

Edward de Vere's Hand in *Titus Andronicus*

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Even though *Sweeney Todd, The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* — a blood-and-gore revenge tragedy involving over-the-top butchery, madness, and cannibalistic pie-eating — keeps enjoying at least moderate successes, “All lovers of Shakespeare,” acknowledges Harold Goddard, “would be glad to relieve the poet of responsibility for that concentrated brew of blood and horror, *Titus Andronicus*.”¹ Grim assessments of the play’s wobbly focus, crude characterization, and uneven or inappropriate poetry, its pre-Brechtian “alienation effect,”² and the obvious emphasis on gratuitous and extremely grisly violence — all make this play second-rate in the minds of most critics. With “no intrinsic value,” proclaims Harold Bloom, who tries to view the play as a parody of Marlovian bombast, “It matters only because Shakespeare, alas, undoubtedly wrote it.”³ There has in fact been some reluctance to accept the play into the canon, where even now, notes Marjorie Garber, it is apt to be “regarded as a Shakespearean stepchild rather than a legitimate heir.”⁴ The Reduced Shakespeare Company’s dismissive assessment is that Shakespeare “seems to have gone through a brief Quentin Tarantino phase.”⁵

So, if we cannot successfully ignore this seemingly early play (which I did manage to do through eight years of teaching Shakespeare until the university launched its own production), then what are we to do with *Titus Andronicus*? How are we to understand this play?

I believe that some Shakespeare works teach us not just life-wisdom compressed into handy Shakespearean gems, although we do get this statement in *Titus*: “Wilt thou draw near the nature of the gods? / Draw near them then in being merciful. / Sweet mercy is nobility’s true badge” (1.1.117-119).⁶ Unfortunately, as Goddard points out, this is “advice which almost no one in the play, including the speaker [Tamora], ever follows.”⁷ Sometimes, though, a Shakespeare work also

teaches us how to read a Shakespeare work. In an *Oxfordian* article I showed images from the Sala di Troia in the Palazzo Ducale in Mantua that Shakespearean consensus declares are those referred to in the *Lucrece* poem.⁸ One of the implications of those having served as the Trojan War images Lucrece herself observes in the poem is that the work now typically known as *The Rape of Lucrece* is one that itself demonstrates to us how to read for meaning. Lucrece applies the Trojan War story to her own plight allegorically, indicating that so too should we (or, originally, Queen Elizabeth) apply the Lucrece story allegorically to contemporary situations. This creative/interpretive principle is itself the foundation for Plutarch's *Parallel Lives of the Noble Greeks and Romans*, with its 23 pairings of historical Greek personages matched with, for Plutarch, recent celebrities, whereby the antique history illuminates the more contemporary. Plutarch provided not only source material to Shakespeare in the form of characters and plot events for *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Timon of Athens*, *Coriolanus*, and others, but also a way of seeing ancient history as cautionary in its applicability to current events.

A close reading of *Titus Andronicus* will lead one to the same conclusion: that this is a play that instructs us on how to read it properly. Much of *Titus Andronicus* consists of a nightmarish playing out of metaphoric language in literalized plot and action. Ultimately, Shakespeare prompts us to read back what we are seeing into the realm of metaphor, where another story of severing and mutilation comes into focus.

The action begins at the Roman Capitol, the senate and tribunes waiting for a resolution to the issue of who will be the new emperor. Saturninus, the older son of the prior emperor, vies with his brother Bassianus who supports an election process. We may have here a political or national allegory. Certainly this interpretive impulse can be seen in orthodox criticism of the play, with such claims as:

- “Characters use the image of the body politic to portray a Rome no less fragmented than the bodies of the various Andronici become.”⁹
- “Bassianus’ wish to defend the Mother of Cities from assault and ‘dishonour’ is primarily a wish to protect her from rape, to defend her ‘passage’ and protect her ‘virtue’ and her ‘continence.’”¹⁰
- “Shakespeare chooses to identify Lavinia’s violation with the violation of Rome and of all civilized value.”¹¹

Indeed, Lavinia is the name of the traditional mother of Rome, daughter of the king of Latium, quarreled over by Aeneas and Turnus. Aeneas killed Turnus, married Lavinia, and founded the Roman race.

But this national dimension comes into no focus until one brings Oxfordian perspectives to bear on the play. Thus, accepting an earlier composition date than orthodoxy will allow, we may find significance in the fact that the French courtier Simier used the name Saturn in reference to Philip of Spain in letters to Queen Elizabeth.¹² The sketchy Oxfordian scholarship suggests that the playwright wrote an early version of *Titus Andronicus* after the “Spanish Fury” against the Dutch Protestants in November 1576, in order to warn that Spain and its horrors presented

a real danger.¹³ In this view, Saturninus represents Philip of Spain, Tamora is Mary Stuart, and Lavinia is partly Queen Elizabeth and partly the city of Antwerp, ravished “within its walls and in its low-lying situation” by the Spanish Fury.¹⁴ Antwerp did get its name -- *Hand-werpen*, or hand-throwing — from a legend concerning amputation as a tariff.¹⁵ So even the first act presents the essential warning: an alliance between Saturninus — Spain, or Philip of Spain — and Tamora of the Goths — France, or Mary Stuart and her “French Connection”?¹⁶ or Catherine de Medici?¹⁷ — means disaster for the Andronici — the Vere ancestry¹⁸ and including also, especially, Elizabeth. Shakespeare has characters refer to Lavinia as “Rome’s rich ornament,” “Rome’s royal mistress” (1.1.52, 241), and one is apt to think in similarly national terms of Queen Elizabeth. In this regard, it is shocking to think of Shakespeare having Lavinia in the play raped and mutilated, however metaphorically this is meant. Nevertheless, given how vain we know Elizabeth was concerning her long white hands, consider how effectively conveyed the warning would be when her uncle Marcus first sees Lavinia after the Goth brothers have chopped off her hands and ripped out her tongue. Marcus laments the loss of Lavinia’s musical abilities: “O, had the monster seen those lily hands / Tremble like aspen leaves upon a lute” (2.4.44-45), “Or had he heard the heavenly harmony / Which that sweet tongue hath made” (2.4.48-49). And perhaps in this latter reference Oxford is countering Arundel’s accusation that he, Oxford, had insulted the Queen’s singing voice. This detail would then come from a time when Oxford returned to the play, reworking it to enable an application to events involved in his banishment and disgrace in the early 1580s.¹⁹ Tamora becomes conspiracy personified²⁰ and emphasis is placed on Aaron, the first two syllables of (Charles) Arundel, the English traitor who ended up working with the Spanish to get the English crown for Mary Stuart.²¹

Literal beheadings and amputations had to have troubled Oxford before he dramatized such brutality in the play. Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey (1517-1547) — uncle to the 17th Earl and the last person executed by Henry VIII about nine days before the death of the King (and the day Howard’s father was scheduled to die too) — was a “literary hero and inspiration” to Oxford.²² essentially responsible for blank verse in English, the unrhymed iambic pentameter lines that Shakespeare established as the quintessential English poetic mode. Surrey, moreover, is responsible for the so-called “Shakespearean” sonnet format, since he and Thomas Wyatt are the chief representatives of English poetry during the early and mid-1500s. Surrey’s eldest son and heir, Oxford’s first cousin, Thomas Howard, 4th Duke of Norfolk, was similarly beheaded in June 1572, when Oxford was a young man. In November 1579 the husband of Oxford’s first cousin Anne Vere, the unfortunately named John Stubbs, had his right hand publicly amputated for writing a pamphlet critical of the Queen’s proposed marriage to the Duke of Alençon and therefore judged seditious.²³ The pamphlet’s printer and distributor were also condemned to having their right hands cut off.²⁴ This particular punishment itself, then, treated the hand symbolically; its removal, as in the play, is not just a disempowerment but actually a kind of silencing.

Such politics and punishments may have inspired, if that is the right word, the strata beneath the final version of the play as we now have it. But when at least

the particular international dangers became more or less obsolete, for the final version of *Titus Andronicus*, Oxford re-allegorized much of the key gruesome features of the play to represent a later and more personal type of maiming. By the time of this revision, Oxford had advanced light-years artistically, and artfully.

We now have in Act I, during the contention over the emperorship, an infusion of metaphoric and metonymic references to body parts. We hear of “eyes” (1.1.11) “hearts” (1.1.207), and “voices” (1.1.218). More importantly and even from the second line, we start encountering words such as “arms” (1.1.2, 30, 32, 38), “hand” (1.1.163), and “head” (1.1.186) -- all terms used metaphorically, for now, but not without hints of the graphic eventualities: “Be candidates then and put it on, / And help to set a head on headless Rome” (1.1.185-186).

Most of these isolated body parts and physical features will be severed from various characters during the course of the play, even as now in Act I the order is given to sacrifice a captured Goth soldier, the son of Tamora: “hew his limbs” (1.1.97, 129), comes the call, and soon “Alarbus’ limbs are lopp’d / And entrails feed the sacrificing fire” (1.1.143-144). Saturninus fancies Tamora, and she peculiarly vows to be his “handmaid” (1.1.331). Titus’ daughter Lavinia, whom Saturninus initially sought to make his Empress, has been kidnapped by her brother to prevent the marriage; and Saturninus tells Titus, “Thou and thy faction shall repent this rape” (1.1.404). He uses the term “rape” in the older, more general Latinate sense of *raptus*: theft. “Early statutory law dating from the late thirteenth century conflated sexual assault with abduction, blurring the distinction between the two.... During the sixteenth century, however, the definition of rape came to exclude abduction.”²⁵ Just as so many other Act I metaphors “will come to grisly life,”²⁶ this term too will soon refer to its more brutal manifestation. “Throughout the [Act I] sequence the emphasis is on Bassianus’s rights, and throughout the sequence Lavinia is silent.... Raped and silent in the woods [in Act II], she has already been raped and silent in Rome.”²⁷ So rape, as well as hands, heads, tongues,²⁸ and other horrors of the play begin as relatively innocuous or figurative terms: “the metaphoric impact of the tragedy can only be realized by forcing the metaphors to take on dramatic life.... Stated metaphorically, the most profound impulse in *Titus* is to make the word become flesh.”²⁹

An isolated example of the play’s self-contained process of this kind of literalizing may be found in the vivid fly-killing scene (Act III scene ii) when Titus first expresses compassion for a fly carelessly stabbed by his brother Marcus: it is an act of murder and tyranny, as the fly had a family. But Marcus compares the black fly to Aaron and Titus begs pardon, borrowing a knife to smash the insect further. Unconnectedly, late in the play, Aaron will vaunt, “Tut, I have done a thousand dreadful things / As willingly as one would kill a fly” (5.1.141-142). Some Shakespeareans feel that the chronologically earlier fly-killing scene was a late insertion in the play.³⁰ Perhaps it was prompted by this comment of Aaron’s and functions therefore as another displaced literalizing of a figurative phrase.

The fly-killing is an especially particular instance of the phenomenon; but the image of the pit haunts this play throughout and similarly morphs between

literal and figurative. The literal pit “becomes the central image upon the stage”³¹ when Lavinia has been dragged away to her off-stage rape. Bassianus’ corpse has been tossed into this pit before two of the Andronici, Quintus and Martius, come upon it, the latter brother soon falling in accidentally. That this serves as “Bassianus’ grave” (2.3.240) aligns the image with the tombs of the Andronici in which Titus’ war-hero son was interred at the start of the play. But Shakespeare enriches the image as Quintus ponders, “What subtle hole is this, / Whose mouth is covered with growing briars, / Upon whose leaves are drops of new-shed blood” (2.3.198-200). The insistence here that we are seeing a “blood-stained hole” (2.3.210), a “blood-drinking pit” (2.3.224), provides the grisly aspect to the oral metaphor: the pit as a bloody mouth, a nightmarish image that will manifest literally in the banquet scene of the final act. “The pit, like the tomb of the Andronici, is a dark hole that swallows life; now Tamora will be made to imitate it.... In revenge Titus compels Chiron and Demetrius to enter Tamora’s body, making her the final image of the hole in the earth that swallows men.”³² Until that climactic moment of revenge, the imagery of eating will weave throughout the play with such utterances as Titus’ reassurance to his son Lucius, “How happy art thou then, / From these devourers to be banished” (3.1.56-57), considering especially the “consuming sorrow” (3.1.61) engulfing the Andronici. Other figurative “feeding” (3.1.74), “gnawing” (5.2.31), and “swallow[ing]” (3.1.97) will also continue being invoked.

More so than “mouth” or “pit,” the key words in *Titus*, used casually and figuratively at first before becoming horrifically literalized, are those referring to body parts that will be torn from various victims in the course of the play. “Hands and heads abound in the text of *Titus Andronicus* as well as in the prop room for the production.”³³ In Act III, Quintus and Martius are condemned as guilty of the murder of Bassianus. Lavinia has been raped and mutilated by the true murderers, Tamora’s two sons, who have ripped out her tongue and amputated her hands. Aaron the Moor, for psychotic sport, tells Titus, his brother Marcus, and his remaining son Lucius that if one of them will send his severed hand to Saturninus, the Emperor will release the two boys. “Lend me thy hand,” says Titus to Aaron, “and I will give thee mine” (3.1.187) -- a disturbing proximity of the metaphoric and the nauseatingly literal. The amputation is carried out, and Titus treats the lopping off of his hand as a triumph; his brother and son who vied for the dubious privilege will just have to “ease their stomachs with their bitter tongues” (3.1.233). When Aaron’s macabre joke is revealed Titus’ severed hand is returned to him along with the severed heads of his two sons -- a possibly deranged Titus with eerie competence delegates the removal of these gruesome “props” from the stage:

The vow is made. Come, brother, take a head,
 And in this hand the other will I bear;
 And, Lavinia, thou shalt be employ’d;
 Bear thou my hand, sweet wench, between thy teeth.
 (3.2.279-282)

In text and film versions of this scene, the moment of Lavinia carrying Titus' severed hand in her mouth seems over-the-top, but not nearly as effective as on stage, where the actress must scoot along the floor trying to clench the grisly prop in her mouth without the aid of hands. Nervous laughter usually bursts from audiences uncertain how to respond. The moment is so extremely bizarre and visually arresting that it demands of us a kind of retreat into metaphoric interpretation.

Critics have indeed sought to understand Lavinia symbolically. As far as they go, we can agree with the inconsequential assertions about the severed hand in the scene: that "In this semiotics the hand is the preeminent sign for political and personal agency,"³⁴ and that "An instrument of reason, obviously voluntary in its motion, the hand serves as the physical link between intention (or volition) and act."³⁵ Therefore, "when, at the end of 3.1, she [Lavinia] carries Titus's hand offstage in her mouth, she symbolizes her instrumentality as the vehicle and emblem of *his* efficacious action."³⁶ But except briefly as a cook's assistant, Lavinia never does serve as this vehicle for Titus in the play. We may also grant that "Her mutilated body 'articulates' Titus' own suffering and victimization" and "transforms her irremediable condition into the emblem of his,"³⁷ and that "Lavinia is 'an emblem for the plight of the voiceless Andronici in a now alien Rome.'"³⁸ But these assertions seem too generic, and the meaning they claim to find in Lavinia amounts only to some form or other of static abstraction. These interpretations ignore the action in the play from this scene early in Act III and beyond, which does point us down some compelling associative pathways. In her commentary on Lavinia, Gillian Kendall brings us further along:

When the disfigured Lavinia enters, it is as if she were no longer simply a character in the play but an emblem -- an emblem of the way in which, throughout this play, facts resist the violent manner in which characters define and transform their world through language. In some sense, of course, this is paradoxical. Lavinia, as speechless emblem, becomes a work of art (made by Shakespeare) designed to show the limits of art and artful language.³⁹

More specifically, the mutilated Lavinia in the middle acts of the play is repeatedly associated with text and textual communication. For example, when Titus attempts to "read" her gestures, he calls her "Thou map of woe, that thus dost talk in signs!" (3.2.12); "I, of these, will wrest an alphabet, / And by still practice learn to know thy meaning" (3.2.44-45). As Kendall sees it, "After her rape and mutilation, she becomes a kind of code, a cipher that needs deciphering. But she is also a cipher in the sense of being a null. The other characters speak of her as if she were an object -- to be bestowed, seized, praised, raped, mutilated. It is as if there were no person there."⁴⁰ But rather than lament this depersonalization and its insensitive antifeminist implications, let us consider the perspective that "the 'alphabet' that Titus is wresting from Lavinia 'represents the beginnings of a definition of Shakespeare's medium and his art: part picture, part word, part sound; part ancient

book, part modern dumb show; part mute actor, part vocal interpreter.”⁴¹ In other words, suppose the relationship between father Titus and daughter Lavinia in one sense at least represents that of creator and created, of an author and his work.

Further associating her with text, Lavinia finds a way to communicate at the start of Act IV through Shakespeare’s own key textual source in this play and what is probably in the larger sense, given its ubiquitous influence throughout the canon, Shakespeare’s favorite book: Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, itself made physically manifest on the stage in a kind of cameo appearance.⁴² “My mother gave it me,” says young Lucius (4.1.43), a comment arbitrary and extraneous in context but of interest to Oxfordians as Arthur Golding, the credited translator of the work into English in the 1560s, was related to Edward de Vere through his mother, Arthur Golding’s sister. While Lavinia chases after young Lucius for the book, misinterpretations of her frenzied pursuit among the other characters abound.⁴³ Titus, for one, assumes that she wishes to read in order to “beguile thy sorrow” (4.1.35) and offers, “Come and take choice of all my library” (4.1.34). (And few find it odd that, even if it weren’t an anachronism anyway, a grain-merchant with no books mentioned in his last will would assign the character trait of pride in his library to a Roman war-dog.) But Lavinia uses her stumps to flip to Ovid’s tale of the rape of Philomela in order to signify her own story of victimization. Shortly after her violation, Demetrius had taunted, “See how with signs and tokens she can scrawl” (2.4.5). The ugly word “scrawl,” presumably a variation of “scrawl,” emphasizes the crude subhuman aspect of the kind of attempt at communication to which Lavinia is limited. However, following uncle Marcus’ example, guiding a staff with her mouth and stumps, Lavinia is in fact able to “scrawl” in the dirt the names of her rapists. “Shakespeare effects a most witty poetic justice. Lavinia’s lips do speak; her handless hands, indeed, do write!”⁴⁴ This is Shakespeare’s plot invention, surpassing Ovid’s solution (Philomela’s needlecraft) just as he had added the amputation of hands to his victimized female character.

Now “that we may know the traitors and the truth” (4.1.76), young Lucius can regard Chiron and Demetrius as “both decipher’d, that’s the news, / For villains mark’d with rape” (4.2.8-9). And although a life-long warrior, Titus eschews for some significant time now the kind of revenge one would expect -- bloody slaughter -- in favor of plans more involved with texts: not daggers but, instead, “another course” (4.1.119). To Tamora’s sons he sends weapons from his armory wrapped in “A scroll, and written round about” (4.2.18). Titus bombards the Emperor’s palace with arrows and gets away with it since the texts attached to the missiles suggest he is insane and shooting at the Roman gods in the sky. When Tamora seeks to torment him further, she finds Titus reluctant to leave his study and apparently raving: “See here in bloody lines I have set down: / And what is written shall be executed” (5.2.14-15). In one key sense, “what is written” is the pair of names of the rapists, though scrawled by Lavinia earlier, and they shall indeed be literally “executed.” When Titus in this same late scene has his opportunity to begin carrying out his final revenge by capturing Tamora’s sons, it is imperative to Titus that these enemies be robbed of their ability to speak, and Titus focuses on the bodily symbol of communication, their mouths:

“stop their mouths if they begin to cry” (5.2.161), “Stop close their mouths, let them not speak a word” (5.2.164), “stop their mouths, let them not speak to me” (5.2.167). Titus spells out his intention in a climactic *mélange* of thematic concerns from throughout the play: communication, eating, “pits” and graves, Ovidian text.

This one hand yet is left to cut your throats,
Whiles that Lavinia ‘tween her stumps doth hold
The basin that receives your guilty blood.

...

Hark, villains, I will grind your bones to dust,
And with your blood and it I’ll make a paste,
And of the paste a coffin I will rear,
And make two pasties of your shameful heads,
And bid that strumpet, your unhallowed dam,
Like to the earth swallow her own increase.

...

For worse than Philomel you us’d my daughter,
And worse than Progne I will be reveng’d.

(5.2.181-195)⁴⁵

As the revenge at last turns actual and bloody, the textual theme recedes, just as has Lavinia’s seeming importance; but of course revenge drama demands this form of catharsis finally. “With the bloody banquet, Titus’ revenge is perfected, and the killings which now follow in rapid-fire order and within an almost ludicrous rhymed interlude are anti-climactic.”⁴⁶ Obligatory to the genre, the action here near the end of the final act does not, however, illuminate for us the thematic implications nor the significance, I think, of the earlier scene of Lavinia carrying her father’s hand in her mouth.

Meanwhile, the subplot involving the villainous moor, Aaron, is also reaching its resolution. This subplot underlines Shakespeare’s attention in the play to matters beyond mere text, and indeed to the issue of authorship itself. Critics have recognized that in his chilling “lunatic humor,” “Aaron displays an odd kind of detached artistry.”⁴⁷ Early in the play when suggesting that Tamora’s sons might consider raping Lavinia, Aaron had noted, “The forest walks are wide and spacious, / And many unfrequented plots are there” (2.1.114-115). He means “plots” topographically, but the sinister inflection of the more literary meaning operates throughout the play in association with Aaron. Just as Stanley Wells sees the villain Iago in *Othello* as a kind of “surrogate playwright, controlling the plot, making it up as he goes along with improvisatory genius,”⁴⁸ so too does Aaron direct other characters, set the stage (planting false evidence against the Andronici, for example), determine what other characters see and how they interpret it (especially manipulating Saturninus), and display other functions we can associate with a stage manager or playwright. When Aaron bargains for the life of his son (the illegitimate boy of the Empress, Tamora), promising to show “wondrous things” (5.1.55), he

especially sounds like this kind of author:

‘Twill vex thy soul to hear what I will speak:
For I must talk of murthers, rapes, and massacres,
Acts of black night, abominable deeds,
Complots of mischief, treason, villainies,
Ruthful to hear, yet pitiously perform’d.
And this shall all be buried in my death,
Unless thou swear to me my child shall live.

(5.1.62-68)

This moor’s plots, or “Complots,” sound a little, at least, like the Shakespeare catalogue of histories and tragedies. “Complots of mischief” may be taken to refer to the comedies, though of course in the context here emphasis is on the darker more dire stories.

More specifically, Aaron claims to have “digg’d up dead men from their graves” (5.1.135), literalizing what Shakespeare has done with Julius Caesar, fifteenth-century English kings, Antony and Cleopatra, Timon of Athens, and others. Aaron claims to have taken these corpses,

And set them upright at their dear friends’ door
Even when their sorrows almost was forgot,
And on their skins, as on the bark of trees,
Have with my knife carved in Roman letters,
‘Let not your sorrow die, though I am dead.’
Tut, I have done a thousand dreadful things
As willingly as one would kill a fly,
And nothing grieves me heartily indeed
But that I cannot do ten thousand more.

(5.1.136-144)

As Aaron has purportedly carved messages on their corpses physically (5.1.138f), so has Shakespeare as playwright used his dramatically resurrected personages to convey political and personal messages to monarch and court.

Whether or not one sees Titus and Aaron as mirror-images of each other, or doppelgangers, in the play,⁴⁹ they are united in the implications of the figurative language and its literal manifestations. Aaron is accused finally of having “been breeder of these dire events” (5.3.178), events that cast him in the role of “author,” while Titus is the literal father of Lavinia, who, correspondingly, seems to function as a mutilated text.

One critic seems accidentally to have nearly struck upon the Oxfordian explanation to the mystery of Lavinia: “she comes closest to standing in the situation of the author of the work. After her mutilation, she is not forbidden to write; in fact, she *must* write.”⁵⁰ But this same critic also claims of Lavinia, Titus’ offspring, “She is

the text for their and our interpretation, a ‘map of woe’ whom, like a map we must learn to read.”⁵¹ This critic apprehends further, “the central image, Lavinia, seems to enfold a further secret, not just the secret of her rapists names.”⁵² But Stratfordian orthodoxy hits the inevitable wall, and the most that can finally be said from that perspective is that “literature and its interpretation are physical necessities for naming a violation — a way of pointing the finger (even without a finger to point) and naming names (even without a tongue to ‘blab’).”⁵³ Impressive-sounding about fury, but signifying anything?

“Write down thy mind” (2.4.3), Chiron (whose name is derived from the Greek word for “hand”) had mockingly invited the mutilated Lavinia. And a central Oxfordian premise is that this is exactly what Edward de Vere did. In a play as nightmarish as *Titus Andronicus*, the mind he wrote down was clearly distressed by a horror urging the playwright unto the verge of nihilism. Psychologists can add much to an understanding of the phenomenon of authorship as disguised autobiography:

This repetition of the past is essential to the process of developing psychological control over the ferocities just passed.... [T]he basic repetitive structure of the drama provides the means of managing the anxieties which the events arouse. Repetition and remembrance become revocation: memory and control. Dramatic structure thus supports ego structure. Our own psychological patterns of repetition leading to mastery are reflected and strengthened by dramatic repetition.⁵⁴

In a play so concerned with themes of authorship and text, as both the Aaron and Lavinia plots demonstrate, Titus’ horror is a literal manifestation of the playwright’s own horror. His creation — offspring/text — has been taken and mutilated. His hand — the symbol of his agency and authorship has been severed. Figuratively speaking, this is what was done to Oxford. In the last revision of *Titus Andronicus* (as in the Sonnets and elsewhere), it is clear that Oxford knew he would not be given credit for his works.

Their proximity to the centers of power caused both Titus Andronicus and Edward de Vere to suffer persecutions unjust enough to drive them each to excruciating emotional states probably approaching madness. If we think creatively and artistically, moving freely between the realms of the figurative and the physicalized — sensitive, in experiencing this play, to “the prophetic literalness of its metaphors”⁵⁵ — we can understand that each was forced to, or at least cornered into, amputating his own hand. Each had his creation, or offspring, mutilated and rendered almost entirely incapable of communicating its own truth.

If it is an unbearably brutal play, it is because *Titus Andronicus* literalizes the brutality of what was done to Edward de Vere. But as close to complete despair and nihilism as this play comes, it also demonstrates the fact that the “raped” (or stolen) and mutilated text can still, however faintly and telegraphically, convey its truth. It can still speak indirectly at least in “scrowls.” And, as in the bizarre scene of Lavinia transporting her father’s hand in her muted mouth, it can still be seen carrying

the presence of its creator's hand, even though that hand has been severed from its unfortunate possessor, the 17th Earl of Oxford, to whom we can offer the same encouragement that is given during the key scene of Lavinia's scowling:

Heaven guide thy pen to print thy sorrows plain,
That we may know the traitors and the truth!
(4.1.75-76)

Endnotes

- ¹ Goddard, Harold C. *The Meaning of Shakespeare. Volume 1* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), 33.
A version of this paper was presented at the 12th annual Shakespeare Authorship Studies Conference in Portland, Oregon, April 2008.
- ² Bloom, Harold. *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (NY: Riverhead Books, 1998), 79.
- ³ Bloom, *Shakespeare*, 86.
- ⁴ Garber, Marjorie. *Shakespeare After All* (NY: Pantheon Books, 2004), 75.
- ⁵ The Reduced Shakespeare Company, *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (Abridged)*, VHS, Acorn Media, 2001.
- ⁶ All play quotations are from *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1997).
- ⁷ Goddard, *Meaning 1*:34.
- ⁸ Delahoyde, Michael. "De Vere's *Lucrece* and Romano's *Sala di Troia*," *The Oxfordian* 9 (2006): 50-65.
- ⁹ Kendall, Gillian Murray. "'Lend me thy Hand': Metaphor and Mayhem in *Titus Andronicus*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 40.3 (Autumn 1989), 300. Bernice Harris notes: "Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* dramatizes a crisis of authority. The question is not simply, 'Who will be the new emperor?' It is also a question of who will decide and on what terms" ("Sexuality as a Signifier for Power Relations: Using Lavinia, of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*," *Criticism* 38.3 (Summer 1996), 393), questions of succession faced during the Elizabethan period.
- ¹⁰ David Willbern, "Rape and Revenge in *Titus Andronicus*," *English Literary Renaissance* 8.2 (Spring 1978), 161. "Titus, too, associates Rome with a mother's womb: especially the center of his Rome, the ancestral tomb of the Andronici" (162).
- ¹¹ Tricomi, Albert H. "The Aesthetics of Violence in *Titus Andronicus*," *Shakespeare Survey* 27 (1974): 17.
- ¹² Ogburn, Dorothy and Charlton Ogburn, *This Star of England* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, Pub., 1952), 348.
- ¹³ Clark, Eva Turner. *Hidden Allusions in Shakespeare's Plays*, 1931. 3rd ed. by Ruth Loyd Miller (Port Washington: Kennikat Press, 1974), 49. What David Roper finds from another angle also supports an earlier date of initial composition that orthodoxy can allow; see "The Peacham Chronogram: Compelling Evidence Dates *Titus Andronicus* to 1575," *The Shakespeare Oxford Newsletter* 37.3 (Fall 2001), 1, 14-17, 21; and also "The Peacham Document Revisited." *The Shakespeare Oxford Newsletter* 38.1 (Winter 2002), 9, 17.
- ¹⁴ Clark, *Hidden Allusions*, 52.

- ¹⁵ Clark, *Hidden Allusions*, 56; cf. Ogburn and Ogburn, *This Star of England*, 355.
- ¹⁶ Clark, *Hidden Allusions*, 50-54.
- ¹⁷ Ogburn and Ogburn, *This Star*, 142.
- ¹⁸ Ogburn and Ogburn, *This Star*, 148.
- ¹⁹ Ogburn and Ogburn, *This Star*, 344; cf. Mark Anderson, "Shakespeare" *By Another Name* (NY: Gotham Books, 2005), 183-184.
- ²⁰ Ogburn and Ogburn, *This Star*, 348.
- ²¹ Clark, *Hidden Allusions*, 50 & 54. The last syllable of Arundel, "dell," is key to the rape scene, though the word comes out only in numerous synonyms; see again Clark *Hidden Allusions in Shakespeare's Play*, 50, and also Ogburn and Ogburn, *This Star of England*, 347-348.
- ²² Joseph Sobran, *Alias Shakespeare: Solving the Greatest Literary Mystery of All Time* (NY: The Free Press, 1997), 6.
- ²³ The full title of Stubbs' pamphlet was *The Discovery of a Gaping Gulf Wherinto England is Like to Be Swallowed by Another French Marriage if the Lord Forbid Not the Banns by Letting Her Majesty See the Sin and Punishment Thereof*. In discussing *Titus*, Rowe notes Stubbs' amputation, but of course leaves comparatively vague the relevance to the playwright ("Dismembering and Forgetting in *Titus Andronicus*," 284).
- ²⁴ Thanks are extended to readers for *Brief Chronicles* for drawing more of my attention to these public and historical brutalities that touched Oxford's life.
- ²⁵ Emily Detmer-Goebel, "The Need for Lavinia's Voice: *Titus Andronicus* and the Telling of Rape," *Shakespeare Studies* 29 (2001): 77. "Several legal historians conclude that the ['rape'] laws were often used to address consenting relationships that were against the parents' wishes" (78). This has traditionally been the explanation for the charge of *raptus* against Chaucer in 1381.
- ²⁶ Garber, *Shakespeare After All*, 76-77.
- ²⁷ Leggatt, Alexander. "Titus Andronicus: A Modern Perspective," in *Titus Andronicus*, ed. Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine. Folger Shakespeare Library (NY: Washington Square Press, 2005), 243.
- ²⁸ Chiron accuses Demetrius "that thund'rest with thy tongue" (II.i.58). Demetrius will "Thrust those reproachful speeches down his [Chiron's] throat" (II.i.55).
- ²⁹ Tricomi, "The Aesthetics of Violence in *Titus Andronicus*," 14. Kendall agrees that "Words in this play tend to become detached from (con)text and made grossly real. Language itself generates horror as words disengage from casual usage and become literalized" ("Lend me thy Hand': Metaphor and Mayhem in *Titus Andronicus*," 299).
- ³⁰ E.g., Stanley Wells, *Shakespeare: A Life in Drama* (NY: W.W. Norton and Co., 1997), 73.
- ³¹ Tricomi, "The Aesthetics of Violence in *Titus Andronicus*," 18.
- ³² Leggatt, "Modern Perspective," 246. Willbern makes the point that "The abhorred pit' will soon assume its central and over-determined symbolic significance as vagina, womb, tomb, and mouth" ("Rape and Revenge in *Titus Andronicus*," 169). Later in the play, "Titus will create a 'coffin' (pastry) to be devoured as the perfect mirror-vengeance for the coffin that devours. The 'devouring receptacle,' 'the swallowing womb,' the 'blood-drinking pit,' is once again dramatically symbolized as Tamora sits 'eating the flesh that she herself hath bred' (V.iii.62)" (Willbern, "Rape and Revenge in *Titus Andronicus*," 179).
- ³³ Kendall, "Lend me thy Hand,'" 299. Tricomi points out: "In a play preeminently concerned with the mutilation of the human body, Titus makes nearly sixty references, figurative as well as literal, to the word 'hands' and eighteen more to the word 'head',

or to one of its derivative forms. Far from being divorced from the action as many critics claim, the figurative language points continually toward the lurid events that govern the tragedy” (“The Aesthetics of Violence in *Titus Andronicus*,” 11). He adds, “hands become powerful dramatic symbols, not simply because they are mentioned sixty times in the text, but because they become *images in action* whose significance we experience visually and not merely verbally, in abstraction” (14).

- ³⁴ Rowe, Katherine A. “Dismembering and Forgetting in *Titus Andronicus*,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 45.3 (Autumn 1994), 280.
- ³⁵ Rowe, “Dismembering,” 282. Similarly, Mary Laughlin Fawcett asserts that “the hand completes the tongue” (“Arms/Words/Tears: Language and the Body in *Titus Andronicus*,” *ELH* 50.1 [Spring 1983], 262).
- ³⁶ Rowe, “Dismembering,” 296.
- ³⁷ E. Green, Douglas. “Interpreting ‘her martyr’d signs’: Gender and Tragedy in *Titus Andronicus*,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 40.3 (Fall 1989), 322.
- ³⁸ Danson, Lawrence, qtd. in Harris, “Sexuality as a Signifier for Power Relations: Using Lavinia, of Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus*,” 394.
- ³⁹ Kendall, “Lend me thy Hand,” 306. Harris also finds this insight valuable enough to quote in “Sexuality as a Signifier for Power Relations: Using Lavinia, of Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus*,” 395.
- ⁴⁰ Kendall, “Lend me thy Hand,” 314. Detmer-Goebel agrees: “Lavinia becomes an emblem, a cipher, a mirror, a text, or, in the words of Titus, a ‘map of woe’ to read (3.2.12)” (“The Need for Lavinia’s Voice: *Titus Andronicus* and the Telling of Rape,” 83). It is easy for feminist critics to object to this interpretive enterprise. As Bernice Harris notes, “Lavinia – first as virgin daughter, then chaste wife, and finally mutilated widow – is repeatedly read as a signifier for something else” in the scholarship (“Sexuality as a Signifier for Power Relations: Using Lavinia, of Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus*,” 384). She continues: “if Lavinia is always seen as a literary construction, or a ‘textual determination,’ to use Jonathan Goldberg’s term, then emotional involvement in the misogynist brutality depicted in this play can be dismissed. A literary critic is required to turn a brutal rape into a literary device or a metaphoric device of language, devoid of literal meaning, as Marcus does on seeing Lavinia” (395).
- ⁴¹ Barkan, qtd. in Green, “Interpreting ‘her martyr’d signs’: Gender and Tragedy in *Titus Andronicus*,” 324n. Recent Oxfordian studies of *As You Like It* similarly treat Audrey as a text whose possession through marriage is vied for by Touchstone and William. Who will marry her? = whose name will she have? See Alex McNeil, “*As You Like It*: Is Touchstone vs. William the First Authorship Story?” *Shakespeare Matters* 2.3 (Spring 2003), 1, 14-22], in which “Audrey ... is not merely a country wench, but represents the author’s dramatic works” (17).
- ⁴² Other evidence of the influence of Golding on *Titus Andronicus* specifically occurs in the mentions of the babbling echo (2.3.14f; 4.2.150f). See Anthony Brian Taylor, “Golding’s ‘Metamorphoses’ and ‘Titus Andronicus,’ *Notes and Queries* (April 1978), 118.
- ⁴³ Detmer-Goebel refers to one such example of misinterpretation: “These men are so used to being the ‘generator’ of meaning and interpretations that they fumble when Lavinia tries to convey meaning. When she holds up her arms, Marcus cannot tell if she is reporting the number of her assailants or swearing revenge (4.1.30-40)” (“The Need for Lavinia’s Voice: *Titus Andronicus* and the Telling of Rape,” 84).

- ⁴⁴ Tricomi, "Aesthetics of Violence," 16. As Kendall notes about Shakespeare's use of Ovid, "Titus adapts the tale of Philomela and rewrites old stories with a new alphabet" ("Lend me thy Hand": Metaphor and Mayhem in *Titus Andronicus*," 304). Fawcett focuses on the similar sounding words evoked by the term "scrowls": "Lavinia's 'signs' are more than scowls or scolds, while her 'tokens' are less than, or different from, scrawls or scrolls" ("Arms/Words/Tears: Language and the Body in *Titus Andronicus*," 261).
- ⁴⁵ In discussing this particular culinary form of vengeance, Harvard Shakespearean Marjorie Garber adds "A personal note: It was the staging of this scene, in Julie Taymor's film *Titus* (1999), that turned me – a lifelong meat-eater – against the eating of mammals' flesh" (*Shakespeare After All*, 85).
- ⁴⁶ Willbern, "Rape and Revenge," 180.
- ⁴⁷ Tricomi, "Aesthetics of Violence," 15.
- ⁴⁸ Wells, *Shakespeare*, 249. The occurrence of the term "evermore" (IV.ii.56) addressed to Aaron could be taken as an Oxford pun – E.Ver = Moor – further identifying the character with the playwright.
- ⁴⁹ "Titus, the patriarchal insider pushed from the center to the margins of his world, and Aaron, the proud outsider who prowls his way to the center by devouring everything in his path, only to discover that his rough nihilism melts in the fact of paternity. Taymor, and her film, understands that "Titus and Aaron are mirrors, absolute mirrors of each other" (Johnson-Haddad, qtd. in Samuel Cowl, *Shakespeare and Film: A Norton Guide* [NY: W.W. Norton & Co., 2008], 95. "In the same line he [Aaron] objectifies the child as 'treasure,' certainly an echo of Titus's attitude toward his sons, whose bodies he deposits like war booty in the family tomb" (Nanette Jaynes, "Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*," *Explicator* 52.3 [Spring 1994], 132. "Aaron's knowledge of the classics incites the rape, but the same text fuels Titus's method for revenge. Thus, the texts of Lucrece and Philomela seem to operate as cultural scripts for action" (Detmer-Goebel, "The Need for Lavinia's Voice: *Titus Andronicus* and the Telling of Rape," 83). The end of Aaron in the play does drive home the eating and "pit" themes. He rants, "Ah, why should wrath be mute and fury dumb? / I am no baby, I, that with base prayers / I should repent the evils I have done" (V.iii.184-186), on which Willbern comments: "Aaron's denial discloses an unconscious fantasy. He is indeed like a baby, half-born and half-buried and half-devoured by the earth, crying for food" ("Rape and Revenge in *Titus Andronicus*," 181). Green supplements with the fate additionally of Tamora's corpse: "the live burial of the still-railing Aaron and the casting forth of Tamora's body signify what this patriarchy cannot digest" ("Interpreting 'her martyr'd signs': Gender and Tragedy in *Titus Andronicus*," 326).
- ⁵⁰ Fawcett, "Arms/Words/Tears," 266.
- ⁵¹ Fawcett, "Arms/Words/Tears," 265.
- ⁵² Fawcett, "Arms/Words/Tears," 272.
- ⁵³ Fawcett, "Arms/Words/Tears," 274. Perhaps the central truth -- or name -- in *Titus Andronicus* is revealed in Titus' own exclamation: "O, O, O" (3.2.68).
- ⁵⁴ Willbern, "Rape and Revenge," 180.
- ⁵⁵ Tricomi, "Aesthetics of Violence," 11.