

***Titus Andronicus* and The Treasonous House of Howard**

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Ever since 1904, when the first and only copy of the 1594 Quarto of *Titus Andronicus* surfaced in Sweden, most scholars have chosen to dismiss as redundant three-and-a-half lines, found only in this edition:

...and at this day
To the Monument of that *Andronicus*
Done sacrifice of expiation
And slain the Noblest prisoner of the *Gothes*. (I.i.35-38) ¹

This is unfortunate, because in the context of the play's opening scene, an Elizabethan audience would readily grasp the potential for the "Noblest of the *Gothes*" to mirror King James IV of Scotland, slain at the battle of Flodden in 1513. The queen and her courtiers would have swiftly seen that Titus and his 500 year-old Andronicus Monument point to one man only—Thomas Howard, Earl of Surrey, second duke of Norfolk (1443-1524), the national hero credited with the King of Scots' death. This renowned warrior, popularly known as "The Flodden Duke," just happened to be grandfather, great-grandfather or in-law to England's most powerful theater patrons: the Queen, the Lord Admiral, the Lord Chamberlain, and the earls of Derby, Sussex and Oxenford. He was also the noble ancestor of Edmund Tilney,² master of the revels, and England's dramatic censor when *Titus* first appeared onstage and in print. Though not related by blood or marriage, George Buc (Tilney's successor in the Revels post) also had ties to the war hero: his grandfather "was brought vp from a child by this most noble erl Thomas, & was euer wth him vntyll his old age (& was) well acquainted wth all his actions & his fortunes".³

Pope Pius V

As we will see, no one at court, including Tilney, "whose job it was to read and approve all dramatic scripts before they were publicly performed"⁴, could possibly have mistaken the victorious old Titus of Act I, who was "surnamed Pius," (I.i.23) for an innocently invented Roman general: the Flodden Duke was too famous, his offspring too notorious. For half a century, from 1546 to 1589, the Tudor regime had indicted for treason each of the Flodden Duke's heirs: his son, Thomas Howard, third duke of Norfolk (imprisoned 1547-53); his grandson, Henry Howard, poet earl of Surrey (beheaded 1547); his great-grandson Thomas Howard, fourth duke of Norfolk (beheaded 1572) and his great-great-grandson, Philip Howard, earl of Arundel (died in the Tower, 1595).

Nor could they have mistaken the author's daring challenge to Elizabeth's religious settlement. Three troupes of players—the servants of Sussex, Derby and Pembroke—all performed this "Lamentable Romaine Tragedy". The literary witness of Ben Jonson⁵ suggests that they first did so right around the time of the Spanish Armada of 1588, sent by King Philip to depose the reigning Protestant monarch of England. In the final act of the play, it is Titus Andronicus, *surnamed Pius*, who stabs the reigning queen, Tamora. As John Klause has shown in his study of the play's engagement with Robert Southwell's *Humble Supplication*, for Shakespeare's audience, the name "Pius" would call to mind both Virgil *and* the "militant (Pope) Pius V...who excommunicated the

English queen in 1570, beginning the transformation of the English Catholic Community into a church of martyrs.”⁶

In 1589, the stubbornly Catholic Philip Howard began his journey towards martyrdom (Saint Philip, canonized in 1970) when his peers condemned him as a traitor on very slim evidence.⁷ In 1592, two years before the publication of *Titus*, Richard Topcliffe apprehended Southwell and immediately began the process of turning his prisoner into a martyr through the hideous tortures he inflicted upon the poetic Jesuit.⁸ Shakespeare may have been aware of these martyrs to the Catholic cause while writing and revising this play; of the ten canonical uses of the term “martyr” (including “martyrs” and “martyr’d”), four appear in *Titus*.

In the wake of these threats to Elizabeth’s Protestant crown, the superfluous addition of “Pius” to the hero’s name was surely an intentional piece of political dynamite. The author of Act 1 (perhaps George Peele, but if so, in close cooperation with Shakespeare as the superior writer⁹) deliberately lights the fuse when he has Marcus Andronicus announce that “the people of Rome” have sent him “this palliament of white and spotless hue” to “name (Titus) in *election* for the empire” (I.i.182-86, italics added). Not only does the rare word “palliament” recall the “pallium” worn by popes¹⁰, but “spotless white” and “election” point directly towards the man who recommended the assassination of Elizabeth: “Up to 1566, the pope’s dress used to be red...but in that year, Pius V, a Dominican friar, was *elected* pope, and he continued to wear his *white Dominican habit*”¹¹ (italics added).

Through a close reading of the thirty-one lines assigned to Marcus Andronicus at his first entrance as they appeared in the 1594 Quarto, this paper will show, through ten strong correspondences, (nine of them from one document) that

A proven link to the Tudor crown’s most powerful British rivals—the massacred House of Howard—should point inexorably towards a new awareness of the play as a personal revenge drama, guided by the intense experiences of a poet with powerful connections to both the ruling elite and the underground Catholic resistance.

the Flodden Duke was, indeed, the author’s model for the battle-weary Titus in the play’s opening scene. With this key to the main character’s initial historical context, we can begin to re-assess the many excellent traditional interpretations (Orthodox and Oxfordian¹²) of the political allegory in *Titus Andronicus* that have nonetheless failed to recognize the play’s pervasive echoes of Howard family history and literature. A proven link to the Tudor crown’s most powerful British rivals—the “poor remainder” (V.iii.130) of the massacred House of Howard—should point inexorably towards a new awareness of the play as a personal revenge drama, guided by the intense experiences of a poet with powerful connections to both the ruling elite and the underground Catholic resistance.

“Sweet Poetrie”

In the fourth act of *Titus Andronicus*, a boy runs onstage, dropping his schoolbooks in fright of his horribly wounded Aunt Lavinia. For no apparent reason, the child blurts out the extraneous information that his mother gave him Ovid’s *Metamorphosis* (IV.i.42). Ovid’s stories, in the naïve yet ambitious translation of Arthur Golding, influenced not only Shakespeare’s conception of this play, but also spilled into much of his later work. The boy’s exclamation has long been of particular interest to Oxfordians, since Edward Oxenford’s mother, Margery, was Arthur Golding’s half-sister. In the same scene, (another of those attributed by many scholars to George Peele) we also learn that this home-schooled boy has a “Noble aunt” (IV.i.22) for his teacher, one who reads “Sweet Poetrie and Tullies Oratour” (IV.i.14) to him. Given the play’s many

anachronisms, what sort of poetry might an Elizabethan noblewoman have read to her nephew? For anyone sincerely engaged in testing the Oxfordian candidacy, the most logical place to begin looking for this “Sweet Poetrie” would be in the “*Songes and Sonettes, written by the ryght honorable Lorde Henry Haward late Earle of Surrey, and other*” printed in 1557, when Edward de Vere, Lord Bulbeck was seven years old. Edward’s noble aunt, Frances de Vere, was Surrey’s widow; he had written several loving poems to her, and she was seven months pregnant with their fifth child when Henry VIII approved his execution by beheading in 1547.

As it turns out, Surrey’s life and works contain some unexpected links to *Titus Andronicus*, including echoes from five of his poems in Acts II, III and IV¹³. We find the most intriguing connection between the poet Henry Howard and Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus*, however, in this information concerning Surrey’s grandfather:

...The old duke left specific instructions for his tomb *to bear a large brass tablet* to chronicle his life, a life clearly as fascinating to him as he expected it *to be instructive for future audiences, not least his offspring*. In the years before the old duke’s death, the language for *this enormous self-honouring tablet* on the tomb had been carefully dictated. In fact, the duke *intended the engraved ‘Table’ to be displayed before a wide and continuous audience* in a prominent religious and cultic centre such as Thetford Priory, where his father and all his prominent ancestors had been buried.¹⁴ (Italics added.)

Keeping this enormous and didactic brass tablet in mind, let us turn to another curious passage a little further on in Act IV of *Titus Andronicus*, where the old warrior Titus tells his grandson—the Ovid-reading boy who drops his books—of a deliberate plan for recording his life’s tribulations:

...I will goe get *a leafe of brasse*,
 And with a gad of steele will write these words,
 And lay it by: *the angry northen wind*
 Will blow these sands like Sibels leaves abroad,
 And wheres *our lesson* then, boy what say you? (IV.i.102–6, italics added)

This is no mere coincidence but a series of them. When the noble Titus dies at the end of the play, young Lucius is present to weep for him, and carry forward his honorable name. The poet earl of Surrey was a boy of eight or nine years when he attended his grandfather’s magnificent funeral in 1524. The fictional grandfather, Titus Andronicus, and the real grandfather, Thomas Howard, second duke of Norfolk, were both noble and renowned old warriors. The invented boy Lucius and young Henry Howard both have a special connection to “Sweet Poetrie and Tullies Oratour.” Both have grandfathers who plan to inscribe significant words onto brass. The words that Thomas inscribes are for instruction, so that his offspring can read the story of his life; the words that Titus has in mind also contain a lesson. Shakespeare’s use of that one word, “lesson,” followed by a sort of “wake up” question to the boy, should work as a cue to his readers: once you connect these two brass projects, the next step is to track down and read the inscription on Thomas Howard’s tomb.

“Tyrant’s Crests and Tombs of Brass”

Unfortunately, the Flodden Duke’s tomb no longer exists. Thetford Priory, founded in 1107, had long housed the bones of Henry Howard’s ancestors: the dukes of Norfolk and the Mowbrays, Bigods, and Howards. For fifteen years after his grandfather’s death, Henry would have seen the

old man's instructive brass tablet every time he entered the church to honor his forbears. Then, in 1539, after Robert Aske's "angry northen wind" of rebellion, (known as "The Pilgrimage of Grace"), and as part of Henry VIII's Dissolution of the Monasteries, the king's "Reformers" sacked the Priory. The poet earl of Surrey was twenty-three years old when it happened:

Not all the honor in which the dead Duke's name was borne could save his tomb from the wanton vandalism of the early Reformers, who when unleashed in this part of East Anglia by Henry and Cromwell, broke into the abbey church of Thetford and destroyed this and many other storied monuments. Hoping to preserve the relics of his ancestors from profanation, the third Duke of Norfolk [the Flodden Duke's eldest son, and father to the poet earl of Surrey] succeeded in obtaining a grant of the tenancy of Thetford Abbey after the Dissolution; but he was too late to stay the hands of these fanatics... and before he could enter into possession, irreparable damage had been done. *The bones of his father, which had been left exposed in their roofless shrine, were reverently gathered together, and ...conveyed to a chapel which the Howards had built in Lambeth, and there reverently reinterred, under a new monument...*¹⁵ (Italics added)

In Act I, Titus reverently inters the bodies of his many glorious sons within the Andronicus Monument, "which" he later tells us, "I have sumptuously *re-edified*" (I.i.351). This renovation—a seemingly extraneous piece of information within the plot—mirrors the recorded actions of Surrey's father (as described above) *and* his grandfather: as he neared his death in 1524, the second duke of Norfolk "requested that £133 6s 8d be allowed for the making of effigies of himself and his wife Agnes for his tomb"¹⁶—a tidy sum towards the sumptuous re-edification of the Cluniac priory at

Thetford, where the Flodden Duke's descendants would enshrine his monumental autobiography in brass.

Could it be that the spent brass tomb weighing on the poet's mind belonged to the great-grandfather of Thomas Howard, fourth duke of Norfolk, executed in 1572 for the crime of attempting to marry the Catholic Queen of Scots?

In his Sonnets, Shakespeare betrays an acute awareness that gilded monuments and marble tombs are subject to razing, overthrow and oblivion. In Sonnet 64, he speaks of "brass eternal slave to mortal rage" and Sonnet 65 begins, "Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea/ But sad mortality o'ersways their power." Sonnet 107 concludes, "And thou in this shalt find thy monument/ When tyrants' crests and tombs of brass are spent." Could it be that the spent brass tomb weighing on the poet's mind belonged to the great-grandfather of Thomas Howard, fourth duke of Norfolk, executed in 1572 for the crime of attempting to marry the Catholic Queen of Scots?

Though the Flodden Duke's tablet no longer exists, a copy of its text—over three thousand words or 14,000 characters etched with that gad of steel—survived Henry's wrath and might have circulated in Shakespeare's day. John Weever's *Ancient Funeral Monuments* (published in 1630) has a transcription of the duke's entire chronicle, as it appeared engraved on the tomb. The testament (in modernized spelling) begins:

For as much as it is written in the Epitaph about the Tomb here present, of the high and mighty Prince, Thomas, late Duke of Norfolk after his descent from his noble ancestors, declared in the same in writing, which is also set out in arms about the same Tomb. That who will see farther of the manner of his living and service done by him to his princes; And of his honorable Departing out of this world, shall resort and look in this Table.

To “see farther of the manner” in which Shakespeare’s noble warrior Titus unmistakably resembles the high and mighty Prince, Thomas Howard, second duke of Norfolk, one need only combine a close reading of “this Table” as compared with the opening speech (I.i.18-48) of Marcus Andronicus, the hero’s brother. Unlike Saturninus and Bassianus, whose initial lines serve to define their respective characters, Marcus uses his first entrance onstage to talk at nearly tedious length about his brother, a man he obviously admires. By the end of this speech, any Howard kinsman in the audience (including Elizabeth, grandchild of the Flodden Duke’s eldest daughter) would easily have guessed where the playwright had found his template for old Titus. Referred to in his narrative as “the said Earl” and often referred to by historians as “Surrey”, Thomas Howard led a life that dovetails repeatedly with what Marcus says of Titus. The ten correspondences below derive *from one speech only*; parallels with the Howard family, built on this initial historical context at the start of Henry VIII’s reign of terror, continue throughout the play. In what follows, after each phrase from Shakespeare’s text, the similarities to Thomas Howard’s life story, both on his brass tablet and in historical accounts, will appear in italics.

Titus and Thomas, second duke of Norfolk

1. According to Marcus Andronicus, “Tenne yeares are spent since first he undertooke/ This cause of Rome,” the cause being the weary wars Titus wages against the “barbarous Gothes.” Elizabeth’s grandfather, Henry VII, commissioned Thomas Howard to do much the same against the troublesome Scots, and (as “the said Earl” repeats, lest we fail to note the duration of his efforts) for the same number of years:

And for the singular trust that the king had to the said Earl, and the activity that he saw in him, he... made him his Lieutenant general from Trent Northward, and Warden of the East and Middle Marches of England, *against Scotland*, and ...*there he continued ten years; and kept the country in peace with policy, and many pains taken...* for that the country had been so lately punished, and not without desert, And thus he did *the whole time of ten year...*

2. Marcus acclaims Titus and his sons as “a terrour to our foes,” the Goths; “the said Earl” Thomas proudly recounts some of the terror he inflicted on England’s perennial foes, the Scots:

And soon after *there was war with the Scots*, and for that the said Earl would be in a readiness to defend them, he went to Annwyke, and there lay to the defense of the borders: And in his own person made a winter Road into Tyvydale, and *there burnt their houses, and their corn to the greatest loss and impoverishment of the country, that was done there in an hundredth year before...*

3. When we hear that Titus “chastised with armes/ Our enemies pride,” it may seem that the author is simply filling out his line with empty rhetoric. For those of Shakespeare’s contemporary audience who had read Thomas Howard’s brass Table, however, the words “chastised” and “pride” would call to mind several audacious encounters the earl had with the proudest of the Scots, King James IV himself:

And after that, *the king of Scots* in his own person... invaded this Realm of England, with a great power, and laid siege to Northam Castle, *And as soon as he heard that the said Earl was coming towards him he departed and fled into Scotland with all the speed he might.* And in the same Summer after, the said Earl made another Road into Scotland, and laid siege to the Castle of Pey-

ton and did raze and pull down the said Castle, the king of Scots with the puissance of his Realm looking upon it; and the Earl had not then past viii or ix thousand men with him.

4. Marcus assures the citizens of Rome that “A Nobler man, a braver Warriour,/ Lives not this day within the Cittie walls.” In Shakespeare’s world, a man was “nobler” not so much for his fine deeds but through his possession of a longer line of noble forbears—such as princes, dukes, or earls—than his fellows could lay claim to. These two lines condense the first paragraph of Howard’s epitaph given above, and sum up the self-portrait Prince Thomas left to the world on his “enormous self-honoring tablet.” Any visitor to his tomb at Thetford prior to 1539 would have seen proof of “*his descent from his noble ancestors*” in not only words, but “*also set out in arms about the same Tomb.*”

5. After Titus has concluded his wars against the Scots and “yoakt a Nation strong,” for his “many good and great deserts to Rome,” the Senate summons him home. Through his military exploits, Thomas Howard strengthened his nation and experienced the same recognition and call to return to court on two separate occasions in his life, the first during the reign of Henry VII:

And when the war was done and ended with the Scots, and the North part of England in good rest and peace, then the King’s Highness sent for the said Earl to be again about his person, and made him Treasurer of England, and of his privy Council.

6. Marcus tells of Andronicus “bearing his valiant sons / in coffins from the field.” For some reason, “the said Earl” makes but one mention of a son in his epitaph, so here we must resort to his biographer, Melvin Tucker, for an account of the importance of Thomas Howard’s “valiant” sons to Henry VIII in the years leading up to his war with France and the subsequent Battle of Flodden:

(Surrey) and his sons figured actively in the king’s plans for the coming struggle. Surrey’s son, Edward, fresh from his victory over the Scottish pirate, Andrew Barton, was entrusted with the command of England’s navy. The old earl derived huge satisfaction from the fact “...*that while he had an estate that could furnish a ship, or son capable of commanding one, the narrow seas should not be infested.*”¹⁷



Thomas Howard, praying for victory before Flodden



Henry VIII Coronation Portrait

“Valiant Sons in Coffins”

As Shakespeare would have found in Holinshed, Edward Howard was one of Henry VIII’s boon companions, impressive in jousting tournaments and gallant in his office of Lord Admiral. His reckless bravery in a sea battle of 1512 ended his brief, exhilarating life, a tragic loss not only for his father, but also for the king and all England. As the old earl marched north towards the Scots in September of 1513, he was still mourning his foolhardy son. He was also mourning the loss of his son-in-law, Sir Thomas Knyvet, another of the king’s companions, who died in a separate encounter at sea, a few months before the death of the Admiral. According to Tucker, “*the loss of Surrey’s sons materially reduced the possibility of his influence with the king at a time when he most needed them in his fight with Wolsey, the new manager of the French war.*”¹⁸

At this time, France was not looking for war with England. Young Henry VIII, who cherished some medieval notions of glory on which to expend the vast sums of gold inherited from his tightfisted father, sent forth the challenge to battle. In the summer of 1513, the twenty-three year old monarch of England emptied his father’s coffers to outfit a huge force, and called up his jousting companions and other favored noblemen to join his adventure. Together, they sailed off for what he hoped would be triumphant victories over the French, even reaching so far as to desire and aim for the crown of that nation, as he believed was his right. Henry left the care of his realm to his pregnant wife and, in anticipation of trouble from the Scots, he entrusted England’s defense to “the said Earl,” now seventy-one years old.

Though he does not mention it in his epitaph, Thomas was near speechless with bitter jealousy when Henry embarked with “the flower of all the nobility of this realm,”¹⁹ on their journey to win honor and fame. If not for his old nemesis, the Scots King, the earl would have gone with them. When he again found his tongue, he used it to vow his revenge on James IV: “Sorry may I see him or die that is (the) cause of my abiding behind, and if ever he and I meet, I shall do (all) that in me lyeth to make him as sorry if I can.”²⁰

He did not have long to wait for the opportunity to make good on his word. As soon as James IV heard that the foolish young Henry had departed his kingdom to conquer another, he, too, emptied his coffers and had his plate melted down to buy ordnance. He sold his jewels to buy guns and equip a force of 20,000. He then proceeded south to invade England, with the best part of the Scottish nobility at his side. “Which when the said Earl heard of, he made as great haste toward him as he could with the king’s power of the North parts,” making camp “in the sight of the King of Scots, and of all his army then lying on Flodden hill,” says Thomas in his epitaph.

The great haste itself took on heroic proportions, as the earl was “so badly crippled with gout he had to be carried in a liter.”²¹ Again, to make up for the earl’s failure to mention his sons, we turn to a modern historian, Derek Wilson, for a relevant excerpt from his rendition of the battle:

...It was at this point that Henry detailed Thomas Howard [heir to second duke of Norfolk] and his brother, Edmund, to take four shiploads of men and go to their father's aid. *Thus the whole Howard clan were detached from the royal venture with all its splendiferous panoply to prosecute a very different, less dressed-up, more utilitarian kind of war that was only expected to amount to a few inglorious border skirmishes.*²² (Italics added)

The Noblest of the Scots

7. Marcus tells of how Titus and his sons have "slain the Noblest prisoner of the Goths"; Thomas mentions "*the dead body of the King of Scots*", repeating "dead body" four times in one short section of his epitaph (see 9, below). But was King James IV ever a prisoner? From Holinshed, the author would have learned that the earl's son Thomas, (referred to by Wilson above), who had succeeded his slain brother in the office of Lord Admiral, had sent a message to the king's herald before the battle, one that set out in unambiguous terms his new, vengeful policy on prisoners:

Furthermore, that he nor none of his companie should *take no Scottish noble man prisoner, nor anie other; but they should die if they came in his danger, vnlesse it were the kings owne person;* for he said he trusted to none other courtesie at the hands of the Scots.²³

This second Thomas Howard (known for some time after his brother's death as the Lord Admiral, and until his father's death as the earl of Surrey) was the poet Henry Howard's father and Elizabeth's great-uncle. For much of the play, Titus Andronicus will mirror *his* life, rather than his father's story. His was a cruel promise, even, or perhaps especially, by the standard of the times. By contrast, Henry VIII had been comporting himself in France as a true knight in shining armor, with the magnanimous generosity that legends are made of, and "tales of his scrupulous chivalry were eagerly told."²⁴ The young king had set out dressed in bedazzling splendor to embrace honor and gamble on a crown, but Surrey and his sons repulsed the Scottish onslaught in a desperate and savage battle to defend England:

...While advancing, and within a spear's length of Surrey himself, James was struck a mortal wound in the head, an English arrow in his side and *his arm almost rent from his body by a sword's stroke.* The carnage continued until the Scots, seeing their king dead in a pit of blood and grime, their leaders dead or separated from them, dispersed.²⁵

The detail of the king's rent arm has a ghastly echo in the words Shakespeare will soon give to Lucius, when this son of old Titus demands the right to take "the proudest prisoner of the Goths" and "hew his limbs" (I.i.100.) Shakespeare's use of the word "prisoner" becomes scathingly ironic when juxtaposed with Surrey's prosecution of the battle at Flodden. As the earl's friend, the Bishop of Durham, reported to Wolsey: "The English *did not trouble themselves with prisoners*, but slew and stripped King, bishops, lord and nobles, and left them naked on the field."²⁶ Yet in spite of the excessive blood and gore, when Thomas Howard with his two sons and their quickly assembled forces defeated the King of Scots at Flodden Field, they inadvertently became the true heroes of the day:

While his king was methodically battering down the walls of French armed cities and achieving great military triumphs at Terouenne and Tournai, the septuagenarian earl hastily mustered his men, took the field, forced a fight with James IV, and won a smashing victory despite the fact that his troops fought with parched lips and empty stomachs. *The circumstances surrounding his victory and the strategy used by the crafty earl caught the imagination of his contemporaries as had*

those of no other battle, for they saw in them divine Providence at work. Forever afterwards the Scots would look to Flodden as a national disaster, but the English would hail it as a national deliverance.²⁷

8. Marcus reminds the citizens of the “honour’s spoils” that the renowned Titus, “flourishing in arms” brought back to Rome. As “the said Earl” Thomas Howard reports in his epitaph (see 9, below), and Holinshed confirms in his history of England, the old warrior returned to London laden in much the same manner. He had triumphantly captured “*two and twentie peeces of great ordinance, amongst the which where seauen culuerings of a large assise, and verie faire peeces*”²⁸ that the Scots King had just purchased; the culverins—a species of long cannon—James had dubbed “The Seven Sisters.”

9. One spoil of the war, however, caused the earl no end of trouble, as he tidied up after the battle and waited for the king to summon him home:

And this done the said Earl went to Barwick, to establish all things well and in good order: And sent for *the dead body of the King of Scots* to Barwick, and when *the Ordenance of the King of Scots was brought of the field, and put in good surety* and all other things in good order. Then the said Earl took his Journey toward York, and there abode during the king’s pleasure, and carried with him *the dead body of the aforesaid King of Scots*, And there lay unto such time as the king’s highness came from beyond the Sea, after his winning of Tyrwyn and Torney. And then his highness sent for the said Earl to meet him at Richmond, and so he did, and there delivered unto his highness *the dead body of the King of Scots*, which *dead body* was delivered in to the Charterhouse there, and there to abide during the king’s pleasure.

Until his death, Thomas could not forget the awful quandary he was in as to what to do with the slain king. At the time, he wrote to Queen Catherine, who then passed on his concerns to her young husband: “My lord of Surrey . . . would fain know your pleasure in burying the King of Scotts’ body; for he hath written to me so.”²⁹

Shakespeare devotes three and a half ambiguously phrased lines to a similar accomplishment of Titus, which will cause the old man no end of trouble: “. . .and at this day/ To the Monument of that *Andronicus*/ Done sacrifice of expiation/ And slain the Noblest prisoner of the *Gothes*.” By the time the play appeared in the second Quarto of 1600, someone had made the editorial decision to delete these lines, a choice followed, unfortunately, by many modern editors. They hold that it makes no sense for Marcus to say here that Andronicus has already “done sacrifice of expiation” since the author inserted a whole skit devoted to this sacrifice, which he will present onstage in just a few minutes. When editors erase this announcement (or consign it to the footnotes), they break a crucial link between Titus and the hero of Flodden, and interfere with what I believe to be the author’s overall plan of exposition.

Expiation means atonement, extinguishing the guilt incurred by one’s actions. After the battle of Flodden, for which the Earl of Surrey had the supreme command and responsibility, no prisoners were held for ransom, as was the custom. Instead, the Scottish nobility lay dead on the field in astounding numbers, among them, the noblest of them all, the King of Scots himself. The death of an anointed regent was an awesome and terrible achievement; these were great burdens on the general’s soul. In addition, before the battle, the Pope had excommunicated James IV, which meant that the victors of Flodden could not give the Scots king a Christian burial. Once in possession of the corpse of a monarch, “the said Earl” had no clue as to how he might respectfully dispose of it. These three-and-a-half lines not only condense his predicament; they

do so with the swift economy of a master. If Shakespeare had written, “*At the Monument of that Andronicus,*” we would be sure of *where* he imagined the Noblest Goth met his end. “*To the Monument*” instead plants the idea of dedication: Surrey’s perplexing triumph in bringing down the noblest Scot became the most remarkable item inscribed on his epitaph, in a controversial Monument that Henry VIII’s reformers had infamously razed.

10. After mentioning the return to Rome with “honours spoils,” Shakespeare has Marcus proclaim, “Renowned *Titus* flourishing in Armes,/ Let us intreat by honour of his name/ Whom worthily you would have now succede.” Titus seems to be a candidate to succeed to the empery, but the word “succeed” also applies to the sons of dukes and earls when they inherit their father’s titles. After fighting on the losing side at Bosworth in 1485, Thomas lost the right to succeed to his father’s title of duke of Norfolk or inherit his estates; all his subsequent efforts over the next eighteen years, expended on behalf of Tudor monarchs, stemmed from a dogged hope to recover this right. Surely, his success at Flodden had earned him this honor; like Titus, however, he would need a friend to entreat those in power to appreciate and reward his worthy deeds:

The prize Surrey coveted was the restoration to his house of the dukedom of Norfolk and he felt that his recent services, *including the sacrifice of his second son*, must have washed away the last vestiges of the stain of Bosworth. He had his friend Bishop Ruthal *plant the idea* in Wolsey’s mind *that Lord Howard might be elevated to the highest rank* and the King’s acquiescence is likely to have owed something to his Almoner’s advocacy.³⁰

Shakespeare has now covered all the essentials of Thomas Howard’s life that pertain to the old warrior’s service to the Tudors, capping the whole with a flourish of honor. The success of Bishop Ruthal’s petition appeared on the brass tablet as the quietly confident epitome of the hero’s autobiography: “*And for the service that the said Earl did, he was honorably restored unto his right name the Duke of Norfolk*, and also had given unto him great possessions by the king’s highness.”

Line by line, with meticulously culled details from “the said Earl’s” autobiography, the chronicles of Holinshed, and the tales of English warriors and battles that many an English boy must have heard in his youth, the playwright built a verbal monument to the Flodden Duke. Whoever happened to notice how much Titus resembled England’s great hero, old Thomas Howard, earl of Surrey, second duke of Norfolk and victor over the Scots at Flodden, would soon re-configure the rest of this provocatively vengeful play as well.

Collaboration

If a pro-Howard sub-text exists in *Titus Andronicus* from the very first lines of the play, who put it there? In *Shakespeare, Co-Author* (2002), Brian Vickers meticulously summarizes the case for George Peele’s hand in Act I and parts of Act IV:

Over the last eighty years scholars have applied... twenty-one separate tests to the play, each of which has confirmed the presence of a co-author... Surely this quantity of independent tests, mutually confirming each other, will now be enough to gain Peele recognition as co-author of ‘The Most Lamentable Romaine Tragedy of *Titus Andronicus*.’³¹

J. C. Maxwell, however, might have required some further convincing. In his 1953 edition of the play, he worried that the collaborative hypothesis leaves us with “not a very plausible” situation, one that “involves holding that as early as 1589-90 Peele, already a well-established dramatist,

acted as a very subordinate collaborator with a writer a number of years his junior in both age and experience.”³²

In the first section of *Shakespeare, Co-Author*, Vickers commends and examines the stylometric work that Ward Elliott and Robert Valenza have done on *Titus Andronicus*.³³ But Elliott and Valenza themselves remain unsettled by what their numbers say. In “Disentangling the Shakespeare Fringes: Shakespeare’s Co-Authored Play Verse”, they discuss the anomalies that caused a large chunk of the disputed *Titus* passages to end up, according to their “best guess,” on their “Shakespeare could-be” list. They consider *Titus Andronicus* “the hardest of our Fringe plays to sort out.”

...It took us many tries to get it as right as we have, and the data still look to us less orderly and consistent than either of our two pure-case Shakespeare-Peele hybrids. ...It is as if we haven’t quite found the true dividing lines between Shakespeare and Peele. On the other hand, we are hardly the only ones who have had trouble with *Titus*...the authors may have commingled their work more thoroughly than is convenient for stylometricians to disentangle...³⁴

Those who find a unified but submerged counter-Reformation allegory in *Titus* also question the nuts-and-bolts mechanics of this supposed collaboration. As John Klause observes, “The unity of the play...not just as a dramatic action but as a thematic conception, suggests that Shakespeare was responsible not only for most of the play’s scenes but for its rationale—no matter what the nature of the ‘coauthorship’.” Klause joins Maxwell in sensing which dramatist would have had the final say: “One can imagine, even assume, that Shakespeare would modify parts of the play for which he may not have been primarily responsible.”³⁵

The Oxfordian Perspective

Even if we grant that George Peele seems implicated in the stilted mannerisms of the first and fourth acts of the play, it is highly unlikely that he would have risked his tenuous position at court by hiding potentially explosive references to the queen’s Howard relations in his portions of *Titus Andronicus*. Reading the play from the Oxfordian perspective allows us a new possibility: perhaps Peele wrote from a provided outline that he then submitted to his senior partner – the Lord Great Chamberlain of England – for rhythmic or allegorical shaping. Yet it may be that Peele’s contribution was less

than voluntary. While supposedly on his deathbed, Robert Greene seems to have warned three playwrights (most likely Marlow, Nashe and Peele) about a certain

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“upstart crow,” whom he nicknames “Shake-scene”. In essence, *Groatsworth* describes a disguised, predatory figure, with his “Tygers heart, wrapt in a Player’s hide.” We find a similar figure in *Satiromastix* – the most rancorous of all the “Poet’s War” dramas – when the Falstaffian “Captain Tucca” threatens “Horace” (Ben Jonson) with a *coerced* collaboration:

Demetrius [i.e. John Marston] shall write thee *a scene or two* in one of thy strong garlicke Comedies; and thou shalt take *the guilt of conscience* for’t, and swear ’tis thine owne, old lad, ’tis thine owne.³⁶ (Italics added)

This passage should give pause to every attribution scholar: Tucca seems to have something objectionable in mind for Marston to write, and he plans to bully Jonson into swearing these scenes as *his own*. Whom, then, should we hold responsible as author? In his *Rival Playwrights: Marlowe, Jonson and Shakespeare*, James Shapiro makes a promising start on the problems of literary ownership for Elizabethan poets:

All too little survives about the personal and professional rivalries of these authors... At what point does imitation become theft? Do the same conditions apply to those who borrow from classical sources as those who imitate contemporary ones? What rights does a writer have over his words? ... To what extent do these theoretical distinctions apply to the collaborative productions of the English Renaissance stage?"³⁷

But he seems unaware of the more disturbing questions that the predatory co-authorship model arouses. What right did authors such as Peele or Jonson have to refuse the scenes that a real-life "Captain Tucca" might have pressed on them? Curiously, not long after Greene's warning, and subsequent death, collaborations with Shakespeare seem to dry up for the remainder of Oxford's life, but then re-emerge in plays brought forward after his death in 1604.

Taking the Oxfordian hypothesis to the logical next step in attribution studies, Stephanie Hughes highlights the insecure foundation of all stylometric testing of Elizabethan texts:

The question that critics like Vickers can't help with is how reliable is the orthodox view of how much of Peele's (or Lyly's or Kyd's or Munday's) canon is actually theirs? If some or all of these canons are actually Oxford's, or one of the other Court writers who used such men to hide their authorship, then such comparisons are worthless. ... However trustworthy and useful Vickers may be in his methods of assigning authorship, without a solid base of certainty with which to compare other works, it's just another house of cards. It may look good from a distance, but best not to start buying furniture."³⁸

In other words, Act I and parts of Act II and IV may be out of "Shakespeare's" ballpark, but are they out of Edward Oxenford's? Can we be sure that Peele was, indeed, the single author of all the works now assigned to him? Unattributed collaborations may exist within his canon, awaiting our discovery. According to Vickers, Peele's "style was distinctively different" from that of Shakespeare's³⁹ but we are still lacking decisive proof that Peele's style is "distinctively different" from Oxford's early style. *Titus Andronicus* may contain unrevised portions of a revenge "device" that Oxford began in fury soon after Elizabeth allowed the beheading of his Howard cousin, Thomas, duke of Norfolk, in 1572.⁴⁰ Perhaps a future round of stylometric studies, involving a comparison of "the numbers" on all of Oxford's poems and prose with those for all the works currently attributed to George Peele, will shed further light on the question of who wrote what in *Titus Andronicus*.

Contested Will: Who Wrote Shakespeare?

As luck would have it, James Shapiro has just upped the ante on this scholarly enigma. In his view,

Only one thing could have arrested all of this biographical speculation: admitting that a surprising number of the plays we call Shakespeare's were written collaboratively. For there's no easy way to argue that a coauthored play, especially one in which it's hard to untangle who wrote which part, can be read autobiographically.⁴¹

As the historiographical evidence presented above suggests, the 1594 Quarto of *Titus Andronicus* offers a unique combination of entanglement and autobiography for testing Shapiro's claim. Oxford's biography, of course, reveals close family ties to the Howard family, through the marriage of his Aunt Frances to the poet Henry Howard—an alliance that connected the Veres to bloodlines nearly as royal as those of the Tudors.⁴² In looking for an “easy way” to arrest the authorship controversy, Shapiro inadvertently suggests that there is an “easy” explanation for Shakespeare's living art. Yet even this earliest of Shakespeare's ‘co-authored’ plays challenges the traditional attribution scholars with a unified complexity that bristles with daring political and religious ambiguities.

Certainly, there are no easy answers to the problems that *Titus Andronicus* raises for Shapiro's champion. Why does young William of Stratford assume the role of superior writer to the more experienced, university-educated George Peele? Why is it so difficult, even for computers, to sort out lines supposedly by Peele from those assuredly by Shakespeare? Can the submerged Catholic background of William and his Arden relations provide an adequate explanation for the play's evident fascination with the treasonous Howard family? Most perplexing of all, how did George Peele and William of Stratford get away with representing Elizabeth's ancestor, Thomas Howard, second duke of Norfolk as the war hero Titus *surnamed Pius* who brutally resolved Rome's succession crisis by stabbing Queen Tamora? As Lisa Hopkins points out, in her discussion of the play's references to Dido and Astraea, Shakespeare was skating on some incredibly thin ice:

A comparison with Dido was by no means necessarily flattering to Elizabeth, but then to some extent all allusion to or iconographical representation of the queen, other than those which she sanctioned herself, was potentially perilous. Indeed Shakespeare would have been on such dangerous ground here that Anthony Brian Taylor, challenging Frances Yates's influential view that there is a clear reference to Elizabeth as Astraea in *Titus Andronicus*, argues that an allusion to the queen cannot have been intended in the play because it would have been too risky.⁴³

In his dismissal of the methodology that J. T. Looney employed in matching characters in Shakespeare's canon to those in the earl of Oxford's biography, Shapiro protests,

But such claims about representing on the public stage some of the most powerful figures in the realm betray a shallow grasp of Elizabethan dramatic censorship. Looney didn't understand that Edmund Tilney, the Master of the Revels, whose job it was to read and approve all dramatic scripts before they were publicly performed, would have lost his job—and most likely his nose and ears, if not his head—had he approved a play that so transparently ridiculed privy councilors past and present.⁴⁴

Thankfully, neither Tilney nor the author—whomever your candidate—lost a single body part through the staging and publication of *Titus Andronicus*, but this does not prove the absence of potentially offensive material in this revenge drama, as Hopkins, Taylor, Klause and Swärdh have all discovered. Tilney, a descendant of the Flodden Duke who remained closely allied to his Howard relations, was first cousin to the Catholic conspirator Charles Tilney, who suffered the repulsively cruel execution that Elizabeth had ordered for those convicted in the Babington Plot. As Frank Brownlow notes, the queen desired “special punishments invented” for the conspirators:

Elizabeth's cruelty is an aspect of her rule which virtually all historians, with a few notable exceptions, ignore or deny, dazzled as they are by contemporary propaganda and subsequent English myth-making... In 1586 she wanted special punishments invented for the Babington plotters, but Burghley eventually persuaded her that the ordinary sentence for treason could be made sufficiently horrifying. When the London crowd showed its outrage over the cruelty of the first seven executions, Elizabeth, characteristically, backed down, and gave well-publicized orders that the second seven victims should be allowed to die before they were mutilated. What wasn't publicized was the fact that she had ordered the cruelty in the first place.⁴⁵

It may well be that the Master of the Revels had good reason to "wink" when this cunningly ambiguous political allegory, simmering with blatant parallels to the lives of his noble – and courageously Catholic – Howard ancestors, crossed his desk.

Shapiro's diversionary tactic in *Contested Will* shields him from confronting the electrifying implications of Oxford as Shakespeare. Would Lord Burghley ever allow the mutilation or beheading of a mere playwright who also happened to be the noble father of his own three granddaughters? From the time of his marriage to Anne Cecil, this privileged playwright possessed the most powerful protector in all England, one capable of persuading Elizabeth herself to act against her own wishes. As long as Oxford's plays and poems remained sufficiently anonymous and ambiguous, his father-in-law Burghley and his surrogate mother, Elizabeth, could suffer his dramatic "toys" and "devises" in dignified silence. By attributing *Titus Andronicus* to William Shakespeare in 1598, shortly after Burghley's death, Frances Meres helped to camouflage the pro-Howard, pro-Catholic potential of the play, shielding the commons and posterity from an unnecessary and unwelcome truth.

As far as the records show, William of Stratford had no connections powerful enough to protect him from the consequences of such explosively subversive writing.

Notes

The present article is an expansion of chapter 1 from an unpublished manuscript, *The First Mousetrap: Titus Andronicus and the Tudor Massacre of the Howards* (2007); introductory chapters available online www.thefirstmousetrap.org.

¹ Text used for this article is from *Shakespeare's Titus Andronicus: The First Quarto 1594*, (Scribner's, 1936); lineation from William Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus*, edited by Jonathan Bate (London: Routledge, 1995). Bate is one of the few editors to include the Quarto's three and a half lines, placed between brackets to indicate their uncertain status.

² Tilney's father, Thomas, "was grandson of Sir Philip Tilney of Shelley (d. 1534), who was treasurer in the expedition to Scotland in 1522 under Thomas Howard, (second) duke of Norfolk; the duke's second wife was Sir Philip's sister Agnes, and the Tilney family was very proud of this relationship." (DNB, Vol. 56, Sir Sidney Lee, 1898), p. 399.

³ Eccles, Mark, *Thomas Lodge and other Elizabethans*, (Octagon Books, N.Y., 1933), p. 417

⁴ Shapiro, James, *Contested Will: Who Wrote Shakespeare?* (Simon & Schuster, N.Y. 2010), p. 177

⁵ In the induction to *Bartholomew Fair*, Jonson clearly dates his play within the text, ("the one and thirtieth day of October, 1614). Then he has "a Scrivener" assert, "He that will swear "Jeronimo" or "Andronicus" are the best plays yet, shall pass unexcepted at here, as a man whose judgment shows it is constant, and hath stood still these five and twenty or thirty years," thus dating the first performances of "Andronicus" that Jonson's scrivener hazily recalls to 1584-89.

⁶ Klause, John, *Shakespeare, the Earl and the Jesuit*, (Fairleigh Dickenson University Press, Teaneck, N.J., 2008), p. 140

⁷ Cobbett, William, and Howell, Thomas Bayly, *Cobbett's Complete Collection of State Trials and Proceedings...* (T.C. Hansard, published by R. Bagshaw, London, 1809-1826), p. 1250-64. "There were a

great many that most heartily lamented the untimely fall of this young nobleman, (for he was not above 33 years of age at the most) and as many on the other side were ready to cry up the queen's wisdom and caution, who by this example had struck a kind of terror into the more powerful part of the Romish faction. The queen after all gave him his life, and was well enough satisfied in having lessened the power of so considerable a man, and one who was so great a bulwark of the Catholic cause." p. 1264

⁸ See Anna Swärdh's, *Rape and Religion in English Renaissance Literature*, (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, Studia Anglistica Upsaliensis, 124, 2003), for her theory of the correspondences between the rape of Lavinia in *Titus Andronicus* and the rape of Anne Bellamy by Topcliffe, which led to Anne's betrayal of Southwell's hiding place.

⁹ Vickers, Brian, *Shakespeare, Co-Author: A Historical Study of Five Collaborative Plays*, (Oxford University Press, N.Y., 2002), pp. 148-243

¹⁰ Klause, John, p. 140

¹¹ Tucker, Mildred Anna Rosalie, and Malleon, Hope, *Handbook to Christian and Ecclesiastical Rome*, (A. and C. Black, London, 1900), p. 337

¹² For a survey of Orthodox critical views on the political allegory in *Titus Andronicus*, including a keen awareness of the play's topical allusions and potential for pro-Catholic interpretations, see Lisa Hopkins, *The Cultural Uses of the Caesars on the English Renaissance Stage* (2008), "Reformation and Deformation", pp. 13-33. For the basis of what Michael Delahoyde refers to as "the sketchy Oxfordian consensus" on the pro-Anglican allegory of the Spanish Fury at Antwerp in *Titus*, see E. T. Clark, *Hidden Allusions in Shakespeare's Plays*, (1930) pp. 43-55. See also Charlton and Dorothy Ogburn, *This Star of England*, (1952), ch. 27, for an expansion of Clark's impressionistic theory. Delahoyde's "Edward de Vere's Hand in Titus Andronicus", (<http://www.briefchronicles.com/ojs/index.php/bc/article/view/11/29>) includes a brief glance at the Howard family beheadings.

¹³ Examined in chapters 13-15 of *The First Mousetrap*.

¹⁴ Sessions, p. 20

¹⁵ Brenan, Gerald, and Statham, Edward Phillips, *The House of Howard, Volume I*, D. Appleton and Co., New York, 1908, p. 112

¹⁶ Tucker, Melvin, *The Life of Thomas Howard: earl of Surrey and second duke of Norfolk*, Mouton & Co., London – The Hague – Paris, 1964, p. 141

¹⁷ Tucker, p. 100

¹⁸ Tucker, p. 102

¹⁹ Wilson, Derek, *In the Lion's Court: Power, Ambition and Sudden Death in the Reign of Henry VIII*, (St. Martin's Press, New York, 2001), p. 107, cited from Hall, *Triumphant Reign*, Vol. I, p. 96.

²⁰ Wilson, p. 107

²¹ Luke, Mary M., *Catherine the Queen*, (Coward-McCann, N.Y., 1967), p. 142

²² Wilson, p. 108

²³ Holinshed, Raphael, *Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*, Vol. 3, (London, J. Johnson 1807-08, N.Y. AMS Press, 1965), p. 593

²⁴ Erickson, Carolly, *Great Harry: The Extravagant Life of Henry VIII*, (Robson Books, Lon., 1980), p. 89

²⁵ Luke, p. 144

²⁶ Luke, p. 145

²⁷ Tucker, p. 104

²⁸ Holinshed, p. 598

²⁹ Luke, p. 146

³⁰ Wilson, p. 113

³¹ Vickers, p. 243

³² Maxwell, J.C., ed., *Titus Andronicus*, (1953), p. xxxiii-iv.

³³ Vickers, p.p. 116-119

³⁴ Elliot, Ward, and Valenza, Robert, “Disentangling the Shakespeare Fringes: Shakespeare’s Co-Authored Play Verse” from *Shakespeare by the Numbers*, book manuscript, Claremont McKenna College, Claremont, CA

³⁵ Klause, John, p. 284, n.55

³⁶ Dekker, Thomas, *Satiromastix* (1602), from *The Collected Works of Thomas Dekker*, edited by Fredson Bowers, (Cambridge [Eng.] University Press, 1953-61), Vol. I, p. 325

³⁷ Shapiro, James, *Rival Playwrights: Marlowe, Jonson and Shakespeare*, (Columbia University Press, N.Y., 1991), p. 3

³⁸ Hughes, Stephanie, “Politicworm”, Feb. 22, 2010, <http://politicworm.com/2010/02/17/merkels-view-of-titus-andronicus/>

³⁹ Vickers, p. 243

⁴⁰ Nelson, Alan, *Monstrous Adversary*, (Liverpool University Press, 2003): “On 18 March (1572) John Lee sent a semi-secret dispatch to Burghley from Antwerp...” containing the first record of Oxford’s fury that he could not save his cousin from the axe. Nelson’s summary: “Thus within three months of his marriage rumour had reached as far as Antwerp that Oxford, who pleaded for Norfolk’s life, had separated from Anne, driven by anger against Burghley.” p. 81

⁴¹ Shapiro, James, *Contested Will*, p. 58

⁴² See Sessions, chapter 1, “The Fathers: Two Battles” and chapter 2, “The Mother”, pp 11-68, for the context and significance of the poet earl of Surrey’s distinguished lineage.

⁴³ Hopkins, Lisa, *The Cultural Uses of the Caesars on the English Renaissance Stage*, Ashgate, (Burlington, VT, 2008), p. 22; quoting Anthony Brian Taylor: “Close examination of the beginning of the *Book of Martyrs*...makes it extremely doubtful that Shakespeare would have wished an audience to identify his character with the legendary King Lucius and then, by implication, with Elizabeth. In the small space devoted to King Lucius, there are two salient facts: the first is that he introduced Christianity into Britain; the second is that he died childless with disastrous consequences for his country. *Titus Andronicus* was written when the Queen was well past child-bearing age; as a young playwright at the beginning of his career, Shakespeare would have had to have displayed a good deal less sense than we normally credit him with, to have invited his audience to link Elizabeth, even by remote implication, with a ruler who was the epitome of the Elizabethan nightmare.” Taylor, ‘Lucius, the Severely Flawed Redeemer of Titus Andronicus’, (*Connotations* 6.2, 1996-97): p. 139

⁴⁴ Shapiro, *Contested Will*, p. 177

⁴⁵ Brownlow, Frank, ‘Richard Topcliffe’, from *Theatre and Religion: Lancastrian Shakespeare*, (ed. Richard Dutton, Alison Findlay, and Richard Wilson, Manchester University Press, N.Y., 2003), p.166. Charles Tilney was among the unfortunate first seven executed for the Babington plot. At the scaffold, Tilney said, “I am a catholic, and believe in Jesus Christ, and by his Passion I hope to be saved; and I confess I can do nothing without him, which opinion all catholics firmly hold: and whereas they are thought to hold the contrary, they are in that, as in all other things, greatly abused.” Cobbett, *State Trials and Executions*, p. 1158

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