Limits of Interpretation", *Sexuality and Politics in Renaissance Drama*, Lewiston NY: Mellen, 1991, pp. 193-209, p. 199.

2.3 Littera pro verbis: the metaliterary dimension of the play

As has been seen so far, the classical presence in *Titus Andronicus* is dense, and Ovid's contribution, the underlying source of the play, is tangible in most passages. But it is not until Act 4 Scene 1 that a physical *codex* of the *Metamophoses* appears on stage and Ovid is directly mentioned:

TITUS
Lucius, what book is that she tosseth so?

YOUNG LUCIUS
Grandsire, 'tis Ovid's *Metamorphosis*. (4.1.41.42)

These lines are preceded by Lavinia's strenuous effort to communicate with her father by turning the "leaves", namely the pages of the book. It should also be borne in mind that earlier in the play Lavinia's hands had been compared to "branches" (2.3.18), so the meaning of "leaves" here might also hint at Lavinia's fingers literally leafing through the pages.

TITUS
Soft! So busily she turns the leaves.
Help her! What would she find? Lavinia, shall I read?
This is the tragic tale of Philomel,
And treats of Tereus' treason and his rape.
And rape, I fear, was root of thy annoy.

MARCUS
See, brother, see! Note how she quotes the leaves. (4.1.47-52)

Although Lavinia has no spoken space in this excerpt, as a "map of woe" (3.2.12) she "talk[s] in signs" (3.2.12) and guides her family to the truth through the knowledge of her textual precedent. Her presence underlined even more by her auditive absence in the play. When I first read *Titus Andronicus*, Lavinia's representation in this scene reminded me of a well-known oxymoron: deafening silence. Lavinia herself might embody an oxymoron, being contemporaneously virgin and violated, pure and "stained". She is deprived of her chastity, and for this loss, one she had to suffer and did not choose, she becomes a badge of shame for her family. Literacy is her own form of revenge. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* give Lavinia the

chance to confirm what has happened to her through the pattern provided by the myth. She may not be able to speak or communicate with her hands, but Titus deemed her "deeper read and better skilled" (4.1.34) and knowledge will be her way of vindicating personal agency.

TITUS
Come and take choice of all my library,
And so beguile thy sorrow till the heavens
Reveal the damned contriver of this deed. (4.1.35-37)

Between the shelves of "all [Titus'] library", Lavinia will find her textual precedent. The latter could serve an additional purpose beyond identifying the culprits: literacy might offer Lavinia some comfort and "beguile [her] sorrows", through the realization that she is not alone in her experience. The precedent might be a source of relief for Lavinia, not only providing a sense of identification and shared understanding between her and Philomela, but in the mythical parallel she might also read the possibility and hope of revenge.

TITUS
Lavinia, wert thou thus surprised, sweet girl,
Ravished and wronged as Philomela was,
Forced in the ruthless, vast, and gloomy woods?
See, see! Ay, such a place there is where we did hunt
O, had we never, never hunted there!
Patterned by that the poet[18] here describes,
By nature made for murders and for rapes. (4.1.53-59)

The actual "root of [Lavinia's] annoy" (4.1.51) is introduced by Titus' words. Up until this point in the play, the family were only aware of the external physical violence inflicted upon Lavinia but ignored the fact that she had been raped. The reiteration of the word "rape" (4.1.50) and the anaphoric positioning of the second "And rape" (4.1.51) already anticipate and highlight Titus' greatest fear: disgrace descending upon the name of the Andronici. "Rape" is repeated once again, later in the passage, in a sentence with only three lapidary words. Titus looks at the words Lavinia painfully wrote in the sand and reads[19] them

[18] Titus recognizes the existing connection between suffering and the woods. In fact, he remembers that the forest in Ovid, here referred to as "the poet", is "patterned" by violence. For a more detailed analysis on the relationship between myth, violence, and the forest, see Chapter 2 Section 2.
[19] Bate highlights the relevance of writing, saying that it "demands to be read but it is always open to misconstruction." Bate, Introduction, p. 34.

out loud: "*Stuprum* — Chiron — Demetrius" (4.1.79). The fact that we find the term written in Latin, in my reading, might have two main implications. First, it might reflect Titus' intention to put, through the means of latinity, a spatial — and lexical — distance between his daughter and the violation she endured.[20] With regards to this, Marshall believes the audience to be "grateful that the story of the rape is channelled into mythological allusion — distant, bookish, unreal", adding that the mythological parallel can serve as a distraction and interrupt the flow of her continued silence.[21] I share this viewpoint, and believe that the use of Latin might be a way of either negating the violence or softening it, by implementing a linguistic separation that functions as coping mechanism for the victim. Since it becomes more and more instilled in Lavinia that her "presence embodies the anguished consciousness and defiled honour of the Andronici",[22] she may have chosen to present her family the news in a more delicate way by writing them down in a different language, a shield that temporarily protects her from the growing feeling of shame and inadequacy. In my view, the use of a different language puts up a filter between word and deed, and in this case linguistic distance might correspond to a psychological distance from an uncomfortable reality.

There is nearly no understanding or compassion towards Lavinia's suffering, and when Titus asks "Lavinia, shall I read?" (4.1.46), he does not seem to expect an answer and merely tries to accelerate the process of her understandably slower writing. This feeling of impatience and eagerness to revenge is best expressed in Marcus' "My lord, look here. Look here" (4.1.67): the reiteration highlights the fact that his attention is focused on revenge and not on his niece's wellbeing and desire to communicate. Act 3, Scene 2, is replete with terms

[20] On this, Fawcett argues that the use of Latin displaces the audience's "understanding of language" and that "Lavinia's Latin may then remind us that all language is an instrumentality, a behaviour learned in order to practice upon reality." Fawcett, Mary Laughlin. "Arms/Words/Tears: Language and the Body in *Titus Andronicus*", *EHL*, (1983), pp. 261-77, p. 268.
[21] Marshall, pp. 199, 201.
[22] Tassi, Marguerite A., *Women and Revenge in Shakespeare: Gender, Genre, and Ethics*, Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2011, p. 98.

that pertain to the lexical cluster of deciphering, decoding, and interpretation more at large. Let us analyse these words, which have been underlined for a more immediate identification:

TITUS
Hark, Marcus, what she says.
I can interpret all her martyred signs.
She says she drinks no other drink but tears
Brewed with her sorrow, mashed upon her cheeks.
Speechless complainer, I will learn thy thought.
In thy dumb action will I be as perfect
As begging hermits in their holy prayers.
Thou shalt not sigh, nor hold thy stumps to heaven,
Nor wink, nor nod, nor kneel, nor make a sign,
But I of these will wrest an alphabet
And by still practice learn to know thy meaning. (3.2.35-45)

For Titus, his daughter is a "map of woe" (3.2.12) to be read, studied, and interpreted. She is presented as a canvas that carries "signs" (3.2.12) and symbols that are in need of an outside subject to explicit and decode them. Titus twice repeats that she "says" (v.35, v. 37) before retracing his steps and identifying her as "speechless complainer" (v. 39) whose action is deemed as "dumb" (v. 40). Titus is determined to *interpret*, *learn*, and *wrest* his way through her "meaning" (v. 45) by crafting an alphabet apt to translate *his* emotions rather than hers. Grammatically, Titus' presence is also heavy. The subject pronoun "I" appears four times in these few lines. The six actions concerning Lavinia — sigh, hold, wink, nod, kneel, make [a sign] — are all accompanied by negation: in fact, in the very moment the verbs are uttered, they are also invalidated by the negations "not/nor". It is observable how Titus, through the six times pronounced reiteration of "not", is trying to convey an eerie feeling of immobility and nullification of his daughter's actions. Lavinia shall supress all suffering, because, according to her family, it is indeed not hers. It is clear how men here are taking over Lavinia's body and voice: she is objectified not only in the sense that her body has been used as if it were worthless, the objectification is also exemplified in her onstage silence, as she appears — visibly, not morally — as part of the objects on stage that make up the scene, there is no chance "of knowing Lavinia's thoughts or feelings", even though she "remains a […]

powerful stage presence even when (or especially when) she can no longer speak".[23] Jonathan Bate points out the characters' obsession with the acts of reading and writing contending that:

> When the characters are not revenging or raping, they spend their time reading — reading events, reading texts and citations, reading the book of Ovid in which the narrative is pre-written.[24]

Poetry, therefore, becomes a means to reveal the truth that had been concealed up until this point in the play. However, the Andronici's attempt to silence Lavinia is not completely achieved. Indeed, through the character of Lavinia, Shakespeare insists on another powerful and active role intertwined with literature: writing. The material dimension of writing can be identified by words and sentences such as "sandy plot", "staff", "write thou", and other expressions, underlined in the following excerpt. Following the example set by her uncle, Lavinia traces the signs of her agency on the sand:

> This sandy plot is plain; guide, if thou canst,
> This after me. I have writ my name
> Without the help of any hand at all.
> […]
> Write thou, good niece, and here display at last
> What God will have discovered for revenge.
> Heaven guide thy pen to print thy sorrows plain,
> That we may know the traitors and the truth. (4.1.70-77)
>
> *She takes the staff in her mouth, and guides it with her stumps and writes.*

In the two brief yet powerful lines which compose the stage directions, Lavinia transforms into an active subject. The former imperatives directed at her, are now converted into present simple tenses. She *takes*, *guides* and *writes*. As the tenses change, so does Lavinia, who, for a moment, transforms into the protagonist of her own destiny and *re*writes her story.

[23] Marshall, pp. 202, 194, respectively.
[24] Jonathan Bate, "Introduction" in William Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus*, ed. by Jonathan Bate, The Arden Shakespeare, London: Routledge, 1995, p. 34.

Classical knowledge is not only a prerogative of the Roman characters. The Moor Aaron utters the first reference[25] to the Ovidian myth, explicitly drawing the connection between Lavinia and Philomela:

This is the day of doom for Bassianus;
His Philomel must lose her tongue to-day,
Thy sons make pillages of her chastity. (2.2.42-44)

During his violence-ridden speech with Queen Tamora, Aaron alludes to his revenge plan against the Andronici just by evoking a name, "Philomel". This reference not only reveals Aaron's cunning intellect, but it is also an indicator of a shared familiarity with Ovid's myths between him and Tamora. The Moor is not exempt from the more material dimension of writing: he is the author of the letters written to implicate Titus' sons in the killing of Bassianus. Addressing Tamora, he says:

AARON
Seest thou this letter? Take it up, I pray thee,
And give the King this fatal-plotted scroll. (2.2.46-47)

Later in the scene, when handing Saturninus the letter, Tamora exclaims:

Then all too late I bring this fatal writ,
The complot of this timeless tragedy. (2.2.264-265)

The letters are patterned by a lingering shadow of death. Tamora says this aloud by recognising that Aaron's writing contributed to orchestrating the tragic action. Heightening the metaliterary — and metatheatrical — dimension, the characters become authors of a tragedy inside the tragedy. I agree with Holderness when he argues that "the letter is part of a plot (=conspiracy), but also contains part of the written script for the 'plot' of the play".[26] The Queen's sons' choice to further mutilate Lavinia is a strong proof of their acquaintance with the classics as well. Mindful of Ovid's lesson of book 6, they decided to protect their

[25] In the play, Philomel is mentioned six times in total, appearing in the two variations of "Philomel" and "Philomela". The references appear in 2.2.43, 2.3.38, 2.3.43, 4.1.49, 4.1.54, 5.2.194.
[26] Holderness, Graham, "*Our Troy, our Rome*: Classical Intertextuality in *Titus Andronicus*", *Critical Survey*, (2022), pp. 93-112, p. 100.

identity by making sure Lavinia would not use her hands to betray them as Philomela did with Tereus. After the mutilation, the brothers had mockingly challenged Lavinia to:

Write down thy mind,
Bewray the meaning so,
And if thy stumps will let thee play the scribe. (2.3.3-4)

In Act four, Young Lucius, on orders from Titus, hands the Goths weapons to which some Latin sentences are attached. In this instance, the brothers' knowledge of the classics is minimized, and it appears limited in comparison to how it was presented in the previous excerpt. Demetrius unwraps the scroll and reads:

DEMETRIUS
Integer vitae, scelerisque purus,
Non eget Mauri iaculis, nec arcu.[27]

CHIRON
O, 'tis a verse in Horace; I know it well.
I read it in the grammar long ago. (4.2.20-23)

"Horace's ode, 'integer vitae', claims that if one is armed with integrity one can roam in the Sabine wood and the wolf will flee from you".[28] With these lines, Titus is implying that the Goth brothers could not have executed their violent plan without Aaron's assistance. It is interesting to note how Latin is used as a covert means of communication, serving as a privileged code intended to widen the intellectual and cultural gap between Romans and Goths. However, Titus' intentions are only partially realized. Despite the Goth brothers' belief that they have decoded the message, they are ultimately deceived,[29] as confirmed by Young Lucius' aside comment:

That you are both deciphered, that's the news
,For villains marked with rape. (4.2.7-8)

[27] Horace, *Odes*, 1.22.1-2, "the man of upright life and free from crime does not need the javelins or bows of the Moor". The original text continues by saying "Nec venenatis gravida sagittis", meaning "nor [does he need] poison filled arrows", continuing the war-like metaphor. Horace, *Odes and Epodes*, ed. by Michèle Lowrie, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
[28] Bate, Jonathan, *Shakespeare and Ovid*, p. 109.
[29] Pramit Chaudhuri argues that: "the characters within the play exhibit a superficial understanding of the meaning of Latin quotations while remaining seemingly ignorant of the original context of the passage." Chaudhuri, Pramit, "Classical Quotation in *Titus Andronicus*", EHL, 81, 3 (2014), p. 788.

Young Lucius hints at the fact that the princes would not grasp the message, insinuating their intellectual inferiority as foreigners, outsiders who are not welcome in Rome's supposed cradle of knowledge and wisdom. Chiron and Demetrius may recognise the external appearance of the Ode, but they do not understand the true meaning the words are imbued with. Instead, Young Lucius, capable of understanding Latin, owes his proficiency to his aunt Lavinia, who, being "deeper read and better skilled" (4.1.33) exposed the boy to classical literature and read him "sweet poetry and Tully's *Orator*" (4.1.14).

Here the insistence on the dichotomy between the culturally refined stature of Rome and the perceived ignorance attributed to foreigners is clearly observable. This image, however, quickly falls short, as Aaron, belonging neither to the Romans nor the Goths, displays his true comprehension of the Latin phrase:

> Ay, just — a verse in Horace; right, you have it.
> [*aside*] Now, what a thing it is to be an ass!
> Here's no sound jest. The old man hath found their guilt,
> And sends them weapons wrapped about with lines
> That wound, beyond their feeling, to the quick. (4.2.24-28)

While Aaron's recognition of Horace's maxim reduces that cultural distance between Romans and Goths Titus hoped for, it also raises a more complex issue, in fact "the play insists on an antithesis between civilized Rome and the barbaric Goths only to break it down: the real enemy lies within".[30] The common element shared by Romans, Goths and the Moor is that they all fail at taking the myth, and literature more at large, as a positive example. I agree with Grace Starry West, who states that:

> Rome is a tradition in which [the characters] have been schooled through school books: the works of Horace, Virgil, Ovid, and Seneca...Roman education, which seems to stand for Roman tradition in general, has been twisted to become the teacher and rationalizer of heinous deeds.[31]

[30] Kahn, Coppélia, *Roman Shakespeare: Warriors, Wounds, and Women*, London: Routledge, 1997, p. 47.

[31] West, Grace Starry, "Going by the Book: Classical Allusions in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus", Studies in Philology*, 79, 1 (1982), pp. 62-77, p. 65.

Titus is equally obsessed with the material dimension of writing; in Act 4 he exclaims: "Give me pen and ink [*writes*]" (4.3.105). Right when he found out the true identity of the culprits, he swears "mortal revenge upon these traitorous Goths" (4.1.93) and manifests the desire to put in writing, or rather, to engrave the terrible deed onto a leaf of brass. Following what seems to be the proverbial "verba volant, scripta manent",[32] Titus speaks these words:

> And come, I will go get a leaf of brass,
> And with a gad of steel will write these words,
> And lay it by. The angry northern wind
> Will blow these sands like Sibyl's leaves abroad,[33]
> And where's our lesson then? (4.1.103-107)

Titus' desire to immortalize his own and his family's feeling of revenge on brass reflects a deliberate effort to preserve the memory of the injustice suffered. He aims to ensure that his family's desire for vengeance remains indelibly etched, never to be lost or forgotten. I find it particularly noteworthy to focus on the concluding words of this passage, wherein Titus speaks of a "lesson", perhaps really recognizing the importance the classic text has in setting an *exemplum*. Beyond the lexicon of interpretation and deciphering, the play employs the language of learning and teaching: in these lines Titus appears in the guise of "schoolmaster".[34] Bate comments the use of the classical texts in *Titus Andronicus* as follows:

> [Shakespeare] displays his own learning [...] But also implicitly offers a critique of the very humanism he is embodying. What kind of education by example is it, he seems to ask, that leads you to murder your daughter? [...] The process recurs throughout the play. What kind of exemplary pattern is it that fits a place for murder and rape? […] It is as if the Ovidian text has licensed the violent action. Lavinia's quotation at first seems to be a constructive use of the classical text, but it turns out to be another violent, destructive one, in that it patterns the bloody revenge. [...] What is the point of a humanist education if, instead of instilling in you *integer vitae*, it makes you into a craftier Tereus? [...] It is one of Shakespeare's darkest thoughts.[35]

[32] Proverbial Latin locution, which translates as "words fly [away], what is written remains".
[33] See Bate, note 105, p. 258. The Cumaean Sibyl, renowned from Virgil and other classical sources, used to write her prophecies on leaves which were sometimes blown away before there was time to read them.
[34] Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid*, p. 106.
[35] Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid*, pp. 106-107.

I agree with Bate's assertion that even the apparently positive use of the Ovidian text in Act 4, where the book serves as a tool to unveil the truth, ultimately turns out to be destructive. The massive presence of the book provides an opportunity to reflect on the usefulness and function of literature as a positive *exemplum*. The characters' error lies in their literal interpretation of the text, which fuels the direct translation into — violent — action of the "lessons" literature offers.

Paradoxically, classical texts become the catalyst for the civic downfall of *Titus Andronicus*' Rome:

> Rome itself becomes "but a wilderness of tigers" (3.1.53). And furthermore, civic virtue breaks down not because the classical texts are neglected, but for the very reason that they are studied and applied selectively. They are evacuated and become instead manuals for barbarians.[36]

To conclude, in the play, neither *historia* nor *literatura* are *magistrae vitae* for the characters, who "put their knowledge of the classics to destructive use".[37] This section has explored the importance of the metaliterary dimension in *Titus Andronicus*. It has analyzed how Lavinia vindicates her own freedom by the means of writing: as Ovid's Philomel used her hands — "pro voce manus fuit" (*Met.*, 6, 609)[38] — to overcome the macabre obstacle set by Tereus, Lavinia too uses her body as a "map" (3.2.12) to replace her voice. Barkan writes that the Ovidian myth encompasses "the competition amongst media of communication as Philomela becomes a walking representative of them".[39] I believe this interpretation can also be extended to Lavinia, whose body becomes a vessel that metaphorically speaks for the violence endured. In *Titus Andronicus*, literature at once symbolizes agency and rebirth on

[36] Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid*, pp. 108-109.
[37] Bate quoted in Barret, p. 458.
[38] "In place of [her] voice was [her] hand". Golding translates it as "she was fayne, To use hir hand in stead of speache". Ovid, *The Fifteene Bookes of P. Ouidius Naso; Entituled, Metamorphosis. Translated out of Latine into English Meeter, by Arthur Golding, Gentleman. A Worke Very Pleasant and Delectable*, London: printed by William Seres, 1567.)
[39] Barkan, Leonard, *The Gods Made Flesh: Metamorphosis and the Pursuit of Paganism*, New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 1986, p. 245.

one side, and destructive destiny on the other. We have observed how the literary dimension represents a thread across the whole play and how it touches on nearly all the characters. Ovid's lesson becomes a book of instructions to be twisted and exceeded, leading Shakespeare's characters to overtake their sources. Henceforth, the play will enact all the different stages of the *vendetta*, yet the characters will "not suffer into knowledge, into wisdom "nor will "they […] attempt to resist their pre-patterned roles and destiny".[40] While *Titus* may be embellished by the "feathers" of classicism, Shakespeare's play lacks the feathers of the Ovidian metamorphosis: Lavinia does not soar in a liberating flight, rather she is betrayed and stabbed twice, not only by the foreigner, but by her own family. This dual betrayal corresponds on a political and societal level to a crisis wherein Rome not only suffers from the invasion of foreign customs, but also from the disintegration

of the core values of Roman culture, such as *pietas*. This collapse, witnessed firsthand by Titus, will be further analyzed in the subsequent chapter.

[40] Greene, Darragh. "*Have we done aught amiss?*: Transgression, Indirection and Audience Reception in *Titus Andronicus*", pp. 63-75, in *Staged Transgression in Shakespeare's England,* London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

CHAPTER III

"A PATTERN, A PRECEDENT, A LIVELY WARRANT"

The third chapter of this thesis mainly elaborates on the events of the fifth and final Act of the tragedy. In light of the analysis undertaken in the previous sections, I have chosen to title this concluding chapter "A pattern, a precedent, a lively warrant" (5.3.43), as I believe this quotation best captures the essence of the entire play. As previously analysed, the "pattern" for the unfolding of the plot was provided by Ovid up until this point of the play. But until the very last Act, Shakespeare does not renounce the charm of classical allusions. The classics will come to life on stage once again. The notion of "lively warrant" quoted in the title refers to one of *Titus Andronicus*' parallel episodes, the tale of Virginius and Virginia, drawn from Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita Libri*. The re-enactment of the infamous Senecan banquet will be the last testament to the importance of classical influences in the play. The following section will examine what Titus saw in Livy's Latin source, namely an expedient which he believed justified his crimes.

3.1 Titus as a new "rash Virginius"

"Thou art Roman; be not barbarous" (1.1.378)

These are the words that Marcus speaks to his brother Titus, whose nature is at best displayed, in my reading, by this line. Titus embodies the duality of a man who is at the same time "Rome's best champion" (1.1.68), and simultaneously a cold-hearted murderer of his son Mutius, even refusing him burial. Until now, it is the "barbarous" Goths who have shown more humanity and parental love. Before exploring the degeneration of Titus' character and

actions, it is necessary to examine the first scene in which the Roman general makes his appearance. From the very first lines of the play, Titus is depicted as an unwavering Roman leader. He returns to Rome in full regalia, adorned with laurels, hailed by the crowd with the Goths in tow, as war prisoners, but above all with the bodies of his twenty-five deceased sons. Titus exclaims:

Hail Rome, victorious in thy mourning weeds!
Lo, as the bark that hath discharged his fraught
Returns with precious lading to the bay
From whence at first she weighed her anchorage,
Cometh Andronicus, bound with laurel boughs,
To resalute his country with his tears,
Tears of true joy for his return to Rome. (1.1.70-76)

In what appears to be a glimpse of paternal love and affection, Titus mentions he cried "tears", which we are initially drawn to think are for his loss. However, the audience is immediately taken aback by the reiteration of the second "tears", which functions almost as a brief pause that allows Titus to correct himself in front of the crowd. He does not shed tears for his family, rather his heart fills with joy for his return to Rome. We can only speculate on the true nature of those tears: they may indeed have been tears of love for his children, perhaps disguised behind tears of happiness for the support received from his people, in an effort to suppress pain and maintain his image of an incorruptible warrior intact. This hypothesis is corroborated by the fact that in Act 3, Scene 1 (which will be briefly displayed more at length) Titus admits in front of the tribunes not having shed any tears for his sons: "For two-and-twenty sons I never wept / Because they died in honor's lofty bed." (3.1.10-11). Certainly, given the subsequent events, it seems more plausible that his correction was made "in the name of decorum".[1] This line of thought leads us to reconsider the meaning of "precious lading", which consistently with the context, can be attributed to the spoils of war,

[1] Ettin, V. Andrew, "Shakespeare's First Roman Tragedy", *EHL*, 37, (1970), pp. 325-341, p. 331.

rather than to the coffins of his sons. Ettin states that Titus is describing the return from a "commercial venture" and that "Rome is, though in mourning, primarily 'victorious', rather than sorrowful".[2] In the face of so much death, Titus still chooses not to honour the value of life. Nothing moves him, not even the distressed and heart-wrenching pleas of Tamora, who speaks to him as a fellow parent:

⌜ *Kneeling* ⌝
Stay, Roman brethren! —Gracious conqueror,
Victorious Titus, rue the tears I shed,
A mother's tears in passion for her son.
And if thy sons were ever dear to thee,
O think my son to be as dear to me.
Sufficeth not that we are brought to Rome
To beautify thy triumphs and return
Captive to thee and to thy Roman yoke,
But must my sons be slaughtered in the streets
For valiant doings in their country's cause?
O, if to fight for king and commonweal
Were piety in thine, it is in these! (1.1.104-115)

Tamora recognizes the fact that her and Titus' universal experience of being parents is what unites them and transcends peace, war, differences in nationality, gender, and role. Titus' flaw lies in his inflexibility and exaggeration of the principles of the social order that he wants to uphold. A good ruler should know measure and when it is most appropriate to either enforce the law or to honour a greater good. But "Chosen Andronicus" (1.1.23) does not waver. He sacrifices Tamora's first-born son. The queen repeats "piety" a second time, here in a suggestive line in clear contrast to Titus' "religious[ly]" sacrifice (1.1.127): "O cruel, irreligious piety" (1.1.130). Slightly over one hundred lines into the play, we realize that Titus is not "Pius" (1.1.23). He fails to empathize with Tamora's reasons because being a father comes second to his being Roman. In fact, "for Titus, the step is short between sacrificing the enemy's son and executing one's own".[3] However, the image of an inflexible

[2] Ettin, p. 331.
[3] James, Heather. *Shakespeare's Troy: Drama, Politics, and the Translation of Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 52.

father falters at the onset of Act 3, where Titus begs the tribunes to spare his sons from being unjustly executed. In Titus' speech we can appreciate the circular structure of the term "piety" (hereafter found in the form of adjective), which Titus denied to Tamora but now appeals to:

Hear me, grave fathers; noble tribunes, stay! […]
Be pitiful to my condemnèd sons,
Whose souls is not corrupted as 'tis thought.
For two-and-twenty sons I never wept
Because they died in honor's lofty bed.

Andronicus lieth down, and the Judges pass by him.

For these, tribunes, in the dust I write
My heart's deep languor and my soul's sad tears.[4] (3.1.1; 3.1.8-13)

In particular, two elements warrant attention: first, we observe an evident reversal of the situation of Act 1. Titus no longer portrays himself as the resolute general who cold-bloodedly slew his son Mutius, only because he felt momentarily disrespected; instead, he begins to show signs of vulnerability and paternal affection towards his sons Martius and Quintus. Like Tamora, he appeals to the *pietas* of the tribunes. The grammatical and lexical structure appears symmetrical as well: Tamora addresses Titus using two encomiastic phrases — "Gracious conqueror/Victorious Titus" (1.1.104-105) —, Titus, in turn, also employs two celebratory expressions to address the tribunes, namely "grave fathers; noble tribunes". Both address their interlocutor by pleading "stay", followed by another imperative:

TAMORA
Stay, Roman brethren! —Gracious conqueror,
Victorious Titus, rue the tears I shed. (1.1.104-105)

TITUS
Grave fathers; noble tribunes, stay! […]
Be pitiful to my condemnèd sons. (3.1.1-2)

[4] Furthermore, with reference to section 2.3 of this thesis, we can appreciate another example of Titus' desire or inclination to "write" when his emotions build up and he experiences a lack of control on the situation around him. In my reading, the act of writing provides a sort of stability to his feelings as if the material dimension of writing down his thoughts would offer more consistency and truth to his words.

As tempting as it might be, the reader and audience should not rely too much on the father's pleas. Titus' primary identity and purpose revolve, first and foremost, around being a Roman. It is exactly his dedication to his beloved *patria* that inflames his soul and will ultimately lead him to the brutal killing of his daughter. A few moments before committing the crime, he addresses Saturninus with these words:

My lord the Emperor, resolve me this:
Was it well done of rash Virginius
To slay his daughter with his own right hand
Because she was enforced, stained, and deflowered? (5.3.35-38)

Titus appears determined to seek permission or at least approval from the emperor before carrying out his extreme action. His question seems rhetorical, almost provoking. Before turning to Saturninus' response, I find it necessary to recount the story of the man mentioned by Titus, Virginius, whose "rash" actions will soon be mirrored by Titus himself. This episode, another precedent that Shakespeare draws from classical literature, is narrated by Livy (59 B.C. - 17 A.D.) in his *Ab Urbe Condita Libri*, a history covering the years from the mythical foundation of the city of Rome (753 B.C.) to the reign of Augustus. Livy details the tale of Virginius in paragraphs 44 to 48 of Book 3.[5] Before offering a more in-depth analysis of the passage, I will provide a brief synopsis of the tale: the young Virginia, daughter of the centurion Lucius Virginius and already betrothed to the ex-tribune Icilius, becomes the target of decemvir Claudius Appius' sexual desires. In a desperate attempt to prevent Appius from seizing and raping Virginia, her father kills her to avoid the dishonour that would befall his family name. This extreme action incites a revolt among the Roman people who do not condemn Virginius but rise against the unjust rule of Appius Claudius and cause the downfall

[5] The episode has been re-elaborated by various authors, including Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Physician's Tale* (*Canterbury Tales*, 1387-1388); John Gower, *Confessio Amantis* (Book VII, 5131-5306, 1389), John Webster, *Appius and Virginia* (1626-1627); Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Emilia Galotti* (1772); Vittorio Alfieri, *Virginia* (1783); Giacomo Leopardi, *Nelle Nozze Della Sorella Paolina* (Canti, IV,1824). The next excerpts are all drawn from: Tito Livio, *Ab Urbe Condita (Libri I-V)*, edited by Luciano Perelli, Torino: UTET, 1974. All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

of the decemvirs.[6] The tale of Virginia, a "manifest double"[7] of Lucrece, closely recalls the tragic story of the young Roman noblewoman raped by the son of King Tarquin the Superb, who lost his kingdom and was banished from Rome as a result of his crime. The analogy between Virginia and Lucrece is straightforward and pointed out by Livy himself:

Sequitur aliud in urbe nefas, ab libidine ortum, haud minus foedo euentu quam quod per stuprum caedemque Lucretiae urbe regnoque Tarquinios expulerat, ut non finis solum idem decemuiris qui regibus sed causa etiam eadem imperii amittendi esset.[8]

Another lecherous crime occurred in the city, which had consequences no less horrible than the one that had driven the Tarquins out of both the city and the kingdom following the rape and death of Lucretia: not only did the decemvirs share the same fate as the kings, but the cause for the loss of power was also identical.

The Roman writer introduces the crime of rape by describing it as "nefas ab libidine ortum", which I rendered with the adjective "lecherous" in my translation but could be translated literally as "a crime born out of lust". Immediately after this brief introduction, Livy proceeds to introduce the reader to the story and presents Virginius with words that remind us of the description that Shakespeare reserves to Titus in the first lines of Act one:

Pater uirginis, L. Verginius, honestum ordinem in Algido ducebat, uir exempli recti domi militiaeque. […] se pro liberis eorum ac coniugibus cottidie in acie stare, nec alium uirum esse cuius strenue ac ferociter facta in bello plura memorari possent.[9]

Virginia's father, L. Virginius, was an exemplary man both as citizen and as soldier, who led a centurion on Mount Algidus. […] Every day he would be on the battlefield for their children and wives, nor was there any other man, of whom more courageous and intrepid war deeds could be remembered.

In Act 3, Titus reminds the tribunes of the sacrifices he made for the people of Rome. Like Virginius, the Roman general also stayed "in acie":

For pity of mine age, whose youth was spent
In dangerous wars while you securely slept;
For all my blood in Rome's great quarrel shed. (3.1.2-4)

[6] "A council of ten that seized more power than it was originally granted, and, backed by force, refuses to surrender its office." Kahn, Coppélia, *Roman Shakespeare: Warriors, Wounds, and Women*, London: Routledge, 1997, p. 70.
[7] Smethurst, S. E., "Women in Livy's 'History"*, Greece & Rome*, 19, (1950) pp. 80–87, p. 80.
[8] Livio, *Ab Urbe Condita (Libri I-V)*, edited by Luciano Perelli, Torino: UTET, 1974, p. 548. All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.
[9] *Ab Urbe Condita (Libri I-V*), p. 550.

And again, let us compare the words Shakespeare employs to describe Titus through Marcus' words: "A nobler man, a braver warrior, / Lives not this day within the city walls." (1.1.25-26). Marcus' words are only a part of a larger praise for his brother's deeds, but it is important to bear this particular parallel in mind since it can be argued that when Titus evokes Virginius before slaying Lavinia, he refers to him as a model, since he proclaims the Livian character's action "well done" (5.3.36).

Another interesting analogy between the play and the tale narrated by Livy is the manner in which the male characters associated with the young women refer to the latter. Let us observe how Bassianus and Icilius identify their betrothed Lavinia and Virginia, respectively.

BASSIANUS
"Rape" call you it, my lord, to seize my own,
My true betrothèd love and now my wife?
But let the laws of Rome determine all.
Meanwhile am I possessed of that is mine. (1.1.410-413)

Placidum quoque ingenium tam atrox inuria accendisset. "Ferro hinc tibi submouendus sum, Appi" inquit, "[…] Virginem ego hanc sum ducturus nuptamque pudicam habiturus".[10]

Such an atrocious offence would have inflamed even a peaceful temper. "You have to send me away with the sword," says Icilius, "[…] I am determined to marry this young woman and I will receive her pure."

Both Bassianus and Icilius protest against the outrage done to the former by Saturninus and to the latter by Appius. It is intriguing to note the language the men use to discuss their women, which appears highly technical and detached. In the first case, that of Bassianus, we observe a certain ambiguity in his language: while on the one hand he reserves words of affection such as "betrothed love" and "my wife" for Lavinia, on the other, a detail not to be underestimated, he speaks of Lavinia without mentioning her name, but referring to her with terms such as "my own", "that is mine", alongside the verbs "seize" and "possess". Lavinia

[10] *Ab Urbe Condita (Libri I-V)*, pp. 552;554.

is treated as if she were a token of exchange, passing from her father's hands, to being betrothed to Bassianus, then promised to Saturninus, again "seized" by Bassianus, and shortly after, hunted down by the Goth brothers. Indeed, Lavinia is defined as a "changing piece" (1.1.314), a trade good passing down from one man to another, her body and chastity functioning as a political symbol, a prize to compete for, the embodiment of a Rome to protect, or to destroy.

Like Bassianus, Icilius also demonstrates a strong desire to fight in the name of the "atrox iniuria" that Appius caused him. He too fails to mention Virginia by her name and instead addresses her as "virginem". This lexical choice is rather interesting, since a few other words exist in Latin to describe a female and/or a female partner, for instance: *puella* (girl), *sponsa* (betrothed), *uxor* (wife), yet Icilius calls her "virginem" (accusative for *virgo*), to underline her marital and sexual status. In fact, his sentence ends with his wish and determination to preserve her purity ("pudicam habiturus"). And exactly this is the cornerstone of our discourse: Icilius does not defend *her*, but *what is his*. He does not fight for Virginia, rather for her chastity, and what might appear as a façade, an irrelevant external attribute, was instead an element of utmost importance in the historical period in which Livy wrote. I agree with the following thought by Coppélia Kahn, and I believe that her words could be adapted not solely to Lavinia's case but to that of Virginia as well:

> For Titus, Lavinia's worth resides in her exchange value as a virgin daughter. In a larger sense, she is symbolically important to Roman patriarchy: as an emblem of what Joplin calls "sacralized chastity", she is "the sign of the father's or husband's political power"- the power of male kin to control women's sexual desire and reproductive power.[11]

As Ovid's Tereus "exarsit conspecta virgine"[12] and "in illa aestuat",[13] so the decemvir Appius Claudius is "alienatus ad libidinem animo".[14] Later in the passage, Appius refers to Virginia

[11] Kahn, Coppélia, *Roman Shakespeare: Warriors, Wounds, and Women*, London: Routledge, 1997, p. 49.
[12] *Met*. 6, 455: "was inflamed at the sight of the young woman [Philomel]."
[13] *Met*. 6, 490-1: "flares up for her."
[14] *Ab Urbe Condita (Libri I-V*), p 560: "maddened in his soul by the unbridled desire."

by calling her "mancipium". It is necessary to linger for a moment on the meaning of this Latin word. Given it belongs to an economical terminology, it offers a clear indication of the worth and importance attributed to Virginia. The Oxford Latin Dictionary registers the following three translations of the term: first, "laying hold of a thing in the presence of witness as a formal method of conveyance of property", secondly "full possession" and "slave or servant".[15] The term is a degrading one: uttering the word *mancipium* is to ultimately admit to Virginia being merely an object to possess. Both Virginia and Lavinia's defenselessness is underlined through the representation of the women as prey: Lavinia was a "dainty doe" that her rapists hoped to "pluck to ground" (2.1.26), whereas Virginia stood "desertaque praeda iniuriae".[16]

Having introduced the story and outlined the parallels between Shakespeare's and Livy's characters, let us now turn to the tragic moment when Titus reenacts the actions of "rash Virginius". In Livy, the scene appears as follows:

Seducit filiam ac nutricem prope Cloacinae ad tabernas, […], atque ibi ab lanio cultro arrepto, «hoc te uno quo possum» ait, «modo, filia, in libertatem uindico.»[17] Pectus deinde puellae transfigit.[18]

He draws the girl and the nurse aside to the stalls near the temple of Cloacina, […]: and there, having taken a knife from a butcher, he says: "In this way, the only one I have, [my] daughter, I vindicate your freedom." Then, he pierces through the girl's breast.

The daughter's body has a strong political significance. Specular to the case of Lavinia, the moment the body is "stained" (5.3.36), so is the virtue and honour of the whole *familia*. Virginius appears to be forced to deprive his young daughter of her life as it is his *uno modo* to protect her chastity and, consequently, the integrity of his name.

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[15] "Mancipium", Oxford Online Latin Dictionary, 1968, *subvoce.* (https://archive.org/details/aa.-vv.-oxford-latin-dictionary-1968/page/1070/mode/2up?view=theater, Accessed April 2024)
[16] *Ab Urbe Condita (Libri I-V)*, p 560: "alone and prey to injustice."
[17] "Vindico", Oxford Online Latin Dictionary, 1968, *subvoce.* (https://archive.org/details/aa.-vv.-oxford-latin-dictionary-1968/page/2067/mode/2up?view=theater, Accessed April 2024). It is interesting to note that the construction of "vindicare in liberatem" inherently means "to free from oppressive rule" and "to free from captivity or bonds".
[18] *Ab Urbe Condita (Libri I-V)*, p. 560.

To Titus' question, whether it was right for Virginius to kill his daughter, the emperor replies:

SATURNINUS
It was, Andronicus.

TITUS
Your reason, mighty lord?

SATURNINUS
Because the girl should not survive her shame,
And by her presence still renew his sorrows.

TITUS
A reason mighty, strong, and effectual;
A pattern, precedent, and lively warrant
For me, most wretched, to perform the like.
[*Unveils Lavinia*]
Die, die, Lavinia, and thy shame with thee,
And with thy shame thy father's sorrow die. (5.3.38-46)
He kills her.

In sharp and unsettling contrast to his former "Lavinia live / outlive thy father's days" (1.1.170-171), now Lavinia has to "Die, die" (5.3.45). Ultimately, the man who was meant to protect and nurture his daughter — the father from whom Lavinia yearned for a blessing, imploring, "O bless me here with thy victorious hand" (1.1.166) — is once again stained with blood. By the end of the play, our hearts ache for Lavinia, as we acknowledge that, despite her newfound agency provided by Ovid's text, she remains entrapped by the chains of the patriarchal system she is part of. Lavinia is mocked by Tamora, humiliated by Aaron, ravished by the Goth brothers, her presence acknowledged yet not understood by her uncle, and ultimately betrayed by the one who should place her above anything else in the world, her father, her own blood. Titus is aware of the fact that Lavinia is indeed a victim, he believes her, but it is not sufficient. As Shakespeare would have another of his characters concisely say: "yet she must die".[19] For Titus, Lavinia's murder has the power to cancel guilt, shame,

[19] Othello pronounces these words right before killing the falsely accused Desdemona (5.6.2). William Shakespeare, *Othello*, ed. by Edward Pechter, London: Norton, 2017.

and sorrow. But it is Titus' "sorrow" (5.3.46), not his daughter's. The "mortal revenge" (4.1.94) the Andronici were singing the praises of was, of course, never about Lavinia.

The death of both daughters is strictly connected to the idea of upholding the honour of the family, but in the case of Virginius, the murder shapes up to be an act of political resistance against the current political power.[20] "Verginius parallels the male role as warrior-protector of Rome with that of *paterfamilias*. The internal order of the city and its safety from external threat both depend […] on the father's guardianship of the daughter".[21] Let us observe the rather interesting reaction of those surrounding the fathers during the bloodshed. Saturninus deems Titus "unnatural" for killing his own blood, while in Livy the "necessitatem patris" is recognized and gruesomely celebrated as it will lead to the deposition of the dispotic and authoritarian decemvirs:

Icilius Numitoriusque exsangue corpus sublatum ostentant populo; scelus Appi, puellae infelicem formam, necessitatem patris deplorant.[22]

Icilius and Numitorius having lifted the lifeless body up, show it to the people: they deplore Appius' crime, the fatal beauty of the girl, and the necessity of the father.

SATURNINUS
What hast thou done, unnatural and unkind?
TITUS
Killed her for whom my tears have made me blind.
I am as woeful as Virginius was,
And have a thousand times more cause than he
To do this outrage, and it now is done. (5.3.48-52)

What Marcus anticipated would happen to Lavinia: "Come, let us go and make thy father blind/ For such a sight will blind a father's eye." (2.3.52-3) is indeed confirmed by Titus himself. Marcus, fearing Titus' descent into madness, had encouraged his brother to: "speak with possibility/ And do not break into these deep extremes" (3.1.215-216). Yet, the

[20] "As in Lucrece, Shakespeare defines rape politically. The mutilations are precise, if horrific, symbol of a society in collapse. Lavinia, Rome's rich ornament, raved, becomes an emblem of the spiritual truncation of the city, for in losing her hands and tongue, Lavinia loses the physical components of civility." Paster, Gail Kern, "To Starve with Feeding: Shakespeare's Idea of Rome", in *The Idea of the City in the Age of Shakespeare*. Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1985, pp. 58-90, pp. 73-74.
[21] Kahn, p. 71.
[22] *Ab Urbe Condita (Libri I-V*), p. 560.

general's grief drives him beyond any comprehensible human limit, so much so that "his imagery takes on cosmic proportions as he describes himself as sea and earth and Lavinia as the "weeping welkin" (3.1.227), her tears and sighs causing his sea and earth to be taken over by "a deluge" (3.1.230) of tears".[23] Titus, like a river in flood, is left with nothing but "vomit" (3.1.232) his and Lavinia's "miseries [and] woes" (3.1.220-221). The extreme grief will culminate in Lavinia's murder, for which he had "a thousand times more cause than [Virginius]" (5.3.51). This line concisely summarizes the pattern Titus follows throughout the whole play: exceeding and surpassing the classical textual precedent is part of the Roman general's deepest nature.

To conclude, the tale of Virginia supplies "a pattern, a precedent, a lively warrant" (5.3.43) for Titus' action and furthermore provides him with a "historical context in which chastity has a fully developed political significance".[24] In times when "patriarchal control over female sexuality is linked to the order and safety of the state […], both stories represent filicide as an act that is both personal and political".[25] Lavinia being veiled is read by Kahn as the indication of her "liminal status as neither maid nor wife, polluted by the stain of rape".[26] Removing the veil means first of all displaying and acknowledging, at last, the true nature of the events and consequently, in my reading, the removal of the veil might represent the clearance of all "sins": a starting point for the restoration of the Andronici and the possibility to reassemble Rome's "broken limbs again into one body" (5.3.73). Identifying the causes of the downfall of new "rash Virginius" (5.3.36) is neither easy nor straightforward: is Titus a victim of Rome's strict institutions, of the Goths, or is he the agent

[23] Willis, Deborah, "*The Gnawing Vulture*: Revenge, Trauma, Theory, and *Titus Andronicus*", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 53, 1 (2002), pp. 21-52, p 45.
[24] Kahn, p. 71.
[25] Kahn, p. 72.
[26] Kahn, p. 72.

of his own ruin? Heather James posits that "in Titus' practices, Roman institutions pervert the virtues they were designed to protect".[27] I too believe that the cause that paves the way for a tragic ending is indeed Titus' blind adherence to Roman traditions, and the resulting misalignment between noble ideals and their actual implementation. Although the climax of Titus' decline is mainly witnessed in the last two acts, it is nourished throughout the whole play. Paster argues that Titus' "first error" lies in choosing to give up the throne in favour of Saturninus, adding that "Titus' refusal to rule the city is catastrophic, much as Lear's similar abdication will be […] it represents a betrayal of the Roman ethos".[28] Perhaps Titus could not have acted otherwise, being simultaneously victim of the past and of a future that, "although it technically still lies ahead, derives from a pattern established in the literary past, one that anticipates an inevitable outcome".[29] Rome, beacon of order and stability, the city meant to be the ideal place of civilization, has at last become a wilderness of tigers (3.1.53), a place of barbarity and chaos, polluted not so much from foreign customs, rather "gnaw[ed]" (3.1.262) at from within.

[27] James, Heather, *Shakespeare's Troy: Drama, Politics, and the Translation of Empire*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 52.
[28] Paster, p. 61.
[29] Barret, J.K., "Chained Allusions, Patterned Futures, and the Dangers of Interpretation in *Titus Andronicus*", *English Literary Renaissance*, 44, (2014), pp. 452–85, p. 455.

3.2 The bloody banquet: influences of Seneca's Thyestes

Scelera non ulcisceris,
nisi vincis.[1]

– Atreus in *Thyestes*

Classical tragedy played a pivotal role in the development of revenge tragedy. Having a lesser knowledge of Greek writing, Elizabethans turned their gaze towards the Roman playwright Seneca (4 B.C. – 65 A.D), deemed to be the "most tragic […] and perfect of ancient writers",[2] whose contributions had a significant influence in shaping the Elizabethan revenge tragedy. Seneca's erudite and declamatory style gained popularity in English schools and universities.[3] The main traits of Senecan drama are an abundance of violent and bloody scenes, and irrationally obsessive passions, such as revenge and madness, taking over the characters and ultimately resulting in their tragic downfall. Moreover, the tragic actions are often imbued and intertwined with political elements. These themes and the overpowering Senecan *pathos* are key features that recur in *Titus Andronicus*. Undoubtedly, Seneca's style resonated well with the contemporary audience. More than any other playwright, Seneca was the model for tragedy in Elizabethan literature and as such he constituted a major aspect of their vision of Rome.[4] I agree with the perspective of scholar Fredson Bowers, who posits that:

> Seneca's emphasis on sensationalism, on physical horror to stimulate emotion, appealed to the English taste, for blood and horror on the stage could not be offensive to the spectators at cruel executions.[5]

Lavinia's murder, analyzed in the previous section, is embedded within the narrative frame of the anthropophagous dinner organized by Titus, an apparent feast of reconciliation that is

[1] *Thyestes*, vv. 195-6: "Crimes are not avenged, unless outdone." Lucio Anneo Seneca, *Tragedie*, edited by Giancarlo Giardina, Torino: UTET, 1987. All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.
[2] Bowers, Fredson Thayer, *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy 1587-1642*, 1966, Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 74.
[3] Bowers, p. 74
[4] Ettin, V. Andrew, "Shakespeare's First Roman Tragedy", *EHL*, 37, 1970, pp. 325-341, p. 333.
[5] Bowers, p. 75.

"overshadowed and underwritten"[6] by Seneca's revenge tragedy *Thyestes*, a manifest source of *Titus*' "energy and its aesthetic of violence".[7] The Senecan play centres on the themes of revenge, conquest of power and familial conflict, which, as in *Titus*, will end in a profusion of blood and damnation. The protagonists of the play are the brothers Atreus and Thyestes, who had been banished by their father Pelops for murdering their half-brother, Chrysippus. Pelops cursed both sons, declaring that they and their descendants would perish at each other's hands. The narrative opens with the presence of a Fury that activates the curse at the beginning of the play and urges Atreus to plot a horrific revenge against Thyestes, who had previously seduced Aërope, Atreus' wife and contested his rule. Atreus feigns a reconciliation with Thyestes and his sons, luring them back to Mycenae, with the promise of peace and shared power. Atreus' true intent, however, is to perform a heinous act of vengeance. He brutally murders Thyestes' sons and serves him their flesh. The play reaches its climax as Thyestes unknowingly consumes his children and precipitates into a state of madness and despair when he learns the truth about the cannibalistic banquet. The Senecan tragedy, distinguished by its intense emotional rhetoric and its dark, philosophical reflection on the nature of evil and human suffering, provided *Titus Andronicus* (among other later revenge plays) with a model of revenge action consisting of the presence of ghosts or furies, the making of the revenger and the revenge ritual.[8] In *Titus*, the Thyestean Fury is echoed through Tamora who, disguised as Revenge, tries to deceive Titus, convinced he has descended into madness — "calls herself Revenge and thinks me mad" (5.2.185):

I am Revenge, sent from th' infernal kingdom
To ease the gnawing vulture of thy mind,
By working wreakful vengeance on thy foes. (5.2.30-32)

[6] Holderness, Graham, "*Our Troy, our Rome*: Classical Intertextuality in *Titus Andronicus*", *Critical Survey*, 34, 4 (2022). pp. 93-112, p. 104.
[7] Miola, Robert S., *Shakespeare and Classical Tragedy: The Influence of Seneca*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992, p. 23.
[8] Miola, p. 23.

In response, Titus addresses the Goth Queen with the following words:

Welcome, dread Fury, to my woeful house;
Rapine and Murder, you are welcome too. (5.2.82-83)

A distinctly Senecan theme can be identified in the Fury who, emerging from the underworld — "infernal kingdom" (5.2.30) —, seeks revenge and claims to help Titus in carrying out his plans. In *Thyestes*, Atreus also invokes the Erinyes (another name for Furies) in hope to receive assistance in exacting his revenge on Thyestes:

Excede, Pietas, si modo in nostra domo
umquam fuisti. Dira Furiarum cohors
discorsque Erinys ueniat et geminas faces
Megaera quatiens. Non satis magno meum
ardet furore pectus, impleri iuuat
maiore monstro.[9]

Leave, Piety, if you ever were in our home.
Let the cruel heard of Furies,
And the mischievous Erinyes come, and Megaera
shaking [her] two torches. Not great enough
is the wrath that ignites my chest,
with a greater monster it needs to be filled.

Although the formal structure of the two invocations may appear similar, it is important to note a crucial difference. Shakespeare, while adopting the narrative device of invoking the Furies, transforms the literary source into an ironic element in his play. Unlike the traditional role of the Senecan Furies, who assist and support the characters in their vengeance, Tamora-Revenge aims to harm Titus rather than help him. Old Andronicus (4.1.129), however, aware of the deceit, convinces "Revenge" to let her two sons in the guise of "Rape and Murder stay with [him]" (5.2.133), so he can exact his revenge on the Goth family together with his daughter.[10] Bate notes that Tamora's disguise is "seen through and then played along with to wonderful comic effect [the encounter between Titus and Tamora] is a brilliant piece of

[9] *Thyestes*, vv. 249-254.
[10] Jonathan Bate, "Introduction" in William Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus*, ed. by Jonathan Bate, The Arden Shakespeare, London: Routledge, 1995, p. 21.

theatre because of the way that one character takes over the other's plot, and turns it against the inventor."

Titus pronounces a monologue addressed to Chiron and Demetrius, in which he meticulously enumerates their crimes:

O villains, Chiron and Demetrius!
Here stands the spring whom you have stained with mud,
This goodly summer with your winter mixed.
You killed her husband, and for that vile fault
Two of her brothers were condemned to death,
My hand cut off and made a merry jest,
Both her sweet hands, her tongue, and that more dear
Than hands or tongue, her spotless chastity,
Inhuman traitors […] (5.2.168-177)

These words also anticipate Titus' true feelings towards Lavinia's rape: her "spotless chastity" now "stained with mud" is "more dear" to him than any other of her features. Robertson argues that in a context in which rape is read as a violation of male property, "the heroic male assumes the place of the avenger" and therefore, the wounding of the male line needs to be punished by the male.[11] The brothers are apostrophized as "inhuman", which may appear striking and rather ironic coming from Titus who, with chilling precision and composure, presents his innermost barbaric intentions:

I will grind your bones to dust,
And with your blood and it I'll make a paste,
And of the paste a coffin I will rear,
And make two pasties of your shameful heads,
And bid that strumpet, your unhallowed dam,
Like to the earth swallow her own increase.
[…]

For worse than Philomel you used my daughter,
And worse than Progne, I will be revenged. (5.2.186-191;194-195)

Chiron and Demetrius are addressed as if they were nothing more than ingredients for the banquet: through the reiteration of no less than four "and", the audience is witness to the preparation of the bloody recipe. Furthermore, the anaphora of "and" might also highlight

[11] Karen Robertson quoted in Tassi, Marguerite A., *Women and Revenge in Shakespeare: Gender, Genre, and Ethics*, Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2011, p. 101.

Titus' desire to extend his victims' fear and, through each addition, to enjoy a foretaste of their punishment. In this regard, Fawcett argues that "father, daughter, and kin experience *Schadenfreude*, the dark pleasure and psychological satisfaction of revenge, as they watch Lavinia's tormenters suffer before their slaughter".[12] The last lines of the excerpt are fundamental to understanding the moral and intellectual decay of the Roman *mos maiorum*. "Worse" is the keyword that has identified the relationship of the characters and classical sources throughout the play. The two rapists had already twisted the myth, and Titus has no intention of interrupting the vicious cycle of violence, rather he declares that he will act "worse than Progne", in exchange for the treatment the brothers reserved for his daughter. This debased approach to the classics is testament to Rome's internal moral decline. I agree with Ettin's position when he says that "the literary sources for the most shocking images of 'unregenerate barbarism' in the play are in fact products of the 'Roman' imagination".[13]

Before serving the banquet, Titus prepares the bodies of his victims with the help of his daughter. In this instance, Lavinia will display her last act of agency in the play:

TITUS
Hark, wretches, how I mean to martyr you.
This one hand yet is left to cut your throats,
Whiles that Lavinia 'tween her stumps doth hold
The basin that receives your guilty blood.

The brothers take on the role of Itys and Lavinia will mirror her Ovidian counterpart. Like Philomela did with her sister Procne, she will aid her father in the preparation of the cannibalistic feast. She plays an active role in her revenge by holding the basin that would collect Chiron and Demetrius' blood "'tween her stumps". Titus encourages Lavinia to "receive the blood" (5.2.197) employing what Fawcett defines "a language suggestive of an

[12] Fawcett, Mary Laughlin, "Arms/Words/Tears: Language and the Body in *Titus Andronicus*", *EHL*, 50, (1983), pp. 261-277, p. 263.
[13] Ettin, V. Andrew, "Shakespeare's First Roman Tragedy", *EHL*, 37, (1970), pp. 325-341, p. 331.

ancient ritual sacrifice".[14] He recognizes the importance of his daughter's participation in the rite, believing it may be liberating her at least to some extent, from the atrocities she suffered: "roles are being reversed ritualistically, victim becomes victimizer".[15] Although Lavinia has lost the bodily means by which she could inflict violence both physically and psychologically, she can still find fulfilment and her own personal form of catharsis in being a witness to her abusers' humiliation.

The ritualistic dimension of the murder is even more heavily displayed in the Senecan tragedy. When commenting on Titus "play[ing] the cook" (5.2.204), Schiesaro stated that "the strong metatheatrical component of Titus is […] inspired by Seneca rather than Ovid".[16] This is confirmed by the fact that, in *Thyestes*, Atreus goes as far as proclaiming himself "sacerdos" (v. 691),[17] manifestly invested with a sacred power. All the actions and objects that revolve around the terrible *scelus* are imbued with an aura of sacredness: Atreus employs "Bacchus' sacred liquor",[18] and calls the scene of the murder "adorned altars",[19] where "the whole ceremony is respected, so that such a sacrilege is not carried out without the observance of the ritual".[20] Although the section's focus is on Senecan tragedy, in order to understand the complexity of the play's classical allusions, it is important to mention that in his *Metamorphoses*, Ovid had already introduced the element of rituality with Procne's revenge. In fact, not only does the killing and dismemberment of her son Itys take place during the holy triheteric festivities organized to honour Bacchus— "tempus erat quo sacra solent trieterica Bacchi" (*Met*. 6, v. 587) —, but she also serves Tereus his son's body "with

[14] Fawcett, p. 263.
[15] Fawcett, p. 263.
[16] Schiesaro quoted in Holderness p. 104.
[17] *Thyestes*, v. 691: "Ipse est sacerdos": he (himself) is priest.
[18] *Thyestes*, v. 687: "sacer Bacchi liquor".
[19] *Thyestes*, v.684: "ornantur arae".
[20] *Thyestes*, v.689-690: "seruatur omnis ordo, ne tantum nefas non rite fiat".

the false excuse of a ritual of [her] country".[21] Furthermore, the myth explicitly invokes the god through the vocative expression "Bacche" (v.596) and mentions "insigna Bacchi" (v.598), "Bacchus' emblems". In addition to the summoning of the Furies, in a solemn and grave tome reminiscent of ritual formulas, Atreus invokes Procne's aid to murder Thyestes' children. Seneca explicitly references the myth of the *Metamorphoses*:

Animum Daulis inspira parens
sororque; causa est similis; assiste et manum
impelle nostram. Liberos auidus pater
gaudensque laceret et suos artus edat.[22]

Inspire my spirit, mother and sister of Daulis;[23]
[Our] cause is similar; assist and guide my hand.
That the gluttonous father may dismember his sons
And with joy consume his own flesh.

Atreus takes inspiration from the sisters' revenge on Tereus but declares his desire to exceed and worsen his precedent: "Thracium fiat nefas / maiore numero".[24] Also, the last line Atreus' speech almost perfectly recalls Titus' wish for Tamora to "swallow her own increase" (5.2.191). It is interesting to note how the two literary sources employed by Shakespeare cross-reference. In this regard, Miola posits that:

As sources in the Renaissance, Ovid and Seneca run routes parallel, identical, contiguous, and intersecting. Ovid's tale of Philomel, Tereus and Procne, for example, appears reformulated in Seneca's *Thyestes*; Renaissance writers — including Shakespeare in *Titus Andronicus* — often draw upon both versions.[25]

The last excerpt I will present most likely displays one of the passages from which Shakespeare drew inspiration for Titus' description of the preparation of the banquet. This passage describes only a portion of the horrific and highly graphic details with which Seneca describes Atreus' actions:

erepta uiuis exta pectoribus tremunt
spirantque uenae corque adhuc pauidum salit. […]
postquam hostiae placuere, securus uacat

[21] *Met*. 6, 648 : "patrii moris sacrum mentita."
[22] *Thyestes*, vv. 275-278.
[23] According to the myth, the events took place in the city of Daulis, in Thrace.
[24] *Thyestes*, vv. 57-58: "That the Thracian crime be committed, [but] in greater numbers."
[25] Miola, p. 4.

iam fratris epulis. Ipse diuisum secat
in membra corpus, amputat trunco tenus
umeros patentes […], denudat artus durus atque ossa amputat; […]
Haec ueribus haerent uiscera et lentis data
stillant caminis. […]
Nec facile dicam corpora an flammae magis
gemuere.[26]

From the living chests are the palpitating entrails torn,
The veins breathe and the still-frightened heart shudders. […]
Once satisfied by the victims, he calmly starts preparing
the brothers' banquet. He cuts up the bodies in pieces,
amputates the broad shoulders up to the bone […],
The flesh is violently stripped from the joints and the bones amputated.
Some entrails are put on the spits and drip, placed over slow fires. […]
I could not easily say whether it is the bodies or the flames that groan more.

These lines highlight the essence of *Thyestes*, a tragedy where family hatred, lack of piety and insatiable evil are the protagonists. Although the raw tone and graphic details are maintained in *Titus Andronicus*, Titus' disguise as a cook and the rapid succession of the killing of almost every character on stage (Lavinia, Titus, Tamora and Saturninus in order of appearance) creates a stage effect that Bate defines as "black comic theatricality".[27] It has been observed how in both Ovid and Seneca, murder and sacrality are closely intertwined. In *Titus,* however, this ritualistic dimension of a sacrifice for a greater purpose is stripped of the apparent sacredness maintained by the literary sources. The banquet even lacks the formal ritualism displayed in the killing of Alarbus in Act 1. In Shakespeare, the "banquet serves to render violence structured and ritualistic instead of arbitrary and chaotic",[28] it represents Titus' way of bringing about political changes by "casting revenge in the form of an elaborate public performance",[29] but it is only a formal device. It is only towards the end of *Titus* that we understand the true meaning of the proverbial formula "Sit fas aut nefas" (1.1.633), that is "be it right or wrong". This formula echoes the Ovidian "fasque nefasque/confusura ruit"

[26] *Thyestes*, vv. 755-756; 759-763; 765-766; 771-772.
[27] Bate, p. 33.
[28] Bate, p. 22.
[29] Bate, p. 24.

(Met. 6, 585-86). The confusion of “right and wrong” referred to Procne’s killing of Itys. Indeed, the confusion between “right and wrong” is the hallmark of the entire play. A work in which we are witnesses to a constant contamination between order and disorder, civilization and barbarism, culture and ignorance, teaching and learning, ritual and savagery, love and brutality. These oppositional pairs are only seemingly antithetical: in *Titus*, these boundaries are blurred, everchanging and intertwined. This conceptual fragmentation is found in the fragmentation of bodies and in in the large number of bodily mutilations, that mirror political chaos. By the end of the play, even if Lucius will try to restore the former greatness of "headless Rome" (1.1.189), what remains is a stage littered with death and a pervasive feeling of bitterness and desecrating comedy.

Summary

Nel febbraio del 1594, il produttore teatrale Philip Henslowe registra nel suo *Diary* la messa in scena di *Titus Andronicus* al Rose di Londra. La prima tragedia di William Shakespeare godrà di un enorme consenso negli anni contemporanei all'autore, per poi essere aspramente rifiutata nei secoli a seguire e additata come una fra le sue opere più sanguinose, tanto da indurre la critica a teorizzare addirittura che l'opera non fosse stata scritta dal Bardo.

L'opera si distingue per una violenza irrazionale, che si manifesta in una profusione di uccisioni, mutilazioni, stupri e inganni, presenti sin dalle prime scene dell'opera. Uno degli elementi che suscita maggiore interesse in *Titus* è il contrasto fra la crudezza degli eventi e il linguaggio forbito con cui essi sono narrati ed inscenati. Per la costruzione della sua opera, Shakespeare attinge a diverse fonti classiche, fra cui Ovidio, Seneca, Virgilio, Orazio e Livio. Questa tesi nasce con l'obiettivo di analizzare il rapporto fra *Titus Andronicus* e le fonti classiche presenti nell'opera. La metodologia adottata per questo progetto si focalizza principalmente su una dettagliata analisi del testo e delle citazioni classiche, con particolare attenzione data ai brani originali in latino, il che permetterà di meglio delineare le interconnessioni fra l'opera e i suoi precedenti letterari.

Il primo capitolo si propone di fornire un'introduzione storica. La prima sezione si occupa di ricostruire la data della composizione dell'opera: sebbene non esista un consenso unanime, si possono individuare due diverse ipotesi, che propendono rispettivamente per gli anni 1589-90 e 1593-94. In seguito, sarà fornita una dettagliata sinossi della trama dell'opera, per facilitare l'orientamento del lettore all'interno delle sezioni seguenti. Il sottocapitolo 1.3 delinea il pubblico per il quale Shakespeare scrisse *Titus*. Si esaminano in particolare il ruolo della morte e delle esecuzioni pubbliche nell'Inghilterra elisabettiana, cercando di risalire alle ragioni per cui un'opera tanto macabra abbia avuto un tale successo presso il pubblico di

Shakespeare. Gli spettacoli sanguinolenti di norma non creavano disgusto tra i cittadini elisabettiani, poiché la violenza era parte integrante della vita quotidiana del tempo. Durante il regno di Elisabetta I, assistere alle esecuzioni pubbliche era una pratica piuttosto comune: gli incontri cittadini in occasione delle condanne rappresentavano sia un mezzo per esorcizzare la diffusa paura della morte, sia una realtà ordinaria e carica di teatralità e spettacolarizzazione della morte. Dunque, lo spettacolo cruento rappresentato in *Titus* non rappresentava una novità per il pubblico elisabettiano, che era già avvezzo alla vista di cadaveri e corpi mutilati. L'ultima sezione del primo capitolo si propone di delineare la definizione del genere della *revenge tragedy*, la tragedia di vendetta. La vendetta è il fattore motivante dietro ogni azione presente nell'opera, la forza vincolante che alimenta la trama e causa la seguente concatenazione di orrori. Si cercherà inoltre di delineare alcune delle caratteristiche principali del genere e di descrivere quale sia il significato della vendetta per gli elisabettiani nell'Inghilterra seicentesca, società in cui nonostante la violenza fosse presente, la vendetta di sangue privata non aveva alcuno spazio legale e la punizione di eventuali delitti era prerogativa dello Stato. Il capitolo si chiuderà analizzando l'episodio che innesca il circolo inesorabile della vendetta e determinerà la caduta degli Andronici, ovvero il sacrificio del primogenito di Tamora, Alarbus.

Il secondo capitolo si propone di studiare il rapporto tra l'opera e la sua principale fonte letteraria, ovvero il mito di Filomela, Procne e Tereo, tratto dal libro VI delle *Metamorfosi* di Ovidio. Si inizierà fornendo una trama dettagliata del mito ovidiano per poi analizzare la Roma in cui Shakespeare ambienta *Titus*. Si cercherà di evidenziare il fatto che, sebbene l'azione dell'opera si svolga a Roma, apparente culla indiscussa di cultura di latinità, le attività estreme dei personaggi sono distanti dal linguaggio raffinato che utilizzano. Essi citano brani di autori classici, non comprendendone, alterandone - o esagerandone - il significato. La memoria confusa dei personaggi è sintomo di una Roma che esiste solo come

un debole ricordo della Città Eterna, un campo di battaglia tra Goti e Romani, passato e presente, la cui gloria è destinata all'oblio per l'incapacità del suo stesso popolo di sostenere gli antichi valori del *mos maiorum*. La romanità dei personaggi è presentata come un involucro esterno piuttosto che come una dimensione intrinseca a cui appartengono e per tale motivo la dimensione temporale in *Titus* si presenta come una sintesi di differenti epoche storiche. La sezione 2.1 esplora la rielaborazione shakespeariana del mito di Filomela attraverso il personaggio di Lavinia e si propone di illustrare quali elementi Shakespeare attinga dalla poetica ovidiana. Questa analisi sarà supportata da una osservazione dettagliata delle citazioni della tragedia e da un confronto con i passaggi più significativi della sua fonte latina. La sezione successiva è dedicata allo studio di analogie e differenze fra il *Titus* e altri due miti utilizzati da Shakespeare per descrivere la metamorfosi di Lavinia, ovvero il mito di Dafne e quello di Io, entrambi presenti nelle *Metamorfosi* di Ovidio. La sezione si concluderà con una riflessione sulle differenti modalità di metamorfosi vissute dalle tre giovani donne. La sezione 2.3 esplora la dimensione meta-letteraria di *Titus Andronicus*, evidenziando come l'opera di Shakespeare tessa uno stretto legame con le *Metamorfosi* di Ovidio. Nella scena 4.1, appare sul palco una copia fisica di un *codex* delle *Metamorfosi*, il quale permetterà a Lavinia, nonostante le sue mutilazioni, di comunicare tramite il testo, attraverso l'esplicitazione del legame tra la sua tragedia e quella di Filomela. Lettura e scrittura diventano strumenti di rivalsa per Lavinia, che utilizza la sua conoscenza letteraria per rivelare la verità sulle violenze subite, nella speranza di mantenere la sua indipendenza. L'incapacità fisica di parlare è compensata dalla sua abilità di comunicare attraverso la letteratura; il suo corpo mutilato, però, si trasforma in una mappa letteraria soggetta ad una costante interpretazione esterna, lasciando a Lavinia uno spazio d'azione e di autoaffermazione limitato. Si analizza inoltre come i personaggi maschili, in particolare Titus, tentino di decifrare i segni lasciati da Lavinia, riflettendo un'ossessione per la lettura

e la scrittura che permea l'intera opera. Inoltre, la presenza fisica del libro sul palco e il richiamo ai precedenti letterari sottolineano una tensione tra la necessità di vendetta e la potenziale redenzione offerta dalla letteratura, che tuttavia si traduce in un uso distruttivo delle conoscenze classiche e nel tracollo dei personaggi. La presenza della lingua latina nel testo di Shakespeare, ad esempio nell'esplicitazione della violenza subita da Lavinia, denota un tentativo di creare una distanza psicologica che funga come meccanismo di difesa per la vittima. Questo si realizza tramite uno schermo linguistico che separa la violenza dalla realtà, offrendo una sorta di filtro mediante l'uso di una lingua diversa. Tuttavia, questa distanza non impedisce che la violenza venga compresa e perpetrata dai personaggi, che interpretano letteralmente i testi classici, portando alla distruzione del loro micro e macrocosmo. L'opera riflette una crisi politica e culturale, in cui le tradizioni classiche vengono travisate e utilizzate per fini distruttivi. In questo contesto, la letteratura, pur simboleggiando il sapere e la rinascita, diventa un mezzo che conduce alla catastrofe.

Il terzo capitolo di questa tesi esamina gli eventi degli ultimi due atti della tragedia e si propone di analizzare *Titus Andronicus* alla luce delle influenze classiche, con particolare riferimento al racconto di Virginio e Virginia tratto dall'*Ab Urbe Condita Libri* di Tito Livio e dal *Tieste* di Seneca. La sezione 3.1 esplora il personaggio di Titus, che oscilla fra l'iniziale rappresentazione come impassibile generale romano, e la seguente vulnerabilità e affettuosità paterna. La decisione, ispirata al gesto di Virginio, di uccidere la sua unica figlia, Lavinia, rivela una connessione sia politica sia personale con il racconto liviano. Questo atto, giustificato da Saturnino come necessario per preservare l'onore della famiglia, segna il culmine della discesa di Titus. Il paragone con Virginio illustra il conflitto tra gli ideali romani di virtù e giustizia e la loro corruzione, perpetrata nelle due opere. La figura di Lavinia, simbolo dell'integrità familiare e politica di Roma, viene quindi sacrificata per preservare la reputazione degli Andronici. Questa perdita, tuttavia, non risparmierà Roma,

che solo nella figura di Lucius potrà leggere una speranza di rinascita. La sezione 3.2 esplora il rapporto della tragedia classica con la tragedia della vendetta elisabettiana, focalizzandosi sull'influenza di Seneca su Shakespeare. Si evidenzia come Seneca abbia fornito un modello per la rappresentazione della barbarie e della passione ossessiva, elementi che si riflettono nella caratterizzazione di *Titus*. Tematiche quali vendetta, potere, violenza e conflitti familiari presenti in *Titus Andronicus* trovano infatti particolare riscontro nel *Tieste*. L'analisi verterà in particolare sulla scena conclusiva dell'opera, che mette in scena il famigerato banchetto cannibalico. Accanto ad osservazioni di tipo linguistico, si studieranno le analogie con il sanguinoso pasto senecano e si esaminerà il ruolo della ritualità nel processo di vendetta in entrambe le tragedie, sottolineando le modalità di reinterpretazione adottate da Shakespeare.

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