

TAMORA IMPERATRIX - DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

short horror movie

adaption of "Titus Andronicus" by William Shakespeare

written & directed by Carolina Rath

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Our movie "Tamora" is inspired by the look of "Game of Thrones" - that means, our look is pretty much the opposite of "Game of Thrones". When I had finished the script, I imagined shooting parts of the film in a historic setting, in ancient Rome. Because I love historic movies - mysterious corridors with flickering candlelight, throne rooms with gold and glitter and rotting iron dungeons where the blood is dripping from the walls, surrounded by cobwebs. Here, of course, as a low-budget variant.

So we were looking for a well preserved, very old basement vault (or something similar) as a location to shoot our film. But during pre-production, I watched another episode of "Game of Thrones" - and suddenly I realized that no matter what we would strive for - with our mini-budget we would not get anything that looks even close to real historical, it would all just look cheap and fake. And that does not work - my heart beats for "Game of Thrones" and gorgeous images on screen - and I also wanted gorgeous images for our little short film. But how to achieve that? Together with my co-producers - cameraman Michael Clemens and production designer Frank-Tilmann Otto - I considered what we could do to create unusual and inspiring images that we could actually afford.

At the same time, we were scouting locations. We did not find a cellar vault, but a studio with completely white walls - and here it came, the inspiration: we decided to use what we had - we would shoot the film completely in a white room. In a white world without borders - a world between reality and fantasy, between life and death. And since this would be a world that we created completely from the scratch, this world would become completely our own, with our rules, without comparisons. That's how it happened. A second shooting block took place in a completely black room, also this our own magical intermediate world.

My wonderful crew used all their imagination and creativity, to conjure mesmerizing sets into the white and black rooms - inventing costumes, incorporating props that I barely dared to dream about - from the glittering forest built from scratch to the exuberant party table, the dark execution place (with real fire indoors) to the foggy witch's kitchen - I was so happy to get all that (and so glad that we did not try to make a real bad copy of "Game of Thrones").

In a world that does not exist, everything is possible - our imagination had no limits. Kitsch and glitter, eroticism and murder, revenge and despair, blood and violence -

everything was allowed into this story, held together by the Shakespeare plot. For me, the film is a frenzy of images, a trip into a very violent, colorful, erotic and cruel nightmare world, which is beautifully supported by the old, magnificent Shakespeare language.

In this dark and bloody nightmare world, there live my protagonists, who roughly follow the Shakespearean play, speak the original language, but have become quite different characters. While the original story features Titus, our story is told from Tamora's perspective. The imprisoned empress, humiliated and murdered by Titus, is my protagonist - she dreams of murder and revenge, helped by the magician Aaron, the ruler of the underworld. But in the end there is no awakening from the world of nightmares, no return from the world of the dead when the boundaries between reality and imagination begin to disappear. Because, after all, I love horror movies.

In Shakespeare's original play, Titus is the moral hero, Tamora the lustful and tainted empress who lets herself be seduced by a foreign lover. For this she has to pay the price - exclusion from society awaits her for daring to take what she fancies. And in the end, death. The daughter of Titus, Lavinia, is portrayed as a poor and innocent victim, but she too pays with her life - because she does not marry who her father proposes to her. That is not only unfair, that is just wrong. I mean - Titus kills not just the son of the empress in cold blood - he kills others of his children, too - just because they do not obey him properly - and he tries to "sell" his already-engaged daughter to someone else for political reasons - but nothing of that impresses the author Shakespeare, he keeps Titus as the moral hero. I cannot understand that. Just because Titus is a man, he is automatically granted the freedom to make his own choices, while Tamora, the woman, needs to die for the exact same reasons.

Not in our film. It was very important to me to repeal the submissive and moral role of the original Shakespeare women and break up the alleged heroism of the original Titus. Although my Tamora lets herself be seduced for revenge, this is just her reaction to Titus' premeditated murder of her own son. For me Tamora is innocent, she is a dreamer. I see Titus as the truly evil - he murders because he wants power, killing excites him - he is anything but morally. His daughter Lavinia knows exactly what is happening, she does nothing to prevent it, on the contrary - and for her malice she has to pay. Tamora's children are the most similar to the Shakespearean characters, but they are not two boys, but brother and sister who torture and rape together. The thing I wanted is to retell the boring scheme of "bad man violating poor woman." Everyone can be good, everyone can be bad, man or woman. Aaron is the draftsman, the ruler of the underworld - in the original play he is corrupted and called evil, but his only "crime" is his unbecoming love to the empress - even with me he can not save her, because I had to follow the plot - but he is not characterless at all, but faithful and loyal to Tamora until he has to let her go.

So for me, the film is a mixture of very stylized images that inspire me (and I hope the audience), it is set between black romance and surreal horror, with a very own, artificial touch through the unfamiliar, old language and the deliberately set theater elements - and the film is also my statement about lustful heroines and moral heroes (or was it the other way round?).