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How to Turn Society Upside Down Being an Outsider:
Gender, Sexuality and Class in *Titus Andronicus* and
Edward II

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Resumen:

Este ensayo analiza cómo ciertos personajes que pertenecen a lo que consideraríamos como minorías (ya sea por motivos de género, sexualidad o clase) de las obras de teatro *Titus Andronicus* (1593) y *Edward II* (1592) ponen en peligro las estructuras de poder y la escala social de las sociedades en las que se desarrollan dichas obras. Utilizando estos personajes marginales, tanto William Shakespeare como Christopher Marlowe nos demuestran lo sencillo que, pese a tratarse del análisis de dos ficciones, podría resultar poner en jaque el status quo. Por otra parte, dando protagonismo a estos personajes parias, ambos escritores ponen en primer plano las vicisitudes a las que se enfrentaban las personas no pertenecientes a las élites. Tomando como referencia las actitudes y acciones de Tamora, Lavinia y Piers Gaveston analizaré como son capaces de dejar atrás su papel de sometidos para transformarse en personajes que llevan cambio, la muerte y la destrucción a las esferas de las clases más elevadas.

Abstract:

This essay analyses how certain characters that belong to what we would consider as minorities (whether it is due to gender issues, sexuality or class) from the theatre plays *Titus Andronicus* (1593) and *Edward II* (1592) compromise the power structures and the social ladder of the societies where these plays take place. By using these marginal characters, William Shakespeare as well as Christopher Marlowe show us how easy it is, in spite of analysing two fictions, to jeopardise the status quo. Moreover, by giving prominence to these pariah characters, both authors bring to the forefront the vicissitudes that those who did not belong to the elites had to face. Taking as a reference the attitudes and actions of Tamora, Lavinia and Piers Gaveston, I will analyse how they are capable of leaving their role as subjugated people behind in order to become characters that bring change, death and destruction to the political spheres of the highest classes.

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1. Introduction

In this End of Degree Project, I am going to analyse the relationship between gender, power relations and social order, and their representation in the Renaissance plays *Titus Andronicus* (1593) by William Shakespeare, and *Edward II* (1592) by Christopher Marlowe. I have decided to write about these two plays because, to me, they are frightening at different levels. What in *Titus Andronicus* begins with the murder of Alarbus masked as a sort of ritual, ends with cannibalism and a massacre derived from the feeling (and almost the necessity) of vengeance. It produces, then, a kind of fear towards the violence and rage motivated by revenge. On the other hand, in *Edward II*, it is the morals, the ethics, what is inspected. The way some of the characters behave cannot be surprising because it is very well known to be true in those high political spheres where the play takes place. However, the consequences that can be seen in actual people (especially Gaveston and the King) are shocking and devastating. By analysing certain characters, the way they behave, they act and the consequences of their actions, I am going to try and prove how they subvert the order of the societies in which the plays are developed. For that, I will mainly focus my analysis on the characters of both plays, since, prior to reading these two plays, some of them would seem unlikely to challenge the structures of power whether it is due to their sex, gender or the class they belong to. During the 16th and 17th centuries, the English society changed drastically. Members of the society reacted to these variations and they soon began to behave and interact in different ways. The main event of that era was the Reformation. It began in 1517 when Martin Luther published his *Ninety-Five Theses* and it lasted until the end of the Thirty Years' War in 1648 that meant to the split of Christianity into different confessions (Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran...) according to the way in which each one of them understood religion. It is worth to note too, that heresy was introduced as a belief to be punished and, also, witchcraft was a criminal offence punishable by death. In such a changing society, as it usually happens with literature, with drama in in this case, the plays echoed

those changes. Thanks to the literature of that time, we can recall and analyse the facts and events that were happening since they were taken to the stages. Even though the Christian religion underwent a series of changes that modified its principles, it kept on being the dominant force of the Renaissance society and still played a key role in it. Renaissance drama not only took inspiration from the society in which it was being written and developed, but, by representing onstage certain ideas, it motivated social and cultural changes itself. Since society and the collective imagination of that time were being redefined, the roles of men, women and how both sexes related to each other did too. Building, in this way, a new sense of gender and, especially, new and more gender inequalities: While “all world religions today maintain male social dominance within societal structures (Young, 7), “religion has been interpreted since the historical times as implying a subjugated status for Women” (Malhotra, 97).

2. The Deployment of Power

After having read these two plays, one could be tempted to think that the concepts of violence and power are deeply connected, almost to the point that they are synonyms. The fact that powerful people treat those around them who are not as powerful as them (Lavinia, Tamora, Aaron or Piers Gaveston) in such cruel way may lead us to think that way. In his book *Power: A Reader*, Mark Haugaard states that “power ‘over’ entails the ability of one actor to prevail over another despite resistance” (4). Power, then, would mean making something happen, getting somebody to do what he/she would not otherwise do. For example, when Tamora allows Chiron and Demetrius to rape Lavinia in *Titus Andronicus*, she is letting them do so, but at the same time it is as if Tamora herself was punishing Lavinia even though the newly crowned Empress is not physically where the raping occurs. She wants to hurt Titus by attacking what he loves and, although it is not Tamora the actual person who commits the raping physically, we have her, together with Aaron, being the instigators, the intellectual perpetrators:

A speedier course than lingering languishment
Must we pursue, and I have found the path.
My lords, a solemn hunting is in hand;
There will the lovely Roman ladies troop:
The forest walks are wide and spacious;
And many unfrequented plots there are
Fitted by kind for rape and villainy.
Single you thither, then, this dainty doe,
And strike her home by force if not by words:
This way, or not at all, stand you in hope.
Come, come, our empress, with her sacred wit
To villainy and vengeance consecrate,

Will we acquaint with all what we intend, (1. 1. 610–622)

Or for example, when in *Edward II*, the Earls manage to get Gaveston arrested and away from the King, just because they see their privileges threatened even though they know that going against the King's interests (and lover) might eventually cause them problems, when Warwick exclaims:

Soldiers, have him away!—

But, for thou wert the favourite of a king,

Thou shalt have so much honour at your hands. (2. 5. 25–27)

This two extracts prove that, when this power is exercised, there is always violence implied.

However, for Hannah Arendt “it is insufficient to say that power and violence are not the same. Power and violence are opposites; [...] Violence appears where power is in jeopardy, but left to its own course it ends in power's disappearance.” (58). In the case of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, for example, a moment when this kind of violence appears is when Lavinia's own father murders her. Titus is only worried about how the shame of his daughter being raped directly means the loss of her honour (and thus, the loss of the virtue and respectability that his family has gained through years of following the social rules that were supposed to bring honour and respectability to families). This comes to emphasise how much Titus values her only as a symbol of chastity. For Titus, Lavinia is more hers than her daughter; he feels attached to her more by a sense of property than by the fact that they are relatives (father and daughter). Which reflects the structural violence exerted on women in patriarchal societies. The fact that she is raped, then, means that neither Lavinia nor her whole family no longer stand for the appropriate values that enabled them to belong to the ruling classes. That is why Titus uses violence, even against his family, when his power is in danger. In Marlowe's play happens the same too when the Earls in *Edward II* stand up against Gaveston (and, hence, against the King) when they see their strength and influence about to wane due to the closeness that begins to appear between the King and Piers Gaveston.

Arendt also reminds us that violence is typically the last resort of those who have neither a say nor a sense of agency and, thus, feel completely powerless: ‘Loss of power becomes a temptation to substitute violence for power.’ (54). Which is what happens to Tamora: after being defeated by the Romans and having his son killed, she has nothing left, so she no longer cares about laws or social conventions. “The point is that under certain circumstances violence—acting without argument or speech and without counting the consequences—is the only way to set the scales of justice right again” (Arendt, 63). Tamora, just because she was born a woman, cannot do anything to restore what she would view as justice. She has lost against the Romans but she will keep on losing once and again because women, back then, had no chance of prevailing over men. They were inferior and it had to remain like that. That is why she rationally and cautiously decides to take the law into her own hands for justice's sake, gives up on her human rationality and becomes a kind of fierce animal willing to do whatever it takes, no matter who she has to fight against to achieve her goal. In the second act, Aaron refers to Tamora’s true nature. He says that his loved one is a “siren that will charm Rome’s Saturnine and see his shipwreck and his commonweal’s” (2.1 . 23). The fact that he uses the term “siren” to describe her is referencing Greek Mythology. Sirens were female creatures, half animal, half human that charmed men taking them to their destruction. Which is exactly what Tamora does in the play with each man that she allies with: since the moment they meet Tamora, they face chaos and death. It is worth to mention that, even though it may seem that becoming as dangerous as Tamora does is "her last resort", renouncing to any kind of human reasoning when being a “beastly creature” (2. 2. 182) or a “ravenous tiger” (5. 3. 195) is what really makes us think is that she is well aware of the society she lives in and that it is a really well thought process in order to feel relieved at last. As Arendt concludes and these two plays portray, “in private as well as public life there are situations in which the very swiftness of a violent act may be the only appropriate remedy” (63).

For Foucault, if a country desired to be mighty, rich and feared by the rest, it had to be densely populated, therefore its fate was deeply tied to ‘the manner in which each individual made use of his sex’ (26) whether it is for one’s pleasure or with reproductive intentions. From the moment in which countries and leaders came to that conclusion, ‘the sexual conduct of the population was taken both as an object of analysis and as a target of intervention’ (26). And even though Foucault refers to the 18th century in the first chapter of *The History of Sexuality: Introduction*, this is also what happens in both of these plays (developed in Rome and in the 14th century, respectively). When anything related to sex and relationships of the main characters is analysed, and as he claims: “At the heart of this economic and political problem of population was sex” (25). One of the main topics that both of these plays deal with is sex and in which way it is understood by the different characters. He goes even further by saying that: “sex became a crucial target of a power organized around the management of life rather than the menace of death” (147). Sex, then, has been connected to power since the moment these two concepts began to affect each other.

When the French author talks about “the legitimate couple, with its regular sexuality” (38), he is referring to the norm, to the heterosexual couples that, throughout the whole history of humanity, have been imposed as the model, as the true and only ways of uniting people (men and women). On the other hand, we would find the “unnatural” (39), comprised by “all these figures, scarcely noticed in the past” (39). Foucault states what has happened all over the world for generations and generations. The only way for societies to keep on growing in numbers is by giving sex a biological interpretation: that would be uniting a man and a woman in a heterosexual relationship so they can breed.

3. Tamora: A Vengeful Foreign Queen

In the play, Tamora becomes a heroin —or at least she tries to—. She is able to think ahead and sacrifices herself by renouncing to her Goth identity and marrying the Roman man who has defeated her. She is a woman, however, in her tribe, she is not like any other: she is the Queen of the Goths —those who have been beaten by Titus and his men—. Although she, then, belongs to those who have been defeated, Tamora uses her gender and her sexuality as tools to achieve a goal. She does exactly as Judith P. Hallett describes in her book *Fathers and Daughters in Roman Society*:

So, too, women of the lower orders in classical Rome did at times gain and wield public influence, and did so in an extra-familial capacity: through first attracting a powerful man sexually and then advising him on important matters. (36)

She marries her enemy, Saturninus, in order to have a chance to revenge the death of her sons in the future. And if she eventually managed to achieve her goal, Tamora herself would be the incarnation of the evil seduction that will end up destroying the Emperor and thus, with him dethroned, the social order of Rome will be over. She uses her sexuality and libertarian attitude (at that time) towards sex to manipulate, seduce and eventually kill her male opponents after having attracted them into her lustful web. As M. B. Rose claims in her book *The Expense of the Spirit: Love and Sexuality in English Renaissance Drama*, Tamora would have power by acquiring an active role when she gives orders to men. She would become an agent of cultural change, if she ended up being capable of killing the Emperor. It is quite important to highlight the word *cultural* since the way society was designed: who was on the top of the social pyramid and who was at the bottom, was something cultural inherited after years and years since the time Rome began as a small city on the banks of the Tiber River. Tamora's silence when hiding her real plan to avenge her son does not have to do with her being a submissive woman but a smart one who knows her role in

society and is just waiting to take advantage of it. It is not that she is declining to talk about her plan, but she is merely waiting for the perfect time to come so she can speak up, take a step forward and act:

Remember boys, I pour'd forth tears in vain

To save your brother from the sacrifice

But fierce Andronicus would not relent,

Therefore away with her as you will;

The worse of her, the better loved me. (2. 2. 163–167).

She is saying that since the time she kneeled down before Titus crying, pleading to save her sons' life but that did not happen and Alarbus was killed, she has to take revenge. However, she has to do it according to the Roman customs, so they do not notice her plan: she has to become one of them, she has to get inside their social hierarchy to be accepted and once it happens, she will be able to develop her plan.

In this way, Tamora comes to prove right Foucault's point of sex not being linked to economy just "to reproduce labor capacity" (37), because, as we can see, people can also rely on sex in order fulfil their goals. At the very beginning of the play, Tamora is presented as a weak woman. The very first thing she does in the play is kneeling in front of the Romans who have defeated her in Act 1 Scene 1 and after that, once that it can be clearly seen that she is inferior, she proceeds to speak. She is in tears because she is afraid to lose her sons: Alarbus—who will eventually end up dying—, Demetrius and Chiron, this comes to show that besides being the Queen of the Goths and hence a powerful woman, above everything she is a mother whose main fear in this case, now that the battle is over, is losing her sons. This first appearance we have from Tamora reveals the image that women were supposed to project: she is devastated, begs pardon and does not want her sons to be murdered as a part of the Romans' ritual sacrifice. However, there might be a first sign of how manipulative she is when she says: "Sweet mercy is nobility's true badge" (1. 1.

122). This line could be revealing her second intentions, as if she was already praising the Romans so she can begin to get her revenge ready.

Nevertheless, what these words unmistakably come to prove is that Romans and Goths were completely different. While the greatest and most important feature of Roman noblemen is mercy, having the ability to forgive, being civilised since they are worried about society, about what the rest may think and about the image they cast, Goths are seen as barbarous people, just like Bassianus describes him when she finds Tamora with him: “Why are you sequestered from all you train” (2. 2. 75). Accompanied but with a barbarous Moor (2. 2. 78). They have a visceral attitude, they are violent and willing to avenge their people. They have a sense of community, something like “an eye for an eye” feeling.

Tamora’s condition as a woman and her sexuality turn out to be tools that mediate in between the actions of the past (the killing of her sons) and the possible events of the future (take revenge on Rome by killing Saturninus). This fact could be seen as a mere act of revenge against someone who has hurt her, but it can be also interpreted as an attempt by women, as a whole group, personified in Tamora, of getting rid of the patriarchal chains that tied women and did not allow them to be free and equal to men. This can be clearly seen at the beginning of the play, when, just after having been “adopted” as the new Empress of Rome, Tamora tells Titus:

Titus, I am incorporate in Rome,
A Roman now adopted happily,
And must advise the emperor for his good. (1. 1. 467–469)

In this extract, we find that Tamora, the newly empress of Rome, knows that she has now power and she is capable of speaking in her own name, of giving herself a voice. She has now such a powerful and active role in the action of the play that she no longer needs a man to speak for her or tell her what to do and she can even advise the Emperor, breaking in that way the social conventions of the time. This is quite shocking and surprising because it is a woman telling a man

what to do, something that, undoubtedly, we can say that did not happen at that time because women had their liberties quite restricted since they were seen as objects, as extensions of their fathers or husbands.

Shortly before that extract, Tamora claims: “My lord be ruled, be ruled by me, [...]” (1. 1. 447), showing that she is now active. She is not the typical woman. She is now able to rule, she has acquired power, so she is not passive anymore. By putting the verbal construction “be ruled by me”, she challenges the hierarchy of the court. Now, it is not only a man, the King, who is ruling but a woman too. That is due to the fact that, here, the Emperor clearly represents the archetype of a weak man blinded by the physical appearance of Tamora, by her beauty, so he easily yields and will do whatever she tells him to do. Shortly after these words spoken by Tamora, she keeps on saying: ‘By my advice, all humbled on your knees,/ You shall ask pardon of his majesty.[Titus’ sons kneel]’. (1. 1. 477–478).

Once again, we realise how the Roman order has been changed due to Tamora’s bursting and we have physically onstage Titus’ sons on their knees by order of Tamora and her recently acquired role as a woman with power. Regarding this issue of sexuality and empowerment, by having Tamora as a powerful character, as an agent of change, it is also worth to note the fact that she is not only breaking with the conception of women as weak people relegated to a secondary plane, but she is also challenging the social order and having power enough to, in this case, make men kneel. This can be seen in Act II when she attempts to convince Aaron to have sex with her, saying:

My lovely Aaron, wherefore look’st thou sad
When everything does make a gleeful boast?
The birds chant melody on every bush;
The snakes lie rollèd in the cheerful sun;
The green leaves quiver with the cooling wind,
And make a chequered shadow on the ground.

Under their sweet shade, Aaron, let us sit,
And whilst the babbling echo mocks the hounds,
Replying shrilly to the well-tuned horns,
As if a double hunt were heard at once,
Let us sit down and mark their yelping noise;
And, after conflict such as was supposed
The wandering prince and Dido once enjoyed,
When with a happy storm they were surprised,
And curtained with a counsel-keeping cave,
We may, each wreathèd in the other's arms,
Our pastimes done, possess a golden slumber,
Whiles hounds and horns and sweet melodious birds
Be unto us as is a nurse's song
Of lullaby to bring her babe asleep. (2. 2. 9–29)

Firstly, we find the adjective “lovely” addressed to Aaron, a man, what shows that Tamora is not a fearful or naive woman. She knows that she is seen as a powerful woman whether it is in Rome, now that she is the Empress, or for the Goths, as she was their Queen. As mentioned above, Tamora has taken an active role, and thus her discourse and attitude depict then her sexual liberation and her condition as a mighty character. She does not resign to follow rules and expectations that were applied to women during the Renaissance. Actually, with her sexual promiscuity, she rebels against them, breaking once again the social order. This makes the reader aware of her real vengeful condition and sets up to the evil immoralities that she will conduct throughout the play. The last lines of the play, spoken by Lucius follow this idea:

As for that ravenous tiger, Tamora,
No funeral rite, nor man in mournful weeds,

No mournful bell shall ring her burial;

But throw her forth to beasts and birds of prey:

Her life was beast-like and devoid of pity;

And being dead, let birds on her take pity. (5. 3. 195–199)

Tamora will not have a mourning rite, a funeral. After having destroyed everything and not having behaved as a proper woman, she just does not deserve it. She has not been a woman, a mother, but a ferocious tiger who allowed her sons to rape Lavinia to achieve vengeance and for Chiron and Demetrius to fulfil their lustful desires on her. Everything is destruction since the very first moment she arrives to Rome. Tamora brings chaos and because of that she ends up being murdered as if it was a message for everybody to follow the rules, a lesson to get out of her fate. A kind of warning that Shakespeare sends by punishing the wandering sheep that is.

4. Lavinia: The Downfall of a Symbol

On the other hand, we find Lavinia, the other woman related to power in *Titus Andronicus*. She is the only daughter of Titus Andronicus and, regarding her behaviour as women, she represents the opposite to Tamora: Lavinia is a submissive character. Thus, she is the woman of the play who stands for the role that women were given during the Renaissance: they were almost nobodies. Her devotion to her father —her male guidance figure in the play— demonstrates that she stays within the role of female and her powerless condition mirrors her female sexuality.

Judith P. Hallett describes the role that women played in the Roman society almost to a point where one could say that she has Lavinia in mind: “women did not generally become politically involved [...] unless they belonged from birth to upper-class Roman families” (35). However, shortly after having said that she claims that “membership in a politically prominent and prosperous house did not, moreover, ensure a Roman woman’s political or social importance” (36). The first appearance of Lavinia is quite revealing when it comes to present women’s non-existent role in a concise way: “In peace and honour, live Lord Titus long. My noble lord and father, live in fame” (1. 1. 160–161) and, as she continues with this first speech, she even kneels before his father showing respect to him.

Act 2 Scene 2 is a key moment in the play since we can find Lavinia and Tamora interacting with other characters and having a conversation that reveals some interesting features that are key for this analysis and also because Lavinia, nothing less than the daughter of the Titus herself is raped. First of all, we have Tamora and Aaron, interrupted by Lavinia and Bassianus. The younger brother of Saturninus speaks to Tamora in a suspicious way, with a clear second intention of letting her know that he knows that the two Goths have an affair:

Who have we here? Rome's royal empress,

Unfurnished of her well-beseeming troop?

Or is it Dian, habited like her,

Who hath abandoned her holy groves

To see the general hunting in this forest? (2. 2. 55–59)

To what Tamora answers in an authoritarian way: “Saucy controller of my private steps, Had I the power that some say Dian had” (2. 2. 60). She is brave enough to reply in this way because she has power, she has a higher position than Bassianus and is well aware that she can downgrade him since he is nobody to control the Empress of Rome. And she even concludes her response by calling him “intruder” (2. 2. 65). In this way she makes things clear and, despite the fact that he is the Emperor’s brother, she is his wife and she is his right hand. Immediately after that, Lavinia intervenes and, once again, shows that she does know who she is, which position she does have in the society and how she has to behave: “Under your patience, gentle empress” (2. 2. 66). She now sees Tamora as a new figure of authority for her, once her father married her. This reflects the change that, thanks to such a simple mechanism as marriage, a recently defeated Goth Queen becomes a Roman authority. She comes to hold such a high rank that is capable of choosing who she listens to, and rejects listening to Lavinia when Chiron and Demetrius are about to take her: “I will not hear her speak; away with her!” (2. 2. 137), “I know what it means; away with her!” (2. 2. 157). These two quotations reflect how strong-minded Tamora is, she has taken a decision that will help her to take revenge and nothing or nobody can stand on her way towards it.

It is in this moment, when Tamora has taken the decision of allowing her two sons rape Lavinia, when we witness a devastating moment that stresses the differences between Tamora and Lavinia. Envisioning her future, Lavinia pleads Tamora for her life: “O Tamora, be called a gentle queen” (2. 2. 168) and “’Tis present death I beg; and one thing more, That womanhood denies my tongue to tell. O, keep me from their worse than killing lust” (2. 2. 173-175). She is trying to gain the Empress’ ear to have her favour so she can remain alive. However, since Tamora does not want to have anything to do with Lavinia and she is only driven by anger, hate and revenge, she will not help her. She will not help a fellow woman, being this one of the cruelest moments in the play and

the opposite to sorority. Having everything lost, Lavinia assertively exclaims: “No grace? No womanhood? Ah, beastly creature” (2. 2. 182).

When Lavinia is raped and mutilated —she has her hands chopped off and tongue cut out too— by Demetrius and Chiron, her sexuality is taken away from her because she loses her virginity in a violent way. She has now her purity damaged by having her virginity and virtue removed. The passiveness that she maintains, even after the rape, is a representation of herself as an adequate female character of that time combined with experiencing trauma after having been sexually assaulted. As women were just objects possessed by men, by keeping her virtue, she keeps the virtue of her family too and the eventual chance to marry a wealthy man. But the fact that she has been raped, means that her whole family has been raped too, they all have had their name harmed.

I would also like to point out that the main difference amongst Tamora (an active character) and Lavinia (a passive one) can be materially seen onstage too. When Lavinia has her tongue cut off and she is no longer able to speak, this turns out to be a strong representation of those women without voice. And even though it has been her who has been raped, neither Demetrius nor Chiron seem to be blamed at first for that as they are men and they had the order on their side, although eventually, once order and rules are destroyed, and men lose their dominant position, they end up being accused for that: ‘O, thus I found her straying in the park,/Seeking to hide herself, as doth the deer/That hath received some unrecuring wound’ (3. 1. 89–91)

Lavinia is compared to a wounded deer after having been raped. Deer were sacred animals, they were a symbol of purity. Besides that, the fact that she is compared to an animal, makes her go down in the social ladder as if she was less human. Lavinia is the daughter of Titus, the Emperor of Rome, she is kind of sacred too. Surrounded by peasants, soldiers and average people in general, she belongs to the best and most important family in Rome and thus she is a representative of them.

Although they are depicted as different characters, in the end, their fate ends up being the same one; both Lavinia, and then Tamora are dead. However, they die due to different reasons. On the one hand, Titus kills his daughter because she had lost her honour and what it meant to the name of their family, as it can be seen in this passage, when he states: 'Die, die, Lavinia, and thy shame with thee,/And with thy shame thy father sorrow die./*He kills her (Lavinia)*. (5. 3. 45–46). Her mutilated body is a materialisation of the shame and ridicule that lies now on the Andronicus family. He also kills her to rid Titus of his own shame of the brutal rape and the helplessness of his daughter. She has so interiorised her role as a naive and powerless character that she herself wanted to die if she no longer had her dignity and chastity. Tamora, on the other hand, is murdered in order to be punished because of her power, evil, corruption, and deception. Tamora's power was channeled through her growing sexual freedom and her part in the deaths and mutilation that occurred throughout the play. Ironically, the fact that both women are dead at the end of the play does nothing but reflecting that no matter how they behaved (according to the norms of the time or not), they are going to die due to the fact that they are women. They challenged the order maintained by men. Men in this play feel intimidated by women and since male characters have the power, they end up getting rid of women.

5. Gaveston or How a Platonic Love Can Destroy a King

On the other side, we have the play *Edward II*, by C. Marlowe. Written and staged around 1592 during the reign of Queen Elizabeth, a time in which England turned into a great global nation what lead to patriotism and nationalism to be widespread. During this time, too, writers began to work on historical plays that served to illustrate the triumphs and failures of certain Kings. Marlowe's *Edward II* follows Edward's reign and his political behaviour but also his most personal journey. It is, as Lars Engle claims in the introduction to the play, "a study in passion and cruelty" (351), looking "at cruelty from the victim's viewpoint" (352). Marlowe presents the reader with a play where order is jeopardised by the presence of the courtier Piers Gaveston and the special favour and attachment that the King has for him. He is a nobody. He does not belong to the upper classes who were sometimes members of the courts. In this case he is described as a "minion" (1. 2. 67), a "base peasant" (1. 4. 7) and an "ignoble vassal" (1. 4. 16) by the Queen herself and some of the King's noblemen, those who were supposed to belong rightfully to the court and who see (and think) that Gaveston should not be in the position where the King has placed him. However, there is a contrast in between these opinions and commentaries, and what the King thinks (and what he verbalises) about his favourite. In what could be an example of what M. Foucault describes in his *The History of Sexuality* as an "abnormal sexual practice" (110), because it is a homoerotic relationship instead of being an example of a normative heterosexual relationship. Although it is not mentioned explicitly, throughout the first part of the play (where Gaveston plays a key role) both the King and him let us perceive that they "share a special relationship". The play begins with Gaveston revealing the true nature of his relationship with King Edward II by reading a letter that has been sent by the King himself:

"My father is deceas'd! Come, Gaveston,
And share the kingdom with thy dearest friend."
Ah! words that make me surfeit with delight!

What greater bliss can hap to Gaveston
Than live and be the favorite of a king?
Sweet prince, I come. These, these thy amorous lines
Might have enforc'd me to have swum from France,
And, like Leander, gasp'd upon the sand,
So thou would'st smile, and take me in thine arms. (1. 1. 1–10)

So just as the play has begun, we unmistakably reach the conclusion that the feelings of love and desire, and thus, sex and sexuality have irrupted and broken the order, because the fact that the King had a homosexual relationship with a courtier could not be well received by his entourage. Shortly after that, Gaveston says: “My knee shall bow to none but to the King” (1. 1. 19) In some way, he is doing the same as Tamora does: he identifies who is the authority, the power belongs to nobody else but to the King. He knows that he has to remain close to him and this, kind of, anticipates the conflict that we will find later in the play: Gaveston vs the noblemen. Knowing that he has already gained the King’s favour, Gaveston gets enough confidence to address the King with loving words and manners: “Sweet sovereign, yet I come. To seethe ere I die. (2. 5. 91). While both of them refer to each other in ways that would lead us to think that they are more lovers than just friends, the Queen and the rest of the noblemen disapprove this unnatural relationship with Mortimer’s and Warwick’s constant opposition to Gaveston and any decision that the King takes influenced by him and want Gaveston to be imprisoned. However, it is more subtle when Mortimer Jr. is speaking with the Queen and calls her: “Fair Queen” (1. 4. 221). Mortimer Jr wants the reader to realise that he knows who is the rightful Queen. He does the same as Gaveston has done before in the play: he identifies the authority and, in some way, once again, and by comparison, we see that Gaveston’s origins are not noble.

But in this play, order not only fails, is not applied nor respected, due to the fact that it encounters a homosexual relationship. Order is also broken by the fact that the king insists on the

fact that the other courtiers have to accept his relationship with Gaveston and he wants gain more and more power thanks to his proximity to the King (Stymeist, 238). That is why the love that Edward II feels for Gaveston brings him problems with the nobles, but he does not care about it and only pays attention to his beloved:

[To Gaveston] Now let the treacherous Mortimers conspire,
And that high-minded Earl of Lancaster!
I have my wish, in that I joy thy sight
And sooner shall the sea o'erwhelm my land,
Than bear the ship that shall transport thee hence.
I here create thee Lord High Chamberlain,
Chief Secretary to the state and me,
Earl of Cornwall, King and Lord of Man. (1. 1. 148–155)

Soon after that, Coventry warns him, but he does not mind what the others say. He only pays attention to Gaveston, who says: “He shall to prison, and there die in bolts.” (1. 1. 194). And the King, as if the fact that he is in love with Gaveston meant that Gaveston is now the king, obeys him and sends Coventry to prison. Order and power, then have been clearly disrupted by Gaveston. Authority no longer rests in the hands of the King but in his lover’s. In this way, this relationship kind of mirrors the marriage of Tamora and the new Roman Emperor, Saturninus, since both lovers serve as disrupting forces because it is them who begin to make decisions and not those who are supposed to do so since they are the King of England and the Roman Emperor respectively.

The irruption of Gaveston in the court has such a big impact that it also affects the other courtiers that are against Gaveston and the King, when in Act 2 Scene 6, Warwick takes Gaveston from Pembroke's soldiers. Warwick is criticised and called traitor, but he claims: ‘No, James, it is my country’s cause I follow. —/Go, take the villain./[Gaveston is taken]. (2. 6. 10–11). Gaveston’s presence becomes so cathartic, so disturbing that even his enemies, those who repudiate him, break

the agreement that had come previously in the play. More or less in the middle of the play, Gaveston is punished too, and just like Tamora and Lavinia, he is killed for having created a disruption in the order of the English society.

However, the King's perception of Gaveston, the way his love is shown throughout the whole novel and it is the King himself the one who seems to go against order, against those social rules of the time: "Farewell, sweet Gaveston, and farewell, niece." (2. 4. 12). When comparing Gaveston to anybody else, "our intruder" is mentioned first as if he was the king's main focus and he is described as "sweet" while his niece goes at the end even though she is a member of his family. Just as if she was nothing special for him. Edward is unrefined even until a point in which the Queen is forced to ask him: "No farewell to poor Isabel, thy queen?" (2. 4. 13). To what he answers idly and blaming on Mortimer and the Queen for the discomfort that there is in the court: "Yes, yes, for Mortimer, your lover's sake" (2. 4. 14). Although, whether he likes it or not, this conflict has been caused by him, by Gaveston and the relationship they have. This leads the noblemen to revolt against the King because of Gaveston with Warwick saying that, in an eventual attack, he would rather follow Mortimer Jr. than the King since they no longer consider that he is acting as he is supposed: "And I'll follow thee." (2. 3. 20). And these same noblemen are depicted not obeying the King's commands:

No, it needeth not;

Arundel, we will gratify the king

In other matters; he must pardon us in this.

Soldiers, away with him! (2. 5. 41–44)

To this Arundel, who has nothing against Gaveston or the King and he believes that he has to act according to what the King dictates, shows his disapproval: 'My lords, it is his majesty's request,/ And in the honour of a king he swears,/He will but talk with him, and send him back' (2. 5. 54–56).

The Queen, one of the highest members (if not the second most important one) of the elites at that time, verbalises the issue that Gaveston has caused: 'How Gaveston hath robbed me of his love:/But yet I hope my sorrows will have end./And Gaveston this blessed day be slain (2. 4. 67–69).

Gaveston is not only the origin/cause of the riot of the noblemen against Edward, but of their marital distress too. As Foucault comments,

[t]he medical examination, the psychiatric investigation, the pedagogical report, and family controls may have the over-all and apparent objective of saying no to all wayward or unproductive sexualities, but the fact is that they function as mechanisms with a double impetus: pleasure and power. The pleasure that comes of exercising a power that questions, monitors, watches, spies, searches out, palpates, brings to light; and on the other hand, the pleasure that kindles at having to evade this power, flee from it, fool it, or travesty it. The power that lets itself be invaded by the pleasure it is pursuing; and opposite it, power asserting itself in the pleasure of showing off, scandalizing, or resisting. (47)

This extract could serve to deal with the nature of Gaveston and Edward's relationship in Marlowe's play. When Foucault mentions 'family controls' he is, at the end of the day, talking about authority. For Marlowe, then, these would be the Earls and the Queen that face the King (together with his unproductive homosexual lover that is Gaveston). Those who are by the King's side so he can be advised on how to act and which decisions to take in order for his own and the Kingdom's behalf but also for their own too. The fact that Foucault writes 'unproductive sexualities' could have a parallelism in the play if we analyse how damaging it is for the King and his country having his sight blinded by Gaveston's presence.

During this period of time, England, Edward II's country, is anything but productive or buoyant. On the other hand, it seems that Foucault had in mind this couple when he talks about the connection between power and pleasure since Edward is attracted by Gaveston and only wants to be with him. By doing so, by loving another man, he questions the rules and, besides getting power

from being the King, he seems to acquire another kind of power by having pleasure in showing off and scandalising with his relationship and by resisting to those who oppose to it.

6. Conclusion

To sum up, in these two plays of the Renaissance period it is easily appreciable that sexuality, power, order and corruption are quite interrelated, especially at a time in which all these notions/concepts were tangible in the society of the time. All the analysed characters in this essay have a strong point of sexualisation due to their sex, gender and/or their class in them, they challenge (or threaten) the established order of the places and systems they live in and therefore they are punished and end up dying. In her article “Approaches to Gender Studies: A Review of Literature”, Manizheh Alami quotes an Eckert and McConnell-Ginet passage from their book *Language and Gender*: “As we age, we continue to learn new ways of being men and women” (247). As characters evolve with the passing of time, with certain events taking place and, depending on the different societies where that shift takes place, gender and characters evolve. Tamora and Lavinia belong to the same sex but they have different features as women, they play different roles: Lavinia is the perfect and submissive woman while Tamora is a rebellious one.

As a conclusion and as this final degree essay has tried to prove by analysing some of the characters from *Titus Andronicus* and *Edward II* and their relationship with power and as Arendt claims in *On Revolution*:

Since the days of the French Revolution, it has been the boundlessness of their sentiments that made revolutionaries so curiously insensitive to reality in general and to the reality of persons in particular, whom they felt no compunctions in sacrificing to their ‘principles’, or to the course of history, or to the cause of revolution as such. (80)

All these characters have been indoctrinated to follow the rules and respect the social hierarchy. However, depending on their personal circumstances, everything is subject to change. Those who rebel against the system do not care about the global context or reality, about society or its rules, they only mind their feelings and their own interests although it is counterproductive for them. They see nothing but the immediate future and whatever it is that they might eventually get, no matter the

means nor the consequences. It is as if irrationality became a kind of new normality for them and their world. Those who rebel, leave rationality behind even until a point in which they do not care anymore if they have to go against the Emperor of Rome or the King of England. No matter what it might seem nor what these characters think about themselves, they never have/gain power because of who they are but only thanks to who they approach or which family they belong to.

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