

Titus Andronicus: The State of Play (Group 2)
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“Words more sweet and yet more dangerous”: Parasitic Discourse in *Titus Andronicus*

We highly prize this noble friend, and that,
 This boone Companion, and that Parasite
 Whose smooth tongu'd language euer leuels at
 Those things which doe administer delight:
 But in conclusion, Death's our truest friend,
 Tels us what we must trust to in the end.

— Walter Colman, ‘La dance machabre or Death's duell’, 1632.

This paper compares the language of the Goths in *Titus Andronicus* to the ‘subtle discourse’ associated with the figure of the literary parasite. John Donne described parasitic discourse as ‘smooth as oyl, and soft as any butter’; it is a language that glosses, disguising malicious intent behind ingratiating flattery. ‘If Tamora entreat him, then he will,/ For [she] can smooth and fill his aged ears/ With golden promises’ (IV.iv.96). With the mouths of Aaron, Chiron and Demetrius all symbolically ‘stopped’ so that they may ‘speak no more’ (V.ii.151, 166), is language the most fearful attribute of Tamora and her Goths?

Jennifer Edwards, Royal Holloway, University of London and Shakespeare's Globe
 ‘Speaking for Lavinia: Shakespeare's ‘Speechless Complainer’

Whatever pain achieves, it achieves in part through its unsharability, and it ensures this unsharability through its resistance to language. (Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain*)

Taking Scarry's discussion of the relationship between pain and language as its starting point, this paper explores the limits of expressive capacity in *Titus Andronicus*, a text preoccupied with ‘the need for Lavinia's voice’ (Emily Detmer-Goebel). With Lavinia and Lucrece as sustained test-cases of characters lost in language, I consider what is at stake in the attempt to speak for Lavinia, highlighting the communicative potential of linguistic failure in order to ultimately demonstrate the paradoxical articulacy of Shakespeare's famously dis-/in-articulate subject.

Brian Harries, Concordia University Wisconsin
 ‘Communal Memory Dismembered in *Titus Andronicus*’

The question of Roman identity is one central to *Titus Andronicus* with its diachronic amalgam of institutions and practices from throughout the culture’s history. My paper will explore this question through the lens of communal memory. As opposed to collective memory, which is predicated on community, communal memory, as understood here, works in reverse. It establishes community based on a common past. This community is assembled from potentially disparate individuals, or those without previous contact by establishing common ground or shared experience. I argue that the fluid and contradictory nature of Rome’s identity throughout the play results from misperceptions about a common past. While many of the characters believe that they are engaged in nation-building as a communal enterprise, their differing memories of Rome’s past result in fractured understandings of its present.

John Kunat, Sonoma State

‘I have Done Thy Mother’’: Race and Sex in *Titus Andronicus*’

My paper maps the geographies of race, gender and sexuality in *Titus Andronicus*. Two mixed-race children are mentioned in the play. The first, belongs to Tamora and Aaron, is described by the father himself as “tawny.” In regard to racial distinctions, this word is generally employed in the Renaissance to distinguish lighter skinned “Moors” from their darker compatriots. However, in *Titus* the word is used somewhat differently to describe a child born of a white mother and a black father, or what in more modern times has been called a “mulatto.” However, not all white mothers and black fathers produce a “tawny” child, for Aaron’s fellow Moor, Muliteus, has fathered a white child with a white wife. Aaron tells Chiron and Demetrius that the child is as “fair” as they are, suggesting the mother is a Goth (other verbal clues suggest this as well) and the child looks just like her. In the racial scheme inherited from antiquity, Goths and the Scythians to whom they are related are not simply “white” but instead are what we might call “ur-white” or even “ur-European,” having originated in the northern most regions. For Herodotus and those who followed in his wake, such as Diodorus, Strabo and Pliny, the northernmost peoples were considered analogous racially, not to their fellow Europeans, the Greeks and Romans, but to their fellow barbarians inhabiting Africa. Had Tamora and Aaron’s child been “fair”—or alternatively, had Aaron’s plan to substitute Muliteus’s child for his own succeeded—then an emperor with the blood of two barbarian races would have worn the imperial crown of Rome. This fate is averted by the intervention of Lucius, who foils Aaron’s plot and insures that Rome remains Roman by presumably assuming the emperorship himself. But he cannot achieve this goal on his own. Instead, he must enlist the aid of the Goths, placing himself at the head of their army. Incorporating the ur-white Goths, the new Rome hailed in the play’s concluding scenes is European in a very different way than the Rome for which Titus fought his endless wars. That Rome, like Herodotus’s *Hellas*, was situated in the middle, between barbarian extremities. It was part of Europe but geographically and politically allied with Africa. The new Rome requires reimagining those alliances as frontiers, while also relocating the centuries-long frontier to the North within the formatively racialized borders of the Empire.

Sandra Logan, Michigan State University

‘Strange Bedfellows: Tamora, the Friend/Enemy Distinction, and the Ideal Citizen’

This essay is part of a larger project on Shakespeare’s Foreign Queens: Politics, Drama, and the Alien Within – a project in which I examine Shakespeare’s surprisingly frequent depiction of royal women whose marriage links them to a husband and a realm far from their own, who are aliens in their new nations and alienated from their former homes. History is filled with such women and such marriages, and seldom does such a marriage assure the political alliance and stability between nations that it is meant to. Within Shakespeare’s canon, such women play a range of roles within the complex dynamics of family and state hierarchies, sometimes serving as ideals of monarchical selflessness, sometimes offering resistance to inherent hierarchies while preserving moral idealism, and sometimes assaulting the political and social order at its very core. In every instance, they disrupt what Carl Schmitt defines as the key antimony in the concept of the political: the distinction between friend and enemy. Here, drawing on Aristotle’s notion of the polis and the citizen, and Schmitt’s ideas concerning the friend/enemy distinction and the internal enemy, I consider Tamora’s attempt to navigate through abjection to autonomous authority, as she invokes, claims, and then problematizes the notion of a unified, morally-grounded polis. Through Tamora’s own manipulations of the friend/enemy distinction, I argue, Shakespeare demonstrates that Titus himself must reject his identity as an ideal subject in order to embrace ideal citizenship, and in that sense she enables a potentially positive transformation in Rome.

Michael Neill, University of Auckland (University of Kent)

‘‘Romaine Tragedie’’: The Originality of *Titus Andronicus*’

When Shakespeare’s first tragic experiment appeared as *The Most Lamentable Romaine Tragedie of Titus Andronicus* (1594), its publisher-- like James Burbage when he chose the latinate name ‘Theatre’ for his new playhouse – was staking a particular claim to cultural authority. On the popular stages of Elizabethan London, tragedy was itself a relative novelty – a classical genre that Elizabethan dramatists were busy struggling to re-invent; but here tragedy’s classical credentials were enhanced with the declaration that this was drama of a peculiarly ‘Roman’ kind. Unusually for Shakespeare, the plot that he and Peele devised seems to have been a largely invented one; so it can hardly be a coincidence that Titus should share a name with the playwright remembered as ‘the first that writ any *Roman* tragedy,’ Lucius Livius Andronicus (c. 280/260 – c. 200 BC). *Titus* was amongst the first plays to bring ancient Rome onto the London stage; and if we can judge from the costumes in Henry Peacham’s famous Longleat drawing, the players seem to have been determined to emphasise its ‘Romaine’ pretensions. To sixteenth century eyes, at least, the very ‘form’ (architecture and ornament) of London playhouses resembled ‘Roman work’; and *Titus* capitalises on the structural resemblance between the two-level Elizabethan stage and the triumphal arches familiar from great state occasions to create a peculiarly ‘Roman’ spectacle. But, by drawing the audience into the action of its crowd scenes, the play insists that tis ‘Rome’ is also England; and contemplating the monument of Roman civilization that dominates the tragedy’s opening and closing scenes, it is impossible not recognise in *Titus Andronicus* a

formidable anticipation of Walter Benjamin's famous aphorism: 'There is no document of civilization, which is not at the same time a document of barbarism.'

Vanessa Rapatz, Ball State University

'Some fit or frenzy': Interpreting the Method's in Lavinia's Madness'

In Alex Cox's 2002 film adaptation of Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy*, Vindice carries the skull of his defiled Gloriana around the stage as he uses the prop to ventriloquize his revenge. Making the dead speak in this way adds a morbidly dark comic valence to Vindice's revenge plot as he makes the dead complicit in his vigilante justice. In *Titus Andronicus*, Lavinia's male relatives similarly ventriloquize her ravishment and desire for revenge in their attempts to translate and respond to the crimes all too visibly marked on her body. The advantage of the skull is that it can and will bear any script required of it, whereas Lavinia, still partially embodied on the stage, must silently perform in conjunction with her male relatives' mournful blazons, interpretive readings, and dramatic decrees in response to her ravishment. And therein lies her potential power, a power that exceeds analyzing her as a mere text. As Kim Solga has argued, "a book Lavinia cannot be, despite the earnest, anxious wishes of characters and critics alike, precisely because her damaged body makes a shocking spectacle of ambiguity, miscomprehension, of exegesis gone awry."¹ More than a vengeance prop, Lavinia moves and gestures in ways not always easily comprehended by her on-stage audience. We see this demonstrated when the boy, in a strangely comic scene, flees from her, pleading with Titus, "Help, grandsire, help! My aunt Lavinia / Follows me everywhere, I know not why" (4.1.1-2), and can only rationalize her actions as "some fit or frenzy" (4.1.17) associated with posttraumatic madness. Try as they might, both as readers and directors, the men of the play can neither fully interpret or necessarily control Lavinia's bodily performance or its effects on an audience. In this paper, I explore the ways Lavinia as an actor has the potential to complicate and even disrupt the commonplace expectations of rape and revenge narratives.

Jonathan Sircy, Charleston Southern University

'The Epistle to *Titus Andronicus*'

This paper argues that an as yet unacknowledged allusion for Titus Andronicus's given name is the New Testament missionary Titus, best known as the titular audience of a canonized Pauline pastoral epistle.

Nicholas Moschovakis has argued convincingly that the play's verbal and conceptual Christian anachronisms, along with the historical associations of Titus's name, criticize state persecution and "the culture of martyrdom." In teasing out the meaning of *Titus Andronicus*'s "Now/Then" anachronisms, we find that the Epistle to Titus offers a distilled articulation of Shakespeare's ideal Christian "Now." The letter summarizes the essentials of Christian doctrine and godly social practice, and the New Testament resonances of Titus's name

¹ Kim Solga, *Violence Against Women in Early Modern Performance: Invisible Acts* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 44.

underscores the contrast between the play's vengeful and bloody Rome with the submissive-to-a-fault social order described in the epistle.

Most importantly, the letter insists that the foundation for the Christian community it describes is not "works of righteousness" but Christ's "mercy" (Titus 3:5). The 1557 Geneva Bible's gloss of this verse claims, "this place doth fully refute the doctrine of merits." The Epistle to Titus thus offers a Protestant account of community formation, one built on divine clemency. Mercy plays a crucial role in *Titus Andronicus*, too, where human works are substituted for divine clemency and consequently destroy community rather than creating it.

Reading the Epistle to Titus alongside *Titus Andronicus*, then, sets a Christian community against the imaginatively represented pagan world from which it emerged.

Deanna Smid, Brandon University

'Listening to Lavinia: Violence and Music in *Titus Andronicus*'

It is by now a critical commonplace (see, for instance, the works of Linda Phyllis Austern, Erin Minear, and Christopher Marsh) that early modern English theorists and authors used the metaphor of music and musical instruments to describe and understand the body. "This variable composition of man's body hath made it as an instrument easy to distemper; [therefore] the office of medicine is but to tune this curious harp of man's body and to reduce it to harmony," writes Francis Bacon in *The Advancement of Learning* in 1605. William Shakespeare, like other Renaissance English authors, makes repeated use of the analogy in his plays. Leontes, for instance, in *The Winter's Tale*, witnesses his wife "virginalling" (as he calls it) upon Polixenes' hand (1.2.127). Hamlet uses another musical metaphor for the body when he tells his mother, "My pulse as yours doth temperately keep time, / And makes as healthful music" (3.4.131-2). Rather than merely recognizing the metaphor in Shakespearean drama, my paper will investigate some of Shakespeare's nuanced uses of the analogy. Specifically, I will debate the potential of the early modern music-body correspondence to understand or "read" bodies that otherwise cannot speak on stage, turning my attention especially to the mute and hand-less Lavinia in *Titus Andronicus*. Can Lavinia, too, be musical? And if her body is musical, does the analogy provide other characters, and the audience, the means to hear and understand her?

Geraldo Sousa, University of Kansas

'The House Reversed in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*'

Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* offers powerful images associated with outsider and insider, alienation and belonging, exclusion and inclusion. I propose to explore the phenomenon of exclusion and what it entails. To this end, the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben helps us to understand "relation of exception," which he defines as "the extreme form of relation by which something is included solely through its exclusion." Other scholars, echoing Agamben, speak of an "exclusive inclusion" and the sense that "the excluded always remains embedded into what is included" (Quiring). In *Titus Andronicus*, I will argue, Shakespeare represents the effects of subjugation of alien nations and brutality of conquest. In this context, the house emerges as an emblem of self-contradictory forces, conflicting perspectives, clash

of religious beliefs and practices, and startling reversals that dominate the violent and grotesque borders of the human in the play.

Whitney Sperrazza, Indiana University Bloomington

‘Granular Reading: Surface and Depth in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*’

Critical work on *Titus* tends to gloss over the synesthetic mode in which Lavinia exists after her rape because, ultimately, she uses traditional modes of linguistic expression—what Mary Laughlin Fawcett terms "the language of the fathers"—when she writes the act and her rapists' names in the sand. My paper revisits the moment of Lavinia's inscription using the medium on which she writes (the "sandy plot") as a framework for my analysis. As this paper will demonstrate, if we put too much emphasis on the words Lavinia writes, we align ourselves with Marcus and Titus, who can only understand Lavinia's plight within the parameters of legible expression reading and writing represent—a mode of expression Shakespeare aligns with predominantly visual methods of interaction. Instead, I argue that Act 4, Scene 1 of *Titus* presents a model for reading in a much more textured and synesthetic register, inviting us to consider the distinction between Lavinia's permanently inscribed, mutilated body, and the granular, ephemeral inscription her labored act of writing produces. Drawing on recent critical debates on modes of reading, particularly what Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus have termed "surface reading," I argue that the way Shakespeare writes the raped body in *Titus* creates a relationship between the surface of the text and the surface of the body that allows him to formulate a theory of reading the text that draws on ways of reading the body. In addition to critical theories of reading, my argument contributes to feminist accounts of *Titus Andronicus* and broader discussions on sexual violence in early modern discourse.

Goran Stanivukovic, Saint Mary's University

‘*Titus Andronicus*: New Tragedy and Elizabethan Classicism’

When in 1594, alone or in tandem with Peele, Shakespeare ‘invented’ a new kind of tragedy never heard and seen before on the public stage in London, the language and style of that new play matched the shock of the spectacular dramatization of a dark moment in Roman history. My essay will be concerned with the questions of style and language, not so much as vehicles for thought and instruments that produce meaning, but as evidence of the complex legacy of rhetoric, dialectic, and logic at the heart of Elizabethan writing. Linguistic and stylistic complexity, indeed authenticity, of *Titus* may not in itself be a new topic. But the structure and origin of that complexity is a topic that is a keen interest to me at present. What makes *Titus* an Elizabethan play is the author(s) indebtedness to the period's engagement with, commentary, re-appropriation, emulation, and transformation of the lexical and rhetorical legacy of classical writing. *Titus* was ‘new’ not only because of the way it turned the Roman history into the subject of drama, but also because of the ways in transformed the classical idiom into a stylistic mode of tragic writing. Ovid, Livy, Plutarch are built into the thematic fabric of the play. But how Elizabethan rhetorical tradition and theory of style directed the ways in which imitation was executed, is woven into the poetic and linguistic map of *Titus* that shows the extent to which Elizabethan classicism shaped versification (e.g.

predominance of masculine endings), stylistic idiom (e.g. amplification); and semantics (e.g. the expansion of meaning) that situates *Titus* at the heart of Elizabethan classicism. In an essay on Racine's writing style, the French linguist and critic of the language of literature, Leo Spitzer, coined the term "Racine's piano" to capture the soft and muted language that contrasts the ecstasy of Racine's rich neo-classical style. In *Titus Andronicus* we witness the symphonic forte of Shakespeare's (and possibly Peele's) writing. What difficulties lurk in studying personal style in a play that may be written by two hands? What makes *Titus* a "pivotal" (J. Bate) moment in Shakespeare's early writing, when seen as a linguistic and stylistic contrast, beyond the sophisticated emulation of Ovidianism, and in relation to his later plays? Why might we wish to consider *Titus* not too removed from *Hamlet* and *Anthony and Cleopatra* stylistically, even if it is set apart from these plays by the date of its composition? What makes it both a deeply Elizabethan and compellingly Renaissance play, if read stylistically? What is 'early' about this earliest of tragedies in the Shakespeare canon? What is, culturally and maybe historically, the style of *Titus* and instance of? These are some of the questions that I will address in my paper.