
The Metatheatre of Broken Banquets in and beyond *Titus Andronicus*

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ABSTRACT

Through an examination of the domestic banquet set in the middle of *Titus Andronicus* and the second banquet in the last scene, this essay aims to explore the metatheatre of these two broken banquets and analyze its role in strengthening the theatricality of the play. A coda, as an appended section to the subject matters under discussion, will provide a brief overview of the broken banquets in five other Shakespearean plays—*The Taming of the Shrew*, *As You Like It*, *The Tempest*, *Macbeth*, and *Timon of Athens*—and call attention to the ways in which the metatheatre in them continues the exploration of diverse issues related to the politics and ethics of eating such as moderation, hospitality, forgiveness, and reciprocity.

KEYWORDS Shakespeare, metatheatre, broken banquets, *Titus Andronicus*

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I.

In the fields of anthropology, ethnology, and sociology, food and eating are objects of research with a long history and have been widely studied both for their own sakes and for their impacts on other topics such as food insecurity, eating and ritual, as well as eating and identities.¹ Since the 1980s, food and eating began to emerge from these fields and became a major topic in early modern studies. One subtopic that is of great interest to scholars and has been comprehensively surveyed ever since is how early modern intellectuals understood eating habits and culinary practices of people in a relationship with sociopolitical and ethical issues. As David B. Goldstein states:

Eating forced Renaissance thinkers to consider questions about how communities were formed and shattered; the creation and dissolutions of true fellowship; the inclusion and exclusion of groups and individuals; the tensions among hospitality, obligation, and agency; and the contested, even illusory, boundary between the self and the world. Further, to think about eating was to acknowledge that the individual did not just have a *relationship* to the world but was *made* of the world, utterly inseparable from it. (6)

In early modern literature, these issues are broadly represented in the banquet and dining scenes of a variety of plays. Scholars like Goldstein, Chris Meads, Amy Tigner, Daryl W. Palmer, and C. Anne Wilson have all made substantial contributions to the survey of such subject matters.² Regardless of the different approaches that they apply, their studies, to a great extent, all suggest the importance of banqueting as a social practice in building and maintaining the bond and hierarchy between people in a community. Such an agreement reached by these early modernists through their studies, as a result, echoes Mary Douglas's words in her influential essay "Deciphering a Meal": "If food is treated as a code, the message it encodes will be found in the pattern of social relations being expressed. The message is about different degrees of hierarchy, inclusion and exclusion, boundaries and transactions across the boundaries" (61). In addition to that, it also confirms Dennis E. Smith's exploration of banquets as social institutions: "The social code of the banquet represents a conformation and ritualization of the boundaries that exist in a social situation" (9). What is crucial about

¹ See Mintz and Du Bois 99.

² See, for example, Goldstein; Goldstein and Tigner; Meads; Palmer; and Wilson.

the remarks of Douglas and Smith—apart from their emphases on the social functions of banquets—is that they point out the inseparability between rituals and theatrics in such events. In other words, because the operation of banquets is highly mannered and orchestrated, it is substantially equivalent to that of a theatrical performance. In her essay discussing the association between the rituals of hospitality and their connections to early modern drama, Julia Reinhard Lupton states:

The rituals of hospitality incubate the theatricality incipient in all human exchange, and do so in a manner that remains close to bodily wants and the compartments and technologies that accompany them: in hospitality events, life manifests itself as theater. Because of this primary conjunction of vitality, welcoming, and performance, scenes of accommodation and conviviality and their refusal or violation abound in the mythic situations of dramatic literature. From masked balls, slaughtered guests, and cannibal banquets to resident aliens, exotic sojourners, and heavenly hosts, hospitality gathers together a diverse yet coherent repertoire of narrative scenarios, physical routines, and repertoire cosmic musings. Hospitality feeds the thematics of Renaissance drama in part because acts of reception are built into the conditions of theatrical performance, whether via the memory of inn yards embedded in the architecture of the public theatre, as the occasion for court entertainments, or as a customary script in the theatre of daily life. (423-24)

Given the fact that banquets are where the rituals of hospitality are performed for the most part, they can consequently be seen as a form of theater. On this account, when banquets are staged in drama, they are comparable to the play-within-the-play—a form of metatheatre in addition to, for instance, chorus, soliloquy, induction, and epilogue—that frequently draws the audience’s attention to the nature of drama itself and/or displays the actor’s/playwright’s self-awareness of the theatrical performance that they are undertaking concurrently. In other words, metatheatre is a moment at which the perceptual boundary between the real world and drama is blurred or broken and, on this “middle ground” in the theater, the audience in the real world can have a better grasp of the actor’s/playwright’s self-reflexivity upon their roles and being (or not-being) in the drama.³ As much as banquets play a critical role in maintain-

³ In this essay, the term “metatheatre,” coined by Lionel Abel in 1960, is mainly used to refer to the self-reflexivity displayed in different dramatic strategies such as play-within-the-play (including role-play, improvisation, and cosplay), chorus, soliloquy, induction, and epilogue applied in the six Shakespearean

ing the stability of personal relationships in both life and drama, however, they at the same time contain a certain amount of instability and uncertainty. Therefore, an issue worth considering about staged banquets is that the enjoyment and order created by the participants in such events, in certain cases, can be interrupted, delayed, or ruined by, for instance, external intrusions from unanticipated incidents or uninvited guests. In other cases, banquets can be destroyed internally by the conflict between guests and hosts, or by hosts who abruptly call off the events.

In William Shakespeare's *Henry VIII* (1613), Cardinal Wolsey calls an interrupted banquet a "broken banquet" (1.4.61), a term that not only refers to the disruption of the event, but also indicates the breaking of the rule and order in it. According to G. Wilson Knight, "Wolsey's reference to a 'broken banquet' . . . recalls the more violently broken banquets in *Macbeth* [1606], *Timon of Athens* [1607], and *The Tempest* [1611]" (300). While these three plays are certainly well known among Shakespeare's works for their violent scenes of broken banquets, there are three other productions from the playwright's earlier days—*Titus Andronicus* (1594), *The Taming of the Shrew* (1594), and *As You Like It* (1599)—that also feature similar episodes and should not be left unnoticed. In addition to the morals that they convey, what is critical about these broken banquets is that they are staged as pivotal points foreshadowing forthcoming events through unexpected incidents or conflicts. The metatheatre in these scenes is an element that can hardly be provided by other forms of dining scenes. Nevertheless, in comparison with the staging of more conventional banquets, the presentation of broken banquets in early modern English drama, as well as in world literature, is a topic less discussed in recent scholarship and worth further investigations.⁴ In the following pages, through an examination of the domestic banquet set in the middle of *Titus Andronicus* and a second banquet in the last scene, this essay aims to explore the metatheatre of these two broken banquets and analyze their role in strengthening the theatricality of the play.⁵

plays being discussed. For Abel's discussions of metatheatre as a dramatic genre, see Abel, *Metatheatre and Tragedy and Metatheatre*. For more recent studies on diverse forms and functions of metatheatre, see the Spring 2018 issue of *Shakespeare Bulletin*, a special issue on metatheatre in early modern drama.

⁴ In English literature, this topic can be found as early as in *Beowulf*, where Grendel regularly attacks Heorot the banquet hall, and in *Sir Gawain and The Green Knight*, where the Green Knight interrupts King Arthur's dinner party on Christmas Eve. In world literature, similar plots can be seen, for instance, in Giovanni Boccaccio's *Nastagio degli Onesti*, the eighth story of the fifth day in *The Decameron*.

⁵ Due to the limitations of space, this essay will mainly focus on *Titus Andronicus*. Still, in the coda as a supplementary to the subject matters under discussion, it will provide a brief overview of the broken banquets in five other Shakespearean plays mentioned above and call attention to the ways in which the metatheatre in them continues the exploration of diverse issues related to the politics and ethics of eating, such as

II.

Before launching into the discussion of the metatheatre of broken banquets in *Titus Andronicus*, it is essential for us to briefly review Thomas Kyd's impact on early modern English drama. About one and half decades prior to Shakespeare's debut of *Titus Andronicus*, Kyd introduced *The Spanish Tragedy* to the Elizabethan stage in the late 1580s, and it soon became a hit. Kyd's achievement can be attributed to his successful adaptation of Senecan tragedies to the contemporary English theater. During the Middle Ages, they had been taught in schools and had a profound influence on neoclassical playwrights on the Continent. In England, they were well known and emulated mostly at universities. Senecan tragedies, as David Bevington points out, "contain long, declamatory, highly rhetorical speeches and soliloquies; they banish violence from the stage, though telling stories of incest, parricide, and the devouring of one's own children; they moralize their tragic stories along philosophical lines; and they observe the classical unities of time, place, and action" (3). What Kyd did adroitly, as Bevington suggests, was blend the elements of intrigue, treachery, vendetta, and carnage in these tragedies into *The Spanish Tragedy* to create a new form of tragic drama that is "suspenseful, action-packed, and theatrically shocking in a way that Seneca's closet plays could never hope to be" (4). In addition, Kyd also established a lasting relationship between banquets/entertainments and accomplished revenge in early modern tragedies. This link can be seen at the royal banquet by the end of Act 1, Scene 4, which Kyd stages as an event foreshadowing approaching crises and upcoming woes through puns and ironies embedded in the exchanges between the characters. In this scene, the seeming conviviality shared at the dining table is designed to furnish dramatic interest that only becomes more intelligible to the audience afterwards: as the play proceeds, they will see that the friendship between the characters begins to break down and, toward the end, witness Hieronimo taking revenge on the murderers of his son in his presentation of *Soliman and Perseda*, the play-within-the-play that is supposed to be an entertainment in celebration of the wedding of Balthazar and Bel-imperia.

The way in which Kyd features a banquet scene and plays-within-the-play in *The Spanish Tragedy* is inventive and inspirational to succeeding playwrights. As Meads suggests:

moderation, hospitality, forgiveness, and reciprocity.

A group of tragedies, beginning with *The Spanish Tragedy*, establish an enduring link between banquets and consummated revenge, a link which gains from and develops, both visually and figuratively, the metaphorical appetite for revenge and that for extravagant foods. The scenes also exploit the public display of order implicit in the banquet's formality and ritual, subsequently exposed as a façade disguising moral malaise, and/or incipient political schism in a society which fractures spectacularly, often at the banquet itself. (70)

Scenes like these can be found on and off stage in works such as Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* (1592), John Marston's *Antonio's Revenge* (1600), Thomas Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy* (1606), Cyril Tourneur's *The Atheist's Tragedy* (1609), Philip Massinger's *The Duke of Milan* (1621), John Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* (1632), and James Shirley's *The Court Secret* (1642). According to Meads, among the tragedies written between 1585 and 1642, thirty-four have banquet scenes, of which six feature two banquet scenes each. From the same period, there are sixty-five non-tragedies passed down to us that incorporate banquet scenes, of which nine contain two banquet scenes (1). With this in view, it can be argued that ever since *The Spanish Tragedy*, banquet scenes had become crucial features broadly applied in early modern drama, and *Titus Andronicus* is no exception. In this early play by Shakespeare, the relationship between banquets and consummated revenge is underscored particularly at the broken banquet featuring cannibalism and a bloodbath in Act 5, Scene 3, the finale. Nevertheless, compared with this savage banquet that makes *Titus Andronicus* (in)famous, the domestic banquet set up in Act 3, Scene 2, also known as the "fly-killing" episode, tends to receive less attention.⁶

What is noteworthy about this domestic banquet is that it did not exist in the earlier version of *Titus Andronicus*. Instead, it is an episode that Shakespeare created for a relaunch of the play.⁷ Before this extra episode was introduced to

⁶ Both the first and second editions of *The Norton Shakespeare* contain this scene, but it is removed from the most recent third edition published in 2016. See footnote 2 on page 531 in the third edition. In this essay, quotations from Act 3, Scene 2 are from the second edition; all other quotations from Shakespeare's plays are from the third edition.

⁷ There are three quarto texts of *Titus Andronicus*: Q1 (1594), Q2 (1600), and Q3 (1611), but there is only one surviving copy of Q1, entitled *The Most Lamentable Roman Tragedy of Titus Andronicus*. This Q1 copy was purchased by Henry Clay Folger in 1905 after it had been discovered in Sweden in 1904. Most editors of *Titus Andronicus* use this Folger Q1 copy as the base text except for Act 3, Scene 2, for this scene is not included in this copy. The Folio, however, is the earliest text incorporating Act 3, Scene 2, which, as many scholars have suggested, was written by Shakespeare probably for a revival of the play in 1594 after Q1 had been printed. The First Folio of 1623 was prepared and printed from Q3, perhaps together with Q1 and Q2 as well, but with more complete stage directions included in it than in the quarto texts. Because the Fo-

the audience, Act 3 contained only one scene in which the Andronici encounter a chain of mishaps: Lucius is banished from Rome after having failed to rescue his brothers Martius and Quintus from execution, Lavinia is found maimed, and Titus loses his left hand to Aaron for nothing. After this scene displaying the reversal of the Andronici's fortune, what comes next in Act 4, Scene 1 is Lavinia chasing her nephew Young Lucius for the copy of *Metamorphoses* that he is reading. By drawing the attention of Titus and Marcus to the tragedy of Philomela in the Ovidian poem and writing down the names of Chiron and Demetrius in sand with a staff in her mouth, she eventually reveals the identity of her tormentors to her father and uncle. After learning the beastly conduct of the Goths to his daughter, Titus loses his mind out of grief. In the end of the scene, Marcus commits himself to taking care of his brother in "ecstasy" (124) and prays that the heavens will take revenge "for old Andronicus" (129). While Lavinia's disclosure of the heinous crime of Chiron and Demetrius is a crucial factor that prompts the Andronici to exact retribution on their foes, Titus's madness and hunger for revenge are left largely underdeveloped in these two scenes. This might be the reason why Shakespeare subsequently staged a domestic banquet scene in the middle of the play—the seventh of the play's fourteen scenes—as a pivotal point that not only intensifies the theater in Acts 3 and 4, but also foreshadows how, in Act 5, the titular character will get even with those who have wronged him and his family.

In the beginning of the domestic banquet, it is obvious that Titus is not in a good mood. Rather than urging his family members to eat up, he asks them to "eat no more / Than will preserve just so much strength" (3.2.1-2) to "revenge these bitter woes" (3.2.3). Seeing Marcus with his arms folded in grief, Titus immediately asks his brother to "unknit that sorrow-wreathen knot" (3.2.4), resenting the fact that Lavinia and himself are deprived of their capacities to express sorrow with their hands, which makes their pain ten times worse than that of Marcus. Having lost his left hand to Aaron for nothing, Titus now can only use his right hand to strike his chest that confines his heart like a "hollow prison" (3.2.10). Lavinia's situation is even worse. As much as she wanted to strike her heart to stop it from beating, she is left no arms to do so, nor can she express her pain verbally since she has lost her tongue as well. Titus laments that all Lavinia

lio text in general is regarded as closer to theatrical practice in the early modern period, Catherine Silverstone, textual editor of *Titus Andronicus* for the third edition *Norton Shakespeare*, suggests that editors tend to modify and supplement stage directions in Q1 using those in the Folio, and the fly-killing episode was very likely inserted into the prompt copy used by the compositor in the preparation of the Folio. See Silverstone's Textual Introduction to *Titus Andronicus* in the third edition (499-500). Also see Textual Note of *Titus Andronicus* in the second edition (406).

can do to her heart now is either damaging it with sighs or killing it with groans. Perhaps, as he suggests, she might hold a knife by her teeth and dig a hole into her chest. This way, she could use it as a “sink” (3.2.19) to collect her “sea-salt tears” (3.2.20) and drown herself in it. While in this case Titus’s descriptions of his heart beating in agony and a hole dug into Lavinia’s chest are metaphorical expressions of their suffering, these figures of speech essentially foreshadow the pain that Chiron and Demetrius will suffer as Titus gashes their throats and has Lavinia collect their blood with a basin held between her arms in the end of Act 5, Scene 2. Hearing his brother’s remarks, Marcus asks Titus to stop inducing Lavinia “to lay / Such violent hands upon her tender life” (3.2.21-22) for fear that she might hurt herself by doing what her father has said. Irritated by Marcus’s unintended pun over hands, Titus cries out that there is no way Lavinia can do the job by herself since she is literally handless now. What is ironic about Titus’s reply, however, is that he will become another persecutor laying a violent hand upon Lavinia’s tender life in no time: after Titus finds out that Lavinia has been stained by Chiron and Demetrius, in order to make sure that she will not survive her shame—or their shame—he kills her before his death in the last scene.

As the domestic banquet proceeds, Titus becomes more irascible at his family members. When Young Lucius asks him to “leave these bitter deep laments” (3.2.46) and cheer his auntie up by telling “some pleasing tale” (3.2.47), Titus asks his grandson to remain silent and admonishes him for being soft: “Peace, tender sapling, thou art made of tears, / And tears will quickly melt thy life away” (3.2.50-51). In a sense, this bitter exchange between Titus and Young Lucius can be perceived as a counterexample to the presentation of banquets as instructive and convivial events in the early modern period. For instance, in *Utopia*, Thomas More states that the Utopians begin every dinner and supper by reading texts “on a moral topic, but keep it brief lest it become a bore.” Taking this occasion, the elders will introduce a topic of a conversation to the youngsters and be ready to hear what they want to say. They conduct such a ritual in order to “discover the natural temper and quality” of each youngster “as revealed in the freedom of mealtime talk” (48). As Douglas M. Lanier suggests, More considers commensality to be “an occasion for communal moral edification set in motion by a public text and reinforced by its communal contemplation through discussion. If food nourishes the body, the reading and its communal digestion through conversation nourish the spirit” (138). This, however, is not the case at the Andronici’s domestic banquet.⁸ According to Goldstein, eating in *Titus Andronicus*

⁸ Although Titus turns down Young Lucius’s pleading for some delightful tales at the domestic banquet, he

neither liberates nor unites anyone. All it does, instead, is debasing all parties and “the heuristic of consumption is the uncovering of one’s own inhumanity” (34). Accordingly, it can be stated that this domestic banquet, instead of nourishing the Andronici’s bodies and spirits, brings out the beasts in them by turning their craving for food into their craving for revenge. It is explicit in this scene that Shakespeare’s application of hunger as a trope for the desire for revenge alludes to the link between banquets and consummated revenge established by Kyd. Nonetheless, unlike Kyd, who applies the rite of the royal banquet in *The Spanish Tragedy* to signify the façade concealing moral malaise and social divides that will be divulged shortly, Shakespeare uses Titus’s ruin of his own domestic banquet to signify the rule and order that the titular character will break when seeking vengeance on his foes afterwards.

Toward the end of the domestic banquet, Titus is exasperated by Marcus’s attempt to kill a fly by swatting it with his knife, condemning his brother for such “A deed of death done on the innocent” (3.2.56). To justify his conduct, Marcus claims that “it was a black ill-favoured fly, / Like to the Empress’ Moor” (3.2.66-67); therefore, he had to kill it. Pleased by such an argument, Titus subsequently grabs a knife and strikes the air as if the flies that he tries to kill in his illusion were Aaron and Tamora. Titus’s seeming insanity in this instance is suggestive of that of Hieronimo after the murder of his son Horatio and the suicide of his wife Isabella in *The Spanish Tragedy*. Even though Titus may have gone mad due to grief as Hieronimo does, his madness, like Hieronimo’s lunacy, can be a disguise for his intent to exact retribution on Aaron and Tamora. In spite of everything, what is tricky and intriguing about Titus’s madness, feigned or not, is that it simultaneously conveys and conceals his motives. In this way, the boundary between his acts and acting is largely blurred, consequently making him a more complicated character. This is a quality that did not substantially develop in him as a character in the earlier version until this supplementary episode was added to the play. Due to this modification, Marcus’s statement on Titus’s madness, “He takes false shadows for true substances” (3.2.79), together with his commitment to taking care of his brother in “ecstasy” (4.1.125), can thus be interpreted as a double entendre: on the one hand, Marcus confirms that Titus has lost his mind and that he will be looking after him; on the other hand, he may as well imply that Titus’s madness is only to cloak his intent to requite the wrongs inflicted on the Andronici and that he will be of help to him in this

does ask him and Lavinia to come to his study to read some “Sad stories chanced in the times of old” (3.2.82) afterwards. In so doing, as mentioned earlier, Lavinia consequently reveals the crime of Chiron and Demetrius to Titus and Marcus by drawing their attention to the tragedy of Philomel in *Metamorphosis*.

commission. Accordingly, apart from an episode set to foreshadow the imminent events in the second half of the play, this domestic banquet also serves as a prelude to the metatheatre in the coming scenes that incorporate a sequence of role-play, improvisation, and cosplay in conjunction with massive bloodshed.

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III.

In the beginning of Act 5, Scene 2, Tamora, Demetrius, and Chiron show up in disguise respectively as Revenge, Murder, and Rape to coax Titus, whom Tamora believes to be mad, into doing her a service. What Tamora is planning in this episode is to induce Titus to persuade Lucius, who is gathering an army of the Goths to attack Rome, to postpone the military campaign and attend a reconciliatory banquet that she is calling for at Titus's house. As a result, Tamora intends to fabricate a scene that Lucius has reconciled with the Romans behind the Goths, framing him for being a traitor to the troops that he is leading. It is arguable that Titus, who may be mad but certainly not silly, immediately recognizes Tamora with her sons and may have perceived what she is plotting when seeing them. Nonetheless, he still plays along with them in his role as a madman that Tamora expects him to be.⁹ According to Meads, "Tamora's attempt to trick Titus finds her outwitted in most dramatic fashion" (76), for her scheme to sabotage the Andronici at a deceitful banquet will backfire on herself shortly in this role-play that she started. In addition to that, what can be understood as more important about Tamora's scheme, however, is its indication of the fact that banquets, to a certain degree, are an expansion of battlegrounds. On both occasions, people slaughter animals or enemies in order to survive and/or obtain pleasure, as shown in *The Spanish Tragedy* and the "fly-killing" episode. This link between banquets and battlegrounds is further emphasized by the end of the scene when Titus has Chiron and Demetrius taken down right after Tamora's exit. Before his execution of the brothers, Titus tells them that, after they die, he will bake them into a pie and serve it to their mother. According to Deborah Willis, Titus's feeding Chiron and Demetrius to Tamora suggests that they, in a metaphorical way, "will be forced back inside their mother's body, in what amounts to a kind of oral rape by Titus. . . . Her womb was the breeding place for murders

⁹ The roles that Tamora and her sons play as personified vices resemble the characters of Andrea's ghost and Revenge in *The Spanish Tragedy*. Even so, unlike the latter serving as the chorus to forecast upcoming events and make comments afterward, Tamora and her sons are more like Shakespeare's caricatures of the personified vices as theatrical personae, particularly through their clumsy role-play with which they attempt to fool Titus.

and rapists; her stomach will become their grave” (49). More importantly, in doing so, Titus gets to repay the brothers for what they have done to Lavinia, as he says to them in the end of the scene: “For worse than Philomel you used my daughter, / And worse than Progne I will be revenged” (5.2.193-94).

The way in which Titus executes Chiron and Demetrius by slashing their throats and draining their blood respectively resembles their ravishment of Lavinia and her bleeding afterwards. His binding and gagging of them also corresponds to their mutilation of Lavinia’s body and cutting off her tongue to keep her from divulging their crime. Moreover, when Lavinia holds a basin between her arms to receive their blood, the basin, like a sink or a hollow/hole carved into her chest, metonymically becomes a part of her body and transforms her into a vessel containing the blood of Chiron and Demetrius. “In collecting the blood of the brothers,” as Goldstein points out, “Lavinia positions herself simultaneously as mother and consumer, incorporating the blood of her tormentors back into her body” (61). Lavinia’s symbolic act of devouring the blood of Chiron and Demetrius can be taken as a ritualistic infusion of energy through which she regains the vitality that she has lost to them in their violation of her. Despite that, she does not get to maintain that vitality for too long before losing it again to her father. In this light, the role of Lavinia can be viewed as an amalgam of Philomela, Io, Lucretia, Virginia, and even Bel-imperia, a “map of woe” (3.2.12) portraying the collective abuse and oppression that all these female characters have suffered both as objects of men’s desire and as subordinates to men. Like other themes alluding to *The Spanish Tragedy* in the play, Titus’s execution of Chiron and Demetrius in the end of this role-play is reminiscent of Hieronimo’s massacre of his foes by the end of *Soliman and Perseda*. Yet, a major difference between these two presentations of metatheatre is that Hieronimo’s brutal slaughter is the finale of his revenge while Titus’s killing, on the contrary, is only the beginning of “some violent death” (5.2.108) that he will cause at the second banquet and make it “More stern and bloody than the Centaurs’ feast” (5.2.202).

Fundamentally, the metatheatre in the second banquet set in Act 5, Scene 3, the finale, is a continuation of that in the domestic banquet. In the beginning of it, Titus welcomes his guests, including the royal couple, the Goths with whom Lucius is in alliance, and Lucius, in the dress of a cook to play up to Tamora’s expectation of his madness. Like Hieronimo, Titus carries out his revenge as a performance—only that he will complete it with Saturninus and Tamora not only as his target audience but also as his targets to kill. As soon as the banquet starts, Titus elicits Saturninus’s opinion about Virginius’s slaying of his daughter Virginia after “she was enforced, stained, and deflowered” (5.3.38), wondering if

such a deed seems appropriate to the emperor. After Saturninus confirms that he found what Virginius did to Virginia rightful because “the girl should not survive her shame / And by her presence still renew his sorrows” (5.3.40-41), Titus consequently kills Lavinia in a ritualistic invocation: “Die, die, Lavinia, and thy shame with thee, / And with thy shame thy father’s sorrow die!” (5.3.45-46). Although Titus’s killing of Lavinia seems to be out of the blue, it is conducted for multiple purposes. First and perhaps foremost, it is a way in which Titus ends his suffering considering that the visual presence of Lavinia, as Willis notes, “is a reminder to Titus of his own overwhelming grief and powerlessness; ending *his* grief and shame takes priority over Lavinia’s life” (49). Furthermore, Willis also suggests that through this unexpected act, Titus skillfully steers Saturninus and Tamora into believing that he conducted this “Unnatural and unkind” (5.3.47) deed because of his madness and subsequently uses it to expose the crimes committed by Chiron and Demetrius (Willis 49). Last but not least, Titus’s ritual murder of Lavinia in a way recalls Agamemnon’s killing of his daughter Iphigeneia to appease Artemis so that the Greek forces can sail for Troy to retaliate on Paris’s abduction of Helen from Menelaus. Given the fact that the triangle between Helen, Menelaus, and Paris as a cause of the fall of Troy is parallel to that between Tamora, Saturninus, and Aaron as a cause of “the civic wound” of “our Troy, our Rome” (5.3.86), as the Roman Lord puts it, the titular character’s act of filicide can thus be regarded as a practice of human sacrifice to plead for divine blessings on his attempt to restore order for Rome. In this respect, other than an event in which Titus exacts revenge on Tamora, the second banquet essentially is set to be a coup to overthrow Saturninus.¹⁰ According to Danielle A. St. Hilaire, Titus’s death in this incident “mirrors the sacrifice of Alarbus from the opening scene; to put an end to bloodshed for the sake of his remaining son, of his family, and of Rome” (325). In addition to that, it can also be seen as his altruistic suicide: by inducing Saturninus to kill him, Titus consequently grants

¹⁰ In the beginning of the play, in order to show his support of Saturninus, Titus not only turned down the offer of the throne but also agreed to Saturninus’s proposal to marry Lavinia, who had already been betrothed to Saturninus’s brother Bassianus at that time. Titus even killed his son Mutius as the latter interfered. Nevertheless, Saturninus soon changed his mind when he met Tamora, as he put it: “A good lady, trust me, of the hue / That I would choose were I to choose anew” (1.1.264-65). As a result, he used Mutius and Lucius’s objection to his marriage with their sister as an excuse to give up Lavinia for Tamora. He also claimed that he would never need the Andronici nor trust Titus again since they had been colluding together to dishonor him: “No, Titus, no. The Emperor needs her not, / Nor her, nor thee, nor any of thy stock. / I’ll trust by leisure him that mocks me once, / Thee never, nor thy traitorous haughty sons, / Confederates all thus to dishonour me” (1.1.302-6). In retrospect, these “reproachful words” (1.1.311) like “razors to [Titus’s] wounded heart” (1.1.317) certainly generated the Andronici’s animosity against Saturninus and ultimately drove them to remove him from power.

Lucius a justification to murder the emperor in retaliation and usurp the throne afterwards.

Like the domestic banquet, not much eating is being done at this second banquet purposefully set to be broken. Despite the fact that it is practically possible to begin or resume eating after Titus's murder of Lavinia, according to Goldstein, not many productions have attempted this for two reasons: "first, surely it would distend disbelief for the actors to continue eating through this ritual murder, and second, the theatrical impact of Tamora's first bite is weakened if everyone has already tucked in" (57). Therefore, Tamora's consumption of the pie can only be momentary or figurative. Even so, it is explicit that Tamora's being duped by Titus into consuming her sons—as Titus's being duped by her into losing his hand to Aaron—recapitulates the link between banquets and consummated revenge established by Kyd with that between banquets and battlegrounds underscored by Shakespeare. What can be understood as more important about this scene, however, is its indication of the inevitability that people tend to become the worst victims of their own crimes, but this causality does not necessarily stop them from committing one, nor compel them to be more lenient with one another on a mutual basis, as shown in the subsequent bloodshed that results in the death of Titus, Tamora, and Saturninus.

After the Romans proclaim Lucius their new emperor, Aaron is brought to him for trial, and Lucius immediately imposes his sentence on the Moor: "Set him breast-deep in earth and famish him. / There let him stand, and rave, and cry for food. / If anyone relieves or pities him, / For the offence he dies. This is our doom. / Some stay to see him fastened in the earth" (5.3.178-82). He subsequently demands that Tamora, the "ravenous tiger" (5.3.194), be tossed away in the wilderness for "beasts and birds to prey" (5.3.197). The punishments that Lucius metes out to Aaron and Tamora are not only a public humiliation over the couple but also a degradation of their status from human beings to beasts, or flies, that do not deserve a proper burial. Beyond that, they are specifically in reprisal for Tamora's allowing Aaron, Chiron, and Demetrius to murder Bassianus and throw his body into a pit, followed by the brothers' ravishment and maiming of Lavinia in the woods. Still, such punishments also recall Titus's impeding his family members from having their meals at the domestic banquet, where hunger serves as a trope for their desire to revenge, along with his killing of Mutius and Lavinia as a means to exercise his patriarchal authority. In other words, the sentences that Lucius imposes on Aaron and Tamora as demonstrations of justice being served, in effect, are the same forms of violence that Tamora and Titus continue to inflict on each other but double back on themselves

in the end. While Lucius's judgement on Aaron and Tamora may bring the cycle of revenge between the two families to an end, it simultaneously echoes Titus's earlier lament over the decline of humaneness in Rome. Not long after the start of Act 3, Scene 1, when Lucius tells his father that he has been banished from Rome for life after his failure in rescuing Martius and Quintus, Titus is glad that the judges did Lucius a favor by driving him away from the city that is currently "a wilderness of tigers" (3.1.54) ever since Tamora has been "incorporate[d] in Rome" and turned into "A Roman now adopted happily" (1.1.464-65).¹¹ What is problematic about Titus's denouncement of the moral deterioration in Rome, though, is that he casts such censures as if he is not accountable for what he rails against. Specifically, he does not seem aware of the fact that he and his family, with Tamora and hers, are a streak of tigers that degrad Rome and make the city a wilderness.

Even though Lucius's coming to power in the end of the second banquet signifies the restoration of order, it is in doubt whether his reign will bring peace back to Rome and ensure amity between the Romans and the Goths, or will become another cycle of violence, particularly when he has the army of the Goths at his disposal. Despite the military forces he has in hand, Lucius is eager to show people his leniency. St. Hilaire suggests that Lucius's making his vow not to kill the son of Aaron and Tamora in Act 5, Scene 1 "makes him the first character in the play to purposefully refrain from killing a child, putting a break in the chain of vengeful murders of progeny and suggesting the possibility of a more merciful society. . . . For this, the play presents hope" (325). Nevertheless, as much as this reading allows the end of the play to look less dreadful than it is, it tends to simplify the complexities in this scene and in the second banquet. What is intricate about Lucius's behavior in this episode is its indication of the fact that leniency and violence, even with their conflict in nature, can certainly be practiced at the same time. While Lucius has sworn to Aaron, as he puts it, that "Thy child shall live, and I will see it nourished" (5.1.60), he has no problem leaving the child's parents to die and rot in the wilderness after the end of the play. In view of the fall of Troy to which the finale alludes, Lucius's public humiliation over Aaron and Tamora is equivalent to Achilles's unrelenting abuse of Hector's body after

¹¹ After Tamora married Saturninus, she coached her husband to "Dissemble all [his] grief and discontents" (1.1.445) and make peace with Titus—for he did not want the Romans to "take Titus' part, / And so supplant [him] for ingratitude" (1.1.448-49). In the meantime, she would "find a day to massacre them all, / And raze their faction and their family" (1.1.452-53). About twelve years after the debut of *Titus Andronicus*, in *Macbeth*, the titular character's wife gives him a similar instruction about how to hide his intents and emotions from people: "To beguile the time, / Look like the time" (1.5.61-62).

killing him in their duel. When Aaron entreats Lucius to spare the life of his son, as Priam pleads with Achilles for the body of his son, Lucius may see Young Lucius in that baby boy and agrees to do as Aaron beseeches despite their feuds, as Achilles sees his father Peleus in Priam and agrees to return Hector's body back to the aged king regardless of their rivalry. From this perspective, Lucius's consent not to kill the child, as St. Hilaire argues, is indeed a crucial gesture of leniency that ultimately stops the cycle of retribution between the Andronici and Tamora's family and, with hope, promises the society a more peaceful future. Even so, considering that the second banquet set in a scene later is intrinsically a coup, Lucius's sparing the child's life in this episode, rather than a sign of his leniency, is more of a political calculation that can only become more intelligible to the audience in retrospect.

In fact, Lucius needs the baby boy to stay alive so that he can kill three birds with one stone on his way to power. First, the baby boy is proof of Tamora's betrayal of her roles as both Queen of the Goths and wife of Saturninus, which allows Lucius to solidify his leadership of the army of the Goths and to justify Titus's murder of Tamora. After his assassination of Saturninus in revenge for the murder of his father, with the backing of the army of the Goths, Lucius effectively pressures the Romans into proclaiming him the new emperor. If they did not comply with his wishes, however, he might attack Rome with the Goths as planned and could still assume the throne after all. This means that whether Lucius wins the Romans' support or not, it is most certain that he will seize power from Saturninus at any rate. Second, by sparing the life of the illegitimate son of his foes and granting the overthrown Saturninus a proper funeral, Lucius may consequently win the allegiance of the Goths and the Romans by presenting himself as a lenient monarch to both groups. Third, through the punishments that he imposes on Aaron and Tamora, Lucius can substantially reinforce his sovereignty by demonstrating his cruelty in dealing with those who have wronged him. Essentially, Lucius's ability to play a lenient monarch and a tyrant at the same time is a quality that Tamora had tried to instruct Saturninus to acquire as emperor but did not work out, just as she had attempted to manipulate Titus in her role-play but was outwitted by the old Andronicus at last. In this regard, it can be argued that if the domestic banquet and Act 5, Scene 2 are the two scenes in which Titus develops into a more complicated character through his madness and uses it to carry out his vengeance, then Act 5, Scene 1 and the second banquet, by contrast, are the two scenes in which Lucius transforms into a calculating ruler and demonstrates his capability of dominating people with his eloquence and acting.

As soon as Lucius accepts his role as the new emperor after the bloodshed at the second banquet, he asks the Romans to grant him a moment “To shed obsequious tears upon this trunk [of Titus]” (5.3.151) with his brother. He also asks his son to teach everyone present “To melt in showers” (5.3.160) for the old Andronicus:

Ex-position
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2022

... Thy grandsire loved thee well.
Many a time he danced thee on his knee.
Sung thee asleep, his loving breast thy pillow.
Many a story hath he told to thee,
And bid thee bear his pretty tales in mind,
And talk of them when he was dead and gone. (5.3.160-65)

While Titus regarded shedding tears as a sign of one’s weakness and prevented his grandson from so doing—as he said to Young Lucius earlier at the domestic banquet: “thou are made of tears, / And tears will quickly melt thy life away” (3.2.50-51)—Lucius, on the other hand, takes advantage of this deed to court public sympathy for his family. In this episode, he uses his son as a prop as Titus used Lavinia previously. By having Young Lucius weep for his grandfather in the sight of the Romans, Lucius not only turns Titus into a martyr but also gives grounds for his judgement on Aaron (and on Tamora in a few lines later), as a Roman states: “You sad Andronici, have done with woes. / Give sentence on this execrable wretch / That hath been breeder of these dire events” (5.3.175-77). In Lucius’s narrative, Titus passed down many of “his pretty tales” (5.3.164) to his descendants. While it is uncertain if these pretty tales are the “pleasing tale[s]” (3.2.50) that Young Lucius implored Titus to tell at the domestic banquet (but got rejected) or if they are pretty tales about Titus himself, what is more certain, however, is that Lucius skillfully characterizes the late Titus as a loving father figure to Rome and constructs a legacy that he can inherit as a worthy successor.

In the metatheatre of the second banquet, Lucius not only redeems himself but also restores the reputation of his family. It can be argued that his success in reforming his role from an exile to “Rome’s gracious governor” (5.3.145) and eliciting the Romans’ pity on the “sad Andronici” (5.3.175)—despite his attempt to attack them in alliance with the Goths and his regicide of Saturninus in the beginning—is largely based on his skills in rhetoric and performing. The way in which Lucius wins over the allegiance of the Romans can be seen as a demonstration of eloquence and acting as more effective means to subdue people than what violence can do. Nevertheless, once people apply such means mainly to

deceive, manipulate, and inflict pain on others—as shown by Hieronimo, Titus, as well as Tamora and her sons—they tend to become the worst victims of their performance, as they tend to become the worst victims of their crimes, no matter how well or poorly they do the job.

Coda

Metatheatre of Broken Banquets

By delving into the metatheatre of broken banquets in *Titus Andronicus* and its allusions to *The Spanish Tragedy*, we can see how Shakespeare, under Kyd's influence, evolves his own pattern in devising and staging disrupted dining scenes in a play. In addition to *Titus Andronicus*, broken banquets can also be found in *The Taming of the Shrew*, *As You Like It*, *The Tempest*, *Macbeth*, and *Timon of Athens*. In these plays, similarly, the broken banquets are almost always staged in or near the middle as pivotal points. Although the exact number of scenes that these five plays contain and the exact scenes in which these broken banquets are staged can vary between editions, in a general sense they are staged in this pattern but for different theatrical effects.

In a comedy or romance like *The Taming of the Shrew*, *As You Like It*, and *The Tempest*, the plot is expected to develop in a relatively positive direction after a broken banquet. In *The Taming of the Shrew*, in order to tame the shrewish Katherina, Petruccio deliberately ruins their wedding banquet and starves his newly married wife at their domestic dinner consecutively in Act 3, Scene 2 and Act 4, Scene 1, the seventh and eighth of the play's fourteen scenes with the two Inductions included. Despite his abuse of her, these two disrupted meals turn out to be incidents that force the couple to learn to get along with each other and stimulate Katherina to acquire her skills in performing her role as an obedient wife. As a consequence, not only does she help Petruccio win the wager with Hortensio and Lucentio at the wedding banquet of Lucentio and Bianca, which can be seen as her breaking of the event by indicating that the compliant disposition of her younger sister is largely feigned, she also finds a way to take control of her husband at the end of the play.¹² On this account, *The Taming of the Shrew* as a title can be perceived as a double entendre: it can refer either to Katherina being tamed by her husband as a shrew, or to Katherina's taming of her husband as a shrew—or it can be both.

In *As You Like It*, Orlando disrupts Duke Senior's lunch banquet at the Forest

¹² If Shakespeare sets more than one onstage broken banquet in the same play, the last one tends to take place in the final scene, as he does in *Titus Andronicus* and *The Taming of the Shrew*.

of Arden in Act 2, Scene 7, the tenth of the play's twenty-two scenes. What is noteworthy about this episode is that when Orlando reenters with Adam, Jaques has just finished his famous "seven ages" soliloquy. This staging makes the feeble Adam a model of Jaques's description of a man on his seventh stage on the verge of dying. But this scene is soon overturned by Duke Senior, for his warm hospitality quickly rejuvenates Adam, even if it may not reverse the old man's mortality. It is arguable that the happy ending of *As You Like It*, to a great extent, results from the duke's generosity to his unanticipated guests. If he had let them die of hunger, the outcome would have been very different: Rosalind would never have been reunited with Orlando, nor in all likelihood would Oliver have survived the attack from the snake and the lioness; this would in turn have resulted in Celia losing her future husband. In a sense, Duke Senior's compassion for those in need—as he says to Jaques, "This wide and universal theatre / Presents more woeful pageants than the scene / Wherein we play in" (2.7.136-38)—can be seen as an illustration of Shakespeare's compassion for the underprivileged. The playwright's self-reflexivity shown at this metatheatrical moment not only underscores the interrelationship between drama and everyday life but also indicates that we, being part of the world as a stage, are obligated to offer our fellow players comfort and support when they are deprived of them.

In *The Tempest*, the broken banquet is staged in Act 3, Scene 3, the seventh of the play's ten scenes with the epilogue included. In this metatheatre, Ariel, under Prospero's direction, ruins the banquet presented to the party of Alonso in the role of a harpy and castigates him, Sebastian, and Antonio for their crimes against the legitimate Duke of Milan twelve years ago. While this broken banquet is seen by G. Wilson Knight as being violent as those in *Macbeth* and *Timon of Athens*, what makes it different from them is that it is more of a test on the possibility of a reconciliation between two parties who used to be enemies than a confirmation of the estrangement between two parties who used to be friends. In other words, this broken banquet is intrinsically Prospero's reevaluation of his relationship with his former foes as he needs to know if it is feasible for him to make peace with them. As a result, Ariel's performance impels Alonso to repent of his crimes and plead for Prospero and Miranda's forgiveness, which leads to their reconciliation in the form of Ferdinand and Miranda's union. Compared with Alonso's remorse for his wrongdoings, Antonio and Sebastian do not seem to show any feeling of guilt about their sins. Not only do they turn a deaf ear to Ariel's condemnation at the banquet, they also remain unmoved when Prospero whispers to them about his knowledge of their scheme to murder Alonso and usurp the king's throne: "But you, my brace of / lords, were I so minded / I here

could pluck his highness' frown upon you / And justify you traitors. At this time / I will tell no tales" (5.1.126-29). Even though it is questionable whether Prospero at any rate settles with Antonio and Sebastian as he does with Alonso, he still grants them a full pardon in the end. The reason for him to do so, as Prospero indicates in the epilogue when begging for the audience's pardon for his crimes, is that we may all have the need for forgiveness and, therefore, we may want to be more forgiving of others when we can. Besides, while forgiving is a deed that allows sinners to redeem themselves for their sins, it at the same time allows forgivers to free themselves from holding a grudge against those who have wronged them and remain in peace externally and internally.

In contrast to a comedy or romance, if a broken banquet is staged in a tragedy like *Titus Andronicus*, *Macbeth*, and *Timon of Athens*, more conflicts between different parties are expected to occur after the scene. In *Macbeth*, an offstage banquet is first set in Act 1, Scene 7 to welcome King Duncan's arrival in the Macbeths' castle at Inverness. While this banquet is neither onstage nor broken, it can be viewed as a scene flipped inside out so that the audience can see how the couple plot against the king behind the scenes and manage to appear attentive to their royal guest dining on the other side of the stage, as the titular character puts it at the end of the episode: "Away, and mock the time with fairest show. / False face must hide what the false heart doth know" (1.7.81-82). Accordingly, this offstage banquet can be seen as a metatheatre of the Macbeths' feigned hospitality, which the couple practice again when inviting Banquo to the national banquet that they know he will never be able to attend at least alive, as the wife and the husband respectively say to him: "If he had been forgotten / It had been as a gap in our great feast, / And I'll request your presence" (3.1.12-13), and "Fail not our feast" (3.1.29). Therefore, when Banquo's ghost shows up and terrifies Macbeth at this national banquet set in Act 3, Scene 4, the fifteenth of the play's twenty-seven scenes, other than a reminder of the couple's crime and expected future, it can also be taken as a revelation of and a satire on their feigned hospitality that ultimately leads them to their downfall. From this point of view, *Macbeth* can thus be regarded as a play exploring the ethics of hospitality and the paradoxes in the practice of it, such as the possibility of unconditional hospitality particularly to those whom we regard as foes, strangers, and foreigners.

Despite a collaborative work with Thomas Middleton, *Timon of Athens* can be seen as a continuation of Shakespeare's inquiry into the problems in the practice of hospitality in *As You Like It* and *Macbeth*.¹³ In this play, the first banquet

¹³ In "As You Like It and the Theater of Hospitality," James Kuzner discusses the performativity of hospitality

is set as early as in Act 1, Scene 2. It is a potlatch-like dinner party at which Timon, like a Native American chief, demonstrates his “Magic of bounty” (1.1.6) to his friends by offering them expensive gifts and refusing to receive anything in return from them. In this manner, he forces them into an infinite debt to him so that he can maintain his superiority over them, morally and financially, as their creditor. This means that in this metatheatre of hospitality, Timon’s seemingly unconditional generosity to his guests is hardly generous. Instead, it is a form of self-aggrandizement springing from his unquenchable need for worship. Consequently, when Timon finds out that none of the beneficiaries of his patronage intends to lend him a hand after his bankruptcy, he decides to invite them to a dinner party one last time to show them his magic of bounty in a different manner. The second banquet staged in Act 3, Scene 7, the eleventh of the play’s nineteen scenes, can be seen as a reversal of the Last Supper in conjunction with other biblical episodes. In this event, Timon serves his guests nothing but water and stones. When they are all stunned by the meal presented to them, he launches into a devastating tirade on their hypocrisy, avarice, and disloyalty. According to Douglas M. Lanier, the meal at this broken banquet is a reversal of Jesus’s turning water into wine in John 2.1-11 and stones into bread in Luke 4.3. It signifies that Timon is “undoing the spiritual efficacy of the earlier banquet” (149) particularly when he splashes water on his guests and curses them as an overturning of asperges. The distortion of traditional Christian *caritas* in the metatheatre of these two banquets is a topical representation of the change in the practice of hospitality in the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras. During this period, hospitality became less of a synonym for charity and turned into a word that implied lavish entertainment exclusively for the wealthy and the privileged. Indiscriminate generosity and heedless spending were also regarded as an aristocratic virtue, one that can hardly be honored without wealth. As a result, noblemen tended to struggle to pay off their hefty living expenses or they simply lived substantially on credit. King James was one of the worst transgressors in this regard.¹⁴ Even though *Timon of Athens* might be left unfinished by Shakespeare and unproduced at least in his lifetime, it is still a theatrical work with a critical insight into contemporary and universal problems. Apart from its delineation of the change in the practice of hospitality and its relation to the fiscal crisis

in relation to the problem concerning how to be hospitable when we do not mean it, and when the best thing we can do is play on.

¹⁴ Leinwand suggests that *Timon of Athens* delineates the historical condition of the early modern aristocracy confronting indebtedness as an “unavoidable necessity.” See Leinwand 37, qtd. in Mallin 77. See also Heal 131, 153.

at its time, it also serves as a timeless exemplum demonstrating that any form of kindness can turn into wickedness when performed in a wrong manner and/or for a wrong purpose.

Through a brief overview of the broken banquets in five other Shakespearean plays, we may argue that the metatheatre in them, to a certain extent, is a continuation of that in *Titus Andronicus*. Even so, this overview is not intended to limit the scope of these plays, or to oversimplify their content. What it aims to do as a coda and a supplementary to the subject matters under discussion in this essay, however, is to call attention to Shakespeare's trajectory in his examination and presentation of diverse issues related to the politics and ethics of eating—such as moderation, hospitality, forgiveness, and reciprocity—via these five plays crafted at different stages in his career after *Titus Andronicus*. By so doing, we can have a better grasp of the playwright's conception of these issues in his time from a theatrical perspective and, on this basis, continue to explore them in our era through and beyond the theatrical world.

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**Metatheatre of
Broken Banquets**

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