Corso di Laurea Magistrale in Lingue e Letterature Europee, Americane e Postcoloniali

Tesi di Laurea

Revenge and Sacrifice:
An Investigation of Violence in Shakespeare’s
*Titus Andronicus* and *Julius Caesar*

Relatore
Prof.ssa Laura Tosi

Correlatore
Prof. Valerio de Scarpis di Vianino

Laureando
Arianna Galletta
Matricola 827567

Anno Accademico
2011 / 2012
Revenge and Sacrifice: an Investigation of Violence in Shakespeare’s Titus Andronicus and Julius Caesar

TABLE OF CONTENTS

**Introduction** - p. 5

1. **Sacrificial Ritual and Gratuitous Violence** - p. 15
   1.1 The Cult of Sacrifice in Shakespeare’s Rome - p. 21
      1.1.1 Senseless and silenced Deaths: Alarbus’s, Mutius’s and Bassianus’s Sacrifices - p. 24
   1.2 Purifying Rituals and collective Agreement - p. 30
      1.2.1 The *Lupercalia* and Caesar’s Sacrifice: from sacred to profane Rituals - p. 32
      1.2.2 Erasing Guilt through Death: Chiron and Demetrius’ Sacrifice - p. 36
   1.3 The sacrificial Victim: the Core of conflicting Feelings. The Case of Caesar and Lavinia - p. 40
      1.3.1 ‘The cause is in my will’ (II.2.71): Caesar’s Condemnation and his Downfall - p. 44
      1.3.2 ‘She is a woman, therefore may be wooed’ (II.1.83): Lavinia’s Objectification and Martyrdom - p. 47

2. **Revenge and Revenges. When blind Passions turn into Crimes** - p. 51
   2.1 Private and public Revenge - p. 59
      2.1.1 The ‘public Good’ as a Motive for public and private Revenge: the Bond of Caesar’s Conspiracy - p. 62
   2.2 Premeditated and unpremeditated crimes: two Aspects of Revenge - p. 67
      2.2.1 Caesar’s Murder: an Example of premeditated Crime - p. 72
   2.3 The Redeemers: the Survivors of Revenge - p. 75
      2.3.1 Lucius - p. 76
      2.3.2 Mark Antony - p. 79
3. **Pure and tainted Blood in Sacrifices and Revenge Murders** - p. 83

3.1 The Fountain of Blood: religious and gender Motifs in Caesar’s and Lavinia’s Martyrdoms - p. 88

3.1.1 Caesar’s bleeding Wounds and the Christian Analogies - p. 90
3.1.2 Lavinia’s unwilled Bleeding - p. 93

3.2 Family blood-Bonds: patriarchal Authority and filial Subjection - p. 97

3.2.1 Father-daughter Relationship: Titus and Lavinia’s shared Suffering - p. 99
3.2.2 The ‘imprisoning Womb’: Tamora and her binding Relationship with her Children - p. 102

3.3 Weeping Tears of Blood: a Demonstration of Mercy and Suffering - p. 106

3.3.1 Tears of Sorrow: Caesar’s weeping Body - p. 106
3.3.2 Relieving Tears: Brutus’s missed Confession - p. 109
3.3.3 Antony’s contrived Tears - p. 111

4. **Dismembering the Body. Powerlessness and degenerated Violence** - p. 113

4.1 Icons of Power: body Parts as Instruments of Authority - p. 121

4.1.1 Heart and Hands: the Core and the Instruments of Power - p. 122
4.1.2 Shaking Hands: the Agreement between Will and Action - p. 125
4.1.3 Titus’s hand - p. 128

4.2 A ‘savage Spectacle’: Caesar’s slaughter and the Conspirators’ Resentment - p. 130

4.3 Eating human Bodies: from Rituals to grotesque Practices - p. 134

4.3.1 The repulsive Banquet - p. 137

**Conclusion** - p. 142

**Bibliography** - p. 150
Concordia.

*Fig. 4: “Concordia,” Geoffrey Whitney, A Choice of Emblemes (Leyden, 1586), 76. From the Folger Shakespeare Library Collection.*
INTRODUCTION

My study centres on the way the issue of violence is treated in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* and *Titus Andronicus*, specifically when it is applied to revenge and sacrifice. Throughout my essay I will try to focus on the use of violence and power, as the common denominators of both sacrifice and revenge. I am going to investigate the way each character deals with physical violence and with his/her own inner passions, such as anger, envy and ambition. My research will be basically a comparative study on the two plays, in which I will try to demonstrate how revenge and sacrifice are actually spurred by similar passions, that is, those which belong to our human nature. My particular concern is with the study of sacrificial practices as means of gathering political agreement in Shakespeare’s Rome. I will also analyse revenge and the passions which are connected to it, specifically when dealing with crimes. By focusing on the different factors which motivate the feeling of revenge, I will pay particular attention to its several aspects. I will study revenge as both a form of retaliation and as an effect of personal resentment.

As sacrifice and revenge are, therefore, interrelated elements of violence, it is important to study these issues in relation to the characters and their development in the play. On this point, I will specifically focus on their dramatic essence, that is, in their being at the same time masters and victims of their fate, a fate which, unfortunately, pulls the strings of events. Through the texts and by comparing each character’s behaviour, I will try to draw a common ground between the two plays, by analysing causes and effects which are likely to encourage the characters’ desire to make use of physical violence. The preservation of the family, as well as that of the community to which they belong is the main motive which leads them to appeal to violence. As I will demonstrate in the following chapters, when these elements are, in some way, threatened, characters are automatically inclined to react. The use of violence in revenge is also connected with the loss of power. Each character, indeed, always acts in order to preserve his identity of single individual. Violence intervenes in order to
fortify his selfish nature, which provides him/her with moral and physical superiority. A significant part of my research is devoted to the issue of blood as a common element to both sacrifice and revenge. What I will try to demonstrate is that both in sacrifices and in revenge murders, blood is always a symbol of guilt. Although it is often interpreted as a purging means, it may be also a sign of distinction, especially in terms of gender. I will also study the religious imagery which is often associated with it, by paying particular attention to the texts. Specific references to Caesar’s and Lavinia’s martyrdoms, indeed, will be also taken into account. I am going to focus on blood as a link between family ties, particularly in *Titus Andronicus*, where family is often conceived as a sort of political community. On this point, a paragraph will be devoted to the close relationship between parents and children, with specific reference to Titus and Tamora, and their control and power over their sons and daughters.

I will conclude my research with a chapter concerning the staging of the body and its components, as both fundamental elements of a sacred ritual and as symbols of political and military power. I will focus on the dismembering of the body as both a metaphor for powerlessness and as a form of rebellion. I will analyse the interaction between the members, as the ideal condition for the good functioning of the body, including that of Rome. The last paragraph of this chapter will be devoted to the study of some rituals concerning the consumption of human flesh. I will analyse this practice as both a medicinal cure and as a degenerated kind of violence. In this last part I am going to focus specifically on *Titus Andronicus* and to the display of its macabre and perverting scenes of violence.

The two plays definitely show a different approach to physical violence. In *Titus Andronicus*, for instance, cruelty and hatred are motives which are always at the background of the events. In this play, spectacular violence appears to be deliberately shocking and grisly. In *Julius Caesar*, instead, violence is justified by seeming political ideals, and it is disguised as a kind of right derived from social and political superiority. Despite the differences, however, the two plays I am going to analyse are examples of tragedies where wrathful passions predominate. Characters’ actions,
indeed, are often a reaction to their emotions, such as personal resentment and envy, which threaten, in some way, their firm resolution. In both *Julius Caesar* and *Titus Andronicus*, characters’ behaviours have ambiguous and diversified aspects. Brutus, for instance, is at the same time a law-abiding and devoted soldier and an active promoter of individual liberties.

The two plays, in some way, represent the exception to their genre: although the first one belongs to the 'Roman' plays, Katherine Maus points out, the plot does not necessarily focus on Roman history and biography. *Julius Caesar* as well is different from the other Roman tragedies. The play seems to deconstruct and destabilise Caesar’s outsize figure. Indeed, although he is hailed for his heroic achievements, he is never depicted as an invincible sovereign. This happens because the text pays careful attention towards a deeper study of the characters, not only from a political and military point of view, but human as well. I will demonstrate that the characters’ personal strengths and weaknesses have disastrous consequences on the balance of the community. Both plays centre on the themes of 'Roman-ness' and civic responsibility. These values, however, often conflict with the characters’ personal and individual choices. It is the similarity between the two plays, along with the way physical violence clashes with the characters’ ideal of ethics, one of the reasons that inspired my research.

The debatable issue of perverting, inverting and neglecting the idea of justified violence attracted considerably my interest for these two plays, where human sacrifice, rape, ritual butchery and mutilation are disturbingly powerful means of obtaining political consent.

As regards secondary sources, my research is based on the study of contemporary criticism, including articles and volumes concerning the issue of revenge as an extreme form of redemption. Bower’s *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy 1587-1642*, in this sense, has been fundamental to the analysis of the role of murder in blood revenge. Through Bower’s specific study on the origins of murder in Renaissance plays and the classification between public and private revenge, I will try to demonstrate to what extent murder was considered to be an accepted and tolerated act, both legally and
religiously, particularly in the case of premeditation. As regards the theme of sacrifice, I made use of some contemporary criticism by Foakes¹ and Liebler², whose study on sacrificial ritual and the display of physical violence have been extremely useful. By developing the theme of sacrifice, I found analogies between the issue of 'collective violence', thoroughly debated and upheld by Girard in his work *Violence and the Sacred*, and Shakespeare's representation of the murder of Julius Caesar. Nevertheless, my particular concern will be that of questioning Girard’s theory on sacrifice as a defence mechanism, necessary to repel 'bad violence' affecting community. As regards the study of the body and its components, essays on therapeutic cannibalism and bloodletting have also been taken into account. On this point, I found Louise Noble’s thesis on the pharmacological and healing nature of human body extremely interesting. I am going to use it as evidence in my study on the display of physical violence. The themes of pollution and purgation are widely discussed also in Catherine Belling³’s essay on therapeutic bleeding, as the cure for dreadful ‘diseases’ such as corruption, rape and the excess of passions, which I used with reference to the case of Julius Caesar’s character.

In the first chapter of my essay I will explore the nature of ‘purging violence’, through an analysis of sacrificial ritual and the power it wields within the community. In *Julius Caesar* sacrifice represents both a way to break the bond between the sovereign and his people, and a means of restoring public honour. Caesar’s death is conceived by Brutus and the other conspirators as a redemptive cure to purge Rome from the illness of corruption caused by Caesar. However, the impossibility to separate personal from

---


political matters is evidence of the play’s great complexity both politically and psychologically. Unlike the representation of Caesar provided in Plutarch’s *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, Shakespeare’s Caesar is depicted in all his humanity, that is, as a sick, deaf and epileptic man, as explained by Katherine Maus. On the one hand, his weaknesses provide the basis for his tragic end but on the other they destabilise the conspirators’ fears. Therefore, their aim to sacrifice Caesar for Rome’s harmony becomes less convincing. Like Caesar, Titus is a complex character, loyal and proud of his country, a man who is at the same time a military leader, a public figure, a father and master of his servants. Despite their political role, both Titus and Caesar are seen as outsiders, since they refuse the crown and therefore the responsibility this position implies. The image of sovereignty as a lawful, supreme and anointed body, which preserves the balance and the stability of the community, is put into question. Therefore, their deaths are a sort of expected end.

In this chapter I will also try to demonstrate how Lavinia’s death may be compared with Caesar’s murder, through a different interpretation of sacrifice. By considering the close relationship between rituals and sacrifice, I shall devote a paragraph on the importance of ritualising death, that is, on how ritual may have relevance in gathering collective agreement. Both *Titus Andronicus* and *Julius Caesar*, indeed, provide examples of rituals, though in different contexts. One of the most important is definitely Caesar’s funeral, in which Brutus and Antony give the audience a completely different description of their leader. As in a trial, where each party tries to demonstrate its own truth and to justify its behaviour by rebutting the other’s accusations, so Brutus attracts the mob’s attention by explaining his motives:

> “Romans, countrymen, and lovers, hear me for my cause, and be silent that you may hear. Believe me for my honour, and have respect to mine honour, that you may believe”®

Antony’s answer is not less direct: “Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears./I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him” (III.2.70-71). Instead of a religious ritual, Caesar’s funeral appears to be more a ‘pagan’ rite, like a sort of summation in which the aim is convincing the court, that is the people, of the good faith of each orator. Although Brutus’s reasons may be “full of good regard” (III.1.226), many critics have questioned whether his need to purify Rome from the infectious Caesarism actually conceals a personal and inner desire to reconstruct his identity. By providing specific examples from the text, I will try, in the following chapters, to corroborate this theory and to confirm Myron Taylor’s assumption regarding the issue of envy as the unleashing motive of both Cassius and Brutus’s anger. What they envy, argues Taylor, is not Caesar’s public figure but “Julius Caesar the man, [...] [who] has achieved his dangerous prominence by virtue of conscious intent and action, even deceit”.

Interestingly, what criticism does not explain is why Brutus, despite the relationship of friendship with Caesar, is led to destroy what he claims to love. In some way, Brutus’s behaviour has much in common with that of Titus. Titus’s desperate attempt to save Lavinia from her shameful destiny, indeed, does not explain the cold-blooded way in which he murders her. As I have mentioned in these few lines, the analogy between the two plays is striking, since in each case death appears to be simply the result of a bitter frustration and not the sacrifice for the common good.

The second chapter will be devoted to the theme of revenge and the motifs which spur it, specifically in relation to sacrifice. What I will try to demonstrate in the chapter is that there is not a clear distinction between the two issues, particularly in terms of passions. Sometimes the reasons which originate sacrificial rituals may be similar to

All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the body of the essay.

5 Taylor, Marion, ‘Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar and the Irony of History’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 24, 1973

6 Ibid., p. 302
those which incite revenge murders. The two themes are often linked to each other. It is hard, indeed, to distinguish an act of revenge from a sacrifice, and the two plays I am going to study provide examples of it. If revenge is to condemn and sacrifice to accept as a lawful and sacred evidence of devotion to the country, how could we classify Alarbus’s slaughter? Whether the deed is the result of Titus’s sense of duty towards Rome or the reward for the grief due to the loss of his sons, Alarbus’s killing is certainly an act of undeserved cruelty. Titus’s behaviour will be the motive for Tamora’s transformation into merciless revenger. When she agrees to Lavinia’s rape, indeed, she is not just retaliating against the person who tore his son from her, she is also rebelling against a wrong and corrupted system, to which she now belongs. Paradoxically, Lavinia’s death may be conceived as a form of sacrifice, since Tamora is trying in some way to end the cycle of violence begun with Alarbus’s murder. Unfortunately, this talionic form of revenge does not lead to the annihilation of violence, but rather it destabilises a even more precarious balance in the community.

Brutus’s behaviour, likewise, is highly debatable, as his decision to kill Caesar seems to hide a deeper feeling of personal frustration. Although he “know[s] no personal cause to spurn at him/ But for the general” (II.1.11-12), his burning desire for ambition sullies his idea of sacrifice. As I will demonstrate in the chapter, purity is a prerequisite for sacrifice, therefore, its lack contaminates the very essence of it. Girard makes a peculiar comparison between sacrifice and the process of decontamination in nuclear systems: if experts do not eliminate the radioactive waste they absorb, they are at risk of contamination. As the core of a nuclear reactor is useful to create energy, so the ‘purifying’ good violence may be essential to cure community from chaos and civil strife. However, the effects of the abuse of violence may be metaphorically as toxic as the radioactive waste produced by the combustion of uranium. It is at this point that sacrifice transforms into revenge, that is, at the very moment when individual passions, such as ambition, envy and anger pollute and corrode the sacred and pure ideal of sacrifice. As a matter of fact, although Caesar has failed in the fulfilment of his function, his murder cannot be justified, since the conspirators’ aims are not pure. Their
behaviour, which lays between crime and justice, is put into question by their will to kill. Caesar's murder will neither end tyranny nor restore a sort of civil order, it will rather mark the beginning of a new cycle of revenge.

After analysing the problem concerning the relationship between sacrifice and revenge, I will devote the third chapter to the study of the issue of blood and its analogies with both religious rituals and revenge murders. The image of Caesar's statue “spouting blood”, for instance, in which Brutus, Cassius and the other conspirators wash their hands is a clear example of a baptismal ritual. As Jack Heller points out, Baptism, like every ritual, is intended both to unify its participants and to distinguish them from others outside of the favored”. In contrast, in Titus Andronicus, the issue of blood has a slight different meaning, as it is mostly associated with the idea of pollution. This is particularly evident in Lavinia’s rape, whose contaminated chastity may be metaphorically compared to the infection of the blood by cachochymia, as explained by Catherine Belling. Lavinia's cacochymic body will be the unleashing motive of Titus's anger, which will be appeased only with her killing. Her death is, indeed, his desperate attempt to “clear” her from the humiliation she suffered: “Die, die Lavinia, and thy shame with thee,/ And with thy shame thy father's sorrow die.” (V.3.45-46) In Julius Caesar as well, blood has many controversial aspects. The act of bleeding is either a means of redemption and the emblem of the characters’ loss of self-control.

Critics have argued that both Julius Caesar and Titus Andronicus are evidence of Shakespeare's great interest in classical myths, as we can see from the various references to imperial institutions, places of ancient Rome, and legendary and

---


historical figures. The plays, indeed, create a sort of amalgam of classical narratives and characters. The story of Lavinia, for instance, derives from a series of classical myths, such as that of Lucretia, the ancient Roman matron violated by Tarquin, the king’s son; the story of Appius and Virginia, “[...] a young Roman woman who was sexually threatened by a powerful judge and killed by her father to prevent her rape”\(^9\) and Ovid’s myth of Philomela.

The characters I am going to study throughout my essay are basically, at the same time, insiders and outsiders of this world. The fact that they are multifaceted and diversified figures, creates an image of them which is not that of the conventional hero. Titus, for instance, embodies both the Roman stereotype, “[...] in his austere patriotism, his intolerance of dissent, his acute sense of personal and family honour, his traditional piety, and his ferocious commitment to patriarchal hierarchy”\(^10\), and the caring and protective father. His double identity is split between the figure of the 'Roman hero', so noble, brave and devoted to his country to “[...] sponsor human sacrifice and to turn his back on his own family in defence of the state”\(^11\), and that of 'the revenge hero', whose cold anger materialises after his daughter’s rape. These characters, whose human frailty clashes with their fictitious heroism, are vulnerable and psychologically complex figures, who are constantly fighting in order to delineate their identities.

I will conclude my dissertation with a focus on the body as the common denominator of both sacrifice and revenge. My aim will be that of demonstrating that the interaction between its members is the necessary condition for the health and life of the body, not only in relation to its physical aspect but also in terms of political structure. The political crisis which affects Rome may be metaphorically interpreted as a symbol of the disconnection between its components. The unity among the members is, indeed,


\(^10\) Ibid., p. 116

\(^11\) Hancock, Brecken Rose, 'Roman or Revenger? : The Definition and Distortion of masculine Identity in *Titus Andronicus*, *Early Modern Literary Studies*, 10, 1, 2004, p. 2
fundamental in order to preserve the harmony and stability of the body. In this last chapter, I will also analyse the body and its components as instruments of power and authority. By providing examples from the texts, I will demonstrate that powerlessness is an inevitable consequence of the disconnection of bodily parts. I will analyse them particularly in relation to their meaning and the significance in the text. On this point, I will pay careful attention to the issue of the ‘hand’, the most important instrument of all. I will consider it as both an external agent, a sign of power, and as a means of agreement. Its dual function, as both object and component of the body, represents its characteristic feature, since hand is “a liminal space between the object world [...] and [...] the world of interiority, intentions, and inventions-that of the self”12.

The last paragraph of this chapter will be devoted to the theme of cannibalism, specifically with reference to Titus Andronicus, and to the episode of omophagia represented in the scene in which Tamora eats the pie made with her sons’ flesh. I will treat this issue separately, as the final act of a process of degenerating violence, that is, as the climax of the play’s extreme vengeance. The cannibal debate, which so shockingly intervenes in the narration, plays a pivotal role in the ritual of spectacular violence and public displays. Its conflicting nature is based on the fact that it is at the same time in dialogue and in conflict with different positions. Some critics, indeed, as for instance Louise Noble13, have raised the issue of medicinal cannibalism as a cure for the body politic. According to Noble, the human body and its products are supposed to possess an extraordinary healing power. My concern in this last paragraph will be that of demonstrating how therapeutic cannibalism is represented in Titus Andronicus, specifically when applied to savage crimes and horrifying acts of revenge. I will question the way they are performed and the consequences brutal violence has not only in the characters’ lives, but also in the tragic epilogue of the play.

13 Noble, Louise, ’“And make two Pasties of your shameful Heads”: Medicinal Cannibalism and Healing the Body politic in Titus Andronicus, ELH, 70, 3, 2003
CHAPTER ONE
SACRIFICIAL RITUAL AND GRATUITOUS VIOLENCE

Fig. 1: “ἈΠΑΘΩΣ,” Claude Paradin, *The Heroicall Devises of M. Clavdius Paradin* (London, 1591), 111. From the Folger Shakespeare Library Collection.
CHAPTER ONE: SACRIFICIAL RITUAL AND GRATUITOUS VIOLENCE

Striking the audiences with shocking acts of violence and excessive cruelty was a prerequisite for a successful play in early modern England, and Titus Andronicus and Julius Caesar definitely seem to prove it. The way violence is treated in the two plays, both politically and in the characters’ relationships, mirrors in some way Elizabethan audiences’ fascination for public exhibitions of violence, including executions and sacrifices. It seems that violence’s popularity lies in its power of being at the same time repulsive and attractive. It is repulsive because society usually condemns any form of violence, especially if it is connected to crime, attractive because it arouses and satisfies the inner desire for violence everyone may have. Sacrifice, along with revenge, represents one of the several aspects of violence. There are many levels on which sacrifice may be analysed, including the political cause, religion and society. What I will try to discuss in this chapter, is at what level sacrifice is conceived in both Titus Andronicus and Julius Caesar, by analysing the causes and the effects that this act has on the events and on the characters’ lives. By focussing on the different examples of sacrifice we can find in the two plays, I will try to demonstrate that, despite the fact that sacrifice is sometimes a justified and necessary act, in both plays it is basically a means to achieve personal redemption and to atone for one’s faults.

The first tragedy I am going to consider is Titus Andronicus, a play probably written in 1593-1594 and first performed in 1594 at the Rose Theatre. It is Shakespeare’s first and bloodiest tragedy, in which political issues, such as the succession to the throne and loyalty, mingle with brutal and gratuitous violence, including rape, mutilation, murders and cannibalism. Titus Andronicus is usually classified as a revenge tragedy, in which the main character is a man racked with grief, because his family has been either raped or murdered, usually by an unlawful king, duke or emperor. However, it is the fact that justice is in the hands of the very person who committed the crime that spurs the protagonist to react against him and find a solution by himself. By struggling to obtain a kind of order, the protagonist of a revenge tragedy abandons the values upon
which he has relied until then, including his mental sanity\(^1\). It is in the last scenes that he finally realises that what he has been fighting for is unreachable, because his standards of justice do not match with the hierarchical society in which he lives. It is probably this sense of frustration that leads both Elizabethan and contemporary spectators to sympathise with the revenger’s condition, and to accept the barbarity with which violence is performed in *Titus Andronicus*. As Katherine Maus points out, whereas in other revenge tragedies characters are presented, at first, as loyal and diligent, in *Titus Andronicus* the protagonist demonstrates his ‘unruliness’ right from the beginning of the play\(^2\), when for instance Titus decides to kill Alarbus, regardless of Saturninus’s approval.

Unlike *Titus Andronicus*, where both events and characters are partly fictional, *Julius Caesar* celebrates a great historical figure. However, what distinguishes Shakespeare’s Caesar from the undisputed general extolled by Plutarch, is his human frailties and physical weaknesses. His supremacy and military skills remain in the background, and they do not contribute to the creation of his legendary myth. This Caesar is exaggeratedly ridiculous, both in his attempt to resemble a divinity and in his physical deficiencies. The role of the political leader here is played by Brutus, who paradoxically embodies all the features of Caesar’s historical character. He is at the same time a public figure, a husband, a loyal and devoted soldier and a military leader. Along with Brutus, Cassius as well is depicted as an honourable and virtuous man, who saved his master from death, by showing a great commitment to both his country and to the values in which he believes, such as freedom and social fairness. The genius and originality of the play lies in reinterpreting classical myths, by mixing and questioning themes and characters.

Written and first performed in 1599 at the new Globe Theatre, *Julius Caesar* is set in 44 BC, the year of Caesar’s death. Although it seems to focus more on political matters,

---

1 Maus, Eisaman, Katherine, *Titus Andronicus*, p. 115
2 Ibid.
such as the usurpation of power, corruption and political treachery, the play shares with *Titus* a common interest in the characters’ psychology, in their human yet ambiguous nature. In both plays, indeed, the characters are part of a violent power struggle, where their belief of republic and public service clashes with their very private interests, such as ambition, envy and revenge. This sort of contradiction between public good and private involvement is a common element of both plays, and it can be perceived roughly at any level, specifically in the characters and in the themes.

This is evident, for instance, in the way Caesar is portrayed in the play, that is, as both a great warrior, a Renaissance icon, but also as an arrogant and autocratic man, whose virtues are often transformed into vices. Caesar is not the only example of the ambiguous nature of the play. Mark Antony is likewise loyal, as we can notice in his total devotion to avenge Caesar’s murder, but at the same time he is also opportunistic, specifically during Caesar’s funeral, when he uses his leader’s will to provoke a riot. *Titus Andronicus* provides, as well, evidence of the different nuances of the characters’ psychology. Many characters in the play, from Titus to Tamora, embody both the figure of the victim and that of the executioner. It is hard to define, indeed, whether a character is a good or a bad one, avenger or revenger, as categories and values are often reinterpreted and disrupted. Titus’ mercy, for instance, clashes with the brutality with which he commits such atrocities, whereas Tamora is at the same time a pleading mother and a cold-blooded and monstrous revenger. Because of the incompatibility of the several aspects of the characters’ behaviours, the two plays demonstrate that opposites may sometimes meet, since man is a multifaceted being.

Along with characters, the two plays show a mutual concern also with the themes treated. Sacrifice is one of those issues which are present in both plays, but with a different meaning. It is conceived as both a means to preserve the good of society and an homage to God. However, while in *Julius Caesar* sacrifice is always associated with honour and with the country’s cause, in *Titus Andronicus*, it is part of a ritual, often degenerated, in which passive victims turn out to be bloody murderers, and
ceremonies turn into grotesque and ridicule reconstructions of a religious and socio-political ritualizing. The violence which characterizes the practice of sacrifice in *Julius Caesar* and *Titus Andronicus* is often unnecessary and exaggerated, caused by personal rivalries and grievances, rather than by a feeling of duty towards the country. Tragedies like *Julius Caesar* and *Titus Andronicus* consecrate and celebrate the cult of sacrifice as a justification and a means to explore the core of human nature. Unlike historical plays or other revenge tragedies, the two plays seem “[…] to magnetise […] [their] audiences to focus on the individual; indeed, the titles of Shakespeare’s tragedies all point to their protagonists”\(^3\), that is, either historical figures or characters who belong to the Roman world, whose ‘Roman-ness’ is put into question. Their behaviour does not correspond with the image of the Roman hero, that is, an upright person, praised for his/her incorruptibility and for the capacity to sacrifice “[…] private goods, such as marriage, friendship, sensual pleasure, and personal enrichment”\(^4\) for public service. In both *Titus Andronicus* and *Julius Caesar*, characters are in some way entrapped into a rigid cultural system, which sometimes limits their development as not only public figures but as private individuals as well.

Sacrifice becomes an inevitable consequence of the hero’s downfall, and a means to preserve both the system of values on which his/her society is based, and to save the community from the dangerous effects of political chaos. The frenzied attempt to restore order in both plays, is often in contradiction with the extreme complexity and rapid change of the characters. *Titus Andronicus* and *Julius Caesar* provide evidence of the fact that categories and classifications cannot be applied neither to characters nor to situations, because, as Katherine Maus points out, “[…] the same scene […] [may provide] a character with a variety of motives, permitting alternative descriptions of a


\(^4\) Maus, Eisaman, Katherine, *Julius Caesar*, p. 261
single action”⁵ and therefore different interpretations. It is the impossibility of distinguishing clearly good from evil, right from wrong, and sacrifice from gratuitous and undifferentiated thirst of violence, that makes the two plays so similar to each other, both in the analysis of the characters and in the themes.

Another common element between the two plays is the fact that the spectator or the reader is alienated from the characters’ tragedy. This is evident specifically in Titus Andronicus, where the distance between the audience and the character establishes a boundary between reality and fiction, a condition which explains the spectator’s hilarious reaction towards the abominable and monstrous situations the characters are involved in. The irony we find in both plays is caused by the absurdity of the events and the contradictions both in the characters’ minds and in their motivations. However, whereas in Julius Caesar irony is progressive and sympathetic, since we participate in the protagonists’ process of repentance, in Titus Andronicus it is dictated by the fact that we know that these situations are absurd and unrealistic, and therefore they are removed from our personal experience of violence.

⁵ Ibid., p. 262
1.1. The Cult of Sacrifice in Shakespeare's Rome

Although as contemporary audience we are apt to condemn murders, rapes and violent deaths as repulsive and despicable acts, *Julius Caesar* and *Titus Andronicus* anoint physical violence and butchery as part of a process of ritualizing. As Louise Geddes points out, the ceremony veils the brutality of the act, by turning violent murders into sacred rites. Sacrifice becomes in these two plays not only a means to eliminate evil from society, but an attempt to justify butchery as well. It was popular, continues Geddes, in Roman society to exalt sacrifice as a form of redemption. There was the conviction, indeed, that through a 'good' death an individual might atone for his faults by receiving God's forgiveness. Sacrificial practices were performed by communities “[...] to invoke supernatural forces - divine or demonic- to explain or subsidize their determinate social limitations”6, as for instance the creation of cultural categories and definitions.

In *Julius Caesar*, for instance, the idea of political order is basically founded on the artificial definition of ‘good’ and ‘bad’. According to this issue, the structure, or rather the form of government, which is considered to be ‘good’, that is democracy, must be preserved, while the ‘bad’ one, that is tyranny, has to be eliminated. The moral qualifiers on which this condition is based, argues Liebler, are “not only arguable but artificially constructed and thus radically limited”7. Both *Titus Andronicus* and *Julius Caesar* cling to the idea that the system on which the community is founded, is composed by a strict set of moral rules, including civic responsibility, discipline, self-control, devotion to the country, and the respect of social hierarchies, which cannot be overturned. What is at issue, however, is to determine not only who created such moral values, but also, and more specifically, for what purpose.

---

7 Ibid.
Sacrificial ritual, in some way, shows the same problem regarding its cultural redefinition. Although it may be conceived as a ‘good’ act, sometimes even necessary for the general good, its founding motives are often the result of competing interests. Sacrifice, like political order, is part of a set of social constructions, created by men for the community. Since communities, explains Liebler, “[...] tend collectively to be conservative in regard to their social structures and customs”\(^8\), they are apt to accept sacrifice as a conventional value. In both *Titus Andronicus* and *Julius Caesar*, this artificial system collapses at the very moment when this set of beliefs are in some way altered. The threat of change, which in *Julius Caesar* is represented by the advent of tyranny, and in *Titus Andronicus* by Tamora’s transformation from prisoner to queen, is at the basis of the community’s crisis. One of the effects of the catastrophe is precisely that of upsetting the concept of hierarchy, both in terms of politics and religion. Ritual, indeed, as a religious practice,

> is inherently hierarchical, orderly, in both the shape of its action and in its enactment, by a designated performer. Like the heroic subject, hierarchy is therefore both the cause and the cure of conflict.\(^9\)

The fact that in both plays sacrificial ritual is performed by a person, or a group of people clashes with the fundamental aspect of sacrifice, that is unanimity. By being a collective rite, indeed, sacrifice’s aim is basically that of strengthening the cohesion within the community and its members, since it requires a general agreement. Both plays, however, begin with a disruption of the ideal of unanimity. In *Titus Andronicus*, for instance, Titus’s decision to kill Alarbus is sudden and irrevocable, it is not, therefore, the result of a collective meditation. In *Julius Caesar* rituals, which are the manifestation of the community’s bond, are inverted and reinterpreted, thus devoted to the glorification of a single person, that is, Caesar, as for instance, in the celebration

---

\(^8\) Ibid., p. 23
\(^9\) Ibid., p. 22
of the *Lupercalia*.

Sacrifice, in some way, emphasises these contradictions and ambiguities, by demonstrating the instability of the social structure. The victim, explains Liebler, paradoxically reflects his/her own world, and therefore its limits\(^{10}\). He/She is at the same time the cure and the illness of the community. In *Violence and the Sacred*, René Girard underlines the central role of the victim, by suggesting that a necessary condition for the successful performance of sacrifice is that the victim has to be part of a group\(^{11}\). He/She has to be, thus, at the same time an insider and an outsider of the community. The more the victim is hated among the members, the more the sacrifice will be barbarous. Alarbus, for instance, is an example of passive victim, who does not belong to the Roman community. His Otherness is a fundamental factor, which determinates his exclusion from society and justifies both the act of sacrifice and the gratuitous violence with which this sacrifice is performed. The ritual, therefore, can be consumed inside the city’s borders because it represents a threat for the community’s balance.

According to Girard, the aim of the ritual is that of transforming the victim into a sort of scapegoat, that is, someone to blame for all the catastrophes, the misfortunes and the tensions of society\(^{12}\). Caesar, like Alarbus, is represented as the emblem for Rome’s crisis. He is a tragic hero,

> […] constructed by and at the same time constructing […] [his] communit[y]. Because [he] constitute[s] the site of all that the community stands for, including its conflicts and crises, […] [he] must be removed, taking, if only temporarily, those conflicts and crises with […] [him].\(^{13}\)

---

\(^{10}\) Ibid., p. 24

\(^{11}\) Girard, René, *La Violenza e il Sacro*, Adelphi, Milano, 2003, p. 361

\(^{12}\) Ibid., p. 359

Once the community identifies the victim as the scapegoat, and approves of the sacrifice as a lawful act, the violence it stirs up will be disastrous. The individual who embodies the scapegoat, may be metaphorically compared to an ill man or a criminal who is likely to spread his illness or the bad violence\textsuperscript{14}, Girard explains, and therefore has to be eliminated. The ritual, concludes Girard, will be concluded when the sacrificers, that is, those who are in charge of saving the community, will avoid contagion. Unfortunately, as we will see, Brutus and Cassius's attempt to eliminate what Caesar represents will turn into sheer bloodshed, and good purposes into unjustified violence. In \textit{Titus Andronicus}, likewise, the effects of violence will be catastrophic. Although Chiron and Demetrius's sacrifices would bring to an end the cycle of violence started with Alarbus's murder, characters will pay for both their faults and human weaknesses with death. In both plays, sacrifice loses its feature of votive act, and turns into a form of atonement, through which men desperately hope to eradicate their sins. All their efforts, however, are useless, as characters are all guilty in some way, that is, they are at the same time victims and executioners of their own tragic destiny.

\textbf{1.1.1 Senseless and silenced Deaths: Alarbus's, Mutius's and Bassianus's Sacrifices}

In \textit{Titus Andronicus} the theme of sacrifice is present right from the beginning of the play, and is depicted as a form of spectacular rite, in which violence intervenes with no limitations. One of the first examples of sacrificial ritual is in Act 1 scene 1 when Titus, once returned to Rome, after ten years of wars with the Goths, is preparing Rome for Alarbus's sacrifice. Unlike Caesar, whose death is conceived as a political redemption, Alarbus is slaughtered because he represents the object of Titus's anger. He is directly responsible for his mother's and his country's faults, and although he is 'the proudest

\textsuperscript{14} Girard, René, \textit{La Violenza e il Sacro}, Adelphi, Milano, 2003, pp. 366-367
prisoner of the Goths’, he has to pay for what he represents. His condemnation, argues Jessica Lugo, begins before the first act\textsuperscript{15}, specifically after the end of the war with the Goths. Alarbus embodies not only his people but also their sins and crimes, including the murder of Titus’s twenty-one sons. His death is senseless, explains Titus to Tamora, but at the same time necessary to appease Rome’s desire for justice:

Patient yourself, madam, and pardon me.
These are their brethren whom your Goths beheld
Alive and dead, and for their brethren slain
Religiously they ask a sacrifice.
To this your son is marked, and die he must
T’appease their groaning shadows that are gone. (I.1.121-126)

This archaic ritual, continues Lugo, condemned him not for a crime he committed, but for his original sin, that is, that of being a Goth\textsuperscript{16}. He is a mute presence in the play, indeed, it is his mother, Tamora, who speaks for him and asks for Titus’s mercy. Along with Mutius and Bassianus, Alarbus is one of the silenced victims of the drama, whose death means nothing but it is simply the consequence of random and gratuitous violence.

The idea of suffering is strictly connected with Alarbus’s sacrifice. His grief, however, is not shown, but suffocated by Titus’s degenerated anger and desire to avenge his sons’ deaths. By suffering, Alarbus metaphorically and physically atones for his country’s faults, but his death, unfortunately, does not represent the end of all sorrows. In Act 1 scene 1, there is a clear contradiction between the idea of torturing and the peaceful and harmonious image of death, originated by the burial rite. Titus’s sons lie dead in their tombs, but cannot sleep in peace because their virtue and nobility have


\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
been sullied by their ghastly deaths. It is only by sacrificing Alarbus, who represents the cause of this humiliation, that these deaths may be redeemed. His sacrifice is claimed by the spirits of their same bodies, who are impatiently waiting for the eternal rest. The dismemberment of Alarbus’s body, whose limbs are ‘hewed’ and ‘lopped’, is a fundamental aspect of their burial rite, as his suffering sanctifies, in some way, the performance of the act. Unlike Julius Caesar, where torture and agony spare its victims, in Titus Andronicus the characters’ satisfaction raises with the level of suffering of their victims. The more sorrowful is their deaths, the more it appeases the desire for retaliation. The pleasure provided by the victims' killing and their suffering, as for instance with Lavinia's rape, raises consequently the level of brutality of the following murders, through an escalation of savagery.

Although in Titus Andronicus characters are praised for being pious, particularly in the first act, mercy seems to be more a value originated by social status, than by noble-mindedness. In the case of Alarbus, indeed, nobody questions whether Titus’s decision to kill him is lawful or criminal, since Tamora’s pleadings are ignored. In this scene (I.1) she loses the role of the ruler, by playing that of a mother pleading for her son’s life.

Tamora first appeals for Titus’s fatherhood,

And if thy sons were ever dear to thee,
O, think my son to be as dear to me! (I.1.107-108)

and then for fairness. She compares his son's dedication to his country’s cause to that of the Romans who died in the war,

But must my sons be slaughtered in the streets
For valiant doings in their country’s cause? (I.1.112-113)

Titus’s cold reaction towards Tamora’s pleadings confirms the fact that his decision to kill Alarbus is based not on a lawful and justified motivation, but rather on a sheer
desire for revenge. The image of the compassionate Titus of the beginning contradicts his behaviour of revenger. Hancock argues that this ambiguity is established by the collision of two sets of values\textsuperscript{17}, that is, pride and piety. In performing Alarbus’s sacrifice, Titus is blinded by his idea of morality, which “make[s] him incapable of displaying, more human qualities”\textsuperscript{18}. His unpleasant behaviour, explains Hancock, is probably due to the ideal image the empire wants to create of the perfect Roman hero.

It is important to underline, indeed, that Titus is a man of war, who has been away from his country, that is, from civilised society for a long time, and his sense of justice reflects, in some way, the military code he follows. The violence he commits during Alarbus’s sacrifice is, like in Mutius’s murder, modelled on a specific conduct, which identifies the enemy with the person who threatens and against whom you fight, and therefore he has to be destroyed.

The only element of sacredness which surrounds Alarbus's sacrifice is represented by fire, which burns not Alarbus's corpse, but his 'entrails'. His dismembered body is used as wood to set the fire, which will sanctify the burial ritual of Titus's sons. By approving the murder of Alarbus, Titus, his sons and the whole community, break the boundary between justice and crime, by converting their honour and virtue into sheer thirst for revenge. Whether Titus and his sons are spurred by personal revenge or by an honourable sense of fairness is not clear, since “if Roman heroes place state before family, revenge heroes place personal and familial concerns above all others”\textsuperscript{19}. Although they are apparently respectable men who abide by the law, by slaughtering Alarbus, their behaviour is equal to that of any of the cruel and barbarous Goths. Everyone is accessory to the slaughter, including Titus, whose image of sacrificer is converted into that of a ruthless butcher and the sacrifice into the initial act of an

\textsuperscript{17} Hancock, Brecken Rose, ‘Roman or Revenger? : The Definition and Distortion of masculine Identity in Titus Andronicus, Early Modern Literary Studies, 10, 1, 2004, p. 4

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid. p. 2
endless cycle of violence, which will unfortunately add other victims.

Mutius, along with Alarbus, is another example of meaningless deaths in the play, that is, passive victims who unluckily face Titus’s doubtful sense of honour. Mutius fights for Lavinia’s freedom, and by disobeying his father he commits an act of treachery, which has to be punished. Therefore, Titus’s killing of his son cannot be considered only as a sacrifice to the country’s honour, but also as a personal revenge action, against an unruly son. Titus, argues Hancock, represents in some way the memory of an institutionalised and nostalgic past, which is still anchored to the image of undisputed splendour and grandeur of ancient Rome. Mutius, by reacting against his father’s decision to separate Lavinia from Bassianus, metaphorically represents the future. Interestingly, although the origins of his name are various, they tend to confirm the idea of changing. According to Hancock, the name probably recalls that of Mutius Scaevola, a Roman hero who bravely saved Rome during the war with the Etruscans and in order to demonstrate his valour burnt off his hand. There are many other hypotheses, however, that link Mutius with words such as ‘muteness’, because of Mutius’s absence in the play, ‘mutilation’, one of the main themes of the drama and ‘mutiny’, the reason for Titus’s revenge. Hancock also suggests that it is likely that the name Mutius may also have Latin origins, the name may refer indeed to ‘mutare’, that is ‘to change’. His killing represents both the uncertainty of Rome’s future, and the beginning of Titus’s degenerating process, which will threaten all his certainties and redefine both his feelings for the state and for the family.

Bassianus’s sacrifice is silently performed, it represents a kind of demonstration of Chiron and Demetrius’s love and devotion towards their mother:

DEMETRIUS This is a witness that I am thy son

CHIRON And this for me, struck home to show my strength. (II.3.116-117)

---

20 Ibid., p. 3
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
His murder does not deal with honour, it is just a means of obtaining something. For Tamora it represents both a test to prove his sons’ loyalty and blind obedience, and a personal revenge towards Lavinia, who first refused to marry Saturninus and then denies his sons’ love. Although as contemporary audience we may understand Bassianus’s slaughter as an unjustified and dishonourable act and judge Chiron and Demetrius as two barbarous butchers, it is important to underline the fact that Bassianus, as almost all the characters in the play, is not a passive and innocent victim. He shows no regret neither towards Saturninus, when he claims his love for Lavinia: “Lord Titus, by your leave, this maid is mine”(I.1.276), nor towards Tamora, when her son is wrathfully killed by Titus and his sons. As Tempera points out, Bassianus combines both positive and negative traits23, his honour and valour, indeed, often clash with his selfish desire to achieve personal happiness. This ambivalent aspect of his behaviour reflects, metaphorically, the desire of the characters to upset the social structure and the apparent order on which it is founded. Bassanius on the one hand appears to be completely devoted to Titus and his country’s cause, on the other he is depicted as impulsive and careless. His short life is the sign of a youth that has been cut short, a man who did not have the opportunity to achieve maturity, necessary to cope with the cruel and deceitful society depicted in the play.

23 Tempera, Mariangela, Feasting with Centaurs: Titus Andronicus from Stage to Text, Clueb, Bologna, 1999, p. 195
1.2 Purifying Rituals and collective Agreement

The power of sacrifice is based not only on its exemplarity, but also on the fact that the violence implied is always justified. However, it is through ritual that sacrifice becomes a solemn act, which can be re-enacted endlessly. The repeatability, which characterises rituals, is typical of celebrations, as Naomi Lieber has pointed out. Originally the word 'ritual' referred to 'festive', from the Latin festum, which was applied not only to entertainment, but more generally to indicate a communal activity. In its early use, continues Liebler, the word 'feast' indicated a form of ritual, specifically the sacrificial ritual, a celebratory and solemn act which consisted of the killing of a victim, either animal or human. Rituals, along with myth and folklore, are part of the community's heritage, and therefore have to be preserved. They represent both past and tradition, essential to re-establish or to reinforce the familiar, religious and social order. The tragic and intense aspect of such practices, especially because of the hard trials concerned, in some way fortifies the image of the person who is performing that ritual. Brutus, for instance, by joining the conspiracy against Caesar takes part into a sort of ritual, by exposing himself to violence. Like a healer, he is aware of the danger he is dealing with by killing his leader. He actually knows that, although Caesar's death is meant to purge Rome from tyranny, he is acting against his principles of honour and duty to his country. It is for this reason that his behaviour is often ambiguous and hesitant:

O that we then could come by Caesar's spirit,
And not dismember Caesar! But, alas,
Caesar must bleed for it. And, gentle friends,
Let's kill him boldly, but not wrathfully (II.1.169-172)

---

Indeed, it is his good faith and true purposes that motivate his decision. They distinguish, in some way, his belief in political and social fairness from the sheer envy of his comrades. Rituals, such as sacrifice, are important because they exalt the universality of the act, by stimulating the unity and brotherhood among people. Such practices, argues Liebler, “[…] reminded people that they lived in a universe larger than individual selves, local events, and personal satisfactions”\(^\text{25}\), by specifying that the person who is acting is someone who cares about the good of society.

Because of their unanimous consent, rituals are also powerful weapons to gather collective agreement. The messages they evoke, such as freedom, democracy and harmony, are justified and strengthened by the ceremonial function and by the great theatrical and artificial effect they create. Although Caesar's murder is measured in its performing, the impact it has is both powerful and shocking. It is powerful because, in order to be accepted, it requires belief, or rather conviction, which is necessary to transform the act into a communal spectacle, in which agents and auditors interact. It is also shocking because it represents a subversion and a clear denial of Caesar’s authority. By murdering their leader, the conspirators not only rebel against the idea of servitude provided by Caesar’s tyrannical power; they also foster republican equality, which exalts both the right of the Romans to be free and equal to each other, and a reinterpretation of values such as the sacrifice of personal interests for the general good.

Since rituals are basically acts of faith, it is fundamental that the motivations for the act are carefully explained and shared. It is the people who hold the balance, and with whom Brutus and Cassius have to clarify their behaviours. The problem concerning Caesar’s death is that he is adored among his people, specifically because he is not a king, but a soldier and a man who has devoted his entire life to his country’s cause. With Caesar’s sacrifice, Brutus and Cassius aim to convince their fellow citizens of the

\(^{25}\) Ibid., p. 53
honesty of the act. They cling to the idea that, Caesar, as a patrician, has betrayed his noblemen by seizing absolute power. However, if on the one hand people seem to be fascinated by the idea of republic fostered by the conspirators, on the other they are still bound to Caesar's image. Indeed, during his funeral, the plebeians do not immediately accuse Brutus and the other conspirators of the terrible crime. What they are claiming is an explanation for what the conspirators have done. Unlike coronation ceremonies, Caesar's death represents an inverse rite, since it deconstructs those cultural values, such as loyalty and devotion to the king, in which people believe. Such a ritual questions values, political relationships and the lawfulness of kingship, undermines the stability and the harmony of society, by reevaluating the foundations on which it is created.

1.2.1 The Lupercalia and Caesar's Sacrifice: from sacred to profane Rituals

The importance collective rituals have in both Julius Caesar and Titus Andronicus, including burial, initiation rites and sacrifice, is fundamental, as they fortify the unity among the members of the community. The Lupercalia, for instance, the feast that inaugurates Julius Caesar, represents symbolically the prelude of Caesar's death. The feast of the Lupercal was a Roman celebration, which was usually observed on 13-15 February, a period corresponding in the Christian calendar to Mardi Gras. According to Plutarch, "the Lupercalia were the oldest and most sacred rites of purgation and fertility in the ancient Roman calendar [...]"26, celebrated in mid February, during what they were called 'the purging days'. The feast coincided with the end of the winter, the period where the wolves, usually hungry, attacked the flocks. The shepherds used to pray to the gods to protect and save their livestock from the massacre. In the Roman calendar, the celebration, which occurred in mid February, corresponded to the end of the year, and it was usually a day of holiday. In Julius Caesar, however, the Lupercalia

26 Ibid., p. 90
acquires a different meaning, since it celebrates Caesar's victory over Pompey, which occurred in October. The cultural redefinition and transformation of this ancient religious and sacred celebration into the more profane feast for the triumph and glory of Caesar, raises a sort of ambiguity about the religious and pure significance of this ritual.

According to Ovid, the ritual of the *Lupercalia* included also the Feast of Quirinus, a celebration devoted to Romulus, one of the kings of Rome, which was also called the Feast of the Fools\(^{27}\). The legend narrates that this feast was invented because of a period of sterility affecting Rome, during Romulus’s reign. During this celebration, people used to sacrifice a goat, whose skin was employed in a ritual practice where women had to be tortured. Their prolonged suffering, conceived as a sort of punishment for their condition of sterility, was said to atone their guilt and to have miraculous effects on their fertility. Based on this legend, in the Roman *Lupercalia* the two celebrants, the *Luperci Fabiani* and *Quintiliani* used to “[...] ran naked through Rome, striking those they met with goatskin thongs”\(^{28}\), as an act of good omen. As Liebler points out, in 44 BC Caesar, to celebrate his image, added another celebrant, called *Luperci Iulii*, a position occupied by Antony, one of the most reliable and loyal of his soldiers\(^{29}\). It is Antony, indeed, the one who, on the day of the celebration of the Lupercal, offers the crown to Caesar, which is then refused by the same leader.

The play evokes these historical references, obtained by both Ovid and Plutarch’s biographies and by Roman legends. Shakespeare’s Caesar, indeed, has many affinities with the historical general, specifically because of the fame he has among his people. The feast of the Lupercal, which is transformed from a religious and sacred rite into a profane and personalised celebration, is therefore devoted exclusively to the

\(^{27}\) Ibid., p. 95

\(^{28}\) Maus, Eisaman, Katherine, *Julius Caesar*, p. 267

glorification of Caesar’s person as absolute ruler. The ambiguity of the ritual reflects in some way the period of confusion and loss of identity that determined Caesar’s last days. This is evident even in the first lines of the play, when the people abandon their professions, and celebrate Caesar’s triumph over Pompey:

COBBLER [...] But indeed, sir, we make holiday to see Caesar, and
to rejoice in his triumph.
MURELLUS Wherefore rejoice? What conquests brings he home?
What tributaries follow he to Rome,
To grace in captive bonds his chariot wheels? (I.1.29-33)

While in Roman tradition this kind of festive rite was usually devoted to defeated foreign enemies, in the play it is used only as a means to sanctify Caesar’s image and to humiliate his political adversaries. This sort of perversion of the ritual clashes with Brutus’s conservative observance of Roman traditional values, such as freedom, democracy and loyalty. The uncertainty and the anxiety that characterise the play paradoxically create the condition through which the conspiracy’s plan may be justified.

Brutus’s design to eliminate Caesar in some way mirrors this ambivalent situation. By exhorting his brothers to act as sacrificers and not as 'butchers', he aims to transform a criminal deed into a religious practice, since for Brutus politics and religion are strictly connected. The conspirators imagine themselves as the defenders of the traditional and ethical conception of the republic, by repudiating the idea of absolute power. Caesar’s murder, like the Lupercalia, represents the beginning of a process of political and social renewal, something which is inevitable and historically preordained by a kind of cosmic order. Brutus and the other conspirators cannot accept tyranny since it would mean upsetting the natural order of things, established by a strict social structure:

CASSIUS Why birds and beasts from quality and kind
Why old men, fools, and children calculate
Why all these things change from their ordinance,
Their natures, and preformed faculties,
To monstrous quality [...] (I.3.64-68)

By killing Caesar, Brutus and his brothers are denying all the principles on which Caesar's empire is based, that is, absolutism, individual primacy and monarchy. It is for this reason that his sacrifice is inevitable, since, like the goat which is used in the Lupercalia to prevent sterility, Caesar has to be sacrificed in order to heal Rome from its crisis. Brutus's good purposes, however, are too idealistic and clouded by his companions' grudges and envy against Caesar. His murder, therefore, will turn out to be only a bloody and terrible crime, committed by treacherous and ungrateful servants. Through sacrifice, Rome in some way sanctifies the image of Caesar, by erasing his tarnished reputation. The power Rome is offering is too tempting for the mighty and glorious Caesar, who has forged his image of great and invincible general in the battle fields. His ambition prevails over his common sense, by making him blind even towards the soothsayer's predictions, Calpurnia's prophetic dream and Artemidorus's letter. However, it is death that redeems Caesar's sins and helps to create his myth, since by being murdered he becomes a victim of Brutus's conspiracy. What the audience and the mob remember of the 'old' Caesar, that is, his arrogance and overbearing manner, is substituted by the new image of martyr, created by his assassination. Brutus, argues Ribner, fails at the very moment when he joins the enterprise, since this implies a clash between his ideals and his real behaviour. The conspirators' aim to destroy tyranny does not only fail because by killing Caesar they start the process of martyrdom, but also because they activate an endless cycle of violence which will lead to their defeat.

30 Ribner, Irving, 'Political Issues in Julius Caesar, JEPG, 56, 1957, p. 18
1.2.2 Erasing Guilt through Death: Chiron and Demetrius’ s Sacrifice

As we have shown so far, sacrifice is conceived on the one hand as a way to restore a sort of peaceful order in the community, as is the case of Julius Caesar, but on the other as a means to purify a character's reputation. In Titus Andronicus, interestingly, sacrifice represents one of the several aspects of revenge, it is indeed a kind of legitimised vendetta, where the use of violence is fully justified. In the play, justice and revenge are clearly interrelated, as if one were a synonym for the other. The characters' distorted sense of justice is often overwhelmed by their personal desire to avenge a wrong they have directly or indirectly suffered. In Act 4 scene 3, for instance, Titus is asking Publius and Sempronius to intercede with Pluto, in order to obtain justice:

Then, when you come to Pluto’s region,
I pray you deliver him this petition.
Tell him it is for justice and for aid,
And that it comes from old Andronicus,
Shaken with sorrows in ungrateful Rome (IV.3.13-17)

We do not actually know, however, whether Titus's petition to the gods is 'for justice' or for sheer revenge. The ambivalence is even clearer few lines down, when Titus, upset by the treacherous behaviour Rome has reserved him, is strenuously defending his right to avenge his daughter's rape:

And sith there's no justice in earth nor hell,
We will solicit heaven and move the gods
To send down Justice for to wreak our wrongs (IV.3.50-53)

The use of the capital letter is not a coincidence, and in some way it confirms the ambiguity of the issue. Whereas in Julius Caesar justice is a means to restore the balance between wrong and right, between good and evil, here it is conceived as a form of
punishment, in other words, a legitimised way to 'equally' administer the same suffering to the offender, so that the crime that has been committed cannot be re-enacted. However, the characters' lack of pity and their belief in a sort of do-it-yourself justice is supported by the fact that their behaviour is always the consequence of a previous act of violence, in which they are directly or indirectly involved. Their sense of fairness is in some way 'personalised', it is indeed above any judicial system or law.

The absence of an external and unbiased entity questions the concept of justice, which corresponds, in the characters' experience, to revenge. The grudge the characters nurse, as happens between Titus's and Tamora's sons, prevails over the awareness that what they are doing may be not strictly lawful. The tragic end of the play proves that they are all guilty, and that the only way for redemption lies first in the acceptance of one's faults and then in the ability to forgive.

The fact that sacrifice and revenge are part of a distorted sense of justice proves that the characters are directly responsible for their tragic destiny. Chiron and Demetrius's sacrifice, for instance, is strictly connected with Lavinia's rape: it is indeed its consequence. As Liebler argues, 'the baking and serving of Chiron and Demetrius is a fitting response to Lavinia's rape and mutilation. Tamora is literally made to swallow the agents of the grotesque violations she has engineered.'

It is as if through sacrifice Titus felt repaid of the humiliation he and his daughter have suffered. The violence and cruelty he uses to kill Chiron and Demetrius mirrors, in some way, Lavinia's suffering. Their murder is not only a punishment for the terrible crime they committed, it is also Titus's personal revenge against Tamora, who mocks him by disguising as Revenge, in Act 5 scene 2. Whereas Alarbus's sacrifice is fully performed, here the ritual process is dismantled, since Titus perversely reserves the final and most grisly part of it, that is, the eating of his victims, to the person that has generated them. There is a clear difference between Alarbus and Mutius's sacrifice and that of Chiron and Mutius.

---

Demetrius: while in the first case the victims are conceived as 'aliens', that is, as enemies who threaten the harmony of the community, and therefore their sacrifice is a legitimate request, in the second case Chiron and Demetrius are part of that community. By marrying Saturninus, Tamora metaphorically participates in a kind of rite of initiation, which enables her and her sons to be accepted as 'selves' and not as 'others'. Chiron and Demetrius's sacrifice is therefore not a legitimate act but an horrific and perverse crime, compared to any other homicide, of which Rome is guilty.

Although Titus is famous for his virtue and for being pious, throughout the play he definitively contradicts himself, by refusing first Mutius's burial and in the last act by transforming Chiron and Demetrius's sacrifice into both a bloodshed and a motivation for personal revenge. When performing the ritual, Titus seems to re-enact Lavinia's rape, as we can see by the use of the knife, with which Lavinia's hands are cut off. Through this instrument, in some way, Titus wants to remember her sexual assault, and by involving his daughter in the ritual, he transforms her from passive victim into an avenging slaughterer. Although in Act 3 scene 2 Titus seems to re-establish a sort of father-daughter relationship, by both interpreting 'all her martyred signs' and by trying to understand her feelings, when performing Chiron and Demetrius's sacrifice he again takes control over her. This ritual represents not only a claim towards the offence against his family, but also his personal redemption. He finally abandons his merciful and loyal appearance, to reveal his cruel and vindictive nature. Like Lavinia, Tamora's sons are reduced to slavery, by being bound and gagged. They can hear their faults but not answer to them: “Sirs, stop their mouths. Let them not speak to me,/ But let them hear what fearful words I utter.” (V.2.166-167)

They are powerless and totally dependent on Titus's pity, and this condition of inferiority gruesomely feeds his desire for revenge. There are several common elements that may be compared in the two rituals, as for instance the basin. However, whereas in Act 2 scene 3 the idea of cleaning hands has a purifying meaning, in the scene of Chiron and Demetrius’ s sacrifice the basin is used as a receptacle to contain the 'guilty blood', which has infected Lavinia's body. Interestingly, the cord with which
Chiron and Demetrius are bound, is used both during Lavina’s rape, as a tool of submission, and in Act 2 scene 4, after the assault, as an invitation to suicide. In the scene of the killing of Lavinia’s rapists, Titus not only wants to re-enact the violence his daughter suffered, he also aims to inflict on the two brothers the same humiliation, by first ‘stopping their mouths’ and then by preventing them to answer the rhetorical question ‘What would you say if I should let you speak?’, which is indeed asked and answered by the same Titus.

Like Lavinia’s, Chiron and Demetrius’s muteness is complex, since it is strictly connected with powerlessness. Tongue and mouth are, indeed, powerful instruments that would undermine the play’s order, and therefore they must be silenced. Silence implies submission and acceptance of authority, which is embodied by Titus. Because they are accused of being ‘villains’ and ‘inhuman traitors’, Chiron and Demetrius are deprived of any right, and this is why Titus’s vengeance appears to the audience as a lawful act, a repayment for such a shame. What triggers his anger is not just the fact that his daughter has been tortured, but, the fact that her ‘spotless chastity’ has been violated. Unlike Lavinia’s rape, Chiron and Demetrius’s sacrifice does not leave violence to the audience’s imagination. Whereas in Act 2 scene 4 we are directly projected towards the consequences of the crime, in Act 5 scene 2 ritual has a significant role, since it is part of the process of revenge. The scene is, indeed, described in detail, from the basin which will contain the traitors’ blood, to the grisly cooking plan, in which Titus turns cook by grinding their bones to dust, and by making with their blood and heads two pasties. Titus’s transformation from loyal and devoted servant to vengeful and cruel butcher has come to its climax, in a scene that through its exaggerated absurdity, which sometimes appears to be even comic, strikingly reveals the core of the play, that is, that of the overturning of values such as honour, hierarchy and social superiority.
1.3 The sacrificial Victim: the Core of conflicting Feelings. The Case of Caesar and Lavinia

Before questioning whether Caesar is the potential victim of a fit of homicidal madness or the effect of a socio-political crisis, it is important to analyse the motivations and the feelings that have spurred this act. Caesar is sacrificed because he represents a threat for both Rome’s stability and harmony. His tyrannical power clashes with the idea of republic, which establishes the importance of values such as fairness, unity and power-sharing. What the conspiracy aims to oppose, however, is not only the fear for a despotic government; it is also fighting against what Caesar embodies, that is a self-centred and arrogant man, a social climber, who is exploiting his role of leader for personal ambition. As Coppélia Kahn points out, the republican ideology evoked in the play, is incompatible with the “[...] highly competitive nature of the Roman ruling elite”\(^\text{32}\), which fosters rivalry and personal success. Although Brutus and his fellows define themselves as the defenders of the republican ideal, they do not realize that this ideal has already vanished. Their sense of duty, that is, to preserve the ‘general good’, is hidden by what Kahn identifies as a pure feeling of emulation\(^\text{33}\). To emulate does not simply mean to imitate, it also suggests the intention to be equal, or rather, to be better than something or someone. This feeling is generated by both a sense of frustration and envy towards an individual or an object, and a mix of contrasting feelings such as love and hate. Brutus’s devotion towards Caesar, indeed, does not explain his decision to assassinate him. The conflicting nature of his behaviour, mirrors in some way that of the other conspirators, whose sense of brotherhood is in contradiction with the desire to emulate their leader. Caesar’s death represents a kind of competition, a way for Brutus, Cassius and their fellows to demonstrate their dominance.


\(^{33}\) Ibid., p. 90
The two characters’ reactions towards the idea of the conspiracy, however, are quite different. Brutus is presented right from the beginning of the play as the most noble of all the Romans, and the protector of the republican ideals. He is committed to the fulfilment of the conspiracy’s cause, since he believes in the necessity to free Rome from tyrannical power. He strenuously defends the concept of unity and brotherhood among his fellows and the whole community, by “[...] rejecting individual oaths to rely on their internalised, collective commitment to the republic.”\textsuperscript{34} He insists on the exemplarity of Caesar’s sacrifice, that is, that of being at the same time a necessary and justified act. Although Brutus is depicted throughout \textit{Julius Caesar} as an upright person, his good purposes are often hidden behind his inner desire to emulate Caesar, and to compete with his brothers. Cassius, like a mirror, reflects Brutus’s afflictions, by revealing his masculine identity. The passions of which Brutus is ‘vexed’ are, indeed, not only jealousy and envy towards Caesar, but also a pure desire to be like his leader. Cassius, by flattering Brutus for his loyalty and ‘worthiness’, in some way, awakens his brother’s most private feelings. Despite his mistrust towards Cassius, Brutus is aware of the danger Caesar’s coronation would imply. He is torn between his love for Caesar and his commitment to the republican cause, but also between his public figure and his private interests.

While Brutus naively believes that Caesar’s death will end the chaos inflicted by the same Caesar, Cassius’s motivations, instead, seem meaner, yet realistic. Cassius, as Myron Taylor points out, is an Epicurean, that is, a man who does not believe in divine providence, but in the fact that man is the maker of his own destiny. His atheistic and materialist behaviour is usually associated, in Shakespeare’s plays, with that of the villain, explains Taylor.\textsuperscript{35} Cassius, indeed, is presented right from the beginning, as a suspicious and vile character, who makes mischief among his fellows. As Caesar

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., p. 95

\textsuperscript{35} Taylor, Marion, ‘Shakespeare’s \textit{Julius Caesar} and the Irony of History’, \textit{Shakespeare Quarterly}, 24, 1973, p. 301
he is a great observer, and he looks
Quite through the deeds of men. He loves no plays,
[...]; he hears no music.
Seldom he smiles [...] (1.2.202-206)

Such men, laments the Roman general, are dangerous since they are able to delve into human feelings by revealing our true self. Brutus envies Caesar because of the means with which he has achieved his power. Unlike Brutus, his motivations are based on Caesar’s personal faults, including ambition, selfishness, and thirst of power. Cassius constructs his logic on the fact that Caesar is only a man, equal to the others, who fulfilled his plan to be master of the world thanks to the aid and the cooperation of other men like him.

Cassius saved Caesar more than once, as he explains in Act 1 scene 2, by demonstrating his loyalty and masculinity. The story he tells Brutus regarding an episode during the Spanish campaign, however, is presented as a way to denigrate Caesar, that is, to highlight his frailties and human weaknesses. Brutus is fascinated by Cassius’s reasoning, and it is for this reason that he is so easily persuaded by his plan to kill his leader. Cassius spurs Brutus’s vanity, by showing that since Brutus is a man as equal as Caesar, he has the same right to be a ruler, even to be a better one:

[...] what should be in that 'Caesar'?
Why should that name be sounded more than yours?
Write them together: yours is as fair a name.
Sound them: it doth become the mouth as well.

---

Weigh them: it is as heavy. Conjure with’ēm:

‘Brutus’ will start a spirit as soon as ‘Caesar’ (I.2.143-148)

Cassius’s words are so persuasive that Brutus cannot ignore them. He clings to the idea of mortality, by destructing the sacred and inviolate image of Caesar. Cassius’s motivations are rational and based on the fact that since destiny is not responsible for our mistakes, it is only man that can judge whether another has failed. There is a clear difference between Cassius and Brutus’s ideals, and the play constantly represents this clash. As long as Brutus sees himself through Cassius’s eyes his determination keeps strong; it is when he faces his wife Portia that all his troublesome and divided nature shows up\(^37\). Conspiracy fails because despite being a group, each member has his own interests and they do not share a common ideal. Ambition and envy, which are hidden behind the disguise of ‘the general good’, are the causes of their deaths. Paradoxically, Cassius fails because he relies not on his own perceptions, but on Pindarus’s\(^38\), by betraying his initial scepticism towards divine and political rules. His suicide, therefore, may be interpreted as a form of self-punishment, a means of redemption for the crime he committed, which clashes with his rational and empirical behaviour of the beginning.

In the case of *Julius Caesar*, sacrificial ritual represents only a way to avoid reality and to hide real motivations and feelings. The ritual, which frames Caesar’s sacrifice, cannot conceal the fact that what the conspirators have committed is a crime, and one of the most cruel. The dramatic awareness that by murdering Caesar they not only lose a fellow but also a leader, is added to the fact that their plan has irreparable consequences. One of the most important is that, by murdering Caesar, they have transformed him into a martyr, and an innocent victim of a treacherous act.

\(^37\) Ibid., p. 80

1.3.1 ‘The cause is in my will’ (II.2.71): Caesar’s Condemnation and his Downfall

Caesar’s commemoration represents one of the most poignant moments in the play, in which ritual and memory become fundamental aspects of the process of glorification. It is at this point, indeed, that we finally understand the reasons of Caesar’s death, or rather, what he represents for both the conspirators and Antony. Act 3 scene 2 begins with Brutus trying to convince the people of his good and noble motivations. Although in the first lines he invites them to follow Cassius and hear him tell about the murder, the scene is totally focussed on Brutus and Antony. Brutus’s defence is conducted to validate his unconditioned love and devotion towards his country. Up to this point, Brutus seems to have learned Cassius’s lesson on freedom and fairness, and now he is acting exactly in the same way as Cassius did with him. He is convincing his fellow citizens that Caesar’s sacrifice is a necessary act, in order to preserve democracy and everyone’s freedom. Brutus’s motto is ‘sacrifice one to save the whole’, and this is what he is basically trying to communicate in the scene. Whereas Cassius may be conceived as the instigator of the conspiracy against Caesar, it is Brutus who actually hatches the plot, and takes the responsibility for the crime the conspirators have committed.

The image Brutus gives of Caesar is that of a valiant and honourable man, who has made Rome a great empire by recording victories and personal success. According to Brutus, Caesar has achieved his fame thanks to the commitment of thousands of soldiers who died for their country. His death is a repayment for his driving ambition, and for the fact of having turned Rome into his slave. On the one hand Brutus acknowledges his glory, but on the other he appeals to both his fellows’ ‘Roman-ness’, and to their sense of belonging:

> Who is here so base that would be a bondman? If any, speak, for him have I offended. Who is here so rude that would not be a Roman? If any, speak, for him have I offended. Who is here so vile that will not love his country?[...] (III.2.26-30)
Brutus has spurred his people’s honour, by gaining their sympathy. The fact that he sacrificed his ‘best lover’ for the good of Rome has transformed him into a sort of hero, ready to be judged or even killed because of his choice.

Antony’s entrance is followed by Caesar’s coffin, containing the body of his leader which is exposed in the market-place. The beginning of Antony’s discourse, in some way, announces in advance the aim of his commemoration, that is, “to bury Caesar, not to praise him”(III.2.71). Throughout his speech, Antony denies Brutus’s charges against Caesar, by evoking his personal generosity and humanity. Antony depicts Caesar as a faithful, just and friendly man, as Rome’s greatest warrior, whose military success has brought Rome wealth and properties:

He hath brought many captives home to Rome,
Whose ransoms did the general coffers fill.
Did this in Caesar seem ambitious?
When that poor have cried, Caesar hath wept.
Ambition should be made of sterner stuff. ( III.2.85-89)

Not only does Antony misinterpret Brutus’s concept of ambition, he also seems to denigrate his cause and to mock his ‘honour’ and respectability. He demonstrates that what Brutus defines as ‘ambition’ is actually confused with humility, since a man like Caesar would not refuse the crown three times if he were not humble. Antony’s description of his leader turns Caesar’s vices into values, by creating an image of him as a neutral and vulnerable target of an uncontrolled and escalating violence. His speech is extremely poignant, like a piercing shriek full of rage and grief, which is chocked by his determination to avenge his friend and mentor. Antony’s victory over Brutus is ensured by Caesar’s will, which includes seventy-five drachmas to each Roman, along with Rome’s heritage, such as parks, monuments and avenues. Antony’s restrained commemoration arrives at its climax when, mourning over Caesar’s body,
he remembers his glories and triumph. However, it is when he uncovers Caesar’s coffin, by revealing his mangled body, that his anger blows up. Each wound is evidence of the conspirators’ ingratitude and of their treacherous and vile act.

The image Antony gives of his leader is incompatible with that of Cassius in Act 1 scene 2, where Caesar is described as a coward and weak man, who shakes and groans like a pleading woman, asking for pity and help. Cassius wonders why such men of ‘feeble temper’ should rule the world, and they, “[...] petty men/ Walk under [...] [their] huge legs, and peep about [...]” (I.2.137-138) The Caesar described by Cassius has nothing to do with the image of the historical Caesar, that is, that of “[...] a man of exceptional talent, whose greatness leads him to crime and disaster [...]”. The glorious general praised by Antony, here is replaced by a weak and sick man, who has made his own fellows subject to his ambition and power. Unlike Brutus, however, Cassius’s feelings towards Caesar are neither ambiguous nor vacillating. Cassius disguises his jealousy and personal envy and transforms them into more honourable values, that is, into the desire for freedom and fairness.

Caesar’s death definitely represents the result of a political degeneration. The ideal guardian represented by Caesar, who must rule both virtuously and rigorously, has turned into a tyrant and the state into a corrupted oligarchy. The play investigates the nature of this decline both in the society and in the characters, that is, when private passions, appetites and misinterpretations undermine reason and virtue. The ritualizing of his death, including the exposition of his body to the mercy of his people, has the double effect of both transforming Caesar into a sort of martyr, a victim of furious madness and to cancel his faults. The conspiracy turns into a useless and idealistic attempt to change, plotted by a group of dangerous and ungrateful men, whose only interest is that of emulating their leader.

---

1.3.2 ‘She is a woman, therefore may be wooed’ (II.1.83):

Lavinia’s Objectification and Martyrdom

Along with Caesar, Lavinia represents another example of political victimization, that is, a mute and passive consequence of collective violence. It is towards their body that the audience’s attention is drawn, which like a relic constantly remains on stage to be worshipped and lamented. The process of ritualizing cannot exist without the intermediation of another person, who through his/her own voice, symbolically gives significance to their bodily condition. Mark Antony and Titus interestingly embody this figure, they give voice to Caesar and Lavinia’s suffering, by restoring in some way their identity of characters. Neither of them are granted the means of self-expression, which include both the ability of speaking and sexuality. Their victimization is first of all a consequence of the exposition of their body to the external world. The ‘wounds’ their bodies bear are not voluntary, but provoked by the weaknesses and disabilities of their feminization. As Coppélia Kahn argues, “wounds mark a kind vulnerability easily associated with women: they show the flesh to be penetrable, they show that it can bleed, they make apertures in the body.”

Lavinia’s rape and Caesar’s stabbing may be studied as similar acts, because they are both unlawful and terrible crimes, and a representation of transgressive desire. The act of murdering Caesar has to be analysed not only as a reaction to a sense of frustration, but also because of its exceptionality. By stabbing Caesar, Brutus and the other conspirators are symbolically and sexually violating his body. In the same way, Chiron and Demetrius’s violence towards Lavinia breaks both her bodily boundaries and her ‘self’, by totally annihilating her.

Interestingly, in both Caesar and Lavinia’s cases there is an obvious contradiction between their physical inferiority to the other characters and the political-moral

---

relevance they bear in the play. The shameful process of feminization of which Caesar is condemned can be redeemed only through Antony’s intervention, which re-establishes his masculine dominance. Lavinia’s violation, instead, is revealed only by Marcus and Titus, who interpret her rape as a precise theft against their family. By being deprived of her tongue and hands, Lavinia is denied any possibility to tell the truth. The power her voice would represent in the play is too strong, since it might not only reveal the identity of her rapists, but also the cruelty of her father, who has strenuously opposed her marriage with Bassianus. Because her voice would threaten the natural order of things, she is silenced, and the reconstruction of the events is left to a more ‘rational’ and masculine word, that of Titus and Marcus. There is no possibility for Lavinia to communicate directly, since both her tongue and hands are cut off. Although in Act 4 scene 1 she strenuously seems to restore her dignity, by writing with a staff the name of her rapists, it is evident that it is only Titus and the other male members of her family who are in charge of taking revenge. As Green points out, at this moment, Lavinia not only is showing the identity of Chiron and Demetrius, she is also metaphorically re-enacting her own violation and the suffering she had to experience. She paradoxically loses her right to speak at the moment of her violation, which in some way erases her, both as a human being and as a character.

Her status of sacrificial victim is determined by the fact that she is both the victim of Tamora’s revenge and, at the end of the play, the object of Titus’s madness. As Foakes points out, she “[...] emblematises the way Rome, as Titus says, has become a ‘wilderness of tigers’”, that is the consequence of a blind and cruel violence, which strikes every character indiscriminately. Unlike Caesar, Lavinia is not responsible for

---


her death, her only fault is that of being at the same time in love with Bassianus and engaged with Saturninus. The image Bassianus, Chiron and Demetrius give of Lavinia in Act 2 scene 1, however, contrasts with the unmerciful and cruel woman in Act 2 scene 3. Lavinia's coldness towards Alarbus's sacrifice and her strong aversion towards Tamora, specifically when she became Saturninus's wife, mark the ambiguity of her character. Unlike Tamora, Lavinia’s strong initial status enables her to avoid the mourning of Mutius and to confront with Tamora from a position of force, a privilege which is sustained by Bassianus’s protection.

However, by depicting Lavinia as the innocent victim, the play seems rather to concentrate on her tragic destiny of sacrificial victim. Like Caesar, she is introduced right from the beginning of the play as ‘Rome’s rich ornament’, that is as a virtuous and perfect woman, compared to a sort of goddess. Like Caesar’s murder, Lavinia’s rape maybe be understood as a sort of punishment for her condition of superiority. For Tamora it represents both a repayment for his son’s loss and a reassertion of her role of ruler. Lavinia’s pleadings for ‘present death’ and her claims to save her from Chiron and Demetrius’ ‘worse-than-killing lust’ (II.3.175) are ignored. Although in this scene the violence is not consumed yet, we perceive that Lavinia is losing her dignity as a character, and that her process of victimization has already started.

Titus, Marcus and Lucius’s reactions after her rape is strikingly captivating, since they sum up Lavinia’s condition of inhuman and deformed being. Although she is still alive, the rape killed her womanhood and turned her into an ‘alien’, whose presence is repugnant also to his father’s sight:

MARCUS Titus, prepare thy aged eyes to weep,
Or if not so, thy noble heart to break.
I bring consuming sorrow to thine age.
TITUS Will it consume me? Let me see it then.
MARCUS This was thy daughter.
TITUS Why, Marcus, so she is.
While for Titus her spectacular appearance may be destabilising, for Marcus and Lucius, it “forcefully consolidates the status of victim within a single body, re-establishing clear boundaries between the victim and the perpetrators”.

In both Lavinia and Caesar’s deaths ritual has definitely a central role, it is a necessary element to restore order and peace and to give them a kind of sacredness. The power sacrifice wields in their deaths is decisive in order to create their myth. However, whereas Caesar is murdered by his sacrificers, and his martyrdom begins after his death, Lavinia is not saved from suffering. Her condition of martyr starts with her rape and continues throughout the play. It is only Titus who completes her transformation into victim, by killing her. He embodies the figure of the sacrificer, who is in charge of healing her body from the shame weighing on both his daughter and his family. Titus’s final and sorrowful act may be symbolically interpreted as a divine intervention, which restores the natural order of things, including the end of Lavinia’s suffering.

---

43 Mohler, Tina, ‘“What is thy Body but a swallowing Grave...?” Desire underground in Titus Andronicus’, Shakespeare Quarterly, 57, 1, 2006, p. 40
CHAPTER TWO
REVENGE AND REVENGES.
WHEN BLIND PASSIONS TURN INTO CRIMES

Fig. 3: “Non sine causa,” George Wither, A Collection of Emblemes, Ancient and Moderne: Quickened with Metrical Illustrations . . . (London, 1635), 137. From the Folger Shakespeare Library Collection.
CHAPTER TWO: REVENGE AND REVENGES. WHEN BLIND PASSIONS TURN INTO CRIMES

To classify revenge as only a personal feeling or as a way to obtain retaliation would mean to minimise the same concept of revenge. Because of the involvement of several factors and motives such as anger, envy, ambition and lack of mercy, revenge is definitely a universal and multifaceted issue. Nashe talks about revenge as “the glory of arms, and the highest performance of valure”\(^1\), in other words, as a lawful and honourable way to test one’s mettle. Bacon, instead, describes revenge as “a kind of wild justice”\(^2\), that is, a distorted and personalised idea of justice based on a series of debatable ideals cobbled together in order to obtain personal satisfaction. According to Bacon, revenge cannot be justified, simply because it refers to a fact that happened and ended in the past. Gratification, explains Bacon, can be reached only if it is turned to present or future goals. In modern usage, the word ‘revenge’ denotes “retaliation for injuries or wrongs”\(^3\), that is, a response to any form of insult or injustice an individual may have suffered. Unlike ‘retribution’, explains Ronald Broude, which is used to define a deserved punishment, freed from personal motives, the word ‘revenge’ indicates “the carrying out of a bitter desire to injure another for a wrong done to oneself or to those who seem a part of oneself.”\(^4\) When this resentful impulse degenerates, revenge turns into what Broude calls ‘vengeance’, meaning a “wrathful, vindictive, [and] furious revenge”\(^5\). The factors that motivate revenge are obviously several and various. They depend, indeed, on its foundations and aims, as well as on the values that have been in some

\(^{1}\) Nashe, Thomas, *The unfortunate Traveller*, 1594
\(^{2}\) Bacon, Francis, ‘Of Revenge’, *Essays*, 1597
\(^{3}\) Broude, Ronald, ‘Revenge and Revenge Tragedy in Renaissance England’, *Renaissance Quarterly*, 28, 1, 1975, p. 38
\(^{4}\) Ibid.
\(^{5}\) Ibid.
way damaged or sullied. Anger is usually the main cause which spurs the revenger’s need for retaliation. This feeling, explains Keyshian, is often the effect of an act of arrogance, committed by an aggressor towards a victim, who may be either the revenger or someone who is connected with him/her. When the revenger has directly and physically suffered an injury, his desire to show his potency and resistance to offence and injustice is stronger, since revengers are often disempowered people, subject to treachery, malice and grief, and deprived of their social status. The avenger’s function is both that of erasing social unfairness, by avoiding the victim’s “[...] public disgrace associated with accepting insult or injury”6, and that of changing the aggressor’s behaviour. The revenger turns into a hero, that is, a healer who restores the balance, by defending the victim’s dignity from the aggressor’s wrathful and gratuitous violence. It is only in this case that revenge can be accepted, that is, when it is aimed to

[...] overcome our fears, override our instinct for self-preservation, and put ourselves at risk to achieve our goals or vindicate ourselves when our persons or values are threatened.8

Anger, continues Keyshian, is not always followed by a general feeling of anxiety and grief: it is also motivated by inner and individual passions such as hope and desire9, which prove, in some way, the personal and selfish aspect of revenge. In Titus Andronicus, Titus’s grisly plan to slaughter Tamora’s sons, for instance, does not conceal the protagonist’s macabre satisfaction in dismembering their bodies. Although he is mourning his son’s death and suffering for Lavinia’s condition, Titus ‘plays the cook’ in a banquet that paradoxically emphasises more its ironic and celebrating aspect

---

7 Ibid.
8 Ibid., p. 17
9 Ibid., p. 18
than its appalling tragedy. In *Julius Caesar*, on the contrary, anxiety and grief are more evident, not only in Brutus but also in the other conspirators. This happens because revenge is motivated by a higher good, that is, the elimination of tyranny and the effects it may have on the balance and integrity of the Roman political system. In both *Titus Andronicus* and *Julius Caesar*, however, anger is always the consequence of a previous act of injustice. The characters’ need to take revenge emerges because they feel, in some way, offended or deprived of their power or status. It is this sense of frustration and the awareness that their desire to retaliate is justified by the wrong they suffered that initiate the process of revenge.

The revenger’s reaction to anger obviously depends on his/her social condition and on the circumstances, which influence more or less deeply his/her grudge towards the aggressor. If the revenger has suffered a wrong caused by someone who is socially at the same level, the crime committed turns out to be less humiliating, in some way tolerable. However, when the victim and the executioner share a close relationship, as either friends or lovers, the feelings of love, respect and devotion they used to have for each other turn into indignation and hate. In this case, although the injurer and the injured belong to the same social class, the ingratitude the executioner feels towards his/her victim annihilates any possibility of forgiveness. This is basically what happens in *Julius Caesar*, when Brutus accepts to be part of the conspiracy in order to eliminate his leader. He is not only envious of Caesar’s popular success, he is also disappointed by the way his general has reached the power. Caesar’s betrayal is to condemn because it ruptures the ‘bond’ of friendship between him and his fellows, but specifically because it besmirches the values on which this bond is based, that is, democracy, freedom and social fairness.

Revenge, in this play, is conceived in higher terms, as a noble instrument which restores these principles. Unlike *Titus Andronicus*, where it represents a form of social redemption, as is the case of Tamora, in *Julius Caesar* revenge is a destructive weapon actually designated for both public and private purposes. Keyshian distinguishes in the play three kinds of revenge, the first associated with Marc Antony, the second with the
Roman populace and the third with Julius Caesar\(^{10}\). Antony’s revenge, argues Keyshian, is very concrete and intimate, since it is dictated by personal motivations, such as love, devotion and respect for his leader. His revenge is the most heinous, since it is originated by the guilty feeling towards Caesar’s death. Antony is aware that he failed because he behaved too naively, by throwing his leader to the ‘savage spectacle’ (III.1.225) plotted by Brutus and his comrades. By avenging Caesar, Antony is trying to atone for his fault, as evidence of his total devotion and gratitude towards his leader. It is Caesar’s blood that appeals for justice and that spurs his anger, and Antony cannot ignore it.

The mob’s revenge, unlike that of Antony, is less personal and moving. When Brutus explains to them the reasons of Caesar’s killing, they do not question the lawfulness of the act, but are simply hypnotised by Brutus’s convincing power. The populace in this play is extremely unstable, desperately in search for a figure to worship and idolise. If on the one hand they are fascinated by Brutus’s appeal for freedom and fairness, on the other they do not have the power to overthrow the political system on which their society is based. They are easily manipulated by both Brutus and Antony, whose attempt is that of convincing them of the truthfulness of their ideals. It is the sight of Caesar’s blood and wounds, however, that stirs up their vengeance against the conspirators, an act that reveals not only compassion but also a deep awareness of Caesar’s greatness, specifically after the discovery of his legacy.

Interestingly, although after Act 3 Caesar’s presence is clouded by the events following his assassination, his body and wounds are always in the background, reminding the characters of the crime they have committed. Caesar’s revenge lies in the guilty feeling he inspires among his people, specifically among those who have loved and respected him. This explains the fact that his apparition appears only to Brutus and not to Cassius, that is, to the person that proves to be the most loyal and devoted to him. The reason, explains Keyshian, is deep and may be a response to Caesar’s shocking reaction

\(^{10}\) Ibid., p. 81
when he discovers Brutus to be one of his killers. Caesar’s revenge, however, is incomplete, as it ends with Brutus’s death. Despite the terrible act of treachery he has committed, Brutus is still the ‘noblest Roman of them all’ (V.5.68). His ‘honest thought’ and commitment to the ‘common good’ is distinguished from the selfish and despicable envy that motivates the conspirators’ plot.

In *Titus Andronicus*, revenge represents a redemptive means to atone for one’s faults. As Keyshian argues, it “[...] emerges from a larger matrix of bargains, negotiations, and exchanges that the play explores”11, specifically between the hero and his country. The characters’ endless search for identity and political success is due to the bond they have with their country. The stronger the bond, the more wrathful their revenge. This explains the spectacular way in which the characters, specifically Titus, perform their murders, that is, in a way that is “[...] proportional to the intensity of [...] [their] original psychic investment in Roman justice [...]”12. Revenge and sacrifice represent a kind of retribution for the commitment to the country’s cause, and therefore are totally justified. In order to be performed, sacrifice needs to be accepted by the whole community, by setting aside all personal purposes. Alarbus’s sacrifice and that of Chiron and Demetrius, however, prove that the characters’ motivations are generated by both the commitment to the common good, and by some sort of private interest. Titus’s unfortunate destiny will be, indeed, a consequence of both his faults and mistakes, because of his blind desire for revenge, which will haunt him until the end of the play. Paradoxically, his revenge is regenerative, as it feeds itself with the sorrows and the suffering of its victims. The more they suffer, the more Titus takes pleasure in the pursuit of it. Unlike *Julius Caesar*, in this play revenge has a therapeutic effect on the characters, whose benefits, unfortunately, last as long as they realise the destructive power of violence.

---

11 Ibid., p. 41
12 Ibid., p. 42
In both *Julius Caesar* and *Titus Andronicus*, the characters’ vindictive behaviour is often an effect of an emotional imbalance, in which rational control yields to the most human and base passions, such as envy, vainglory and anger. The need for revenge is often a distinguishing feature of those characters who suffered a form of humiliation, either physical or psychological. The violent behaviour they adopt represents, in some way, a justification for their deficiencies and defeats, both in the battlefields and in life. Tamora’s revenge against Titus’s family, for instance, is not only motivated by the grief for Alarbus’s death, but also by the political humiliation for the Goths’ defeat against the Romans. Likewise, Brutus’s decision to join the conspiracy is inspired by both the virtuous cause to eliminate tyranny, and by a pent-up frustration of not being able to be as successful as Caesar. It is typical of these characters to disguise their revengeful desire and turn it into a public, ethically justified issue, by persuading themselves of the integrity of their enterprise. In both plays, characters play the heroes, “[...] wrenched from their normal ways of life, and thrust by circumstance into new and unstable roles [...]”\(^{13}\).

Although *Julius Caesar* is not usually classified as a revenge play, the year of its publication (1599) and the presence of many revenge elements are evidence to the contrary. As Thorndike suggests, “[...] between 1599 and 1604 tragedies dealing with ghosts and revenge were especially popular in London theatres”\(^{14}\). According to Thorndike, revenge tragedies are those plays in which the revenge element is the fundamental motive, followed by the revenger’s hesitation towards the crime he is going to commit. The characters’ madness, or rather their mental insanity, is another prerequisite for a revenge play, which can be both real or pretended. Intrigue, explains Thorndike, particularly if plotted against the revenger, is important as it stimulates the

\(^{13}\) Ibid., p. 53

\(^{14}\) Thorndike, A.H., “The Relations of Hamlet to the contemporary Revenge Plays”, *PMLA*, 17, 1902, p. 128
revenger’s meditation on the problems and consequences of his revenge.\textsuperscript{15} The fifth aspect of Thorndike’s classification is dissimulation, with which he identifies all the machinations employed by the revenger in the pursuit of his plan, often suggested by the ghost\textsuperscript{16}.

However, the two most important elements that the two tragedies share are blood and poisoning or stabbing\textsuperscript{17}. While in the first play, blood is conceived as a sacred and purifying means to eliminate evil affecting the community, in the second play, it is a contaminant and an element of impurity, whose staining flowing threatens the political contagion. The victim’s poisoning or stabbing is strictly connected with the theme of blood, as it is the means through which the revenger performs his/her vindictive fury. As I will show throughout this chapter, the act of stabbing, both in \textit{Julius Caesar} and \textit{Titus Andronicus}, represents a form of violation, similar to rape. By being assassinated, Caesar’s bleeding body is exposed to the public shameful judgement, as evidence of both human weakness and “[...] as a failure of physical self-mastery particularly associated with woman”\textsuperscript{18}. In \textit{Titus Andronicus}, instead, stabbing is more clearly connected with physical violation, as we can notice in both Lavinia’s rape and in Chiron and Demetrius’s sacrifice. Interestingly, whereas in \textit{Julius Caesar} stabbing is used as only a means of killing, in \textit{Titus Andronicus} it is also an instrument to inflict harm on the victims. This kind of despicable death deprives the victims of both their human dignity, and of the possibility to communicate with the world outside, as in the case of Lavinia’s mutilation.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{15} Ibid., p. 143
\item \textsuperscript{16} Ibid., p. 165
\item \textsuperscript{17} Ibid., p. 184
\item \textsuperscript{18} Paster, Gail K., ‘“In the Spirit of Men there is no Blood”: Blood as Trope of Gender in \textit{Julius Caesar}, Shakespeare Quarterly, 40, 1989, p. 284
\end{itemize}
2.1 Private and public Revenge

Revenge is considered to be one of the most ancient forms of punishment inflicted as a consequence of an act of injustice, often including a wrathful and gratuitous use of violence towards a victim. The injury, which revenge is supposed to vindicate, may be caused either by a single person or a group of people. It is an individual act when the revenger is motivated by personal grudges and by a feeling of anger towards a single victim, who has threatened his/her balance or interfered, in some way, with his/her life. Instead, when revenge concerns a group of people it can be either the result of a general unrest, or simply a binding obligation\textsuperscript{19} among the members of a group. In this last case, revenge is no longer a personal choice but a duty or a rule which is part of a code of behaviour. Among primitive people, explains Bowers, the only way to retaliate an injury was through direct revenge\textsuperscript{20}, which allows the injured to make use of violence without the intermediation of an unbiased third agent. The modern concept of State, however, clashes with the idea of revenge as a form of justice, since it questions the authenticity and enforceability of the law.

Private revenge was not only a synonym for justice but also a means of demonstrating strength and power. Since revenge provides the use of violence, the gap between those who were lawfully allowed to take revenge and those who were not was huge. Subjects, for instance, were excluded from the possibility of avenging, as well as from any kind of retribution. The Renaissance ideal of revenge, however, does not only allude to “[...] the general idea of retribution but also [to] each particular species of retribution authorised by any of the several socio-legal systems [...]”\textsuperscript{21}. This included crimes committed against people, either individuals or families, against the state or

\textsuperscript{19} Bowers, Fredson T., Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy 1587-1642, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1959, p. 4

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., p. 3

\textsuperscript{21} Broude, Ronald, ‘Revenge and Revenge Tragedy in Renaissance England’, Renaissance Quarterly, 28, 1, 1975, p. 40
even a divinity\textsuperscript{22}. Injuries against families usually led to what it was called ‘blood feud’, that is, a particular kind of private revenge involving two or more families. The violence provided by the feud is collective, that is, it is aimed at the commitment of the whole family, in order to safeguard the protection of each member.

Tamora’s revenge against Titus may be defined as a ‘family revenge’, motivated not only by mere anger against Titus but also by a general aversion towards his family. What Tamora is planning after her coronation is, indeed, a real war against the Andronici, as she explains to her sons: “Ne’er let my heart know merry cheer indeed/
Till all the Andronici be made away.”\textsuperscript{(II.3.188-189)} Titus’s wretched destiny is a consequence of his indifference towards Tamora’s pleadings. As Jessica Lugo argues, her revenge and the atrocities that occur throughout the play “[…] could be avoided with the tiniest morsel of compassion for a fallen enemy.”\textsuperscript{23} The cruelty Tamora manifests in the performance of her revenge mirrors the society to which she now belongs, that is, a society which allows violence in all its forms, by the use of both lawful and vile means. Tamora’s transformation into a villain is clear in the fact that the anger she expresses against Titus turns into general hatred against the whole Roman community. Interestingly, the thirst for revenge she nourishes throughout the play grows as excessively as in the case of Titus.

Hatred, explains Bowers, is an innate passion, or rather “a natural wrath which had endured too long and had turned to unnatural malice”\textsuperscript{24}. Anger, unlike hatred, is originated by personal wrongs and it is usually addressed to a single victim, or a limited number of victims. Whereas anger is a temporary passion, hatred is endless and blind, aimed at the victim’s annihilation. If motivated by hatred, revenge is not an impulsive act, but a premeditated and cold plan, in which the revenger turns into a

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., p. 41

\textsuperscript{23} Lugo, Jessica, ’Blood and Barbarism, and Belly Laughs: Shakespeare’s Titus and Ovid’s Philomela’, \textit{English Studies}, 88, 4, 2007, p. 405

\textsuperscript{24} Bowers, Fredson T., \textit{Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy 1587-1642}, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1959, p. 21
butcher and the victim into a random effect of senseless violence. The case of Titus is exemplary since his vengeance against Tamora does not end with the execution of her son Alarbus. His anger, indeed, which is a result of both the military loss he is still mourning and the acceptance of Tamora as his queen, first turns into hatred and then into a euphoric state of mind, which culminates with madness, in an escalation of intensity.

Passions that motivate private revenge do not differ much from those which originate public revenge. Early modern society, argues Broude, makes a clear distinction between what it is called ‘state justice’ and the other forms of retributions, either private or divine\textsuperscript{25}. In Renaissance political system the division between ‘public’ and ‘private’ revenge was usually clear and strictly defined. The word \textit{magistrate}, for instance, was associated with the concept of ‘public revenge’ to indicate a commissioned justice, a nobleman, a military officer, or other person in authority\textsuperscript{26}. The \textit{magistrate} was, therefore, a person who was lawfully in charge to administer justice, that is, to judge whether and how to condemn a person who committed a crime. The distinction between ‘public’ and ‘private’ revenge, continues Broude, was less evident in pre-Tudor institutions, where private citizens were supposed to accomplish tasks dealing with the maintenance of law and order\textsuperscript{27}, as well as with the use of the force to both preserve the people’s security and to pursue criminals.

According to Broude, another important aspect of ‘public revenge’ is the concept of divine mandate\textsuperscript{28}. This prerogative allowed the king and magistrates to increase their power beyond the line of what it was considered to be legal, so that their behaviour could not be condemned as a form of ‘private revenge’\textsuperscript{29}. The divine mandate basically

\textsuperscript{25} Broude, Ronald, ‘Revenge and Revenge Tragedy in Renaissance England’, \textit{Renaissance Quarterly}, 28, 1, 1975, p. 42

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., p. 48

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., p. 49

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.
gave the king or other authorities the power to act by proxy for God. According to this, each crime committed against the state was considered to be a divine offence. Since murder was one of the worst injuries, it was only a ruler’s prerogative to issue pardons, that is, to decide whether a crime needed to be punished severely or whether it could be avoided.

Reformation politics, argues Broude, motivates private citizens to react when the king or other authorities did not fulfil their duties, and to act in order to preserve a fair and unbiased justice. It is in this case that the idea of ‘private’ and ‘public’ revenge is altered, that is, when human vengeance turns into a reflection of divine justice. ‘Private’ revenge intervenes when ‘public’ vengeance fails, thus, when the political and social order of the community is threatened. The issue of ‘public’ and ‘private’ revenge is particularly evident in *Julius Caesar*, where Caesar represents the failure of the political power, and the conspiracy the only alternative to tyranny and corruption.

2.1.1 The ‘public Good’ as a Motive for public and private Revenge:

*the Bond of Caesar’s Conspiracy*

Although the plot to assassinate Caesar is conceived as a means to save Rome from its fatal destiny, the motivations that spur Brutus and the other conspirators to kill their leader go beyond the mere love for the country. Right from the beginning of the play, specifically in Act 1 scene 1, when Flavius and Murellus are questioning the reasons for Caesar’s celebration, we can perceive that their uneasiness is due specifically to a feeling of ingratitude towards their fellow citizens. As we have explained before, ingratitude is, along with anger, one of the first motivations for revenge. When the conspirators accuse the Roman citizens of being as ‘blocks’, ‘stones’, ‘senseless things’ (I.1.34), or even as ‘tag-rag people’ (I.2.256), they are not only questioning their political

---

30 Ibid.
31 Ibid., p. 55
and social identity, they are also accusing them of being bound to the sacred and undisputed image of Caesar.

Through conspiracy Brutus and his comrades are offering an alternative to slavery, that is, a way to escape from a binding and unfair role which has undermined their right to be free and respectable citizens. There is a slight difference, however, between the way Cassius and Brutus look at Caesar’s death. Whereas Cassius’s aim to kill his leader is focussed on the issue of ‘bondage’ and fairness, Brutus’s concern is basically about the necessity to purify Rome from the disease of tyranny and corruption, which is now questioning and offending the people’s honour. Cassius is always remarking his position of free Roman republican, by inviting the whole community to follow his ideal. He explains the power and benefits of freedom first to Brutus, in order to persuade him into joining the conspiracy, and then to Casca, by convincing him that

Nor stony tower, nor walls of beaten brass,
Nor airless dungeon, nor strong links of iron,
Can be retentive to the strength of spirit; (I.3.92-94)

However, although Cassius underlines the fact that all Romans are born free and equal as Caesar, he actually contradicts himself when he promises Pindarus, his servant, to release him from ‘bondage’ provided that he helps him with his suicide:

Come hither, sirrah. In Parthia did I take thee prisoner,
And then I swore thee, saving of thy life,
That whatsoever I did bid thee do
Thou should attempt it. Come now, keep thine oath.
Now be a freeman [...] (V.3.36-40)

Paradoxically, in Julius Caesar those who talk about freedom are not real ‘bondmen’, that is, they do not belong to the servant class, but are rather patricians who aspire to individual power. They are masters as well as Caesar, who exercise their influence over
their underlings through blackmail, by appealing to their servants’ unquestioning sense of obedience. The issue of liberty, therefore, seems to be more a prerogative of a limited group of people than a universal and shared right. Strato and Messala, for instance, never show any interest in Brutus’s desire for freedom\(^{32}\), since the bond that links them with their masters and lords is not only motivated by the respect for hierarchy, but also by devotion. As Vawter points out, “their love for their masters is dramatically verifiable by the deeds with which they honour their bonds of duty.”\(^{33}\)

The society which is depicted in \textit{Julius Caesar} is a fragmented world, in which Rome represents the body and the characters its members. The crisis Rome is suffering because of Caesar is literally splitting the country away from its citizens. It is like a disease that metaphorically separates the heart from the brain. Caesar’s assassination is evidence of the populace’s loss of compassion, meaning “an induration of feeling that gradually hardens their hearts”\(^{34}\). The love that stimulates the bond between master and servant is the only example in the play of indissoluble feeling. All the relationships in \textit{Julius Caesar}, indeed, are designed to fail, as in the case of the conspiracy and Brutus’s marriage with Portia. The bond that exists between the members breaks because their initial commitment in the ‘common good’ is diverted by private interests, such as the desire for emulation, envy and pride. Moreover, the absence of a contract validated by an oath determines the break of the pact of mutual protection between the conspirators, as well as the elimination of any kind of obligation between the members. The plot to kill Caesar will collapse because the bond that links the conspiracy lacks the fundamental principle of equality between the members.

Whereas at the beginning the plan to eliminate tyranny and the abuse of power was a common aim, from then on it becomes only a tool for each conspirator to rise above the


\(^{33}\) Ibid.

others. The lack of a shared ideal ruled by a vow creates the condition for the beginning of individual rivalries, motivated by a feeling of personal revenge. Interestingly, explains Vawter, after Act 2 scene 1 Brutus’s role in the conspiracy changes from peer into absolute leader35. This evolution is due to the fact that the conspirators are constantly flattering him, by feeding in some way his ego. Brutus does not realise that this flattery is actually encouraging his desire for ambition and pride, as dangerously as in the case of Caesar. He acts exactly like a tyrant, first of all when he decides in favour of Antony’s life regardless of his comrades’ approval, secondly by allowing Caesar’s commemoration and thirdly by questioning Cassius’s military valour. Ironically, suggests Vawter, in the play the people who condemn eagerness and arrogance are actually those who, through their flattery, spur these vices36:

DECIUS Pardon me, Caesar; for my dear love
To your proceeding bids me tell you this,
And reason to my love is liable (II.2.102-104)

METELLUS Most high, most
mighty, and most puissant Caesar (III.1.33)

Brutus behaves roughly in the same way, when he first shows Caesar his love and total devotion: “I kiss thy hand, but not/ in flattery, Caesar”(III.1.52-53) and then by slaughtering his “best lover for the/ good of Rome”(III.2.41-42). Here Brutus is playing the hypocrite as well as the other conspirators, by transforming his love for Caesar into mere praise.

In Julius Caesar characters are always pretending their feelings in order to satisfy their interests. They act individually and for their own purposes, often motivated by the desire for emulation or for mere selfishness. The attempt to kill Caesar crumbles

36 Ibid., p. 321
because of the lack of unity among the members. The absence of communication, which is evident both among the conspirators and between the state and the people, clashes with the idea of bond and community as a whole. The tragic aspect of the play lies in the characters’ never-ending and desperate search of a means of preserving the ‘common good’, an attempt that will unfortunately destroy them. It is the combination of private and public interests and the fact that the characters are not only private citizens but also public figures, one of the causes of this destruction. Despite the honourable deeds they did for the country, they are, in some way, victims of their own human weaknesses. Pride, ambition, and envy lead the conspirators to make the same political mistakes against which they so vigorously fought. The tragedy, unfortunately, emerges at the end of the play, when the gap between their ideals and their real behaviour becomes unbridgeable.
Revenge represents for the victim not only a means for retaliating but also a way to achieve other goals. Keyshian identifies some key points which are useful to clarify both the causes and the effects the act of revenge may have on the victim. First of all, explains Keyshian, the victim’s desire for revenge is motivated by the need to restore his/her self-esteem\textsuperscript{37}, through deeds which are aimed at fortifying his/her personal skills and power, as we can notice by Titus’s desire to eliminate Tamora. In order to take revenge, the victim needs to eliminate the source of his/her suffering, that is, the enemy who has threatened, in some way, his/her safety.\textsuperscript{38} The third aspect of revenge is about reputation\textsuperscript{39}. Indeed, it is only by avenging the crime the victim has suffered that he/she will erase the shame this act has caused to his/her character. Lavinia’s rape, for instance, is certainly a crime which needs to be avenged in order to restore Lavinia’s dignity as both a woman and a human being.

According to Keyshian, the fourth and last motive for revenge is the claim for justice, which occurs when the victim has been wrongly injured or condemned, and therefore he/she wants his/her executioner to equally suffer the same injury. In \textit{Titus Andronicus}, victims are always avenged by someone else. Indeed, when Quintus and Martius have been unjustly accused of Bassianus’s slaughter, it is Titus who takes care to ensure their innocence and to plan a worthy revenge. Justice represents for the victim a kind of reward for the grief and the shame he/she has experienced, often linked to despicable crimes such as rapes and massacres.

When justice does not satisfy the victim’s desperate claim for fairness, the desire for revenge grows, and turns the wrong the victim suffered into a motive which justifies the use of private justice. In the case of \textit{Titus Andronicus}, Titus realises the need to


\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.
avenge his family only when his brother Marcus reminds him of all the injuries and the shame he has been suffering until then:

Thou dost not slumber. See thy two sons’ heads,
Thy warlike hand, thy mangled daughter here,
Thy other banished son with this dear sight
Struck pale and bloodless, and thy brother, I
Even like a stony image, cold and numb. (III.1.253-257)

Titus’s reaction to these lines is totally unexpected. His “Ha, ha, ha” (III.2.263) has many interpretations, explains Keyshian: it is probably a sign of initial madness, an example of bitter and weary resignation, or even an evil and grisly response to such cruelty. Apart from its meaning, this line definitely represents a turning point in the play, since it is evidence of Titus’s maturity, a sign of “[...] liberation from moral confusion.” The sense of honour and devotion towards his country, which at the beginning seems to blind him, is now replaced by a need for truth. From then on, his desire to avenge his family will turn into an artful and meticulously detailed plan, aimed at the annihilation of his enemy. Keyshian argues that the laugh is probably also a sign of “gained sanity”, due to the awareness of his own mistakes.

Since Titus’s revenge is the result of a meditated and aware process of self-analysis, the crime Titus is going to commit against Lavinia’s rapists has nothing to do with impulsiveness. Chiron and Demetrius’s fake sacrifice, indeed, will turn out to be a real vengeful and cold-blooded plan, in which grief is metabolised and transformed into determination:

40 Ibid., p. 40-41
41 Ibid., p. 41
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
Why, I have not another tear to shed,
Besides, this sorrow is an enemy,
And would usurp upon my wat’ry eyes
And make them blind with tributary tears. (III.2.265-268)

The deep anger Titus feels when he sees Lavinia martyred and ravished turns into
strength. It is memory and the awareness of the fact that justice will not bring things
back that keep his anger alive. The image of Lavinia’s physical and psychological
wounds represents for Titus a clear violation of the sacred family bond, thus, a lawful
and undisputed motive for revenge. The “task” (III.2.274) Titus promises to fulfil,
unlike that of Brutus and the other conspirators in Julius Caesar, is validated by a vow,
in which he swears to right the wrongs his family has unfairly suffered. It is bitter
revenge that feeds Titus’s detailed plan and that preserves his strength, along with the
awareness of the fact that he has actually nothing to lose. He has been mocked and
deprived of his dignity, not only as a man but also as a Roman soldier, and as a father
as well. The hand, which symbolises masculinity and the instrument through which
bonds are validated, is here replaced by a stump, as if to demonstrate the characters’
powerlessness and extreme vulnerability. The missing hand is also a constant reminder
of the shame Titus and his family have suffered, which feeds and fortifies his promise
to take revenge.

Interestingly, the intensity of revenge is strictly connected with the loss of power: the
more the victim has been physically and morally injured, the more his/her vengeance
will be planned and meditated. Both Titus’s and Tamora’s revenges are, indeed,
premeditated, as they are spurred by old and personal grudges. They are not, thus,
sudden and reckless reactions, but rather calculated and detailed plots aimed at
annihilating the enemy’s identity. Characters like Titus, Tamora and Aaron are
individuals who are naturally predisposed to revenge, whose vengeful wrath prevents
them from forgiving and from having mercy on their enemies. When Aaron says,
“Vengeance is in my heart, death in my hand,/ Blood and revenge are hammering in
my head”(II.3.38-39), it is clear that he is referring to his evil nature. The way Tamora promises to take revenge, however, is not less cruel: “I’ll find a day to massacre them all,/And raze their faction and their family” (I.1.447-448). Strangely enough, among the three it is Titus who is seeking a kind of fair justice, by appealing to the gods’ permission:

Then, when you come to Pluto’s region,
I pray you deliver him this petition.
Tell him it is for justice and for aid,
And that it comes from old Andronicus,
Shaken with sorrows in ungrateful Rome. (IV.3.13-17)

Although the play seems to celebrate revenge as a form of elaborate public performance44, often supported by a meticulous plan, there are examples in Titus Andronicus of unpremeditated crimes, that is, wrongs which are inflicted unintentionally, in which revenge is but an aspect of anger. Mutius’s death, for instance, may be an example of a sudden and burning act of rage, motivated by Titus’s strict sense of honour and devotion to Roman values. Mutius’s death is sudden and ‘painless’; it is an involuntary though selfish act committed because of Titus’s proud cruelty. His son’s murder definitely confirms Titus’s detachment from the audience’s sympathy, which leaves “[…] him only the abstract admiration due his undoubted honesty”45. He is so haughty and convinced of the lawfulness of his actions that he paradoxically seems to expect Tamora to be thankful to him46. The difference between

---

44 Hancock, Brecken Rose, 'Roman or Revenger?: The Definition and Distortion of Masculine Identity in Titus Andronicus', Early Modern Literary Studies, 10, 1, 2004
May, p. 3


46 Ibid., p. 112
Mutius’s and Chiron and Demetrius’s murders is that whereas the first is motivated by an act of insubordination, the second is the result of a process of victimization against Titus, started with Quintus and Martius’s murder charge, and concluded with their decapitation.

Unpremeditated crimes, therefore, are those wrongs which are committed without the use of malice, that is, in a way which is unintentional and unplanned to hurt someone. Bowers argues that Lavinia’s rape may be an example of unpremeditated crime, by justifying it as “[...] merely incidental to the larger plans to strike Titus through his sons.” Lavinia, however, represents Titus’s Achilles’ heel, and his most significant weakness. It is for this reason that we cannot exclude the fact that Lavinia’s rape is premeditated, since for Tamora it would represent the key to virtually destroy Titus. Lavinia’s rape initiates her ruthless and planned revenge against her arch enemy. The cruelty and suffering it involves confirms the wilfulness to act, which constitutes an aggravating circumstance of the crime Tamora, though accomplice, is going to commit. In addition, we must not forget that it is Aaron in Act 2 scene 1 who plots the rape and spurs Chiron and Demetrius on to sate their carnal lust:

The woods are ruthless, dreadful, deaf, and dull.
There speak and strike, brave boys, and take your turns.
There serve your lust, shadowed from heaven’s eye,
And revel in Lavinia’s treasury. (II.1.129-132)

Bassianus’s murder, unlike Lavinia’s rape, is definitely unpremeditated. It is spontaneous not because of the savage and abrupt anger with which it is performed, but because it is a tragic casualty. Bassianus’s slaughter is but a means for Chiron and Demetrius to demonstrate their obedience and devotion towards their mother. He is just an hindrance to the achievement of the real object, which is Lavinia. His murder gives also Tamora the opportunity to blame Quintus and Martius and to start a war

47 Ibid.
which is first of all motivated by personal grudges between two old enemies. The clash Tamora has started also raises political issues such as treachery and negligence towards the country and the sovereign. Bassianus’s only guilt, unfortunately, is simply that of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. His murder adds to all other useful and innocent deaths revenge tragedies always include.

Although it goes unnoticed, the nurse’s murder in Act 4 scene 2 is another example of tragic casualty. As Aaron explains to Demetrius, “‘tis a deed of policy” (IV.2.147), an act which is committed in order to preserve the secrecy and the stability of the plot. The nurse dies not because she has refused to accept Aaron’s son, by defining him as a “devil” and “a joyless, dismal, black, and sorrowful issue” (IV.2.66), but because of a mistake she would probably make in future, that is, betrayal. The nurse’s killing is something unexpected which threatens the achievement of the goals, and therefore, has to be performed. It proves Aaron’s mistrust and hate towards not only Saturninus’s corrupted court, but also towards the whole Roman society.

2.2.1 Caesar’s Murder: an Example of premeditated Crime

To define Caesar’s murder as an act of premeditated revenge would be certainly inappropriate. However, if we analyse the way it is planned and the motives that originate this crime, we could notice that there are specific elements which belong to revenge tragedy. Although the intention to kill Caesar is clear and revealed right from the beginning of the play, the leader’s reaction is totally unexpected. Caesar’s life is constantly hanging by a thread, and his downfall is always, in some way, predicted, first by the soothsayer’s presage, secondly by Calpurnia’s deadly dream and thirdly by Artemidorus’s letter. However, these textual devices are not the only evidence which herald Caesar’s tragic end. His death, indeed, is compared to a devastating and ferocious storm “dropping fire” (I.2.10), which lashes the earth with thunders and lightning. Even the presence of the clock, which “hath stricken three” (II.1.193) is
another common element in revenge tragedies\textsuperscript{48}, which represents the never-ending passing of time punctuating Caesar’s predicted death. Despite all these signals, which are a premonition of the disaster is going to happen, Caesar cannot escape his tragic fate. His murder is not only premeditated but also cunningly concealed, and plotted in a way that makes it a lawful and expected deed. It is through a stratagem sealed by a secret deal that the conspirators betray their leader. The bond they made, unlike that between Titus and his sons against Tamora, is not guaranteed by an oath, but by secrecy. This element not only questions the principles the conspiracy praises, it also makes the conspirators’ plan premeditated. The concept of secrecy, indeed, clashes with the idea of honesty Brutus seems to promote:

\begin{quote}
What need we any spur but our own cause  
To prick us to redress? What other bond  
Than secret Romans, [...]  
And what other oath  
Than honesty to honesty engaged  
That this shall be or we will fall for it? (II.1.122-127)
\end{quote}

Along with intrigue, another aspect which characterises Caesar’s murder is dissimulation, which is often disguised as flattery. It is Decius the first who, by minimising Calpurnia’s anxieties, does not hesitate to send his leader to the Senate and condemn him to death. By being constantly flattered, Caesar does not know he is the victim of a designated plan, which is apparently supported not only by his own friends and comrades, but also by the other senators. Although it is not evident, Caesar’s elimination is not the isolated attempt of a group of rebels, but a general omen, as Popillius discreetly reports to Cassius: “I wish your enterprise today may thrive” (III.1.12). Paradoxically, in \textit{Julius Caesar}, characters’ faults are constantly repeated.

\textsuperscript{48} Thorndike, A.H., ‘The Relations of Hamlet to the contemporary Revenge Plays”, \textit{PMLA}, 17, 1902, p. 175
When Antony, for instance, in Act 3 scene 1, accuses the conspirators of being deceitful towards Caesar, he does not realise that he is actually acting exactly the same way towards his comrades. By lying about his real intentions of avenging Caesar’s murder, Antony is betraying not only his fellow-citizens but also the bond of brotherhood among the whole Roman community.

Caesar’s slaughter is premeditated both in the way it is planned and in the use of devices such as secrecy and dissimulation. The fact that the conspirators are all motivated by a feeling of envy and jealousy towards Caesar and not by furious anger proves that the murder is not the result of an act of impulsiveness. Although it cannot be classified as a real revenge tragedy, *Julius Caesar* has many common elements with this genre, as it proves the presence of the ghost in Act 4 scene 2. The difference between *Julius Caesar* and *Titus Andronicus* is that, whereas in the first play characters show neither repentance nor mercy in what they do, in the second play it is Brutus the first who both hesitates and meditates upon the consequences his actions may have.
2.3 The Redeemers: the Survivors of Revenge

Violence, including physical, psychological, political and individual cruelty, is always at the background of the characters’ actions. It is, indeed, the characters’ violent behaviour which spurs their unquenchable thirst for revenge. *Titus Andronicus* and *Julius Caesar* are the evidence of the destructive effect violence has on the characters’ relationships, which leads to the tragic end of the plays. The claim for justice Brutus, Cassius, Titus and Marcus seem to make is always associated with the idea of physical punishment. The characters’ desperate search for a fair and suitable means to retaliate a wrong they suffered, often through debatable means, may be a consequence of a corrupted and collapsed system, in which each individual tries to emerge from a group.

The Rome that is described in both plays is but “a wilderness of tigers” (*Titus Andronicus*, III.1.53), an ungrateful and dangerous country which “shakes like a thing unfirm” (*Julius Caesar*, I.3.4) and is torn apart by “domestic fury and fierce civil strife” (*Julius Caesar*, III.1.267). It is “a city of ambiguity”49, troubled by chaos, by controversial rules of conduct, and by a degenerating leadership50. The absence of a fair and solid judicial system, along with the rampant corruption affecting Roman politics is certainly a good motive which justifies the characters’ difficult and desperate decision to resort to a form of private justice. The Roman political system that appears in both plays mirrors the condition of Republican Rome, during Caesar’s reign. As Greg Woolf explains, “Republican Rome was [...] a violent, under-policed, volatile world with little social justice and few restraints on the whims of the rich.”51

---


50 Ibid.

The characters’ frantic search for an ideal sociopolitical order and their obstinacy to adhere to their principles of honour, respectability and devotion to their country are the causes of their downfall, as both public figures and private individuals. The collapse of the political system and the clash of values due to the conflicting and selfish nature of the characters’ behaviour have a great influence on the tragic end of the plays. Interestingly, the characters who escape their fatal destiny and survive from the destructive power of revenge are those who, in some way, have learned how to deal with their passions, including anger, pride and envy, by using them for their own purposes. These characters are not only supposed to restore the balance and the reputation of their country, they are also in charge of ‘fixing’ the fabric of society, by fostering the cohesion among its members. Their success is due to their duplicitous and manipulative behaviour, often associated with military and diplomatic skills, which they acquired during their war experience as either soldiers or generals.

2.3.1 Lucius

In Titus Andronicus it is Lucius who, despite being exiled from his country, is in charge of redeeming Rome, by “preserv[ing] her welfare in [his] blood” (V.3.109). Unlike Titus, he has been able to combine the two aspects of his identity, that is, that of Roman hero and that of revenger. Both his heroic and military qualities come out when he offers his hand instead of Titus’s, in Act 3 scene 1, and then when he persuaded the Goths into recruiting an army in order to march on Rome and take revenge on queen Tamora. The honour and valour he demonstrates as a soldier are often in contrast with his thirst for blood, a desire which reveals his identity of revenger. This aspect of his behaviour is clear right from the beginning of the play, with Alarbus’s sacrifice. Indeed, the way

---

52 Hancock, Brecken Rose, 'Roman or Revenger?: The Definition and Distortion of Masculine Identity in Titus Andronicus', Early Modern Literary Studies, 10, 1, 2004 May, p. 8
he describes Alarbus’s body as a heap of “lopped limbs” (I.1.143), which needs to be “clean consumed” (I.1.129) is evidence of his controversial nature.

Lucius, as all revengers, is a multifaceted character. He alternates determination and pragmatism, as in Act 3 scene 1: “O noble father, you lament in vain./ The Tribunes hear you not. No man is by,/ And you recount your sorrows to a stone” (III.1.27-29) with moments of extreme cruelty and mercilessness: “First hang the child, that he may see it sprawl/ A sight to vex the father’s soul withal.” (V.1.51-52) However, what distinguishes Lucius from other revengers is the ability to ask for forgiveness. Whereas Titus dies in the final and most poignant act of his revenge without realising his guilt, Lucius in the last scene beats his breast in front of the Roman community and humbly falls on his knees: “O pardon me,/ For when no friends are by, men praise themselves” (V.3.116-117). Marcus’s intervention, which precedes Lucius’s speech, is fundamental to ensure the people’s approval. Marcus justifies the Andronici’s revenge as a natural reaction towards an unfair fate, manipulated by “[...] an irreligious Moor,/ Chief architect and plotter of these woes.” (V.3.120-121) The fact that Lucius leaves Aaron’s life to the community’s judgment, by saving him from his personal thirst for revenge, is evidence of the great respect he has towards his country.

Lucius’s double identity, as both Roman and revenge hero, however, questions the same concept of “heroism”. As Hancock argues, “his revenge on the living body of Aaron and the dead body of Tamora in his last speeches recalls Saturninus’s first moments as emperor when he desired revenge on Titus.”53 Saturninus’s and Lucius’s crowning seem to be both inappropriate choices, explains Hancock, since the two characters are, in some way, still involved and bound to their past misunderstandings. If we analyse Lucius in terms of behaviour, we may notice that his revengeful nature has many affinities also with that of Chiron and Demetrius54. Indeed, the deliberate cruelty and the spine-chilling craftiness with which they commit their crimes are

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid.
similar to each other. This is evident specifically in their language: Lucius’s use of the words “limbs” (I.1.129) and “entrails” (I.1.144) to describe Alarbus’s body has the same terrifying effect as Chiron and Demetrius’s description of ravished Lavinia: “See how with signs and tokens she can scrawl” (II.4.5). Curiously, the word “scrawl”, echoes the word “sprawl” (5.1.51), used in Act 5 scene 1 by Lucius to order the killing of Aaron’s son. The comparison between Lucius’s and Chiron and Demetrius’s languages, assumes Hancock, is probably a way to underline Lucius’s disguised hypocrisy.

Despite the parallels with Saturninus, Chiron and Demetrius, at the end of the play Lucius’s virtues prevail over his vices. As his name evokes, Lucius means “light”, that is, Rome’s future and the only means to prevent its own downfall. The motives of Lucius’s success are not only due to his name and noble origins, including the fact that his uncle Marcus is a member of the Tribunes, but also to what he actually does throughout the play. As Teller suggests, indeed,

He calms Saturnine, who is about to call his followers to arms; he supports Bassianus’s claim to Lavinia; […] he pleads for Mutius’s burial in the monument; […] he justifies to Saturnine his part in Lavinia’s abduction […]. He offers his own hand to save his brothers.

However, his behaviour is ambiguous until the end of the play. In the first scene of Act 5, for instance, we see Lucius ordering the Goths to spare Aaron’s son, by saving him from being hanged. In scene 3 the baby is shown to the Roman community as a devil, and as “the base fruit of [Tamora and Aaron’s] burning lust” (V.1.43). We do not know,

55 Ibid., p. 9
56 Ibid.
57 Ibid.
however, whether the child is actually alive or dead, and if he will escape Lucius’s harsh sentence, which condemned his parents to death. In Julie Taymor 1999’s adaptation, Aaron’s son is alive and carried by young Lucius, who raises him to heaven. Taymor’s decision to “save” the child’s life may be conceived as a request for nonviolence and for tolerance, as well as an appeal for mercy, a value which is often suffocated in the play by the characters’ blind desire for revenge.

2.3.2 Mark Antony

Unlike Titus Andronicus, where Lucius becomes emperor first by admitting his faults and then by being subjected to the community’s approval, in Julius Caesar Rome’s redemption occurs through a process of manipulation and deception. Although Octavius is Caesar’s lawful heir, and the next sovereign to redeem and save Rome from corruption and dishonour, the final scene of the play definitely represents Antony’s retaliation. Until Act 3, which begins with Caesar’s assassination, his character is not clearly marked. He is always at the background of the events, ignoring the fiendish plot to eliminate his master. In the first two acts Antony does not distinguish himself as a trusted adviser, and his role is condensed into that of a mere flatterer. It is after Caesar’s death, however, that he realises his failure, as both a friend and a servant. This feeling of frustration is evident at the very moment of the discovery of Caesar’s body, when Antony begs the conspirators to kill him. He is sadly resigned to the consequences his absence had on Caesar’s murder:

Gentlemen all- alas, what shall I say?
My credit now stands on such slippery ground
That one of two bad ways you must conceit me:
Either a coward or a flatterer. (III.1.191-194)
Antony’s transformation from invisible character to revenger starts at this moment when, by invoking Caesar’s spirit, he promises to avenge him, an act which is probably an attempt to appease his sense of guilt. From then on, Antony’s revenge will represent not only the end of the conspiracy but also his own damnation, which will cease only with the fulfilment of his duty.

When Antony discovers Caesar’s body he not only has to face his guilt, he is also forced to grin and bear it. He shakes his hands with the conspirators in a natural and brotherly way, without showing any sign of weakness. He is cunning and moderate in expressing his feelings, by playing with the conspirators’ distorted sense of moral authority. His task will be that of convincing Rome and its citizens “[…] that the assassination was a cruel slaughter committed by petty, envious, self-interested opportunists”\textsuperscript{59}. As Buhler and Keyshian underline, Antony’s unexpected ability to manipulate the people’s reaction is evident both in the way he triggers indignation and outrage in their hearts\textsuperscript{60}, and in the way he exploits appearances to politic ends\textsuperscript{61}. His behaviour is Machiavellian since by avenging Caesar’s death he not only “[…] manages […] to injure his opponents, […] [he also] […] discredit[s] their cause”\textsuperscript{62}, by turning his revenge into a satisfying and successful victory.

Antony’s transformation into revenger-redeemer is profound, specifically in the chameleonic way in which he disguises his feelings. His idea of friendship and brotherhood changes rapidly according to the situation. Although Antony defines Brutus and his comrades as ‘friends’, the difference between the intimate and sincere relationship he shared with Caesar is far removed from the fake bond he has with the conspirators. It is in Act 3 scene 1, however, that Antony’s revenge suddenly explodes, by revealing all his rage and frustration. The curse he puts on those who murdered

\textsuperscript{59} Keyshian, Harry, \textit{The Shapes of Revenge}, Humanities Press, N.J., 1994, p. 84

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{62} Keyshian, Harry, \textit{The Shapes of Revenge}, Humanities Press, N.J., 1994, p. 84
Caesar appears to be rather an outburst against a corrupted and petty society, which lacks ideals and cooperation among its members:

Woe to the hand that shed this costly blood!
Over thy wounds now do I prophesy—[...]
A curse shall light upon the limbs of men;
Domestic fury and fierce civil strife
Shall cumber all the parts of Italy; [...] (III.1.261-267)

Antony’s commitment to the salvation of Rome is soon clouded by his personal revenge and desire for ambition. Act 4 scene 1 represents a turning point in the play, as it is here that the real Antony comes out, that is, in the way he asserts his authority over Octavious and Lepidus. The two members of the second triumvirate are, indeed, only an instrument to the accomplishment of his machinations. As he explains to Octavious, Lepidus is but a creature that “must be taught, and trained, and bid go forth/ A barren-spirited fellow, one that feeds/ On objects, arts, and imitations” (IV.2.35-37). Antony compares Lepidus to a property, specifically to a horse, whose motions need to be governed and disciplined by a human mind.

The eagerness to demonstrate power comes to its climax in Act 5 scene 1, when Antony and Octavious are raising their army against Brutus and Cassius. It is clearly Antony who is leading the action here, whereas Octavious is simply a ‘spectator’, a soldier who is obeying an order. Antony’s commitment to avenge Caesar’s death and to redeem Rome is deflected by his personal and ambitious plan to destroy the conspirators’ army. Interestingly, the more he imposes his superiority and haughtiness the more he resembles Caesar: “Octavious I have seen more days than you” (IV.2.18), “[...] I am in their bosoms, and I know/ Wherefore they do it.” (V.1.7-8).

Although Octavious’s and Antony’s roles are overturned, it is Octavious who controls Antony’s impulsiveness and restores the order in the end. He both frees Strato and Messala from the bond of servitude and decides in favour of Brutus’s rites of burial. By
recognizing Brutus’s honour and the limits of human action, Antony survives from the destructive power of revenge. As Taylor suggests, his “view of human nature, while less rigidly philosophical than that of the conspirators, is deeper in its awareness of the significance of destiny in the determining of the events of history”\textsuperscript{63}, therefore it is more inclined to forgiveness.

\footnotesize\textsuperscript{63} Taylor, Myron, ‘Shakespeare's Julius Caesar and the Irony of History’, \textit{Shakespeare Quarterly}, 24, 1973, p. 308
CHAPTER THREE
PURE AND TAINTED BLOOD IN SACRIFICE AND REVENGE MURDERS

Fig. 2: “Non sine causa,” Claude Paradin, *Devises*, 29. From the Folger Shakespeare Library Collection.
CHAPTER THREE: PURE AND TAINTED BLOOD IN SACRIFICE AND REVENGE MURDERS

In both *Titus Andronicus* and *Julius Caesar* blood is paradoxically both the symbol of the characters’ guilt and the only means to wash out that guilt. The need to clean their sin and to purify the act they performed is stronger than their desire for violence. By “bathing their hands” in their victims’ blood the characters create a sort of ritual, conceived as a means which is symbolically designed to remove the impurities and the infections the victim is likely to transmit to the community. This is particularly evident in *Julius Caesar* when, in Act 3 scene 1, Brutus bellows: “Stoop, Romans, stoop,/ And let us bathe our hands in Caesar’s blood” (III.1.106-107). If we look closely at *Titus Andronicus*, specifically at Act 2 scene 3, we may notice that there are several analogies between Brutus’s line and Aaron’s speech. The Moor spurs Tamora’s sons to wash their guilty hands in Bassianus’s blood after violating Lavinia’s body: “Thy sons make pillage of her chastity/ And wash their hands in Bassianus’s blood” (II.3.44-45). However, whereas in the case of Brutus the rite of dipping the fingers into Caesar’s blood has a therapeutic and purifying meaning, in *Titus Andronicus* Aaron’s grisly plan to wash Chiron and Demetrius’s hands in Bassianus’s blood represents not only a parody of the Roman rituals, but also a reprehensible and twisted means to blame Bassianus for his wife’s tainted virtue.

In both plays blood represents the denominator between sacrifice and revenge. Its double aspect, as both an instrument of redemption and as a symbol of the victim’s weakness and loss of control, is evidence of its controversial role. Blood generates life and at the same time it leads to death. Paster defines blood as a vital fluid¹, along with mother’s milk and semen, whose flow is essential for nourishment and life. Renaissance imaginary depicts blood as “a complex, viscous fluid with powerful

---

¹ Paster, Gail K., ’“In the Spirit of Men there is no Blood” : Blood as Trope of Gender in *Julius Caesar*, Shakespeare Quarterly, 40, 1989, p. 285
pharmacological significations”, including curative properties. When drunk, it was believed to have miraculous cures. Its regenerative power was prized also in Roman tradition, explains Noble, as a medicine to heal degenerative diseases. The act of drinking blood from a gladiator’s wounds, for instance, was said to cure epilepsy³. Blood was strictly connected with the attitude and the ethics of a person. Indeed, being infected with a criminal’s blood was considered to be dangerous, not only because the infection would transmit to the victim the genetic heredity of the criminal character, but also because it would increase the probability of a career of crime⁴. Blood condenses into its fluid not only the qualities and the virtues of a person, but also the lineage to which he/she belongs. In these two plays, family ties are visceral and are all sealed by blood. The “crimson river of warm blood” (II.3.22) which runs through Lavinia’s lips metaphorically represents the genetic line of the Andronici, which is deviated by the infectious semen of the Goths. In Julius Caesar, instead, family is often replaced by friendship. It is Antony, indeed, who avenges Caesar’s death and his stained virtue. Interestingly, the image of Lavinia’s bloody lips is similar to that of Caesar’s wounds in Act 3 scene 1, whose “ruby lips”, compared by Antony to “dumb mouths” (III.1.263), claim the voice and word of a tongue. Caesar’s bloodline survives treachery and does not mingle with the “[...] rebel blood/ That will be thawed from the true quality/ With that which melteth fools” (III.1.40). Its purity prevails over the conspirators’ filthy and coward blood, which threatens to break the sacred dynastical bond. This is clear in the last scene, when another Caesar is restored to the throne of

---

² Noble, Louise, ‘“And make two Pasties of your shameful Heads”: Medicinal Cannibalism and Healing the Body Politic in Titus Andronicus’, ELH, 70, 3, 2003, p. 695

³ Ibid., p. 682

⁴ Thorndike, 8:536, quoted in Noble, Louise, ‘“And make two Pasties of your shameful Heads”: Medicinal Cannibalism and Healing the Body Politic in Titus Andronicus’, ELH, 70, 3, 2003, p. 685
Rome, an act which proves the need to maintain the genetic heredity which, through blood, is passed from father to son.

In both *Julius Caesar* and *Titus Andronicus* blood represents a sign of distinction, not only between families and communities but also in terms of gender. The bleeding body was usually interpreted as a sign of loss of control and weakness, that is, as the inability to stifle one’s emotions. Women, unlike men, were considered to be more prone to passions, “[...] which were understood as powerful urges of the soul as it responded to internal or external sensory stimuli [...]”\(^5\). Because of its fluidity, especially during menstruation, female blood was believed to be impure, therefore, polluting. Although menstrual blood was medically identical to the blood produced by the body through injuries, it was usually considered a synonym of impurity and waste, that is, as one of “[...] the varieties of female incontinence, [such as] sexual, urinary, [and] linguistic”\(^6\). Lavinia’s troubling condition is marked not only by her womanhood, but also by her marital status, which paradoxically justifies and authorises her aggressors’ perverse sexual desire. The brutal way with which Lavinia is raped has many connections with Caesar’s assassination. Interestingly, explains Paster, by stabbing and exposing his body to public judgement, the conspirators seem to evoke his bodily weakness, characterised by the inability to stop bleeding\(^7\), a distinctive trait of female body.

The act of “bathing the hands in someone’s blood” also provides the two plays with religious motives. However, whereas in *Julius Caesar* the element of blood is always part of a ritual, in which it is turned from bodily fluid into a “costly” and “sacred” symbol of divine power, in *Titus Andronicus* blood is understood in its most human

---


\(^6\) Paster, Gail K., ‘“In the Spirit of Men there is no Blood” : Blood as Trope of Gender in *Julius Caesar*, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 40, 1989, p. 287

\(^7\) Ibid., p. 285
and physical aspect. In this play, religious rituals, such as bloody sacrifices, are always alluded to but never fully performed. Alarbus’s sacrifice, Mutius’s death and Chiron and Demetrius’s dismembering are only distorted kinds of religious rites. They are, indeed, disguised and unemotional acts of revenge, aimed at boosting the characters’ ego. Moreover, in Titus Andronicus blood is always associated with family ties. It is an instrument which determines whether an individual is an outsider or a member of the community. In Julius Caesar, instead, blood is not the background of grisly and macabre situations, but it is rather included in a world of mystery and superstitions. The soothsayer’s prophecies, the ghost and the natural events that happen throughout the play are, indeed, part of that world in which, as Mark Rose points out, magic, ritual and drama are thoroughly combined, and in a way that “ [...] it is sometimes hard to say where the boundary lies between attending a play that is about ritual and participating in a ritual”.

---

3.1 The Fountain of Blood: religious and gender Motifs in Caesar’s and Lavinia’s martyrdoms

Presages announcing Caesar’s death are not only associated with natural events, such as apocalyptic storms, “scolding winds” and “threat’ning clouds”, but also with the characters’ involuntary actions, including dreams. In *Julius Caesar*, dreams and omens are always signs of tragic fate. Calpurnia’s dream, for instance, which is conceived as a bizarre figment of her imagination, plays a great role in the process of interpreting her husband’s death. When Caesar, in Act 2 scene 2, tells Decius about the dream his wife had the night before, the first image he describes is that of a fountain-like statue splashing blood. Allusions to Roman Catholic tradition, particularly to Baptism and Eucharist, often influence the discussion about the issue of sacramental honour regarding Caesar’s death⁹, explains Heller. The imagery to which the play often makes reference has many similarities with the idea of Christ as the emblem of the Fountain of Life, and Calpurnia’s dream definitely proves it.

According to Heller, in Roman Catholic iconography “the crucifix or the figure of Christ is presented as part of the statuary of a fountain [...]”¹⁰, which is usually called the Fountain of Life. Some baptismal images, for instance, often portrait the crucifix and a font containing blood, in which people bathe their hands. In Eucharistic images, instead, the font is replaced by a cup, filled with Christ’s blood. Protestant tradition also provides evidence of the Fountain of Life. During the second half of the sixteenth century, argues Bynum, in the north of Germany “[...] Protestant woodcuts and altarpieces depicted the blood of the crucified, splashing on the heads of Christians to


¹⁰ Ibid., p. 79
bring salvation”\textsuperscript{11}. The idea of the sacred blood providing healing properties may be also found “[...] in the medieval cult of the Holy Blood, which featured not only the proliferation of phials of Christ’s blood but also stories about bleeding statues and paintings of Christ”\textsuperscript{12}.

The association of the image of bleeding Caesar with that of Christ is particularly evident in Act 2 scene 2, the scene which anticipates Caesar’s assassination. Caesar and Decius’s different interpretations of Calpurnia’s deadly dream reveal two conflicting theological points of view. Whereas Caesar explains the vision as a deadly premonition according to his wife’s predictions, Decius conceives the dream as a good omen, by interpreting the blood spurting from the fountain as a “reviving” and divine instrument for Rome’s salvation. The image of the Romans “bathing their hands in Caesar’s blood” is a clear reference to Baptism and to the idea of death, burial and resurrection. Instead, the Eucharist interpretation Decius gives of Calpurnia’s dream is based on the concept that life exists and it is remembered in the sacrifice and blood of Christ\textsuperscript{13}. Decius’s interpretation, explains Heller, gives emphasis not on death but on the transmission of life\textsuperscript{14}, whose regeneration is possible only through Caesar’s sacrifice.


\textsuperscript{12} Kaula, David, ‘“Let us be Sacrificers” : Religious Motifs in \textit{Julius Caesar}, Shakespeare Studies, 14, 1981, p. 204


\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., p. 86
Although religious motifs are at the background of both the events and the characters’ behaviours, *Julius Caesar* demonstrates the failure of the sacraments, explains Heller. First of all, because Caesar is neither Christ nor a deity, as shown in the anecdote Cassius tells about Caesar’s weak body, during the Spanish campaign. Secondly, after his death Caesar comes back to the play not through a resurrection process but in the shape of a ghost seeking for revenge\(^\text{15}\). Thirdly, Act 2 scene 2 depicts the Roman general as an haughty person, who challenges his fate and the gods’ will. His behaviour is ambiguous throughout the play, as he alternates moments of extraordinary generosity towards his people, with others in which he reveals his most devilish and tyrannical aspect. The way Cassius depicts him has nothing to do with the divine and mighty leader evoked by Antony during the funeral. He is rather a “[...] prodigious, terrifying figure who thunders, lightens, opens graves, and roars like a lion [...]”\(^\text{16}\), an image which is often associated, in Protestant tradition, with that of the Pope.

The worldly political power Caesar acquired during his reign has been frequently compared with that of the Catholic leader. This analogy, explains Kaula, is probably due to the sixteenth century’s bitter controversy concerning the truthfulness of the Christian doctrine, particularly in terms of worship. From the Protestant point of view, indeed, “the word ‘image’ itself carries suspicious overtones of idolatry”\(^\text{17}\), since it clashes with the second of the Ten Commandments which prohibits the veneration of any kind of images. Some critics have found evidence of the Protestant-Catholic debate also in the presence of pro- and anti-Caesar factions, with Cassius, Brutus, Flavius and

\(^{15}\) Ibid., p. 80

\(^{16}\) Kaula, David, ‘“Let us be Sacrificers”: Religious Motifs in *Julius Caesar*’, *Shakespeare Studies*, 14, 1981, p. 201

\(^{17}\) Ibid., p. 199

90
Murellus embodying the Protestant stereotype and Mark Antony representing the Catholic point of view. The idea of the Day of Judgement which would mark the end of the Pope’s universal power has important analogies with Caesar’s tragic death, which will turn him from dictator into martyr.

The issue of sacrifice and martyrdom is evoked in Decius’s interpretation of Calpurnia’s dream, which helps to create an image of Caesar-redeemer, who generously sheds his blood in order to save his people from damnation. The blood splashing from Caesar’s wounds is “costly” and “sacred”, it is a pure fluid with regenerative and healing properties. It is the source of life as it is basically life, Kaula reminds us. Because of its miraculous power, when released and shared with people, blood was believed to infuse the vitality of the victim, by creating a sort of blood-bond among the receivers. In the case of Caesar, the commemorative aspect is evident in the image of “the fountain spouting blood in many pipes” (II.2.85), in which the Romans bathe themselves. The act of bathing echoes the biblical reference to Christ’s blood, which was considered to be the only cure for both physical and spiritual infirmities, such as the desire for “peace, freedom and liberty” evoked by the conspirators after Caesar’s assassination.

The fact that Caesar’s blood is, in some way, a divine element is proved by the use of the word “relics” (II.2.89), which belongs to Christian imagery. His “reviving blood” will become, explains Decius, substance “for tinctures, stains, relics and cognizance”(II.2.89) and worshipped by the whole community. In the soliloquy preceding the funeral, however, Antony emphasises the Christian aspect of Caesar’s martyrdom. But whereas in the moment straight after Caesar’s assassination he expresses his most deep and sincere feelings for the mourning of his friend’s death, at the end of the scene his pain turns into anger, by transforming the image of Caesar’s sacred wounds, dispensing life and health among the Romans, into “[...] the lurid evidence of butchery and then into the [...] [motivation] for wholesale havoc and

\[\text{18 Ibid., p. 208}\]
vengeance. Relics, explains Kaula, were powerful instruments to ensure the believers’ trust and devotion. Their worth was even greater than gold, since they were unique examples. Parts of the body, hair, bones and garments stained with the “sacred” blood of the martyr, either a saint or a king, were sold as merchandise of great value. The idea that Caesar’s body is but a tool for Antony’s growing ambition is clear in the way he exploits his image of martyr, by stirring hatred and riots among his fellow citizens. The use of the body and blood of his leader for propagandistic and political purposes echoes, in some way, the features of a holy crusade.

The association of blood with life and the displaying of Caesar’s dead body reveal, in some way, his womanly weakness. The physicality and strength which characterised Caesar in the first two acts is replaced here by muteness and by the inability to stop bleeding, two qualities which are often connected with womanhood. Caesar’s feminine image, argues Paster, matches with some late-medieval debates concerning the close relationship between manliness and motherhood, “[...] particularly in the conventional iconography of Christ lactating blood.” Interestingly, the excess of bleeding in the play, which is demonised by 15th century medicine, represents neither fertility nor abundance, it is rather a sign of both vulnerability and inability to control impulses, often compared to a kind of rebellion. In the case of Caesar, it is Antony who restores Caesar’s manhood, which is threatened by the conspirators’ vile behaviour. It is him who interprets “his martyred signs” by giving voice to his leader’s most inner feelings, silenced by his sudden death: “For when the noble Caesar saw him stab,/Ingratitude more strong than traitors’ arms,/Quite vanquished him.” (III.2.178-180). In Julius Caesar as well as in Titus Andronicus, barbarous images and violent deeds are not dramatised

---

19 Ibid., p. 209
20 Ibid., p. 205
21 Ibid.
22 Paster, Gail K., ‘‘In the Spirit of Men there is no Blood” : Blood as Trope of Gender in Julius Caesar’, Shakespeare Quarterly, 40, 1989, p. 288
but always reported and distorted by other characters’ reinterpretations, as in the case of Caesar and Lavinia.  

3.1.2 Lavinia’s unwilled Bleeding

Whereas in *Julius Caesar* blood is both an instrument to separate manliness from womanhood and a sign of the characters’ guilt, in *Titus Andronicus* it is also connected with the will to act. Paster identifies two different typologies of suffering: voluntary and involuntary. Voluntary bleeding was usually associated with man, whose ability to control impulses and passions was considered to be stronger than that of a woman. Menstruation, for instance, was seen as an example of involuntary bleeding, a kind of punitive act, which demonstrated the natural inferiority of women. Compared to men’s sporadic cases of bloodshed, the menstrual period was “[...] a particularly charged instance of the female body’s predisposition to flow out, to leak”\(^{24}\), or simply as a sign of lack of self-control. According to 15\(^{th}\) century medicine the excess of bleeding, commonly identified as *plethora*, was dangerous since it questioned the ability to rule the body. Therefore, a plethoric body, usually associated with women, unlike a male body, “[...] was [more] predisposed to corruption and disease, because it resisted natural government.”\(^{25}\)

---


\(^{24}\) Paster, Gail K., ‘”In the Spirit of Men there is no Blood” : Blood as Trope of Gender in *Julius Caesar*, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 40, 1989, p. 287

What distinguishes men from women’s excess of blood is the possibility to shed it at will\(^\text{26}\), continues Paster. When bleeding is a freely willed act, that is, it is an effect of an individual’s decision, it is regenerative, thus, therapeutically useful. Lavinia’s womanly condition surely provides a motive for her being a victim. The fact that, as Demetrius explains, “She is a woman, therefore may be wooed;/ She is a woman, therefore may be won;” (II.1.82-83), proves Lavinia’s passivity, that is, her natural predisposition to be always subject to man’s intervention. The association of her body with a “bubbling fountain stirred with wind” (II.4.23-24), whose cheeks are wet with blood like “a conduit with three issuing spouts” (II.4.30), is an image which indicates involuntary bleeding. The fountain, argues Albert Tricomi, is usually a symbol of female sexual organs\(^\text{27}\). When stopped, the fountain represents ‘virginity’, as it is connected with the ability to suffocate sexual instincts. Instead, when it is depicted in the act of overflowing, it means ‘lost virginity’\(^\text{28}\).

Another example of impurity is the image of Lavinia’s bloody mouth. Paster gives a quite daring interpretation of her mutilated mouth, by comparing it to the image of the vagina, whose blood flowing can be neither represented on stage nor stopped\(^\text{29}\). Although it may appear unrealistic, her analysis of Lavinia’s character perfectly matches with that of a woman, whose weak condition cannot be changed, as it is naturally imposed. The bloody mouth representing menstrual flowing along with the image of the fountain as the emblem of sexual maturity are all examples of involuntary wounds that cannot be cured. Lavinia’s bodily inferiority condemns her to her tragic

\(^{26}\text{Paster, Gail K., ‘’In the Spirit of Men there is no Blood’’ : Blood as Trope of Gender in \textit{Julius Caesar}, Shakespeare Quarterly, 40, 1989, p. 288}\)

\(^{27}\text{Tricomi, Albert, ‘The Mutilated Garden in \textit{Titus Andronicus}, Shakespeare Studies, 9, 1976, quoted in Paster, Gail K., ‘’In the Spirit of Men there is no Blood’’ : Blood as Trope of Gender in \textit{Julius Caesar}, Shakespeare Quarterly, 40, 1989, p. 289}\)

\(^{28}\text{Paster, Gail K., ‘’In the Spirit of Men there is no Blood’’ : Blood as Trope of Gender in \textit{Julius Caesar}, Shakespeare Quarterly, 40, 1989, p. 289}\)

\(^{29}\text{Ibid.}\)
fate. Her rape, which is symbolically a wound, is but the evidence of male sexual violence and arrogance. It is an offence to both her marriage vows and loyalty to her husband. Her sexual assault may be interpreted not only as an example of physical violence, but also as “[…] the affirmation of the hierarchical order of human relations”\(^{30}\). The violence which spurs Chiron and Demetrius’s crime is motivated, assumes Mohler, not by a physical desire towards Lavinia as a woman, but by a sick and desperate need for carnal and social transgression.

The corrupted blood with which Lavinia is contaminated during her rape is like a venom, which feeds on the good blood inside her body, by causing diseases and bastard progeny. By becoming a sexually dishonoured woman, Lavinia is responsible for the risk this stain will have on her bloodline. Her death will be, indeed, an attempt to both save her from shame and to preserve the integrity of her family. Titus kills her not only in order to separate his daughter’s infected blood from the patriarchal blood, the symbol of his undisputed authority, but also in order to restore the virtue and purity of the Roman body. Lavinia’s association with Rome is evident right from the beginning of the play, when Titus, while performing the burial ceremony for his dead sons, greets his daughter by comparing her to his country: “Kind Rome, that hast thus lovingly reserved/ The cordial of mine age to glad my heart!”(I.1.165-166).

Throughout the play we never see Lavinia in her female role, as she is always conceived as a sort of property:

By her husband:

BASSIANUS: Lord Titus, by your leave, this girl is mine (I.1.276)

By her king:

SATURNINUS: Lavinia will I make my empress,

Rome’s royal empress, mistress of my heart (I.1.240-241)

And by her father:

TITUS: […] the tribute that I owe (I.1.251)

\(^{30}\) Mohler, Tina, ’ “What is thy Body but a swallowing Grave…?” Desire underground in Titus Andronicus’, Shakespeare Quarterly, 57, 1, 2006, p. 23
Her condition of womanhood not only “denies [...] [her] tongue to tell” (II.3.174), but also prevents her from being free from the family relationships to which she is tied. Unlike Portia, who desperately claims her right to be part of Brutus’s life, by sharing the secret of the conspiracy, Lavinia simply accepts her ‘gender disabilities’, without fighting for her own independence. Her muteness, indeed, symbolises powerlessness, a quality which clashes with the female common talkativeness. Whereas Portia does not depend upon a male voice in order to communicate with the world outside, Lavinia relies exclusively on her father’s and her uncle’s interpretations. The rape deprives her not only of her power to speak, but also of the ability to express interiority31, which is transferred to Titus. The masculine self, explains Mohler, “that might at any time be revealed in [...] [Portia] is permanently banished from Lavinia. The fact that Portia dies because of the “impatience of [...] [Brutus’s] absence” is a clear allusion to suicide, a privilege Lavinia will never have.

---

31 Ibid., p. 42
3.2 Family blood-Bonds: patriarchal Authority and filial Subjection

The theme of blood is basically at the core of the characters’ relationships, particularly within the family circle. In both *Julius Caesar* and *Titus Andronicus* blood-bonds provide the family members with an identity, which is created and legitimised by the name they carry on. Blood hierarchy and family names, indeed, determine the exclusion or the belonging to the family-community. In order to preserve its integrity and purity, members are, in some way, allowed to act against those who threaten the balance and stability of the family to which they belong. In both plays, family is often associated with the country, in a way that it is sometimes impossible to separate the two aspects. Titus’s relationship with his sons, for instance, is seriously compromised by his blind loyalty towards Rome. His devotion and adherence to Roman-ness often clash with the features of the loving father, who sacrifices himself for his sons’ sake. Whereas in *Julius Caesar* the feeling of belonging, generated by blood-bonds, always alludes to a wider context, in *Titus Andronicus* the relationship between the individual and the state mirrors the microcosm represented by family ties.

In both plays characters’ relationships are all sealed by a sort of blood contract, an indissoluble bond which cannot be destroyed. However, whereas in *Julius Caesar* the idea of the contract deals with social fairness and mutual respect, in *Titus Andronicus* it is often associated with the issue of slavery and subjection. If we analyse, for instance, the relationships between Titus and Lavinia, Tamora and Chiron and Demetrius, and Aaron and his son, we may notice that they are all based on the idea of property. Love, admiration and mutual sharing, which characterise the relationship between father and son, are replaced, in *Titus Andronicus*, by excessive control and overprotection: “Shall I speak for thee? Shall I say’tis so?” asks Marcus when he finds his niece ravished. Likewise, when Titus guarantees he “understand[s] her signs” (III.1.143), he unconsciously reveals all his patriarchal power by becoming, in some way, the only interpreter of her suffering:
I am the sea. Hark how her sighs doth blow.
She is the weeping welkin, I the earth.
Then must my sea be moved with her sighs,
Then must my earth with her continual tears
Become a deluge overflowed and drowned,
Forwhy my bowels cannot hide her woes,
But like a drunkard must I vomit them. (III.1.224-230)

This happens because “in Titus Andronicus almost every spectacle, deed, and character is absorbed into the titanic presence of the protagonist”32, whether we refer to Titus or to Tamora. Their sons and families are, indeed, only tools in their own systems. When Mutius disobeys Titus in order to save Lavinia, he is punished not only because he has offended his father, but also because he questions his patriarchal authority. The same happens with Tamora, who attests his sons’ loyalty by asking for the rape of her enemy’s daughter: “the worse to her, the better loved me” (II.3.167). Titus’s and Tamora’s behaviours bring out their most tyrannical side, by overshadowing, in some way, their figures of father and mother. What we are going to discuss in this paragraph is, indeed, the nature of the relationships between parents and children, specifically between father and daughter, and mother and son. We are going to focus on the exclusiveness and indissolubility of their bond, as well as on the way in which the issue of blood determines the lawfulness or unlawfulness of the bloodline.

In Titus Andronicus family ties are stronger and more important than other kinds of relationships, such as friendship and marriage. Members are, in some way, bound by an alliance which can be broken off only through death. Sometimes, death even fortifies the relationship among the clan, as in the case of Mutius, in which Lucius and his brothers strenuously defend his cause and his right to be buried in the family grave, by opposing Titus’s will. In the play, disobedience coincides with dishonour and

treason. However, it is often hard to explain whether dishonour and treason are based on political or family matters. In Act 1 scene 1, for instance, analogies between Titus’s and Saturninus’s reactions towards their sons-allies are quite evident:

TITUS Nor thou nor he are any sons of mine.
My sons would never so dishonour me. (I.1.290-291)

SATURNINUS Nor he, nor thee, nor any of thy stock.
I’ll trust by leisure him that mocks me once,
Thee never, nor thy traitorous haughty sons,
Confederates all thus to dishonour me. (II.297-300)

In this scene, the figure of the father mingles with that of the king, as well as that of the son with that of the subject. The violation of the blood-bond, which may happen through an act of treason, insubordination or even through the murder of one of the members, creates the condition for the development of an endless and sanguinary feud. In Titus Andronicus tragedy usually starts in the family, to expand to a wider context, that of politics.

3.2.1 Father-daughter Relationship: Titus and Lavinia’s shared Suffering

In order to analyse the relationship between Titus and his daughter, we need to study Titus’s character in terms of fatherhood. From Act 1 to Act 3 Titus is virtually absent both from his son’s lives and from home. The figure of the caring father is replaced by that of the detached and veteran soldier, devoted to his country and king. The idea of virtue and greatness he construes around the myth of Rome clashes with the real image of the city. Similarly, the way he describes Lavinia as an ornament and as a sacred object does not correspond with the real Lavinia of Act 2 scene 3, whose dialogue with Tamora contradicts the image of chaste and silent woman, by unveiling
all her wittiness and maliciousness. Up to this point, there seems to have been no communication between father and daughter. Titus’s only concern is focused on the protection of Lavinia’s integrity, as if her body were a country to defend from foreigners’ attacks. Their relationship is limited and restrained by social and political boundaries, which prevent them from recognising each other in their family roles, that is, as that of father and daughter.

It is only after Lavinia’s rape that Titus understands his mistakes. His process of change starts the very moment when his daughter’s body is found ravished and mutilated. The body he used to venerate in Act 1 is now transformed into a human wreck and a carcass. Lavinia is metaphorically the reminder of Titus’s failures, both as a father and as a Roman citizen. She embodies the real image of Rome, that of mixed and disrupted country in which the concept of hereditary monarchy clashes with the populace’s will. Even the issue of purity, guaranteed by bloodline, is put into question when Tamora, after being crowned Empress of Rome, gives birth to a half-moor baby, the fruit of the adulterous relationship with Aaron. Lavinia’s rape is a sad reflection on the chaos with which Rome is affected. Titus’s relationship with his daughter develops when he realises that his total commitment to his country’s cause was not sufficient to avoid Rome’s imminent downfall. “What shall I do/ Now I behold thy lively body so?” (III.1.104-105), asks a resigned Titus to himself when he faces Lavinia’s tortured body. Titus’s thought, however, is open to interpretation since it is not clear whether the body to which he is referring is specifically his daughter’s or that of Rome.

The first example of Titus’s change is when he sacrifices his hand in order to save his sons from death. This act is fundamental to demonstrate his unconditioned love towards his family. Unfortunately, all his attempts to redeem himself and to restore the order inside the family circle are vain. His hand, which represents his power and military glories, is returned with Martius’s and Quintus’s heads, a scornful and cruel act of mockery, plotted by Aaron and Tamora. It is the sharing of mutual suffering and the shame they experienced that unite Titus and Lavinia. In Act 3 scene 1 their relationship becomes closer and more intense, specifically when Lavinia kisses her
father, which is actually the first sign of physical contact between them. Indeed, Titus’s former attempt to kiss his daughter’s lips cannot be interpreted as a voluntary act, but simply as “[...] a perverse, yet fatherly instinct to mend her injury”\(^{33}\). By trying to control and interpret her voice, Titus seems to give her childish innocence back to her, therefore, to cleanse her of her guilt.

The fact that Lavinia is entirely dependent upon her father may be explained as an attempt to suffocate her cleverness and to restrain her female impulses. She is incapable of both hurting and killing herself, thus, she is not allowed to eliminate the source of her grief. Her voice is powerful and must be silenced since it would shake the whole story: Chiron and Demetrius’s crime, Tamora’s adultery, Aaron’s intrigues, even Titus’s mistakes. Lavinia’s suffering, however, echoes in Titus’s conscience. She is, as Green suggests, “[...] the occasion and the expression of his madness, his inner state”\(^{34}\). When Lavinia kisses his lips, indeed, Titus automatically sympathises with her physical disabilities and powerlessness. Her condition becomes his condition. Their intense bond, which is sealed by blood, is fortified by the experience they shared. Lavinia paradoxically becomes Titus’s double, both in her humbleness due to her womanhood, and in her extreme intolerance towards Tamora. She unfortunately “embodies the very lesson the proud conqueror Titus is forced to learn”\(^{35}\).

On the one hand Titus seems to be aware of his daughter’s tenacity and valour in demonstrating the truth, on the other he is constantly claiming his patriarchal authority, by reinterpreting her “alphabet”. It is only when Lavinia reveals the name of her rapists that Titus’s behaviour changes. From then on, the image of Lavinia as a possession and a property is substituted by that of a trustful and obedient collaborator, that is, a co-author of Titus’s unrestrainable revenge. The scene of Chiron and


\(^{34}\) Green, Douglas E., ‘Interpreting “her martyr’d Signs”: Gender and Tragedy in *Titus Andronicus*, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 40, 3, 1989, p. 322

\(^{35}\) Ibid., p. 323
Demetrius’ sacrifice is emblematic, as she turns from victim into executioner. She catches the brothers’ blood, by metaphorically “replicating her enforced reception of it by the rape”\(^{36}\). Interestingly, explains Belling, her name, from the Latin \textit{lavoare}, meaning, to wash, “[...] is indicative of her double role as the recipient of a stain and the site of its purification”\(^{37}\). By asking for Lavinia’s collaboration, Titus wants to initiate the process of purification of both Lavinia and Rome, by transferring the infected blood from his daughter to ‘the swallowing womb’ that generated Chiron and Demetrius, that is, their mother\(^{38}\). By returning her own flesh to her Titus closes, in some way, the circle of violence and deterioration started with the Goths’ arrival in Rome. Unfortunately, his attempts to heal the body of Rome are vain, as, like Lavinia’s, it has been contaminated with the virus of corruption. Their bodies are inseparable from the disease of which they have been tainted, therefore, they are necessarily condemned to the only cure which annihilates them, that is, death.

3.2.2 The ‘imprisoning Womb’: Tamora and her binding Relationship with her Children

Tamora is the expression of woman’s subtle power. She is both the cause and the effect of Titus’s revenge. As Green suggests, she is along with Lavinia, “one pole on the female scale by which we measure Titus”\(^{39}\), since she at the same time mirrors and emphasises the darkest side of his character, the one dealing with evil and revenge. Their complex relationship represents the paradox of the avenger’s fatal destiny, that is, that of resembling the object of his/her own revenge. Titus, indeed, is guilty of the


\(^{37}\) Ibid.

\(^{38}\) Ibid.

same crimes Tamora is accused. The fact, continues Green, that she disguises as Revenge in Act 5 scene 2, proves that her vengeance is as justified as that of her enemy. Her motherhood, however, is put into question precisely when her personal desire for revenge prevails over the sense of protection towards her sons. When in Act 5 scene 2 she abandons them, by throwing them into Titus’s madness, Tamora has already turned from pleading mother into villain.

Titus’s and Tamora’s behaviours mirror each other, as the two characters are involved in a constant struggle to demonstrate their role of both political and family leaders. They emulate themselves while at the same time contrasting each other. When at the beginning, Tamora seeks Titus’s sympathy by appealing to his parental status, she is still the loving and caring mother who pleads for his son’s life. Her transformation starts when she realises all her efforts are vain, specifically when her son Alarbus is slaughtered by Titus and his son Lucius. Tamora and Titus are suffocating parents, who exercise control over their children, by preventing them from developing their own identity as single individuals. They are pathologically attached to their role of leaders as well as to their father- and motherhood. The great influence they have over their sons and their overprotected behaviours definitely prove their selfish and narcissistic nature, which incites them to take revenge on the person who, in some way, humiliated them.

Alarbus’s death marks Tamora’s loss of identity as a mother, by transforming her into not only a cold-blooded revenger but also into Titus’s double, that is, into a sort of male character. The separation between mother and son, which usually occurs with birth, does not actually happen in Titus Andronicus. The blood-bond which exists between them, develops into a form of subjectivity, as in the case of Chiron and Demetrius. Tamora does not allow them to grow as men, but forces them to maintain their childish status. The two brothers are entrapped into a sort of limbo, still anchored to their condition of half-children. Chiron and Demetrius’s infatuation for Lavinia,

---

40 Ibid., p. 321
which is misinterpreted as love, and the naughty way they fight against each other in Act 2 scene 1 confirm their immaturity:

DEMETRIUS Chiron, thy years wants wit, thy wits wants edge
And manners to intrude where I am graced
And may, for aught thou knowest, affected be.
CHIRON Demetrius, thou dost overween in all,
And so in this, to bear me down with braves.
‘Tis not the difference of a year or two
Makes me less gracious, or thee more fortunate.[...]
And that my sword upon thee shall approve,
And plead my passions for Lavinia’s love. (II.1.26-36)

Although they are physically adults, the umbilical cord which connects them with their mother has not been cut yet. It is only through the development of manhood and the creation of a sexual identity that this separation may be possible. The child becomes a man the very moment when these two conditions exist. Chiron and Demetrius, unfortunately, will never achieve this status. Tamora fails in her role of mother because not only does she prevent her children from being independent individuals, but also because she has transformed them into slaves and warlike machines instructed in the use of violence and in the culture of intolerance. The swords with which they play in Act 2 scene 1 are real weapons, which are used later for Lavinia’s dismembering. Tamora’s wrong behaviour put an emphasis on the strict Roman military education which is “[...] passed between father and son, culminating in honourable triumph such as is enjoyed by Titus and his sons at the start of the play”41.

Maternal love, which characterises the relationship between the Goth queen and her sons before Alarbus’ death, turns into anger. It is this feeling that spurs her need for revenge, which is appeased only after Lavinia’s rape. The assault, in some way, re-enacts Alarbus’s sacrifice. Lavinia metaphorically embodies Tamora’s son, whereas Chiron and Demetrius play the role which used to be that of Titus and Lucius. Her thirst for revenge does not heal her grief, yet marks her irreversible transformation into a villain, whose climax occurs in Act 5 scene 3, when she eats her own children. Tamora pays for her mistakes and excessive boldness not only with death, but also with the denial of a proper burial. Despite her attempt to escape from the boundaries of womanhood, Tamora is a woman whose “[...] voice is still mute when forced to engage with men.” Indeed, she is not able to free her sons from the bond of slavery to which they are condemned because they are her tools. She is the mind and they are the arm of her revenge.

Tamora’s miserable condition of humiliated woman, prisoner, depraved mother and vessel is the reason why women’s sexuality is so limited in the play. Indeed, the control of female sexual nature was strictly connected with the preservation of primogeniture. When this purpose failed, explains Davies, “[...] and women determined their own sexual appetites regardless of procreation, the social structure was threatened with collapse.” This is exactly what happens when Tamora gives birth to Aaron’ son. Her unconscious desire to fill Alarbus’s loss with the Moor’s baby cannot be satisfied, as he represents the fruit of both her adultery and sexual transgression. Her death, therefore, will atone not only for her subversion as a woman but also for her inability to ensure a legitimate blood descent.

3.3 Weeping Tears of Blood: a Demonstration of Mercy and Suffering

The act of weeping is usually an involuntary action, that is, the effect of a strong emotion connected with both grief and joy. When they are the result of negative emotions, tears can be interpreted as either a response to private suffering or as a means of non-verbal communication, through which an individual interacts with the community to which he/she belongs. In the case of Lavinia, for instance, tears are the symbol of her pent-up frustration of not being able to reveal the identity of her rapists. Her weeping eyes are not only the emblem of her suffering, but also the real interpreters of her mind. Indeed, whereas her body has been annihilated and silenced by the rape, her mind is still alive and eager for revenge. Her tears mirror her agony, which is not only the result of the inability to communicate with her family, but also the response to the fear and shame she suffered. Titus’s “bitter tears” (III.1.6), instead, are the expression of the grief of his soul, of his guilt and failures. They are evidence of both his human weakness and disappointment due to his country’s betrayal.

3.3.1 Tears of Sorrow: Caesar’s weeping Body

Tears acquire different meanings depending on the feelings they arouse. In Julius Caesar, for instance, they are often associated with the idea of pity. By describing Caesar’s dead body as “a bleeding piece of earth” (III.1.257), deprived of both his physical force and of the image of prodigious and divine protector of Rome, Antony transforms the anger and indignation of his fellow-citizens first into mortification and then into mercy. He depicts Caesar as a magnanimous and pious leader, who refused the crown as evidence of humbleness towards his people, and of submission to his country. Like Titus, Antony is the interpreter of Caesar’s suffering. However, whereas in the case of Titus Lavinia’s weeping is real, since it originates from real emotions, the image Antony gives of Caesar’s tears is, in some way, imagined and suggested by his leader’s memory. Both his actions and emotions, including the act of weeping, are
carefully planned and aimed at convincing the people of his good purposes. Unlike Titus, Antony’s tears are not the expression of a change in his behaviour, but are a means to manipulate the mob’s feelings.

In *Julius Caesar* the act of weeping is also conceived in terms of sacred rite. Caesar’s “gracious drops” (III.2.188) running down his body, which has been stained and violated by the conspirators, may also be interpreted as tears of blood. The blood that soaks Caesar’s garment is contaminated with pollution and treason. It is the symbol of an undefeated Rome, which has been invaded and violated within its margins. The use of the word ‘gracious’, however, is evidence of the uniqueness and sacredness of the royal blood. The purity of Caesar’s drops, indeed, is beneficial in order to expel the venom injected into Rome’s body. The blood of the monarch, along with his touch, explains Deborah Willis, was believed to have magical properties, it was “the product of a supernatural power mysteriously inhering in the king’s person, which operates mechanically to heal the afflicted person” 44, that is, Rome and its people. Obviously, the miraculous power related to these practices was often influenced and nourished by imagination and popular beliefs.

The effective way in which Antony prepares his fellow-citizens to the sight of Caesar’s slaughtered body ensures the success of his plan. Antony plays on his people’s compassion and sense of guilt, by inventing an image of Caesar, disappointed by the ingratitude of his subjects and most trustful supporters:

> If you have tears, prepare to shed them now.[…]
> Look, in this place ran Cassius’ dagger through.
> See what a rent the envious Casca made.
> Through this the well-beloved Brutus stabbed[…]

---

This was the most unkindest cut of all.

For when the noble Caesar saw him stab,

Ingratitude, more strong than traitors’ arms,

Quite vanquished him.[...](III.2.163-180)

However, it is the element of blood that fortifies and proves his assumptions. Blood is the irrefutable evidence of both the conspirators’ treason and the violation of Caesar’s body. Not only does Antony try to go over his leader’s last hours, by interpreting what his feelings and reactions might have been, he also makes up an image of a weeping dead body overwhelmed by pity:

O now you weep, and I perceive you feel
The dint of pity. These are gracious drops.[...]

[...] Look you here.

Here is himself, marred, as you see, with traitors. (III.2.187-191)

People’s reaction is certainly influenced by Antony’s point of view, which displays Caesar as a merciful healer. Sacrifice bestows on him the figure of both the caring father and that of the saint who protects his believers, by absorbing through his body the evil affecting community. In Act 3 scene 1, Antony adds the idea of suffering to the image of the dead and tortured Caesar, which intensifies his condition of martyr. At the sight of the violated body, indeed, Octavius’s servant is racked with grief for the loss of his leader. In the dialogue, Antony compares the servant’s tears to a demonstration of the excess of passions. The strong analogy between water and blood is made clear by the use of the word “beads”:

Thy heart is big. Get thee apart and weep.

Passion, I see, is catching, for mine eyes,

Seeing those beads of sorrow stand in thine,

Began to water.[...](III.1.285-288)
Caesar’s martyrdom not only implies the suffering of his human body, but also of the body of the country he represents, that is, Rome. “O mighty Caesar! Dost thou lie so low?”(III.1.149) asks Antony when he sees his leader dead. By sharing, in some way, the suffering with his people, Caesar metaphorically becomes one of them, a symbol of common humanity. His transformation from divine and sacred figure into an ordinary man is fundamental in order to gain the admiration of his subjects. Depicted as an example of extraordinary pity, Caesar becomes a model to be imitated. His thirst for ambition, his haughtiness and tyrannical behaviour are automatically wiped out by his sacrifice. People identify with his suffering and devotion, an image which may be compared to that of Christ who is alive on the crucifix atoning for human sins. However, as Willis explains, the monarch’s special quality of being pious “[...] cannot logically be a crucial aspect of his ability to heal: the miraculous power is inherited with the office of king [...]”\textsuperscript{45}. The fact that people feel closer to Caesar and are merciful towards his condition of martyr fills the gap between his divine and human figure, by strengthening the bond between them.

\textbf{3.3.2 Relieving Tears: Brutus’s missed Confession}

The dialogue with Portia, in Act 2 scene 1, represents for Brutus a cathartic moment, in which all his anxieties and worries about the conspiracy come out. Portia, unlike Calpurnia, claims her role of both wife and companion, by comparing the bond of marriage with that of the conspiracy. She is the mirror of her husband’s affliction and melancholy. Indeed, it is through her account of the night before that we understand Brutus’s hesitation and sense of guilt for the treacherous plan to eliminate Caesar. She demonstrates a genuine interest both in her husband’s sorrow and in finding the cause of his pain: “[...] Dear my lord,/ Make me acquainted with the cause of your grief”\textsuperscript{45}

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., p. 155
II.1.254-255). She not only sympathises with his suffering, she is also determined to heal and save him from his own collapse. She is aware of the fact that her husband’s sickness has nothing to do with his body, but it is “an offence within [...] [his] mind” (II.1.267). Portia perfectly interprets Brutus’s condition, by not appealing to her womanhood, but rather on the rights her family rank confer on her: “I grant I am a woman, but withal/ a woman well reputed, Cato’s daughter” (II.1.293-294).

The bond of marriage to which Portia refers is an agreement of mutual love, in which both husband and wife promise to support each other, by sharing pleasures and grief. Brutus’s behaviour is threatening, in some way, the stability and balance of this bond, by transforming Portia from wife into a sort of concubine. Brutus needs Portia’s help in order to recover from the sense of guilt which is gripping his soul. The dialogue with Portia represents the first moment in which Brutus shows all his humanity and sincerity. The reference to blood is made clear by the analogy between Portia’s honourable virtue and “the ruddy drops/ That visit [...] [his] sad heart” (II.1.288-289).

The word ‘ruddy’, which alludes to the idea of freshness and health, paradoxically clashes with the image of Brutus’s serious and sick heart, afflicted with the awareness that what the conspirators are planning to do is basically wrong and against his principles of good and loyal Roman citizenship.

While Brutus and his comrades link the element of blood with deadly omens, such as threatening storms, fire, and lightning, as symbols of divine rage, the connotation blood acquires at the end of Act 2 scene 1 is totally different. Blood is here associated with life, loyalty and truthfulness, qualities which are all embodied by Portia. Her integrity and credibility, indeed, are guaranteed by the name she bears and by the pure blood of her ancestry. The wound she inflicts in her thigh is the proof of her “constancy” (II.1.298) and unconditional love towards her husband, which she hopes might be rewarded with trust. Portia represents not only Brutus’s most honourable and clean part of himself, but also the emblem of the ideals of valour, heroism and perseverance. Brutus’s conversation with his wife represents a turning point in the narration, an outlet for his emotions, in which he reveals his real self. The scene delves
into Brutus’s character by revealing his conflicting nature, that of a man split between political commitment and human pity.

### 3.3.3 Antony’s contrived Tears

As we have discussed so far, the act of weeping may be either a synonym for purification, as in the case of Caesar, or a means for venting our inner emotions, as in the case of Brutus. However, it can be also an interesting and successful theatrical device. Act 3 scene 2, indeed, is pivotal to demonstrating the characters’ powerful skills as orators. Whereas Brutus naively points out his good purposes and the motives for Caesar’s assassination, in favour of honesty and loyalty to his country, Antony seems to adopt a completely different tactics. The fact of bringing Caesar’s body in front of his people, the ironic way in which he says the opposite of what he actually believes, and the theatrical and dramatic devices he uses are fundamental to ensure his success in the trial. Antony’s attitude is more pragmatic and less philosophical than Brutus’s. His discourse is construed in a deliberately misleading way, and it is aimed at disproving Brutus’s opinion on Caesar. The combination of political and theatrical skills along with the extraordinary talent for manipulating people’s feelings create an image of a man who is fully conscious of both his abilities and powers, that is, a man who “[...] is ready to practice clemency as good as politics”

The display of Caesar’s undefeated body obviously helps Antony in his plan to eliminate the authors of such a crime. Antony is the second to speak and when he intervenes he has carefully listened to Brutus’s speech. His intervention is not off the cuff, it is rather a meditated and studied political speech, in which anger has been transformed into resolution and the need to do justice is turned into mere desire for revenge. Antony was Caesar’s right hand, his most trustful servant and the person in

---

charge of his safety. His strength and firmness originate from his inner hatred for those who, by deceiving Caesar, have in some way humiliated him. The use of rhetorical devices, such as irony, reinforces the weight and meaning of his statements, with the double effect of both destabilising the mob and discrediting Brutus’s credibility. To achieve this he avoids explicit references:

[...] The noble Brutus
Hath told you Caesar was ambitious.
If it were so, it was grievous fault, [...] (III.2.74-76)

We know Caesar was but a tyrant, who exploited his power for his personal aim. Yet he appears to be the good one, that is, Rome’s hero who “[...] hath brought many captives home to Rome” (III.2.85), who has never concealed his pity towards people’s suffering and finally who has demonstrated his most human and humble aspect, by refusing the crown three times.

Once he has convinced Roman people of the reliability of his reasoning, Antony cleverly asks for their love and mercy, the same, he points out, that Caesar demonstrated towards them when he was alive. The tears he sheds at the end of his speech represent a useful dramatic device, that is, a means for appealing to people’s feelings. Antony’s weeping is neither an effect of real emotions, nor an act of purification from the excesses of his temperament. It is rather a great stage prop, which intensifies the dramatic force of his words. His grief is still rooted in his soul, so that it cannot escape from the chains of his sense of guilt. Although “his eyes are red as fire with weeping” (III.2.112), his mind is still full of resentment not only against the conspirators but also towards himself. The act of weeping, which should be a means of venting emotions and pain, is actually Antony’s trump card, that is, the guarantee of his victory. We are perfectly aware of the fact that tears do not undermine his resolution, and that although his “[...] heart is in the coffin there with Caesar” (III.2.103) his mind is working lucidly and with reason in order to accomplish his task.
CHAPTER FOUR
Dismembering the Body.
Powerlessness and Degenerated Violence

Fig. 5: “En Dextra Fides Que,” Wither, Collection, 230. From the Folger Shakespeare Library Collection.
CHAPTER FOUR: DISMEMBERING THE BODY. POWERLESSNESS AND DEGENERATED VIOLENCE

In both *Julius Caesar* and *Titus Andronicus* Rome is often compared to a specific and independent organism, firmly held up by the collaborating activity of its members, that is, the citizens who work harmoniously in order to preserve its stability and health. Rome works exactly as a human body, by gathering strength in the good functioning of each single member. However, when the action of even one of these elements stops, the body will be debilitated and exposed to diseases and to the threat of external elements. The political crisis which affects Rome during Caesar’s reign may be metaphorically interpreted as a kind of plague, which feeds itself on the sap which keeps the body of Rome alive, that is, the unity among its members. In the representation of the country as a human and living being, Caesar is often associated with its heart, whereas “the conspirators, by the same logic, function as [...] [its] hands”\(^1\), suggests John Anson. Following Anson’s reasoning, we may argue that Caesar’s death is the result of the break between heart and hands, that is, between the motion and the instrument which enables the action.

A single member will not exist unless it is strictly connected with the body to which it belongs. This condition is paradoxically the cause of the characters’ downfall in *Titus Andronicus*. Titus, who embodies both the arm, the agent and the tool “[...] of the ‘glorious body’ of sovereign Rome”\(^2\), changes his behaviour the very moment when he realises the incommunicability between the two, by breaking the bond of loyalty and trust with his country. The same occurs to Caesar, whose thirst for ambition and vanity separates him from his people, “[...] in an isolation conceived not as the result but the

---


source and quintessence of his greatness.’’3 Power, indeed, is determined by the
greement and the unity of strengths, which includes in a human body the
coordination of muscles, bones and organs. This coordination and interaction between
the elements prevail neither in Julius Caesar nor in Titus Andronicus, where characters
seem to be more interested in confirming their single identities than in maintaining the
values on which both their society and bond are based, that is, pity and forgiveness.
In this final chapter I will try to investigate the issue of the body and its parts, as
metaphors and instruments of power and kingship. I will analyse the influence they
have on characters, especially in relation to their loss. The dismembering of the body is,
indeed, connected to a socio-political imagery and to the origin of the nature of
kingship. Hands, along with tongue, mouth and head are symbols of agency, that is, of
the ability to operate and to act. The disconnection of them from the body may cause
the loss of self-representation4 as in the case of Lavinia, annihilation, as in the case of
Titus, or even the transformation of the characters’ values into vices, as in the case of
Brutus, who is torn “between his ‘genius’ and its ‘instruments’”5, that is, between the
will to act and his feeling of friendship towards Caesar. The separation between the
parts of the body and the activity of the brain, which Elizabethans usually associated
with heart, may be interpreted as a form of rebellion of feelings against rationality. The
two plays provide many examples of this image, as for instance in the relationships
between Brutus and Cassius or between Lavinia and Titus.

Studies, 2, 1966, p. 16
4 Rowe, Katherine A., ‘Dismembering and Forgetting in Titus Andronicus’,
Shakespeare Quarterly, 45, 3, 1994, p. 295
5 Anson, John S., ‘Julius Caesar: the Politics of the Hardened Heart’, Shakespeare
Studies, 2, 1966, p. 23
Bodily parts need to be analysed also in terms of instrumentality\textsuperscript{6}, that is, in relation to the meaning and relevance they acquire throughout the plays. Their absence is not only a sign of the characters’ powerlessness, but also an indication of their transformation. When Titus, for instance, sacrifices his hand in order to save his sons from death, he has already started the process of downfall. The “victorious” (I.1.163) hand of the beginning, which has loyally served Rome “And reared aloft the bloody battleaxe,/ Writing destruction on the enemy’s castle” (III.1.168-169) is turned into an “effectless” (III.1.76) and worthless scrap. The issue of Lavinia’s mouth is as complex as that of Titus’s dead hand. It is both the evidence of the crime she has been involved in and the means of her revenge. The fact, explains Rowe, that she carries her father’s dead hand offstage within her mouth, “as a supplement to her lost tongue [...] [symbolises her] conversion of a figure of dismemberment into a figure of agency [...]”\textsuperscript{7}

Interestingly, whereas Titus’s chopped hands represent his final defeat, the loss of Lavinia’s tongue and the use of her ‘dumb’ mouth become a motive for retaliation, which turns her from passive victim into co-author of murders.

In Julius Caesar, instead, the functionality of the body and its parts is always in relation to the social position of the characters. The violation of Caesar’s body, for instance, is considered to be a sacrilege not only because it undermines his fixed and godlike figure, but also, and more importantly, because it threatens his position of moral supremacy. The idea of Caesar as “the Northern Star” (III.1.60) of matchless brightness clashes with the image of the dead leader, who “lie so low” (III.1.149) bloodless and lifeless. Although in the case of Caesar there is not a physical separation of the body from its components, the loss of power is metaphorically represented by the conspirators’ betrayal, which breaks the bond between heart, the centre of the motion, and its limbs, which are the instruments which enable the action. The theme of the

\textsuperscript{6} Rowe, Katherine A., ‘Dismembering and Forgetting in Titus Andronicus’, 
Shakespeare Quarterly, 45, 3, 1994, p. 284

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., p. 300
in a relationship between Brutus and Cassius. Brutus, indeed, as Anson argues, “is shown from the start as an instrument of Cassius’ design, the mere hand of his heart.” The initial insubordination that led the conspirators to separate from Caesar’s “body” works paradoxically the same way between them, and unfortunately it will be the reason of their defeat.

Bodily parts along with blood are often associated not only with power, but also with family ties. However, the imagery linked to the body, particularly to the hand, has several connotations. The act of shaking hands, for instance, may indicate dynastic continuity, generation renewal, or even an agreement, which includes that of marriage.

In Titus Andronicus, the body bears several shades of meaning. While in the first act head and hands are symbols of the power and the glory of Rome, from the second act, precisely after Lavinia’s rape, the body represents not only a means of communication, but also an important vehicle of interaction among family members. In Julius Caesar, instead, hands are both symbols of the bond between the conspirators, and the means through which Caesar’s murder is committed. The only reference to family ties is in Act 3 scene 1, when Caesar compares him to the polestar, surrounded in the sky by innumerable stars. The idea of family that we deduce from his words, however, is that of a group of people, who are “flesh and blood” (III.1.67) of a single and “unassailable” (III.1.699) individual, embodied by the same Caesar. Julius Caesar, unlike Titus Andronicus, lacks the idea of family as a whole, that is, as a community united under the same name and the same blood.

The idea of the disconnection between heart and the other organs of the body is also interpreted as a sign of the domination of impulses and irrationality over reason, two qualities which are often connected with man- and womanhood. This is evident in Act 2 scene 4, when Portia appeals to her ‘manly’ firmness in order to separate her heart from tongue. In this scene she is desperately struggling against her female instinct to

---

8 Anson, John S., 'Julius Caesar: the Politics of the Hardened Heart', Shakespeare Studies, 2, 1966, p. 27
talk and to reveal her worries about the future of both Rome and Caesar. On the one hand, she is aware of the limits of her womanhood and the obligations her marriage imposes, including the caring of her husband and obedience. On the other, she would like to be part of Brutus’s life, by sharing his force and “the secrets of [his] heart” (II.1.305). The surprising strength of mind she conserves inside herself allows her to think rationally, by suffocating her female instincts. Unlike Portia, Calpurnia does not fight in order to reinforce her role of woman and wife. Her weak and sterile body prevents her from separating emotions from reason, so that her predictions about her husband’s death appear to be only the result of her inconstancy of mind and of her degenerating madness.

Whereas in *Julius Caesar* the annihilation of female qualities is conceived as a means to control emotions and to regain self-control, in *Titus Andronicus* it is a sign of the characters’ emotional coldness, and of their transformation into cruel and selfish beasts, unable to feel mercy. The case of Tamora’s conversion from pleading mother into bloody murderer is exemplary in order to explain this condition. The feeling of revenge she nourishes against Titus is so prevailing to separate her motherly and caring hands from her male cold heart. Her hands are indirectly guilty not only of Lavinia’s rape, but also of Bassianus’s murder. Revenge affects her body like a venom, not only by restraining good emotions but also by transforming her motherly virtues into dangerous instruments of evil:

LAVINIA: The milk thou sucked’st from her did turn to marble,
Even at thy teat thou hadst thy tyranny.
Yet every mother breeds not sons alike. (II.3.144-146)

Incited by hate and humiliation, Tamora is now blind and deaf towards both Lavinia’s and Titus’s suffering. Unfortunately, this transformation is irreversible, since she will never recover from the disease which affects her soul. Her fate, like Titus’s, is sadly
designed to end with death, the only cure to eliminate her guilt and the atrocious deeds she performed.

Whereas in *Julius Caesar* death constitutes the end of any sort of jealousy, envy and humiliation, in *Titus Andronicus* characters seem to be satisfied only after treating their victims cruelly. The degenerating and macabre violence the play denounces is often interpreted and misunderstood as an “homeopathic remedy[...]", whose benefits are necessary in order to defeat chaos and political instability. This kind of violence, however, is inflicted randomly, that is, in a way that prevents each character from being safe. The play, indeed, provides many examples of unmotivated and absurd deaths, which are considered as exemplary representations of gratuitous violence. One of these is that of the Clown in Act 4 scene 4, in which Saturninus, after reading Titus’s letter, orders he must be immediately hanged. The Clown’s execution, explains Foakes, is “unexplained in the sense that no overt reason is given for it”\(^{10}\). It is evidence of the fact that characters “can kill and torture unthinkingly and without feeling, like automatons”\(^{11}\). In both *Julius Caesar* and *Titus Andronicus* characters seem to have lost their sensibility towards violence, and have become cruel and unmerciful monsters, whose human nature has been gradually detached from any kind of morality, ethics and judgement.

The escalation of violence we notice throughout the two plays, particularly in *Titus Andronicus*, reaches its climax when victims and executioners participate in the same vicious circle of violence. Chaos prevails when they are unable to control their actions and emotions, that is, when they convince themselves of the lawfulness and value of their deeds. It is no wonder, therefore, that the human body is so denigrated and

\(^9\) Noble, Louise, ’“And make two Pasties of your shameful Heads”: Medicinal Cannibalism and Healing the Body Politic in *Titus Andronicus*, *ELH*, 70, 3, 2003, p. 688


\(^{11}\) Ibid.
despised in the play. The image of the body it is framed, indeed, is basically that of a
patchwork of flesh, bones, and blood, discordantly gathered together. Although they
generally try to forge their own identity, in Titus Andronicus characters are lifeless
entities, deprived of their soul and reduced to an endless agony. The fact that the body
is “abused, sacrificed, dismembered, and finally eaten”¹², as if it were flesh to be
butchered, has many analogies with the idea of empty Rome, invaded and deprived of
its own worth and beauty, which became sterile because of wars and internal conflicts.
What is at the same time shocking and exhilarating, however, is the way the play deals
with the issue of cannibalism, a much-discussed and perverting point. The disgusting
yet hilarious scene of the banquet, in which Tamora is served the pie stuffed with the
heads and remnants of her two sons, is certainly the most important example of human
cruelty. In Titus Andronicus the ingestion of parts of the body represents the final act of
violence. It is not only an act of purification, but also the evidence of “[...] the play’s
insatiable appetite for revenge [...]”¹³, spurred and motivated by a constant competition
among the characters, and by the inner desire to demonstrate strength and power over
people.

¹² Noble, Louise, “And make two Pasties of your shameful Heads”: Medicinal
Cannibalism and Healing the Body Politic in Titus Andronicus’, ELH, 70, 3, 2003,
p. 688
¹³ Ibid., p. 699
4.1 Icons of Power: body Parts as Instruments of Authority

The representation of the body in Julius Caesar and Titus Andronicus carries different shades of meaning. In the first play, for instance, there is a great discrepancy between Brutus’s and Cassius’s image of Caesar. In Cassius’ account of the Spanish campaign, the leader appears as a weak and ill man of “feeble temper” (I.2.131), whose physical debility questions his powers of mighty and immortal sovereign. Caesar, indeed, ‘shakes’ and ‘groans’ like an ordinary man, suffering from fever. The way Cassius describes his leader is important to reconstruct his multifaceted human image. The brightness and sacredness of his character vanish with the transformation of his body into a dismantled whole of elements. His mouth that used to terrify Rome is now turned into “coward lips” (I.2.124); his fierce eyes, which were the symbols of his power, “did lose [its] lustre” (I.2.126); even his tongue, the instrument of God’s word, is represented as a sign of female fickleness. Caesar’s body is not only metaphorically dismembered by Cassius’s description, it is also feminised. It has lost his masculinity and, therefore, the royal prerogative which includes the right of supremacy over his subjects and the inviolability of his body.

In Titus Andronicus, instead, the body and its parts, explains Rowe, “[...] have always had a profoundly equivocal status [...]”\(^{14}\), that is, they have been interpreted as both physical components and as a sort of stage props. Titus’s dead hand, Quintus’s and Martius’s heads are not only grotesque symbols of a mocked and distorted sense of loyalty, they are also intentionally planned to shock the audience. The body in Titus Andronicus is a symbol of kingship as its parts are often compared to real instruments of power. The fact that Titus sacrifices his hand, that is, the source of his strength and the means through which he defended Rome “from thousand dangers” (III.1.194), is an act that demonstrates not only his great humbleness, but also his resignation towards

his cruel fate. It is Act 1 scene 1, however, that designates Titus’s decline, precisely when he gives Rome the real instruments of his power, that is, his “sword”, his “chariot” and his “prisoners”. The loss of his military and political strengths along with that of his physical skills annihilate not only his manhood, but also his credibility as a great general.

Hands and heads, however, are not the only instruments of power in the play. Tongue and mouth represent, likewise, other means which indicate the ability of self-expression. By losing them, Lavinia becomes, unfortunately, a helpless creature, who is unable to take revenge without the direct intervention of her father. Her body is ‘dismembered’ of its corporal symbols, which enable her to take care of herself, including the practice of basic skills such as speaking, writing and washing or even the ability to hang herself. Lavinia’s dismemberment symbolises not only the loss of her physical strengths but also the deprivation of her instruments of agency. Her stumps, her mutilated mouth and her ravished body keep onstage as the picture of her own experience, which can be re-enacted only through her relatives’ interpretations.

4.1.1 Heart and Hands: the Core and the Instruments of Power

The idea of the heart as the origin of motion was common among Elizabethan audiences, who were used to associate the organ with the core of the sovereign’s political and divine powers. According to Renaissance theories, indeed, “[...] the faculties of motion and emotion belong to the sensitive soul and have their seat in the heart, which is regularly described as king and commander of the body”15. When the action of the heart does not prevail over the instinct to act, thus, over the instruments of motion, the harmonious balance between reason and emotion inside the body breaks. This is exactly the motive of both the conspirators’ insurrection against Caesar and the

origin of the conspiracy. If we analyse Brutus’s behaviour throughout the play, indeed, we may notice that, unlike Cassius, he is always torn between the awareness of the fact that what he is going to perform is a lawful and necessary act, and the sense of guilt that would affect him after killing his leader. Brutus compares this state of mind to internal conflicts, which undermine the perfect functioning and the life of a kingdom. The period, Brutus points out, which elapses between the resolution of this conflict and the decision to act is obscure and uncertain. Interestingly, it is, in some way, the metaphorical representation of the crisis into which Rome is precipitated:

Between the acting of a dreadful thing
And the first motion, all the interim is
Like a phantasma or a hideous dream.
The genius and the mortal instruments
Are then in counsel, and the state of man,
Like to a little kingdom suffers then
The nature of an insurrection. (II.1.63-69)

The disassociation of heart and hands, symbolised by the break of the relationship between Caesar and the conspirators, occurs when the channel of coordination and interaction which links them is obstructed. In the case of Julius Caesar, it is the thirst for ambition, the characters’ mutual envy and the desire for supremacy that threaten the good functioning of the body-state. It is because of his arrogance and mercilessness that Caesar has achieved his greatness, explains Anson. The separation of heart and hands results in his inability to sympathise with people, but above all, in the freezing process of his emotions. He has become, in the conspirators’ imagery, “[...] a kind of godlike block, a marble monster, who, in his will to remain untouchable, threatens to occupy the whole space of the living world.” In his fixed and unmovable position of

---

16 Ibid., p. 16
17 Ibid., p. 21
divine sovereign, Caesar has now turned into “a beast without a heart”\textsuperscript{18}, unable to coordinate human feelings with cold rationality.

The separation of heart and hands, which is often interpreted as an act of insubordination, is the main motive of the conflict between not only Caesar and his peers, but also, and paradoxically, between Cassius and Brutus. The turning point in the narration is precisely Caesar’s death. Once the conspiracy fulfilled its duty, the characters’ human nature finally comes out. The ideals which inspired and united the members at the beginning have been defeated by their selfishness and by their personal vices. The hatred Cassius feels towards Caesar is now vented upon Brutus’s image. The same happens with Brutus, whose love and devotion for the country actually conceals a profound and unconfessed envy of Caesar. An example, explains Anson, of Brutus’s concealed resentment is the fact that he uses Cassius “[...] explicitly as a ‘mirror’ whose reflection brings to light the hostility latent in [...] [him].”\textsuperscript{19} The conspirators are bound to Caesar the same way Brutus is bound to Cassius. Their role of subjects mirrors their condition of passive tools, that is, of mere executors of the body’s will. The disconnection of heart and hands is, in this case, a clear attempt to overturn their initial roles of instruments of power.

Caesar’s death is a precise revealing moment in the play. It not only discloses the motivations of the conspiracy, it is also the means through which the characters’ behaviour emerges. The idea of subjectivity, which is expressed by the interaction between heart and hands, is evident also in Antony’s conduct in Act 4 scene 2. The merciful and noble man who honoured Caesar during his funeral is now turned into a cruel and haughty tyrant, whose strength lies in the perfect working of its instruments, which are embodied by Lepidus and Octavius. The instrumentality of their bodies, particularly with reference to Lepidus, is evoked in the image of “the ass bearing gold”\textsuperscript{(IV.2.21)}, to which Lepidus is compared. In this scene Antony is depicted not

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., p. 25
only as a military leader, but also as a father-owner, who claims his right of possession on his properties. He is metaphorically the mind which controls and rules over the action:

It is a creature that I teach to fight,
To wind, to stop, to run directly on,
His corporal motion governed by my spirit; [...] (IV.2.31-33)

Although Caesar is dead, his heart, that is, the centre of the power, outlives in Antony and it still remains inside the body of Rome. Antony, like Brutus, represents Caesar’s arm, that is, the tool through which, even after death, he calls for vengeance. The reversal of roles, symbolised by Antony’s transformation into a tyrant, represents another clear example of the rebellion of hand against heart.

4.1.2 Shaking Hands: the Agreement between Will and Action

Among all instruments of power, the hand is certainly the most useful means to perform an action. The imagery which is at the background of the idea of hand is quite various, and it includes the act of clasping hands. The gesture, explains Rowe, “[...] often accompanies gift exchange in the heroic tradition [...]”20, it is, thus, a sign of gratitude and mutual respect. Titus Andronicus parodies this ritual, by re-enacting it in the scene of the butchering of Titus’s hand. “Lend me thy hand, and I will give thee mine” (III.1.186) suggests Titus to Aaron, when all his sons left. This grisly and grotesque example of gift exchange is actually a means to reassert his loyalty and devotion to the king. The loss of his hand, however, is evidence of his renunciation of glory and personal ambition, that is, a sacrifice which proves his determination to preserve the honour and respectability of his family.

The iconography linked to the image of joined hands often depicts this act as a symbol of “[...] a faithful contract in emblems of friendship and service”21. Whereas in Titus Andronicus, however, the reference to any kind of ritual is always distorted or overemphasised, in Julius Caesar these practises are still interpreted in their original meaning. The play provides, indeed, three examples in which the act of shaking hands refers exactly to an agreement between members. The first is in Act 1 scene 3, specifically in the dialogue between Casca and Cassius. Up to this point, Cassius is persuading Casca into joining the conspiracy and into agreeing to the bond of mutual trust and brotherhood among the members. Cassius’s discourse stresses the issue of subjectivity in relation to the idea of social fairness. In this case, the ritual of shaking hands represents a sign of approval, which indicates not only the precise intention to act, but also the agreement between the two parties: “There’s a bargain made” (I.3.119), slyly concludes Cassius. As the iconography suggests (see Figs. 4 and 5), the union of the hands metaphorically reminds of the harmony and cooperation inside a group, as well as of the mutual sharing of ideals and ethics. Act 1 scene 1 provides another example in which the act of clasping hands is directly related to the idea of reciprocal agreement, specifically when Cassius expresses his will into sealing the accord through a promise. In this case, the fact that the conspirators shake their hands replaces the ritual of oath, since it represents itself a guarantee in compliance with the obligations the bond implies, as if it were sealed with blood.

There are, however, examples in which the act of shaking hands is not valid. It is precisely when members use the agreement as a form of deceit. In Julius Caesar this condition happens in Act 3 scene 1, when Antony misleads the conspirators by disguising his real intentions:

I doubt not of your wisdom.
Let each man render me his bloody hand.

21 Ibid.
First, Marcus Brutus, will I shake with you.-
Next, Caius Cassius, do I take your hand.-
Now, Decius Brutus, yours; now yours, Metellus;- 
Yours, Cinna; - and my valiant Casca, yours;
Though last, not least in love, yours good Trebonius. (III.1.184-190)

Antony’s aim is obviously that of taking advantage of the conspirators’ trust and to exploit it as a weapon at the moment of revenge. In this case, the act of shaking hands totally differs from that in Act 2 scene 1, as it lacks the necessary condition of faithfulness and trust.
The image of two hands clasped are also interpreted as a symbol of the union between husband and wife. Renaissance iconography, indeed, usually associates the two hands with two parties which join together in marriage. The exchange of the rings, during the ritual, proves the individuals’ will to honour the bond and to preserve it until death. According to a survey on marital imagery, explains Rowe, the act of exchanging rings evokes that of shaking hands.\textsuperscript{22} The fact that these rings are “[...] worn on the third finger of the left hand, [...] [was said] to be joined to the heart by a vein or a nerve.”\textsuperscript{23}
Whereas in \textit{Julius Caesar} the idea of the sacred bond of marriage is maintained in the relationship between Brutus and Portia, in \textit{Titus Andronicus} nuptial agreements are always profaned, either with the death of one of the parties or with physical violation, such as Lavinia’s rape. Tamora and Saturninus’s marriage represents another disruptive example of invalid bond, which has been agreed only in order to spur violence and to initiate a process of endless revenge.

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., p. 293
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
4.1.3 Titus’s hand

Hands are the instruments through which the action can be performed. This action, however, cannot be carried out without the use of an instrument, which is usually associated, in Renaissance iconography, with a weapon (see Fig. 1). The indivisibility of hand from the instrument which enables the action was an idea which was often connected with providential intervention. These representations, indeed, often portray God’s hand holding a weapon, usually a dagger or a sword, which was supported by a sceptre (see Figs. 2 and 3). These instruments, which are included in the iconography of kingly powers, were often considered as an integral part of the hand, which was, therefore, the means of connection, or rather the extension, between the weapon and the body. The fact that Titus sacrifices his hand, which is, according to the tradition, the source of his strength, is clearly a sign which indicates the importance political power has in the play. The act of resigning his sword, his chariot, and his prisoners, that is, his military strengths, in Act 1 scene 1, announces, in some way, his final defeat.

The dead hand has been interpreted not only as a sign of Titus’s powerlessness, but also, in its objectification, as a “talisman”\(^{24}\), that is, as a reminder of a concealed yet furious revenge. It is, argues Rowe, a representation of the “dramatic mortmain”\(^{25}\), thus, the grisly picture of a painful past, marked with his sons’ deaths and the exile of Quintus and Martius, which storms necessarily into the present. The dismembering of body which, in Titus’s case is symbolised by the loss of his hand, provides the disassociation and the circulation of each single element onstage, which becomes not only the emblem of the character’ suffering, but also “[…] the icon that justifies and excuses vengeance”\(^{26}\). Titus is motivated by the image of Lavinia’s stumps, which acts as a constant reminder of the shame and dishonour which weigh heavily on his family.

\(^{24}\) Ibid., p. 290

\(^{25}\) Ibid. p. 290-291

\(^{26}\) Ibid., p. 296
His dead hand, like Lavinia’s stumps, may be compared to a ghost, which feeds his hatred and the desire to take revenge. At the same time they are paradoxically instruments, stage props as well as performers of the act of revenge.

Since in the imagery hand is the symbol of agency, that is, of the will to act, the dead hand represents, therefore, the separation between intention and deed. In Titus Andronicus, however, the loss of hand is strictly connected with the vulnerability of the characters. By losing the source of their strength they are, in some way, exposed to public humiliation and shame: “And here’s thy hand in scorn to thee sent back/ Thy grief their sports, thy resolution mocked” (III.1.236-237). The loss of hand not only deprives characters of their heroic qualities, it also questions their fixed and unalterable condition of supremacy and power. The displacement of body parts, such as the hand, onstage and the flexibility of their function mirror the characters’ changeable and multifaceted state of mind. It is the evidence of both their human weakness and of their unfortunate yet inevitable fate:

[…] This poor right hand of mine
Is left to tyrannize upon my breast,
Who, when my heart, all mad with misery,
Beats in this hollow prison of my flesh,[…] (III.2.7-10)
4.2 A ‘savage Spectacle’ (III.1.225): Caesar’s slaughter and the Conspirators’ Resentment

Although it is Titus Andronicus the play which openly demonstrates an interest in spectacular and hilarious scenes of macabre violence, Julius Caesar provides as well evidence of the characters’ inclination to gratuitous and uncontrolled acts of cruelty. Unlike Titus or Tamora, the motivations which spur the conspirators to plan their leader’s death are more complex and hidden behind outward principles of fairness and political renewal. The cause of their hatred and their desire to annihilate Caesar is, indeed, intrinsic to their nature of human beings, that is, that of being envious and vengeful individuals. Their feelings are always concealed, in a way that their real intentions are overshadowed by the principles and ethics they preach. The moral virtue which they seemingly distribute among their fellow citizens is not actually a quality of their character, but rather an instrument to gather general agreement, which justifies, therefore, the murderous deed they committed. Their behaviour constantly mirrors their insatiable appetite for a kind of doctrine, based on fairness, political commitment and sacrifice to the country, which unfortunately remains at the background of their actions.

The reference to physical violence in Julius Caesar is evident but not necessarily paraded as in Titus Andronicus. However, the fact that the vile act of murdering Caesar is not grisly performed neither justifies nor minimises the dramatic force of the play. The conspirators’ resentment, explains Anson, originates “[…] from a sense of being the meat upon which Caesar feeds, the flesh of a body wasted away by the greed of the spirit […]”27. This explains the image of Caesar as a monster, which is nourished by its personal success and ambition, by depriving Rome of its splendour. The issue, in some way, links to the previous matter of the instrumentality of the body. Caesar’s spirit,

which is corrupted by a voracious desire for power, is gradually consuming its body, by interrupting, therefore, the interaction between its parts. But “[…] Romans now/ Have thews and limbs like to their ancestors” (I.3.80), thunders Cassius, in a specific attempt to claim his right to act in order to save Rome. The right to which he appeals is, according to his theory, inherited by Romans’ predecessors, who were considered as the real guardians of Roman principles and uprightness.

The more we get into the narration, however, the more we realise that, although Brutus “[…] know[s] no personal cause to spurn at him” (II.1.11), the motives that are at the origin of the conspiracy against Caesar are far from being disinterested. This is clear right from the beginning of the play, when Cassius defines the plot as the “most bloody, fiery, and […] terrible” (I.3.129) of all. These words betray, indeed, an explicit will not only to kill Caesar but also to make him suffer. As Anson suggests, “the desire to carve Caesar as a dish fit for the gods represents not humanitarian euthanasia but talionic retribution exacted for his feeding on the Romans as meat to nourish his godhead”28. In its being such a bloody and vile act, Caesar’s murder appears to be a consequence of a degenerating feeling of hatred and envy, rather than a purging sacrifice. The accusations the conspirators formulate against their leader are unreliable since they are only assumptions made in order to discredit Caesar. The only evidence of Caesar’s negligence is that he refused the crown three times. This, however, does not make him a tyrant.

Unlike his comrades, who are incited by Cassius’s revolutionary ideas, Brutus seems to be the one who actually believes in the act he is going to perform. His intentions, however, are no honourable at all. He naively wants to eliminate Caesar, without causing harm to him: “O, that we then could come by Caesar’s spirit,/ And not dismember Caesar!” (II.1.169-170). His words definitely allude to a sort of hypocrisy, which is carefully and secretly concealed. Indeed, he is aware that to deprive Caesar of his vices includes killing him physically. This makes his condition of murderer even

---

28 Ibid., p. 28
worse, since not only does Brutus deny the real reasons of the conspiracy, he also seems to exploit his friendship with Caesar, by justifying his performance as a moral duty towards his friend and leader. Whereas Cassius clearly declares his hatred towards the Roman general, by accusing him to be responsible for Pompey’s death, Brutus disguises his real intentions, which are misinterpreted as moral principles. In some way, his great resolution enables him to substitute the grief for the loss of his friend, derived from a feeling of love and devotion, with seeming political commitment. It is the determined way he explains his reasons to the Romans that makes his behaviour suspicious. This results in the fact that he neither hints at regretting what he has committed, nor he demonstrates any sign of sincere affliction for the death of his friend.

Brutus, unlike Cassius and the other conspirators, does not act because he is spurred by the wave of emotions, but because he believes in the ideals he teaches. His plan about how Caesar’s death has to be performed is clear and meticulous. The fact that he expresses his disagreement about Mark Antony’s killing proves that his aim is that of avoiding the exploit of Caesar’s murder, which has to be understood, instead, not as a mere bloodshed plotted by a group of rebels, but as the most noble of the sacrifices. His killing, underlines Brutus, has to be performed by diligent and pure people, who care about the future of their country and are not inclined to vile passions. However, the cruel language they employ, as shown in the use of the words “hack”, “carve”, “hew” and “carcass”, helps to create an image of the conspirators which is far from that of civilised and honourable people. The moderation and rationality with which Brutus speaks do not justify, though, the rage and the barbarity of the murderous deed. This is how he exhorts his comrades to behave conscientiously:

Let’s be sacrificers, but not butchers, […]
Let’s kill him boldly, but not wrathfully.
Let’s carve him as a dish fit for the gods,
Not hew him as a carcass fit for hounds. (II.1.166-174)
It is obvious that Brutus is actually finding an excuse to act. The fact that the conspirators do not hesitate for a moment about the evil nature of the deed they are going to commit, is revealing as it persuades us of the good intentions of their plan. Their resolution, motivated by Brutus, deviates our attention from the real meaning of Caesar’s death, that is, that of violent butchery, whose consequences are disastrous for the community. This, indeed, will result both in the quarrel between Brutus and Cassius, in Act 4 scene 2, and in Antony’s transformation into a revenger. Caesar’s murder not only opens the way to an irreversible crisis, it will be also the cause of the conspirators’ downfall. The ghost, through which Caesar comes back to the play, is a reminder of their sins. It is the symbol of an expected death that does not spare anyone. It is only when Cassius faces his tragic fate that he realises the brutal reality of the crime he committed. His last thought is, indeed, to his leader: “Caesar, thou art revenged” (V.3.44), which can be interpreted as a desperate attempt to remedy his mistakes. Brutus’s reaction mirrors that of Cassius; it is, thus, a sort of redemption. When he cries “Caesar, now be still./ I killed not thee with half so good a will” (V.5.50-51), he is not only admitting his guilt, he is also begging Caesar to complete his revenge. Death will represent for Brutus the end of his inner torture, which is derived from his sense of guilt.
4.3 Eating human Bodies: from Rituals to grotesque Practices

In *Titus Andronicus* the body is not only violated, mutilated and dismembered, it is also consumed. The most grotesque aspect of the play is, indeed, the fact that violence has no boundaries, and it is often displayed in its most cruel form. Characters are overcome by a sick desire to hurt, which usually degenerates into madness. This madness, however, is paradoxically lucid, it is not, thus, the result of uncontrolled passions. Characters are perfectly aware of their burning thirst for revenge, and this condition does not restrain themselves, but rather fortifies their egos. The crimes they commit are not only means of personal justice, they are also distorted therapeutic methods of healing the body from polluting elements. The issue of pollution, in some way, anticipates the discourse I am going to examine in this last paragraph, which is that of the consumption of human flesh.

This practice, which in *Titus Andronicus* is exemplified in the popular scene of the banquet, in which Tamora eats her two sons, is very controversial. It is basically a means to distinguish the limits “[...] between ‘civilised’ and ‘barbaric’ modes of behaviour.”\(^{29}\) In the war between the Romans and the Goths, the rite of eating human bodies has the specific aim to demonise Otherness, by exalting the culture of civilization. The play, however, provides evidence of the fact that sometimes ‘civility’ is but a social ideal, which paradoxically clashes with the hypocritical behaviour of the characters, who consider themselves as members of a civilised society. The discourse, though, introduces a debate which I am not going to develop, that is, that of European colonialism. My concern is rather with the study of cannibalism as a form of spectacular violence, whose display sometimes verges on the ludicrous. What is at the same time hilarious and disgusting about the practice of eating human flesh, in *Titus Andronicus*, is the manner in which it is performed.\(^{29}\)

\(^{29}\)Noble, Louise, ’“And make two Pasties of your shameful Heads”: Medicinal Cannibalism and Healing the Body Politic in *Titus Andronicus*, *ELH*, 70, 3, 2003, p. 678
Andronicus, is that it is both interpreted as a taboo and as a beneficial cure. It is this conflicting nature that makes this rite so deliberately shocking. Titus’s aim is, indeed, that of provoking people’s outrage, by playing with their reactions. The scene of the banquet represents not only an act of purgation of evil, it is also a degenerating yet perverting means of personal revenge.

Titus’ s evil nature is revealed right from the beginning, with Chiron and Demetrius’s slaughter. Their death is a real execution, intentionally aimed at torturing them. Titus’s plan is not only that of killing his victims, but also to annihilate their identities as human beings. Indeed, the way he binds and gags them reminds us of some traditional practices concerning the dissection and the embalming of animals. Because of its rituality this practice is often interpreted as a sacrifice. It is the nature and the motives which are at the origin of the act, however, that contradict this assumption. When Titus utters: “Hark, wretches, how I mean to martyr you” (V.2.179), it is clear that the verb “to martyr” is, without any exaggeration, a synonym for ‘to butcher’. The execution, indeed, has nothing to do with sacrificial practices, since sacrifice, in religious terms, implies the renunciation of selfish and personal aims. Although it is disguised as a sacrifice, the act is a clear and grisly example of human cruelty, as well as of denigration of the human body. Even though circumstances and reasons may, in some way, favour Titus’s position, they do not explain this extreme and unjustified use of violence.

Since these practices were usually condemned by ‘civilised’ communities, their abuse was used to provoke general uneasiness among early modern audiences, suggests Noble. What makes them disturbing is the fact that they are constantly parodied. Sacrifice and cannibalism are traditional rites, which the play reconstructs and alters, in a way in which they appear to be absurd. The dismemberment of corpses, which follows the brothers’ murder, is again evidence of the play’s concern with misinterpreting and adapting social and religious practices. The reference to Christian

30 Ibid., p. 685
rituals is evident, for instance, in Titus’s verse “I will grind your bones to dust” (V.3.185), which reminds us of a passage in Genesis 3:19 in which God tells Adam: “for dust you are and to dust you will return”.

The image of Titus as God’s representative, however, is very unlikely, specifically in his disguise as a cook. Titus constantly mocks death and the rituality to which it refers. This results in the association of the pastry with the coffin, which will contain Chiron and Demetrius’s bodies. The coffin, which is definitely a symbol of death here is presented in the macabre image of food. The fact that Tamora eats her two sons baked in a pie consequently classifies her as a degenerate cannibal. In Titus Andronicus, indeed, the “[…] constructions of the barbaric Other […] rely on the cannibal distinction […]”³¹, which clearly separates Roman civilization from the polluting savagery of the Goths. Titus, in some way, emphasises clichés and beliefs which belong to the culture of superiority of Roman society. He appeals to the idea that to eat human flesh is condemned as unnatural, since it clashes with those moral principles which disassociate humans from animals. This explains the several metaphors (e.g. the lion in IV.1.97) and allusions to beasts, such as the “ravenous tiger”, which Titus often makes use of.

According to early modern pharmacological theories, the consumption of body parts was considered to have exceptional healing properties. It was believed to be a cure for physical and psychological diseases, such as epilepsy and madness. However, there was still a widespread reluctance, among sixteenth and seventeenth century’s societies, to accept the practice of the ingestion of human corpses. Titus Andronicus, in some way, overemphasises these anxieties, which classify these rites as disturbingly unfamiliar. Titus’s degenerating behaviour mirrors the decay of Rome wrecked by internal conflicts, corruption and ruthlessness³². The act of forcing Tamora into eating her two sons may be interpreted as a hyperbolic attempt to eradicate evil and to restore order.

³¹ Ibid., p. 689
³² Ibid., p. 690
and civilization in Rome’s tortured body. The references to the rite of the ingestion of human bodies in *Titus Andronicus*, however, seem “[…] to reinforce the dubious motif of healing which valorises brutal revenge as the purgative for the ailing body politic.”33 The way Alarbus’s body is dismembered and savagely violated is another clear example which proves the personal and dangerous motives which spur this ritual, thus, the heinous nature of the act. As Noble suggests, “the gruesome sacrifice of Alarbus lacks any clear communal efficacy […] functioning instead as a rather puerile personal revenge rite to punish the Goths for the host of Andronici sons slain in war.”34

4.3.1 *The Repulsive Banquet*

The scene of the banquet is anticipated by the monstrous dismemberment of Chiron and Demetrius’s bodies. The rite is meticulously detailed and does not leave anything to imagination:

> And now, prepare your throats. Lavinia, come.  
> Receive the blood, and when that they are dead  
> Let me go grind their bones to powder small,  
> And with this hateful liquor temper it,  
> And in that paste let their vile heads be baked. (V.3.195-199)

Interestingly, the dramatic and horrifying nature of the scene is enriched with a clever use of humorous puns and culinary metaphors, which at the same time spur our sense of laughter and restrain our repulsion for practices which are considered to be morally incorrect. Titus starts his gruesome ritual first by decapitating Chiron and Demetrius and then by cutting their throats. When their blood is finally drained, he reduces their bodies to a pulp, which is mixed with the fluid and used as dough in order to bake the

33 Ibid., p. 691
34 Ibid., p. 692
pasty. As Nobel suggests, the act proves Titus’s firm intention to transform Chiron and Demetrius “[...] into the main dish of culinary vengeance wreaked on Tamora”\(^{35}\). What is at the same time compelling and shocking of his behaviour is the cold-blooded determination with which he fulfils his aim. The pie he will serve up to Tamora partly fills his ravenous appetite for revenge. The fervour and the excitement which follow the preparation of the food, however, have completely destroyed any sign of human rationality and mercy, by transforming him into a savage beast. In this frenzy planning, Titus is the character who clearly demonstrates a chameleonic behaviour. After playing the role of the sadistic executioner, indeed, he first turns into an anatomist, when he dissects Tamora’s sons, then into an alchemist. His metamorphosis concludes with his transformation into a cook, a role which he interprets in an exhilarating yet sublime way. The scene gives a detailed description of Titus while mixing and adding ingredients, an image which parodies popular beliefs concerning the healing properties of medicinal cannibalism.

The most grisly aspect of Titus’s plan, however, is the macabre dinner he prepares for Tamora, in which he serves her two children baked into a pasty. The image, in some way, evokes the idea of earth devouring men at the moment of passing. Tamora’s mouth, however, is not the only example of death. The pit in which Bassianus is found dead, may metaphorically be interpreted as a sort of dark hole which swallows life. The same image may be applied to Aaron, who is condemned to do penance for his cruelty, by being “fastened in the earth” (V.3.182), an idea which reminds us of the act of devouring the body. The scene of the banquet is introduced by Marcus, who describes the feast Titus has organised as the most “[...] honourable end,/ For peace, for love, for league, and good to Rome” (V.3.22-23). Marcus’s words condense the real meaning of this grisly dinner, that is, the well-deserved conclusion for a play which constantly emphasises a kind of violence which is uncontrolled and degenerated.

\(^{35}\) Ibid., p. 698
The motto Marcus uses in his verse, in some way, disguises the dreadful healing purposes of the banquet, which add to this cannibal practice. Chiron and Demetrius’s corpses represent “[...] not only the blood and flesh of revenge but [also] the crucial ingredients [...] for the health of Rome”\textsuperscript{36}. The fact that Tamora eats the polluted flesh “that she herself hath bred” (V.3.61) is conceived as a cure in order to eradicate evil. Her sons’ bodies, like Lavinia’s, represent at the same time the “[...] conflicted site of violent pollution, and the source for that profound bloody elixir -rich with contradictory significations- that saturates the Roman earth”\textsuperscript{37}. Like a vaccine, Chiron and Demetrius’s sacrifice is aimed at protecting the body of Rome from future diseases. It is for this reason that it cannot be avoided.

Once he has greeted his guests, Titus abandons for a while the role of the cook, to come back to that of father. He compares his condition with that of Virginius, a Roman centurion who, according to the legend, killed his daughter in order to prevent her rape. Saturninus explains that the girl’s killing was necessary because she would not have survived to such a shame. The act Virginius performs is what we may call an ‘honour killing’ which, according to old customs, would erase guilt. Like Virginius, Titus appeals to his right to avenge the wrong his daughter has suffered. His decision to kill Lavinia is, indeed, an attempt to put an end not only to her unfortunate condition, but also to his family’s curse. Titus’s dramatic force lies in his ability to use metaphors and examples which strengthen the act he is going to perform, so that his behaviour appears to be faultless. Lavinia’s murder is, indeed, “a reason mighty, strong, effectual;/ [...] and lively warrant/ [...] to perform the like” (V.3.42-44). But does her death actually relieve her “father’s sorrow” (V.3.46)? Obviously not. Titus dies with a profound yet concealed regret for the terrible deed he performed. Lavinia’s killing certainly participate in a process of escalating violence, which will conclude with the murders of Tamora, Titus and Saturninus.

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., p. 699

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., p. 696
When Titus reveals the identity of his daughter’s rapists, he has already concluded his act of revenge. It is, however, when he unveils their heads that the scene reaches its climax. This represent the most spectacular moment of the play, in which the characters’ hatred finally takes shape. The confusion that follows is evidence of their degenerating state of mind which has prevailed over the sense of justice they used to preach. The succession of killings, Titus that stabs Tamora, Saturninus who kills Titus and then Lucius who avenges his father’s death by killing the same Saturninus, proves the fact that each character, in some way, tries to put an end to a situation which is already a total mayhem. This glorious epilogue, gained through revenge murders, envy and rivalry, does not mark the beginning of a new era for Rome. Lucius, the character that will succeed Saturninus to the throne of Rome, indeed, represents the restoration of the old system, which still supports the dominating logic of revenge and gratuitous violence.

The death of Saturninus, as well as that of Caesar, does not imply the complete recovering of Roman political and social system. Marcus’s noble ideal to “knit again/ This scattered corn into one mutual sheaf” (V.3.69-70) appears to be a good omen rather than an offer for teaching. Characters, in Titus Andronicus, have not learned the lesson the play seems to recall, that is, that no regeneration and stability are possible unless there is a communal interaction and collaboration among the members. The lack of tolerance and mercy is another element which prevents the healing of Rome’s fractured body politic. To accept Otherness as an integral part of our being, indeed, would mean to accept the idea that we are not individual selves but part of a whole. The tragedy the play displays is not only about the death of the body and its spirit, but also of the characters’ identity as citizens and members of a community.

Lucius’s denial of a proper burial for both Tamora and Aaron reminds us of Titus’s merciless behaviour when he refused to bury his son Mutius in the family grave. To give them a decorous funeral rite would mean to accept them as part of that community. Aaron and Tamora, instead, remain ‘alien’, at the margins of Rome’s cultural system. The fact that Lucius condemns Aaron to be “set […] breast-deep in
earth” (V.3.178) and Tamora to a slow and painful death as a prey for birds, proves his resentment and personal motivation. His behaviour does not conceal his rooted hatred for the two people who are responsible for his family’s ruin. His judgement is, therefore, biased and based on mere thirst for revenge. Both Titus Andronicus and Julius Caesar investigate the characters’ failures as both human beings and as public figures. They frame a sad picture of a society which does not learn from its mistakes but fosters, instead, violence as a predominant feature for the survival of the individual.
CONCLUSION

The purpose of my study was to analyse the several aspects of violence in Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus* and *Julius Caesar*, particularly with reference to sacrifice and revenge. I analysed violence in its essence, that is, in its being at the same time repulsive and attractive. In this process I have considered the way characters deal with violence, by paying particular attention to their reactions and to the way violence interacts with their behaviours. The salient point of the research has been that of demonstrating the power of violence, through an analysis of revenge and sacrifice as expressions of it. While studying the two plays, I have noticed that whereas in *Julius Caesar* characters resort to violence as a means of restoring a kind of order, in *Titus Andronicus* violence is exhibited and represented as an exaggerated and spectacular dramatic device. It is the degenerating way in which the play deals with this issue that makes violence such a problematic point.

My investigation has focussed on revenge and sacrifice as the main aspects of violence in the two plays. I analysed revenge as a universal and multifaceted subject, by paying attention to the motives which trigger it. On this point, I have observed that the passions which are at the core of an act of revenge are various. Revenge is not only motivated by anger, but also by a sense of ingratitude and frustration. This occurs specifically in *Julius Caesar*, where characters resort to revenge because they have been, in some way, deprived of their social status, or of a previous condition of power. The most interesting point of the play is that revenge appears to be a necessary and absolutely justified means of restoring a position of authority. Characters’ honourable sense of duty disguises their desire for power, that is, their natural attitude to violence and vengeance. In *Julius Caesar* revenge is a destructive weapon, whose effects result both in the characters’ tragic epilogue and in the failure of the conspiracy’s ideals.

Whereas in *Julius Caesar* acts of revenge are often interpreted as sacrificial rites, in *Titus Andronicus* revenge performances are real means of retaliation. Characters are naturally vindictive individuals, who act in order to preserve their self. Their nature of revengers is not concealed, but rather emphasised and incited by the constant desire to eliminate
the source of their suffering. In this play, revenge is displayed as the most cruel form of violence. It is brutally and randomly inflicted on the victims, in a way that does not demonstrate any sign of mercy or forgiveness. Characters use revenge as a punishment, which is justified by the wrongs they have suffered. The strongest their personal grudges, the more intense their revenge. It is a way to restore their self-esteem and public reputation, in the absence of a real and lawful judicial system.

Another form of violence which is particularly evident in the plays is that of sacrifice and sacrificial rites. Along with revenge, sacrifice is conceived, in both social and religious terms, as a means to preserve the good of society and, at the same time, an homage to God. By comparing the two plays, however, I have observed that whereas Julius Caesar, in some way, tries to maintain the sacredness of the ritual, though the motifs which originate it are no honourable at all, in Titus Andronicus the idea of sacrifice as both a divine offer and as a duty to the country is parodied, in a way that ceremonies and rites appear to be grotesque and farcical reconstructions of socio-political practices. In both plays, violence which is provided in sacrificial rites is often deliberately exaggerated and unnecessary, aimed at inciting personal rivalries and grievances. Characters use sacrifice as a form of redemption, that is, as a justification for the crimes they have committed. Several examples of sacrifices, including that of Caesar, Alarbus, Quintus and Murtius, are but the expression of degenerated and brutal savagery.

Sacrificial rites as other kinds of practices are redefined in their cultural meaning. As social constructions, they are created by men and modelled on the conservative structure of the communities. In both plays, however, this artificial system collapses when the set of believes which belong to it are altered. The observance of ceremonies requires the unanimous agreement of the members of the community. Indeed, the fact that these practices are reinterpreted and used as a means of glorification of a single individual is evidence of the frailty and instability of the social structure. In the analysis of sacrifice as a fundamental aspect of violence, I have paid careful attention to the role of the victim, as insider and outsider of the community. Girard’s Violence and
The association of sacrifice with gratuitous and uncontrolled violence is significant not only in *Titus Andronicus*, but also in *Julius Caesar*, as in the case of the murder of Cinna the poet. The plays provide examples of meaningless deaths, which are only the effect of a personalised use of violence. In the first chapter I analysed several kinds of deaths, including that of Alarbus, Mutius and Bassianus. Although they are performed as real sacrifices, the origin of these acts reveals more subtle reasons. Alarbus, for instance, dies because of his country’s faults, which are linked with the murder of Titus’s twenty-one sons. Mutius, instead, dies for protecting his sister, an act which is considered as a real offence to Titus’s fatherly authority. Bassianus’s murder, interestingly, appears to be less cruel as it is, in some way, expected. Bassianus, unlike the other innocent victims of the play, is ambitious and politically motivated. His behaviour towards Tamora, along with his social position, does not save him from a horrible and humiliating death.

In the study of sacrificial rituals as redemptive means and as extraordinary cures to atone for guilt, a significant part of this chapter has been devoted to the analysis of sacrifice as another powerful means of collecting political agreement. On this point, I have made reference specifically to *Julius Caesar* and to the ritual of the Lupercalia. I have noticed that the perversion and the misinterpretation of these rites mirror the process of socio-political renewal which Caesar has introduced. His death represents not only the failure of an attempt to regenerate Rome’s political system, it also sanctifies his image, by turning him into a martyr. By slaughtering Caesar, the conspirators obtain the direct opposite of what they actually aimed for. Through a calculated and moving oration, Antony not only exploits his leader’s death in order to stir up the mob’s hatred towards Brutus and his comrades, he also reveals the real motifs of the conspiracy: envy, thirst for ambition and emulation. In *Titus Andronicus*, instead, sacrificial practices are terrible instruments of torture, which are part of a
distorted sense of justice. If the victims, as in the case of Chiron and Demetrius, do not belong to the socio-political system of the person who performs the rite, the intensity of violence which is used in these practices is greater. Sacrifice represents, therefore, not only a kind of personalised vendetta, but also a means of distinction, both in terms of gender and membership.

What makes revenge and sacrifice such significant issues is their exemplarity and the fact that they can be re-enacted endlessly. An act of revenge as well as a sacrificial ritual are always the result of a previous action or condition. They are justified because they are substitutes for a form of fairness which is absent. Their use cannot be blamed, since there are no alternative options which may replace them. These practices are aimed at exalting brotherhood and unity among the members. When the prerequisite of unanimity lacks, however, revenge and sacrifice become the expression of the feelings of a single individual. They are condemned because they do not mirror the political goodwill, but are the consequence of a degenerated state of mind. Anger, ingratitude and frustration are all connected with the characters’ reactions. They often act as a deterrent to a rational and unbiased use of violence. Titus’s rage against Chiron and Demetrius is a clear example of cruel savagery, motivated by blind passions. Although Titus’s motives may be honourable, since the two brothers are guilt of a crime which neither death nor any kind of punishment may erase, the way he vents his hatred and disregard of them, reveals a worrying state of apathy and isolation. Titus resorts to revenge because he has nothing to lose. Humiliation and rage have unfortunately removed any sign of human sympathy and pity.

Both plays depict a fragmented society, whose foundations have been damaged by the characters’ villainy and natural bent for social climbing. The values which characterise Roman society, such as loyalty, fairness, mercy, honour and respect for authority have been replaced by ambition, dissimulation and pride. Characters are slaves of their own passions and vices, and this results in their emotional imbalance, which characterises their behaviours throughout the plays. There is a latent hypocrisy which lies in their personal choices and attitudes, in hiding their feelings in order to satisfy their own
interests. It is the sense of guilt, however, that predominates in the end. Characters, indeed, have to face their mistakes in order to find redemption from their sins. The motives which incite them to violence are very different. However, they seem to be all directed towards the preservation of the social group, which in *Julius Caesar* is represented by the community and in *Titus Andronicus* by the family.

By analysing the several aspects of violence, I have considered the element of blood as the common denominator between revenge and sacrifice. My choice has been motivated by the ambivalent meaning this word has in the texts. In both plays, indeed, blood is either the symbol of the characters’ guilt and paradoxically the means to wash out that guilt. In *Julius Caesar*, for instance, blood represents sin, it is, thus, the evidence of the conspirators’ fault. This stain, which sullies both their conscience and public reputation, cannot be erased but with death. In *Titus Andronicus*, instead, blood is associated with family ties. It is connected with a person’s behaviour and pedigree. It is the container of all the qualities and virtues of an individual as well as of the family to which s/he belongs. The act of bleeding is also linked with the idea of purification. When Titus, in Act 5 scene 3 hangs Chiron and Demetrius’s bodies in order to purge their “guilty blood”, he is metaphorically trying to cure Rome and to eradicate evil, which through their blood has penetrated into the country.

The bleeding body, however, has many interpretations. It is also associated with the idea of loss of control and weakness. Women were, according to Renaissance beliefs, more vulnerable than men, therefore, more inclined to passions. The excess of blood was an expression of female uncontrollable impulses, that is, of the inability to control the body. Lavinia’s bleeding is evidence of her powerlessness due to her womanhood. The rape represents a clear example of male sexual violence and arrogance, a way to claim hierarchical order, which has been upset by Titus’s victory over the Goths. By violating her body not only do Chiron and Demetrius avenge their mother’s offence, they also contaminate Lavinia’s body with their blood, an act which is aimed at threatening Titus’s undisputed authority. They have polluted not only Lavinia’s blood but also the patriarchal bloodline, that is, the legitimate progeny of the Andronici.
Family ties in *Titus Andronicus* are maintained and protected by blood, which like a thread unifies the members through an indissoluble bond. The relationship among the members is sealed by a sort of blood contract which cannot be broken. The play provides two examples of family bonds: one between Titus and Lavinia, and the other between Tamora and her sons. Both relationships are characterised by filial subjection, that is, by a condition of inferiority rather than by love. Tamora and Titus use their children as tools in order to perform their personal revenge. Lavinia, Chiron and Demetrius are entrapped into a limbo, that is, into a condition which prevents them from growing as single individuals. It is revenge which transforms maternal and paternal love into a binding obligation. The effect revenge has on them is destructive, not only in terms of mental sanity, but also in terms of human relationships.

In both *Titus Andronicus* and *Julius Caesar* characters are selfish individuals who act in order to maintain their identities. They are basically egocentric creatures, whose behaviour enhances their most vile and horrible aspects. Their noble intentions to restore order and to save the community or the family to which they belong from downfall are clouded by their opportunistic and greedy desire to surpass the others. Even those who seem to support the ideals of humility, mercy and sincere devotion to their country eventually reveal their selfish and obscure side. Mark Antony is definitely one of these characters, whose transformation begins exactly after Caesar’s death. The way he imposes his will and power over Octavius and Lepidus is evidence of his moral and physical superiority. The same occurs to Titus, whose aim to defeat Tamora and his sons is not only motivated by a sense of protection towards his family, but also by a personal hatred towards the queen of the Goths. The end of the play represents, indeed, the final battle, that is, the conclusion of an already degenerated process of violence, which has led to the annihilation of the individual.

The element of blood has many analogies with religious issues, particularly with reference to Roman Christian tradition. Throughout this chapter I have analysed the religious imagery which is provided in the two plays, by paying careful attention to *Julius Caesar*. The play deals with baptismal and Eucharistic images, such as that of the
Fountain of Life, which is represented in Calpurnia's dream, and that of Caesar's bleeding wounds, which has analogies with the image of Christ suffering on the crucifix. The act of bleeding has a similar function as in Titus Andronicus. If we compare Caesar's sacrifice and that of Chiron and Demetrius we may notice that they are both aimed at purifying these bodies which have been, in some way, contaminated with evil. The process of martyrdom eliminates their identity as human beings, by turning them into objects. Whereas the two brothers become their mother's meal, Caesar is transformed into a relic to be worshipped by his people.

In the last chapter of my research I have provided evidence of the power of violence and of the use characters make of it. By comparing Rome to a body, I have analysed the conditions through which a country may survive from collapse. As a living organism, Rome needs her instruments in order to preserve its stability. The harmonious functioning of the body, however, cannot exist unless there is cooperation between its members. It is only through the interaction of its parts that a body may live. Caesar's death represents, indeed, the disconnection of the members from the body, therefore, the break between Rome and its strengths. This final chapter has been devoted to the study of bodily parts as instruments of power. On this point, I have observed that whereas in Titus Andronicus powerlessness is connected with physical deficiency and to the inability to act, in Julius Caesar the functionality of the body is linked with the characters' social status. The violation of Caesar's body questions not only his divine power, but also his political supremacy.

Whereas in Julius Caesar the body and its imagery often refer to political matters, in Titus Andronicus the body has many analogies with the family. Renaissance iconography, as shown in the images which are included in this essay, demonstrates, for instance, that the act of shaking hands was used to indicate dynastic continuity. The hand, indeed, was considered to be the most important symbol of power, along with head and mouth. Both plays provide examples of the significance of the loss of body parts: Titus's dead hand, which is the source of his strength, represents his military and political defeat, Lavinia's mutilated mouth is the symbol of her humiliating status of
victim while Caesar’s wounded body is evidence of his human weaknesses. The
dismemberment of the body was also associated with the loss of self-control. As with
the excess of blood, the disconnection of the members from the body influences the
ability to coordinate human feeling with rationality. The failure of the conspiracy,
Titus’s degenerated madness and the tragic epilogues of the plays are the effects of a
desperate attempt to upset a socio-political and cultural order which is already
designated.

The dismemberment of the body does not mark the end of the circle of violence. The
last step of the escalation of savagery is represented by the consumption of human
flesh. As I have argued in the last paragraph of chapter four, the way the two plays
deal with physical violence is very different. Although Julius Caesar does not provide
specific images of spectacular and grisly forms of violence, the cruelty and vile
motivation which are at the core of Caesar’s murder do not reduce its dramatic and
intense effect. It is the language the conspirators use which betrays their desire to
annihilate Caesar. Titus Andronicus, instead, portrays an image of violence which goes
beyond the boundaries of tolerance. The way the body is violated, mutilated, and
consumed is evidence of the characters’ perverted enjoyment of cruelty. The climax is
represented by the popular scene of the banquet, in which Tamora eats her two sons,
baked into a pasty. The most interesting point of this play is that violence, expressed
through revenge and sacrifice, is used in a deliberate and uncontrolled way. The sense
of justice characters have is ‘personalised’, aimed at preserving the self, rather than the
whole. Both Titus Andronicus and Julius Caesar demonstrate the ineffectiveness and
destructive power of all the forms of violence, either revenge or sacrifice, by
underlying their incompatibility with a more natural and socially fair justice. The plays
also investigate the origin of human passions, by inviting us to meditate upon their
effect on our actions. The way they analyse the character, that is, by emphasising the
hero’s qualities and, at the same time, by highlighting his vices, demonstrates the
ambivalent aspect of human nature.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources


Secondary Sources

Books:


**Essays:**


Broude, Ronald, 'Revenge and Revenge Tragedy in Renaissance England', *Renaissance


Hancock, Brecken Rose, 'Roman or Revenger?: The Definition and Distortion of Masculine Identity in Titus Andronicus', Early Modern Literary Studies, 10, 1, 2004, pp. 1-25.


Noble, Louise, ' “And make two Pasties of your shameful Heads”: Medicinal

Parker, Barbara L., '“A Thing Unfirm”: Plato’s Republic and Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar’ in *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 44., 1, 1993, pp. 30-43.

Paster, Gail K., ‘“In the Spirit of Men there is no Blood”: Blood as Trope of Gender in *Julius Caesar*, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 40, 1989, pp. 284-298.


Thorndike, A.H., ‘The Relations of Hamlet to the contemporary Revenge Plays’, *PMLA*, 17, 1902.


Willis, Deborah, ‘The Monarch and the Sacred: Shakespeare and the Ceremony for the Healing of the King’s Evil’ in *True Rites and maimed Rites. Ritual and Anti-Ritual in Shakespeare and His Age*, ed. by Woodbridge L. and Berry E., University of Illinois Press,