

The comparison of human nature through the study of literary devices



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Throughout Shakespeare's "The Tragedy of Titus Andronicus", Tamora and Aaron seek to harm Titus for the murder of the Goth prince. While it is clear that the queen's motive for seeking retribution is to avenge the death of her son, it is not certain that revenge is Aaron's motive. After all, Tamora is merely his lover and her eldest son was not conceived by the Moor. Rather, Aaron's actions against Titus are of a different nature, one of inherent evil, as he refers to the color of his skin as a possible precursor to his own human nature. Through the use of literary devices, Shakespeare shows that Aaron's desire to harm Andronicus is deeper than the mere want to avenge the death of his lover's son. In Act III, Scene One, it is evident that Titus is troubled by the disappearance of his two sons. According to Aaron the Moor, Titus learns that he must cut off his own hand to satisfy the king and thus have his sons returned to him. While Lucius and Marcus Andronicus begin to plot another way to bring the sons to safety, Titus steals away with Aaron to finish the cold-blooded deal by cutting off his own hand and giving it to Aaron, in hopes of filling the king's requirements. To a dismayed Lucius and Marcus, Titus says, "Now stay your strife: what shall be is dispatch'd. / Good Aaron, give his majesty my hand," (3. 1. 192-193). Although Aaron assures Titus that he will soon see his sons, it becomes clear that this is not the case. Aaron says, "Look by and by to have thy sons with thee. / [Aside] Their heads, I mean. O, how this villany / Doth fat me," (3. 1. 201-203). Through an aside, Aaron tells the audience that he does not intend to honor his word. On a superficial level, this passage (3. 1. 192-205) is important to the play because it shows the extremes that Titus will go to for the protection of his sons, as well as articulates Aaron's plot against the war hero. But on a deeper level, it is the beginning of Aaron's inner malice and the workings of <https://assignbuster.com/the-comparison-of-human-nature-through-the-study-of-literary-devices/>

his wholeheartedly evil nature. In this set of lines, Shakespeare shows through various literary elements that Aaron despises Titus not only because the war hero is responsible for the death of the Goth prince, but also because of his inherently evil nature. Aaron uses a simile to compare the quality of his soul to the color of his skin, associating black with all that is evil. He says, " Let fools do good, and fair men call for grace. / Aaron will have his soul black like his face," (3. 1. 204-205). The two lines also have a strikingly unstable quality to them because of their regular/irregular meter. The first line is pure iambic pentameter, while the second has a few substitutions of iambic feet: " Aaron" and " black like" are two instances where a trochee is exchanged for an iamb. These replacements make the reader almost trip over the words in the second line, which is significant to Aaron's character. Also, because the second is irregular, it implies that a soul that is black is deviant from what is correct, whereas the preceding line follows the form of iambic pentameter and deals what is good and calling for grace. Earlier in the stanza, Aaron uses this regular/irregular pattern when he lies about the safe return of the sons of Titus. He says, " Look by and by to have thy sons with thee. / Their heads, I mean. O, how this villany," (3. 1. 201-202). Again, the first line is regular iambic pentameter, but this time there are several caesuras that will simply not allow the reader from easily skimming along. As before, the focus is directed towards the evil nature of Aaron. Titus's seemingly unknowing nature of Aaron's innate evil serves to amplify the crudeness of Aaron, and in these lines he is a foil to Aaron's wickedness. It is ironic that Titus refers to him as " Good Aaron" (3. 1. 193), because the audience knows that Aaron is plotting against Titus and his family line. Also, the quotation begins a new line which allows Shakespeare

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to capitalize “ Good Aaron”, which thickens the irony. When Titus gives his hand to Aaron and confers directions for what the moor is to say to the king, he is most likely in a state of delirium. After all, he has just lost a hand and probably used a nearby rag to attempt to stop the bleeding. Even so, the hyperbole Titus uses to describe the nature of this deed portrays his incredible desire to see his sons return safely as well as honorably. Titus says, “ As for my sons, say I account of them / As jewels purchased at an easy price;” (3. 1. 197-198). An easy price this was not, but rather his words were a great exaggeration. The extent of Aaron’s evil is compared (by their interchanges) to the extravagance of Titus’s desire to see his sons return safely, as well as his will to do what is right. The significance of a truncated hand that belongs to a man as great as Titus is illustrated through synecdoche. Titus says, “ Give his majesty my hand: / Tell him it was a hand that warded him / From thousand dangers;” (3. 1. 193-195). It is not the hand that has warded off danger, but rather Titus himself. The use of the literary device brings more meaning to the action and the hero’s character, the polar opposite of all that represents Aaron. While the character of the two men seems clear when judging by these lines alone, the rest of the play provides a perception that, at times, is a bit more blurry. In the first Act, Titus kills his own son when he is impeded while chasing Lavinia. He argues that no son of his would stand against his own honor or would question the will of the emperor. Nevertheless, he kills his own child. But when Aaron’s infant is endangered by the sons of Tamora, the moor convinces them through skillful manipulation to let the mixed child live, even though it will most likely bring great embarrassment to the empress. It is arguable that Aaron’s care for his son makes him a better father than Titus, however, <https://assignbuster.com/the-comparison-of-human-nature-through-the-study-of-literary-devices/>

seeing after his own flesh and blood seems to be one of his only redeeming qualities. By analyzing literary devices, one can more closely read any Shakespearean excerpt. Through simile and disrupting the meter, it is easier to appreciate the full-scale atrociousness of Aaron's evil nature. It is not just Tamora's anger that drives Aaron—it is also his known disposition towards malice. This temperament is magnified by the foil of good and faithfulness that Titus presents, a man who will cut off his own hand to bring his sons to safety. The relevance of their conflicting viewpoints is derived from the fact that every human being copes with their problems differently, whether it be trying to see the good in someone else or learning from the mistakes they have made and holding onto their troubled past. Through verse, as well as the formal elements of poetry, the characters take hold of our emotions and focus our thoughts, because we truly possess the lyrics that are dear to us. As a student of poetry, I can see the formal elements at work such as simile, synecdoche, and irony. Because these elements are more than terms with dictionary definitions, they have allowed me to take meaning from “ The Tragedy of Titus Andronicus”, as well as enabled me to delve deeper into the author's feelings of other poems I have studied. Works Cited Shakespeare, William. “ The Tragedy of Titus Andronicus” 13 FEB 2006.