

# Aaron as a purely evil character



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“ The function of wisdom is to discriminate between good and evil”-Cicero-

There are villainous characters throughout the history of literature that capture our utmost fears of hatred, vengeance, and psychotic behavior. The complexity of the characters one comes to adore, though, arise when abruptly, the character manifests some sort of moral condition, or provides understandable reasoning for their psychotic actions. From Shylock in William Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice* (who later gained some sympathetic reviews from the audience because he was discriminated against, and his conflicts with his daughter) to even modern day villains such as Dr. Hannibal Lecter in Thomas Harris’s *The Silence of the Lambs* (who was discovered to find love for his protégé), these characters symbolize humanity, and give optimism to readers in that everything and everyone is not purely concentrated evil or good, rather, there is a little of both emotions inside even the most psychotic villains. Aaron the Moor, from Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus*, however, is portrayed as nothing more than a treacherous and detestable individual who encompasses everything which is truly diabolical and malevolent in humanity. Aaron’s character does not show any sympathy for those around him, including his own flesh and blood, unless there a greater benefit for himself in the process. Moreover, though Aaron was faced with all of his crimes in the end, he never once showed remorse, and manifested a lack of empathy towards his victims, which establishes him as a modern day sociopath. Although Aaron was not the sole scoundrel in *Titus*, the other characters were motivated by their own cause to pursue a malicious path (for example, Tamora developed into a spiteful individual when her son was sacrificed in front of her). Nevertheless, Aaron was the only character who never rationalized his actions, or even attempted to give

reasoning for his behavior. Through his persona, villainous deeds, dialogue, Aaron is truly portrayed as the utmost and paramount symbol of evil. Aaron is the stereotypical epitome of pure sin and immorality. He possesses qualities which are frowned upon society, and considered ungodly and malevolent. Firstly, an imperative characteristic which Aaron possesses that makes him purely evil as well is that he is black, and proud to be so. The color black, specifically in Shakespeare's time, was considered that which is unholy and mysterious, as well as being associated with the devil. Aaron is fully aware of this, and when his son is referred to as diabolical because of his skin color, Aaron replies with, "Zounds, ye whore, is black so base a hue?" (line 71 4. 2) and "Coal-black is better than another hue" (line 98). He perceives himself and his son superior in comparison to the white Romans, and his sense of dominance and arrogance in that era, where skin colored truly was paramount, aided the audience in perceiving him and evil. Also, Aaron was utterly perverse in his conversations, never once allowing an opportunity to pass in which he did not make an allusion to a crude sexual act and so forth. For instance, in lines 13-14 in Act 2, Scene 1, "To mount aloft with thy imperial mistress, and mount her pitch who though in triumph long..." or lines 95-96, "Why then, it seems some certain snatch or so would serve your turn". By speaking so perversely in front of the audience, and even in front of the female characters, Aaron is perceived and vulgar and crude, alluding to any regular dirty slave or lower class trash. This is imperative, however, because by adding a myriad of dimensions of immorality (from the trivial vice of a corrupt mouth) to his persona, Aaron is understood to just be completely evil, rather than acting upon revenge or so forth. His mouth is a fountain of wickedness. He convinces Tamora's sons,

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Chiron and Demetrius, to rape Lavinia through persuasive conversation, and guides the audience through his villainous acts through soliloquies and speeches. He also completely manifests his devoid for any pity with his infamous line, “ But I have done a thousand dreadful things as willingly as one would kill a fly, and nothing grieves me...that I cannot do ten thousand more” (line 141-144 5. 1) Aaron was also very perverse and malevolent in his physical dealings. Firstly, he was Tamora’s love slave, which constituted adulterous behavior between the two of them, regardless of the fact that Tamora was married to the Emperor of Rome, and obviously it was frowned upon. Secondly, it was Aaron who tricked Titus into cutting his own hand for the sake of his children, though it was a lost cause. Later on in the play, Aaron himself admitted that he was tickled upon completing his villainous task, “ When for his hand he had his two sons’ heads, beheld his tears, and laughed so heartily” (line 113 5. 1), showing no signs of compassion. Hands are often a symbol in a myriad of cultures as the givers and by having Titus cutting of his hand, he is voiding Titus of accomplishing simple tasks, as well as even symbolically taking away the hand in which Titus fought so many of Rome’s wars with. Aaron, unremorsefully doing this, aids to his character being perceived as pure evil. Various critiques have been written linking the passion Aaron has to saving his only child to that of caring for another life beside his own, as well as having paternal instincts, and hence somewhat of a good heart. However, if one analyzes the dialogue Aaron utilizes in talking to his son, one realizes that Aaron never uses any terms of endearment for his child. Rather, Aaron perceives the child as “ tadpole”, “ thick-lipped slave”, and so on. Furthermore, Aaron states that he will raise the child “ to be a warrior and command a camp”. He never perceives the child as his son,

which he will love and care for. Rather, he is the future emperor of Rome, and as long as he is alive, he is Aaron's meal ticket and salvation. Aaron has much to benefit with keeping this child alive, and even though he protects the child, no emotions ever stir within him to promote pity or remorse for his previous actions. In the end of the play, even, when he is condemned to a lonesome death, he never once pleads for his life to care for his child, or even makes an attempt in drawing sympathy. Instead, he states, " If one good deed in all my life I did, I do repent it from my very soul" (line 188, 5. 3). To be so incredibly unapologetic and unsympathetic to all the lives which he devastated, even when his own life is at risk, without any rationalized cause, proves him to be the ultimate in pure evil. In conclusion, through his insensitive and heartless actions, words, and emotions, Aaron might just be the cruelest and fundamental villain in Shakespearean literature. Aaron is perverse, crude, and never regrets anything he has done. He aided in the rape of an innocent girl, tortured an old Roman hero with the death of his sons, killed a nurse, and brought an unwanted bastard into the world. He ultimately was the cause of all the conflict in the play, and, rather than pleading for mercy in the end, as a true villain, he takes all of his deeds with him as accomplishments and proof of how gullible and idiotic the human race is, as if he were of a different class of species altogether, not just between Roman and Moor. It did not take Aaron to be anything but human to commit all of this treachery and villainous actions, for as Joseph Conrad once said, " The belief in a supernatural source of evil is not necessary; men alone are quite capable of every wickedness".