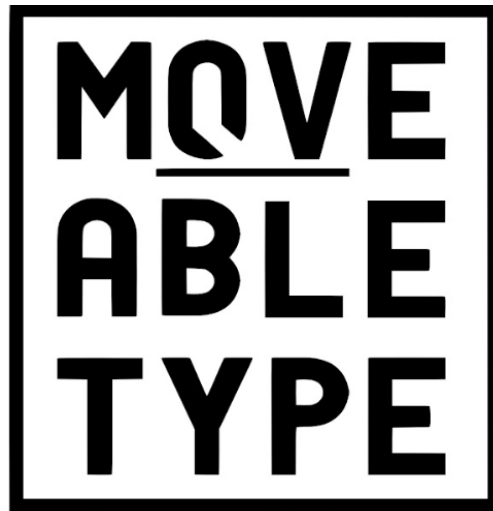




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‘[D]o me right’: The Promise of Protection and State Action in Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus*

LUKE BASIL LOUIS OW ZHI HENG

This paper deploys close reading to interpret William Shakespeare’s early tragedy *Titus Andronicus* as articulating that belief in the state as a consistent, regulatory institution – as exemplified by Thomas Hobbes’ proposals in *Leviathan* – is a flawed one due to its misalignment with a core component of the human psyche which stymies attempts at fostering uniformity among individuals; the tendency for humans is to be swayed by emotional changes. In *Titus Andronicus*, the broken promise of the state is crystallised by a fixation on glory which distracts characters from protecting each other’s interests. This paper then proceeds to read *Titus Andronicus* alongside Niccolò Machiavelli’s *Discourses on Livy* to uncover vigilance as the key for survival no matter the political conditions in which individuals may find themselves.

Keywords: *Titus Andronicus*, Hobbes, Machiavelli, promise

In William Shakespeare’s tragedy *Titus Andronicus* (1594), after being celebrated for his awe-inspiring military actions, the titular character suffers overwhelming losses at the hands of the Roman state which he had served. The state turns on him and his household on the whims of its sovereign–Saturninus–after the general had devoted years of service to safeguarding the collective security of his fellow subjects. This account of a corrupted political environment calls into question ideas on duty and the state, ideas which later informed Thomas Hobbes in his writing of the treatise *Leviathan* (1651). In it, Hobbes establishes his commonwealth—an omnipotent force multiplier designed to guarantee safety to all of its members. From Hobbes’ perspective, the commonwealth ameliorates conflicts by introducing stability into the interactions amongst its members. With every member of the group now viewed as a potential ally sheltering together under a sturdy protective umbrella, clear behavioural obligations are established for the commonwealth’s members to carry out as an attempt to engender trust among them, fostering a sense of common purpose in the population. In the worldview of *Leviathan*, since the state is ostensibly able to discipline and harness the passions of its members, this form of governance is framed as the solution to interpersonal strife.

However, the civil conflict in *Titus Andronicus* demonstrates that strong institutions in themselves—like the state—are unable to fulfil the promise laid out in *Leviathan* that a strong state will exorcise conflict from the human condition. The play’s action reveals an element in the human psyche which stymies attempts at nurturing cohesion among members in a commonwealth: their individual tendency is to be swayed by emotional changes. Hobbes is aware of this condition and expresses his opposition towards intangible elements like feelings interfering with the life of the commonwealth due to their unpredictable effect upon human behaviour. However, apart from repeated emphases on obedience to preserve a commonwealth, and warnings that any failures to do so would cause a group to revert to ceaseless conflict, *Leviathan* provides no further insights regarding how else subjects can defend themselves from or, at least, negotiate the emergence of any sudden attacks. To address this gap in Hobbes’ *Leviathan*, this essay proffers that Shakespeare’s play is in dialogue with Niccolò Machiavelli’s ideas of vigilance—which the Florentine details in his *Discourses on Livy* (1531). In the

Discourses, Machiavelli warns his readers of the varieties of human behaviour and advises them to alter their modes of response according to the situation at hand. Machiavelli's perspective serves as a useful frame of reference to characterise Titus' evolution from a glory-minded monarch's obedient minister to a shrewd operator prioritising his family's interests. Thus, *Titus Andronicus* anticipates *Leviathan* in contending that the pursuit of the intangible quality of glory pulls the sovereign and their subjects away from their respective obligations to each other. The play demonstrates that individuals who fixate on glory corrode a commonwealth's ability to keep its promise of protecting its members. Ultimately, the play's depictions of bloodshed within the bounds of the commonwealth expose the limitations of political actions which are founded upon rigid ideas, hinting that vigilance should be cultivated in individuals to better safeguard their interests in a corrupt environment.

In *Leviathan*, Hobbes concerns himself with the creation of an institution that can insulate humans from the effects of conflict. He theorises that, amongst humans, 'the weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest, either by secret machination, or by confederacy with others, that are in the same danger with himselfe'.¹ The philosopher argues that physical prowess alone cannot guarantee a person's survival. According to him, even the most imposing individuals can be felled by covert operations, or partnerships between persons who feel threatened by the influence of such aggrandised individuals. Under these conditions, any person is susceptible to being attacked and dispossessed of anything according to the whims of another '[and this initial aggressor] again is in the like danger of another' (87). Hobbes' understanding of ungoverned human interactions is one of unpredictable, unceasing conflict. The sheer variety of situations under which one can be injured or killed makes it impossible for an individual to be protected on their own. It is in response to this concept of human relations that Hobbes proposes his commonwealth.

To neutralise the endless fighting described here in *Leviathan*, Hobbes envisions the commonwealth as an institution which fosters safety for a group of people:

as if every man should say to every man, *I Authorise and give up my Right of Governing my selfe, to this Man, or to this Assembly of men, on this condition, that thou give up thy Right to him, and Authorise all his Actions in like manner.* This done, the Multitude so united in one Person, is called a COMMON-WEALTH... that great LEVIATHAN, or rather (to speake more reverently) of that *Mortall God*, to which wee

This dictum establishes the commonwealth as an institution which is generated when many persons converge and invest their collective trust in one entity, the sovereign, who is given sole command over their state. As subjects, they have empowered the sovereign to act on the behalf of the well-being of every single member of the community. Instead of having to struggle against multiple threats to their survival, each individual can now shelter under the collective security of the state, trusting that their sovereign would muster the combined strength of their fellow subjects for their defence should an external party threaten any of them. Hobbes' characterisation of the state as a controlled, force multiplier able to act in excess of any individual's capabilities is what leads him to christen his thesis after the biblical beast and liken it to a divinity. These comparisons imply that *Leviathan* posits that subjects should yield to their

¹ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. by Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.87. All quotations are from this edition and are cited in text in parentheses.

far-more-powerful sovereign for the promise of their own safety in a hostile world, just as mortal creatures are meant to defer to omnipotent deities for the maintenance of their well-being.

Prefiguring Hobbes' recommendation of subjects obeying their sovereigns, *Titus Andronicus* explores this relationship that a subject has with their sovereign through the construction of its protagonist as a dutiful subject. When the newly-nominated emperor Saturninus declares his intention to marry Titus' daughter at the start of the play, Titus acts according to the emperor's wishes (I.1.243–253).² His loyalty to his sovereign is such that he disregards existing cultural customs regarding property rights, even killing his own son without hesitation to execute Saturninus' will (I.1.281–301). By acting in complete deference to his sovereign's choices, Titus is fulfilling his conception of the role of a subject under the governance of another entity. Titus' understanding of his place in the commonwealth to which he belongs is revealed when he is questioned regarding his killing of his own son on Saturninus' account, retorting: 'My sons would never so dishonor me./Traitor, restore [my daughter] to the emperor' (I.1.298–299). Titus asserts that his identity is founded upon his service to his sovereign. He believes too that his offspring function as extensions of his own worldview, pushing him to aggregate their own relationship with the emperor together with their filial duties to him as their father. By disowning his sons for their lack of fealty to the emperor, Titus exhibits that his is tied to state directives, demonstrating a glimpse of Hobbes' conception of an omnipotent sovereignty – that the sovereign's dictates should constitute the consciences in each one of their subjects (223). In short, Titus expresses his rigid faith in Saturninus' government, trusting that the emperor's decisions would be beneficial to his well-being.

The depth of Titus' service to his sovereign and the state is emphasised as a glorious trait. To calm the intercommunal tensions stirred up by the contest for the vacant throne at the very beginning of the play (I.1.1–19), Titus is heralded by his brother, Marcus Andronicus, as the epitome of duty – '[Titus] hath returned/Bleeding to Rome, bearing his valiant sons/In coffins from the field' (I.1.33–35). Marcus reminds everyone that Titus has been away from the metropole, placing his own life and those of his male offspring at risk for the safety of the community. By gaining wounds and losing the lives of his children, Titus' service has literally cost him his flesh and blood, in contrast to the self-interested behaviour of the claimants for the imperium who merely dress their respective bids for their personal aggrandisement in the attire of service (I.1.5–7; 16–17). According to Marcus, Titus has persisted in military service in spite of these personal losses, enabling Rome to overcome the Gothic threats against it (I.1.27–35). Through his campaigns having assured the safety of everyone in Rome, Titus has already performed the role of protector, explaining the people's enthusiasm in trusting him with sovereignty over them (I.1.20–26). This general's commitment in performing his obligations to the Roman community is framed as a trait deserving of respect, pointing to a connection between the performance of awe-inspiring actions and the making of a political community.

Titus' losses in the service of Rome garner him respect, a testament to the importance of sacrifice to the sustenance of a political community. In the aftermath of his elevation to the throne, Saturninus hails Titus as 'noble Titus, father of my life' (I.1.256). The newly-elected sovereign marks Titus out as a subject worthy of high praise, upon whom his own existence depends. The general's military role in the commonwealth anticipates Hobbes' description of public ministers in *Leviathan* as servants acting in the person of their sovereign (167). To Hobbes, these public ministers are 'parts Organicall' (166). This description denotes their

² William Shakespeare. 'Titus Andronicus', in *The Complete Pelican Shakespeare*, ed. by Russ McDonald (New York: Penguin, 2002), pp.1219–1250. All quotations are from this edition and are cited in text in parentheses.

invaluable status in performing tasks which enable the body of the state to function. In drawing attention to Titus' exalted status as Rome's martial protector, Shakespeare's play presents a sovereign relying upon a subject to outdo himself in feats of public service in order to ensure the general safety of every other member of the commonwealth. Significantly, since his fellow Romans owe their well-being to his military campaigns, Titus' assumption of the duty of protecting his fellow Romans from harm calls into question the sovereignty of Saturninus. The emperor realises the jeopardy in which his authority lies relative to Titus' position in the community and, consequently, refuses to honour any promises made to the soldier, triggering the eventual unfolding of their relationship. Saturninus insists that Titus has 'mock[ed him]', branding Titus and his offspring as '[c]onfederates all thus to dishonor [him]' for allegedly boasting that he had 'begged the empire at [their] hands' (I.1.304, 306, 310). Saturninus interprets Titus' martial exertions as an insult to his status as sovereign and thinks of Titus and his children as having conspired behind his back to make him look weak. Saturninus' focus on his status illustrates the fragility of the bonds amongst the components of a state.

In having its emperor concerned that he owes his authority to one of his subjects, Shakespeare's play echoes the writings of Machiavelli. In his *Discourses on Livy*, the thinker writes of rulers being ungrateful to those who have led armies for them, 'for the captain who has virtuously acquired an empire for his lord... of necessity acquires such reputation with his soldiers, with enemies, and with the subjects belonging to that prince that the victory cannot taste good to the lord who has sent him'.³ Machiavelli explains that sovereigns are likely to be embittered by the successes of their subjects who perform magnificent deeds which strengthen the state in the sovereign's name. Like Shakespeare's Titus, such subjects have garnered loyalty from the soldiers they have led in the field, confidence from their fellow subjects, and intimidation from any beaten enemies. However, these feelings of respect are directed towards the subject who has led the military campaign, not the sovereign. In a state where the monarch should act as the sole locus of authority, such a military leader has inadvertently become an alternative source of protection for the monarch's subjects. With Machiavelli's perspective in view, it is unsurprising that Saturninus is reacting out of envy towards Titus, a leader who has proven himself in battle. Therefore, Shakespeare's play makes us aware that the performance of awe-inspiring deeds can trigger tensions between components of the commonwealth.

With Saturninus' reverence for Titus turning quickly into loathing, *Titus Andronicus* depicts the fickle nature of human sentiment. This insight on human nature is expounded upon by Hobbes in *Leviathan*. In his discussion on the passions in Chapter 6, Hobbes explains that, in the absence of an authority over them, 'whatsoever is the object of any mans Appetite or Desire; that is it, which he for his part calleth *Good*.' Hobbes challenges a key conceptual binary – that between good and evil – reducing a moral judgement to an unfixed varying entity, its verdict dependent upon a person's cravings in any given moment. Hobbes clarifies the unpredictability of this condition, stating that, 'it is impossible that all the same things should alwayes cause in him the same Appetites' (39). For this philosopher, a human being cannot be depended upon to respond to any given stimulus in the same way in every moment of life. Recalling his conception of the state as an institution which functions as a shield for its members at all times, a shifting entity like sentiment seems unfit for the purpose of nurturing a collective which is supposed to guarantee security.

³ Niccolò Machiavelli. *Discourses on Livy*, trans. by Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), p.65. All quotations are from this edition and are cited in text in parentheses.

Hobbes traces the emotional journey taken by a person who is consumed by the pursuit of glory. Hobbes describes how ‘great *vaine-Glory*; which is commonly called *Pride*, and *selfe-conceipt*... subjecteth a man to Anger, the excesse whereof, is the Madnesse called RAGE, and FURY... That excessive love, with jealousie, becomes also Rage’(54). Hobbes specifies that the thirst for recognition – if severed from an honest evaluation of one’s own abilities – wraps a person in a cloak of self-deception. When the person encounters an external reality which does not align with their elevated view of themselves, they lash out. Determined to protect and actualise their self-perception, the vainglorious person operates amongst others in a hostile manner, wary of potential enemies which ostensibly lie in wait to attack and humiliate them. This development is logical since ‘[u]nlike a material good (e.g. the quantity of food or drink necessary to satisfy hunger and thirst), the immaterial good of honour... depends on the attitude and behaviour of other people’.⁴ In contrast to tangible items like food and drink, the intangible feeling of being well-reputed rests upon the belief systems held by other people. Other people need to be convinced of the value of one’s actions first before expressing this recognition through concrete gestures like praise or the awarding of a medal. Often, these gestures can be insincere if the giver determines that performing them to flatter a specific person might advance their own temporary interests. With the determination of whether one has attained glory being dependent upon so many variables beyond an individual’s control, the trait’s utility in building the promise of security for a multitude is doubtful.

These meditations on the risks inherent in the pursuit of glory read as a prompt book for Saturninus’ behaviour in *Titus Andronicus*. With Titus popular amongst the Romans, Saturninus perceives any move by him as a threat to his influence:

TITUS:	Patience, Prince Saturninus.
SATURNINUS:	Romans, do me right. Patricians, draw your swords, and sheathe them not Till Saturninus be Rome’s emperor. Andronicus, would thou were shipped to hell Rather than rob me of the people’s hearts! (I.1.206–210)

Unable to restrain himself from acting on his desire to become emperor, Saturninus lashes out at the war hero. The play’s verse structure shows Saturninus cutting Titus’ line, pointing to his deep suspicion of the general’s intentions. In the ruler’s mind, the Roman populace resembles a mine of personal bodyguards to be exploited in his squabble against anyone who would block his way to the throne. The well-being of these Romans does not factor into Saturninus’ calculations as someone aspiring to lead them; he seems unperturbed or unaware that he is hazarding some of their lives for his prospective advancement. In addition, Saturninus intends to vanquish and purge the man whom the play presents as the chief architect of a Roman victory against a foreign danger. If Titus were to be removed from public life as per Saturninus’ whims, it is unclear that anyone else remains who could defend Rome from external threats. Saturninus’ pursuit of glory pushes him to behave recklessly with the security of the people over whom he is aspiring to be sovereign, a sign that the focus on glory undermines the promises of security which people seek from political collectives.

⁴ Barbara Carnevali. ‘Triumphs of the Mind. Hobbes and the Ambivalences of Glory’, in *Studies in the History of Philosophy of Mind 25: The Dark Side: Philosophical Reflections on the “Negative Emotions”*, eds Paola Giacomoni, Nicollò Valentini, and Sara Dellantonio (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2021), pp. 119–38, (pp.128–129).

The chase for individual glory is unveiled to be a compulsion, driven by unceasing competition. With contestants possessing no fixed intrinsic measure of success, their views of victory or defeat are pegged to 'the waves of other people's feelings and behaviour'. Being pushed to value themselves and each other according to an ever-shifting and idiosyncratic series of norms, '[r]estlessness and instability' are generated. As surpassing a rival today does not guarantee remaining supreme tomorrow, it is possible to be surpassed in the future by a different competitor, or by the vanquished party. In an arena where every competitor holds the mindset of constantly seeking to either ascend to or remain on top, there can be no resolution to the struggle and 'stable hierarchies [become] impossible. In the war of all against all, there will always be someone able to overcome our ephemeral victories'.⁵ Left to develop, the pursuit of glory is little different from Hobbes' state of nature (87). In an environment where everyone is fighting against each other, there is a high risk of being vanquished or killed at any moment. Mistrust becomes endemic and ordering systems fail to take root. This description of the consequences of individuals embarking on the pursuit of glory runs counter to the purposes of the commonwealth as defined in *Leviathan* Chapter 17—that of a shelter for individuals seeking respite from violence. Far from promoting the promise of security, attempting to mould a political community around the pursuit of glory only engenders fragmentation and constant strife.

Titus Andronicus elucidates the effects of the competition for glory being a pursuit fraught with instability. Saturninus does not settle into his role as head of state. As sovereign, he continues to be disturbed, railing, 'Was ever seen/An emperor in Rome thus overborne,/ Troubled, confronted thus' (IV.4.1–3). Distracted from tending to the welfare of his subjects, Saturninus fixates on threats to his power. His outrage suggests that, to him, emperors should be free to exercise their sway over their subjects and face no opposition from them. At the same time, Saturninus' outburst reflects the reality that instability is associated with the pursuit of glory; he frets that he could be ousted from power and someone else could become emperor in his stead. Saturninus continues, '[w]hat's this but libeling against the Senate/And blazoning our injustice everywhere... he and his shall know that justice lives/In Saturninus' health' (IV.4.17–18, 23–24). Much like his earlier speech from Act 1, Saturninus attempts to pull other parts of the Roman state onto his side. He inflates his perceived personal affront, accrediting this local insult as a slight to the Senate too, and reconceptualising personal slander to be an act of injustice inflicted upon the whole population. Saturninus' desire to enact vengeance upon his opponent is expressed as a performance of righteous fury against a criminal, bringing the state to the brink of war to avenge a personal injury. By pursuing the advancement of his personal reputation at any cost, Saturninus disregards any promises of acting in the interests of his subjects, perpetuating the ceaseless interpersonal conflict which Hobbes posits in *Leviathan* to be the antithesis to the very notion of a state.

Saturninus' desire to turn the state into a personal vehicle for avenging himself against perceived slights to his reputation reflects Machiavelli's observations on attempts to keep societal corruption in check. In his *Discourses on Livy*, he notes:

...as good customs have need of laws to maintain themselves, so laws have need of good customs so as to be observed. Besides this, orders and laws made

⁵ Carnevali, p. 130.

in a republic at its birth, when men were good, are no longer to the purpose later, when they have become wicked... (49)

Machiavelli is conscious that rules and regulations can only manage the members of a collective if these precepts are anchored in the existing culture of the members who constitute said society. Strong rules and regulations last only when they are nourished by supportive conditions amongst a people. Also, Machiavelli points out that the rules which were fashioned by a state to govern itself in its infancy – when its members possessed a different temperament – no longer serve a state after its members have undergone years of change. This implies that the Florentine is convinced of the importance of having laws which can evolve along with the people that they are designed to help govern. In the context of the abuses in *Titus Andronicus*, no regulation can serve to check Saturninus' actions if the attitudes of the majority of the people around him are more aligned with his fixation on personal status than in recognition of Titus' faith in duty. This failure of rigidity in political life gestures towards the necessity for inventing new tools to safeguard the well-being of a commonwealth's members. Therefore, when read together, Machiavelli's *Discourses on Livy* and Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* question the efficacy of being fixed in one's political disposition.

Titus Andronicus documents the consequences of being slow to adapt to changing societal circumstances. Observing Saturninus' outbursts upon being challenged for the Imperium, Titus responds 'Content thee, prince, I will restore to thee... The people's hearts, and wean them from themselves' (I.1.206–10, 213–214). In contrast to Saturninus' self-interest, Titus gives up any bid for power when he realises that opposing Saturninus would only plunge the Romans into war amongst themselves. Instead of pursuing his own advancement, Titus chooses to serve the Roman state by unifying its people under Saturninus' banner. Through this act, Titus demonstrates his commitment to the security of all Romans by attempting to teach those watching him – one of whom is Saturninus – to orientate their politics towards the common good. However, in his blind acquiescence to Saturninus, Titus inadvertently turns himself and his family members into prey (III.1.1–24). He is unable to turn the tides of the society to which he has returned, causing him to be swept up in wave after wave of losses.

The worldview of *Titus Andronicus* anticipates that of *Leviathan* in acknowledging that promises and rules in themselves are impotent moulders of human behaviour. Hobbes assesses that most humans are caught up in the 'pursuit of "Wealth, Command, or sensuall Pleasure" [which] has dulled most men's capacity for generosity'.⁶ According to Hobbes' theory of ungoverned interpersonal relations, the pursuit of control to facilitate one's personal access to resources and delights makes most less likely to look out for the interests of their fellow men; indeed, in this zero-sum game, the gains of others are seen as threats to one's well-being (70, 87). In response to humanity's dulled capacity for generosity, Hobbes' 'appeal to authority does not reflect the ontological status of the law, but the need to impress its necessity on the malicious man or woman who cannot be depended upon to think like a philosopher'.⁷ *Leviathan* asserts that any political community can only be given life if it has a sole source of overbearing power at its head to compel all of its parts to obey its directives. According to Hobbes, a law functions as an aspirational standard to which the sovereign is supposed to direct their subjects. To ensure the safety of everyone under the aegis of the commonwealth, individuals who would typically be at each other's throats have to be instructed by the sovereign on how to live at peace with each

⁶ Julie E. Cooper. 'Vainglory, Modesty, and Political Agency in the Political Theory of Thomas Hobbes', *The Review of Politics*, 72 (2010), pp. 241–269, (pp. 246–7).

⁷ Catherine Wilson. 'Political Philosophy in a Lucretian Mode', in *Lucretius and the Early Modern*, eds. David Norbrook, Stephen Harrison and Philip Hardie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 259–282, (p. 281).

other. It is up to the sovereign to decide how best to impress the necessity of civil interpersonal behaviour on the malicious under their authority. From this perspective, *Leviathan* hints that sovereigns have the flexibility to tinker with devising laws, as long as their choices succeed in coercing their subjects into living peaceably alongside each other.

Titus Andronicus has often been interpreted as a meditation on the boundless depths of human cruelty. Far from guaranteeing anybody's safety, Saturninus' rule is one where subjects are harmed on a whim and those who are untouched live in fear of being next.⁸ The play documents the rapacious lawlessness of a sovereign failing to keep the promise of the commonwealth. In his *Discourses on Livy*, Machiavelli describes how a subject can respond to living under a regime of such predations:

...if a man is greatly offended either by the public or by a private person and is not avenged according to his satisfaction, ...if he lives under a prince and has any generosity in himself he is never quiet until he avenges himself against him, even if he sees evil for himself in that (196)

Warning his readers that aggrieved individuals are a risk to the state to which they belong, Machiavelli is convinced that those who have been injured either by other individuals or by the community at large must receive redress from the state for their wounds. Failure for the state to respond to this acute need from any of its subjects reinforces to the aggrieved individuals that they were left unprotected by an institution which was supposed to preserve their well-being. Consequently, they would have no motivation to preserve this institution which did not safeguard their interests. Depending on the depth of the injury, the aggrieved individual might strike back against those whom they regard to be responsible for their woe. Therefore, Machiavelli explains that individuals, when pushed into a corner, have the capacity to destabilise the entire edifice of state.

In demonstrating that individuals are not helpless in the absence of proper sovereignty, *Titus Andronicus* is aligned with Machiavelli's observations. After fruitlessly offering up one of his hands for the lives of his sons (III.1.150–161, 233–238), 'Titus [begins to see] his suffering as to some extent educative, correcting false perceptions of the society he lives in'.⁹ After mourning his losses, Titus becomes aware that his past inaction in the face of predation had contributed to the ensuing pain endured by himself and his family members. Knowing that any notion of Roman-ness founded upon mutual service has been swept away, Titus chooses to act against those who have harmed the well-being of himself and his household (III.1.284–287). Titus repurposes the mantle of a general, albeit for a different cause—that of his household's interests. He alters his course, adapting to his present circumstances by turning his back on the state which had long turned its back on his well-being and that of his household.

The play presents Titus adapting adroitly to the norms of the Rome under Saturninus. Studying Titus' behaviour in the latter half of the play, Aaron—an associate of Saturninus—comments to himself, 'Now what a thing it is to be an ass!/Here's no sound jest! The old man hath found their guilt./And sends them weapons wrapped about with lines/That wound, beyond their feeling, to the quick' (IV.2.25–28). Aaron notes the benefits of playing the fool. He realises that Titus has ostensibly humbled himself before the brothers who raped his daughter, feigning service and naïve goodwill to lure them into a false sense of security (II.4.1–2). Instead of openly

⁸ Foakes, R. A, 'Shakespeare and the display of violence', in *Shakespeare and Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 36–60, (p. 55).

⁹ Warren Chernaik, 'Self-inflicted wounds', in *The Myth of Rome in Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 56–78, (p. 73).

attacking them and giving them an opportunity to crush his project of vengeance, Titus acts subtly; by concealing his intentions, Titus increases his odds for success. In controlling his anger in front of his daughter's assailants, he speaks to the human spirit possessing the skills 'to act as autonomous agents'.¹⁰ Concentrating on attaining his final goal, Titus is able to operate in spite of his emotions, allowing him to assert his interests. Instead of a space which enacts concord, politics has evolved into a ceaseless competition between groups suspicious of each other.¹¹ As Titus learns from his mistakes and jettisons his fixed disposition of state service for a vigilance to these new norms, he becomes an effective advocate for his household against threats to its interests.

Hence, while Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* anticipates Hobbes' *Leviathan* in questioning whether human persons without coercion can be trusted to act in each other's interests, it critiques the notion that rigid obedience to particular precepts can reliably safeguard the interests and well-being of those who need to be safe from predations. The titular character's arc serves as a warning for individuals to be vigilant of the political conditions in which they find themselves. The cruelties inflicted upon Titus and his household are initially exacerbated due to his blind acquiescence to Saturninus; the general begins the play believing that Saturninus would repay his services to the state in kind. While Titus eventually adapts to the norms of Rome under Saturninus, it comes too late to save many members of his household. Therefore, part of the play's tragedy lies in the unanswered question of whether Titus and his household could have better protected themselves if the general had asserted his household's interests against the whims of Saturninus from the beginning of the play. The gesturing in *Titus Andronicus* towards the flexible decision-making discussed by Machiavelli in his *Discourses on Livy* lends nuance to the characterisation of Shakespeare's political vision as a conservative cry for a fading worldview. Instead, Shakespeare's writings serve as forum for various ideological positions to interact with each other, forging well-rounded and considered discourses which have continued to inspire and provoke generations of readers to scrutinise the varieties of political action which affect their lives.

¹⁰ Alison Brown. 'Lucretian Naturalism and the Evolution of Machiavelli's Ethics', in *Lucretius and the Early Modern*, pp. 69–89, (p. 70)

¹¹ Moore, Andrew. 'Introduction', *Shakespeare between Machiavelli and Hobbes: Dead Body Politics* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016), pp. 1–31, (p. 25).

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