# "Like a cook, placing the dishes": Performance of "Eating" Practices in *Titus Andronicus*

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*Abstract*
In recent years, Shakespearean scholars have demonstrated that *Titus Andronicus* was and is still able to work on stage and on a popular level. They have shown how it originates from the successful revenge tragedy of late sixteenth-century England and Europe and from a popular culture able to understand and give (new) values to the empty but violent rhetoric of the play thanks to recognizable contemporary popular discourses and cultural practices on/of the human body that visibly interfere with the play-text. In line with recent studies on this topic, I will interrogate *Titus Andronicus*' uses of eating and cooking metaphors and practices. I argue that they originated in the rhetoric of the revenge tragedy, but that they were also re-signified thanks to the intersection of classical knowledge, popular imagination and discourses on food and eating practices, which mainly involved the human body and its by-products. Concerns and topics of a popular culture that, as Peter Burke reminds us, was "everyone's culture".

*Keywords*: eating habits, cannibalism, food, popular and material culture.

It is only in the last decades that the theatrical potential of *Titus Andronicus* has been established, a play that, after the popular success it obtained when it was first performed (1594), had been long neglected by Shakespearean critics for its incoherence, embarrassing language and violent scenes. Indeed *Titus Andronicus* was successful in its own time, and on the very few occasions when it reappeared in the repertoire – Ravenscroft's re-adaptation in the late 17th century called *Titus Andronicus, or, The rape of Lavinia* performed at the Theatre Royall, and Ira Aldrige's 1851 adaptation – prior to Brook's watershed production in 1955, which was recognised as "one of the best that the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre had seen" (Bate 1992: 97). In recent years Shakespearean scholars have demonstrated that

*Titus Andronicus*, much more than other Shakespearean plays, was and is still able to work on stage and, more importantly, on a popular level. It enters popular culture and continues to challenge critics and directors to come to terms with its many contradictions. As Mariangela Tempera demonstrated in 2010, the last twenty years have seen "several productions of *Titus Andronicus*" on stage, television and screen which have offered modern audiences the opportunity to respond to the violence and the dismemberment of the human body at the very core of the "bloodiest of Shakespeare's plays" (2010: 109-110). Jonathan Bate, in his very recent revised edition of the play, also notes an increment in *Titus Andronicus*' productions and re-mediation, and points out how "The online *World Shakespeare Bibliography* records no fewer than 150 productions across the globe between 1995 and 2016, ranging from landmark stagings by major directors to such bizarre spin-offs as *Titus Andronicus! The Musical* and *Shakespeare's Nigga*, in which the dramatist himself is 'cast as an urbane, cognac-sipping slave owner'" (2018: 121).

Narrowing the gap that has often divided those who study Shakespeare's plays as literature from those who view them as theatre scripts that acquire (new) meaning, or their real meaning, once they are performed in front of a heterogeneous audience, Shakespearean scholars have highlighted the huge theatrical potential of this early, disturbing tragedy. They have demonstrated that what has not been proved so far or can't be fully proved by the mere reading of the text, can be better achieved on stage and/or on screen, where the multi-layered meaning of the language of the play and its sometimes unspeakable quality can be "visibly" perceived and, consequently, stimulate and affect various levels of knowledge and taste. They have shown how *Titus Andronicus* originates from the successful revenge tragedy of late sixteenth-century England and Europe and in particular from a popular culture that was able to understand and give (different) meanings to the empty but violent rhetoric of the play.

Moving from the debates on this topic and in line with the recent studies on Shakespeare's link to popular and material culture in early modern England, I will examine *Titus Andronicus*' use and misuse of body parts and, more specifically, of eating and "cooking" metaphors and practices, which verbally inhabit the play-text and literally occupy the stage. My aim is to demonstrate

how these metaphors and practices are the means through which high and popular culture intertwined, intersected and overlapped. I argue that they originated certainly in the rhetoric of revenge tragedy, in the various sources Shakespeare undoubtedly used, but were inevitably re-signified thanks to the intersection of classical knowledge, popular imagination and discourses on food and eating habits, which mainly involved the human body, its health, and the healing or corrupting properties of its by-products. Concerns and topics of a popular culture that, as Peter Burke reminds us, was everyone's culture, a system of shared meanings, attitudes and values, which were produced at various levels and through various ways and mediums amongst which the theatre certainly played a pivotal role. Aware of the existence of a clear division between the "great tradition" of the educated few and the "little" one of the "common people", Burke clearly states that the elite, the learned and educated few, had the possibility to take part in the little tradition of the rest:

> There were two cultural traditions in early modern Europe, but they did not correspond symmetrically to the two main social groups, the elite and the common people. The elite participated in the little tradition, but the common people did not participate in the great tradition. This asymmetry came about because the two traditions were transmitted in different ways. The great tradition was transmitted formally at grammar schools and at universities. […] The little tradition […] was transmitted informally. It was open to all, like the church, the tavern and the market-place, where so many of the performances occurred (1978: 28).

In this respect, if it is true that *Titus Andronicus*, despite being a play set in a decaying Rome at the end of the empire, is "saturated" with the presence of early modern England – as DiPietro and Grady, focusing on the multi-layered function of anachronisms in the play, argue (2008: 44-73) – it is also true that *Titus Andronicus* is a play "permeated" by the presence of early modern England's popular and material culture. It is indeed difficult to deny that "any desire to recognize in the play a unified idea of 'Rome' […] is made impossible by the fragmentary use of multiple classical sources" (DiPietro and Grady 2008: 52), by patterns that shape the very language and rhetoric of the play-text and its re-mediation of the classical knowledge to which the play refers. Conversely, I also argue that it is even more difficult to deny that these same fragments were

probably chosen by Shakespeare not only to satisfy the elite, but because they were contiguous with the representations of violence and dismembered bodies, and with the circulation of medical practices, dietary manuals and cookbooks which were available to a considerable multitude. In other words, they easily recalled aspects of everyday life which could certainly be recognised and re-signified by a heterogeneous audience and not exclusively by those who participated in the "great tradition" (Burke 1978: 28). At the very beginning of his career, Shakespeare knew perfectly that in order to become a dramatist he needed to follow "the compositional habits of his time" (van Es 2013: 37), thus to imitate the classics that were taught in grammar schools. This would have attested to his classical knowledge and allowed him to compete with the University Wits, convincingly showing those with the knowledge of the great tradition that he could write tragedies. In this light, the references or allusions to body parts, food and food metaphors, and cannibalism which emerge from the play-text acquire new epistemological values since they are at the same time addressed to the few learned, who were able to recognise and appreciate his classical knowledge, and to the rest, the common people. Itself a visible link between the violence on stage and outside the theatre, where "executions were staged as spectacles, and the heads of traitors graced the city gates" (Tempera 1999: 84), the body was experienced as a real producer of multiple meanings. It was a signified and a signifier at the same, since it condensed "in itself the real and the ideal" and validated "the process of metaphorical shifting from the abstract to the concrete and vice versa" (del Sapio Garbero 2010: 13). In so doing, together with its by-products, the body also shifted from its metaphorical and symbolic function as body politic to its possible and real use as body natural, thus as a potential healing remedy and/or edible food.

Particularly challenging in *Titus Andronicus* is in fact the presence of eating habits, food terms and metaphors. These practices, words and images not only confirm the existence of anachronisms in the play, which however allow us to understand early modern English tastes and/or taboos rather than those of the Romans depicted in the play; they also confirm how even food in general could at that time work at various levels of communication and knowledge. As Robert Appelbaum argues, and as Shakespeare himself probably

wanted to indicate in his play, in the early modern age, food was not only a "biological function, or an economic reality answering to a biological function, but also the object of a discourse. Or, better yet, […] the object of a multitude of discourses: stage plays, religious polemics, mystical tracts, cookbooks, medical texts, herbals, travelogues, novels" (2006: xiii) which were produced by and, at the same time, themselves produced, a shared popular knowledge and a familiar language. It is worth noting that during the second half of the sixteenth century dietary manuals became popular (Sugg 2011), and that Renaissance diners were also very concerned with the effect or consequences of food on the body. This is perhaps one of the reasons why in *Titus Andronicus* we not only have a "classical" bloody banquet at the end of the play, clearly referring to recognizable Ovidian and Senecan sources, to which we will later refer in detail, but also a private family dinner that has nothing to do with the final banquet that will be organized to commit Titus' revenge. This family dinner is set in a homely context in which the handless and tongueless Lavinia and her family, more like an English family than a Roman one, are gathered around a table waiting to eat:

Titus: So, so, now sit, and look you eat no more
Than will preserve just so much strength in us
As will revenge these bitter woes of ours. [They sit.] […]
Come, let us fall to, and, gentle girl, eat this.
Here is no drink! Hark, Marcus, what she says:
I can interpret all her martyred signs –
She says she drinks no other drink but tears, […]
Peace, tender sapling, thou art made of tears.
And tears will quickly melt thy life away.
[Marcus strikes the dish with a knife]
What dost thou strike at, Marcus, with thy knife?
Marcus: At that that I have killed, my lord – a fly. (III.ii.1-3, 33-37, 50-53)

This private scene does not seem to combine with the general structure of the tragedy. It is in contrast with the quotes of classical sources in which the presence of food or the representation of banquets have nothing to do with the question of nutrition or with the necessity to nurture the human body with healthy and few foods in order to "preserve", as Titus clearly recommends to his diners, "so much strength in us" (III.ii.2). This scene instead generates a

rather incongruous presence – rather bizarre too is the idea that the mutilated Lavinia can easily join a family dinner – in a tragedy which is mainly composed of fragments from classical sources and where, as we will see, the climax coincides with an Ovidian and Senecan bloody banquet at the end of the play. The scene seems instead to be a clear reference to the everyday life of an early modern English family who, having finished dinner, as Titus indicates at the end of the scene, clears the table before leaving the room "Come, take away. Lavinia, go with me" (III.ii.82). In this respect, it seems quite understandable that during the family dinner both in the stage directions and in the dialogue between Titus and Marcus, specific references are made to the presence of knives and dishes, a sign that informs how eating became "a far more regulated and indeed civilized affair in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries than it was in those preceding", as well as a possible "mark of a refined and cultured upbringing" (Albala 2006: 8). But this scene also indicates to us, and to the Elizabethan audience, that even a heroic and mortal character such as Titus needs to eat and, more importantly, needs to eat according to a specific "diet" if he wants, as it seems, to successfully avenge the outrageous offence he has just suffered. This is a diet that seems to recall the Galenic humoral model of the body according to which the key to maintaining health, to resist extravagance and in particular gluttony[1] was: "Exercising temperance, with the restraint of all excesses" since "if the body became overfull it required some assistance: the diet had to be adjusted" (Healy 2014: 318). The family dinner in fact comes after the vow that Titus, Marcus, Lucius and Lavinia have made, in which they all swear to avenge the murder of Titus' sons and the violence – and the not yet overtly revealed rape – against Lavinia. It is therefore more than reasonable for an Elizabethan audience familiar with the Galenic theory of the body, that the quantity of food eaten at dinner should not compromise the humoral balance of the revengers' body and thus the success of Titus' plan:

[1] Excessive drinking and eating were not only denounced for their negative effects upon physical health, causing humoral disruption, but also for their moral effects. Fitzpatrick reminds us how "The sin of gluttony was regularly condemned from the pulpit in the medieval and early modern period" since amongst its effects it "will inevitably lead to lust" (2010: 15, 18)

Titus: Come, let me see what task I have to do.
You heavy people, circle me about,
That I may turn me to each one of you
And swear unto my soul to right your wrong
[*They make a vow*]. (III.i.276-279)

Other references to the specificity of food, to its efficacy and to the way in which it may influence the body natural and its strength, as well as the multi-layered meaning it could acquire for an early modern audience, recur in *Titus Andronicus.* Particularly compelling is the scene in which Aaron tells his black child that he intends to feed him like a general and thus nurture him with a precise kind of nourishment. The black baby, born from the adulterous relationship between the Moor and Tamora, will be brought up as a warrior and, more notably, as a Gothic commander for whom food becomes a necessary element of distinction, health and strength:

Now to the Goths […]
Come on, you thick-lipped slave, I'll bear you hence,
For it is you that puts us to our shifts.
I'll make you feed on berries and on roots,
And fat on curds and whey, and suck the goat,
And cabin in a cave, and bring you up
To be a warrior and command a camp. (IV.ii.174, 177-83)

Jonathan Bate, who also sees the tragedy in connection to the complex relationship Elizabethans had with Roman history and their own thorny past, contends that these lines reveal a clear ideological reference to Tacitism, to Tacitus' positive view of the Goths. According to Bate, Aaron's references to the child's diet are meant to create a possible link between the play and the political dissatisfaction in certain English circles in the 1590s: "One of Tacitus' ways of condemning imperial rule was by means of the contrasting image of wholesome, pastoral Germans who fed on berries, roots, goatsmilk, curds and whey" (2018: 20-21). Thus, the reference to the diet Aaron intends to bring up his child on is used to reinforce the representation of a corrupted Roman Empire, a backdrop for the London of Shakespeare's time, which seems to be even more polluted when compared to the Goths' social organisation: a vigorous body politic which is definitely epitomised by the "uncontaminated" and

"healthy" body natural of the Goths who follow, since childhood, a specific diet.

Without neglecting Bate's interpretation, I also argue that these lines offer further information about early modern English cultural and popular discourses as well as eating rules and practices. They indeed seem to confirm how throughout the late sixteenth century and beginning of the seventeenth century there was an increase in recipe books whose recipes not only referred to food, but also to "ethical conduct involving social organization, commodity culture, the composition of the body politic, and gender relation" (Goldstein 2013: 24). They also show how Shakespeare knew perfectly well that food terms could acquire different meanings according to the knowledge and experience of his heterogeneous spectators who, despite their class differences, shared with Titus, and with his family, the same bodily needs, the same necessity to be healthily nurtured. And they were also probably aware that food, like clothes, was a clear marker of social, cultural and class distinction, thus a possible tool to establish or subvert social and behavioural codes. In the Renaissance, as Ken Albala reminds us, food "may have been condemned because of association with the lower classes, because of a foreign or exotic origin, or merely because an ancient authority denounced it" (2002: 4). In this respect, if it is possible for Aaron's diet to recall the food of a virtuous Gothic commander in order to covertly condemn the imperial excesses and rules, as Bate suggests, it is also true that ambiguous words such as "feed", "fat", "suck", and "roots" reveal the "animalistic nature of the child's diet", a diet that "would have struck an early modern audience as distinctly bestial" (Fitzpatrick 2010: 133), consolidating the idea that even food contributed to establish specific class hierarchies. After all, the child is not only "a joyless, dismal, black and sorrowful issue./ As loathsome as a toad" (IV.ii.70-71), a slave by nature who smiles upon his father, "Here's a young lad framed of another leer:/Look how the black slave smiles upon the father" (IV.ii.121-22) but is also the animal-like offspring of the relationship between "an incarnate devil", "a beastly villain" and a "beastly creature" (II.ii.182). While in fact Aaron has "done a thousand dreadful things" and mischievously regrets that he "cannot do ten thousand more" (V.i.138), Tamora is not only unwilling to have mercy on Lavinia's requests but also greedy to taste, and thus unable to contain her gluttony, of the

"honey", that is the pleasure, that Chiron and Demetrius will obtain in raping, violating and metaphorically "eating", as the term "honey" indicates, Lavinia's chaste body.

Tamora: But when ye have the honey we desire.
Let not this wasp outlive, us both to sting.
Chiron: I warrant you madam, we will make that sure.
Come, mistress, now perforce we will enjoy
That nice-preserved honesty of yours. (II.ii.144)

The explicit references to food and nutrition in *Titus Andronicus* also suggest that during the late sixteenth century there was a change not only in the way people used to eat but also in the role of the cook, who had the power to transform raw food into a delicious and sophisticated recipe. It is no coincidence that for the cannibal banquet at the end of the play, despite the presence of familiar classical quotations and models, Titus enters the scene unexpectedly dressed *Like a cook, placing the dishes* (V.iii.25). This deviation from classical models generates a clear re-mediation of the original blueprint in which the authority of the classical source is maintained while the production of a new text, of a contemporary representation, is created. In the early modern age, as Appelbaum has demonstrated, and in Shakespeare's London, as *Titus Andronicus* seems to show, people from all social classes not only stopped "eating with their hands and started using forks, […] plates of pewter, porcelain, and glass", but the cook himself became a professional: "coffeehouses, restaurants, and celebrity chefs and hosts appeared on the scene" while "cookbooks became a serious business" (2006: xv). Read in its interweaving with the context in which it was produced, *Titus Andronicus*' cook makes us think about the presence of this figure who was probably known in London and was used by Shakespeare as a possible reference to this emerging new occupation by creating potential analogies with practices or popular discourses circulating at the time. In this respect the murder of Chiron and Demetrius, their bodies' dismemberment and the act of cannibalism that are performed at the end of the play take on particular significance. They are allusions to both classical language and rhetoric, "A pattern, precedent, and lively warrant" (V.iii.43), as Titus declares, recalling Virginius' murder of his daughter as a

precedent or a script for the murder, "to perform the like" (V.iii.44), of his daughter Lavinia. And they are also possible references to plausible recipes or remedies which include the use of body-parts, thus informing on new eating practices and forms of cannibalism that existed at the time of Shakespeare and that were probably perceived by the audience in various and heterogeneous ways. If put and pronounced on stage, these allusions, like Titus' visible and inappropriate dress, had indeed the power to release different meanings and to produce, as Greenblatt would say, the circulation of compound social energy (1988: 1-8) in which cultural and popular discourses clearly intertwined, contributing to fix and establish a collective taste. Alongside the scene in which Lavinia is raped and mutilated, these last scenes have created a great many problems to directors, due to the difficulties in reproducing on stage the rape and atrocities committed against human bodies, and the inhuman, brutal ingestion of body parts, which Tamora and Saturninus are subjected to at Titus' cannibalistic banquet. Shakespeare himself was probably aware of this difficulty, for both the rape of Lavinia and the murder of Chiron and Demetrius are accompanied by two very long speeches, which clearly follow (Marcus' speech) and anticipate (Titus') atrocious actions. Here the description of what has been done (to Lavinia), or is going to be done (to Chiron and Demetrius) is clearly outlined and made visible through both classical rhetoric and ordinary language, enabling the audience to evoke the outrageous scenes. Shakespeare evidently knew how to make the un-representable and unspeakable not only describable, but also possible, and thus "visible" to his spectators by resorting to familiar images, roles, knowledge and practices.

Recent studies, in order to contextualise the language of these scenes and their possible response from the Elizabethan audience, have pointed out that the dismemberment of bodies and the cannibalism present in the play need to be read in connection with the travel narratives on the New World that circulated in England at the time. Here the English could read descriptions of cannibal practices and atrocities done against human bodies. David Goldstein, for instance, convincingly suggests examining *Titus Andronicus* "in a colonial context rather than a humanist one (as most other critics have done)" since from this alternative perspective, the play seems to be "organized around misuses of cooking and eating with roots

in European accounts of Iberian, Brazilian, and Aztec cannibalism" (2013: 22). These practices were recounted by the European travellers and were mainly perceived as markers of the natives' inferiority or as part of their rites, forms of revenge or different eating habits. It is indeed during the sixteenth century that the description of cannibalism acquires, in European and English contexts, different epistemological values. While defining the inexorable otherness and inferiority of the natives, the "ferocious consumption of human flesh" reported in the travelogues on the New World recalls violent and abhorrent experiences, which had always been rooted in the European imagination, culture, religious language and acts, eating habits and healing practices (Lestringant 1990; Gordon-Grube 1988; Tartabini 1997). Cannibalism was thus not only an ancient taboo, which evoked an ancestral fear of a possible fall into a ferine/uncivilised human condition, but the extreme act that truly upset the European continent, devastated by religious wars and famine.

In this respect, the murdering of Chiron and Demetrius as well as the ingestion of their bodies pulverised to become, as Titus declares, that "pie, wherof their mother daintly hath fed" (V.iii.59-60), not only mirror the atrocities that were reported in "*A Treatyse of The New India* (1553) and *The Decades of the Newe Worlde* (1555) by Pietro Martire Anghiera […], André Thevet's *The New Found VVorlde* […], translated in 1568, his longer 1557 *Cosmographie Universelle*, published in France in 1575" (Goldstein 2013: 37), and probably in Hans Staden's *Warhaftig Historia und beschreibung eyner Landtschafft der Wilden Nacketen Grimmigen Manschfresser-Leuthen in der Newenwelt America*, 1553-1555 (Golinelli 2007: 103-22), but also reproduce a cultural anthropophagic imagery with which Elizabethans were undoubtedly familiar. Particularly telling is the depiction of Chiron and Demetrious' dismemberment, killing and transformation into a pastry fit for human consumption, and "the main dish of culinary vengeance wreaked on Tamora" (Noble 2011: 53).

[*Enter* Titus Andronicus *with a knife, and* Lavinia *with a basin*]
Hark, wretches, how I mean to martyr you:
This one hand yet is left to cut your throats,
Whiles that Lavinia 'tween her stumps doth hold
The basin that receives your guilty blood.

You know your mother means to feast with me,
And calls herself Revenge and thinks me mad.
Hark, villains, I will grind your bones to dust,
And with your blood and it I'll make a paste,
And of the paste a coffin I will rear,
And make two pasties of your shameful heads,
And bid that strumpet, your unhallowed dam,
Like to the earth swallow her own increase.
This is the feast that I have bid her to,
And this the banquet she shall surfeit on:
For worse than Philomel you used my daughter,
And worse than Progne I will be revenged.
And now, prepare your throats. Lavinia, come,
Receive the blood, and when that they are dead
Let me go grind their bones to powder small,
And with this hateful liquor temper it,
And in that paste let their vile heads be baked.
Come, come, be everyone officious
To make his banquet, which I wish may prove
More stern and bloody than the Centaurs' feast.
[*He cuts their throats.*]
So, now bring them in, for I'll play the cook,
And see them ready against their mother comes. (V.ii.180-205)

In this long and detailed description we have the juxtaposition of elements taken from different sources which shift, as Titus' own quotations prove, from Progne's famous revenge, narrated in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Bate 2018: 89-90) and Seneca's *Thyestes* (Tempera 1999: 67-70) to the world of contemporary popular imagination, cultural practices and informal knowledge. Before acting the role of a professional cook, who "would be sure to have all well/ To entertain your highness and your empress" (V.iii.31-32), Titus clearly performs the role of a madman, "I knew them all, though they supposed me mad" (V.ii.142), a priest and a butcher in quick succession. He explains what he is going to do to the two brothers "as Gómara's Montezuma explains what he will do to Cortés's men" (Goldstein 2013: 59-60), but also shows how he intends to transform them into the special dish of a feast in which he clearly intends to perform the role of a professional cook[2], armed with all the tools one probably

[2] It is difficult here to see whether the cook was present in Roman literature or even

needed in order to complete a recipe: a knife, liquor and a basin. Through the description of the ingredients to be included in the pies, Titus seems to follow a sophisticated recipe for a special dish that one expects to be served in celebration of an official event: the feast to which Tamora, Saturninus and the Andronici have been formally invited. Indeed, all these characters are expecting to participate at a banquet intended to reconcile and celebrate Rome's prosperity. Both Marcus' words and the stage directions that follow – we are informed that trumpets are playing – emphasise the importance of the event:

Marcus: The feast is ready which the careful Titus
Hath ordained to an honourable end,
For peace, for love, for league and good to Rome,
Please you therefore, draw nigh and take your places (V.iii.21-24).
[Trumpets sounding, a table brought in. They sit]

In reality, Titus' performance re-inscribes the past in a historical context (the English one) accessible to the heterogeneous audience attending the public theatre. It is once again the presence of anachronisms in the play that allows us to shed light on the multi-layered purpose of this scene and of its language. While for example the term *pasty* refers to "a common English meat pie" (DiPietro and Grady 2008: 58) rather than to an ancient Roman dish, words such as grind, bones, powder and coffin, if read in their interconnection with the draining of the brothers' blood, the "hateful liquor" used to prepare a coffin, "a pie-crust, with obvious pun" (Bate 2018: 303), become the main elements of Titus' grotesque but probably not so unfamiliar recipe and tragicomic performance which is enacted, presumably, in Titus' kitchen. It was in fact in the kitchen, as Fitzpatrick reminds us, that Elizabethans usually kept "body parts […] for cures which demanded dung, breast milk, human urine and animal organs" (2010: 123). All these elements clash with the "sacrificial" meal that is about to be consumed, transforming the symbolic feast into the - this time real - cannibal banquet and Titus' revenge, which is

whether Shakespeare knew something about his role, his presence and the way he was depicted and used. Recently John F. Donahue has shown how the cook was described by Plautus, showing that in his verses: "the cook is a highly amusing and ever-confident self-promoter with the ability to bring much comic energy to the plot" (2015: 16).

actually announced by a "cook", into a farce. This odd effect is also possible because in order to prepare the pasty, Titus cuts the brothers' throats using his remaining hand while Lavinia gathers the brothers' blood in a bowl that she is paradoxically obliged to hold between her two stumps.

The detailed account of how Titus intends to carry out his revenge has also been interpreted as a possible reference to a form of legitimate cannibalism which was accepted within the early modern medical discourse according to which the human body and its by-products possessed an extraordinary healing and curative power at both a symbolic and literal level. Thus, both Titus' butchery and the cannibal banquet replicate a necessary ritual sacrifice employed "to purge the community of pollutants, with the victim, or *pharmakos*, supposedly incorporating impurities" (Noble 2011: 45). This is confirmed by the fact that the violence against the human bodies culminates with the ingestion of Tamora's sons, which can be seen as "harsh homeopathic remedies […] deployed as powerful agents against socio-political pathogens in a vain attempt to rescue the disintegrating moral framework of Rome" (Noble 2011: 42). It is Titus himself who alludes to his revenge as a kind of homeopathic remedy when, before stabbing Tamora with his knife, he reveals that the Empress has just eaten the (polluted) "flesh that she herself hath bred" (V.iii.61); in other words, that she has ingested the same poison which she has produced and, once incorporated in Rome, "Titus, I am incorporate in Rome, / A Roman now adopted happily" (I.i.466-67), has helped to spread. Compelling too are Lucius' words at the end of the play when he decides that Tamora, unlike Saturninus, Titus and Lavinia, does not deserve to be buried in Rome but to be thrown to feed beasts and birds:

Lucius: Some loving friends convey the emperor hence,
And give him burial in his fathers' grave;
My father and Lavinia shall forthwith
Be closed in our household's monument;
As for that ravenous tiger, Tamora,
No funeral rite, nor man in mourning weed,
No mournful bell shall ring her burial,
But throw her forth to beasts and birds to prey:
Her life was beastly and devoid of pity,
And being dead, let birds on her take pity. (V.iii.190-200)

Once again, we have references to food metaphors which confer symbolic functions and meanings on the human body and confirm how the ingestion of human parts for their symbolic healing properties and the culinary eating of human flesh continuously overlap. In this respect, Titus' butchery and the eating of Chiron and Demetrius' corpses, bones and blood reduced to a pasty to become an edible and, at the same time, symbolic healing meal, also suggests a possible joke or (ironic) homage to the belief, shared by the majority of Shakespeare's spectators, in the real healing properties of specific body parts, and in the success of corpse medicine, a healing practice that part of the audience probably believed in and practised.

At the time of Shakespeare, but even today, as Noble points out when remarking how "the consumption of the human body, is part of a long and complex history that continues with the global trafficking of organs and body parts today" (2011: 1), corpse medicine was popular among consumers. There existed a type of cannibalism that was neither ritual nor mythological but to be ascribed to accepted medical practices (Tartabini 1997: 16). It was a cannibalism that involved "human flesh, blood, heart, skull, bone marrow, and other body parts" and was not "limited to fringe groups of society but was practised in the most respectable circles" (Gordon-Grube 1988: 406). It was accepted, in other words, by both high and popular knowledge, not only in Europe, but also in England where the oppositions between the two "were flawed and [...] the overlap of 'popular' and 'elite' – or rather the presence of a broad substratum of common beliefs about health, illness, and therapeutics that most members of the society shared – best characterized early modern medicine" (Lindemann 1999: 11-12). We also know that this kind of healing practice was encouraged by at least two of Elizabeth's royal surgeons: "One of these was John Banister. In 1575 Banister describes a water of rhubarb and mummy drunk for ulcers of the breast, and a mummy plaster for a tumorous ulcer" (Sugg 2011: 33). Particularly in demand seemed to have been Egyptian "mummy"[3], a medicinal preparation "of the remains of an embalmed, dried, or otherwise 'prepared' human

[3] On the use of mummy as a mainstream western medicine and on its specific origin see also Richard Sugg (2006: 225-40).

body that had ideally met with sudden, preferably violent death" which was included in the "official London Pharmacopoeias of the 17th century" (Gordon-Grube 1988: 406) and could be easily found in the London mummy shops.

Re-considered within this accepted practice, the pasty prepared by Titus with blood and the ground bones reduced to "powder", as well as the compendium-like language that Titus in his role as cook employs to make visible his atrocities against Chiron and Demetrius' bodies, acquires another epistemological value. The last two scenes clearly oscillate, as Noble convincingly points out, "between the pharmacological and the culinary", and in so doing they raise questions on the real existence of "the boundary between the therapeutic and culinary consumption of human flesh" (2011: 54), the consumption, as some Elizabethans would have probably understood, of a corpse medicine or remedy which, however, was not always prepared and sold by official apothecaries or physicians, but, as the joke performed by the cook may indicate, by charlatans[4]. But they also offer Shakespeare's contemporary audience what they perhaps wanted to see, allowing us to grasp the complexity of early modern Elizabethan culture in which food and food metaphors, body parts and their by-products had a pivotal and combining function. As well as providing evidence of the Elizabethan interest in classical knowledge and of Shakespeare's ability to master it, of the circulation of cookbooks and recipes, of cannibal practices in the New World, and even of medical cannibalism, *Titus Andronicus*' rituals, food metaphors and body parts also seem to indicate the mechanisms underpinning the formation of early modern English taste. At the same time, they remind the spectators of Shakespeare's time and, seeing the recent success of *Titus Andronicus*[5], of our own

[4] It is again Sugg who argues that "Egyptian mummy was sufficiently popular to generate persistent counterfeiting. Fraudulent substitutes were on sale in London apothecaries' shops well into the eighteenth century." (2011: 8).

5 *Titus Andronicus* was included by Angus Jackson in the season of the Royal Shakespeare Company for the year 2017. Directed by Blanche McIntyre, *Titus* is the last "episode" of "the journey through Rome's birth and its decay" which was the main theme of the "Roman season" playing at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre in 2017. As clearly stated in the Royal Shakespeare's Company's announcements: "The decay of Rome reaches its violent depths in Shakespeare's bloodiest play *Titus Andronicus*. Titus is a ruler exhausted by war and leaves

time, that they are themselves the means through which high and popular culture intertwined, intersected and overlapped.

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