

Relations between Council and Catastrophe in Shakespearean Tragedy

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Abstract:

In order to investigate possible regularities of dramatic effect in William Shakespeare's tragedies, the study maps the situations in which one character advises another in ten Shakespearean plays: *Titus Andronicus*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Coriolanus* and *Timon of Athens*. The hypothesis guiding this investigation is that the advice functions as a foreshadowing of the scenes of catastrophe of the characters involved in the act of advising. Among the theoretical contributions to be used for the discussion are the research by Bradley (2009) and Smith (2014), among others.

Keywords: Advice; Shakespearean tragedy; Catastrophe

1. Introduction

In *The Narrator - Considerations on the Work of Nikolai Leskov*, one of the most recurrent texts for literary studies when commenting on the narrative genre, Walter Benjamin (1985) exalts the function of advice in traditional forms of storytelling as an integrator of community values and stimulator of social exchanges. Advice, for this philosopher, would be a kind of wisdom that would make it possible to issue the continuity of a narration at the same time as communicating a socially recognizable experience.

If, considering Benjamin's reasoning, this seems reasonable in studies on narratives, when faced with the Shakespearean tragic genre, one observes that the function of advice derives a diametrically opposite effect to that imagined by Benjamin. Instead of providing a link between men, their experiences and values, in Shakespearean tragedy the advice functions as a marker that directs those involved towards an inevitable catastrophe. Finally, as a consequence of the damage, the council expands the scenarios of social disintegration, enhances the feeling of uncertainty about the paths, melts the solidity of any transmissible social value and authenticates the accidental force as sweeping human trajectories. In Shakespeare's tragic plays, both for those who listen to advice and carry it out, and for those who despise it, the simple enunciation of a warning, recommendation or admonition, instead of leading to a prudent stance capable of enabling these characters to avoid catastrophe, signals a moment of irremediable march towards future damage and suffering.

In order to illustrate the function of advice in ten of William Shakespeare's tragedies - *Titus Andronicus*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Coriolanus* and *Timon of Athens* - we have chosen sections that mirror repetitions of the circumstances surrounding the matter of advice in Shakespearean theater. These groupings will be presented through: a) the motivation for revenge; b) the imagined benefit (ultimately innocuous); c) the fatal disparagement; d) the stimulus to ambition or vanity; and e) sarcasm. So as not to make the notes illustrating the passages too long, we have chosen to present the first and last lines (verse or prose) of the quotations found in the book *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, published by Barnes & Noble in 2015, in order to guide the reader to the location of these passages in Shakespeare's work.

The first type of advice to be analyzed, which is related to the feeling of revenge, appears in five plays: *Titus Andronicus*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Macbeth* and *Timon of Athens*. The second type of advice - which seeks to benefit but causes harm - appears in four plays: *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus*. The third type of advice, that which causes harm through a lack of attention or concern on the part of the person it is intended to warn, occurs in five plays: *Romeo and Juliet*, *Julius Caesar*, *Macbeth*, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Timon of Athens*. The

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fourth type of advice, motivated by ambition and vanity, occurs in three plays: *Julius Caesar*, *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*. The fifth type of advice, disguised as sarcasm, occurs in two plays: *King Lear* and *Hamlet*.

2. Revenge advice

The tragedies that have the motivation of revenge in their plot occur from the most different perspectives with which the advice is related and point to a catastrophic end. In the case of *Titus Andronicus*, we can recognize how the immense quantity of violent actions derived from advice makes a circular movement. Initially, the advice accompanies the increasingly aggressive pace of the acts staged; at the end, this advice emerges from the same initial scene as a process of correcting tensions: the threat to murder Tamora's son is repeated. In *Hamlet*, when King Claudius' advice to Laertes to avenge the death of his father (Polonius) by Hamlet is crossed by the advice given to Prince Hamlet by the ghost of the former king (Hamlet-father) to avenge the murder committed by his brother Claudius, one of the most violent final scenes in Shakespearean tragedies is produced: king, queen, prince and nobleman killed on stage in the final scene - in addition to the announcement of two other noblemen executed in distant territory. In *Othello*, the centrality of the advice given by the character Iago (derived from acute cunning and perversity) makes the antagonist the main figure, erasing the qualities of the protagonist who gives the play its name. Iago's meticulous behavior in the act of advising consists of carrying out a covert intention while the speech uttered says the exact opposite of what the antagonist intends. In *Macbeth*, advice can have little meaning in making human destinies better or changing the negative conditions of the facts, since they are carried out for the fulfillment of an initial prophecy. With *Timon of Athens*, advice motivated by revenge becomes widespread - from personal tragic experience, Timon sentences the human race as wicked and unworthy of existence.

In *Titus Andronicus*, Demetrius, Tamora's son, advises his mother against Titus because of the death of her other son and to avenge the Gothic people² - this stimulus to conflict will lead to the death of the trio in the future. Later on, Tamora, because of her beauty, becomes empress and wife of Saturninus. In order to carry out her revenge, Tamora instigates the emperor Saturninus against Titus, claiming the dishonor he has caused Titus by failing to fulfill his commitment to marry his daughter to the emperor's eldest son. In this passage, Tamora suggests to Saturninus the temporary concealment of this dishonor (the cover-up) in order to preserve the stability of a recently established government, while at the same time capturing the emperor's complicity for the architecture of his revenge³. Later, Tamora's council, which fuels the discord between Titus and Saturninus, will determine the death of one at the hands of the other and the death of Saturninus at the hands of Lucius, motivated to avenge his murdered father.

When Aaron, Tamora's lover, in order to prevent conflict between the brothers Chiron and Demetrius, his beloved's sons, advises them to carry out the rape of Lavinia, Titus' daughter⁴, this advice not only causes harm to Lavinia (sexual violence and mutilation) but also promotes the murder of Chiron and Demetrius by Titus' act of revenge. Similarly, when Tamora advises her children to commit perversity against Lavinia so that they can avenge the son killed by Titus⁵, the act will mark the three of them (Tamora, Chiron and Demetrius) with Titus' vengeance by murdering them.

At the end of the play, Aaron, having had the life of his newborn son between him and Tamora (still married to Saturninus) threatened by Lucius, confesses his advice to Demetrius and Chiron⁶ and, in the end, becomes a victim of that advice and is condemned to die. It should be noted that, even though the Moor Aaron doesn't regret any of his acts of vengeful fury, Shakespeare's way of bringing the tragedy to a close is to put up a barrier that blocks the spread of evil: the preservation of the life of a child between Aaron and Tamora. Interestingly, the tragic scene returns to its initial stage at this point: Titus' decision to kill Tamora's son initiates a series of damages caused by plans for revenge; Lucius' decision to preserve Tamora's son reveals the wickedness and imposes the beginning of a course correction by punishing the guilty parties - at the end of the play, the opposite choice that Lucius made in relation to his father Titus was illustrated.

This question of the murder of children becomes even more complex when we consider Titus' action in taking the life of his own daughter Lavinia. Emma Smith (2014) re-presents the question by suspending the possible interpretations already put forward by Shakespearean critics: does Titus commit a merciful murder to spare his daughter from suffering? Is it possible to distrust Titus' authority with his brutal gesture in taking his

² "Then, madam, stand resolved; but hope withal [...] To quit these bloody wrongs upon her foes" (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p.140)

³ "My lord, be ruled by me, be won at last; [...] Kneel in the streets and beg for grace in vain" (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p.144)

⁴ "For shame, be friends, and join for that you jar: [...] And revel in Lavinia's treasury." (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p.145)

⁵ "Hadst thou in person ne'er offended me, [...] The worse to her, the better loved of me" (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p. 147-148)

⁶ "Indeed, I was their tutor to instruct them: [...] And for my tudings gave me twenty kisses." (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p.160-161)

daughter's life? Or is his daughter Lavinia an allegory of Rome's own political body, violated, mutilated and with no chance of survival due to the damage it has already suffered? First of all, it's important to state that the shock of the scene of the father murdering his daughter to spare her the suffering of violence and the dishonor of defloration does not originate in the Shakespearean play. The theme had already been dealt with, for example, by Geoffrey Chaucer (2021), specifically in *The Physician's Tale*, contained in the work *Canterbury Tales*. It is the brutal form that is most striking in the play *Titus Andronicus*, not least because the forced silencing by Lavinia's previously mutilated tongue and the absence of any description of the victim's reaction lead us to assume that Titus' abrupt act reflects a unilateral decision⁷.

In the midst of these questions, it can be seen that although, from the Roman perspective, the representative of the Goths Tamora or the Moors Aaron are described as uncivilized, the acts of savagery promoted by Titus himself - such as murdering the son of a woman who had already been captured or murdering his own son Mutius for having been an accomplice in Lavinia's escape with Bassianus and for blocking his path - point to the composition of the protagonist as a character characterized by his brutal and self-centred nature.

In *Hamlet*, the ghost of Hamlet's father advises his son to take revenge on his uncle Claudius, who was responsible for poisoning him while he slept in the garden⁸. As a mirror of this same scene, Claudius advises Laertes, son of the councillor Polonius, to avenge his father's murder against Prince Hamlet⁹. The union of these two scenes results in one of the bloodiest catastrophes in Shakespeare's works, with four bodies exposed on stage (Gertrude, Claudius, Laertes and Hamlet) and the news of two more executions confirmed by the Norwegian ambassador (Guildenstern and Rosencrantz) in the last moment of the play, the second scene of the fifth act. Claudius, who advises Laertes, has his life taken, along with his queen, who unknowingly drinks from the cup of poison prepared by the same king and husband for Prince Hamlet. Laertes and Hamlet, mutually advised, murder each other in a duel previously orchestrated for revenge. Finally, the ghost of King Hamlet, who advised the prince and his son, irretrievably loses the chance of any consanguineous link in descent to the throne with the rise of the foreigner Fortimbrás in his right to claim the kingdom.

Although there has been a long discussion in the critical fortune on the play *Hamlet* about the delays in carrying out the revenge against Uncle Claudius - in which there is a psychoanalytic explanation, as in studies by Freud (1996) and Jones (1970), and another based on seeking explanations in the historical or structural contexts of the play, as in Bloom (2004) and Heliadora (2004) - there have been few moments when King Claudius' own delays in carrying out the murder of his stepson have been commented on. One of these few moments can be found in Frye's (1992) critique, when he suggests an organic correspondence in the play's structure between Prince Hamlet's delays in taking revenge on his uncle and his uncle's delays in executing his nephew.

Specifically, in the scene in which Claudius advises Laertes to take revenge, the reasons for the delay are more similar to those stated in the play *Titus Andronicus*, when Tamora advises Saturninus to postpone revenge. In other words, Shakespeare had already practiced the expedient of delaying executive power at hand for the justification of preserving the stability of a newly installed power on the throne, in a more simplified form - the scene of these two pieces of advice (from Tamora to Saturninus and from Claudius to Laertes) are equivalent in this sense and enhance the derivation of a catastrophe.

With *Othello*, Shakespeare creates a complex character who is more elaborate in the act of giving advice: Iago. Considering Bradley's (2009) interpretation of Iago, the revenge aroused against Othello because he promoted Cassio to lieutenant becomes the starting point for the manifestation of the villain's character, whose foundations are his feeling of superiority over others, contempt for his fellow man and susceptibility to anything that affects his vanity. By retaining a feeling of bitterness towards Othello because of his preference for Cassio, Iago devises a plan of revenge in which his vanity, combined with his eagerness to satisfy his sense of power, is resolved in his ability to entangle people and maneuver them as if they were his characters. In the view of the aforementioned theorist, Iago's ability to control his pawns during the execution of his plan is due to his prodigious ability for self-control and dissimulation. As a result, the advice Iago gives actually ends up being a trap for those he advises, as he exercises his villainy and intellectual superiority out of all proportion to the protagonist Othello and the other characters in the play.

Such moments in the play are varied and reveal the effort and pleasure that the villain Iago takes in carrying them out. As an illustration, certain passages can be listed. Iago, claiming social incompatibility in a union

⁷ Emma Smith (2014) comments on some of the acting choices in the scene where Lavinia tries to escape her father Titus' brutal act of murdering her - which further reinforces Titus' self-centered and intolerant attitude.

⁸ "Ay, that incestuous, that adulterate beast, [...] Adieu, adieu, adieu! remember me." (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p.678).

⁹ "No place, indeed, should bite sanctuarize; [...] Requite him for your father." (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p.704)

between a wandering barbarian and a refined Venetian, advises Rodrigo (in love with Desdemona) to gather money and provide it to separate Othello from Desdemona with expensive gifts to woo her¹⁰. As a result, Iago deceives Rodrigo and takes his resources. At another point, Iago advises Cassio to seek out Desdemona in order to influence Othello's temper, upset by the lieutenant's night of excesses and drunkenness that he has elected¹¹ - with this, Iago has stimulated an opening for a disguised interpretation of an erotic-affective rapprochement between the two, commenting on it, disguised and full of subterfuge, to Othello.

In another situation, Iago advises Othello to beware of jealousy¹² and suggests that Othello look at Cassio without jealousy in relation to his closeness to Desdemona¹³ while, at the same time, very carefully stating that Desdemona has used pretense before in order to have a loving relationship with Othello himself¹⁴. In this case, Iago, through this conversation, manages to plant the feeling of jealousy in Othello's head. From that moment on, Iago himself will create future situations to feed Othello's suspicions. Later, Iago advises Rodrigo to murder Cassio in order to force Othello and Desdemona to remain in the city, instead of leaving for Mauritania, since Cassio's position (to replace Othello) would be vacant, and the Moor would have no choice but to remain in his post¹⁵. Behind this advice, Iago plans the murder of Cassio and Rodrigo at the same time. The execution of the former would avoid the possibility of confronting Iago's version with Othello about Cassio's involvement with Desdemona; the execution of the latter would eliminate Rodrigo's demand for the gold already given to Iago himself in order to help the procession to Desdemona. Finally, all of Iago's advice disguises a malice against the one he is advising, and such machinations turn against the advisor himself when Othello's real intentions are revealed to him through Emilia, the villain's wife. By the time this happens, however, the damage has already been done: Cassio escapes wounded from Rodrigo's assassination attempt, and Iago kills Rodrigo in order to annihilate one of the problems (that of the collection of invested funds); Othello, out of jealousy, strangles his wife Desdemona, and when Emilia reveals (too late) to Othello her husband's machinations, Iago fatally stabs his own wife and flees, but ends up being arrested. Finally, Othello, regretting his brutal act against Desdemona, commits suicide by driving a dagger into his throat.

In *Macbeth*, there is a council based on justice for revenge that will lead to catastrophe at the end of the play. Banquo, mortally wounded, advises his son Fleance to escape so as not to be killed and to be able to avenge him in the future¹⁶. Fleance, by fleeing, saves himself, preserving his own life; however, this act, which seems to be derived from a personal choice, reserves the possibility already foreseen for Macbeth's future tragedy as the fulfillment of the prophecy of the three witch sisters¹⁷; in other words, the necessary evil of the truth (even if ambiguous) spoken by the witches not only vindicates the final words of Banquo, Fleance's father, but also makes his death inevitable. In this sense, Fleance's father's advice, his murder at Macbeth's behest and Fleance's revenge appear as pieces of an evil that has already been prophesied and in which the actors play with their own lives, drawn into an abyss that cannot be circumvented.

In *Timon of Athens*, the tragic hero is a powerless, vulnerable figure, driven mad and rejected by excessive debt. As an element despised by Athenian society, which encouraged his prodigality until he became miserable and marginalized, Timon tries to take revenge on Athens' social order by advising the underprivileged to wreak havoc on it¹⁸. In this passage, as an illustration, Timon advises debtors to slit their creditors' throats and servants to steal from their masters (like legitimate plunder). At another point, even though Timon has found gold - which would make it easier for him to reintegrate into the Athenian social body - his misanthropy and thirst for revenge do not cease: he advises Alcebiades' mistresses to spread diseases in order to infect the citizens with their sex, providing them with part of the gold found¹⁹. In an even later passage, Timon offers gold to thieves and advises them to steal as is the nature of beings and the logic of social organization - one of the bandits gives up the profession after hearing so much evil uttered from Timon's mouth²⁰. As Timon's advice is given to his interlocutors, his awareness of the unjust standards of Athenian society grows more and more until his feelings

¹⁰ "It is merely a lust of the blood and a permission [...] thy joy than to be drown'd and go without her." (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p.825)

¹¹ "You or any man living may be drunk at a time [...] shall grow stronger than it was before." (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p.832)

¹² "O, beware, my lord, of jealousy; [...] Who dotes, yet doubts, suspects, yet strongly loves!" (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p.836)

¹³ "I am glad of it; for now I shall have reason [...] Is - not to leave undone, but keep unknown." (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p.836)

¹⁴ "She did deceive her father, marrying you; [...] She loved them most." (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p.836)

¹⁵ "O, no; he goes into Mauritania, and takes away [...] time, and the night grows to waste: about it." (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p.848-849)

¹⁶ "O, treachery! - Fly, good Fleance, fly, fly, fly! / Thou mayst revenge. - O slave!" (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p.870)

¹⁷ "All hail, Macbeth, that shalt be king hereafter!" (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p.859); "Thou [Banquo] shalt get kings, though thou be none: / So, all hail, Macbeth and Banquo!" (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p.860)

¹⁸ "Let me look back upon thee. O thou wall, [...] Amen." (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p.1023-1024).

¹⁹ "Consumptions sow [...] More whore, more mischief first; I've given you earnest." (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p.1026)

²⁰ "Nor on the beasts themselves, the birds, and fishes; [...] I'll believe him as an enemy, and give over my trade." (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p.1029)

turn into a generalized misanthropy - which increases his bitterness at existing in this deplorable condition of being a human. Therefore, Timon's last speech suggests the self-destruction of men (suicide by hanging from a tree); after that, the record that can be found of Timon is an inscription on his tombstone in which he expresses both his self-despise for his vile nature and his hatred for the rest of human beings²¹.

3. Advice that aims to benefit, but harms

In this group of advice, Shakespeare makes it clear that the emotional atmosphere (such as kindness or love) or even the intellectual construction (cunning, knowledge and revenge itself) are overcome by chance. Affection doesn't guarantee the stability of the relationship - and advice, in this case too, is disposable - since the randomness of events disrupts the plans for a future of plenitude between the lovers (the case of the undelivered letter in *Romeo and Juliet* comes to mind here). Initially sincere (or even naïve) advice can incite stratagems that rival two poles based on a situation that surprises everyone. In *Hamlet*, for example, at the same time as Claudius advises Hamlet to stay, the then king makes it possible for the prince to encounter an unusual (and supernatural) situation: the appearance of Hamlet's father's ghost calling for revenge. In the same way that the stratagems of revenge on one side (Hamlet) and the other (Claudius) became the consequences of an inaugural eventuality, chance itself can also mean that plans can be undone without any logical reasons - because chance surpasses foresight and human intellectual capacity. Man's own understanding of the actions that surround him can be the result of some kind of randomness (which causes collateral damage), given the multiplicity of possible interpretations. In the play *Antony and Cleopatra*, for example, Mark Antony's advice for Octavia's return to Rome, initially thought by Antony to preserve his own in view of the brevity of the conflict, is understood by Caesar as a serious political decision that hurts diplomacy, heightens tensions and makes war between the two inevitable. Similarly, in *Coriolanus*, Volumnia and Virgilia's advice not to attack Rome is based on an interpretation that is far removed from the real and tragic consequences for Coriolanus - diametrically opposed to the Volscians' understanding that giving up the attack was considered an act of treason condemnable to death.

In *Romeo and Juliet*, Benvolio advises Romeo to get a new infection of passion, i.e. to forget Rosalinda and go to the Capulet family party in order to be enchanted by other beauties²². As a result, at the party, Romeo falls in love with one of the members of the family that rivals his own, Juliet - which will fuel the two lovers' conflict in relation to the determinations of the families. Friar Lawrence advises that Romeo and Juliet be united, because he believes that this loving feeling will dispel the hatred between the families²³ - this will be the stimulus for the development of the future tragedy of the families with the suicide of the young people. At another point, even though Romeo has killed Teobaldo, Juliet's cousin, and has been banished from the city, Friar Lawrence, without realizing how the catastrophe is gradually eating away at the Montecchio and Capulet families, insists on preserving the couple's love, saying that exile is a kind of blessing because it allows Romeo to strategically plan his return to Juliet²⁴. In a later passage, Friar Lawrence secures a drug that simulates death, advises Juliet to take it to avoid marriage to Paris and claims to pass on a letter to Romeo, arranging the simulation with him²⁵; however, chance would win out and tragedy would prevail, as the bearer of the letter would not be able to fulfill the plan to deliver it to Romeo, and he, in turn, believing that Juliet was really dead, would end up taking his own life. As a result, Juliet, waking up from the strong sleeping pill, would see her beloved dead and decide to take her own life. Finally, the friar's advice led to murders and suicides - the moral crisis would also be one of the negative consequences for the counselor himself. It's interesting to note how Shakespeare observes the inability of the religious institution (personified in one of its representatives) to provide a better destiny (a destiny of blessings) based on its intentions and teachings - for the playwright, chance crushes man, regardless of his will or any previous orientation²⁶.

²¹ "Here lies a wretched corse, of wretched soul bereft: [...] Pass by, and curse thy fill; but pass, and stay not here thy gait." (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p.1034). Unlike Dante Alighieri (2003), who points to incontinent squandering as a sin with a punishment equivalent to suicide in Hell, Shakespeare explored this theme not in order to judge the individual for their lack of control, but used the vice to broaden the focus of the lens to the relationships of vain vanity and ingratitude that drive men and their associations with money.

²² "Tut, man, one fire burns out another's burning, [...] And the rank poison of the old will die." (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p.248); "At this same ancient feast of Capulet's [...] And I will make thee think thy swan a crow." (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p.249)

²³ "For this alliance may so happy prove, / To turn your household's rancour to pure love." (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p.257)

²⁴ "What, rouse thee, man! thy Juliet is alive, [...] Than thou went'st forth in lametation. -" (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p.266)

²⁵ "Hold, daughter: I do spy a kind of hope, [...] And, if thou darest, I'll give thee remedy." (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p.270); "In the mean time, against thou shalt [...] Abate thy valour in the acting it." (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p.270)

²⁶ Another form of interpretation based on the idea of counseling was brought up by Barbara Heliodora (2016) in relation to William Shakespeare's play *Romeo and Juliet*. According to Heliodora, while the tradition of the story that gave rise to the Shakespearean play *Romeo and Juliet* - essentially the text written by Arthur Brooke - sought to advise young people to obey their parents and not listen to prostitutes and friars, the text recreated by Shakespeare reconfigures the direction of the advice: the playwright condemns the old feuds between families stimulated by parents and reveals to the audience how such conflicts lead to environments prone to tragedy.

In *Hamlet*, King Claudius advises his step-nephew and prince Hamlet not to mourn too long and to stay in Elsinore instead of leaving for Wittenberg²⁷. This stay will allow the prince to discover the fratricide against the former king and his father carried out by Claudius, and because of this fact and Hamlet's self-confidence in taking revenge, a series of sufferings and deaths will befall the characters in the play, not excluding the counselor and the counseled.

As well as Polonius advising King Claudius to let his son Laertes leave for France²⁸, as a reflex scene and immediately after the king-uncle's advice to the prince-nephew, there is the moment when Polonius advises his son Laertes about his return trip to France²⁹. By inducing the estrangement of the only male child in the family, the same advice given by Polonius will leave him more vulnerable and susceptible to the attacks of Prince Hamlet, which will result, in one of its maximum forms of intemperance, in the murder of the kingdom's counselor and father of Laertes. In other words, the lack of protection from her older brother makes Ophelia an easy target for Hamlet's anger or sarcasm, and later, because of the shock of her father's death (murdered) and her older brother's lack of consolation (still in France), Ophelia's madness and subsequent suicide are facilitated.

At another point, with a little more tact than their father, Laertes advises Ophelia to preserve her honor (virginity) in relation to Hamlet's youthful desires, making her see that a prince's desire for marriage is independent of his personal desire and is driven by the interests of the kingdom³⁰. In a more direct and brusque manner, Polonius advises Ophelia to stay away from Hamlet - fearing that this closeness could conspire against her daughter's virginity - and to treat him with indifference in order to value more the honor of a presence that does not tend towards the prince's erotic-affective interests³¹. As a result of Ophelia's attitude, Hamlet, offended and in the midst of his revenge plan, feigns madness and takes advantage of this stratagem to morally attack Ophelia; Polonius, in his attempt to use his daughter to seek a greater position in the kingdom, states the hypothesis that Hamlet's madness is the result of his love for Ophelia and will use his own daughter as bait to prove his interpretation - which will cause Ophelia even more suffering; finally, the councillor Polonius, in his obstinacy in trying to associate the discovery of the reason for Hamlet's madness with some way of gaining prestige with the crown, stands behind the tapestry and is shot dead by Hamlet. As a corresponding scene, Hamlet advises his mother and queen Gertrude not to have any more sexual relations with King Claudius³². Such a recommendation will further reinforce Claudius' need to eliminate Prince Hamlet and, consequently, so does the king with a well thought out plan together with Laertes. However, the result of this stratagem would be four corpses in the final scene of the play: Hamlet, Laertes, Claudius and Gertrude.

In *Antony and Cleopatra*, Agrippa advises the marriage of Octavia, sister of the triumphant Octavian Caesar, to Antony in order to strengthen political ties³³. The decision to marry, however, would cause future misfortune; for when Antony returns to Egypt and decides to go to war with Caesar, Octavia's return is understood by her brother as a serious diplomatic snub that affects family honor. In another passage, the seer advises Mark Antony to return to Egypt, because he says that his guiding spirit (*daimon*) is weakening with Caesar's³⁴; however, if this advice is heeded, this return is understood as an affront to the political alignment demanded by Caesar. Later in the play, Antony advises Octavia to return to her brother so that she can preserve herself from the conflict³⁵. Caesar sees this separation as too hostile an act on Mark Antony's part and accelerates the future war between the two.

²⁷ "'Tis sweet and commendable in your nature, Hamlet, [...] Our chiefest courtier, cousin, and our son.'" (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p.673). With regard to this passage, Hoisel (1996) compares King Claudius' speech to an ideological persuasive message, a concept coined by Umberto Eco, as it attempts to mask a situation of power that he wishes to preserve despite the dangerous obstinacy of Hamlet's mourning.

²⁸ "He hath, my lord, wrung from me my slow leave [...] I do beseech you, give him leave to go." (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p.672-673).

²⁹ "Yet here, Laertes! aboard, aboard, for shame! [...] Farewell: my blessing season this in thee!" (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p.675-676). In Karnal's (2018) interpretation of this passage, the philosopher concludes that, although the advice is mature and well used, it does not reflect the personality of the advisor himself - there is a considerable dissonance between the old advisor's speech and deed. This comment ties in perfectly with Ophelia's response to her brother's advice about approaching Hamlet. Although she is answering one piece of advice with another and directing it at her brother, this speech immediately precedes Polonius' entrance and the advice given to Laertes before his departure for France, and seems to present Polonius' personality rather than serving Laertes - which provides the scene with a certain comicality with a displaced speech that predicts, immediately afterwards, the presentation of Polonius' character (without it being directly presented): "I shall th'effect of this good lesson keep, [...] And reck not his own rede." (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p.675)

³⁰ "For Hamlet, and the trifling of his favor, [...] Youth to itself rebels, though none else near." (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p.675).

³¹ "Ay, springers to catch woodcocks. I do know, [...] Look to't, I charge you: come your ways." (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p.676).

³² "O, throw away the worse part of it, [...] One word more, good lady." (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p.697).

³³ "To hold you in perpetual amity, [...] By duty ruminated." (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p.933).

³⁴ "Caesar's. [...] But he away, 'tis noble." (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p.934).

³⁵ "Gentle Octavia, [...] Your heart has mind to." (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p.943).

In *Coriolano*, Menenio, Coriolano's friend, advises him to talk to the people in order to get votes³⁶; however, by giving in to his friend's advice, Coriolano is unable to disguise his contempt for the needs of the people; his overly aristocratic and elitist attitude, his unwillingness to recognize himself as a representative of popular appeals or customs - motivated by Coriolano's understanding that such an act would be a debasement of the nobility of the spirit - expose the protagonist's vulnerability to being a bad politician: he is unable, through falsehood or the practice of flattery, to set himself up as the people's godfather.

In another passage, Volumnia, Coriolanus' mother, while praising her son for his quality as a strategist in battle, faking certain actions that led his enemies into error, advises him to expose himself to the public and express humility in front of the Senate³⁷. When Coriolano answers his mother's request, he can't fake it and, with his words, ends up being banished, provoking an atmosphere of aggressive political dispute in the Senate between nobles who defend him and tribunes with greater popular appeal. Finally, Volumnia and Virgilia advise Coriolanus not to attack Rome (even though he has every chance of winning the battle)³⁸. By complying with this request, Coriolanus will be declared a traitor by the Volscians and will then be executed.

4. Overlooked advice

In this group, contempt for the advice of counselors can be motivated by various reasons. In the play *Romeo and Juliet*, for example, the counselor Juliet's stubbornness towards her nanny is based on her belief in the supremacy of feelings as a mark of human dignity (above economic security or material beauty). In the play *Julius Caesar*, the protagonist's temerity also results in contempt for his advisors, but this stubbornness stems from a different motivation: pride. In *Macbeth*, hesitation is synonymous with unpreparedness to act on advice in a timely manner. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, the irrationality of Mark Antony's erotic-love feelings and the dominance of the feminine (represented by Cleopatra) over him mean that his decision-making power is undermined and he disregards more rational and advantageous advice for his actions. In *Timon of Athens*, the protagonist's wastefulness in the play makes it clear that vices win out over advice.

In *Romeo and Juliet*, Juliet's nanny, as a counterpoint to Friar Lawrence in the play, suggests that she marry Count Paris as a form of financial security and because he has physical beauty³⁹. Calling the nanny a monster, Juliet despises the advice and listens to the friar's advice, which will lead to a tragic end for her and her beloved Romeo. It's interesting to note that, as previously mentioned - and which is very evident in this case - the atmosphere of the advice, regardless of the action to be taken by the person being advised, already creates the foreshadowing of tragedy, either by choosing to act on the advice given, or by despising not to follow the advice given. Both the pragmatism of the alliance based on money and the standard of beauty suggested by the nanny and the joining of spirits based on affection and fidelity to feelings recommended by the friar are not answers (they are not choices) that can benefit the characters in the Shakespearean tragedy. Rather, the advice is a sign that catastrophe is looming.

Julius Caesar is the Shakespearean tragedy in which this category of advice occurs the most. In this play, the seer advises Caesar to beware of the end of March⁴⁰; Julius Caesar disregards this advice and does not realize that this would be the time of his future assassination. Calpurnia, Caesar's wife, advises her husband not to leave the house because she has had a nightmare about him⁴¹, but Decius (one of the conspirators of the criminal act against Caesar) convinces him not to take the advice seriously and says that the Senate will grant him the crown; rejecting the advice, Caesar goes directly to the Senate, the place of his assassination. Artemidorus advises Caesar to read the letter before he enters the Senate (in which he warns of conspiracy)⁴²; Caesar ignores the request, and this would be the last sign that could prevent the assassination in the Senate. The poet advises Cassius and Brutus not to stir up conflict like generals between generals⁴³; they ignore the poet's advice and demean him as an idiot - conflict therefore becomes inevitable.

In *Macbeth*, the messenger advises Lady Macduff and her son to flee for fear of their lives⁴⁴, however, for lack of immediate action to escape, assassins arrive soon after, find Lady Macduff and her son and kill them.

³⁶ "It then remains [...] Your honor with your form." (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p.979).

³⁷ "If it be honor in thy wars to seem [...] As thou hast power and person." (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p.988).

³⁸ "Should we be silent and not speak, our raiment [...] And then I'll speak a little." (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p.1002-1003).

³⁹ "Faith, here it is. Romeo [...] As living here, and you no use of him." (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p.269).

⁴⁰ "Beware the ides of March." (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p.583).

⁴¹ "Alas, my lord [...] Let me, upon my knee, prevail in this." (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p.592).

⁴² "O Caesar, read mine first; for mine's a suit [...] Delay not, Caesar; read it instantly." (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p.594).

⁴³ "For shame, you generals! what do you mean? [...] For I have seen more years, I'm sure, than ye." (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p.603).

⁴⁴ "Bless you, fair dame! I am not to you known, [...] I dare abide no longer." (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p.876).

In *Antony and Cleopatra*, Charmiana, the servant of Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt, advises her to give in more to Antony and not be so possessive of him⁴⁵. Cleopatra, however, refuses the advice, saying that she will lose her beloved. In the future, Cleopatra's influence over Antony will generate an idea of political misalignment with Rome - which will fuel future conflicts with Caesar. At another point, Enobarbus advises Cleopatra not to enter the battlefield so as not to distract Antony⁴⁶; Cleopatra rejects Enobarbus' opinion. So when Cleopatra decides to flee in the middle of the naval battle, Mark Antony runs after her and loses the war humiliatingly. In another passage in the play, Enobarbus advises Antony to attack by land, taking advantage of his advantage and experience in land warfare⁴⁷; Mark Antony disregards his friend's advice, reinforced by Cleopatra - who claimed to have a better maritime fleet than Caesar's -, attacks by sea and loses the war advantage he had.

In *Timon of Athens*, the steward advised Timon, several times and without success, not to squander his riches⁴⁸ and was rebuffed by him on each occasion; from then on, Timon becomes poor because of his debts, rejected by his friends and banished from the city by the Senate because of the crime of excessive indebtedness - unable to honor the commitments made to his creditors.

5. Advice from ambition or vanity

With *Julius Caesar*, Cassius' discourse on the need to demystify a political idol (of hegemonic breadth and dictatorial tendency) seems to have the purpose of giving rise to other agents and social forces, but this defense also hides the envy and selfish interests of a certain circle of individuals (whom Cassius represents) in order to preserve their privileges and to ascend and dominate Rome's political power. In the play *Macbeth*, the cunning and cruelty contained in Lady Macbeth's advice is driven by the ambition to make her husband king; however, not by moral teaching, Lady Macbeth's pretensions pave the way for making her own husband dead. It is important to argue that the catastrophe reserved for the play *Macbeth* does not introduce a moral judgment regarding the condemnation of unbridled cunning or ambition - both good and bad acts and the fate of people (regardless of their character) are enslaved by prophecies that do not consider values such as justice. With the play *Hamlet*, Shakespeare presents Polonius as a counselor who, because of his vanity and self-centered interest, fails to fulfill his main function: to advise. His advice is actually the result of machinations to enable his promotion at court.

In *Julius Caesar*, Cassius advises Brutus to beware of Julius Caesar because of his predisposition to dictatorial action⁴⁹; Cassius actually wants to preserve his status as tribune and feels threatened in his position - such advice will lead Brutus to take part in the conspiracy to kill Caesar and, later, Brutus himself will be affected by a moral crisis and political persecution that will result in his suicide.

In *Macbeth*, Lady Macbeth advises the murder of Duncan, King of Scotland, to her husband so that he will be king according to the witches' prophecy⁵⁰. Although the same Lady Macbeth carried out the action because of her husband's hesitation, she also advises Macbeth to smear the vigilant soldiers with blood to incriminate them and throw off the real authorship of the regicide⁵¹. Such advice places Macbeth in the logic of the witches' ambiguous prophecies which, in the end, demanded his own elimination.

In *Hamlet*, Polonius' advice tries to reflect the erudition of his education as a vanity maneuver in the face of the dialogue with royalty in order to explain the reasons for the prince's madness⁵²; however, such attempts at intellectual demonstration interrupt an effective reflection on Hamlet's behavior. In this way, Polonius' advice, based on ambition, in wanting to marry his daughter to the prince, obscures the real reason for Hamlet's melancholy and delays King Claudius' plans to defend himself against the danger of the prince's conduct threatening the preservation of the crown. Furthermore, Polonius' explanations, by distorting the reasons for Hamlet's (disguised) madness, become another component in facilitating the play's tragic sequence.

6. Sarcastic advice

The Shakespearean tragic plays that use sarcasm as advice, *King Lear* and *Hamlet*, have in common the relationship between the act of mockery and madness. In *King Lear*, it is important to note how the figure of the court jester is close to the madman, as he disrupts the parameters of social behavior through his words and

⁴⁵ "Madam, methinks, if you did love him dearly [...] But here comes Antony." (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p.927).

⁴⁶ "Your presence needs must puzzle Antony; [...] Manage this war." (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p.945).

⁴⁷ "Your ships are not well mann'd, - [...] From firm security." (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p.945).

⁴⁸ "O my good lord, [...] To pay your present debts." (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p.1016).

⁴⁹ "Why, man, he doth bstride the narrow world [...] As easily as a king." (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p.584).

⁵⁰ "O, never [...] Give solely Sovereign sway and masterdom." (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p.862).

⁵¹ "They must lie there: go carry them, and smear / The sleepy grooms with blood." (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p.865).

⁵² "This business is well ended. - [...] Within the center." (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p.682-683).

gestures. Of course, in the Shakespearean universe, this approach is not gratuitous. As noted by Aíla Oliveira Gomes (2000), as the court jester mocks the ruined king, accelerating Lear's madness, he becomes more and more a kind of caricature of the monarch's darker conscience. In the play *Hamlet*, the prince's feigned madness places him in a condition very close to that of a court jester, since he has the advantage of being able to make acid criticisms and ironies of other characters without putting himself at serious risk. Furthermore, Prince Hamlet's offensive reaction is one of the components influencing Ophelia's madness. In a similar way to what happens with the consequences of the attitudes and speeches of the court jester in *King Lear*, which fuel the monarch's madness, in *Hamlet*, the prince, with his theatricalized madness and mirroring of the possible behaviour of the old court jester from his childhood (Yorick), stimulates the disturbance of Ophelia's conscience.

In *King Lear*, every time the court jester advises the monarch, bitter truths are produced that further erode Lear's former monarchical status, causing the king to become mentally unstable. The court jester's sarcasm is directed at the king's naive and incoherent act of dividing his assets between his daughters in such a way as to leave him without sufficient resources (in a state of penury) and a slave to the whims of others⁵³. In these moments, the council is yet another way of punishing the king for his stupid or naive actions in sharing his resources and power - which led to the loss of his sovereignty.

In *Hamlet*, Hamlet advises Polonius as a way of mocking the elderly counselor and ridiculing his position, while at the same time, pretending to be mad, he provides false clues as to the reason for his madness⁵⁴. These clues will stimulate an obsession in the counselor himself to want to prove his hypothesis that the prince has gone mad out of love for Ophelia - which, in the future, will leave the counselor blind and vulnerable enough to be murdered behind the curtain when he was spying on Hamlet in an attempt to make his interpretation stick. Hamlet also advises Ophelia to go to a nunnery⁵⁵; his aggressive, sarcastic and rude stance contributes to the development of Ophelia's deviant behavior, leading her further and further into madness.

7. Final considerations

The function of advice in Shakespeare's tragedies transcends the mere offer of guidance, revealing itself as an element that intensifies conflict and deepens the disintegration of the social and personal order. Instead of providing a way to resolve conflicts and preserve values, the advice amplifies the internal and external crisis of the characters, exacerbating the unfolding of tragic destiny. The presence and impact of the recommendations not only fail to establish a posture of caution that could prevent the impending calamity, but paradoxically intensify the inevitability of ruin, demonstrating the inability of human interventions to modify the predestined tragic course. In this way, advice in Shakespearean tragedies emerges not as an instrument of rescue, but as an agent that, contrary to expectations, accelerates the progress of the characters towards their tragic destiny.

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⁵³ "If I gave them all my living, I'd keep my cox- [...] daughters." (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p.892). / "Nay, he reserved a blanket, else we had been all shamed." (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p.905).

⁵⁴ "Let her not walk i' th' sun: conception is a bless- [...] friend, look to't." (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p.683).

⁵⁵ "Get thee to a nunnery: why wouldst thou be a [...] ways to a nunnery. Where's your father?" (SHAKESPEARE, 2015, p.689).

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