

Titus Andronicus: The State of Play (Group 1)

Seminar Leader: Dr Farah Karim-Cooper, Shakespeare's Globe

Samantha Dressel, University of Rochester

"Witness These Crimson Lines": Judicial Spectacle in *Titus Andronicus*

Daniel Kane describes *Titus Andronicus* as "an anti-narrative, an extended roar, an anticipation of Artaud's Theater of Cruelty." Kane and many others see the violence and spectacle in *Titus* as unreadable. For Kane, this is a positive – plot can dissolve into spectacle, creating a profound and uncomfortable chaos into which the audience is drawn. Others have viewed the chaotic spectacle in a less positive light.

For me, however, spectacle serves as an alternative vehicle for meaning, as opposed to a destroyer of meaning. Rather than an incoherent rant, I read Titus as a self-conscious rhetorician who is highly invested in communicating the workings of and validation for his revenge. I suggest that throughout the play, Titus stages a trial for himself, displaying physical evidence along with verbal narrative to support his position. His repeated cry to "Witness" calls upon both other characters and the audience watching the play, to judge Titus and his actions, no matter how gruesome, with equity. I see Titus's constant appeal of rightfulness as pivotal to the play, as it serves to give coherence to Titus's spectacle and to differentiate his approach to revenge from that of Tamora, who dies ignominiously while Titus is posthumously praised.

Mitchell Macrae, University of Oregon

"Lavinia, shall I read?": Citation and Accusation in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*

This paper argues that Shakespeare builds upon Thomas Kyd's thematizing of revenge as a form of violent accusation, a theatrical (re)enactment of a trauma which cannot be returned to the perpetrator through language alone. But where Kyd utilizes theatrical spectacle--the play-within-the-play--as a medium for 'performance violence,' Shakespeare emphasizes a citational mode of accusation and retribution. In Shakespeare's play, Lavinia is denied speech and writing, having her tongue and hands lopped away, and in her silence she resorts to citation. Rather than being a text herself (from which Titus initially hopes to "wrest an alphabet") or being relegated to the role of the 'handmaiden of revenge,' she becomes a *textual authority*, using her wounded stumps to turn to the pages in her nephew's copy of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, citing Philomel's rape in order to initiate an accusation and recommend a course of Procnean retribution. In

light of our own radical proliferation of possible venues for violent spectacle (whether it be streamed, uploaded, or broadcasted), it is important that we question the implications of a play like *Titus Andronicus*, which explores the escalation of violence which occurs when words fail or voices are silenced.

Lizz Angello, University of South Florida

'In/di/gestion: On South Park, Shakespeare, and Subjectivity'

Titus Andronicus is a play about limits and their erasure, about the porousness, to borrow from American author David Foster Wallace, of certain borders. It recognizes and at times fervently upholds the fictive boundaries that we create to define our selves, our families, and our societies, all the while emptying the entire concept of stability and meaning. It is Theatre of the Absurd. To that end, my paper will take up the most absurd, most unstable, most osmotic version of the play: "Scott Tenorman Must Die," a 2001 episode of the animated television series, South Park. The episode asks a number of deeply uncomfortable and very possibly unanswerable questions about the limits of comedy, citation, consumption, performance, and agency, mimicking its Shakespearean and Senecan forebears. "Scott Tenorman Must Die" is a citation to end all citations, the turducken of revenge tragedies: it stumbles under its own grotesque weight, laden as it is with a Titus that is stuffed with a Thyestes that is overflowing with Ovid and Virgil. In this brief study, I hope to provide a framework for reading the bizarreness of the South Park episode that depends wholly on the strategic (and strategically differentiated) manner in which the show's creators deploy their source materials.

Larry Bonds, McMurry University

'Revenge Tragedy, *Punch and Judy*, and Julie Taymor's Christian Vision: The Use of Max Lucado's *You're Special* in *Titus*'

In her 1999 film adaptation of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, Julie Taymor explores the implications of the cycles of attack and revenge that constitute the play's action. In the play and the film, the world of the Roman Empire teeters on the edge of two major, roughly coeval transformations: Successful invasions of the Empire by Germanic tribes from northern Europe (exemplified by the Goths in the film and the play) and Christianization. Taylor does not, however, present merely the cycle of attack and revenge that she found in Shakespeare's play. As a solution to the problem of the

revenge cycle, Taymor offers Titus, members of his family, and the film's audience glimpses of a world in which Christian *agape* rather than revenge might be embraced. An important part of the development of this vision of *agape* revolves around the action when young Lucius goes to a toy shop and obtains two prosthetic hands to replace the hands that Chiron and Demetrius cut off young Lucius's Aunt Lavinia when Tamora's sons rape her and cut her tongue out. This loving action by young Lucius is not in the play, but only in the film. This part of the film takes its inspiration from theologian Max Lucado's children's book, *You're Special*. My paper shows how this scene and another are inspired by Lucado's book and argues that two scenes help Taymor develop her message that Christian *agape* is a preferable alternative to the cycle of attack and revenge.

The first scene that is especially relevant to Taymor's use of Lucado's *You're Special* shows the return of the heads of two of Titus's sons and of Titus's own amputated hand, which are "in scorn to thee sent back" (3.1.237). In the film, these body parts are returned to Titus in a performance by a traveling show that is strikingly similar to the way in which *Punch and Judy* shows in the UK were staged in the 20th Century. *Punch and Judy* performances, to the great delight of audiences to this day, present what is essentially revenge comedy.

The second scene, where Taymor explicitly quotes visually from Lucado's *You're Special*, shows young Lucius entering the toy shop to get the prosthetic hands for his Aunt Lavinia. In *You're Special*, the people of the story are wooden puppet-and-toy-like creatures known as "Wemmicks." The Wemmicks, have been carved by a maker called Eli and live in a perpetual cycle of attack and revenge in which they give each other star stickers for good behaviors and dot stickers for bad. The protagonist of the story, a puppet named Punchinello (whose name has been shortened in the UK to *Punch* and which is, by the way, an Anglicized version of *Punchinella*, the name of the violent source character from 16th Century Italian *commedia dell'arte*), spends most of his time receiving dots from better looking and performing Wemmicks till he meets a happy Wemmick without stars or dots named Lucia. Lucia (whose name is the feminine form of *Lucius*) tells Punchinello about Eli, who unconditionally loves all Wemmicks. Lucia encourages Punchinello to go see Eli. Punchinello goes to Eli in his workshop, loses some of his dots, and feels much better. In *Titus* Taymor explicitly quotes visually the scene in Eli's workshop from *You're Special* and shows young Lucius behaving in an *agape*-like manner to his aunt Lavinia.

It seems probable that Taymor's connection to Lucado's *You're Special* stems from the fact that both Martinez and Taymor have worked for Disney. Taymor, besides her Shakespearean films of *Titus* and *The Tempest*, is famous for directing the Broadway musical version of Disney's *The Lion King*. The illustrator of Lucado's *You're Special* is Sergio Martinez, who has done illustrative work for Disney. . Indeed, the influence of Taymor's *Lion King* stage work is also evident in the film's animalistic costumes that Chiron and Demetrius wear when they disguise themselves as Rape and Murder to torment Titus.

As far as I know, this paper is the first to point out and analyze the influence of Lucado's *You're Special* on Taymor's *Titus*.

David Currell, American University of Beirut
'Titus Andronicus as "Classic," or Why Does Titus Give Pleasure?'

Titus Andronicus is now "major" Shakespeare (witness our seminar!). Though its trajectory from the periphery of the Shakespearean and world literary canons is still playing out, the last long half-century of scholarship and performance invites a consideration of how this early modern play (popular in its day, but not then applauded for conformity to "classical" criteria) became a classic in modernity.

Such a framing appears to set up a historicization of how *Titus's* cultural relevance and theatrical vitality were *invented* (i.e. both discovered and produced). I survey some work along these lines, generally preferring accounts that find turning point(s) in theatre history than in History. My principal aim, however, is to add some more formalist explorations, using aspects of the rubric "classic" that have obvious thematic resonance within *Titus*: the power of catharsis and the power of allusion.

On catharsis: Can we imagine A.D. Nuttall's apparatus for addressing the question "Why does tragedy give pleasure?" (Aristotelian purgation, the "game of death," etc.) applied to *Titus* in place of *Lear*? What does that say about the *Titus* we read today (or about Aristotle-Nuttall!)? On allusion: I want to argue for the influence of *Titus* on Saadallah Wannous' *Al Ightisab* [*The Rape*]. Wannous' cunning handling of Shakespearean sources is usually identified only in later works, but to see *Titus* at work in *Al Ightisab* illustrates the kind of engendering influence that is another sign of *Titus* as "classic."

Curtis Perry, University of Illinois at Urbana
'Titus, NDS, and the Intertextual Copia of Rome'

In Geoffrey Bullough's monumental, 8-volume anthology *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare* [NDS], *Titus Andronicus* was part of Vol. 6—"other classical plays", along with *Troilus and Cressida*, *Timon of Athens*, and *Pericles*. For the upcoming NDS reboot, *Titus* has been moved into Volume 5—Roman plays—along with *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *Coriolanus*. I am currently editing this volume. Bullough's original placement downplayed the play's seriousness about its Roman setting, in keeping with a then-current orthodoxy that saw the play as juvenile and its allusiveness as scattered and out of control. The premise of the shift, presumably, is that we should treat its investment in Rome instead as being on par with the three Plutarchan tragedies.

But Roman plays, in general, pose special challenges for a project like NDS since they come freighted with all the intertextual copia of Rome (this is something Bullough evidently struggled with in his selection process for the three Plutarchan plays, too). In some ways, because we do not have a controlling source text, *Titus* epitomizes (and maybe even thematizes) this challenge. Thinking about *Titus* as a Roman play in the context of NDS means reassessing some of its famous cruxes: is it set in a particular moment of Roman history or is it synoptic in its idea of Rome? How does one understand its uses of intertexts from Virgil, Ovid, Seneca etc. as relating to its setting? How can one disentangle, say, the play's use of Seneca from its use of non-Roman plays that use Seneca, like *Selimus* or *Lochrine*? Does the likely co-authorship of Peele change the way we assess the play's classicism? My paper will discuss issues pertaining to the challenges, for a project like NDS, that go with thinking about *Titus* as a Roman play.

Sawyer Kemp, University of California, Davis

'Love, Blood, & Rhetoric: Building Emotional Accessibility in *Titus Andronicus*'

In April of 2014, the London *Telegraph* reported, "Globe audience faints at 'grotesquely violent' *Titus Andronicus*" after five audience members passed out in one night of the show's opening week (Furness). By July, the gleeful headline from *The Independent* read "Globe Theatre takes out 100 audience members with its gory *Titus Andronicus*!" The spokesperson for the Globe confirmed that many of the faintings occurred after the bloody—and in this production, five minute long—reveal of the raped and mutilated Lavinia. The spokesman also noted, somewhat curiously, that the "front of house staff are very well trained to look after people." In further interviews the spokesperson points out that fainting among the 'groundlings' (who paid 5£ for standing tickets) isn't uncommon, but this lack of distinction between people fainting from gore and people fainting because they've been standing too long muddies the boundaries between affective reaction and disability¹. In the interviews, the Globe spokesperson jokes that Shakespeare "didn't pull any punches" with *Titus* and warns that it may not be "one for the squeamish," suggesting that the issue is a lack of hardiness in audience members. According to this account, these reactions—sickness, fainting, and discomfort—are a necessary feature of the play and any faithful production of it.

Although the range of reactions may be unintended or incidental, the reporting suggests that they were not unanticipated. Taking Gay MacAuley's configuration of performance—in which performer, spectator, and *space* are the equally important pillars of performance—this paper will expand the space of *Titus* to see how para-performative texts and contexts shape audience experience. If *Titus* would rather generate audience members who self-select based on their gore threshold, how is that negotiated? And what spaces allow for recuperation for those accidental or unintended audience members who miss the memo? Moreover, how do these accrue over time to shape our ideas about *Titus*

¹ For other interviews, see Tobitt, and the Daily Mail Roundup.

Andronicus? This paper will examine three contemporary productions and audience to ask what the *Titus* audience can tell us about *Titus*'s 'State of Play.'

Ralph Alan Cohen, Mary Baldwin College
'*Titus Andronicus* and Theatrical Transgression'

"The eye of man hath not heard,
the ear of man hath not seen,
man's hand is not able to taste,
his tongue to conceive,
nor his heart to report what my dream was."

As we may say of all his plays, Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* is not like his others, and neither is an audience's experience of it. My paper will consider *Titus* as one of the plays of Shakespeare that explores the nature of the theatrical experience and challenges its limits. All Shakespeare's plays are about plays; some, like *The Tempest*, *Hamlet*, and *Henry V*, are explicit about that exploration. Others – *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *King Lear*, and *The Winter's Tale* – are about theatre not because they do or do not mention it but because they test the limits of the theatrical project and in particular challenge the power of an audience to function as part of the enterprise. *Lear* does that trivially (*pace* Dr. Johnson) in the blinding of Gloucester and crucially in the death of Cordelia. *The Winter's Tale* does that structurally and in the revivification of Hermione. *Dream* does that by pushing and altering the nature of invisibility.

What I wish to suggest in my paper is that *Titus Andronicus* transgresses theatrical limits by what it makes visible, repeatedly forcing an audience to see things on stage – amputations, self-mutilation, miscegenation, torture, human pies, and arrows flying in a crowded theatre – that discomfort them not only because of the indecorous matter of those things but also because of their presentation violates of the normal efficiencies of staging. The play thus adds an audience's unconscious awareness of the physical work of putting on a play to their conscious response to the violation of norms in its narrative, and in doing so it doubly risks itself and – in terms of the audience's sensations – doubly succeeds.

Andrea Van Nort, USAF Academy

'Time, Symbol, and Text in *Titus Andronicus*'

The architecture of *Titus Andronicus* reveals the dramatist's interests in not only the decayed civilization of his early readings but also in significantly new dramatic structures, moving beyond the temporally compressed historical approach (the first

tetralogy) toward a more imprecise, apocalyptic interval in time dominated by pure tragedy. Indeed, although considered an ill-formed drama by many, the play marks an irreversible step beyond the tragedies of the early 1590s by strategically transforming structure and representation. Time is conceived symbolically, as are the characters' actions; both mark a dramaturgical movement toward condensed representation on the stage, as opposed to episodic culminations. In tandem, texts drawn from, though transcending, a specific space and time participate in developing this indefinite representation, forcing sylleptic connections with a bygone literary Rome, Titus's declining Rome, and Tamora's post-barbarian Goths.

James Hirsh, Georgia State University
'Soliloquies in *Titus Andronicus*: An Empirical Approach'

In medieval and early Renaissance drama, soliloquies by characters engaged in the fictional action often explicitly acknowledge the presence of playgoers. The convention governing soliloquies radically and decisively changed in the late 1580s and early 1590s. Evidence of audience address in soliloquies by characters engaged in the action became extremely rare in new plays, and evidence that soliloquies represented self-addressed speech exploded. The dramatists most instrumental in the establishment of the new convention were Thomas Kyd, Christopher Marlowe, and Shakespeare. This is not a trivial matter. If a soliloquy had knowingly been addressed by a character to thousands of playgoers, it would have represented the most *public* form of speech possible in the period. The character's purpose in speaking would have been to inform, entertain, persuade, surprise, provoke, dismay, or otherwise influence a large gathering of strangers. In fact, soliloquies represented the most *private* kind of speech possible and depicted *how the character interacts with himself*. In some soliloquies the character attempts to talk himself into a belief or a course of action; in some the character attempts to arouse or to suppress an emotion; many soliloquies depict a character engaged in the fascinating process of self-deception. The very first soliloquy in *Titus Andronicus* contains two unambiguous markers of self-address: "**Titus**, when wert **thou** wont to walk alone . . .?" (1.1.339), and the rest of the play contains many other pieces of evidence of various sorts that soliloquies represented self-addressed speech as a matter of convention. At no point in the play does any character unambiguously acknowledge the presence of playgoers. This paper will explore the implications and ramifications of the operations of the convention of self-addressed speech in the play.

Eon Joo Park, University at Buffalo
'The Enigma of Excess: Anger, Revenge, and *Titus Andronicus*'

This paper proposes that *Titus Andronicus* is actually not centered on or geared toward excessiveness. Unlike a number of critical interpretations about the play's exorbitant gore, I argue that *Titus* is a play that consistently oscillates between the logic of excess and the logic of equilibrium, eventually turning to vengeance to

achieve a semblance of balance. I draw upon Aristotle's concept of anger to situate these different logics. First, I focus on how anger and revenge are related to the notions of honor, dishonor, and slighting in *Titus*. Suggesting anger as a common currency, Shakespeare showcases how both factions – the Andronici and the foreign group of the Goths – are equally influenced by this concept. Also, the play stresses how the emotion of anger can be freely transmitted inside of groups and thus anyone can take up the role of avenger to address slights in their own faction. Second, I examine how the notion of temperance from *Nicomachean Ethics* plays a role in distinguishing the two factions in terms of the logic of vengeance. In *Titus*, only the Andronici abides by the intermediate rule of anger and bases their revenge plot on the law of equilibrium. Consequently, the play contextualizes the dynamics between excess and moderation through the conflict between the two factions. By ending the play with the foundation of new Rome, Shakespeare demonstrates the curative and regenerative power of an intermediate version of anger and vengeance.

Stephen Cohen, Central Connecticut State University

'Eating In or Dining Out: Consuming the Self and the Other in *Titus Andronicus*'

This essay takes up *Titus Andronicus*' status as an outlier among Shakespeare's tragedies and the grotesque violence involved in that status by contextualizing both within a consistent concern of Shakespearean tragedy—the incorporation of otherness—and its predominant metaphor, bodily incorporation through eating. *Titus* explores but ultimately fails to reconcile or resolve the simultaneous danger and necessity of intercultural incorporation through images of, on the one hand, the destructiveness of ravenous devouring and, on the other, an anorexic self-denial of external nutriment that leads to the consumption of the self. It is not the former but the latter that informs the play's most transgressive moment, Tamora's cannibalistic consumption of her sons. Rome's inability to incorporate otherness leads to the play's self-destructive, endocannibalistic climax and to the further feeding of the Andronici's insatiate self-consuming tomb. This same intractable failure haunts Shakespeare's other tragedies of intercultural contact, from *Othello* to *Coriolanus*.