

Julie Taymor's *Titus*

Modern cinema possesses the ability to present Shakespeare in ways that contemporaries of the Bard could only dream of. But with greater artistic scope comes greater variation in the interpretation of the texts, such as found in Julie Taymor's *Titus*, adapted from Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*. Taymor chooses to create a Shakespearean realm where Roman times blend with the modern age in a game-like arena. Taymor uses this game-type world to play with cinematic perspectives by inserting a young boy from the modern age as a third party observer, eventually bringing him into the narrative by assigning him the role of Titus' grandson. The boy allows for the audience to become aware of its viewing presence, reminding us that this ostentatious display of violence and revenge is staged for our viewing pleasure. It is like a game in which we lose ourselves, but are occasionally taken back to our position as spectator.

How does the final act of *Titus Andronicus* blend the stage and cinema, the game sphere, and modernity? What tools does Taymor use in order to create this surreal environment? The dinner scene perhaps best illustrates the use of cinema as subject. The final act begins with the two grotesque cannibalistic pies cooling in a window sill, a scene that harks back to 1930s America, complete with upbeat jazzy music. The entire scene is quite theatrical, as Titus makes his grand entrance dressed as a chef to serve his guests their deadly dinner. During the moment when Lucius kills the emperor, the entire theatrical dinner is suddenly paused while the camera, in a fashion reminiscent of *The Matrix*, swivels around this moment frozen in time. The guests are then abruptly transplanted back to the Roman amphitheatre in which the movie began. We now see an audience composed of seemingly "real" and modern people, who look on detachedly from the horrible scene of carnage before them. Reading Donaldson's article, I learned that this audience was Croatian—people who recently experienced one of the most violent and barbaric wars known in recent history (The Wars of Yugoslav Succession).

This final act showcases the all of the components in this unreal world: the cinema, the theatre, reality and modernity, and the game sphere. Both the boy, who has been the symbol of the viewer, and the addition of a real audience, which slaps us in the face to remind us of our viewing presence, now place the actors and the cinema as the focus of the film. The film itself has become the subject as all three audiences watch together, simultaneously. Together, we all watch on—in horror and detachment—as the carnage finally concludes with brutal on stage murders of four primary players. The beauty in the film is the violence itself, and how by using the cinema as the subject, Taymor is able to allow her audience to consciously watch the ensuing violence in a manner that both appalls and entertains. She makes a mockery of the brutality by showing how ridiculous and barbaric it is when we are able to watch from this perspective.