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**'Rome is but a wilderness of tigers':
Isolation in *Titus Andronicus*
and *Coriolanus***

PROFESSIONAL PAPER

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'Rome is but a wilderness of tigers': Isolation in *Titus Andronicus* and *Coriolanus*

The titular characters of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* and *Coriolanus* are both respected soldiers of Rome. Both also ultimately turn against Rome and its institutions, and are killed. This paper explores the relationship of the soldier and society in these two tragedies.

The key elements determining the position of a soldier in society which are examined in the paper are the language employed to discuss warfare (especially that used by the protagonists), the treatment of the soldier's body (linguistically and otherwise), and the soldier's relationship with his family. Aspects of the two plays which might indicate trauma are pointed to, by expanding on the plays and taking into account early modern warfare and the chivalric system. In addition, contemporary war trauma theory is used, focusing particularly on one symptom – isolation. It is precisely this element that characterizes the soldier's relationship with his society, which is illustrated by the comparison of the two protagonists' narratives.

By looking at the parallels and differences between the two plays, with the aid of history of warfare and contemporary trauma theory, the paper aims to examine the role of the soldier in Shakespeare's plays, centring on the idea of isolation.

KEYWORDS

soldier, isolation, war trauma, *Titus Andronicus*, *Coriolanus*

Introduction

Titus Andronicus is one of Shakespeare's earliest tragedies, and the first Roman tragedy. *Coriolanus*, on the other hand, is his last tragedy set in Ancient Rome. Both protagonists are distinguished soldiers who turn against Rome and its institutions, and ultimately die because of it. However, whereas the conflict in *Titus Andronicus* is contained to the Andronici and the royal family, in *Coriolanus* it extends and sets the protagonist against a whole social class, the plebeians.

Given the similarity of the positions the titular characters are in, and the plays' places in Shakespeare's oeuvre, the two tragedies present an opportunity to explore the evolution of certain elements relating to the figure of the soldier in Shakespeare's work. This paper will look more closely at the ways in which language is used to refer to war in both plays, the treatment of the soldiers' bodies, as well as the soldiers' relationships with their respective families. Special attention will be given to potential traumatic elements, analysed with the use of contemporary trauma theory in conjunction with early modern physiology. The chivalric system, as an important aspect of early modern warfare, will also be taken into consideration. The aim of the essay is to explore isolation of veterans in both of these plays, which is primarily visible in the way the protagonists are treated by Rome, whose 'cruelty and envy' (*Coriolanus* 4.5.75) is based on an inability to understand the profession of the soldier.

'I am the sea': physiology of trauma

The very beginning of *Titus Andronicus* is marked with unrest. Internally, Rome is divided between two imperial candidates, brothers Saturninus and Bassianus. However, 'the people of Rome ... / have by common voice, / In election for the Roman empery, / Chosen Andronicus' (*Titus Andronicus* 1.1. 20-23). This same Andronicus, Titus, has been away fighting Goths in a conflict which has lasted for ten years. Now he is returning to Rome, having won a great but costly victory:

Hail, Rome, victorious in thy mourning weeds!
Lo, as the bark that hath discharged his fraught
Returns with precious lading to the bay
From whence at first she weighed her anchorage,
Cometh Andronicus, ... (1.1.70-74)

This first speech given by Titus is notable in establishing the use of imagery which will flow through the play, marking episodes crucial for the development of both the titular character and our understanding of them. Returning from war, he compares himself to a bark that returns to a bay where it is safe to cast anchor. By implication, the environment he returns from is conceptualised as the sea, and Rome a safe haven after the unpredictability and danger of war. Thereby war,

and by extension unrest and conflict, is symbolically marked by the element of water. This imagery is later used by Aaron in 2.1., when he says that he wants to 'see [Saturninus] shipwrack and his commonweal's' (2.1.24). His question 'what storm is this?' (2.1.25) draws attention to the means by which he plans to execute this – Chiron and Demetrius, now part of the imperial family. It is through the figures of the two brothers that external, foreign unrest and conflict becomes internal, domestic unrest, as is attested by the prevailing marine imagery. They rape and mutilate Lavinia, using her as 'a stream / To cool [their] heat' (2.1.134-35). Seeing 'a crimson river of warm blood, / Like to a bubbling fountain stirred with wind' (2.4.22-23) streaming from her mouth, her uncle compares her to 'a conduit with three issuing spouts' (2.4.30). When Titus sees her, still distressed after the wrongful accusation of two of his sons, the language he uses reflects his gradual loss of control. The image of a river overflowing in the lines 'My grief was at the height before thou cam'st, / And now like Nilus it disdaineth bounds' (3.1.70-71) becomes a scene in which a solitary figure is faced with raging nature:

now I stand as one upon a rock,
Environed with a wilderness of sea,
Who marks the waxing tide grow wave by wave,
Expecting ever when some envious surge
Will in his brinish bowels swallow him. (3.1.90-97)

Just her 'picture in this plight, / ... would have maddened' him (3.1.103-4), but now his cheeks are 'like meadows yet not dry, / With miry slime left on them by a flood' (3.1.125-26), his pain at seeing his daughter mutilated only increasing:

When heaven doth weep, doth not the earth o'erflow?
If the winds rage, doth not the sea wax mad,
Threat'ning the welkin with his big-swoll'n face?
And wilt thou have a reason for this coil?
I am the sea. Hark how her sighs doth blow!
She is the weeping welkin, I the earth;
Then must my sea be moved with the sighs;
Then must my earth with her continual tears
Become a deluge, overflowed and drowned (3.1.220-28; emphasis added)

It is in this speech that the two sets of water imagery conflate, Lavinia's 'weeping welkin' unleashing the force of Titus' raging sea, a considerable step away from the bark that was returning to the safety of the bay at the very beginning of the play. Titus now thinks of himself in the terms of the same chaos that war presents, i.e. as its embodiment. An alternative to understanding this symbolically is an interpretation anchored in the early modern understanding of physiology. War, conceptualised as the sea, not only evokes the elemental force of water, but also implies the quality of coldness. It could be claimed, therefore, that this quality is central to the Renaissance perception of war and its effect on the body,

which is especially pertinent in that it is also an attribute of melancholy (Sugg 277, Breitenberg 37). Renaissance medical theory has roots in the teachings of Aristotle and Galen (Sugg 12), which developed during the Middle Ages into the humoral theory of medicine. One of the four humours which influenced the body was melancholy. However, when a problematic disease, as opposed to simply a bodily humour, melancholy was the result of a change in either the quality or the quantity of black bile (Breitenberg 37), which is produced by the liver (as is blood) (51). Melancholy seems to have plagued Europe in the early modern period (Gowland 77). It was also referred to as 'black choler' (Breitenberg 37) and was characterised by symptoms such as 'inconstancy and changeability, moodiness, sullenness, an inability to be governed by reason, the excess of passion and imagination' (54). The causes of it are varied, but they all disrupt the body's homeostasis (37). And it is precisely the preservation of that dynamic equilibrium that was the primary concern of early modern medicine.

The Renaissance idea of the body was one of a permeable entity, highly dependent on its surroundings. Apart from the well-known Galenic humours, an important aspect to factor in while discussing the Renaissance idea of the body is the notion of the spirits, the most potent and rarefied part of blood (Sugg 3). In the body, they were perceived as either smoke or vapour, and were responsible for the communication of the soul with the body (3). Three organs in particular were closely related to the spirits: the liver, the heart, and the brain. Each of these organs had a particular role in the production and processing of spirits: the liver's was 'vegetative', one of growth, the heart's 'sensitive', one of 'feeling', and that of the brain 'rational'. Similarly, the spirits of these regions were 'natural', 'vital' and 'animal' (from the Latin 'anima', meaning 'soul' or 'mind') (16). The soul controlled the body through the spirits (15), but they could be influenced by, for example, 'the measure and the substance of the food men are used to' (23), and were 'caught up in a continual interplay of different factors: spatial, generational, seasonal and climatic' (14). According to 'intramission' (one of the theories of sight), 'each object of vision had its own spirit, usually known in optic theory as its 'species' – a kind of film or skin which streamed into the eye to permit sight' (35), where it would presumably react in some way with the observer's spirits. The air one breathed changed one physiologically – the quality of it influenced the spirits, which then changed the make-up of the humours (14). Air would 'mix with blood to form spirits', and was also thought to 'remove impurities which might otherwise corrupt the blood' (16). It was therefore paramount to try and keep the body balanced with the introduction of food and activity that would help keep or restore the equilibrium.

War conceptualised as the sea in *Andronicus* could therefore also be understood as an intimation of the potential issues relating to being exposed to violent conflict. The overwhelming expanse of water might be shorthand for the physiological effects that war has on soldiers, which then in turn might also imply spiritual consequences (especially given the theory of sight outlined

above). The coldness of the sea could be interpreted to hint at melancholy, and by extension, its symptoms, especially loss of control and passionate outbursts, which might be understood as the body's way to re-establish equilibrium (which will be discussed later). A similar mechanism could be understood to be at work in *Coriolanus*. War is conceptualised as the sea in this play as well, and warriors as vessels. This is first brought to attention in Cominius' speech in the senate, praising Caius Martius, Rome's most celebrated soldier. After describing Martius' first experience of war, the battle that marked the end of tyranny in Rome and set the foundations of the Roman Republic, Cominius says that Martius 'waxed like a sea, / And in the brunt of seventeen battles since / He lurched all swords of the garland' (*Coriolanus* 2.2.97-99), meaning that his extraordinary prowess in war won him the first and most distinguished position among his brothers in arms. And more recently, at Corioli, he was a force to be reckoned with when '[a]s weeds before / A vessel under sail, so men obeyed / And fell below his stem' (2.2.103-5). The imagery is picked up by Martius, when he tries to calm his mother after his banishment from Rome, reminding her of what she used to say to him:

That common chances common men could bear,
That when the sea was calm all boats alike
Showed mastership in floating; ...
... You were used to load me
With precepts that would make invincible
The heart that conned them. (4.1.5-11)

Martius might simply be evoking the imagery to draw attention to the fact that there are greater evils than banishment. However, this passage might also contain a hint at what it is that allows him to perform so well in battle – a fortified heart.

Courage was understood as the heat of the spirits that inhabited the heart (Sugg 23). But that organ also played an important part in the physiology of emotions such as fear, anger, affront, hate, and envy. Fear, for example, caused the spirits to drown the heart in order to protect it from the outward threat (20), while anger, on the other hand, forced the blood (and spirits) to boil and rush from the swelling heart to the extremities, preparing the body to react (21). Affront agitated the blood and spirits, thereby also causing the individual to be in a state of readiness (22), hatred and envy burdened the heart and thus hindered the circulation of blood (23), and grief forced the spirits to draw to the heart, essentially causing the body into lockdown (23). It is interesting in light of this to look more closely at what happens to Martius on the battlefield, focusing on the battle at Corioli.

After the Volscians push the Romans back, Martius launches into a torrent of insults, calling his troops 'shames of Rome' (*Cor.* 1.5.2), 'souls of geese / That bear the shapes of men' (1.5.5-6) and threatening to 'leave the foe / And make my wars on you' (1.5.10-11). Although this is in part a result of his frustration at the

necessity of a retreat, it could, given the physiology outlined above, also be an attempt on Martius' part to agitate his soldiers' spirits, and thereby spur them on. He asks them to 'prove good seconds' (1.5.14), 'Imlark [him], and do the like' (1.5.16), but they either will not or cannot. So Martius enters Corioli alone, and the gates shut behind him. It is only when he fights his way out that the Roman army storms Corioli. The text of the play describes Martius as both bloody and bleeding, which is in itself an indication not only of the destruction, but also of the sacrifice that a soldier has to make as even bleeding for medicinal purposes was thought to present the danger of bleeding the soul away (Sugg 111). In the scene set in Corioli after the battle, Titus Lartius is reluctant to let Martius leave Corioli and help their commander, Cominius: 'Worthy sir, thou bleed'st. / Thy exercise hath been to violent / For a second course of fight' (*Cor.* 1.6.14-16). To which Martius responds 'The blood I drop is rather physical / Than dangerous to me. To Aufidius thus / I will appear and fight' (1.6.18-20). The discrepancy between what he feels, i.e. that the blood he is bleeding is medicinal, and what he looks like, 'as [if] he were flayed' (1.7.22), testifies to the violence of Martius' rampage in Corioli. 'Alone he entered / The mortal gate of th' city' (2.2.108-109) and 'aidless came off' (2.2.110), and while in Corioli he 'made what work [he] pleased' (1.9.9). That level of violent physical activity might point to a well-known phenomenon – berserking.¹

In *Achilles in Vietnam*, Jonathan Shay dedicates a whole chapter to berserking, and lists the triggers for that state, one of which is a feeling of being trapped. The phenomenon is characterised by frenzied violence, irrespective of the affiliation of the object of the violence. The people who experience such episodes often report a sense of invulnerability, and retrospectively perceive themselves as either bestial or god-like, feeling shame over the amount of destruction they were capable of. A similar loss of control is characteristic of traumatic events. In moments of extreme stress certain regions of the brain fire up to ensure the body's survival. The amygdala, for example, detects the threat and controls the reaction to it, while the prefrontal cortex is effectively shut down, disabling a rational reaction to the threat, i.e. planning the reaction (Southwick et al. 29, 33). Another important aspect relating to situations of extreme stress is the memory of it that is left, which is also where the amygdala plays an important role. It is in charge of 'encoding and consolidation of memory for events and stimuli that are arousing, stressful, or fear-provoking' (29). As this is an evolutionary mechanism, the point of such memories is the insurance of survival in a similarly stressful situation (Hunt and Robbins 60), and so the memories must be quickly accessible (59). For this reason, they are encoded as implicit memories (59), in the so-called situationally accessible memory system (SAM) (Brewin 140), meaning that they cannot be expressed linguistically (139). Implicit traumatic memories contain images, sounds, and physiological reactions, such as a sense of pain, and changes in heart rate and body temperature (140). Berserking could, therefore, due to the violence that is inherent to it, leave the individual traumatised. And although the play doesn't follow Martius into Corioli, there are some indications (apart from the ones already mentioned) that might further point to Martius

experiencing berserking episodes. The first instance comes shortly after Martius joins Cominius and the Roman army fighting the Volscians a couple of miles from Corioli. This battle over, Cominius praises Martius for his fierceness, but that is not something that Martius wants to hear:

Pray now, no more. My mother,
Who has a charter to extol her blood,
When she does praise me, grieves me.
I have done as you have done, that's what I can;
Induced as you have been, that's for my country.
He that has but effected his good will
Has overta'en mine act. (*Cor.* 1.10.13-19)

This is not the only time when Martius shows reluctance to listen to praises, or indeed when he is very verbal about not believing that what he has done is any more praise-worthy than the actions of any soldier. This could of course be understood as false modesty, but given the frequency of similar reactions, it could point to him being ashamed of what happens to him when in battle. It is important to note in Martius' speech above that he himself thinks more of those that 'effected [their] good will' than of what he is doing, which does imply that there is something mechanical and impersonal about his perception of his military exploits. Being praised for what he refers to as his 'work' (1.6.17), what he can do for his country like everybody else, is something he finds hurtful (2.2.71).

For that I have not washed
My nose that bled, or foiled some debile wretch,
Which without note here's many else have done,
You shout me forth
In acclamations hyperbolical;
As if I loved my little should be dieted
In praises sauced with lies. (1.10.47-53)

This repeated refusal to accept praise could also indicate reluctance to revisit the events being praised. In the aftermath of the conflict with the Volscians, Martius' memory is proving to be unreliable, and he requires fortification: 'Have we no wine here?' (1.10.92). This particular request might be indicative of what is happening to him in similar situations, as consuming wine was supposed to help the spirits spread through the body and thereby increase vigour (Sugg 24), leading to wine being thought of as a cordial drink (49). Returning to the physiology of emotions outlined above, the need to activate the spirits and move them from the heart would indicate fear. It is plausible that the 'precepts' with which his mother used to fortify his heart, i.e. courage, are not always sufficient. Martius does feel fear. If that is also taken into account, his battle-frenzy would no longer seem bestial and inhuman, and his failed attempt at a pep-talk could point to a mechanism he himself uses when he finds himself between a rock and a hard

place – he tries to counteract fear with anger. In other words, when the spirits all congregate around the heart, Martius works himself up in order to send them flowing into the extremities, allowing him to do his 'work'. His outbursts of anger might be an indication of him feeling threatened, and could therefore constitute a defence mechanism (apparently highly effective when in battle). There is a further indication that this is common practice, or at least that similar episodes of berserking rage have happened before. When he appears before Cominius after Corioli, Cominius comments on having 'before-time seen him thus' (*Cor.* 1.7.24) (i.e. looking like a man flayed). If similar berserking episodes, with their frenzied violence and physiology (potentially traumatic), tend to happen to Martius often on the battlefield, his reluctance to remember any of it would be understandable. His shame might be more than just modesty if hearing commendations about both his military exploits and the scars that confirm his prowess only serve to remind him of what he feels when in battle. However, celebrating him seems to be all everybody is preoccupied with.

Cominius, adamant in commemorating Martius' victory in Corioli, decides to prevent him from being 'cruel to [his] good report' (1.10.54):

If 'gainst yourself you'll be incensed we'll put you,
Like one that means his proper harm, in manacles,
Then reason safely with you. ...
... and from this time,
For what he did before Corioles, call him,
With all th'applause and clamour of the host,
Martius Caius Coriolanus! (1.10.56-65)

It is with this addition to his name that Rome greets him on his return: 'Welcome to Rome, renowned Coriolanus!' (2.1.163), but it seems that Martius is not keen on his new appellation: 'No more of this, it does offend my heart. / Pray now, no more' (2.1.163-64). To his mother's "Coriolanus' must I call thee?" (2.1.170) he remains silent. Before Cominius' speech in Martius' honour in the senate, Martius excuses himself saying 'I had rather have my wounds to heal again / Than hear say how I got them' (2.2.67-68), and refuses to 'idly sit / To hear [his] nothings monstered' (2.2.74-75). His scars, on the other hand, might signal valiant deeds and honour to his mother and everybody else in Rome, but to Martius they are just another reminder of how differently he and the Romans perceive war:

To brag unto them 'Thus I did, and thus',
Show them th'unaching scars, which I should hide,
As if I had received them for the hire
Of their breath only! (2.2.146-49)

What the Romans perceive as expressions of gratitude and marks of honour could be interpreted by the veteran as constant reminders of the contexts which for him

seem to be anything but honourable. His work, which he carries out because that is his role in Roman society, in his eyes does not merit such attention. Martius' unwillingness to revisit the memory of the state he was in when he did his 'work' could be the biggest indicator that he has suffered war trauma. The most common traumatic responses are to shut down emotionally, or use avoidance as a coping mechanism (Hunt 7-8), avoiding both thoughts and conversations that are reminiscent of the traumatic event (52-3). If Martius is understood to suffer from war trauma, a potentially new interpretation of the character arises. His outbursts of anger and aggression off the battlefield could be interpreted as a comorbid disorder (i.e. one that appears in tandem with trauma), which is very often the case with trauma sufferers (56-7). Instead of wondering about the ethics of his motivation, his actions might be explained by trauma theory. His willingness to go to war might be an indication that he is having trouble working through his trauma. What would some indicate pride and a hunger for fame, might just be an attempt on Martius' part to work through his trauma using the only means he has at his disposition – acting out. A similar lack of understanding of the soldier (and their body) can be traced back to *Titus Andronicus*.

A 'lonely dragon': social support

One of the first things mentioned about Titus is the fact that over the long years he has been Rome's soldier, he has also been losing sons on the battlefield: 'five times he hath returned / Bleeding to Rome, bearing his valiant sons / In coffins from the field' (*Tit.* 1.1.33-35). As Titus himself testifies, over the course of forty years, he 'buried one-and-twenty valiant sons, / Knighted in field, slain manfully in arms / In right and service of their noble country' (1.1.195-97), and now asks that 'Rome reward with love' (1.1.82) those that he has left. The treatment of his progeny is particularly pertinent when one considers the fact that children are more than just physical issue. Titus' children could be understood as an extension of himself, as the father was believed to 'contribute a soul which informed the raw feminine matter produced by the mother' (Sugg 263). It is therefore the manner in which his children die that lies at the heart of the matter. Those sons that died honourably for Rome in battle were accorded the appropriate respect. Martius and Quintus, on the other hand, are wrongly accused of murdering Bassianus, and are treated dishonourably, without being given the opportunity to defend themselves at court. Moreover, Chiron and Demetrius raping and mutilating Lavinia is not only a pollution of her body and soul, but could also symbolically be understood as a pollution of Titus himself, especially given the fact that he refers to his daughter as the 'cordial of mine age to glad my heart' (*Tit.* 1.1.166). When he sees his cordial defiled, the strength of his grief overcomes him, threatening also to stop his body, as grief was thought to cause the spirits to draw to the heart and force the body into a standstill. Lavinia's pain, however, works him up into a rage which finds an outlet in revenge after his two sons' heads are delivered to him. What causes the veteran to turn against his country, therefore, is not only

the Emperor's scorn of 'all [Titus'] blood in Rome's great quarrel shed' (3.1.4), both in the guise of his own blood (with the spiritual consequences that has) and his dead sons, but also the dishonourable treatment of Titus' body in peace, again encompassing both his physical mutilation (he cuts off his left hand as payment for his sons' freedom) and the treatment of his children. Seeing, after forty years of service, that 'hands to do Rome service is but vain' (3.1.80), both his body and his family (and thus symbolically his soul) decimated and dishonoured, Titus vows to revenge his family on Rome. And although *Titus Andronicus* deals substantially with the issue of family, it focuses more on the immediate physical significance it has for the veteran. A more nuanced portrayal, however, is given in *Coriolanus*.

In times of stress, social support determines how well a person will cope, leading to 'low perceived social support [being] seen as a predictor of traumatic stress' (Hunt 2-3). Seeing how trauma constitutes a breakdown of the individual's belief system and perception of self and society (10), the family is the most immediate system of support. But in *Coriolanus* the family is no longer a whole and safe unit. This division is made obvious in the figures of Volumnia, Martius' mother, and Virgilia, his wife. Although Martius is popularly thought to do what he does 'to please his mother' (*Cor.* 1.1.36), the following speech made by Volumnia might point to this popular opinion being an oversimplification:

When yet he was but tender-bodied and the only son of my womb, when youth with comeliness plucked all gaze his way, when for a day of kings' entreaties a mother should not sell him an hour from her beholding, I, considering how honour would become such a person – that it was no better than, picture-like, to hang by th' wall if renown made it not stir – was pleased to let him seek danger where he was like to find fame. To a cruel war I sent him, from whence he returned his brows bound with oak. (1.3.5-15)

In Cominius' speech in the senate, it is made clear that Martius was at this point only sixteen years old. The physiology of the changes Martius' experiences in battle has already been discussed above, but it is precisely this that his mother does not understand. Volumnia focuses exclusively on the physical marks of courage, as can be seen in the extract above. The imagery used is that of an almost cherub-like figure, which could be put to better use than simply hang about, 'picture-like'. Volumnia's fixation on the visual, along with the stern and purposeful (as is discussed below) child-rearing it implies, might point to a home that is not exactly the safe haven and a supportive environment necessary to develop effective coping mechanisms (Hunt 79). It is also clear from the quoted excerpt that Volumnia considers honour to be fame acquired through exposing oneself to danger. Her propensity not to look past the image is again made obvious when she discusses Martius' return from Corioli. Over the course of that conversation, Menenius repeatedly inquires after Martius' injuries, and the pair of them proceed to list not only all the wounds Martius has on his body, but also how he got them. Both also seem to make him out to be almost a demi-god,

an elemental force, as when Menenius says: 'Every gash was an enemy's grave' (*Cor.* 2.1.150-51), and again in Volumnia's remark: 'Before him / He carries noise, and behind him he leaves tears. / Death, that dark spirit, in's nervy arm doth lie, / Which being advanced, declines; and then men die' (2.1.154-57). Volumnia further demonstrates her inability to understand her son later on in the play, when she tries to persuade him to meet with the plebeians and apologise to them. She first starts laying out her arguments by appealing to his profession, using the more formal pronoun 'you', and using as her main argument the fact that stratagems are perfectly allowable in war, and that pretence and lying to the plebeians 'no more dishonours you at all / Than to take in a town with gentle words, / Which else would put you to your fortune and / The hazard of much blood' (3.2.60-64). But when that does not seem to have the desired effect, she changes her tactics. She lowers the tone by saying 'I prithee now, my son' (3.2.74) and then proceeds to tell him exactly what he needs to do to provoke the desired effect, and also explains why that is necessary. The overall sense is one of Martius being just an instrument for her, or in other words of her living vicariously through Martius, which is also confirmed in the following lines:

I have lived
To see inherited my very wishes,
And the buildings of my fancy. (2.1.194-96)

Phrases such as 'my very wishes' and 'my fancy' could be understood to mean not only her hopes for her son's advancement, but also her own unrealised hopes for distinction. That sense is further enforced by the idea of inheritance, implying a handing over of an entity from one person to another. Martius proves difficult to convince of the necessity of the pretence, and the emotional blackmail finally succeeds after she tells him that it is more dishonourable for her to have to beg him, than for him to have to beg the plebeians. As her final point she reminds him of the extent of his indebtedness to her: 'Thy valiantness was mine, thou suck'st it from me, / But owe thy pride thyself' (3.2.131-32). Although during the course of the play she implies that she respects and understands her son, Volumnia shows either little knowledge of or care for his profession. Martius stays true to the chivalric ideal and tries to uphold his vows and oaths, which were the 'foundation of the medieval honour system', with an oath-breaker being considered a dishonoured perjurer and a traitor (Meron 141-2). His aversion to linguistic manipulation is reiterated throughout the play, and is made apparent in his reluctance to go back on his word after Menenius asks him to return to the plebeians and 'repent what [he has] spoke' (*Cor.* 3.2.39): 'For them? I cannot do it to the gods, / Must I then do't to them?' (3.2.40-41). Her lack of understanding of chivalry might also be the reason why her parallel between Martius' situation and a besieged town proves inadequate. The crux of the matter is not in using 'gentle words' to prevent loss of men. On the contrary, according to medieval laws of war, once the conquering army enter the besieged town after the town refused to surrender, it was common practice for all laws of chivalry to be suspended

(Meron 72, 133). The pressure, therefore, is not on the conqueror, but rather on the town. The emotional blackmail does work, however, both in this instance, and in the final act of the tragedy. After Martius' banishment, he goes to Antium and gives himself over to Tullus Aufidius, to be either used or killed. He ultimately becomes the Volscian general and moves to conquer Rome. In order to save themselves, the Romans send three embassies to him, first Cominius, then Menenius, and finally Martius' family. Volumnia's pleas are only effective after the three of them kneel before Martius, and she threatens not to speak until Rome is on fire. His reaction seems to imply that she only prevailed because she forced him to prioritise his duties as a son:

O mother, mother!
What have you done? Behold, the heavens do ope,
The gods look down, and this unnatural scene
They laugh at. O my mother, mother, O!
You have won a happy victory to Rome;
But for your son, believe it, O believe it,
Most dangerously you have with him prevailed,
It is most mortal to him. But let it come. (*Cor.* 5.3.183-90)

The unnaturalness of the scene is of course contained in a mother kneeling before her son and showing respect, when it should be the other way round. It is the primacy of this custom that forces Martius' hand, which might be interpreted as another sign of trauma, inasmuch as adhering to customs can be interpreted as an imposition of structure on life. Given the fact that a traumatic event breaks down the individual's existing narrative, that narrative has to be re-established somehow, i.e. some structure has to be reintroduced. It is possible that Martius uses custom (with what he calls his work as a central notion) as a structure around which he constructs his narrative, which might explain why he only deviates from it when he feels threatened, as in the scene when he has to ask the plebeians for their votes. Asking for their voices requires him to show his scars, which is a potential trigger as they are a clear sign 'not of what he *is* but of what he has *done*' (Jagendorf 465; emphasis in the original).

Virgilia, on the other hand, even though she is not as present as Volumnia in the play, seems to be a source of comfort to Martius. On his triumphal return from Corioli, her peaceful presence stands out in the crowd. Their interaction could signal understanding between the husband and wife, as he greets her with 'My gracious silence, hail' (2.1.171). The fact that she welcomes him with silence, the complete opposite of what hurts him in the behaviour of others, does seem to imply that the couple have a healthy relationship.

Another aspect of the play that merits discussion is the mention of war in the context of sexual imagery, where the idea of the first wedding night is especially pertinent. When used to talk about war, but not by soldiers, sexual

imagery tends to imply morally questionable behaviour, as in Volumnia's claim that she 'had rather had eleven [sons] die nobly for their country than one voluptuously surfeit out of action' (1.3.24-25). Likewise, a Roman spy comments on the situation after Martius' banishment with the following words: 'I have heard it said the fittest time to corrupt a man's wife is when she's fallen out with her husband' (4.3.29-31). A Volscian serving man also wonders at the warm welcome Martius had: 'Our general [Tullus Aufidius] himself makes a mistress of him' (4.5.199-200). Similar to this is Menenius' retort to the tribunes: 'He [Martius] loves your people, / But tie him not to be their bedfellow' (2.2.62-63), which implies, much like the serving man's comment, that intimate imagery is a shorthand for equality and understanding. This is why it is our contention that intimate imagery need not necessarily be understood, as it often is, as either overtly referring to sexuality (e.g. *Cor.* 179n25) or homoeroticism (e.g. *Cor.* 58, Rackin 72), but rather evoking the sensuousness of the experience. The locus of the marital bed would then imply not just an exchange of bodily fluids, but also the spirituality relating to that exchange, and the context of safety. It is worthwhile to note that in *Titus Andronicus* the marital bed is used only in context of death, as in the phrases 'honour's bed' (Tit. 1.1.178) and 'honour's lofty bed' (3.1.11), potentially implying that the only real comfort for a soldier can be found in death. However, in *Coriolanus*, when Martius greets Cominius after Corioli with 'O, let me clip ye / In arms as sound as when I wooed, in heart / As merry as when our nuptial day was done, / And tapers burnt to bedward!' (*Cor.* 1.7.29-32), his words could be understood as an expression almost of relief at having met with a fellow combatant (as is evident in 'sound arms' and a 'merry heart'). Tullus Aufidius reacts similarly when Martius comes to Antium after his banishment: 'But now that I see thee here, / Thou noble thing, more dances my rapt heart / Than when I first my wedded mistress saw / Bestride my threshold' (4.5.116-19). The fact that it is soldiers who use such imagery, and that they use such language only with other soldiers, implies that there is an element of understanding between all members of the warrior class that excludes civilians, i.e. that there are aspects of their shared experiences that only other soldiers can understand. This seems to be a constant through time, as veterans very often report that they cannot openly discuss what happened to them with civilians, but do find relief in taking part in the activities of veteran support groups, as those are the only people that truly understand them (Hunt and Robbins 62). War trauma seems to be a cross-cultural and cross-historical constant, but instances of psychological breakdown were often not reported (Hunt 18), as breaking down in war was seen as a 'weakness on the part of the individual' (18-9). Much as in the case of Martius, an inability to construct a narrative that would include the traumatic event leads to acting out instead of working through. Narratives about the self are 'central to our understanding of self and identities' (6), and all traumatic memories have to be integrated into the narrative in order for the sufferer to successfully work through the trauma (63, 71). If, however, the context is such in which the sufferer does not feel they can even begin to express and encode verbally all of the physiological memories of the traumatic event, the alternative is an acting out of the trauma, visible in Martius' willingness to go to war.

Other than this affinity with the members of his class and a discomfort at being reminded of his triumphs on the battlefield, Martius himself offers a conclusive example of his isolation. On leaving Rome he parts with his family and friends with the following words:

though I go alone,
Like to a *lonely dragon* that *his fen*
Makes feared and talked of more than seen, your son
Will or exceed the common or be caught
With cautelous baits and practice. (*Cor.* 4.1.30-34; emphasis added)

The loneliness of the dragon in this instance is not the result of his bloodthirstiness, but rather of his habitat. In other words, it is not the dragon himself, but that which surrounds him that makes him seem ferocious. And the *seeming* danger should be emphasized, as it underlines the fact that what is at the heart of the matter is essentially a lack of understanding. Another aspect that should be discussed is the image of a fen, which is another example of the usage of water imagery in *Coriolanus*. There is one other instance of that image being used, and that is Martius' outraged cry after the tribunes and the plebeians banish him from Rome: 'You common cry of curs, whose breath I hate / As reek o'th' rotten fens, whose loves I prize / As the dead carcasses of unburied men / That do corrupt my air ...' (3.3.121-24). In this latter example, the emphasis in both images is placed on the miasma-like quality of the air – corrupt, with a potential to corrupt. But it is also interesting to note that after nature imagery Martius moves straight to a scene from the battlefield – dead bodies decomposing, with the horror of the scene contained not only in the visual, but also in the implication of that image, namely, either an inability to bury the men due to the extent of the battle, or an unwillingness (for whatever reason) to adhere to chivalric laws (Meron 77). As has already been mentioned, the quality of the air dictated the quality of the spirits in the human body, and by extension the physiological processes that went on (Sugg 14). It could therefore be claimed that there is (at the very least in Martius' perception) a lasting effect on the body of the experiences from the battlefield. And it is precisely this lasting effect that is the dragon's fen, a fen which keeps him isolated from the rest.

Conclusion

Titus Andronicus establishes the use of water imagery to signal disturbances in the normal, peaceful order. Naval imagery is used to refer to war, and when utilised by the titular character is shorthand for his own feelings, which could also be understood as tapping into his experience of battle. Images of rivers overflowing and fountains polluted, on the other hand, mark those elements which provoke the protagonist to exact revenge. In *Coriolanus*, naval imagery is likewise used to refer to war and to denote soldiers, and sources of conflict are

again marked with the usage of water imagery. Civil unrest is conceptualised as rivers overflowing, but the imagery used by the protagonist is more nuanced. It does not refer directly to the emotions felt, but rather hints at the physiology behind them. Using the image of a fen, with its corrupt and corrupting air, Martius taps into the implication of destructiveness inherent in the water imagery, but primarily draws attention to the long-lasting effects on a very physical level.

The treatment of the soldier's body is in *Andronicus* closely tied to the issue of family (primarily, children). Titus' sons and his daughter are perceived as an extension of himself, so consequently any mistreatment of them is a mistreatment of him, a display of dishonourable behaviour, and a reminder that all the loss he had to sustain was futile. In *Coriolanus*, the body of a soldier is also considered an instrument, to be used as Rome sees fit, but without any real understanding of how it works. As opposed to *Andronicus*, however, *Coriolanus* does not present a united family, but rather emphasizes the difficulty of understanding the profession of a soldier by showing how differently Martius is treated by the women in his family. Ashamed of the actions he is praised for, he is himself aware of the extent of his isolation as well as the causes of it.

Titus Andronicus establishes the issue of a veteran discarded by his community, along with the elements central to the discussion of that issue, namely the use of water imagery to convey disorder and the relationship between the veteran's body and their family. And whereas Titus does have monologues at his disposal to verbalise what he is going through internally, the protagonist of *Coriolanus* remains distant even in his soliloquies. This could in itself be indicative of the extent of his isolation – real communication is only possible with other members of the warrior class. But by applying trauma theory more light can be shed on Martius' character, proving that he is more than, 'even at his most terrifying, ... an extremely dangerous version of a little boy' (Greenblatt 165), and that his emotional outbursts are more complex than 'an overgrown child's narcissism, insecurity, cruelty, and folly' (166). If Macbeth is very forthcoming in his descriptions of the nuances of his emotions, with Caius Martius one almost has to read between the lines. To understand his battle-rage one has to know what happens to a body in extremely stressful situations, and to understand why he opposes praise and pomp so much one has to realise that his shame is rooted precisely in what happens to his body. The closest Martius gets to opening up is when he compares himself to a dragon, made more terrifying and mysterious by his habitat than actually seen and understood.

End Notes

- 1 For alternative perspectives and interpretations of violence in *Andronicus* and *Coriolanus* see for example Willis, Deborah. "The Gnawing Vulture": Revenge, Trauma Theory, and *Titus Andronicus*,' *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol. 53, no. 1, 2002, pp. 21-52, Lamb, Caroline. 'Physical Trauma and (Adapt)ability in *Titus Andronicus*,' *Critical Survey*, vol. 22, no. 1, 2010, pp. 41-57, Rackin, Phyllis. 'Coriolanus: Shakespeare's Anatomy of *Virtus*,' *Modern Language Studies*, vol. 13, no. 2, 1983, pp. 68-79, and chapters two and six in Starks-Estes, Lisa. *Violence, Trauma, and Virtus in Shakespeare's Roman Poems and Plays: Transforming Ovid*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

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