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Reading the Unreadable

Text, Intertextuality, and Authorship in
Textual Practice and in *Titus Andronicus*

The Question of Reading

The question that is preliminary to any inquiry on reading always remains unanswered: “Who’s there?” It would be inappropriate, in the current state of human sciences, to separate reading as a phenomenon from the reading subject. I have to propose that either or both of these are *a priori* true: there is no verb (act) without a subject and/or there is no subject without a verb (event). Therefore, I will have to position these two notions in relation to each other. This relation can be measured by the standard of originality, that is, by determining which one of the two phenomena is constitutive of the other. This study will attempt and fail to make the mentioned determination, but, in the meantime, it aims to provide an outline (i.e. a position) of what we today call reading. Reading, as a process, is a quest – a search for meaning. This search has a predetermined course, which is guided by epistemology. When any kind of epistemology is in a crisis, the course of reading is derailed into the direction of the unknowable, which is otherwise concealed by “knowledge.” This results in the increased self-awareness and playfulness of textual practice. The present study aims to describe this detour of meaning production by examining the relationship of meaning and textuality. In the second part of the study, I shall demonstrate the problem of reading through William Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus*, by putting certain elements of the play into the context of my semiotic explorations; besides the demonstrative function of the tragedy, this step may also shed a new light on several aspects of the play.

A Few Meanings of the Word Text

It seems obvious that reading is impossible without a text. But is such a *without* possible at all? Several problems arise from the fact that what a text is can be interpreted in several ways. We could say, for instance that this statement limits reading to the deciphering of written language. But we are back to square one, if we take the deconstructionist notion about writing into consideration: any kind of linguistic performance (*parole* – however contradictory this may seem or sound) is a form of writing, a (re)production of signifiers (Derrida, 1976, 6-7). In this case, of course, “There is nothing outside the text.” (Derrida, 1976, 158) But we are still not any closer to the meaning of text. If we take the text (whatever it may be) as constitutive of our reality, then we may feel the need to find a different term for the more traditional meaning of text. For that

reason I will introduce a binary opposition which is also a whole-part and a parent-child relation. There is what I shall henceforth call the *Derridean text*, an infinite set of signifiers, where meaning is a process, continuously deferring itself, and differing from everything else (including itself). This text is all-encompassing, and constitutive of referential, or rather, (always already) representational reality. I shall not question the now centuries old proposition of Western (meta)physics that the actual material reality (with the thing, either in itself, or not) is operationally barred from the human cognitive apparatus, because we are here concerned with reading – a process that is a function of the same apparatus, regardless of any knowledge of material reality. The other term we are concerned with is what I shall call the *Barthesian work* (Barthes, 2007, 878-81). This is a text taken as unit. It is a thing in the referential reality and perhaps in the material one, but that does not concern us. The work is a product of an institution; it can become a commodity, and it has a signifier that refers to it. But the Barthesian work is created by the limitations imposed upon the Derridean text, which is always already there. These limitations come about by the introduction of the *origin* of the work.

The origin is always already a supplement to the Derridean text – which in turn is a chain of supplements. But the origin is there to hide this supplementarity (Derrida, 1976, 156-7). It is a centre that makes freeplay possible, and also limits it (Derrida 2002, 352). The origin of the work is the author. As Foucault argued, in our consumer culture the work is the product and property of the author. Or rather, the author's function is to provide the place of product for the work (Foucault, 1984, 305). The notion of the author implies that the work is the creation (or creature) of the author and it arose from its meaning producing self. But we have seen that the work is not something in itself, it is a relation between the author and a supplement of the Derridean text. Let us elaborate on this from the point of view of the reader: for the reader, the work is a relation between the reader, and the supplementary origin of the work: the author. For the author, on the other hand, the same supplement is the reader. Reader and author *imply* each other to provide a relation which is the work. This implication is the concealment and limitation of the Derridean text. A relation with the Derridean text itself (?) is not imaginable, unlimited *différance* (Derrida, 1982, 1-29) is unable to provide coherent meaning, thence the desire for a centre. The limitation

and concealment of endless supplementarity is an operational necessity of the subject, for whom the illusion of non-deferral meaning is constitutive.

For the reader, the author is an *other*, and vice versa. It is essentially a supplement for reality, in the sense of what I call the Derridean text. Even though their function, as described above, is basically the same, there is a crucial difference between the author and the reader with respect to the way in which they carry out the limitation of meaning. This difference is essentially temporal, and carries in itself the danger of the dissolution of the unity that is imposed upon the chaotic play of the Derridean text by the I-other-work relation. For the reader, the author is always in the past, and for the author, the reader is always in the future.

A work is thus deprived of a stable context. Without the I-other relation it is a set of dead signifiers. It cannot signify anything, unless it is being read or written. The determining force, shaping meaning is the socio-historical context, the moment of utterance. But this moment is elusive; it is a blurred context, dissolved between the moment of writing down, and the moment of reading. For establishing a stable meaning for the work, which is deprived of context, the reader has to assume a context, a moment of utterance, and the other who uttered. Thus the reader assumes another communicant, who within this assumed context uttered (wrote) the work. This communicant, in my reading, is the implied author of reader response criticism (Booth 1983, 71). There always has to be an assumed communicant, since the two communicants are both essential parts of the context. Therefore, the author also assumes the reader on the other side of the communication. Nobody really writes only to themselves. The reader supposes a specific intention behind the text and that this intention *originates* from the other, even after the, we could say optional, death of the author (Barthes, 2007, 874-7). Conversely, the author assumes the reader who is supposed to be an other within a specific context that enables him to understand the work on every level of polysemy intended by the author. This relation supposes a completely selfsame meaning that exists in itself and is entirely transferable in the signifiers of the work. This supposition is a necessity, but it is an illusion.

Firstly, the writing of the work is not self-evidently the creation or production of it. Everything that is in the work is always already there, and always already more than what the work shows it

to be. The signifiers are produced through and not by the author. They are the products and also the elements of the Derridean text, which then is supplemented by a supposedly selfsame other, the reader. Every work is thus an intertext, which means, as Kristeva puts it: “in the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize each other” (Kristeva 1980, 36), where text is what I have called the Barthesian work. The other works only seem intersected within the space of a given work because they are supposed to be parts of a coherent and cohesive whole. This is supposed because there is an intention assumed in the work by both the author and the reader. In other words, the works intersect each other in the centre formed by the subject, and neutralize each other because this centre limits (but does not stop) the deferral of meaning.

Secondly, I have to point out that the intention of the author, assumed to be understood by the reader, and the intention that the reader actually assumes cannot be the same. The direct connection between two human “minds” (the quotation marks aim to indicate that I use a very loaded term only for the lack of a better word) is impossible. Any connection is made through the medium of language, in the form of utterances, which requires a context to operate as a medium. This context cannot be the same for the author and the reader; it is not even the same for the author when he becomes the reader of his own work. Subjects look at the same thing from different spaces, in different times – the quantity of elapsed time is not the real issue, it is the fact that any amount of time passed – they cannot see the same thing in the same way. Furthermore, subjects have their conscious and unconscious histories that influence their relations to particular signifiers. And finally, the heterogeneity of the subject prevents it from observing the intention homogeneously. A very simple example is how a sudden change of moods can affect the interpretation of a work. Thus, there is not a single, absolute centre, where the intersection of works happens, rather the work can be observed from many positions, each being a possible centre, a possible intersection.

The multiplicity of possible intersections implies that there is no constant pattern in the way the works neutralize each other, that is, the deferral of meaning is limited differently in different

cases. This means that it is not absolutely limited, in the infinity of the possible relations to a work. The dissolution of the unity of work is inherent in the fact that the intention behind the work is in fact a trace, in the Derridean sense (Derrida, 1976, 47-8). The reading of a work is the search for this trace which is inevitably endless, in fact the reciprocal of supplementarity. This is how the Derridean text reemerges from the imposed limitation of the work. This is paradoxically enough brought about by the subject, but in a specific way that necessitates the introduction of another meaning of text. In following the trace, the subject does not give up the desire for a non-deferral meaning. The trace is not there in the work; therefore it induces the reader to produce a supposed hidden meaning in the work. It is a story about how and why the work is supposed to come into existence – it is the assumed intention turned into a story, another work. We are thus faced with a duplication of the work, which is an attempt to maintain limitation on meaning. In Bakhtinian dialogism, the interpreter can only make sense of an utterance *in relation* to other utterances, or in our case, works. Therefore, I shall call this double (or multiple) work, a *dialogue*. (Holquist, 1990, 13-64). These works are dependent on each other, they determine certain meanings for each other, and thus result in the becoming-author of the reader, who thus supplements himself and limits the deferral of meaning. The fact that the reader is now supplemented for an author implies that the dialogue becomes a work itself, and induces other dialogues, within or without the same reader. I shall call this endless dialogue of dialogues *discourse*.

Discourse is self-reflexive and constantly reproduces itself. Any meta-discourse is always already part of the discourse. The discourse has no author, but it also contains the trace of the other as any dialogue. This trace is what we know as the history of the discourse. Here, there is no supplement for the origin, only its trace that is endlessly being lost. Discourse is possibly infinite, but it has boundaries, and it is structured around the trace of its origin, thus it is endlessly expanding. However, it is not all encompassing, as the Derridean text, it only aims to be. The Derridean text has *différance* operating within it – the forward motion of supplementarity and the backward motion of trace are both possible. Discourse, on the other hand has only its history, only the reaction to previous works is possible, this is an always already limited *différance*, limited by the referential nature of the relations within the system of

the discourse: it is *référance*¹ – the difference between two elements of discourse is always already only diachronic.

In the case of the work, the subject can take the place as a centre; in the case of discourse, the subject can only participate as an element (and as a centre of a work, which is also an element). Discourse is there in every work and dialogue as a specific history, as *référance*. If we observe the author – reader relation from the perspective of discourse, we will see that every reader becomes an author, producing a reading of a work, which is also a work. We can call the work produced from a reading an interpretation, and we can call the work, from which an interpretation is produced an influence. Every author had been a reader before becoming an author and any work they produce is always already a reading of a previous work. If we consider meaning production only, there is no difference between reading and writing.

Reading Subjects

At this point I suspend the enterprise of unveiling the meanings of the word text. I limited this attempt, firstly to prevent multiplying elements beyond necessity, and secondly to remain within a more or less contemporary framework – even though I used the contemporary terminology in a somewhat arbitrary manner. My more or less systematic model will be sufficient to outline the nature of reading, in relation to the subject. Let us now turn our attention towards the human element, and to the process of its subjectivity.

The human subject is first and foremost a body. There is nothing more important in its constitution than the way it perceives and senses its body. The real body is both the only possible (and indirect) connection with reality and the thing that makes direct connection impossible for the subject. I do not claim that there is an actual self, a Cartesian Ego, somewhere within or above the body that controls it and perceives through it. The *I* is a function of the human body, it allows for a very specific (it is in fact a human *diferentia specifica*) relation to the world and reality. This function requires a certain alienation from the body, which results in the illusion that the body is something homogeneous and controllable, whereas it is actually a chaotic set of

¹ I propose this new term to designate this special operational logic of *différance*.

drives, hormones, and needs. According to psychoanalytic theory, the *I* begins with the mirror phase: the child recognizes itself in the mirror and begins to observe itself as a unit which is different from the rest of the world (Lacan, 1977, 1-6). A little later, the subject realizes that it cannot complete the (m)other and become a whole again itself, this is where repression cuts off every connection with reality, through the introduction of language which is able to signify things that are not present. This loss is the loss of something that was never actually real, it is a trace; the subject is never really an undividable part of the (m)other, it is never really her object of desire, but it sees its origin in this illusionary unity. This Symbolic Order is governed by a law, which is, at least in the Freudian tradition, established by the father, the first figure of authority that the child encounters. Through the signifier that presents absence, the subject will constantly try to regain its loss, which is impossible because the signifier can present nothing but absence. This unconscious, unsatisfiable desire is what pursues the subject into the signifying chain (Lacan, 1977, 111-36). I have already referred to this phenomenon as the desire for the non-deferral of meaning.

The mechanics of this desire is explained by Kristeva. It is clear now that signification, and therefore the speaking subject, is not a thing *per se*, but a process. In this process “A plurality of signifiers aims at and fails at being a signified” (Kristeva 1985, 214). In Kristeva’s model, the referent and the signifiable are in a contradictory relationship, because the referent is also a signifier, i.e. a supplement for reality; however the process of signification is a persistent attempt to signify the referent. The constant production of meaning is an attempt to signify everything, so that nothing would avoid being “caught up in the sign”, but because of the contradiction between signifiable and referent, there will always be a leftover, an opacity; this is what produces the “sentiment of the body” (Kristeva, 1985, 214).

There is another “disturbing” aspect of signification that has not been mentioned in the discussion on the text, because it is induced specifically by a certain aspect of the subject. This aspect is what I term as heterogeneity. The subject, before using the signifiers of the language as symbols, uses them differently; they are used to produce an effect with the use of intonation and rhythm. The memory of this semiotic *chora* remains attached to the subject as a memento of the repressed pre-symbolic phase. Thus, there are the semiotic and the symbolic modalities of

language, what constitutes the difference between the two is that in the symbolic the signs are unmotivated, while in the semiotic, they are motivated by the repressed, thus unconscious drives, that is, they are not really symbolic signs, but from our necessarily symbolic point of view, they signify as if they had been already signs before the entry into the symbolic (Kristeva, 1984, 19-90). Signification exists in these two modalities: most utterances are dominated by the symbolic, but the unconscious regularly presents itself as a surfacing of the semiotic, this is especially true to poetic language (Kristeva, 1985, 215). However, the signifiers appearing in a semiotic utterance are always also symbols, with their arbitrary relation to absence: thus the utterance in the semiotic modality is in fact a supplement of the origin of the subject – or the mark of the trace of the unconscious. This is what makes the subject to be the engine of the deferral of meaning, which is exactly what it tries to repress.

Let us now observe the subject from another perspective. I have to point out another very specific aspect of the human condition. Humans live in communities. The subject is in a complex relationship with other subjects within the framework of a certain kind of discourse which we know as culture. The subject occupies a position in at least two kinds of relations: power relations and relations of identity preservation. These two are of course dependent on each other, but they result in different activities of the subject. Both of these relations will be presented through the theories of Michel Foucault. In his essay about the subject and power, Michel Foucault describes the methods by which the subject is constituted in society by technologies of power. This constitution is achieved through a certain kind of individualization that fixes the position of the subject (as an individual) in its social context. As an individual, the subject has to be “othered”, through the system of binary oppositions, which is inherent in the structure of power, and also, the technologies of power provide (institutionalize) certain discursive practices and the possible meanings within them, and the individual subject has to have the opportunity to react to these discourses – we should not be misled by the word “opportunity”, the subject does not have the choice to abstain from reaction, but it can choose from a number of possible reactions (possible as determined by the power technologies) that will represent it within the power relations to other subjects. This way, the subject takes up a position concerning certain epistemological questions (or answers, but that mostly depends on the position) (Foucault, 1988,

208-26). The relations that I called the relations of identity preservation are concerned with the subject's knowledge of self. According to Foucault, the subject has its own technologies for reflecting upon its own actions and thoughts. Through these technologies, the subject aspires to achieve the "purity of thought." This requires the censorship of "impure" thoughts. In Foucault's model, this censure is achieved through the "confession" of the thoughts to the figure(s) of authority. Foucault states that this technology originates from the Christian tradition of confession. But since the decline of the influence of Christianity, it is the State which assumed the position, to whom the permanent verbalization of thoughts is addressed. For the practice to be completely successful, the addressee has to tell the correct story, the proper form of thinking as a response to the confessor (Foucault, 1993, 198-227).

Let us consider the purity of thought taking into consideration the arguments proposed so far. A pure thought is supposed to be a work with a clear authenticity of both the author and the reader - I and other. In a pure work, the origin is present, and there is no deferral of meaning, nor trace or supplement. Only a transcendental subject could be able to produce such a work. A real, heterogeneous subject is unable to do so, since the trace of the unconscious, the semiotic modality, i.e. the opacity of the referent is always manifested in every work. The reproduction of work into dialogue, and dialogue into discourse takes the form of a Foucauldian confession. The author implicitly confesses the deferral of meaning within its work, and the reader, taking the role of author attempts to provide a proper work with the play completely closed off. However, the reader-now-author also has a history, an unconscious, and this will turn his work into another confession. The constant recreation of discourse comes about from the continuous effort of the reading subjects to rationalize something that both precedes and contradicts reason.

Confession is a specifically Western way of reproducing discourse. I have to assume, however that discourse as we use it here is not culture specific. I shall presume that "literature" is a universal, in one of the several possible meanings of that term. I shall also presume that it is universally a discourse, if not in any other way it is the reading of reality (the Derridean text) and then passing that reading into oral tradition. And oral tradition fits perfectly into the outlined model as a continuous (re)production of subjective works. Of course in more tradition based cultures, the terminology used here should either be replaced or redefined, but this would go too

far from the present enterprise. If discourse, as I described it, is universal, there has to be something operating behind it that is not specifically Western, rather specifically human. It is not without risk to present such an aggressive universalization, and I cannot escape presenting it from the perspective of Western thought. I shall thus contend that the model for the operation of a discourse-creating drive is applicable in/to the Western culture, and I shall assume that the same model, with a very thorough revision of the applied terminology taking culture-specific elements into consideration, in each particular case is applicable as a universal.

For establishing this model I shall turn to one of the most debated works in Psychoanalysis: Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (Freud, 1961). The problem that Freud examines in his work shook one of the fundamental principles of psychoanalysis: in cases of trauma, the traumatic experience is repeated in dreams (or, as later demonstrated, in life, where the subject is the agent performing repetition). It is a paradigm in psychoanalysis that every dream is a fulfillment of a wish. The dreams of repetition lead Freud to the conclusion that there is a force, a drive operating beyond the Pleasure Principle – which had been thought to be the most basic and universal drive that works in the psyche (Freud 1961, 1-5). As always, Freud has an explanation. The psyche has to be protected from the outer and inner incursions of energy before the Pleasure Principle can be put to work. In order to achieve this, the “outer layer” of the psyche, the part which is connected to the outside world, has to be reshaped after every incursion to be able to protect the psyche from a next one. Whenever the invasive energy is too powerful to be kept outside, it pushes the balance within the psyche – this is a trauma. We have to notice that trauma is not necessarily the consequence of pain, but the impact of an excessive, unbearable and unexpected amount of energy into the psyche. The trauma induces the change of “the outer layer” and this reestablishes stability, in which the Pleasure Principle can continue to operate (Freud 1961, 18-26). It is crucial that we are talking about processes here and not things or structures. The process which restores the balance in the psyche is the repetition of the trauma. In the process of repetition, the subject ceases to be the passive sufferer of the trauma and becomes the active agent (Freud 1961, 10).

Now, it is implied throughout the discourse of psychoanalysis that every human being has a basic and fundamental trauma (which is also constitutive of it). This trauma is the loss of the unity

with the (m)other, or we could say, the discovery of the lack of that unity. The *I* itself comes about from that trauma, in fact, it is the protective “outer layer” that is to be further strengthened. This basic trauma, the introduction to the Symbolic Order and the master signifiers is both pre-symbolic, and the beginning of the symbolic. It is a supplementary origin for the Symbolic Order. A trace that is followed by the repetition of that trauma, or I should rather say, the possibility of the trace comes about from the compulsion to repeat that trauma. This repetition is nothing else but the continuous resurfacing of the semiotic modality within the symbolic. And we have seen that it is the semiotic modality that triggers the reproduction of discourse. However, there is more. Freud tries to explore what would happen to the psyche, without the incursion of trauma, that is, what the aims of the drives are before the incursion of the trauma. He points out that the aim of energy is always perfect stability, the return to the state of standstill. This state is in our case the inorganic. That is, the instinct seeks to conserve the status quo in the economy of the psyche, therefore every change is against the instinctual “will” and causes trauma. The repetition of the trauma merely lengthens the path to the final destination – death. That is to say, the aim of the instinct is death, but not death of any kind – the cycle that was established by earlier changes has to be completed before the return into the state of inorganic – therefore the drives that seemingly aim to keep us alive, are only maintaining the proper journey into death. Death before the completion of the cycle is against the principles of the death drive (Freud 1961, 31-3).

There are two things to point out, in relation to this. Firstly, the death that the drives seek to reach is unreachable. There is no perfect death, that is one cannot live his own death to be perfect, because one dies before he could live it. This concealed lack of a *telos* is a basic property of discourse; it is the same thing, the same drive that expands discourse by reproducing works and constantly lengthens life in the hope of a perfect death. Secondly, this image of an end is what constitutes the work as a unit. Brooks describes how the Freudian death drive is inherent in the structure of “literary” works – or more precisely, of the plot. The plot is directed towards the conclusion, as life is directed towards death; it seems that Freud’s death drive drives the forces that assemble the plot, and maintains their unity. There is postponement between the beginning and the end, which contains everything needed to imbue the conclusion with the value of a *telos*

(Brooks 1992, 97). Lacan states that a part of the signifying chain can become a meaningful utterance only *ex post facto*, after punctuation has been placed after it. In Lacan's thought, a signifier is articulated, but it is not specifically a word, it can be a sentence or even a larger linguistic unit, but when the *point de capiton* freezes the signifying chain, at that moment, that unit becomes *the* signifier, as a whole, and it is "hooked" into another signifier, which, for that moment, becomes the signified, this is how meaning is possible in an endlessly deferring signifying chain (Lacan, 1977, 231-2). This *point de capiton* is the end, the conclusion of the work, which constitutes it as a work. But though the meaning of the work is, for the moment of the *anagnorisis*, complete and seemingly coherent (Brooks 1992, 91-2), returning to Kristeva, there is still an opacity, something not signified, and so another cycle begins. The middle of the plot ensures a proper full cycle, there has to be some anxiety, some suspense, an overflow of energy that would be released in the end, but again it is not released completely, and so the work becomes a dialogue, and so on.

The Reading of the Question

The end is always anticipated. The nature of this anticipation is what determines the shape of a discourse. For every human attempt to seize knowledge of reality is finally directed towards the question of death. That there is such a question is a universal aspect of human cultures, but the question itself cannot be formulated outside of a culture-specific framework, which would then conceal certain aspects of it. As for the answer, knowledge is institutionalized and often provides a provisional answer, but neither of these answers can be taken, at least not in our age, as satisfying. There have been periods in the history of the West, which saw the shaking of the institutions of knowledge. In periods like this (like ours), the individual (always in a historically specific sense of the world) comes about; the individual, who, arising from the doubt of the institution, is left alone to make sense of the world and, of course, death. This results in the questioning of the possibility of any knowledge and a terrible uncertainty that arises from the fear of the unknown.

What is to be done in the light of this comprehensive epistemological uncertainty? The answer is found hidden in the discourse of "literature", an endless reproduction of the play with the drive

that generates all meaning. If we cannot know anything, we can only play. For instance, I have outlined a theoretical model, and now I am inclined to apply it to a specific literary work of art. But in the case of “literary” studies, application of a theory means nothing more than the recognition that another work also expresses the same theory, only in a different manner. I cannot point out a truth that is not true only by virtue of its premises, but I can show it from a different angle, and thus reveal a new aspect of the unformulated question, for which there is no real answer. In the remaining part of this study I shall interpret Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus*, a play written during the epistemological crisis of the English Renaissance. I have chosen a work from a different historical period than our own to point out certain paradigmatic aspects of such crises.

“Terras Astrea Reliquit”

Titus Andronicus, this earliest tragedy of Shakespeare has puzzled critics and audiences for several centuries with its intriguing and troubling elements and themes. This play is the systematic depiction of chaos and disorder, a metalanguage that tries to come to terms with the gap between referentiality and representation. It does not make an attempt to represent reality; it constantly tries to utter a linguistic impossibility: as we have seen at Kristeva, the referent is not signifiable, that is, it cannot become a signified. *Titus Andronicus* explicates this problem by constantly turning referents into signifiers and signifiers into referents in its own world. It is the metalanguage of referents. And the problematic referent is always the self, the body. The excessive amount of brutality and mutilations on the stage in this play is in fact the desperate search for the trace of the body. The play represents this search, and does it in a double alphabet: that of spoken language and that of body parts imbued with signifying value; and there is interplay of these alphabets, a conflict.

The most problematic body part is the hand. Lavinia’s hands are cut off to completely cut her off from any kind of communication, unlike Philomela, who she later identifies with, she cannot even write down her story. Her hands are lost for good and absent from the stage. However, in the case of Titus, the hand gains a value, becomes a signifier, or we could even say, a commodity: Titus gives his hand in exchange for his sons’ lives. The failure of signification, the

fragmentation of meaning is shown by the two heads Titus gets in exchange for his hand. The hand did not signify properly, it could only retrieve parts of his sons. Furthermore, the cutting off of Titus' hand is a ritual, Aaron and Titus are holding hands, as in the case of a feudal oath, but we cannot decide who is the lord and who is the vassal, since Titus is a patriarch, a renowned general, and yet it is Aaron, a moor who gives something in exchange for the oath, as a feudal lord would do, I shall return to this later. When the hand is returned along with the heads, it ends up in Lavinia's mouth, from where no successful sign can arise anymore. The scene in its horrifying brutality may be a sensationist move, but this does not account for the fact that throughout the play the word 'hand' is also treated with a certain kind of cruelty: there are several puns and metaphors including hands, which is at least tactless, considering the amount of handless characters. This shows a tendency of the play: the *de dicto* and the *de re*² are constantly confused, or blurred with each other, what the characters say, frequently becomes real. Consider for example: "TAMORA: I will not hear her speak; away with her" (II. iii, 86.) said about Lavinia shortly before her mutilation, and the already mentioned scene, when Titus gives a hand to Aaron. In this play, words turn against their users; the language, the system, Rome, all become malignant and, worse, indifferent towards the people who very likely thought that they were in full control of them.

The cruelty of language, of the symbol, is a return of something attached to the symbol, the return of the uncontrollable (within the symbolic), of the semiotic. The semiotic modality is not necessarily cruel or unpleasant, but it always marks the haunting trace of the repressed, somewhere, hidden in it there is its own loss, there is *the* trauma. Here, the play with the unsignifiable, its constant invocation to the stage is what presents the semiotic, the overwhelming invasion of the real into the symbolic. There is something that I call an extreme manifestation of this return, *when what returns has never been*. This horrifying non-sign is what Kristeva calls the abject. The abject is neither an object nor a subject; it is the borderline between the symbolic and the unsignifiable reality. It does not produce meaning: it is the manifestation of nothingness, of death (Kristeva, 1982, 1-31). The abject threatens with dissolution, if only for a moment, it makes the end, the telos appear to be closer, at *hand*. Thus, it threatens with the

² There is an uncertainty about whether the utterances in the play should be interpreted as speaking *of the word* or *of the thing*, since things regularly become words, and vice versa.

premature ending of the cycle, the defilement of the death drive. But *Titus Andronicus* does not attempt to merely represent death; it attempts to create a language that can fully contemplate it. The archetype of abjection is the “abhorred pit” of the third scene of the second act (II. iii, 98), a pit which is only seen to be a pit, but what actually is within it is hidden, and it is in its non-visibility that it is the most horrifying. The bottom of the pit marks the place where the trace leads to: into nothing. The fear of the pit is in fact the fear of becoming what Lavinia is turned into, after her mutilation: a corpse that lives. Lavinia becomes the manifestation of the danger of circumventing the death drive - she defies the *ars moriendi* and dies before really and properly dying. The characters around her develop certain strategies to make her (?) meaningful, to prolong their real encounter with her. We can point to the long soliloquy of Marcus after he sees the “transformed” Lavinia, or to Titus’ oath to create a new alphabet to understand her. *Titus Andronicus* shows in a metaperspective how discourse is reproduced in the constant delay of death by meaning production, until the telos, death can be properly lived (i.e. never), as I have outlined in my model. But as a work, the play cannot escape the same drive which it seeks to unveil, for in the end, Lavinia does gain a meaning, but the way she (?) returns to the living reveals even more.

Let us investigate Lavinia’s case. She, like Philomela in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* is raped and then has her tongue cut out. But in addition, Lavinia is also deprived of her hands. This seems to be a careful measure taken by Chiron and Demetrius, who seem to know Philomela’s story (Philomela writes down the story of her rape, and reveals her offender), and seek to prevent Lavinia from incriminating them. This explanation seems legitimate, but it does not explain the pertaining obsession with hands throughout the play. We should consider the metaperspective, and direct more attention to the hand as an instrument of writing. Lavinia is deprived of the ability to write, she cannot produce meaning with her hand and, as it turns out neither can Titus, who sends his hand as a letter to the emperor, in vain. The removal of the writing hand, the failure of writing points to another tendency of the play: the lack of any authority. This is true on the metaperspective too: the author cannot write down meaning, only dead signifiers, as if his hands were removed, and the only way he can communicate anything is by exposing the removed hand, as his own trace. This is the work of art: a mutilated child whose father can only

be seen disappearing in her silent mouth. This self-awareness of the work, that is, the awareness of the lack of a self on the part of the author (i.e. his trace) is in fact a main motif of *Titus Andronicus*. The play seems to show not only the death, but *the suicide of the author*. From a metaperspective, the author of the play is not in any way authenticated. Most of what happens throughout the play can be found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, though it is modified and paraphrased, but mostly it seems to be a compilation of classical stories about rape and its consequences: Philomela, who became an author after she was raped, and thus her repetition is modified to exclude the act of writing in the case of Lavinia; Lucrece, who is able to tell her story, but then commits suicide (like the author of this play); Virginia, who does not have any authority, but her father has and thus he kills her to save her from shame; and we should not forget Actaeon, who is punished for accidentally witnessing the mystery of the female body, much like the way Tamora punishes Bassianus – this return demonstrates the uncontrollable and inevitable agency of language, of intertextuality. I do not intend to question the originality of the play. I would rather like to point out a complete subversion of any authority within it. The scene where Lavinia can tell almost exactly what happened to her with the help of the *Metamorphoses*, this way can be interpreted as a self-mockery by the author, as if he tried to indicate that he only changed the names. But before I continue to follow this trail, I feel obliged to provide more ground for the new term I daringly introduced earlier: *référance*. At any point of time the reader is faced with a work, he can only relate it to other works that *were* written before. The present work dissolves into non-presence, as an intersection of references, and it is the force of this temporally limited *différance* which drives us to follow the trace, *référance* is a backward deferral of the origin of a work. What *Titus Andronicus* shows here on the meta level, is exactly this: the implied author, an implied William Shakespeare ceases to be the origin, he is only an intersection, a rearrangement around a temporary centre, of classical works compiled by Ovid (a previous such centre). I contend that the fact that the work implicitly shows its awareness of the mechanics of the discourse of literature, indicates a cultural determination, which is just as characteristic of our age as that of Shakespeare: in a specifically non-positivist epistemology, discourse revolves around its own blindness, unlike in positivist periods, when rationalism or empiricism or something forgotten or something yet to be seen hides this blindness in a successful institutionalization of knowledge.

Let us observe how this epistemology is reflected within the play and return to the motif of the lack of authority. The world of *Titus Andronicus* is a world without gods or God. The epistemological crisis of the English Renaissance has to be interpreted by taking the effect of Reformation into consideration. One of the innovative doctrines of Reformation was the notion of predestination, which implies that God knows of one's deeds before one commits them, and therefore one is judged without any possible interaction with God. Every communication with God and his agents is cut off, the (wo)man of reformation is left alone, helpless, without any possible way of controlling their fate after death. This terrifying aspect of the *zeitgeist*³ resonates through *Titus Andronicus*, in the form of silence. Firstly, the Tribunes of Rome do not even answer to Titus when he begs for the lives of his sons. Secondly, in the arrow shooting scene the letters of Titus do not reach their address - the Gods give no signs of themselves. In this context, the scene when Titus talks to stones can very well be interpreted as an emblem: the stone is a medieval – Biblical emblem of Saint Peter and the Church. The silence of the stone means two things: God and his church have become indifferent to and absent from the earth, and conversely, the stones are not polysemic anymore, they are just stones. Justice has left the Earth. Rome is headless, and later governed by an emperor who is in the hands of Tamora, an enemy of the empire. Chaos reigns, and even the strongest taboo is breakable – Tamora's feast breaks two very strong taboos: cannibalism and in a certain sense, incest. The cruelty of language and the lack of an authority both indicate a world(view) which is full of uncertainty and the horrifying fear of the unknown. Gradually, everything is turned into that "abhorred pit" which both hides and reveals too much to be dealt with. And in spite of this, in the end, order is restored, at the cost of many lives.

It is a characteristic of Shakespearean tragedies that after the anagnorisis and the death of the tragic hero, special care is taken to restore order in the world of the play; the best example is the seemingly completely unnecessary depiction of the arrival of Fortinbras in the ending of *Hamlet*⁴. This gives us the impression that Shakespeare uses a framework for his tragedies: the

³ On the effects of the Reformation and Protestant theology on the world view of the English Renaissance, and its influence on the contemporary dramas see *Dollimore, 1984, 9-49*.

⁴ I would like to note that these endings do not offer a safe closure that would promise to close off the interpretation; rather they open up a possibility of continuity of the story, and in that sense they are not really endings.

framework of the carnival. Carnavalesque, as an aspect of literature is a notion introduced by Bakhtin (Dentith, 1995, 63-84). *Titus Andronicus* gives a strong impression that it is influenced by the antique Roman festival, the Saturnalia. Saturnalias were festivals honouring the Golden Age during the reign of the god Saturn, which was characterized by equality and absolute liberty. These carnivals included a change of roles, where slaves became masters and masters became slaves. In the play, the real chaos begins, when Saturninus takes the throne (the similarity between the names of Saturn and Saturninus is brought into our attention by Titus, who addresses an arrow “To Saturn ... not to Saturnine” (IV. ii, 57)). Let us observe how certain roles are changed in the play. Tamora, who is a prisoner of war and thus a slave, becomes an empress; Aaron, a moor, in the emblematic feudal oath becomes the feudal lord, who provides protection to the vassal in exchange for his fidelity and in this case, for his hand; Saturninus, the emperor in a patriarchal society, is in fact controlled by a woman, Tamora. In this festivity, there is no fear of punishment and everybody is free to roam and rape and murder without consequences. We should also point out that it was Saturn who devoured his own children, the breaking of this taboo is conserved, but the act is shifted to Tamora, who now sits on the upside-down throne. This festival-play begins with the sacrifice of a prince (Tamora’s son) and ends with the sacrifice of an emperor, with some excess of blood in the end. It seems that the end not only involves the ritual ending of a festival, but also a purification of everything that had been tainted, even before the festival began. For in the end everything is put into its proper place, even if this place is the grave. Lavinia, when identified with Virginia can now die a proper death, Titus (like Saturn) is punished for the now multiple murders of his sons, Tamora, the enemy, the other is destroyed and Saturninus is killed – sacrificed.

What remains to be explained is the reason for the use of this framework. I shall relate it to the previously proposed revolution of discourse around its own blindness. In *Titus Andronicus* this blindness is represented by Lavinia, a trapdoor of meaning, an almost-sign of death. Lavinia becoming just the supplement of Virginia is the end of this blindness: Lavinia is now restored into the order of things and does not bother her interpreters anymore. What lies behind the carnivalisation of drama in Shakespeare, if we maintain my proposition of the self-awareness of his works, is the realization that complete subversion of knowledge does not end in the absolute

bliss of an epiphany, it ends in chaos. Carnival is there to limit this chaos and put an end to it, before it swallows everything like Saturn did. This kind of semiotic practice is a dance around the dangerous question of death getting as close to it as possible and then jumping away, trying to reveal something about it in the meantime. It is a certain kind of deconstruction, which implies that in periods similar to that of the English Renaissance and our “post-modern condition” there always appears a festival in human discourse. This characteristic of our thinking is probably the reason why our thought leads to epistemological periods compared to which crises like the one we live in are considered to be transitory.

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