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“Groaning Shadows that are Gone”: The Ghosts of *Titus Andronicus*

Word Count (including footnotes and references): 9,581

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in English studies on 08 April 2015 available online: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0013838X.2015.1011892>
[10.1080/0013838X.2015.1011892]

Abstract

Titus Andronicus is a play concerned with bodily dismemberments and other “unspeakable” acts, which, under the framework of revenge tragedy, refuse to be forgotten. What is lost from the world of the play always, in effect, seems to return, haunting characters and playgoers alike in the form of apparitions not yet laid to rest, severed body parts that return to the space of the stage, and language itself that, however inarticulate or unspeakable the act, serves to remind us of what was present before: “O, handle not the theme, to talk of hands, / Lest we remember still that we have none” (3.2.29-30). This paper examines the representation of ghosts in Shakespeare’s early Roman play, exploring how perpetrators of violent acts and violated bodies are haunted by spectral returns, and to what end. Although not often commented on by critics, *Titus*’s ghosts allow us to gain new insights on the play’s textual and theatrical bodies, for despite the centrality of Lavinia’s body in the play’s feminist criticism, it is in fact the male body, not Lavinia’s, that is most haunted by “groaning shadows that are gone” (1.1.126).

“Groaning Shadows that are Gone”:

The Ghosts of *Titus Andronicus*

More than any other Shakespeare play, *Titus Andronicus* violates the condition of the human body. Its brutal deeds concentrate on acts of dismemberment: the hewing of Alarbus’s limbs; the rape of Lavinia and the removal of her hands and tongue; the severing of Titus’s hand; the beheadings of Quintus and Martius. These spectacles of violence have provoked ambivalent responses in the play’s criticism. As Katherine Rowe explains, “the severed hands, heads and tongue have always had a profoundly equivocal status in the critical and theatrical reception of the play.”¹ Similarly, “the resemblance between opposing sides in feuds and factional violence” has also provoked ambivalent responses from the play’s audiences.² Since *Titus*’s brutal deeds are committed by both Romans and Goths, the representation of alterity is understood as “simultaneously horrific and fascinating, alien and similar.”³ But what undoubtedly spills out from *Titus*’s violations of textual and theatrical bodies is an overwhelming sense of *loss*: while the performances of live theatre have the power to make spectators “aware of their own physical existence in the presence of other highly marked bodies on the stage”, *Titus*’s acts of dismemberment persistently challenge audiences to question their own “fundamental ideas of bodily presence and totality.”⁴ In the play’s bloody portrayal of “Roman rites” (1.1.143) and “barbarous Goths” (1.1.28), a sense of wholeness or recuperation is achieved “only through acts of foreclosure and self-mutilation”.⁵

Permeating their sense of loss through the framework of revenge drama, the violated bodies of *Titus Andronicus* manifest peculiar, uncanny returns, so that ghosts take on many different forms in Shakespeare’s early Roman tragedy. As Marjorie Garber explains, a ghost is not merely an apparition of the body after death: it is also “an embodiment of the disembodied, a re-membering of the dismembered, an

¹Rowe, “Dismembering and Forgetting”, 279.

²Willis, “The Gnawing Vulture”, 24.

³Smith, “Spectacles of Torment”, 316.

⁴Cynthia Marshall, *The Shattering of the Self*, 108, 113.

⁵Willis, 26. All quotations and line numbers from Shakespeare’s plays are taken from Bate and Rasmussen, eds., *William Shakespeare: Complete Works*.

articulation of the disarticulated and inarticulate.”⁶ Shakespeare’s highly Senecan play is saturated with bodily dismemberments and other “unspeakable” acts, which, through the conventions of revenge tragedy, refuse to be forgotten. What is lost from the world of the play always, in effect, returns, haunting characters and playgoers alike in the form of apparitions not yet laid to rest, severed body parts that return to the space of the stage, and language itself that, however inarticulate or unspeakable the act, serves to remind us of what was present before: “O, handle not the theme, to talk of hands, / Lest we remember still that we have none” (3.2.29-30). The horror located in such uncanny returns is epitomised by the Vice character of Aaron and his “heinous deeds” (5.1.124) which he reports to onlookers in the play’s final act:

Oft have I digged up dead men from their graves
And set them upright at their dear friends’ door,
Even when their sorrows almost was forgot,
And on their skins, as on the bark of trees,
Have with my knife carved in Roman letters,
‘Let not your sorrow die, though I am dead’
(5.1.136-41).

As the play’s most villainous character, Aaron serves here as an ominous reminder of the “sorrows” that could not, or indeed, perhaps should not, be forgotten in Rome. Operating on the threshold between material and spiritual worlds, his tale of “a thousand dreadful things” (5.1.142) presents his character as a type of grotesque intercessor, digging up corpses from their graves and carving Roman letters into their flesh so that the dead may “speak” back to the living. At the end of the play, Lucius’s decree reveals that this outsider of Rome will be set “breast-deep in earth”, left to “stand and rave and cry” (5.3.179-80) until he is starved to death. With his head remaining visible above the ground and his body buried beneath it, Aaron himself will become one who literally speaks back from the grave, a talking “corpse” who refuses to let “wrath be mute and fury dumb” and would perform “Ten thousand worse” evils if ever he had the “will” to do so (5.3.184-8). Even when the play’s grisly acts of violence have ceased, the “living burial of Aaron and the refusal of proper burial rites

⁶Garber, *Shakespeare’s Ghost Writers*, 15.

for Tamora” suggest there will be no peace for the dead, or indeed the living.⁷ Aaron’s “un-dead” head will continue to “speak” its ghostly message of “venomous malice” (5.3.13): *let not your sorrow die, though I am dead*.

Unappeased spirits, improper burials and vexed funeral rites are common features of early modern revenge tragedy, their controversial aspects, according to Thomas Rist, often “challenging Reformed rationalizations of ghosts as demons” and “reflecting the anxiety of Catholics and religious waverers that without due memorial the dead in Purgatory would languish in torment.”⁸ Exploring the genre’s “aesthetics of mourning” through the context of Elizabethan anti-memorialism, Rist proposes that a recurring feature of revenge tragedy is “the emphatic *value* it attaches to extensive funerary performance”, with corpses “repeatedly viewed as dishonoured and thus devalued if *deprived* of their funeral’s ritual”.⁹ Thus revenge tragedy, “though eventually coming to an extent to subvert them”, is “a genre rooted in the culture of traditional memorials.”¹⁰ Extending Rist’s reading of the play, this paper examines the *outcomes* of subverted grave sites in *Titus Andronicus* through a consideration of the play’s ghosts, exploring how perpetrators of violent acts and violated bodies are in fact haunted by spectral returns, and to what end. The presence of ghosts in Shakespeare’s earliest revenge tragedy is, ironically, marked by absence: no actual voice or visible body represents them as *dramatis personae* on the Elizabethan stage. However, this paper endeavours to offer them a more potent existence. While there are no visible spirits of deceased men here, *Titus*’s ghosts, I shall argue, persistently hover at the margins of the play’s presentations of violence, their troubling absent presence reflecting contemporary theological anxieties and the subtleties required to perform them on the Elizabethan stage. Reading *Titus*’s ghosts also opens up new perspectives on the play’s textual and theatrical bodies, for despite the centrality of Lavinia’s violated body in the play’s feminist criticism, it is in fact the male body, not Lavinia’s, that is most haunted by “groaning shadows that are gone” (1.1.126).

⁷Bate, ed., *Titus Andronicus*, 15.

⁸Rist, *Revenge Tragedy*, 14. Michael Neill also observes how “scanted or interrupted funerals, unburied corpses and disinterred skeletons, violated sepulchres and neglected tombs” feature heavily in early modern revenge tragedies. Neill, *Issues of Death*, 46.

⁹Rist, 15-17.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 17.

I. Prodigies on Earth

Talk of ghosts in Shakespeare's revenge plays typically evokes the image of Hamlet's father or Banquo's ghost in *Macbeth*.¹¹ Such apparitions remain potent both for audiences and for the play's named protagonists as they have an immediate physical presence: in both *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, the ghost makes a stage appearance. During the banquet scene in *Macbeth*, Banquo's ghost enters and sits in Macbeth's place at the dinner table. In *Hamlet*, the ghost of Hamlet's father occupies a stronger physical manifestation, appearing on the stage in four scenes and delivering an extensive amount of dialogue in his third appearance. Given that such compelling spectral figures appear in later works from the canon, it is hardly surprising that *Titus Andronicus* rarely features in criticism concerning Shakespeare's ghosts. In his seminal work, *Hamlet in Purgatory*, Stephen Greenblatt explores "the middle space of the realm of the dead" through the "weird, compelling ghost in *Hamlet*", addressing ghosts and other ghostly forms in *The Comedy of Errors*, *Twelfth Night*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Richard III*, *Julius Caesar*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Cymbeline* and *The Winter's Tale* but refraining from a reading of *Titus Andronicus*.¹² Similarly, Paul D. Streufert explores Banquo's apparition through "the staging of alterity" and identifies *Hamlet*, *Richard III*, *Julius Caesar* and *Cymbeline* as "Shakespeare's other ghost plays".¹³ However, while such readings tend to focus on "the resurrected, visible, and incorporeal spirits of deceased men", spectres, of course, can be examined in broader contexts through the conventions of revenge tragedy.¹⁴ And ghosts, although they may not appear as *dramatis personae*, have an immediate and controversial presence in *Titus Andronicus*.

Revenge tragedy, as a genre concerned with thresholds, provides the ideal dramatic locale for the liminal figure of the ghost. As Bate and Rasmussen surmise, the revenger "stands on a whole series of borderlines" including those "between civilization and barbarity, between an individual's accountability to his or her own conscience and the community's need for the rule of law" and "the conflicting

¹¹For comprehensive work on the ghost of Hamlet's father, see Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory*; for substantive readings of ghosts in both *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, see Garber; for other significant readings of Banquo's ghost in *Macbeth*, see Stott, "The Need for Banquo's Ghost" and Streufert, "Spectral Others".

¹²Greenblatt, 3-4.

¹³Streufert, 78, 87.

¹⁴Ibid., 78.

demands of justice and mercy.”¹⁵ Another often crucial borderline in revenge drama exists between the living and the dead, and it is this threshold which provokes most anxiety for characters and audiences in *Titus*’s opening scene. The play commences with the announcement of a deceased emperor whose passing has left the future government of Rome uncertain. As Saturninus and Bassianus enter the stage, Saturninus entreats his followers to “Defend the justice of [his] cause with arms” (1.1.2), while his brother, Bassianus, declares himself as the more suited claimant to “approach / Th’imperial seat” (1.1.13-14). However, princely competition for “rule and empery” (1.1.19) is swiftly interrupted. Marcus announces that Titus, whom the people have “by common voice” (1.1.21) chosen for the empery has returned to Rome after “weary wars against the barbarous Goths” (1.1.28). Titus’s return is marked by a heavy burden, for he brings with him “his valiant sons / In coffins from the field” (1.1.33-5) and proceeds with their bodies, not yet laid to rest, toward the tomb of the Andronici. In the dramatic processional entry accompanied by the sounds of drums and trumpets, playgoers witness the approach of “captive Goths, victorious Romans, and the bearers of an unspecified number of coffins”, their arrival stalling the play’s opening political action and confirming that the place of the dead will impact heavily on Rome’s living, as the followers of Saturninus and Bassianus exit the stage and literally “make way” (1.1.64) for the returning corpses.¹⁶ In the procession, theatrical bodies represent war and peace, freedom and captivity, celebration and funeral, presence and absence, life and death: those who have survived and “brought to yoke, the enemies of Rome” (1.1.69) can only be seen alongside those who have perished, as Titus declares “Behold the poor remains, alive and dead!” (1.1.81). Titus, celebrated as “Rome’s best champion” (1.1.65), is also a crucial figure of loss: while he has survived the wars and “returned / Bleeding to Rome” (1.1.33-4), he also “resolute[s] his country with his tears” (1.1.75) for no less than twenty-one Andronici sons have perished on the battlefield. Titus himself, chosen “by common voice” for the empery, literally becomes a representative of the dead amongst Rome’s community of the living.

For critics who discuss *Titus*’s ghosts, the unappeased spirits of Titus’s sons typically provide the play’s first reference, but Saturninus’s opening speech implicitly

¹⁵Bate and Rasmussen, eds., 1617.

¹⁶Brown, *Shakespeare: The Tragedies*, 11.

introduces the theme for the play's audiences.¹⁷ Saturninus is "the first-born son that was the last / That wore the imperial diadem of Rome" (1.1.5-6). Reflecting the typical transfer of power that occurs in royal succession, he declares to his followers, "let my father's honours live in me" (1.1.7), exemplifying how "the natural body of the ruler dies, but the mystical body lives in the successor."¹⁸ As Rome is without a chosen successor at this point, the mystical body, like the bodies of Titus's sons, waits in a state of limbo. Caught between the arrival of new claimants for the empery and the spiritual departure of the deceased, *Titus*'s opening scene does much to emphasise the ineffectuality of the present, as the living and the dead, bound together, occupy the space of the stage. Rome stands in the shadow of five violent and bloody wars that have spanned the length ten years: the city itself appears haunted, victorious in its "mourning weeds" (1.1.70) and rewarding heroes both "with love" and "with burial" (1.1.82-4). Marcus's plea for Titus to "help to set a head on headless Rome" (1.1.186) has been described as a reflection of the political fracturing of Roman society and the physical acts of dismemberment that will soon occur, as metaphors of dismemberment "punningly slip into literal mutilation".¹⁹ But Marcus's plea also defines the city through spectral markers of loss: Titus, as head of the Andronici family, has already suffered the ultimate loss by outliving "one and twenty valiant sons" (1.1.195); the head that headless Rome seeks is also an allusion to a spectre of the past as much as an emperor of the future, as Titus is named in election alongside "the late-deceased emperor's sons" (1.1.184). At the beginning of the play, then, Rome itself is neither living nor dead in Marcus's description, held in a state of limbo between its need for a new ruler and he "that held it last" (1.1.200).

II. Roman Rites

Just as Hamlet is summoned to action by the ghost of his father, Titus is summoned to act by familial ghosts. As death and remorse cloud the triumphant heralding of his return, Titus expresses anguish over the dead bodies of his sons who, not yet laid to rest, "hover on the dreadful shore of Styx" (1.1.88). Deborah Willis describes this moment as first making *Titus* something of a "coming home" story,

¹⁷See Willis, 35-6.

¹⁸Ray, "Rape, I fear, was root of thy annoy", 27.

¹⁹Aebischer, "Shakespeare, Sex, and Violence", 122.

where Titus and his son Lucius “return as combat survivors, carrying coffins and haunted by ghosts.”²⁰ But for the classical dead, “a public, ritual acknowledgement” of their passing was required and, if this was not done properly, “the ghost might return to remind his friends or kin of their negligence.”²¹ In order for the ghosts of Titus’s sons to be appeased, Lucius declares that Alarbus, “proudest prisoner of the Goths” (1.1.96) must be sacrificed “*Ad manus fratrum*” (1.1.98) as a religious offering to the spirits of Lucius’s dead brothers. This, according to Jennifer Waldron, quickly establishes that the play “takes place in an alternate religious universe from that of Protestantism”: as Reformers rejected the notion of Purgatory, the “sacrifices of Masses performed on behalf of the dead drew particular Protestant ire.”²² However, critical opinion on the relationship between the play’s depiction of classical Rome and the religious context of Elizabethan England remains divided. Jonathan Bate, for example, agrees that certain actions and phrases in the play denote “a Reformation context”, proposing that the Goths who accompany Lucius at the end of the play are there “to secure the Protestant succession.”²³ Alternatively, Rist’s reading of the play firmly attests that “Titus’s revenge is consonant with traditional and Catholic funeral, but *not* with the reduced remembrances persistently proposed by Reformers.”²⁴ The purpose of this argument, however, is not to confirm that *Titus* either advocates or challenges Reformed beliefs, or indeed that the Goths represent post-Reformation Protestants while the Romans embody pre-Reformation Catholic beliefs. Rather, as Bate points out, *Titus* is concerned with “dissolving the distinction between insiders and outsiders, civilized and barbaric.”²⁵ As Shakespeare’s revenge plays often “put the audience *in the middle*, producing divided loyalties and shifting, ambivalent identifications”, these blurred distinctions, apparent from the outset, are to my mind deliberately ubiquitous.²⁶ As recent historiographical studies have shown, relations between the Church of England and the Church of Rome exposed many

²⁰Willis, 35. Willis is one of the few critics to acknowledge the agency of the play’s ghosts, discussing the events of the play through the framework of trauma theory and proposing that the ghosts of Titus’s sons are “in an important sense the play’s first revengers.”

²¹Finucane, *Ghosts: Appearances of the Dead*, 10.

²²Waldron, *Reformations of the Body*, 156.

²³Bate, ed., 20-1.

²⁴Rist, 53.

²⁵Bate, ed., 7. Rist, although conceding that in “presenting ‘Roman’ and ‘Goth’ by the end of the play, there is no clear distinction”, presents an opposing argument here, surmising that “Goths and Romans in *Titus Andronicus* do – as others have also argued – suggest English Protestants and Catholics, but the play is not therefore Reformed.” 46.

²⁶Willis, 24 (my italics).

contradictions. Protestant and Catholic responses to the dead “could show remarkable points of similarity, in spite of radically opposing theories of salvation, death rituals and views of the afterlife.”²⁷ Similarly, anti-catholicism, although a central feature of English Protestantism, was necessarily “a multiform, adaptable theme, adapted to polemical requirements directly drawn from the complex dynamics within the Church of England.”²⁸ What therefore becomes apparent in the distorted representations of barbarous Goths and civilized Romans in *Titus*’s opening scene is how opposing cultures can seep into one another, implicitly suggesting that contemporary anxieties concerning ghosts and commemorative burials for the dead did not exist solely within the confines of Catholicism. In *Titus*, it is the Romans who pay tribute to the dead, but it is Tamora, Queen of the Goths, who sheds “a mother’s tears in passion for her son” (1.1.106) at the tomb and voices Roman values of piety and mercy while the Andronici mother is “conspicuously absent from the funeral rites”.²⁹ As Tamora weeps and pleads for Alarbus, the audience’s perception of Goths as barbarians is relocated in a public ritual killing performed by Roman soldiers, as Alarbus’s body is dismembered, his limbs hewed and “clean consumed” (1.1.129) to appease the “groaning shadows” (1.1.126).

Given that, under Elizabeth’s rule, “a number of authorities were keen to confirm Archbishop Sandys’s emphatic assurance that ‘the gospel hath chased away walking spirits’”, it is perhaps unsurprising that there are no walking spirits of the deceased appearing on stage in *Titus*.³⁰ However, unresolved conflicts concerning the appropriate place for the dead in the culture of Elizabethan England are signalled clearly through the play’s undecided treatment of ghosts. The spirits of *Titus*’s sons, although absent from view and evidently lacking the potency of those found in *Hamlet* or *Macbeth*, are far from extraneous: rather, they have a major part to play in the first staged collision between Goths and Romans. Their unconfirmed yet troublesome presence is indicative of contemporary polemical religious discourses: as Peter Marshall explains, in contexts that extended beyond the campaign against Catholicism, “Protestant writers were quite ready to affirm that popular belief in ghosts was far from moribund.”³¹ Thus, fittingly for the context of Elizabethan

²⁷Gordon and Marshall, eds., 12.

²⁸Tutino, *Law and Conscience*, 8, 205.

²⁹Kahn, *Roman Shakespeare*, 55.

³⁰Peter Marshall, *Beliefs and the Dead*, 245.

³¹*Ibid.*, 246.

England, the ghosts of Titus's sons are both present and absent, vengeful and non-vengeful, instigators and non-instigators of the play's escalating cycle of revenge. Their shadows must be appeased, but it is the Andronici who must be held accountable for the death of Alarbus, a sacrifice which is "recalled frequently by the imagery in later scenes of the play" and ultimately the catalyst for all future crimes of vengeance.³² Roman rites therefore mark both kindness and cruelty, repose and torture, peace and violence, bodily preservation and defilement: the "silence and eternal sleep" of Titus's sons (1.1.155) and the barbarous death of Alarbus whose "entrails feed the sacrificing fire" (1.1.144-5). The act of appeasing the dead becomes necessarily sacrilegious in the play's first revenge "doubling", for while the bodies of Titus's sons will be laid to rest in "peace and honour" (1.1.150), nothing will remain of Alarbus's body that can be buried. Conflicting relations with the dead, like all other controversial matters explored within this play, are conveyed through extreme forms of representation: the corpse, revered and buried, is at the same time "clean consumed". As Tamora's paradox neatly surmises, it is "cruel, irreligious piety" (1.1.130).

Titus's "groaning shadows", although absent from view, perform a similar dramatic function to those appearing in Shakespeare's later revenge plays by the threat they pose to the integrity of the human body. As Steven Simkin asserts, "Nowhere is the fragility of the body more evident than in revenge tragedy", and in *Titus*, ghosts specifically underscore the fragility of the male body's totality, as it is Titus and Lucius whose thoughts are most affected by ghosts while Alarbus's body will become the relinquished site of the ghosts' appeasement.³³ In Shakespeare's other revenge plays, components of male totality – mind, soul and body – are tested by the "questionable shape" of the ghost (*Hamlet*, 1.4.24). While Lady Macbeth's words imply that she looks only "on a stool" (*Macbeth*, 3.4.78), for Macbeth, Banquo's ghost is horribly real, and he weighs the existence of its image against his own physicality: "If I stand here, I saw him" (3.4.85). In *Hamlet*, the form and existence of the apparition is again measured through the material existence of the body, as Horatio declares: "I knew your father: / These hands are not more like" (1.2.214-15). A more terrifying challenge of bodily potency and subjectivity occurs in *Julius Caesar* when the "monstrous apparition" of Caesar's ghost responds to Brutus's

³²Willis, 32.

³³Simkin, ed., 9.

questioning of its shape with: “Thy evil spirit, Brutus” (4.2.367-72). As Stephen Greenblatt explains, “the figure identifies himself not as Caesar’s ghost but rather in terms that seem to claim that he is *part of Brutus*”.³⁴ Ghosts of revenge tragedies therefore provide “a space for the playwright to investigate the construction of identity”, and what remains apparent for both audiences and readers here is that the identity being *deconstructed* is inherently masculine.³⁵ Lady Macbeth warns her husband that what he sees is in fact “the very painting of [his] fear” (3.4.71); in a remarkably similar fashion, Gertrude tells Hamlet in the closet scene that the sight he looks upon is “the very coinage of [his] brain” (*Hamlet*, 3.4.142). Under such terms, the paradoxical figure of the ghost also becomes an important site of reflection, representing the tragic flaw that threatens to “undo” each protagonist: Macbeth’s fear, and Hamlet’s madness. While Banquo’s ghost makes Macbeth a stranger to his own “disposition” (3.4.130) and disavows his manhood – “being gone, / I am a man again” (3.4.123-4) – the ghost of Hamlet’s father threatens to draw his son’s “noble mind” into “madness” (*Hamlet*, 1.4.58; 3.1.148).

In *Titus*, the figure of the ghost again reflects the tragic flaw that threatens to undo the play’s protagonist, for once Titus declares that Alarbus must be killed, “barbarism has entered the city” of Rome.³⁶ It is this “sacrifice” of Alarbus (1.1.124) which will prompt Tamara’s “sharp revenge” (1.1.137) and set the cycle of revenge in motion. As Bate and Rasmussen observe, “a harsh but elegant symmetry” appears in the bloody crimes that follow: “Alarbus’ limbs are lopped, and so then are Lavinia’s: since Tamora, Queen of the Goths, loses her son, so Titus, General of the Romans, must lose his daughter.”³⁷ But a fundamental difference also remains between these two chief revengers. While Tamora’s actions are dictated by the “irreligious piety” of her son’s murder, Titus’s actions are dictated by ghosts: “so the shadows be not unappeased” (1.1.100) and men are not disturbed by “prodigies on earth” (1.1.101). Interestingly, the sacrifice of Alarbus finds its parallel in Shakespeare’s later work, *Cymbeline*, where, in the play’s final scene, the kinsmen of those slain request that “their good souls may be appeased” with the slaughter of those captured (5.4.83-4). In *Cymbeline*, the sacrifice never takes place – the British king forgives all prisoners – but in *Titus*, it is the appeasement of ghosts, not forgiveness, which must prevail for

³⁴Greenblatt, 182 (my italics).

³⁵Streifert, 79.

³⁶Bate, ed., 6.

³⁷Bate and Rasmussen, eds., 1617.

the Roman general.³⁸ The unconventional reconciliation at the end of this Jacobean tragedy was perhaps deemed necessary in the aftermath of King James's union of the Scottish and English thrones and the highly controversial oath of allegiance. But if this is so, then a subversive reading of *Cymbeline*'s Elizabethan counterpart seems equally plausible, given that uncertainties concerning a successor to the Protestant throne "had become the primary issue in English politics".³⁹ A further probing of the play's material is useful here, for if the appeasement of "groaning shadows" sets the scene for controversy in the play's opening act, other ghosts in *Titus Andronicus* refuse to lie dormant.

III. A Woman's Face

While the ghosts of Titus's sons affect the actions of the remaining Andronici and necessitate the desecration of Alarbus's body, these violent *effects*, it seems, must also be displaced onto the female body in the play's ensuing cycle of revenge. Titus, "unkind and careless of [his] own" (1.1.86) returns from weary wars and sacrifices "the proudest prisoner of the Goths" (1.1.96) so that his dead sons may rest in peace; but it is Lavinia's body that inevitably becomes doomed to signify what the loss of Tamora's son pertains to, as Chiron and Demetrius rape her, cut off her hands and remove her tongue to leave her as fragmented as Rome itself, the emblem of her father's grief. The play's action has often been understood as "structured around the spectacular display of the female body".⁴⁰ As Douglas Green explains, it is "largely through and on the female characters that Titus is constructed and his tragedy inscribed."⁴¹ Lavinia's mutilated body "articulates Titus's own suffering and victimization" as his speech "re-presents" her as both "the occasion and the expression of his madness".⁴² While Lavinia's body must be used to emblematised Titus's suffering, Tamora's body, as both sexual and maternal threat, is positioned as the instigator of that suffering, as she instructs her sons to use Lavinia as they please and stages the fall of the Andronici around the site of the "detested, dark, blood-

³⁸For further comparisons, see Centor, "*Cymbeline: Beyond Rome*", 169-84.

³⁹Streufert, 80.

⁴⁰Willis, 22. Noting how feminist criticism has made a substantial contribution to the body of work on *Titus* over recent decades, Willis here suggests that violence in the play tends to be explored through the woman's violated body, while "violence against the male body is ignored."

⁴¹Green, "Interpreting 'Her Martyr'd Signs'", 319.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 322.

drinking pit” (2.3.224) of the woods. In the play’s opening act, the third level of the stage “figures the underworld” as Titus’s “first task is to give a proper burial to his sons”.⁴³ Here, the theatrical space beneath the stage represents a site of repose for Rome’s citizens. It is a “sacred receptacle”, a “Sweet cell of virtue and nobility” (1.1.92-3) that Titus’s memorial speech makes absolute as the coffins are laid in the tomb:

In peace and honour rest you here, my sons:
Rome’s readiest champions, repose you here in rest,
Secure from worldly chances and mishaps.
Here lurks no treason, here no envy swells,
Here grow no damnèd grudges, here are no storms,
No noise, but silence and eternal sleep:
In peace and honour rest you here, my sons
(1.1.150-6).

In the play’s second act, a further doubling sees the underworld come into sharper focus, as the resting site of Titus’s sons is now replaced by the “unhallowed and blood-stainèd hole” (2.3.210) that will claim the bodies of the living, and of the dead. Here, violated bodies and vexed burial sites configure on a more catastrophic scale to invade the community of the living: it is no surprise that the “subtle hole” (2.3.198) of the “abhorred pit” (2.3.98), whose “mouth is covered with rude-growing briars” (2.3.199) carries such darkly female associations, for a significant part of Tamora’s strategy for revenge will be to disrupt the “silence and eternal sleep” of Rome’s dead that was so instrumental in claiming her son’s life.⁴⁴ But as boundaries between the deceased and the living become more vexed in the ensuing spectacles of violence, so too do the play’s representations of ghosts.

Lavinia’s violated body has been at the centre of feminist criticism on *Titus* in recent decades, and for many, the relationship between Lavinia’s body and Rome’s

⁴³Bate, ed., 5.

⁴⁴Wynne-Davies describes the cave as “the vagina, the all-consuming sexual mouth of the feminine earth, which remains outside the patriarchal order of Rome”; linking “female sexuality to death and damnation” and consuming only male bodies, its “power is to castrate”. Wynne-Davies, “The Swallowing Womb”, 135-6.

body politic is essential for an understanding of the play.⁴⁵ As Pascale Aebischer explains, the play “only begins to make sense if the reader/spectator learns to interpret a body like Lavinia’s both as that of an individual sufferer, the mutilated rape victim, *and* as a representative of ‘headless Rome’”.⁴⁶ The metaphor of “headless Rome” therefore provides a nexus between space and the body that also centres on the feminine for its dual representation: not only is the “glorious body” of Rome feminised here, but the descriptions of Lavinia throughout the play also repeatedly associate the territory of her body with Rome and its defilement. When Titus gives Rome to Saturninus, announcing that he should be crowned emperor, he also gives him Lavinia: as “the crown of the empire”, possession of her signifies power.⁴⁷ For Titus, Lavinia’s sexual violation, as the most unseen of her injuries, gives his soul “the greatest spurn” (3.1.101): her “spotless chastity” is “more dear / Than hands or tongue” (5.2.175-6) because it signifies the sanctity of Roman values.⁴⁸ In choosing to “identify Lavinia’s violation with the violation of Rome and of all civilized value”, Shakespeare overcomes the “unavoidable limits in *Titus Andronicus* to dramatic spectacle” and simultaneously draws a picture of Rome as unbound, failing, defiled which is heavily informed by gender ideology.⁴⁹ However, to readily perceive Lavinia’s violated body as a representative of Rome’s violation or Titus’s own suffering risks aligning our perspective with the protagonist’s and over-simplifying the additional meanings that we may interpret from her “martyr’d signs” (3.2.36). If, as D. J. Palmer suggests, the raped and mutilated daughter of Rome “is, and is not, Lavinia”, then the visual spectacle of her body gives rise to a terrifying absent presence which allows her to return and “haunt” the father who failed her.⁵⁰

Lavinia herself becomes a kind of ghost after her mutilation and rape: “an unfamiliar, unknown presence to the men around her”.⁵¹ Before Chiron and Demetrius drag her body from the stage, Lavinia begs for her own burial, to be granted a “present death” (2.3.173) and to be tumbled into “some loathsome pit /

⁴⁵For examples, see Ray, 22-4 and Wynne-Davies, 141.

⁴⁶Aebischer, “Shakespeare, Sex, and Violence”, 124.

⁴⁷Harris, “Sexuality as a Signifier”, 391.

⁴⁸Tricoli writes: “For all the severed heads, for all the poignance of Lavinia’s mutilated beauty, the one horror the dramatist could not depict upon the stage was the fact of Lavinia’s violated chastity”. 109. Eaton also suggests that Lavinia’s “missing hands and tongue” do, in their absence, “signify the loss of her chastity”. Eaton, “A Woman of Letters”, 66.

⁴⁹Tricoli, 109.

⁵⁰Palmer, 321.

⁵¹Harris, 393.

Where never man's eye may behold [her] body" (2.3.176-7); but this request for burial is refused, and instead Lavinia is defiled by her attackers and left to her "silent walks" (2.4.8). On discovering her "ravished", Marcus's speech dwells on Lavinia's absent body parts: those "pretty fingers" that trembled "like aspen-leaves upon a lute" (2.4.42-5) and the "heavenly harmony" of her "sweet tongue" (2.4.48-50). Through these verbal manifestations of absent body parts, Lavinia is transformed into a ghostly presence, silent and "dead" in the eyes of her uncle and yet occupying a physical form on the stage.⁵² When Marcus presents her to Titus, saying, "This was thy daughter" (3.1.62), he speaks of her as one who no longer lives. For Marcus, Lavinia is "already transformed and depersonalised ... the victim of a strange and cruel metamorphosis"; she is "both familiar and strange, fair and hideous, living body and object".⁵³

However, as a kind of ghost, Lavinia is also powerful. Like Juliet on the bier, her liminal body exists on a threshold between life and death, and in this unclassified and paradoxical form, she makes her own ghostly return. As a once valuable commodity, Lavinia is "transferred by Titus to Saturninus, subsequently snatched by Bassianus, Demetrius, and Chiron in succession, and then left to wander in the woods until picked up by Marcus and returned to her father."⁵⁴ Defiled and devalued, this "object" (3.1.64) is no longer Lavinia in the eyes of the remaining Andronici, but the appearance of her violated body functions as any other ghostly return that has the power to invoke sorrow, madness, and revenge. When Marcus enters with Lavinia and warns Titus that he brings "consuming sorrow" (3.1.60), Titus replies: "Will it consume me? Let me see it then" (3.1.61); unlike the ghosts of Titus's sons, Lavinia *is* a visible body both for her father and the play's audiences. Her silent body torments Rome's warrior for his "unkind" and "careless" deeds, and if Titus does not hear her, he certainly sees her: "Why, Marcus, so she is" (3.1.63). In delivering her terrible message of abuse and naming her attackers, Lavinia fulfils another typical function of the ghost which is, by its own form and design, particularly haunting. Lavinia's telling of rape in the "sandy plot" (4.1.71) is ghost-like: writing words that will certainly be

⁵²Rist describes Titus's daughter as "deathly Lavinia", noting textual allusions to her martyrdom and her ability to appear simultaneously in life and death. Rist, 56-8. In her PhD dissertation on the figure of the ghost in early modern revenge tragedy, Sarah Monette also argues that "ghost" and "body" become "equally unstable categories" in this play, "collapsing into each other as they collide in the representation of Lavinia." Monette, "'It Harrows Me With Fear and Wonder': Horror and Haunting in Early Modern Revenge Tragedy." PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004, chap. 3, <http://www.sarahmonette.com/dis-ch3.html>.

⁵³Palmer, 321.

⁵⁴Smith, 327.

remembered by readers but have no permanency in the dust, she uses her haunted signs to enable her loved ones to “know the traitors and the truth” (4.1.78). Lavinia also uses Ovid’s “tragic tale of Philomel” (4.1.49) to reveal Chiron and Demetrius’s crime, but her rape is in fact, as Shawn Huffman observes, “an assemblage of the many rapes that occur in *The Metamorphosis*”; haunted by the ghosts of these literary characters, Lavinia’s telling of rape causes other stories of female suffering to collide and conflate, thus enacting a complex process of remembering that extends beyond Lavinia’s readers on stage to the audiences of Shakespeare’s play.⁵⁵

For Titus, Lavinia remains a “lively body” (3.1.105), but what remains to be seen in the presence of that body – her absent hands, tongue and violated chastity – will haunt him, and like some consuming tide with an “envious surge”, “swallow him” (3.1.96-7). After his discovery of her violation, he expresses – again, through an image of bodily dismemberment – his own sense of loss: “Give me a sword, I’ll chop off my hands too, / For they have fought for Rome, and all in vain” (3.1.72-3). In instructing Aaron to remove his hand, Titus temporarily “exempts himself from Lavinia’s hidden injuries, the tongue severing and the rape.”⁵⁶ But in the play’s final act, he must lay his daughter’s ghostly figure to rest in an attempt to end his own torment: “Die, die, Lavinia, and thy shame with thee, / And with thy shame thy father’s sorrow die” (5.3.46-7). It is a killing that often seems, to our own modern sensibilities, brutal and unjust, but in the context of the play’s unorthodox treatment of ghosts, the act is performed as an intercessory rite. When Tamora asks why Titus has “slain [his] only daughter” (5.3.55), Titus responds: “Not I, ’twas Chiron and Demetrius” (5.3.56-8). As Naomi Conn Liebler explains, Titus here “completes Lavinia’s definition as ‘dead’”.⁵⁷ As a ghost, Lavinia can be laid to rest after the destruction of her murderers: the fact that she must also die “to re-establish Titus’

⁵⁵Huffman, “Amputation, Phantom Limbs, and Spectral Agency”, 71.

⁵⁶Ray, 37.

⁵⁷Liebler, “Getting It All Right”, 272. Lavinia’s return to her father as a kind of ghost also recalls Cordelia’s return to her narcissistic father in Shakespeare’s later tragedy, *King Lear*. Lost in madness after his ill treatment of her, Lear looks upon his only loving daughter and says: “You are a spirit, I know: where did you die?” (4.6.50). Like Lavinia’s own suffering which results from her father’s careless treatment of her, Cordelia has, as Greenblatt explains “in some sense been destroyed and made into a ghost by Lear himself.” However, Lavinia’s mutilated body, as an image of life-in-death, is more powerful than Cordelia’s: as the most potent ghost of all in this revenge tragedy, she instigates her own revenge. Greenblatt, 186.

identity” only confirms her ghostly function as a site of reflection for the play’s protagonist.⁵⁸

Despite the fact that *Titus*’s female characters belong to “an almost exclusively male world” where their roles are “circumscribed by patriarchal norms”, Lavinia and Tamora perform crucial opposing functions that contribute to the play’s interrogation of ambivalent relations between the living and the dead.⁵⁹ Lavinia’s ghostly return may give Titus’s soul “the greatest spurn”, but the other woman of the play, Tamora, assumes the form of another spectral figure when she personifies Revenge in an attempt to deceive Titus. When Saturninus mocks Tamora’s request to “basely put it up without revenge” (1.1.436), she assures him that revenge will be her motive, that she will “find a day to massacre them all” (1.1.453). But in taking up the role of Revenge as part of her elaborate scheme to massacre the Andronici, Tamora’s performance alludes to other Reformed theological beliefs of the period: that stories concerning walking ghosts were either “tricks of imposters to deceive the simple, or deceits of devils to delude the learned”.⁶⁰ Arriving at Titus’s house in a “strange and sad habiliment” (5.2.1), Tamora tells Titus that she is “Revenge, sent from below” to “join with him / And work confusion on his enemies” (5.2.3-8); but the “apparition” she performs is nothing more than an elaborate stage trick. Her counterfeit performance is also recognised by Titus, who does not presently reveal his knowledge the charade but instead plays along with Tamora’s disguise in order to fulfil his own plan of revenge. Thus, as Bate suggests, retribution becomes “a matter of human, not divine will.”⁶¹ But in exposing Tamora as role-player, *Titus* also challenges audiences to question their responses to the play’s shifting representations of ghosts. Somewhat fittingly for the protagonist who teeters on the brink of madness, Tamora’s performance as Revenge functions both as the trick of an imposter “to deceive the simple” and as the deceit of a devil “to delude the learned”: she is “Revenge, sent from th’infernal kingdom” (5.2.30) and “mighty Tamora” whom Titus recognises “well enough” as soon as she begins to speak (5.2.21-6). In staging acts of trickery through metatheatrical devices, Shakespeare’s play deliberately exposes the controversy surrounding ghosts and ghostly appearances and dissects their equivocal

⁵⁸James, *Shakespeare’s Troy*, 79.

⁵⁹Willis, 22.

⁶⁰Thomas Beard, *Retractive From the Romish Religion* (London, 1616), 437; cited in Peter Marshall, 241.

⁶¹Bate, ed., 22.

status through the fictional world of Elizabethan theatre. Ironically, here, Titus maintains his own comical pretence as a willing spectator of Tamora's disguise; so too, then, does Shakespeare, in moving the scene from tragedy to comedy and then back again to the imminent threat of violence, seem to delight in these various contradictions, reluctantly dispensing with popular folklore but never entirely "giving up the ghost". In the play's endless confluences of Roman and Goth, civilization and barbarism, tragedy and comedy, ghosts and ghostly impersonators appear equally at home.

IV. A Tyrannising Limb

While spectral figures appear in various guises throughout Shakespeare's revenge tragedy, dismembered *body parts* also return to the space of the stage to enact their own haunting of the play's protagonist. The mutilated bodies of Titus and Lavinia reveal "terrifying indistinctions that pollute by their very failure to separate the living from the dead"; however, readers and spectators of Shakespeare's play should not equate the dismemberment of Titus's hand with the loss of Lavinia's.⁶² Much of the play's criticism has "assimilated Lavinia's plight to Titus's tragedy", but the meanings that unfold in the return of Titus's severed hand provide another reason for examining the play's ghosts in broader contexts.⁶³ Lavinia's dismemberment "is eventually understood, by means of its Ovidian parallel, as a secondary result of the rape"; Titus's dismemberment, however, serves to represent his own ineffectuality in Rome.⁶⁴ His "noble hand" which has "thrown down so many enemies" (3.1.162-3) is ransomed for the safe return of Titus's two sons, Quintus and Martius; but in the very act of removing his hand in an attempt to save the lives of his sons, Titus ironically severs himself from his role as "Rome's best champion" (1.1.65) and becomes utterly powerless in preventing a double murder. If Titus's "warlike hand" (3.1.256) is indeed "the sign of his role as Rome's defender", then there is much to be understood in its ghastly return.⁶⁵

⁶²Liebler, 276.

⁶³Cynthia Marshall, 128.

⁶⁴Ibid., 131.

⁶⁵Neill, "Amphitheatres in the Body", 24.

What is lost from the body often has the power to return both as physical properties of performance and through the literalness of the play's language, as severed body parts obtain a kind of "afterlife" of their own through the theatrical material of stage props and the exaggerated "talk of hands" (3.2.29). The relationship between the play's language and its acts of violence has been well documented, with Albert Tricomi's seminal essay defining the play's "peculiar literary importance" as its "spectacularly self-conscious images" and "the prophetic literalness of its metaphors".⁶⁶ Incidentally, it is the gulf between the descriptions of language and the reality of events – in other words, the ways in which the play "turns its back on metaphor" or reality "begins to take vengeance on metaphor"⁶⁷ – that has become a significant focus for critical discussions concerning mutilation. However, criticism concerning the *purpose* of these returning body parts has been less prevalent. In asking how "the return of Titus's hand to the stage – as a property passed from one player to another" should be understood, Katherine Rowe examines Titus's hand as "a kind of dramatic mortmain, the grasp of past experience reappearing in the present", and in doing so, offers a fruitful understanding of its ghostly function: "it plays the role that ghosts typically inhabit in the revenge tradition, an unforgettable reminder of *his purpose*."⁶⁸ If, however, as Ray suggests, Titus's hands have indeed become ineffectual in Rome and his remaining hand is "a tyrannising limb" left to thump down his beating heart in the "hollow prison" of his body (3.2.10), then his returned hand is equally tyrannising, a disembodied signifier that forces him to confront his own failures in Rome.⁶⁹ Michael Neill argues that Titus's "heroic identity becomes embodied in his severed hand"; if that is so, then it is the failure of Titus's heroic identity that will return to haunt him.⁷⁰

When giving Aaron his hand, Titus bids him to tell the emperor that "it was a hand that warded him / From thousand dangers", and then says: "bid him bury it" (3.1.195-6). But like Lavinia's body, instead of being buried, Titus's hand is sent back to him "in scorn" (3.1.238), and like the daughter passed as property from one man to another, Titus's disembodied hand now passes from Aaron to Saturninus and is then sent back to its former owner. Just as all acts of revenge in this play tend to repeat and

⁶⁶Tricomi, 99.

⁶⁷Tricomi, 102; Kendall, 299.

⁶⁸Rowe, 280, 290-1 (my italics).

⁶⁹Ray, 37.

⁷⁰Neill, "Amphitheatres in the Body", 42.

expand on former crimes to increase a sense of punishment, the reappearance of Titus's severed hand is accompanied by the return of the severed heads of his two sons, Quintus and Martius. When these severed body parts return to the space of the stage, their ghostly presence is "felt" by Titus:

Then which way shall I find Revenge's cave?
For these two heads do seem to speak to me
And threat me I shall never come to bliss
Till all these mischiefs be returned again
Even in their throats that have committed them
(3.1.271-5).

Returning alongside the threatening heads of Titus's sons, Titus's disembodied hand indirectly recalls the loss of his *other* son, Mutius, who was killed by Titus's own "noble hand" and refused an honoured burial in the tomb of the Andronici. It also recalls the image of Martius's hands reaching out from the "devouring receptacle" (2.3.235) of the pit that was Bassianus's unhallowed grave. Quintus and Martius, returning from this "gaping hollow of the earth" (2.3.249) to receive a "worse end than death" (2.3.302), now "speak" back to their father, the silent threats of their severed heads serving as a shocking and brutal reminder that Titus's "warlike hand" failed in Rome long before it was cut from his body.

In the play's depictions of lost limbs, language also serves to heighten a sense of what is presently described in medical terms as "phantom limb sensation": while severed limbs remain absent from the body, the preoperative pain may still be felt and, for some amputees, the full limb can even appear to be present. This is a concept explored in Shawn Huffman's reading of the play's presentations of Titus and Lavinia. Here, Huffman argues that while the "spectral agency" of Lavinia's phantom limbs "seems limited to the identification of her assailants", the ghostly hand of Titus "appears in order to strike back."⁷¹ However, this seems to contrast with my own collective reading of *Titus's* ghosts, which, in turn, points towards a more subversive reading of the play's patriarchy. While Huffman focuses on the phantom presence of Lavinia's missing body parts and therefore limits her "spectral agency" to her telling

⁷¹Huffman, 71.

of rape, I read Lavinia *herself* as a type of ghost whose terrifying indistinctions speak so violently of her father's errors that his "bowels cannot hide her woes" but must instead, "like a drunkard ... vomit them" (3.1.231-2). It is the men of the play who are haunted by violent deeds, whose minds and bodies are tested by questionable shapes and punished by ghostly returns. If Titus himself is the play's most haunted character, before we can conceive of his "punishing the guilty" we must first conceive that it is he who is the guilty to be punished; before we can understand why Titus "projects the spectre of his own loss upon his victims", we must first understand why other victims have projected the spectre of their own loss onto Titus.⁷²

However, despite the ghostly signifiers that continue to unsettle the play's protagonist, Shakespeare's play, as Marion Wynne-Davies observes, "never entirely overthrows the patriarchal values of the political system"; instead, the return of Titus's hand and his sons' heads is reconfigured to reinstate a sense of Rome's wholeness, as Titus instructs his family to circle about him, vowing to right their wrongs as he bids them to collect the body parts that have been sent back from the emperor.⁷³ This bizarre re-gathering of family body parts functions as some grotesque attempt to achieve what Marcus will later attempt to teach the people of Rome: "how to knit" their "broken limbs again into one body" (5.3.70-2). However, as Titus's attempts to "knit" the Andronici into one body are ultimately based on the fragmentation of *other* bodies (namely, the grinding and baking of Chiron and Demetrius's bodies in a pie), his role in restoring a sense of wholeness remains undoubtedly fragile. What does exist, however, in the play's restoration of Roman values is an honoured place for the dead. Lucius, as Rome's new emperor, assumes his sovereign duties by ordering that the bodies of Titus and Lavinia should be buried in their "household's monument" (5.3.194) and given all proper funeral rites. Titus also receives an extended staged farewell after his death, as Lucius, Marcus, and the young boy all take their turns to offer warm kisses and "shed obsequious tears upon this trunk" (5.3.152). But while Titus and Lavinia will "sleep in peace", spectators of this tragedy who are also implicated in its violence will continue to be haunted by Tamora, thrown "forth to beasts and birds of prey" (5.3.198), and the ghostly head of Aaron, fastened "in the earth" (5.3.183). Aaron's talking head disrupts the closing harmony of *Titus* in a way that is even more potent than the "usurper's cursèd head"

⁷²Ibid., 73.

⁷³Wynne-Davies, 142.

(5.7.99) in the final scene of *Macbeth*. Recalling the events of the play's opening, Rome's new leader is haunted not by the "past honours" of a previous emperor but the "heinous deeds" of a villainous Moor whose talking head will "torment Lucius and the Roman public" by "reminding them of his past victories over the Andronici".⁷⁴ If the ghosts of Lavinia and Titus will be laid to rest, then the "un-dead" Aaron and Tamora will continue to haunt the play's audiences.

V. False Shadows

Marjorie Garber describes *Macbeth* as "*the* play of the uncanny", but *Titus Andronicus*, as a shockingly violent revenge tragedy that has itself, despite some critics' best efforts, refused to lie dormant, embodies a potent ghost story of its own.⁷⁵ As Shakespeare's most gruesome play, it has previously been dismembered from Shakespeare's other works in criticism but has since returned to enact its own haunting of the canon. As Jonathan Bate observes, many critics "have been anxious to find grounds for devaluing its place in Shakespeare's career or even dismissing it from the canon of his works altogether."⁷⁶ For Bate, *Titus* remains "an important play and a living one"; but the threshold status of the play in criticism, as a work that both does and does not belong to Shakespeare, also gives this revenge tragedy a kind of spectral existence.⁷⁷ Due to its peculiar ghosting of the canon, the favourable critical speculations of recent decades have indeed become, to use Garber's phrase, a "remembering of the dismembered", an "articulation of the disarticulated and inarticulate." During the latter half of the twentieth century and particularly since Peter Brook's haunting 1955 production, the play's critical afterlife has grown more "varied and dynamic", generating "highly provocative studies of race, gender, and political ideologies in Shakespeare" and demonstrating how literary discourse also shapes and alters perception.⁷⁸

But if Shakespeare's first revenge tragedy has returned to claim its rightful place in the canon, critics of Shakespeare's other ghost plays might also benefit from acknowledging its return. What remains so striking about *Titus*'s ghosts is the ways in

⁷⁴Smith, 326.

⁷⁵Garber, p. 107.

⁷⁶Bate, ed., 3.

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸Kolin, "Lucius, the Severely Flawed Redeemer", 94.

which they meticulously document, often through gruesome permutations and violent spectacle, early modern relations between the living and the dead. Contradictory beliefs concerning views about the afterlife, popular belief in ghosts, fears of dying, fears of the corpse, the obligation to remember the deceased, and the very human desire to forget are all deeply embedded within the text – where they remain, indisputably, unresolved. However, *Titus* never claims to offer any resolutions for its audiences: instead, a significant part of the protagonist’s tragic flaw is to honour the dead and neglect the living, while part of Tamora’s strategy for survival will be to substitute mourning for revenge and violently disrupt the community of the living *and* the dead. The action of the play forces its protagonist to abandon “tributary tears” that have made him “blind” (3.1.270) and embrace coping mechanisms of laughter and revenge in the face of utter despair; but by the end of the play, Rome regenerates itself by once more teaching its citizens how to honour the dead.⁷⁹ The play also commences with the commemorative burial of Titus’s sons and the desecration of Alarbus’s body, only to end by placing preparations for Titus’s and Lavinia’s funeral alongside “the living burial of Aaron and the refusal of proper burial rites for Tamora.”⁸⁰ However, as Heather James rightly explains, as the play “insistently conflates various antagonistic models and ostensible opposites”, it “cannot confidently promote a vision of social order and providential design at its conclusion.”⁸¹ In refusing to properly clarify its ideological standpoint, Shakespeare’s play reveals how early modern Catholics and Protestants “wrestled with many of the same questions” including “how the community should understand and articulate its relationship with those who had gone before it.”⁸² Aaron and Tamora’s spectral ruses and the ghastly returns they enact may indeed serve to mock the “popish tricks and ceremonies” (5.1.76) of Roman Catholics; however, as the play’s villainous characters are extricated from Rome’s community and denied all funeral rites in the play’s closing scene, it is *their* languishing souls that will serve as Titus’s and *Titus*’s final punishment. Similarly, although we may detect an element of mockery in Marcus’s observation that Titus, wrought by grief, “takes false shadows for true substances” (3.2.80), this viewpoint comes from a character who often misjudges and

⁷⁹Rist argues that the close of *Titus* will “emphasize unambiguously that a reduced funerary remembrance is a punishment.” 53.

⁸⁰Bate, ed., 15.

⁸¹James, 80-1.

⁸²Gordon and Marshall, eds., 15.

underestimates the play's protagonist, and its credibility is therefore deliberately undercut.

Titus was immensely popular in its day, perhaps in part because it was capable of dramatising shared theological concerns through a dramatic framework that revels in its own portrayals of violence as entertainment. But the play's unorthodox treatment of ghosts denotes a clear sense of working through, of reviewing and renegotiating, of posing questions and permeating boundaries so that audiences must decide for themselves how best to reconfigure relations between the living and the dead. Playing out these contemporary concerns, the absent-presence of spectres in the play becomes increasingly potent, as literal ghosts and ghostly impersonators provide equally valuable sites of reflection on the Elizabethan stage. If *Titus Andronicus* is indeed Shakespeare's earliest ghost tragedy, then we, as critics and spectators, must embrace its return.

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