Introduction

Shakespeare's first tragedy, *Titus Andronicus*, centers on an act of violation. Titus' daughter Lavinia has been raped in the woods by the Goths Chiron and Demetrius. They cut out her tongue and cut off her hands, taking language away from her. Her uncle Marcus finds her and brings her back to Rome, and to her father. What follows is a moment whose implications resonate throughout this play, and through the plays that follow. Titus at first does not recognize her: "But who comes with our brother Marcus here?" Marcus presents her with the words: "This was thy daughter." Titus replies, "Why, Marcus, so she is" (III.i.63–64). The question is not, what has happened to her? but, who is she? Her body mutilated and her language gone, she seems to Marcus no longer Lavinia but a nameless thing that used to be Lavinia. But for Titus, she is still Lavinia.

Shakespeare's interest in the idea of violation has been examined by critics from a number of angles. To name only two, Linda Woodbridge sees it in cultural terms, in the light of what she calls "magical thinking"; Heather Dubrow relates it to invasions of domestic space.[1] I would like to trace the idea of violation and its implications through the working of the play text itself. *Titus Andronicus* is not just a cultural document but a play – an early, self-conscious play at that. My approach is going to involve a close reading of individual texts, rather against the current practice of reading plays as embedded in their culture and determined by it. The best of this work (as in the two critics I have singled out) has been valuable and illuminating; but there is always the danger that a thick reading of the culture will entail a thin reading of the plays. I have tried to absorb what I find useful in the culturally oriented criticism of the last twenty-five years, and it should be clear that I have found much of it (feminist criticism in particular) very useful indeed. But the engagements with criticism will be mostly in the notes. My main business is a close engagement with the plays themselves, trying to keep them free to do their own thinking. The

underlying assumption, implicit throughout, is that this thinking was shaped by dramatic considerations and by the theatrical conditions in which Shakespeare worked. This is not going to be a work of stage history, much less an attempt to reconstruct the performances of Shakespeare's time, though practical stage considerations will surface throughout the discussion. But I want to begin not just by introducing the main themes that cluster around the idea of violation but by relating those themes to the theatrical circumstances in which the plays began.

The first of these themes, and one that will concern us throughout, is identity. Lavinia is the subject of a dialogue between two other characters, the point of which is to establish who she is. The violated woman is displayed, debated, interpreted. Inevitably, there is cultural work going on here: what values are in play if a woman who has been raped is thought to have lost her identity? But there is dramatic work going on as well. Who is this character, and how does she relate to the characters who are discussing her? The rape is offstage: the onstage business of the play is the interpretation, the dialogue in which the brothers debate Lavinia. In that debate she has a dual identity, Lavinia and not Lavinia. There is something here that relates to the theatrical occasion itself. The double identity of Lavinia, herself and a nameless other, is the condition of a character played by an actor, with a double identity of an equivalent kind. Thomas Kyd opens *The Spanish Tragedy*, one of the seminal plays of the Elizabethan theatre, with a figure striding on to the stage, crossing the border from the tiring house into the acting area, and addressing the audience with a speech that identifies him, and does not identify him:

> When this eternal substance of my soul
> Did live imprison'd in my wanton flesh,
> Each in their function serving other's need,
> I was a courtier in the Spanish court.
> My name was Don Andrea. . . . (I.i.1–5)[2]

If his name was Don Andrea, what is it now? He has, like Lavinia, a dual identity, one named and one nameless. He is a liminal figure, a boundary-breaker, who has crossed from the world of the dead to the world of the living, a move dramatized by his crossing from the tiring house to the stage. Addressing the audience, he crosses another boundary, between the fiction in which he is enclosed and the literal reality in which he is an actor on stage, speaking to us. All this goes with his liminal identity. In *Hamlet* Horatio describes the Ghost, another boundary-breaker, not as Hamlet's father but as "A figure like your father" (I.ii.198). Troilus, seeing Cressida

in the Greek camp with her new lover Diomedes, declares, "This is and is not Cressid" (V.ii.152). Othello at the end of his play is "he that was Othello" (V.ii.281).

These dual identities within the fiction are the equivalent of the combination of actor and role in the performance. Contemporary evidence suggests that audience perceptions, then as now, moved back and forth between the character and the actor. Sometimes, jokingly, the actor shows through. Richard Corbet describes how "mine host," "full of ale and history," recounted the Battle of Bosworth: "For, when he would have sayd, King Richard dyed, / And call'd – A horse! A horse! – He, Burbidge cry'de."[3] This would not work as a joke, however, if the figure on stage were identified simply as the actor. That identification is always in play with another, that of the figure on stage as the character. This means taking the play seriously. An account of a 1610 performance of *Othello* by the King's Men at Oxford reports, "Desdemona, though always excellent, moved us especially in her death when, as she lay on her bed, her face itself implored the pity of the audience."[4] Desdemona, not Master so-and-so; she, not he. Yet the actor, whose name the reporter does not acknowledge, is at work creating the pathos that moves him. This is, and is not, Desdemona; and it is the actor, not just Desdemona, who is "excellent."

The doubleness of Lavinia's identity links with the doubleness of the act of atrocity that has broken her. To the question, what is this person? is added the question, what is this act? Lavinia is a Roman matron raped by Goths: the attack on her is an attack on a woman, and on a city. Preparing to murder Desdemona, Othello threatens to stain the sheets with blood (V.i.36); they are her wedding sheets. Her murder is also her wedding night. Romeo kills Tybalt the day he is to consummate his marriage with Juliet. Both acts are a shedding of Capulet blood, and a loss of innocence: the lovers' first sexual encounter, and Romeo's first killing. It is by killing Duncan that the Macbeths consummate their marriage, in an act they themselves have trouble naming. Lavinia's rape, we shall see, is not just a figurative attack on Rome; it has disconcerting links with her marriage, which involves rape of another kind. The name of the deed, like the name of the character, becomes unsettled.

As acts of violation become figuratively connected with other acts, including acts of love, the idea of violation spreads through characters' other relationships, tainting them, and relationship itself comes into question. Relationship is a way of fixing identity. Marcus does not say

"This was Lavinia" but "This was thy daughter" and for a moment that is what he and Titus debate. As Evelyn Gajowski puts it, "To be a full human being, Shakespeare intimates, is to be a relational, rather than an autonomous being; yet he gives unblinking attention to the excruciating vulnerability involved."[5] Relationship can inflict suffering. Lavinia suffers as herself, and as Titus' daughter; Titus suffers as her father. Locked in silence, Lavinia is in one sense alone; but she is never alone on stage. As soon as the rapists leave, Marcus enters; and for the rest of the play she is surrounded by her family, trying to talk to her, trying to read her, trying to find some way of dealing with her intolerable suffering. These efforts, we shall see, take on a dual nature as the rape does: they become a form of attack on her, a new dimension to her suffering. Relationship can bring healing; it can also bring more damage. In Edgar's tending of the blind Gloucester we are going to see a disturbing conflation of caregiving and torture.

This is bound up with the workings of theatre. Dialogue is the condition of drama, putting the actors into relationship. Shakespeare's company was unusually stable, a team of sharers who worked together year after year, and an important part of their skill would have been an instinctive teamwork that came with mutual familiarity. "J. Cocke" in his character sketch of "a common player," describes a bad actor as one who concentrates on his own performance at the expense of the teamwork: "When he doth hold conference upon the stage; and should looke directly into his fellows face; hee turnes about his voice into the assembly for applause-sake, like a Trumpeter in the fields, that shifts places to get an echo."[6] For all the star power of actors like Burbage and Alleyn, they were not just building a single powerful character; they were part of a group experience. The opening of *Richard III*, with Richard revealing himself in a long soliloquy, is unique in Shakespeare. Hamlet is introduced in cross-talk with Claudius, Othello with Iago. The teamwork of the actors functions when Lavinia's family tries to deal with her; it even functions in the aftermath of the rape, as the taunting voices of Chiron and Demetrius play off against Lavinia's silence.

Dialogue is relationship, but in Shakespearean tragedy relationship is frequently damage. Shakespeare explored what the closeness of one person to another can mean in a non-dramatic work, *Lucrece*, that shares many of the concerns of his tragedies. After the rape Lucrece and Tarquin part, never to meet again; but the narrator holds them together:

She bears the load of lust he left behind,
And he the burden of a guilty mind.

He like a thievish dog creeps sadly thence,
She like a wearied lamb lies panting there;
He scowls, and hates himself for his offence,
She desperate, with her nails her flesh doth tear. (734–39)

There is a dark relationship here, a terrible mutual understanding; they have been together somewhere that no one else in the poem has been. We shall see such relationships in the plays, Othello and Iago being a prime example.

One part of relationship is interpretation, and this too does damage. Desdemona, Cordelia and Cressida are stared at by the men of their plays, debated, and interpreted. And the act of interpretation leads to their destruction. Lavinia is destroyed, then interpreted, then destroyed again. Interpretation is what audiences do. Usually it is in comedy that the act of interpretation, and especially of misinterpretation, is brought self-consciously on to the stage. In inductions and intercut scenes, Jonson has onstage characters debate how they should take the play, with the author's spokesmen getting it right and the fools getting it wrong. The comedy gets an increasingly bitter edge later in Jonson's career, as his relations with the audience become more hostile. Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* shows an onstage audience going one step further: the citizens not only object to the play the company is performing, reading it against the grain by attacking its sympathetic characters; they break it apart by insisting on the insertion of a play of their own devising, with an actor, the apprentice Rafe, they provide themselves. Here we see that misreading can actually destroy a play, and Beaumont's joke blew up in his face when his own audience rejected the play itself. When in tragedy Shakespeare brings acts of interpretation and misinterpretation on to the stage, within the play proper, the comedy falls away: these misreadings are deadly. This is what happens when Othello misreads Desdemona, when Lear misreads Cordelia.

Such acts of interpretation imply boundaries: between character and commentator, between the main action and the heckling of eavesdroppers. Such a boundary was created on stage – and we can confirm this by watching performances at the Bankside Globe – by the pillars that were a permanent part of the set. They divide the space into a central acting area and a periphery; it is in the periphery, where characters comment on what they are watching, that interpretation takes place. The other division to

which the Globe alerts us is one we have suspected all along, the boundary between stage and audience. The boundary is there: the stage floor is well above the pit floor, and the audience is not likely to climb on to it. We are aware of our space, and their space. At the same time, the actors address the audience across the boundary, and the audience responds by sending voluble reactions back to the stage. Everyone is in the same light, making boundary-crossings more natural than they are when a lit proscenium stage faces a darkened auditorium.

Shakespeare's tragedies are full of boundary-crossings, and these boundary-crossings are themselves acts of violation. The Goths enter Rome; Romeo enters Juliet's bedroom, then breaks into the Capulet tomb; the Ghost breaks out of his sepulcher; Othello enters Desdemona's bedchamber, Macbeth enters Duncan's; Lavinia and Lear cross from civilization into the wilderness. These boundary-crossings relate to the double nature of the actions that take place – as the boundary, for example, between love-making and killing breaks down. National space is violated by enemy invasions, even invasions that aim to restore order (doubleness again: what is rescue, and what is enemy action?) Plays end with traditional enemies in the citadel: Goths in Rome, Norwegians in Denmark, the English in Scotland. Cordelia comes to save her father at the head of a French army, and even Albany, whose cause is hers, feels bound to resist. The enemy within is sometimes personal: Othello never has to fight the Turks, but he has to kill the Turk in himself; Hamlet's internal enemy, by his own account, is his madness, a thing within him that is not him. (This is, and is not, Hamlet.)

In moments like these we are very much inside the story, even inside the character. But they relate to the initial doubleness of perception created when an actor walks on to the stage. Burbage is and is not Hamlet; the thing that killed Polonius is and is not Hamlet; the army that has come to restore order is and is not an enemy. The effect is not (or not simply) metatheatre. It is not that Shakespeare wrote "This is and is not Cressid" to remind us that we are in a theatre watching an actor in a play. He wrote "This is and is not Cressid" because he himself was a theatre artist, and this shaped the way he thought about what was happening in the story, and determined what Troilus would say to express his sense of betrayal. It drew him to thinking of characters and actions as having double identities, and to seeing acts of interpretation that tease out those double identities as part of the action of the play itself.

There is also, I suspect, something personal here, whose roots we can only guess at. Shakespeare's theatrical thinking links up with an

experience that obviously disturbed and engaged his imagination. His early work in particular is filled with images of rape, and with displaced rape: the literal sexual assaults on Lavinia and Lucrece are at the centers of his first two attempts at tragedy, dramatic and non-dramatic. In *Venus and Adonis* the boar kills Adonis in what Venus imagines as a complex sexual assault involving sodomy and oral sex: "And nuzzling in his flank, the loving swine/Sheath'd unaware the tusk in his soft groin" (1115–16). This too, like the debate over Lavinia, is an act of interpretation: it is Venus who sees this as a love-death, a displaced climax to her own aggressive wooing. She gives a destructive twist to the Ovidian transformation that should bring new life, plucking the flower Adonis has become (killing as deflowering) to let it wither and die between her breasts. In *Henry VI Part One* John Talbot's death in his first battle as a "maiden youth" (IV.vii.150) is another drawing of first blood, another deflowering.[7] The theme continues to haunt Shakespeare's work, and I would like to show – again, rather against the current practice of seeing plays as culturally determined – that one play feeds on another as ideas are picked up, transformed, and arranged in new combinations. There is an author at work here. He responds to the conditions of his society, and to the demands of the theatre in which he works. But he also responds to his sources, constantly transforming them; and those sources include his own work.

I have selected for consideration seven of Shakespeare's tragedies: *Titus Andronicus*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Othello*, *King Lear* and *Macbeth*. Here the ideas I am interested in seem especially pervasive, though they could be traced in other tragedies, notably *Julius Caesar* and *Coriolanus*. Violated identity, violated space, the damage that comes with interpretation and even with relationship itself, the double nature of characters and of the acts they commit – these will be the concerns of the discussion that follows. They will appear and reappear in different combinations. They will not always relate to each other in the same way. Each chapter will take as its starting point an act of violation that provides a focus for the discussion, an angle of vision from which to view the play. The constant factor is that each act, wherever it occurs in the story (and the placing varies) resonates through the rest of the work, often linking with other acts of violation, using the resources of theatre to question not just what we do to each other, but who we are. The last question, as we shall see, is increasingly asked not just of those who suffer violence, like Lavinia, but of those who inflict it.

CHAPTER 1

Titus Andronicus: *This was thy daughter*

DEBATING LAVINIA

The assault on Lavinia that forms the central act of violation in *Titus Andronicus* takes place, like the acts of violence in Greek tragedy, offstage. Chiron and Demetrius rape her, cut off her hands, and cut out her tongue. What the audience, and Lavinia's family, have to confront is not the sight of the event but its significance. For Chiron and Demetrius it is simple: they have done what they wanted to do, and now they can gloat. As they taunt her in the aftermath of the rape, their voices work together easily, each taunt sliding into the next:

> DEMETRIUS So, now go tell, and if thy tongue can speak,
> Who 'twas that cut thy tongue and ravished thee.
> CHIRON Write down thy mind, bewray thy meaning so,
> And if thy stumps will let thee play the scribe. (II.iii.1–4)

They use language smoothly and confidently to tell Lavinia she will never use language again. But in silencing her they have inadvertently made her the most powerful character in the play. What the rape means for them is straightforward: an expression of their power. What it means for her is beyond language, beyond imagining. That is what her silence conveys to us, and from this point on that silence haunts the play.

Yet plays use words, and on her next appearance we see her again with two brothers, her father and her uncle, who try to read the thing she has become and, unlike Chiron and Demetrius, disagree. And plays use the presence of the actor, who in circumstances like this can dominate a scene without language, simply by standing there. Lavinia must be dealt with. When Marcus, having found her in the woods, brings her back to Rome, out of the wild place where the unimaginable has happened to her, and back to the city where everything should be familiar, Titus at first does not know who she is: "But who comes with our brother Marcus here?" (III.i.58). Marcus replies, "This was thy daughter." She is finished, a

nameless thing, like the ghost who can only say "My name was Don Andrea." But Titus replies, "Why, Marcus, so she is" (III.i.63–64). His reply puts Lavinia back into relationship. At first this may sound as simple as the taunts of the rapists: whatever has happened she is still his daughter. But what it means to be his daughter in her new condition is something the rest of the play has to explore, and in the process their relationship becomes the most difficult, conflicted one in the play. The rape has put identity into crisis: what is Lavinia now? It has put language into crisis: what words can be used about her? Relationship has to be renegotiated: is she Titus's daughter, and what does this mean? As we sense these questions forming, we sense the significance of the rape expanding beyond the pain of one character to include the network of relationships that form the community of her family, and ultimately of Rome. As two brothers debate her, earlier scenes return in memory, transformed, haunting the present action. Before Aaron pointed out that they could both have her, Chiron and Demetrius argued over her as rival lovers, debating which had the right to claim her as Marcus and Titus now debate how to read her. Earlier in the action yet another pair of brothers, Saturninus and Bassianus, competed to marry her. Further back still, at the beginning of the play, the same brothers competed for the empery of Rome. Lavinia's rape does not come from nowhere; it haunts, and is haunted by, her marriage and the larger political action.

HAUNTED BY RAPE

One feature of the stage itself is implicated in what happens to Lavinia, as though to warn us of the way the significance of the act will spread. We do not see the rape; but we see the stage trap, which represents the pit in the wood where the assault will take place. Like Lavinia herself, it is interpreted in different ways by different characters. Trying to entice Aaron, Tamora calls it a pleasant place fit for love (II.ii.10–29). Setting up the murder of Bassianus and the rape of Lavinia, she describes it as a place of terror (II.ii.91–104). Even so the sexual act, the act of love, will become an act of horror. Aaron has already described the wood itself as "ruthless, dreadful, deaf and dull" (I.i.628), going in one line from abstract menace to a more disturbing atmosphere of deadened senses and enervation. When Lavinia's brothers approach the pit Quintus complains, "My sight is very dull" (II.ii.195) and when Martius falls into the pit Quintus lacks the strength to pull him out; instead he lets Martius pull him in. The pit seems to exert a malign force that dulls the senses and weakens the body.

Something of this atmosphere creeps into Marcus' long speech over the mutilated Lavinia. The first shock of realizing what has happened to her produces not sharp emotion but a trance-like border state, neither sleeping nor waking:

> If I do dream, would all my wealth would wake me;
> If I do wake, some planet strike me down
> That I may slumber an eternal sleep. (II.iii.13–15)

From that point his will seems suspended; he goes on talking but does nothing, and he even projects this state of suspension on to her attacker who, if he had heard the music Lavinia made "would have dropped his knife and fell asleep, / As Cerberus at the Thracian poet's feet" (II.ii.50–51). The atmosphere suggests falling asleep after love-making; except that what has happened is not love-making but a violent parody of it, and any such feeling would not be that of Lavinia (who is beyond exhaustion) but that of Chiron and Demetrius. As something of Tarquin remains with Lucrece, the eerie mood of sleepiness that hits the play at this point seems to trap us in the consciousness of the rapists.[1]

The pit is also a sexual image, anticipating Lear's "there's hell, there's darkness, there is the sulphurous pit" (IV.vi.123–24). To the horror of what it is, suggesting a recoil from sexuality itself, is added the horror of what has been symbolically done to it. Quintus gives a graphic close-up:

> What subtle hole is this,
> Whose mouth is covered with rude-growing briers
> Upon whose leaves are drops of new-shed blood
> As fresh as morning dew distilled on flowers? (II.ii.198–201)

Having invoked both menace ("subtle") and damage, the speech is capped by a grotesquely inappropriate lyricism that takes us back to Tamora's description of the setting as a place for love. The association of the pit with Lavinia makes for a grim pun in the action. Three men have entered her body: her husband Bassianus, then the Gothic brothers. Three men enter the pit: first Bassianus, then Quintus and Martius.[2] In this pattern her own brothers take the place of the rapists, and this happens during the attack itself. (They fall into the pit while the rape is happening offstage.) As the significance of the rape expands, the division between Lavinia's family and her assailants, between the civilized structures of Rome and the horror of the woods, is shaken. The tomb of the Andronici dominates the first act as the pit dominates the second. It ought to represent piety and order. Titus sees it as a final resting place for the family, and a final reward