

Edinburgh Fringe 2015 review: Shakespeare Untold: The PieMaker's Tale

A humorous version of Titus Andronicus comes in at just the right pitch for a Children's adaptation, according to [Amy Wong](#)

Thursday 6 August 2015



Image: Alex Harvey-Brown, courtesy of Shakespeare's Globe

★★★★☆

Venue: Pleasance Courtyard

I'm fairly certain *Titus Andronicus* wouldn't be most people's first choice when selecting a Shakespeare play to adapt for children, so it was with a mixture of apprehension and curiosity that I sat down to watch *Shakespeare Untold: Titus Andronicus (The Piemaker's Tale)*. Thankfully, Shakespeare's Globe and Seabright Productions pull the difficult task of adapting *Titus Andronicus* off with aplomb, delivering a show that's more consistently entertaining than their first offering of the day, *Romeo and Juliet (The Party Planner's Tale)*.

Predictably, a lot of the violence is toned down. There's no mention of the deaths of Aaron and Mutius, Lavinia's ordeal is sanitised a little, and the secret birth of Aaron and Tamora's child is omitted too. It's a shame that some of the intricacies of the play are unavoidably lost. Aaron's severely diminished role is particularly disappointing as he's one of the more interesting characters in *Titus Andronicus*. However, the

omissions definitely make the play more accessible and palatable for younger audiences. It's also refreshing to see a company have so much fun taking on such a problematic play, with the constant stream of black humour keeping the audience in stitches. Of course, that's not to say *The Piemaker's Tale* is entirely one note in its tone. Many of the more violent scenes that are kept are delivered in a surprisingly poignant way, creating the perfect balance between comedy and tragedy. The manner in which these moments are relayed to the audience is also remarkably inventive, with various deaths and acts of self-mutilation represented by a wet sponge being slowly dragged across a blackboard.

As with *The Party Planner's Tale*, the set is one of the highlights of the show. The stage is quickly transformed into a mini kitchen and the performance begins with the piemaker sitting at the table while a timer ominously ticks away in the background. The kitchen timer is cleverly used to create a sense of tension on several occasions, helped by the use of a smoke machine and red lighting as the show reaches its climax. The creative use of kitchen-related props is reminiscent of Forced Entertainment's take on Shakespeare as a spilt bag of onions becomes an army and Chiron and Demetrius are substituted for salt and pepper grinders. As the only person on stage, Tom Giles engages the audience with ease as the piemaker, demonstrating a natural flair for storytelling and improvisation.

If *The Piemaker's Tale* has one flaw, it's that older audience members are likely to find the sillier jokes a bit drawn-out and grow weary of the constant recapping. However, it would be unfair to criticise the show too harshly for this – it is, after all, primarily aimed at children, and its core audience are sure to be kept thoroughly entertained throughout this fun take on Shakespeare's bloodiest play.



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