

INTRODUCTION

Date

The earliest reliable reference to *Titus Andronicus* comes from the *Diary* of the Elizabethan entrepreneur Philip Henslowe, proprietor of the Rose playhouse on Bankside. The *Diary* is really an account-book which records the share of the players' receipts which was the 'rent' Henslowe charged companies performing in his playhouses.¹ According to the *Diary*, the Earl of Sussex's Men played a season from 26 December 1593 to 6 February 1594, probably at the Rose. On 23 January the play was 'titus & andronicus'; in the margin Henslowe wrote 'ne', which is usually taken to mean 'new'.² Two more performances followed, on 28 January and 6 February, after which a new outbreak of the plague moved the Privy Council to close the playhouses.³ On the same date, both 'a booke intituled a Noble Roman Historye of Tytus Andronicus' and 'the ballad thereof' were entered for copyright in the Stationers' Register by John Danter, who printed Q.⁴ We cannot be certain whether Danter's 'booke' was Shakespeare's play, or an early version of the prose *History of Titus Andronicus*.⁵ If it was the former, this was the first of Shakespeare's plays to be registered for publication. Amongst his works, only *Venus and Adonis* was entered earlier, on 18 April 1593.

Henslowe's only reference to the suburban playhouse at Newington Butts records a short season by 'my Lord Admeralle men & my Lorde Chamberlen men' from 3 June to 13 June 1594. There were performances of 'andronicus' on 5 and 12 June.

These are the only specific records we have of performances of *Titus Andronicus* in the public playhouses. Even if the Stationers' Register entry should refer to the prose *History*, as Adams suggests,⁶ there is no particular reason to suspect that the date of Q is wrong. Accordingly, we may accept January 1594 as a pretty reliable *terminus ante quem* for the composition of *Titus Andronicus*. The real problems arise when we seek a *terminus post quem* which is rather more exact than, let us say, Shakespeare's twelfth birthday. By early 1594 he had composed *Richard III* and was on the point of writing *Romeo and Juliet*: detractors of *Titus* cannot believe that Shakespeare was still capable of perpetrating

¹ R. A. Foakes and R. T. Rickert (eds.), *Henslowe's Diary*, 1961, p. xxviii, agree with W. W. Greg (ed.), *Henslowe's Diary*, 2 vols., 1904–8, II, 128–34, who argues that Henslowe's share represents half the gallery receipts.

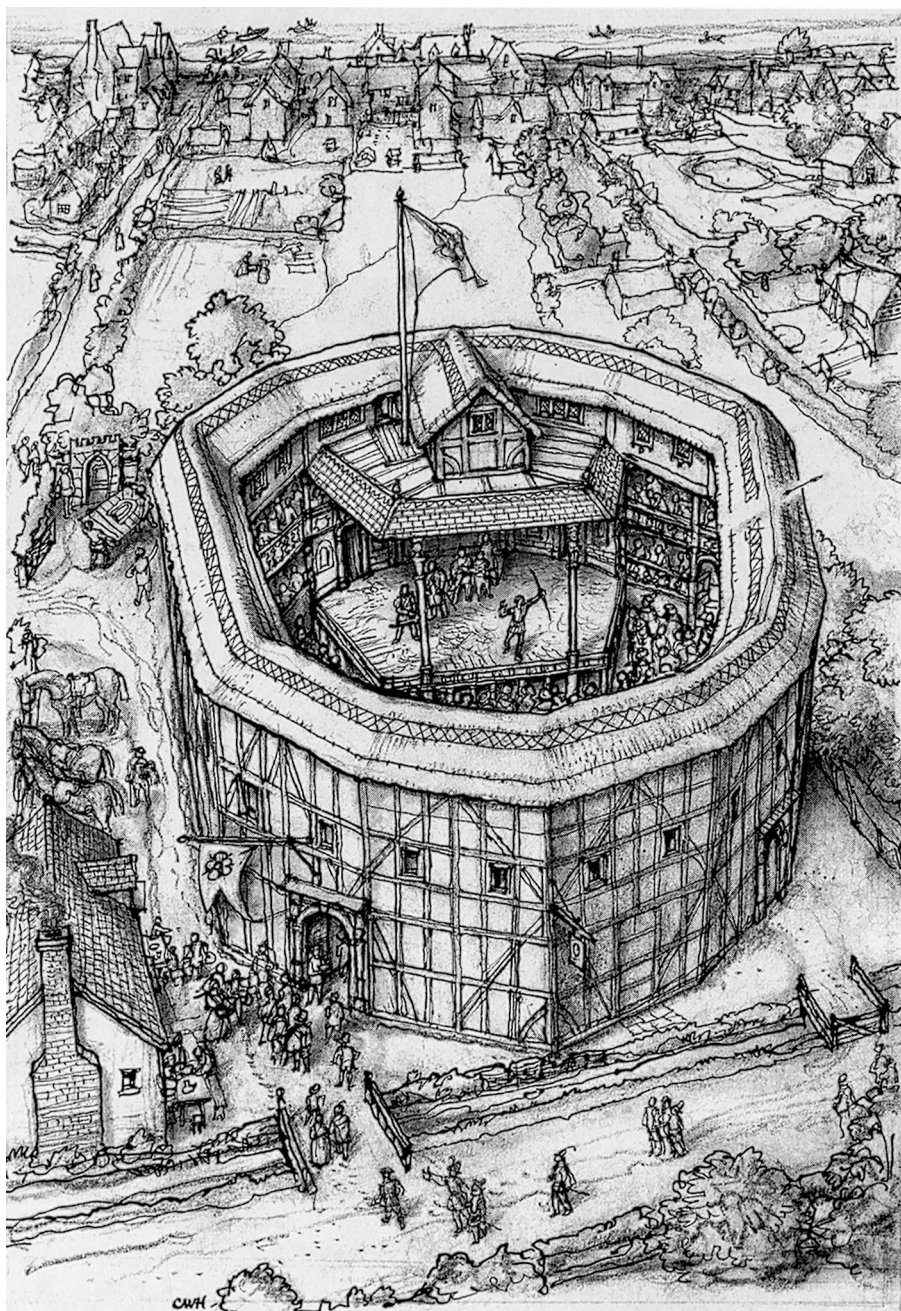
² Since we know that some of the plays Henslowe marked 'ne' were not new, he may have meant something different: for instance, that the play was newly revised, as may have been the case with *Titus*. Interpretation is controversial; see Foakes and Rickert, pp. xxvi–xxx.

³ Chambers, *Stage*, II, 95.

⁴ Of the eight plays known to have been published by Danter, only one is a really 'bad' quarto which he may have printed illegitimately. Perhaps because this was *Romeo and Juliet*, his reputation amongst modern scholars is worse than he deserves. See Harry R. Hoppe, *The Bad Quarto of 'Romeo and Juliet'*, 1948.

⁵ See pp. 9–10 and 160 below.

⁶ Adams, p. 9.



1 'My lord, I aim a mile beyond the moon': a possible staging of 4.3.66 by C. Walter Hodges, showing the Rose Theatre as reconstructed from its foundations, excavated in 1989

such a play by that date.¹ Some have suggested that it is not by Shakespeare at all, or that it is his incomplete revision of another man's play; others have suggested an earlier date. The evidence for the former is reviewed below (pp. 10–12); evidence for the latter is slight and circumstantial.

Since it was in Danter's commercial interest to present his Q edition as the authentic text of a playhouse success, we cannot be certain that the information printed on the title page is perfectly accurate. Nevertheless, it gives unique information about the play's history: 'The Most Lamentable Romaine Tragedie of Titus Andronicus: As it was Plaide by the Right Honourable the Earle of *Darbie*, Earle of *Pembrooke*, and Earle of *Sussex* their Seruants'. The reference to Sussex's Men tends to confirm that Henslowe's entries in January and February of that year refer to Shakespeare's play as published in Q. If the other companies really had performed the play, there is no guarantee that it was in the form that reached print. The Earl of Derby's Men were simply Lord Strange's under a new name, which they cannot have adopted before their patron succeeded to the title on 25 September 1593; however, the name used on the title page has more significance for the publication date of Q than for the alleged performances. Danter would naturally use the patron's new and more impressive title, but there is no real evidence that the performances referred to were recent. On the other hand, the reference to the Earl of Pembroke's Men may push the history of the play, or some form of it, back a little. We have no record of this company before the autumn of 1592, and the last we hear of them for several years is a vivid vignette of Elizabethan theatrical life. The London playhouses were closed because of the plague, and the companies were dispersed, most of them touring in the provinces. On 28 September 1593, Henslowe wrote to his son-in-law, Edward Alleyn: 'As for my lorde a Penbrookes w^{ch} you desier to knowe whear they be they ar all at home and hausse ben this v or sixe weackes for they cane not saue ther carges wth trauell as I heare & weare fayne to pane ther parell for ther carge.'² Assuming that both Henslowe and the Q title page are accurate in all respects, that would mean that Pembroke's Men could not have played *Titus Andronicus* after the last week in August 1593. The fact that Derby's Men are named before Pembroke's may point to an even earlier performance, but speculation on this subject, while fascinating, is bound to be inconclusive: quite possibly it has no significance at all.³

Earlier still is an apparent reference to *Titus Andronicus* in an anonymous play called *A Knack to Know a Knave*, which Henslowe marked as 'ne' during a season in which Strange's Men acted something called 'tittus and vespasia' (February to June 1592). One character bids another welcome,

¹ See Chambers, *Shakespeare*, I, 317–18; and R. F. Hill, 'The composition of *Titus Andronicus*', *S.Sur.* 10 (1957), 68–9.

² Chambers, *Stage*, II, 128; Chambers, *Shakespeare*, I, 320; Wilson, pp.xl–xlvi; Waith, pp. 5, 8–9.

³ Chambers, *Stage*, II, 129–32; David George, 'Shakespeare and Pembroke's Men', *SQ* 32 (1981), 305–23.

Titus Andronicus

4

As Titus was unto the Roman Senators,
 When he had made a conquest on the Goths:
 That in requital of his service done,
 Did offer him the imperial Diademe . . .¹

While this is not precisely what happens in *Titus Andronicus*, it is difficult to agree with those who have tried to explain it away in order to support a later date.² It is possible, nevertheless, that it refers to Shakespeare's lost source, or even to 'tittus and vespasia'.

In the Induction to Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* (1614), a character speaks ironically of the spectator who is 'fixed and settled in his censure . . . He that will swear *Jeronimo* or *Andronicus* are the best plays yet, shall pass unexcepted at here as a man whose judgement shows it is constant, and hath stood still these five and twenty or thirty years.' A literal interpretation would date both *Titus* and *Jeronimo* (presumably *The Spanish Tragedy*) between 1584 and 1589. But Jonson (b. 1572) was a boy in the 1580s, and even if he knew or cared about the original dates, common sense suggests that he would have cared more about his joke and meant only that both were hopelessly old-fashioned plays which, maddeningly, the groundlings still preferred to such up-to-date flops as his own tragedy, *Catiline* (1611).³ Jonson also implies, however, that they were *similar* old plays, as indeed they are.

Violence is commonplace in Elizabethan drama, but these plays are linked by a bizarre and sensational type of violence in which dismemberment is unusually conspicuous: Lavinia's tongue is cut out, Hieronimo bites his off and apparently spits it onto the stage. Both tragedies have grand old heroes driven mad by suffering and oppression, and the Senecan rhetoric of their madness enjoyed such an enduring vogue that additional mad scenes were commissioned to exploit it. Similar tastes are reflected in some of Marlowe's earlier plays. His 'mighty line' fairly wallows in rhetoric. The cannibal imagery of the banquet scene in *Tamburlaine the Great, Part 1* (c. 1587) parallels the physical horrors of the climactic banquet in *Titus Andronicus*: Marlowe even refers to Procne's revenge, a conspicuous theme in Shakespeare's play.⁴ Compare the style of violence in *Titus* with the suicides of Bajazeth and Zenocrate, who brain themselves onstage, and, at the climax of *The Jew of Malta* (c. 1590), the death of Barabas, who falls into a boiling cauldron. Like Aaron, Barabas revels in evil: John Dover Wilson has demonstrated the resemblance.⁵ J. C. Maxwell notes a close parallel between part of Aaron's defiant confession and a speech in *The Troublesome Raigne of John King of England*, published in 1591 but probably performed several years earlier:

¹ G. R. Proudford (ed.), *A Knack to Know a Knave*, Malone Society Reprints, 1963, sig. F2^v.

² Paul Bennett, 'An apparent allusion to *Titus Andronicus*', *N&Q* 200 (1955), 422–4; and 'The word "Goths" in *A Knack to Know a Knave*', *N&Q* 200 (1955), 462–3; Wilson, pp. xli–xliv.

³ Chambers, *Shakespeare*, 1, 319–29. Wilson, p. xl, and Waith, p. 4, give Jonson's evidence little credit; Maxwell, p. xxii, thinks it suggests a date earlier than 1594, at least; Hill, 'Composition', p. 69, is convinced by it; see also G. Harold Metz, 'The date of composition of *Titus Andronicus*', *N&Q* 223 (1978), 116–17.

⁴ Christopher Marlowe, *Tamburlaine the Great*, ed. John D. Jump, 1967, Part 1, 4.4; *Tit.* 5.3; see note on 2.3.43.

⁵ Wilson, p. lxii.

How, what, when, and where, have I bestowd a day
 That tended not to some notorious ill.¹

Compare Aaron:

Even now I curse the day – and yet I think
 Few come within the compass of my curse –
 Wherein I did not some notorious ill . . . (5.1.125–7)

Apparently, then, *Titus Andronicus* has much in common with a type of play which was being written before 1590. If it was written much after that date, it was a belated specimen of the type.

Passing from even such circumstantial evidence to internal evidence is like entering a carnival fun-house with its distorting mirrors. ‘The game of verbal parallels’, as Wilson calls it, is a fascinating but unreliable way of establishing dates. In the light of that remark, it is surprising to find him playing it himself. In the first place, one person’s ‘indisputable echo’ is another’s far-fetched nonsense. Coincidences and common sources are both difficult to rule out, the latter especially when we recall how much Elizabethan literature we have lost. Even when a parallel is as clear as such things may be, we often cannot know which author wrote first, or how much time separated first writing from imitation. Let us take the example of the coined word ‘palliamment’, which is used twice in extant Renaissance literature: at *Titus* 1.1.182 and in George Peele’s poem, *The Honour of the Garter* (line 92), which can be dated with precision to May–June 1593. Wilson uses this coincidence to argue that Peele not only wrote both passages, but did so at very nearly the same time, and that the play must be slightly the earlier of the two because he thinks the word is better suited to its context there than in the poem.² With respect to Aaron’s speech, quoted above, Maxwell warns us that we cannot know who is the borrower, but leans towards the author of *The Troublesome Raigne* on the grounds that he is ‘a shameless borrower’ and because Aaron uses it more felicitously than King John.³ Since this is the same argument Wilson uses to attribute *Titus Andronicus* to the author of *The Honour of the Garter*, the evidence – such as it is – cancels itself out. Furthermore, since the play shows signs of revision, a parallel may belong to either a first draft or a revised version. The same hazards attend any hope of using recent archaeology to date the stagecraft in *Titus Andronicus*. For example, Aaron buries gold under a ‘tree’ (2.3.2), perhaps one of the stage columns which may have been a novel feature of the Rose after its renovation (c. 1592). Like a verbal parallel, however, this stage business could as easily date from a revision as from the original draft.

The only real evidence for the date of the play, then, is external, but it is scanty and not beyond question: Henslowe might have been mistaken, perhaps Danter lied. With these *caveats*, we can say that *Titus Andronicus* was probably established on the stage by mid 1593, and possibly earlier. Circumstantial evidence suggests that it might have

¹ J. W. Sider (ed.), *The Troublesome Raigne of John, King of England*, 1979, 5.85–6.

² Wilson, pp. xlv–xlvi.

³ Maxwell, p. xxi.

been first written several years before: the style of its violence and language seems to link it to *The Spanish Tragedy*, *Tamburlaine* and *The Troublesome Raigne*. In the end, we can only conjecture or despair. Thus, discarding all pretence of objective proof, I shall base a conjecture upon my subjective assessment of style.

As I have shown, *Titus Andronicus* resembles several sensational plays which were all written somewhat earlier than 1592. Moreover, the writing seems stylistically uneven. Some of it is Ovidian, formal and mannered, as in Marcus's speech to the ravished Lavinia (2.4.11–57); some is crude, particularly in Act 1. These passages feel like the work of a young poet. Other portions more closely resemble Shakespeare's mature style: see for example Aaron's defence of his child (4.2.65–111). The stagecraft, on the other hand, is as dexterous as anything Shakespeare ever accomplished, which suggests a working familiarity with the theatre.

From these observations I conjecture that the young Shakespeare wrote a crude draft of *Titus Andronicus* before he turned dramatist – even as early as 1588, when he may still have been living in Stratford; that it accompanied him to London, where nobody would produce it; and that having established himself to Robert Greene's dissatisfaction in 1592,¹ he revised it and offered it either to Strange's or Pembroke's Men. They may have played it in the provinces. But by the summer of 1593 the latter company, being bankrupt and currently in possession of the play, sold it to Sussex's Men, who played it at the Rose in early 1594, and subsequently sold the copy to Danter when plague closed the playhouses. The scene of Titus's mad banquet, which appears only in the First Folio, was added later. This complicated hypothesis must await the discovery of new, *reliable* evidence to be tested. It may wait long.

Sources

It is uncertain whether Shakespeare's major source for *Titus Andronicus* has survived. The context of the story is the decline of the Roman Empire, but the events are fictional: thus, the source was also fiction. Shakespeare is unlikely to have invented the story; his only original plots are found in comedy: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, the Beatrice and Benedick plot in *Much Ado About Nothing*. For tragedy and history plays, he and his fellow dramatists turned to historians such as Livy, Plutarch and Holinshed; to old plays like *King Leir* or *The Troublesome Raigne of John King of England*; or to the Italian *novella*, which the Titus story resembles.

In 1936 J. Q. Adams announced his discovery, in the Folger Shakespeare Library, of a volume containing a short prose *History of Titus Andronicus* and a 120-line ballad, *Titus Andronicus' Complaint*.² Since it was published between 1736 and 1764, this little chapbook seems an unlikely place in which to seek Shakespeare's source. Nevertheless, some scholars believe they have found it in either the ballad or the *History*.

¹ Greene's *Groats-Worth of Witte bought with a Million of Repentance* refers to 'an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his *Tygers hart wrapt in a Players hyde*, supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blanke verse as the best of you: and beeing an absolute *Iohannes fac totum*, is in his owne conceit the onely Shake-scene in a countrey' (Scolar Press facsimile (n.d.), F1 V).

² Adams, pp. 7–9.

The publisher, C. Dicey, is known to have reprinted old works on other occasions. The ballad was certainly old; it had been published in 1620, in Richard Johnson's *The Golden Garland of Princely Pleasures and Delicate Delights*. It is possible that Johnson merely reprinted a ballad that was old enough to be Shakespeare's source. No early edition of the *History* is known, but while spelling and punctuation follow eighteenth-century practice, the diction is archaic. This suggests that the claim printed on the title page, that it was 'Newly Translated from the Italian Copy printed at Rome', was false at the time of publication.

The ballad and the *History* are linked by an identical couplet, which Lavinia writes with her staff to identify her assailants:

The lustful sons of the proud Empress
 Are doers of this hateful wickedness.¹

The *History* is unlikely to have been the source of the ballad. The latter narrates the incident (5.2) in which the empress and her sons appear to Titus disguised as Revenge, Rape and Murder. This is not in the *History*. Since the ballad is original in no other respect, this incident may be drawn from a lost source, or from the play. The latter seems more likely. Marco Mincoff² argues that the ballad is the source of the *History*, but his case has been exploded by G. Harold Metz.³ G. K. Hunter suggests that the ballad was written to capitalise on the popularity of Shakespeare's play.⁴

The *History* is essentially different from the play. Sargent points out that it 'presents a whole which has a consistency of its own, a consistency which is not the same as the play's'.⁵ It tells the same story, with some different names and details of plot, but neither Shakespeare's concern with evil and justice nor the serious political theme which requires a Lucius to restore order is present in the bald narrative. Nevertheless, there must be some link. Since the entire story is fiction, all versions must be related to each other. Sargent also notes that there is little quoted speech in the *History*, and that 'A careful search reveals no verbal resemblance between the history and the play; the spoken lines of the drama owe nothing to the language of this prose version.'⁶ This is true, if the search is confined to dialogue; but there are several close parallels between the narrative phrasing of the *History* and Shakespeare's dialogue. Compare the following:

Hark, wretches, how I mean to marty you;
 This one hand yet is left to cut your throats
 Whiles that Lavinia 'tween her stumps doth hold
 The basin that receives your guilty blood. (5.2.180–3)

¹ Ralph M. Sargent, 'The source of *Titus Andronicus*', *SP* 46 (1949), 170.

² Marco Mincoff, 'The source of *Titus Andronicus*', *N&Q* 216 (April 1971), 131–4.

³ G. Harold Metz, 'The *History* of *Titus Andronicus* and Shakespeare's play', *N&Q* 220 (April 1975), 163–6.

⁴ G. K. Hunter, 'Sources and meanings in *Titus Andronicus*', in J. C. Gray (ed.), *Mirror up to Shakespeare: Essays in Honour of G. R. Hibbard*, 1984, pp. 179–85.

⁵ Sargent, 'Source', p. 169.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

Titus Andronicus

8

Andronicus cut their throats whilst Lavinia, by his command, held a bowl between her stumps to receive the blood. (*History*, p. 43)¹

Hark, villains, I will grind your bones to dust,
 And with your blood and it I'll make a paste,
 And of the paste a coffin I will rear,
 And make two pasties of your shameful heads . . . (5.2.186–9)

Then conveying the bodies home to his own house privately, he cut the flesh into fit pieces and ground the bones to powder, and made of them two mighty pasties . . . (*History*, p. 43)

If this is enough to show that there was a direct link between the play and the *History*, what is its nature?

If we rule out the ballad as a source, only three possibilities remain: the play and the *History* have a common source, which might be an Italian *novella*, or a translation in either French or English; the play is the source of the *History*; or an early edition of the *History* is Shakespeare's source.

Shakespeare preferred English sources, but he may have been able to read Italian and could certainly read French. A *novella* by Cinthio, either in the original Italian or a French translation by Gabriel Chappuys, is the chief source of *Othello*;² some critics believe he turned to Boccaccio for the wager theme in *Cymbeline*;³ *The Merchant of Venice* draws upon Ser Giovanni's *Il Pecorone* (1558), probably in Italian;⁴ either Bandello's *Novelle* or Belleforest's French translation is a probable source of *Much Ado About Nothing*.⁵ Thus, a *novella* in Italian or French is not an impossible source. No such work is known, however.

Hunter argues that some details of the *History* seem to be drawn from ancient sources which were not available in English in the sixteenth century. 'One must assume either that the chap-book author was a learned man or that a learned intermediary (learned, perhaps, in "the Italian copy printed at Rome" cited in the heading) had already digested the sources into a form which could be applied to the Titus Andronicus story.'⁶ On the other hand, the *History* might have been written as late as the eighteenth century, when its author would have needed only Shakespeare's play and Gibbon or other sources that were readily available by that time. If that was the case, however, he amalgamated his historical sources with the play in an imaginative and creative manner which appears to be inconsistent with his modest literary abilities. It is easier to believe that Shakespeare worked up a dry tale like the *History* into drama. If we consider the creative changes he frequently made, for dramatic effect, in the narrative of his sources, it seems probable that the *History* or a common source came first.

¹ The *History* is quoted from Bullough.

² Norman Sanders (ed.), *Oth.*, 1984, pp. 2–3.

³ J. M. Nosworthy (ed.), *Cym.*, 1955, pp. xx–xxii, who thinks 'There is little evidence that he could read Italian.'

⁴ M. M. Mahood (ed.), *MV*, 1987, pp. 2–5.

⁵ F. H. Mares (ed.), *Ado*, 1988, p. 1.

⁶ Hunter, 'Sources and meanings', p. 178.

Besides, there is external evidence to consider. On 6 February 1594, the date of the third and last recorded performance of *Titus Andronicus* by Sussex's Men, John Danter entered 'a booke intituled a Noble Roman Historye of Tytus Andronicus' and 'the ballad thereof' in the Stationers' Register. This gave him the sole right to publish the book named in the entry, much in the manner of modern copyright. It does not prove that he exercised that right.

Danter published the first quarto (Q), which is dated 1594 on the title page. There is no reason to doubt the date. Had his Stationers' Register entry clearly referred to the book of Shakespeare's play, the case would be simple. But his wording appears to refer to the *History*, and since the ballad is mentioned as well, it looks as though he meant to print something rather like the eighteenth-century chapbook. If this was so, the *History* had evidently existed long enough to permit the ballad to be written. If *Titus Andronicus* was really new when it was first performed on 23 January, less than a fortnight elapsed before Danter's entry in the Register.

If the *History* was based on the play, several people had been incredibly busy. We would have to suppose that the author of the *History* saw the 23 January performance and adapted the play, with major changes; that the author of the ballad then somehow saw the *History*, and adapted it too; and that both subsequently took their works to Danter and persuaded him to publish, all in a few days. It is easier to believe that the *History* was based on an earlier version of the play, or completely preceded it.

More probably, Danter took the initiative. *Titus Andronicus* was a playhouse success, and he intended to capitalise on it by publishing the *History* and the ballad. We cannot be certain that he never did so; his edition is not extant, but to argue from absence of evidence will not do. Nevertheless, he published his quarto of *Titus Andronicus* in the same year, without making any further entry in the Stationers' Register. W. W. Greg says 'it would be quite in keeping with Danter's character to make one entrance serve for two separate publications',¹ but it is possible that Danter saw his chance when the playhouses were closed by plague (immediately after the 6 February performance), bought the play from Sussex's Men, and used the rights he had established for the *History* and ballad to publish the play instead. The principal flaw in this suggestion is that Danter entered his copy on the very day of the play's last performance. This is a difficult coincidence to swallow, but no other explanation readily presents itself.

We are left with the probability that the *History* had existed for some time before 1594, and that it, or its Italian original, was Shakespeare's source. Unless we suppose that not only he but Danter and the author of the ballad read the *History* in manuscript, in Italian, or both, there must have been an earlier printed English edition which Danter proposed to reprint. There is no way of knowing how old it was in 1594, but if it was still in print Danter was surely risking trouble with its publisher. It follows that this lost edition must have been several years old.

The archaic diction of the chapbook *History* casts doubt upon the claim of the title page that it was 'Newly Translated from the Italian Copy printed at Rome'. More probably, the publisher simply reprinted that line along with the rest of the text. In that

¹ W. W. Greg, *A Bibliography of English Printed Drama to the Restoration*, 4 vols., 1939, I, xxv.

case, the old edition was probably the *first* in English, but adapted or translated from an Italian source. Since an English version was available, Shakespeare is likely to have used it instead of the original, a suspicion which the verbal parallels quoted above tend to confirm.

The *History* may not have been Shakespeare's only source, but if it was the major one, there is no reason to argue that he went elsewhere for details that could be found in the book that lay open before him. Possible secondary sources might be the story of Philomel in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and Seneca's *Thyestes*; but since a copy of the former actually figures in the action of *Titus Andronicus* (4.1) and Lavinia's story closely resembles Philomel's, Ovid was probably more important. Perhaps Shakespeare knew both works so well that he did not need to open either as he wrote; but Ovid was fresher in his memory.

Authorship

The external evidence that Shakespeare wrote *Titus Andronicus* rests upon two solid facts. (1) It was included in the First Folio (1623), published by John Heminge and Henry Condell as a memorial to their friend and colleague. They would hardly have included a play they believed to be spurious, and as senior partners in the same company of players as Shakespeare they were in a position to know. (2) Comparing ancient and contemporary poets in *Palladis Tamia: Wit's Treasury* (1598), Francis Meres counts *Titus Andronicus* with Shakespeare's early tragedies. Meres may have lacked inside knowledge, but he was an educated man who was living in London by 1587.¹

The only evidence that the play might be spurious comes from Edward Ravenscroft, who was born almost 25 years after Shakespeare's death. The address to the reader published with his adaptation of *Titus Andronicus* (1687) excuses Ravenscroft of plagiarism, claiming

I have been told by some anciently conversant with the Stage, that it was not Originally his, but brought by a private Author to be Acted, and he only gave some Master-touches to one or two of the Principal Parts or Characters; this I am apt to believe, because 'tis the most incorrect and indigested piece in all his Works; It seems rather a heap of Rubbish than a Structure.

In view of the relative authority of the evidence, it seems odd that so many scholars have agreed with Ravenscroft. In the eighteenth century Theobald, Johnson, Steevens and Malone all declared against Shakespeare's authorship, with Capell the only significant dissenter. The nineteenth century followed suit, with the exception of the Germans (apart from Gervinus). Those who doubted the tragedy's authenticity had no evidence, but flinched from the 'horrors', found the characters shallow and unsympathetic, and the language inferior to Shakespeare's usual standard. In fact, *Titus Andronicus* simply offended their literary taste, and they wished to absolve Shakespeare of the responsibility for perpetrating it.

¹ E. A. J. Honigmann believes Meres was 'not up-to-date in theatre affairs', but this view is disputed. See A. R. Braunmuller (ed.), *John*, 1989, p. 2.