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Modern Rape-Revenge Movies and Percy Bysshe Shelley's *The Cenci*

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ABSTRACT

The Cenci bears a striking similarity to a number of rape-revenge movies which flourished with the rise of the second wave feminism in the 1970s. These movies tell the story of a female victim who is transformed into a hero-avenger by taking law into her own hands and avenging herself in the face of a dysfunctional legal state. Though *The Cenci* repeats the traditional pattern of violation-revenge-violation, it focuses on the corruption and irresponsibility of the patriarchal legal system as well as its reformation, which have been neglected by both mythical narratives and modern rape-revenge movies. By reading *The Cenci* along with William Blake's "Visions of the Daughters of Albion" and Shelley's "Prometheus Unbound," we examine how *The Cenci* challenges the concept of justice in the modern rape-revenge movies and how Beatrice could have used her agency and her anger in a more effective way to fight against tyranny.

Keywords: Shelly's *The Cenci;* rape-revenge movies; rhetoric of anger.

INTRODUCTION

The Cenci was written in 1819 while Percy Bysshe Shelley was in the middle of writing *Prometheus Unbound* in Italy. Unlike the latter, *The Cenci* was intended to be performed on the English stage; however, to Shelley's dismay, it was rejected by Covent Garden and other playhouses on grounds of its content: incest and parricide (Bates, 1908, p. 9). After rejection, Shelley permitted its publication and it soon became popular enough among the readers to make a second edition in the following year. *The Cenci* was generally received by the early critics as "disgusting" and "the most abominable," which excites no feelings, "but those of detestations at the choice, and horror at the elaboration" (Barcus, 1975, pp. 163-4). So, for most of the nineteenth century the play did not have the official right to be staged. It was first produced by the amateurs of the Shelley Society in 1886, but it only gained popularity in the twentieth century, especially after Antonin Artaud's adaptation of the play in 1935. *The Cenci* is generally studied in its nineteenth century historical and political context and is occasionally considered as an allegory of the French Revolution (Ferriss, 1998), the Irish Question (Tomoko, 2011) or the oppressive, dysfunctional Inquisitorial authority and confessional government (Canuel, 2004). Besides being concerned with such historical events, this study tries to go beyond the nineteenth century to see how modern audience would react to the theme of rape and revenge in this play.

The Cenci is an adaptation of a real story of a famous and rich Italian family during the Renaissance, which since then has complicated and stirred people's responses to the tragic story of Beatrice Cenci. People have difficulty judging Beatrice and categorizing her either as an innocent girl or a monstrous tyrant, as well as justifying her crime of parricide. Ginger Strand and Sarah Zimmerman claim that by taking revenge and committing parricide, Beatrice "does not end up as diabolical as her father" (1996, p. 249) because lack of words and audience forced her to action. Knowing that her father through "intimidation and retribution […] has made himself untouchable," by taking revenge, Beatrice tries to find "a public forum and to win sympathy from her listeners." Though late, in court she finally finds an audience to whom she reveals her father's crimes (1996, p. 250). On the other hand, Earl Wassermann (1971) and Jeffrey N. Cox (1987) believe that Beatrice and her father are mirror-images of each other since after being sexually violated, Beatrice changes from an innocent victim into a tyrant, who commits murder with no remorse. Diversity of responses show that most of the audience sympathize with Beatrice and are aware of her predicaments although they cannot easily accept her transformation into a cold-hearted person, who insists on her innocence while all her family and the assassins confess under torture and are put to death. Stuart Sperry calls this dilemma, the play's "ethical problem":

> the fundamental issue upon which the drama turns is […], was Beatrice wrong in planning the murder of her father, […] or was she justified in following, like Antigone, the dictates of her conscience and in adopting violent means to relieve both her family and herself from an insupportable tyranny? (1988, p. 130)

This article argues that such uncertainties on the part of the audience defy the clear cut response demanded by both traditional and modern rape-revenge narratives and leave some space for the sympathetic audience to ask themselves whether revenge can promise justice while the legal system remains unreformed. To see how this play challenges the aforementioned narratives, some traditional rape-revenge narratives and some modern rape-revenge movies and their influence on the audience will be addressed to be compared with *The Cenci.*

Traditional Rape-Revenge Narratives vs. Modern Rape-Revenge Movies

Rape and revenge have been present in literature from Greek and Roman classic works to contemporary literature and popular cult,ure. Writers' attitudes towards rape and revenge have been so wide and different which make it impossible to unite them under one ideological system. Nevertheless, some attitudes regarding the punishment of the rapists and the fate of the raped woman are more common in different texts and contexts. As Saunders reports, early Roman law was only concerned with the offence of abduction of women (raptus) and would punish the offender by death at a time when marriage was considered as an important political and economic institution and abduction as a threat to arranged marriages. Later, the definition of raptus extended to include sexual violence of virgins and widows while the severity of punishment decreased to the payment of a fine or the marriage between the offender and the abused woman (2001, pp. 34-5). Up to 1285, in England women themselves were responsible for their rape charges, but due to the Statute of Westminster in 1285, the king was granted the right to sue the offender and condemn him to death if found guilty. In 1382, a new statute gave fathers, husbands, and next of kin in their families the right to press charges for rape of the women, which reinforces the fact that women were regarded as men's property in need of protection; thus, in many literary texts, rape is considered as men's affair with which men could offend each other's honor by raping their wives and daughters (Pistono, 1988, p. 270). Since many cases were dismissed as false and many of the accused men did not show up in the court and the victim and her family had to go through the complex legal procedure, many offended and dishonored male members of the desecrated women decided on revenge (Saunders, 2001, p. 63).

Titus Andronicus avenges his daughter's rape by killing and cooking the flesh of the rapists who violated and mutilated Lavinia. Tamar, daughter of king David, was raped by her half-brother, Amnon, and was avenged by her full brother, Absalom (2 Samuel in Hebrew Bible). In one of the most famous rape-revenge stories written again and again by different writers in different eras, "The Rape of the Lucrece," Lucrece is sexually assaulted by Sextus Tarquinius and is avenged by her husband and other Roman nobles. Literature is replete with such revenge stories incited by such offences. In these narratives, retribution seems so inevitable and mandatory that nothing else looks appropriate. Furthermore, there is no emphasis on the legal system and its lack of responsibility is taken for granted. In contrast, the feminist modern rape-revenge movies are not dependent on a male relative avenger, but instead heroize the sexually abused woman who turns the tables and avenges herself on the male villain.

Female sexual liberation and the so-called crisis in masculinity in the mid- to late 1970s are jointly held responsible for the production of many films across different genres that portrayed clashes between the two genders. While some feminist film critics, like Katherine J. Lehman, express their concerns about the ways these films' stereotypically sexualized portrayals of women and focus on rape would increase "violence against women and eroticiz[e it] in media more broadly,"(2011, p. 219). Carol J. Clover (1992) and Jacinda Read (2000) contend that these movies, including horror films, depict our current sexual attitudes more truthfully. Clover views rape-revenge films as a horror subgenre, whereas Read refers to them as "narratives of transformation," which are not limited to horror films, but can be found across a wide range of genres, from the detective genre to the neo-noir, to the science fiction, and even the Western. Read maintains that such narratives occurred in a historical context in which feminism defined self-defense and revenge as aspects of anti-rape activism and Hollywood tried to "make sense of feminism and the changing shape of heterosexual femininity in the post-1970 period" (2000, p. 240). Movies from this period which follow the old model of a male avenger are dismissed by feminists as "conservative" because the female victim is relegated to a minor "prop" and rape only justifies "a particularly violent version of masculinity" (Projansky, 2001, p. 60). By contrast, feminist and progressive rape-revenge movies promote female agency by depicting sexually violated

women who "recognize that the law will neither protect them, nor avenge them, and are left to take the law into their own hands" (Projansky, 2001, p. 60). In these movies, the victims do not seek help from the third party in the form of the official legal system since this patriarchal system has failed victims repeatedly in their quest for justice. Consequently, justice is sought after outside courts, where sexual offence is treated as a special crime on par with murder. Hence, the actions taken by the female protagonist are forgivable as retribution and the scales of justice are balanced when rape, considered as murder, is avenged by murder (Andrews, 2012).

In movies, such as *Lipstick* (1976), *Sudden Impact* (1983), *Savage Street* (1984), *The Ladies Club* (1986), *Eye for an Eye* (1996), and *The Last House on the Left* (2009), the legal system is either absent or dysfunctional, which justifies women's violent revenge. In *Sudden Impact*, the fourth film in the *Dirty Harry* series, Jenifer and her sister had been gang raped ten years earlier and now Jenifer finds the rapists one by one. After forcing them to recognize her and understand what she is about to do, she shoots them first in the groin and then in the head. In the end, she is saved by Harry from the last remaining rapist who was trying to rape her again. They pass the responsibility of all murders to the last rapist and finally Harry and Jenifer are left together free of any charge. In *Lipstick*, Chris, a beautiful super model, who has been raped by her sister's music teacher, risks her reputation and takes the case to the court despite her lawyer's warning that it is too difficult to prove Gordon guilty. To her surprise, her lawyer had been right. The juries buy the logic of Gordon's attorney who accuses Chris of being responsible for the rape since her use of her body to sell cosmetics advertised on the cover of magazines and billboards is a way of consenting to the sexual affair and an inviting message to the viewer. Disappointed with the judges and the law to support raped women, Chris takes revenge on Gordon when he rapes her sister. Generally, these movies suggest that the unjust, unsympathetic and dysfunctional legal system cannot protect women against the violence in the society and instead of aiming at its reformation, they propose that women need to change themselves in order to protect themselves.

Women spectators have already been discouraged from taking their cases to the court for several reasons, like feeling of shame and guilt, or for fear of their rapists coming back to them and harming them even more. These movies further this alienation from the legal system by depicting rape trials as humiliating, emotionally taxing, and at last, a failure. Although in reality these difficulties might exist to some extent, these movies do not attempt at any reformation or any hope for a better legal protection. Instead, they absolve the judicial system from all responsibilities for protecting women in the society and give this idea that rape and domestic violence should be privately resolved. Even when Chris is acquitted in her trial at the end of *Lipstick* and her lawyer can finally achieve justice, the message is that "even a rich, successful supermodel like Chris McCormick has no choice but to get a gun and go vigilante in order to protect the sisterhood" (Heller-Nicholas, 2011, p. 27). Kimberly Paige Bowers argues against critiquing domestic violence by depicting battering homicides that result in the death of the abuser since it can be problematic for the feminist movement to end violence by using violence itself. Moreover, she points to this fact that these movies deny the possibility of conviction for murder while in reality "when women kill their abusive husbands, they are more likely to be convicted if judges, juries, or lawyers suspect that they have acted vengefully" (2008, p. 228).

The Accused (1988) is one of the few rape-revenge movies which regards the legal system responsible for women's safety and believes that all the efforts should be made in order to reform its deficiencies. However, Clover prefers *Lipstick* to this film since *The Accused* demonstrates that law (personified in part by Kathryn the lawyer) is capable of correcting its own mistakes: "there is a sense in which the third party, the legal system, becomes the hero of the piece; focus has in any case shifted from the victim to her lawyer, from questions of why men rape and how victims feel to questions of what constitutes evidence" (1992, p. 146). For Read, *The Accused* is less a feminist piece of work than a movie dedicated to the general sense of "right-wing populism" of the late 1980s in Britain and the United States (2000, p. 109). Therefore, for these critics, *The Accused,* which gives the legal system an opportunity to correct itself, is not strong in feminist point of view and does not reflect reality, which is more hostile to raped women despite the fact that this movie has been based on a true story. Having rape-revenge movies in mind, a modern spectator of *The Cenci* is more likely to realize that this play discourages women from responding to the sexual assault with violent revenge, and instead, focuses on the responsibility of the legal system and the importance of revealing its corruption and deficiencies as a step towards reformation.

The Cenci as a Rape-Revenge Play

From the very beginning of the play, Count Cenci is presented as a villain with "thousands of unrepentant crimes" and as a rascal, who had recently settled and

hushed a murder by bribing the Pope. Soon a relationship is established between the tyrannous Count and the corrupt church, which together build up the unsympathetic and oppressive patriarchal system of the Italian society. The malevolent and malicious Count Cenci has not only tyrannized his own family but also with his money and power has terrified his kinsmen in a way that they are afraid of taking any action against him while his daughter pleas for help at the banquet. During the banquet, which is held by the Count to celebrate his sons' death, the shocked and repelled guests fail to support Beatrice, who accuses her father of tyranny and abusive behavior.

Beatrice defies the typical image of a female victim and is depicted as a headstrong and firm girl, who is courageous enough to stand against the tyranny of her sadistic and abusive father. She implores the departing guests to see their predicament and take them away and do justice by punishing the abuser; however, the angry guests are threatened by the Count who warns them of his revenge: "Beware! For my revenge/ Is as the sealed commission of a king/ That kills, and none dare name the murderer" (Shelly, 1886, pp. 110-12). Hearing about the event, to save his friendship with the Count, Pope remains "neutral" and accuses Beatrice and her brothers of being ungrateful and "disobedient, / sting[ing] their fathers' hearts to madness and despair" (Shelly, 1886, pp. 32-3). In this way, the church, as the legal system, fails in supporting Beatrice's case and proves inadequate to protect women and children from domestic violence.

Soon after the feast, to avenge himself on Beatrice, Count Cenci executes his demonic plan and sexually abuse her though there is neither overt reference to this hideous action nor is the word mentioned by anyone. After being raped, Beatrice becomes shattered and for some minutes loses control of her mind and thinks she is in a mad house. Filled with hatred and disappointed with a law that can be bought by "gold" and "power" (Shelly, 1886, pp. 185) Beatrice, Lucretia and her brother, Giacomo, plan the murder of the Count as an act of vengeance and with the help of Orsino, they hire two assassins to complete the task. As can be seen, this play is so much like the rape-revenge films discussed above, which heroize women killers who avenge themselves on the rapists; however, unlike these movies, it does not depict a successful revenge capable of restoring order without getting involved with the consequences of murder. *The Cenci* has a tragic ending for the avengers. The tragic ending, surely, does not send spectators happy with the result and does not promote revenge as an ideal way of ending tyranny while the legal system is inadequate; moreover, it troubles their minds with questions such as: Was there any other way for Beatrice to save herself and get her father punished for his crimes? Does the play suggest that there is no way out?

The deficiency of legal system is emphasized when Pope's neutrality in familial matters and his failure in taking action against the Count are directly addressed by Giacomo and Beatrice, who accuse the legal system of inaction. Giacomo complains to Camillo and asks why Pope does not protect his siblings against their father (Shelly, 1886, pp. 46-51). Likewise, after disclosure of their crime, Beatrice cries: "will human laws, / Rather will ye who are their ministers. / Bar all access to retribution first,/ And then, when heaven doth interpose to do/ What ye neglect, [...] make ye the victims who demanded it/ Culprits? 'Tis ye are culprits!" (Shelly, 1886, pp. 116-123)

Rhetoric of Anger: Challenging Rape-Revenge Genre

The Cenci problematizes revenge itself and instead of considering it as the only way to protect and regain honor, shows its negative attitude towards this concept. The word "revenge" for the first time is introduced in the play by Count Cenci himself, who declares: "All men enjoy revenge; and most exult / Over the tortures they can never feel/ […] And I have no remorse and little fear" (Shelly, 1886, pp. 77-84). Introducing the Count as a revengeful person, a tyrant with thousands of hideous crimes, the play taints "revenge" with sin, cruelty and wickedness, which put side by side with Beatrice's revenge, makes it difficult for the audience to approve her action. Moreover, it seems that Beatrice undergoes a transformation after rape and becomes a selfish person, who ignorant of the aftermath of her actions, is ready to sacrifice not only the hired assassins but also her own family. James D. Wilson (1978) believes that Beatrice does not change into a corrupt tyrant by the final act and retains her innocence to the end; on the contrary, Suzanne Ferriss argues that incest transfers the Count's oppressive power to Beatrice, makes her respond to Cenci's tyranny with more violence and changes her to "a product of her father's despotism" (1998, p. 219). She contends that by taking revenge, bypassing the law, sending the hired assassin to his death while denying any participation in the crime, Beatrice has perverted her revolutionary ideals in the same way that French citizenry betrayed their ideals and failed the French Revolution. Daniel Davy interprets the Count's murder as a self-consciously planned suicide conducted by "Beatrice's *raging* response [to rape], which serves as a final 'quickening' of her inner transformation" and degradation into the state of a murderer (1990, p. 108, italics added). Even Beatrice herself is ambivalent about her new position

as the avenger and confesses that she does not know whether she deserves "punishment or reward": "Death! Death! Our law and our religion call thee/ A punishment and a reward . . . Oh, which/ Have I deserved?" (Shelly, 1886, pp. 117-19)

After rape, Beatrice cannot continue living in her "unavenged" body and cannot rest till she avenges herself on her father (Shelly, 1886, p. 131). She steadfastly insists on revenge and ironically proves that the Count was right when he foresaw that "'tis her stubborn will / Which by its own consent shall stoop as low /As that which drags it down" (Shelly, 1886, pp. 10-12). She becomes Cenci's self-appointed judge and by taking law in her own hands, she acts much like her father. She declares that "In this mortal world/ there is no vindication and no law/ which can adjudge and execute the doom/ of that through which I suffer" (Shelly, 1886, pp. 134-37). Therefore, by insisting on revenge, she "evades all external authority in pursuing her rebellious designs. Like the agents of the Terror, she justifies suspending the law in the name of revolutionary action" (Ferriss, 1998, p. 217). Moreover, Beatrice like her father appeals to God and in the same way that he sees God's will in the sudden and accidental death of his sons, she claims that the assassin was a "sword in the right hand of justest God" (Shelly, 1886, p. 126); hence, the murder was "a high and holy deed" (Shelly, 1886, p.85). These parallels between Beatrice and her father, their selfishness, tyranny and violent revenges demonize her act of vengeance and force the spectators to seek justification for her actions. Shelley himself refers to the same issue of justification of her violent revenge in the preface to *The Cenci* and suggests: this story is not recalled among the Italians unless with a sympathetic view of this beautiful and innocent looking girl and "it is in the restless and anatomizing casuistry with which men seek the justification of Beatrice, yet feel that she has done what needs justification" (Shelly, 1886, p. 4). According to him,

> Undoubtedly, no person can be truly dishonoured by the act of another; and the fit return to make to the most enormous injuries is kindness and forbearance, and a resolution to convert the injurer from his dark passions by peace and love. Revenge, retaliation, atonement, are pernicious mistakes. If Beatrice had thought in this manner she would have been wiser and better; but she would never have been a tragic character. (Shelly, 1886, p. 4)

For Shelly, destructive emotions of "Revenge," "Envy," and "Prejudice" can pervert one's idea of a peaceful world and can breed more violence and destruction without really eliminating tyranny (Shelly, 2002, p. 134). Shelley also attempts at criticizing hateful revenge and retaliation in "Prometheus Unbound," an idealistic version of fighting against tyranny. In this poem, he suggests that "eternal love," "Gentleness, Virtue, Wisdom, and Endurance" (Shelly, 2002, p. 307) are keys to reform as opposition to the defiant, revolutionary "spell" that Earth still considers to be the basis of political change. However, it would be naïve to imagine this revolutionary poet as the one who promotes endurance without opposition, love without challenge. In addition, responding to tyranny and oppression with love and kindness as well as converting the injurer to a sympathetic person seems too idealistic. In her banquet speech, Beatrice refers to her endurance and love for her father in hopes of making some changes; however, her meek and passive endurance proved ineffective in eliminating the oppression (Shelly, 1886, p. 111- 20).

In fact, even in "Prometheus Unbound," it was Prometheus's anger towards tyranny as well as his efforts at exposing the artificiality and oppression of social order that provided a way to the downfall of Jupiter. As Andrew M. Stauffer states, Shelley, like William Blake, was aware of the importance of anger and considered it as "a weapon, a needful torch" necessary for political and social transformation (2005, p. 112). Similar to Blake, he was enchanted by anger "because of its renovating force" and imagined anger as "the remover of masks and the despoiler of illusions that constitute an unacceptable status quo" (Stauffer, 2005, p. 112). Therefore, in opposition to what Wilson believes, by rejecting Beatrice's revenge, one does not suggest that Beatrice should "have allowed her father to continue his ruthless and demonic tyranny without opposition" (Wilson, 1978, p. 87). What becomes important in Shelley's rhetoric of anger in opposition to tyranny is the way one must manage and direct it towards revelation of tyranny and "unmasking" the hypocrisy of the oppressors, which would be the first step in the reformation of political institutions. Therefore, *The Cenci* represents a kind of anger which has been misled into breeding more violence rather than reforming the legal state.

Beatrice: Prisoner of her Own Mind

For effective political change, reformation and liberation of the public mind are mandatory to secure a more peaceful transformation away from violent reaction to oppression. What leads to Beatrice's involvement in a violent revenge and her failure to oppose the patriarchal system seems to be her inability to recognize her own belief in the same patriarchal ideologies that she intends to oppose. Her idea about rape and the fate of a raped woman is exactly what the

patriarchal societies promote and support. In these societies, women are regarded as male properties and their virginity as their market value, which could be damaged and devalued by any violation of their virginity regardless of being forced or having consented to the sexual intercourse. Although the Roman rulers did not find the sexually abused women guilty or responsible for their rape, they used "*stuprum*" for any kind of illicit sexual relations (either consented or coerced), which etymologically means pollution, defilement, disgrace and dishonor (Saunders, 2001, p. 35). Therefore, despite law and the insistence of later Christian theologians on the purity of raped women, it seems that these women experience shame and dishonor for their polluted bodies, which cannot be purified except by death either at their own hands or at the hands of one of the male members of their families. Although Beatrice does not commit suicide, she feels polluted, devalued and dishonored. Such feelings prevent her from revealing her secret publically and directing her anger into a more beneficial way. After being violated, she is stupefied and uses disease and infection imagery to explain her destructive experience: "There creeps a clinging, black, contaminating mist About me/ [. . .] 'tis substantial, heavy, thick,/ I cannot pluck it from me, [… it]dissolves/ My flesh to a pollution, poisoning/ The subtle, pure, and inmost spirit of life!" (Shelly, 1886, pp. 17 -23)

She refers to her body as a "foul den," a "contaminated," "poisoned," and "polluted" body which suffers a wrong with no name. Beatrice, together with other raped women mentioned earlier, is a victim not only of rape but also of the ideological discourses surrounding this crime. As Susan Griffin observes, these rape narratives prove that raped women saw themselves through the eyes of male members of the society and were twice victimized: once by the forceful rapist and the second time by seeing their bodies polluted and deserving death (1982, pp. 45-6). These women, unlike Oothoon in William Blake's "Visions of the Daughters of Albion" (1793), are slaves to patriarchal ideologies. Oothoon listens to the Golden nymph who tells her "Pluck thou my flower Oothoon the mild./ Another flower shall spring, because the soul of sweet delight/ can never pass away" (Blake, 1993, pp. 1342). This piece of wisdom assures Oothoon that nothing can destroy her innocence and the flower of her virginity. Contrary to Beatrice and Theotormon, Oothoon's mean lover whose name as Bloom notes, suggests a "man tormented by his own idea of God" (1970, p. 102), Oothoon refuses to accept the status of a fallen woman after assault and believes in the purity of her body and soul. This experience, though harsh and oppressive, has a liberating force since she tells Theotormon that now her mind is free of the restrictions imposed by Urizen, "the 'jealous god' of the Old Testament" (Damon, 1988, p. 420), who had "inclos'd my infinite brain into a narrow circle, / And sunk my heart into the Abyss" (Blake, 1993, p. 1344). Contrary to Oothoon's outspokenness, Beatrice, feeling polluted and contaminated, cannot talk about her predicament and cannot even find a name for her sufferings. Beatrice announces that "of all words,/[…] there is none to tell/ My misery" (Shelly, 1886, pp. 108-114).

She tells Lucretia and Orsino not to ask her about the incident "for there are deeds/ Which have no form, sufferings which have no tongue" (Shelly, 1886, pp. 111-12). Most victims of sexual assault experience such silence due to the difficulty of finding appropriate words to express their sorrows and overcoming their shame and fear to reveal the name of their violator. In addition, they are most likely to be silenced by the offender, who fears the disclosure of his identity. Interestingly, in this play, Beatrice is the one who intentionally remains silent and silences the rapist. Chained to patriarchal ideologies, Beatrice tries to prevent her infamy, dishonor and disgrace by avenging herself and silencing the rapist. She maintains that the wrong is so grave that anyone with the same predicament has "died as I will die,/ And left it, as I must, without a name" (Shelly, 1886, pp. 115-16). In her response to Orsino's suggestion for taking her case to the court and "let[ing] the law/ Avenge" her, she accuses him of being "ice-hearted counselor!," who does not understand, "If I could find a word that might make known/ The crime of my destroyer; […] my unpolluted fame should be/ With vilest gossips a stale mouth story;/ A mock, a bye-word, an astonishment" (Shelly, 1886, pp. 154-60).

In refusing to go to the Pope and charging her father with incest, Beatrice is more concerned with her fame, which will be destroyed by the announcement of the crime than the possibility of losing the case. Ironically, she quiets the Count's crime of incest in the same way that the Pope silences the Count's other crimes by accepting bribes (Shelly, 1886, p. 8). Finally, Beatrice remains chained to the patriarchal ideologies and does not reach "higher plateau of spiritual self-knowledge" nor does she attain "the realized self" expected from traditional tragic heroes (Davy, 1990, p. 112). Unlike the latter, she never achieves "the anagnorisis" and at the end of the play she "continues in the delusional belief of her own innocence" (Dempsey, 2012, p. 880). Even in the last scene, she is still engulfed in her terrifying imagination, fearful of being dragged down by the spirit of her father: "Masked in gray hairs and wrinkles, he should come/ And wind me in his hellish

arms, and fix/ His eyes on mine, and drag me down, down, down!" (Shelly, 1886, pp. 65-67)

Fearful of her fame and honor, Beatrice not only refuses to give name to her violation but also silences her father in an attempt to prevent the "publication" of her infamy, as opposed to Lucrece, who "publis[es] Tarquin's foul offence" by giving words to the harm done to her. Unfortunately, keeping her rape a secret and avenging her father herself misdirect her anger, which ideally could have aimed at "unmasking" the tyranny and corruption of the legal system. In contrast to the modern rape-revenge movies, which direct women's anger to violent, private revenge and dismiss the legal system for its deficiencies, Shelley is after social and political changes, not resolving problems privately and leaving the source of corruption untouched. Jacquline Mulhallen rightly argues that "Beatrice's murder of her father ultimately fails because it is an act in isolation against only one tyrant, but tyranny runs through the whole of her society" (2010, p. 90). For Shelley, according to Stauffer, the power of anger should "unmask figures of deception and vice" and reveal "the corruption hid [den] beneath the mask of virtue" (2005, p. 111). As mentioned earlier, by directing his anger towards revealing Jupiter's tyranny and evilness, Prometheus defeats him and compels him "to assume a form that corresponds to his inner state. In other words, he dooms the god simply to be himself: Jupiter Unmasked" (Stauffer, 2005, p. 117): "let the hour/ Come, when thou must appear to be/ That which thou art internally" (Shelley, 2002, p. 237). Once Beatrice was successful in such "unmasking" in her relationship with Orsino. Orsino says: "Since Beatrice *unveiled* me to myself, […] Shew a poor figure to my own esteem, […] I'll do/ As little mischief as I can; that thought/ Shall fee the accuser conscience" (Shelly, 1886, pp. 116-20. Italics added). This is exactly what Beatrice, by hiding rape as a secret, fails to do in her relation with her father. Instead, she directs her anger to "underhanded, private, and malignant" revenge, which is completely different from Shelley's "defiant, public, and moralistic" anger (Stauffer, 2005, p. 125). To prevent vengeful anger and hatred, in his poems such as "Prometheus Unbound" and "England in 1819," after using anger to reveal the tyranny and corruption of the oppressor, Shelley retracts his anger and prepares the way for "the triumphant entrance of a conciliatory and harmonious figure, who puts an end to anger, heralding the impending advent of a peaceful millennium" (Stauffer, 2005, p. 122).

At the beginning of the play, hypocrisy and corruption of the legal system are just known to the spectators, who have witnessed the Count settling down his crimes with the Pope's delegate. After rape, Beatrice makes every effort to hide this crime while she could have used her anger to disclose her father's corruption and the corruption of the legal system. By performing her anger before common people, she might have been able to provoke them to share her feelings of anger and be moved to action against a common enemy. Although the Pope sees Cenci as "the shadow of his own" (Shelly, 1886, p. 56), he cannot publically support an incestuous person and as Camillo states: "if they would petition to the Pope/ I see not how he could refuse it" (Shelly, 1886, pp. 52-3). In fact, the audience knows that Orsino never delivered Beatrice and Bernard's petition to the Pope. In case of being publically rejected by the Pope, as a victim of rape, Beatrice might have revealed his alliance with the Count and unveiled the corruption of the organized church, an aim which was vehemently pursued by Shelley throughout his life.

It should also be noted that Beatrice's refusal to pronounce rape linguistically, leaves the trial only concerned with the crime of parricide and the judge only responsible for finding the murderers and punishing them according to the law. Ironically, torture does not bring about false confessions and true murderers are punished. However, Pope's final decision, though on the surface is lawfully right, proves that Beatrice's private revenge is wrong not in a sense that the final decree was issued out of love for justice but because this decision was made by the same corrupt legal system whose motive among others, according to Shelley, was to punish "whoever killed Count Cenci and deprived his treasury of a certain and copious source of revenue" (Shelly, 1886, p. 3). Richard A. Ponser, a judge himself, also believes that the play "disapproves of her having taken the law, Hecuba fashion, into her own hand" (2009, p. 133). He argues that Beatrice's revenge is wrong because she has involved others and sacrificed their lives to avenge herself on her father while she coldheartedly insisted on her own innocence. Moreover, the ironical entrance of the Papal legate with a warrant for Cenci's arrest and possibly his "instant death," just after the murder, also suggests that "maybe human justice is not so hopeless as Beatrice had thought" (Ponser, 2009, p. 133). Whatever the reason might be for such unexpected entrance of Savella looking for the Count to "answer charges of the gravest import" (Shelly, 1886, p. 12), it shows that some problems had emerged between the Count and the Pope, which could have been beneficial to Beatrice's case. In this scene, unlike the modern rape-revenge movies, the play emphasizes the consequences of revenge with regard to law. After the entrance of Savella, Lucretia regrets the deed and laments that "All was prepared by unforbidden means

/ Which we must pay so dearly, having done" (Shelly, 1886, pp. 29-30). However, Beatrice, fixated on revenge, does not care about what may follow and is happy to be "free as the earth-surrounding air; […] Consequence, to me, / Is as the wind which strikes the solid rock / But shakes it not" (Shelly, 1886, pp. 49-52).

CONCLUSION

Beatrice fails in her opposition to the patriarchal system and in her fight against tyranny since she is chained to the same patriarchal ideologies which consider women as male possessions and their chastity as their sole value ruined by any kind of illicit sexual behavior, even rape. The revelation of disguised evil is indeed the first and the most important step to oppose injustice and bring hope for future reformation. Beatrice is condemned to death because she did not oppose the source of tyranny and corruption, but yielded to destructive emotions of hatred and private revenge. As a result, contrary to "The Rape of Lucrece," in which despite Lucrece's death, rape is constructive by revealing the crimes of Tarquins, banishing his entire tyrannical royal family, and founding the Roman Republic, *The Cenci* depicts the destructive consequences of private vengeful anger and ignoring the reformation of the legal system. While *The Cenci* arouses our sympathetic compassion for a woman who is victimized by the unjust patriarchal society, it reminds us of the fact that a hopeless soul imprisoned in its own ideological prison is unable to imagine an alternative to revenge and cannot reach a better reality or execute any reform and that is what makes this play tragic. Unlike both the traditional and modern rape-revenge narratives, reformation of the corrupt legal system seems to be the aim of the play. Therefore, a modern spectator is more likely to dismiss private revenge as capable of ending violence and see reformation of the deficient legal system as a higher goal for feminist activists.

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