

TITUS ANDRONICUS

1. What kind of place is Rome? What constitutes proper “Roman” behavior? (or un-Roman behavior?) What are the Roman buzz-words? (*noble* — along with related terms like *nobility* — is one) How could you make these qualities more obvious through the props, action, setting, and so on? Titus is the most Roman of the Romans: describe what you take to be his most important characteristics, his most typical action(s) and words?
2. Compare the Goths (who are not on home territory in the first part of the play but are still Goth-ic), especially the Queen of the Goths, Tamora. Aaron is a Moor rather than a Goth, but he almost out-Goths the Goths: what are his identifying characteristics? Any words particularly associated with him?
3. By the end of the first scene Rome is already well on its way into tragedy. Which words and actions initiate the progress toward tragedy? Some critics look to Titus’ political decision (his choice of Saturninus over Bassianus for office) and others to Titus’ treatment of Tamora (his treatment of Lavinia has also been mentioned). Do any of these make sense? Is there a way to reconcile the separate theories?
4. In addition to verbal imagery Shakespeare builds scenes from what we might call dramatic imagery, defined roughly as “spaces and movements on stage that symbolize the characters’ larger situations and experiences.” Titus’ repeated begging is an example of dramatic imagery, as is Lavinia’s hideous fate. Consider the “loathsome pit” (2.3.193) into which Titus and Martius fall. See how it is described. Think of other related situations and experiences — Titus’ sons being swallowed up by the tomb, for example. Notice that while we see the pit *on* stage, off stage at that very moment Lavinia is being raped. How does the pit function in the play, how does it add to your sense of the entire action?
5. *Enter the empress’ sons, with Lavinia, her hands cut off, her tongue cut out, and ravished* [raped].
This is probably Shakespeare’s most famous stage direction, in one of his most controversial scenes. Critics have claimed that Shakespeare didn’t write — *couldn’t* have written — this scene; others find it, on the contrary, a particularly Shakespearean achievement. Which seems more accurate? Regardless of who wrote it, how would you stage it? How would you (or would you?) show that Lavinia had been *ravished*? That her tongue had been cut out? How bloody would you want to get? Why? One famous production used red crepe paper streamers to represent blood; would you? Look at Marcus’ response when he discovers Lavinia in this condition (2.4.21 and following). Is there any way to justify his artificial and lengthy excursion into poetry at a time like this?

6. In 3.1, Titus (already suffering from terrible losses) begs the Tribunes and Senators to have pity on him — but no one listens. Instead, the only “answer” he gets is a series of even more terrible losses. Notice his response to each new loss; watch how it changes. Pay particular attention to the imagery he uses to describe his situation (3.1.93ff): “For now I stand as one upon a rock.” His plight is emblematic of *the* tragic situation as Shakespeare will create it again and again, in different forms, in his later and greater tragedies. How would you describe this situation?
7. Why is there so much gore throughout this play? One way of beginning to answer is to think about Shakespeare’s sensitivity to the relation between the state of one’s body and the state of one’s mind, or the relation between the state of one’s body and the state of the State. Or think about Shakespeare’s notorious love of puns (they were his “fatal Cleopatra” according to Samuel Johnson).
8. Think about the ways in which each character’s death is appropriate for that character; for example, why is Tamora thrown “forth to beasts and birds of prey” who will, presumably, eat her?