

Titus andronicus by william shakespeare



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Titus Andronicus by William Shakespeare Table of Contents The Monstrous as Gratuitous and Remorseless: On Titus Andronicus 3 Works Cited 6 The Monstrous as Gratuitous and Remorseless: On Titus Andronicus

Everywhere in the play there are instances of various forms of monstrosity, and they all reinforce one another, in a display of what can be construed as the fate of man when he allows himself to be totally overrun by his earthly and animal passions, ambitions and desires. This paper looks at monstrosity in the form of murder, and posits that in two close reading passages, what makes murder monstrous is the gratuitous and remorseless way in which the murders were accomplished, seemingly going against some very fundamental aversions present in more ordinary men towards killing done in such an inhuman way. In the first passage chosen for this paper, Titus Andronicus tells Saturninus that he in fact killed his two sons, and then proceeded to mix their flesh with pie, which their mother then unwittingly ate: “ Why, there they are both, baked in that pie;/ Whereof their mother daintily hath fed,/ Eating the flesh that she herself hath bred. Tis true, tis true; witness my knives sharp point. (Shakespeare). In this passage two things are worth noting. One is that Titus seemed to be proud of the fact that he had killed two people, and both of them the sons of the person he is addressing. If this were an act of revenge, or an act where a noble man kills men who were evil and had done some terrible wrong to others, then this boasting would have remained within the confines of sane narration. What makes this killing so monstrous is that Titus was not content with killing the two sons, but we read between the lines that he had prepared their flesh and mixed them with pie, precisely so he could feed the flesh of her dead sons to their mother. There is no sense to this, and no justification, other than to

show that Titus lacked remorse. It was unnecessary to do things this way. The purpose of the monstrous in this case seems to be just to demonstrate how inhuman the whole cascade of events was. The killing and the subsequent baking and feeding of the pie to the mother was gratuitous, totally uncalled for by the turn of events. This aspect of the killing is what makes the act so monstrous and totally inhuman (Shakespeare).

Elsewhere we see just how Titus killed the two sons. He did so with the help of Lavinia, who held the basin that caught the blood from the slit throats of the two brothers. We understand that Lavinia suffered much from the two, but the measure of her revenge seemed to go beyond the bounds of what is human too. She could have just had them killed, but she chose to see the killing, and she chose to do so in that ghastly way. As for Titus we see that in his machinations too, he had gone overboard and had far transgressed what could be called human (Shakespeare):

Receive the blood: and when that they are dead,/ Let me go grind their bones to powder small/ And with this hateful liquor temper it; / And in that paste let their vile heads be baked./ Come, come, be every one officious/ To make this banquet; which I wish may prove/ More stern and bloody than the Centaurs feast (Shakespeare).

Men of normal constitutions would not think of doing such a thing. What makes the whole speech so monstrous is that Titus seems to have been going through this with so much remorseless deliberation. There was no double-thinking or hesitation, no qualms in the words, no moral scruples. A person seeking revenge would simply maybe just kill the person who is hated, but to think of such things as Titus had thought, and to act in ways that seem to have no grounding in ordinary human reality, is astounding,

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and monstrous indeed. The purpose here seems to be to incite such feelings of disbelief and disgust from the audience, to show the extent of Titus disconnect with ordinary reality, which is to say, that the disconnect seems total. The only way to make sense of this monstrous killing is that Titus was inhuman and insane, in the same way that Lavinia too, must have gone mad by that point (Shakespeare)

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Works Cited

Shakespeare. " Titus Andronicus Act V". William-Shakespeare. info. 2005. Web. 4 February 2013.