

"Lucius, the Severely Flawed Redeemer of *Titus Andronicus*": A Reply*

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For centuries, including at least the first half of the Twentieth, *Titus Andronicus* has been the outcast of the Shakespeare canon, an easy prey for stalking critics. In denouncing the play, the critics' motto has been close, if not identical, to Aaron's—"Tut, I have done a thousand dreadful things . . . / And nothing grieves me heartily indeed / But that I cannot do ten thousand more" (5.1.141-44). The turning point in *Titus* criticism came in 1955 with Peter Brook's haunting production starring the Oliviers as Titus and daughter Lavinia. Either because of that production or because of criticism in the late 1950s/early 1960s corroborating Brook's interpretation, the tide of *Titus* criticism, or more properly the rivulet since so little positive about the play had been written up to that time, had changed, and Shakespeare's first Roman play began to elicit a more varied and dynamic critical response that saw power in its verse and formidable ambiguity in its action. Highly influential studies by Eugene Waith on the Ovidian characteristics of Shakespeare's theatre poetry and A. C. Hamilton on *Titus* and Shakespearean tragedy opened rewarding possibilities for (re)examining the play. In the last ten years or so, *Titus* has been an emerging script for highly provocative studies of race, gender, and political ideologies in Shakespeare.

Enter Anthony Brian Taylor and his article on Lucius in *Connotations*, 6.2. There is much to applaud in Taylor's discussion of Lucius, especially his evidence publicizing the sins against a false historicity claimed for Titus's only surviving son and Saturninus's successor to the Roman throne. But when Taylor attempts to discredit Lucius on internal grounds,

*Reference: Anthony Brian Taylor, "Lucius, the Severely Flawed Redeemer of *Titus Andronicus*," *Connotations* 6.2 (1996/97): 138-57.

I fear he propagates a view of the play that is retrograde to the contemporary, and welcome, criticism that privileges ambiguity, indeterminacy, and complexity in the script. Taylor's reading of the political events in Shakespeare minimizes the subterfuges and pacts that are central to *Titus*. Clearly, the implications of Taylor's argument extend far beyond the single character of Lucius, who has less than five percent of the 2700 lines in the play.

Attempting to dethrone Lucius as either savior or order figure, Taylor devotes much energy to drawing out damning parallels between father and son. He marshals a long list of similarities, in action and in word, to demonstrate that Shakespeare attaches the same blame to Lucius as to Titus. Underpinning Taylor's argument is his belief that Shakespeare, in this "witty, consciously repetitive play," valorizes what mathematicians call binomial distribution or expansion—the proliferation of binary sets. Repetition for Taylor forecloses recuperation for Lucius. Yet this approach resembles earlier imagery studies by Caroline Spurgeon and others in the 1940s and "theme and structure" articles thriving in the 1950s when Structuralism ruled benignly over a text. While Taylor dutifully presses comparisons between Titus and Lucius, I wish he had gone beyond the traditional to explore the more ambitious political strategizing that Shakespeare and contemporary directors delight in foregrounding through *Titus*.

There are major differences between father and son, and these differences are, I contend, what makes *Titus* an aggressively problematic political play rather than a spectacle of violence an early Shakespeare served up to gore-happy Elizabethans. As events turn out, Lucius does not end up like his father, nor is he the inept political bungler that Taylor accuses the Andronici patriarch of being. Lucius's grasp of politics far exceeds his father's reach. The son's winning is not confined to the battlefield; he succeeds on the homefront as well by instituting a renewed *Pax Romanorum* and by offering a new profile in polity. Lucius is not fixed in the past, as Taylor suggests, but ushers in a *novus ordo seculorum*, different from the past yet not devoid of its legacies for rule. A popular leader, Lucius is a shrewd student of the realpolitik. He engineers a "Rainbow Coalition," similar to those multi-racial, multi-ethnic groups found in contemporary society, between Romans and Goths to purge

Rome. For Taylor, a Goth is a Goth is a Goth, all blood-thirsty varlets, though he recruits pity for Tamora by heaping coals on Lucius's head for his revenge toward her. Yet for Shakespeare (and Lucius), the Goths at last support a Roman emperor rather than the other way around, as under Saturninus's short-lived reign. Thanks to Lucius, there is a Roman on the throne and not a Roman-turned-Goth like Saturninus or a Goth-defeated Roman like Titus. Unlike his father, Lucius controls the Goths and not the other way round.

Taylor's view of what/who constitutes a political "savior" or order figure is conventional, paradigmatic. Pointing out that Lucius must be seen "in stark contrast" to "savior-figures in Shakespeare like Richmond and Malcolm" (141), Taylor is unresponsive to Shakespeare's (and Marlowe's, and Marston's, and Tourneur's) variations on and subversions of the type. Surely Shakespeare did not believe that all rulers must be sanctified in hagiography, as Richmond and Malcolm were. The Elizabethan/Jacobean political necessity of patronage (Elizabeth was descended from Henry VII and James I's honor was emblazoned through Malcolm) no doubt influenced Shakespeare's portrait of these two particular "saviors." But more often than not, Shakespeare pushes the notion of a "political savior" outside the bounds in which Taylor wants to circumscribe Lucius. Shakespeare incessantly demystifies order figures revealing the irony underneath their crown.

Lucius is among the first in a long line of savvy saviors who bring an unconventional resolution to their respective plays. Amid Shakespeare's array of savior/order figures are cunning plotters, exiles, political opportunists, men not afraid of wily deals and/or restitutions made at the block, e.g., leaders like Bolingbroke and his craftier son Hal, Caesar, Fortinbras, Duke Vincentio, and especially Ulysses. When we compare Lucius with them, and not the shadowy and saintly Richmond, we get a keener appreciation of how unorthodox and devious Shakespeare's savior/order figures can be. In such company Lucius deserves more latitude—and maybe even respect—than Taylor grants him.

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