



## INSCRIBED BODIES IN *TITUS ANDRONICUS*

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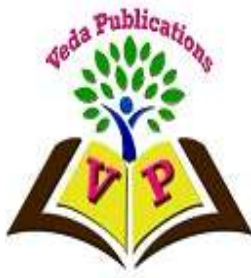
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### ABSTRACT

“what it is to know that others, that we, have bodies” –Stanley Cavell

*Titus Andronicus* is packed with tormented, mutilated and disfigured bodies. The rape of Lavinia is central to the plot of the play. Bodily disfigurement metaphorically reflects the state of (a headless) Rome. Bodies in this play embody political significance. Systematic violence and torture impregnated against bodies are performative of an overarching power of an empire that foresees a downfall. Patriarchal and vengeful nature of power strategically uses female body as a tool to exert authority over the subjects. This paper examines the nature of violence and the (political) role bodies play in an empire.



**Keywords:** *Body, Violence, Shakespeare, Lavinia, Andronicus.*

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Shakespearean plays are significant not only with the choice of words but also with the manner in which Shakespeare exhibit bodies. Bodies, in Shakespearean plays, are medium of expression. Writing and language are intangible, "as if language were in the head, and the body were simply a convenient tool for chattering [or scribbling] out its messages" (Sheets-Johnstone 12). To eliminate body from the process of creativity, writing makes it a problematic to write the body. Gallop observes that the "theorizing is precisely endless, an eternal reading of the "body" as an authorless text, full of tempting, persuasive significance, but lacking a final guarantee of intended meaning (13). Writing and performance are akin to critical discourse and embodiment. Body involves in writing body and forestalling bodies will enhance writing. Body speaks: "its fortunate position, its *raison d'être* and what makes it different—the fact that there it is possible to get across the living, breathing, speaking body" (Cixous, "Aller" 547). Body that performs on stage is not merely an "uncomplicated materiality" but an aid to restore its privileged position to reproduce living. Performing Body is, at once, discursive and representational over against a natural body. "Performers have always only performed representations of bodies inscribed by language, theatrical codes, and gestural/corporeal stances, and imprinted by history" (Birringer 212). The body that performs on stage exhibits a spectacle that is subject to the creative gaze of the audience.

*Titus Andronicus* begins with the noise of argument between brothers on who might exercise the power over Rome. The politically motivated argument is also about the legacy and democracy:

Saturninus: I am his first-born son that was the last

That were the imperial diadem of Rome;

Then let my father's honours live in me,

Nor wrong mine age with this indignity. (I. i. 5-8)

Bassianus:...suffer not dishonor to approach  
The imperial seat...

But let desert in pure election shine. (13-14, 16)

The brothers argue and intimidate to use violence which is thwarted by a reminder about the dangers of their desire. Marcus Andronicus, the people's tribune declares the demand for election by Rome. The election would decide on a candidate whose virtue is inspirational. Marcus warns about the violence and asks to withdraw and "abate" their strength in the use of violence. It is said that Titus, brother of Marcus is coming home as a head of an army. The political antagonists pull out on their roles and relationship to possess a reconsidered ambition making them the rival suitors. Bassianus beseeches a different suit:

Marcus Andronicus, so I do affy

In thy uprightness and integrity,

And so I love and honour thee and thine,

Thy noble brother Titus and his sons,

And her to whom my thoughts are humbled  
all,

Gracious Lavinia, Rome's rich ornament,

That I will here dismiss my loving friends...

(47-53)

Bassianus announces his affinity to remind that Lavinia had previously discussed the thoughtful consolidation of the political and particular suits by risking a right associating with an affluent family before the election could bring out the independent political position. The positive political position is predicated upon Lavinia's body. Titus' arrival is spotted with both triumph and lamentation, a rhetoric that justifies war. While this incident interferes the political crisis in Rome, the sacrifice of Alarbus and the funeral of Titus' sons becomes significant. The dead and the living bodies are metaphorical in how Rome reveals its entangled deference to the opportunity of legacy: "the noblest that survives, /The eldest son of this distressed queen" (102-3). Tamora's appeal for her son's life is fervent and influential but in vain. Neither her tears nor mercy could help her son's cause. Titus' dead sons symbolizes silence where the affected funeral rites and the recommencement of political catastrophe expresses itself. Lavinia expresses her grief: "at this tomb my tributary tears/ I render for my brethren's obsequies" (159-60). Titus addresses Rome: "Kind Rome, that hast thus lovingly reserved/The cordial of mine age to glad my heart"



(165-6). He follows with a praise on Lavinia's virtue: "Lavinia, live, outlive thy father's days/And fame's eternal date, for virtue's praise" (167-8). Through his speech, Titus emphasizes that "the body is the arena in which honour is won or lost" (Robertson 218). Virtues are explicitly related to the consideration of a female body that is incomplete. The incompleteness is enforced on the body through oppressive patriarchal ideologies where a female has to transport between her father and her husband: "Marcus: Be *candidatus* then.../And help to set a head on headless Rome./Titus: A better head her glorious body fits..." (185-7).

Ideologies impose a male head on female body: "A better head her glorious body fits/Than his that shakes for age and feebleness" (187-8). Patriarchal ideological imposition is institutional, "To an institution that fears loss, the daughter's presence by definition constitutes a threat to the maintenance of closed boundaries" (Boose, "Father" 31). While Saturninus is violent, Bassianus is amiable. Titus extracts the honour by creating imperial relations. Eventually, the female bodies are exchanged for male honour when Saturninus initiates the suit:

Titus Andronicus, for thy favours done  
 To us in our election this day...  
 ...to advance  
 Thy name and honourable family,  
 Lavinia will I make my empress,  
 Rome's royal mistress, mistress of my heart,  
 And in the sacred Pantheon her spouse.  
 Tell me, Andronicus, doth this motion please thee? (243-43).

Female body for male honour is a socially motivated apparatus, Lavinia play no active role in it. Lavinia's body has a political value where two men who are politically antagonistic engrave their political status. The possession of a female body motivates the political rivalry between two brothers and exhibit imperial Roman ideologies. The killing of Titus's son, a body embodiment of imperial Roman ideologies exemplify and dominate the rhetorical violence of Lucius: "Dead, if you will, but not to be his wife,/That is another's lawful promised love" (293-4). In order to restore Lavinia to the Emperor, Lucius is obdurate in his stand. The dissent for the suit makes honour at stake. When Saturninus reappears, the situation

becomes a perceptive political setting: "Saturninus: No, Titus, no. The Emperor needs her not, /Nor her, nor thee, nor any of thy stock." (296-7). Saturninus aggravated Bassianus into subversive actions that distanced himself from being disrobed of his honour. Titus was not able to reinforce his exchange with brothers. Lavinia's body is presented not only as an object of social exchange but also as a political ragdoll to stop the kingmaker. In endorsing Lavinia, Saturninus allows a sovereign position to Tamora. She establishes her political and personal motifs towards her associates: "Saturninus: Lavinia, you are not displeased with this? / Lavinia: Not I, my lord, with true nobility/Warrants these words in princely courtesy" (270-2).

Lavinia expresses her mind as a dutiful wife to her husband but with ambiguous expressions. While she distances herself from any kind of bodily relations, she opened up the possibilities to determine her choice of silence that is highly dexterous. The men around her attempt to expose her exclusive nature:

Bassianus: Lord Titus, by your leave, this maid is mine.  
 Titus: How, sir, are you in earnest then, my lord?  
 Bassianus: Ay, noble Titus, and resolved withal  
 To do myself this reason and this right  
 Marcus: *Suum Cuique* is our Roman justice.  
 This prince in justice seizeth but his own.

Bassianus expresses himself in a narcissistic manner, Marcus attempts a legal legitimation and Lucius claims military might. Lavinia is completely ignored and she is not the centre of conversation but they speak *for* her. Claiming to save her, Bassianus claims his rights and Titus his nobility. The interaction about possession and exchange becomes a patriarchal discourse. The discourse on Lavinia and male honour endures:

Saturninus: So, Bassianus, you have played your prize.  
 God give you joy, sir, of your gallant bride.  
 Bassianus: And you of yours, my lord. I say no more,  
 Nor wish no less; and so I take my leave.



Saturninus Traitor, if Rome have law or we  
 have power  
 Thou and thy faction shall repent this rape  
 (396-401)

'Rape' call you it, my lord, to seize *my own*—  
 Mytrue betrothed love, and now my wife?  
 But let the laws of Rome determine all;  
 Meanwhile am I possessed of that is mine.  
 (402-5).

Lucius: That is another's lawful promised  
 love (294)

Bassianus Meanwhile am I possessed of that  
 is mine (405)

The female body (Lavinia) as possession and property is objectified within the dispute of brothers and Roman law. The political endeavor to establish male honour finds a parallel narration. Rome is assumed as an imperfect female body embodied and is offered by Titus to father of Rome, Saurinus. Lavinia, Titus' daughter who is physically present in the stage is taken by Bassianus. Female bodies are offered either by force or by submission.

Demetrius: She is a woman, therefore may  
 be wooed;  
 She is a woman, therefore may be won;  
 She is Lavinia, therefore must be loved. (82-  
 4).

The dynamics of a body in performance is a "mediation on language." The disfigurement in her deliberations does not impact a damage of value but an alteration. Fawcett observes that even before the loss of Lavinia's tongue, her language captures her father's rhetoric through any thoughts of her language:

When we look back on the first two acts, her silence after her mutilation appears to be a development, an increase in eloquence, rather than a stopping or reversal. In the early acts she is not given many words with which to create herself, and these are echoic or censorious...From the words on the page one can feel a kind of disengagement in Lavinia, a refusal of any kind of dramatic interchange, a deliberate muteness... (266).

After the mutilation, Lavinia discovers yet another language that interconnects on to the word around her. However, Lavinia uses symbols and signs to define her newly found language that is scowl. Such a language is "not spoken not written, not closed and not open, not syntactical and yet not meaningless" (Fawcett 261). Lavinia aims to allow the activities to be the symbol of the will to speak and write. Eventually, she develops the new tongue as an alter speech. Moreover, the father's part in the tongueless mouth of the daughter is the continuance of the stump:

...the father's hand as tongue in the daughter's mouth are ideas about the patriarchal nature of language (her tongue is her father), about the equivalence between speaking (tongue) and doing (hand), and about writing (what the hand does) as a substitute for speaking (what the tongue does). ...Lavinia is being transformed in another direction, from speaker to witness, and from character to writer." (Fawcett 266)

Titus fails in the rhetoric because no one pays attention to his speech. The change from the speaker to witness allows Lavinia to find a position that is akin to the audience. The audience finds an answer in writing her body as it becomes the fundamental tool both literally and metaphorically of thought. Thus, Lavinia becomes the creative mouthpiece of the author: "her situation itself, in its iconic quality, embodies the situation of the artist as he assimilates himself to his role: the writer giving words to others to do revenge for his unspoken and unspeakable wrongs" (Fawcett 266). Titus sends his arms to Tamora with a verse from Horace. It reinscribes the guilt. Fawcett identifies the vigour of the message: "Written words pierce beneath perception and comprehension. Titus' message has an inherent power of aggression, even when not understood. This possibility of secret retribution inherent in written words becomes clear only at the end of the work, when the sons are...killed and cooked because they do not "read" Titus's madness right; they have not understood that text either" (Fawcett 264).

Speechless complainer, I will learn thy  
 thought;





In thy dumb action will I be as perfect  
As begging hermits in their holy  
prayers:  
Thou shalt not sigh, nor hold thy  
stumps to heaven,  
Nor wink, nor nod, nor kneel, nor make  
a sign,  
But I of these will wrest an alphabet  
And by still practice learn to know thy  
meaning.(3.2.39-45)

The impact of self that assumes the dynamics of the roles underlay different shades of subjectivity that is related to body. It is mimetically complex when it comes to drama and performance. Such a position engages and emerges differently through the skeptical and autonomous existence of body as trapped in and decreased with part of existence. However,

Revenge is an uncontrollable force and may metaphorically stand for the energy of the unconscious, which is beyond any regulations and authorship, above and beyond the subject whose identity depends on the successful repression of these energies. Renaissance revenge tragedy foregrounds the fact that the subject which gives way to these contents will be swallowed up by their heterogeneous and unsettling energy. (Kiss 56).

*Titus Andronicus* has a series of violent actions that end in Titus feeding Tamora. The violent acts are sanctioned by the state resulting in rape and mutilation. The play represents

the myth of the Other as more violent and horrible than the Self that *Titus* initially exploits and then completely deconstructs...Indeed, Titus begins by asserting polarities, proceeds to undermine them by collapsing boundaries that separated Self from Other, and yet concludes with an attempt reiteration of those very polarities that had proved so fragile" (Smith 316-7).

The extremities in the play are identified by Smith as Romans/Self and Goths/Other. The coercive

approaches of violence that state employs for the sake of violence remains a tool: "Juridical notions of power appear to regulate political life in purely negative terms—that is, through the limitation, prohibition, regulation, control and even "protection" of individuals related to that political structure through the contingent and retractable operation of choice" (Butler 2).

Tamora's revenge is vividly explained by her part in the rape of Lavinia and the ensuing false execution of Titus's sons for the murder of Lavinia's husband. Tamora's intentions for revenge is based on the murder of her son but her means are founded on the state sanctioned violence. "In a reciprocal representation of alterity, the play dramatizes the irony and falseness of the Self-Other binary most vividly in this opening scene as Tamora and her sons, seen by the Romans as barbaric and violent, in turn decry the Roman spectacle of retaliation and vengeance as primitive and inhuman" (Smith 319). The tactical proposition to plan the violent revenge ends in her choice of barbaric violence that is displayed in Roman spectacle of retaliation. Violence committed against Lavinia is macabre but serves as the focal point in the text ushering in the sexual violence and symbolic violence. Tamora's character is convoluted as it is writ large on the ambiguous gender, a character addressed by Lavinia: "The presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it. When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice" (Butler 6). Falling prey to the patriarchal struggle and bargain, Lavinia is a discursive character. The predictable roles "when agreed-upon identities or agreed-upon dialogic structures, through which already established identities are communicated, no longer constitute the theme or subject or politics, then identities can come into being and dissolve depending on the concrete practices that constitute them" (Butler 16). Tamora, who is unstable in her actions and definitions allow her character to be influenced by the Goth or Roman patriarchal values. The identities, therefore, came to be dissolved through the instability of the character that is



encompassed by the aesthetic female artistic features and the performative expectations of Tamora as a woman. The bodies of these two women become the site of patriarchal inscription. The heightened act of violence instills subjective violence that are carried by an influential and identifiable agent and therefore moving towards an insufficient retribution that is sanctioned by the roman government which is political and personal at once in the act of an identifiable hegemony. Hence we see Lucius casting Tamora's body out of the city:

As for that ravenous tiger, Tamora,  
No funeral rite, nor man in mourning weed,  
No mournful bell shall ring her burial,  
But throw heforth to the beasts and birds to  
prey:  
Her life was beastly and devoid of pity,  
And being dead, let birds on her take pity  
(5:3.194-99).

Tamora's body "is merely thrown away, her waste corpse is symbolically jettisoned 'forth' from the order of culture into that of nature from the human world into that of the beasts from society into the wilderness, or into whatever it is that is outside, and constituted in opposition to, Rome" (Barker 147).

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## BIO-NOTE

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