

# *Classical Mythopoetic Profusion in The Most Lamentable Roman Tragedy of Titus Andronicus*

by Earl Showerman, MD

One of the dramatist's most inventive plays, a complex, self-conscious improvisation upon classical sources, most notably *The Metamorphoses* of Ovid — Jonathan Bate

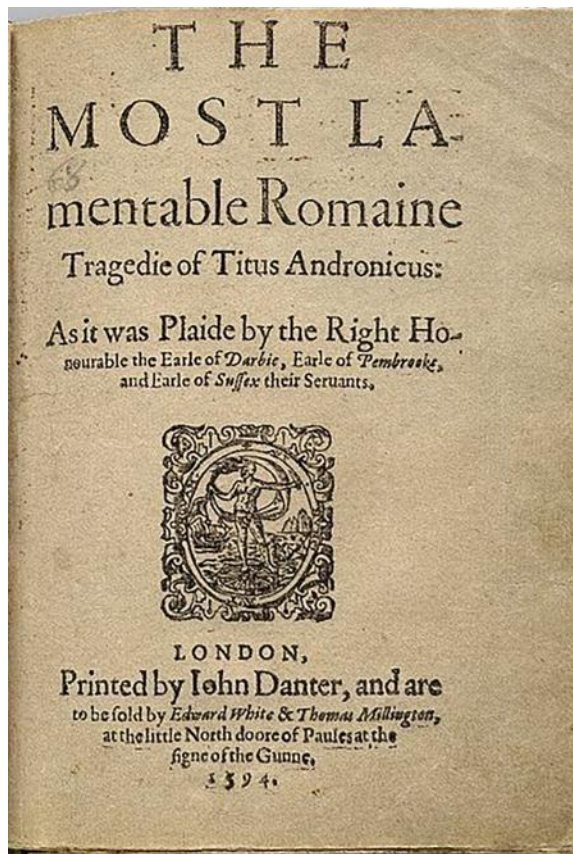
*The Most Lamentable Roman Tragedy of Titus Andronicus* was the first Shakespeare drama to be registered and published in quarto in 1594, “as it was plaide by the Right Honourable the Earl of Darbie, Earl of Pembroke, and Earl of Sussex their servants.” This fictional tragedy of blood has no primary literary source, but is based on a series of classical fables, as well as Roman and Greek historical sources. Despite its unrelenting series of violent, vengeful actions, interspersed with scenes of black comedy, *Titus* is in myriad ways the most self-consciously classically influenced play by Shakespeare. Numerous identifiable Latin sources, including the works of Ovid, Seneca, Virgil, Horace, Terence, and Livy have been recognized by scholars, as have many Greek sources, including the works of Plutarch, Herodotus, Herodian, Heliodorus, Euripides, Sophocles, and Diodorus.

This paper will provide evidence that Arthur Golding's 1564 translation of Justin's *Abridged Trogus Pompeius*, which was the first book ever dedicated to his nephew, Edward de Vere, 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford, should be included among these classical sources for *Titus Andronicus*. Recent scholarship by Jane Grogan (2013) has developed a compelling case that Tomyris, Queen of the Massagetae as described in Herodotus's *Histories* Book 1, was the likely model for Shakespeare's Goth Queen Tamora. Grogan, however, failed to acknowledge that Book 1 of Justin's *Trogus* also provides a narrative of Tomyris's triumph over and beheading of King Cyrus, and echoes precisely Herodotus's Book 1 text. For Oxfordians, this duplication of

potential sources is especially relevant as de Vere possessed both Golding's English translation of Justin's *Trogus* and Boiardo's Italian translation of Herodotus's *Histories*.

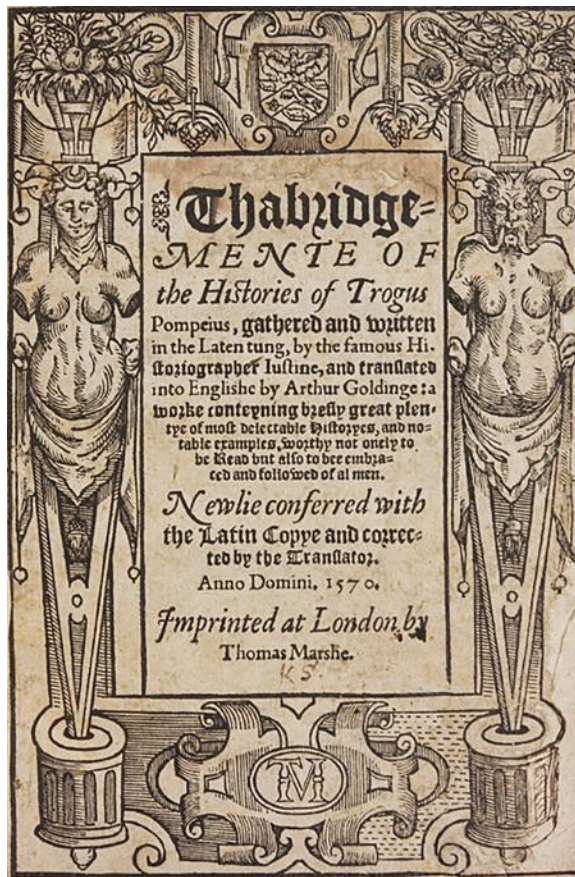
Golding's 1560s translations include two other titles that are relevant to *Titus*. In 1563, Golding dedicated his first publication, *Aretine's History of the Wars between the Imperials and the Goths for the Possession of Italy*, to Sir William Cecil. In 1565, he published the first four books of the work that was to ensure his lasting fame, his translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The complete translation of *Metamorphoses* was published in 1567, with a revised edition released in 1575. In *Shakespeare and Ovid* (1993), Jonathan Bate asserted that

upwards of 90% of Shakespeare's mythological references come from Ovid. The relentless Ovidian influence on *Titus* is exemplary in this regard, including the dramaturgy of Lavinia reading the story of Philomela from *Metamorphoses* to indict her assailants, and the numerous repetitions of the Tereus and Procne narrative throughout the play. References to Ovidian tragic couples in *Titus* include Hecuba and Priam, Acteon and Diana, and Pyramus and Thisbe, as well as allusions to Orpheus charming Cerberus to sleep, the



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dispute between Ulysses and Ajax, the bloody Centaur's Feast, and, repeatedly, the rape of Lucrece by Tarquin.

The representations of human sacrifice, revenge murder, and mutilation in *Titus* are unmatched by any other Elizabethan tragedy, with nearly twice as many deaths than Thomas Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* or Shakespeare's bloodbath ending in *Hamlet*. The litany of violence begins in the first scene with Lucius, Titus's eldest son and future Emperor, demanding the brutal sacrifice of Tamora's eldest son, Alarbus, by dismemberment to decorate the on-stage Andronici tomb with blood to satisfy the ghosts of Titus's dead sons, who were victims of

the Goth wars. Before the scene is over, Titus has killed his youngest son, Mutius, for protecting Lavinia and Bassianus and is adamant about denying Mutius proper funeral rites. These two grossly impious actions condemn Titus to a relentless cycle of unmitigated violence and suffering as brutal as a Greek tragedy.

In Act 2, Demetrius and Chiron, Tamora's surviving sons, murder Bassianus, the new Emperor's brother, while colluding with Aaron the Moor to frame Titus's sons, Martius and Quintus, who will be summarily convicted and beheaded. Tamora's sons then rape and mutilate Lavinia off-stage, cutting off her tongue and both hands in an amplification of the brutality of Tereus on Philomela from *Metamorphoses* Book VI. The Nurse, who was present at Tamora's birth-giving of Aaron's son, is murdered onstage, and a Clown is condemned for delivering a message to the Emperor. In the final scenes, Demetrius and Chiron, disguised as Murder and Rape, have their throats slit onstage, and are chopped up offstage into a Senecan pie to be served at a banquet for Emperor Saturninus and Tamora. Lavinia is then sacrificially killed by Titus, who cites Livy for justification, and who immediately turns and stabs Tamora to death. Saturninus then kills Titus in retaliation, followed



by Lucius mortally stabbing Saturninus. Newly crowned Emperor Lucius then orders Tamora's body to be "thrown forth to beasts and birds of prey" and Aaron to be buried alive. The vengeful passions and resultant horrors in *Titus Andronicus* are shocking to the point of incredulity and are relentlessly subversive of Roman authority.

Although apparently wildly popular during the Elizabethan era, *Titus* did not enjoy critical praise during much of the past century. T.S. Eliot referred to *Titus* as "one of the stupidest and uninspired plays ever written," Harold Goddard called it "a concentrated brew of blood and horror," and Dover Wilson referred to *Titus* as "a huge joke, a parody" with the author "tossing out gobbets of sob-stuff and raw beefsteak" (Bate 11). The scenes of satiric black comedy blur the conventional separation between comedy and tragedy and create a disturbing sense of the absurd. *Titus* incorporates translation, imitation, and frequent quoting and intentional misquoting of Latin poets, while its moral world sinks into in a dystopian tragedy of blood.

## Classical Sources for Titus

While passages from Seneca's *Hippolytus* are directly quoted in *Titus*, there are also numerous elements and references to Greek tragedy that have interested scholars. The dramatization of revenge murders, dismemberment, cannibalism, rape, mutilation, intergenerational murder, insanity, and especially maimed burial rites (for half a dozen characters) are all emblematic of Greek tragedy. Both J. Churton Collins (1904) and Emrys Jones (1977) have identified specific Greek drama sources, including Euripides's tragedy of *Hecuba*, which Jones proposed as "Shakespeare's chief dramatic model for *Titus Andronicus*" (91).

Collins earlier wrote that, "If Shakespeare had not read [Sophocles's] *Ajax* and been influentially impressed by it, there is an end to all evidence founded on reference and parallelism.... We have reference in *Titus Andronicus*, 1.2, a scene evidently modeled on the contest between Teucer, and Menelaus and Agamemnon about the burial of Ajax. Marcus Andronicus's lines, 'The Greeks upon advice did bury Ajax / That slew himself: and wise Laertes's son / Did graciously plead for his funerals.' (1.1.384–46) exactly echoes the scene in Sophocles tragedy" (Collins 63–64).

In *Greek Tragic Women on Shakespearean Stages* (2017), Tanya Pollard amplifies the importance of Euripides's tragedy *Hecuba* on Shakespeare's vision of corrupted Rome.

*Titus Andronicus's* self-conscious classical allusions and setting have inspired consideration of literary debts to Virgil, Seneca, Ovid, Herodian and Herodotus. Despite the Latin focus encouraged by the play's Roman setting, critics have also suggested affinities with Greek plays:

Emrys Jones has described Titus as a male version of Euripides's Hecuba, recreating her grief, insanity, and revenge.... The play's references to Hecuba mark the start of Shakespeare's reflection on her ability to inspire tragic grief and rage in audiences." (100)

In the light of Titus's impious sacrifices of two sons in the opening scene, Tamora inherits the authority of Greek tragic maternity, and sympathy for Titus's imminent suffering is preemptively undermined. Pollard argues that Shakespeare's Titus is linked to Euripides's "Thracian tyrant," Polymestor, who incurs Hecuba's wrath by killing her son, Polydorus. Pollard identifies a specific reference to Euripides's *Hecuba* in that Tamora's son Demetrius mentions the revenge takes place in a tent, a detail not included in the narratives of Hecuba's retaliation in either Ovid or Seneca.

The self-same gods that armed the queen of Troy  
With opportunity of sharp revenge  
Upon the Thracian tyrant in his tent  
May favor Tamora, the queen of Goths.... (1.1.139–42)

Tamora is also identified with Hecuba by giving birth to Aaron's son, whose dark complexion threatens to destroy the Goth's power at court, "a joyless, dismal, black, and sorrowful issue." Like Hecuba and Priam's Paris, Tamora and Aaron's son is destined to undo his mother and threaten his country.

Trained by Tamora, Titus carries out his own revenge in a theatrical plot. His grotesque plan—chopping up Tamora's remaining sons and serving them in a pie—suggests the Greek tragic scenes of dismemberment such as that in Euripides's *Bacchae*, transmitted especially through Ovid's *Procne* and Seneca's *Thyestes*. (109)

Pollard concludes that *Titus Andronicus* presents a layering of Roman literary models on "Greek ghosts," forming a new English original, a "palimpsest" indebted to a panoply of Latin historians and poets as well as Greek historical and dramatic origins.

Jonathan Bate's introduction in his revised *Titus* Arden edition (2018) elaborates how cleverly Shakespeare personifies his characters by direct association with historical personalities drawn from a variety of classical sources. The name "Titus" most likely refers to the Titus who conquered Jerusalem on behalf of his father, the Roman Emperor Vespasian. "Andronicus" was an Emperor of Byzantium, notorious for mutilations.

Bassianus was the name of the third century emperor, now better known as Caracalla, who vied with his brother over the succession, one of them appealing to primogeniture, the other to the people; in Herodian's *History* (available to Shakespeare in Smyth's translation), a tribune named Saturninus was sent to assassinate Bassianus. (Bate 91)

Titus's son, Lucius, can be associated with Lucius Junius Brutus, who expelled the Tarquins from Rome. "Lavinia" is the name of Aeneas's wife, and therefore the Mother of Rome. "Demetrius" was the son of Antigonus, known as "Besieger" in Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*. "Marcus," "Quintus," "Caius," "Emillius," and "Sempronius" all derive from a cluster of characters identified in Plutarch's "Life of Scipio." "Aaron" may also be named after an "Arron" in Plutarch who assisted the Gauls during their invasion of Italy. "Mutius," the son Titus kills, is the name of a Roman described in Livy who "proved his loyalty to the Roman code of honor by thrusting his hand into a fire" (92). Finally, Tamora's son "Chiron" is clearly a reference to the Greek Centaur, half-human and half-beast, but doubles in significance because its meaning in Greek is "hand," quite possibly an allusion to Titus's sacrificial hand amputation, which Lavinia carries in her mutilated mouth.

Bate also posits that the name "Tamora" suggests "Tomyris," "a Scythian queen famous for her cruelty and, more specifically, for her spectacular revenge when Cyrus slew her only son" (92–93). Although Bate does not identify a literary source for the story of Tomyris, in "'Headless Rome' and Hungry Goths: Herodotus and *Titus Andronicus*" (2013), Jane Grogan develops a compelling case for Shakespeare's Tamora being modeled on Tomyris, as well as other elements of *Titus* to have been influenced by Herodotus's *The Histories*, Book 1.

Shakespeare's play evokes a well-known set of narratives centered on the figure of Cyrus the Great, founder of the ancient Persian Empire. These intertextual resonances work not only in Tamora's favor, but also provide a positive moral cast for the play's central image of the disaster that has befallen Rome, the 'swallowing womb.' Through the Herodotean intertext, then, the contradictions of Shakespeare's Rome take new political shape, and the questions Shakespeare poses of Roman values—and England's obsession with them—gain a stronger moral and historical force than we have hitherto allowed. (32)

Grogan demonstrates how the dramatic literature of the 1580s reflected a marked increase in interest and knowledge of the history of Persia with plays like *Tamburlaine* (1587), *Soliman and Perseda* (1592), and *The Wars of Cyrus* (1594). During Elizabeth's reign, Cyrus was the primary subject of classical and historical interest, with translations of Herodotus, Xenophon and Justin available in England. Cyrus was commended by Cicero, Erasmus, and Machiavelli, but treated with approbation in the Old Testament Book of Ezra.

It is this popular knowledge of a set of narratives centered on the Persian Cyrus that Shakespeare awakens in the "barbarous" Rome of *Titus Andronicus*, and specifically the account originating in Herodotus' *Histories*. (33)

While Herodotus was praised by Cicero as the "Father of History," Plutarch referred to him critically as a "father of lies" and a "lover of barbarians."

Book 1 of *Histories* is dominated by textual narratives about the rise and fall of Cyrus, whom Herodotus describes as an arrogant, merciless ruler, and who merited his undoing and beheading by Tomyris. Grogan details a cluster of allusions in Book 1 that parallel in both plot and imagery Shakespeare's tragedy of horror.

Herodotus is the primary source through which early modern readers learn of Tomyris and her achievement. At least one early reader of the text seems to have made the connection between Tomyris and Tamora: in the *First Folio*, Tamora is misprinted on one occasion (at 3.2.74) as "Tamira." (36)

Nonetheless, most Shakespeare editors have ignored or rejected the identification of Tamora with the historical Tomyris, who was repeatedly described derisively as a Queen of Scythia who was notoriously cruel. Herodotus, however, identifies Tomyris as the Queen of the Massagetae, who were the ancestors of the European Goths, also called Geats, which unquestionably links Tamora to Tomyris. Importantly, both queens share the same motive for revenge against the merciless tyrants responsible for their sons' deaths and the ritual beheadings to follow. Grogan argues that Queen Tomyris's means of revenge on Cyrus, beheading and placing his head in a bloodbath of gore, underlies her moral authority as she recounts her ruin by the loss of her son by Persian guile, but makes good her threat to give Cyrus his fill of blood.

Her revenge is both politicized and gendered. Indicting his bloodthirstiness by improvising a surrogate stomach full of blood in which Cyrus might sate his "insatiable" bloodthirstiness, Tomyris creates a gruesome but unforgettable image of righteous barbarian vengeance upon supposedly "civil" wrong-doing. The moral transgressions and hubris signaled by Cyrus's crossing of the river Araxes, boundary between Europe and the barbarians of Asia, and highlighted in Herodotus's account of his duplicitous stratagems and degraded standards of war and mercy, give Tomyris's revenge a moral authority and even a providential inevitability for Christian readers. (38)

Tomyris's victory over Cyrus was viewed as just revenge by early Christian and medieval writers and artists. Subsequently she became a frequent, symbolic participant in pageantry as one of the female "Nine Worthies," along with another semi-legendary eastern queen, Semiramis, Queen of Assyria, to whom Shakespeare's Tamora is compared twice (1.1.521 and 2.2.118).

The first book of Herodotus lends further associations with *Titus* in the detailed account of the rise of Cyrus from condemned infant to the first ruler of the Persian Empire. The plot of an enemy being revenged upon by being duped into cannibalizing their own offspring, what Titus foists on

Tamora before killing her, seems to have originated in Herodotus, making *Histories* a credible source for both Seneca's *Thyestes* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* Book 6, where Progne serves her husband Tereus the flesh of their son Itys in revenge for Tereus's rape and mutilation of her sister, Philomena.

Herodotus identifies the turning-point in the Medo-Persian struggle as the defection of the Median general Harpagus to the cause of Persian Cyrus in a counter-act of revenge upon Astyages who had previously made Harpagus unwittingly consume his own son during a banquet. Astyages had organized that cruel act as punishment of Harpagus for previously disobeying his orders years earlier to murder Cyrus, the grandson he feared would usurp him. Astyages's horrible vengeance is, in fact, the primary source for Seneca's cannibalistic banquet in *Thyestes*, an acknowledged source for the infamous banquet in *Titus Andronicus*. (35)

In both Shakespeare and Herodotus, baby-swapping is used as a means of saving the life of a royal child. Grogan observes that Shakespeare fashioned his masterful conceit of the "swallowing womb" primarily from the beheading that Tomyris exacts upon the corpse of Cyrus. Book I of the *Histories* closes with a recounting of Cyrus's death at Tomyris's hands.

Herodotus uses a Greek moral framework to describe an unforgettable case of barbarian hubris: Cyrus foolishly crosses the river Araxes to attack the Massagetae and then uses underhand means to capture a large part of the Massagetae army, including Tomyris's son Spargapises. Refusing Tomyris's pleas for the release of the now-suicidal Spargapises—or, as Justin has it in a later version also known to Renaissance readers, actually killing Spargapises with his own hand—Cyrus incurs her wrath and vengeance. Accordingly, Tomyris defeats his army and takes the terrible maternal revenge that so interests Shakespeare. After the battle she seeks out Cyrus's body and has it decapitated, ordering that his head be thrown into a vat of blood, whereupon she jeers at him: "Thou boutcherly tyrant, my sonne thou takest by craft and killed by cruelty, wherefore with thy self I have kept touch; Now therefore take thy fill bloody caitiff, suck there till thy belly crack." (38)

## The Golding *Trogus* and *Titus*

Although Grogan noted that Justin also included the narrative of the defeat of Cyrus by Tomyris, she failed to identify additional elements from Book 1 of Arthur Golding's 1564 translation of Justin's *Abridged Trogus Pompeius* that suggest it is arguably Shakespeare's original source, rather than Herodotus. Golding's translation of Justin was dedicated with copious admiration to his nephew, Edward de Vere, while both were in residence at Cecil House



on the Strand. During that period Golding was acting as de Vere's "receiver," essentially responsible for legal and financial matters concerning the young Earl. Golding had intended to dedicate his *Abridged Trogus* to John de Vere, 16<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford, but following the 16<sup>th</sup> Earl's death in 1562, turned his literary attentions to his nephew.

The argument that Golding's Justin is very likely to be Shakespeare's primary source for the character of Tamora is based on several criteria. First, in *1 King Henry VI*, the Countess of Auvergne, while awaiting Lord Talbot's arrival, speaks these lines:

The plot is laid: if all things fall out right,  
I shall as famous be by this exploit  
As Scythian Tomyris by Cyrus's death. (2.3)

In *The Reader's Companion to The Death of Shakespeare* (2023), Jon Benson suggests that Shakespeare's reference to Tomyris as Queen of the Scythians points to two possible likely sources: a Latin edition of Marcus Junianus Justinus's *Abridged Trogus Pompeius*, or Arthur Golding's 1564 translation. "As Charles Wisner Barrell pointed out in 1940, there are at least ten citations in Shakespeare's plays derived from Justin" (208).

Herodotus, unlike Justin, refers to Tomyris as "Queen of the Massagetae." The association of Tamora with Scythian Tomyris is clearly stated in the response of Tamora and her son Chiron to Titus's refusal of mercy in the death by dismemberment of her eldest son, Alarbus, which initiates the revengeful horrors to follow:

Tamora: O cruel, irreligious piety!  
Chiron: Was never Scythia half do barbarous! (1.1.133–34)

The likelihood that Golding's translations of Justin's *Trogus* was Shakespeare's source for the historical model for Tamora is dramatically relevant to the Oxfordian theory of authorship of the Shakespeare canon. In Golding's first literary dedication to his nephew, he expressed how Oxford showed an "earnest desire your honor hath naturally graffed in you to read, peruse and communicate with other as well as the histories of ancient time and things done long ago" and of Oxford's "great forwardness" at a young age that gives everyone hope for his future. Emphasizing the importance of knowing the classical canon, Golding advised:

Right honorable, I find in perusing of ancient writers that it hath been the custom of the greatest estates and princes in the world (when they have had intermission from the serious and weighty affairs of their realms) to bestow their idle times in revolving and perusing stories.... Alexander the Great had that noble writer of the famous battle of Troy in such veneration that he never went anywhere but he had his

works about him, nor never slept but that he had them under his pillow. Moreover, coming into a school and finding not Homer's works there, he gave the master a buffet with his fist, meaning thereby that the knowledge of histories was a thing so necessary to all estates and degrees that it was an offence to be without them. (Golding *Trogus*, Dedicatory Epistle)

Golding's translation of Justin's description of the "Scythians Queene Thomyris" triumph over Cyrus, while less detailed than in Herodotus's version, provides all the essential elements for her serving as the model for Shakespeare's Tamora. According to Justin, after ferrying his army across the Araxes River, Cyrus laid a trap by setting up and then abandoning camp, while leaving out a feast and wine with the intention of intoxicating and disarming the Scythian army that Queen Thomyris had sent with her son in command. Predictably, when they came to Cyrus's camp, the Scythians, being ignorant of the effects of alcohol, were overcome first with wine and afterward with weapons as Cyrus's army returned by night, and "put them all to the sword, and the Queene's son among them."

Thomyris having lost so great an army and (which was worse) her only son, powered not out the grief of her loss into tears but comforted herself with purpose of revenge, and beguiled her enemies into their chief rush for the new gotten victory. For feigning a mistrust to slaughter in the last overthrow, she gave back so long they had brought Cyrus into a strait, and there environing him ... in the mountains for the same purpose, they slew 200,000 Persians and the king himself. In which conflict this thing is worthy to be noted, that there was not so much as one man left to bear home tidings of so great a slaughter. The Queene commanded the head of Cyrus be cut off, and thrown into a bowl of man's blood, calling him out for his cruelty. Now fill thyself with blood, which thou has ever thirsted." (Golding *Trogus*, Book 1, Chapter 8)

This evidence that Shakespeare's Tamora has further connections to Justin's *Trogus* is that she is twice compared to the Assyrian Queen Semiramis, who was noteworthy for her beauty, her military achievements, and her alleged promiscuity. Immediately after Emperor Saturninus has taken Tamora to be his wife, Aaron the Moor offers what amounts to a sun salutation to Tamora and then vows,

I will be bright, and shine in pearl and gold  
To wait upon the new-made empress  
To wait said I?—to wanton with this queen,  
This goddess, this Semiramis, this nymph,  
This siren that will charm Rome's Saturnine  
And see his shipwreck and his commonweal's. (1.1.518–23)

Two scenes later, Lavinia and Bassianus accuse Tamora of infidelity by coupling with the Moor, and threaten to report her “spotted, detested and abominable” dishonor to Emperor Saturninus. Then Tamora’s sons Demetrius and Chiron enter and are provoked by their mother into stabbing Bassianus to death as an act of revenge against the accusation of their mother’s infidelity. Lavinia, witnessing the assassination of her beloved, proclaims,

Ay, come Semiramis, nay barbarous Tamora,  
For no name fits thy nature but thy own. (2.2.118–19)

That the story of Semiramis is only mentioned in a single reference in Herodotus’s Book 1, but provides the central narrative in *Trogus* Book 1, Chapters 1 and 2, is evidence that supports the theory the Shakespeare modeled his vengeful heroine Tamora on the Scythian Queen Tomyris, and that his primary source for this association is Arthur Golding’s translation of Justin’s *Trogus*. Further, Book 1’s Chapters 4, 5, and 6 of *Trogus* include a detailed description of the rise of Cyrus, including the narrative of King Astyages serving Harpagus a meal made from Harpagus’s son in revenge for his general not having murdered the infant Cyrus, which Jane Grogan has identified as a likely source for both Seneca and Shakespeare.

Other narratives from Justin’s *Abridged Trogus* that resonate with Shakespeare’s dramatic interests include “how Cleopatra succeeded to the Kingdom; who upon Mark Antony’s falling in Love with her, put an End to the Reign of the Ptolemyes by a Naval Battle fought at Actium” (Brown, Prologues xxiii). Given the evidence presented here of multiple literary connections between Justin’s *Abridged Trogus* and *Titus Andronicus*, it is surprising that no scholars other than Oxfordians Barrell and Benson have noted these parallels. Justin’s *Abridged Trogus* is not included in the definitive compendia of Shakespeare’s literary sources, *Shakespeare’s Books* by H.R.D. Anders (1904), nor in the identical title edited by Stuart Gillespie, published exactly a century later.

In summary, Arthur Golding’s translation of Justin’s *Abridged Trogus Pompeius* is arguably a newly recognized literary source for Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus*. It is also but one of three Golding translation publications clustered between 1563 and 1567 that are intimately related to the plot and images of *Titus*, all written during the years of Golding’s receivership of his nephew Edward de Vere, while both resided at Cecil House.

## Discussion

While the first recorded performance of *Titus Andronicus* took place on January 24, 1594, it was also included in the performances at Newington Butts with *Hamlet* and *Taming of a Shrew* in June 1594. However, if Ben Jonson’s testimony in the prologue to his play *Bartholomew Faire* (1614) is

to be believed, a credible dating for Shakespeare's *Titus* would be between 1584 and 1589. From a historical perspective and in support of Elizabethan interests, a Titus drama in the mid- to late 1580s would prove to be radically subversive of Roman, and therefore Catholic, authority. It would certainly be topical of Pope Pius V's 1570 Bull excommunicating Queen Elizabeth, and the brewing 25-year war with Catholic Spain, commencing with the escalation of Elizabeth's proxy war in the low countries with Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, leading over 6,000 foot soldiers and 1,000 cavalry to relieve the siege of Antwerp in 1585, followed by the launch of the ill-fated Spanish Armada in 1588. This time period also corresponds with the initiation of Oxford's unrestricted £1,000 annuity in 1586, possibly granted in support of literature and dramatic productions that elevated English concerns above those of a corrupted Roman polis, and which continued over the next 18 years during the creation of the Shakespeare canon.

Shakespeare's allusion to Astraea in *Titus*, who is the virgin Greek goddess of justice and purity, may arguably be interpreted as referencing Queen Elizabeth. The focus of Titus's mad campaign of revenge against Saturninus and Tamora is initiated by a multi-party search for Astraea, who was the last of the immortals to inhabit the earth from the time of Ovid's Golden Age. Titus's Latin quotation from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* Book 1 in the opening speech of Act 4.3, "*Terras Astraea reliquit*: be you remembered, Marcus, / She's gone, she's fled," is followed ironically by actions Titus commands of his followers to seek Astraea on the seas and in the depths of the earth, actions that are emblematic of problems inherent in Ovid's description of the Iron Age: seafaring and mining. In the Iron Age, which represents the culture of Titus's Rome, the world became rampantly covetous, distrustful, and violent, with Astraea abandoning mankind forever.

In "Classical Quotation in *Titus Andronicus*," Pramitt Chaudhuri points out how this allusion engenders an inconsistency with the meaning of the Astraea reference: "on the one hand Titus, like Ovid, decries the flight of justice from the world, but on the other hand he orders the kind of morally degenerate actions that led to Astraea's departure in the first place" (791). How fitting that Queen Elizabeth's archetypal identity is connected to Astraea, whose absence brings catastrophe. In *Of Chastity and Power: Elizabethan Literature and the Unmarried Queen* (1989) Philippa Berry asserts that "Francis Yates showed how Elizabeth's cult adapted the apocalyptic and Golden Age imagery favored by European absolutism in the service of the English Protestant Reformation.... Elizabeth's combination of feminine gender and unmarried state meant that she herself could be identified with Astraea". (Berry 63)

In 1591 George Peele wrote a poem, *Descensus Astraea*, for a pageant honoring the Mayor of London. In the poem he refers to "Our fair Astraea, our



Pandora fair, Our fair Eliza, Sweet Cynthia's darling..."; Peele proclaimed that Elizabeth was as "dear to England and true English hearts" as any Pompey, Caesar, Alexander, or Hector were revered by their own people. One might be led to speculate that it was Peele's encomium linking Elizabeth to Astraea that first made him a candidate as contributor to *Titus Andronicus*.

The theory that Peele wrote Act 1 of *Titus* has been debated for over a century, with many scholars, including Macdonald Jackson, Emrys Jones, Brian Vickers and Arden editor Jonathan Bate embracing this idea based on stylistic criteria and the evidence that Peele "had a high level of classical education and a taste for large-scale symmetrical stage encounters spoken in high-flown rhetoric" (Bate 126). While Oxford University Press has recently promoted the theory of co-authorship to virtually half the Shakespeare canon of dramas, no scholarly agreement has yet emerged via computer analyses to define the degrees of collaboration or revision. To be specific, Act 1 of *Titus* has but one very long scene of 630 lines, comprising no less than a quarter of the play text. Only Act V of *Love's Labor's Lost* is longer.

It is evident that all the dramatic elements of *Titus*, including the plot, themes of mutilation and maimed funerary rites, Latin quotes, Ovidian imagery, and historical markers are introduced in Act 1 and seamlessly reconfigured throughout the tragedy. Although computer analyses may identify statistically significant variations in use of feminine endings, rare words, rhetorical devices, word-adjacency frequency, and stage directions that reportedly support the theory of co-authorship, from the standpoint of an integrated artistic vision, Act 1 is in exactly the same mode as the rest of *Titus Andronicus*.

In the introduction to her award-winning book, *Greek Tragic Women on Shakespearean Stages*, Professor Tanya Pollard speculates on the implications of Peele's alleged collaboration with a young Shakespeare in writing *Titus*. Peele spent the 1570s at Oxford University, flourishing "within its Hellenized literary coteries, winning praise...for his English translation of Euripides *Iphigenia*...." Pollard hypothesizes that Peele joined forces with Shakespeare "to write a tragedy exploring sacrifice, grief, and rage, with self-conscious allusions to the tragic women who had captured his imagination in Oxford" (Pollard 1).

Not long after this collaborative venture, the older playwright [Peele] suffers an untimely death, but the younger playwright [Shakespeare] continues exploring the same figures, patterns, and allusions to other [Greek] plays, which attract audiences and spark competitive emulation from his contemporaries. Centuries after his death, this younger playwright remains a sensation and household name. (1)

Such speculative projection of co-authorship and its imagined enduring legacy is the consequence of recognizing Shakespeare's breadth of classical

knowledge, including Greek drama, while lacking any means of establishing his personal sources. In my opinion, it is the weakest and most subversive musing in Pollard's otherwise brilliant analysis.

Should the theory that George Peele was a co-author of *Titus Andronicus* be confirmed, there is supporting literary evidence that Peele had direct connections to Edward de Vere. According to the on-line Dictionary of National Biography, Peele was a close associate of Robert Greene and Thomas Nashe, and in 1582 Peele contributed poetry to Thomas Watson's *Hekatompathia or Passionate Centurie of Love*, the first Petrarchan sonnet sequence in English, which was dedicated to Edward de Vere. When Queen Elizabeth visited Lord Burghley's Theobalds in 1591, Peele composed speeches that were addressed to the Queen, and in 1596 he it is reported that he delivered a manuscript of his *Tale of Troy* to Burghley through his eldest daughter.

Moreover, the Earl of Oxford himself had direct connections to virtually all the multiple literary sources for *Titus Andronicus* that have been noted by scholars. To these titles, Arthur Golding's translation of Justin's *Abridged Trogus Pompeius*, the first literary work dedicated to Edward de Vere, must be considered. In his introductory commentaries of *Trogus*, Justin noted that he had excerpted the most noteworthy material from the original 44 volumes to produce a "brief anthology to refresh the memory of those who had studied Greek, and to provide instruction to those who had not." (Yardley 13) *Trogus* represented an important contribution to the genre of world history, and was deeply indebted to Greek sources, including Herodotus and Diodorus, the primary difference being that *Trogus* was written in Latin with a concentration on Greek and near-Eastern affairs, including the succeeding kingdoms of the Assyrian, Persian, and Macedonian empires. Would not a 14-year-old polymath be fascinated by Trogus's ethnographic and geographic discourses that focused on character, and where "rhetoric lent its force to the delineation of virtues and (better still) vices, and created vivid scenes of high emotion"? (7)

In "Edward de Vere's Hand in *Titus Andronicus*," Professor Michael Delahoyde extends the allegorical interpretive context beyond the simple associations of Queen Elizabeth with the goddess Astraea. Shakespeare's *Titus* represents the playing out of a crisis of authority where "characters use the image of the body politic to portray a Rome no less fragmented than the bodies of the various Andronici become" (156). Hinting at a political allegory for the corrupt Emperor Saturninus, Delahoyde recounts how the French Ambassador Jean Simier referred to King Phillip of Spain as "Saturn" in letters to Queen Elizabeth.

Delahoyde points out that after her rape and mutilation, Lavinia is primarily associated with text and textual communication, that she becomes a code that requires deciphering by her father and uncle with a visually symbolic image for female victimization originating as an Ovidian metamorphosis, now

fully visible on-stage. Further, he suggests that Lavinia is in some fashion a stand-in for the pseudonymous author; forbidden to write, but compelled to use Ovid's text, her "map of woe," to bring her attackers to justice.

In a play so concerned with themes of authorship and text, Titus's 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. (164)

Finally, the question of untranslated Greek literary sources for allusions in *Titus Andronicus* has been raised by academic scholars, including J. Churton Collins, Emrys Jones, and Tanya Pollard, with textual parallels to Euripides's tragedy, *Hecuba*, and Sophocles's *Ajax* clearly identified. Edward de Vere had access to continental editions of Greek texts for nearly a decade while he lived at Cecil House, where he was in close contact with England's leading translators: Arthur Golding, George Gascoigne (Euripides's *Phoenissiae*, 1572), and Arthur Hall (the first ten books of Homer's *Iliad*, 1581). William Cecil possessed Greek editions of Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and Plato in his personal library, and Mildred Cecil, Oxford's mother-in-law, was herself an accomplished Greek translator. Documentation exists that demonstrates Oxford's keen interest in ancient Greek literature, proven by purchases of Plutarch's *Lives*, Plato dialogues, Herodotus's *Histories*, and his receiving the dedication to Thomas Underdown's highly influential translation of Heliodorus's *Aethiopica*.

## Conclusions

*Titus Andronicus* is a brutal, classically inspired early tragedy of blood, very likely to have been composed and performed during the political crises of the mid- to late 1580s, compassing the brewing war with Spain and 1587 execution of Mary Queen of Scots. Although no primary source for the plot has been identified, there are innumerable references to both Latin and Greek texts, and among these sources are works translated by Arthur Golding when he was serving as the receiver for his nephew Edward de Vere in the 1560s. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* has long been recognized as the most frequently referenced source throughout *Titus*, but no previous scholars, aside from Oxfordian researchers, have systematically considered Golding's translation of Justin's *Abridged Trogus Pompeius* as another potential source, specifically the Book 1 narrative of the triumph of Tomyris, Queen of the Scythians, as emblematic source for Shakespeare's vengeful Goth Queen Tamora. An Oxfordian interpretation of *Titus* offers fresh considerations of unattributed literary sources, of political allegory, and of personal testament, and supports Edward de Vere's candidacy as the author of the Shakespeare canon.

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