Resisting Patriarchy and Petrarchy: Shakespeare, Ovid and a Rhetoric of the Assaulted Female Body

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Resisting

Shakespeare's remarkable tendency to break all sorts of norms in his writing is by now a widely acknowledged feature of his work. This contesting vocation finds expression at different levels, from rhetoric to syntax, through themes and characterization, and in particular in the way Shakespeare problematizes received assumptions regarding the female body as the locus of conflict -territorial, historical, political, poetic. His narrative poem *The Rape of Lucrece* constitutes one of the finest instances of the poet's critique of the values of patriarchy and its literary articulation, the Petrarchan paradigm, which he systematically demolishes as his writing gravitates towards an Ovidian mode of poetic utterance. Shakespeare's borrowed use of Ovid's figures and imagery, together with his experimental incorporation of the female voices in an Ovidian key, allows for a profound inquiry into the unspoken, always fatal, consequences of the gender violence generated and reproduced by the joint patriarchal/ Petrarchan establishment. The present exploration of an eight- stanza section of *The Rape of Lucrece* addresses the poetic, political and gender/ genre issues raised by the poet as part of his aesthetic manifesto.

I. Patriarchy and Petrarchy

The Rape of Lucrece, Shakespeare's second narrative poem, was published by Richard Field in 1594, one year after *Venus and Adonis*. It is believed to constitute the "graver labour" promised by the poet to his patron, Henry Wriothesley, Third Earl of Southampton -20 years old at the time- in the dedication of *Venus and Adonis*. Both poems were composed in the period 1592- 1594, during which theatres in London were closed down as a result of a particularly virulent outburst of the bubonic plague and during which, legend has it, Shakespeare took up residence with his patron at his rural hall in order to devote himself entirely to the production of his poetic work.

There is considerable scholarly consensus in regarding *Lucrece* as complementary with *Venus and Adonis*, the latter an amusing, titillating mythological account of an unsuccessful attempted rape by a female -and therefore comic in tone-; the former a serious, lugubrious, historical narrative of an effective rape committed by a male and therefore tragic in tone. Indeed, *Lucrece* might be considered a reflexive revisiting of similar material and tropes as are explored in *Venus and Adonis*, this time

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with more pointed insistence on the diverse implications of the actions of its main characters, particularly before and after the perpetration of the crime of sexual assault.

Like many of Shakespeare's writings, *The Rape of Lucrece* shares an interest in the *matter of Rome*, the vast literary, mythological and historical corpus of texts giving shape to the Elizabethan school curriculum that Shakespeare and his contemporaries were introduced to as children. The Roman Empire, operating then as a signifier for the rise of England as an imperial power, carried metonymic significance as political and cultural model and mirror. The poem narrates a well- known tragic story, that of Lucrece the Chaste, which signals a momentous event in Roman history -the end of a tyrannical monarchic system and the inauguration of an aristocratic republican system-, punctuated by different forms of violence. Shakespeare foregrounds this violence and explores it from several perspectives, downtoning his sources as he propounds a more critical vision of the dominant discourses that define culture, identity and conflict. Correspondingly, he resorts to source texts with similar orientation[1], which he manipulates and rewrites in "darker, more self- conscious, more culturally loaded tones" (Kennedy in Cheney, 2007, p.19).

There are multiple effects of this *strategic opacity* -the useful term coined by Greenblatt (2004, p. 280)- in the poet's handling of his source materials. From a historical- political perspective, Rome, a great source of "civilization", also manifests itself as a nation whose values are seriously impeached and, transitively, obscure the values that sustain the rise of the British Empire. Shakespeare unveils the unpleasant realities underlying foundational violence and subtly introduces his uncomfortable questions: Is this the way in which England wants to become an empire? Are these the values that inform and uphold the expansion of English civilization? Is this empire going to be constructed on the dead and mutilated bodies of women?

A second order of effects deriving from these considerations concerns the exploration of the strengths and limitations of Roman rhetoric, the linguistic foundation around whose principles the concept of *empire* is organized and made to work. The poem is structured as “a series of rhetorical disputations, each a set piece presented as a debate or as a formal declamation” (Bevington & Kastan, 1988, p. 71), and which are constructed around familiar sets of antitheses -monarchy/ republic, affection/ reason, honour/ lust, etc-, expressed in contrastive imagery. The value of argumentation - as well as its social, political and ideological bases and its status as a dominant form of thought and linguistic articulation- is called into question by highlighting its intrinsic failure, not only to deter Tarquin's crime, but also, more significantly, as an instrument of justice and social change. Lucrece experiences in her body and in her psyche the futility of defending herself *verbally* from the assault, and in defending her chastity later, in the presence of the men in her family, and "convinces herself that only suicide can prove her innocence and perhaps motivate a change in social values" (Kennedy in Cheney, 2007, p.19). Her body speaks itself lifeless.

But perhaps the most remarkable effect of Shakespeare's manipulation of his source material is the foregrounding of the concept of *rapere* –literally “to steal”- as a fundamental patriarchal practice:

> ... the rape serves as a means of examining the nature of marriage in a patriarchal society where competition for ownership and struggles for power characterize men's attitudes toward politics and sex. Using Rome as a familiar mirror for English customs, Shakespeare presents Lucrece as a heroine acting to uphold the institution

[1] Among others: *A Mirror for Magistrates*, Samuel Daniel's *Complaint of Rosamund*, Geoffrey Chaucer's *Troilus and Crisseyde* and *Legend of Good Women*, Livy's *History of the Republic*, John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, Thomas Nashe's *The Unfortunate Traveller*, Robert Greene's *The Scottish Historie of James the Fourth*, and Christopher Marlowe's *Dido, Queen of Carthage*.

> of marriage. It is she who acquires the stain through being violated and she who must pay the cost of wifely duty in marriage. (Bevington & Kastan, 1988, p. 70)

The Tarquins may be rapists -of women, of Rome- but their major offence lies in their tyranny, for which they are ousted. The all- male resolution that closes the poem consists of a repudiation of the old order and the consequent move towards republicanism (ibid.), but patriarchy will remain intact throughout and beyond the political transition. No matter the system, woman -living or dead- will always be a man's property.

II. Ovid

This is the point at which Shakespeare's most important literary predecessor, Ovid, emerges with overriding power and indisputable relevance. Ovid's *Fasti*, an unfinished account of the origins of Roman festivities and religious practices, includes the legend of Lucretia as part of Book 2 -February-, corresponding to the *Regifugium* ("Flight of the King"), lines 721- 852. This Book compiles the legends associated to the fall of the Tarquin dynasty and identifies the rape and suicide of Lucretia as the immediate reason for the establishment of the Republic.

In Ovid's account, during the siege on Ardea, the Roman generals engage in a boasting competition over their wives' chastity, which leads to a wager won by Collatinus, whose wife, Lucretia, is proved to be the only one sitting at home and spinning with her maids. Incensed by the thought of her, Tarquin, the king's son, leaves the siege and secretly rides back to Collatium, where he is received as a guest by an unsuspecting Lucretia. Under cover of night, he breaks into her bedchamber, rapes her and rides back to camp. Lucretia summons her father and husband, reveals the crime and the name of the abuser, and stabs herself. Collatinus swears revenge, Brutus gathers forces and the Tarquins are deposed and banished. The themes presented by Ovid are incorporated by Shakespeare as elements in the plot summary -"The Argument"- which opens the poem: the proprietary discourses about Lucrece's body; her chastity as the token of male legitimacy, envy, competition and trespassing; suicide as the only form of female political intervention; and the (dead) female body as object of metamorphosis into a convenient political symbol.

Like all the other talented young writers of his generation, Shakespeare took an Ovidian approach to the relationship between language and the body throughout his work. The rediscovery of Ovid and the espousal of Ovidian aesthetics as a generational reaction against the poetic establishment entrenched at the Elizabethan court was predicated on the need to find a more satisfactory mode of poetic expression. The Ovidian Movement sought to break free from the constraints of the hegemonic Petrarchan paradigm, an already exhausted form of stilted, heteronormative, two- dimensional, motionless, suffocating poetic devices. This literary artifice found its embodiment in what is known as the Petrarchan *blazon*, the poeticized inventory of disjointed female body parts that informs the sonneteering tradition and which emphasises a male-male discussion of the female anatomy. The object of praise celebrated in this convention, always a lady, is an ideal (ized) stereotype of feminine beauty, her unchanging features endlessly replicated, jigsaw- like, in all forms of poetry, her unattainability part of an ambivalent narrative of virtue and sensuality: "The term 'blazon' means both a poetic description of an object and a heraldic description of a shield; when a woman is blazoned, then, she is incorporated into a certain heroic discourse" (Kahn, 2002, p.30).

It is precisely this poetics of traditional praise that Shakespeare deconstructs from the beginning of *The Rape of Lucrece* by making explicit the link between language, property, patriarchy, and gender violence. The rhetoric of Collatine's infelicitous, ill- fated, Petrarchan boasting -inscribed in a literary tradition uniting praise with violence- is the primal cause of the crime and ultimate (self-) annihilation of Lucrece, as it invites competition for ownership. The conflictive relationship between language, body, sex, violence and voice reflects the "equally complex engagement with the

materiality of reading and writing practices in the Roman world" (Enterline, 2004, p. 6). It also serves as a political and poetic occasion, on the one hand, to review the significance of the female body as the site of convergence of aesthetics, sexual and cultural violence, text and social world, and, on the other hand, to propose the transformation of a story about rape into the painful birth of a new poetic form.

III. A Rhetoric of the Assaulted Female Body

Into the chamber wickedly he stalks, (365)
And gazeth on her yet unstainèd bed.
The curtains being close, about he walks,
Rolling his greedy eyeballs in his head.
By their high treason is his heart misled,
Which gives the watchword to his hand full soon
To draw the cloud that hides the silver moon.

Look as the fair and fiery-pointed sun, (372)
Rushing from forth a cloud, bereaves our sight,
Even so, the curtain drawn, his eyes begun
To wink, being blinded with a greater light.
Whether it is that she reflects so bright
That dazzleth them, or else some shame supposed;
But blind they are, and keep themselves enclosed.

O, had they in that darksome prison died, (379)
Then had they seen the period of their ill!
Then Collatine again by Lucrece' side
In his clear bed might have reposèd still.
But they must ope, this blessèd league to kill,
And holy-thoughted Lucrece to their sight
Must sell her joy, her life, her world's delight.

Her lily hand her rosy cheek lies under, (386)
Cozening the pillow of a lawful kiss,
Who, therefore angry, seems to part in sunder,
Swelling on either side to want his bliss;
Between whose hills her head entombèd is;
Where, like a virtuous monument, she lies,
To be admired of lewd unhallowed eyes.

Without the bed her other fair hand was, (393)
On the green coverlet, whose perfect white
Showed like an April daisy on the grass,
With pearly sweat resembling dew of night.
Her eyes, like marigolds, had sheathed their light,
And canopied in darkness sweetly lay,
Till they might open to adorn the day.

Her hair, like golden threads, played with her breath- (400)
O modest wantons, wanton modesty!
Showing life's triumph in the map of death
And death's dim look in life's mortality.

Each in her sleep themselves so beautify
As if between them twain there were no strife,
But that life lived in death and death in life.

Her breasts like ivory globes circled with blue, (407)
A pair of maiden worlds unconquerèd,
Save of their lord no bearing yoke they knew,
And him by oath they truly honorèd.
These worlds in Tarquin new ambition bred,
Who, like a foul usurper, went about
From this fair throne to heave the owner out.

What could he see but mightily he noted? (414)
What did he note but strongly he desired?
What he beheld, on that he firmly doted,
And in his will his wilful eye he tired.
With more than admiration he admired
Her azure veins, her alabaster skin,
Her coral lips, her snow-white dimpled chin.

(*The Rape of Lucrece*, ll. 365- 420)

The eight- stanza fragment under consideration (ll. 365- 420) comprises the brief narrative/ descriptive moment of Tarquin's surreptitious entrance into Lucrece's bedchamber. Tarquin has left his own sleeping quarters -after much internal debate- and has advanced stealthily and carefully, *violating* all the locks and padlocks on the way. His movements are narrated in "real time": he enters the room, walks around the canopied bed, opens the curtains and finally stands still, studying the sleeping Lucrece, scrutinizing her innocent beauty, *reading* the text of her body in a Petrarchan key, in what clearly takes shape as a blazon.

The choice of military imagery blended with the animalistic discourse of hunting and predation to narrate Tarquin's entrance -*stalks*, *high treason*, *watchword*- serves to remind the reader of one of the leading extended metaphors in the poem -a city under siege- as well as one of the leading themes: rape as an act of territorial usurpation. Correspondingly, this is reinforced by the idea of bodily dismemberment, fragmentation: the different parts of Tarquin's body -*eyeballs*, *head*, *heart*, *hand*- seem to act autonomously and in coordination with each other, like the battalions ready to charge. Significantly, the whole configuration is rhetorically articulated by hypallage and personification -*wickedly he stalks*, *unstainèd bed*, *greedy eyeballs*, *by their high treason is his heart misled, gives the watchword to his hand*- , as if somehow attempting to suggest a sense of alienation, or distance, between the man and his actions.

The gesture of drawing the bed curtains (l. 371) seems to interrupt the real- time sequence of movements, and narration, frozen, blends into description. Tarquin's eyes, dazzled, are momentarily blinded by the shining beauty of his victim and also by his own shame. This instant is described by means of a simile: drawing the bed curtains is just like -*look as*- the sun coming out from behind a cloud to dazzle the eye. The use of a simile rather than a metaphor at this point invites attention: the lexical sign of its explicitness stresses the distancing effect, not only between the abuser and his actions, but also, at a poetic level, between reality and idealization. Contrary to the male- generated discourses about her, this lady is not an ideal Petrarchan beauty -conventionally described in terms of the *sun* and *shining* in the sonneteering tradition- but the victim of an imminent crime which the reader knows will inexorably happen. The distance between signifier and signified, an intrinsic

characteristic of the simile, makes it effective, in the context of these lines, as a linguistic hedge inviting reflection on the destructive effects of the discourses overwritten on the female body.

The next stanza (ll.379- 385) suspends the portrait of the sleeping Lucrece to introduce a proleptic reflection on the part of an intrusive, sympathetic persona, expressed in the subjunctive mood. If Tarquin's eyes had died within their dazzled state; if they had never opened again, Lucrece’s tragedy would have been averted, the marital bed would have remained unstained, and the marriage –*blessèd league*- would not have been *killed*. Indeed, the idea, solidly supported by visual imagery associated to death, seems to be that this tragedy, like the envy that produces it, starts in Tarquin’s *eyes*, for whose sight the saintly Lucrece will have to pay a high price, i.e., by *selling*, or losing, *her* life and happiness.

Line 386 opens the blazon proper, organized in the sequence *hand- cheeks- head- her other hand- hair- breasts- veins- skin- lips- chin*. The colours of Lucrece's hand and cheeks are described in floral terms -*lily*, *rosy*-, thus resuming the chromatic pattern of the Petrarchan red- and- white cliché established at the beginning of the poem (cf. ll. 50- 77). This stanza starts by digressing on the relationship between her head and the pillow on which it rests, a relationship that echoes the problematic features of gender relations by means of the effective personification of the pillow. It is masculine and, angry at being deprived of a kiss, feels *cozened*, cheated of its male proprietary "right" to Lucrece's lips, and so it parts and swells -like an animal at hostile or sexual display- on either side of her head, making it sink as if *entombèd*. The unexpected violence of the picture clearly contributes to, and anticipates, the atmosphere of masculine violence that surrounds Lucrece and which will eventually destroy her.

This anticipation is carried further into at least three lines of the stanza (390- 392), which complete the mortuary image of Lucrece, her body lying *like a virtuous monument*. Again, a simile reminds the reader of the distance, this time between present and future, and between male discourses about the female body and the female body itself. Lucrece looks like the conventional female effigies on tombs, their heads typically resting on pillows, lying alongside their husbands. Her sleep is like the sleep of death, her virtue persisting even beyond life, and the overall rigor-mortis- like rigidity of her figure is nevertheless admired -in an almost necrophiliac, certainly anticipatory moment- by lascivious and profane eyes.

Line 393 opens the portrayal of Lucrece's other hand by means of a further sequence of similes. It is a *fair hand -fair* meaning both "beautiful" and "pale"-, whose whiteness contrasts and combines with the green colour of the bedspread to offer an inlaid miniature verbal portrait of a daisy on the grass. The April *daisy* –from Old English *dæges ēage*, "day's eye"- suggests springlike youth and innocence as well as simplicity, purity and virginity. The simile stresses the paradoxical reading of Lucrece: even though she is a married lady, there is something virginal about her, which reinforces her chastity. Like Vesta, the virgin goddess of *domus* –the domestic sphere- and *civitas* –the public sphere-, Lucrece is the pillar on which the Roman Empire rests and her rape thus acquires the connotation of a sacrilege at several levels:

> the cult of Vesta [...] replicated ancient Roman family rituals on a national scale and centered on the maintenance of the sacred altar fire by the vestal virgins. It was believed that catastrophe would befall Rome if this fire were ever extinguished; thus the very existence of the state was made symbolically dependent on the confinement of women’s bodies within the institutional boundaries of marriage, family, and domus [...] Lucrece, described throughout the poem in the imagery of Vesta, is established as the very embodiment of the goddess even in the Argument. (Kahn, 2002, p. 32)

Two further explicit comparisons introduce her sweat -resembling pearls and dew- and her closed eyelids, compared to marigolds, “Mary's Gold”, “a flower which opens itself to the sun,

making it a popular emblem of womanly responsiveness" (Williams, 2006, p. 202). Any Elizabethan reader would have been alert to the sexual meaning of the word *eye*, which, together with the connotations of the floral trope in the stanza, very subtly points back to the subtext of the rape: female genitalia, like all other body parts, are an item of male property, and thus equally vulnerable to theft (*rapere*).

The image of the marigolds also supports the semantics of violence that underlies the portrait: the marigolds of her eyes, closed after sunset, had *sheathed their light.* As a noun, *sheath* refers to the "tubular or enrolled part or organ of a plant" (OED, 1994) as well as the protective cover of a weapon, suggesting the equation eyes= mortal weapons= vagina. As a verb, it anticipates the wording of Lucrece's death at the end of the poem: "Even here she sheathèd in her harmless breast/ A harmful knife, that thence her soul unsheathed" (l. 1722-23). Indeed, the OED registers line 397 as the first printed use of the verb *sheathe* meaning "to cover from view" (ibid.). The final couplet continues the floral trope by introducing the image of the canopy, which, as long as it is closed, will protect the flowers/ eyes/ genitalia that lie sweetly in the darkness, to conclude, with tragic irony, that at some point Lucrece's eyes might open, like flowers, to beautify the day.

So far the only attribute that seems to retain some life is Lucrece's hair, stirred by her breath. The only movement in the whole poetic portrait inspires an extended oxymoron. The golden threads of her hair are described as *modest wantons*; their playful motion as *wanton modesty* -where *wanton* means "unchaste"-, and both oxymora are probably motivated by *played,* a word whose sexual overtones cannot have escaped the notice of an Elizabethan reader, and which metonymically problematizes the essence of the Petrarchan blazon. Movement and play do not only suggest the presence of sexual activity; they implicitly associate it with death. At the same time, *play* also suggests life -through breathing- and its prevalence over death as prefigured by sleep. The semiosis of sleep that confers sense to the whole section is systematized at this point in terms of a fusion of opposites: sleep is what beautifies and conciliates the fundamental binary opposites of life and death, and it is also the *map*, or representation, of life's victory.

The metaphor of the map reinforces and consolidates the Renaissance geosexual imagery underlying the blazon. As a pictorial representation of territory, the map expresses a proprietary, political reading of land which produces imaginary, arbitrary divisions into fragments allotted according to the logics of ownership. The female body is one instance of such territorial readings of the world; as a matter of fact, both woman's body and land are articulated through a common order of discourse. Lucrece is the territory about to be invaded, seized, usurped, trespassed and sacked by a male against the interests of another male. This stanza presents the figurative map that Tarquin will read to enter that territory, some of whose features -*lily*, *rosy*, *hills*, *daisy*, *grass*, *dew*, *marigolds*, *canopy*- have already been surveyed from a close- up perspective. However, as Tarquin moves closer to his victim, and as the imminence of the crime grows to suffocating tension, the geosexual metaphors suddenly expand to vaster dimensions, as if the usurpation actually comprised the whole world, perhaps suggesting the mechanical similarity between colonial domination and gender violence.

Line 407 introduces a discussion of the first intimate detail of Lucrece's anatomy. Her breasts, a most appetizing token of conquest, are compared to *ivory globes* and *maiden worlds unconquerèd*, circled with blue. The image is one of insular virgin territory surrounded by water, under only one apparent *owner*, and which at once arouses an imperialist ambition in Tarquin, igniting his desire to usurp the territory and depose its *lord*. In what is perhaps the most powerful political and ideological statement in the poem, the central part of the blazon takes the reader back from Petrarchan and patriarchal discourses to the political discourse of colonialism and Empire which envelops them, sustained in only one word. *Ivory* is emblematic of the appropriation and exploitation of the African continent, frequently semiotized as a female body. Its distinctly colonial resonances constitute a

metonymy of what is perhaps the most outrageous instance of imperial rape perpetrated by European "civilizations" on other people's land. Lucrece, like Africa, is the *fair throne* as well as the ideal pillar sustaining the Roman Empire and Roman patriarchy.

It is precisely this concept of support that confers a special sense and cohesion, not just to this stanza but rather to the poem as a whole. It organizes the stanza as a sequence of three distinct moments. The first moment, roughly corresponding to Lucrece's married life before the attack, is signalled by words like *circled*, *unconquerèd*, *oath*, *truly honorèd*, *bearing yoke*. *Bearing* as a polysemic sign evokes at least three features of the conventional female role -providing support, supporting the weight of a man during sexual intercourse, and carrying and giving birth to children- which, combined with *yoke* -allusive of beasts of burden- completes the picture of female subalternity. The second, brief moment, on line 411 -"These worlds in Tarquin new ambition bred"-, ventures further into the engendering capacity of the lady's breasts and her -as yet unfulfilled- maternity, which will now forcibly engender her own death. As the sequenced descriptive progression moves back from the contemplation of her body to his *ambition*, this deliberate reversal of agentivity acquires a veneer of irony by anticipation: discourses of sexual assault always locate the blame on the victim. The third moment considers the -by now- inevitable consequences of the previous two. The most intense and politically violent terms can be found at this point -*foul usurper*, *fair throne*, *heave the owner out*-, and they reinforce the idea that this rape is also a coup d'état.

The last stanza in this section (ll.414-421) opens with a sequence of different instances of perception -*see/ noted*; *note/ desired*; *beheld/ doted/ tired; admired*- to retrace the association of sight and desire. The fourth line ("And in his will his wilful eye he tired", l. 417) presents an intricate network of conceits that economically elaborate on this connection and bring it to a conclusion. *Will* -which, apart from "volition", means "lechery" and "genitalia" in Elizabethan English- is what causes a *wilful eye* and is also where the wilful eye *tires* itself. *Tire* means "to become exhausted" -perhaps here also with visual and orgasmic connotations- as well as "to feed ravenously", a term imported from falconry, another pervasive trend of imagery in the poem. Tarquin is aroused and exhausted from contemplating the sleeping Lucrece, and, by anticipation, from sexual satiety. He is also visually feasting on her body and on the point of preying on her like a rapacious bird: what is about to happen is, indeed, an act of *predation*.

The last three lines of this complex stanza (418- 420) strike a sharp contrast when the focus of the narrative shifts from Tarquin's lustful *eye* to the innocent beauty of the still- sleeping Lucrece. In quick succession, to an increasing tempo, *veins*, *skin*, *lips* and *chin* are described, again with exotic reverberations of colonialist discourse -*azure*, *alabaster*, *coral*: all of them costly materials, highly valued in works of art. With almost brutal irony, these lines synthesize and conclude what, by now, has long ceased to read like a conventional blazon. This poetic device is traditionally meant to elicit the sort of admiration inspired by the scrutiny of a work of art, a relatively passive, *contemplative* aesthetic emotion. Yet, in Tarquin's case, his feelings go far beyond mere contemplative admiration. He feels moved into action, an attempt to possess, destroy and kill.

The sinister underside of the blazon is thus pulled up to the surface and its effects implacably examined and found wanting. Petrarchan rhetoric is no longer appropriate as a means of poetic expression; it misrepresents the feminine because it is at the service of obsolete patriarchal forms of subjection. As gender perceptions, beauty standards and narratives about relationships begin to mutate, this paradigm loses all claim to representativity. Shakespeare, the poet-playwright, knows very well that gender is a profoundly unstable, movable, colourful category, and as such it requires a new, more accurately representative vehicle of (self-) expression and a new, more satisfactory, less heteronormative order of discourse to name it. The revolution of *gender* politics thus bleeds into a revolution in *genre* politics, of which Shakespeare, with his continuing experimental approach to poetic diction, will be the precursor and spokesman for the rest of his poetic and dramatic career.

Contesting

Shakespeare continues to interpellate every new generation of readers with his uncomfortable questions, his intelligence and the beauty of his artistry. His work continues to uphold the feminine condition, with its alternative narratives, as resistance and antithesis to an already exhausted traditional patriarchal narrative and its cultural inscriptions on the female body. Even in our world today, a world that is losing empathy with its most vulnerable inhabitants, the voice of Shakespeare rises, very much alive, to scream in defence of those who have no voice. He continues to invite his readers -and audiences- to challenge the renewed upsurge of an increasingly savage, genocidal, right- wing patriarchy in the world and in particular in our Latin American continent.

Shakespeare challenges the double standards of a hypocritical society which has systematically set women on fire for centuries. His text denounces an obsolescent patriarchy which has appointed for itself the custody and disciplining of rebellious and assertive women, and whose repressive state apparatus continues to appropriate the bodies of female human rights activists and social fighters in order to shoot them or put them in prison without cause or trial. His poetry resists with indignation in the face of an overbearing hegemonic male power whose misogyny, still operating with igneous fury, is legitimized and exacerbated by the dominant network of corporations, human trafficking organizations, media conglomerates, and the mediocre, Palaeolithic babbling of their pseudo- democratic puppets.

Shakespeare has already seen everything.

Instead, he advocates, from the historical heights of his revolutionary transgression, the empathy of his screaming, singing feminine voice and his daring aesthetics. They remain for present and future generations of readers and audiences to retrace and retrieve them from within the folds of his lines, to revise the world and then -and only then- perhaps change it.

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