# Titus Andronicus and the wicked streets of Rome.

HOPKINS, Lisa

*Article*

*Cahiers Élisabéthains*

# *Titus Andronicus* and the wicked streets of Rome

Cahiers Élisabéthains
1–18

DOI: 10.1177/01847678241235808
journals.sagepub.com/home/cae


**Lisa Hopkins**
Sheffield Hallam University, UK

**Abstract**

*Titus Andronicus* is full of dichotomies: Black/white, good/bad, men/women, Goths/Romans, educated/uneducated (is a verse in Horace just a verse in Horace, or ought we to look for a deeper meaning?), whole/mutilated, alive/dead. The way in which the play represents the tensions between inside and outside is however particularly provocative. This essay explores how *Titus Andronicus* disturbs and undermines the distinction between inside and outside through its use of stage space, its evocation of early modern ideas about Roman architecture, and its deployment of coded reminders of the effects of the English Reformation.

**Keywords**

*Titus Andronicus*, architecture, dissolution of the monasteries, Reformation, stage space, tombs, thresholds

**Résumé**

*Titus Andronicus* est une pièce riche en dichotomies : noir/blanc, bien/mal, hommes/femmes, Goths/Romains, cultivé/inculte (est-ce qu'un vers d'Horace est juste un vers d'Horace, ou devrions-nous rechercher un sens plus profond ?), intégrité/mutilation, vivant/mort. Toutefois, la façon dont la pièce représente les tensions entre le dedans et le dehors est particulièrement provocante. Cet article explore comment *Titus Andronicus* dérange et sape les distinctions entre intérieur et extérieur à travers son utilisation de l'espace scénique, ses évocations des idées sur l'architecture romaine qui avaient cours à la première modernité, et le déploiement de rappels codés des effets de la Réforme anglaise.

**Mots clés**

*Titus Andronicus*, architecture, dissolution des monastères, Réforme, espace scénique, tombeaux, paliers

**Corresponding author:**
Lisa Hopkins, Sheffield Hallam University–City Campus, Sheffield S1 1WB, UK.
Email: L.M.Hopkins@shu.ac.uk

On 28 February 2023 news broke that a missing couple, Constance Marten and Mark Gordon, had been found and arrested in the south of England after a manhunt that had begun 53 days earlier when they had abandoned a burning car by the side of a motorway in Lancashire with their newborn baby, which had apparently been born on the back seat of the car. In the weeks since they had fled, the couple had been caught on security cameras from time to time, and at first they had the baby with them; however, when they were arrested there was no sign of it, and 200 police officers immediately began to comb the rough ground where they had apparently been living in a tent, hoping to find the child before it came to harm in unusually cold weather.

At the time of the announcement of the couple's capture, on 26 February 2023, *Titus Andronicus* was playing at the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse, the indoor theatre that is part of the Shakespeare's Globe complex. This was an all-female production in which there was, unusually for *Titus*, no violence against humans, but this was compensated for by two things: Firstly, every character had a candle avatar which was extinguished if they died or cut up if they were being mutilated, and secondly, both at the beginning of the production and straight after the interval the entire cast sang interpolated songs. The first of these promised us a bloodbath which would take our minds off our own terrible lives; the second, which the cast described as a play-within-the-play, told the 'terrible tale' of Mrs Rabbit, a 'fluffy family pet' bought 'to help the children comprehend death'. Initially this seemed to strike a potentially comic note, but it became very dark indeed when Mrs Rabbit heard a fox outside, 'forgot she was a herbivore', and killed and ate her babies. To the question 'How could you do it, Mrs Rabbit? How could you commit infanticide?' Kibong Tanji (also playing Aaron) replied, 'I panicked'; that got a laugh, but the laughter died away as she went on to explain that she 'thought they would be safer inside'. As the cast went on to sing, it was an episode that 'taught the children a lesson they will never forget'.

There were striking latent parallels between the story of the fleeing couple and the play. Constance Marten is a white woman from an extremely wealthy family with royal connections (her father was a pageboy to Queen Elizabeth II); Mark Gordon is a Black man convicted of rape in the United States. The baby was thus biracial and the couple clearly felt it important to conceal it from the authorities, though their reason for wanting to do this was unclear. However, in the light of the Wanamaker production one common factor between the news story and the play particularly stood out, and that is the actual or threatened exposure of the baby. It was the fear that a very young baby was outside in cold weather that got 200 police officers searching through scrubland, because the idea of a baby outside and unprotected is a monstrous and horrifying one. It is not, though, unthinkable or unprecedented: It was the fate of Oedipus in Greek legends and of Romulus and Remus in Roman ones. It is also the fate to which the infant Perdita is subjected in *The Winter's Tale*, which was playing in repertory with *Titus* in a production that actually took Perdita as well as the baby outside since it began in the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse but resumed after the interval in the Globe proper; for some of the run an unseasonable cold snap accentuated the contrast between inside and outside.

For a baby, to be outside is full of dangers, whereas to be inside should be safe, but the terrible tale of Mrs Rabbit forces us to reconsider the ways that dichotomy may work.

*Titus Andronicus* is full of dichotomies: Black/white, good/bad, men/women, Goths/Romans, educated/uneducated (is a verse in Horace just a verse in Horace, or ought we to look for a deeper meaning?), whole/mutilated, alive/dead. The way in which the play represents the tensions between inside and outside is, however, particularly provocative, which is partly why the Mrs Rabbit song had such an effect on the audience. This essay explores some of the ways in which *Titus Andronicus* disturbs and undermines the distinction between inside and outside through its use of stage space, its evocation of Roman ideas about the burial of the dead and early modern ideas about Roman architecture and its deployment of coded reminders of the effects of the English Reformation. The story of Constance Marten, Mark Gordon, and their baby is evoked not gratuitously but because it arouses the primal horror that *Titus Andronicus* ought to make its audience feel but which modern productions very rarely allow it to.

I want to start by considering some of the uses of stage space in the play. The opening stage direction of *Titus Andronicus* is unusually detailed:

> *Flourish. Enter the Tribunes [including* MARCUS ANDRONICUS*] and Senators aloft. And then enter [below]* SATURNINUS *and his followers at one door, and* BASSIANUS *and his followers at the other, with drums and colours.*[1]

It is clear that whoever wrote this (perhaps George Peele, to whom the first act of the play is now generally credited and who had helped his university friend William Gager prepare two plays for the entertainment of Prince Albertus Alasco in 1583)[2] thought that the use of stage space was important and significant: as Maria del Sapio Garbero observes, 'the possibilities offered by the triple-layered form of the Elizabethan stage in this play's opening scene – gallery or upper stage, main stage, the "cellarage" accessible through a trapdoor – are fully exploited here'.[3] As the play develops it becomes clear that it is particularly interested in the difference between inside and outside, which is frequently represented as both a literal and a symbolic distinction. One of the two royal brothers and competitors, Bassianus, exhorts his fellow Romans,

> If ever Bassianus, Caesar's son,
>
> Were gracious in the eyes of royal Rome,
>
> Keep then this passage to the Capitol,
>
> And suffer not dishonour to approach
>
> The imperial seat, to virtue consecrate,
>
> To justice, continence and nobility. (1.1.10–15)

'Dishonour', 'virtue', 'justice', 'continence' and 'nobility' are all abstract nouns, but Bassianus apparently connects them with something very concrete because 'this

passage to the Capitol' presumably refers to an actual part of the stage (probably one of the two doors at the back which led into the tiring-house), and his injunction to 'keep' it implies that he wishes the access to the interior space of power to be policed physically as well as metaphorically, as is indeed underlined when Saturninus has to say 'Open the gates and let me in' (1.1.65). This command is presumably obeyed because a stage direction immediately afterwards reads '*Flourish. They go up into the Senate House*' (1.1.66 SD). The interior to which the doors at the back give access is thus instantiated as a space of power, but not necessarily of virtue: it could have been that if it had been properly guarded, but the entry of Saturninus has clear potential to pollute it.

Matters are not improved when the door *is* guarded. Titus' son Mutius exhorts his brothers to help Bassianus escape with Lavinia:

> Brothers, help to convey her hence away,
>
> And with my sword I'll keep this door safe. (1.1.291–2)

Keeping the door 'safe' proves to mean holding it against his father: 'My lord, you pass not here' (1.1.294). Mutius' defence of the door results in both his own death and also the metaphorical 'death' of the door, which must now cease to act as the entrance to the Senate House and take on a succession of new identities. This always happens in early modern plays, but it does so in an unusually self-conscious way in *Titus Andronicus,* which is partly conditioned by its intertextuality with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: The Goth Demetrius shares a name with one of Hermia's suitors, and Martius reminds us of the play-within-the-play when he says 'So pale did shine the moon on Pyramus' (2.2.231). When Peter Quince announces 'This green plot shall be our stage, this hawthorn-brake our tiring-house',[4] he is inviting us to adjust to a form of double vision in which the stage appears to us a green plot before turning back into the stage and the tiring-house briefly becomes a hawthorn-brake before resuming its original and essential identity as a tiring-house. In *Titus Andronicus* too the tiring-house is *obviously* that because the actors will need to visit it to produce the effect of 'handlessness', and in this self-consciously metatheatrical sense actors who enter the space under or behind the stage *do* come out again, as new characters: Mutius, Bassianus, Quintus, and Martius all die so early in the play that the actors playing them must at some point reappear in one or more new roles.[5]

This metatheatricality makes it unsurprising that no sooner has the space behind the stage done duty as the Senate House than it is called into play again, this time to serve as the tomb of the Andronici.[6] This is defined by Titus as a pure and hallowed place:

> Here lurks no treason, here no envy swells,
>
> Here grow no damned drugs, here are no storms,
>
> No noise, but silence and eternal sleep. (1.1.156–8)

The tomb is free of human vice and sin, but it is also sterile and inorganic: Titus specifies its freedom from bad plants and bad weather, but there are also no good plants and no

good weather. This is an inside space which may be safe, but is also a literal dead end. Or is it? Lucius seems to imply that it might not be:

> Give us the proudest prisoner of the Goths,
>
> That we may hew his limbs and on a pile
>
> *Ad manes fratrum* sacrifice his flesh
>
> Before this earthly prison of their bones,
>
> That so the shadows be not unappeased,
>
> Nor we disturbed with prodigies on earth. (1.1.99–104)

Lucius apparently envisages the sacrifice of Alarbus as part of a rite that will prevent the potential breaching of a barrier between this world and the next and prevent supernatural activity by his dead brothers: the tomb may be the 'earthly prison of their bones', but it cannot necessarily contain or keep back 'their shadows'. In Garbero's analysis, it facilitates

> the uncanny '*lament* from history' … which Shakespeare lets us hear as if rising from the earth, and which perfectly corresponds to the theatrical dispositive of the trapdoor. In fact its prominence, as a reservoir and releaser of disturbing meanings, grows as it later changes into a pit (Act II) – a wild cave of fragmenting drives and desires – and an instrument of punishment and torture, a hole, for procuring death by gradual interment … or, conversely, a space impiously denied as a place of burial.[7]

Lucius' words figure the tomb as not so much a sealed container as a door into the afterlife, an inside that potentially transports its occupants into a different sort of outside, in the shape of the Elysian fields in which, as Charles King notes, many Romans believed their dead to wander.[8]

There might even be a double significance to the stage direction '*They open the tomb*' (1.1.92 SD) because although this is obviously done primarily to allow the bodies of the latest batch of dead sons to be deposited therein, King explains that in Roman funerary practice,

> One ritual that suggests the existence of an underworld was the opening of the mundus. The mundus was a subchamber or pit within an underground chamber, which the Romans opened three times a year in a state-ritual that was probably connected to the agricultural cycle. Varro (quoted by Macrobius, *Sat*., 1.16.18) says that the mundus was 'like a doorway for the sad gods below' (*deorum tristium atque in ferum quasi ianua*). Cato (quoted by Festus, 144L) says specifically that the mundus was sacred to the *di manes*.[9]

Peele, who had had a classical education at Oxford, might well have read about doors inside tombs, or growing antiquarian interest in England might even have led to the observation of such a feature: Garbero notes that both Stow and Camden commented

on the discovery of a Roman cemetery in the fields outside London.[10] There is certainly a suggestion in *Titus Andronicus* that although death is a spiritual state, physical movement is required to reach it, as we see when Titus apostrophises himself,

> Titus, unkind and careless of thine own,
>
> Why suffer'st thou thy sons unburied yet
>
> To hover on the dreadful shore of Styx? (1.1.89–91)

The dead sons are hovering, unable to move forwards or backwards, because Charon cannot bring his boat to take them across the river of death until their bodies have been buried (with coins placed in their mouths to pay his fee). The souls may have left their bodies, but they are still bound to them, and until their living relations physically carry the bodies into the tomb, the dead souls remain literally stranded, an image which must have had particular power in a theatre which was itself built on the strand of the Thames. Thomas Rist observes that 'Elizabethan and Jacobean Revenge Tragedy … regularly reflects and intervenes in the period's religious controversies over the dead',[11] while J. Y. Michel contends that all revenge plays 'are so death-oriented that they are bound to reflect, in some way or other, Elizabethan funerary rituals. Actually, late sixteenth-century playgoers, actors and playwrights considered the stage as a set of funerary items and buildings'. What such buildings showed, however, was in Michel's view in the eye of the beholder, because while '[t]he Elizabethans who held on to Catholicism still thought that monuments showcased holy relics and symbolized an allegorical vision of death', for Protestants '[m]onuments sheltered dead matter which was useless or even poisonous as long as it was not contained in what may be called a "deathtight" edifice. Only the outward shape of the monument was worthy of worship because it symbolized an idealized social order'.[12] But in *Titus Andronicus* the monument has no outward shape: it is a physical void and an ideological *aporia*, inviting the audience to construct it however they like and to consider what death and burial mean to them personally.

There may also be a hint of the connection to the agricultural cycle mentioned by King. Titus apostrophises the tomb:

> O sacred receptacle of my joys,
>
> Sweet cell of virtue and nobility,
>
> How many sons of mine hast thou in store
>
> That thou wilt never render to me more? (1.1.95–8)

In effect, Titus figures the tomb as a cupboard: both the phrase 'in store' and the idea of rendering work to connect the tomb to the idea of harvest produce, which is stored away so that it may be kept fresh and removed later. The idea of harvesting is picked up later in the play when Demetrius says of Lavinia 'First thrash the corn, then after burn the straw'

(2.2.123), and perhaps too when Lucius queries Aaron's use of 'trimmed' with reference to Lavinia and Aaron replies, 'Why, she was washed and cut and trimmed' (5.1.95): Lavinia has *not* been washed – it is one of the few things not done to her – but James Frazer claims in *The Golden Bough* that corn dollies were drenched in water.[13] Most notably, the idea of harvest rituals is invoked by Marcus Andronicus when he exhorts the Romans,

> O let me teach you how to knit again
>
> This scattered corn into one mutual sheaf. (5.3.69–70)

Although modern etymologists dismiss any connection between the words 'threshing' and 'threshold', Shakespeare (and Peele) might well have understood them as related, and it is perhaps suggestive that Emillius compares Lucius to Coriolanus (4.4.67) because when Shakespeare comes to write *Coriolanus* some years later, he certainly reaches for the harvest industry and also has Aufidius talk of his threshold.[14] In both plays he implicitly opposes Rome to the green world, but whereas *Coriolanus* draws a distinction between the city and a 'world elsewhere', *Titus Andronicus* presents Rome itself as its own opposite, with Goths inside and noble Romans banished outside, and the play's depictions of buildings and their thresholds – not least the thresholds of tombs – are a crucial part of that project.

There is also another strand of imagery at work here in Titus' description of the tomb: He calls it a 'cell', a term used too for the lodging of monks and nuns. There is evidence that some monks' cells also offered a window and potentially a door to the afterlife. There are no surviving monks' cells in England as a result of the Reformation, but the *freschi* executed by Fra Angelico in San Marco in Florence might conceivably have had parallels elsewhere. Shakespeare, who seems to have had a great-aunt who had been a prioress,[15] would have been well aware that the Guild Chapel in his native Stratford-upon-Avon had once had an extensive programme of wall paintings because his father John had been paid to whitewash them. Such paintings gave a glimpse of another and better world and encouraged those who saw them to thoughts and behaviour that might help them attain it; their loss may be one of the things that the audience remembers when a member of the invading Goth army reports,

> Renowned Lucius, from our troops I strayed
>
> To gaze upon a ruinous monastery,
>
> And as I earnestly did fix mine eye
>
> Upon the wasted building, suddenly
>
> I heard a child cry underneath a wall. (5.1.20–4)

As many critics have observed, it is surprising to find a ruined monastery in Rome, but it would not be in the least surprising to find one in Shakespeare's England. It would also not have been surprising to find a child abandoned near a religious house, though it would

more probably have been a convent than a monastery: as in *The Winter's Tale*, where the shepherd assumes the infant Perdita to be the bastard offspring of a waiting gentlewoman, unwanted and/or illegitimate babies were liable to be born in an age without contraception and might well be commended to the care of nuns.

By evoking a ruined monastery, the play takes us from classical Rome to early modern England as well as inviting us to think not only of an imagined landscape but also of a real one. By the time that Shakespeare and Peele wrote *Titus Andronicus*, there were no more nuns or monks, and the buildings they had once inhabited were in many cases 'bare ruined choirs'. Usually, the lead from the roofs was the first thing to be stripped from them, followed by the windows,[16] so that what had previously been interiors were exposed to the elements. In *The Duchess of Malfi*, as Antonio approaches the rendezvous that is to prove fatal to him, he and Delio pass through a ruined abbey, which prompts Antonio to muse:

> I do love these ancient ruins:
> We never tread upon them but we set
> Our foot upon some reverend history.
> And questionless, here in this open court,
> Which now lies naked to the injuries
> Of stormy weather, some men lie interr'd
> Lov'd the church so well, and gave so largely to't,
> They thought it should have canopy'd their bones
> Till doomsday; but all things have their end:
> Churches and cities, which have diseases like to men,
> Must have like death that we have.
> *Echo.* *Like death that we have.*[17]

Shakespeare himself would be buried in the chancel of Holy Trinity Stratford, suggesting that he too may have attached some importance to being buried under a roof, and others also mourned the loss of monasteries and convents: As Eamon Duffy notes, William Lambarde's *Perambulation of Kent* (1576) lamented the despoliation of the religious buildings of Canterbury, while John Stow's *Survey of London* (1598) had a similar emphasis; there were also popular ballads, such as that lamenting the fate of Walsingham of which Philip Howard was probably the author[18] and which Shakespeare would mention in *Hamlet*.[19] J. B. Harley notes that in John Speed's atlas 'the landscape held a series of signposts to the destroyed monastic era',[20] and John Weever wrote an entire volume on *Ancient Funeral Monuments* (1631), further evidencing the sense of loss that some might feel in the wake of the Dissolution of the Monasteries.

Any religious houses that were not still ruined had been converted into mansions for Tudor magnates. The Dissolution sparked a lot of building and conversion activity that stimulated a new interest in architecture, reflected in *Titus Andronicus* in Shakespeare's sole use of the word 'architect', when Marcus calls Aaron 'Chief architect and plotter of these woes' (5.3.121). Lena Cowen Orlin observes that 'The very idea of building as an art of design can be traced to the time of Shakespeare. The earliest English architectural treatise, published in 1563, was John Shute's *The First and Chief Grounds of Architecture*'. (She notes that 'Shute had conducted field research on a trip to Italy sponsored by the Earl of Northumberland' and also regards it as suggestive that Shakespeare 'bought and renovated New Place, one of the most impressive houses in his hometown'.)[21] Titus Andronicus has also been building, as we see when he says,

> Traitors, away! He rests not in this tomb.
>
> This monument five hundred years hath stood,
>
> Which I have sumptuously re-edified. (1.1.354–6)

What *Titus Andronicus* principally registers is however, a profound ambivalence about buildings and a persistent riddling of the apparently clear distinction between inside and outside.

Officially, inside is safe and outside is dangerous. Titus pleading for his sons' lives adduces 'all the frosty nights that I have watched' (3.1.5), implying that it is particularly meritorious on his part to have spent nights outside when it is cold, and he has had to remain alert. There is also an inherent distrust of the outside evinced when Titus announces that Alarbus will be sacrificed and Tamora objects not only (understandably) to the proposed act but also, less predictably, to its location: 'But must my sons be slaughtered in the streets' (1.1.115). Later she repeats the phrase when she vows vengeance and says she will 'make them know what 'tis to let a queen / Kneel in the streets and beg for grace in vain' (1.1.459–60). Saturninus also draws attention to the distinction between inside and outside when he declares,

> Sith priest and holy water are so near,
>
> And tapers burn so bright, and everything
>
> In readiness for Hymenaeus stand,
>
> I will not resalute the streets of Rome,
>
> Or climb my palace, till from forth this place
>
> I lead espoused my bride along with me. (1.1.328–33)

Finally, Titus tells Demetrius to 'Look round about the wicked streets of Rome' (5.2.98). Outside, it seems, is a dangerous and hostile place, and the streets of Rome particularly so.

If the streets of Rome are wicked, its buildings are prestigious. Saturninus has already said he will marry Lavinia 'in the sacred Pantheon' (1.1.246); now he says 'Ascend, fair queen, Pantheon' (1.1.338). Since there has already been a stage direction that reads '*Enter aloft the* Emperor *with* TAMORA *and her two sons and* AARON *the Moor*' (1.1.303 SD), the implication seems to be that they are going to climb to an even higher point, which can only be the imagined space between the upper storey of the tiring-house and the roof. Such an ascent is troped by Aaron as splendid and important – 'Now climbeth Tamora Olympus' top' (1.1.500) – and certainly seems to imply that the Goths have been elevated to a place of security and safety, though we may also detect overtones of the pride that comes before a fall.

Soon, though, the distinction between inside and outside starts to fall apart. In her article 'Illicit privacy and outdoor spaces in early modern England', Mary Thomas Crane argues that 'real privacy, especially for illicit activities, was, until well into the seventeenth century, most often represented as readily attainable only outdoors'.[22] One manifestation of this is the religious symbolism underlying a garden such as the Lyveden New Bield, of which Andrew Eburne argues that after 'the 1593 act … had driven recusancy more firmly into the private arena'; faith sometimes found expression in garden design, partly through symbolic shapes and structures and partly through the fact that '[p]opular contemporary Catholic culture attached religious significance to a great variety of plant life'.[23] In effect, a garden such as that at Lyveden New Bield had become a *de facto* church.

I suggest that a systematic, religiously informed ambiguity pervades the landscape in which the hunting episode of *Titus Andronicus* is situated. This includes the words '[t]he hunt is up' (2.1.1); this may seem innocuous, but there seem to have been at least two variations on the lyrics of this ballad, 'Harry our King is gone hunting' and 'Jesus our king is gone hunting', and John M. Ward notes that '[t]he earliest association of the words, "the hunt is up", with singing is in a summary of the depositions taken in 1537 from four citizens of Norfolk, who gave evidence against the minstrel John Hogon, described by them as … performing a seditious song (it was the time of the Pilgrimage of Grace)' whose lyrics apparently included 'the hunte is vp, the hunt is vp, &c. the Masteres of Arte, & Doctoures of Dvynyte haue brought the realme ought of good vnyte'.[24] The song could then comment on the Reformation and on the vexed relationship between royal power and virtue.

Not least because of the shared idea of horns, anything to do with hunting could also suggest bedroom encounters, particularly illicit ones. Owen Emmerson, Kate McCaffrey, and Alison Palmer note that during his courtship of Anne Boleyn, Henry VIII 'sent to Hever a buck he had killed himself by his own hand, telling Anne that he hoped when she ate it, she "may think of the hunter"',[25] and William Cornysh's song 'Blow thy horn, hunter', also associated with the court of Henry VIII, blatantly smuggles in bawdy comments about orgasm disguised as a story about a doe who will not die (for anyone who doesn't immediately get the point, one of the lines asks 'Now the construction of the same – what do you mean or think?').[26] Nor was the elision between hunting animals and hunting women confined to the reign of Henry VIII: Elizabeth was often figured as Diana, an icon of beauty but also the goddess of the hunt (as for instance in

the frieze which adorns the wall of the High Great Chamber at Hardwick Hall). Garbero notes that St Paul's Cathedral was believed to have been built over a temple of Diana, an idea that the antiquarian William Camden considered to have been confirmed by the fact that 'an incredible number of Ox-heads' had been dug up there in the reign of Edward I, understood as evidence of sacrifices.[27] The hunt scene takes place outdoors, but it also has the potential to suggest indoor settings as well as reminding audiences of religious and political controversies.

The character who most strikingly undermines the distinction between inside and outside is Aaron. First, he recalls that

> It did me good before the palace gate
>
> To brave the tribune in his brother's hearing. (4.2.35–6)

This is another instance of a location being unexpectedly stressed, as when Tamora objects to having her son slain 'in the streets': It seems one thing for Aaron to 'brave' Marcus Andronicus and another for him to specify that he did so 'before the palace gate', and it creates a sense that this defiance hovers uneasily between a public and a private status. There is a more disturbing sense of liminality when Aaron boasts that

> Oft have I digged up dead men from their graves
>
> And set them upright at their dear friends' door. (5.1.135–6)

Not only is he violating the taboo against disinterment of human corpses, he is also outraging any sense that the door of a house is a barrier – literally between inside and outside, metaphorically between what we welcome into our homes and what we exclude from them. Although purely coincidental, it is perhaps suggestive that not long before *Titus* was probably written, on 25 March (Lady Day) 1586, the Catholic Margaret Clitherow (now St Margaret Clitherow) was pressed to death on Ouse Bridge in York by having a door placed over her so that weights could be deposited upon it until she was dead: Suspended above the river in the middle of the bridge, that door too became an interface between life and death while still recalling its original function as controlling passage into and out of the house. (The horror of the execution was, if possible, increased by the fact that Margaret Clitherow may have been pregnant, but she refused to confirm this because she welcomed martyrdom and most of her judges were in any case unwilling to admit the possible pregnancy as relevant.)[28]

It is Aaron who introduces the play's most dangerous space, the wood outside Rome which is no green world but rather a place where the city's human tigers may prey freely upon their victims. Alexandra Walsham has shown how 'the landscape of the British Isles became a battleground in which wars about memory were waged': Numinous sites in the landscape could provide 'a focus for conservative resistance to the Reformation' by means of what Walsham calls a 'sacred geography'.[29] Shakespeare arguably seems to subscribe to this idea in *As You Like it*, where there are sermons in stones and books

in the running brooks, but *Titus Andronicus* is set in a much more dangerous and savage landscape, as we see when Aaron advises Chiron and Demetrius that

> The forest walks are wide and spacious,
>
> And many unfrequented plots there are,
>
> Fitted by kind for rape and villainy. (1.1.614–6)

In this lawless place, Aaron assures the two Goths, they will be able to isolate Lavinia and 'strike her home by force, if not by words' (1.1.619), with the word 'home' working with savage irony to underline that what is being proposed is a monstrous violation of a woman's private interior space. The idea of the woods as a problematic home is developed when Aaron goes on to tell the rapists that

> The emperor's court is like the House of Fame,
>
> The palace full of tongues, of eyes and ears;
>
> The woods are ruthless, dreadful, deaf and dull. (1.1.626–8)

Court and wood are in a fearful apposition to each other: the court, a built environment, is animate, but alive only with malice, while the wood, which should be organic and populated with animal, bird and insect life, is unfeeling and unhearing.

If exterior spaces are dangerous, so too are interior ones. It was well understood in the early modern period that the city of Rome was environed by walls; Christopher Marlowe, for instance, mentions them in *Tamburlaine the Great*, Part Two (where they are threatened by the Turks),[30] and also in his translation of the first book of Lucan's *Pharsalia*.[31] However, in *Titus Andronicus* the walls are completely ineffective, failing to keep out both the Goths and later the avenging Lucius, and functioning indeed as a symbol of reversed polarities when Lucius vows,

> If Lucius live, he will requite your wrongs
>
> And make proud Saturnine and his empress
>
> Beg at the gates like Tarquin and his queen. (3.1.297–9)

Other interiors are also unsafe. Young Lucius says of Chiron and Demetrius,

> if I were a man
>
> Their mother's bedchamber should not be safe
>
> For these base bondmen to the yoke of Rome. (4.1.107–9)

Tamora's oddly phrased warning to Saturninus that '[y]ou are but newly planted *in* your throne' (1.1.449, my italics), where 'on' would be more usual, again works to figure being *in* something as perilous.

The most dangerous interior of all is the pit. First mentioned by Tamora at 2.2.98, the pit is an inside space contained in an outside landscape; its onstage location might reprise the space previously used for the tomb of the Andronici, but if so, there is no suggestion of any potential passage to a better world. The fullest description of it comes from Quintus, who characterises it in profoundly ambiguous terms as he asks his brother Martius,

> What, art thou fallen? What subtle hole is this,
>
> Whose mouth is covered with rude-growing briers
>
> Upon whose leaves are drops of new-shed blood
>
> As fresh as morning dew distilled on flowers?
>
> A very fatal place it seems to me. (2.2.198–202)

Quintus' summing-up of the pit as 'A very fatal place' entirely disregards the oddly pastoral note introduced by the mention of fresh morning dew and flowers, but then the fact that 'flowers' was a standard early modern term for menstruation should alert us to the fact that the pit is, as Marion Wynne-Davies observes, a womb as much as a tomb.[32] Unlike the inorganic tomb, the pit does have vegetation, but the dew looks like blood and the briers are 'rude-growing', hinting not only at the lack of cultivation but also at the pubic hair that we would expect to find in the vicinity of the entrance to the womb. It is no wonder that Martius calls it an 'unhallowed and bloodstained hole' (2.2.210): It is an inside which is more threatening than any outside could be.

An almost equally perilous inside is Titus' house, about which we have an unusual amount of information. The first thing we learn is that Lavinia has a closet in it:

> Lavinia, go with me;
>
> I'll to thy closet and go read with thee
>
> Sad stories chanced in the times of old. (3.2.82–4)

It also has a kitchen, as we see when Titus orders, 'So, now bring them in, for I'll play the cook' (5.2.204); this is only to be expected, but what may perhaps surprise us is that contains an armoury, as we learn when Titus asks his nephews to accompany him there (4.1.113). Finally, there is a study: when they go to Titus' house Tamora tells Chiron and Demetrius to 'Knock at his study, where they say he keeps' (5.2.5), and a few lines later Titus asks 'Is it your trick to make me open the door?' (5.2.10). Garbero suggests that 'Titus' library (which as a stage presence materialises in Act 4.1 and Act 5.2) contains ideally all the books that have been written',[33] but neither the knowledge stored in the library nor the weapons stored in the armoury can make the house safe. Titus seems

to know this when he says 'Lavinia, come; Marcus, look to my house' (4.1.120), but he presumably does not know that Aaron has been able to spy on him in his own home:

> I pried me through the crevice of a wall
>
> When for his hand he had his two sons' heads (5.1.114–5)

Like the CCTV that helped trace Constance Marten and Mark Gordon, Aaron can spy on what people think is private, and the wall of the house cannot stop him any more than the wall in *Dream* can prevent the conversation between Pyramus and Thisbe. If walls are as insecure as this suggests it is no wonder that Aaron should signify his opinion of the inadequacy of Chiron and Demetrius by calling them 'white-limed walls' (4.2.100), nor that he proposes to bring up his own child to a 'cabin in a cave' (4.2.181). Walls are again proved perilously permeable when Marcus says 'Kinsmen, shoot all your shafts into the court' (4.3.62) and some, at least, of the arrows prove to have reached Saturninus, who calls the messages attached to them 'Sweet scrolls to fly about the streets of Rome' (4.4.16). (In Michael Fentiman's 2013 production for the Royal Shakespeare Company John Hopkins' Saturninus was in his bath when an arrow sailed through the window into the bathwater.) Previously Saturninus has implied a difference between the court and 'the streets of Rome'; now he collapses the two, as if the court were as much an outside space as the streets.

Titus' house lends itself to three further uses. Emillius tells Lucius that Saturninus 'craves a parley at your father's house' (5.1.159), implying that there is a large room suitable for what are in effect diplomatic negotiations; Aaron is being kept prisoner there (5.3.122), and Titus hosts a banquet in which he serves up the product of his earlier activities in the kitchen. This monstrous meal is the play's final and grossest violation of the border between inside and outside. When enquiry is made about the whereabouts of Chiron and Demetrius, Titus announces,

> Why, there they are, both baked in this pie,
>
> Whereof their mother daintily hath fed. (5.3.59–60)

This is doubly horrific in that Chiron and Demetrius are inside the pie, violating the taboo against cannibalism in general, but have further been ingested by their mother in a hideous inversion of her role as bringer forth of babies. There is also a ghastly latent parody of the Eucharist in which the sanctified flesh and blood of the son of God is replaced by the cooked human flesh of the sons of the queen of Goths, and it is perhaps conceivable that this might have resonated with contemporary conflicts about transubstantiation (which was a salvific miracle) versus consubstantiation (which might be seen as an act of mere eating).

When he is banished from Rome, Titus Andronicus' son Lucius speaks of his exile in terms that recall the expulsion from Paradise: 'The gates shut on me, and turned weeping out' (5.3.104). That original expulsion was from a garden into a world of buildings and interiors; Lucius and indeed all the play's characters now find themselves in a world

where the distinction between built and natural environments has collapsed, and this may indeed have been how Shakespeare and his contemporaries thought of Rome. Huw Griffiths notes that in Inigo Jones' account of Stonehenge, not published until 1655 but prepared well before that, Jones 'pronounces that the stones are the remnants of a temple to the Roman God *Coelus*';[34] for Jones, Stonehenge looked Roman because it was roofless, and just as the mutilation of Titus and Lavinia makes them look like the Roman statues which time has so often robbed of their extremities,[35] so the sense that the houses of Saturninus and Titus are permeable and vulnerable may have made them seem all the more authentically Roman. Ironically, only a final breaching of barriers can restore order. 'A Roman Lord' beseeches Marcus Andronicus,

> Tell us what Sinon hath bewitched our ears,
>
> Or who hath brought the fatal engine in
>
> That gives our Troy, our Rome, the civil wound. (5.3.84–6)

'The fatal engine' was the Trojan horse, which was brought into Troy after the walls, which had kept the city safe throughout the siege, were partially demolished in order to admit it; inside it was a contingent of Greek soldiers who admitted the rest of the army and captured the city. It is an appropriate analogue for the events of the play because by acknowledging and understanding how what should have been kept outside has come to be allowed inside, Rome might finally come to a proper understanding of its own identity and be able to reclaim its historic sense of self.

Two days after the arrest of Constance Marten and Mark Gordon, the remains of their baby were found. They had refused to disclose not only its whereabouts but also its sex, and when the body was discovered, that question could not initially be resolved; however, when they were charged with manslaughter, court documents gave the baby a name – Victoria, the Latin word for victory, which sounds a hideous echo of Lucius' triumph at the end of the play – and also revealed that the body had not been buried but concealed in a plastic bag. Although various productions, including this one (and the Julie Taymor film), provide closure for the story of Aaron and Tamora's baby, the text offers no certainty that Lucius will honour his guarantee of the child's safety, but the fate of both its parents is spelled out by the play. Lucius gives orders for the burial of Saturninus, Titus, and Lavinia but decrees that Tamora will not be buried (5.3.190–7) and that Aaron is to be placed half in and half out of the earth: 'Set him breast-deep in earth and famish him' (5.3.178). Earlier in the play Marcus Andronicus had condemned the failure to bury as a mark of the savage when he exhorted Titus to allow the body of his son Mutius into the family tomb: 'Thou art a Roman, be not barbarous' (1.1.383). He goes on to develop the point by reminding his brother that 'The Greeks upon advice did bury Ajax' (1.1.384), who had committed suicide. There is something visceral about most people's reaction to the idea of leaving a body unburied: For many commentators it made it worse that Marten and Gordon had not only let the baby die but had hidden the body, and it has also been a persistent trope of reporting of the war waged by Russia against Ukraine (another crucial temporal context for the production at the

Sam Wanamaker Playhouse, which ran from 19 January until 15 April 2023) that the Ukrainians retrieve and bury their dead while the Russians abandon theirs. As we have seen, it was a fundamental tenet of the Roman belief that if the body was left unburied then the soul of its owner could not progress to the afterlife; it may be no coincidence that *Titus Andronicus* contains one of Shakespeare's few mentions of Limbo because Lucius is effectively condemning both Aaron and Tamora to a limbo-like state in which they can never cross the River Styx nor have a tomb with a door which could lead them to the underworld. In yet another of the play's horrors, they will both be trapped for all eternity in a state which is neither inside nor outside.

*Titus Andronicus* uses all the doors and traps we can see on the stage and invites us to imagine two more, one which leads upwards to Pantheon and one that leads downwards to the underworld. It thus pits the worldly against the divine and the literal against the metaphorical. For its original audiences, *Titus Andronicus* provoked difficult questions about how barbarous or how civilised Elizabethan England itself was. In the modern world it still has the power to raise such questions: Can we keep our babies safe? Do we bury our dead? and if we believe in an afterlife, do we think we can find a path to it?

## Acknowledgements

The author is grateful for the help from Tony Morgan and also for the detailed and thoughtful comments of the two anonymous readers.

## Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## ORCID iD

Lisa Hopkins https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9512-0926

## Notes

1. William Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus*, ed. Jonathan Bate (London: Routledge, 1995), 1.1.1sd. All further quotations from the play will be taken from this edition, and reference will be given in the text.
2. Thorleif Larsen, 'The early years of George Peele, dramatist 1558–1588', *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*, series 3, 22, sec. 2 (1928), pp. 271–318, 292–4.
3. Maria del Sapio Garbero, *Shakespeare's Ruins and Myth of Rome* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2022), p. 4.
4. William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ed. Harold F. Brooks (London: Methuen, 1979), 3.1.34.

5. A possible doubling scheme can be found at https://www.playshakespeare.com/forum/titus-andronicus-casting-options (accessed 1 February 2024).
6. It is assumed that it is the discovery space rather than the area beneath the trap that is used as the tomb because the entrance to it needs to be contested, and it would be difficult to stage characters trying to bar each other from entering the trap.
7. Garbero, *Shakespeare's Ruins*, p. 5
8. Charles King, 'The living and the dead: Ancient Roman conceptions of the afterlife', unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 1998, p. 125.
9. King, 'The living and the dead', pp. 126–7.
10. Garbero, *Shakespeare's Ruins*, pp. 56, 58.
11. Thomas Rist, 'Religion, politics, revenge: The dead in Renaissance drama', *Early Modern Literary Studies*, 9(1), May 2003. Online: http://extra.shu.ac.uk/emls/09-1/ristdead.html (accessed 1 February 2024).
12. J. Y. Michel, 'Monuments in late Elizabethan literature: A conservatory of vanishing traditions', *Early Modern Literary Studies*, 9(2), September 2003. Online: http://extra.shu.ac.uk/emls/09-2/michmonu.html (accessed 1 February 2024).
13. J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 2 vols (London: Macmillan, 1894), I, p. 227.
14. William Shakespeare, *Coriolanus*, ed. Peter Holland (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 4.5.120.
15. Isabella Shakespeare, prioress of St Leonard at Wroxall.
16. Roy Strong, *Lost Treasures of Britain: Five Centuries of Creation and Destruction* (London: Guild Publishing, 1990), pp. 34–6.
17. John Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi*, ed. John Russell Brown (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977), 5.3.9–19.
18. Eamon Duffy, 'Bare ruined choirs: Remembering Catholicism in Shakespeare's England', in *Theatre and religion: Lancastrian Shakespeare*, ed. Richard Dutton, Alison Findlay, and Richard Wilson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 40–57, 41–3 and 48–9.
19. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Harold Jenkins (London: Methuen, 1982), 4.5.29–32.
20. J. B. Harley, 'Meaning and ambiguity in Tudor cartography', in *English Map-Making 1500–1650*, ed. Sarah Tyacke (London: The British Library, 1983), pp. 22–45, 37.
21. Lena Cowen Orlin, 'Architecture', in *The Cambridge Guide to the Worlds of Shakespeare*, ed. Bruce R. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 417–24, 417.
22. Mary Thomas Crane, 'Illicit privacy and outdoor spaces in early modern England', *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, 9(1), Spring 2009, pp. 4–22, 5.
23. Andrew Eburne, 'The passion of Sir Thomas Tresham: New light on the gardens and lodge at Lyveden', *The Garden History Society*, 36(1), Spring 2008, pp. 114–134, 115 and 125.
24. John M. Ward, 'The hunt's up', *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association*, 106, 1979–80, pp. 1–25, 7–8.
25. Owen Emmerson, Kate McCaffrey, and Alison Palmer, *Catherine and Anne: Queens, Rivals, Mothers* (Exeter: Jigsaw Publishing, 2023), pp. 37–8.
26. https://www.cpdl.org/wiki/index.php/Blow_thy_horn_hunter_(William_Cornysh) (accessed 1 February 2024).
27. Garbero, *Shakespeare's Ruins*, pp. 56, 58.
28. Tony Morgan, *Power, Treason and Plot in Tudor England: Margaret Clitherow, an Elizabethan Saint* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2022), pp. 154–6.
29. Alexandra Walsham, 'Sacred topography and social memory: Religious change and the landscape in early modern Britain and Ireland', *Journal of Religious History*, 36(1), March 2012, pp. 31–5, 33–4, 40 and 42.

30. Christopher Marlowe, *Tamburlaine the Great, Part Two*, ed. Mark Thornton Burnett (London: J. M. Dent, 1999), 2.1.9.
31. Christopher Marlowe, *The Collected Poems of Christopher Marlowe*, ed. Patrick Cheney and Brian J. Striar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 95–7.
32. Marion Wynne-Davies, '"The swallowing womb": Consumed and consuming women in *Titus Andronicus*', in *The Matter of Difference*, ed. Valerie Wayne (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), pp. 129–52.
33. Garbero, *Shakespeare's Ruins and Myth of Rome*, p. 101.
34. Huw Griffiths, 'Britain in ruins: The Picts' Wall and the union of the two crowns', *Rethinking History* 7.1 (2003), pp. 89–105, 90.
35. Garbero, *Shakespeare's Ruins and Myth of Rome*, p. 99.

## Author biography

**Lisa Hopkins** is Professor Emerita of English at Sheffield Hallam University. She is a co-editor of *Journal of Marlowe Studies* and of *Shakespeare*, the journal of the British Shakespeare Association, and a series editor of Arden Critical Readers and Arden Studies in Early Modern Drama. Her most recent publication is *The Edge of Christendom on the Early Modern English Stage* (De Gruyter, 2022).