

The Hutton Inquiry

“Titus Andronicus” by William Shakespeare by [danhutton](#)

at Shakespeare’s Globe, Friday 4th May 2012

For *Titus Andronicus*, Tang Shu-Wing Theatre Studio’s contribution to the Globe to Globe festival, this production is surprisingly free of blood. In the monochromatic colour scheme, simple red gloves are used to show decapitated hands, reminiscent of the girl in the dress in Schindler’s List. But whilst Tang Shu-Wing’s production, performed in Cantonese, has some wonderful imagery, it doesn’t quite manage to find out exactly what it’s saying about the play.

The evening opens with a fascinating semi-expressionistic ‘prologue’, with actors poisoning on and around chairs using simple gestures as conversations occur about what’s to become of Rome. It’s mesmerizing, but doesn’t seem to have much of a point and, disappointingly, isn’t drawn on again.

The simple black-grey-white aesthetic allows for sharp, clear images, and make the story clearer, as does the perfect two-and-a-half hour running time, which seems to be standard for this season and which, in all seriousness, we would do well to start taking note of home-grown productions. Unfortunately, Shu-Wing attempts to include both tragedy and comedy without really succeeding in either. Naturally, the slaughter Shakespeare includes in the latter scenes is laughable, but by using broad cartoony brush-strokes, some of the pathos is lost. It’s not an easy play to get right, but the company would do well to play down the humour a little.

As seems to be a trend with this season (this is only my third production but speaking to others it seems to be the case), the acting on display is wonderful, surpassing that of many English companies. The cast is universally brilliant, but three performances stand out. As Lavinia, Lai Yuk-Ching manages to impart whole speeches post-maiming using only her eyes and quiet squeals. Ivy Pang Ngan-Ling’s Tamora is her exact opposite, plotting throughout with a menacing tone in her voice with a steely, dead glint in her eye. Andy Ng Wai-Shek soars as a drop-dead brilliant Titus, never crumbling to a wreck and maintaining a human stoicism in the face of extreme loss. Intriguingly, he is presented as devoid of a genuine tragic flaw; the only reason he lowers to filicide is due to uncontrollable events around him. The tragedy is that he could not see this coming, and the haunting, somewhat ugly live music played by Chan Wai-Yee only adds to this feeling.

It’s quickly become a cliché of this festival to say that the focus is on the story, but this is once again the case with *Titus Andronicus*. There are echoes of brutal, genocidal regimes but, especially since we see no blood, we are constantly drawn to the narrative rather than its implications. It’s a shame that Shu-Wing’s production doesn’t take the risk of playing it more seriously, but some beautiful pictures redeem them somewhat; in any case, with a play as complex as this, the mere fact they’ve made it easy to follow is impressive enough without attempts at grandeur.

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