

Reality and Metaphor in Jane Howell's and Julie Taymor's Productions of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*

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Recommended Citation

Ghita, Lucian. "Reality and Metaphor in Jane Howell's and Julie Taymor's Productions of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 6.1 (2004): [<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1215>](http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1215)

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CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture

ISSN 1481-4374 <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb>>

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***CLCWeb* Volume 6 Issue 1 (March 2004) Article 12**

Lucian Ghita, "Reality and Metaphor in Jane Howell's and Julie Taymor's Productions of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*"

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Contents of *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 6.1 (2004) Thematic Issue *Shakespeare on Film in Asia and Hollywood* Edited by Charles Ross

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol6/iss1/>>

Abstract: In his paper, "Reality and Metaphor in Jane Howell's and Julie Taymor's Productions of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*," Lucian Ghita looks at how Jane Howell's 1985 BBC production of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* and Julie Taymor's film 1999 adaptation *Titus* re-fashion the image of Young Lucius. In Ghita's interpretation this happens by structuring the boy as the nexus of a cycle of violence that disturbs not only Andronicus's household, but also the moral and socio-political structures of ancient Rome. Ghita shows how the two directors politicize and ritualize their films by using cinematic techniques to distinguish, on the one hand, the real from the imaginary, and on the other hand, private morality from the psycho-political dynamics of a particular cultural environment: Shakespeare's representation of Roman absolutism. Ghita's interdisciplinary treatment of the audiences' reception and involvement in the filmic sequence reflects his belief that the cinematic shift of perspectives represents not only the directors' desire for novelty but also an effort to defamiliarize Shakespeare's play in order to uncover what *Titus* can teach contemporary audiences about personal and public morality.

Lucian Ghita,

Reality and Metaphor in Jane Howell's and Julie Taymor's Productions of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*

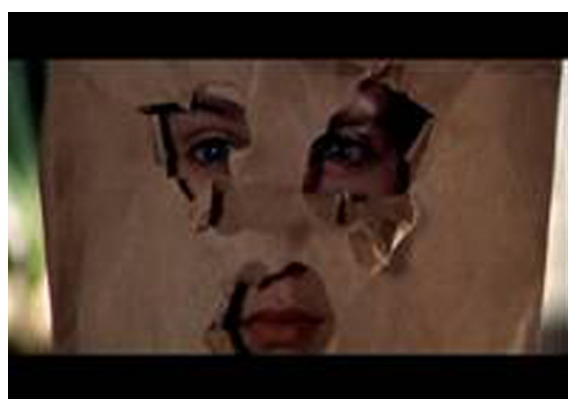
After Aaron chops off Titus's left hand in order to present it to Saturninus as "ransom" for the "fault" of his two sons, the quick and ghastly unfolding of the late Roman cycle of revenge reaches a disturbing climactic point. The ensuing scene, in which Titus is "ill-repaid" with the heads of his "two noble sons" and his hand "in scorn" returned to him (3.1.234-37), represents one of the most poignant and spectacular moments throughout the play. In her recent film production of *Titus Andronicus* (1999), Julie Taymor chooses to pinpoint some of the greater significances of the play in this particular scene. In a cinematic mock ritual which parodies the street puppet shows of *fin de siècle* France or Italy, Titus (Anthony Hopkins), Marcus, Lucius, Lavinia and Young Lucius become horrified spectators to a carnivalesque display of body parts as the Clown lifts the metal shutter which reveals Martius's and Quintus's heads floating in two specimen jars on the mini-stage of the sideshow wagon.

Similar to the opening kitchen table sequence, in which the little boy plays war with his toy soldiers, the presence of the Clown allows an emblematic leap from reality into fiction and back: He appears in two other key sequences of the film. In the first one, he saves the boy from his real-life children's game and transports him into a more real yet imaginary ancient Coliseum (filmed on-site in the ancient amphitheatre of Pula, Croatia) in which the Roman army returns victorious from the war with the Goths. The second sequence corresponds to the heads-and-hand scene of the playscript and shows the Clown pulling up his motorcycle in front of Titus's house and preparing the sinister mini-show into which the audience is unwarily trapped. The whole sequence is reminiscent of Fellini's *La Strada* much to the same extent to which the architectural space created by Taymor's set director Dante Ferretti (a nightmarish, baroque composition intermixing elements from different cultural and historical époques) triggers stylistic associations with Fellini's visually stunning representation of Roman decadence, hedonism, and sexual licentiousness in *Satyricon* (1969). The sudden revelation of the horrors behind the metal shutter door of the wagon adds to the illusory effect already created by the spiral of violent acts (the stabbing of Mutius, the killing of Bassianus, the rape and mutilation of Lavinia, the chopping off of Titus's hand), prompting Titus to powerlessly lament this mind-blowing turn of events: "When will this fearful slumber have an end?" (Titus in Taymor 108).

The problematic of ontological associations between reality and dream are designated at two representational levels, pertaining to two different types of audience, involved in the scopic act, whereupon the tension between reality and illusion is played out. First, there is the immanent reality of the on-screen event, wherein Titus, Lavinia, Marcus and Lucius painfully experience the clown's show as something more than reality. Second, there is a surreal perception of reality that originates in the interplay of cinematic/realistic and metaphoric/fantastic elements introduced by the playful management of the camera eye in relation to the spectator's visual regimes of analysis and interpretation. Young Lucius (Osheen Jones), who does not take a seat in



front of the wagon mini-stage but observes the whole scene from a distance, sheltered under an archway, achieves a certain impersonal perspective on the event while simultaneously sharing it with the off-screen audience through the alienating effect of the camera eye. Taymor's decision to place Lucius in this scene (3.1) appears perfectly justifiable insofar as it is his perspective which organises the on-screen reality for both intra- and meta-diegetic audiences: Right from the start, the boy is a silent observer of his family anguish and his presence "highlights the cruel pantomime aspects of the drama" (Walker 202). He frames and channels what the audience witnesses on screen by blurring the intermediary cinematic space that separates actor and spectator. His journey from innocence to knowledge, decision-making and morality points to a similar trajectory experienced by the film audience. As Julie Taymor explains in one of her interviews, the child's eyes peering out of the primitive paper-bag mask in the opening sequence points metonymically to the viewer's innocent scopic position, oscillating between the dream-like reality of an American kitchen and the illusory, atemporal arena of the Roman Coliseum and in this way, the spectator is drawn into a doubly-magical world in which he can see both puppet and puppeteer while his face is identified with the virtual mask that he wears more or less consciously:



In good Brechtian tradition, Taymor considers that once we get rid of the mask and the mechanics of the show become apparent, the whole effect is more surreal, "not because it's an illusion and we don't know how it's done" but precisely because "we know *exactly* how it's done" (Schechner 42). The stylistic effect is literalized here by the close-up of the boy's face as he picks up his toy soldier from the scattered remains of his house and touches it while the camera suddenly swoops across the ring-shaped arena and reveals the Roman soldiers moving in a highly choreographed, toy-like movement. The

Roman bath scene that follows the introductory sequences of the military parade creates a similar impression repositions the film action into a mode of reality, symbolically epitomized in the image of the naked soldiers washing away the clay from their bodies and subtly transforming from "archaic sculptures into human beings" (Blumenthal 225). As in the scene of Lavinia's rape and mutilation, in which graphic naturalism is counterpoised by the digital replacement of her hands with a pair of twigs through elaborate computer-generated imagery, the surreal result reasserts Taymor's self-declared principle of creating a world of metaphor which can be grounded simultaneously in a sense of possibility and reality.

Importantly, the roots of Taymor's cinematic experiment can be traced back to Jane Howell's 1985 TV production of *Titus Andronicus*, the last of the thirty-seven Shakespearean plays to have been produced by the BBC. Howell and Taymor share a subtle artistic preoccupation and belief that film representation is a "double event" (Schechner 43), amalgamating not only the story told, but also the mechanisms through which the narrative is constructed and presented. It is both the "what-ness" and the "how-ness" in directing this underrated Shakespearean tragedy that pose the most significant problems for the process of translating Shakespeare from one system of signs (communicative and conventional modes of theatrical performance) into another (the representational or cinematic medium of film productions). In Jack Jorgens's view, there are three essential cinematic modes: the "theatrical mode," which uses film as a "transparent medium" to encapsulate theatrical space and performance, the "realistic mode," which shifts the emphasis from the actors to actors-in-a-setting, and the "filmic mode," which represents a poetic approach to the surfaces of reality in the same way as a poem does in relation to ordinary language (10). Stylistically, both Taymor and Howell favour strategies and techniques subversive of representationalism as an essential cinematic approach. In other words, they combine a theatrical mode with emphasis on the poetic, anti-illusionist effects pertaining to the discontinuous, subjective movement of the camera. As Samuel Crowl points out, Julie Taymor shares with Peter Brook a distinctive theatrical language that can sometimes prove difficult to translate into moving

image (46). In Howell's opinion, actors should speak and respect Shakespeare's verse: "what is the line, what is the intellectual sense, play the intellectual sense, stop mucking about with emotions. Let the emotions follow the intellect" (Cook 326). In Howell's production, the technical emphasis lies on presentationalism rather than representationalism. The illusion of transparency is suspended by theatrical artifices such as direct addresses to the camera, juxtaposed close-ups, slow motion scenes (such as the killing of Mutius, the image of Aaron's infant fading away into the image of Tamora dressed up as the Goddess of Revenge) and poetic intercutting, which establish a "direct partnership between the actor on the screen and the often solitary spectator before the television set" (Cook 331).

Taymor stresses in turn the creative effect of camera movement by referring to the early filmmakers who made extensive use of theatrical techniques: "People think that when you say theatre it's stilted. No. It just means that you're using the imagination and you're using the power of all these special effects to create a collage, a montage of imagery that can be like our dreamscapes" (Russell <http://dvdangle.com/fun_stuff/interviews/titus/print.html>). The nightmarish insertions or the Penny Arcade Nightmares (PAN) function as poetic prostheses which enable the audience to approach the film sequence with an unrestrained sense of direct participation. This pattern of spectatorial engagement echoes the cinematic transition of Young Lucius from his initially detached perspective to his subsequent involvement in the Andronici's revenge plan. Each of the four PANs is carefully interwoven within the filmic mise-en-scene and functions as a visual preparation for the last two sequences (the banquet and the funeral/ascension sequences) in which the accumulated tensions are finally released through a ritualised display of brutality. In both cases, the presence of Young Lucius is given a prominent dramatic function and represents a major departure from the Shakespearean text, which affords virtually no part to Titus's grandson.

More than anything else, both productions of *Titus Andronicus* privilege the image of Young Lucius. By interleaving multiple layers of gaze, they manage to convey a compelling directorial statement about the spectator's position and his modes of engagement as well as his visual and mental processes of experiencing on-screen representations of violence. They also project the boy in the position of a liminal witness who constantly mediates between various modes of ontologic experience. These cinematic techniques are instrumental for the two directors to reveal a metaphoric dimension elicited by the cinematic interplay of reality, metareality, and microreality, the inside and the outside of the narrative frame of experience. What is most striking for the TV and cinema audiences of the two film adaptations of *Titus Andronicus* is undeniably the visual emphasis on Titus's grandson, Young Lucius. His viewpoint represents the arch of the narrative sequence, in which he gradually evolves from spectator to participant and finally actor. At each stage, his presence makes a strong directorial statement about the way in which the audience perceives and engages with Shakespeare's playscript. The implicit idea that the violent sequence of events (sacrificial killings, random stabbings, secret vendettas) may actually be the boy's dream or fantasy is an intriguing technical artifice which projects the entire narrative frame at the level of individual (un-)consciousness. This relativisation of the cinematic viewpoint allows in both cases for the insertion of the spectator's perspective within the actual stylistic framework through a subtle process of identification with Young Lucius's visual position.

Howell's film adaptation commences with the grisly image of a skull slowly resolving into the uneasy countenance of a bespectacled boy (Paul Davies-Prowles), who later turns out to be Titus's grandson (Trevor Peacock). Howell introduces Young Lucius into the sequence of events from the very beginning by projecting him as meta-observer of the action and by allowing him a high degree of autonomy outside the conventional cinematic frame. The most striking detail of his physiognomy is a pair of old-fashioned, steel-rimmed glasses that appear to be neither Elizabethan nor Roman, but rather anachronistically contemporary. This peculiar aspect of the boy's outward appearance stresses the idea that reality, or at least what we as spectators deem reality, is always mediated through someone else's perspective, through the consciousness of an on-screen witness. Envisaging a more or less similar effect, the opening sequence of Taymor's *Titus* introduces a ten-year-old boy, who wears a brown paper bag over his face with holes cut out for his eyes and

mouth and who violently stages a mock fight with his toy soldiers over the ravaged battlefield of the kitchen table, "dousing his soldiers in ketchup blood" (Titus in Taymor 19). The boy's primitively designed mask renders the catalyst image of the suburban kitchen mayhem in which he appears as a quasi master of puppets, marshalling at will his toy soldiers. Again, the mask functions as a signifier for the intermediary space which separates spectator/actor from the reality-event as well as for the childlike fantasy-world draped over the more-real world of experience and actual violence. The image of the mask is further enhanced in the following sequence, in which the boy is transported through an Alice in Wonderland time warp into the ancient Coliseum to watch the triumphant Roman army return from the war with the Goths.

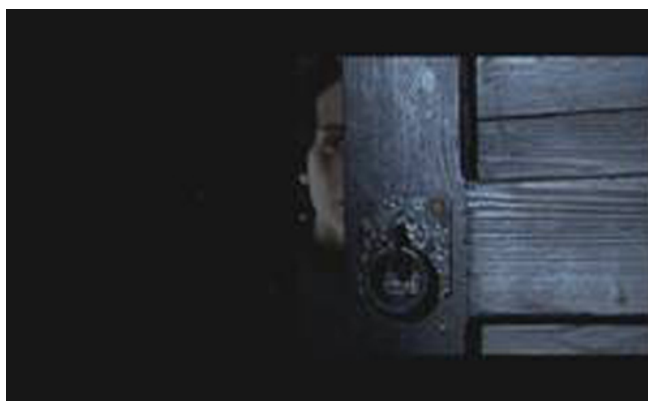
There is a striking resemblance between the ritualised military processions depicted in the two films. First, the still-like appearance of the soldiers, covered in layers of earth, wearing either sharp-cut helmets and short pointed swords (Taymor) or greenish, mouthless masks (Howell) suggests the anonymity of a faceless invisible audience cheering the presence of the military. Howell's functional use of masks is relocated at a more subtle level in Taymor's film; thus, the empty bleachers of the Coliseum contrast with the sound of a cheering crowd hailing the Clown holding the saved Young Lucius high over his head as a trophy. The same symbolism reoccurs in Titus's desperate plea for his sons' lives while he moves through the silent procession of faceless tribunes, judges, and townspeople. The presence of Young Lucius is highly visible in both adaptations. Nonetheless, while in Taymor's film he remains a silent observer of the military procession, in the BBC production he is one of the main actors who performs a welcoming ritual intended for Titus, presenting him with cleansing water and attending the sacrificial ceremony in which the entrails of Alarbus are put into the bowl of fire. As Mary Mahrer (147) and Jonathan Bate (8-10) note, there is a strong sense of ritual which underlies the two directorial concepts (funeral rites, appeasing sacrifices, election fights, sybaritic feasts) and contributes to the idea that the boy takes on an ambiguous object/subject position in his fantastic vision of revenge. In *Titus*, Taymor creates this technical artifice with the aid of her famous production designer Dante Ferretti. By allowing time and space, civilisation and barbarity, reality and fiction to interrelate and mingle, the film succeeds in creating a visual and stylistic extravaganza that blends a wide range of historical and cultural material from "ancient Rome, even Etruscan, and then the 30's, 40's, 50's and the present" (Eby <<http://talentdevelop.com/jtaymor.html>>). Howell's set designer Tony Burroughs sticks to the same type of forum-like setting, the archetypal amphitheatre of violence, rearranged throughout the play to serve as forest, pit, banquet hall or slaughterhouse-like cellar emphasizing yet again the acute ritual and funeral aspects of the revenge cycle. The ring-shaped set triggers stylistic as well as cultural with the ancient Coliseum, wherein the inside and the outside can be manipulated through the interplay of the spectator's perspectives.

The boy's appearance represents the first major counterpoint effect created by camera movement. In each of the two filmic treatments of the sacrificial ceremony in which Alarbus is slain, the boy's bright face contrasts the conspicuous blood-spattered foreheads of Titus' sons bearing the entrails of "the proudest prisoner of the Goths" (1.1.99). Against this carefully stylised cinematic effect, Young Lucius represents a mundane, casual appearance; dressed in either a uniform of a greyish, tan colour (BBC) or dark coloured shorts and T-shirt (Taymor), he stands out from the rest of the protagonists. The boy is thus simultaneously placed inside and outside the narrative framework of the film and affords the off-screen spectator an emotionally engaged perspective on the events to follow. As Taymor argues in one of her interviews, a story is all the more interesting if we as spectators are given the possibility to interpret or even question the particular style or viewpoint the artist introduces in his narrative or film. In other words, the spectator is interested not so much in the object of the story itself, but rather in its telling, its representational modes, its nuances. Hence, the analysis of the story-teller's or viewer's reactions and perceptions becomes very much a process of self-experimentation aimed at discovering the intrinsic mechanisms whereby we, as peripheral spectators of the on-screen events, shape this type of cinematic/televisual experience.

It is worth noticing that the child's graphic itinerary from innocent passivity to culpable agency in the violent drama of his family is neither fixed, nor preset, but rather unequal, with sudden

outbursts of poignant compassion and startling aggression. In the BBC production, Young Lucius tries twice to resist outbreaks of violence, first during the sacrifice of Alarbus and then the stabbing of Saturninus. In the second sequence of the first act, he silently kneels alongside Tamora and entreats Titus to spare her eldest son's life (1.1.119-21). He also leaps upon his father's neck, crying "No, no!" just as Lucius raises his dagger to stab Saturninus in the Thyrstean banquet sequence. In both case, however, he fails to interrupt the violent cycle of events. This cinematic manoeuvre reflects the directors' belief that the most interesting thing to grasp as part of the process of cinematic perception is not the action *per se*, but the character's reaction to it. Therefore, the cinematic mechanisms of producing / representing violence on-screen are explored not only through the characters' reactions, but also through the viewer's modes of engagement with the on-screen events.

In the final burial/accession sequence of the BBC version, the camera picks up the boy's distressed and silent posture, weeping over the black coffin containing Aaron's baby. Tight camera shots combine with fluid trajectories of the camera eye, but the focus rests on Young Lucius's face. As the boy looks at Aaron's baby, his face is "briefly obscured by Marcus closing the lid" and "upturned with an expression of sadness and confusion" (Mahrer 146). The film ends by superimposing the grinning image of a skull on Young Lucius's darkened face so as to give a final metaphoric statement on the nature of the personal and collective tragedy of the Andronici. In Taymor's film, the camera concentrates on the characters' individual responses, particularly Young Lucius's, to different forms and aspects of violence. Similar to the Shakespearean text, some of the most violent events occur off-stage or at least are not registered by the camera eye: the ritual killing of Alarbus, the rape and mutilation of Lavinia, the scene in which Aaron chops off Titus's hand. The last one appears to be particularly disturbing insofar as the camera swoops from a close-up of Titus's face to the boy's distressed expression as he peers through the kitchen door:



Taymor's cinematic space is visually filled up by the boy's reactions to Titus's pain. The director thereby maintains a double perspective on events (the actor's and the spectators') that becomes even more unsettling insofar as the camera eye spots the poignant details of the on-screen event, thus allowing a direct insight into the boy's troubled realization of Titus' pain. In Mary Lindroth's opinion, Young Lucius is one of the characters who re-contextualizes the acts of aggression for the viewers, and, in doing so, shows them "how the lesson of violence is transmitted to, and thus perpetuated by, the younger generation" (111). In the BBC production, Young Lucius occurs in other key moments of the film to emphasize his gradual passage from ingenuousness to experience, and eventually to outspoken hostility. In the fly scene (3.2), for example, he is introduced reading a book just as his family come into the room to dine. Both the



cinematic synchronization of the two moments and the direct visual reference to the book suggest the idea that the ceaseless cycle of brutality may be a child's unrestrained fantasy nourished by children's stories. But, apparently, the story extends beyond Lucius's liminal consciousness and gradually threatens to entrap him within the same logic of violence which possesses the rest of the characters.

In Taymor's production, the boy is given a more active part, as he is the one who strikes the fly with a knife. Rebuked by Titus vehemently, he reveals playfully the rationale behind his "deed of death": "Pardon me, sir; it was a black ill-favour'd fly, / Like to the empress' Moor, therefore I kill'd him" (Taymor 113). The incident is highly significant for the ensuing outbursts of violence and metaphorically supplies the Andronici with an axiom of revenge, further enforced through the exposure of Demetrius and Chiron. Marcus's words ("he [Titus] takes false shadows for true substances") underline a key aspect of the film, namely the way in which reality is re-activated through a playful interchange of perspectives whereby conventional meanings assume new attributes through the mirroring intervention of Young Lucius's mediating viewpoint. Moreover, it brings forth the issue of imagination and of the modes in which actors/spectators are summoned to supplement the rough surfaces of reality. The image is intensified in Act 4, when a Lear-like Titus sits in the bathtub invaded by grotesque images of revenge while reality and dream blend in a "theatrical surreal vision of violence" (Blumenthal 228), the Penny Arcade Nightmare (PAN) of Rape, Revenge and Murder. Similar to the cinematic image of Lavinia's hands digitally replaced by twigs, the off-screen spectator accepts the cinematic convention as a highly stylised version of reality, but he does so because he knows it is "heightened reality" (Johnson-Haddad 35).

At this point, Young Lucius undertakes a more active role and becomes a direct accessory to Titus's retaliatory tactics. Both productions emphasize this moment, which corresponds to the first and second scenes of Act 4 and presents Titus' decision to send Young Lucius to Chiron and Demetrius in order to gratify "the honourable youth, the hope of Rome" with the "goodliest weapons of his armoury" (4.2.12-13). The boy's reaction to Titus' entreaty ("Come; thou'lt do thy message, wilt thou not?" 4.1.117) seems particularly shocking in line with his previous vehement responses to the acute outbreaks of violence: "Ay, with my dagger in their bosoms, grandsire" (4.1.118). Even though the Shakespearean text records his words, the visual construction of the scene in the two films recontextualizes it at the level of the spectator's perception by emphasizing the ways in which extreme violence generates extreme responses and corrupts visually and morally even the most innocent observers. Henceforth, the patterns of cinematic engagement are activated as the boy seems gradually to take control over his part. According to Howell, "you have to find a hook for yourself and, in this case, the viewer is constantly forced to think – what are we doing to the children" (Billington 29). In similar ways, Taymor's focus lingers on the boy's face in order to record his conflicting states of mind. Struggling to retain a solemn posture while delivering his speech to Chiron and Demetrius, he is for the first time seen to interact physically and verbally with the enemies of his family. At times, Taymor's camera betrays Young Lucius's viewpoint by interjecting sections of reality and meta-reality into the cinematic sequence of events. For the first time, the imagined spectator watches the boy making asides to the camera before leaving the palace dungeon: "and so I leave you both/, (*aside to camera*)/ like bloody villains" (Taymor 121). The boy is metaphorically positioned both off- and on-screen, as he is either placed in the background, watching other people arguing, or literally placed amidst the main film sequences (the fly sequence, the apprehension and killing of Chiron and Demetrius).

In Taymor's version, the boy's perception is radically altered and conditioned by the spatio-temporal relativization triggered by his Alice in Wonderland time warp in the beginning of the film. Having fallen into the multi-dimensional rabbit hole, he is carried away into a world in which he experiences chronotopic displacement. Stylistically, this moment corresponds to a double cinematic technique put forth by the alienating effects of camera manipulation: the reversal and reciprocation of the spectator's gaze through a theatrical (not cinematographic) enactment of the on-screen events, and the collapse of our common-sense belief in the reality of the quotidian world into a dreamlike fantasy of revenge whereby the boy as spectator tries to understand the incomprehensible, to make sense of the nonsensical cycle of violence. In each case, the absurd dimension of reality is released through an anatomical imagery of body and mind (the sequence of the Thyestean feast) which shows the stuff humans are really made of, thus both realising and unmaking them. This technique may be seen in turn as a kind of physical Brechtianism, showing the mechanics or the makings of the cinematic event simultaneously with the events unfolding on-screen.

The relationship between actor and performing space is crucial in both productions. Taymor's vision of Rome is reminiscent not only of the decayed ancient capital, but also of the infamous centre of Mussolini's fascist government, of the escalating violence in the American public schools, or of the ethnic conflicts and atrocities in Bosnia (the war broke off only months after Taymor's shootings in Croatia and Bosnia). This strong artistic statement seems to take into account the fact that the effect of witnessing is crucial in both theatre and cinema, a thing which nevertheless also holds true for Howell's directorial viewpoint. Her image of Rome is not of pillars and the white marble of the grandiose palaces and temples, but a Rome that could also be Northern Ireland. Howell thus makes a compelling directorial statement which not only aims at finding a recent or present-day hyper-text for Shakespeare's vision of violence during the ethical-political crisis of the Roman society, but also reflects a keen preoccupation with the critical issues of violence current in 1980s Great Britain (the religious and social conflicts between the English and the Irish population in Northern Ireland).

The apprehension of Chiron and Demetrius provides another opportunity for both Howell and Taymor to emphasize extreme violence through the spatial configuration of the film set and to suggest Lucius's passage from inexperience to maturity. The British director chooses to set the sequence in a slaughterhouse in which Tamora's naked sons hang upside down suspended from meat hooks. Taymor retains the pattern, but places the sequence in Titus's cellar. The film sequence suggests that the boy is somewhere off-stage, fearfully glancing at the bloodshed from behind the door or some wooden piece of kitchen furniture. In Howell's version, the boy is directly engaged in Titus' preparations for the Thystean feast: he takes part in the scuffle to apprehend Chiron and Demetrius, leads the culinary procession and actually serves at the banquet after pouring the libations over his father's hands. The mise-en-scenes highlight the boy's rite of passage, which actually parallels the spectator's own visual coming of age. At this point, the on-screen events can no longer be validated as real, but merely as bizarre misapprehensions or misrepresentations of Titus's troubled sense of self and revenge phantasmagoria. Being an emphatic counterpart of Young Lucius, the cinematic spectator becomes increasingly aware of his ambiguous position, outside and inside the narrative frame at the same time. What was previously detached or sympathetic observation becomes now, through a series of ingenious cinematic subterfuges, empathetic involvement and culpable partaking. The visual, psychological transfer of guilt has left both actors and spectators bloody-handed.

In Howell's banquet sequence, there is one striking chromatic detail that arrests the spectator's attention: the solemn blue-greenish masks the Roman people wear in the beginning metamorphose into the long green togas the Andronici wear as they arrive on the scene. This surprising element suggests that the cycle of violence has come full circle and left everyone involved speechless and dis-figured. As the family drama comes to an end, the off-screen spectator's, as well as Young Lucius's wordless reactions to the gory sight of the feast, produce a counterpoint effect to the heavily verbalised responses of many of the other characters, particularly Marcus (Wells). After the quick chain of killings and stabbings, Howell breaks ingeniously the action suggesting the idea of a temporal lapse which separates the banquet sequence from Titus's funeral ceremony and Lucius's ascension to the throne. In turn, in Taymor's production, camera movement is tied to the rapid succession of events: after sacrificing his own daughter, Titus stabs Tamora in the neck with his carving knife. Saturninus jumps on Titus, hastily grabs a candelabrum, bites the burning candle out of the holder and plunges the candle spike into Titus's abdomen. The gruesome spectacle of the feast, which culminates with Lucius's shooting the emperor in the head, renders an acute impression of outlandish fantasy. Similar to the BBC production, the sequence is suddenly discontinued by the echoing blast of the gunshot while the camera rapidly zooms out to reveal the bloody banquet scene placed in the centre of the Coliseum, upon which spectators of different nationalities, ages and races look silently. According to Taymor, they watch with our own eyes, "they are we" (Taymor 185). Although each director reinvents her in-site audience with her own technical weapons, the physical presence of these eyewitnesses confers a powerful theatrical effect to the closing scene. On the one hand, there is the "adrenalin of proving a play before an audience, for which there is no substitute" (Willems 80), and on the

other hand, there is the need to pause, "cleanse your palate of the language" (Johnson-Haddad 35) and visually fill in the gaps of Shakespeare's text.

Both productions seem to give special visual emphasis to one particular moment in the end, thus raising further questions about the spectator's visual authority and interpretive functions. In the BBC version, as the boy gradually steps out of the action and retreats into an ambiguous mode of reality, the camera follows him closely. While Marcus makes his funeral speech, a soldier comes forth bearing a small, black coffin. Aaron's child is placed in the black box at which Young Lucius gazes in panic. There are half close-ups as well as detailed focusing, as the overall camera framing becomes tighter, thus allowing the spectator to concentrate on Young Lucius's face weeping over the child's body which lies in a bed of straw. In the closing sequence, the boy raises his head and looks directly into the camera while the image resolves into the initial necromorphic figure of the skull. Taymor creates a somewhat brighter ending. As Lucius makes his final speech giving directions for the funeral of his father and Lavinia and leaving Aaron and Tamora's body at the pity of prey birds, Young Lucius is seen standing over a small cage containing Aaron's baby boy. As he opens it, "the sound of a baby crying transforms into thousands of babies crying, then into squawking birds of prey and then into the tolling of bells" (Taymor 170). He takes the baby in his arms and slowly proceeds towards the archway that leads out of the Coliseum (another necromorphic image) as the background gradually lights up, suggesting the poetic passage of night into daylight. Just as the Clown brought Young Lucius forcibly into the story, the boy carries the baby outside the blood-bathed arena (see Walker 203-04).

The bleak bluish landscape brings into play the idea of cleansing and forgiveness, of a solar voyage, which is nonetheless a frozen sunrise, signalling possibility and hope but not solution. By the end of the film, the spectator's feeling is that of a *déjà vu* and that is because the story he has been told is nothing new. As Taymor puts it, "in the last century, we had Hitler, Rwanda, East Timor, Bosnia, Littleton, the whole shebang" (De Luca and Lindroth 29). The spectator is ironically left with the burden of having witnessed the whole bloody mayhem and the attempt to re-integrate it within a particular logic of existence. His peripheral, metadiegetic position cannot guarantee him an identity beyond the fictional framework of the onscreen sequence of events; ultimately, the story itself exists at the same time within and beyond the confines of his consciousness.



In sum, the two film adaptations underline not only Howell's and Taymor's desire for a fresh, more engaging mode of approaching the Shakespearean text, but also their effort to create an "edge of defamiliarization" (Marcus 40) about what has become too well known in his plays, and thus to set up new ways of experiencing and experimenting Shakespeare. Whether the two directors succeed in finding an appropriate artistic code of translating Shakespeare's text into a more compelling semiotic medium for twentieth century audiences is still debatable. Nonetheless, the radicality of their directorial enterprise projects a new performing as well as socio-political environment which ultimately reveals the cultural and aesthetic otherness of what we previously thought Shakespearean drama meant. I believe it is the directors' hope that the silent viewers in the bleachers will manage to find eventually a way out of the Coliseum.

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