

Honor Killing, Filicide, and the Looking-Glass Self in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* and Tawfiq Al-Hakim's *The Song of Death*

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Abstract

A parent's killing of their children can be one of the most heinous crimes to be ever committed. Yet, such killing of sons or daughters can be easily justified in the cultures of honor. Cultures of honor are some of the oldest forms of social organization in human history. Yet, they persisted long enough to be part of even today's world. This paper attempts to study the culture of honor in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* and Tawfiq Al-Hakim's *The Song of Death*. The study adopts the perspective of Charles. H. Cooley's theory, *the looking-glass, self* to analyze and understand the characters' motivation for filicide in honor culture. These two works are selected because they offer a similar form and pattern of honor killing. The study concludes that the two plays offer a sharp and painful critique of the honor culture in general, and honor killing of offspring, in particular.

Keywords: Honor killing, honor culture, filicide, Shakespeare, Tawfiq Al-Hakim

جرائم الشرف وقتل الأبناء والذات المرآتية في مسرحية تيتوس أندرونيكوس لشكسبير ومسرحية أغنية الموت لتوفيق الحكيم

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المستخلص

يُعدّ إقدام الوالد أو الوالدة على قتل أبنائهم من أبشع الجرائم التي يمكن أن تُرتكب. ومع ذلك، فإن قتل الأبناء أو البنات قد يجد تبريراً سهلاً في ثقافات الشرف، والتي تعد من أقدم أشكال التنظيم الاجتماعي في تاريخ البشرية، لكنها استمرت عبر الزمن حتى أصبحت جزءاً من عالمنا المعاصر. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى بحث ثقافة الشرف في مسرحية (تيتوس أندرونيكوس) ومسرحية (اغنية الموت). وتعتمد الدراسة على منظور نظرية الذات المرآتية لعالم الاجتماع جارلس كولي لتحليل وفهم دوافع الشخصيات لارتكاب جريمة قتل الأبناء في إطار ثقافة الشرف. وقد اختير هذان النصان لأنهما يقدمان نمطاً وصورة متشابهة من جرائم الشرف. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن المسرحيتين تقدمان نقداً حاداً ومؤلماً لثقافة الشرف بصورة عامة، ولجريمة قتل الأبناء بدافع الشرف بصورة خاصة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: جرائم الشرف، ثقافات الشرف، قتل الأبناء، شكسبير، توفيق الحكيم

1. Introduction

As children, human beings learn that their self-definition depends upon other people's judgment of what is good or bad. Growing up, there is a little added to the beliefs formed around these 'good' and 'bad' that people receive in their early life. People become socially driven to judge themselves depending on people's expectations and thoughts. However, a question arises here: if no one can access other people's thoughts, how is it possible for individuals to judge themselves based on them? Charles Cooley (1902) poses this question and answers it with the theory of *looking-glass self*. His theory indicates that individuals are raised to imagine the society's reaction to a specific behavior, and this imagination is a first step before they decide if they should do certain thing or give it up.

Thus, when someone praises the behavior, speech or any property or quality of someone, this person internalizes this praise as an idealistic manifestation they need to meet or keep meeting. This socially constructed self-image is theorized by Charles Cooley in his book *Human Nature and the Social Order* (1902). Cooley's work demonstrates that someone's image of themselves varies according to the different people they interact with, lowering and lifting self-esteem consequently in accordance with that. "The social self", he says "is simply any idea, or system of ideas, drawn from the communicative life, that the mind cherishes as its own. Self-feeling has its chief scope within the general life, not outside of it" (Cooley, 1902, p. 147). Thus, whatever someone believes others' thought of him to be, that becomes the parameter for judging themselves no matter whether it is accurate or not. Cooley names this condition *the looking-glass self* and justifies this name by stating that:

As we see our face, figure, and dress in the glass, and are interested in them because they are ours, and pleased or otherwise with them according as they do or do not answer to what we should like them to be; so in imagination we perceive in another's mind some thought of our appearance, manners, aims, deeds, character, friends, and so on, and are variously affected by it. (Cooley, 1902, p. 152)

Cooley proceeds to explain how this self-image or self-idea forms an impact on the psyche. He explains that a self-idea is formed of three elements: first, the imagination of one's own appearance to other people, second, the imagination of the other's judgement of this appearance, and third, a feeling formed around this imagination which leads to either feeling proud or ashamed of how others might perceive the person. Thus, "[t]he thing that moves us to pride or shame is not the mere mechanical reflection of ourselves, but ... the imagined effect of this reflection upon another's mind." According to Cooley, "the character and weight of that other, in whose mind we see ourselves, makes all the difference with our feeling" (Cooley, 1902, p. 152). The individual's status, appearance, and value is, thus, measured in accordance with the imagined thoughts of those around.

People decide who they are and what they worth depending on how they think of their image in other's minds. Cooley (1902), states that "[w]e are ashamed to seem evasive in the presence of a straightforward man, cowardly in the presence of a brave one, gross in the eyes of a refined one, and so on" (p. 153). This social reflection could be summarized as (*I imagine how you think of me and I evaluate myself according to this imagination*). Cooley

believes this condition of social thinking to be true for people in general, even those that do not admit to care about society and how others might judge them. With regards to people that think themselves safe from internalized social gaze, he states:

If failure or disgrace arrives, if one suddenly finds that the faces of men show coldness or contempt instead of the kindness and deference that he is used to, he will perceive from the shock, the fear, the sense of being outcast and helpless, that he was living in the minds of others without knowing it, just as we daily walk the solid ground without thinking how it bears us up. (Cooley, 1902, p. 177)

The looking-glass describes a human need for social connection and survival. As social creatures, humans need to connect to the larger community, and by that they are tied to the expectations of people around them. The concept of looking-glass is necessary to construct and amend one's behavior throughout life. However, it could result in dangerous ramifications and breed psychological disorders due to unrealistic or exaggerated thinking of other's evaluation. The concept of looking-glass gains an important complication in what is known as 'honor culture'. In the main designs of such culture, there is an outstanding pressure that is placed on the individual to satisfy the cultural standards that deem a person 'honorable':

One's honor, as he feels it, and his honor in the sense of honorable repute, as he conceives it to exist in the minds of others whose opinion he cares for, are two aspects of the same thing. No one can permanently maintain a standard of honor in his own mind if he does not conceive of some other mind or minds as sharing and corroborating this standard. If his immediate environment is degrading he may have resort to books or memory in order that his imagination may construct a better environment of nobler people to sustain his standard; but if he cannot do this it is sure to fall. (Cooley, 1902, p. 208)

People have known the concept of honor since the earliest of civilizations in history. They even came to structure some of their cultures entirely around it. Leung and Cohen (2011) divide and compare three types of culture. These are dignity, face and honor. Their division depends on how each culture treats individual's worth. In dignity culture, there is an emphasis on the equality of people who are all respected and considered worthy simply because they are human beings, regardless of their job, lifestyle, or origin. In face culture, there is an emphasis on the hierarchy and group harmony, while honor culture focuses on the need to defend and establish the honor and virtue of the individual or his group before he could call himself respectable or worthy.

In honor culture, the individual's worth is not measured by the fact that s/he is a human being, rather it is found in the following of the group's rules and what is deemed 'right,' and 'wrong.' Thus, the concept of honor is significantly related to the individual's social self, because honor is connected to "reputation, integrity, self-esteem, and the image of oneself and others" (Wieczorek, 2024, p. 12). In other words, with the development of societies to take hierarchal structure, a person's sense of their status has become largely

dependent on other people's evaluation and judgement. In honor culture, people's sense of their dignity is quite attached to other's deeming of them as honorable or not. So, in situations that risk their honor, people become ready to use violence and aggression, because there is a constant fear in honor culture "of shame, loss, and dishonor that could result in social exclusion and stigmatization" (Wieczorek, 2024, p.12).

According to the psychologists, Ayse K. Uskul and Susan E. Cross (2020), "[h]onor cultures are defined as groups that position social image or reputation in one's community as a core concern. ... where honor plays a defining role in shaping the self and social interactions" (p. 177). Thus, it is important to distinguish the meaning of 'honor' as a concept that is present in people's thoughts, and the meaning of honor cultures. The two terms are related yet they refer to different things; "[h]onor usually refers to an individual's personal honesty or integrity; however, in honor cultures it refers also to a man's social status, precedence, or right to respect" (Moritz, 2008, p. 100).

Dawid Wieczorek (2024) argues that honor can be divided into two parts, one is psychological and it is directly relevant to someone's identity, and the other social and it is related to group formation that functions through inclusion or exclusion (p. 12). According to the theory of the looking-glass, an individual's actions are driven by his/her imagination of other people's thoughts. According to this supposed image about the self in others' minds, people choose to do or withdraw from any sort of action. Thus, even the individualistic sense of honor can be read as a result of somebody's internalized thinking of others' judgement and criticism. Honor "can be considered a distinctly social and relational phenomenon and that one's honor depends on the social environment, social hierarchy, and relationships with others" (Pejković & Nedeljković, 2024, p. 294). Thomas Scheff (1988) has expanded the work of Cooley by linking it to the Skinnerian psychology which can explain why cultures of honor still exist. In daily life, the Cooley–Scheff conjecture implies that:

The consequences of behaviors are experienced as rewards or punishments and behaviors that lead to rewards are reinforced while behaviors that lead to punishments are suppressed. Thus, as is the case with all higher animals, the behavioral repertoires of human beings are subject to selection processes. These learned contingencies provide guidance for the organism in terms of relatively simple rules. (Shaffer, 2005, p. 61)

Thus, people learn that shame can lead to their social exile in honor culture and that they can no longer live among their people when they do something 'shameful'. That leads to an internalized fear of shame and magnified need to preserve honor. In a typical honor culture, respect and reputations are prioritized over life itself. People are expected to fight and go to extreme measures to keep good reputation. Men's reputation in honor culture rest on qualities like bravery, strength, and aggression against disrespect. Women, however, are judged for their loyalty and sexual purity (Brown, Baughman, & Carvallo, 2017, p. 2). An example of such culture can be seen in different places around the world including the Mediterranean, the Middle East, Central and South America, etc.

Traditional societies usually know honor as a dominating force that can structure society and cause fuels. In his study of Algerian peasants, Pierre Bourdieu (1979) has studied honor as a relational phenomenon between two participants; one is honored and the other is shamed. The process of establishing an honorable reputation implies a reversal of these two roles, usually by violence (p. 100). Consequently, the feeling of pride and shame comes from an established knowledge of what the society accepts or rejects: "We always imagine, and in imagining share, the judgments of the other mind. One may boast to one person of an action they would be *ashamed* to own to another" (Scheff, Daniel & Sterphone, 2018, sec. 1, para. 3). The process of trying to judge oneself based on what others might think of them create a need to try and please people's expected opinions.

The need to uplift oneself above others by doing what is 'honorable' can push people to violence and heinous acts of injustice in order to preserve their honor. The theory of looking-glass self in relation to honor is necessary to understand the motives and actions of characters in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* (1594) and Tawfiq Al-Hakim's *The Song of Death* (1950). A thorough analysis of these two plays follows in the next sections.

2. *Titus Andronicus*: An Honor Restored with Blood

Characterized as the bloodiest and most violent among Shakespeare's plays, *The Lamentable Tragedy of Titus Andronicus* (1549) endured harsh criticism and was considered by Dover Wilson and T. S. Eliot to be a play without merit, especially when it is compared to his other revenge tragedies (see Hamilton, 1963). John M. Robertson (1905) placed this tragedy outside Shakespeare's work claiming that he did not write it. Both the excessive and the unnecessary violence have led Robertson to such exclusion. However, the play has received a more appreciative criticism with time, considering that it was a necessary part for Shakespeare's artistic and dramatic development.

Titus Andronicus, which was performed in the late 16th century, is considered the earliest of Shakespeare's revenge and Roman tragedies. It is estimated to be the fourth or fifth play that he wrote for theatre. Its plot, characterization, and structure show the early dramaturgy of Shakespeare before he perfected his craft and molded it for later tragedies. Despite its significance in the development of Shakespeare's canon, it used to be harshly denounced by critics who objected to the play's exhibitionistic staging of torture, cruelty, mutilation, filicide, and even cannibalism. Violence has had a long and fluctuating history on stage, with theatre either embracing or rejecting it entirely. In Renaissance drama, English playwrights presented varying degrees of violence that they integrated in their plots and staged directly before audience. It was part of a general culture of violence that entertained knights' tournaments, bloody animal fights, and public executions.

The play opens with a quarrel between the two sons of the late emperor, Saturninus and Bassianus, who both claim a right to the throne. Their dispute is silenced by the arrival of Roman's celebrated and victorious general, Titus Andronicus, who has returned from a very long war against the Goths and have captured their queen and brought her with him. Titus has as many as twenty-five sons and has lost twenty-one of them in battle. To him, this sacrifice is honorable and worthy because it is done in the name of Rome.

The choice of Rome as a setting for the play can be justified with many reasons like the Renaissance celebration of Roman history, or that it is used to give an example about English politics. However, a sound reason could be that it is a play about the loss and regain of honor and must be set in a culture that values honor above everything:

There is no mistaking that Rome defines itself as an honor culture [in the play]. Men's honor is displayed here most spectacularly through military prowess, political power, and funeral rites, all exhibited in the first act. Honor is integrally bound with masculine virtue, a term derived from the Roman god Virtus, who exemplified bravery and military prowess. (Tassi, 2011, p. 137)

Titus Andronicus opens with an ordinary plot and setting, yet, it quickly deteriorates into chaos and bloodshed. On the threshold of the senate, stands the two sons of the late Emperor, Saturninus and Bassianus. Both have summoned their followers to support their right to the throne. However, they agree to put their dispute aside when they hear the announcement of Titus Andronicus' triumphant return. "Rome's best champion,/ Successful in the battles that he fights,/ With honor and with fortune is returned," (Shakespeare, 2009, 1.1. 64-66). Titus spent ten years fighting the Goths on their homeland. He does not lament that loss of his sons despite his agony, he rather prides in it because he lost them in honorable way.

Titus lays the bodies of his martyred sons in the tomb telling them to "sleep in peace, slain in your country's wars" (1.1. 91). This opening episode establishes the tone of the play, it is tragedy that is created around power struggles among the hailed leaders of the country. Once, Titus buries his sons, he kills the son of the captured Goth queen, Tamora, to avenge the dead Roman soldiers. Despite Queen Tamora's begging, her son Alarbus is killed as a sacrifice to please Titus' dead sons and soldiers who "ask a sacrifice" to bring peace to their souls.

Alarbus' death is not a retribution for something he specifically did. It is an unjust act of revenge where Titus sacrifices one of the enemy's prisoners to avenge his own followers, which is known as 'ritual sacrifice.' Titus stages the death of Alarbus to be a holy rite. "He considers Alarbus's sacrifice as a religious duty. This barbarous Roman rite sets the chain of revenge in motion" (Amir, 2011, p. 24). This murder can also be categorized as a 'blood revenge,' which is an ancient way to establish order that is used to retaliate for the victim by killing any 'equal' person from the opposite group. It is an act of murder that is persistent with honor culture: "Blood revenge ... has several functions. The retaliating family receives emotional atonement, gets even (rights a wrong) with an enemy, punishes the attacker ... In sum, by retaliating they prove they care for their honor, their moral reputation" (Erners, 2018, sec. 5, para. 2). The action of murdering Alarbus sets in motion a series of murders and crimes that are committed in the name of blood revenge or honor killing. Rarely do the victims, in the play, get killed as a retribution for their action. Rather, they are usually innocent people who are killed either for blood revenge or honor killing.

Titus is offered the throne by the Senate but he refuses it and asks to crown the oldest son instead, Saturninus. As an expression of gratitude, Saturninus asks to marry Titus'

daughter Lavinia and make her an Empress. The moment Titus accepts the offer, Lavinia's fiancé and Saturninus' brother, Bassianus, kidnaps her in front of everyone. When Lavinia's brothers help Bassianus to take her away, Titus is enraged and calls this treason. He withdraws his sword and kills his son, Mutius, who prevents him from following them. Titus kills his son only because he allowed Lavinia to escape. He believes that his family has dishonored him by standing against him. Titus' accusation of his sons as traitors shows that he is "more of a Roman warrior than he is a family man" (Hamamra, 2020, p. 1).

Killing Mutius is not simply an act of rushed angry thought as it does not provoke any regret in Titus later on. He kills him because Mutius threatens his face image, a son standing against his father with a drawn sword is seen as a taint to the family's reputation, specifically Titus' reputation as a war general. In honor culture, violence can be incorporated when a man feels that his reputation is threatened. "[T]he honor code dictates that he has the right to defend his interests ... Indeed, he is expected to do so if he wants to be known as a "real" man" (Brown, Baughman, & Carvallo, 2017, p. 2). Despite his grief over his sons, Titus quickly kills another one of them, erasing by that his previous image of a mourning father.

Honor culture makes the man's reputation more important than his life or family. Titus looks at his honor and reputation from the supposed eye of others. If he imagines the attendants judging him and his family as dishonorable, then he must retrieve his honor by killing the one who threatened it. He screams "[n]or thou, nor he, are any sons of mine:/ My sons would never so dishonour me./ Traitor, restore Lavinia to the emperor" (1.1. 295-296). Cooley indicates that people's perception of themselves is created through their interactions with others. Thus, a man in honor culture would always judge himself and his worth according to people's expectations. If he believes that people expect him to retaliate insult with violence, he uses violence. If he thinks he should respond to his son's defiance with murdering him, he murders him. It is not mentioned in the play how people reacted to his son's behavior, they may have not reacted at all. In fact, it is hard to say if anybody there was expecting Titus to kill his son, not even Saturninus, but as an 'honorable' man, he must take extreme measures to demonstrate his stance against insult:

A feature of many honor cultures is that men are prepared to use violence and even die to defend their reputation as honorable men. Moreover, aggression in these specific contexts is institutionalized, regarded as legitimate and necessary by the society at large. (Moritz, 2008, p. 101)

In cultures of honor, a man's character and strength is measured by his exertion of power on others. The weaker he is in his society, the more ashamed he feels. There is an urge to live up to the image of formidable man in traditional societies where honor and man's valiance and strength are directly linked. Titus has been the exemplary of this socially designed image for years, yet he quickly loses it at the hands of his son's defiance. Saturninus turns his head to the captured queen Tamora and decides to take her for a wife instead of Lavinia. When Titus witnesses the new bride ascends with the emperor he remarks "I am not bid to wait upon this bride./ Titus, when wert thou wont to walk alone,/ Dishonoured thus and challenged of wrongs?" (1.1. 338-340).

Once she is crowned as empress, Tamora swears to take revenge with the help of her lover Aaron the Moor, and her two sons. She convinces her sons to kill Titus' sons and daughter Lavinia. However, Aaron the Moor convinces her sons to take the opportunity to rape Lavinia, whom they admire "what you cannot as you would achieve,/ You must perforce accomplish as you may" (2.1. 107-108). They decide upon the hunting day as an opportunity to act out the plan in the forest.

The tragedy takes a dark turn during the scene of the hunt. All the main characters gather in the forest in Act 2, and while everyone disperse in search of their prey, Tamora and her sons gather to take revenge on Titus and his children. They kill Bassianus, throw his body in a dig, then frame Titus' sons, Martius and Quintus, for the crime. Tamora's sons, then, rape and mutilate Lavinia by cutting her hands and tongue to stop her from disclosing their names. The scene is highly violent and tragic and the events quickly escalate in a way that leaves Titus and his brother Marcus stunned. In her attempt to avenge her son Alarbus, Tamora has fallen for the same system of patriarchal abuse of women when she let her sons rape Lavinia and mutilate her. In honor culture, the sexual honor, purity, of women is considered a possession of her male relatives. Thus, an attack on a woman's body is considered an attack against the honor of her family men. In *The Creation of Patriarchy*, Gerda Lerner (1986) observes:

The impact ... of the rape of conquered women was twofold: it dishonored the women and by implication served as a symbolic castration of their men. Men in patriarchal societies who cannot protect the sexual purity of their wives, sisters, and children are truly impotent and dishonored. (p. 80)

Thus, rape is not like murder in honor culture. Tamora causes the death of Titus' sons by accusing them of murdering Lavinia's husband. But it is not the loss of sons that brings shame and bereavement to the Andronici, rather it is the attack on their woman's sexual purity, because "Lavinia's rape symbolically castrates Titus" (Ritscher, 2009, p. 91). Indeed, Lavinia asks to be murdered instead of being raped. She pleads during the attack, "Tis present death I beg, and one thing more/That womanhood denies my tongue to tell./ O, keep me from their worse than killing lust," (2.3. 73-75). Lee Ritscher (2009) argues that women's preference of death over rape in life shows the extremity of enforced patriarchal values of honor (p. 90).

Lavinia's wish shows her refrain from how people, including her family, might see and judge her as a rape victim. She does not see her own life value at this moment, only the value of what her culture cherishes in a woman, which is being sexually intact. This understanding of purity is a strange one in honor culture because Lavinia did not agree to this physical assault. She was raped against her will, yet she knows that she still would be shamed and seen like a woman who walked willingly towards adultery. Rape and adultery are made equal in Lavinia's society because no matter how she was touched by a man, unless it is a husband, she becomes a source of shame for her family.

Kathleen Z. Young (1993) indicates that "rape is traumatic for a female of any age or religion and is a compounded trauma if the survivor is a virgin, as it robs her of control over

the transition into adult sexuality.” In traditional societies like ancient Rome or modern day traditional communities, “[a]ny sex outside of marriage, including rape, is associated with a female’s ‘moral disgrace,’ and myths of virgin martyrs ... are used as a kind of sexual terrorism” (p. 112). Thus, just like a man who is encouraged to die instead of being dishonored, a woman is also encouraged to lead herself to death instead of being raped.

Cooley (1902) retains the significance and motive of any sort of actions to the expected attitude that people would show towards it. He states that “[t]here is no sense of ‘I,’ as in pride or shame, without its correlative sense of you, or he, or they” (p. 151). Cooley’s theory shows that the public behavior is a spectacle where actors decide what to do next based on whether they would win the audience favor or not. These decisions are not always deliberately made to appease the expectations of people. Sometimes, the unconscious leads individuals to orchestrate their life according to the society’s desires. In fact, most of the time people do not realize that they do what they do only because the social setting demands it. Consequently, if the physical behavior is treated as a public scene, then the female body in honor culture is the spotlight of that scene. Lavinia’s apparent possession of her body is constantly taken away throughout the play. She first loses her physical agency when her husband kidnaps her to marry her, then she loses it tragically to rape and mutilation at the hands of Demetrius, and Chiron, and eventually she loses it entirely to death at the hands of her father.

Titus is shown with conflicting emotions and attitudes towards his daughter after the accident. His sadness brings him closer to madness as he rages alone and falls apart in front of his family. Lavinia’s tragedy puts Titus’s brain in a state of chaos. What worsens his situation is that nobody listens to his pleading for justice, or save his sons, or try to find and punish the culprits in Lavinia’s attack. Trapped in pain and despair, he cries “he that wounded her/ Hath hurt me more than had he killed me dead” (3.1. 92-93). At the same time, he laments his wasted sacrifice and how he was punished for his service instead of being rewarded for it: “give me a sword, I’ll chop off my hands too,/ For they have fought for Rome, and all in vain” (3.1. 72-73). Titus’ dejection leads him to jump among conclusions and ideas that are quite contrary such as “[i]s dear Lavinia, dearer than my soul./ Had I but seen thy picture in this plight,” (3.1. 102-103), which is quickly followed by him inviting her to commit suicide, which angers his brother Marcus. He plainly tells her:

When thy poor heart beats with outrageous beating,
Thou canst not strike it thus to make it still.
Wound it with sighing, girl, kill it with groans;
Or get some little knife between thy teeth,
And just against thy heart make thou a hole, (3.2. 13-17)

Titus does not stop considering the idea of killing Lavinia to end her suffering and ‘shame.’ In fact, filicide in the name of honor might be the only thing in common between Tamora and Titus!

Tamora gains her revenge over the Andronici. Afterwards, in Act 4, Scene 2, she is shown in labour giving birth to a baby while Aaron and her sons wait outside. The baby is born with black skin which exposes the true identity of his father, Aaron. The appearance of

the baby reveals her affair with her lover and her betrayal of the emperor Saturninus. Out of fear of scandal, Tamora orders Aaron to kill the newborn baby. The nurse that brings the baby tells him "The empress sends it thee, thy stamp, thy seal,/ And bids thee christen it with thy dagger's point." (4.2. 69-70). The same mother that launched a cruel campaign of vengeance over Titus and his family for killing her son Alarbus is now ordering her lover to murder her newborn. The fear of shame and the willing to use cruelty to preserve honor come hand in hand in honor cultures. A person's status and honorable image must be defended at any price which shows that her former pursuit of revenge may not have been the result of grief alone, but grief and shame as well. The only parent who is not caught by the idea of filicide in the play is Aaron, he responds to the orders of murder saying: "This before all the world do I prefer;/This maugre all the world will I keep safe". (4.2. 109-110). What gives Aaron this liberty to choose fatherhood over the norms of honor culture is that he is not considered a person of high rank or a significant public image. If he had such reputation or social image then he would be obliged to either lose it or succumb to the norms of honor killing. Yet, Aaron prefers to take the baby away and kill the nurse and midwife instead, to save the queen's reputation. He proudly addresses his newborn while quitting the place,

I'll bear you hence;
For it is you that puts us to our shifts:
I'll make you feed on berries ...and suck the goat,
And cabin in a cave, and bring you up
To be a warrior and command a camp. (4.2. 176- 180)

Aaron's devotion to his paternity puts him in contrast to both Titus and Tamora. Specifically, Titus who ties honor to his core identity and cannot separate it from who he is.

In Act 5, Shakespeare practices his usual method of tying all the loose ends of the plot and concluding the stories of his characters in the final act of the play. In this Act, Titus avenges himself and his family in one of the bloodiest scenes in Shakespeare's canon (see Hamilton, 1963). Tamora and her sons visit Titus to see how he handles the sequence of tragedies that he received. He pretends to be mad and invite them with the emperor to have dinner. Once Tamora leaves to invite Saturninus, Titus kills her sons and drains their blood. He prepares all his family members to attend the family dinner with the emperor and his wife. Everyone is seated on the table while Titus butchering the bodies of Tamora's sons and bake them into a pie to serve them to her.

When the emperor arrives and sits with them, Titus asks him: "Was it well done of rash Verginius/To slay his daughter with his own right hand, / Because she was enforced, stained, and deflowered?" (5.3. 36-39). Saturninus and Titus provide "a different version of the myth of Verginia's attempted rape" (Ritscher, 2009, p. 92). The different ending to the myth of Virginia state that she is eventually killed by her father Verginus after being raped. Saturninus answers positively and explain that "the girl should not survive her shame,/ And by her presence still renew his sorrows" (5.3. 41-42). Saturninus represents the highest form of power and order in the empire. He confirms to Titus that a woman's life is only valuable as long as she does not bring shame and sorrow to her family men. A social doctrine that Titus already knows and follows, yet the emperor's words were the final straw that broke his

stoutness in the face of social rule. Titus kills his daughter and tells her as she bleeds to death “Die, die, Lavinia, and thy shame with thee,/ And with thy shame thy father’s sorrow die” (5.3. 46-47). In honor culture, the violence against women appear most clearly in the phenomenon of honor killing where a man kills his female relative as a punishment for the shame she brought to his family (Pejković & Nedeljković, 2024). It is a tragic outcome of a culture that places the value of a human in how much pride or shame they bring to their society and family.

Titus’ relationship with his daughter is defined with love because she is the only one who did not defy him among all his children. She was married, widowed, then raped and mutilated by her husband’s murderers. With all the tragedies that she bore, she surrendered to her fate and did not fight against it. Yet, she is still a source of shame for Titus and Rome due to being raped against her will. Titus’ murdering of his son Mutius then the killing of Lavinia explain how, in a culture of honor, the social pressure to exhibit strength and intolerance forces a father to kill his offspring in order to satisfy the community around him:

Human “survival machines” would operate by the rules that one should learn and ... choose courses of action that lead both to rewarding physical consequences and to social acceptance and the feeling of pride and to avoid courses of action that lead both to punishing physical consequences and to social rejection and the attendant feelings of embarrassment or shame. ... [thus] the large-scale systems of justification we call “culture” emerge (Shaffer, 2005, p. 62).

Titus repeats the word shame before and after Lavinia’s death as if he declares that ‘shame’ can only be treated by death. He does not claim that he murders her to appease the social image of a capable male, but the beliefs around that image is engraved enough in his consciousness that it motivates and inspires his brutality. Cooley explains that “we live in the minds of others, without knowing it” (Cooley, 1902, p. 177). The concept of the looking glass is significant in the understanding of honor crimes, because in this case, it is the person’s imagined judgement of others that moves him forward or backwards. The aspects that an individual likes or hates about his behavior, his life, his body or anything that is related to him, largely depends on this judgement. Thus, “[t]he thing that moves us to pride or shame is not the mere mechanical reflection of ourselves, but an imputed sentiment—the imagined effect of this reflection upon another’s mind” (Scheff, Daniel & Sterphone, 2018, sec. 1, para. 3). Honor culture turns this need, to be proud and acceptable, into something fatal by forcing its members to prove their strength and worthiness by violence.

The play ends with a blood-bath as all characters are killed by one another and only Lucius, son of Titus, remain alive to rule Rome after killing Saturninus. Shakespeare shows a triumph of aggression and violence over reason, and passion. Brutally, Titus avenges his family by feeding Tamora her sons then killing her only to get killed by Saturninus. When Lucius arrives from exile with an army, he kills Saturninus to avenge his father. The rash of deaths and excess of violence in the play is the reason why it was usually underestimated by critics despite its significant material; “this, Shakespeare’s earliest tragedy, is crude in plot and thin in characterization-closer to farce and melodrama than to high tragedy” (Hamilton,

2003, p. 75). Yet, even with the rushed and successive murders of all main characters, Lavinia's death stands out. She is the only one who was "a passive, not an active, agent in her father's dishonor" (p. 75). She 'stains' his reputation not because of something she did, but because of something that was done to her.

Lavinia's initial appearance in the play deems her precious and 'wanted' as the two possible heirs, Bassianus and Saturninus, compete to win her hand. Yet when she appears as mutilated figure, weak and deflowered by rape, she becomes a subject of sacrifice because her current image is rejected and smeared by patriarchal honor society. She turns into a subject of pity by the same society that adored her. This is the same society that leads her father to see her as a burden and a stain that must be removed before he could regain his image. Even though Titus knows he would die shortly after murdering her, he still views himself as an honorable man that must remove the source of his shame and avenge himself against Tamora and her family before he dies. Members of honor culture do not follow social codes to enjoy a better life. Rather, they follow these codes to prove that they have dignity and worth as human beings. The code must be followed even if it leads to the death of the entire family as in the case of Titus. As a result, the innocent people's death, like Alarbus, Titus' sons, and Lavinia, become a necessary and unavoidable sacrifice that honor culture demands.

3. *The Song of Death: Lost Sons and Grieving Mothers*

Tawfiq Al-Hakim (1898–١٩٨٧) is an Egyptian writer who has written prolifically in drama, novel, and poetry, and has contributed to literary criticism and philosophical speculations with different essays and letters. Even though he is mainly known for his drama, yet he created outstanding pieces of fiction (Badawi, 2014, p. 952). As a dramatist, Al-Hakim wrote more than eighty plays, in the period between this 1920s and the 1970s.

The Song of Death was published in 1950 along with other twenty more plays by Al-Hakim in one collection that is titled *Masrah al-Mujtama*, Theatre of Society. The plays in this collection are mainly one-act plays that discuss few characters and straightforward theme, plot, and struggle. *The Song of Death* is the final play in this collection. It is a tragic drama that dive into the clashes of tradition and modernity, as well as honor and shame. (Badawi, 2014, p. 957). The play focusses on the character of Asakir, her son Alwan, her sister Mabrouka, and Mabrouka's son Sumeida.

The play is set in Egyptian countryside and is told in the form of a dialogue between two sisters, Mabrouka and Asakir, and their sons, Sumeida and Alwan. It opens and concludes in one place and within the span of two hours and has one storyline, one main plot; one action. Without the slightest deviation, Al-Hakim strictly follows the three unities of drama in *the Song of Death*. This technique makes the play compact, direct, short, and more intense as it has no interrupting actions or comic relief.

The play opens with Asakir occupying the center of the stage with her sister as they discuss the arrival of Asakir's long waited son, Alwan who was raised in the city by her brother and never visited the countryside since childhood:

ASAKIR: I hope, Mabrouka, you haven't told anyone he's my son.

MABROUKA: Am I crazy? Your son Alwan was drowned in the well at the water-wheel when a child of only two years. The whole village knows that. (Al-Hakim, 2008, p. 183)

The mother hid her son away from sight after the death of her husband at the hands of Suweilam Tahawi. Asakir lives in a closed traditional community where a cycle of revenge between her family, the Azizis, and the family of Tahawis, has been being carried on for generations. Every few years, one of the two families kills a man from the other family out of vengeance. The cycle seems endless and irreversible as it pushes the lives and reputation of the two families to the verge of collapse with every murder. In order to guarantee that her son can grow up in safety until he could take revenge for his father, she decided to spread the rumor of his death and wait until he becomes a young man. Yet, Asakir does not guard that secret quite completely. She allows a word to spread that her family is planning to take revenge:

ASAKIR: He [her nephew] heard one of them say, in a crowd of people, that either the Azizis have nothing but women left, or they are hiding a man to take vengeance—a man nearer to the murdered man than his cousin Sumeida.

MABROUKA: Yes, my son Sumeida did say that. Were it not for this rumor he wouldn't be able to walk about the village with raised head (Al-Hakim, 2008, p. 184).

The Egyptian countryside, for long decades, was governed by Bedouin tribes that exercised customary law. Due to the weakness of the state before and after the independence of Egypt from Britain. Bedouin tribes had the upper hand in controlling and regulating people into groups governed by customary law. According to Frank H. Stewart (1987), “[d]uring the long centuries of anarchy, the administration of justice in the countryside was no longer in the hands of the state. The Bedouin tribes, the villages, and even some of the small towns followed customary law” (p. 473). Thus, people take justice in their own hands without the intervention of state law. This sort of customary law is deeply rooted in the country and is hard to shake, especially in the rural areas where tribes settled and thrived.

The death of Asakir's husband is part of a long series of deaths incited by honor revenge between the two families. The killing of a man from the other tribe is not only an act of revenge but also an act of honor that removes the shame that accompanies defeat and loss in honor cultures. Honor killing in general can uplift a man in his community by proving his capacity and power over his opponent. A weak man in such community is a source of shame to his family. In fact, “[r]evengeful behavior, a form of social control, existed in most prehistoric societies as a response to violence and as a deterrent against potential attackers due to a man's strong reputation” (Pejković & Nedeljković, 2024, p. 298). Violent retaliations become a social duty that men have to fulfill in honor culture because if they do not, they “harm their personal or family reputation” (p. 299). Asakir waited for seventeen years to make her son take revenge. In honor culture, women's honor is tied to their sexual purity, while men's honor depends on their demonstration of strength and appealing to the traditions.

Yet, Asakir bears the shame and defeat of having her husband killed and butchered without anyone to retaliate for that:

ASAKIR: Let them learn today that the son of the murdered man is still alive. ... It is no longer I who live in fear but those who cannot sleep at night for fear. Bring him quickly, train, quickly, for I have waited so long! Seventeen years! I have counted them up hour by hour. Seventeen years! I have milked them from Time's udders drop by drop just as the milk drips out from the udder of an old cow. (Al-Hakim, 2008, p. 184)

Motherly love mingles in the play with revengeful duty. To Asakir, her son, Alwan, is her savior from the shame that villagers make her feel. They have taken the life of her husband and made her and her family look weak and helpless. She awaits her son's return and states "[t]oday I'll rend the garment of shame and put on the robes of self-respect" (Al-Hakim, 2008, p. 187). It is significant to notice that Asakir waited seventeen years for her son to grow up and reclaim their honor instead of doing it herself. If it was merely an act of retribution and punishment, Asakir should not have waited that long. But blood revenge turns into a ritual that is performed by the men of each tribe to prove their worthiness and establish solid reputation for themselves. This is something further proven when Asakir later tells her son that she will sharpen the same knife with which her husband was killed as she refuses the use of any other weapon.

ASAKIR: The saddlebag in which your father's body was brought to me, carried upon his donkey. In this pocket I found his head, in the other the rest of his body cut into pieces. They killed him with the knife he was carrying. They put the knife with his body in the saddlebag. Look, this is the knife. I kept it like this with the blood on it so that it's gone rusty. As for the donkey which brought your murdered father, making its way to the house it knew, its head lowered as though mourning its owner, I have been unable to keep it for you: it has died, unable to bear the long years. (Al-Hakim, 2008, p. 188)

The retributive act of vengeance can give emotional healing to the family of the victim while restoring the most important thing for them; their honor, as "the avenger protects the honor of their entire group" (Sorokina, 2024, p. 10). Thus, the act of vengeance becomes compulsory when it comes to blood revenge, because if the family of the murdered do not retaliate, they lose their honor and respect. Asakir emphasizes this when she tells Alwan, "this is what we have been waiting for patiently for all these nights—seventeen years with all the Azizis like the dead, waiting for you to come to bring them back life!" (p. 193). According to Ermers (2018), tolerance of blood murder "shows cowardice, lack of care, commitment and courage, all of which damage the entire group's reputation for morality" (sec. 5.1, para. 3). The avenger must act under the pressure of the group and save his and their honor. Yet, in the play, Alwan does not seem to be attentive to how people would perceive him. His upbringing in Cairo has allowed him to see the tribe of his father as a group of strangers whose opinions and judgments are not related to how he measures his own pride and shame:

ALWAN: ... today my mind wants to be convinced. What proof is there? Was this crime investigated?

ASAKIR: Investigated? ... They asked us and we said we knew nothing and had not seen a body. We buried your father secretly at night.

ALWAN [as though talking to himself]: So that we might take vengeance into our hands.

ASAKIR: With the same knife with which your father was killed. (Al-Hakim, 2008, p. 189)

Even though blood revenge was originally used as a way to regulate society and put an end to unpunished death and chaos in pre-state societies, it gradually changed into an exhibition of power and courage and became an action that is done at the hands of men to retaliate for other men. The person who is targeted for retaliation should be of the same gender, status, and age of the dead victim. The guilty clan must lose a member whether it is the killer himself or someone else even if it meant waiting for someone to grow up to take vengeance; “[i]t did not matter if the murderer was a different person; collective responsibility was assumed by the entire clan, including future generations” (Sorokina, 2024, p. 9). The cycle of blood, thus, continues forever probably or until there are no men left to take revenge.

What amazes Alwan is that there is no known reason for the transgenerational vengeance between the two families. There is only death and retaliation for the sake of preserving their honor and atoning their pains. According to Cooley (1902), the individual's endeavor to gain something or leave it is dominated by their need to appear good for other people even when there is nobody around them to judge what they do. A life in shame can be very difficult to endure, which is why they chase honor and pride: “If we once grasp the fact that the self is primarily a social, ideal, or imaginative fact, and not a sensual fact, all this appears quite natural and not in need of special explanation” (Cooley, 1902, p. 210). The lost honor and reputation of the tribe has to be restored even if different generations have lived and died after the accident. This is stressed by Asakir when she answers Alwan about the cause of the feud between the tribes as she says:

ASAKIR: All that people know is that between the Azizis and the Tahawis rivers of blood have flowed. ... They only stopped to flow after the death of your father—because you were so young. ... so rise up, my son, and quench my fire, water my thirst for revenge with the blood of Suweilam Tahawi! (Al-Hakim, 2008, p. 190)

Asakir rejects the idea of tolerance, forgetfulness, or forgiveness because her society rejects it. She is unconsciously guided to please and live up to her tribe's expectations because there is no alternative. Chagnon (1988) emphasizes that blood revenge does not have time limitations. A man can spend decades in preparation or waiting for an opportunity. After all, no matter how long or in what means the revenge must be taken. Nikos Aggelis documents an accident in Crete where a woman makes a promise on her dead husband's grave: "Don't worry/my beloved/ the one who will take revenge on you/ is now resting in my body" while in another accident, a mother laments her son saying “My son Yannis, didn't I tell you, didn't

I say,/ That bullets are on loan?" (cited in Tsantiropoulos, 2008, p. 71). Roberto Colombo and Emil Souleimanov (2023) emphasize this side of an unbreakable cycle of vengeance as it is carried on only to remove shame and reclaim honor. It is because the tribe of the victim become offended by murder, an avenger must rise and remove the offence. Alwan receives this obligatory duty from his mother who tells him that she endured shame "till people began whispering and others spread false rumors. I twisted and turned on a fire of rage, suppressing my anger, waiting for this moment. And now it has come" (Al-Hakim, 2008, p. 190). Yet, the educated religious young man who spent his days learning in Al-Azhar does not want to fulfil his duty and remove his tribe's shame:

ALWAN: I am saying that the Mighty Avenger was merciful to us when He wanted to take from us this burden without paying a price. ...

Mother, I won't kill!

ASAKIR [concealing her dismay]: What do I hear?

ALWAN: I won't kill.

ASAKIR [in a hoarse voice]: Your father's blood!

ALWAN: It is you who have failed him by hiding it from the government—reprisal is for those in power. (Al-Hakim, 2008, p. 193)

Alwan's endeavor to persuade his mother to give up her thought of vengeance is not different in strength and nature from hers. He, too, is a person who tries to live up to others' expectations. Yet, unlike his mother's concept of honor, he cares to protect and be worthy of the standards he constructed with his educated teachers and colleagues. The society according to which he judges himself is in Cairo's Al-Azhar, not the conflicting tribes of his parents' village. To him, he is doing the right thing by resorting to law. Alwan does not fathom blood revenge because it is not carried in the name of justice and law. Rather, it is carried to please the ritual of retrieving a lost honor. Alwan's civilized upbringing prevents him from understanding the everlasting shame that his mother will have to carry after this decision:

ALWAN [alarmed at her state]: Mother—what's happened to you?

ASAKIR [as though unconscious of anyone being with her]: The blood of your father . . . seventeen years . . . the blood of your father . . . seventeen years . . . [...] My son? My own son? No, never, never! [...] I am not your mother. I do not know you. No son issued from my belly. (Al-Hakim, 2008, p. 194)

Despite having a strong motherly love for her son, Asakir gives in to rage and surpasses the feelings of motherhood. Disowning her son is an expected act in a community that puts reputation and honor above life itself. So the drive to prove one's worthiness in the community comes with the willingness to construct one's life and family life according to the rules of that community. These rules are pushed on people and they submit to them in order to gain the satisfaction of others: "Many people of balanced mind and congenial activity scarcely know that they care what others think of them, and will deny, perhaps with indignation, that such care is an important factor in what they are and do". (Cooley 1922, p. 177)

Cooley's remarks are clarified in Asakir's cry after she asks her son to leave. She does not mourn her husband's death anymore but her son's rejection. Suddenly, for her, there is a greater shame to bear than the unavenged death. She says, "Everything is easy to bear except this disgrace! After it life becomes impossible. How can I live in the village when the people know that I have such a son?" (Al-Hakim, 2008, p. 195). The fear of misconduct does not come from the actual physical or psychological consequences but from social ones. Asakir's insistence on revenge was not to atone the dead only but to retrieve her family's good image and strength and to avoid the shame that can come from undoing it. She, thus, laments her son's rationality with fear rather than reason. She fears the voices of the villagers that will say: "What a failure of a belly that brought forth such a child!" Yes, this belly! [*She strikes at her belly with violent blows.*] All the women of the village will scoff at it, even the deformed, the dull-witted, and the barren" (p. 195). The social code in Asakir's upbringing was that there should be a willingness to sacrifice one's life, future, and even family for honor. Those who refuse to do so jeopardize their reputation with a possible everlasting shame. Maintaining a good status in an honor culture means to never subject this rule and always fall in line to fulfill it:

On one extreme pole, there is a readiness to sacrifice one's life for the cause; on the other there is doubt, not to say cowardice. Against this background, there appears the issue of status granted by the group, the need to defend this status, to maintain restraint and distance while at the same time maintaining freedom of action. (Wieczorek, 2024, p. 13)

Asakir's sense of shame of her husband's unavenged death is overwhelmed by her shame of her son's 'undutiful' behavior. Had Alwan refused his mother any personal request, she might have accepted that. But the lack of social dutifulness instantly puts her in a mental cage where she sees herself with shameful and dishonorable people.

Asakir's imagined reactions from the villagers isolate her motherly feelings and puts forward the unbearable weight of embarrassment and shame that will be inflicted on her. Under such a pressure, the eager and longing mother turns into a cold blooded murderer that wants to remove the source of shame at any cost. Thus, she tells Sumeida to take the knife and kill her son! "Sumeida—are you a man? ... Ward off the shame from your cousin! ... [*taking up the knife from the saddlebag*]: Kill him with this knife!" (Al-Hakim, 2008, p. 196). Once Again, Asakir ascribes the mission of reclaiming honor to a man, instead of taking it upon herself. Honor cultures are centered around the male ego. Such cultures push women to much inferior degree which is why honor becomes "an attribute of free, independent men, not of women, slaves, servants, or other 'small men'", it becomes a man's property and can only be reclaimed by a man (Jon Elster cited in Souleimanov, E. A. and Aliyev, 2015). In fact, Asakir pushes Sumeida to kill his cousin Alwan by frightening him that people will compare him to women: "If you're a man, Sumeida, don't let him dishonor the Azizis! After today you will not be able to walk like a man amongst people; they will whisper about you ... "A woman hiding behind a woman!" (Al-Hakim, 2008, p. 196). The murder that Asakir want to carry out against her son is different from blood revenge, it is an honor killing that is executed to cleanse the family from the shame of inappropriate conduct. In honor culture, honor practices can be divided into two types "revenge and purification norms" which can be

constantly observed in different cultures across different times of history (Thrasher & Handfield, 2018, p. 372).

As a strict form of patriarchal culture, honor culture has a set of expectations and stereotypes that men must fit into. This leads the “cultures of honor possessing both prescriptive and proscriptive norms that can lead to tangible harms for males who subscribe to them.” (Pomerantz & Foster, 2023, p. 2). If a man does not show courage and resilience while confirming his place in society, or that he rejects aggressive behavior towards his foes, he is not a ‘real’ man. In this case, his situation is not better than the girl that loses her sexual purity because they both lack an essential ‘component’ to their worthiness in the community. Therefore, just like a girl who is barbarically murdered in honor culture because she is not pure enough, a man without courage or strength might be killed too to cleanse the shame by blood:

Asakir How often, Mabrouka, did I feel proud of him within myself and boast of him in front of you, reckoning that I had produced a son who would wash clean the family honor. And lo! The son I have borne and whom I hid away, as one hides a treasure inside a clay jar, is nothing but a mark of shame that has befallen our tree, just as the blight attacks the cotton bush. (Al-Hakim, 2008, p. 198)

The issue with people who live in honor culture is that they lose their capacity to view a human worthiness outside the culture’s norms. A person is only worthy of life or respect if they confirm the ideals of honor as prescribed to them, if not then they lose their reputation and sometimes their life: “[I]n honor societies, reputation is largely externally conferred, meaning that it is a function of what others perceive and believe about you, not what you believe about yourself, that matters” (Pomerantz & Foster, 2023, p. 2). Asakir’s internalized fear of society and stigma does not, however, remove her emotions. She urges Sumeidah to follow her son and kill him yet after few minutes her sister notices: “Why are you breathing so heavily, Asakir?” to which she answers “ [as though asking herself]: Is he now on the train?” (Al-Hakim, 2008, p. 199). The tension of both the mother and the audience escalates in the final few minutes as Asakir begins to pray that her son have caught the train before his cousin had reached he train. Sumeida made a promise to sing loudly if he succeeds to kill Alwan before he travels. A moment of silence prevails as Asakir listens carefully hoping that her son has survived,

ASAKIR [*in a whisper*]: Will he catch up with him?

MABROUKA: Maybe it won’t be long before you see them coming along together again.

ASAKIR [*as though talking to herself*]: No, this time Sumeida will come by himself.

MABROUKA [*looking at her in alarm*]: Your face, Asakir, frightens me.

ASAKIR [*listening intently*]: Quiet! Listen! Listen! Do you now hear something?

MABROUKA: No, what should I hear?

ASAKIR: Singing. (Al-Hakim, 2008, p. 199)

The violence and murder of both the father and the son are kept off stage. Audience do not see the exercise of honor killing that is carried out by Sumeida, yet the impact of that death is made heavier than direct performance because the focus becomes on the regret and sorrow that falls on his mother once she begins to realize what she has asked. Asakir is both an initiator and victim of a merciless defense of reputation in an oppressive environment that prioritizes public image over life. When the play is about to close, both Mabrouka and Asakir catch the distant voice of Sumeida singing:

SUMEIDA [...] *When of the father I did hear
My shame no bounds did know,
And both mine eyes did open wide
And copious tears did flow.*

ASAKIR [*pulling herself together lest she collapse; even so a faint suppressed cry, like a rattle in the throat, escapes her lips*]: My son!
(Al-Hakim, 2008, p. 200)

The final theatrical image of a mother collapsing beneath the pain and the pressure of having to uphold the honor norms is quite impactful. Usually it is the woman that falls victim to Honor culture and the man is the initiator of violence against her. Yet, in this play, “The son abstains from killing despite being a male and the mother is in favor of killing despite the fact that she is a woman” (Gurung, 2021, p. 31). In the final lines, there is a hollow victory of traditions over family and motherly love. With the death of Alwan the cycle of revenge is not even broken, it only divaricates itself into newer branches with newer and more victims to be killed in the future.

Conclusion

Despite the persistence of honor killing in different societies and literary works, *Titus Andronicus* and *The Song of Death* feature a different type of honor killing. In these two plays, parents deliberately kill their innocent offspring not because they have done something wrong but because their culture demands their death. Lavinia is killed because she was raped and Alwan is killed because he refused to murder another person. Both Lavinia and Alwan get killed by their parents for being passive rather than being active. Strangely enough, the parents in the play, Titus Andronicus and Asakir, claim love and care for their families and would avenge the death of their family members. Yet, they themselves would kill their children once they dishonor them. The point of paradox here is if the parent is the killer then who is going to atone the death of the child? who is it that will avenge the death of Lavinia, Mutius, or Alwan? And the answer is nobody –a victim that is killed for being dishonorable in honor culture is not considered a ‘human’ enough or worthy of justice. Despite losing their children, neither Titus nor Asakir achieve anything truly from the filicide they commit. Titus does not restore his lost status, reputation or position, and Asakir is left with the unavenged death of her husband. Even with the long time span and the different geographies that separate the two plays, honor culture is presented with the same destructive power and lack of regards to human life. The final image of death and destruction in the two plays show the

culture of honor as equally barbaric, irrational, and oppressive as it demands death and constant battling for absolutely no avail.

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