

# William examination of the text in act



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

William Shakespeare's earliest tragedy entitled Titus Andronicus is one of much action and spectacle. The majority of the characters' actions are motivated by revenge which is an essential theme throughout the work. Titus Andronicus, unlike all of Shakespeare's later plays, falls in line with Aristotle's six elements of tragedy putting plot before character. Characters are developed through the use of action in this work rather than the character determining the plot.

Through close examination of the text in Act 4, Scene 1, lines 30-62, the ever-present theme of revenge and constant action can be observed. Sexuality, power and death although honour, and revenge are three essential themes, which are present throughout the entire play. Titus Andronicus invites us to contemplate multiple murders, human sacrifice, severed heads and hands, the rape, murder, and dismemberment of Lavinia, and a cannibal feast featuring Titus' crazed cookery of Tamora's sons. In the particular lines previously mentioned, Lavinia has just been raped and had her tongue and hands cut off by the sons of the Goth Queen, Tamora. Motivated by the need to avenge her son's death, Tamora urges her two sons to take out their lust on the young bride. Each character seems to have their own agenda and pursues revenge until the bitter end. In Shakespeare's later tragedies, such as Hamlet, characters are revealed through the use of soliloquy or speech rather than spectacle.

However, in Titus Andronicus, Shakespeare uncharacteristically uses action in order to reveal the characters. An example of this can be found in Act 4, Scene 1. It begins with young Lucius fleeing from his aunt Lavinia, fearing that she is crazed. However, she merely wants to get to the book he is

carrying, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. She turns through its pages until she reaches the story of Philomela and Tereus (Tereus rapes his sister-in-law Philomela and then cuts off her tongue so that she cannot reveal the crime), which she shows to her father and uncle to indicate what has been done to her. Marcus urges her to carve the name of the culprits in the sand.

Holding the staff with her mouth and guiding it with her stumps, she writes, "Stuprum Latin for rape — Chiron — Demetrius." They all kneel and take a vow to not rest until the treacherous Goths have been made to pay with their blood. Here it can be seen that like Aristotle's poetics, plot is of first importance. The events, which take place and the actions committed by all of the characters, are the determining factors as to how each of them acts individually.

As Lavinia is physically pared down, her narrative and thematic importance escalates, drawing our attention to the importance of spectacle on the stage.

Bibliography: