

Turning the Body of Texts into Spectacle: *Titus Andronicus*, Gender Performances and the Objectification of Lavinia

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Abstract

This paper focuses on Lavinia's book-assisted mystification and readerly mistreatment by the male characters of Titus Andronicus to argue that the two closely related actions serve not only the interests of the stage – by iconizing Lavinia's performance of suffering – but also the interests of a patriarchal culture which objectifies women and entrusts them to men, whether father or husband. Classical allusions in Titus – or the book-assisted mystification – "script" the course of action as readerly response to the classics, yet Shakespeare's deliberate choice of texts of rape and masculine aggression suggests, I argue, less a critique of the humanist curriculum, as many Shakespeareans contend, and more his silent acquiescence in the prescriptiveness of the gender roles outlined in the classics and performed (in Judith Butler's sense) in this play, as feminist Shakespeareans do.