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Published in:

Politics and Aesthetics in European Baroque and Classicist Tragedy

DOI:

[10.1163/9789004323421_014](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004323421_014)

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Helmets, H. (2016). The Politics of Mobility: Shakespeare's Titus Andronicus, Jan Vos's Aran en Titus and the Poetics of Empire. In J. Bloemendal, & N. Smith (Eds.), Politics and Aesthetics in European Baroque and Classicist Tragedy (pp. 344-372). Leiden: Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004323421_014

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The Politics of Mobility: Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, Jan Vos's *Aran en Titus* and the Poetics of Empire*

Helmer Helmers

At least five distinct plays were published and performed in seventeenth-century Europe that told the story of the Roman general Titus Andronicus whose triumphant return to Rome spells the beginning of a violent cycle of revenge that causes the empire to disintegrate. Today, of course, the dramatic material is practically exclusively known in William Shakespeare's version that was first published in the Quarto edition of 1594, and held the London stage for at least two decades.¹ Yet it was not in Shakespeare's version all early modern audiences knew the play. By 1620, when *Titus Andronicus* had already been mocked as old-fashioned by Ben Jonson,² Shakespeare's play had largely lost its appeal to London audiences.³ Exactly at that moment, a German play was published, *Eine sehr klaegliche tragoedia von Tito Andronico und der hoffertigen Kayserin* (*A Very Lamentable Tragedy of Titus Andronicus and the Haughty Empress*), in a playbook of English players who travelled the continent and had translated and adapted Shakespeare's play.⁴ This play in turn, was adapted by a Dutch associate of the English players, Adriaen van den Bergh, who published his Dutch version, *Andronicus*, in 1621.⁵ That third play is regrettably lost,

* This article was written with the support of a Veni-grant by The Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO). I thank Frans-Willem Korsten for his comments on a draft version.

1 I have used William Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus*, ed. Jonathan Bate (London: Routledge, 1996). Hereafter *TA*.

2 Ben Jonson, 'Bartholomew Fair', in *Ben Jonson*, ed. C.H. Herford and P. and E. Simpson, vol. VI (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1938), p. 16, ll. 106–111.

3 On the stage history of *Titus Andronicus*, see: G. Harold Metz, 'Stage History of Titus Andronicus', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 28 (1977), 154–169.

4 The German play is reprinted and translated in Albert Cohn, *Shakespeare in Germany in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: An Account of English Actors in Germany and the Netherlands, and of the Plays Performed by them During the Same Period* (London: Asher & Co, 1865), pp. 161–235.

5 Ernst F. Kossmann, *Nieuwe Bijdragen tot de Geschiedenis van het Nederlandsche Tooneel in de*

but it was followed by fourth, Jan Vos's *Aran en Titus, of wraak en weerwraak* (*Aran en Titus, or Revenge and Counter-Revenge*) which Vos wrote in Dutch for the Amsterdam theater in 1638.⁶ Finally, Titus returned to England in the Restoration, when Edward Ravenscroft published his version of the tale in 1687 as *Titus Andronicus, or the Rape of Lavinia*, which had already been performed in 1678.⁷

Of these five plays, Jan Vos's version, which deviated considerably from the others, was undoubtedly the most successful in its own time. Following its first performance in Amsterdam in 1641, it became by far the most popular play in the Dutch Republic, and maybe even in Northern Europe as a whole. Performed at least 100 times in the Amsterdam theater, it continued to hold the stage well into the eighteenth century.⁸ The printed text ran through at least 34 editions (see illustration 1), and was translated into Latin (as *Aran et Titus, mutua vindicatio*, in 1658) and German (various translations).⁹ The Dutch version was also taken abroad by the famous Dutch playing company of Jan-Baptist van Fornenbergh to be performed at the courts of German and Swedish princes.¹⁰ It was in Vos's heavily adapted version, then, that most European audiences became acquainted with the Titus material. In terms of contemporary impact, *Aran en Titus* has a stronger claim to being a major landmark in seventeenth-century theatrical history than *Titus Andronicus*.

17e en 18e eeuw (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1915), p. 93; Wim Braekman, *Shakespeare's Titus Andronicus: Its Relationship to the German Play of 1620 and to Jan Vos's Aran en Titus* (Gent: Blandijnberg, 1969), p. 17.

- 6 I have used Buitendijk's edition: Jan Vos, 'Aran en Titus, of Wraak en Weerwraak', in *Jan Vos: Toneelwerken*, ed. Wim J.C. Buitendijk (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1975), pp. 47–210. Hereafter *A&T*. All translations from Vos are my own.
- 7 Edward Ravenscroft, *Titus Andronicus, or the Rape of Lavinia: Acted at the Theatre Royall, A Tragedy* (London: J. Hindmarsh, 1687).
- 8 Elise Oey-de Vita and Marja S. Geesink, *Academie en Schouwburg: Amsterdams toneel-repertoire, 1617–1665* (Amsterdam: Huis aan de drie Grachten, 1983), p. 196.
- 9 Jan Vos. *Aran et Titus, mutua vindicatio* (Tiel: Goosewyn van Duyn, 1658), translated by the Latin school of Tiel under the guidance of rector J. van Aelhuisen. The text, a faithful translation of Vos's Dutch with an additional prologue for students, can be found on: <http://www.let.leidenuniv.nl/Dutch/Ceneton/Facsimiles/VosAranMutua1658/> (accessed 28-11-2014); for the German translations, see: Buitendijk, 'Inleiding', in *A&T*, pp. 79–80.
- 10 For the history of Van Fornenbergh's playing company, which was much influenced by English actors, see: Ben Albach, *Langs kermessen en hoven: Ontstaan en kroniek van een Nederlands toneelgezelschap in de 17de eeuw* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 1977).



FIGURE 12.1 *Jan Vos, Aran en Titus, title page (1641)*
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In terms of scholarly attention, however, Shakespeare's play of course eclipses all the others—despite the fact that *Titus Andronicus*, considered to be offensive to good taste and unworthy of the great playwright, has long been one of the least studied plays in the Shakespearean canon. Notwithstanding its unrivalled success, even Vos's play has hardly been studied, and suffered a similar faith as the much less prominent German text: often mentioned as evidence of Shakespeare's early continental afterlife, seldom read. If they were studied at all, it was to investigate their philological relationship, or to argue their inferiority to Shakespeare.¹¹ Ravenscroft's play, too, has long been condemned to such obscurity. Only quite recently it was rediscovered by Michael Dobson, whose work on Restoration adaptations has generated new interest in them as plays that should not be demeaned as 'cul-de-sacs' in literary history, but as plays that did their own cultural work, and require to be interpreted and assessed on their own terms, in their own contexts.¹² It is about time to shake off the heritage of nineteenth-century nationalism and bardolatry in the international context, too. Rather than treating the fascinating earliest Shakespeare adaptations as derivatives or even vulgarizations uninteresting in their own right, we should, as Anston Bosman has argued, start reading these plays in dialogue, as equivalent stages in a single process of cross-cultural innovation and interpretation.¹³

This article seeks to contribute to the study of that process by presenting a cultural-political reading of the early mobility of the Roman material first dramatized by Shakespeare. Focusing on the crucial intermediate case of Vos's *Aran en Titus*, I will argue that the adaptation of Shakespeare's text was deeply influenced by political concerns. Partly, as we shall see, these concerns were topical and related to specific political circumstances at the moment when Titus appeared in print or on the stage. But underlying these particularities was a more structural aspect: the heritage of Roman imperialism. At different moments in time, England, Germany and the Dutch Republic were rewriting a Roman past that was at once emblematic of imperial might and of imperial

11 For a philological comparison between Shakespeare, the German play, and Vos, see: Braekman, *Shakespeare's Titus Andronicus*. Other revenge tragedies suffered the same fate. For a similar study of the versions of Thomas Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*, see: Rudolf Schoenwerth, *Die Niederländischen und Deutschen Bearbeitungen von Thomas Kyd's 'Spanish Tragedy'* (Nendeln: Kraus Reprint, 1977).

12 Michael Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet: Shakespeare, Adaptation, and Authorship, 1660–1769* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 5 and *passim*.

13 Anston Bosman, 'Renaissance Intertheatre and the Staging of Nobody', *English Literary History* 71 (2004), 559–585; id., 'Mobility', in Henry S. Turner (ed) *Early Modern Theatricality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 493–516.

ruin. It was this ambivalence that was at the heart of the interest in the dramatic accounts of Roman decline. The states in North West Europe, laboring to perpetuate (the Holy Roman Empire) or appropriate (England and the Dutch Republic) Rome's imperial legacy, could not but confront the causes of Rome's violent destruction, if only to evade a similar fate. Just as the (translations of) histories of Sallust and Tacitus, Senecan revenge tragedies such as Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* and Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* were read and performed in the context of this European struggle with past and present Romes. The different versions of *Titus Andronicus*, and Vos's adaptation in particular, exhibit how adapters recognized, used, and developed a poetics of empire that lent itself particularly well to recontextualization, and thus, to exchange.

Translatio imperii and the Poetics of Empire

In early modern Europe, as David Armitage has claimed, 'The language of empire was common to all claims of authority, sovereignty and territory'. Empire was a complex concept: it could simply mean authority or sovereignty, but it also referred to the territory over which such authority was claimed, and denoted the rule over many dominions as well.¹⁴ Nearly always, however, also it referred to the inheritance of Roman power.¹⁵ The new aspiring monarchies and nascent nation states in early modern Europe all modeled themselves after the Roman Empire, and claimed to be its proper successor. The idea that imperial dominion was transferred in time from Troy to Rome and onwards to other European states rooted in Medieval eschatology and was understood as *translatio imperii*. This concept provided early modern historians with the expectation that a new power would arise, but it also suggested, as Heather James has pointed out, that the 'founding acts of empire turn out to contain the seeds of its destruction'.¹⁶ While describing a perceived historical phenomenon, *translatio imperii* therefore encapsulated both the hope of future imperial hegemony and anxieties about future ruin.

14 David Armitage, 'The Elizabethan Idea of Empire', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 14 (2004), 269–277, esp. pp. 271–272. See also: Frances Yates, *Astraea: The Imperial Theme in the Sixteenth Century* (London: Routledge & Kegan, 1975).

15 Cf. Richard Hingley, *Globalizing Roman Culture: Unity, Diversity and Empire* (London: Routledge, 2005).

16 Heather James, 'Cultural Disintegration in *Titus Andronicus*: Mutilating Titus, Vergil and Rome', *Themes in Drama* 13 (1991), 123–140, esp. p. 123.

In early modern revenge tragedy imperial decline and *translatio imperii* were central concerns, and the flourishing of the genre therefore cannot be seen apart from the political contexts in which it was written and rewritten. Indeed, the translation from English into Dutch and German of revenge tragedies such as the *Revenger's Tragedy* and, most notably, Thomas Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* and Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, can only be understood in the light of an intense political interest in the question of which form of government was best suited to uphold the law, contain disruptive energies, and prevent power moving elsewhere. The lessons drawn from such representations of imperial collapse could evidently vary, yet there can be no doubt that Kyd's play, which dramatized the decline of the Spanish monarchy, invited its initial, late sixteenth-century, audiences to cheer the collapse it portrayed. Performed in the context of the Anglo-Dutch alliance against Spain, and energized by the animosity towards the 'universal monarchy' the Black Legend suspected Spain to build, *The Spanish Tragedy* was bound to circulate in anti-Habsburg territories. It is no coincidence that Adriaen van den Bergh made his translation-cum-adaptation of Kyd's play in 1621, when the Dutch war with Spain was about to resume after twelve years of truce. 'From one war to the next' was Van den Bergh's appropriate motto.¹⁷

Titus Andronicus can be applied to the Habsburg Empire in a similar way as the *Spanish Tragedy*. Indeed, when the English revenge blockbusters of the 1580s were so successfully rewritten for the Dutch stage in the late 1630s and early 1640s, the theme of a Habsburg imperial collapse was even more topical than it had seemed to Kyd and his audiences after the defeat of the Armada of 1588. Following a series of setbacks in the war against the Dutch, and later paralyzed by the Catalan revolt (1640–1659), Spain was showing severe signs of imperial overstretch. The contemporary Holy Roman Empire of the Austrian Habsburgs, too, had been brought to the verge of collapse by Gustavus Adolphus's spectacular military intervention of the early 1630s. Widely advertised as *Gothic* victories, the recent Swedish triumphs undoubtedly contributed to the topicality of the Gothic opposition to Rome in our Titus plays.

The destructive and violent 'civil wars' that the logic of revenge and counter-revenge had unleashed in the Habsburg Empire during the Thirty Years' War, one might argue, are implied to lead to another translation of power: to the Protestant bulwarks of England and the Dutch Republic, who increasingly

17 Ton Hoenselaars and Helmer Helmers, 'The Spanish Tragedy and Revenge Tragedy in Britain and the Low Countries', in Nicoleta Cinpoes (ed.), *Doing Kyd: Critical Essays on The Spanish Tragedy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), pp. 144–167.

competed for the imperial title. In *Titus Andronicus*, the rise of a new order is indeed associated with England. Invoking the names of both Saturn and Astraea, Shakespeare relates Rome's descent into the chaos and the violence of civil war primarily to Ovid's tale of the four ages of men and the loss of the golden age (*Metamorphoses* I, 89–150), but Lucius's succession at the end of the play seems to herald a new era of imperial justice, peace, and prosperity. Since Lucius has 'hit Virgo' in the shooting scene, Shakespeare suggests that he pulled Astraea back to earth. By portraying Lucius as the new emperor and the retriever of Astraea, Shakespeare also hints at the *translatio imperii* from Rome to England: Lucius, after all, was also the name of the first Christian king of England and thus the ultimate predecessor of the Virgin Queen commonly associated with Astraea.¹⁸

But in the case of the Titus plays, set in Rome instead of Madrid, the collapse of political order is more ambiguous than it is in Kyd's tragedy. Less associated with the enemy, classical Rome functioned as an image for the domestic political order as much as for the Habsburg empire. It is evident that all seventeenth-century Titus plays are replete with topical anxieties about the collapse of government rule and the violent anarchy that might follow it. In Shakespeare, the German play, and Ravenscroft, these anxieties focus on the royal or imperial succession. Each of these plays opens with an election battle (between Saturninus and Bassianus in Shakespeare, between the unnamed Roman Emperor and Titus in the German play). It is this imperial election that sets Rome's descent into civil war and imperial tyranny in motion. When Shakespeare's play was published in the 1590s, this scene spoke directly to public concerns about the political mayhem that might follow the death of the Queen when no successor was named. The Ovidian quote, 'Terras Astreae Reliquit', referred both to the flight of the goddess of justice as to the possible demise of the contemporary Astraea, Elizabeth, who upheld the law in England.¹⁹ Similarly, and even more pertinently, the German play's rendering of the first act alluded to the actual imperial election in the German Empire in 1619. When the play was first printed, in the 1620 playbook, the Thirty Years' War had just begun, and Ferdinand II's election as Holy Emperor had played a major role in causing it—the destruction of the Roman empire in the play was therefore uneasily

18 Yates, *Astraea*, pp. 74–76; Robert Miola, *Shakespeare's Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 62–68; Jonathan Bate, 'Introduction', in *TA*, pp. 17–18, ll. 1–122.

19 Paul Raffield, "'Terras astraee reliquit': Titus Andronicus and the Loss of Justice', in Paul Raffield and Gary Watt (eds.), *Shakespeare and the Law* (Oxford: Hart, 2008), pp. 203–220. The quote is from Ovid, *Metamorphoses* I, 150.

close to reality. Ravenscroft's adaptation, finally, was explicitly written to reflect on the Exclusion crisis of 1678, when the Whigs had sought to exclude James II from the royal succession, and continued to be read politically throughout the early eighteenth century.²⁰ Vos, as we shall see, did not address such a specific event, but his adaptation strategy shows that he, too, was deeply aware of the Roman material's political implications.

Heather James has described in *Titus Andronicus* a poetics of empire, a political aesthetics, in which *translatio imperii* occupies a central position.²¹ One important aspect of this poetics, which can be traced in all the Titus plays, relates to the idea of repetition, to the rise and fall of empire again and again in different locations. It is because of this repeated manifestation of an essentially unchanged imperial power that Stephen Greenblatt has associated *translatio imperii* with biblical typology.²² Rooted in eschatology, *translatio imperii* and the biblical account of history were indeed entangled in the early modern mind: it is, after all, the movement of worldly power from the first monarchy to the fifth that structures the fulfillment of God's plan in the New Testament. The concept, then, presupposes an idea of history that, though it ultimately progresses towards a predestined end, requires repetition of basic structures and, in the words of Foucault, time to fold back onto itself. To translate empire is therefore an inherently anachronistic enterprise: it requires a past Rome to be present in any of its successors.

With this in mind, it becomes clear that anachronism is an essential and functional part of all Titus plays. Critics have long attacked both Shakespeare and Vos for their unspecific and eclectic treatment of Roman history,²³ yet this is to misunderstand the power of renaissance and baroque uses of anachronism.²⁴ Recent Shakespeare scholars, including Jonathan Bate, Phyllis Rackin

20 Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet*, pp. 72–76; Andreas K.E. Mueller, 'Shakespeare's Country Opposition: Titus Andronicus in the Early Eighteenth Century', *Connotations* 15 (2005/2006), pp. 97–126.

21 Heather James. *Shakespeare's Troy: Drama, Politics, and the Translation of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); id., 'Cultural Disintegration', pp. 123–140.

22 Stephen Greenblatt, 'Cultural Mobility: An Introduction', in id. (ed.), *Cultural Mobility: A Manifesto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 7–16. Cf. also Moschovakis on Christian providentialism in *Titus Andronicus*: Nicholas R. Moschovakis, "Irreligious Piety" and Christian History: Persecution as Pagan Anachronism in *Titus Andronicus*, *Shakespeare Quarterly* 53 (2002), 460–486.

23 Buitendijk, 'Inleiding', 63–64.

24 Cf. Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance* (New York: Zone Books, 2010). So central was anachronism to renaissance and baroque conceptions of

and Heather James, acknowledge the play's anachronisms, but argue that they are purposeful and essential to the meaning of the play.²⁵ Shakespeare does not only 'collapse the whole of Roman history', he also uses the language of recent, post-Reformation history to update it and to make it applicable to contemporary experience. If Christian language pops up throughout the play, including not only in general references to Heaven and Hell, but also to specific sites of Reformation conflict such as the Catholic sacrament of the Eucharist, and 'a ruinous monastery',²⁶ this invites Shakespeare's audience to apply the Roman action of the play to sixteenth-century religious violence, which is suggested to be a consequence of the absence of a European empire.²⁷ It is no coincidence, therefore, that the famous Peacham drawing shows the actors dressed both in classical Roman, contemporary Spanish and Elizabethan costumes: the interweaving of various historical episodes is at the heart of the play.²⁸ Through anachronism, Shakespeare was able to 'interrogate Rome', and to transform, in Clifford Ronan's words, the 'Then [into] a Now that urgently must be dealt with.'²⁹

Past, present and future are intimately linked in this way of thinking about *translatio imperii*, and that is exactly why *Titus Andronicus* could retain its political meaning in a variety of contexts throughout the seventeenth century. But it made a difference from and to which imperial regimes the play moved, and at what moment. When Vos wrote *Aran en Titus* he maintained *translatio*

history, that one might even argue, as Raymond has done, that to use the term itself is an anachronism. See: Joad Raymond, 'Introduction: Networks, Communication, Practice', in id. (ed.), *News Networks in Seventeenth-century Britain and Europe* (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 2–3. I prefer to use the term anachronism over possible alternatives such as 'synchronism', however, because it is widely used in early modern scholarship.

25 Bate, 'Introduction', pp. 16–21; Phyllis Rackin, 'Temporality, Anachronism, and Presence in Shakespeare's Histories', *Renaissance Drama* 17 (1986), 103–123; Heather James, 'Cultural disintegration'. Cf. also: Cary di Pietro and Hugh Grady, 'Presentism, Anachronism and *Titus Andronicus*', in id. (eds.), *Shakespeare and the Urgency of Now: Criticism and Theory in the 21st Century* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2013), pp. 9–37.

26 *TA*, 5.1.21.

27 Moschovakis, "Irreligious Piety".

28 According to June Schlueter, the Peacham illustrates the first act of the German play, but her argument is contested. See: June Schlueter, 'Rereading the Peacham Drawing', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 50 (1999), 171–184; Richard Levin, 'The Longleat Manuscript and *Titus Andronicus*', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 53 (2002), 323–340. Though important, I would argue that this debate posits too big a gap between Shakespeare and his continental adapters.

29 Cited through Moschovakis, "Irreligious Piety", p. 461.

imperii and anachronism as aesthetic and political principles, but adapted his source in such a way that it would apply to his own historical and institutional context.

Adapting Shakespeare Politically

Translatio imperii was as central a concern to Vos as it had been to Shakespeare. Throughout his adaptation, Vos accentuates the theme. By renaming Titus's grandson Askanius, Aeneas's and Lavinia's son in Roman mythology and one of the founders of the Roman race, he foregrounded the idea that power moved westwards. More subtle was Vos's introduction of the chiasmus as the central figure of style in *Aran en Titus*, because the numerous chiasms in the play ('Revenge Andronicus, Andronicus Revenge!') linguistically reflect the main political theme of rise and fall. This is further highlighted by the heightened contrast between the Goths and the Andronici, whose fortunes also relate chiasmatically. Once we start looking at *Aran en Titus* from this political perspective, many of the changes Vos made turn out to be carefully designed to update and develop Shakespeare's poetics of empire, and to render it applicable to Amsterdam. Even the excessive horror Vos has often been accused of, can be seen as serving a political function.

An essential part of Vos's poetics of empire was his effort to classicize the Shakespearean material. In his extensive comparison of *Titus Andronicus*, the German play of 1620, and *Aran en Titus*, Willem Braekman has shown that Vos enhanced the Senecanism of his possible sources in two ways.³⁰ Firstly, Vos amplified the horrific aspects by introducing various ghosts and even speaking severed heads absent in the other plays.³¹ Secondly, and even more so than Ravenscroft, Vos imposed a formal order on the seemingly chaotic action of the play. Thirdly, he added choruses at the end of each act, which antiphonically summarized and interpreted the action. Many of his interventions indicate that he consciously strove to make his play adhere to the unities of time, place, and tone, for instance by cutting Aaron's and Tamora's lovebaby and the Clown. Traditional scholarship has explained these changes by ascribing to Vos a desire to defend the Senecan-Scaligerian poetics (that had been prevalent in

30 Braekman, *Shakespeare's Titus Andronicus*, pp. 117–173.

31 Often interpreted as a ploy to enhance the horrific aspects of the play, it should be noted that by introducing these voices from the past, Vos also enhances the entangledness between past, present and future that is central to his political argument.

the Dutch Republic for decades) against the new Aristotelian poetics to which Vondel was increasingly drawn.³² In that sense, Vos might be seen to represent an antiquated poetics mocked by Jonson.

Contemporaries did not see it that way, however. They praised Vos extensively for his poetical achievement. ‘The whole of antiquity possesses no tragedy more tragic’, the prominent Amsterdam intellectual Caspar Barlaeus wrote. In strong contrast with modern critics, Barlaeus saw in Vos’s play ‘tragedy at its cruelest’ (‘het treurspel op zyn wreedst’),³³ admired its exemplary, even divine ‘grave sentences’ (‘sententiae graves sunt & densae & plane πρὸς διόνοσον’), its ‘characters’ (‘mores’), and ‘passions’ (‘affectus’). The Dutch literary establishment followed Barlaeus’s judgment. Hooft was ‘stupefied’ (‘stupuit’), Van den Burch ‘stunned’ (‘attonitus’), and Vondel judged Vos to be a man of ‘marvelous wit’ (‘portentosi ingenii’).³⁴ Contrary to his custom, Barlaeus visited the play seven times in the Amsterdam theater, and, as his letter to Huygens indicates, did much to augment its reputation. With Barlaeus’s help, Vos was catapulted into Amsterdam’s cultural elite, securing the patronage of the Amsterdam burgomaster Huydecoper, and becoming one of the directors of the Amsterdam theater for many years. As a result Vos’s baroque style, with its deep *chiaroscuro*, its violence and high-pitched emotions, its transcendent historicity, and its reliance on an emblematic visuality, deeply influenced not only the Dutch and German genre of *treurspel* or *Trauerspiel*, but also became one of the pillars in the cultural politics of the Amsterdam elite.³⁵

Classicizing the Shakespearean material, then, was also a modernizing move, with great political implications since Vos, both his early critics and the burgomasters recognized, achieved the greatness of classical antiquity befitting an aspiring new world power. A modern empire, they knew, should be

32 Wisse A.P. Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah. Deel 3: Koning David-spelen—Noah* (Zwolle: Tjeenk Willink, 1962), p. 593; Marijke Meijer-Drees, ‘Toneelopvattingen in beweging: Rivaliteit tussen Vos en Vondel in 1641’, *De Nieuwe Taalgids* 79 (1986), 453–460.

33 Caspar Barlaeus, ‘Op het hooghdravend Treurspel van JAN DE VOS Glazemaker’, in *A&T*, p. 107.

34 Barlaeus to Huygens, 15 December 1641, in J.A. Worp (ed.), *Briefwisseling van Constantijn Huygens, 1608–1687. Deel 3: 1640–1644* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1914), pp. 254–255. Also in Geeraerdt Brandt (ed.) *Barlaei epistolarum liber* (Amsterdam: Johannes Blaeu, 1667), pp. 857–859.

35 On baroque ‘Trauerspiel’, see: Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, transl. John Osborne (London: Verso, 1998). On Vos’s career: Nina Geerdink, *Dichters en verdiensten: De sociale verankering van het dichterschap van Jan Vos (1610–1667)* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2012). For the effect *Aran en Titus* had on Vos’s success, see esp. pp. 30–46.

like Rome in more than just its might—it should also emulate the culture of Rome. As Stephen Greenblatt has argued in *Cultural Mobility*, the idea of *translatio imperii* encouraged this appropriation of foreign aesthetics: as Rome had appropriated the culture of Greece, so its early modern heirs appropriated the culture of Rome: ‘the symbols, regalia, and other literal trappings of Roman imperial power were physically carried (...) from the ancient capital to a succession of new sites’.³⁶ By classicizing Shakespeare, Vos politically appropriated the play, and made it suitable for the New Rome Amsterdam considered itself to be.

In contrast to modern critics of Vos, seventeenth-century commentators grasped these political implications, as they were well aware of the fact that the institutionalization and classicization of the theater were part and parcel of early modern imperial claims. Eulogists of Jacob van Campen’s new Amsterdam theater emphasized that the city’s imperial power could not be complete without that quintessential classical institution. ‘Great Rome we imitate’ (‘Wy bootzen ’t groote Rome naer in ’t kleen’), Vondel wrote in a poem on the opening of Van Campen’s theater, which he associated with the Dutch victory over the Spanish at the Siege of Breda (1637). Both the Amsterdam theatre and the theater of war showed that while the Dutch were on the rise, both culturally and politically, Rome’s fame was ‘fading’ (‘hun faem verdooft’).³⁷ Like Ben Jonson, who moved seamlessly to eulogizing Britain as superior to Rome when he praised Shakespeare as the ‘soule of the age’ in the early days of the London theater,³⁸ Dutch eulogists did not hesitate to incorporate individual poets, including Vos, in this imperial discourse. As a prefatory poem in the first edition of Vos’s *Aran en Titus* exclaimed:

Wijkt Spanjen, Vrankrijk, wijkt zelf Romen, ja, wijkt Greeken,
Ik weet niet of’er wel yet grooters oyt uyt quam.
Schept moed, o nieuwe hoop van ’t magtigh Amsterdam.

(Give way, Spain and France, give way, even Rome and Greece
I don’t think a greater play ever appeared before
Take courage, O new hope of the powerful Amsterdam!)³⁹

36 Greenblatt, ‘Cultural Mobility’, pp. 7–12.

37 Joost van den Vondel, ‘Op den nieuwen schouwburg’, in id., *Gysbreght van Aemstel*, ed. Mieke B. Smits-Veldt (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1994), p. 34.

38 Cf. James, *Shakespeare’s Troy*, p. 7.

39 Vechter, Jan Pietersz [= Joan Victorijn], ‘Op het treurspel van Jan de Vos’, in *A&T*, p. 109.

Eclipsing rivals in the present and in the past, Vos's play, according to Jan Vechter, was as much the 'echo of the old' ('der ouden wedergalm') as Amsterdam itself.⁴⁰ It was a judgment that was itself echoed in various other poems.

The suggestion of course, is that rather than Elizabethan London, republican Amsterdam would inherit not only the greatness, but also the vulnerabilities of classical Rome. From this perspective it is highly significant that among the differences between *Titus Andronicus*, the German play, Ravenscroft's adaptation and the Dutch *Aran en Titus* is Vos's omission of Shakespeare's opening succession scene. In the earlier plays, as we have seen, the succession scene rendered Roman history directly relevant to the political context in which they appeared. Considering the fact that both his possible sources retained the succession scene, Vos's replacing it with a monologue on Rome's imperial rule was evidently a deliberate choice. On the one hand, it is part of a whole set of changes to the first act designed to heighten the contrast between Aran and Titus. Vos also omits the Andronici's abduction of Lavinia and Titus's subsequent murder of his own son Mutius, which considerably complicates his character in Shakespeare's play. In doing so, Vos absolves Titus of any responsibility for the ensuing tragedy: in contrast to Shakespeare's protagonist, he neither raises a tyrant to the throne nor stains himself with the sin of infanticide. Critics such as Braekman have interpreted the heightened contrast between Aran and Titus from an aesthetic point of view, arguing that it is part of Vos's baroque poetics.⁴¹ Yet the changes also greatly affect the political meaning of the play, because they alter the causes of Rome's ensuing civil war. In Shakespeare's play the succession conflict and Titus's inflated sense of honour are important causes of the collapse of the Roman state. Vos, by omitting both, does not only show his aesthetic preferences, but also fundamentally changes the political premises of the play. The fact that Saturninus's speech on Roman greatness precedes his own tyranny indicates that he addresses the problem of the perceived conflict, which would also trouble Milton during the English Republic in the 1650s, between political greatness and liberty.⁴²

40 Vechter, 'Op het treurspel van Jan de Vos', p. 109.

41 Braekman, *Shakespeare's Titus Andronicus*, pp. 117–173.

42 Cf. David Armitage, 'Empire and Liberty: a Republican Dilemma,' in Martin van Gelderen and Quentin Skinner (eds.), *Republicanism, A European Heritage*, vol. 11 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 29–46; id., 'John Milton: Poet Against Empire', in David Armitage, Armand Himy and Quentin Skinner (eds.) *Milton and Republicanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 206–225.

Instead of Shakespeare's complex of conflicts, the first act of *Aran en Titus* highlights just one main cause of Rome's descent into violence: Saturninus's excess of passion. Because Vos also left out the projected marriage between the emperor and Lavinia, his Saturninus bears no grudge against the Andronici; he is an honourable character at first, who is subverted only because of his love for Thamera. Like Shakespeare's Saturninus, Vos's emperor is thunderstruck by Thamera's appearance, but Vos's devotes much more attention to the change that Thamera brings about in him—and to the political implications thereof. Upon seeing 'the sorceress' Thamera, Saturninus, who had been comparing Titus to Scipio and the sun in appropriately exalted alexandrines, suddenly shifts to Petrarchan language, praising her appearance in more than twenty lines. Now *she* is the sun, and he declares that he would renounce the imperial crown in order to dally with her in the pastoral fields.⁴³ If this is already disturbing, Saturninus's lustful behavior elicits ominous comments from various other characters that help the audience to interpret it. When he threatens to force Thamera into his bed, to rape her, she warns him in prophetic words: 'Woe on them who trample the holy right for lust' ('Wee hen die 't heilig recht door minlust oversteigeren').⁴⁴ Mistakenly, Saturninus considers his political authority to trump Thamera's sovereignty over her own body, her individual liberty. Whereas Thamera's following statement, 'The Prince serves the people, not the other way around', would have been met with approval by many Dutch theatergoers, Saturninus's absolutist retort ('the Prince's will is law') was rather less appealing.⁴⁵ Lustfulness in an over-powerful emperor, Vos shows, results in tyranny. In vain Titus seeks to remind the emperor of his former self, and at the end of the first act the chorus laments the 'bolts of love' that made the emperor 'rage'.⁴⁶ With his reason, law and order leave Rome.

Significantly, the Andronici function as foils to emperor's excitability. In contrast to Shakespeare's portrayal of Titus, they embody moderation and above all display reason, the traditional counterweight to the passions.⁴⁷ When Vos's Titus is provoked by Aran, he manages to control his anger with the help

43 A&T, ll. 54–87.

44 A&T, l. 122.

45 A&T, ll. 124–125.

46 A&T, ll. 247–261, 341–346.

47 On the ideal of moderation in princes, see: Ethan Shagan, *The Rule of Moderation: Violence, Religion and the Politics of Restraint in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

of the rational Marcus, who lectures that fights in the Capitol are fought with laws, not swords (ll. 279–282). Titus himself, too, is able to calm the passions in others. When he pleads with Saturninus for the lives of his sons, he argues that it was his ‘reason’ that had stopped the raging rabble and ended the civil war that had turned Rome into a ‘sea of blood’ in an unspecified past (ll. 809–865). It takes the hideous crimes of rape and mutilation to unsettle the Andronici’s equanimity.

Recently, Andrew Hadfield has provocatively read Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus* as a republican play, which shows that monarchy easily degraded into tyranny.⁴⁸ In my opinion, Shakespeare rather speaks to the anxieties related to the royal succession, without explicitly favouring one system of government.⁴⁹ Considering the fact that Ravenscroft used *Titus Andronicus* as an outspokenly royalist play in the context of the debate on the succession of James II in the 1670s, it is highly likely that Shakespeare responded to what Patrick Collinson has called ‘the Elizabethan Exclusion Crisis’, in which England declared itself ‘a republic which happened also to be a monarchy, or vice versa’.⁵⁰ If *Titus Andronicus* indeed resonates with the debate over the exclusion of Mary, Queen of Scots, the issue of monarchy versus republicanism seems to be besides the point. By showing the tragic consequences of Titus’s choice for primogeniture, Shakespeare dramatizes the failure of a specific *kind* or *interpretation* of monarchy. Once we read Shakespeare in dialogue with Vos, we clearly see how bland the ‘republicanism’ of the former is.

By foregrounding Saturninus’s excitability and emphasizing its tragic consequences, Vos introduced a humanist theme with pronounced republican

48 Andrew Hadfield, *Shakespeare and Republicanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 154–183.

49 For an extensive discussion of the issue, and a rebuttal of Hadfield’s argument, see: Mueller, ‘Shakespeare’s Country Opposition’, pp. 106–113. See also: Quentin Taylor, ‘“To Order Well the State”: The Politics of *Titus Andronicus*’, *Interpretation* 32 (2005), 125–150.

50 Patrick Collinson, ‘The Monarchical Republic of Queen Elizabeth I’, in id., *Elizabethan Essays* (London: Hambledon Press, 1994), pp. 31–58; Patrick Collinson, ‘The Elizabethan Exclusion Crisis and the Elizabethan Polity’, *Proceedings of the British Academy* 84 (1995), 51–92. Peter Lake offers an instructive parallel to the case of *Titus Andronicus* in his reading of Ben Jonson’s *Sejanus* (1604) as a Catholic response to the Protestant Elizabethan mixed monarchy: Peter Lake, ‘From Leicester his Commonwealth to Sejanus his Fall: Ben Jonson and the Politics of Roman (Catholic) Virtue’, in Ethan Shagan (ed.) *Catholics and the Protestant Nation: Religious Politics and Identity in Early Modern England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), pp. 128–161.

overtones. According to later Dutch political theorists such as the De la Court brothers, a republican system of government was to be preferred above single-headed rule (as they called it) precisely because the desires of regents were controlled by peers with whom they were in constant competition. A monarchy, they argued, was susceptible to the whims and passions of the king.⁵¹ If Vos's first act already suggests such a political reading, he develops the theme in the third act, when Titus pleads for the life of his sons, and begs Saturninus to suspend his vengeance. When Saturninus refuses, this leads Titus to contrast his imperial rule to republicanism:

SATURNINUS Wy wreken zoo 't ons *lust*: wie dart'er tegen blaffen?
 TITUS Heel anders blonk oud' Room, toen d'elpebene staf
 Van 't *Burgermeesterschap* zich op het landt begaf,
 En huwden aan de spa (...)
 Toen 't *Raadhuis* en de ploeg elkander quam omhelzen
 Met onderlinge trouw.

(SATURNINUS We avenge ourselves according to *our desire*: who dares
 to bark against it?
 TITUS How different did Rome shine, when the ivory staff
 Of the *burgomasters* went into the country
 (...) when plow and *City Hall* embraced
 In mutual loyalty.)⁵²

Unlike Shakespeare, Vos *explicitly* contrasts Saturninus's unreasonable vindictiveness with a nostalgia for the Roman republican past, when humble rulers such as Cincinattus were close to the people and ruled over an harmonious state. Like De la Court he thus emphasizes the superiority of Republicanism over a single-headed, monarchical rule apt to be disturbed by an individual's passions. Moreover, Vos tempts his audience to apply the implied lesson to Amsterdam by introducing blatant anachronisms ('burgomasters' for 'consuls';

51 Wieger Velema, "‘That a Republic is Better Than a Monarchy’: Anti-monarchism in Early Modern Dutch Political Thought", in Martin van Gelderen and Quentin Skinner (eds.), *Republicanism: A Shared Heritage*. Volume 1: *Republicanism and Constitutionalism in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 9–26, esp. p. 14; Arthur Weststeijn, *Commercial Republicanism in the Dutch Golden Age: The Political Thought of Johan & Pieter de la Court* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), pp. 179, 191, 272.

52 A&T, ll. 916–920, emphases added.



FIGURE 12.2 *Artus Quellinus*, Portrait of the Amsterdam Burgomaster Andries de Graeff as Roman Consul (1661)
AMSTERDAM, RIJKSMUSEUM, BK-18305

'City Hall' for 'Forum'). Thus his play foreshadows the Amsterdam burgomasters' identification with Roman consuls in the 1650s and 1660s (see illustration 2).

Another indication of Vos's republicanism is the fact that he introduces a new character, a messenger in Titus's household named after the republican historian Tacitus. The name, emphasized when Titus calls the silent character in the fourth act (l. 1869), is highly suggestive: the go-between Tacitus in the play

cannot but remind the audience of that other, transhistorical go-between, the Tacitus who reported the decadence and violent failure of the Roman Empire to posterity. The Tacitus, moreover, who contrasted that very Roman decadence to the simple virtue of German tribes such as the Batavians, widely perceived to be the ancestors of the Dutch people (see below). If a Tacitean discourse runs through Shakespeare's play, as Jonathan Bate has suggested, Vos recognized and highlighted it, and removed the obstacles to a Tacitean reading by improving Lucius's character.⁵³

Both by contrasting the rule of Saturninus with republican Rome and by introducing the character Tacitus, Vos's *Aran en Titus* aligned itself to the republicanism developed by Hooft and Grotius. When Vos wrote his play, the kind of historical warning he presented was particularly dear to prominent members within the Amsterdam regent class, who saw themselves confronted with the increasing power and ambitions of the House of Orange. Hooft, we may remember, provided a similar mirror with his history of Florence, which he suggestively entitled *Disasters Following the Elevation of the House of Medici*. Although Hooft never made this explicit, his book showed that like Rome, the great Republic of Florence went into steep decline after being subjected by a single ruler. Although the *Disasters* would only be published in 1649, when William II threatened to upset the balance of power in the Dutch Republic, it already circulated in manuscript in Amsterdam in the late 1630s.⁵⁴ Ten years later, from 1648 onwards, Amsterdam's identification with republican Rome would be enshrined in Van Campen's neoclassical city hall, which Vos helped to decorate, and which is replete with the kind of historical parallels offered by *Aran en Titus*.⁵⁵

Aran en Titus's republicanism is as much aimed against Calvinist insurgence as it is against political opposition against the regents' sovereignty. Saturninus's sexual lust may be the most important cause of the unfolding tragedy, it is not the only passion targeted in Vos's adaptation. More so than Shakespeare, and fully in the line of Hooft and Grotius, he emphasizes that religious excitability, too, undermines the stability of the state. This is especially visible in Vos's

53 Bate, 'Introduction', p. 21. Against Bate's Tacitean reading, see: Anthony Brian Taylor, 'Lucius, the Severely Flawed Redeemer of Titus Andronicus', *Connotations* 6 (1996), 138–157.

54 Pieter Cornelisz. Hooft, *Rampzaeligheden der verheffinge van den Hujze Medicis*, ed. J. de Lange (Den Haag: Nijhoff, 1981); Simon Groenveld, 'Pieter Corneliszoon Hooft en de geschiedenis van zijn eigen tijd', in id., *Hooft als historieschrijver: Twee studies* (Weesp: Heureka, 1981), pp. 7–46, 93–99.

55 Cf. Eymert-Jan Goossens, *Het Amsterdamse Paleis: Schat van beitel en penseel*, pp. 88–137.

adaptation of the Alarbus scene. Whereas in Shakespeare it is Titus, the army commander, who presses to sacrifice Tamora's son Alarbus (and his sons who execute the sacrifice), Vos makes Aran the victim of the sacrifice, and introduces a *priest* who favors to burn the Moor. Aran's reply, at the end of the first act, is replete with topical overtones:

Houd op versteend gespook tot mijn verderf geschapen;
 Geveinsde tempeliers, van God vervloekte papen:
 Bloeddronke wichelaars: die, als 't uw schenzucht wil,
 Het plonderende graauw, onkondig in 't geschil
 Van kerk, en landbestier, ontslaat van al hunn' eeden:
 En t'zaamgerotte schuim der vrygevochte steeden,
 Als of 't den hemel wou, op 't heilig Raadhuis hitst;
 En 't Rijk, door tempelwrok, en moordkrakkeel gesplitst,
 Ten roof geeft aan den muil der geestelijke tijgers.

(Stop, you heart-hardened specters made for my demise
 You feigned templeers, you Papists cursed by God,
 You bloodthirsty prophesiers, who, with your sacrilegious lust
 Allow the raging rabble, ignorant of the high disputes
 In Church, and Government, to renounce their oaths;
 And incite the assembled riffraff of the liberated cities
 Against the Holy City Hall, as if Heaven ordered it,
 The Empire, split by temple wrath and murderous discourse,
 Is thus given prey to the mouths of spiritual tigers.)⁵⁶

While Aran construes religious passion ('sacrilegious lust', 'temple wrath') as another danger to the state, Vos again allows the language to slip into an anachronistic mode. There can be little doubt that 'the liberated cities' allude to the United Provinces ('liberated' from Spain) and the preachers inciting the ignorant rabble to rise against their Holy government are an unequivocal reference to the Dutch Truce conflicts, the violent conflict between the orthodox Calvinists led by the Dutch stadholder and the State party led by Johan van Oldenbarnevelt, who was eventually 'sacrificed' to prevent a civil war. Is Vos here sneering at the fanaticism of the orthodox Calvinists (often denounced as 'Papists' by their opponents) who put the country's safety at risk by inciting the rabble to rise against its lawful government? Such a statement certainly

56 A&T, ll. 165–174.

chimes well with Vos's own political opinions. That Vos uses the villain Aran as a mouthpiece may seem to undermine the point, but this is to apply modern demands to a play that ultimately is not about character, but about the polis. Like Thamera's, Aran's villainy serves a political function: both characters expose the weakness of Rome. From that perspective, Aran's words should be taken very seriously as an indication that religious passion adds oil to the fire of Saturnine's lust, and exacerbates Rome's, and by implication Amsterdam's, vulnerability.

That Rome was destroyed by an excess of passion was in itself not an original argument. One recurring element in Hugo Grotius's comparison between the great Republics of Athens, Rome and Batavia, *Parallellon rerumpublicarum* (1602), was the cruelty and immoderation of the southern Europeans. Grotius chided those Athenians and the Romans who, 'like animals', did not 'moderate the powers of spirit and body with reason', and stressed that their inability to control their passions, will 'easily lead to violence, rebellion and war'.⁵⁷ In a range of examples Grotius highlighted the furious, vindictive temper of Roman rebels such as 'the Gracchi, Saturnine, Drusus, Lepidus, Catiline, Clodius, and, finally, Caesar'.⁵⁸ Rather than judging Roman history through the lense of republicanist or monarchic values, Grotius condemned all populist troublemakers. Recognizing the truth of Du Bellay's statement that Rome was defeated by Rome only, he isolated the source of Rome's weakness, the excess of passion, as the true danger to any state, regardless of its form of government. Seen in this context, it may be no coincidence that Shakespeare and Vos used the name of the tribune Lucius Appuleius Saturninus (to whom Grotius's enumeration is referring) for their emperor: especially in Vos he exemplified the impassioned liability to the state.⁵⁹

57 Hugo Grotius, *Parallellon rerumpublicarum liber tertius: De moribus ingenioque populorum Atheniensium, Romanorum, Batavorum*, vol. 1, ed. Johan Meerman (Haarlem: Loosjes, 1801), p. 86: 'die de krachten van ziel en ligchaam, naar de wijs der dieren, door geen reden temperen (...) ligtelijk in geweld, oproer en oorlog uitbarst'.

58 Grotius, *Parallellon Rerumpublicarum*, p. 92: 'Maar toen het onafgebroken geluk der overwinningen rust van 't oorloogen, en trotschheid met zich bracht: welke bewegingen, welke oproeren ontstonden 'er toen niet door de Gracchen, Saturninus, Drusus, Lepidus, Catilina, Clodius, en eindelijk Caesar? Welke voorbeelden zag men niet van geweld en woestheid? Die dat slechts leest (...) zal moeten toestemmen, dat de wreedheid niet verder heeft kunnen gaan. De keizerlijke heerschappij (...) overtrof evenwel die van hun allen. Ja ook heden, onder zoo veel volkeren als de aarde draagt, is dit nog het geen, daar de toorn het ligtste ontbrandt, en de wraak het hevigste eindigt. En deezen zijn dan die Romeinen, die ons woest en verschrikkelijk noemen'.

59 On the name of Saturninus, cf. Bate, 'Introduction', pp. 28–29, 93–95. Bate argues that

It was by applying the observation to a Rome detached from a specific historical situation, a transhistorical Rome one might say, that Vos was breaking new ground. The main difference between Grotius's and Vos's treatments of the passions lies in Grotius's emphasis on the contrast between the Romans and the Dutch as a *natural* contrast. Grotius emphasized that the Dutch character led them neither 'fiercely [to] pursue' revenge, nor to 'ignore her completely', which allows them to be brave in battle without being cruel.⁶⁰ Vos's text, by contrast, presents Rome in an anachronistic mode, which highlighted the similarities between Rome and Amsterdam, and the migration of empire. More so than Grotius, Vos and his characters warn his audience for the dangers that await an imperial power. The difference, then, is not only caused by a difference in genre, but also by a changed context.

When Grotius wrote his text in 1602, any Dutch imperial claim seemed ludicrous. Grotius was one of the great propagators of the Batavian myth, which stipulated that the Dutch descended from the Batavians who had successfully defended themselves against the Roman Empire. He had provided the Dutch Republic with a history of successful opposition to imperial tyranny that prefigured the Dutch Revolt against Spain.⁶¹ For Grotius, images of Roman tyranny and horrors were therefore also images of Spanish tyranny. As the Dutch Republic gained in power and wealth, however, this anti-imperial myth, based on a few lines in Tacitus, was becoming ever more difficult to align with its own imperial ambitions, and as a result, the attitude towards it became increasingly ambivalent.⁶² In Vos's time, in 1638/41, the Dutch Republic had become one of the most powerful states in Europe, and Amsterdam's claim to be the

Shakespeare probably refers to Saturn, the cannibal God of the Ovidian Iron Age as well. In Vos, the reference to Saturn was less pronounced, since Vos did not allude to Astraea and the Golden Age.

- 60 Grotius, *Parallellon Rerumpublicarum*, p. 98: 'De wraak wordt bij ons noch hevig achtervolgd, noch gansch uit het oog verlooren'.
- 61 Cf. Ivo Schöffer, 'The Batavian Myth During the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', in E.H. Kossmann and J.S. Bromley (eds), *Britain and the Netherlands. Papers Delivered to the Fifth Anglo-Dutch Historical Conference*, vol. 5: *Some Political Mythologies* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975), pp. 78–101; Haitsma Mulier, 'De Bataafse mythe opnieuw bekeken', *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis van Nederland* 111 (1996), pp. 344–376.
- 62 W.A.M. Hessing, 'Foreign Oppressor Versus Civiliser: the Batavian Myth as the Source for Contrasting Associations of Rome in Dutch historiography', in R. Hingley (ed), *Images of Rome: Perceptions of Ancient Rome in Europe and the United States in the Modern Age* (Portsmouth: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 2001), pp. 126–143. See also: Marijke Spies: 'Verbeeldingen van vrijheid: David en Mozes, Burgerhart en Bato, Brutus en Cato', *De zeventiende eeuw* 10 (1994), pp. 141–155, p. 151.

new Rome was taken very seriously. Moreover, in the intervening period the Truce Conflicts had shown that the Dutch moderation Grotius had confidently taken pride in was far from natural. As a result, the horrors of imperial Rome were increasingly also the horrors of the Dutch themselves.

Aran en Titus's republicanism, then, took part in a particularly Dutch power struggle that rooted in the Truce Conflicts and resurfaced during the disorders of 1650 and 1672. It is for this reason that Vos never embraced a principled republicanism aimed against monarchy in general. Like Vondel (who gravitated towards absolutism) and Oudaen (who gravitated towards anti-monarchism later in life) he was a great admirer of foreign monarchs such as Charles I, and like them he was not afraid to revert to absolutist slogans in order to propagate the king's cause during the English civil wars.⁶³ Rather than an argument for republicanism, Vos offers an emblem of an actually existing republican order's past and future alternatives. By turning Shakespeare's Rome into the mirror of Amsterdam, *Aran en Titus* showed the horrors that descended upon an empire disconnected from its republican past and unable to subject the church in order to support the ruling oligarchy against the political and religious forces that upset the Republic's internal passions.

The Raped Virgin

Vos's sole emphasis on the role of the monarch's passion in causing of the destructive cycle of revenge in *Aran en Titus* greatly strengthened the thematic unity of the play, because even more so than Shakespeare, Vos alerted his audiences to the correspondence between the civil war that enveloped Rome and the violent rape of Rozelyna. If Shakespeare's Lavinia has been read as an emblem of Rome's ravished and dismembered body politic,⁶⁴ Vos explicitly exposed unbridled lust as the common threat to body politic and female body, thus reinforcing the suggestion that the rape of Rozelyna, like Lucrece's, was both an aspect and a symbol of political tyranny, and perhaps also a prelude to regime change. The fact that Vos changed Lavinia's name into a Dutch

63 Cf. Helmer Helmers, *The Royalist Republic: Literature, Politics and Religion in the Anglo-Dutch Public Sphere, 1639–1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

64 See e.g. Eugene M. Waith, 'The Metamorphosis of Violence in Titus Andronicus', *Shakespeare Survey* 10 (1957), 39–49; and Keira Reilly, 'Lavinia's Rape: Reading the Restoration Actress's Body in Pain in Ravenscroft's *Titus*', in James Robert Allard and Matthew R. Martin (eds), *Staging Pain, 1580–1800: Violence and Trauma in British Theater* (London: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 139–150.

name, well known from Dutch love poetry, is therefore highly significant. The change sets her apart from the other characters, who all have Roman names, and gives her a timeless, and peculiarly Dutch quality in an otherwise Roman environment. It is emphatically with her that Vos wants his Dutch audience to identify. And in the Dutch cultural-political context of the 1630s and 1640s, the rape of a Dutch virgin was saturated with meanings associated with both Dutch opposition against empire and Dutch imperial ambitions.

Vos, who had already hinted at the correspondence between civil war and rape in the dialogue between Saturninus and Thamera in the first act (cited above), further develops the motif in the second act. When Aran incites Quiro and Demetrius to rape Rozelyna, he juxtaposes Rozelyna's prosperity (lit. 'shine', *glans*) with Titus's 'shameful' ('schendig') victory against the Goths, the adverb 'schendig' carried strong connotations of rape.⁶⁵ What he suggests, then, is that Rozelyna's rape is eye for an eye for Titus's raping Gothland. Aran's ensuing plea for the brothers to engage in lawless, ungodly, and unnatural behaviour in order to unsettle Rome significantly culminates in a call to ravish the virginity of the state:

Verdelgt het heilig recht; maakt Romen tot een bloedbadt,
 Door bitse burgerkrijg, een schipbreuk voor 't gemeen;
 Schept lust in dwinglandy; pleegt bloedschandt, met de geen
 Die u ter werreld brocht; verft uw' schenzieke handen
 Met broêr en zustermoordt; ontbindt de kuissche banden
 Van Vestas maagderey.

(Destroy the holy law, change Rome into a pool of blood
 By fierce civil war, a shipwreck for the commonwealth;
 Enjoy lustful tyranny, fornicate with your mother,
 Paint red your violating hands through sororicide
 And fratricide, untie the bonds of chastity
 Of Vesta's virgin choir ...) ⁶⁶

In what appears to be a chiasmic sequence of metonymies (mirroring the numerous chiasms in the play), Aran first analogizes Gothland's rape to Rozelyna's, and then Rozelyna's to the rape of Rome. The reference to the Vestal virgins,

65 *Woordenboek der Nederlandse Taal (WNT)* (Leiden: Instituut voor codicologie, 2007), 'schendig'.

66 *A&T*, ll. 372–377.

added by Vos, is essential to *Aran en Titus's* political symbolism. The Vestals, who were selected from Rome's finest, and sworn into celibacy, guarded the city's eternal fire and personified the spirit of Rome. If they were touched, legend had it, Rome's holy fire would die out and something evil would befall the state. When Titus, in the second act, prophesizes how the civil war will extinguish Rome's eternal fire, and make the Vestals 'shudder' (l. 956) he again associates their virginity with the city's well-being and harmony. By associating Rozelyna's impending rape to that of the Vestals, both Aran and Titus suggest that Rozelyna, too, is analogous to the body politic.⁶⁷ As a result, when Titus laments the demise of the 'pearl of Europe' after the rape, he might be referring to Rozelyna as well as to Rome itself.

Surely, Vos did not invent the analogy between Rozelyna's rape and Rome's civil war. Both in *Titus Andronicus* and Ovid's tale of Philomela (a king's daughter), rape also symbolized a violent intrusion of the body politic. But Vos highlighted the analogy implicit in his sources, and directed it away from Shakespeare's Virgin Queen/Astraea towards the Vestals and towards a Dutch pastoral character. In doing so, he activated the strong political associations of the raped virgin in the Dutch Republic. In the late sixteenth, and the early seventeenth centuries, the rape of the female body politic had been developed into a commonplace literary image. Vondel's *Gysbreght van Aemstel*, written in the same year as Vos's play and equally concerned with the fall of a city that prefigures seventeenth-century Amsterdam, offers an instructive parallel to *Aran en Titus*.⁶⁸ Structuring his play around three rapes, Vondel constructs a mythology for Amsterdam that, like Rome's, is founded on a series of sexual violations parallel to Helen's rape, Lucrece's rape, and Mars's rape of the vestal virgin Ilia. The rape of Geeraerd van Velsen's wife, which provides the immediate occasion for Gijsbreght's war, is followed by the besiegers' rape of the Poor Clares, and, finally, by the rape of the city itself:

Het Sparen stack na Aemstels kroon.
Hoe wraeck met zwaerden en met speeren

67 Vos reinforces the analogy when he introduces another virgin emerging from amongst the violent crowd to plead for the life of Titus's son, offering her virginity to save the peace. See: *A&T*, ll. 1167–1199.

68 On the motif of rape in *Gysbreght van Aemstel* and its relation to identity formation in the Dutch revolt, see: Amanda C. Pipkin, *Rape in the Republic, 1609–1725: Formulating Dutch Identity* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 35–82. On rape and sovereignty, see: Frans-Willem Korsten, *Sovereignty as Inviolability: Vondel's Theatrical Explorations in the Dutch Republic* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2009), pp. 159–167.

De torenkroon van 't hoofd wou scheeren
 Der schoone en wijd vermaerde stad,
 En rucken door geweld van benden
 Der vesten gordel van haer lenden
 En plondren haer kleenood en schat;
 Gelijck de schender Velzens vrouwe
 En schenden d'edele en getrouwe,
 Thus [the river] Sparen envied Amstel's crown.

(O how Revenge, with spears and swords
 Sought to (...) rip the girdles of defense
 From her hips, to plunder her jewel and treasure
 And violate the honourable and loyal [virgin]
 Like the violator of Van Velsen's wife.)⁶⁹

Eventually, Amsterdam will indeed be penetrated by a 'sea-horse' filled with enemy soldiers. Thus, in Vondel, violence committed against natural and religious bodies culminates in the violation of the body politic, the personification of the Amsterdam *polis*: the city virgin.

That proud commonplace personification of Dutch cities, represented in numerous early modern poems, theatrical processions and prints celebrating local achievements and prosperity, embodied the civic commonweal all city regents pledged to further and protect. In the Dutch Republic, it was through this figure, rather than through Shakespeare's Virgin Queen, that political and sexual violation were seen as analogous, or even overlapping. As long as this Vestal-like virgin was protected, the city would thrive.

While symbolizing the body politic, the city virgin was also a deeply sexualized figure. In paintings and sculpture, she was represented as an attractive, perhaps even inviting woman, dressed in spare, translucent robes that often reveal a comely figure and one or both breasts bare. In poetry, her sexuality was exploited to the full as poets described how she willingly 'opened herself up' to benign male traders that made her body 'swell'.⁷⁰ Although slightly paradoxical, the virgin's sexuality clearly functions politically as well—the wealth,

69 Vondel, *Gysbreght van Aemstel* (ed. Smits Veldt), ll. 420–428.

70 Arie-Jan Gelderblom, 'De maagd en de mannen: Psychokritiek van de stadsuitbeelding in de zeventiende en achttiende eeuw', in id., *Mannen en maagden in Hollands tuin: Interpretatieve studies van Nederlandse letterkunde 1575–1781* (Amsterdam: Thesis, 1991), pp. 78–93.



FIGURE 12.3 *Joachim Wtewael, The Dutch Virgin Trampled (ca. 1612)*
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honor, and prosperity of the *polis*, after all, not only depend on a virulent activity through the city's openings, but also attracts foreign violators against whom the vigilant (male) protection of the lawful government and the city militia is required. If that protection falters, as happens in both *Gysbreght van Aemstel* and *Aran en Titus*, hostile penetration and mutilation was the result.

The image of the raped city virgin had a long history that deeply associated her with the Dutch struggle against Spain. Propagandistic images produced by the rebels during the Dutch Revolt, such as Hans Collaert's *Beclaghinghe der Nederlandscher verwoestinghe (Lament over the Desolation of the Netherlands, ca. 1580)* or Joachim Wtewael's dyptich *De Nederlandse maagd vertrappt (The Dutch Virgin Trampled, 1612)*, showed the allegorical personification of The Netherlands harassed and violated by real soldiers in realistic settings, thereby simultaneously alluding to the widely reported crimes that the Spanish army committed against women and Philip II's violation of Dutch privileges (see illustrations 3 and 4). Individual suffering and the suffering of the Dutch body politic are indistinguishable as the hostile intrusion of the natural body, the family and the state could thus be represented in one multivalent image. This image lent itself particularly well to Vondel's and Vos's baroque aesthetics

Conclusion

When we study the movement of *Titus Andronicus* through Europe, the philological issues that have dominated the scholarship on Shakespeare's early continental afterlife will always remain intriguing. We may still speculate about the question of which version of the play inspired which, as Braekman did, and, proceeding from Braekman, we may start to wonder whether the various similarities between Vos and Ravenscroft are evidence of an Anglo-continental process of exchange coming full circle. Did Ravenscroft know that Vos's *Aran* was burned on stage, and did that cause him to modify Shakespeare's ending? Did he know that Vos had centered his play around lust and rape, and did that inspire him foreground Lavinia's rape as well? In the end, however, such questions are probably unanswerable, and certainly not the most rewarding. We know that Shakespeare circulated on the continent, and we know that his plays were far from stable in performance. This article has therefore tried to sidestep these issues, and focus not on finding the similarities, but on interpreting the differences, the changes in context and content (and consequently in meaning) between *Titus Andronicus* and its seventeenth-century spin-offs, foremost *Aran en Titus*.

Titus Andronicus, I have argued, was adapted not only because it was a blockbuster, but also, and perhaps even more fundamentally so, to do political work. Shakespeare's plays, when they started to circulate on the continent, had to navigate a political and institutional landscape that greatly affected when and where they surfaced, and which shapes they assumed. In Germany, the imperial election energized the play in 1618–1620, in Amsterdam it reflected on the city's newly claimed imperial status, in Ravenscroft's London, on the Exclusion crisis. Once we read these plays in dialogue, it becomes clear that they were not only catering to a seventeenth-century hunger for horror, as is still often presumed. Like the German play, and like Ravenscroft, Vos turned to *Titus Andronicus* also, and perhaps even more so, in response to political needs and anxieties.

Vos was alert to the political implications of Shakespeare's original, and able to develop his own poetics of empire. Once we compare this poetics to Shakespeare's, it becomes clear that Vos had a keen eye for the possibilities of the anachronistic portrayal of Roman decline into civil war. Recognizing that classical Rome extended into the present, Vos knew it his task to rewrite the Shakespearean material in such a way that it would be an Amsterdam present. In keeping with his later role as one of the overseers of Amsterdam's cultural politics, Vos catered for the city's ruling class and made Titus's failing Rome evoke the superiority of Amsterdam's republican rule. Emblematically highlighting

the weaknesses of Rome's imperial regime, *Aran en Titus* supported the city's imperial claims, and bolstered the regents in their battle against both the Prince of Orange and the Calvinist orthodoxy claiming the superiority of the church over the state.

Distancing the Shakespearean material from Elizabethan London, and analysing how playwrights like Vos interpreted and recontextualized Shakespeare, tells us much about how early moderns read Shakespeare politically, and may therefore be taken to either support or complement various of the historicist readings of Shakespeare's play mentioned in the notes above. Moreover, studying Shakespeare's plays moving through the early modern cultural-political landscape will greatly help to assess what he brought to the cultures that adapted him, and to understand the (changing) relationship between political and aesthetical regimes in early modern Europe.

Further Reading

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