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From New to Neo-Europe: *Titus redivivus*

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Abstract

The ‘dramatic rise’ of *Titus Andronicus* ‘among critics and directors’ in the 1990s was primarily linked to ‘the growth of feminist Shakespeare criticism’.¹ Its recent stage popularity, however, lies in its responses to the new geopolitical realities and the shifting physical and mental borders of the European Union. This article examines four European productions of *Titus Andronicus* in their engagement with political change, migration, rising nationalism and xenophobia, which, I argue, refocus attention onto *this* play’s position in the Shakespeare canon.

Keywords

Titus Andronicus, Silviu Purcărete, Jan Klata, Zoé Ford, Blanche McIntyre, EU, Brexit

Résumé

‘L’essor dramatique’ de *Titus Andronicus* ‘chez les critiques et les metteurs en scène’ dans les années 1990 était principalement lié au ‘développement de la critique shakespearienne féministe’. Le succès récent de la pièce à la scène est toutefois à rattacher à sa capacité à se confronter aux nouvelles réalités géopolitiques et aux frontières physiques et mentales mouvantes de l’Union européenne. Cet article étudie quatre mises en scène européennes de *Titus Andronicus* à travers leur façon d’aborder les changements politiques, les migrations, la montée des nationalismes et de la xénophobie, approche qui, selon l’auteur, recentre l’attention sur le positionnement de cette pièce au sein de l’ensemble de l’œuvre shakespearienne.

Mots clés

Titus Andronicus, Silviu Purcărete, Jan Klata, Zoé Ford, Blanche McIntyre, EU, Brexit


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Premiered on ‘Thursday 24 January 1594’ in Henslowe’s Rose Theatre, *Titus Andronicus* had immediate appeal on the stage, as one of the many revenge tragedies that made the fashion of the time, and in print, as John Danter put it out both as a play and as a ballad in February the same year.² The play travelled to the continent where it had similar appeal but a longer lasting impact: it was performed, adapted, translated and reprinted for another century.³ Following this early success, the play’s history is one recording sporadic stage appearances both in England and mainland Europe, ‘various indignities [...] and several centuries of *Titus*-bashing’⁴ which, as Pfister argues,

not only banished the play from the stage but relegated it with the help of Shakespearean scholarship to the margins – if not beyond them – of the canon of his works as a sorry juvenile performance not worthy the master, forgettable hackwork in which Shakespeare may have had a hand.⁵

Increasing attention to the play post–World War II spiked between the 1980s and 1990s, as Willis argues, due to the ‘growth of Shakespeare feminist criticism’ which focused the play’s concerns on ‘its imagery of womb, tomb, and pit’,⁶ and in editorial work, to the renewed interest in the play as collaboratively authored.⁷ Since 1995, as Bate puts it, ‘academic criticism has unapologetically put the play at the centre of readings of Shakespeare in relation to race, gender, empire, politics, religion, ritual, education, rape, torture, trauma, linguistic and theatrical representation, geography and even [...] ecology’.⁸

In recent years, *Titus Andronicus* has made a spectacular return on both mainstream and fringe stages. And it is not coincidental what company it keeps: **in** the United Kingdom, Shakespeare’s gory tragedy has lately shared the stage with its sixteenth-century contemporary, Thomas Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy*; on the continent, it has appeared alongside its twentieth-century counterpart, Heiner Müller’s *Anatomy Titus Fall of Rome*, dubbed *Ein Shakespearekommentar* in its title (1985). What may appear coincidental – but is not, I argue – is that the four productions which make the smaller and larger focus of this article – Silviu Purcărete’s for the ‘Marin Sorescu’ National Theatre, Craiova (1992), Jan Klata’s for TeatrPolski in Wrocław and Staatsschauspiel Dresden (2012)  Zoé Ford’s Hiraeth Artistic Productions for the Arcola, London (2013),⁹ and Blanche McIntyre’s for the Royal Shakespeare Theatre (RST), Stratford-upon-Avon (2017) – emerge at historic moments of national(ist) and European tension that prize open the violent conflict between Romans and Goths as explorations of identity and the role of Shakespeare today – albeit in different measures and to different ends.

New Europe: Enter **Titus**

In freshly out from the Eastern Bloc Romania, theatre rejoiced in experimenting with freedom and mobility – from artistic to linguistic, from emotional to institutional and geographical, as borders opened after decades of isolationism. While the subversive role Shakespeare played in the communist ghetto appeared superfluous to requirement in a

theatre enjoying open choice, Shakespeare's presence remained strong following the momentous changes of 1989. Both home and expat directors who returned to work in Romania looked to Shakespeare to make sense of theatre in/and the New Europe. With productions of 14 Shakespeare plays in less than a decade after the 1989 Revolution, the choice was truly eclectic, including repertoire staples, such as *Romeo and Juliet* or *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, as well as rarely performed plays, such as *Timon of Athens* or *The Winter's Tale*, and absolute premieres, such as *Titus Andronicus*.

Directed by Silviu Purcărete in 1992, *Titus Andronicus* was not the director's first encounter with Shakespeare: he had staged *Romeo and Juliet* in 1974, *Richard III* in 1983 and *Ubu Rex with Scenes from Macbeth* in 1990. Seen also against notable absences, such as *Hamlet* or *Julius Caesar* or *Macbeth*, the most performed Shakespeare plays before 1989, the interpretive blank canvas afforded by *Titus Andronicus* was an opportunity too good to be missed and a well-timed choice. With one translation only (Dan Duţescu's, published in the 1956 Party commissioned *Complete Works* project) and with no stage history in Romania,¹⁰ no work was needed to undo interpretive traditions and audience expectations for this Shakespeare play. However, audiences – both at home, at the Craiova National where the play opened, and abroad, when the production went touring – certainly had expectations of a Purcărete production. Only a year or so before, his *Ubu Rex with Scenes from Macbeth* proposed a shock-therapy re-examination of theatre aesthetics and politics, one unanimously received by critics as 'a grotesque parody of political totalitarianism'.¹¹ The same interdependence between aesthetics and politics was evident in Purcărete's *Titus Andronicus* – despite the director's comment, in a 1993 interview for *The Sunday Age*: 'I had no intention to make any connection with Romania's political situation. It is more a link between the play and the state of world politics',¹² and the production poster, which offered to the viewer neither Titus, nor Lavinia, nor scenes of war, nor electoral competition, but a couple of gagged men, whose sumo wrestler *cum* nappy suits not only strip them of any dignity and masculinity but infantilize them.

This *Titus Andronicus*, set in a ubiquitous *nowhere* – Jarry like – on a cavernous empty stage framed by giant white sheets, was a relentless and thrilling exploration of cruelty and suffering – 'a triple-speed Wilson minus the budget', according to Remshardt.¹³ Projections changed on this unnerving, animated white box (borrowed from Peter Brook) and occasionally betrayed the uncanny 'wilderness of tigers' (3.1.53)¹⁴ beyond. The set's versatility, the minimalistic use of props – a gurney, scaffolding, a wheelbarrow – and white basic robes (Roman and hospital like), opened the production to multiple interpretations, ranging from oversized, grotesque Punch and Judy show to psychiatric ward. Hinting at Purcărete's training as a puppeteer, the former interpretation decoded this Rome as a totalitarian regime exercising control by infantilizing its people, which it read as communist, but also as post-1989 Romania by Marian Popescu,¹⁵ as the ravages of the Balkan Wars by Mariangela Tempera,¹⁶ and as the 'insane tyrannies of our own day' by Paul Taylor.¹⁷ The latter recognized control through institutionalized fear, decoding the psychiatric ward as the other term for political prison in pre-1989 Romania and/or as an interrogation cell of anytime anywhere.

Both critical takes suggest that such an exercise could only emerge in the new European (post-1989) milieu. While this held true in relation to the 1990s socio-political present which offered new meanings to both Shakespeare's old words and to Romanian old ways of recruiting Shakespeare for dissident work, in terms of artistic freedom, this was not the case in Purcărete's view: 'the change in December 1989 meant little to me as a director. I did not feel it as a "liberation"'.¹⁸ His artistic change was brought by his move from the Little Theatre, Bucharest (whose artistic director he had been since the mid-'70s [AQ2]) – to what became the home for his major directorial work – the 'Marin Sorescu' National Theatre, Craiova. Away from the temptations and demands of the capital, he concentrated on his own projects in a theatre that offered him a stable ensemble of actors (under contract)¹⁹ and the largest acting space and deepest stage in the country. His first large-scale experiments were free from the Little Theatre claustrophobia.²⁰

Intended or not, the continuity between his early Shakespeare productions, *Ubu Rex* (1990) and *Titus* (1992), and his later ones, *Twelfth Night* (2004), *Measure for Measure* (2006) and *A Tempest* (2010) or Goethe's *Faust*, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, or most recently Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, has been evident in several directorial trademarks. First of these is Purcărete's use of space and 'excessive visualization' through tableaux of epic dimensions, in a style he terms 'anti-Brook'.²¹ A second one is the complex dynamics between words, silence, and sound, in which music is not audio-background but an active character, integral and essential to the plot. A third is the interaction between live action, recorded projection, and movie-like stills. A fourth is the director's choice of comedic double acts, sinisterly changing from silent movies (Laurel and Hardy style) to Grand Guignol, as in the pairs Ma and Pa Ubu (in *Ubu Rex*), Chiron and Demetrius (in *Titus Andronicus*), Duncan and Macbett (in *Macbett*), the Duke and Angelo (in *Measure for Measure*) and Stephano and Trinculo (in *A Tempest*). Last but not least, is the spellbinding and uncanny metamorphosis of the production's set: white sheets caught flying axes in *Titus* or projected, throughout, the ever moving spiral of history (visualized as the worm of a gigantic mincing machine); walls moved in *Measure for Measure* reconfiguring the space and trapping the characters; witches flew on suitcases and tables rose up from the stage floor in *Macbett*; the banquet ignited itself in *A Tempest*.

Alongside these elements that make up Purcărete's auteurial signature, the live exploration of spectatorship viewed as aesthetically and politically engaged was symptomatic of the New Europe age. In *Titus Andronicus*, this was detectable at several levels: in the use of sound, which combined election campaign hysteria, amplified growls and moaning, and Mozart's Piano Concerto no. 20 in D minor for the banquet; visual projection of electoral speech [AQ3]; and the production's key trope, offered right from the beginning and reiterated in the ending. Purcărete's *Titus Andronicus* starts with a child who entered reading a book, an act eliciting immediate questions: was he Lucius reading Ovid's *Metamorphoses*? Young Shakespeare reading Ovid? The director reading Shakespeare? The young child's attention was hijacked by loud noises (microphone-amplified) coming from two mobile monitors broadcasting the 'jabbering heads'²² of two competing candidates in the Roman elections. Whether read as an

attempt to update Romanian theatre with new technology or a protest against the unfair competition posed by television, the use of intermediality in this scene possessed an eerie topicality: the production opened in March 1992, 3 years after the 1989 events which ended with the capture, swift trial and gruesome execution of the Ceaușescu on Christmas Day – all broadcast nationally and internationally; 2 years after the University Square protests against the National Salvation Front's U-turn (from their firm promise not to enter the election) were violently crushed by the miners' arrival in Bucharest, called upon and thanked by the President for saving the day (another bit of Romanian history extensively televised); 2 years after the interethnic street violence in Tîrgu Mureș, followed by a rise of nationalist extremism (and the formation of the Greater Romania Party). The spring of 1992 was also the year when the late King Mihai of Romania was briefly allowed to visit the country at Easter, but fear of his rising popularity led to Iliescu's government enforcing another 5-year ban on his visits. The most immediate, however, was the violent split in the National Salvation Front, leading to the formation of the Roman faction and the Iliescu faction, both in full electoral campaign when *Titus Andronicus* premiered in Craiova.

What all of the above shared was mediatisation: all were broadcast live on Romanian TV and used mass media, uncannily turning citizens into spectators of their own destiny. That the consequence of this process was limiting participation to viewing was evident in Purcărete's *Titus Andronicus*. Young Lucius holding the book stood for the young Romanian democracy: its people, whose own lives were shaped by the media, were the new language of the old power. In hindsight, Purcărete's production of *Titus Andronicus* was an attempt to train audiences in a school of theatrical citizenship. As with his subsequent choices of Shakespeare plays, its functions were to purge the past, to enforce an examination of the present and, most importantly, to look the future straight in the eye. Only by putting together past, present and future, the aesthetic and political engagement of Purcărete's theatre worked – then and since – as a kind of social exorcism, as the director called it back in 1997.

The ending of Purcărete's 1992 production, like that of Shakespeare's play, left spectators with a living paradox: young Lucius and Aaron's baby. On the one hand, it seemed to suggest that despite history repeating itself, hope was in the young; on the other, it stood as a 'lively warrant' warning about 'pattern' and 'precedent' (5.3.43), the 'old eating the young' as Purcărete put it in 2006.²³ When stepping out of the auditorium and into the foyer, spectators met an 'unrepentant Aaron, [who] though lashed to a collar of spears, [wa]s still unsubdued' and 'lurche[d] menacingly toward the crowd like a giant spider, hissing and growling, his face twisted with pure malevolence'.²⁴ Like the entire production, the ending divided both viewers and reviewers, in its approach to aesthetics and politics. For Richard Eyre, who saw the production on tour in 1994, Purcărete's *Titus Andronicus* was 'very modish and untouchable (and untouching). A sort of unappealing directorial swagger, full of imagistic ostentation, but now and again a brilliant device – as in a shadow execution'.²⁵ The same year, Ralf Erik Remshardt, who saw it touring in Germany, recognized its 'aesthetic dissonance' typical of the early 1990s, concluding that 'in Romania, theatre cannot afford to be merely a clever diversion' and 'when [Purcărete] asserts that the ghosts of modern European history . . . have haunted Romania

more recently than the West, these are not idle observations or metaphors but stage directions for an ongoing history play'.²⁶

'United in diversity'?

When showcasing at the Shakespeare Festival, Gdańsk, in August 2014, the co-production *Titus Andronicus* directed by Jan Klata played to a more international audience than it first encountered in Wrocław, when it opened on 15 September 2012, and in Dresden, when it opened on 28 September 2012. While the complex linguistic subtleties of this German-Polish *Titus Andronicus* may have escaped non-speakers of the two languages (they did me!), Klata's choice of placing into dialogue two *Titus*-es in his production – Shakespeare's and Müller's – and putting on show the long history of political conflict between the two nations cast as the Romans and the Goths at the heart of the production were impossible to miss. In Gdańsk, a city not without problematic Polish-German history itself (like Wrocław and Dresden), Klata's production was a much awaited highlight in the Festival's line-up which included five other productions and adaptations of the play. The director's reputation for fast-paced artistic, head-on assault on audiences' senses and propensity for leaving no sacred national symbol unturned and taboo unchallenged, has earned him both fans and critics, especially since his first adaptation of *Hamlet*, titled *H.* which he staged in the Solidarność Shipyard, in Gdańsk in 2004.²⁷

Like his Gdańsk Shipyard-Elsinore, Klata's Rome was a location at once national *and* European, one torn apart by conflict. Played by German-speaking actors,²⁸ like all male Romans in this production, the Andronici returned victorious from war bringing their trophy: Goth royalty in chains (played by Polish actors) and their heavy burden of war casualties. The Andronici's focus, thus by extension the audience's, was to pay tribute to the dead first. All 21 dead sons were brought back in flight cases: Titus (Wolfgang Michalek) himself carried them, one by one, and created a grave monument – the stage set for this production. The play's ritual burial was a harrowing – physical and psychological – experience for actors and spectators alike. Buckling under the sheer weight of each coffin he carried, Titus sweated profusely; his surviving sons saluted each fallen hero without a fail; his brother Marcus joined in, shedding grotesque tears on each casket. Repeated 21 times, in a countdown recorded visually in Roman numerals on the production's backdrop screen, the carefully choreographed ritual turned into a solemn memorial to victims of war: the projected numerals multiplied with each coffin and the final projected image uncannily resembled an aerial shot of an anonymous military graveyard in which individual soldiers became sheer numbers.

It wasn't the lengthy burial ritual (ten minutes or so of the 150-minute production) or even its soundtrack, Behemoth's 'Ov Fire and the Void',²⁹ blasting out of the wall of amplifiers (invisible behind the screen backdrop) that made the scene unsettling. What sparked controversy was the choice of casting Germans as victors and Poles as prisoners, and of costumes. The Romans wore high military black boots, white trousers (whose design resembled Nazi uniforms) and sported white cotton T-shirts displaying printouts of iconic photo images from the 1939 German invasion of Poland. Henceforth, the

production proceeded to debunk all national myths with a cruelty ‘mainly contained in the ruthless stereotypes which each nation has of the other and cherishes about itself’.³⁰ Alarbus was sacrificed (off stage) while (on stage) his brothers hummed and mimed on imaginary electric guitars the tune *Polskie Drogi* [Polish roads], a ‘70s TV series glorifying the Poles as World War II victims and freedom fighters.³¹ Tamora (Ewa Skibińska) – whom Lavinia (Paulina Chapko, the only Roman played by a Pole!) called ‘the Polish slut’ – paraded her sexuality to win Saturninus in a ploy **though** which she clearly exploited the tension between the two brothers. At the double wedding, which turned into an orgy enjoyed by everyone, Tamora aroused Saturninus by riding an ice-block and later copulated with Aaron. In Wojciech Ziemiański’s interpretation, the Moor was the embodiment of evil in every stereotypical, xenophobic way: face and hands blacked up, he wore a huge pair of horns (a crescent moon more than devil’s horns), was endowed with both female breasts and a giant erect penis, always on full display.

The product of consumerism and European migration in equal measure, Chiron (Marcin Pempuś) and Demetrius (Michał Majnicz) played dumb and dumber. In stark contrast to the black and white Roman costumes, their brand tracksuit bottoms and trainers, paired with colourful beach shirts, stereotyped them as petty dealers and/or new jumpers on the Western consumerist bandwagon. They spoke simultaneously, appeared ignorant and struggled to follow the plot so much so that at times they had to rely on the production’s subtitles and projections to make sense of it. Such instances of linguistic and educational incompetence transformed tragic situations into sinister comedy, as in their attempt to translate the story of Lavinia’s rape. For this scene, the production created an unnerving contrast between the shocking content of the story (whose script was projected but in German) and the clumsy Polish version the two brothers produced by guesswork and speculation, as Mancewicz writes, on phonetic analogies between the two languages and on references to bilingual Gdańsk and wider German–Polish relations.³² As before, in the opening scene, the videoscape (text, symbols, languages) played a key role in the complex dynamics of this production. But the monolingualism which clearly segregated the Romans and the Goths was trespassed at key points. When disguised as Revenge, Tamora wooed mad Titus in German (albeit with a heavy Polish accent), occasionally reading the (foreign) words off the back of her hand; Titus replied to her in Polish. Klata used direct citation from Müller’s *Anatomy Titus* in his production: delivered in German and projected in Polish, Müller’s *Titus* spoke back to Klata’s staged *Titus Andronicus*.

Using kitsch aesthetics to deflate tragedy into grotesque, the production made ingenious use of soundscape. Two key scenes were choreographed to ‘Slice me nice’, **the ‘80s German pop star Fancy’s hit**. One was Lavinia’s rape and mutilation, in which, instructed by **the / tune’s ‘the rhythm of love’ and line ‘it’s time for action baby’**, Tamora’s sons chased and trapped (wrapped?) Lavinia in cling film before raping her in full view. Her and others’ lopped limbs and chopped heads were seen as mass-produced, cling-film packaged meat. In this production’s rendition of the end of 4.1, they returned as commodified accessories, proudly worn by the Andronici in the (literally pieced together) family photo shoot which was their pledge for revenge. The other was the banquet scene, constructed in a similar grotesque-absurdist key. Straight out of

Greenaway's *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife & Her Lover*, Titus wheeled in Chiron and Demetrius trapped in two individual, life-size nude body cakes and reduced to screaming heads throughout their own consummation as literal 'pies made for hungry guys' (another line from Fancy's hit) and witnessing their mother's cannibalism. Unperturbed by the 'dish' served, Tamora proceeded – as instructed by the hit's lyrics – to 'slice [them] nice', while other guests returned for second helpings of their favourite parts.

There was no ambiguity to this production's ending: New Rome, like the old one, left little to the spectators' imagination as to what Lucius's regime thought of politics and difference – national, ethnic, racial. The classical Roman white marble statue – symbolic heir of a derelict Rome(?) and this production's young Lucius – stepped down from its pedestal to welcome its heritage. He received Aaron's baby, studied it with curiosity, held it carefully, then, to audible gasps from the audience, in a final act of cannibalism–consumerism, ate what turned out to be a life-size dark chocolate prop. The sinister gag, more than a 'crude and cruel exploitation of European traumas and stereotypes',³³ was the director's parting challenge to 'political correctness' and 'a [timely] reminder that antagonisms, unpaid bills and unjust courses of events are deeply rooted in Poles and will not be changed by the funds from the European Union'.³⁴ As for other former Eastern Bloc countries, the accession process may have ended when the EU member status was attained (in 2004); that of integration, however, continues and it is not without challenges. As 'the boundary between [Poland's] consciousness of national identity and European aspirations, mainly consumerist, [has been] getting thinner and thinner',³⁵ in the recent years of increasing tensions within Poland and between Poland and the EU, work like Klata's, which 'draws from past and present traumas, conflicts, anxieties and diversities to point to the similarity of experiences across cultures', has yet a way to go to 'push audiences towards understanding'.³⁶ While Shakespeare cannot be banned even by a right-wing party (like *Law and Justice* currently in government) a director's voice can be stifled by a carefully choreographed non-renewal of contract.³⁷

Thug Britannia

Across the Channel, another *Titus* using '80s tunes was treading the boards in 2014. In the small Arcola Studio 1, London, a 13-strong cast and a heavily cut text brought the violence of the play disturbingly close to its audience, seated on three sides. Welsh named but a London-based company, Hiraeth Artistic Productions' *Titus Andronicus* was as raw and visceral as their *Hamlet* at the Riverside Studios earlier that year. For director Zoé Ford, a self-confessed 'babe of the '80s', Thug Britannia was the natural Rome – ridden by gang warfare, nationalist politics, crime and immigration. This was no RSC RP Shakespeare: the Romans were skinheads flaunting their extremist tattoos: Lucius (James Utechin) sported a swastika on his right wrist while Titus the gang leader (David Vaughn Knight) proudly displayed his political allegiance – a National Front (NF) tattoo. This was a turf war waged by the NF Andronici against the 'Irish pikes' Goths. Like the Neo-Romans, these were New-Goths; complete with hairdos, black eyeliner and nail varnish, they were simply the latest arrivals of Irish immigrants, and as such, fell victims to poverty, electoral division and political violence. No surprise, then,

that Aaron (Stanley J. Brown), a Black Caribbean of the previous migrant wave, successfully fuelled the Goths' thirst for revenge to quench his own.

The dispute was as black and white as the visual contrast between the Andronici (sporting white T-shirts, denims, red breeches and Doc Martens) and the black-clad Goths. The Andronici's dead son was avenged by the murder of Alarbus in a tit-for-tat violent exchange. Carried out as a gang ritual and accompanied by the only non-'80s track in the entire production, Mozart's *Lacrimosa*, the funeral revolved around a pillar (stage right) that became an impromptu street monument – at the top, a photo of the fallen victim decorated with flowers, at the bottom, candles lit by each gang member. Its counterpart, the ritual sacrifice, was a gang fest, too, conducted onstage with knives and a baseball bat decorated with St George's cross stickers. Lavinia (Maya Thomas) putting out the candles with her can of Special Brew – vats of which were drunk on both sides – swiftly moved the scene from the mourning of the lost brother to the violent hysteria of Alarbus' bloody execution and, together with young Lucius (a teenager in this production), joined in the ritual killing.

In this Rome Andronici did Saturninus's bidding grudgingly. They leafleted among the audience for his election, a service the firstborn openly paid for with wedges of dosh, but it was Bassianus who had their support all along. His outfit and head tattoo clearly identified him as one of them and Lavinia's rightful match, a situation that antagonized Titus only temporarily, and not to Shakespeare's degree of violence; this production had no Mutius to dispose of, therefore the gang and family loyalties did not conflict. The suited and booted Saturninus (Pip Gladwin) was clearly an outsider and thus could only claim another outsider, Tamora (Rosalind Blessed), as his rightful prize – along with the BMW keys Titus offered (as this production's version of Shakespeare's 'chariot' (in 1.1.249)). The newly elected emperor remained oblivious to the double games – the election services he had paid for had in fact undone his campaign as large four-letter words handwritten in red over his flyers made mockery of his claim – and hardly kept up with the fast-moving action – as he was asking for her hand, Tamora's was already busy cussing under her breath and retaliating against Titus.

Copious cuts to the playscript were used to various effects: some streamlined the plot in order to fit in with the '80s concept; others eliminated the clash between Shakespeare speak and the street-word spitting, generously seasoned with ad-lib swearing. Sometimes they were employed to heighten tension: while Aaron retained most of his lines, which he delivered with poetic care, and a mixture of calm menace and West Indian softness, Lavinia's speech was cut short by Chiron and Demetrius literally stopping her mouth before raping her. This was a move consistent with this production's Lavinia, who spoke little, but swore, drank, puked and fought like her bros. Hyped up by drugs and instructed at knifepoint by Aaron, Chiron and Demetrius danced to Human League's 'Don't You Want Me, Baby?' interacting with the audience – a directorial take similar to Klata's – before they turned the entertaining number, to some spectators' horror, into a rape scene of excessive graphic violence which ended with Lavinia tied to her brother's street funeral monument – a trophy for the Goths, another victimized Andronici.

The violence, too close to bear in the claustrophobic round studio space, contrasted the intense emotion and tenderness of Marcus's discovery of his niece. Unlike Klata's

Marcus, who freaked out and hid Lavinia from sight (unwittingly burying her in one of the flight cases), Ford's Marcus freed, cradled and covered her mutilated and bruised body, and tenderly wiped the blood gushing from her mouth. It was a broken child, not the earlier feisty woman he delivered to Titus, who literally buckled under the weight of this burden. Widowed, raped and mutilated, Lavinia was taken back into the Andronici home as the child daughter. Gone were her days of gang uniform (denim miniskirt, white T-shirt, red breeches) hung for a red and white polka-dot dress, and of swearing, now stoically borne silence. Yet her rejection of the imposed girly role was crystal clear in her attempt to strangle herself to the tune of Joy Division's 'She's lost control again'. Her family 'reintegration' was at once cruel and moving to watch: she refused being helped to dress and feed. It was Marcus's writing method that restored Lavinia to her former self: breaking free of her silence, she exerted herself to breaking point to write the initials of her killers with builder's bricks.

In this claustrophobic production, gory violence, visual as well as verbal, abounded: slit throats flooded the stage red, Titus's hand was cut with a shovel; the broad accents – cockney for the Andronici, Irish for the Goths – were packed with expletives. There was no place for gods or their justice in this Rome: Titus's messages were his rage against the establishment, delivered by his sons as porno-graffiti inscribed on the stage floor in brick and chalk, using everything this derelict neighbourhood could supply. The banquet was a family barbeque, presided on by Titus, equipped with apron and tongues. Humming Sex Pistols' 'God Save the Queen', he dished out (Chiron and Demetrius) burgers to the royal guests under Lavinia's keen eye. The killings were both farcical and sinister: every domestic object to hand – forks, skewers – was put to use in this bacchanal which ended with Saturninus's head inside the barbeque, whose lid was slammed shut by Lucius.

Fast-paced, loud and strobe-lit, this *Titus* was not a 'fearful slumber' (3.1.251) – save for perhaps the Clown, who was high on intravenous drugs throughout – but a living nightmare which did not end with the pile of dead bodies, the only act of integration afforded. The '80s might have passed, but their issues remained rife and highly topical in this production, not least due to anti-EU propaganda and the rise of nationalism in the United Kingdom and across Europe. Like Klata's production, this was an awakening call, extended to the audience: the dead rose to take the bow, punching the air and chanting (Madness's track): 'Our house, in the middle of our street / (Something tells you) / (That you've got to get away from it) / Our house, in the middle of our' . . . *Lights out. Silence.*

'What country, friends, is this?'

In a sudden and sinister turn of events, which 'If [. . .] were played upon a stage now', would be 'condemn[ed] as an improbable fiction' (*Twelfth Night*, 3.4.114–5), Shakespeare's global commemoration year got hijacked by conflict, division and violent events that put it down in history also as the Brexit and the Trump year. A year on, in Shakespeare's cradle-and-grave Stratford-upon-Avon – a town as divided as it could get on the UK vote map³⁸ – all things Roman were on offer. In the main house, the line-up was *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Titus Andronicus*; next door, in the Swan,

the traffic of the stage over the summer was also Rome: Wilde's *Salome* (mined for the Roman connection), a revival of the Ovid-inspired Shakespeare poem, *Venus and Adonis* (as a puppet show), a Plautus spin-off world premiere (in Phil Porter's 'new play'): *Vice Versa or the Decline and Fall of General Braggadocio at the Hands of his Canny Servant Dexter and Terence the Monkey*. The autumn instalment of the Rome saga opened with *Coriolanus* in the RST and, in the Swan, with Marlowe's first play – sourced from Virgil's *Aeneid* – *Dido, Queen of Cartage*, and continued with a brand-new adaptation of Robert Harris's bestselling *Cicero Trilogy*, penned for the stage by Mike Poulton³⁹ as *Imperium*, an epic event: six mini-plays delivered in two parts, Part I – *Conspirator* and Part II – *Dictator*.⁴⁰

While the RSC's Artistic Director, Greg Doran, introduced the season as an anniversary one (2000 years since Ovid's death and 50 years since the decriminalization of homosexuality in England and Wales), in his trailer for the main house shows, Angus Jackson, the Rome Season Director, focused on two other features brought to the fore by the opportunity of staging all four of Shakespeare's Roman plays: in a 'season of tragic thrillers', they allow 'us to see the evolution of *this* society' from 'birth to decay', 'tearing itself to pieces'; these 'very high stakes plays', he comments, have 'resonances with contemporary politics'.⁴¹ *Titus Andronicus*, like the other plays in the season, was about the relationship between 'rhetoric and power', about charismatic leaders and about gaining power not by 'what you say' but 'how you say it'.⁴² Key to this exploration throughout the RST season was Robert Innes Hopkins's one-design vision (for all four plays): *this* Rome was constructed as live interaction between 'thens' and 'now', and this interaction was made possible through a game of ghosting. Rome in *Julius Caesar* featured marble steps atop which lay, taking pride of place, a life-size replica of the *Lion Attacking a Horse*.⁴³ Complete with Capitol colonnades as backdrop, this was the locus for the first scene. Recycled emblem of victory and defeat, violence and political authority, the sculpture appeared later atop the colonnade structure, allowing the action to move thus from locus to platea. Though recycling the same stage design, *Titus Andronicus* was set in a different era. This Capitol was protected by bulletproof glass and caged in by high metal gates, barb wired and remote controlled.

The play proper was prefaced by street fights between rival gangs – the caps versus the hoodies; both were street wiser than the special forces out to disperse the clashes; one cardboard banner read 'Austerity kills'; on both sides, fighters robbed, looted and took **selfies!**, while media cameras recorded the anarchy. On the other side of the fence, 'the other half' sported designer suits and shades, Barbour jackets and expensive riding boots; Tamora and Saturninus toned their bodies in the gym, and Chiron and Demetrius lounged by the pool. Faced with these two sides of barbaric individualism, Titus's military valour could not have looked more outdated and/or discredited. The soldier manners and brass band always accompanying his entrances deemed him (and his generation) visibly out of touch with reality and were productively recycled for comic effect. Not only did he insist on hosting the hunt at dawn but woke up the 'just-married' couple with loud horns, a routine repeated as they failed to come out on the first call; later in the play, brass instruments and their toy versions accompanied his madness (both real and faked).

While some reviewers found making *Titus* such an ‘urgent play for today’ rather ‘gimmicky’, they nevertheless welcomed the break from the ‘season’s restrictive toga-themed format’.⁴⁴ This *Titus* was not a story about two different empires, the Romans and the Goths, but about one nation ripped apart by an election campaign that tore at the heart of the election principles and legislation, and sent the country into civil war. As such, it set its stall out even before the prologue to its first scene: unbeknown to the spectators, members of the two factions mingled with the audience. The mini-commotions, as they appeared from the gallery (where I saw the show from), were not over seating matters (in the priciest section of the venue): the undisclosed actors, I found out later,⁴⁵ were asking unsuspecting members of the audience whether it was right to have an elected emperor or to inherit the title – a question that clearly proved too much for many, but managed to engage the few.

Albeit received differently, two more audience participation cameos followed – both were visible to all. In one, Titus asked front row spectators for money to pay the messenger – in this production a delivery boy working for Deliveroma!⁴⁶ On the day I saw it, the young man addressed referred to his empty pockets – a comment as much on austerity as on the price of front row tickets – unaffordable for young spectators; on a different night, the scene was cut short by the (older) spectator’s embarrassment and £10-note handover. In the other cameo, Lucius handed over Aaron’s baby, took it back, then passed it back again: on the day the production was streamed live in cinemas, it was a man who received the baby and caringly rocked it to sleep; on a different day, the woman charged with its safekeeping refused to return it to a Lucius she clearly saw capable of disposing of it.

As with any production of *Titus Andronicus*, plenty of gore, violence, blood and lopped limbs were on the menu. Some scenes were gruesome, other cartoonish; some predictable, other striking. The unifying feature was that both sides strove to keep their hands clean – by wearing gloves: Alarbus’ entrails were brought on a platter and Titus’s hand was surgically removed on a medical trolley by two nurses. Given Aaron’s violent nature in this production, it came as no surprise that he stabbed the nurse who delivered his baby; conversely, Titus disposing of Lavinia in the same manner (and thus turning her once again into a bloody sight) seemed to suggest that though much had happened not much had changed between his stabbing of his son Mutius and that of his daughter.

Perhaps the most striking directorial innovation was McIntyre’s supply of the play’s missing revenge tragedy trope: the production featured not one but multiple ghosts. And I am not referring here to recasting from the earlier plays in the season *Julius Caesar* or *Antony and Cleopatra* (though Cassius’s return as Saturninus certainly stood out) but to the interpretive decision to give the dead agency in their own revenge. After being dispatched, the dead watched silently the unfolding action; they remained visible behind the bulletproof glass, sinister human colonnades between the colonnades of this production’s Capitol. They returned as stage hands to claim matching closures: in a twisted family scene, Quintus and Martius helped with restraining and tying Chiron and Demetrius to be bled to death; just as Lucius’s first speech as the new ruler was moving from tentative to increasingly aggressive, a ghost soldier crept up on him and cut it short by strangling him – he, it turned out, was no other than Alarbus. History had come full

circle and there was no hope left in this divided Rome – save for the faint glimmer that the young generation (carefully *not* exposed to the gory killings of the final scene) might settle accounts differently. The lights went down over this Rome torn apart by conflict: political, military, class, gender, race, leaving **both** spectators and Young Lucius holding Aaron's baby facing an uncertain future – **in the theatre as outside.**

(Br)exeunt

When launching the invitation to the European Shakespeare Research Association (ESRA) for its biennial conference in Worcester 2015, the focus was on the dialogue between Shakespeare's Europe and Europe's Shakespeare(s), and on two anniversaries of great importance for world Shakespeare scholarship and for the Association: 25 years since the first events that focused exclusively on *European Shakespeares* (in Antwerp, 1990) and 425 years of European Shakespeare studies. Two words, used when making the invitation (back in 2013) and again when welcoming the participants to ESRA 2015, stand out with renewed prominence as I am writing the coda to this collection: one is 'timely', the other, 'vigorous'. What neither this volume's editors nor its contributors could have anticipated is how much timelier this exploration would become – nor how vigorous.

Three years on, the tense and intense political, cultural, financial, military exchanges in Europe and beyond have translated 'timeliness' into urgency and 'vigour' into agency. This collection, therefore, comes as a collective stance that aims to take stock of the work Shakespeare Studies has done in the time that has elapsed between the emergence of the New Europe, which was the focus of the seminal volume edited by Boika Sokolova, Derek Roper and Michael Hattaway in 1992 – and whose second edition release in 2016 was a timely reminder 'lest we forget!' – and the Neo-Europe, one threatening to 'make division of' itself in the face of rising neo-liberalism, xenophobia, racism, immigration, conflict and extreme nationalism, one threatened by looming extreme-right from both West and East.

Besides continuing what has been a strong tradition in Shakespeare Studies, the varied contributions to this volume – ranging from new critical interpretations, adaptation, translations, performing, publishing, reviewing and archiving – literally map out the intrinsic role Shakespeare-the-European has been playing in shaping Europe (and the world), not least giving voice to those who refuse to be cast as 'mutes or audience' to political acts that '¶ put down strangers, / Kill them, cut their throats, possess their houses, / And lead the majesty of law in lyam' (*Thomas More*, ADD.II.D, 130–2). Like the 1992 volume *Shakespeare in the New Europe*, which served both as a 'pattern' and a 'precedent', the present collection of articles records Europe's Shakespeare(s) 'strange eventful history' as a way of working through a 'time [that] is out of joint' and, by thinking back, thinks *ahead* of ways to 'set it right'.

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Notes

1. Deborah Willis, ‘The Gnawing Vulture: Revenge, Trauma Theory and Titus Andronicus’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 53:1 (2002), 21–52, 22. DOI: 10.1353/shq.2002.0017.
2. On the play’s debut in 1594 and early history – on the stage and the page – see Jonathan Bate, ‘Introduction’, in Jonathan Bate (ed.), *Titus Andronicus*, revised edition (London, Bloomsbury, 2018), 1–162, especially 68–78.
3. In the Low Countries (alongside Thomas Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy*), it was performed by young Van den Bergh (in the 1630s) and recorded ‘a hundred performances before 1665 and some twenty-eight editions by 1726’ in ‘Jan Vos’s Shakespearean adaptation entitled *Aran en Titus*’ – see Ton Hoenselaars and Helmer Helmers, ‘*The Spanish Tragedy* and Revenge Tragedy in Seventeenth-Century Britain and the Low Countries’, in Nicoleta Cinpoș (ed.), *Doing Kyd* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2016), 144–67, 148. It was Shakespeare’s first play ‘to be printed in Germany. In 1620, possibly in Leipzig’, the ‘eighth play in the [384 page] collection’ *Englische Comedien und Tragedien*’ – see Jonathan Bate, ‘Introduction . . .’, 43.
4. Michael Friedman with Allan Dessen, *Titus Andronicus, Shakespeare in Performance Series*, 2nd edition (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2013), 5.
5. Manfred Pfister, ‘Titus Redivivus’, in Jerzy Limon and Agnieszka Zukowska (eds.), *An Anatomising Theatre* (Gdansk, Slowo/Obraz Terytoria, 2014), 38–48, 39.
6. Willis, ‘The Gnawing Vulture . . .’, 21.
7. Indeed, the famous Arden edition (edited by Jonathan Bate) has just released a revised text with an extended introduction by the editor that addresses issues with its ‘defensive operation’ approach in 1995 and clear reconsiderations of Peele’s hand in view of ‘now a compelling body of evidence’. See Jonathan Bate (ed.), ‘Introduction . . .’ 121–36, 123.
8. Jonathan Bate, ‘Introduction . . .’, 121.
9. My analysis of this Shakespeare play on European stages builds on ‘The Aesthetic and Political Background of Silviu Purcărete’s Titus Andronicus’, in Jerzy Limon and Agnieszka Zukowska (eds.), *An Anatomising Theatre* (Gdansk, Slowo/Obraz Terytoria, 2014), 135–43; **Titus Andronicus by TeatrPolski, ‘Titus Andronicus by Hiraeth Artistic Productions (review)’**, *Shakespeare Bulletin*, 33:1 (2015), 135–41.
10. This remains the only production of the play in Romania.

11. Lucian Ghița, 'Review of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* (directed by Silviu Purcărete), the National Theater in Craiova, Romania, 14 March 1992', *Shakespeare*, 46:3 (2013), 342–46, 342.
12. 'Interview with the director', *Sunday Age*, 12 September 1993.
13. Ralf Erik Remshardt, 'Review of Theater der Welt '93, Munich 12–27 June 1993', *Theatre Journal*, 46:2 (1994), 262–7, 263.
14. All quotations from Shakespeare's plays are from *The Norton Shakespeare*, 2nd edition (New York, Norton, 2008) and will be referenced parenthetically in the text.
15. Marian Popescu, 'Florile răului sau civilizația barbară' [Fleurs du mal or the barbarian civilisation], *Teatrul azi*, 5–6 (1992), 20.
16. Mariangela Tempera, '*Titus Andronicus*: Staging the Mutilated Roman Body', in Maria Del Sapio Garbero, Nancy Isenberg and Maddalena Pennacchia (eds.), *Questioning Bodies in Shakespeare's Rome* (Goettingen, V&R Unipress, 2010), 109–20, 114.
17. Paul Taylor, 'Not a pretty sight', *Independent*, 24 May 1997.
18. Victor Parhon, '*Titus Andronicus* – Destinul unui spectacol teatral' [*Titus Andronicus* – The Destiny of a Theatre Production], *Teatrul azi*, 5–6 (1992), 54.
19. Key examples of the long-term artistic partnership are: Ilie Gheorghe, Pa Ubu (1990) and Aaron (1992), went on to play Sir Toby Belch (2004), Vincentio, The Duke (2008), Prospero (2010) and lead roles in *Faust*, *The Decameron* and *Metamorphoses*; conversely, Ștefan Iordache, Titus in 1992, had been a major name at The Little Theatre, Bucharest, known to the older generations as Hamlet at the Nottara (1975) and to the younger as Richard in Purcărete's *Richard III* (1983).
20. In Craiova, he directed: *The Gnome in the Summer Garden* (1989) and *Ubu Rex with Scenes from Macbeth* (1990).
21. Parhon, '*Titus Andronicus* – Destinul unui spectacol teatral . . .', 54.
22. Paul Taylor, 'Not a pretty sight'.
23. Personal interview with the director, Stratford-upon-Avon, 2006.
24. Remshardt, 'Review of Theater der Welt '93' . . ., 264.
25. Richard Eyre, *National Service: Diary of a Decade at the National Theatre* (London, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2003), 242.
26. Remshardt, 'Review of Theater der Welt '93' . . ., 264.
27. The birthplace of the 1980s Polish Solidarity movement and key player in the collapse of communism in the Eastern Bloc, the Shipyard had become a derelict site by 2004. Its iconicity (both national and European) made the news, again, recently: it opened as the European Centre of Solidarity Movement in September 2014; in 2016 far-right activists and neo-Nazi demonstrators protested against the EU policy on immigration and 2017 saw mass protests against the authoritarian attempt of the 'populist ruling party to put the supreme court and the rest of the judicial system under its political control'. See Alex Duval Smith, 'Poles Apart: Gdansk Divided as City Grapples with Immigration and Identity', *The Guardian*, 20 April 2016. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2016/apr/20/gdansk-poland-immigrant-identity-refugees> and 'Poland's Former President Lech Wałęsa Joins Protest Against Judicial Overhaul' (22 July 2017). Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jul/22/polish-senate-approves-bill-to-give-government-influence-over-courts> (accessed 29 March 2018). Also see Jerzy Limon, 'Jan Klata's *H. [amlet]*: Questioning the Myth of Solidarity', *Cahiers Élisabéthains*, 90 (2016), 101–14.
28. As Madalena Cieślak comments, 'the clear-cut' German–Polish division was 'based on language, not nationality'; 'the term "German actors" turned out to be problematic and Klata specifically explained that the German-speaking actors were not all German'. This, Cieślak

- warns, is ‘meaningful’ given the production’s close exploration of ‘national stereotypes and historical memory’. Magdalena Cieślak, “... The Ruins of Europe in Back of Me.” Jan Klata’s Shakespeare and the European Condition’, *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia*, 50:4 (2015), 67–77, 70.
29. Gdansk born, Behemoth is a death metal band which was nearly banned in its home country for alleged instigation to Satanism and murder.
 30. Jacek Fabiszak, ‘Nationality and human condition in Jan Klata’s *Titus Andronicus*’, conference paper delivered at International Shakespeare Festival, Craiova, Romania, April 2014. Courtesy of the author.
 31. For decoding this key production detail I am grateful to Jacek Fabiszak.
 32. See Aneta Mancewicz’s review of Jan Klata’s production of *Titus Andronicus*. Available at: <http://bloggingshakespeare.com/reviewing-shakespeare/titus-andronicus-teatr-polski-teatr-wybrzeze-gdansk-shakespeare-festival-poland/> (accessed 29 March 2018).
 33. Mancewicz’s review of Jan Klata’s..., Available at: <http://bloggingshakespeare.com/reviewing-shakespeare/titus-andronicus-teatr-polski-teatr-wybrzeze-gdansk-shakespeare-festival-poland/> (accessed 29 March 2018).
 34. I am grateful to Karolina Nyka for assisting with the translation of the review by Piotr Wyszomirski, ‘Pulp teatr, czyli Zły rządzi. “Titus Andronicus” Jana Klaty na Festiwalu Szekspirowskim’ (5 August 2013). Available at: <http://wielkiemiasto.pl/index.php?id=2&t=1&page=48223> (accessed 29 March 2018).
 35. Wyszomirski, ‘Pulp teatr, czyli Zły rządzi...’.
 36. Magdalena Cieślak, “... The ruins of Europe in back of me.”...’, 76.
 37. Started in 2013, Jan Klata’s extremely successful artistic directorship of the National Stary Theatre in Kraków was cut short in 2017. One of the seven applicants and undoubtedly the most high-profile contestant for the post re-advertised in May by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, Klata was unsuccessful. The position went to Marek Mikos, ‘a theatre critic’ whose ‘most high-profile previous managerial experience is running a local TV station in Kielce’. Available at: <https://www.thestage.co.uk/news/2017/international-news-round-may-25/> (accessed 29 March 2018).
 38. The referendum results for Stratford-upon-Avon were 48.4 percent remain versus 51.6 percent leave. Available at: <https://ig.ft.com/sites/elections/2016/uk/eu-referendum/> (accessed 29 March 2018).
 39. Poulton returned to Stratford following the 2013–14 box-office success of his adaptation of another bestseller, Hilary Mantel’s *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*.
 40. ‘Cicero, the greatest orator of his age, devoted all his energy and cunning to preserve the rule of law, and defend Rome’s Republic against the predatory attacks of political rivals, discontented aristocrats, and would-be military dictators. **Imperium** follows Cicero’s triumphs and disasters, through power struggles, civil wars, and personal highs and lows, told through the eyes of Tiro, his loyal secretary. A backstage view of Rome at its most bloody and brutal’. Available at: <https://www.rsc.org.uk/imperium-i-conspirator/about-the-plays> (accessed 29 March 2018).
 41. *Titus Andronicus*..., Production Programme, 2018.
 42. See Angus Jackson introducing the Rome Season. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=elje4nWfV2o>. Also see ‘For the Good of Rome: Discussing Rhetoric Live 2 May 2017’ Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fUQCqjzO6HA> (accessed 29 March 2018).
 43. See image available at: http://www.getty.edu/art/exhibitions/lion_attacking_horse/ (accessed 29 March 2018).

44. Dominic Cavendish, 'David Troughton Shines in An Otherwise Gimmicky Titus Andronicus – RSC, Stratford-Upon-Avon, review', *The Telegraph*, 5 July 2017. Available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/theatre/what-to-see/david-broughton-titus-andronicus-rsc-stratford-upon-avon-review/> (accessed 29 March 2018).
45. For this piece of information, I am indebted to Boika Sokolova and her students who saw the production from a range of seats in the RST stalls.
46. His bicycle and the turquoise bag from which he produced the takeaway container were a clear reference to the Deliveroo scandal in the United Kingdom. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2017/nov/19/gig-economy-ruling-deliveroo-riders-equipment-basic-employment-rights> (accessed 29 March 2018).

Author biography

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