

Titus Andronicus



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Shakespeare's father was a glove-maker, and Shakespeare received no more than a grammar school education. He married Anne Hathaway in 1582, but left his family behind around 1590 and moved to London, where he became an actor and playwright. He was an immediate success: Shakespeare soon became the most popular playwright of the day as well as a part-owner of the Globe Theater. His theater troupe was adopted by King James as the King's Men in 1603. Shakespeare retired as a rich and prominent man to Stratford-upon-Avon in 1613, and died three years later.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The play is set in the late Roman empire, when it is past its height and entering its long decline, fighting off the Goths and other barbarian groups at the fringes of the empire. Shakespeare's Rome is a fictional creation, though, filtered through a Renaissance English perspective, filled with English-speaking Romans who reference things like the practice of knighting and English-style grammar schools. Roman historical legends and Greco-Roman myth underpin the plot, most importantly the story of Philomela from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Titus Andronicus can be seen as one of Shakespeare's responses to the popular genre of revenge tragedy in Renaissance England. As the name would imply, these plays centered around acts of revenge-killing and were often filled with gruesome bloodshed. The tradition of revenge tragedies in general was greatly influenced by the tragedies written by the Roman stoic philosopher and dramatist Seneca the Younger, who lived from 4 BC to 65 AD but whose works were widely read during the Elizabethan period when Shakespeare was writing.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Titus Andronicus*
- **When Written:** Late 1580s or early 1590s (it is believed to be one of Shakespeare's earlier plays).
- **Where Written:** England
- **When Published:** 1594
- **Literary Period:** English Renaissance (also called the early modern era)
- **Genre:** Revenge tragedy
- **Setting:** Ancient Rome

- **Climax:** At the feast with which the play concludes, Titus feeds the remains of Tamora's own children to her and reveals who has raped Lavinia; a whirlwind of murder ensues, leaving Lavinia, Titus, Saturninus, and Tamora all dead.
- **Antagonist:** Tamora and Aaron the Moor.

EXTRA CREDIT

Authorship. While extremely popular in Shakespeare's day, the play has lost favor with many critics since then. As early as the 17th century, in fact, critics were questioning whether Shakespeare even wrote the play. While the issue cannot be completely settled, most critics today agree that Shakespeare at least co-wrote the play.



PLOT SUMMARY

As the play begins, the Roman general Titus Andronicus returns to Rome from a campaign against the Goths, bringing with him several prisoners: Tamora, queen of the Goths, her sons, and Aaron the Moor. Because the emperor of Rome has recently died, there is some dispute over who will be the next emperor. The former emperor's two sons, Saturninus and Bassianus, argue over the throne, while the Roman people support Titus as the next emperor. Titus declines due to his age and, speaking for the people of Rome, proclaims Saturninus as emperor. As revenge for the deaths of many of his children during the war with the Goths, Titus has Tamora's oldest son, Alarbus, executed. As emperor, Saturninus announces that he will take Titus' daughter Lavinia as his wife. Bassianus, though, says that she was betrothed to him. Titus' sons and his brother Marcus side with Bassianus, preventing Saturninus from marrying Lavinia. Titus is angry that his sons are disobeying the emperor, and he kills his son Mutius when he stands in Titus' way. Angry with the Andronicus family, Saturninus takes Tamora as his wife instead of Lavinia. Tamora encourages Saturninus to forgive Titus and his family, but whispers to him that this is only a façade and that she is plotting revenge upon Titus. Titus invites Saturninus and Tamora to join him and his family on a hunt, as a gesture of reconciliation.

Aaron, who is secretly Tamora's lover, encourages Tamora's sons Demetrius and Chiron to rape Lavinia. He and Tamora plot their revenge. During the hunt, Lavinia and Bassianus find Tamora and Aaron and discover that they are lovers. Demetrius and Chiron then kill Bassianus and carry off Lavinia. Aaron forges a letter that makes it look as if Titus' sons Quintus and Martius killed Bassianus and Saturninus believes it. He orders Quintus and Martius to be taken away as prisoners and

executed. Marcus finds Lavinia after she has been raped and has had her hands and tongue cut off by Demetrius and Chiron, but because she can not communicate no one knows who has done this to her.

Titus begs for his sons to be bailed out from jail and asks for them to stand trial for the murder of Bassianus. Aaron tells Titus that the emperor will allow Quintus and Martius to be ransomed if Titus will send one of his own hands. Titus eagerly agrees and cuts off one of his hands. Aaron, however, sends Titus not his sons, but their heads. Marcus then brings Lavinia to Titus, who sees her mutilation and suffering. He is so outraged that he vows revenge and tells his son Lucius to go raise an army of Goths to march on Rome. While Lucius does this, Titus has a meal with Marcus, Young Lucius (Lucius' son), and Lavinia. When Marcus kills a fly, Titus becomes upset. But when Marcus tells him that the fly was black like Aaron, Titus laughs in delight and stabs at the fly repeatedly.

Unable to speak, Lavinia attempts to reveal what has happened to her by pointing to a copy of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In this epic poem, there is the story of Philomela, who was raped and had her tongue cut out by the wicked Tereus. She points to this part of the story, and Titus realizes that she has been raped. He gives her a staff with which she can write in the dirt (guiding it with her mouth) and she writes the names of Demetrius and Chiron. Titus plans revenge on Tamora and her sons.

Meanwhile, Tamora gives birth to Aaron's son, whose dark skin threatens to reveal that Aaron and Tamora are lovers. Aaron arranges for a white baby to take the child's place at court and takes his own child to the Goths, where he will try to have it raised safely.

Titus and his family fire arrows with messages to the gods written on them, as a way of praying to the gods for the return of the personified deity Justice. Some of the arrows land in the royal court. Titus sends a passerby to bear a message from him to Saturninus. Having found some of the arrows from the Andronicus family, Saturninus is upset. He kills the messenger who brings the letter from Titus. Saturninus hears that Lucius is leading an army of Goths and is worried, since the Roman people support Lucius. He sends a message asking for a meeting between Titus, Lucius, and him, and Tamora goes to try to persuade Titus into getting Lucius to stop his attack on Rome.

Aaron is captured by one of Lucius' Goths. Lucius plans to kill Aaron and his child, but spares the child in return for information. Aaron tells him about all that he, Tamora, Demetrius, and Chiron have done. A messenger from Saturninus arrives, telling Lucius of the proposed meeting with Saturninus, and Lucius agrees to the meeting.

Tamora, meanwhile, goes to Titus dressed as the personification of Revenge, along with her sons (dressed as Revenge's followers, Rape and Murder). She thinks that Titus has gone mad and is fooled by her disguise, but Titus actually

recognizes her and her children. She tells Titus to invite Lucius to a feast and says that she will bring Tamora and her sons to Titus for him to exact revenge. Titus agrees, but asks that she leave "Murder" and "Rape" (Demetrius and Chiron) with him. Tamora leaves, and Titus has her sons killed. He gathers their blood and grinds up their bones, using their remains to make pies that he plans to serve to Tamora.

At the feast, Titus serves the pies to Tamora and Saturninus. He reveals that he knows who raped Lavinia, that Tamora is now eating her own sons, and kills Lavinia because she has been dishonored. He then kills Tamora. Saturninus responds by killing Titus, and Lucius avenges his father by killing Saturninus. Marcus and Lucius then speak to the Roman public, telling them about everything that Aaron and Tamora have done and promising that they will repair and restore Rome. Lucius is made emperor, and he orders for Aaron to be killed. Marcus, Lucius, and Young Lucius mourn the deceased Titus and arrange for his proper burial.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Titus Andronicus – The tragic hero of the play, Titus is a Roman general who returns to Rome from war with the Goths at the beginning of the play. Because of his many heroic deeds at war, the Roman people want him to be emperor, but he does not take the throne. He is very loyal to Rome and the emperor Saturninus, even when it means killing his own son, Mutius. He has Tamora's son Alarbus killed as revenge for the deaths of some of his sons in battle, thus beginning the cycle of revenge and violence that dominates the play and leaves nearly all its characters dead.

Marcus Andronicus – Marcus is Titus' brother and a Roman tribune (an elected official). He advises Titus throughout the play and attempts to reason with him as he slides more and more into a vengeful rage. He survives the entirety of the play, assuring the Roman people along with Lucius that they will bring stability back to Rome.

Saturninus – Saturninus is the oldest son of the recently deceased Roman emperor and thus becomes emperor at the beginning of the play. When Titus' sons and Bassianus claim that he cannot marry Lavinia, as he wished, he becomes angry with the Andronicus family and chooses Tamora as his wife instead. He then secretly engages in acts of revenge against Titus, though does not realize that he is being lied to and manipulated by Tamora.

Tamora – Tamora is the queen of the Goths and is brought to Rome as a prisoner by Titus. She begs him not to kill her son Alarbus, but when he does she vows revenge against him. When Saturninus takes her as his wife, she gains the opportunity to plot revenge, and helps Aaron, Demetrius, and

Chiron as they avenge Alarbus through the rape and mutilation of Lavinia, the deaths of Quintus and Martius, and the exile of Lucius.

Aaron the Moor – Aaron is Tamora’s secret lover and fathers a child with her. Of African descent, he takes abuse from both the Andronicus family and from Demetrius and Chiron for his dark skin. While the distinction between barbarous Goths and civilized Romans tends to blur over the course of the play, Aaron is still separated from other characters because of his skin color. Aaron is a cunning villain, behind much of the violence of the play: he arranges for Quintus and Martius to be framed for Saturninus’ murder, and also encourages Demetrius and Chiron to both rape Lavinia. He feels no regret for his deeds when captured by Lucius, and says that he only wishes he could live to commit more crimes.

Lavinia – The daughter of Titus, Lavinia is notably passive in the play. She is given away in marriage, then raped by Demetrius and Chiron. They cut out her tongue and cut off her hands, removing her ability to speak or communicate. For the rest of the play, she is thus a mute example of extreme suffering. As a chaste Roman maiden who is violated and dismembered, she can be seen as somewhat symbolic of a crumbling Rome (the city is traditionally personified as female), violated by the intrusion of barbarians into the royal court and by the perversion of its own virtues. As a virtuous but passive sufferer, Lavinia may be contrasted with the other main female character in the play, Tamora, who is powerful and clever, but wicked and cruel. Lavinia is eventually killed by Titus, because she has lost her honor, emphasizing how much her own father values her only as a symbol of chastity and traditional female virtue.

Lucius – Lucius is one of Titus’ sons and the only one to survive the entirety of the play. After being exiled from Rome, he goes to the Goths and raises an army to challenge Saturninus. He has the popular support of the Roman people and, at the end of the play, promises to return Rome to its former greatness.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Bassianus – Saturninus’ younger brother, Bassianus does not allow Saturninus to marry Lavinia, as she was originally his own betrothed. He is killed by Demetrius and Chiron, but Titus’ sons Quintus and Martius are framed for the murder and executed for it.

Demetrius and Chiron – Demetrius and Chiron are Tamora’s two sons, who carry out Aaron and Tamora’s plans for revenge against Titus. They are presented as heartless and cruel, mocking Lavinia, for example, after raping and disfiguring her.

Quintus and Martius – Titus’ two sons, who are framed for the murder of Bassianus and then executed by Saturninus for the crime. Their death spurs Titus to turn against Saturninus at last.

Young Lucius – Young Lucius is Titus’ grandson and the son of

Lucius. A young boy, he survives the entire tragedy as essentially an innocent bystander and, as someone unsullied by the bloodshed of the play, perhaps offers some hope of a brighter future for Rome.

Publius – Publius is the son of Marcus Andronicus.

Aemilius – Aemilius is a Roman messenger who helps propel the plot along, leading to the banquet with which the play concludes.

Alarbus – Alarbus is Tamora’s oldest son. Titus has him killed in return for the deaths of his own children, thereby setting in motion the revenge-fueled chain of events that makes up the tragic plot of *Titus Andronicus*.

Mutius – One of Titus’ sons, Mutius tries to prevent the marriage of Lavinia and Saturninus. Angry at this betrayal of the emperor, Titus kills him.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



REVENGE

Titus Andronicus is an example of the genre of drama called revenge tragedy (another, very different, example is Shakespeare’s [Hamlet](#)), so it is no surprise that revenge is central to the play. The play unfolds as a series of acts of revenge that plunge the characters into a spiral of eye-for-eye and tooth-for-tooth violence, summed up well by Lucius: “There’s meed for meed, death for a deadly deed.” But, as the play demonstrates, revenge does not annul or cancel out a crime or violent act. Rather, it only continues a cycle of violence. Titus kills Tamora’s oldest son as revenge for the loss of some of his own children, but this only causes her to seek revenge on him. But neither does her revenge solve the matter; it only prompts Titus to seek further vengeance on her. The tragedy concludes not because revenge finally settles any disputes, but because by the end of the play no one is left alive to seek further vengeance. Shakespeare thus takes a common convention of tragic plots—revenge—and explores it to its fullest extent throughout the play, even having Tamora appear disguised as the very personification of Revenge in Act 5. Ultimately, Shakespeare reveals revenge as an alluring and tempting, but ultimately ineffective and harmful, response to personal injury and loss.



VIOLENCE AND JUSTICE

In addition to revenge, Shakespeare pushes another common aspect of tragic drama to its limits: violence. Not only do characters die in *Titus Andronicus*, but children are murdered in front of their parents (Tamora's oldest son), Lavinia is raped and disfigured horribly, Titus has his hand cut off, and—in the final act of the play—Titus feeds Tamora's own children to her. In the play, Shakespeare stretches the boundaries of what can be represented on stage and what audiences (and readers) are willing to endure.

The proliferation of violence in the play also prompts us to ask whether *any* act of violence can be just, as characters carry out their acts of horrid violence in the name of justice. Titus and his sons explicitly pray for the personified goddess of justice to come help them in Act 4, and they see their subsequent actions as bringing such justice about. Titus and Tamora believe in the justice of revenge, but as the play devolves into an endless cycle of bloodshed, this seems like anything but justice. Titus' sons Martius and Quintus are put on trial, but the trial certainly does not arrive at a just conclusion. And Saturninus believes that he is carrying out justice in opposing Lucius and his army of Goths. Titus even maintains, in the final scene of the play, that killing his own daughter Lavinia, after she has been raped and mutilated, is justified because it returns her honor to her. *Titus Andronicus* thus asks us to consider whether justice can be attained through violence and whether justice is ever really served in the play.

As the play concludes, Marcus asks the Roman people, "Have we done aught amiss?" but he might as well be asking the audience. While it seems clear that justice has not been served in the tragedy, Shakespeare also asks us to confront our own ideas of justice. If all the characters in the play act in accordance with their own ideas of justice, how can we be confident that *our* ideas of justice are not also mistaken or merely specific to our own understanding of the world?



CHILDREN

Children and lineage (the importance of, on the one hand, begetting children to be heirs and, on the other hand, being able to trace one's descent from a family line), especially sons and male lineage, are extremely important in the cultural world of ancient Rome that Shakespeare constructs in *Titus Andronicus*. In the first scene of the play, lineage determines who will be the next emperor of Rome (Saturninus). By contrast, Aaron's child by Tamora does not have a suitable lineage (with its Moorish heritage made plain by its dark skin) for the Roman throne and threatens to expose Aaron as Tamora's lover. The special importance of one's children is why Titus is so greatly upset by the deaths of his sons in war and is why he decides to inflict the same pain on Tamora, by killing her oldest son.

But if children are extremely precious and valuable in the world of *Titus Andronicus*, they are also oddly disposable. Titus is quick to kill his own son Mutius when he tries to prevent Saturninus from marrying Lavinia (whom Titus is also quick to give away in marriage), and Titus also kills Lavinia in the final scene of the play as a way to protect the Andronicus family's honor. At times, Titus appears to value his children more as reflections of his own virtue and honor than as persons in their own right. And while Titus and Tamora value their relationships with their own children, each is unable to respect the other's attachment to his or her children, as they mercilessly kill each other's sons. In the balancing act of revenge, children are used like bartering chips to settle disputes between rivals. Thus, despite how much characters like Titus and Tamora appear to value their children, they may also be doomed by how little they value them.



ROME, ROMANS, AND BARBARIANS

The dissolution of the Andronicus family and the dismemberment of various bodies (Lavinia's, Titus', Demetrius', and Chiron's) takes place against the background of a Rome that is itself falling apart. When encouraging Titus to become emperor, Marcus tells him to "set a head on headless Rome" and, near the end of the play, compares Rome to "broken limbs" that must be reformed "into one body." The disfigurement of individual bodies and the strife between the individual characters of the play can thus be seen as mirroring, and even standing in for, the more general turmoil of a crumbling Rome. Once the great capital of an enormous empire, Rome is in a precarious position in *Titus Andronicus*. After the death of the emperor that directly precedes the play, it is unclear who should take the throne. Titus allows Saturninus to become emperor, but in Act 4 Saturninus admits that "the citizens favor Lucius" as a leader. Rome is at war with the Goths, but Saturninus takes Tamora as his wife instead of the virtuous Roman maiden Lavinia. At the end of the play, Rome seems to return to stability, as Marcus and Lucius address the Roman public itself and assure them that the horrible deeds of Saturninus and Tamora are behind them. However, it is unclear whether Rome can emerge unscathed from all its recent bloodshed (and if Lucius' ordered execution of Aaron at the end of the play is any indication, more bloodshed is in its future).

Not only is the city of Rome important in the play, but also a more general sense of Roman identity. Ancient Romans defined themselves as civilized in contrast to the savage barbarians against whom they waged wars. But, over the course of Shakespeare's play, this distinction between Roman and barbarian blurs. Marcus denounces Tamora and her children as "barbarous Goths" in the first scene of the play, but as Romans alike begin to act cruelly, the Romans seem just as barbarous as the barbarians. Furthermore, Lucius himself ends up leading an army of Goths to march against the Roman emperor. (As

another complication, the Englishmen acting in Shakespeare's play would have been seen as barbarians by the ancient Romans they were portraying.) The play thus calls into question a simple distinction between cruel, savage barbarians and civilized, honorable Romans. However, as this distinction between Romans and Goths blurs, one character is even further singled out as fundamentally different because of his ethnic identity: Aaron. As a Moor (someone of African descent), he is insulted by numerous characters and is barred from joining Roman society as easily as Tamora does.



GRIEF AND MOURNING

If one consequence of the numerous deaths and violent acts of the play is revenge, the other is mourning. As characters experience ever-increasing pains over the course of the play, they are plunged deeper and deeper into grief—especially Titus. The repeated scenes of grieving beg the question of whether such lamentation is actually worth anything or is simply useless. In Act 3, Scene 1, Lucius tells Titus that he “lament[s] in vain,” but Titus says that he “tell[s] [his] sorrows to the stones” and that there is some consolation in this. Marcus advises Titus to “let reason govern thy lament,” but Titus insists on an outpouring of grief. Later in the same scene, though, Titus begins to laugh, saying “I have not another tear to shed.” He is, in a sense, pushed beyond the limits of grief and can then only turn to cold-hearted revenge.

The play also brings up the question of how much grief is fitting or appropriate for someone to display. Titus is plunged into extreme outbursts of grief, whereas Marcus and Young Lucius (Lucius' son) practice restrained mourning for the death of Titus and pay their respects to the dead within reason, taking care to have Lavinia and Titus buried in the Andronicus family tomb. As a way of responding to suffering, mourning may not change anything, but, within reasonable limits, it may help people cope and move on, as Marcus, Lucius, and Young Lucius hope to do at the play's close. And as a response to tragedy, it at least seems preferable to revenge.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



THE WHITE ROBE

In Act One, Scene One, Marcus presents Titus with a white robe and asks him to don it as emperor. In ancient Rome, it was the custom for those seeking political office to wear a white garment, signifying moral purity. (As “candidatus” means white in Latin, this practice gives us the English word “candidate”.) While the robe does not appear

elsewhere in the play, it is worth thinking about this ideal connection between moral uprightness and political power. Over the course of the play, power seems much more connected with ruthless bloodshed. One may wonder if, at the end of the play, *any* character's virtue is so unstained that he can be a valid “candidate” to lead Rome. The unstained, white robe may also be seen as symbolizing more generally the relative innocence of the characters at the beginning of the play (especially the chaste Lavinia), which will gradually become more and more sullied by the bloody acts of revenge that fill the tragedy.



THE HUNT

The Andronicus family goes hunting with Bassianus, Saturninus, and Lavinia in Act 2, Scene 3. However, it is Bassianus, Lavinia, and the rest of the Andronicus family that end up being preyed upon by Demetrius, Chiron, Aaron, and Tamora. This reversal—where hunter becomes the hunted—encapsulates the process of revenge. One character may begin as the avenger, but he or she soon becomes the object of someone else's act of revenge. Violence and revenge are inherently unstable in the play: perpetrators of violence are likely to find their acts backfiring on them and leading to their own suffering, just like a hunter who suddenly finds himself being hunted.



THE BODY

Titus Andronicus is filled with tortured, dismembered, disfigured, and hurt bodies. In addition to Lavinia, who is raped and has her tongue and hands cut off, Titus loses one of his hands, and the body parts of Demetrius and Chiron are cut up and made into the food that Titus serves Tamora. All this bodily disfigurement can be related to a common metaphor that personifies the empire of Rome as a body. For example, when Marcus wants Titus to become emperor of Rome, he tells him to “set a head on headless Rome.” Similarly, at the end of the play, Marcus promises to restore Rome, saying that he will “knit...these broken limbs again into one body.” Thus, all of the dismembered bodies throughout the play can be seen as standing in for the larger dissolution of Rome.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Simon & Schuster edition of *Titus Andronicus* (Folger Shakespeare Library) published in 2005.

Act 1, Scene 1 Quotes

Victorious Titus, rue the tears I shed,
A mother's tears in passion for her son.
And if thy sons were ever dear to thee,
O think my son to be as dear to me.

Related Characters: Tamora (speaker), Titus Andronicus

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 1.1.105-108

Explanation and Analysis

While Saturninus and Bassianus's argue over who should be the next emperor of Rome, Marcus Andronicus says that the people have chosen his cousin, Titus, for the heroic deeds Titus has done as a general. Marcus announces that Titus and his train are approaching, and that Titus has lost 21 out of 25 of his sons in the recent battle against the Gauls. Titus then enters with the bodies of his deceased sons and with five living "barbarian" prisoners: Tamora, her three children, and Aaron the Moor. After Titus buries his dead sons in the family tomb, his living son Lucius requests that one of Tamora's sons be killed for sacrifice retribution; Titus consents to the killing, offering up Tamora's eldest son, Alarbus.


Here, Tamora pleads with "Victorious Titus" for the life of her son. Note that in his first line of the play, Titus called Rome "victorious." Tamora is appealing to Titus's sense of pride and victory, and she is immediately adopting Roman rhetoric and speech patterns. She proceeds to appeal to Titus's fatherhood and sense of empathy, crying "tears in passion for her son." She tries to use Titus's own sons to be persuasive, saying that if his sons are dear to him, he'll understand exactly how dear her own sons are. We can also note the added rhyme of *thee* and *me* for emphasis. But this line of reasoning is futile; though Titus has lost 21 of his children in the war, he will kill another one in anger within this very scene.



Alarbus is still sacrificed, despite Tamora's pleas. This revenge slaying begins a cycle of vengeance that will continue throughout the play, each family attempting to get revenge for the latest death.

Be *candidatus*, then, and put [the white robe] on /
And help to set a head on headless Rome.

Related Characters: Marcus Andronicus (speaker), Titus

Andronicus

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 1.1.185-186

Explanation and Analysis

Alarbus has been sacrificed, and Tamora and Chiron (one of her sons) have cried out that the Romans are barbarous (note that the play will continue to ask the question of who is civilized and who is barbaric). But Demetrius, Tamora's other son, quietly tells his mother and brother to calm down and seek revenge on the Andronicus family. Titus then speaks for his dead sons and reunites with his daughter Lavinia, before Marcus enters with the White Robe, which symbolizes the citizens' choice to make Titus emperor.

This robe also symbolizes purity, morality, and political power. The whiteness of the robe contrasts with the blood that has been and will continue to be spilled during the course of the play. The choice to kill Alarbus might be framed as just by association with the White Robe, but ultimately Titus refuses the robe and the power that it carries. However, he still must select the next emperor of Rome, which is currently "headless." This characterization of Rome relates to the body politic, in which the state is analogous with the body of its ruler. Without a leader, the body is literally headless. Such a gruesome image also foreshadows the countless cases of dismemberment that occur during the play.

Titus chooses Saturninus for emperor, since he is older than his brother Bassianus, but this choice and the drama over whom Lavinia will marry set in motion the eventual crowning of Tamora as empress of Rome and much of the chaos that will (literally) tear the Andronicus family apart.

Suffer thy brother Marcus to inter
His noble nephew here in virtue's nest,
That died in honor and Lavinia's cause.
Thou art a Roman; be not barbarous.

Related Characters: Lucius (speaker), Marcus Andronicus, Lavinia

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 1.1.382-385



Explanation and Analysis

Grateful to have been appointed emperor, Saturninus offers to marry Lavinia and make her empress. Titus, who has chosen Saturninus, is pleased and accepts the offer, creating a problem since Bassianus and Lavinia are already betrothed. Marcus and Lucius support Bassianus's claim to Lavinia, but Titus becomes enraged and calls them traitors. Lucius and Marcus and some more of Titus's children help Lavinia to escape with Bassianus, and when Titus tries to follow, Mutius (another son) will not let his father pass. Furious, Titus kills Mutius. He values his children's lives, but not as much as he values Rome and his duty as a Roman.

In these lines, Lucius and Marcus have returned and seek to bury Mutius in the family tomb. Titus refuses at first, saying that Mutius was no son of his. Here Lucius appeals to Titus's sense of honor and civility. Lucius pleads with his father to allow Marcus to bury Mutius with the family in "virtue's nest," since Mutius "died in honor" trying to protect his sister. The final line in the quote is particularly convincing and powerful: he reminds his father, you are a Roman, don't be a barbarian. Even though he has just murdered his son, Titus values his Roman-ness above all else, and, like everyone in the play, he seeks to believe that he is civilized and that everyone else is the barbarian. Ultimately, he concedes and allows Mutius his place in the family tomb.

☛☛ Traitor, if Rome have law or we have power,
Thou and thy faction shall repent this rape.

Related Characters: Saturninus (speaker), Saturninus

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 1.1.411-412

Explanation and Analysis

After witnessing much of the family debacle described above, Saturninus decides he does not trust the Andronicus family. He decides not to marry Lavinia (who has escaped with Bassianus anyway) and instead elects to wed Tamora, making the "barbarian" prisoner instantly empress of Rome. Tamora immediately accepts, and embraces her incorporation into Rome, demonstrating an easy transition into Roman speech and her newfound power.

Here Saturninus is furious with his brother and with Titus for what he sees as their "treason." He accuses them of "rape," by which he means they have forcefully taken Lavinia from him. This language foreshadows Lavinia's literal rape at

the hands of Chiron and Demetrius. Saturninus seeks justice for the slights he perceives as having been perpetrated against him, and suggests he might pursue his vengeance through a legal medium, using the power he has been granted as emperor of Rome. But his new bride is quickly (and slyly) able to convince him otherwise, and he publicly forgives Titus and Bassianus in order to seek private, personal revenge against them through activities that are outside the law.

☛☛ I'll find a day to massacre them all
And raze their faction and their family,
The cruel father and his traitorous sons.

Related Characters: Tamora (speaker), Titus Andronicus, Lavinia, Lucius, Quintus and Martius

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 1.1.458-461

Explanation and Analysis


After Saturninus's claim of "rape" earlier, Titus and Bassianus make their cases. Tamora outwardly encourages Saturninus to forgive them, saying that Titus is only acting out because of his grief. These lines come as an aside spoken only to Saturninus during Tamora's speech. She tells him to be patient and appear forgiving, since he is so newly in power; Tamora doesn't want the people to dethrone him in the event that they pity Titus. Instead, she says: leave it to me to get revenge. She claims she'll "find a day to massacre them all / And raze their faction and their family." The seeds of revenge are planted. Already Tamora is planning to eliminate Titus and his entire family as revenge for his murder of her son.

Note also that *raze* is a loose pun on *race*, which will come into play when Aaron's character develops. Aaron, a Moor and a driving factor behind much of Tamora's revenge, does not speak during the first act, but is given the second most lines in the play.

☛☛ Titus, I am incorporate in Rome,
A Roman now adopted happily.

Related Characters: Tamora (speaker), Titus Andronicus

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 1.1.472-473

Explanation and Analysis

Tamora successfully convinces Saturninus to make a show of forgiveness while inwardly pursuing revenge. Publicly forgiven, Titus thanks the emperor and the empress. This quote is the beginning of Tamora's response to Titus. She says that she is "incorporate in Rome," meaning that she has been immediately adopted into the physical body of Rome (and suggests that her own goals now align with Rome's goals). Note that as empress, Tamora, too, can evoke the body politic, evidenced by the presence of 'corporeal' (meaning of the body) in the word *incorporate*. She is careful to repeat that she is "A Roman," continuing to assert her status with perfect Roman speech.


Note also that Titus has lost his moral high ground over Tamora. His rationale for murdering Alarbus was rooted in his Roman honor, which because it was used as a basis for murder established devotedness to Rome as a questionable moral standpoint. But now Tamora herself is part of Rome, and so the purity of Titus's moral stand point has been diluted. At the same time, as the audience, we know that Tamora even as she has been made Empress of Rome, and says that she is a happy Roman, is plotting vengeance on Titus – and so the very idea of Rome as being noble and honorably has been made murky by Titus's own actions, and now by Tamora's.

Act 2, Scene 1 Quotes

☞ There serve your lust, shadowed from heaven's eye,
And revel in Lavinia's treasury.

Related Characters: Aaron the Moor (speaker), Demetrius and Chiron, Lavinia

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 2.1.138-139

Explanation and Analysis

Aaron begins this scene with a soliloquy in which he reveals that Tamora and he are lovers, and that the pair is plotting the downfall of Saturninus and of Rome. He relishes in his villainy. As he is soliloquizing, Chiron and Demetrius enter arguing over their desire for Lavinia. They draw their



swords, preparing to duel for her, but Aaron intervenes and instigates one of the worst crimes in the play.


In the quote, he suggest that rather than fight over Lavinia, who is already engaged, they should together "serve their lust" in secret, and "revel in Lavinia's treasury." In other words, he encourages them to rape her. The violent rape which they soon commit is the source of a tremendous amount of grief, mourning, and tears, and it instigates further retribution by the Andronicus family.

Act 2, Scene 3 Quotes

☞ Vengeance is in my heart, death in my hand,
Blood and revenge are hammering in my head.

Related Characters: Aaron the Moor (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 2.38-39



Explanation and Analysis



This scene takes place during The Hunt, in which the Andronicus family goes hunting with Bassianus and Saturninus. But here, the hunters become the hunted, and are preyed on by Tamora, Aaron, and Chiron and Demetrius. Aaron begins the scene by entering alone and burying a bag of gold that will be used as a prop in his plan. Soon Tamora arrives and asks why Aaron looks so sad, making a sexual advance.

But Aaron denies Tamora, saying that his melancholy does not symbolize sexual desire. Instead, he delivers the quote shown here, saying that he is overtaken by a desire for revenge. He is captivated by his plot for revenge, and his usual desires are replaced by bloodthirst. His reference to his "hand" and "head" subtly foreshadow the eventual dismemberment and discombobulation that will plague the Andronicus family. His language here illustrates how obsessed he has become by revenge, and his refusal of Tamora shows Aaron as the central villain, conceiving of and driving the violent plans.

☞ Revenge it as you love your mother's life,
Or be you not henceforth called my children.

Related Characters: Tamora (speaker), Demetrius and Chiron, Bassianus

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 2.3.114-115

Explanation and Analysis

Aaron has left Tamora alone, but not before the pair has been spotted by Bassianus and Lavinia. Bassianus and Lavinia each make fun of Tamora for cuckolding Saturninus and for sleeping with a Moor (revealing their own racist views of darker-skinned people). When Chiron and Demetrius enter, Tamora delivers a long speech in which she accuses Bassianus and Lavinia of tricking her and threatening to kill her. Tamora tells her sons to avenge her, inciting them to murder Bassianus, throw him in the pit, and commit the rape that Aaron planned.

These lines are particularly violent and twisted: Tamora asks her children to transmute love for their mother into violent revenge, and threatens to disown her if they don't. Love and violence are intermingled, and the acts of murder and rape are framed as familial love. The speech is also interesting as a counterpoint to Titus's fury earlier when he disowns Mutius for stopping him from forcing Lavinia to marry Saturninus. In each case a parent's love is predicated on their children's obedience. At the same time, the cycle (like all cycles of violence) keeps amping up to higher levels, and Titus's desire to make his daughter marry the Emperor is not at the same level as Tamora's demand that they murder Bassianus and rape Lavinia.

☛ Ay, come, Semiramis, nay, barbarous Tamora,
For no name fits thy nature but thy own.

Related Characters: Lavinia (speaker), Tamora

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 2.3.119-119



Explanation and Analysis


These lines are spoken immediately following Bassianus's death. Lavinia first calls Tamora "Semiramis," the name of an Assyrian queen, but Lavinia corrects herself, saying that she instead must use "barbarous Tamora," since "no name fits thy nature but thy own." The claim is essentially that Tamora

is an evil so great that only her own name can be used to describe her. Lavinia also emphasizes Tamora's status as outsider and barbarian; despite Tamora's claim to be incorporate in Rome and her perfect Roman speech, she is still characterized as barbaric because of her violent, hateful deeds. Lavinia's line also speaks to the source of Tamora's evil: it is in her nature as a Goth.

☛ Remember, boys, I poured forth tears in vain
To save your brother from the sacrifice,
but fierce Andronicus would not relent.
Therefore away with her, and use her as you will;
The worse to her, the better loved of me.

Related Characters: Tamora (speaker), Demetrius and Chiron, Titus Andronicus, Lavinia

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 2.3.163-157

Explanation and Analysis

Enraged, Tamora initially wants to kill Lavinia, but Chiron and Demetrius stop their mother so that they can rape Lavinia first. Hearing this exchange, Lavinia begs for mercy, but Tamora is merciless. In the quote, she tells her sons to remember that she "poured forth tears" to save Alarbus from sacrifice, "but fierce Andronicus would not relent." Bent on revenge, she determines that Chiron and Demetrius can do whatever they want with Lavinia.

Again, Tamora makes the sickening conversion of motherly love into violence. She says that the worse Chiron and Demetrius treat Lavinia, the better they love their mother. Thus the rape is explicitly configured as an incestuous gesture of filial obligation; Chiron and Demetrius show love to their mother through sexual violence.

Act 3, Scene 1 Quotes

☛ O noble father, you lament in vain.
The Tribunes hear you not; no man is by,
And you recount your sorrows to a stone.

Related Characters: Lucius (speaker), Titus Andronicus

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 3.1.27-29


Explanation and Analysis

According to Aaron's plan, Quintus and Martius have fallen into a pit and been framed for the murder of Bassianus. (Aaron forged a letter and planted gold to make it look like they paid for the murder.) As a group of judges and tribunes passes with the imprisoned Quintus and Martius in tow, Titus begs for mercy for his sons and falls to the ground in anguish. With his head down, he continues lamenting and begging for mercy, even as the judges walk off stage.

Here Lucius informs his father that he is lamenting "in vain" since the Tribunes cannot hear him; everyone else has left the stage. In a stunning image, Lucius says that Titus recounts his "sorrows to a stone." These lines convey a sense of futility: Quintus and Martius will be executed no matter what Titus says or does; unbeknownst to Titus and Lucius, Marcus will also soon enter to inform them that Lavinia has been mutilated; the cycle of revenge has enough momentum that it cannot be stopped until everyone of significance is dead. Titus himself is aware of this inevitability, and he continues lamenting and begging to the very stones on the ground, which he claims are more sympathetic than the Tribunes who will soon execute his sons.

☞ Why, foolish Lucius, dost thou not perceive
That Rome is but a wilderness of tigers?

Related Characters: Titus Andronicus (speaker), Lucius

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 3.1.54-55

Explanation and Analysis

Lamenting the impending deaths of Martius and Quintus and frustrated by his powerlessness in the face of inevitability, Titus claims that his sons are better off dead, since "Rome is but a wilderness of tigers." Titus is disillusioned about the Rome he idealized and placed at the center of his moral compass.

In the very first scene, he murdered a son whom he considered a traitor. Now, Rome itself has become barbaric. The incorporation of Tamora into the body of Rome has rendered the city a chaotic wilderness, the antithesis of civilization (though one might argue that Titus's own killing of Alarbus suggested that Rome had no more than a veneer

of civilization to begin with). His grief at this moment is already extreme, but moments later it will border on absurdity when Marcus introduces the mutilated Lavinia.

☞ My grief was at the height before thou cam'st,
And now like nilus it disdaineth bounds.

Related Characters: Titus Andronicus (speaker), Lavinia

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 3.1.72-73

Explanation and Analysis

Marcus dramatically enters with "Titus, prepare thy aged eyes to weep," presenting Lavinia, whose tongue and hands have been removed. As he comes to understand the extent of her dismemberment (though yet ignorant of her rape), Titus speaks this quote, saying that his grief was at its highest point before he saw Lavinia. Now, he compares it to the flooding Nile river, overflowing and in excess.

Titus's response, though, is not quite as excessive as Marcus. When Marcus discovers the bloodied Lavinia, he offers a painfully long speech in which he professes grief. The scene is made all the more painful by the fact that while Marcus speaks and speaks, Lavinia can say nothing.

Note also that Marcus introduces Lavinia here with "This was thy daughter," suggesting that her maiming, and the destruction of her beauty, has made her something other than what she was, has made her not his daughter any longer, or, even, that in a way she is already dead.

☞ Sweet father, cease your tears, for at your grief
See how my wretched sister sobs and weeps.

Related Characters: Lucius (speaker), Titus Andronicus, Lavinia

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 3.1.138-139

Explanation and Analysis


Titus has continued to grieve, saying that the violence done to Lavinia is more painful than his own death. Here he seems to value his children above all else, contrasting the image we see when he murders Mutius in the first scene.


Titus's grief appears endless, but Lucius here calms him down, telling him to stop crying, since his surplus of grief is upsetting Lavinia.

This scene is filled with tears. At this point in the play, almost all that Lavinia can do is cry, since she has been so tortured and mutilated that she cannot otherwise communicate. Titus, Marcus, and Lucius also flood the stage with tears, to the point where Marcus' handkerchief is drowned in water. The mourning will continue when Aaron tricks Titus into cutting of his own hand in another futile attempt to save the lives of Martius and Quintus. By the end of the scene, Titus only laughs, since he has no more tears to weep.

☝ Is not my sorrow deep, having no bottom?
Then be my passions bottomless with them.

Related Characters: Titus Andronicus (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 3.1.221-222

Explanation and Analysis

Titus has just cut off his own hand, as Aaron has told him that if he does so his sons Martius and Quintus will be spared. But Aaron quickly informs Titus that he has fallen for a trick: the heads of Martius and Quintus will soon be delivered. Titus experiences intense anguish, and cries out that his sorrow and passions are bottomless and unending. Marcus tries to calm Titus down and moderate his weeping with "let reason govern thy lament," but Titus will not be calmed, and when the heads of Martius and Quintus are brought on stage, even Marcus gives in to more excessive grief and stops trying to restrain Titus's sorrow. It is at this point that the maddened, dismembered Titus begins to laugh. He has wept himself dry, and will now pursue revenge instead of grief.

Act 3, Scene 2 Quotes

☝ "But"? How if that fly had a father and mother?
How would he hang his slender gilded wings
And buzz lamenting doings in the air!
Poor harmless fly,
That, with his pretty buzzing melody,
Came here to make us merry! And thou hast killed him.

Related Characters: Titus Andronicus (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 3.2.60-66

Explanation and Analysis

Despite his claim to have wept all of his tears, Titus begins this scene by lamenting that he and Lavinia have lost their hands. Titus says he will learn to interpret her sign language, at once pitying her and objectifying her, since she is voiceless and he must speak for her. In a sense, Lavinia is just an object for Titus's own grief.

After Marcus kills a fly, Titus offers the lines in the quote, which demonstrate some of the empathy and logic that could have prevented much of the revenge and violence of the play. Titus wonders if the fly had parents, imagining their grief at the death of their son. This type of thinking might have prevented him from killing Alarbus at the start of the play.

But Marcus points out that the fly was black, like Aaron, and Titus quickly turns his thoughts back to his revenge. The fly and Aaron are identified as barbaric outsiders, ceasing Titus's empathy and making way for more violence.

Act 4, Scene 1 Quotes

☝ And swear with me—as, with the woeful fere
And father of that chaste dishonored dame,
Lord Junius Brutus swore for Lucrece' rape—
That we will prosecute by good advice
Mortal revenge upon these traitorous Goths,
And see their blood or die with this reproach.

Related Characters: Marcus Andronicus (speaker), Lavinia, Titus Andronicus, Demetrius and Chiron, Tamora

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 4.1.90-95

Explanation and Analysis

In this scene, Lavinia is brilliantly able to communicate the extent of her attack and the names of her attackers. She points to a book, in particular Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, a huge source text for Shakespeare. In the book, she points to the story of Philomela, who was raped in the woods. Philomela's attacker cut out her tongue, but did not take Chiron and Demetrius's extra step of cutting off the victims hands.

Upon learning this information, Titus takes a staff and, with

his mouth, uses it to write in the dirt. He instructs Lavinia to do the same, allowing her to indicate that Chiron and Demetrius are the rapists. At this revelation the Andronicus family is furious. In the quote, they all swear to pursue "Mortal revenge upon these traitorous Goths." They will spill the blood of Tamora, Aaron, Chiron, and Demetrius, or die trying. Before they spoke of revenge, but now that they know the true extent of the crimes of the Goths, the Andronicus family swears to seek the revenge that they will soon achieve. Note that by this point the family does not even consider a legal, judicial means of getting "justice." Their revenge must be taken outside of the laws of Rome, which has been characterized as wild, lawless, and barbarous.

Act 4, Scene 3 Quotes

☝☝ Kinsmen, his sorrows are past remedy.
Join with the Goths, and with revengeful war
Take wreak on Rome for this ingratitude,
And vengeance on the traitor Saturnine.

Related Characters: Marcus Andronicus (speaker), Titus Andronicus, Saturninus, Tamora, Demetrius and Chiron

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 4.3.31-35

Explanation and Analysis

Titus, Marcus, Young Lucius, and Marcus's son Publius are gathered. They have all prepared arrows with inscriptions on them, which they will shoot into the sky in pleas for divine justice. This practice reveals that they believe their plight for justice and revenge to be entirely (and divinely) justified. When Publius suggests that they try to calm down and find some "careful remedy" to the situation, Marcus responds that Titus's "sorrows are past remedy." There is no hope for solace or a peaceful solution; they only seek revenge.



In the following lines, Marcus shows how far the drive for revenge has taken him and his complete disillusionment with Rome. He cries out that his kinsmen should "Join with the Goths," hoping that they can then wage "revengeful war" against all of Rome. Violence has caused an inversion of what is Roman, what is Gothic, and what is just. The drive for revenge is so great that the Andronicus family, quintessentially Roman at the start of the play, now hopes for revenge and war on Rome itself in order to gain the "justice," or revenge, that they themselves set in motion by killing Alarbus according to the Roman way at the beginning

of the play.

Act 5, Scene 1 Quotes

☝☝ But I have done a thousand dreadful things
As willingly as one would kill a fly,
And nothing grieves me heartily indeed
But that I cannot do ten thousand more.

Related Characters: Aaron the Moor (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 5.1.143-146

Explanation and Analysis

This scene begins with Lucius preparing an army of Goths to attack Rome, following through on Marcus's cry to "join with the Goths" above. Meanwhile, Lucius has captured Aaron as well as Aaron and Tamora's child; Lucius wants to kill the child and then Aaron, but Aaron asks Lucius to spare the baby in exchange for information. Aaron then explains that the baby is Tamora's, that Chiron and Demetrius killed Bassianus and raped Lavinia, and that he, Aaron, was responsible for all of the murders and the revenge plot.



Aaron speaks the lines in this quote when Lucius asks if he feels regret for all of the horrible things he has just outlined. Aaron's response is that he has "done a thousand dreadful things" as easily as if he was killing a fly. His only regret is that he cannot do "ten thousand more" evil deeds. Thus we see how purely evil Aaron's character is. He is motiveless, and relishes in his evil; it is pure delight rather than personal interest that propels his villainy.


(It is worth thinking about the fact that Aaron is the only Moorish, or black, character in the play, and that he is also the only character who performs evil for evil's sake. While the play never clearly makes this connection, some critics argue that Aaron is in fact not without motive at all, and that he acts out of a desire to destroy all of the Romans and Goths as a reaction to societal racism; other critics argue that the play itself is racist because it makes a black man purely evil in a way none of the other characters are.)

Act 5, Scene 3 Quotes

☝☝ My lord the Emperor, resolve me this:
Was it well done of rash Virginius
To slay his daughter with his own right hand
Because she was enforced, stained, and deflowered?

Related Characters: Titus Andronicus (speaker), Saturninus

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 5.3.35-38

Explanation and Analysis



The Andronicus revenge plot is underway. Titus has tricked Tamora into leaving Chiron and Demetrius behind, and he has killed them and baked them into pies he is now serving to Saturninus and Tamora (who are visiting in hopes of dissuading Lucius and his Goths from attacking Rome).


As Tamora and Saturninus unknowingly begin to eat the pies, Titus asks Saturninus for his opinion as emperor. Titus asks about a Roman legend concerning Virginius, who killed his daughter after she had been raped to preserve his family's honor. Titus uses this line of questioning to introduce to Saturninus the fact that Lavinia was raped, but the result is a shocking one.

There is a darkly humorous cast to this scene, as Titus asks Saturninus about the proper way to respond to familial "stains" even as he "stains" his guests by having them eat Tamora's children. The story further establishes the strange values of Rome, in which honor was placed above the lives of children, in which being a citizen of Roman civilization required the killing of one's daughter who was innocent of any crime other than being raped. The story also helps place Titus Andronicus into the tradition of bloodthirsty Senecan revenge tragedies (a genre named after a Roman writer named Seneca, and which was still popular among authors of Shakespeare's time). There is, further, a sense that, even as Shakespeare fits his own story into this tradition, he is gleefully showing other playwrights who's the boss through the incredible bloodthirsty madness of his plot.

☞ Die, die, Lavinia, and thy shame with thee,
And with thy shame thy father's sorrow die.

Related Characters: Titus Andronicus (speaker), Lavinia

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 5.3.46-47

Explanation and Analysis

When Saturninus tells Titus that "the girl should not survive her shame / And by her presence still renew his sorrows" in reference to the legend of Virginius, Titus immediately accepts this line of reasoning as precedent and kills Lavinia. The quote here are his final lines before he strikes her down.


He says that her shame will die with her, and with that shame, his own sorrow will die. This shocking murder is the means by which Titus reveals to Saturninus that Chiron and Demetrius raped Lavinia. Her death might briefly rid Titus of shame, but he does not live long enough to exhibit any relief from sorrow; Lavinia's death pushes the revenge plot to its climax and is followed by the deaths of Tamora, Titus, and Saturninus in quick-fire succession.

Note that when Saturninus asks for the rapists to be brought before him, Titus reveals that they are baked into the pies, resulting in possibly the most twisted, gruesome revenge of the play. After all of Tamora's strange inversions and perversions of filial love into rape and violence, the play ends with the mother ingesting (we can read un-birthing) her sons in another cruel reversal.

☞ There's meed for meed, death for a deadly deed.

Related Characters: Lucius (speaker), Saturninus, Titus Andronicus

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 5.3.67

Explanation and Analysis

Titus reveals that Tamora "hath fed / Eating the flesh that she herself hath bred," and he stabs Tamora before she can respond to the fact that she ate the flesh of her own children, which comprises her dying thought. Part of Titus's revenge is this silencing; he didn't seek a reaction, but rather justice. Witnessing Titus slay Tamora, Saturninus curses and kills Titus. At the death of his father, Lucius says, "Can the son's eye behold his father bleed?" and kills Saturninus.


After killing Saturninus, Lucius completes his rhyming couplet (interrupted by a death) with the line of the quote, which speaks to the cyclical patterns of revenge and

violence in the play. Murder and vengeance beget more revenge; opposing families take revenge for revenge killings over and over again, without end, until one family is completely erased. The excess of blood and revenge in the play can be seen as caricatures, ridiculing the popular revenge tragedies of Shakespeare's contemporaries.

●● O, let me teach you how to knit again
This scattered corn into one mutual sheaf,
These broken limbs again into one body.

Related Characters: Marcus Andronicus (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 5.3.71-73



Explanation and Analysis

Marcus speaks this line to the Roman public in the aftermath of the play's climax. After the conclusion of the family conflict, Marcus addresses the conflict in Rome itself, as all three of the men considered for the position of emperor at the start of the play are now dead.

Beginning with an analogy about knitting "scattered corn into one mutual sheaf," Marcus speaks of healing Rome and restoring it to his former glory. He then refers back to the body politic, hoping to heal "these broken limbs again into one body." This language shows how the dismemberment and bodily violence done on Titus and the leaders of Rome is reflected in the state itself. Headless, handless, torn limb from limb, Rome must be pieced together by the remaining members of the Andronicus family.

●● Now judge what cause had Titus to revenge
These wrongs unspeakable, past patience,
Or more than any living man could bear.
Now have you heard the truth. What say you, Romans?
Have we done aught amiss?

Related Characters: Marcus Andronicus (speaker), Titus Andronicus

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 5.3.126-131

Explanation and Analysis

Addressing the public, Marcus has revealed the extent of Tamora's family's crimes, as well as the nature of her relationship with Aaron. Marcus then asks the public to judge for themselves the causes that Titus had to seek revenge, saying that he dealt with "wrong[s] unspeakable, past patience, / Or more than any living man could bear." Now that they know the truth, he asks the Romans, can they really say that the Andronicus family has done anything wrong?

This line of thinking is demonstrative of the opinion that Titus and his family have held from the start of the play: the revenge may be personal, but it is divinely justified and morally right. Titus's extreme revenge is, to Marcus, no more than justice. The public seems to agree, as Lucius is selected as emperor.

After the final loose end of revenge is tied up, with Aaron being buried chest deep so that he starves to death and Tamora's body being left for wild beasts to feed on, it appears that the cycle of revenge and violence has been broken, and that Rome will have peace. However, we should note that the conflict with the Goths is entirely unresolved, as their former queen is denied funeral rights, and the child of Aaron and Tamora is left alive, possibly to grow up and seek revenge of his own.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

ACT 1, SCENE 1

As the play opens, Saturninus and Bassianus, the two sons of the recently deceased emperor of Rome, are arguing over who should rightfully become the next emperor. They appeal to the people of Rome. Saturninus claims that it is his right, as the previous emperor's oldest son, while Bassianus appeals to the Roman people to make their own decision and choose him as emperor because of his virtue.

The Roman tribune (a government official appointed to protect the common people) Marcus Andronicus intervenes, telling both sons that the Roman people have instead chosen Marcus' brother, Titus Andronicus, as emperor, because of his heroic deeds as a general. Marcus announces that Titus is just now returning to Rome from a military campaign against the Gauls, where 21 of his 25 sons died in battle. Bassianus and Saturninus concede and the three men exit.

A military captain heralds the arrival of Titus, who enters and salutes Rome, then orders for his deceased sons to be buried in his family's tomb according to custom. Titus brings with him five prisoners: Tamora, the queen of the Goths; her three sons (Alarbus, Demetrius, and Chiron); and Aaron, a Moor (someone of African descent). Titus' son Lucius suggests that one of Tamora's sons be killed as retribution for the deaths of Titus' sons. Tamora protests and begs Titus not to kill her child, but Titus says that Tamora's son is owed to him as a sacrifice since the Goths killed his children. Titus' remaining sons leave with Alarbus, to go and kill him.

Tamora and Chiron cry out in grief and accuse the Romans of being barbarous. Demetrius, though, calms them both and advises Tamora to seek an opportunity for revenge upon Titus. Titus's sons re-enter with bloody swords, announcing the death of Alarbus. Titus then addresses his deceased, buried children, honoring the dead in their tomb. Titus' daughter Lavinia enters and kneels at the tomb in mourning. Titus is happy to see his daughter again.

The dispute over who will be the next emperor reveals that Rome is unstable and lacks a clear leader. Saturninus' claim that he should be emperor since he is the former emperor's oldest son shows the importance in this Roman society of lineage, of establishing a line of male children as heirs and being able to claim a powerful heritage through one's father.



Marcus reveals that the Roman people support Titus as emperor, further demonstrating the instability of Rome's political system. The mention of war is the first instance of violence in the play. While we do not see the war, its violence and the deaths of Titus' children lead directly to the chain of violence and revenge that continues throughout the entire play.



Titus ensures that his sons are properly buried, showing the importance of mourning the dead in the appropriate way. Titus's murder of Alarbus is the first act of revenge in the play, which will prompt Tamora to carry out her own revenge later. Tamora's plea shows how much she values her children, just like Titus, though Titus does not respect her attachment to her own son. Titus thinks that the death of Alarbus is owed to him as recompense for his own losses, and sees it as a justifiable act.



The Romans see themselves as superior to and more civilized than barbarians, but as Tamora and Chiron's accusation hints, the Romans can be just as barbaric as any barbarian. Demetrius encourages Tamora to respond to Alarbus' death by plotting revenge, rather than sinking into grief. Titus and Lavinia continue to pay their respects to the dead.



Marcus enters with a **white robe** and presents it to Titus as a token of the citizens' election of him as emperor. Titus declines (he says he is too old and weak) and Saturninus responds by reasserting his claim to the throne. Bassianus asks for Titus to support him as emperor. Titus asks the Roman people to allow him to decide the next emperor and the tribunes approve on behalf of the citizens. Titus chooses Saturninus as emperor, since he is the former emperor's oldest son.

As a gesture of thanks to Titus, Saturninus declares that he will take Lavinia as his wife. Titus is pleased with this, and presents his remaining prisoners to Saturninus as a present to the new emperor. Saturninus declares the prisoners freed and leaves along with his tribunes and senators.

Bassianus tells Titus that Lavinia was already betrothed to him and takes Lavinia by the arm. Marcus and Lucius support Bassianus's claim to Lavinia, and Titus responds by calling them traitors. Titus then calls for Saturninus to alert him and Saturninus returns. Titus' son Mutius helps Titus' other sons and Bassianus flee with Lavinia. Titus tries to pursue, but is prevented by Mutius, who will not let him pass. Titus angrily kills Mutius. Lucius then returns and tells Titus that he has wrongfully killed his own son. Titus replies that he considers no one who would so dishonor him as his son.

Angry that Lavinia has been taken from him, Saturninus says that he no longer trusts the Andronicus family and will not have Lavinia as his wife. Instead, Saturninus asks Tamora to be his wife and the "Empress of Rome." Tamora accepts the offer and everyone but Titus leaves.

Marcus and Titus' sons return and Marcus chastises Titus for killing Mutius. Titus again claims that Mutius was "no son of mine." Lucius asks for Mutius to be buried in the Andronicus family tomb, but Titus refuses. Marcus and Titus' sons attempt to convince Titus to allow Mutius the customary honor of being laid to rest in the family tomb. Titus grudgingly allows it, but does not join the others in mourning him.

Saturninus enters with Tamora, her sons, and Aaron, while Bassianus enters with Lavinia. Saturninus tells Bassianus that he can have Lavinia and calls him traitorous, telling him that he and his supporters will "repent this rape." ("Rape" here means a forcible seizure or abduction.) Bassianus maintains that Lavinia was rightfully his, and pleads on behalf of Titus, telling Saturninus that Titus killed his own son out of respect for him.

There continues to be disagreement over who the next emperor will be, until Titus concedes the throne to Saturninus. Marcus' gift of a white robe to Titus suggests that Titus is unstained and pure, though Titus has already had Alarbus killed. The continued violence and bloodshed of the play will further call into question this notion of Titus as morally pure, innocent, and just.



Titus values Lavinia, as he does his sons, but she is in a sense used here like a bargaining chip, an object exchanged between Titus and Saturninus to repay a favor (much like the prisoners Titus gives to Saturninus).



For someone who has just lost 21 sons, Titus is remarkably quick to kill his own son Mutius, resorting to violence almost immediately in this dispute. While Titus values his children, he places his allegiance to Rome and the emperor—what he sees as his honor—ahead of the lives of the individuals in his own family.



The union of Saturninus and Tamora further blurs the supposed distinction between Romans and Barbarians.



Titus and his family disagree over whether it was right for him to kill Mutius. Titus' refusal to mourn Mutius properly is a powerful statement of his disowning Mutius as his son.



Saturninus immediately jumps to thoughts of revenge, telling Bassianus and Titus that they will "repent" their deeds. The discord between Saturninus and Bassianus (whom Saturninus calls a traitor) exemplifies the general civil and political turmoil at Rome.



Tamora convinces Saturninus not to seek revenge, but rather to forgive Titus. However, she secretly whispers to Saturninus that this mercy is only a public ruse. She says that she will plot revenge upon Titus for the killing of her son. Speaking aloud, Tamora continues to lie to Titus, telling him, "This day all quarrels die." Marcus, Lavinia, and Titus' sons ask for Saturninus' pardon. Saturninus publicly forgives them. Titus invites Saturninus to go on **a hunt** with him the next day as a gesture of reconciliation and Saturninus accepts the invitation.

Tamora is entirely devoted to getting revenge on Titus. Far from bringing an end to "all quarrels", her plans of vengeance ensure that much more violence and bloodshed is to follow in the play.



ACT 2, SCENE 1

In a soliloquy, Aaron reveals that he and Tamora are lovers and says that Tamora will cause the downfall of Saturninus and Rome. Chiron and Demetrius enter, arguing over their desire for Lavinia, and prepare to draw their swords and fight. Aaron calms them and convinces them that instead of fighting over her they should both rape the chaste Lavinia. He tells them that there will be an opportunity for them to do so during the upcoming **hunting trip**. He suggests that they tell Tamora about their plans, so that she may advise them.

Demetrius and Chiron are seen here as extremely violent characters driven by lust. As Aaron encourages them both to rape Lavinia, he likewise emerges as someone who takes delight in violence.



ACT 2, SCENE 2

Marcus, Titus, and Titus' sons prepare for **the hunt**. Titus tells his sons to watch out for Saturninus, as he has been "troubled in my sleep this night." Saturninus, Tamora, Bassianus, Lavinia, and Tamora's sons arrive. Everyone prepares for the hunt, while Demetrius and Chiron plot their rape of Lavinia.

The hunt can be seen as symbolic of characters' attempts to engage in a controlled amount of violence, as it is a somewhat regulated and relatively safe activity of limited violence. However, the hunt will soon backfire on several of the hunters, just as violence (and especially revenge) tends to lead to further, unforeseen violence.



ACT 2, SCENE 3

Alone during **the hunt**, Aaron buries a bag of gold under a tree. Tamora arrives and suggests she and Aaron make love. Aaron says instead that he is busy with carrying out revenge. He tells her that her sons will rape Lavinia and kill Bassianus. He gives Tamora a letter to show to Saturninus.

Aaron continues to appear as a cruel character driven by revenge.



Bassianus and Lavinia come upon Aaron and Tamora, discovering that the two are lovers. Aaron leaves to find Tamora's sons. Bassianus teases Tamora, asking sarcastically whether he's stumbled upon Diana (the Roman god of hunting) in the wilderness. Tamora replies that if she's Diana, he would be Actaeon. (In Greek myth, Actaeon found Diana bathing in the wild; she turned him into a deer and he was then killed by his own hunting dogs.) Lavinia and Bassianus chastise Tamora for sleeping with Aaron and say that they will tell Saturninus about what they've seen.

The myth of Actaeon encapsulates the reversal in hunting that will occur here, as the hunters (in this case Bassianus, Lavinia, and the Andronicus family) are about to become hunted themselves. Again, this reversal encapsulates how violence and revenge operate in the play, as avengers have vengeance taken upon them and killers are themselves killed.



Chiron and Demetrius arrive and Tamora tells them that Lavinia and Bassianus have tricked her to follow them into the wilderness and have threatened to tie her up and leave her to die in a pit. She asks her sons to avenge her and they both stab Bassianus, killing him. Lavinia calls Tamora “barbarous” for her cruelty. Tamora offers to kill Lavinia herself, but her sons stop her, wanting to rape her first. Lavinia pleads with them to pity her, but they do not, as Tamora reminds them of how Titus killed their brother. Lavinia then begs for a quick death and asks to be spared rape, but Tamora refuses this, too. Chiron and Demetrius throw Bassianus’ body into a pit and carry off Lavinia.

Aaron enters, leading two of Titus’ sons (Martius and Quintus) and telling them that he has seen a panther trapped in a pit. As it is dark and difficult to see clearly, Martius falls into the pit. Aaron goes to find Saturninus. Martius sees Bassianus’ dead body in the pit. Quintus attempts to help him get out of the pit, but falls in instead. Aaron returns with Saturninus. Saturninus asks who is in the hole and Martius answers him. He tells Saturninus that Bassianus is dead. Tamora, Titus, and Lucius arrive. Tamora feigns ignorance about Bassianus’ death and gives Saturninus the letter that Aaron has given her.

Saturninus reads the letter, which describes a plan to kill Bassianus in return for payment in the form of gold hidden under a nearby tree. Aaron unearths the gold. Saturninus believes that Titus’ sons are behind the plot, and since they are down in the pit with the deceased Bassianus, they appear to be guilty. Saturninus orders for them to be taken to prison. Titus begs that they be bailed out from prison on his word and promises that they will stand trial for Bassianus’ murder. But Saturninus refuses, as he is utterly convinced of the sons’ guilt. Tamora tells Titus that she will appeal to Saturninus on behalf of Titus’ sons.

ACT 2, SCENE 4

Demetrius and Chiron enter with a mutilated Lavinia, whose hands and tongue have been cut off. Demetrius and Chiron tease her about her inability to speak or write and thus reveal who raped her.

As Bassianus is stabbed to death in front of Lavinia and his body is disposed of on-stage (as opposed to, for example, Alarbus, who is killed off-stage), Shakespeare heightens the spectacle of brutal violence that his audience would have expected in a revenge tragedy. Lavinia accuses Tamora of being barbarous, thereby distancing herself as a Roman from such cruelty. However, over the course of the play, Romans like Titus act just as barbarously as the supposed barbarians.



As Tamora and Aaron’s revenge plot begins to take shape, Martius and Quintus fall prey to a reversal similar to that of Bassianus and Lavinia. They fall unaware into the dark pit, just as Titus progresses unwittingly toward his own demise at the hands of Tamora (and Tamora towards hers at the hands of Titus).



The speed with which Saturninus jumps to his conclusion that Titus’ sons are guilty suggests the capriciousness of justice in Rome: Saturninus can have Titus’ sons carried off to be executed based on nothing more than his opinion as emperor, despite Titus’ call for a trial to discover what really happened.



The sight of a mutilated Lavinia again heightens the amount of violence and suffering displayed on-stage beyond what was customary in revenge tragedies, while Demetrius and Chiron continue to display their barbarity.



After Demetrius and Chiron leave, Marcus enters and discovers Lavinia. Marcus is horrified and asks what has happened to her and who has cut off her hands. He asks why she doesn't say anything, before he realizes that her tongue has been cut out. He compares her to Philomela—a character in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (an ancient Roman, mythological epic poem) who was raped and had her tongue cut out—and desperately notes that Lavinia has suffered even worse. He wishes he knew who did this to her, so that he could seek revenge. Finally, he takes her to go see Titus and laments to her, "O, could our mourning ease thy misery!"

ACT 3, SCENE 1

As a group of judges and tribunes lead Quintus and Martius off to be executed, Titus begs for their pity. He falls to the ground, still talking to the tribunes, who leave with Quintus and Martius. Lucius enters and tells Titus that the tribunes are gone. Titus continues to plead, saying that it doesn't matter, since the tribunes wouldn't listen to him anyway. He laments his children's impending executions, addressing his weeping to stones on the ground, which he says are more sympathetic than the cold tribunes.

Lucius tells Titus that he is going to rescue Quintus and Martius, but Titus says that they are better off dead, since Rome is now "a wilderness of tigers." Marcus enters with Lavinia and Titus sees what has been done to her. Titus asks Lavinia to tell him who has hurt her. He says that he thought his grief was at its limit, but now it goes over its limits, like the Nile flooding and overflowing its banks. Lucius also asks Lavinia to speak, but Marcus tells them both that her tongue has been cut out.

Titus says that whoever has done this to Lavinia has hurt him more than if he had killed him. Lavinia weeps when Titus mentions Quintus and Martius and Marcus wonders whether it is because she knows that they killed her husband Bassianus or because she knows that they are wrongfully accused. Titus continues to lament, and Lucius tells him to "cease your tears," because he is upsetting Lavinia. Marcus offers Titus a handkerchief to dry his eyes, but Titus says, "Thy napkin cannot drink a tear of mine, / For thou, poor man, hast drowned it with thine own."

Marcus' outcry, "O, could our mourning ease thy misery!" gets to the heart of the issue of mourning. It seems ineffectual and does nothing to ease Lavinia's pain or circumstances, but Marcus still feels compelled to lament her pain. Unlike Titus, who will later claim that there is some value in an outpouring of grief, Marcus regards excessive mourning as ultimately purposeless.



As Titus continues to lament to no audience in particular, he implicitly asserts that there is some value in such an outpouring of emotion, whereas Lucius would see such grieving and pleading only in practical terms, as a way of trying to persuade the judges and tribunes to take pity.



Titus' comment that Rome—the civilized capital of the largest empire in the Western world—is now a wilderness emphasizes the blurring of the distinction between Romans and barbarians and the dissolution of Rome. He also continues to grieve, saying that his pain has surpassed any limit he once thought existed.



Titus values his children so much that he sees Lavinia's pain as more hurtful than his own death. Titus continues to indulge in what Lucius and Marcus see as excessive mourning. He again suggests that his grief surpasses its normal limits (with Marcus and him shedding more tears than a handkerchief can absorb).



Aaron enters and tells Titus that Saturninus will allow Titus' sons to be ransomed if Titus, Marcus, or Lucius will cut off one of their hands. Titus is eager to do it, but Lucius and Marcus volunteer as well, and the three argue over who will cut off a hand. Titus pretends to concede and Lucius and Marcus leave to find an axe to use, both eager to sacrifice a hand. After they leave, Titus tells Aaron to cut off his hand and he does. Lucius and Marcus return and Aaron reveals that he has tricked Titus: in return for Titus' hand, he will send not Titus' sons to him, but rather their heads.

As Aaron's cruelty escalates, Titus shows his willingness to sacrifice his own body for the sake of his sons. Shakespeare's gruesome display of violence continues with Titus having his hand cut off on-stage.



Aaron leaves and Titus cries out in pain, saying that his passionate grief is "bottomless." Marcus advises Titus, "let reason govern thy lament," but Titus replies that since the cruelties done to him are without reason, so will his grief be without reasonable limits. A messenger from the emperor brings Titus the heads of Quintus and Martius, as well as Titus' own hand. At this, Marcus stops trying to restrain Titus' grieving.

Titus struggles to find the words suitable to describe his pain, again describing it as without limit, "bottomless." Marcus attempts to keep Titus within the proper bounds of decorous grieving, but even he relents at the sight of Quintus' and Martius' heads.



Overwhelmed by pain, Titus begins to laugh. Marcus asks why he laughs, and Titus responds that he has no more tears to shed and that sorrow is useless. Instead, he will seek out revenge. He sends Lucius to go to the Goths and raise an army to challenge Saturninus. Lucius bids farewell to Rome, Lavinia, and his father, calling Titus "the woofull'st man that ever lived in Rome."

Titus seems to have exhausted the possibilities of grief. He has gone so far in suffering that all he can do now is laugh. Having left behind mourning as a response to his suffering, he now turns to revenge, through which he can achieve more practical goals (but which will ultimately cause him even more suffering).



ACT 3, SCENE 2

Titus, Marcus, Lavinia, and Young Lucius (Titus' grandson, the son of Lucius) are eating dinner. Titus laments the fact that Lavinia and he have lost their hands. He attempts to interpret Lavinia's gestures and claims to speak for her, saying that she will drink nothing but her own tears. Titus says that he will learn to interpret and understand Lavinia's gestures as a kind of sign-language.

While Titus clearly cares for Lavinia, he continues to objectify her, in a sense. He speaks on her behalf and claims to interpret her gestures, using her as a way to continue his own proclamations of grief and not allowing Lavinia to attempt to express herself. As earlier in the play, Titus tends to value his children greatly, but only as reflections of himself and not necessarily as persons in their own right.



Marcus kills a fly, which upsets Titus, who thinks of the pain it would cause the fly's parents. Marcus responds that the fly was black, like Aaron. Titus cries out gleefully and tells Marcus he was right to kill the fly. He grabs a knife and tries to stab the fly again and again. Marcus thinks that Titus has gone mad. Titus takes Young Lucius and Lavinia off to read them a story to distract them from their sufferings.

At first, Titus responds to the fly's death with empathy, the emotional capacity that might, earlier, have stopped him from having Alarbus killed despite Tamora's pleas as a mother (and thus would have prevented Titus' own suffering). However, Titus quickly lapses into vengeful thinking. Notably, it is the fly's resemblance to Aaron's dark skin—and thus a perceived ethnic difference between Titus' Roman identity and that of barbarians—that stops him from feeling empathy.



ACT 4, SCENE 1

Young Lucius is running away from Lavinia, who is following him and, because of her disfigurement, frightening him. Marcus and Titus tell him not to be afraid of Lavinia, who is attempting to communicate with gestures. Young Lucius thinks Lavinia may have gone mad, but Titus realizes she is trying to point out a book. Marcus interprets Lavinia's raising up her two arms as meaning that two people hurt her.

Lavinia points to a copy of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and opens it to the story of Philomela. Titus realizes that Lavinia is saying she was raped, like Philomela, in the woods. Titus takes a staff and uses it to write in the dirt on the ground, guiding it with his mouth. He encourages Lavinia to do the same and write the names of those who have violated her. Lavinia writes "stuprum," which is the Latin word for rape, and the names Chiron and Demetrius. Marcus, Titus, and Young Lucius swear to exact revenge on Tamora's sons. Titus tells Young Lucius to bring some weapons to Chiron and Demetrius as presents.

ACT 4, SCENE 2

Young Lucius delivers the weapons to Chiron and Demetrius and announces that their crime against Lavinia has been discovered, before leaving. Trumpets from off-stage announce that Tamora has given birth to a son. A nurse enters, bearing Tamora's son. She tells Aaron that the child is dark-skinned, and will thus reveal that Tamora and Aaron are lovers. Demetrius and Chiron are concerned that Tamora will be exposed and suggest that the baby be killed. But Aaron refuses and takes his child from the nurse. He asks the nurse who has seen the child, and she says that only she, Tamora, and a midwife have seen it. Aaron kills the nurse and makes plans to get a fair-skinned baby to change places with his and pose as Tamora and Saturninus' son. He asks Demetrius and Chiron to send the midwife to him (so he may kill her, as well). Aaron leaves to take his child to the Goths where the boy can be safely raised.

Young Lucius' fright at Lavinia's disfigurement parallels the shock of the audience viewing the gory violence of Shakespeare's play. In displaying on stage violence and disfigurement that is usually kept off-stage, Shakespeare forces the audience to directly experience the true cost of vengeance and violence.



Upon learning the identity of the culprits behind Lavinia's rape, the Andronicus family immediately jumps to planning revenge, continuing the play's cycle of violence. (Why it takes Titus and the others so long to realize that Lavinia might be able to communicate in this way isn't really explained and is probably better being ignored.)



Just like Titus and Tamora, Aaron cares deeply for his child, whom he tries to protect. The child not only threatens to reveal that Tamora and Aaron are lovers, but also, as an illegitimate child of the emperor's wife, is particularly unacceptable because of the importance of legitimate heirs and lineage in the Roman political system and society. But it is important to Aaron for a different reason—because it is his, a product of himself, his own child. And Aaron is willing to go to any extreme of senseless violence—killing an innocent nurse and midwife—to keep it safe, just as Titus and Tamora have gone to nearly insane lengths to protect or get revenge for their own children.



ACT 4, SCENE 3

Titus, Marcus, Young Lucius, and Marcus' son Publius are gathered with arrows that have inscriptions on them addressed to the gods. They shoot arrows into the sky as a way of asking for divine help, specifically asking for the divine personification of Justice to come to them. Marcus suggests they try to aim so that the arrows land in the royal courtyard. Marcus and Publius are concerned for Titus (who appears to be mad) and Marcus says that Titus' "sorrows are past remedy." Titus shoots more arrows inscribed with addresses to various gods and says that he is ready for revenge. A "clown" (a rustic peasant) enters and Titus writes a message that he has the clown deliver to Saturninus.

Now that Titus' sorrows are beyond any remedy that could be gained or achieved through mourning, he is entirely devoted to seeking revenge. Through their arrows addressed to the gods, Titus and his family invoke a divine ideal of justice, seeing their revenge on Tamora and her sons as divinely justified. Of course, Tamora, whose own son Titus killed, sees herself as being just as justified.

**ACT 4, SCENE 4**

Saturninus, attended by Tamora, Chiron, and Demetrius, is annoyed by the arrows shot by the Andronicus family into the royal court. He thinks Titus has been driven mad by his suffering and is angry that he is spreading the idea that Saturninus is unjust. He then vows to do justice to Titus. Tamora encourages him to be lenient toward Titus, pretending to be sympathetic to Titus' pains. The clown arrives bearing Titus' message. After reading the letter, Saturninus orders the clown to be hanged. Saturninus is outraged at the Andronicus family, who he sees as traitors, and wants Titus to be brought to the royal court.

While Titus believes that he is carrying out justice, Saturninus also thinks that he is acting justly in opposing Titus and his family, perceiving them as traitors to the Roman state. Both sides thus fit ideas of justice to their circumstances and use it to justify their own actions.



A messenger named Aemilius arrives and tells Saturninus that Lucius is leading an army of Goths against Rome. Saturninus worries, since the Roman people are supportive of Lucius. Tamora suggests that they persuade Titus to make Lucius stop. Saturninus doesn't think that Titus will listen to them, but Tamora insists that she can persuade him. Saturninus tells Aemilius to arrange a meeting between the Andronicus family and Saturninus and Tamora, to take place at Titus' house. Tamora leaves to go trick Titus into stopping Lucius from attacking Rome.

The fact that a Roman is commanding an army of Goths against Rome exemplifies the breakdown of the distinction between Romans and barbarians, and—along with the people's support for the "rebel" Lucius instead of the actual emperor Saturninus—suggests the instability of Rome.

**ACT 5, SCENE 1**

Lucius prepares his army of Goths to attack Rome. A Goth enters with Aaron and Aaron's child, having found them in hiding. Lucius decides to hang the child in front of Aaron, and then hang Aaron himself. But Aaron offers to tell him valuable information in return for sparing his child.

Lucius' original decision to kill the baby in front of Aaron reveals his own potential for cruelty and barbarism, while Aaron prioritizes the life of his child over his and Tamora's own safety.



Aaron tells Lucius that Tamora is the mother of his child and that Demetrius and Chiron killed Bassianus, raped Lavinia, and cut her hands and tongue off. Aaron says that he was behind all the murders, goading Demetrius and Chiron on. Lucius asks if Aaron is sorry, to which Aaron answers that he has lived a life of evil deeds and his only regret is that he cannot commit more crimes. The messenger Aemilius arrives and announces that Saturninus wants to meet with Titus and Lucius at Titus' house. Lucius agrees to the meeting.

Aaron's lack of repentance characterizes him as driven by a love of crime and cruelty. Unlike other characters, he does not even seem to claim that his acts of violence were justified, but rather simply delights in causing harm. Some critics argue that Aaron's motivation may be that, as a black man, he is even more singled out and mistrusted and poorly treated than even the barbarians, but it is not clear that this interpretation is truly supported by the text. Aaron may just delight in causing mayhem and pain.



ACT 5, SCENE 2

Tamora and her sons wait outside of Titus' house in disguise. Tamora has dressed up as the personified deity Revenge. They knock on Titus' door and he answers. Titus recognizes Tamora and does not want to speak to her, but Tamora tells him that she is in fact Revenge, sent to Titus to help him exact vengeance on his enemies. Titus then says that Demetrius and Chiron must be the personifications of Rape and Murder, who are attendants of Revenge, and tells Tamora to stab them to prove that they are deities. Tamora answers that she needs their assistance, so she cannot hurt them now. Titus notes how much Rape and Murder resemble Demetrius and Chiron, but pretends to be persuaded by Tamora. He leaves.

The allegorical disguises of Tamora and her children make obvious the thematic importance of revenge and violence in the play. And, indeed, Tamora is so consumed by her desire for revenge and her children by their desire for rape and murder, that it can be argued that they aren't actually in disguise at all—that their disguises as the embodiments of Vengeance, Rape, and Murder are actually extremely accurate depictions of their characters. Put another way, in disguising themselves they actually more fully reveal their true natures.



Tamora thinks that she has tricked Titus and that Titus has lost his mind. She plots to go among the Goths while Lucius is at a banquet at Titus' house, and turn them against Lucius. Titus returns and tells "Revenge," "Rape," and "Murder" to look in Rome for Tamora, Demetrius, and Chiron, and to kill them. Tamora tells Titus to invite Lucius to a banquet, where she will bring Tamora, Demetrius, and Chiron to be punished. Titus sends Marcus to fetch Lucius.

Titus and Tamora continue to plot revenge against each other. Neither of them seems to realize each one's own acts of revenge have prompted the other to strike back with more violence. Obsessed with their own vengeance, both are unaware that they are locked in a mutually reinforcing cycle of revenge, with devastating effects.



Tamora prepares to leave with her sons to go prepare for the banquet, but Titus insists that "Rape" and "Murder" stay with him. Tamora agrees and leaves. Titus immediately has Chiron and Demetrius tied up and gagged so they cannot make noise. Titus then stabs them, while Lavinia catches their blood in a basin. He tells them that he will make a paste from their blood and ground bones and use it to make a pastry that he will feed to Tamora.

As Titus kills Demetrius and Chiron and reveals his plan to feed them to Tamora, he becomes just as cruel and barbarous as Tamora and her sons (if not more so). His plan to feed Tamora her own children can be seen as the ultimate perversion of parenthood: she will consume and take back into her body the very children that she brought into the world.



ACT 5, SCENE 3

Lucius, Marcus, and some Goths arrive at Titus' home for the banquet, bringing Aaron and his child with them as prisoners. Lucius has Marcus watch over Aaron until it is time for him to reveal Aaron's relationship with Tamora. Saturninus and Tamora arrive with their attendants and agree to a peaceful meeting with Lucius. Titus enters, dressed as a cook, and serves a meal to everyone. Titus asks Saturninus his opinion about whether it was just for Virginius to kill his own daughter. (In Roman historical legend, Virginius was a man who killed his own daughter after she had been raped, to preserve his family's honor.) Saturninus says it was right, since "the girl should not survive her shame." Titus says that he is following the precedent of Virginius and kills Lavinia. Saturninus is shocked, but Titus tells him that Lavinia had been raped. He encourages Saturninus and Tamora to eat, which they do.

Titus then reveals to Saturninus that Demetrius and Chiron raped Lavinia and mutilated her. Saturninus asks for the two sons to be brought to him, but Titus says they are already present, baked into the pies he and Tamora are eating, so that Tamora is "eating the flesh that she herself hath bred." Titus kills Tamora. Saturninus responds by killing Titus. Lucius then avenges his father by killing Saturninus.

After all this chaos, Lucius and Marcus address the Roman people. Marcus says that he will help them restore Rome to its former greatness and will repair "these broken limbs again into **one body**." Lucius tells the public about how Chiron and Demetrius killed Bassianus and raped Lavinia, causing Quintus and Martius to be wrongfully executed and him to be exiled. Marcus then reveals Aaron and Tamora's child, tells the Roman people, "Now judge what cause had Titus to revenge / These wrongs unspeakable," and asks them "Have we done aught amiss?" (i.e. have we done anything wrong?).

Aemilius acclaims Lucius as emperor, since the Roman people support him. Marcus orders for Aaron to be brought out, while the Roman people hail Lucius as their new emperor. Lucius says that he will "heal Rome's harms" but first must "shed obsequious tears" for his dead father. Marcus, Lucius, and Young Lucius mourn Titus.

Titus' killing Lavinia exemplifies the strange relationship between him and his children. He clearly values them greatly, but seems to care about them more as reflections of his virtue than as persons in their own right. Thus, he kills Lavinia, who has been dishonored, as a way of maintaining his family's honor. Moreover, he (and Saturninus) avow that this act of killing one's own daughter is the right, just thing to do. Once again, characters' ideas of justice seem determined by their specific circumstances and ideas and seem to be ways of justifying otherwise cruel acts.



This scene is perhaps the culmination of the play's spectacle of gruesome violence, as Tamora realizes with horror that she has been eating her own children and three people are killed in quick succession. The back-and-forth killing (Lucius kills Saturninus for killing Titus for killing Tamora) is the clearest example of how revenge operates as a continuing chain of violent events that stops only when there is no one left to kill or be killed.



Now that all the turmoil between the Andronicus family, Tamora's family, and Saturninus has concluded, Lucius and Marcus address the broader turmoil of Rome. Marcus draws a parallel between the crumbling of Rome and the disfigurement of individuals, by using the metaphor of the Roman state as a body. Marcus also appeals to the Roman people and asks them to judge whether he and Lucius have acted in accordance with justice. While they may have the Roman public's support, whether they really were just is a question forever open to the judgment of the play's audience and readers.



It seems as though Rome will gain stability with Lucius as emperor, supported by the people. Marcus, Lucius, and Young Lucius take care to mourn Titus properly, in contrast to Titus' earlier outbursts of unrestrained grief.



Guards bring out Aaron and Lucius orders for him to be buried chest-deep in the earth, where he will starve to death. Lucius orders for Saturninus to be brought to his family's tomb, and for Titus and Lavinia to be buried in the Andronicus family tomb. He asks that Tamora's body be given no funeral rites, though, but rather be left for wild beasts to feed upon.

Lucius ensures that Titus, Lavinia, and Saturninus will all have proper burial rites. However, while Lucius seems to return stability to Rome, this resolution is an uneasy one: the play does not conclude with any kind of peaceful reconciliation between Rome and the barbarians, but rather with dishonor for Tamora's corpse and the promise of a cruel death for Aaron. The cycle of vengeance within Rome may have come to an end, but the war and vengeance between Rome and the barbarians has not.





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