

ANATOMY MONSTROUS: POLITICS IN CONTEMPORARY
PRODUCTIONS OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S *TITUS ANDRONICUS*¹

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RESUMO: O presente artigo analisa duas montagens contemporâneas da peça *Tito Andrônico*, escrita por William Shakespeare em cooperação com George Peele. Assim, o presente estudo analisa as montagens de Michael Fentiman (2013) e Lucy Bailey (2014). A análise focou na relação entre os momentos mais violentos da peça e a submissão – ou resistência – das personagens ao poder estatal. Em vez de tentar estabelecer qual a afiliação política de Shakespeare ou discutir se a peça tem uma postura reacionária ou revolucionária, este estudo, baseando-se principalmente em Anderson, Fernie e Gil, conclui que tais montagens contemporâneas revelam ideias complexas sobre poder, liberdade e política. É precisamente nesses momentos de violência que tais ideias podem ser percebidas de forma mais clara.

Palavras-chave: Shakespeare em performance. *Tito Andrônico*. Violência e política.

Artigo recebido em: 27 set. 2019.
Aceito em: 29 out. 2019.

¹ This work is part of my PhD thesis, defended in 2018 at the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC) under Dr. José Roberto O'Shea's supervision. Much of the research was conducted at the Shakespeare Institute (University of Birmingham), in Stratford-upon-Avon. I would like to thank CAPES, again, for funding my research both at the Institute and in Brazil.

ABSTRACT: The present work addresses two contemporary performances of William Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, written in collaboration with playwright George Peele. The present work analyzes Michael Fentiman's (2013) and Lucy Bailey's (2014) productions. The focus of the analyses lies on the relationship between the most violent moments in the play and characters' submission or resistance to State power. Instead of trying to establish "Shakespeare's politics" or arguing whether the play is reactionary or revolutionary, the present work, drawing mainly on the works of Anderson, Fernie, and Gil, concludes that contemporary performances of the play reveal intricate ideas about power, freedom, and politics. It is precisely in the moments of violence that those ideas can be perceived more clearly.

Keywords: Shakespeare in performance. *Titus Andronicus*. Violence and politics.

*Human beings in a mob
What's a mob to a king?
What's a king to a god?
What's a god to a non-believer who don't believe in anything?*

(Jay Z and Kanye West featuring The Dream and Frank Ocean, "No Church in the Wild")

I.

For a considerable part of its critical history, George Peele and William Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*² was looked at as a thoughtless exercise of bloody stagecraft. However, Victor Kiernan comments on the recent surge of serious criticism on the play, substituting an easy dismissal of it due to its supposedly poor taste: "Yet there has been of late more willingness than formerly to think it—or most of it—genuine early Shakespeare, in spite of its

² Peele's hand in the writing of *Titus* is convincingly evidenced in Vickers (2004) and *The New Oxford Authorship Companion* (2017). A third collaborator, possibly Thomas Middleton, is also discussed in the *Authorship Companion*. This arrangement, however, is not exclusive to *Titus Andronicus*. We now know that collaboration was a common practice in Shakespeare's business.

wild and whirling story and grotesque horrors: a change of opinion which must owe something to our own prodigiously grown appetite for the sensational” (1999, p. 133-134). Taking up the critical task of thinking *Titus Andronicus*, I intend to offer in this brief paper an analysis of two contemporary productions of the play: the 2013 production directed by Michael Fentiman and the 2014 production directed by Lucy Bailey at the Globe (a revival of her 2006 production in the same venue). The aforementioned critical shift in the way *Titus* is seen led me to consider the political implications of its depictions of violence. Before proceeding to the spectacular analysis itself, I am going to present some of the critical voices that will inform my reading. I will, firstly, discuss some of the contemporary criticism on "political Shakespeare" and the politics in *Titus*, and then offer a critical reading of the productions themselves.

II.

The two authors that began highlighting the relationship between violence and the political dimension of the play were Francis Barker and Leonard Tennenhouse. The latter cleverly identifies the political relevance of the focus, in *Titus Andronicus*, on the mutilated female body. Considering that *Titus* was produced in a context in which the monarch was a female, Tennenhouse remarks “[u]nder such circumstances, these representations—perhaps any representation—of the aristocratic female provided the substance of a political iconography which enhanced the power of the Elizabethan state” (2005, p. 112).

Barker, a decade earlier, argued that *Titus*, instead of offering the *display* of violence (thus contrasting with Tennenhouse's thesis, defended in his aptly named *Power on Display*), occluded *actual* violence. The theatrical and outrageous killings and mutilations in the play served, in Barker's view, to shift focus away from the arbitrary, real-life executions of common citizens. The key scene to his reading is the killing of the clown in act 4, scene 4: "Here the rueful lack of protest in the Clown's last line [. . .] bespeaks an apparently cheerful acceptance, and equally cheerful incomprehension, of what is to be done to him. The poor are happy to be hanged by their betters" (1993, p. 168).

Moving away from the dichotomy between Tennenhouse and Barker, Gillian Murray Kendall argues that exaggerated instances of violence in Shakespeare, paradoxically, work not to reaffirm the power of those who perform such violent deeds, but rather to display how fragile and ineffectual

this power is. Two of the examples come from Roman plays, namely *Julius Caesar* and *Titus Andronicus*. In the first case, Kendall writes, of course, about the murder of Julius Caesar and how its perpetrators vacillate. This reading of Caesar's murder might sound strange at first, but Kendall's argument is convincing: "Brutus and the conspirators, for example, stab great Caesar repeatedly, as if they had little confidence their violent act could kill him" (1998, p. 175). Ironically, Caesar returns as a ghost and the mob is quickly turned against the conspirators by Mark Antony's famous speech; the *overkilling* of Caesar is thus turned against itself.

The second examples Kendall summons is Titus's revenge on Tamora and her sons: "he cuts their throats, grinds their bones to dust, adds their blood to it, and bakes their heads in a pasty, which he feeds to their mother" (1998, p. 175). "Such complete destruction," Kendall writes, "ultimately limits Titus' ability to enact vengeance" (1998, p. 175). Jane Howell's *Titus Andronicus* for the BBC series, for example, goes as far as having Titus reenact the murders, as he cuts Tamora a slice of the pie. To say that he cuts the pie is a euphemism: he stabs it, as if preparing the "feast of centaurs" is not enough to satisfy his wounded heart and his lust for vengeance. But Chiron and Demetrius are already dead, and stabbing the pie, as in the televised *Titus*, achieves effectively nothing. In a note, Kendall quotes Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* to strengthen his point: "A body effaced, reduced to dust and thrown to the winds, a body destroyed piece by piece by the infinite power of the sovereign constituted not only the ideal, but the real limit of punishment" (1998, qtd. on p. 195). Overkilling, then, "suggests the limits of power—and not only of power that is usurped, but, by analogy, power that is, in the context of the play, legitimate" (1998, p. 175).

The extreme violence done to these bodies, particularly in the case of Caesar, moves us to one of the major political themes in Shakespeare's plays, that is, the recurring metaphor of the body politic. This image, "that metaphorical entity made up of all the individual bodies of the commonwealth and headed by the monarch—informs numerous instances of excessive violence" (KENDALL, 1998, p. 173). According to Bernard J. Dobski and Dustin Gish, in the preface to the collection of essays edited by them, *Shakespeare and the Body Politic*, the metaphor of the body politic, "perhaps the most vivid and enduring image in speech describing political community ever proposed" (2013, p. x), accounts for Shakespeare's relevance not only in his own time but also today. So pervasive is the image of the body politic that it infiltrates nearly all aspects of the plays: "The sentiments and consequences of familial affection or romantic love, the longed-for blessings of peace and

prosperity, the desire for justice and vengeance, and the spirited pursuit of honor and glory cannot be conceived apart from the limits of the body politic” (2013, p. xi). And so developed such an image is in Shakespeare’s plays that “there may be no greater account or anatomy of the Body Politic in the English language than what one discovers in Shakespeare’s plays and poetry” (2013, p. 1).

Dobski and Gish argue that, today, the image the body politic invokes in the minds of readers is one of tyranny, associated with the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century, in which considerations about an organic, whole society ended up being attempted to be built at the cost of a severe destruction of individual liberties and human lives (2013, p. 1-2). Nevertheless, for them, it is worth recovering the tradition of the body politic in a wholesome manner, as it can signify the harmony of the whole, with the disharmony of such a body resulting in “diseases” such as a civil war (2013, p. 6-8). In Shakespeare’s own time, the image of the body politic steers away from the absolutism contemporarily associated with it. In line with Andrew Hadfield’s thesis that Shakespeare’s works have a Republican vein, Dobski and Gish highlight the use of the body politic in alignment with such ideals:

The contribution of citizens, especially members of parliament and counselors to the crown, to the inner workings of a healthy body politic complicates the common portrait of Henrician and Elizabethan England as an absolute monarchy demanding strict order, the rule of law, and the utter subservience of subjects. In reality, this brief survey of its uses should suffice to show that political thought in Shakespeare’s time had recourse to the image of the body politic as a means to explore republican principles and mixed government as well as to sustain or even re-conceive royal authority. (2013, p. 9)

In *Titus Andronicus* the body politic is completely dismembered, resulting in the decadence of the empire. What Dobski and Gish highlight about *Titus*, however, is a part that is often ignored when speaking of body politic and *Titus Andronicus*, a play so filled with chopping and maiming. They emphasize how Titus ignores a crucial part of the body politic, that is, the domestic head represented by the voice of the people. By deciding to ignore such a voice,

Titus deprives his body politic of the Roman head it lacks and the domestic sovereignty it urgently needs. Shakespeare’s Roman works thus illustrate the dangers of failing to invest at least one part of the body politic with sovereignty;

one needs to give a part of the community a voice that can speak for the whole and, in doing so, define, order, and preserve it. (2013, p. 15)

But the body politic metaphors do not always work in obvious, equivalent ways in *Titus Andronicus*. Katherine Rowe, in “Dismembering and Forgetting in *Titus Andronicus*”, calls attention to the paradoxical ways in which dismembering occurs in the play, exploring the body politic metaphor in unusual ways. The bizarre image of Lavinia carrying Titus’s hand between her teeth offstage ends up signifying their first step towards revenge (1994, p. 300-301). The lack of hands, a body part associated with effective political action, signifies exactly the opposite of what one would expect: “dismemberment symbolizes loss of effective action in the world, it is clearly the condition of political agency in the play” (1994, p. 303). Missing hands, thus, offer a “false physiological synecdoche” (1994, p. 280), or perhaps an opposite physiological synecdoche. Considering the previous examples, it is clear that Shakespeare was not only acquainted with the body politic metaphor, but used it in unexpected ways, avoiding a “one to one” relationship between body parts and the equivalent in terms of government, society, or political action. All in all, the study of the body politic, for Dobski and Gish, shows that Shakespeare’s preoccupation with forms of government “is a genuinely philosophical one, which takes its bearings from an experience of politics that is familiar—or at least available—to us all” (2013, p. 22).

In one of the essays from *Shakespeare’s Fugitive Politics*, entitled “Body Politics and the Non-Sovereign Exception in *Titus Andronicus* and *The Winter’s Tale*”, Anderson argues that in *Titus Andronicus* Shakespeare wants to explore “the idea of the dangerous female body with a potency to kill” (2016, p. 139). The question of the body politic, as I have shown, is crucial to understanding the political intricacies of *Titus Andronicus*. Having this metaphor in mind, it is crucial to note how Anderson’s reading of *Titus Andronicus* (and also of *The Winter’s Tale*, although not the focus here) avoids obvious equivalences. Interestingly, if Kendall sees in *Titus Andronicus* the issue of overkilling, Anderson identifies in the play quite the opposite, what he calls “overliving”. Through the mutilated body of Lavinia (and the statue of Hermione in *The Winter’s Tale*),

Shakespeare travesties the concept of the king’s two bodies central to early modern sovereignty, redistributing agency between subjects to objects and from intentions to effects. In its parody of sovereignty’s charismatic survival beyond death, these plays, to different degrees, transform political theology into a

feminist politics of overliving in which performing objects . . . evoke the phenomenon of non-sovereign agency that defines Shakespeare's fugitive politics. (2016, p. 142)

If at the same time we have the phenomenon of overkilling, which shows the limits of Titus's revenge, we also have overliving, which “probes the limits of fugitive politics by representing the female body as an object with an agitating force demanding a response to its fragile condition” (2016, p. 149). If overkilling and overliving are both present in *Titus Andronicus*, as noted by Kendall and Anderson, life and time in *Titus Andronicus* seem to be out of joint.

Anderson sees in Lavinia's body a redefinition of “the trope of the early modern blazon” (2016, p. 150). Her body is akin to an anatomic blazon on stage, “anatomised and frozen . . . for most of the play after her violent assault” (2016, p. 150). In a play that foregrounds the exchange values of body parts and has “the human body as the central political metaphor for the sovereign state” (2016, p. 150), Lavinia's mutilated body resists the interpretations the male characters try to assign to her. Instead of seeing the dismembered body as a signal of a fractured subjectivity, Anderson highlights Lavinia's body's “tactility, its agitating power that poses problems for the way the play's characters and critics attempt to make sense of Lavinia's physical condition” (2016, p. 152). For instance, Marcus's problematic long speech upon seeing Lavinia for the first time after her mutilation emblazons her body in a literary way. However, quoting Katherine Rowe, Anderson reminds us that “Marcus's initial reaction to Lavinia [is] a ‘culmination of a fantasy of *his* own release into expressive tears and anger” (2016, p. 154). Nevertheless, “Lavinia's body resists becoming a poetic trope”. To view Lavinia solely as a spectacle of violence is to miss the work that her body does on stage as language tries unsuccessfully to manage her unruly corporeality” (2016, p. 158-159). The only character that seems to understand or at least communicate with Lavinia is Young Lucius. Titus's desire³ to interpret

³ In the chapter “Lavinia as a Blank Page” from *Presentist Shakespeares*, edited by Hugh Grady and Terence Hawkes, they highlight how in two productions of the play, namely Julie Taymor's *Titus* and Jane Howell's BBC adaptation, “Lavinia looks like a dog when she has Titus's hand in her mouth; in other words, Titus's hand hangs out of her mouth, replacing and representing her own excised tongue” (2017, p. 133). In the authors' view, the image of Lavinia with Titus's hand between her teeth becomes a metaphor for her subjection to patriarchy. However, I believe this image emphasizes her active role in the revenge plot. Titus's losing of his hand, too, paradoxically signals

Lavinia's signs is "[p]redicated on forgetting the division that defines politics" (2016, p. 156). Even in such a moment of pain, in his logic "Lavinia's agentic capacities must reflect his own desire, and her political dissent must reinforce Roman consensus" (2016, p. 157). Young Lucius, on the other hand, is anchored to his identification with Lavinia, the woman who educated him, as noted by Bethany Packard (2016, qtd. in ANDERSON, p. 157). His engagement with Lavinia's suffering, therefore, "is not appropriative but intersubjective" (ANDERSON, 2016, p. 157). The interaction between "woman, boy, and text" (WITMORE qtd. in ANDERSON, 2016, p. 157) is a sign of "non-sovereign [political] agency" as "the foundation for political action in opposition to dominant forces of oppression such as Roman patriarchy, masculine desire and an ethos of violence enacted on female bodies" (ANDERSON, 2016, p. 158).

For Anderson, the recent production that better "captures Lavinia's non-sovereign agency" is Julie Taymor's *Titus*. Daniel Juan Gil writes about the film in *Shakespeare's Anti Politics*:

[...] this film transposes the life of the flesh from the particular early modern political-discursive universe that I have examined in this book into the modern political domain. If Shakespeare wrote at the dawn of the era of the nation-state and focused on the discursive underbelly of this new form of sovereign power, then Taymor's *Titus* transposes Shakespeare's vision into the era of massively powerful corporate states uneasily caught up in the forces of globalization. (2013, p. 125)

Similarly to Anderson's argument about "overliving" in *Titus Andronicus*, Daniel Juan Gil sees in *Titus* the overliving of the whole Andronici clan, except that he calls such phenomenon "undeadness". It is through this undeadness that the characters can transcend the boundaries of state power. Perhaps, such a transcendence by means of undeadness is consonant with Ewan Fernie's idea that in tragedy, by moving towards death, characters can free themselves. It is in tragedy that the struggle for freedom is developed to its extreme and characters' selves most fully realized, "because in moving out towards death, the tragic hero also moves liberatingly beyond merely provisional social arrangements. Tragedy affords an opportunity to pursue the Shakespearean vocation for being someone else" (FERNIE, 2017, p. 70). In this sense, it is by moving towards dismemberment and death that they

political power, for it is the loss of his hand that ultimately signals his shift to revenge hero, as pointed out by Katherine Rowe (1994, p. 300-301).

become “victimized to the point of transcending the field of state power altogether” (GIL, 2013, p. 128).

To wrap up this section, I would like to evoke Ewan Fernie's more general considerations about Shakespeare and politics before moving on to the analysis of the two productions. Fernie makes a passionate but scholarly defense of the political, metaphysical, and human relevance of studying Shakespeare's plays today in his *Shakespeare for Freedom* (2017). Fernie writes: “Shakespeare means freedom. That is why the plays matter, and not just aesthetically but also in terms of the impact they historically have had and can continue to have on personal and political life in the world” (2017, p. 1). Fernie reminds us of a “long lost tradition of associating Shakespeare with freedom which we urgently need to recover” (2017, 48). In exploring how Shakespeare's characters embody this struggle for freedom in “both its individual and political aspects” (2017, p. 66), Fernie nods to Andrew Hadfield's thesis, argued in *Shakespeare and Republicanism*, that one can find in the plays “a strong Republican strain in Shakespeare” (2017, p. 66). This is achieved through the interaction between characters who not only are “free artists of themselves”, to quote Hegel, but also “always forged in relation to other characters and their freedoms. This dialectic between the individual and collective is fundamental to drama as interaction and has significant ramifications” (2017, p. 66). Self-realization in relation to other characters' freedoms dramatized by Shakespeare, to Fernie, takes precedence over the plot. For him, even if a Shakespearean plot is far from progressive, it is through characterization “that the Shakespearean struggle for freedom foretells the great political passion of modernity, amounting to a serial and probing experiment in liberal democracy *avant la lettre*” (2017, p. 67). Thus, “Shakespeare's plotting is [not] always progressive” but “his characters tend to exceed his plots, gesturing towards a more perfect scenario in which their potential really could be consummated” (2017, p. 65). Fernie beautifully sums it up: “The life that Shakespeare wants for his characters exceeds the life of genre” (2017, p. 65). But even if the plotting itself is less relevant to the advancement of the freedom Fernie identifies in Shakespeare, it is in the tragic genre that such a freedom is explored to its deepest. It is in tragedy that the struggle for freedom is developed to its extreme and characters' selves most fully realized, “because in moving out towards death, the tragic hero also moves liberatingly beyond merely provisional social arrangements. Tragedy affords an opportunity to pursue the Shakespearean vocation for being someone else” (2017, p. 70).

III.

Michael Fentiman's *Titus Andronicus* was staged at the more intimate Swan Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon, in the summer of 2013. Fentiman's production played with the two levels of his set and the pit, mixing them with the lighting to further explore the overlapping of characters in the same physical space. The set resembles, at the same time, a medieval church and a mosque, giving the impression that even before the play starts the Goths and the Moor have already taken over Rome. Peter J. Smith links it to "Cordoba Cathedral built within the Great Mosque": "The play is set in ancient Rome but in this staging it has become a palimpsest, a Christianised Moorish temple" (2013). This setting seems to be aligned with Paul A. Cantor's claim in *Shakespeare's Roman Trilogy: The Twilight of the Ancient World* that

[...] what is happening in them [in the Roman plays], culminating in *Antony and Cleopatra*, takes place on an apocalyptic scale—the dissolution of an entire way of life. We are witnessing not just the death of the Roman Republic but the end of the ancient city itself and thus of the ancient world and all that distinguished its way of life from modern alternatives. With remarkable historical insight, Shakespeare realized that the emergence of the Roman Empire marked a fundamental alteration of the human condition and thereby laid the foundations of the modern European world (which is one reason Shakespeare correlates the rise of the Roman Empire with the rise of Christianity). (2017, p. 16)

The tribunes, Marcus included, are dressed as monks, implying that they serve both political and ritualistic functions. Going back to Smith's review, "Friars in long-hooded cassocks people a state whose insignia, an outstretched eagle, is reminiscent of Nazi iconography" (2013). The religious elements of the set are mainly created by the use of stained glass on the upper level of the stage. The lighting behind it is altered throughout the performance, either to highlight or occlude the figures on top, or to give way to an upper lighting that puts characters on stage level in the spotlight.

One of the most common alterations productions make to the playtext concerns the ordering of the events in Act 1 Scene 1, namely whether to stage Titus's entrance before or after Bassianus and Saturninus quarrel with the support of their factions in the hopes of becoming the next emperor. Fentiman's *Titus* presents a curious decision to the opening of Peele's act in

Titus by having Titus sitting in a chair in the dimly lit stage level whereas Bassianus and Saturninus discourse on the upper level against the stained glass. Saturninus sports an obvious Nazi look, wearing a black suit and a red band around his arm. Bassianus, on the other hand, wears a light gray suit, quoting the recurrent theme in *Titus's* stage history of having Saturninus in darker costumes and Bassianus in lighter tones, at least in this initial moment of political dispute. While the brothers speak, Titus sits silently in the shadows, exhausted after spending his life in “weary wars against the barbarous Goths” (2017, 1.1.28), while Lucius stands behind him. The corpses of the dead Andronici soldiers can be seen behind them, wrapped in white sheets on hospital beds. Such an arrangement smoothly conveys how both brothers’ aspirations to “set a head to headless Rome” (2017, 1.1.189) are shadowed by Titus’s threatening presence, much favored by the Roman people, as the brothers possibly know. It also highlights the cost of maintaining such an imperial head: it needs to be constantly fed corpses, blood, sacrifices (NOBLE, 2013, p. 692-695). The passionate political rhetoric of the suitors hides the costs of the empire in terms of human lives, but the audience can see it onstage, even if dimly lit.

But does Titus hear them speak? If he does and still chooses Saturninus as Rome’s emperor, in spite of the anti-republican views expressed by him, contrasting with his less authoritarian brother, then Titus’s role in engendering his own family’s tragedy is amplified. In this case, his choice is not simply based on traditional succession rules—emphasized by Saturninus, played by John Hopkins, who puts great stress in “I am his first-born son” (2017, 1.1.5) and nearly threatens Rome to ascend to the throne—and a general cluelessness from an old warrior who spent more time abroad than at home, but also informed by the pleas both candidates made to their respective factions. If the Nazi armband worn by Saturninus makes his authoritarian leanings rather obvious to contemporary audiences, Titus, without knowing about the history it carries, can probably guess its values and chooses to approve of them. Titus thus refuses to be *candidatus* and prepares to announce who should be the new emperor while the brothers kneel on opposite sides of the stage. Saturninus’s reaction to being “elected” Rome’s emperor reflects his previous attitudes and speeches as well as foreshadows his rule: he removes the “pallament of white and spotless hue” (2017, 1.1.185) and throws it away violently—contrasting to Bassianus’s gesture of doing a cross on the floor when he says he will honor Titus and his family. Throwing away the pallament is throwing away the voice of the Roman people and could be seen as an instance of decapitation as discussed by Dobski and Gish (2013,

p. 15), the ultimate mutilation of the body politic, since the palliament stands as a symbol of people's voices. Ultimately, people's voices return coupled with the "warlike Goths" (2017, 5.3.27), and Saturninus is dethroned by both domestic and foreign forces.

The pit is utilized in Fentiman's *Titus* not as a site of proper burial, but rather as a place for sacrifice. The burial of Titus's sons is staged using a resource commonly employed in the murder of Chiron and Demetrius: ropes attached to their feet do suspend them, thus taking them offstage into the ceiling. Alarbus's sacrifice takes place onstage and, although explicit, is not gory. Lucius and his brothers surround Alarbus, raise their swords, and deliver their blows as the pit descends, so that the audience can see that they "hew his limbs and on a pile / Ad manes fratrum sacrifice his flesh" (2017, 1.1.100-101) but not necessarily any blood or the swords themselves piercing Alarbus's body. In this Christianized Rome, Titus's sons are sent to heaven thanks to their proper burial, whereas Alarbus is sent to hell through sacrifice, and the space of the stage clearly conveys such differences in burial. Alarbus seems to return from the pit, though, by means of his brothers Chiron and Demetrius's deeds. In "'Groaning Shadows that are Gone': The Ghosts of *Titus Andronicus*", Lindsey Scott argues that *Titus Andronicus* should be regarded as one of Shakespeare's ghost tragedies; *Titus's* characters are haunted by the return of the dead who were refused proper burial rites (2015, p. 1-21). Ghosts, overliving, or undeadness, however you name it, there seems to something in *Titus* that returns, literally or metaphorically, that sovereign power is unable to completely eliminate.

In act III, Lavinia is taken by Marcus to her father. Fentiman's *Titus* adds another layer to her mutilation: Chiron and Demetrius also cut her long blonde hair and tie her tresses to the stumps, creating a brutal effect that perverts the stylization of violence done by Peter Brook and then Ninagawa. Oliver writes that

Fentiman chose realism over symbolism in showing Lavinia's mutilated body: she reappeared from below the stage on a platform, shivering, bloodied and dirty. However, the decision to make it look as though her hair had been cut off was questionable, as it left spectators wondering why Chiron and Demetrius had bothered to give her a neat, short haircut and tie her tresses around the stumps of her arms. (2013)

I disagree that this is a choice of realism over symbolism; it is a choice of a symbolism that emphasizes the cruelty of the act. Having hair tied to her

stumps is far from realistic, but it quotes and at the same time subverts a theatrical tradition that attenuates Lavinia's wounds.

When analyzing a performance of *Titus*, much is said about the way the violence and mutilation are performed onstage. My focus when looking at Titus's mutilation and his two sons' deaths in Fentiman's production is how he reacts to them, precisely his reaction to the body parts. The act of severing Titus's hand itself takes time; Aaron saws Titus's hand off and then "[cauterizes] the wrist in a bucket of boiling tar" (SMITH, 2013). Aaron takes the hand away and, moments later, a messenger dressed like a working-class man from the 1920s brings Quintus's and Martius's heads, as well as Titus's hand, in a wheelbarrow. Playing with the possibilities of comedy in this scene, Titus takes his severed hand, hits his own head with it, and throws it into the air, simply playing around with it. If, as Katherine Rowe argues in "Dismembering and Forgetting in *Titus Andronicus*", lack of hands ends up being the metaphor for effective political action, here Titus takes the hand metaphor to an extreme. Not only is the severed hand a metaphor for effective political action, it is also a metaphor for his own feelings; his way of dealing with tragedy is through laughter, creativity, and a dark sense of humor. By taking control of his own trauma—and then sharing this control with Lavinia, by asking her to take the hand—Titus is able to make the transition from humiliated war veteran to rightful avenger. In my view, this is the moment in which the Andronici have "an encounter with raw sovereign power" (GIL, 2013, p. 1). By defying all norms of expected behavior and literally taking control of his flesh, Titus can, at least for a moment, achieve the tragic freedom discussed by Fernie, by going into death—or at least a degree of "undeadness", as previously discussed. This moment also resonates with Daniel Juan Gil's reading of this same scene in Julie Taymor's film, which illustrates his general argument about sovereign power and subjection. When attempts to resist sovereign power fail, Titus allows "it to transform self and other. This transformative response to sovereign power is marked by an increasingly absurdist quality to the action" (2013, p. 127). Gil illustrates his argument with the carnivalesque aspect of this scene in Taymor's film, but I argue that the same could be said about Titus's reaction in Fentiman's production.

Titus also employs dark humor when handling his two sons' heads. Before uttering the lines "[f]or these two heads do seem to speak to me" (2017, 3.1.270), he takes the heads and puts them near his ear, as if they were telephones ringing with a message from the underworld. The moment causes nervous laughter, but it evokes Lindsey Scott's ideas of the ghosts in *Titus Andronicus*, since "[w]hen these severed body parts return to the space of the

stage, their ghostly presence is ‘felt’ by Titus” (2015, p. 418) . By not being given proper burial, the ghosts of Titus’s sons are the ones who, from the realm of the dead, are able to drive him to “find Revenge’s cave” (2017, 3.1.269). As previously mentioned, Dobski and Gish argue that Titus ignores the voice of the people, i.e., the “head” in the body politic metaphor. Ironically, it is the severed, voiceless head that commands him to exert revenge not just on Saturninus, but on Rome itself, this “wilderness of tigers” (2017, 3.1.53).

The killing of the clown in Michael Fentiman’s *Titus*, a moment deemed crucial by the aforementioned critic Francis Barker, in my view, highlights the major flaw in Barker’s argument concerning this “uncanny” episode as he calls it. To argue that *Titus Andronicus* occludes violence contrasting the killing of the clown to the spectacular killings of the other, often aristocratic, characters is to work with assumptions concerning the performance of the play that cannot be known. If the killing of common people was so pervasive in Renaissance England and the death of the clown is a way of sweeping such a brutal reality under the rug, it is hard to believe that audiences then would not connect the dots. As much as my argument equally hovers to the realm of speculation, it is reasonable to think that the killing of the clown could be performed in a hundred different ways, and the text we have of *Titus Andronicus* as of today is incapable of telling us much about the performance practices of such an episode. Nor does it tell about Peele and Shakespeare’s audiences. And, to complicate it even further, the printed text in which contemporary editions are based could be significantly different from the text that was being performed.

What we can know is how the play is performed today, and in Fentiman’s *Titus* the killing of the clown is perhaps one of the most brutal moments in the play. This scene opens in a similar fashion to the previous scene set in the palace, showing that life for those in power is filled with pleasures. Previously, when Young Lucius is sent to the palace to deliver the messages from Titus to Chiron and Demetrius, the brothers are satisfying their lust with concubines. Now, Saturninus emerges from the pit in a bathtub, perhaps in a failed attempt to calm himself down after receiving the arrows from the Andronici. Tamora is seen nurturing a seemingly white baby, indicating that Aaron’s machination to save his own baby and not compromise Tamora has worked. Enter the messenger, played by a black actor, and one wonders what would have happened to Aaron were he not such a ruthless and scheming figure, being his malignity the only way to survive in a white man’s world. Chiron and Demetrius take him to be hanged, and at this point the episode might seem uneventful, but as Aemilius delivers his message

concerning Lucius's approaching army of Goths, it is possible to see that Chiron and Demetrius take the clown to the upper stage and his killing takes place on stage against the stained glass. The lighting against the stained glass, highlighted by the lights going off below after the characters exit, emphasizes the figure of the clown being hanged, and finally his body is taken offstage by Chiron and Demetrius themselves. If Barker argues that "[p]ower is not made visible by *Titus Andronicus*; it is hidden, as we have seen, by other visualities" (BARKER, 1994, p. 257), Fentiman's production shows us otherwise. The death of the clown, however, is not unexpected; to the contrary, the Nazi imagery and Saturninus's obvious disregard for the common people and institutions (as seen in the palliament episode) anticipates the killing of the clown. "Tis he the common people love so much" (2017, 4.4.71), says Saturninus after sending the messenger to be hanged and hearing the news from Aemilius, and seeing the clown being hanged moments after that is the embodiment of Saturninus's despise of the common voice—as well as of his fear of rebellion.

Moving to the banquet scene (5.3), Lucius arrives accompanied by the army of Goths. It is interesting to note that one of the Goths allied to Lucius is a woman—doubled by one of the concubines—apparently the new queen of Goths. Lucius, after leaving Rome by the end of act 3 scene 1, is seen getting rid of his Roman attire and being taken in by the Goths, marked like cattle to the sound of drums, as if entering the heart of darkness, being taken by the all-consuming other. At last he returns to Rome to attend "the Centaurs' feast" (2017, 5.2.202), which in Fentiman's production is a gory gala, described by Peter J. Smith as "a formal evening-dress dinner that descends with febrile alacrity into bloody mayhem – from *Great Gatsby* to *Grand Guignol*" (2013). What follows is not the usual staccato killings, but rather a bloodbath as the killings and stabbings are not restricted to the deaths of Lavinia, Tamora, Titus, and Saturninus. In Emily Oliver's words, "[w]hereas Shakespeare's play calls for four characters to be killed, this sudden release of atavistic energy left the stage littered with corpses" (2014).

So enters Titus, who doesn't look as fancy as his guests. If Titus's entrance dressed as a chef is usually one of the highest moments in terms of comedy in productions of *Titus*, this moment gained even more appeal after seeing Anthony Hopkins play the intertextuality with Hannibal Lecter in Taymor's *Titus*. But instead of a male chef attire, "Titus is here a 'nippy' from a Lyons Corner House, in black dress and white apron, cheerfully dishing out Sweeney Todd pasties" (SMITH, 2013). Titus's madness is highlighted by such a disruption of gender conventions and is reminiscent of Heath Ledger's Joker

when disguised as a female nurse (2005). Titus's killing of Lavinia is perhaps the most unnerving moment in the production, differing radically from most stagings. It is usually implied that Titus's killing of Lavinia works more as a suicide pact, a moment of intimacy between a father and daughter who know that their lives are beyond repairing. The bond established by father and daughter by their mutual suffering and mutilation culminates in their going into death together. But here Lavinia "was clearly not complicit in her death" (OLIVER, 2014), and her body writhes as Titus struggles to suffocate her. The way her body loses life is akin to the killing of the Clown by Chiron and Demetrius. To Titus, after all, they are the ones who killed his daughter, and the similarity between both deaths follows this logic.

The revelation of the content of the pie triggers an unlikely reaction in Tamora, who fights "the urge to be sick after learning the truth, but then force[s] herself very slowly to take another bite" (OLIVER, 2014). What this choice entails is a highlighting of the incestuous subtext of the cannibalistic banquet, which now becomes voluntary from Tamora's side. The banquet turns into a blood-fest and, as previously mentioned, the killings go way beyond the ones commonly indicated in the playtext. The promptbook consulted has the stage direction "the Goths protect the Andronici family", but it does not seem that anyone, Romans or Goths, survive, other than the main characters. Even Marcus participates in the carnage and ends up being lightly wounded, breaking a whole set of expectations concerning the cerebral, usually constrained tribune. Blood-drinking Rome still requires another sacrifice, and if the beginning of the reasonably populated banquet creates expectations for an acclaimed discourse by Lucius, in the end no one hears him speak, except for his uncle Marcus who is too busy arranging a multitude of corpses. The play closes, again, with the conflation of the political and the funerary, making the relationship between both quite clear: in Rome, order can only be built by means of the sacrifice of human bodies, including Aaron and Tamora's baby, brutally murdered by a Young Lucius finally perverted by the violence committed by his ancestors.

IV.

Lucy Bailey's *Titus Andronicus*, first performed at the Shakespeare's Globe in 2006, was subsequently revived in 2014 due to its critical acclaim, took place in a radically different theatrical space from Fentiman's. Pauline Kiernan describes it as a

[...] bundle of paradoxes it defies easy categorization. It is a building that has been designed and made on Tudor principles, following historical research into sixteenth-century architecture, craftsmanship and joinery as scrupulously as modern safety regulations will allow. (1999, p. 3)

Thus, as of its opening in 1997, the Globe was described by theater practitioners of its first seasons as “‘raw’, ‘strange’, ‘exciting’, ‘energizing’, ‘dangerous’, ‘new’, ‘avant-garde’” (1999, p. 3). The main component of the space, however, seems to be the audience, who participates more actively in the spectacle due to the lack of a clear-cut line separating actors from spectators. Therefore, Shakespeare’s Globe “offers radical possibilities for shared experiences on the part of the audience. When the yard is packed round with standing groundlings on all sides, the audience can become an angry mob, a fearsome army, a threatening force to those on stage” (1999, p. 4-5). Such an effect is also heightened by another major architectural feature of the Globe, namely its lack of a roof. Director Tim Carroll points out two implications: “The first is that the audience and the actor are in the same light [. . .] The second is that it introduces into every performance an element of inevitable unpredictability” (2008, p. 38). If actors and spectators are in the same light, spectators are susceptible to the actors’ gaze as much as the actors are susceptible to the audience’s. In Bailey’s *Titus* spectators and actors are subject to the same light not due to the lack of roof, but rather due to the “velarium that stretches over the yard” (LEE qtd. in KARIM-COOPER, 2008, p. 68), creating a dark, gladiatorial space. The stage is also covered in dark drapers, painting the colorful columns black. Characters’ exits to the backstage make it seem as if “the night swallowed them up, purely and simply” (LEVI, 1959, p. 11), similarly to Auschwitz prisoners in Primo Levi’s memoir.

The first act of Bailey’s *Titus Andronicus* is Saturninus’s show. In this production, Saturninus is played as a spoiled, insecure, and authoritarian leader who, at the same time, is utterly submissive to Tamora’s desires. Saturninus is also the character that interacts the most with the audience, reinforcing the statement that laughter is not only acceptable but encouraged, as he often directs his laughter to spectators, who end up laughing with him (or at him). As Saturninus’s quality as a comic character is built up throughout the first act, his submission to Tamora’s desires becomes humorous, making the “My lord, be ruled by me” line (2017, 1.1.445) particularly effective in moving the audience to laughter, relieving some of the

tension that their dangerous marriage produces. If Saturninus is authoritarian as a leader, but submissive in his relationship with Tamora, it is easy to see that Tamora can indirectly rule politically by controlling Saturninus domestically.

The severed body parts in act 3, scene 1 are employed to comic effect, and their presentation does not shy away from the explicit display of violence. The ghostlike characteristic of the severed heads of Titus's sons is even more humorous than in Fentiman's production. Here, Titus shushes the other characters so that he can better hear what his sons are trying to say. It is likely that Fentiman's approach to this scene was inspired by Bailey's first run with *Titus Andronicus*, in 2006. Concerning Titus's hand, its chopping is perhaps one of the most shocking in *Titus Andronicus's* performance history, not because of its visual appeal but rather due to the loud noise of Aaron's axe quickly hitting the wood upon which Titus's hand lays. Finally, when Aaron delivers his aside before exiting, he uses Titus's hand to scratch his own face, driving the audience to laughter.

Aaron has his major speech cut in Bailey's production, but an interpolation between acts 3 and 4 underscores his pleasure in doing evil. A Bacchus figure, who appears in act 1 to wake with the audience and to deliver the lines assigned to a commander in the playtext, is seen here being carried by an angry mob, commanded by Aaron, Chiron, and Demetrius. The group, carrying torches, beating drums, dancing, and screaming "mortem", sacrifices the Roman clown. Aaron's leading role in the sacrifice reveals both his joy in doing evil—precisely the content of the "But I have done a thousand dreadful things/As willingly as one would kill a fly" (2017, 5.1.140-1) speech—and perhaps the powerful influence he is exerting in Rome. The sacrifice of such stereotypically Roman figure may also further highlight Rome's lost values. Another interpretation is that such a sacrifice, which seems barbaric at first, results from what the former prisoners experienced when they arrived in Rome: seeing one of their own inhumanly sacrificed.

What Bailey does with the final banquet scene subverts the expectations of those familiar with *Titus Andronicus* and its stage history. The way characters die is not only relevant due to the obvious reason that the plot must reach its conclusion and, for that to happen, revenge must be exerted, but the sometimes subtle variations between stagings can produce radically different meanings in terms of how characters relate to one another, what their deaths mean to the future of Rome, what is their relationship with death itself, and so on. Each of these aspects can be covered by a different death,

namely Lavinia's, Saturninus's, and Titus's, even though their significance overlaps.

Titus's death is similar to Lavinia's, in the sense that it is nearly suicidal. If Lavinia welcomes death by her father's hands, Titus knows he is marked to die. Titus and Lavinia understand that they do not fit in the new age that is about to begin; they belong to an old Rome that no longer exists, and they too must cease existing. Thus, after revealing the contents of the pie and stabbing Tamora, Titus sees the approaching emperor and simply opens his arms, literally and figuratively embracing death. Lavinia embraces Titus, and moments later Titus embraces Saturninus. It is as if they follow the pattern of their suffering: Lavinia lost her hands and then Titus willingly gives his away.

I stress that Lavinia's relationship with Titus's should not be overlooked. Their mutilation, however inviting of metaphors, must primarily be looked at as what it is: literal handlessness, a wound that connects father and daughter on a palpable level. This motion of relegating the metaphorical aspect of their handlessness to the background seems, at first, to reduce the political significance of their mutilation, since its connection to the State or to political power is mitigated in favor of the actual loss of hands. But both in their mutilation and in their deaths, particularly the latter in Lucy Bailey's production, the materiality of such events is precisely what renders them political, in the sense that they are the result of a particular power structure and of Lavinia's and Titus's contact with sovereign power. In their willingness to accept and embrace death I see both Ewan Fernie's freedom and Daniel Juan Gil's anti-political drive. By taking control of their own deaths, Titus and Lavinia can resist a sovereign power that attempted to seize control of their bodies in horrendous ways. I own much of this idea of seeing some instances of suicide as extreme forms of resistance to my unpublished analyses of the films *La Noire de...* (1966) by Ousmane Sembène and *Caché* (2005) by Michael Haneke.

But more innovative, considering the history of *Titus* in performance, is the way Lucius revenges his family by murdering Saturninus. Before commenting on Saturninus's death itself, I would like to mention one particular aspect of the banquet scene that always seems to be a source of tension for spectators and critics alike: how do characters other than Saturninus and Tamora behave during the feast. Do they eat the pie? Does Titus have a different dish served for them? Here Titus motions to serve Lucius a piece of the pie but instead drops it on the floor, faking a lack of skill to spare his son of the cannibalistic dish. Lucius, however, disappointed and

possibly hungry, avenges his father's death by cannibalizing Saturninus, not differently from what Count Dracula would do. If the question of who is the true cannibal in *Titus Andronicus* was a matter of cultural speculation, in Bailey's *Titus* the one true cannibal is neither Titus, the cook, nor the imperial couple, ignorant of the ingredients of the pie, but Lucius, who knocks Saturninus on the table and then proceeds to bite his neck. Soon after, Lucius is scouted offstage by both Marcus and his Goth soldiers, and the medieval music gives way to war drums. In Bailey's production, Lucius crosses all the thresholds between civilization and barbarism. As summed up by Lindsey Scott, such is the journey of the revenge hero (2015, p. 406). Considering Louise Noble's argument that *Titus Andronicus* deals with Early Modern anxieties about the contemporary practice of consuming human body parts for medicinal purposes, Lucius's choice of murdering Saturninus this way could be a form of medicinal cannibalism; by consuming the flesh of the then Emperor, Lucius could heal the wounded body politic. Louise Noble's argument, evidently, focuses on Titus's strange recipe, but the argument could be made, in Bailey's production, regarding Lucius's practice, which is less ambiguously cannibalistic than what Titus does. Going back to the interpolation when the captain is sacrificed, perhaps what we see here is not the problematic opposition between a supposedly civilized culture and the barbarian customs, but rather the interaction of two cultures, resulting in an even more dangerous and violent hybrid, symbolized by the Roman cannibalistic general supported by an army of Goths.

V.

By presenting an overview of some contemporary critical views on Shakespeare and politics and *Titus Andronicus* itself, I hope to have shown that the usual simplifications about the play's supposedly gratuitous violence do not stand the test of performance and criticism, and that a careful look at the play in performance can reveal the subtleties of its violence and the relationship of such violence to complex ideas about power, freedom, and politics. The research from which this paper sprung from originally analyzed five productions of the play, covering nearly 70 years of stage history in England. However, a quick look at Fentiman's and Bailey's production is enough to shed light on the how it is precisely in the moments of violence that politically intricate ideas about power, sovereignty, control, and freedom can appear. True enough, such violent moments can be, and usually are,

exaggerated, astonishing, dark, and hilarious, but they are far from meaningless.

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