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Learned Goths and Roman Exports: *Titus Andronicus* and Presentism in the 2010s

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Abstract

When compared with the use of *Sir Thomas More* in 2016 for pro-refugee purposes, *Titus Andronicus* may instead be read as a form of post-truth, an almost archetypical story in which distrust of the foreigner is proved right, both through its depiction of extreme violence occurring along cultural fault lines and its tenuous temporal placement at an undefined point of the late Roman Empire. From the threat of foreign rapists (echoed in calls to “protect our women”, after the 2015-16 New Year’s Eve sexual attacks in Cologne), via the Moor that enters the Andronici’s house to ask for Titus’ hand, to the Gothic army at the gates of Rome, *Titus Andronicus* is packed with anxiety concerning open borders and hostile guests. This essay proposes a presentist triangulation of three traumatic timeframes: the period of great migrations vaguely represented by the play, the Shakespearean context in which trouble with strangers was both expected and provoked, and our own time, in which *Titus Andronicus* can be read as the type of narrative that could be used by PEGIDA (in English translation, Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the West) for purposes of fear-mongering. My purpose will be to reconsider the play’s representation of threatening mobility while exploring The Smiths’ suggestion that, in fact, “barbarism begins at home”.

Resumo

Quando comparada com o uso de *Sir Thomas More* a favor dos refugiados em 2016, a peça *Titus Andronicus* pode passar a ser lida como pós-verdade, como uma história quase arquetípica em que a desconfiança face ao estrangeiro se confirma, não só por via da representação de violência extrema a ocorrer ao longo de linhas de falha culturais, mas também através sua colocação temporal vaga num ponto indefinido do império romano tardio. Desde a ameaça de violadores estrangeiros (que encontra um eco em apelos para “proteger as nossas mulheres”, após os ataques sexuais da véspera de Ano Novo de 2015-16 em Colónia), e passando pelo mouro que entra na casa dos Andronici para pedir a mão de Titus, até ao exército gótico em frente aos portões de Roma, *Titus Andronicus* é um texto carregado de ansiedades em relação a fronteiras abertas e a convidados hostis. Este ensaio propõe uma triangulação presentista de três momentos traumáticos: o período das grandes migrações vagamente representado na peça, o contexto shakespeariano em que problemas com “estranhos” eram esperados e provocados, e o nosso próprio tempo, em que poderemos ler *Titus Andronicus* como o tipo de narrativa que poderia ser usado pelo movimento PEGIDA (em tradução portuguesa, Europeus Patrióticos contra a Islamização do Ocidente) para fomentar o medo. O meu propósito consistirá assim em reconsiderar a representação, na peça, de uma mobilidade ameaçadora, ao mesmo tempo que se explora a sugestão dos The Smiths de que, na verdade, “a barbárie começa em casa”.

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On November 9, 2016, I had to teach a class on *Jane Eyre* at 9:00.¹ I had gone to bed early the night before, assuming the worst. The following morning, I turned on the television before breakfast, expecting that whatever channel I might randomly hit on would be showing what I wanted to know. It did. There they were: the new president of the United States of America and his family celebrating. For once, my students, usually so casual and aloof, seemed stunned and worried and we chatted about the election for about half an hour before I turned to “the madwoman in the attic”. Later that day, as I scrolled down my Facebook feed, I found generalised shock and genuine surprise. Apparently, several of my friends had not been expecting this outcome. I then posted a quotation from Walter Benjamin’s eighth thesis from “On the Concept of History” (1940):

The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the “state of emergency” in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that is in keeping with this insight. Then we will clearly realize that it is our task to bring about a real state of emergency, and this will improve our position in the struggle against Fascism. [One reason why Fascism has a chance is that its opponents confront it in the name of progress as a historical norm]. The current amazement that the things we are experiencing are “still” possible in the twentieth century is *not* philosophical. This amazement is not the beginning of knowledge – unless it is the knowledge that the view of history which gives rise to it is untenable (Benjamin 1999: 249).²

¹ Constantly updated versions of this essay were presented in conferences throughout 2017 and 2018. Its original sense of urgency, however, meant restricting most contemporary references to the period of 2016-2017. Otherwise, an expanding catalogue of horrors would have risked making this essay a perpetual work in progress. This essay also benefited greatly from the input of several colleagues and friends, above all by Christian Smith (who wrote a detailed and highly engaging response to his paper when presented in a seminar at the 2017 ESRA conference in Gdańsk), but also Remedios Perni, Evelyn Gajowski and Rui Carvalho Homem. I am deeply grateful for their comments, encouragement and the opportunities I was given to present the essay in new fora with a view to developing it. I am only sorry that I could not incorporate all their suggestions. Naturally, all slips and errors are my own.

² I am here quoting Harry Zorn’s translation, although the one I then used for Facebook was the readily available online version by Dennis Redmond. I have used my own translation of the sentence inside square brackets, because there is a significant problem in English translations of this thesis, both in Zorn’s and Redmond’s case. Referring to fascism, Benjamin writes “Dessen Chance besteht nicht zuletzt darin, daß die Gegner ihm im Namen des Fortschritts als einer historischen Norm begegnen” (Benjamin 1991: 697). Most translators have misunderstood the sentence. Harry Zorn’s version, on which the translation used for Michael Löwy’s *Fire Alarm* is clearly based, and which I have replaced with my own version, originally reads “One reason Fascism has a chance is that, in the name of progress, its opponents treat it as a historical norm”. This muddy formulation, in which it is unclear what “it” refers to, will, however, tend to produce a nonsensical reading, since it seems to imagine the opponents of fascism sheepishly accepting that fascism is a historical norm (a formulation that sounds strange), and moreover doing so in the name of progress, thus pessimistically throwing down their arms and granting fascism its chance to be

As Michael Löwy explains, it is important to note that Benjamin is arguing here that most opponents of fascism completely misunderstood it as anachronistic, a blast from the past with no place in a modern society and hence doomed to fade away. They did not understand “the modernity of Fascism, its intimate relation with contemporary industrial-capitalist society”. As Löwy adds, “Only a conception without progressivist illusions can account for a phenomenon like Fascism that is deeply rooted in modern industrial and technical ‘progress’ and was, ultimately, possible *only* in the twentieth century” (Löwy 2005: 59). And the same might be said about our own contemporary fascism, following hard on the heels of globalisation, of the destruction of industry and of a regulated market in now neoliberal Western economies, with the mass unemployment and hopelessness that it brought about for the working classes. From the point of view of a non-progressivist history, such Fascism as ours may indeed have been impossible before the twenty-first century. However, the fact that this new fascism, like the old, tends to display the state’s repressive apparatus, thus making its power felt, has given its opposers a visible face to strike at, so that it may be used to address the neoliberal system whose convulsions have made it appear.

My second theoretical point comes from T. S. Eliot, who, in “Tradition and the Individual Talent”, wrote of the literary canon that “Whoever has approved this idea of

victorious. However, Benjamin is not saying that fascism is treated as a historical norm and a progressive one at that; he is saying that *progress* is treated as a historical norm, which certainly makes much better sense both conceptually and historically. We should therefore treat “im Namen des Fortschritts als einer historischen Norm” as a unit in Benjamin’s sentence. The problem addressed by Benjamin, and clarified in the sentence that follows this one, is that the opponents of fascism, working as they were within the framework of a conception of history as progress, underestimated fascism because they were incapable of understanding the historical chances of a movement that was not progressive. Hence, they were astonished that such a thing as fascism could appear in the twentieth century. I have, therefore, accordingly changed the translation to reflect this reading, which I believe is the only one that makes sense in the context of the thesis and of Benjamin’s work as a whole.

order, of the form of European, of English literature will not find it preposterous that the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past” (Eliot 1999: 15). Eliot is arguing, of course, that the appearance of new works inevitably alters the way older works are read, even though we might nowadays object to his organic understanding of the literary system. Importantly, Eliot uses a word, “preposterous”, which means inverting the order of what came before and what came after, corresponding to the figure of “hysteron proteron” (literally signifying “the latter before”). Mieke Bal, for instance, uses the expression “preposterous history” to express just such an inversion, which she explains: “This reversal, which puts what came chronologically first (‘pre-’) as an aftereffect behind (‘post-’) its later recycling, is what I would like to call a *preposterous history*” (Bal 1999: 7).

I would like to slightly alter the scope of Eliot’s point to make what might seem a commonplace argument, but one that enables what I will proceed to say: that the introduction of a new context (besides the introduction of a new text) will necessarily alter our previous configuration of past contexts too (besides texts). Within the bounds of this article, I thus aim to argue that the current refugee crisis encourages us to reconfigure our understanding of Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus*, as well as its attendant contexts of production and of reference. This new context may not necessarily bring much that is new to a discussion of this play and its dual context, but it allows us to see the old text/context from a different prism, using a new narrative which comes from our own experience. These opening quotations are thus placed here as the briefest possible theoretical introduction, a rationale for a textual and contextual *presentism*.³

³ On presentism in Shakespeare studies, see, among others: Grady 1996; Hawkes 2002; Grady and Hawkes 2007; Gajowski 2009; DiPietro and Grady 2013.

Indeed, like new historicism before it, presentism too ought to be understood as a contextualism. It is simply that it deals with a different context, in this instance, our contemporary context for early modern plays, which, in turn, may be used to critique the present conditions that prompted the analysis.

Titus Andronicus falls in a time of hostility against “strangers”, the 1590s. As we know from Antony Munday *et al*’s *Sir Thomas More*, the strangers’ economic freedom in a highly regulated market and their geographical mobility became metaphorically associated with a looseness of morals and customs, especially if practised with English women; as we also know, the sexual lives of migrants are nearly always resented. This being said, it may not come as a surprise that the film *Titus*, directed by Julie Taymor in 1999 and considered by many to be one of the finest screen adaptations of Shakespeare in English, was co-produced by the much-reviled Steve Bannon, better known for having been executive chair of Breitbart News and White House Chief Strategist for Trump. One 2016 piece from *The Paris Review* came back to the story behind film in the context of the presidential campaign in the US and depicted the affair as “Bannon’s obsession with Shakespeare’s goriest play” (Weiner 2016: n. p.). In it, Rex Weiner made the point that Bannon had been attracted to the play because of its violence, going on to detail his plans for a sci-fi version taking place in outer space.⁴ The point, of course, was to ridicule Bannon, but the article spectacularly failed to address another aspect that must surely have appealed to him in Shakespeare’s play and maybe even in Taymor’s aestheticized version: its brutal confirmation of the narrative of migrant murderers and rapists upon whom deeply gratifying vengeance is then wrought.

⁴ In his recently revised edition of *Titus Andronicus*, Jonathan Bate also mentions Rex Weiner’s article, but mostly follows Weiner’s lead and does not attempt to develop why Bannon should have been interested in this specific play, besides his having optioned Julie Taymor’s stage production for the screen (Bate 2018 159-160).

Besides the depiction of extreme violence that might have attracted Bannon, it is evident that this violence all occurs along cultural and racial fault lines. Although it is the Romans who open the hostilities with their sacrifice of Alarbus, the play focuses above all on how the foreigners, Goths and Moor, go on a killing and raping spree, often laughing at the results of their crimes. Nevertheless, racial hatred is mutual and pervasive, by Romans (namely Bassianus and Lavinia) towards Goths and Moor, by Goths towards Romans, even in Chiron, Demetrius and the Nurse's disgust at Aaron's baby. It is also important to bear in mind the play's tenuous temporal placement at an undefined point of the late Roman Empire sometime during the wars with the Goths from the third century onwards. Though Goths became increasingly Romanised, as they were pushed southwards by the invading Huns, they too added to the already impressive mass of peoples who historically overran the Roman Empire of the West, with Visigoths eventually sacking Rome in 410.

Anyone from Southern Europe who begins to learn about German culture will probably be surprised by the term used by German scholars to describe what one once knew as the "Barbarian Invasions": "Völkerwanderung", literally meaning "wandering of the peoples".⁵ We now usually call this the "Migration Period". My point is that this vivid shift in perspective can be found powerfully dramatized in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, which addresses a violent point of transition. It is perhaps not surprising that, in a decade marked by hostility against foreigners, Shakespeare should have written a play alluding to one of the largest and most traumatic migrations in the history

⁵ The term, of course, is composed of two resonant words in German culture: "Volk", a key concept in both German Romanticism and the discourse of nationalism; and "Wanderung", the cult of taking long walks in the countryside, immortalized in Schubert's "Das Wandern" and in myriad images of Germans and Austrians hiking in the country as a form of getting closer to the(ir) land.

of Europe, only a few centuries before but leading to the feudalism whose disruption and dissipation early modern England was experiencing.⁶

On the other hand, *Titus Andronicus* may qualify as an instance of post-truth, an almost archetypical story in which distrust of the foreigner is proved right.⁷ If the pro-refugee speech written by Shakespeare for *Sir Thomas More* was used, in 2016 and again in 2018, as an exercise in empathy towards refugees, asking its audience to imagine itself in their shoes, Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* can be partly looked at as a dramatization of anti-immigrant fears and hate.⁸ We can find two versions of these narratives in quotations from Trump's campaign, for instance, the first from June 16, 2015, and the second from February 6, 2016:

When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you. They're not sending you. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.

⁶ It is probably also not by accident that, at a time of increasingly massive migrations, though still some years before the refugee crisis, Stephen Greenblatt should have included in his introduction to *Cultural Mobility – A Manifesto* a reflection on the overrunning of Rome at the end of the empire: “In this displacement, of course, the conquerors were merely doing to Rome what Rome itself had long done to those it had subdued” (Greenblatt 2010: 7). He goes on to quote the Gothic Adolphus, successor of Alaric, who is said to have wished that “the gratitude of future ages should acknowledge the merit of a stranger, who employed the sword of the Goths, not to subvert, but to restore and maintain, the prosperity of the Roman empire” (Greenblatt 2010: 9; Greenblatt is quoting from Edward Gibbon's own quotation from Orosius, in Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*).

⁷ Still, as Slavoj Žižek points out in *Against the Double Blackmail: Refugees, Terror and Other Troubles with the Neighbours* (Žižek 2016: 81-83), it is nevertheless deeply patronizing to imagine that a migrant cannot also be a criminal, as if the refugee must always remain a victim, and as if the host *needed* the refugee to remain a victim, always reassuringly less powerful than the host, while eternally grateful for a belittling hospitality.

⁸ Shakespeare's pro-refugee speech for Anthony Munday et al's *Sir Thomas More* was digitised and made available by the British Library in the Spring of 2016, as part of the commemorations of the 400 years of Shakespeare's death. It was also performed by Ian McKellen at BBC2's “Shakespeare Live!”, broadcast on 23 April. Shakespeare's handwritten “plea for humanity”, as it was often called in the media, was widely disseminated during the height of the refugee crisis and in the run-up to the Brexit referendum. It reappeared again in the media on 20 June 2018, on World Refugee Day, as two separate short films based on More's speech were made public on the day before. One was created by International Rescue Committee and Shakespeare's Globe (<https://www.rescue-uk.org/video/strangers-case-shakespeares-rallying-cry-humanity>), whereas the second one was directed by Peter Trifunovic for BBAShakespeare (British Black and Asian Shakespeare) and the University of Warwick (<https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/research/currentprojects/multiculturalshakespeare/news/?newsItem=8a17841a6411e8b401642243e1b859b6>).

In the Middle East, we have people chopping the heads off Christians, we have people chopping the heads off many other people. We have things that we have never seen before – as a group, we have never seen before, what’s happening right now. The medieval times – I mean, we studied medieval times – not since medieval times have people seen what’s going on. I would bring back waterboarding and I’d bring back a hell of a lot worse than waterboarding. (Newsday.com staff n.p.)

Regarding this last quotation, there seem to be two slippages at work here: the most obvious one is the aural suggestion of “evil” in the repetition of “medieval”; the second, which is not there but seems to enable the otherwise arbitrary reference to “medieval times”, is a possible connection between “Middle East” and “Middle Ages”. Inevitable here, when considering this association between “medieval times” and extreme forms of violence, in the context of North-American culture, would be Quentin Tarantino’s *Pulp Fiction* (1994), when Marsellus Wallace famously explains how he will avenge himself on his rapist: “I’m a get medieval on your ass”.

The perceived threat of foreign rapists is especially topical (besides the even greater topicality of rapists who are *not* foreign), since it was recently echoed in patronising and patriarchal calls to “protect our women”, after the 2015-16 New Year’s Eve sexual attacks in Cologne were initially covered up by the police, once the testimonials pointed in the direction of North-African migrants and just possibly refugees who had very recently entered Germany (BBC News 2016: n. p.; Hill 2016: n. p.). This attempt to co-opt gender violence to justify racism was characteristic of several pieces of alarmist news, such as the following two, entirely self-explicatory and unbelievably long titles from the *Daily Mail*, both published on 8 January 2016, just days after the news from Cologne: “Migrant rape fears spread across Europe: Women told not to go out at night alone after assaults carried out in Sweden, Finland, Germany, Austria and Switzerland amid warnings gangs are co-ordinating attacks” (Wyke et al

2016: n.p.) and “German vigilante group vows to protect women from migrant attackers as 34 suspects are arrested - including three for gang-raping two teenagers” (Akbar and Wyke 2016: n.p.). In late 2016 in Freiburg, Maria Ladenburger’s rape and murder by a refugee who had entered Germany the year before, and who had criminal precedents, was equally used to create the impression of a general tendency among refugees, although German officials and the more responsible press did their utmost to decouple the criminal act from the rapist and murderer’s origins. Inevitably, a fabricated mass sexual attack in Frankfurt, once more by Arab migrants and once more on New Year’s Eve, was reported in 2017 by the German tabloid *Das Bild*, which later apologised and retracted the piece of news (*Das Bild* 2017: n. p.). Perhaps faced with an evident insufficiency of shocking criminal behaviour coming from most refugees, a German soldier was later arrested, in April 2017, for planning an attack while pretending to be a Syrian refugee (BBC News 2017: n. p.).

To return to my point, *Titus Andronicus* does indeed provide us with a terrifying textbook narrative of how foreign barbarians, after they are brought into the imperial centre, are first oppressed, then welcomed, and finally go on to rape daughters and kill sons, while benefiting from imperial protection. The play might almost be read as wish fulfilment about vengeance on the immigrant, in which, even in a cosmopolitan and ethnically diverse society as the late Roman Empire was, the foreigners are wholly liquidated. If we add to this the Moor who enters the Andronici’s house to literally ask for Titus’ hand and the Gothic army at the gates of Rome, we can see that *Titus Andronicus* is packed with anxiety concerning open borders and hostile guests. As Trump also said in a rally, “lock your doors, folks” (Engel 2016: n. p.), in a certainly

involuntary echo of another fearmonger's question, namely Iago's question to Brabantio in 1.1 of *Othello*: "Are your doors locked?" (1.1.84).

This essay has so far aimed to triangulate three traumatic timeframes, corresponding to when the play is set, to when it was written and to when it is read now: the vaguely represented period of great migrations, the Shakespearean context in which trouble with strangers was both expected and provoked, and our own time, in which *Titus Andronicus* can be read as the type of narrative that, with its catalogue of horrors and its updatable fantasy of the terrorist immigrant, could be told by the popular German movement PEGIDA (in English translation, Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the West) for purposes of fear-mongering. We can therefore think about *Titus Andronicus* as a representative version of anti-immigrant hate speech; and we can also study it for internal elements that deconstruct this same narrative.

As one of the many reincarnations of the Vice figure from morality plays, Aaron quite sufficiently fulfils the role of the barbaric immigrant, humanised only when tending to his child. The Goths are, however, another matter, as Jonathan Bate has argued in his introduction to the third Arden edition of *Titus Andronicus*. On the one hand, the Renaissance began the work of denigrating what was said to be "gothic", establishing a paradigmatic break between a barbaric medieval past, marked by a lack of learning, and the Italian humanists' *rinascita*. On the other hand, Goths were by then also being characterised as a vital force opposed to the decadence of the Romans, after Tacitus' characterisation of the Germanic peoples in *Germania*, meant as a historical and ethnographical document but also as a republican critique of imperial Rome, a republicanism that is later taken up in Elizabethan England (cf. Bate 2018: 15-21). If we nowadays still imagine manly barbarians effortlessly putting down an effeminate,

gender-bending empire, it is partly because of Tacitus' post-truth, that is, his ideological contrast of both peoples.

This mixed heritage is complicated by Shakespeare, who has the Goths rape and cut off Lavinia's tongue and hands, thus outdoing Tereus' rape and mutilation of Philomela in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. As Touchstone reminds us in *As You Like It*, when he says "I am here with thee and thy goats, as the most capricious poet, honest Ovid, was among the Goths" (3.3.5-6), Ovid had been exiled by Augustus in 8 AD to Tomis, by the Black Sea, among the Goths. The way Shakespeare has the Goths repeat the story of Philomela almost seems to suggest that they had in the meantime indeed learnt something from the Roman poet. In fact, besides the Latin lines that they sometimes bring forth (as in Demetrius' two half-lines in 1.1.633 and 635), it is obvious that the Goths are well-versed in Latin poetry. This is made explicit in act 4, when they receive a gift from Titus containing weapons and a scroll with Latin verses. Demetrius recites the lines and Chiron at once knows where they are from: "O, 'tis a verse in Horace, I know it well. | I read it in the grammar long ago" (4.2.22-23), although, as Aaron quickly points out, Chiron crucially misses their import.

Naturally, the Romans themselves are also well acquainted with their Ovid, so that it is Lavinia's desperate leafing through the *Metamorphoses* – "TITUS Lucius, what book is that she tosseth so? / BOY Grandsire, 'tis Ovid's *Metamorphosis*" (4.1.41-2) – that allows her father to understand her by reading "the tragic tale of Philomel" (4.1.47).

At first, though, Titus still does not suspect the strangers: "What Roman lord it was durst do the deed" (4.1.62). His immediate suspicion of a Roman lord, even of Emperor

Saturninus himself,⁹ following the historical example of King Tarquin's rape of Lucrece, is almost touching in its innocence, the least xenophobic conclusion one could jump to, important here simply in order to be shattered. Only after their names and acts are revealed by Lavinia does Marcus promise "Mortal revenge upon these traitorous Goths" (4.1.93), clearly identifying them as aliens who have betrayed the Romans' hospitality.

Knowing as we do Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, we can see how barbarism can be said to be a Roman export, perhaps simply imitated to the letter by those who have become Romanised. This challenges the binary opposite of civilisation at home and barbarism from abroad. I would thus like to take the lead from a song by The Smiths, from their 1985 second album, *Meat is Murder*, by suggesting that, in *Titus Andronicus* and elsewhere, instead of coming from abroad, "Barbarism begins at home". Dealing as it does with parental violence against their children, the song can be used here as a signifier of a warped educational process. And, indeed, one of the first acts of violence in the play is Titus' murder of one of his few remaining sons, Mutius, when he bars his father's way to cover for the escape of Bassianus and his supporters, after Bassianus seizes Lavinia (1.1.294-296). This and the sacrifice of Alarbus are, in fact, some of the last elements of a Roman education of the Goths, who, in the first act, can still exclaim: "Was never Scythia half so barbarous!" (1.1.134).¹⁰ In this complex theatrical and

⁹ "Or slunk not Saturnine, as Tarquin erst, / That left the camp to sin in Lucrece's bed?" (4.1.63-64).

¹⁰ Chiron and Demetrius' education also includes the chivalric codes of love which their descendants will make famous during the Middle Ages, when, at the end of the first act, they enter ready to kill each other for their loved one, Bassianus' wife. But it only takes little over twenty lines to get from Chiron's "I love Lavinia more than all the world" (1.1.571) to Demetrius' threatening "What, hast not thou full often struck a doe / And borne her cleanly by the keeper's nose?" (1.1.593-594), that is, from romantic love to the beginnings of a plot to rape Lavinia. Here too the underside of the discourse of chivalric love, with its metaphors of hunting, siege and assault, is quickly revealed, thus showing the barbarism hiding behind the home of romantic love, which assumes the availability of women for the mere fact that they are

historical allusion, barbarism at home in Ancient Rome is said to exceed that of the nomadic people which, in Marlowe's version, would later yield Tamburlaine, a device by which the authors of *Titus Andronicus* can also claim to exceed the barbarism which made Marlowe's play so popular.

Barbarism is thus not an import, but something that is sent out from the imperial centre into the world. After all, like the Syrians and the Afghans in contemporary Europe, the Goths only turn up in Rome because Titus has exported war (and a specific type of Roman culture) to them. And one is therefore reminded of C. P. Cavafy's "Waiting for the Barbarians", in which, though anxiously expected and prepared for, "the barbarians have not come. / And some who have just returned from the border say / there are no barbarians any longer" (Cavafy 1992: 18). It does not take much interpretative twisting to understand from this that those that come through the border can no longer even be called barbarians. Their hoped-for destruction and renewal of a decadent civilisation is a historical trope, not a reality.

Nonetheless, this is a smug conclusion, the self-satisfying deconstruction of the intellectual needing to find some redemption in Shakespeare, but ultimately changing nothing. Indeed, finding "subversion" at all costs may often be a pointless and, worst even, a self-gratifying task. Instead, one may choose to remember that this iconic figure of the barbarian is wished for, namely by anti-immigrant fearmongers, for allegedly confirming their warnings. It is important for them that, unlike in Cavafy's poem, those identified as barbarians should come from abroad and should be seen to act violently, hence confirming their status as barbarians, so they can be made the objects of

women: "She is a woman, therefore may be wooed; / She is a woman, therefore may be won; / She is Lavinia, therefore must be loved" (1.1.582-584).

aggression. As the last two lines of Cavafy's poem say, "And now, what's going to happen to us without barbarians? / They were, those people, a kind of solution" (Cavafy 1992: 18). But, knowing as we do about "solutions" in European history, and seeing the European Union paying bordering countries to keep refugees at bay in camps, one can only fear what kind of solution this will end up being.

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