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SHAKESPEARE IN THE TUBE:
THEATRICALIZING VIOLENCE IN BBC'S *TITUS ANDRONICUS*

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ABSTRACT

The problem addressed in the present study concerns William Shakespeare's plays in performance on television, most specifically the presence of violence in BBC's production of *Titus Andronicus*, directed by Jane Howell. I have come up with two sets of hypotheses. The first is that the violence identifiable in the playtext seems to have been recreated by Howell through the specificities of the medium, making such violence neither excessively gory nor comic. The second is that Jane Howell's utilization of alienating devices in Shakespeare's first tetralogy, as pointed out by Graham Holderness, can also be verified in *Titus Andronicus*. Such elements may be related to the aforementioned treatment of violence in the play and may serve as a way of making political or aesthetic commentaries on the play itself. Thus, in order to approach my corpus I relied on television and performance studies and Bertolt Brecht's and some of his commentators' writings on epic theater. I have also brought to my work the voices of critics about the violence in the play itself, most importantly Francis Barker's notions on the "occlusion of violence" in *Titus Andronicus*. The present thesis concludes that Brechtian elements are indeed present in Howell's production and that, to a certain extent, they are related to the violence in *Titus Andronicus*. However, this relationship is complex. At the same time that the extravagant violence is hidden from the spectator and alienation devices every now and then distance the audience from the characters and the action, Young Lucius' reaction to this same, often-unseen violence is highlighted.

22,669 words

76 pages

RESUMO

O problema a ser tratado nessa dissertação diz respeito às peças de William Shakespeare em performance na televisão, mais especificamente a presença da violência na produção de *Tito Andrônico* pela BBC, dirigida por Jane Howell. Apresentei duas hipóteses. A primeira é que a violência identificada no texto da peça aparenta ter sido recriada por Howell através das especificidades do meio, tornando tal violência nem excessivamente sangrenta nem cômica. A segunda é de que a utilização de elementos alienantes por Jane Howell, como apontado por Graham Holderness, na primeira tetralogia de Shakespeare, também pode ser verificada em *Tito Andrônico*. Tais elementos podem estar relacionados com o tratamento da violência na peça citado anteriormente, e pode servir como forma de tecer comentários estéticos ou políticos sobre a própria peça. Portanto, a fim de abordar o corpus, baseei-me em estudos da performance e da televisão, e nos escritos de Bertolt Brecht e seus comentadores sobre o teatro épico. Além disso, também incorporei ao meu trabalho as vozes de críticos sobre a violência na peça, principalmente as noções de Francis Barker sobre a “ocusão da violência” em *Tito Andrônico*. O trabalho conclui que elementos brechtianos podem ser, de fato, encontrados na produção e que, em certa medida, estão relacionados com a violência presente na peça. Entretanto, essa relação é complexa. Ao mesmo tempo que a violência é escondida do espectador e elementos alienantes ocasionalmente distanciam a audiência dos personagens e da ação, a reação do Jovem Lúcio para com essa violência geralmente escondida é ressaltada.

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1. SHAKESPEARE'S SEEMING TIMELESSNESS: *TITUS ANDRONICUS* IN THE TUBE

Director Jane Howell said that she was attracted to William Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* "because [she] didn't know how to do it", and confessed "that making sense of or finding a route through the violence was not easy" (Willis 172). I could say the same about the play and about her production in relation to writing the present thesis. Not only was it a problem to find "a route through the violence", but also to attempt to solve the apparently irreconcilable tensions between playtext and production, playtext and its new medium, and Howell's conception and the BBC series' conception. Thus the present thesis deals with a controversial play produced in a controversial environment. The study of such variety of antagonizing phenomena will, hopefully, shed new light on the subject of Shakespeare on television and on the critical reception of *Titus Andronicus* itself.

Therefore, the overall problem to be dealt with in the proposed investigation concerns Shakespeare's plays in performance on television. The specific issue to be investigated is the presence of violence in BBC's adaptation of *Titus Andronicus*, directed by Jane Howell. *Titus Andronicus* is considered a problem play due to its exaggerated violence. Some critics (see chapter 2) take this approach to violence as a way through which Shakespeare parodies other Elizabethan playwrights, whose gory plays were popular at the time. Therefore, staging *Titus Andronicus* demands that directors come up with a consistent way of dealing with intense violence, be it through parody or tragedy. I have found that Howell's conception of the play and the techniques she uses as a director do address the violence found in the playtext, while mitigating such violence and making it more accessible to a general audience. Furthermore, critic Graham Holderness finds Brechtian elements in Howell's tetralogy.¹ Arguably, such Brechtian elements are also present in Howell's *Titus*, and may be related to her approach to the violence in the play. Thus, in the following paragraphs I will attempt to contextualize my research, in order to clarify some of the issues underlying the present thesis.

The general context of the present work is Shakespeare's plays in adaptation, foregrounding television. The subject of adapting Shakespeare to television and cinema has been dealt with by several

¹ The first tetralogy, i.e. the three parts of *Henry VI* and *Richard III*.

critics, especially since the proliferation of adaptations of Shakespeare's plays to film. As H. R. Coursen remarks,

[t]o say that Shakespeare is timeless is to utter an aphorism only half true. Shakespeare's seeming timelessness results from his ability to change with the times, to survive, even thrive, in different formats and in media undreamt of in his dramaturgy. (3)

One of the formats to which Shakespeare's plays were successfully adapted is the radio. John Russell Taylor argues that while the plays have much to offer in visual terms, the greatest moments in Shakespearean dramaturgy are the ones with most verbal language. The large amount of radio adaptations of the plays by BBC radio accounts for such relative ease with which Shakespeare can be adapted to radio. Taylor remarks that *The Tempest*, for instance, was produced eleven times on radio (11-2). Television, on the other hand, did not have many Shakespeare productions, at least not in its beginnings (12). Taylor mentions that while "the box" is an intimate medium, like the radio, it is also visual. "Both of these qualities", Taylor writes, "are in themselves mixed blessings where Shakespeare is concerned, and moreover each complicates the problems which arise from the other" (13). Such complications arise, for instance, in close-ups, when spectators may get distracted; in long-shots, when the actors become too small and cannot capture the spectators' attention; and in the abuse of medium-shots, when the action becomes monotonous, still according to Taylor (13).

Furthermore, in a comparison between cinema and television, critic Michèle Willems writes that "the cinema is more akin to the theatre than television as far as communication with a collective public is concerned" (71). Willems' statement may seem strange at first, due to television's ability to reach millions of spectators at once. But ultimately television is received at the spectators' homes, where they watch it alone or with their families, which according to Willems "does not make up an audience" (71). Thus, concerning reception, television is a more domestic and intimate medium than cinema.² In terms of actor/audience interaction, however, television and cinema are similar in the sense that actors are unaware of their audience's reaction, a feature that may be especially damaging to comedies (71-72). Besides, the

² However, cinema is apparently becoming "more domestic". Films today are often watched on our computers or on other smaller screens, such as tablets or even cellphones.

specificities of the TV medium in relation to cinema and theater should also be pointed out. Whereas cinema is seen as a representational medium, due to the supremacy of image over other aspects, the Elizabethan theater relied heavily on verbal language. Television, while sharing some features with cinema, seems to be an intermediate medium, due to the smaller size of its screen, which considerably diminishes the influence of the visual code. Adapting Shakespeare to television seems to be, thus, an experience that lies between the cinematographic and the theatrical, as Howell's adaptation seems to confirm.

Still exploring such comparison, John Caughie, in "Rhetoric, Pleasure, and 'Art Television' – *Dreams of Leaving*", analyzes a piece of television drama in an attempt to identify where the pleasure of television lies. Caughie concludes that one of the main differences between cinema and television is identification:

Freed from the fictional space, she spectator *watches* television (in a way which is quite different from the look within cinema) without being lost in it. What the rhetoric produces is a relatively unmediated identification of the look of the spectator with that of the camera [...]. (28)

Moreover, reinforcing the assumption that television is more akin to theater than cinema, Caughie argues that television and theater share a mode of acting. The fact that television is more domestic, plus "the sense of being in control of the image", has spectators become more aware of acting, similarly to the theater, whereas cinema favors identification (29). The point Caughie makes is that such difference in identification occurs due to the different rhetoric in television drama and film: in television, he argues, the camera is separated from the main character's gaze. Such rhetoric, Caughie argues, establishes complicity, not identification (29-30).

Television also differs from cinema in terms of time and nature. Drawing on the concept of chronotope developed by Mikhail Bakhtin (briefly defined as "the specific organization of space and time within the work or within a genre" [Adorno's *Reproach* 139]), Caughie argues that time in television is characteristic for its interruptions: "Unlike the novelistic of cinema or of the twentieth-century novel, the television novelistic is organized around interruption rather than around closure" (141). The question of time on television, thus, is directly related to its

status as a “non-specialized activity”.³ Caughie argues that analyzing a work’s or a genre’s chronotope is more valuable, however, if coupled with an analysis of its “internal generic form and external history” (142). Television, due to its overall reception context, “differs quite fundamentally from cinema which is still, characteristically, a ‘specialized activity’” (142). In this sense, theater can also be considered a “specialized activity”, differentiating itself from television, which belongs to the domain of everyday activities. Going back to the internal temporal organization of film, the latter plays with the spectator by its use of cuts, whereas television does so through the intercalation of continuous flow and interruption (145).

In my view, Caughie’s arguments in relation to both desire and time in television problematize comparisons between different media, often found when talking about Shakespeare in adaptation. Differences between theater, television and cinema cannot be explained, exclusively, through their diverse uses of the visual and aural code, but must also encompass the subtleties concerning their relationship with a broader context and their places as different social practices. Having said that, I agree with Caughie that television seems to share a mode of acting with theater, but differs from it in its being, usually, a non-specialized activity. But would a play from the BBC series be considered a non-specialized activity, like the everyday news program? However unanswerable such question may be, it sheds light on the intricacies of my object, and on how it seems to evade classification.

Having discussed the general context of this proposal, I will now discuss its specific context, that is, the BBC’s series and the play *Titus Andronicus*. According to Susan Willis, producer Cedric Messina originally conceived the series in 1975 (3). The BBC already had a strong drama department, having produced Shakespeare and other canonical playwrights. Even so, producing 37 plays in seven years was a tremendous effort. Messina was successful in raising funds for the series, since it had a potential for sales, especially in the United States, for educational purposes (4). His goal was simply to deliver “solid, basic televised versions of Shakespeare’s plays to reach a wide television audience and to enhance the teaching of Shakespeare” (10-11). However, the series in general was not well received. Director Michael Bogdanov, for instance, considered it to be “the greatest disservice to Shakespeare in the last 25 years” (qtd. in Willis 26).

³ “Non-specialized activity” in the sense that it is part of the “everyday”, “and only on ‘special’ occasions occupying ‘special’ time set aside for it and it alone” (142).

The series' poor reception was arguably due to its predominantly conservative take, as requested by its underwriters—both in Britain and abroad. The BBC was urged to produce the series faithfully according to the period set in the playtext, i.e., Ancient Rome for *Titus Andronicus* and so on. The plays should not run over two and a half hours, which required severe cuts in the script. The financial groups who supported the endeavor sustained Messina's aforementioned purpose for the series: they did not want the productions to "get too wild or experimental" lest they lose their money (10). This choice was financially successful, in fact, as in 1982, three years before the last play was produced, the series had already paid itself (8). It is possible to say that the series' conception as a whole did not derive from some aesthetic concern, but rather from a practical and financial need.

But however well-intentioned Messina was, Jonathan Miller eventually replaced him. The BBC decided to choose an outsider to try to give the series a different conception and instigate new interest in spectators and critics. Miller's intention was to test the limits of Shakespeare on television, and in order to do so he brought to the series directors like "Jane Howell, serious and symbolic in approach; Jack Gold, with a 'vigorous and efficient and interesting imagination' [...] and Elijah Moshinsky, the bright and young director of operas" (Miller 25). These directors infused "life and freshness and intelligence" in the productions and ended up working also under Shaun Sutton's producership, thus finalizing the series (26).

Jane Howell, thus, was responsible for directing the aforementioned first tetralogy, *The Winter's Tale* and the production presently analyzed, *Titus Andronicus*. Her "attitude to the printed text was the same in all six productions: a remarkable fidelity, both to its letter and to its spirit" (Neil Taylor 88). Although, as we have seen, the series in general was subject to criticism, Howell was praised for her work. When it comes to the BBC Shakespeare, scholars commonly mention her work as a successful example—sometimes the only—in terms of direction. "The most noticeable aspect of Howell's productions", Susan Willis writes, "is their strong conceptual basis and visual imagery" (167). One of the means that Howell uses to achieve such effect is the scenery. As Willis points out, even though Howell uses one set, she changes it throughout the plays, producing different visual effects and fostering the creation of meanings and defying television realism (166-7). Another key feature of her approach is her concern for the actors. Howell "believes the power of Shakespeare's work is in the words. They have to communicate clearly, and the

audience must listen” (169). Howell also focused on ensemble acting and actors often doubled roles.

Concerning *Titus Andronicus*, Howell emphasized her conception of the play as a nightmare (Susan Willis 172). This effect was achieved, mainly, by making Young Lucius present in more scenes than in the original text (Neil Taylor 88). As Susan Willis writes: “The accretion of images and the number of scenes that open with a close-up of young Lucius’s face both contribute to the dreamlike or subjective sense of the action” (173). Such visual interpolations can be seen as a way of making Young Lucius “the viewer’s representative” in her production (Taylor 92). In order to develop such effect, Howell also uses “superimposed images, soft, slow two-way fades [. . .] and wipes” (Willis 172). Not only are the editing tricks used to convey the oneiric atmosphere, but also to comment on the political situation of the play. One major example would be the superimposition of “an empty tribune’s mask over Titus as he pleads for his sons” (173), thus reinforcing Titus’ sorrowful words, ignored by Rome’s politicians:

Tit: Hear me, grave fathers! Noble tribunes, stay!
 For pity of mine age, whose youth was spent
 In dangerous wars whilst you securely slept;
 For all my blood in Rome’s great quarrel shed,
 For all the frosty nights that I have watch’d
 And for these bitter tears which now you see
 Filling the aged wrinkles in my cheeks,
 Be pitiful to my condemned sons,
 [. . .]
 O reverent tribunes! O gentle, aged men!
 Unbind my sons, reverse the doom of death,
 And let me say (that never wept before)
 My tears are now prevailing orators.
 Luc: O noble father, you lament in vain:
 The Tribunes hear you not, no man is by,
 And you recount your sorrows to a stone.
 (3.1.1-29)⁴

Having briefly contextualized my field of study, I now proceed to detail my objectives in this research. The overall objective of the proposed investigation is to analyze Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus* in performance on television. That is, my concern is not only related to the

⁴ All quotations from Shakespeare’s plays refer to the Riverside edition listed under references.

play in performance, but also to the specific features of television that influence the outcome of such production. The specific objective of the proposed investigation is to verify how the violence in the playtext was dealt with in BBC's production and the thematic implications of such treatment. The play presents shocking scenes of murder, torture, and cannibalism, most of them happening onstage, becoming a problem when it comes to performing such actions before thousands of spectators in their homes. The violence is so intense at certain points that it can place the verisimilitude of the action into question. Therefore, I intend to analyze how these problems have been solved—or not—bearing in mind the intended audience of the play, BBC's general approach to the series, Howell's conception of the play, and the presence of Brechtian elements in the production.

I have come up with hypotheses. The first is that the violence identifiable in the playtext seems to have been recreated by Jane Howell through the specificities of the medium, making such violence neither excessively gory nor comic, a procedure which I explain and illustrate later in this thesis. The second is that Howell's utilization of alienating devices in the tetralogy, as pointed out by Graham Holderness, can also be verified in *Titus Andronicus*. Such elements may be related to the aforementioned treatment of violence in the play and may serve as a way of making political or aesthetic commentaries on the play itself.

Thus, the corpus of the proposed research is the play *Titus Andronicus*, by William Shakespeare, and the television production *Titus Andronicus*, by Jane Howell. I have chosen *Titus Andronicus* due to its violence, which seemed to me difficult to be staged when I first read the play. I have chosen to investigate BBC's production due to the further problems that could arise in adapting the play to television, especially considering BBC's overall conservative approach to Shakespeare's plays. Reading Harold Bloom's remarks on the play in *Shakespeare: The Invention of Human* highly influenced my choice. Bloom's considerations on how the play could unintentionally generate laughter in the audience and could only be appreciated if conceived as a parody seem to clash with BBC's intention of delivering traditional, straightforward productions (113). As for my personal reasons, I have chosen *Titus Andronicus* due to an interest in the theme of violence in art, and an interest both in Early Modern English Literature and contemporary popular culture, hence the choice of studying Shakespeare on television.

Concerning the relevance of the present work, first of all, it is relevant to the study of the play *Titus Andronicus* itself, which does not

seem to have received as much critical attention as other Shakespeare's plays. Secondly, the proposed study can add up to the research on Shakespeare in performance that has been conducted at UFSC-PPGI. Eight MA theses and four doctoral dissertations on Shakespeare in performance have been produced at PGI. Among these, the MA thesis "Shakespeare, Television and Painting: Stylization in the BBC *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Cymbeline*" has dealt with Shakespeare on television, and a doctoral dissertation entitled "'Strange Images of Death': Violence and the Uncanny in Five Productions of *Macbeth*" has analyzed violence and the uncanny in productions of *Macbeth* for the cinema, theater and television. Finally, the proposed investigation might shed light on issues such as the depiction of violence in art and mass media.

Since the proposed research investigates Shakespeare in performance on television, foregrounding violence, I will draw my critical concepts from sources dealing with Shakespeare in performance, from Shakespeare in adaptation, and from cinema and television studies. Moreover, I will be dealing with concepts coined or appropriated by Bertolt Brecht concerning epic theater, strangeness, and alienation, which will be accounted for in a chapter on its own. Considering Shakespeare in performance, I will draw my concepts mainly from Jay Halio's *Understanding Shakespeare's Plays in Performance*, as it deals with important aspects of producing Shakespeare to be performed. Moreover, since the proposed investigation deals with Shakespeare on television, I will borrow concepts from cinema and television studies in order to analyze the aspects of the production related mainly to editing and cinematography. These concepts will be carefully considered, bearing in mind critical writings on the features of television in general as a mass media, and will appear throughout the thesis. Considering the issue of violence, I will focus mainly on Barker's and Foakes's notions on violence in Shakespeare.

In order to proceed with my investigation, I reread the playtext of *Titus Andronicus* and the most relevant critical writings on the play. Meanwhile, I studied Brecht's writings on the epic theater, alienation and strangeness. While doing that, I was able to deepen my understanding of dramatic performance theory and television studies. Then, I analyzed Jane Howell's *Titus Andronicus*, bearing in mind the critical writings on Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* and the aforementioned theories. My analysis has focused on the following five scenes: act 1, scene 1; act 2, scene 4; act 3, scene 1; and act 5, scene 3. I have chosen such scenes for their explicit display of violence. Other

scenes will be commented in passing but will not be the focus of my analysis. While conducting the analysis, I will also expand my understanding on the issue of violence itself. More specifically, I will address violence in Shakespeare's plays, focusing on the play *Titus* itself. I have also watched the other productions directed by Howell, in order to verify the presence of Brechtian elements in them. At the same time, I have verified whether such elements can be related to the way violence is recreated in Howell's *Titus*.

The present thesis is thus divided in four chapters. Firstly, the introduction contextualizes the research and presents the research hypotheses. The second chapter covers the theoretical background of the work, and offers an analysis of the violence in the play. The third chapter analyzes Howell's production, invoking the discussion developed in the previous chapter to enrich the analysis. Finally, in the last chapter, I present the main findings and discuss them, as well as make suggestions for further research.

2 *TITUS ANDRONICUS*: VIOLENCE, PERFORMANCE AND EPIC THEATER

Unlike the other Roman plays⁵—*Coriolanus*, *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*—*Titus Andronicus* has no easily traceable historical source.⁶ Although there was an emperor Titus Andronicus, in no way does he seem related to the Titus in Shakespeare's play. Harold Bloom, in his psychoanalytical reading of the play's inception, sees in *Titus Andronicus* Shakespeare attempting to rid himself of Christopher Marlowe's influence. Thus, the play's exaggerated violence is Shakespeare's way of leaving Marlowe behind and overcoming his own anxieties as a newcomer in London's theater scene (77-8).

Naomi Conn Liebler, in an attempt to identify the main sources for *Titus Andronicus*' Rome, argues:

in the English translation of Herodian's *History* the Rome of *Titus Andronicus* is identifiable. The play's "political situation" includes certain very specific situations represented by Herodian and thus tells of a particularly disastrous period "known to Roman history". (265)

Thus, the elements in the play's plot do not necessarily resemble Herodian's *History*, but Shakespeare depicts a decadent Rome akin to the one described by Herodian, comprising roughly a 60-year period of imperial Rome. Although some characters in the play might have been only loosely based on such narrative, Liebler argues that "the Rome they inhabit in this play" was far from fictional (267). The Rome found in Herodian is a decadent empire, defeated by the barbarians not through military conflict, but rather through cultural invasion: "its values compromised and its pollution led and orchestrated by a politically ambitious and calculating matriarch (mirrored in Tamora) and by a dynasty of African rulers" (274). Thus, this Rome, destroyed

⁵ The status of *Titus Andronicus* as a Roman play is questioned by certain critics, as discussed by Robert S. Miola in *Shakespeare's Rome*. I tend to agree with Miola in seeing *Titus Andronicus* as an undoubtedly Roman play, especially due to "Shakespeare's growing interest in the processes of Roman government, in the secular problems of power and order, and in the political and moral issues raised by the clash between private interest and public duty" (44).

⁶ The utilization of terms such as "source" is rather problematic, as suggested by Stam (see section 2.2). However, I stand with Naomi Conn Liebler, in the sense that "[w]hen these semantic challenges are combined with new-historicist interrogations of 'historicity' (another troublesome word), the likelihood of saying anything concrete about Shakespeare's recycling of antecedent literary or historical texts [. . .] diminishes exponentially" (271).

from the inside, with its values being questioned and its margins obliterated, is the site of the majority of the violent acts perpetrated in *Titus Andronicus*. In the following section, thus, I will explore the thematics of violence in Shakespeare's plays and, particularly, in *Titus Andronicus*.

2.1. Word Made Flesh: Violence in *Titus Andronicus*

As for violence in Shakespeare, critic R. A. Foakes identifies two main sources for the violence in his plays: classical, or heroic, violence; and biblical violence. The former seems to have been learned in Shakespeare's studies of the classics, particularly Ovid, and the latter from his own society (18). Foakes sees violence in general as both cultural and natural at the same time. Violence is in our genes but is also learned in society, especially in males, as Foakes remarks (3). Advancements from often-rival fields, such as Evolutionary Psychology and History, are taken into account to explain that violence seems to be constant in human history, but its expressions "erupt in different ways at any time, and the problem continues to haunt our age as much as it did that of Homer, or of Shakespeare" (3).

Classical violence, as learned from Homer, Virgil and Ovid, is that resulting from a war culture, a sort of rationalized violence as depicted in the *Iliad*. Although the epic heroes acknowledge the evils of violence, it is through violence that they are pushed beyond their limits to perform valorous deeds (19-20). Moreover, the fascination caused by the *Iliad*, according to Foakes, is due to its displaying

human aggressiveness powerfully in a technologically primitive world in which men fight and kill one another as individuals face to face. At the same time, it reveals and clarifies for us the force of impulses we have to learn to manage. (21)

As for biblical violence, it seems that Shakespeare was mainly concerned with the tale of Abel and Cain. Foakes points out some of the implications and common interpretations of this tale. Cain might be seen as a hypocrite whose sacrifice was rightly rejected by God, or as a man who regrets having killed his brother and whose rejection by God was, in this case, arbitrary (25-6). What seems striking about this tale is that violence is, at the same time, arbitrary and creative, since the founding of civilization resulted from Cain's act of murdering his brother.

Violence is, thus, at the same time, related to the irrational but also to the rationality of the city (27).⁷ Besides the aforementioned aspects, Shakespeare probably also “encountered violence on the streets of London, witnessed executions, fought quarrels, [and] gazed at the traitors’ heads mounted on the gate of the bridge over the Thames” (32).

Violence in *Titus Andronicus*, thus, seems to be multifaceted and to serve different purposes. Whereas Foakes argues that “[i]t is as if Shakespeare gives full imaginative scope to the culture of violence he had encountered in ancient epic and in Ovid” (54), in my view, the violence in *Titus* also seems to derive from the aforementioned biblical violence. Titus’s offerings—first Tamora’s son, Alarbus, and then his own hand—can be seen as a type of sacrifice rejected by the gods, for they bring Titus nothing but suffering.

However, the controversial issue when it comes to *Titus Andronicus* does not seem to be the origin of its violence, but rather its aesthetic purpose. Although the play has recently “had some eloquent defenders” (Bloom 56), both Foakes and Harold Bloom (the latter in *Shakespeare: The Invention of Human*) seem to agree that the violence in *Titus Andronicus* is exaggerated to the point of becoming comic. This conception of the play, however, does not seem to be shared by Jan Kott in *Shakespeare Nosso Contemporâneo*. The play might be comic when read but, on stage, has the power to frighten and move the audience (301-2). Leonard Tennenhouse, more eloquently defending the play, asserts:

The sheer spectacle of a woman, herself dismembered, herself carrying her father’s amputated hand in her mouth has not earned this play a particularly high place in a canon based on lofty ideas and good taste. The mutilation of Lavinia’s body has been written off as one of the exuberant excesses of an immature playwright or else as the corrupting influence of another poet. But I would like to consider these sensational features as part of a political iconography which Shakespeare understood as well as anyone else, one which he felt obliged to use as well as free to exploit for his own dramatic purposes. (107)

The spectacle of Lavinia’s mutilated body is a reminder of the horrors that have taken place in the Rome of *Titus Andronicus*, particularly

⁷ A similar pattern is found in the legend of Romulus and Remus, the founders of Rome.

Titus' killing of his own son, as well as an emblem of the disrupted political order. The body of the State is thus mirrored in the body of an aristocratic female (107-8).

Although, as I have already mentioned, Ovid is often regarded as the main source for the horrendous display of violence in *Titus Andronicus*, it would be unwise not to acknowledge the presence of Senecan elements in Shakespeare's earliest revenge tragedy. Robert S. Miola, in *Shakespeare and the Classical Tragedy: The Influence of Seneca*, presents a comprehensible study on such Senecan elements in *Titus Andronicus*. Miola identifies the concept of *scelus*, "an awesome crime", as taught by Seneca to Renaissance playwrights, to be central to Elizabethan drama: "how to focus on the crime, the perpetrators, the victims, and on the moral framework violated" (16). Thus, the two misquotations from Seneca's *Phaedra* that Miola finds in *Titus Andronicus* "pertain to causes and consequences of *scelus*" (16). The first one is Demetrius's "*Per Stygia, per manes vehor*" (2.1. 135 qtd. in Miola 13)—an expression of his wicked lust for Lavinia—and the second is Titus' exclamation "*Magni Dominator poli, / Tam lentus audis scelera? Tam lentus vides?*" (4.1. 81-2 qtd. in Miola 14), asking for divine justice.⁸ For Miola, these speeches

direct one's gaze below, to Styx and the uncharted regions of the dead, and above, to the divine powers putatively responsible for human life. Trapped between the murky shades and the silent heavens, Senecan characters exercise awful and hideous powers of evil, potent enough to recreate the cosmos they violate. These figures deeply fascinate Shakespeare and shape his early sense of tragedy and the tragic hero. (16-7)

As I discuss later in this section, such violation is not merely spiritual, but also political, as the acts of violence done by Titus challenge the Roman distinction between civilization and barbarism.

The setting where *scelus* takes place, Miola argues, is also "distinctively Senecan". Miola mentions, for instance, the hunting scene in the woods: "In both *Phaedra* and *Titus Andronicus*, captive barbarian women dominate the woods, which soon become a scene for perverted

⁸ Miola explores the contextual differences between such words in Shakespeare and in Seneca. The minor changes in Shakespeare's lines are notably more Christian in their mythology. For instance, whereas Titus, showing a monotheistic conception, evokes the "Ruler of great heaven", Hippolytus, in Seneca, appeals to the "Great ruler of the gods" (14).

lust, lies, and murder” (17). The tomb is also cited, in a parallel with *Troades*, as a “locus for action” in a Senecan manner. Shakespeare goes beyond that, though, and instances of a tomb appear metaphorically throughout the play, such as the pit into which Bassianus’s corpse is thrown (21-2). Furthermore, the way Aaron is sent to death, buried chest-deep on earth to starve, can also be seen as a form of tomb. Thus, “Shakespeare employs the tomb as a setting for dramatic action and ironic commentary” (21).

In the end, just like Theseus, desperately trying to “reassemble into a whole body the scattered pieces of Hippolytus”, Marcus too aims at unifying a scattered body into a whole. In Marcus’ case, however, this body is the political body of Rome, metaphorically dismembered throughout the action (Miola 18). Thus, the thematics of dismembering is crucial for a reading of the violence in the play, and deserves careful consideration.

Katherine A. Rowe thus addresses the question: “How should the dismembered body parts of Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus* be understood? As part of the world of stage properties or of character?” (279). Rowe warns of the dangers of taking the dismemberments only as metaphors for castration, ignoring the specificities of each body part and the network of representations they evoke. Concerning hands, for instance, the body part under scrutiny in Rowe’s paper, they have their “own iconographic and social history, connected to the complex visual imagery of the body politic” (280). As shown by Rowe, hands stand for a sign of “political and personal agency”, and, in the play, may assume two different meanings: “effectless” and “victorious” political action (280).

Rowe argues that, paradoxically, the missing hands, which are normally read as signs of impossibility of action, mean quite the opposite in *Titus Andronicus*, expressing a “false physiological synecdoche” (280). Rowe turns to Freud’s writing on fetishism to explain Titus’ relation to his severed hand. Fetish, as defined by Rowe, represents “the conversion of an experience of helplessness into an object that can be completely controlled” (298). It is through dismemberment that the hand can be turned into an instrument, thus becoming the object of fetish. Hence, by holding Titus’ hand between her teeth, Lavinia is the agent of “victorious” action, putting in motion the revenge plot (300-1). Ironically, whereas “dismemberment symbolizes loss of effective action in the world, it is clearly the condition of political agency in the play” (303).

And, *Titus Andronicus* is violent not only in its actions but also in its prophetic language, as Albert Tricomi shows in “The Aesthetics of Mutilation in *Titus Andronicus*”, an essay published in a collection entitled *Shakespeare and Language*. In an attempt to highlight the merits of the often-criticized play, Tricomi points out the wittiness of the dialogue, and how words “become flesh” (230). Contrarily to what many critics say, Tricomi argues that the language in *Titus Andronicus* is not separated from the violent actions, but rather becomes “*image in action*, whose significance we experience visually and not merely verbally, in abstraction” (emphasis in the original, 230).

Thus, the metaphors in *Titus Andronicus*, instead of translating “immediate events in images that reach far beyond the poor limitations of the stage”,⁹ serve to “unite language and action in an endeavour to render the events of the tragedy more real and painful” (226). The words “hands” and “head” are constantly used metaphorically, not only foreshadowing the horrors that take place in the play, but also emphasizing them, creating powerful images, beyond those already created through the action. Titus’s words when seeing Lavinia for the first time after her mutilation recreate “the horrible even in the imagination” (227):

Speak, Lavinia, what accursed hand
Hath made thee handless in thy father’s sight? (3.1.66-67)

While Titus’s “response is so artificial as to invite derision, and, no doubt, the whole idea of asking the dumb to speak is a questionable way of inviting pathos”, Tricomi argues that “we must acknowledge that the bitter contrast between the mere metaphor and the experienced reality of Lavinia’s handlessness is powerfully conceived” (227-8). Tricomi sees in *Titus Andronicus* more than the bizarre tragicomical play Bloom sees, but a rather carefully plotted dramatic exercise: “a uniquely important experiment in drama, for in it Shakespeare is exploring the resources inherent in a referential use of metaphor and is trying to integrate the power of the poetic language with the immeasurable potential of dramatic action itself” (237).

Having dealt with the violence in the playtext, both psychologically and linguistically, I would like to shift my focus to a

⁹ I assume Tricomi’s claim that the stage has “poor limitations” is directed at the Elizabethan stage and its relative lack of physical resources in comparison with theater today, not at theater in general, so as to diminish the medium in relation to Shakespeare’s language and authority as a playwright (see 2.2).

political analysis of such violence. In “A Wilderness of Tigers”, the late Francis Barker argues that *Titus Andronicus* has a certain “structural positive anthropology”, in the sense that in its depiction of Romans and Goths the play attempts to define culture positively in opposition to barbarism (146). This opposition is problematic, however, as Barker shows, since Rome itself displays characteristics associated with the primitive: “the play foregrounds ritual practices, ceremonial spectacle, and the charging of the sacred by fetishism and taboo” (144). Thus, “the Rome of *Titus Andronicus* is a society organized by the signs of the primitive” (144). For Barker, these contradictions between civilization and wilderness reach their peak by the end of the play. One of the examples is the ambiguity in the cannibalism scene: who should be considered the cannibal, the one who eats the pie unaware that it is made of human flesh, or the one who baked it but did not eat it? (193) Finally, it is Gothic barbarism that frees Rome from Saturninus' tyranny, when Marcus returns triumphant with the army of Goths, which he gathered during his exile (193).

Moreover, Barker claims that *Titus Andronicus* is characteristic for its “occlusion of violence”. However surprising this argument may seem at first, Barker grounds it cogently on political terms. The key passage for this reading is the killing of the clown, in act 4 scene 4. Whereas the violence in the play is extravagant, the clown's hanging is “so undemonstrative and marginal that it has consistently escaped notice” (165). More than that, his death remains unjustified. Whereas the acts of violence in *Titus Andronicus* serve a purpose, the execution of the clown is “inexplicable”, it “lack[s] credence”, and it is not even protested by the clown himself (168). What strikes Barker is that this act of violence is occluded, i.e., “never mentioned again”. Barker concludes, still referring to the clown's death: “It is simply *there*: strange, *unheimlich*, and, I have found, haunting” (168).

This episode led Barker to research the practice of execution by hanging in Early Modern England. Even though judicial records have survived, the number of deaths was possibly higher than what one would have got from the extant records. After all, deaths in prison could also be considered a type of execution, given the poor conditions to which prisoners were subject (174-5). After several calculations Barker reaches the conclusion that

[t]hese figures, whether evidential or projected, are horrendous. But there are three kinds of reason¹⁰ for believing that they are radical underestimations of the numbers of people actually put to death, and that the aggregate figures should be very much higher than those given here (and might have been, as we shall see, even higher again). (179)

Regardless of the precision of the numbers, Barker's main point is that this massacre of the English population during Shakespeare's time is occluded from the play. The spectacular violence in the play, instead of calling attention to the deaths of common English people "[i]n defence of property and the established social order", shifts the spectator's focus away from such slaughter (190-1). Thus, reiterating the thesis that supports the whole book, Barker submits that the "strategies of occlusion and exoticisation" of violence in *Titus Andronicus* eventually serve to legitimate "an entire historical culture of violence which it domesticates" (205). Culture, thus, does not stand in opposition to violence, but rather walks with, so that Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* is not only an example of Elizabethan culture, but also of the violence upon which such culture was founded. Barker seems to read Shakespeare's text as a reactionary force, in line with the State's interests.

Although Barker raises a valid argument concerning the exoticization of violence in *Titus Andronicus*, and that the strange execution of the clown, in a sense, occludes a certain Elizabethan culture of violence, I believe that *Titus Andronicus* is filled by the presence of the State as one of the main sources of violence. As I have previously mentioned, Rome itself was founded on the sign of violence, and the Rome in *Titus Andronicus* seems to resemble *Macbeth's* Scotland: a warrior society in which a man's value is usually measured by his ability in the battlefield. Both plays, moreover, begin with the protagonist returning victorious from the battlefield. Violence is not the exception in the world portrayed in both plays, but rather the rule. Just as *Macbeth* begins with the "bloody man", *Titus* starts with twenty dead sons. However exotic the violence in *Titus Andronicus* may seem, the

¹⁰ The first reason is technical: given the quality of the extant records and the methodology used by Barker, the number could be higher. Secondly, the records that Barker takes into account do not comprehend the entire judicial system in Early Modern England. Thirdly, only the subjects "whom the state was *successful* in killing" are present in the records, leaving out anyone who was eventually persecuted but not executed (Barker 179-80).

warrior culture depicted in the play reminds us that state-sponsored violence is the rule, and figures such as Aaron are the exception, whose acts of violence do not seem to have a convincing explanation, other than his own pleasure. As Dolores Aronovich Aguero argues in her doctoral dissertation, *Macbeth's* ending is often read pessimistically, differently from *Titus Andronicus*, which seems to provide a more reassuring and stable ending (205-6). As I will argue in the third chapter, however, Jane Howell's *Titus Andronicus* offers spectators a darker ending.

2.2) Shakespeare, performance and television

James C. Bulman introduces the collection of essays in *Shakespeare, Theory, and Performance* by positioning this collection as the “heterodoxy” in relation to old paradigms concerning Shakespeare in performance (8). If Shakespeare's plays started being seen as scripts, whose full potential can only be achieved through performance, such acknowledgement came at the price of, paradoxically, enclosing the possibilities of meaning to a finite set of possibilities, previously ascribed in the playtext itself. Bulman, thus, attempts to look at performance differently, going beyond such notions of authority and universality (1).

Jay Halio seems to be, to a certain extent, inserted in the essentialist tradition which Bulman seeks to revise. Even so, Halio's *Understanding Shakespeare's Plays in Performance* can be useful to performance analysis. In the book Halio presents readers and theatergoers an account of the elements of a performance, in order to enhance readers' critical awareness. His aim is to have audiences go beyond a simple gut-reaction such as “I liked/didn't like the play!” to a more informed appreciation of the spectacle (2). This informed appreciation must be achieved through the careful analysis of certain elements that constitute the experience of Shakespeare on stage, from text through subtext, from characterization through set design. At the end, the theatergoer should find—or not—unity and coherence in a given production (72).

Concerning how far directors are supposed to go about when producing Shakespeare, Halio seems to believe that the “essence” of the play must not be altered, although he admits the possibility of different and “sometimes conflicting” interpretations of the Shakespearean text (10). Arguably, Halio is only open to new interpretations insofar as they “remain within boundaries that preserve the play's essential structure

and meaning” (11). However, in my view, these boundaries do not seem to be precise, and assuming that the plays possess an essential meaning can be highly problematic. After all, Halio’s remarks on the matter of the play’s “essence” and the dangers of a performance going beyond such boundaries may suggest a reductive binary distinction between the original and the copy. As pointed out by Robert Stam when writing about filmic adaptations of novels:

*A crítica derridiana das origens é literalmente verdadeira em relação à adaptação. O “original” sempre se revela parcialmente “copiado” de algo anterior; A Odisséia remonta à história oral anônima, Don Quixote remonta aos romances de cavalaria, Robinson Crusoe remonta ao jornalismo de viagem, e assim segue ad infinitum (22)*¹¹

Although Stam is arguing for the autonomy of filmic adaptations, the same might be thought considering a theatrical performance, especially when it comes to Shakespeare, whose plays can be seen as examples of adaptation themselves.

Thus, although Halio’s notions in *Understanding Shakespeare’s Plays in Performance* are useful for the critic, they should be taken with a pinch of salt. As William B. Worthen argues more convincingly, “[t]he relationship between texts, textuality, and performance is deeply inflected by notions of authority [. . .] the stabilizing, hegemonic functioning of the Author in modern cultural production” (2). This seems to be the case of Halio’s ideas on performance. Although Halio’s approach to Shakespeare is obviously performance-focused, his discourse relies on Shakespeare’s authority, and, to draw on Worthen’s ideas, it seems to take “the stage to be authorized [. . .] as a place for authentically Shakespearean meanings” (3).

Worthen, thus, challenges traditional notions of authority concerning Shakespeare in performance. Certain discourses, such as Halio’s, which seem to focus on what happens on stage, somehow appeal, ultimately, to Shakespeare’s authority, for instance, by implying

¹¹ “The Derridean critique of origins is literally true concerning adaptations. The ‘original’ always reveals itself to be partly ‘copied’ from something anterior; *The Odyssey* can be traced back to anonymous oral history, *Don Quixote* to chivalry romance, *Robinson Crusoe* to travel journalism, and so on, *ad infinitum*.”

the existence of meanings immanent in the text, meanings which are to be brought to life on stage. Other discourses claim that the modern theater would be able to reproduce certain conditions akin to Early Modern England's theaters, ignoring nearly 400 hundred years of history. The question, thus, between text and performance is more complicated than it might seem at first, and certainly more complicated than Halio's assessment.

As Terry Eagleton puts it:

The production is not in this sense the soul of the text's corpse; nor is the converse relation true, that the text is the informing essence of the production. The text does not contain, *in potentia*, dramatic "life": the life of the text is one of literary significations, not a typographical "ghosting" of the flesh of production. The text is not the production "in rest," nor is the production the text "in action"; the relation between them cannot be grasped as a simple binary opposition (rest/motion, soul/body, essence/existence), as though both phenomena were moments of a single reality, distinct articulations of a concealed unity. (qtd. in Worthen 21)

Moreover, I believe it is worthwhile highlighting Worthen's use of Barthes' now classic "opposition between the work (authoritarian, closed, fixed, single, consumed) and the text (liberating, open, variable, traced by intertexts, performed)" when discussing performance (6). Performance, thus, "is insouciant, rewriting and disseminating the work in various ways" (7). I believe that, by bringing both Eagleton's and Barthes's voices, Worthen accounts for the production aspect of performance (and criticism as well). The stage—and the stage on television, as addressed in the present thesis—is not the place where an authoritarian and closed text is finally expressed, complying with pre-established interpretational rules, but rather the place from which meanings are constructed, disseminated and played out. Therefore, throughout the present thesis, I will attempt to see Howell's production—and my own "production" of the play as a critic—not in terms of such dichotomies criticized by Eagleton, but rather as a "mode of production, not merely a mode of enunciation" (Worthen 24).

Considering Shakespeare on television, it is important to take into account the origins of the medium as well as its development. H. R. Coursen's remark that "[t]elevision's tradition is not the imagery of the

silent screen but the sound of radio” (6) stresses at the same time two aspects of television: it relies less on images and is more domestic than cinema. As opposed to the cinema, whose image “is all we can see” (6), television, with its smaller screen, “can incorporate more language than film” (7). Over time, however, television has become more filmic, and this proximity to cinema, Coursen argues, could make it harder to translate Shakespeare to television. For Coursen, as the supremacy of language in the medium decreases, television as a medium distances itself from the Elizabethan theater:

the substance of Shakespeare’s plays is their language. Television can incorporate more language than film. Films made *for* television, for example, follow a different set of conventions than films made for the cinema. When the Bard meets the Tube, then, the transition should be much easier than it is when Shakespeare is translated to film. (7)

This transition, however, becomes harder as television becomes a more image-driven medium and distances itself from its radio origins. Nevertheless, even today with 50-inches LCD screens, television still retains its aural features. I agree with Coursen when he points out that television could serve as a background, and I think that it still can, even with the aforementioned technological improvements that have resulted in an increase of its dependency on image: television’s radio origins are still noticeable and its reliance on sound does not seem to have been eliminated. Besides, the realism expected to be found in television is also problematic. Concerning the theater, “[w]e assume its artificiality and willingly suspend our disbelief in our act of dramatic faith” (7). Television, on the other hand, with its

mechanical quality [. . .] and its un-surreal and documentary quality [. . .] makes our suspension of disbelief almost impossible. During the best moments of the BBC Shakespeare Series, my response was that I could hardly believe that I was watching television. (7)

Thus, according to Coursen, the BBC Shakespeare Series’ best moments are precisely the ones in which directors seem to challenge the series’ own initial purposes, as stated by Cedric Messina, who wanted “solid, basic televised versions of Shakespeare’s plays” (10).

Therefore, it is not surprising that the director of BBC’s *Titus Andronicus*, Jane Howell, is praised mostly for her theatrical approach

to television Shakespeare. As shown by Neil Taylor, “the conventions of television drama were partly assimilated, partly challenged” (86) in Howell’s productions. While Elijah Moshinsky, another successful director of the series, in Taylor’s view, treated “television as if it were cinema”, Howell, on the other hand, “publicly acknowledged a struggle between television and the theater” (86). Even though theatrical elements are strongly present in her productions, Howell also explores

the cinematic possibilities of cutting from one shot to another and, by means of the camera’s own movements, ‘discovering’ or ‘losing’ an actor or a portion of the set. In the theatre the set is all there before us, but in film and television each new shot creates a new set. Howell achieved *two* sets, the *known* permanent set and the *framed* set, and she played them off against each other. (emphasis in the original, 90-1)

However problematic this remark is—to be sure, theater directors can control the audience's gaze through the use of lighting, blocking and so on—the camera is, in fact, more authoritarian and ultimately controls what spectators see. Anyhow, such awareness of how television works does not cancel out Howell’s theatrical approach, but rather enriches it. After all, as Graham Holderness claims, “[t]his director found it possible to reject television naturalism in favour of the theatricalising of television; to mix the conventions of one medium with those of another” (198).

2.3) Brecht and the Epic Theater: an Overview

Before beginning to present an overview of some of Brecht’s ideas that underlie my analysis, I would like to justify why I find pertinent to attempt to establish a connection between Brecht’s ideas and Jane Howell’s practice as a director. What geared the present thesis towards an investigation of theatricalizing devices in the chosen corpus was Graham Holderness's article “Radical Potentiality and Institutional Closure: Shakespeare in Film and Television”, published in the seminal collection of essays *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism*, edited by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield. Instead of providing a comprehensible panorama of Shakespeare on film, Holderness's article tackles two problems: “the position of Shakespeare films within what has been defined as the ideological function of the

cinema in society; and the existing status and potential value of films within the dominant practices of literary education” (182). Concerning television, Holderness draws attention to the “democratic recovery of Shakespeare” that television could offer, due to its possibility of reaching a wide audience and to its status as a “national institution” (192). The BBC series, at least in the words of Cedric Messina and quoted by Holderness, attempted to achieve such accessibility (192-3). Due to the high costs of broadcasting, however, this accessibility is subject, in the case of the BBC Shakespeare, to “the very highest levels of economic and cultural power”, i.e., BBC's central planning and the American underwriters (194). Along with Messina's already mentioned conservative conception, these factors seem to account for the “naturalism” and “commitment to illusionist representation” present in the productions (195-6).

Jane Howell's first tetralogy is an important exception, according to Holderness (196). Her tetralogy defies television conventions of realism—and the illusion of realism—and draws the spectators' attention to the fact that they are watching a play. For instance, Holderness mentions her usage of the set, techniques of doubling and even her advice to the actors, the latter suggesting a rejection of the Stanislaviskian “natural” method. Finally, Holderness acknowledges that “these devices are defamiliarising, estranging, 'alienating'; they induce the kind of alert and vigilant curiosity sought by Brecht's 'epic' theatre” (198). Such remarks are written about the tetralogy, but they justify the concern in the present thesis with the presence of such elements in another of Jane Howell's productions, namely her *Titus Andronicus*.

But the question of Brechtian elements, as it seems to me, is particularly interesting in *Titus Andronicus* due to its tricky relationship with the aforementioned “naturalism” and “realist representation”. By saying this I do not imply that other Shakespeare's plays—or any other text for that matter—present a faithful representation of reality, as if such thing were possible, but I am simply highlighting the fact that the previously discussed violence in the play is already, in a sense, challenging such representations sought by BBC (but rejected by Howell, as Holderness argues). In order to better illustrate my point, I would like to develop two arguments.

Firstly, I would like to mention an argument presented by Professor Emma Smith in a podcast about *Titus Andronicus*. Smith asks herself why Marcus, finding Lavinia ravished and mutilated, does not provide her first-aid immediately, but instead delivers a four-minute-

long speech. Marcus' speech, thus, cannot be taken realistically, but rather we ought to suspend our disbelief and overlook the absurdity of such action. Smith argues that the speech is an instance of *ekphrasis*, that is, the verbal depiction of a pictorial work of art:

Marcus: what stern ungentle hands
 Hath lopp'd and hew'd, and made thy body bare
 Of her two branches, [.]
 Alas, a crimson river of warm blood,
 Like to a bubbling fountain stirr'd with wind,
 Doth rise and fall between thy rosed lips,
 [.]
 And lest thou shouldst detect [him], cut thy tongue.
 Ah, now thou turn'st away thy face for shame! (2.4.16-28)

In production, Smith argues, the speech promotes a suspension of time, and it can be seen as a nightmare—a flow of images—and an attempt of to come to terms with the horror Marcus sees. Smith's reading of the speech as a nightmare, thus, converges with Howell's unrealistic conception and production. Anyhow, Smith's point about the speech is not to be ignored if the artificiality of the play is in discussion.

Secondly, I would like to comment on Harold Bloom's claim that

[the] Brechtian "alienation effect" evidently was learned by that grand plagiarist from *Titus Andronicus*, whose protagonist estranges us from the start by his ghastly sacrifice of Tamora's son followed by his butchery of his own son. Any playgoer or reader is likely to prefer Aaron the Moor to Titus, since Aaron is savagely humorous, and Titus savagely dolorous (408).

Curiously, the passage above is found in the chapter on *Hamlet*, and *Titus Andronicus* is brought up as an example of Shakespeare's early failures, which would be the main justification for Shakespeare's anxiety in reviewing *Hamlet*. However, what has called my attention was Bloom's identifying Shakespeare himself, through Titus, as the father, as it were, of Brecht's A-effect. As I had already decided to attempt to analyze Howell's production with the aid of Brecht's theorizations before coming across Bloom's claim, this has been a happy serendipity for a researcher. It is also important to note that Brecht's political motivations are not taken into account by Bloom in

this comparison, possibly on purpose, as he seems to thoroughly reject them: “Hamlet inaugurates the drama of heightened identity that even Pirandello and Beckett could only repeat, albeit in a more desperate tone, and that Brecht vainly sought to subvert” (405).

These arguments by both Emma Smith and Harold Bloom signal that writing about *Titus Andronicus* with the aid of Brecht’s theorizations is pertinent, especially in relation to Howell’s production, a director whose Brechtian methods were already identified by Holderness. Therefore, in order to investigate such elements in Howell’s *Titus Andronicus*, a closer look at the concepts of alienation (or A-effect) and epic theater as defined by Bertolt Brecht is necessary. Providing a summary of Brecht’s aesthetics is not a simple task, as his own ideas on theater evolved since the beginning of his career. *Brecht on Theater*, a collection of Brecht’s writings on the subject, edited, annotated, and translated by John Willet, will be the main source to define the aforementioned terms. Besides Brecht himself, I will also look at Walter Benjamin’s and Laura Bradley’s writings on Brecht’s theories.

From the development of Brecht’s aesthetics it is possible to see how his ideas evolved to be more politically oriented. Not that they had not been so before, but the increasing presence of Marxist thinking in his aesthetics is remarkable, culminating in “A Short Organum for the Theater”, his “main theoretical work” on epic theater (Cuddon, “Epic Theatre”, 273-4). In order to respect such evolution, I will attempt to present Brecht’s theories in a more or less chronological order, although such order might be broken, as my main concern in the chapter is theoretical rather than expository.

In Brecht’s view, the objective of theater is to “entertain the children of the scientific age, and to do so with sensuousness and humour” (204). In Brecht’s early writings he advocates a “smokers’ theater”, a theater in which spectators, like an aficionado watching a boxing match, would distance themselves from the play, being able to take a critical instance towards it (8-9). Such relationship with the play ought to be achieved by the epic theater’s appeal more to reason than to feelings and seeking the audience’s understanding and critical detachment, not its empathy (23). Thus, Brecht rejects what he calls “Aristotelian drama”. His theater aims at deliberately alienating audiences, instead of having them reach the Aristotelian catharsis (57). Thus, identification is not desirable, neither from audiences nor from actors. Actors must not try to believe that they are the characters, and

audiences should understand the characters, not feel their emotions as if they were in their place¹² (26-8).

Nevertheless, Brecht's use of the term catharsis deserves a certain caution. As is known, this key concept found in Aristotle's *Poetics* has been interpreted differently throughout history, and discussions about theater for a long time centered on re-working Aristotle's main ideas, as Marvin Carlson points out throughout his *Theories of the Theatre*. Brecht's opposition to Aristotelian drama, in a sense, continues and legitimates this tradition of looking at theater in terms of what it does to the audience. However, catharsis, as used by Aristotle in his *Poetics* receives no clarification, and one can only speculate about its meaning. It seems that, for Brecht, catharsis is related to identification. Thus, by seeing tragedy unfold, spectators would identify themselves with the tragic hero or heroine, and somehow share their emotions. On the other hand, as Laura Bradley notes, Brecht's A-effect "does not imply any rejection of emotion. The characters in epic theatre experience the full range of emotions, and Brecht simply wants the spectator to retain sufficient critical detachment to analyse these emotions" (7).

Therefore, the A-effect is achieved through an attitude of detachment towards the action. Brecht writes: "In order to produce A-effects the actor has to discard whatever means he has learned of getting the audience to identify itself with the characters which he plays" (Brecht, 193). Moreover, audiences are "required to be reminded from time to time that they were only watching a play, a representation of life, and therefore they should control their identification with the characters and action" (Cuddon, "alienation effect", 20). The audience needs to be conscious of its emotions and of the artificiality of the play. In Chinese acting, for instance, actors alienate the audience by often breaking the fourth wall, expressing their "awareness of being watched" (91-2). Thus, the actors subject themselves to the audience's approval, and feelings may arise, not necessarily out of identification, but out of conscious sensations towards the characters (94-5). Brecht remarks that such effect can also be caused "by the music (choruses, songs) and the setting (placards, film etc.). It was principally designed to historicize the incidents portrayed" (96). Thus, the A-effect makes strange what seems

¹² These ideas were mostly developed in "A Dialogue About Acting", in which Brecht uses Shakespeare and Sophocles when exemplifying some possibilities for his epic theater, implying that epic elements do not necessarily appear only in productions of Brecht's plays.

to be natural: “A representation that alienates is one which allows us to recognize its subject, but at the same time makes it seem unfamiliar” (192).

Although the aforementioned elements, such as music and setting, are crucial for epic theater, Brecht seems to advance his theories more frequently and eloquently when talking about acting. In “Short Description of a New Technique of Acting which Produces an Alienation Effect” Brecht offers a good deal of advice on how to properly play a character so as to produce the A-effect. Empathy, as I have mentioned, should not be sought neither by audience nor actors: “the technique which produces an A-effect is the exact opposite of that which aims at empathy. The actor applying it is bound not to try to bring about the empathy operation” (136). Besides breaking the fourth wall, as the Chinese often do, Brecht also stresses the importance of the “gest” or “gesture” for this way of acting. Brecht writes: “the actor must invest what he has to show with a definite gest of showing” (136). The gest of showing, thus, goes beyond being or representing, thus merging the epic and the tragic (“Epic Theatre”, Bradley, 229).

So crucial is the concept of gesture that Walter Benjamin affirms: “Epic theater is gestural. Strictly speaking, the gesture is the material and epic theater its practical utilization” (23). But “from where does epic theater obtain its gestures?” (23), Benjamin asks himself. “[T]he gestures are found in reality” (23), and the reality of the gesture is a social one, as explained by Brecht: “the mimetic and gestural expression of the relationships prevailing between people of a given period” (139). It is through the A-effect, fostered by the social gesture, that theater can historicize events and promote a discussion on society’s conditions (139-40). However, still according to Benjamin, what truly characterizes the gesture is its “definable beginning and a definable end” (3). Due to this quotable nature, gestures help achieving the A-effect by interrupting the action, just as other alienating devices do: “It is the retarding quality of these interruptions and the episodic quality of this framing of action which allows gestural theatre to become epic theatre” (4).

Anatol Rosenfeld also stresses the importance of the concept of gesture in Brecht’s theater:

Mas todos esses recursos não bastariam se o ator representasse à maneira de Stanislavski, identificando-se

totalmente com seu papel. O ator épico, ao contrario, narra seu papel com o gestus de quem mostra uma personagem, mantendo certa distância dele. Mesmo representando um possesso, não deve parecer possesso, senão, como pode o espectador descobrir o que é que possui o possesso? (152)¹³

Rosenfeld proceeds to argue that, this way, actors clearly separate themselves from their roles, raising the audience's awareness concerning the play itself. Such separation highlights that the character's actions could have been different, that is, history can be altered (152-3).

Thus, the A-effect does not serve a merely aesthetic purpose; conversely, by enabling the audience to take a critical instance towards the play, it aims at showing the historical contradictions of a given society and a possibility of change. Brecht writes:

The main advantage of the epic theatre with its A-effect, intended purely to show the world in such a way that it becomes manageable, is precisely its quality of being natural and earthly, its humour and its renunciation of all the mystical elements that have struck to the orthodox theatre from the old days. (140)

Diverging from a ritualistic tradition of theater, the A-effect, ultimately, aims at showing spectators that they are the agents of history. The stage, thus, "is no longer 'the planks which signify the world' (in other words, a magic circle), but a convenient public exhibition arena" (Benjamin 2). Brecht's affiliation with Marxism is never to be ignored, as his remarks on history and society are grounded on Marx's theorizations on modes of production, class struggle, and the end of history. By alienating the audience, thus, epic theater brings to the surface more than the artificiality of the play, but the production relations in a given society. Brecht's use of the word alienation is somehow surprising, as it seems to be the opposite of Marx's. Brecht's alienation ultimately leads spectators to identify ideology in the play,

¹³ "But all of these resources would not be enough if the actors played in a Stanislavskian way, identifying themselves completely with their characters. Epic actors, on the other hand, narrate their role with a gestus of showing the characters, keeping a certain distance from them. Even playing a possessed character, the actor must not seem possessed, otherwise, how can the spectator know what is possessed about this character?"

instead of simply seeing it represented, coated by the reality effect, in bourgeois theater. As Walter Benjamin puts it, Brecht is most remarkably Marxist in his engagement with the audience: “Brecht’s dialectical materialism asserts itself unmistakably in his endeavor to interest the masses in theatre as technical experts”. He goes on: “Epic theatre, then, does not reproduce conditions but, rather, reveals them. This uncovering of conditions is brought about through processes being interrupted” (4-5).

Having covered the main concepts of Brecht’s Epic Theater, I would like to comment briefly on the relationship between Brecht and Shakespeare before moving on to the next chapter. Writing, as Harold Bloom does, that Brecht learned his A-effect from Shakespeare could be risky and inaccurate, as Brecht might then be seen as a Shakespearean himself, or at least an admirer of Shakespeare. Whereas Brecht is seen, usually, as a Marxist, it is important to remember that Shakespeare might arguably be understood as his ideal spectator, at least in the beginning of Brecht’s career, going back to the days of a “smoker’s theater”, whose main objective was simply to entertain (Brecht 7-8). Brecht’s references to Shakespeare seem to present a mix of admiration and a wish to update Shakespeare’s drama—or maybe to liberate it from “bourgeois theater”.

Brecht’s argument focuses on the narrative aspect of drama. Theater, he claims, in Brecht’s time, appreciated classical works through empathy, thus neglecting narrative, which, in accordance with Aristotle, “is the soul of drama”. This type of drama, Brecht writes, was not fit to tell the stories “of the great Shakespeare” (183). Brecht directly addresses the possibility of producing an epic Shakespeare in an interview. When asked if “the epic style of acting” could “be applied also to the classics, the romantics and the dramatists around 1900”, Brecht answers quite objectively that “[i]t seems to be most easily applicable [. . .] in works like Shakespeare’s” (225).

More objectively, the Berliner Ensemble, Brecht’s theater company in East Germany, produced Brecht’s own adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus*, entitled *Coriolan*. Professor Roberto Ferreira da Rocha, from UFRJ, analyzed several productions of *Coriolanus* in his doctoral dissertation entitled *Politics and Performance: Three Contemporary Productions of William Shakespeare’s Coriolanus*, including the Berliner Ensemble’s, focusing on the political aspects of the play. Rocha analyzes the protagonist through concepts of value and honor: “Honour gives Coriolanus his own identity and is the driving force that leads him to his tragic end”.

Brecht's *Coriolan*, as shown by Rocha, provides an even more political text. To achieve this end, Brecht personalizes the plebeians by giving them names and paints the tribunes as more favorable characters than Shakespeare does. The tribunes, which could be associated with East-Germany's bureaucrats, are not seen as parasites but rather as a political class genuinely interested in favoring the people, set in direct opposition to the tragic hero (105). Brecht's *Coriolan*, thus, turns the plot of the fallen hero into a more political story: although psychology still plays a role in Brecht's *Coriolan*, class struggles become the focus. Thus, as Rocha puts it, "*Coriolan* is not a play about a great historical individuality, but about the historical conflicts that led to the fall of a great leader" (107-8). As for the hero's destiny in Brecht's work, "Coriolanus' tragedy derives from his consciousness that he is not irreplaceable or indispensable" (111). Coriolanus is not a valuable individual in himself, but his value is a product of the circumstances: he "can only be understood in relation to the role(s) he plays during war and peace" (112).

But more important to the present work is Rocha's summary of Brecht's attitude towards Shakespeare, even though Rocha's focus lies on *Coriolanus*. As Rocha summarizes in his dissertation, Brecht's early criticisms towards the Bard were addressed not to Shakespeare himself, but rather to the bourgeois way of staging Shakespeare's plays (96-7). Commenting on Brecht's review of a German production of *Coriolanus* directed by Erich Engels, Rocha argues that Brecht seems to see Shakespeare's dramaturgy as running "against the linear concept of drama". Such conclusion derives from Brecht highlighting that, in Engel's *Coriolanus*, "*chaque scène existait pour elle-même*"¹⁴ (qtd. in Rocha 95). Also worthwhile mentioning, as pointed out by Rocha, is Brecht's assertion, introducing a radio broadcasting of *Macbeth* in 1927, that Shakespeare's plays are difficult to be (re)presented due to their epic elements, but are also capable of representing the truth (95-6). Moreover, Rocha lists certain elements in Elizabethan and Jacobean theater that Brecht considered alienating: "the fact that female characters were represented by men, the extensive use of songs, the mixture of comedy and tragedy, the rhymed couplet, the direct address to the audience are among the most well known" (137).

Among such alienating elements in Elizabethan and Jacobean theater, the mixture of comedy and tragedy seems to be the more relevant to the study of *Titus Andronicus*, even though the others are not

¹⁴ "Each scene existed on its own".

to be ignored. Jane Howell may have further alienated spectators in her productions for the BBC Shakespeare, and I will try to assess in the next chapter, in my reading of Howell's *Titus Andronicus*, whether and when Howell uses such alienating devices, and their broader esthetical, theatrical, and political significance, and whether they are somehow linked to the depictions of violence in the production.

3 “A VERY EXCELLENT PIECE OF VILLAINY”: ANALYZING HOWELL’S PRODUCTION

After seeing the decapitated heads of his sons, unjustly accused of murdering Bassianus, and his own severed hand, “in scorn to thee sent back” (3.1. 237), Titus says: “When will this fearful slumber have an end?” (3.1. 252). Titus, on the verge of madness, possibly aggravated by his senility, sums up the nightmarish aspect of the play, which Jane Howell explicitly creates in her *Titus Andronicus* for the BBC series (Willis 172). Before proceeding with the analysis of the selected scenes themselves, I would like to dwell for a while in Howell’s conception for her work on the BBC series as a whole, foregrounding *Titus Andronicus*, and to comment on her approach under the light of the discussions presented in previous chapters.

Thus, Susan Willis, in her comprehensive work dedicated to the BBC Shakespeare, devotes a chapter on its own to Jane Howell’s directing. Not only does Willis often quote Howell directly, but she also provides analyses of a few sequences from the productions. In her productions, Howell does not choose to dismiss sets entirely, neither does she aim for a highly realistic type of set, but rather a minimalistic, suggestive use of the setting: “a theatre set such as Shakespeare’s, by which she means one that suggests rather than one that duplicates” (165). Howell uses a single set in each of her six productions (an amphitheater in *Titus Andronicus*, for instance). This single set, however, suffers transformations throughout the action, contributing to the conceptual richness of the productions.

Such choice, as stated by Willis, seems to be a way of following “the original production rules—not strict Elizabethan staging but the fact that one scene follows another immediately and that the focus must be on the actors” (165). Even though I agree with Willis in the sense that Howell does focus on the actors, such allusion to the original production rules is somewhat problematic, as the previous discussion on Worthen’s ideas about Shakespeare and authority shows. Nevertheless, Howell’s focus on the actors seems to be in line with John Caughie’s considerations on television drama and the effects it produces. If television calls particular attention to acting, Howell’s approach enhances such feature of the box.

Such concern with acting, Willis writes, is mainly due to the fact that Howell “believes the power of Shakespeare’s work is in the words. They have to communicate clearly, and the audience must listen”

(169). As I have already mentioned, citing Graham Holderness, Howell's method of acting is rather an "antimethod": "'You cannot just work yourself up to an emotional crisis and do a scene', she says" (qtd. in Willis 170). Besides the advice to her actors, Howell's notion of ensemble acting also seems to be considerably Brechtian, especially in her use of doubles. Willis writes that "the audience was intended to recognize repetitions", and thus "chose them [the actors to double characters] thoughtfully" (170). Such choices bring thematic implications to the productions and establish relationships between characters that otherwise would not come to the surface. I also believe that her working with the same actors through her run at the BBC series further expands such relationships. Considering that the plays belonged to a series aired with certain regularity, seeing the same actor play different parts not only in one play but in the series in general would further "alienate" audiences, calling attention to the acting itself or even highlighting thematic similarities between the plays.

What strikes Willis the most, however, in Howell's productions, "is their strong conceptual basis and visual imagery, more noticeable perhaps because the plays are not rendered realistically, so the concepts show" (167). As I have previously submitted, the minimalist set, with its slight, meaningful changes, conveys this sense of conceptual care, but Howell's use of imagery is not restricted to the set. Jay Halio disapprovingly warns that Shakespeare on the stage can become "designer's theater"¹⁵ (20).

However, Howell's use of imagery is far from flamboyant, meaningless exaggeration—which would also look awkward on TV—but it rather serves the purpose of commenting on the action, providing interpretational hints and therefore developing the production's conception. To exemplify such feature in Howell's productions, Willis mentions Howell's own interpretation of the War of the Roses plays: "it struck me [. . .] that the behavior of the lords of England was a lot like children—prep school children" (Howell, qtd. in Willis 167). The way Howell finds to comment on the lords' childish behavior is to film Winchester and Gloucester challenging "each other from hobbyhorses while their men brawl, after which Howell cuts to three French boys fighting over a weapon" (167). Howell thus fully explores the visual possibilities of television, and how cutting serves to establish

¹⁵ Designer's theatre is a reference to the "lavish settings, elaborate costuming, and intricate stage business" present in certain Shakespeare's productions set in "periods far removed from their original historical or chronological period" (Halio 20).

relationships between shots, not simply to provide a narrative sense—the camera observing and registering the action—but also to create meanings: “the visual element of a production complements the text and often works to interpret it, as it can and should in the medium of television” (167).

Proceeding with the analysis of the selected scenes, a few formal considerations and provisions are necessary. Even though I have already set the grounds of my analysis, as well as my thematic focus, a certain structural concern needs to be herein addressed. Firstly, although my object consists of a filmed play, whose production had the intent of being shown on television, Halio’s notions in *Understanding Shakespeare’s Plays in Performance*, i.e. in theatrical performances, are nevertheless useful. The elements explored by Halio are also present in televised plays as well as in film. However, the formal questions of what happens to Shakespeare when filmed will be addressed under the light of television and cinema studies, for both fields provide helpful tools to analyze issues such as camera movements, editing, and other elements that are peculiar to Shakespeare on the screen, large and small.

3.1 “Hail, Rome, victorious in thy morning weeds!”: Analyzing the Opening Scene

Before the beginning of the action, the play presents itself as spectacle, as seems to the rule in TV shows. Firstly, it identifies itself with the previous plays in the series, and mostly inserts itself in the tradition of Shakespeare as literature—the opening credits displayed over an illustration that suggests the frontispiece of an edition of Shakespeare’s complete works, and a reproduction of his face visually signals the BBC series previously discussed conception, as well as attempting to give the production credit by appealing to Shakespeare’s authority, as discussed by Worthen.

As the actual production begins, we see a slightly transparent skull on a foggy, dark background. Howell’s use of imagery is clear from the beginning. The skull can be read in relation to its immediate context as well as to the entire play. The skull announces that what is to be presented speaks of death and horrors, as well as a certain loss of identity: one can think of Hamlet holding Yorick’s skull and thinking how it looks nothing like the jester he once knew. The immediate context, however, is quite straightforward: the opening sequence reveals Rome’s former emperor’s dead body. The way the transition occurs, however, is paramount to a reading of the play, as it sets the tone of the

action. As the skull is shown in a close-up, being displayed from different angles through superimpositions, the camera finally transitions to Young Lucius' face, also in a close-up. The boy, wearing Victorian spectacles, looks at the horizon, notably alienated from the surrounding action: the Roman funeral rite. The anachronism of the spectacles calls further attention to Young Lucius' role in the production: it highlights his position both as an observer and as an outsider to the Roman world.

Such transition from the purely conceptual imagery into the action itself is important for mainly three reasons. First, it reveals one of Howell's major textual alterations from Shakespeare's playtext: the aforementioned presence of Young Lucius in more scenes than originally scripted. Second, it conveys Howell's conception of the play as a nightmare. The transition from the skulls to Young Lucius' face gives the impression that the boy is seeing the skulls himself, and his distant gaze is his reaction to such nightmare. Finally, the imagery and Young Lucius' denaturalizing acting seem to work as alienating devices for the audience, shattering the illusion of representation right from the beginning. Brecht's well-known use of images on stage so as to alienate the audience may find a parallel in such visual interpolation, as the skull literally overlaps with the action.



Fig 1: Young Lucius and the Skull

As the skull disappears and the action begins, the fog sticks around, surrounding the scene, signaling a continuation—rather than a rupture—from the nightmarish atmosphere. As Marcus and Saturninus take the emperor’s crown and scepter, and Roman masked soldiers remove his body from the scene, a rhythmic drum sets a warlike tone, contrasting with the solemnity one would expect in this sort of funeral rite. Whereas the action says one thing, the music says the opposite. A Roman Captain thus announces Titus’ return from the war against the Goths, in another of the changes made by Howell in relation to the playtext. Instead of showing first Bassianus and Saturninus quarelling over the throne, gathering supporters among the Roman people, Howell decides to show first the “power vacuum” (Howell qtd. in Willis 173), symbolized by the emperor’s dead body, and Titus’ arrival with the prisoners. Besides simply reinforcing Titus’ role as the protagonist, such shift from the former emperor’s death to Titus’ arrival may suggest that maybe Titus would be the most suited candidate to the throne.

The aforementioned minimalist set, typical of all of Howell’s productions in the BBC series, is in *Titus Andronicus* a sort of Roman amphitheater. A set of stairs is seen in the background, where masked figures—Rome’s tribunes—stand, almost like a silent chorus. Roman soldiers are also seen standing on such structures, they too wearing masks. In the middle of the set we see a table, which could be used for a banquet as well as for the ritual that would soon take place.

And so Titus returns to Rome, and in about two minutes of action five dead bodies have already appeared: the first characters to enter the scene are Roman soldiers carrying the bodies of Titus’ dead sons. The prisoners are the next ones to enter, and finally comes Titus and his remaining sons. Costume design establishes a brutal difference between Aaron, the Moor, and Titus: Aaron enters handcuffed and shirtless, whereas Titus enters fully armored and magisterial. Titus’ apparent superiority is shattered when Rome’s champion sheathes his sword, trembling, nearly falls down, but is helped by his sons. A cursory psychoanalytic reading would maybe read too much into the sword, but the contrast between Aaron’s raw masculinity and Titus’ lack of physical power is evident, even though Titus seems in control right now.

The ritual sacrifice unfolds, and character’s gestures are highly marked in what could be considered a Brechtian way. The gestures, as discussed in chapter 2.3, are quotable and, in a sense, interrupt the action, as characterized by Walter Benjamin (What is Epic Theatre? 3). Such gestures may call attention to the arbitrary nature and contextual strangeness of such sacrifice: historically, Romans were not at all

known for performing human sacrifices. If Rome is “organized by the signs of the primitive”, as remarkably written by Francis Barker (144), such gestures call attention to this feature. In this context, Titus’ and Lucius’ gestures—as well as the blood on Lucius’ and his brothers’ faces, resembling war paint—become these very signs of the primitive, the utmost expression of the ritualistic and spectacular nature of the Rome depicted in *Titus Andronicus* (144).



Fig 2: Titus begins the rites



Fig 3: Lucius returns after offering Tamora’s eldest son

The fog continues to serve as a transition element, and the following sequence also opens with Young Lucius. The Roman amphitheater, suffering minor alterations, becomes the Andronici’s tomb. The center table is now filled with candles, which seem to be the only source of light, creating a dark atmosphere, emphasizing color contrasts. The same drums from the Roman emperor’s death serve as a background for the burial of Titus’ sons, as he and his remaining sons march around the tomb, again, in almost ritualistic manner. Saturninus, Bassianus, and their respective factions invade the scene to thus begin the dispute for succession that opens Shakespeare’s playtext. Besides the aforementioned significance that this change of order may carry, their entrance, suddenly interrupting the Andronici family’s funeral rites, might reinforce the invasion of the private sphere by public affairs.

Titus thus refuses being *candidatus*, placing the public interest above all. The recognition of his old age is what makes him abdicate the possibility of becoming Rome’s emperor, and his abnegation is evident in Howell’s production. As Saturninus (fearing losing the throne) and Lucius draw their swords, Titus seems to ignore the action, as if such disputes do not concern him whatsoever. The same applies to Bassianus’ uttering his support for Titus:

Andronicus, I do not flatter thee,
But honor thee, and will do till I die.

My faction if thou strengthen with thy friends,
 I will most thankful be, and thanks to men
 Of noble minds in honorable meed. (1.1.212-16)

At last, Titus crowns Saturninus and hands over the war prisoners to the new emperor. What is remarkable in this sequence is Saturninus' treatment of Tamora, whose face he gently strokes as he utters his lusty words: "A goodly lady, trust me, of the hue / That I would choose were I to choose anew" (1.1.261-2).

After several corpses seen on stage and one death offstage, the first death onstage takes place: Titus slays his own son for helping Bassianus run away with Lavinia. What calls attention to this murder is not so much Titus placing the public interest above his private life—which has not been the first time in the play—but that, in an attempt to honor the emperor, Titus disrespects the Roman law. Even Marcus, possibly the most sensible character in the play, affirms: "Bassianus seizeth but his own" (1.1. 281). Titus, thus, kills his own son in order to protect the honor of a ruler, but not necessarily to protect Rome and its laws.

The way violence is portrayed in the sequence is far from explicit. The sequence, possibly the least violent murder in the play, is nearly concealed from the spectator's gaze by Howell. Mutius has his back to the screen, as Titus horizontally attacks him in a slow motion sequence. Mutius face is hidden by a combination of camera angle and blocking. His body is seen again, partially blocked by Titus and Saturninus. The image composed by this shot is somewhat ironical: a corpse lies behind Titus, Tamora stands at the other side, on a higher level, while Saturninus stands between the two of them. The composition of this shot could well summarize the power struggle in the play: Titus and Tamora antagonizing each other, Saturninus caught in the middle of the conflict, offering Tamora his hand, and Mutius' corpse behind Titus, as a reminder of his tragic mistakes.



Fig 4: Saturninus advances Tamora as the empress of Rome

The composition of each shot seems to be carefully thought out: as we see Tamora's reaction in a medium close-up, Aaron is seen blurred in the background by Tamora's side. The irony is astonishing. Again, the gestural aspect of the action, in a Brechtian sense, is remarkable. Tamora's response is highly marked.

Titus thus directly addresses the audience. Breaking the fourth wall, as often happens in Howell's production, he asks: "Titus, when wert thou wont to walk alone, dishonour'd thus and challenged of wrongs?". As the Andronici discuss what to do with Mutius' corpse, Barker's argument seems relevant: "the play foregrounds ritual practices, ceremonial spectacle, and the charging of the sacred by fetishism and taboo" (144). Titus seems to respect such ritual rules more than his common sense.

Young Lucius' role as the viewer's representative in the play is thus reinforced as Titus' sons and Marcus plead that he bury Mutius in the family tomb. While all kneel and look at Titus, Young Lucius can be seen in the background, standing still, observing the action. As he kneels, moments later after the others, his gaze is directed at Mutius' corpse, not at Titus. As the conflict is solved and Titus lets Mutius be buried in the family tomb, Young Lucius awkwardly picks up the

candidatus toga—probably the one refused by Titus—and his face is superimposed on the right half of the screen.



Fig 5: Young Lucius' face superimposed

The act approaches its end with the court's return, and once again a direct address to the audience is used. This time, however, it is Tamora who addresses spectators, revealing her cunning strategy to revenge her firstborn. The direct address to the audience is clearly contrasted with her again marked gestural acting. Shot composition, as usual, presents various layers. As the action unfolds, the masked tribunes are seen in the background. Their masks can be seen as a symbol of their indifference towards the complicated power transition taking place in Rome. The scene ends with Lucius and his son hugging each other: a touching image, if it were not for Aaron, again in the background, observing the action. Flames are superimposed to operate as a transition to the next scene, which begins with Aaron breaking the fourth wall.

3.2 “The woods are ruthless, dreadful, deaf and dull”: Scenes from the Second Act

As seems to be a pattern in Howell’s production, transitions from one scene to the next are highly symbolic and meaningfully alienating. Right after Tamora’s eldest son says “till I find the stream / to cool this heat, a charm to calm these fits, / *Per Stygia, per manes vehor*” (2.1. 134-5), flames are again superimposed. The scene fades into a barking dog—with the flames still superimposed—and it all fades into the next scene. The correlation does not seem to be obscure: the flames stand for the brothers’ desire for Lavinia (as well as Aaron’s for Tamora) and the dog foreshadows the hunt.

The transition from the second to the third scene is also revealing. After Chiron and Demetrius, apparently the last ones to exit the scene, say devilishly “hunt not, we, with horse nor hound” (2.2. 25), but rather seek to ravish Lavinia, Young Lucius is seen behind them, watching the scene, disturbed by the young men’s villainy. Rome fades into the woods, and Aaron directly addresses the audience, justifying why he would “bury so much gold under a tree, / And never after to inherit it” (2.3.2-3). It seems that both Young Lucius and Aaron are the characters who address the audience directly more often. Although theme-wise they are diametrically opposed, they seem to share such feature. Also worthwhile noting is Hugh Quarshie’s powerful performance as Aaron: he delivers his lines with remarkable joy, looking directly at the camera and smiling, highlighting that Aaron’s evil deeds serve mainly to his own pleasure: “Vengeance is in my heart, death in my hand, / Blood and revenge are hammering in my head” (2.3.38-9).

Thus, the last three scenes from act two are some of the few scenes in the production that do not use Howell’s single set. The contrast between the wilderness of the woods and Rome is clear in terms of the set, but not so much in terms of action. Aaron, when convincing Tamora’s sons to rape Lavinia in the woods, since they are fit for villainy and rape, makes a clear distinction between the city of Rome and its barbarous surroundings. However, as has already been shown, the city of Rome is also home to barbarism. Even if there is a formal distinction between the woods and the city, it seems clear that, as Barker argues, *Titus Andronicus* deals with the ultimate inability of differentiating barbarism and civilization, culture and violence. If the woods in Howell’s production are dark and foggy, often so is Rome.

Continuing with the analysis, I wish to point out that Aaron and Tamora are finally seen alone together, and their relationship is now revealed not only through Aaron's words, but also physically. Still as regards Aaron's passion for violence, it is curious to notice his dialogue with Tamora. If at first Tamora starts with the typical love discourse, Aaron is quick to change to subject. It can hardly be denied that Aaron loves Tamora in some way, but his compulsion for villainy seems to lie above any sort of romantic interest.

Another onstage murder takes place, as Aaron's plot to rape Lavinia unfolds. Chiron and Demetrius murder Bassianus, in front of his wife, under their mother's request. The second onstage murder in the play is also somehow concealed from the spectator's view. The celerity of the action—each brother stabs Bassianus once, both strike him rather quickly—leaves no room for any sort of excessive graphic violence. Blocking, again, just as in the play's first onstage murder, plays a role in hiding Bassianus' corpse. After Chiron stabs Bassianus, he walks around Bassianus, whose fall is blocked by Chiron's body, thus hiding the corpse. When Bassianus' corpse is finally removed from the scene, along with Lavinia, only the bottom half of his body is to be seen.

Finally, Tamora attempts to murder Lavinia, but is stopped by her sons, who then reveal their intents. I believe that there are two crucial points in this sequence. First, Bassianus does not seem to be a traditionally masculine¹⁶ character, and Howell's production arguably emphasizes such characteristic. Bassianus fails to be chosen as Rome's emperor, needs help from Titus' sons to take Lavinia as his wife (which has cost Mutius his life), is easily killed by Chiron and Demetrius before he can even draw his sword and, more importantly, does not consummate his marriage. It all adds up to make his situation more pathetic. In a warrior society such as the Roman Empire—a feature shared by the Goths—Bassianus fails in what a man is expected to be. Lavinia is seen first as Titus' daughter and then as Bassianus' wife. The rape of Lavinia, instead of being seen as a violence against herself, is, in a patriarchal society, an attack on Titus and the men who surround Lavinia. Her body is an instrument used by the Goths to take revenge on Rome, and Chiron and Demetrius' using Bassianus' body as the "pillow" for their act is an expression of such idea. As well as an attack

¹⁶ It is not my intention to discuss ideas on gender roles here. I think that such questions are complex and require careful elaboration, and binary classifications such as masculine and feminine fail to grasp the complexity of human gender identities. What I mean by masculine, then, is a patriarchal pattern: roughly, possessing strength and aggressiveness (typical of Shakespearean violence as argued by Foakes, see chapter 2 section 1).

on Bassianus' (lack of) masculinity, Lavinia's rape is also, as I have already argued, a direct attack on Rome, as her body serves as a metaphor of the body of the State (Tennenhouse 107-8). At last, Lavinia makes an eloquent point to both Tamora and her sons, similarly to what Tamora did to Titus, but both the Queen of the Goths and Rome's general are ruthless. Ironically, Anna Calder-Marshall, who plays Lavinia, also played Hermione in Howell's *The Winter's Tale*, another eloquent arguer.

The scene continues and possibly one of most humorous moments in the play takes place, when Martius accidentally falls into the pit into which Bassianus' body is thrown. This sequence is almost kitsch, purely physical comedy. Although it seems that the possibly comic elements in *Titus Andronicus* are suppressed in Howell's production, this particular sequence can possibly produce laughter in the audience. Nevertheless, what is striking in Howell's production is Aaron's presence on the screen. The way he positions himself, crouched in a relaxed fashion as he observes the goofy brothers discover Bassianus' body at the bottom of the pit, alienates him from the action. Aaron seems an almost spectral figure, not merely an observer, but also sort of a narrator. After all, it was Aaron who plotted the murder and the rape, and in this sequence he is portrayed accordingly.



Fig 6: Aaron observes his plans unfold

His aside, thus, could be considered an alienating device, operating on different levels. First, as posited by Brecht in his writings on theater, a breaking of the fourth wall alienates audiences: Aaron subjects himself to the audience's approval (91-5). But more than that, Aaron's aside is particularly alienating since it completely ignores that Titus' son stands next to him. Opposing conventional realism, where Titus' son would hear Aaron's lines, Howell's production causes the aside to sort of interrupt the action, thus reaching an epic, narrative, dimension. Aaron himself is alienated from the action, in a way that epitomizes his behavior, as I believe that Aaron's previously mentioned position onstage would heighten such effect, as well as the already mentioned foggy atmosphere of the woods. In any event, the way Aaron is depicted in this scene is akin to what he does in the play in general: he plots evil deeds and tricks others into executing them. This time, as he is seen nearly as a specter in the woods, seems to be just a visual evidence of this reading of the character.

And thus, in act 2, scene 3, one of the most graphic scenes of violence takes place, as Marcus finds Lavinia after the rape and mutilation in the hands of Tamora's sons. Firstly, the scene begins with the two young men laughing at Lavinia, and joking about her condition.

Strangely, in Howell's productions the younger brother is seen holding a knife and shaking. It is difficult to interpret such sign: was it guilt, fear of being caught or sheer excitement? As Marcus is about to enter the scene, the brothers leave the scene running and screaming.

Marcus enters the scene to deliver his famous—if problematic—speech, performed in its entirety in Howell's production. In Julie Taymor's highly acclaimed film *Titus*, for instance, Marcus' speech is severely cut. Although Lavinia's wounds are stylized in Taymor's film, it seems that Taymor tries to represent Marcus' discovery of his mutilated niece in a more realistic way on a psychological level. As I have previously mentioned, Professor Emma Smith argues that Marcus' lengthy speech (two and a half minutes in Howell's production) promotes a suspension of time and cannot be read realistically. It would be absurd to think that Marcus would speak for nearly three minutes non-stop, leaving his niece to bleed to death. Marcus' speech is rather his coming to terms with the image of Lavinia, an instance of ekphrasis.¹⁷ More than that, Marcus calls attention to her body, making it spectacular, just as Tennenhouse has put it: the spectacle of the body of an aristocratic female (107-8).

The making of this spectacle is evident in Howell's production, as the camera insists on focusing on Lavinia. First, as Marcus, shown in a medium-shot, enters the scene, the camera turns around his back, thus revealing Lavinia. The scene cuts to Marcus' reaction—and consequently the beginning of his speech—but soon cuts again to show Marcus' back and Lavinia's body. The camera then zooms in, showing only Lavinia in a medium-shot, as Marcus continues with his speech completely out of the spectator's sight. Not only does this emphasize the unrealistic nature of the speech, but it also "spectacularizes" Lavinia's body. Rome, always referred to in the feminine, and the State, always referred to as a body, find their correlation in Lavinia. Just as Rome has been invaded by the Goths, Lavinia becomes an icon of the decadence of the Empire.¹⁸

¹⁷ As defined by J. A. Cuddon in the *Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms*, ekphrasis is

The intense pictorial description of an object. This very broad term has been limited by some to the description of art-objects, and even to the self-description of 'speaking' art-object (objects whose visual details are significant). A more generous account would define *ekphrasis* as virtuosic description of physical reality (objects, scenes, persons) in order to evoke an image in the mind's eye as intense as if the described object were actually before the reader. (252)

¹⁸ Again briefly commenting on gender, I should say that such representation of a woman is quite problematic. It is not uncommon to see rape victims represented in a way that their



Fig 7: Lavinia is displayed as Marcus delivers his speech

And then spectators see blood being shed onstage for the first time, even though two characters had already been killed in front of them. In what can be seen as one of the most violent scenes in the play, Marcus urges Lavinia to speak, who answers simply by opening her mouth, letting out “a river of blood” and thus revealing that her tongue has been cut off by her attackers, lest she reveal their identity. Even with the suspension of disbelief caused by Marcus’ speech, the scene remains appalling. I believe that this power derives not only from the graphic exhibition of Lavinia’s mutilation, but also from the relationship between the violence in this scene and in the rest of the play. As I will argue, Howell’s production is characteristic for its concealing of violence. Lavinia’s blood is one of the rare occasions spectators are confronted with gore—at least explicitly visually.

suffering does not belong to them, but to the men close to them, as if a woman is not entitled to her own pain.

3.3 “These two heads do seem to speak to me”: first scene of the third act

Titus begins act 3 on the verge of madness, shouting at the tribunes, who take his two sons to prison, unjustly accused of murdering Bassianus. The tribunes enter the scene dressed in white and wearing gray masks. As they pass by Titus, completely ignoring his ardent clamor for his sons’ lives, a tribune’s mask is superimposed on a black background. As the mask fades out, Titus is seen on the floor, still pleading for his sons’ lives, but now the tribunes have already left. The use of such device seems to depict the tribunes as impersonal, authoritarian politicians, in accordance with Titus’ words: stones would make better politicians than them. It also shows Titus’ situation politically: a man abandoned by the State he so fiercely fought to protect. It should not be ignored, however, that such device alienates the audience from Titus’ speech and highlights his madness. When the tribune’s mask fades out, the tribunes are gone; the superimposed mask, clearly marking Titus’ speech to the stones, hides their exit. Titus is looking at where the tribunes entered the scene when he shouts, not at their exit, giving the impression that his suffering disconnected him from reality to the point of not perceiving the tribunes’ departure from the scene.

Upon hearing that Lucius is banished from Rome, Titus utters his famous words “Rome is but a wilderness of tigers” (3.1.54). His gestures, feebly trembling as he speaks, further indicate his madness. At the same time, Titus’ words are surprisingly accurate for a character that is often mistaken in the play, and may suggest that his madness could lead to some sort of wisdom. Nevertheless, Rome being described as a wilderness of tigers may refer not only to the political situation, with the Goths gaining power politically and innocent men being slain and sent to prison, but also to the coliseum, a site where violent acts take place just for the sake of spectacle.

If, as Neil Taylor argues, Howell creates two sets and explores the possibilities of both television and theater, this seems to be most noticeable in Act 3 Scene 1 (90-1). Coincidentally, in the playtext, this is arguably the most—or at least one of the most—violent scenes in the play. A combination of cinematography and blocking is remarkable in Marcus’ showing of Lavinia’s wounded body. The camera films Lucius and Titus, predominantly on the left-hand side of the screen, while Marcus and Lavinia enter from one of the gates. The combination between camera angle and actor positioning captures the three men,

while Lavinia is hidden behind Marcus. This whole setup contributes, in my view, to Howell's idea of ensemble acting and theatricalizes television. Instead of overusing cuts and close-ups, Howell mixes blocking and camera angles to offer the spectators a better notion of the whole scene, of who is on stage, the characters' gazes, and their interactions.

The display of Lavinia's wounds to her father and brother furthers the objectification of her body. "This was thy daughter", says Marcus, as he literally pushes Lavinia onto Titus. It would be impossible to ignore the implications of such way of revealing Lavinia, especially considering Marcus' line. Lavinia's body, in a way, has completely become something other than a human body, rather an icon for the Andronici's sufferings and Rome's decaying civilization. "This object kills me", says Lucius falling, to which Titus answers by lifting the boy so that he must keep looking at it. The action revolves around Lavinia, who stands in the middle of the scene as simply an object to be looked at.

Titus is thus further driven into madness. The sight of Lavinia's lack of hands prompts Titus to want to chop off his hands as well. Titus' gesture at this point is highly marked: the trembling hands simulate the action he will soon perform. The prophetic power of language in *Titus Andronicus* is here reflected also in the action. Ironically, the idea of not having hands leads Titus to reflect on the political situation of Rome: it is better to not have hands to fight for such a corrupt State. As Katherine Rowe has submitted, the hands are seen as metaphors for political action, and not having hands ironically signals aptitude for political action (280). However, the sight of Lavinia's body triggers Titus' apparently sudden interest in politics: she is, at the same time, the emblem of Rome, of the Andronici and the Roman people in general.

As Lavinia's brother and uncle try to come to terms with her mutilation, and Lavinia herself stands as a vivid reminder of pain, Titus distances himself from the scene and delivers some lines explaining the situation of the Andronici at this point. In Howell's production, Titus seems to be addressing the audience and is drastically separated from the other characters in the action. With Lavinia, Marcus and Lucius on the background, Titus says:

For now I stand as one upon a rock
 Environ'd with a wilderness of sea,
 Who marks the waxing tide grow wave by wave,
 Expecting ever when some envious surge

Will in his brinish bowels swallow him.
 This way to death my wretched sons are gone;
 Here stands my other son, a banished man,
 And here my brother, weeping at my woes:
 But that which gives my soul the greatest spurn,
 Is dear Lavinia, dearer than my soul. (3.1.93-102)

The lines are delivered calmly, which is unusual given Titus' situation. As they are delivered, Titus points the "way to death" his "wretched sons are gone", his "other son, a banished man", and his brother, but when it comes to Lavinia, Titus starts approaching her and such explanatory interruption of the action ends. If Titus' speech seems cold and distanced, serving more to describe the action than to advance it, the following sequences are not in tune with such coldness.

In fact, the following sequences do not seem to be in tune with the overall conception of the play. Whereas the previous scenes here analyzed often offer rich visual suggestions and a certain degree of self-consciousness, both fueled by some Brechtian touches, the Andronici's reunion around Lavinia seems overtly emotional. The Andronici hug each other and cry together at their woes, and the sequence displays levels of physical closeness not seen before. The whole sequence is so exaggerated in its emotional tone to the point of producing laughter, for instance, when Titus is unable to wash his tears with Marcus' napkin, for it is already completely wet from Marcus' own tears. If the family drama can be seen as pathetic and comic, it could also be said that this is the first time that the men display some empathy towards Lavinia. However problematic this sequence may be, it serves to humanize Lavinia's suffering. It all comes to an end, though, with Titus' couplet: "O, what a sympathy of woe is this. / As far from help as limbo is from bliss" (3.1.148-9). Conveniently, the camera zooms out to reveal that Aaron, the Moor, arrives.

The shot composed by the Andronici hugging on the bottom-left of the screen and Aaron, standing gloriously on the right-hand side, displays Aaron contemplating the family's suffering before interrupting it to announce the Emperor's offer to save Titus' sons. Again, Hugh Quarshie delivers Aaron's lines full of joy. Contrarily to Julie Taymor's filmic adaptation, where Aaron seems to be deeply affected by his "cloudy melancholy" (2.3.33), Quarshie's take on the character emphasizes his pleasure in spreading evil. When Quarshie speaks the lines, it seems as if Aaron can barely hide his joy in plotting against the

Andronici—and such joy is, of course, mistaken for genuine good will by Titus.

Aaron's asides are, again, somewhat alienating in Howell's production. Aaron is the character with more asides in the play, and, along with Young Lucius, is the one who breaks the fourth-wall more often. However, in this particular instance, Aaron's aside seems to do more than that: it also serves as a sort of comic relief. The break is so radical, with Aaron's entrance, and the juxtaposition of Aaron's delight in doing evil and the Andronici's suffering, that such quasi-comical—as well as alienating—display of joy immediately displaces the family drama. It is almost as if Aaron belongs to a different level in the play—along with Young Lucius and the spectator—from which he can analyze and control the events.

Thus, Aaron sometimes seems to play the role of a narrator-like character in *Titus Andronicus*. This is noticeable, for instance, as he reveals his plans and comments on the action, looking directly at the camera:

If that be call'd deceit, I will be honest,
 And never whilst I live deceive men so;
 But I'll deceive you in another sort,
 And that you'll say ere half an hour pass.
 [.....]
 O how this villainy
 Doth fat me with the very thoughts of it!
 Let fools do good, and fair men call for grace,
 Aaron will have his soul black like his face. (3.1.188-191, 202-5)

Aaron barely participates, physically, in the violent acts carried out in the play. He does, indeed, cut Titus' hand in Howell's production, but it is Titus who has a clear active role in the sequence. However, the other violent acts performed onto Titus' family are only plotted, but not performed, by Aaron.¹⁹

Howell's single set does not work realistically, and, in the hand-chopping sequence, the artificiality of such space is evident. Realistic rules of space do not apply to the production's set. Titus deceives Marcus and Lucius, but they are seen in the background, nearly

¹⁹ In my view, it is highly unlikely that the decision to cut Titus' sons' heads rests entirely on Aaron's hands. It seems that he simply takes advantage of their execution to further hurt Titus psychologically, merely for his own pleasure, as his speech in scene 5.1.98-120 seems to indicate.

fighting to get the axe, during Aaron's aside. Realistically they would hear the aside and, more than that, see Titus offer his hand as sacrifice. However, in Howell's coliseum, it seems that such spatial notions are suspended and, although Aaron, Marcus and Lucius are seen onscreen at the same time, it is as if they are in different places.

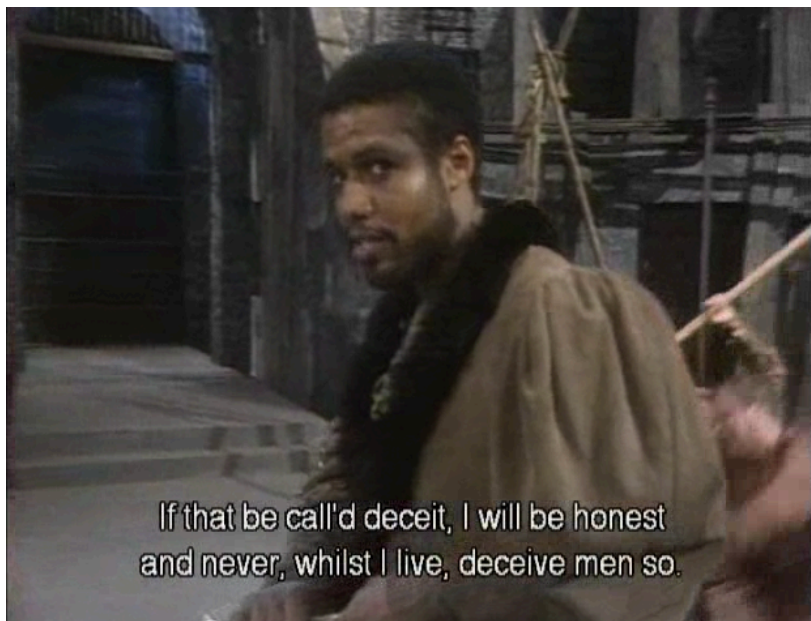


Fig 8. Aaron delivers his aside while Marcus and Lucius fight for the axe

The soundscape in the passage foregrounds the sacrificial theme of Titus' cutting his own hand. We hear the same drums from act I, when Titus offered Tamora's elder son so that the spirits of his twenty-one dead sons could rest. Therefore, I go back to my claim, as argued in chapter 2.1, that Biblical violence has also its place in *Titus Andronicus*. At this point, it can be said that this is the fourth time Titus offers a sacrifice in the play. Firstly, Titus literally sacrifices Alarbus. Secondly, he sacrifices the throne, as he finds himself too old to rule. Thirdly, he sacrifices his own son, again, in the honor of Rome. Finally, he sacrifices his hand, in a failed attempt to free his sons from prison. All of this is in vain. One is left to speculate: why is Titus punished by his sacrifices? We recall that, as Francis Barker suggests, *Titus Andronicus* is a play ruled by the "sign of the primitive" and, perhaps, Titus is punished for not being Roman enough. By rejecting Roman

piety—as Tamora begged him not to—and offering his first sacrifice in the play, Titus dooms his family.

The severing of Titus’ hand takes place onscreen, but its explicit graphical violence is mitigated. Titus’ hand is not shown, but spectators can see Aaron’s action cutting it off. Instead of a vivid display of violence, spectators are left with their imagination, the sound of the dagger cutting Titus’ hand, and Titus’ reaction.



Fig 9. Titus having his hand cut off

If Katherine Rowe argues that body parts should not be read simply as metaphors of castration, but rather understood within that “political iconography” mentioned by Leonard Tennenhouse, Titus’ first remark after having his hand cut off seems to confirm the political significance of his hand: “Tell him it was a hand that warded him from a thousand dangers” (3.1.194-5). The first feature of the hand, thus, is its use in war. Titus sacrificed nearly everything for the glory of the Empire.

Aaron leaves the scene with, again, another aside. What is interesting about this aside is that, as he delivers the lines, Aaron holds Titus’ severed hand and shows it to the audience. Even though the act of mutilation itself was hidden from the audience, the hand is now shown, separated from the body, as if unrelated to the process that removed it

from Titus. However violent the scene is, due to said disruption it seems as if the hand is shown as somehow comic, rather than tragic.



Fig 10 Aaron and the hand

However realistic the hand may seem, its link to Aaron’s “comic violence”, as described by Harold Bloom, arguably precludes any shock the scene may cause us. And so Aaron continues his aside, scornfully looking at Titus, as if time itself had stopped for him to deliver his lines, and then exits. Like his entrance, Aaron’s exit is sudden—he nearly runs away from the scene—reinforcing, in my view, his separation from the regular course of action.

If the advice that Jane Howel gave to her actors was “not to work yourself to an emotional crisis” (Willis 170), Trevor Peacock, playing Titus, does not seem to have followed this piece of advice. Peacock’s over-the-top performance, however, is not the only remarkable thing in the sequence: his physical proximity to Lavinia reaches its peak. Both father and daughter, handless, are brought together by their condition. Moreover, Lavinia, a silent presence when the playtext is read in the “theater of the mind”, here moans hauntingly. If the emotional crisis experienced by Titus—and reproached by Marcus—is pathetic, Lavinia’s moaning is, in a way, strange, unsettling, even repulsive.

One of the key moments of the play, Lavinia's carrying Titus' hand between her teeth, is nearly hidden from the spectators' gaze in Howell's production. But first, a closer look at the nature of this passage is necessary. It is here, finally, that the table turns, and the Andronici's revenge begins. Thus, holding Titus' hand between her teeth cannot be seen, merely, as a bizarre spectacle, but rather Lavinia taking an active stance in the revenge plot. If Lavinia stands as a metaphor for Rome, and the hand as an emblem of political agency, such image can be read as a foreshadowing of a new political order in the Roman Empire. But more than that: it also foreshadows the cannibalism in act 5.

The camera, however, avoids showing Lavinia picking the hand up with her stumps and putting it in her mouth. As she approaches the basket where the hand was "in scorn to thee sent back" (3.1.237), the camera conveniently zooms on Titus and Lucius. When the camera zooms out, Lavinia gets up, walks away, but the vision of the hand is blocked by Marcus' body—himself carrying one of his nephews' head—and we finally gaze at the hand, but for no longer than two or three seconds. If the hand was previously shown by Aaron with no problems, and the two heads are displayed with no resort to such combinations of cinematography and blocking tricks, why is Lavinia so consistently hidden from our view? Perhaps Howell saw, like Bloom, how comic this moment in the playtext could become in performance. However unintentionally comic *Titus Andronicus* may be, Howell's production seems to avoid comedy most of the time.²⁰ Such rejection of comedy, however, is not done through a thoughtless acceptance of tragedy, but rather through a conscious process of putting the supposedly tragic elements of the play into question.

3.4 "Eating the flesh that she herself hath bred": The closing scenes

Before analyzing scene 3, I must draw a few considerations about act 5, scene 2, for they are significant to the focus of my analysis. Focusing on Tamora's visit to Titus, disguised as Revenge, it is important to notice, specifically, the setting and, again, the use of space. The dark, foggy setting is reminiscent of the hunting scene. This time, however, the Goths are the prey. In the background it is possible to see pieces of meat hanging, as if the characters are in a slaughterhouse, thus

²⁰ What I mean by comedy is, basically, unintended comedy due to the exaggerated violence and lack of psychological realism in the playtext. Aaron's character is deliberately comic in Howell's production, but such effect is achieved by highlighting his joy in doing evil.

foreshadowing the cannibalism. Just like in act 3.1, traditional conventions of space are broken. Instead of aiming at a more realistic use of space, Howell opts for a theatricalization of television. After Titus asks Tamora's sons, disguised as Murder and Rape, to stay with him, Tamora turns to them asking if they should conform to Titus's demand. She shares the set with Titus, and speaks to her sons, in what is marked as an aside in the playtext, as if simply Titus is not there. Although hidden from our view, Titus is clearly there, and this is noticeable when he invades the shot to deliver his aside. If breaking the fourth-wall is one of Brecht's most common alienation devices, Trevor Peacock goes beyond that in Howell's *Titus Andronicus*: it looks as if he is holding the camera himself when speaking the aside.



Fig 11. Titus' aside

Young Lucius' aid in binding Tamora's sons is one of the sequences in which his role as the audience's representative is most highlighted. After Publius, Valentine and Caius immobilize Chiron and Demetrius, Young Lucius enters from a staircase and gags one of the brothers. The camera zooms on Young Lucius as he binds him, nearly ignoring the other brother. The brothers are taken to be butchered by

Titus and Lavinia, but the camera stays with Young Lucius, who stands looking at the boys being taken away. Lucius' son seems to be divided between family duty and morality. While Chiron and Demetrius scream, Young Lucius stands terrified, alone, and gazes at the meat, which indicates that he is well aware of their fate. Young Lucius' dilemma seems to be between the desire to revenge and maintaining a moral code that seems to be disregarded both by Romans and Goths. Howell, through the perspective of a child, problematizes the issue of violence: what is the effect it has on us? Are we accomplices?



Fig 12 Young Lucius looks at the meat

Before moving to the final scene some aspects of scene 2 are still noteworthy. The first is, again, the ritualistic nature of Titus' killing of Tamora's sons. As I have highlighted in the beginning of my analysis, such aspect is present in Howell's production, in accordance to Francis Barker's thesis that "the Rome of *Titus Andronicus* is a society organized by the signs of the primitive" (144). Preparing himself to cut their throats, Titus repeats the gesture that he and Lucius did when offering Alarbus as sacrifice in the beginning of the play. After the "deed is done", and Titus and Lavinia leave, Young Lucius, again, stays on the scene, astonished by such violence. The action cuts, moving to

the final scene with an opening close-up shot of Aaron's baby, establishing a relationship between Young Lucius and the baby: two innocent beings caught in the middle of a political struggle.



Fig. 13 Titus cuts Chiron's and Demetrius' throats

The last scene is possibly the one in which Young Lucius' perspective is most present, and the directorial choices made by Howell provide a somewhat pessimistic ending to the play. Just as in 5.2, Young Lucius is here given a more active role. Young Lucius can be seen with a dagger tied to his belt, which he reluctantly hands to Lavinia while Titus cuts the pie. This dagger is precisely the one used by Titus to murder Lavinia. I believe that this choice has two implications. First, it involves Young Lucius directly in the Andronici's plans for revenge in the banquet. Secondly, it also grants Lavinia an active role in her own death, as if she consents to being murdered by her father.

It is also worthwhile noting how both Aaron and Titus disrupt rituals in the final scene. When Lucius arrives with his army of Goths, he seems to be performing a sort of rite, similar to the funeral and sacrificial rites performed by Titus in the first act. Aaron laughs loudly while Lucius orders that he be taken away to witness against Tamora. Aaron resists and runs towards the ritual table and throws down the

plates and candles. Titus, about to stab Tamora, does something similar to the banquet table. The similarity of both disruptions establishes a relation between Aaron and Titus, both plotters of most of the violent deeds in the play. But whereas “barbarous” Aaron is commonly associated with barbarism by the other characters, Titus is the Roman patriarch par excellence. In keeping with Barker’s thesis, Howell’s choice highlights the irony in Titus’ actions. The distinction between Romans and Goths, civilization and barbarism, is nearly obliterated. Moreover, when serving Tamora and Saturninus, Titus brutally slices the pie, as if he were murdering Chiron and Demetrius again. Who is the cannibal, then: Titus, who bakes the pie, or Tamora and Saturninus, who eat it unaware of its true content? (Barker 193).

If Titus is violent slicing the pie, the sequence of murders in the banquet is highly mitigated, following the same pattern as every other murder onstage in Howell’s production: a combination of cinematography, editing and blocking hides any gore from the spectators’ view. What changes, however, is Young Lucius’ presence in the scene, and his participation in Saturninus’ murder. Perhaps he could stand seeing all this bloodshed, but watching his own father murder someone is too much. Besides Young Lucius, the masked tribunes are also witness to this bloody spectacle. As usually, they remain impassive, blurring the already problematic line of public and private in the play.

If, for Barker, the killing of the Messenger haunts the playtext, my reading of Howell’s production is that the death of Aaron’s baby is what haunts the production. Instead of being in the arms of an attendant, as in the playtext, Aaron’s child is shown by Marcus in a tiny coffin, which he holds as it were a trivial object. Young Lucius is the only one moved by the innocent baby’s death. The boy even ignores his father’s crowning as Rome’s Emperor to mourn the baby. Lucius’s “Come and learn with us to melt in showers”, addressed to a Young Lucius hugging the coffin and crying, becomes bitterly ironical. In the end, Young Lucius seems somewhat skeptical towards the Roman establishment. His father’s final speech, ordering the burials, does not receive Young Lucius’, nor the camera’s, attention. Instead, the boy looks at the dead baby, that is, until Marcus closes the small coffin, ending the play as it had begun, with funerals and a superimposition of skulls.

The question, however, is how does the baby die? The event goes unexplained, and one can only speculate about what has killed the baby. However, it is not unlikely that the Romans somehow caused his death. The baby’s death here, thus, provides a much darker ending than, for instance, the ending of Julie Taymor’s *Titus*. If in Taymor’s *Titus*

Young Lucius flees from Rome with the baby in his arms, suggesting a brighter future, in Howell's his death seems to signal a continuous decadence of values or even more political turmoil. The coldness with which Marcus and Lucius—Rome's most powerful men by the end of the play—treats the baby seems to epitomize the problematic, to say the least, nature of Roman civilization.

4. CONCLUSION

After having finished my analysis, when casually reading Harold Bloom's remarks about *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, I came across the following passage:

There remains a puzzle of why Shakespeare subjected the pseudo-Falstaff to so mindless a laceration, really a bear baiting, with "Sir John-in-love" as the bear. As a lifelong playwright, always quick to yield to subtle patrons, statist censors, and royal performances, Shakespeare in his deepest inwardness harbored anxieties that he rarely allowed expression. He knew that Walsingham's shadowy Secret Service had murdered Christopher Marlowe, and tortured Thomas Kyd into an early death. [. . .] I have to conclude that Shakespeare himself is warding off personal horror by scapegoating the false Falstaff in this weak play. (318)

What struck me is that the "torture" endured by Falstaff in *The Merry Wives* is somehow analogous to the death of the messenger in *Titus Andronicus*. However, Bloom's reading of Falstaff's misfortune differs radically from Barker's reading of the death of the messenger. Bloom paints Shakespeare as a more sympathetic figure, the playwright fearing being oppressed by an oppressive State. Barker, on the other hand, presents Shakespeare as a reactionary force, whether willingly or not. In my view, it would be possible to read such violent—yet occluded, as Barker writes—act in *Titus Andronicus* in the same way Bloom reads Falstaff's "torture". The messenger, being sent to death with a joke, does not legitimize State power, but rather signifies a certain anxiety towards it. Laughter is, after all, a way one finds to deal with tragedy.

As my analysis of Howell's production has shown, however, the BBC's *Titus Andronicus*, in its most violent scenes, conceals violence in a way, as well as alienates the audience with the use of certain Brechtian devices. Howell's *Titus*, therefore, is far from a raw display of spectacularized, Tarantinesque violence. That does not mean, however, that violence is occluded completely in Howell's production. What seems to happen is that, through the use of Brechtian devices and presenting certain scenes from Young Lucius' perspective, the spectacular character of violence in *Titus Andronicus* is explicitly pointed out, without necessarily revealing itself more clearly.

What Howell achieves with her occlusion of explicit violence and making Young Lucius' reaction to violence explicit, it seems, is a critique of violence, rather than a legitimizing of it, as Barker suggests as a possible reading of the playtext. In this sense, the killing of Aaron's baby is crucial to my reading of Howell's production: it is the utmost act of violence in the production. My reasons to believe so are twofold. Firstly, unlike other violent acts in the play, its result is explicitly displayed, both to the camera and to the characters onscreen. Secondly, the killing of the baby fosters a certain interpretation of Lucius' character. In Howell's *Titus Andronicus*, as pointed out by Keith Parsons and Pamela Mason in *Shakespeare in Performance*, Lucius is a closet sadist. It is precisely in this moment that he gets out of the closet, bringing political implications to the conclusion of the act (219). Even if the killing of the baby could be seen as an extension of the Andronici's revenge—however problematic it may be, even in comparison to the horrors previously performed—it reveals a serious flaw in Lucius. As an honorable Roman who is supposed to keep his word, he breaks his promise to Aaron—who even made Lucius swear to his Gods that he would not. The production begins with Titus refusing to “draw near the nature of Gods” and ends with Lucius breaking his vow to the Roman Gods (Parsons and Mason 219).

Lucius' choice comes with a price and reinforces the cyclical nature of violence present in the production. Due to Howell's choice of starting the play with Titus entering victorious in Rome, it is possible to say that the production starts and ends with funerals. Lucius, like his father, is burying not only his family members but also an outsider, arguably unjustly killed. If, as Andrew Hadfield argues in *Shakespeare and Republicanism*, the play *Titus Andronicus* is filled with republican images and is, ultimately, a republican work, Lucius' killing of the baby cannot be seen with good eyes (155). A political order established upon the killing of a newborn cannot prosper. It would be difficult to believe that such political order would not become authoritarian.

As I have discussed in my analysis, Brechtian elements are arguably present in Howell's production. This is not to conclude, however, that the BBC's *Titus Andronicus* is “epic theater”. Yet, since such elements can be found in her production, what conclusion can be drawn from their usage? If the objective of epic theater is to reveal conditions of a certain society's mode of production, do the alienating elements in *Titus Andronicus* achieve that? In such a conflicting production, whose conception, as part of a series, attempts a certain neutrality and timelessness—both problematic—such elements seem to

disrupt the proposed conception of the BBC series. In a series that sought to establish the televised canon, a definitive Shakespeare with educational purposes, the epic elements in Howell's *Titus Andronicus* challenge this possibility. By making the spectator sometimes take an active stance towards the play, raising their awareness concerning the artificiality of the play, such elements threaten the possibility of a fixed meaning.

But, if a political analysis of Howell's production is to be sought, it seems that it should concern mainly Young Lucius' perspective. Being the viewer's representative in the production, the boy's role in this *Titus Andronicus* is that of being shocked. Whereas violence is occluded from us, it is not from him. Young Lucius seems to be the channel through which the audience can be in contact with the violence in the play. However, this position is explicitly not neutral. The anachronism produced by the boy's spectacles epitomizes his position in the production. Young Lucius does not belong in the Rome of *Titus Andronicus*. Thus, the production can be read pessimistically. Instead of seeing in Young Lucius a hope for a new political order, his position as the viewer's representative suggests that such political order is unable to be altered by his future intervention as a likely candidate for the throne.

However, it is possible to conclude that the Brechtian elements in Howell's production only partially achieve the effects sought by the epic theater. If the Brechtian elements may alienate the audience to a certain extent, and offer meta-theatrical comment on the play—and the series as a whole—it does not seem to work dialectically, in the sense of making explicit the possibility of changing society. What I am questioning is the “*intuito didático do seu teatro, [. . .] capaz de esclarecer o público sobre a sociedade e sobre a necessidade de transformá-la*” (Rosenfeld 150).²¹ It is possible to say that Howell's production has epic elements, minus the Marxism.

Unlike Julie Taymor's *Titus* in which Young Lucius—similarly to Howell's production functioning as the viewer's representative—brings Aaron's baby home with him, there is nothing left for Young Lucius in the BBC's *Titus*. The loss of Aaron's baby seems to signify, also, the loss of his father, whose humanity is put in question in the production. In this sense, whereas in Taymor's film Young Lucius symbolically takes such father role by taking care of Aaron's baby, in

²¹ “didactic intent of [Brecht's] theater [. . .] being able to raise the public's awareness concerning society and the need to transform it”.

Howell's production Young Lucius is left with an absent father, a metaphor for the political order in *Titus Andronicus*' Rome.

As the last chapter of Jay Halio's *Understanding Shakespeare's Plays in Performance*, "Finding Coherence" establishes what should be sought for after experiencing a play in performance. The play's conception and its realization on stage should create a coherent whole, and from such coherence would emerge aesthetic pleasure. Halio's essentialist notions have already been criticized in my thesis (see chapter 2, section 2.2). So, taking this concept of coherence with a pinch of salt, is Howell's production coherent? I believe that, in keeping with the conception proposed by the underwriters and producers of the series, the production was successful in delivering what they had planned for the series, in the sense of not being too outrageous nor too experimental, but it went beyond that, delivering an original work, rich in possibilities for readings, instead of closing the production as a mere extension of Shakespeare's playtext. Despite the aesthetic merits of the BBC's *Titus Andronicus*—it is not really my intention to judge them—it is possible to acknowledge that the production has positive points and is worth discussing.

Thus, to conclude, I believe that I have shown that Brechtian elements are indeed present in Howell's production—even if partially, as aforementioned—and that, to a certain extent, they are related to the violence in *Titus Andronicus*. This relationship is complex, as I have argued: at the same time that the extravagant violence is concealed from the spectator and alienation devices every now and then distance the spectator from the audience, Young Lucius' reaction to this often unseen violence is highlighted. As the Brechtian elements in this rendering of the play alienate the spectator from identifying with the main characters, identification is only possible through Young Lucius, such a marginal character in the play, and Aaron, the comic villain.

For those seeking inspiration from this work, I would like to mention that, at first, my intention was to analyze Brazilian productions of *Titus Andronicus*. Unfortunately those are scarce and the records are basically non-existent. My suggestion for further research is thus, if the play gets produced more often in our country, to contextualize and analyze Brazilian productions of *Titus Andronicus*. I am sure that, since no production can escape its sociopolitical context, even if it tries to, a performance of *Titus Andronicus* in a violent and politically troubled country such as ours would be worth analyzing.

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