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Titus Andronicus and the Nightmares of Violence and Consumption

By Steven Gregg[1]

In Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, the audience are confronted with a nightmarish series of violent acts, increasing in ferocity and volume, which culminate in the Roman general Titus feeding Tamora, Queen of the Goths, her sons 'baked in a pie | Whereof their mother has daintily fed' (5.3.59-60).[2] Much of the play's reputation has been built upon the graphic depictions and reports of violence, which commence in state sanctioned execution, worsen to rape and mutilation, and climax in cannibalism. There is little doubt that the scale and manner of the violence in *Titus Andronicus* is horrific, but the significance and symbolic value of the acts has often been overlooked. This paper will examine the nature of the violence in the play, and argue two points: firstly, that the spiralling offences emanate from a loss of control over legally sanctioned violence; and secondly, that Tamora's consumption of her sons is a form of incest, a taboo representing the climax of nightmarish transgression in the play. The juridical violence depicted in the early stages of the play is a discourse that pervades the entire narrative, which the Roman characters use as a way of creating and perpetuating authority. Tamora's actions challenge stereotypical conceptions of female characters, as she acts out a performative hybrid sexuality that is juxtaposed with the more passive and overtly feminine Lavinia, the daughter of Titus. I will use the theoretical writings of Slavoj Žižek and Judith Butler to illuminate my own ideas on the subjects addressed in this paper, specifically regarding the nature and structuring of violence, and performativity. Shakespeare's intense focus on violence in the play forces the audience to consider them in unusual modes; rather than simply being destructive acts, violence appears to have a curative quality, eventually restoring the order so desired by the Romans.

Titus Andronicus depicts a violent clash of two cultures, and from the dating of 1593 provided by Jonathon Bate is almost certainly the playwright's earliest attempt to represent Roman culture;[3] Francis Barker writes: 'Judging from the early incidence of human sacrifice or from the prominence that it gives to an act of cannibalism, it could be argued that *Titus Andronicus* represents Rome as a primitive society'.[4] This depiction, in a setting where legal jurisdiction becomes increasingly fraught, gives rise to what is by a considerable margin Shakespeare's most violent play, and a graphic analysis of the collision between the Self and Other. Molly Easo Smith argues that the play exposes

> the myth of the Other as more violent and horrible than the Self that *Titus* initially exploits and then completely deconstructs [...] Indeed, Titus begins by asserting polarities, proceeds to

> undermine them by collapsing boundaries that separated Self from Other, and yet concludes with an attempted reiteration of those very polarities that had proved so fragile.[5]

What Smith describes as the 'polarities' examined by the play are in more practical terms two groups, Romans/Self and Goths/Other, carrying out extreme acts of violence upon one another, variously in the name of tradition, revenge and honour. The sustained and macabre violence depicted became the focal point for early critical interpretation of the play, effectively becoming the defining element by which the play was recognised and judged.

The disgust with which critics of the long eighteenth century were to react to the play was encapsulated by Dr Johnson, who wrote: 'The barbarity of the spectacles, which are here exhibited, can scarcely be conceived tolerable to any audience'.[6] However, the play has been embraced by twentieth and twenty-first century audiences, who have found it more than scarcely tolerable; this summer, for example, the Citizens Theatre in Glasgow, Scotland have put on the play as part of their annual 'Bard in the Botanics' series, demonstrating the level of the continued interest in the play. Further to this, Julie Taymor's *Titus* (1999) was the play's first feature length film adaption, a reading which uncompromisingly portrays the explicit, sustained violence of the play. Jonathan Bate, in the introduction to his Arden edition, writes:

> Audiences may still be disturbed by the play's representations of bloody revenge, dismemberment, miscegenation, rape and cannibalism, but theatregoers who are also moviegoers will be very familiar with this kind of material.[7]

Taymor's *Titus* draws attention to the text's arguably carnivalesque release of energy through violence, providing at some points a darkly comic experience. A direct textual adaptation of *Titus Andronicus* does not offer the same visual violence as *Titus*, with several acts being reported; instead, it is the symbolic value of the acts that instils a nightmarish terror in the play, relying upon Early Modern patriarchal values that have to a certain degree prevailed in our own age to provoke fear. The rise in critical popularity of the play has been, I believe, largely as a result of the increased study of representation. For example, the rape and mutilation of Lavinia cannot simply be read as a crime against an innocent young woman; it is a profound statement to us on the situation of Early Modern women. Instead of the violence being seen simply as gratuitous and excessive, the symbolic value of the individual acts has been embraced by readers in the theoretical age. Barker, in his incisive reading of the play, 'A Wilderness of Tigers', suggests an ideological motivation behind the critical objection to the play:

> The play has been scorned or ignored from a very early moment in a way which suggests to me that more is at stake than bad artistic work. There is something insistent in the warding off of

> Titus, as if the rejection of that material which is unacceptable for other reasons has been disguised as aesthetic criticism.[8]

Following Barker's analysis, I will argue that the play raises questions regarding legally-encoded violence, issues that force an interrogation of the foundation upon which that juridical violence bases itself. Žižek's theories, set out in his 2008 text *Violence*, illuminate the importance of state-sanctioned violence, and the consequences of loss of control over it.

Žižek's text, like much of his work, has modern concerns; it is chiefly occupied with the coercive strategies of violence that governments deploy for state control. However, his schematisation of violence remains a useful tool for understanding the difference between violent acts. He writes that 'A step back [from the analysis of violence] enables us to identify a violence that sustains our very efforts to fight violence and promote tolerance'.[9] Žižek suggests here that even in protest, there is a form of violence. He identifies two categories, the latter of which he subdivides, forming a triumvirate: subjective violence, 'performed by a clearly identifiable agent', and objective, which he divides into 'symbolic' and 'systemic' violence.[10] Symbolic violence is that which is 'embodied in language and its forms... reproduced in our habitual speech forms', while systemic violence is 'the often catastrophic consequences of the smooth functioning of our economic and political system'.[11] All three of these forms are identifiable in the play. This ordering can be used to analyse the acts of violence, and to track the cyclical movement of legally-encoded violence from the beginning to the end of the play.

Legal discourse saturates *Titus Andronicus*; from the opening lines of the play, when Saturninus says 'Noble patricians, patrons of my right, | Defend the justice of my cause with arms' (1.1.1-2), attention is drawn to the importance of the law. Lorna Hutson has written extensively on the importance of the forensic legal elements of the text in *The Invention of Suspicion*, offering what she refers to as a 'displaced jury trail' in the play:[12]

> The errors of a comic plot become deceptions as to the facts of a recent homicide, and the middle acts of the play represent the characters trying to reason out, from the uncertain, ambiguous probabilities of evidence, what the true facts are.[13]

Although the play is often seen as belonging to the genre of revenge tragedy, Hutson suggests that she believes it is in fact an embryonic detective drama, where evidence, suspicion and juridical processes are all carefully considered and foregrounded topics. The anachronistic elements of the play allow legal processes that an Early Modern audience would be familiar with to be drawn into the play, rather than it being a specifically Roman

legal drama.[14] The legal aspects of the text, and their use and misuse in the narrative, create a corrupt moral foundation upon which Rome is based; the Romans, and the Goths interpellated into Roman society, use this exploitative ethical code to achieve bloody revenge, but are propelled towards the bloody climax of the play by the environment in which they exist and operate. Juridical law exists primarily to assert and establish power within select groups of people or institutions, in order for power to be exercised over those who break laws by those who enforce them. Judith Butler, following Michel Foucault's analysis of power, writes:

> Juridical notions of power appear to regulate political life in purely negative terms – that is, through the limitation, prohibition, regulation, control and even "protection" of individuals related to that political structure through the contingent and retractable operation of choice.[15]

Butler's analysis of juridical power locates its authority in the ability to regulate lives; that is to say, the power to assert what is admissible and what is inadmissible for subjects. A by-product of this authority, which Roman law in the play seeks to maintain, is the development of taboo.

Taboo is a phenomenon not only decided upon by strict legal and moral codes, but as Sigmund Freud demonstrates in *Totem and Taboo*, a complex value system inherent in society. Freud describes the Australian Aborigines fear of the taboo of incest, a subject which receives metaphorical treatment later in *Titus Andronicus*, writing:

> We should surely not expect that these poor naked cannibals should be moral in their sex lives according to our ideas, or that they should have imposed a high degree of moral restriction upon their sexual impulses. And yet we learn that they have considered it their duty to exercise the most searching care and the most painful rigor in guarding against incestuous sexual relationships. In fact their whole societal organisation seems to serve this object or to have been brought into relation with its attainment.[16]

Though Freud is describing this phenomenon in order to elucidate his theories on the power of the totem, the fear which incest can provoke as a taboo is a powerful and manipulative tool in *Titus Andronicus*. The play's interest in legal discourse foregrounds the liminal elements of the law, and the creation and breaking of taboos is at the transgressive end of the juridical spectrum. In the play, the breaking of taboo is acted out through violence, creating a dual assault in which taboo and escalating violence become intimately associated. Hutson's interest in the play stems from its explicit appeal to forensic rhetoric and reason, but the same forensic elements assist to draw attention to the importance of taboo and its breaking. The language of taboo-breaking is articulated in juridico-legal terms, and Lavinia's injuries provide the backdrop for the search for justice in the legal proceedings of Acts 3 and 4. Shakespeare subtly associates these two ideas to make them into a powerful,

homogenous force within the play. The dramatic effect of adhering to a corrupt juridico-moral code and breaking taboos is accentuated by intimately associating them with one another in the narrative.

Having emphasised the importance of legal discourse to the play, the nightmare of violence can be more clearly understood as part of the degradation of Roman society. Violence is intrinsic to the society portrayed in the play, where armed struggle abroad and internal conflict are common-place. The significance of familial relations is also foregrounded early, as Saturninus and his brother, Bassianus, find themselves in conflict over succession to the title of Emperor following the death of their father. Titus' allegiances are shown soon after his entrance, in consenting to the ritual execution of Tamora's eldest son, Alarbus. Tamora's protests for the life of her son are ignored, with Titus justifying the death to her by saying:

> These are their brethren whom your Goths beheld
> Alive and dead, and for their brethren slain,
> Religiously they ask a sacrifice.
> To this, your son is marked, and die he must,
> T'appease their groaning shadows that are gone. (1.1.125-129)

In the first of several incidents of violence to take place off-stage, the sons return, and Lucius reports that 'we have performed | Our Roman rites: Alarbus' limbs are lopped | And entrails feed the sacrificing fire' (1.1.145-7). This gory image is the origin of the double revenge cycle the play depicts. Commenting on this episode, Francis Barker suggests: 'One would hardly need look further for evidence of a typically primitive account of the sacred incarnate in a material, indeed corporeal, ritual of sacrificial propitiation of the unseen spirits of the dead'.[17] In the execution of Alarbus, Lucius and his brothers justify their actions as ritualistic, while the audience could easily interpret them, as the Goths do, as primitive. The difference in the way in which the murder of Alarbus is interpreted by the Romans and the Goths is crucial; what Lucius considers his 'Roman rites' are viewed as an act of barbarity by Tamora and her sons: 'Oh cruel, irreligious piety!' (1.1.33). According to Žižek's ordering, this is an act of systemic violence: the legal system of Rome is in full operation, but the effect for Tamora and her family is catastrophic. The potential for violence is always-encoded in Roman law, and a ritual sacrifice in the juridical sphere is an appropriate response for Titus' sons. Indeed, it appears Roman law even *requires* violence in the pursuit of justice; no dissenting voices are heard from the Roman citizens. However, the status of legally-codified violence becomes problematised when Titus murders one of his own sons for dishonouring him.

After Lavina's secret engagement to Bassanius emerges, Mutius obstructs Titus as Lavinia is taken off stage, and is killed by his father, who says 'What, villain boy, barr'st me my way in Rome?' (1.1.295). The first act of on-

stage violence is filicide, and yet this is another example of the same systemic violence that propels Alarbus to his death. Lucius, seeing his brother dead, says to his father: 'My lord, you are unjust, and more than so: | In wrongful quarrel you have slain your son' (1.1.297-8). Žižek writes that 'Objective violence [which systemic violence is a part of] is invisible since it sustains the very zero-level standard against which we perceive something as subjectively violent'.[18] The honour code of Roman law suggests, in principal, that Titus can murder his son for dishonouring him. However, in being committed by Titus upon a Roman, the act moves from the realm of objective violence to that of subjective violence; its culprit can be clearly identified, instead of being part of the faceless systemic violence upon which Rome is built. Titus subsumes personal relationships into the political normality of objective violence, in the process exposing 'the often catastrophic consequences of the smooth functioning of our economic and political system'.[19] The collapse into one another of easily identifiable categories of violence signals the highly problematic and political nature of violence in the play; the loss of jurisdiction occurs when political violence becomes personalised, and personal violence politicised. Douglas E. Green draws attention to the dangerous nature of this form of justice, suggesting that the fallibility of the system lies in those who operate it:

> Titus' judgment and one-armed justice against his own son Mutius are little more than willful vengeance and, like his support of Saturninus over Bassianus (for emperor and for son-in-law), examples of faulty reason and blindness.[20]

The characteristics of the violent acts committed are crucial to the audience's reception of the antagonism in the Roman/Self and Goth/Other dialectic; Barker notes the way in which Shakespeare problematises this binary, writing:

> This impression [of barbarism] persists in the host of related, accessory ways in which the text not only displays the beliefs and practices of the ancient culture but displays them as 'marked' behaviours in a manner which signifies its primitive character, [in] such large scale practices as the habit of enslaving captives taken in war.[21]

In narrative terms, the close proximity of the ritual sacrifice of Alarbus and Titus murdering Mutius serves to signify the 'primitive character' of both incidents. These incidents show the distance between the legally-legitimated Self and legally-excluded Other to be alarmingly close.

State-sanctioned violence is a topic Early Modern audiences would be familiar with. Public executions were frequent, and drew crowds. As Michel Foucault famously documents in the first chapter of *Discipline and Punish* in his description of the execution of Robert-François Damiens, these were bloody, gruesome events.[22] Another

example is the Shrove Tuesday celebrations, which Mark Thornton Burnett describes as 'the religious festival traditionally associated with the licensed indulgence of excessive behaviour prior to the period of Lenten abstinence'.[23] Apprentices were effectively allowed to run riot in the liberties, indulging in xenophobic attacks, and, in 1617, destroying the new theatre at Drury Lane. I would like to stress not the actual loss of power over legally-encoded violence in these examples, but the potential for loss of jurisdiction. At the very moment of the theatrical demonstration of extreme power, such as in Foucault's description of Damiens' execution, a dissident potential is simultaneously generated and released. In *Titus Andronicus*, this potential becomes reality, as Tamora seeks out revenge for the offence that has been exacted on her family.

Tamora's revenge is most clearly portrayed by her part in the rape and mutilation of Lavinia, and subsequent false execution of two of Titus' sons for the murder of Lavina's husband, Bassianus. Tamora's motivations for this revenge appear to be based purely in the ritualistic murder of her son, but her means are based upon the legally-encoded violence which the Roman characters deploy. Smith writes:

> In a reciprocal representation of alterity, the play dramatizes the irony and falseness of the Self-Other binary most vividly in this opening scene as Tamora and her sons, seen by the Romans as barbaric and violent, in turn decry the Roman spectacle of retaliation and vengeance as primitive and inhuman.[24]

Tamora's strategic decision to carry out the most violent form of revenge possible – 'I'll find a day to massacre them all, | And raze their faction and their family (1.1.455-6) – results in her resorting to the same barbaric violence that has been displayed by 'the Roman spectacle of retaliation'. The atrocities committed against Lavinia are a macabre, yet crucial, element of the text. The incident ushers in a theme of sexual violence, and also introduces a prominent strain of symbolic violence – that intrinsic to speech. The sexually malevolent discourse employed by Chiron and Demetrius is both misogynistic and masochistic: 'Stay, madam, here is more belongs to her [Lavinia]: | First thrash the corn, then after burn the straw. | This minion stood upon her chastity' (2.2.122-4). Karen Bamford, in *Sexual Violence on the Jacobean Stage,* suggests 'an understanding of sexual assault as a function of culture, rather than nature; of a socially constructed male dominance, rather than a biologically determined impulse'.[25] The confederacy in, and coordination of, the attack by Tamora's lover, Aaron, supports Bamford's idea of sexual violence as a 'socially constructed male dominance'; it is a synchronised, and politicised, male assault on the innocent Lavinia. However, Bamford also draws attention to the societal effect of Lavina's rape, hence my identification of it as a politicised attack. She writes:

> Like cuckoldry, rape thus involves a triangular relationship between assailant, victim, and her male proprietor(s). In illegally possessing a female, the rapist dominates and dishonours another man, or men, as well as the victim.[26]

I will say more below about the status of Lavina's body with regards to men and society, in direct comparison to Tamora, but for now Bamford's clear argument provides sufficient emphasis on the phallocentric nature of rape in the play. Chiron and Demetrius initially transpose the threat of rape from the physical to the linguistic realm, establishing it as symbolically violent before carrying it out as an act of subjective violence. Following the attack, in which Lavinia is raped, has her hands cut off and her tongue cut out, Chiron and Demetrius mock her:

> CHI: Go home, call for sweet water, wash thy hands.
> DEM: She hath no tongue to call, nor hands to wash,
> And so let's leave her to her silent walks.
> CHI: And 'twere my cause, I should hang myself.
> DEM: If thou hadst hands to help thee knit the cord (2.3.6-10)

Compare this to the uncharacteristically florid verse for the play used by Marcus, Lavinia's uncle, to describe her injuries:

> Why dost thou not speak to me? [Lavinia opens her mouth]
> Alas, a crimson river of warm blood,
> Like to a bubbling fountain stirred with wind,
> Doth rise and fall between thy rosed lips,
> Coming and going with thy honey breath (2.3.21-5)

The explicitly natural, organic imagery used by Marcus obscures the symbolic violence of the act, diverting attention away from the decidedly unnatural manner of the attack. Marcus mourns Lavinia's loss as chaste, pure woman in the same language of male ascendancy that Chiron and Demetrius use to mock her before and after the attack. Here we can see the hierarchy established in the play to which female characters are subservient. In order for Tamora to exact the revenge she desires upon Titus, she must establish herself in patriarchal society. This movement corresponds to the masculinisation of her character; Lavinia says to her 'O Tamora, thou bearest a woman's face -', before being interrupted (2.2.136). This disruption of normative gender traits in part relates to the threat Tamora poses as a sexually experienced woman, compared to the meek Lavinia. This factor, combined with her overtly feminine position as a mother, leads Titus to form his unique, cannibalistic strategy for revenge.

The complexity of Tamora's character is based largely upon her equivocal gender, a trait recognised by Lavinia. Regarding gender performativity, Judith Butler writes:

> The presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it. When the

> constructed status of gender is theorised as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice.[27]

The theatrical effect of Lavinia's insult to Tamora, 'Thou bearest a woman's face', is based on the 'presumption of a binary gender system'. Lavinia is overtly and stereotypically female, in the opening scene finding herself the helpless victim of a patriarchal struggle and the bargaining chip in a matrimonial debate; she is a pre-discursive and discursive 'woman'. Tamora, meanwhile, has the biological characteristics of a woman, but in her pursuit of revenge abandons the discursive performativity by which she would be gendered 'female'. In his diametrically opposed representations of women, the passive Lavinia and active Tamora, Shakespeare draws gender into a larger debate within the play surrounding the performativity and expectation of roles. 'Moreover,' Butler writes,

> when agreed-upon identities or agreed-upon dialogic structures, through which already established identities are communicated, no longer constitute the theme or subject of politics, then identities can come into being and dissolve depending on the concrete practices that constitute them.[28]

Like the identity of Tamora as a stereotypically constructed, performative 'woman' being made unstable by her actions, the definitions which allow a character to be called a Roman or a Goth are shown to be inadequate within the scope of the play. The malleable identities, which 'come into being and dissolve', rely upon the assumptions of other characters; most powerfully in the case of Tamora, the instability of character is shown to be based upon her aesthetic female qualities, and the performative expectations for her as a woman. To use Butler's formulation, the escalating violence and retribution in the play compromise the 'concrete practices' that produce identity. Lavinia's continual willingness to perform the female role, even after her rape and mutilation, propels her towards her demise in the final scene at the hands of her father, while Tamora's rejection of the role results in her meeting an equally gruesome fate. The bodies of the two main female characters in the play are sites of inscription for men and patriarchal society. Lavinia's willingness to rehearse the role imposed upon her is juxtaposed to Tamora's rejection of it. Lavinia's body truly is an inscriptive site; Titus asks Saturninus 'Was it well done of rash Virginius | To slay his own daughter with his own right hand, | Because she was enforced, stained and deflowered?' (5.3.36-8), before carrying out the duty of Roman patriarchy. The laws of men are written upon Lavinia, with her stumps, mutilated mouth and stab wounds. Tamora's body, meanwhile, becomes a vessel, her stomach containing at the moment of her death the flesh of her own sons, the price Titus deems necessary for transgressing against the patriarchal law that also requires him to murder his own daughter.

The double revenge cycle of the play portrays an escalation in violence, creating an environment where the perpetrator seeks to act out something worse than they themselves experienced; thus, the sexual nature of the crimes committed against Lavinia are seized upon by Titus. Tamora says to Lavinia before her rape: 'Shall I rob my sweet sons of their fee. | No, let them satisfy their lust on thee' (2.2.179-80). This is an act of symbolic violence later echoed by Titus, as he says to Chiron and Demetrius that he will 'bid that strumpet, your unhallowed dam, | Like to the earth to swallow her own increase' (5.2.190-1). The escalation in symbolic violence correlates to the increase in subjective violence; threats are fulfilled by violent acts, carried out by a clearly identifiable agent. With Tamora having already begged in vain for the life of Alarbus, for Titus to simply murder Chiron and Demetrius is insufficient retribution. In making her consume her children, Titus forces her into an act of symbolic incest, one of the only taboos left untouched up to this point in the play. State-sanctioned violence proves itself capable of going beyond moral law in order to secure its own ascendancy, for example in Titus' callous murder of his own son; similarly, the acts of political and personal violence acted out upon the Goths seek to establish cultural hegemony over a group firmly identified as outsiders.

The final scene of the play, where Titus succeeds in making Tamora to 'swallow her own increase', combines the taboo of incest with the taboo of cannibalism, a subject I have touched upon with regard to Freud's *Totem and Taboo*. Using Titus' darkly comic line that he will 'make two pasties of your shameful heads' (5.2.189) as a point of departure, in a fascinating article Louise Noble explores the discourses surrounding cannibalism in the early modern period, and suggests an alarming link between medicinal cannibalism and the 'healing of the body politic':

> Different perceptions of the eating of human flesh by humans are constituted and regulated within distinct orders of discourse. By constructing medicinal cannibalism as a desirable practice, early modern medical discourse offers a complex understanding of what it means for one human to eat the body of another; this is at odds with discourses of cannibalism circulating in the period which repudiate such practices as abhorrent and taboo.[29]

Noble shows how a trade in 'mummy', a catch-all term for prepared human flesh, was in conflict with an opposing discourse that acted against cannibalism. These concurrent discourses show us that as 'the performative codes of civility disintegrate, we are clearly reminded that cannibalism is no longer a measure for barbarity'.[30] Instead, the convergence of a cannibalistic and medicinal discourse sheds an entirely new light on Titus' decision to enact his revenge by feeding Tamora her sons; Noble suggests that it is in fact a strategy for curing the body politic of the patriarchal disorder that Rome finds itself infected by. Titus formalises the ritual, removing it from the realm of bloody murder to another ritualistic death, saying 'Come, come, be everyone officious | To make this banquet' (5.2.201-2). To a Western postmodern audience, from which the medicinal discourse of cannibalism has been purged and the dominant idea of it being repulsive and criminal reinforced,

this tactic seems unbelievable; in all likelihood, despite Noble's persuasive argument for the medicinal use of mummy, the cultural taboo of this incident would also strike an early modern audience. Titus' long speech to Chiron and Demetrius before he cuts their throats emphasises what Noble describes as 'pollution therapy',[31] an attempt to discover whether acts of violence can in fact have a therapeutic function. The scene also foregrounds what Barker identifies as 'the fetishisation of bodily emissions, especially tears, blood and breath';[32] Titus' desire to make Lavinia catch the blood of the brothers, 'this hateful liquor' (5.2.199), in a bowl held in her stumps and using it in the baking of the pie emphasises this, and reminds us again of the attempt to use human material in a curative capacity. The final scenes draw together all the individual strands of nightmarish violence and transgression in the play, with Noble suggesting that 'the desire to heal Rome is underpinned by the heavy duty of caring for Rome, a task burdened with licensed killing and the deconstruction of the civilized self this action demands'.[33] Ultimately, Titus sees the murder of Chiron, Demetrius, Tamora and Lavinia as actions that will restore Rome to a normality that was initially disrupted by the appropriation of violent Roman strategies by Tamora and the Goths. The 'licensed killing', a privilege initially reserved exclusively for Roman rituals, is a strategy taken up by Tamora as being the most effective method of communication in a play saturated with discursive violence. The way in which violence is considered in the play is encapsulated by the manner in which Rome is returned to patriarchal normality – symbolically incestuous cannibalism. One of the play's nightmares is undoubtedly the paradoxical curative capacity of violence, where war leads to murder, murder to rape, and rape to medicinal cannibalism, a macabre political solution that provides Lucius with the opportunity 'To heal Rome's harms and wipe away her woe' (5.3.147).

What conclusions can we draw regarding the nightmares of violence and consumption in *Titus*? I have shown that the loss of control over legally-encoded violence sets in motion a chain of events that ends in the bloody meal, where Titus, Tamora, Saturninus and Lavinia are all murdered. The double revenge cycle privileges violent, sexual retribution over sound justice; and yet the justice at the beginning of the play acted out on Alarbus is bloody, patriarchal and vengeful in itself. Lucius becomes Emperor at the end of the play, returning Rome to its normality of systemic violence, and securing its patriarchal future by the increasing importance of Lucius' son. While the murdered Romans are given an honourable burial, Lucius casts Tamora's body out of the confines of the city:

> As for that ravenous tiger, Tamora,
> No funeral rite, nor man in mourning weed,
> No mournful bell shall ring her burial,
> But throw her forth to the beasts and birds to prey:
> Her life was beastly and devoid of pity,
> And being dead, let birds on her take pity (5.3.194-99)

Identified as inhuman, Tamora's crimes, including the incitement of rape, symbolic incest and cannibalism, are punished by the fate of executed felons in Elizabethan times.[34] Barker comments on the symbolism of this incident, writing:

> [Tamora's body] is merely thrown away, her waste corpse is symbolically jettisoned 'forth' from the order of culture into that of nature, from the human world into that of the beasts, from society into the wilderness, or into whatever it is that is outside, and constituted in opposition to, Rome.[35]

The presence of the Goths in Rome forces the audience to question exactly how civilised Roman society is in comparison to the barbarism of Gothic culture. Barker's assertion that Tamora's body has been 'symbolically jettisoned' fails to note that that her corporeal ejection is a reality with a symbolic function. Tamora has already been identified as beastly, 'a ravenous tiger', and the placing of her body in the natural zone of exclusion outside Rome inseparably fuses the notions of juridical functioning and Tamora's otherness. The nightmare is, to a certain extent, resolved, and yet a powerful memory of it remains.

Steven Gregg

NOTES

1. I would like to thank Dr Eric Langley for his enthusiastic criticism of the draft of this paper; his perceptive comments helped change it from a conference paper to a publishable essay.

2. All quotations from the play are taken from Jonathan Bate's 1995 Arden edition.

3. Jonathan Bate, 'Introduction' in William Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus*, ed. by Jonathan Bate (London: Arden, 1995), p. 69.

4. Francis Barker, *The Culture of Violence: Essays on Tragedy and History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), p. 143.

5. Molly Easo Smith, 'Spectacles of Torment in Titus Andronicus', *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 36: 2 (1996), pp. 316-7.

6. Quoted in Bate, p. 33.

7. Bate, pp. 1-2.

8. Barker, p. 205.

9. Slavoj Žižek, *Violence* (London: Verso, 2008), p. 1.

10. Žižek, p. 1.

11. Žižek, p. 1.

12. Lorna Hutson, *The Invention of Suspicion: Law and Mimesis in Shakespeare and Renaissance Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 90.

13. Hutson, p. 92.

14. Hutson, p. 97.

15. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990), p.2.

16. Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1950), p. 3.

17. Barker, p. 145.

18. Žižek, p. 2.

19. Žižek, p.2.

20. Douglas E. Green, 'Interpreting "Her Martyr'd Signs": Gender and Tragedy in *Titus Andronicus*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 40: 3 (1989), p. 322.

21. Barker, p. 143.

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