



the brainchild of Alpha, a theatre magician who does not reveal his secret technique, Bercut says.

Books, in the Mesguich vernacular, symbolize knowledge, civilization, the law and ultimately, humanity itself. No wonder then, this is a library-turned-upside-down. "Things are topsy turvy," Bercut says. "We don't know whether we're up or down, things are turned around."

The set walls were constructed around wooden frames, filled in with panels of plywood, covered with a thin cotton fabric and then painted.

One of the most interesting visual effects was created by a dome-like volume located upstage and illuminated from behind with blue light. Reinforcing the audience's sensation of being deep inside the belly of a human beast, it nonetheless provided a sort of window to the outside and a glimpse of the future.

The stage was also flanked by two temple-shaped, Plexiglas moratoriums adorned with Roman numerals, Greek letters, and Egyptian hieroglyphics. As the plot advances and the murders accumulate, the temples fill up with skulls and thick vegetation, illuminated from inside.

The cold-blooded savagery of *Titus Andronicus* was enhanced by Gerard Poli's lighting effects. On what he described as a shoestring budget, the 38-year-old optical engineer had to make do with what was already in the theatre — including equipment dating from the 1960s — and improvise. "This is a case of technology determining art," Poli notes. The lighting-booth was equipped with an AVAB 202 board and a digital amplifier. For atmosphere and back lighting, he used four 2kw and two 1000w projectors and, using filters, he created a pinkish, amber light.

The cupola was illuminated by fluorescent lights (amber: Lee 134; blue: Lee 132, 161). The stage was also equipped with 42 small light sources, where Poli used PAR 36 with a Rosco 114 filter. Another consideration was the floor — varnished to a matte finish so as not to reflect too much light.

Poli did not hesitate to use everything the small theatre had to offer, including a magnificent, 19th-century gilded frame which borders the entire stage and which was illuminated as the curtain rises.

"Lighting the frame is a way of situating Shakespeare as a playwright, as universal. We all know that rape, sadism

and murder are facts of daily life — we read about those things in the paper all the time," Poli explains. "But the frame is a sign that the play is art. It's not to be taken literally. We're showing the audience that we're putting on a play, not simply recreating some awful thing that happened."

For Poli, *Titus* is universal because it has no beginning or end. There is no sunlight, no moonlight to delineate the passage of time. Conventional narrative has been replaced by Mesguich's concept of internal, universal time.

At the same time, Poli had to help make the characters believable. The spotlights located on the floor were used to intensify expressionist effects as the actors looked towards different sources of light depending on where they were. "This technique helped some members of the cast project a maximum of anxiety and fear," he says.

Costume designer Laurence Forbin had the especially difficult job of putting Shakespeare's deliberate and premeditated savagery into the text of 20th-century Europe. Tamora, for example, takes off her toga and is swept from Roman times to the 1930s. The dress — a plum-coloured crepe de soie — is transformed into the form-fitting ensemble of a scheming femme fatale once the toga is removed. Even her hair style combines past and present. Cropped short and standing straight up on her skull like a crown (designed by wig and make-up artist Kuno), the result is an exotic blend of 1980s punk and Roman majesty.

Forbin, a 32-year-old artist who also designs sets, worked on a reduced budget of 35,000 francs (UK £3,500; US \$6,000), scouring the Paris flea markets for men's clothes that would evoke pre-war 1930s.

"Tamora's sons, who rape Lavinia, and then cut off her hands and gouge out her tongue, are dressed alike, in suits worn by upper-middle class dandies before the war," she says. "They are supposed to typify a certain kind of sadistic young man who later turns into a brutal SS soldier or a Gestapo agent. The play is not about the barbarism that resides in all of us, but rather the violence and cruelty that is the fruit of serious reflection," says Forbin.

"Titus may be a Roman emperor, but he is also Abraham, the father of us all," she says. "And he is ultimately the old Jewish man who goes to his death in the