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Female Literacy in *Titus Andronicus*

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INTRODUCTION

Titus Andronicus is a tale of rape, violence, and revenge. Because its narrative sources include so many tales from Ovid, the ability to read Ovid, and literacy itself connects each character and enables the rape, violence, and revenge. In this paper, I argue that literacy finds power in the Ovidian rape narrative, including Ovidian revenge plots, the green world, and Lavinia's ability to connect with her family through Ovid.

Shakespeare constructs Lavinia's literacy to employ the logic of Ovid and of the green world but doing so places Lavinia in jeopardy. Lavinia's literacy empowers her to take charge of Shakespeare's narrative by bringing Ovid to the foreground. In this manner, Lavinia becomes the lynchpin for all of the Ovidian elements that appear in *Titus.* Lavinia attempts to use Ovidian language to control Tamora, but she fails miserably. Lavinia can only communicate with and control those who understand Ovid: specifically, the other Romans.

Because the narrative flows through Lavinia, she is the lightning rod for the play's violence. Violence, but particularly violence toward the female body, is typical of the Ovidian rape narrative. *Titus* includes tremendous amounts of violence, specifically toward the female body. The violence to all bodies, male and female, connects through Lavinia, as does the desire for revenge. Her brothers' deaths, husband's murder, and father's dismemberment all enter the play through her presence and negotiation of the narrative. Further, Lavinia's negotiation of the narrative coupled with her presence in the violence inspires the characters to seek justice to provide empowerment.

In *Titus*, literacy, particularly Lavinia's literacy, drives the action of the play through its references to Ovidian rape narratives, which Lavinia attempts to control through her education and expertise. In this tragedy, the Ovidian rape narratives inspire revenge and take Lavinia into

the horrific green world and finally out the other side to a place where, though mutilated, she is able to connect and communicate through Shakespeare's manipulation of Ovid.

CHAPTER 1: DOOM

Lavinia's literacy is her downfall, but it is also her salvation. Because she is literary, Lavinia forces the barbaric acts of the play which occur in the horrific forest back into the civilized Roman world, allowing her to connect the two spaces. I define literacy as more than simply the ability to read or write. Many historians of literacy have a rather vague definition of exactly what it means to be literate, especially for Shakespeare's time. Evidence suggests that many women were literate or even literary in Shakespeare's England. Current studies recognize the many forms that female literacy assumed during the early modern period. As Eleanor Hubbard points out in "Reading, Writing, and Initializing: Female Literacy in Early Modern England," "literacy in early modern England consisted of a complicated hierarchy of increasingly difficult and rare skills, and few people made their way all the way up to the top" (557). A specific type of literacy noted in early modern England and defined by Heide Brayman Hackel is "abecedarian" literacy, or novice literacy skills enabling a person to recognize and possibly utilize the alphabet. According to Hackel, "literacy is implicated in class status, but it is defined in terms of technical skill" (73). In early modern England there were degrees of literacy present in society, as there are today. Many people could identify the letters of the alphabet, some could read but not write, and some women, such as Queen Elizabeth, were very well-educated. Like Queen Elizabeth, the daughters of important people in her court were highly educated, and Shakespeare constructs Lavinia to reflect this level of education present in the English court. Lavinia's character comes out of a growing tradition of highly educating important female members of society, solidifying her importance in the play. While Lavinia reflects the high class, well-educated woman, Tamora reflects the abecedarian women present in the audience. Shakespeare's juxtaposition of these very different forms of literacy may have inspired women in the audience to want to learn to

read, write, think for, and express themselves. In *Titus,* a similar hierarchy of literacy skills is present in the juxtaposition of the Goths and the Romans. The variety of levels of literacy in *Titus* demonstrates the complexity of the concept. While all are familiar with classics like Ovid, few are capable of weaponizing Ovid's words as Lavinia does in the green world. I measure Lavinia's advanced form of literacy, which expands beyond being literate into being literary, through her knowledge and application of Ovid throughout *Titus*.

Lavinia's education exceeds the normal standard of education, especially for women of Shakespeare's time. Shakespeare tends to incorporate learned heroines into his works, evidenced by their familiarity with Ovid and their ability to write poetry, but Lavinia's education seems to go above and beyond, specifically concerning her knowledge of classical literature, which is what makes her literary. Titus, or potentially Marcus, educated Lavinia so well that they only recognize her desire to communicate through Ovid's *Metamorphoses* because Titus doesn't understand why she wants to read something that far below her capability. Her father remarks, "But thou art deeper read and better skilled; / Come and take choice of all my library" (4.1.33-34). Titus's comment attests to the strangeness of Lavinia singling out *Metamorphoses* because that piece of literature is more suited for her young nephew than for herself. Lavinia has received enough education to understand and apply the material she has learned. In turn, Lucius fears Lavinia because of what he has read, and what she has taught him. He tells his grandfather, "I have read that Hecuba of Troy / Ran mad for sorrow: that made me to fear" (4.1.20-21). Lucius doesn't fear Lavinia because she chases him; he fears her because he read a story about a woman who went crazy and he fears that the same will happen to Lavinia. Lavinia's knowledge of the classics, coupled with her nephew's understanding of the same pieces of literature, attests to Lavinia's exceptional education. She is at least as educated as her male contemporaries, if not

significantly better educated. Lavinia's superior literacy is one of the many reasons that Lavinia's character must suffer to create a space that connects the barbaric and Roman worlds.

Lavinia's education makes her more susceptible to violent behavior as a result of jealousy and estrangement. Lisa Jardine, in "Cultural Confusion and Shakespeare's Learned Heroines: 'These are old paradoxes'," points out that Lavinia's situation places her in the midst of the controversies surrounding the education of women: "There were significant numbers of educated women amongst the gentry and nobility of Europe in the period, and the surviving texts that acknowledge them are split in their response to them (sometimes split within a single text)" (4). Jardine goes on to recognize the two contrasting opinions of the time, the first being that an education in the classics would make the female pupil morally superior and better fit to be a part of the nobility, and to raise the next generation of nobility, and the second being that a woman who receives a quality education is not bound by the same societal rules which, in turn, means that she cannot be chaste nor controllable. These two ways of thinking about educated women come together in *Titus.* Because of Lavinia's education coupled with her literacy, she possesses an air and position of genuine superiority, which causes Tamora to feel threatened. At the same time, because of Lavinia's education, she should guard her chastity, but she does not bother because her attention is held by her novel marriage to her beloved Bassianus. With the encouragement of Aaron, Chiron and Demetrius enter the terrifying forest and seize Ovid's most misogynistic narrative and use it to change Lavinia.

CHAPTER 2: THE DARK, HORRIFIC GREEN WORLD

Lavinia seals her fate when she enters the green world, encounters Tamora in the throes of passion with Aaron, witnesses the murder of her husband, and survives rape and mutilation at the hands of Chiron and Demetrius. This green world, while not one of the most frequently visited settings of *Titus,* is of crucial importance. The green world appears in *Titus* as a horrific version of what Northrop Frye calls the "green world." The green world's original purpose, to navigate the complicated trials and tribulations of court life in a bucolic setting, still exists within *Titus,* but in a much more violent manner. I argue in this chapter that while the green world in a comedy serves to achieve a comic resolution (Frye 182), the green world in a tragedy serves to achieve a tragic resolution. For example, just as all the lovers in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* find love in the forest—thus achieving the comic ending of the play—the lovers, Bassianus and Lavinia, in *Titus Andronicus* experience the beginning of the tragic ending of the play. Lavinia's awareness of the source of her misery is the crucial difference between *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Titus*. The characters in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* live their lives blissfully unaware that the inspiration for their tribulations comes from Ovid. For example, Peter Quince and the other craftsmen are completely unaware of the fact that "Pyramus and Thisbe" comes from Ovid, and Bottom lacks the knowledge to inform him that his metamorphosis from human to grotesquely misshapen other comes from Ovid. Lavinia's awareness can only happen because of her literariness. Her awareness of the world around her and her knowledge and control of the Ovidian rape narrative creates the horror of the green world in *Titus Andronicus.*

As the violence in the forest begins, Tamora, Bassianus, and Lavinia find common metaphoric ground in Ovid. Tamora and Bassianus' use of Ovidian mythology and language sets Lavinia up to take control of the conversation in a powerful way. Even though Bassianus also

insults Tamora in the forest and is the first to reflect on Tamora's reference to Ovid, Lavinia's words have a disturbing effect on the former Queen of the Goths because of her superior ability to apply the morals of the myths which causes Tamora to demand her defilement. Tamora must be quick to destroy Lavinia's control of the Ovidian rape narrative if her quest for vengeance and future security for herself and her progeny is to succeed. However, Tamora's lack of control over the Ovidian rape narrative makes her words hollow. Lavinia is the one who pushes the reference to Diana and Acteon into the present situation by referring to Saturninus as a horned cuckold who might, like Acteon, find himself accidentally attacked by his own hunting dogs. To begin, Bassianus remarks upon the encounter of Tamora in act two, scene three, "Who have we here? Rome's royal empress, / Unfurnished of her well-beseeming troop? / Or is it Dian, habited like her, / Who hath abandoned her holy groves / To see the general hunting in this forest?" (2.3.55-59). Here, Bassianus's cheeky insult works by comparing Tamora to the Roman goddess Diana, who was discovered naked by Acteon. His comparison of Tamora to Diana allows Tamora to turn Ovidian mythology in her favor. Offended, Tamora counters, "Saucy controller of my private steps, / Had I the power that some say Dian had, / Thy temples should be planted presently / With horns, as was Actaeon's, and the hounds / Should drive upon thy new-transformed limbs, / Unmannerly intruder as thou art!" (2.3.60-65). Tamora reacts angrily, demonstrating to the audience that she is an angry, unruly woman and thus uncontrollable. An early modern male audience would find Tamora's uncontrollable nature frightening. Moreover, Tamora jabs at Bassianus' religion by wishing she possessed the power that "some say" Diana did; by including this phrase, Tamora implies that she doesn't believe in the myth, yet she knows of it and uses it to curse Bassianus and his intrusion by wishing that he transform into the same creature as Acteon so that the hunting hounds would tear him limb from limb, allowing her to

achieve vengeance in a rather gruesome manner. Bassianus's words upset Tamora so much that she doesn't notice Lavinia until she speaks. Tamora probably wishes she had paid more heed to the silent figure because her ability to rely on the written word as opposed to the spoken word dons more power upon her control of the Ovidian rape narrative and her use of Ovid's written word threatens Tamora far more effectively than any of Bassianus's spoken words could. As Mary Laughlin Fawcett points out, "Lavinia appeals to literature as an alternative method of argument and rational persuasion; she looks for some guarantee of efficacy in what has been *written* rather than what has been *spoken*" (Fawcett 268). Relying on the spoken word to construct a rebuttal does not indicate any level of literacy, but relying on the written word to construct a rebuttal indicates tremendous levels of literariness, knowledge, and education. Following Tamora's insults, Lavinia skillfully builds on the pattern of rebuttal established by Tamora and Bassianus and uses the Goth's words in her favor in order to support her husband and threaten her rival. Unlike Tamora and Bassianus, however, Lavinia focuses her argument on Ovid's original words. Lavinia remarks,

> Under your patience, gentle Empress,
>
> 'Tis thought you have a goodly gift in horning,
>
> And to be doubted that your Moor and you
>
> Are singled forth to try thy experiments.
>
> Jove shield your husband from his hounds today!
>
> 'Tis pity they should take him for a stag. (2.3.66-71)

In these few lines, Lavinia references the fact that Tamora has cuckolded Saturninus, which might make him grow horns, and would cause him to receive the same treatment that Tamora

just wished upon Bassianus. In doing so, Lavinia takes Tamora's haughty insult, couples it with Ovid's rhetoric, and uses it as a direct threat. Now, because Tamora feels threatened, belittled, and embarrassed, she has every reason to make sure that Lavinia loses her ability to speak in order to bring her down to the same level as Tamora. Lavinia's literacy, therefore, puts Lavinia in jeopardy and directly results in the violence that follows.

As soon as Tamora catches on to Lavinia's capabilities, she hastily employs the brutality of her sons to enact her revenge, which is a mistake. Tamora's hatred and fear of Lavinia result in her demand for her sons to "Revenge it as you love your mother's life, / Or be ye not henceforth called my children" (2.3.114-115). While Lavinia's words threaten Tamora, Tamora's words threaten Chiron and Demetrius. The overt threat that they will no longer be considered sons of their mother if they do not act brutally reflects one of the main concerns of the play—revenge. Tamora's lust for retribution causes a slow and languid silence for Lavinia; a silence that leads to death and happens because Tamora mimics Lavinia's threats towards her. Lavinia's literacy directly incites the rape and mutilation that she suffers as a result of employing her literacy and literary abilities to threaten Tamora.

Lavinia does not realize that the employment of her literacy prompts the violence towards her, and her attempts to salvage her life through language only serve to make matters worse. Lavinia hastily, and in terror, hopes to inspire some passion within either Chiron and Demetrius to disregard their mother's threat:

> 'Tis true the raven doth not hatch a lark.
>
> Yet I have heard—oh, could I find it now—
>
> The lion moved with pity did endure

To have his princely paws pared all away.

Some say that ravens foster forlorn children

The whilst their own birds famish in their nests.

Oh, be to me, though thy hard heart say no,

Nothing so kind but something pitiful (2.3.149-156)

In just a few lines Lavinia plops down multiple arguments in her favor, or so she assumes. Lavinia grossly underestimates the intelligence of the Goths before her and fails to succeed in pleading for her life. Unfortunately, she only angers them further. While Lavinia manages to take control of Ovid's words and mold them to her purpose when she threatens Tamora in the green world, William Weber claims that "the rapists clearly use Ovid as a pattern for their actions and Lavinia's explicit reference to the tale provides impetus to revenge" (Weber 698). Application requires superior intellectual ability than replication does, placing the rhetoric of the Lavinia above that of the Goths even in this very traumatic scene. However, when Tamora claims, "I know not what it means" (2.3.157) after Lavinia's passionate attempt to save her life she does not admit to inferior intelligence, consciously or unconsciously. Rather, Tamora understands Lavinia, but her fear and hatred of the girl outweigh any desire to help her. Lavinia's ability to manipulate Ovid's words makes her a formidable threat to Tamora's quest for blood, and because Lavinia is a threat, Tamora must treat her like one.

One of the functions of Northrop Frye's green world is to investigate the relationships and politics of court life. The horrific green world serves a very similar purpose as Lavinia and Bassianus find a space to experiment with belittling Tamora, but it also provides a space for the Goths to control the landscape of the Roman court. In Rome, the Romans are in charge, but in

this dark space, the Goths are empowered. Not understanding that she is not empowered, Lavinia threatens the temporarily powerful Goths, and Chiron and Demetrius leave her incapable of doing so again, which removes Lavinia from a position of power in Rome and allows the tragic action to continue for three more acts. Lavinia's shame and her lack of a tongue and make it impossible for her to immediately accuse her rapists. She becomes a disgrace to her family and to Roman society. Her defilement also provides Tamora with the assurance that Lavinia will no longer be able to embarrass or threaten her, nor will she be able to tell a soul about what she happened to her and Bassianus in the forest, which, in Tamora's mind, secures her opportunity for vengeance against Titus Andronicus and control over the Roman crown, which will provide power and protection for her unborn child. Keeping Lavinia alive after she is brutally raped and mutilated reminds the audience that the Goths are savage beings. The atrocities committed in the forest have to happen there because there is no place for such savagery in Rome. The Romans may be able to understand and interact with Ovid, but the Goths use Ovid as inspiration for their heinous deeds. When Chiron and Demetrius reenact Ovid's most misogynistic narrative, they place violence towards the female body in center stage, reminding the audience of how Ovidian the narratives of *Titus* are.

Shakespeare turns the comic green world into a tragic, terrifying green world because, in *Titus,* nature cannot be controlled. In this green world, Bassianus finds himself murdered and his body finds itself chucked into a pit while Chiron and Demetrius drag Lavinia off to be ravished, leaving the innocent Quintus and Martius Andronicus to bear the blame. Aaron manages to lure the two Andronici to the pit under the premise of a lingering panther, trapping them (2.3.192-208). While within the confines of the city, the Romans are in control, but in this terrible green world, there is no control for the Romans. Because the Romans relinquish their control, they

relinquish their power to a certain degree, leaving the Andronici particularly vulnerable to the uncontrollable, femininity of the green world, and of the Goths. This uncontrollable green world mirrors the fear of the uncontrollable female, which perhaps explains the vaginal imagery of Shakespeare's horrifying green world. Upon Quintus and Martius' discovery of the hole Bassianus' body has been relegated to, they describe the pit, "What subtle hole is this, / Whose mouth is covered with rude-growing briars / Upon whose leaves are drops of new-shed blood / As fresh as morning dew distilled on flowers?" (2.3.198-201). Quintus describes multiple holes, which allows the audience to imagine other holes, particularly vaginas. The employment of overtly vaginal imagery to describe the hole, and Bassianus' body, forces the audience to imagine not just vaginas, but birth and allows Shakespeare to juxtapose the innocence of birth with the gruesome scene of Bassianus' dead body. It carries importance that the horrific green world contains vaginal images in order to allow the green world to be aligned with images of nature and the feminine, to juxtapose this green world and the events that occur in it with the cool, logic, male-dominated Roman world.

While only one of many murders and Lavinia's rape and mutilation occur in *Titus Andronicus'* green world, it is indeed the place where the central tragic action occurs, particularly because the devilish minds of the Goths control this green world, rather than the cool, calculated logic of the Romans, making the horrific green world inherently noteworthy. As Northrop Frye explains in *Anatomy of Criticism,* "The green world has analogies, not only to the fertile world of ritual, but to the dream world that we create out of our own desires" (Frye 183). The tragic green world of *Titus* is subject to the same degrees of ritual and desire as the comic green world. Shakespeare employs the barbaric, devilish figure of Aaron in the villainy of the green world, so these rituals and desires are Aaron's. In the green world, Aaron discusses his

plots with Tamora, he explains, “Vengeance is in my heart, death in my hand, / Blood and revenge are hammering in my head” (2.3.38-39). Prior to entering the green world, Aaron describes both the plot for Lavinia’s rape and the plot to frame Quintus and Mutius for Bassianus’ death; ergo, Aaron serves as an instrumental figure in setting up the action of the play. The plots conceived by Tamora and Aaron are threatened by Lavinia’s literacy. The conception of these plots mirrors the conception of Tamora and Aaron’s child who Tamora desires to endow with control of the Roman empire. Aaron’s plot to rape Lavinia has less to do with his desire to assist Chiron and Demetrius and more to do with his desire to protect his lover, Tamora, and the future of her child. Aaron is motivated by a desire for power that will enable him to protect his empress.

Lavinia’s eloquence, and her control over the Ovidian rape narrative, does not provide her with power because control of the green world belongs to chaos, and therefore to Aaron. Aaron and his child belong to and control the green world because they do not belong to the world of the Goths or to the world of the Romans; as such, their placement in the green world reflects Frye’s conceptualization of the green world as a magical construct, belonging to fairies and other mythical beings. While Aaron is not a fairy or a mythical being, his placement in the green world confirms his status as a marginalized character. His marginality separates him from the worlds of the Goths and the Romans and confines him further to the green world where he is simply a devilish moor with what Mary Laughlin Fawcett describes as “an almost Puckish sense of himself as evil. He sets fire to barns, trips up cattle, carves up the dead” (Fawcett 271). Most cultures and religions have a trickster figure, for Shakespeare, these trickster figures include Aaron and Puck, who function to complicate the plot of various plays, confuse the characters, and genuinely cause unprecedented chaos. Aaron’s role as the marginalized trickster affects

Lavinia because Aaron's villainy provides him with the power to come up with dastardly ideas that result in her defilement.

Aaron and his baby are relegated to Shakespeare's horrific green world because Aaron's pastoral desires place him outside of both Roman and Goth desires. After murdering the nurse and devising a plot to give Saturninus and Tamora a new, white baby, Aaron tells his son,

> Come on, you thick lipp'd slave, I'll bear you hence,
> For it is you that puts us to our shifts.
> I'll make you feed on berries and roots,
> And feed on curds and whey, and suck the goat,
> And cabin in a cave, and bring you up
> To be a warrior and command a camp (4.2.175-180)

Aaron desires to serve as the mother to his infant, to nurse and nurture him off plants, berries, and goats. The desire to have his infant suck the goat, in particular, is a pastoral image because only a woman can nurse a child. Because the mother is missing from this bucolic scene, Aaron must become the mother. Aaron's reversal of his own masculine nature for a feminine desire to nurture and nourish his son places him further outside of the worlds of the Romans and the Goths, permanently confining him to a pastoral status. The typical green world, as described by Northrop Frye in *Anatomy of Criticism* is a pastoral world. Frye explains that the green world has analogies to dreams, and thus to the pastoral (Frye 183). Because Aaron's dream for his and his child's life is overtly pastoral, Aaron fits even better into the form of what the typical green world requires.

In *Titus,* the conditions of Northrop Frye's green world are skewed, creating a tragic and bloody version of the original concept. As seen in Aaron's character development at the end of

the play, however, a shift occurs in this horrific green. As Aaron controls the tragic green world, his desires must change in order to allow for the conclusion of the play. Aaron begins the tragedy as a devilish figure who controls and manipulates all of the horrific occurrences, at the end however, his sins serve as evidence which allows the Andronici to learn the full story of what transpired and reach a decision on how to end the misery, sealing the fate of the characters by removing Lavinia from a position of power. Because Lavinia has no say in Roman affairs, she relies on her literariness to communicate. Lavinia's literary abilities provide her with better familiarity and understanding of Ovid which releases her control of the Ovidian rape narrative in order to allow her to continue to interact with Shakespeare's plot as a co-author of the trauma that is to come.

CHAPTER 3: SALVATION

Lavinia's literacy dooms her, but it also saves her. Lavinia's rape and mutilation are caused by her literacy because Tamora cannot allow Lavinia to continue to communicate—she should not even allow Lavinia to exist—if she wishes to achieve vengeance for her son's death because Lavinia's ability to employ her literary knowledge to threaten others will quickly result in Tamora's demise. In this manner, Lavinia's literacy puts her in harm's way, and because she is in harm's way, Lavinia must be immediately silenced. If Lavinia were to speak early on in the plot of *Titus*, or even to write, she would use her literariness and her eloquence to further threaten Tamora's claim to power and her devotion to revenge, which explains why Tamora commands her sons to do as they wish with Lavinia and prompts them to be as brutal as possible. If only the Goths had managed to cut off Lavinia's literacy as opposed to just her tongue and hands, they might have succeeded in their schemes. Lavinia's success in communicating who has ruined her proves that literacy and knowledge are more important and more prosperous than barbarity and vengeance. Her success also grants Lavinia the liberty to assist in creating a new form of language for the crumbling Roman empire.

Because Lavinia's language and literacy allow her to control the Ovidian rape narrative in *Titus,* Lavinia becomes a map of the events of the play, forcing the audience, in addition to the characters on stage, to learn a new language in order to understand her. Because, for the majority of the play, Lavinia is incapable of speech, speech itself loses meaning. The concept of Lavinia as a map comes from Mary Laughlin Fawcett's article, Arms/Words/Tears: Language and the Body in *Titus Andronicus,* where she explains that Lavinia "walks through the work challenging both characters and audience to find some adequate response to her presence. She is the text for their and our interpretation, a 'map of woe' whom, like a map, we must learn to read" (Fawcett

265). And like a map, Lavinia's character portrays the most important events of the play, the murders of her brothers, both in war and in Rome, the murder of her husband, her own rape and mutilation, and her father's forced self-mutilation. Not only does her body reflect all these atrocities, but she is the only character present for all of them, which provides Lavinia with a rich perspective akin to that of the audience. Tamora's desire to remove Lavinia from the plot of the play instead places Lavinia in a position of power over the characters in the play, as she knows the sins of all.

Even though Lavinia is aware of and has the knowledge and evidence required to accuse the Goths of their heinous deeds, she has no means of communicating her knowledge. As Katherine Rowe describes in "Dismembering and Forgetting in *Titus Andronicus,"* "In losing her hands, Lavinia, as Chiron and Demetrius note, loses the ability to *do* for herself: to wash or even to hang herself. Loss of these *means* represents a contingent loss of self-representation, of the capacity to 'bewray' her own meaning" (Rowe 295). Lavinia can do and say nothing, she is rendered mute and helpless by the atrocities of the Goths. Lavinia's loss of any means of communication raises many questions, but without answers, the Andronici force Lavinia to live a silent, troublesome life.

The warrior and conqueror, Titus, is also forced to live a silent, troublesome life; but, unlike his daughter, he has no knowledge with which to accuse those who have done him wrong. For Titus, the emotional trauma of losing so many children in such a short period of time, coupled with seeing his daughter's gruesome, mutilated body over and over and being forced to develop an entirely new system of communication, leads to Titus insanity. His language devolves throughout the text to the point where he himself almost becomes the text in an attempt

to limit the effects that the text can have on the plot of the play. After he sacrifices Lavinia, Titus explains clearly, banning any doubt, that he,

> Killed her for whom my tears have made me blind.
> I am as woeful as Virginius was,
> And have a thousand times more cause than he
> To do this outrage, and it now is done (5.3.42-51)

Here, Titus's language places him inside of the text through his concreteness and his references to Virginius. Doing so allows Titus to remain somehow blameless, as if Lavinia was no more real than Virginius' daughter. The language he uses also lacks the ceremonial candor it once possessed. The original language of the Andronici relies heavily on sharp consonants that emphasize the cool, harsh tones of the language, and of Rome. Some of Titus's first lines read, "Romans, of five-and-twenty valiant sons, / Half the number that King Priam had, / Behold the poor remains, alive and dead" (1.1.82-84). Here Titus's words are poignant, but not plain. As Titus's language devolves it transforms into language that is plain and pointed, allowing for little to no ambiguity. Even though he is possibly insane, Titus realizes that spoken words bring about the action of the play, so Titus does everything possible to avoid further action, and therefore further pain. The changes to Titus's language reflect the necessary changes made to language as a whole in order to navigate the devastating effects of the play.

Throughout the play, literacy and language inspire violence, which causes the characters to develop new means of communication in order to avoid further catastrophe. The violence that occurs is not random, Shakespeare's decisions for what will happen when are incredibly calculated, and his language provides opportunities for the violent acts to coalesce. As Gillian Murray Kendall explains, "The world of *Titus* is not simply one of meaningless acts of random

violence but rather one in which language engenders violence and violence is done to language" (299). Aaron's words result in the loss of Lavinia's tongue and Titus's hand. He states, "His Philomel must lose her tongue today" (2.3.43), resulting in Lavinia's dismembered tongue and severed hands. Aaron makes this remark 265 lines before the audience learns and sees that Lavinia has been raped and mutilated, quite literally becoming Philomela, but yet she is still more than Philomela. While developing the plot for Chiron and Demetrius to rape Lavinia, Aaron remarks "Lucrece was not more chaste / Than this Lavinia" (2.1.109-110). These lines occur 458 lines prior to Lavinia's rape. These awful words prove that language is a learned reality because Aaron compares Lavinia to her raped and mutilated predecessors before Chiron and Demetrius defile her. In the scene where the audience is introduced to Lavinia's ravished body, the words used to describe her are the clearest indication of the atrocities that have been committed. Here, Shakespeare demonstrates violence being done to language, "Alas, a crimson river of warm blood, / Like to a bubbling fountain stirred with wind, / Doth rise and fall between thy roséd lips" (3.1.22-24). Marcus describes the literal fountain of blood spewing from Lavinia's mouth, perhaps as she attempts to call out to him for help. Shakespeare prompts violence through his use of language. The idea that words can bring about action is seen in the violent acts that first occur in words but later occur in gruesome forms on the stage, such as the ravished picture painted by Lavinia following her rape and mutilation. The structure of the play is the direct result of the symbolism and the words of the characters; which results in the fact that the language of the play calls for the events that occur. Just as Sara Eaton argues, in *Titus* the "Acts of literacy become violent, visualized ones" (54); the audience does not witness the atrocities committed to Lavinia's body, rather those atrocities are explained by the actors, which is an act of literacy conveying intensely violent sentiments.

Just as Shakespeare uses Ovid to refer to the brutality and logic of the Goths, Shakespeare uses Ovid's material as inspiration. As William Weber brilliantly describes, "Rape leads to revenge, writes Ovid; double rape leads to double revenge, writes Shakespeare" (Weber 712). As Shakespeare must outdo his predecessor, Lavinia must outdo hers in order to maintain her empowered position as the co-author. Philomela is mutilated, but Lavinia is doubly mutilated. Philomela manages to tell her tale through a tapestry, a typically feminine form, but Lavinia tells her tale through demonstrations of literacy, placing her in the foreground of the male-driven stage of *Titus.*

Lavinia's silence allows her to serve as a sort of middle-ground between the two prominent ways of speaking in the play. The Roman way of speaking consists of truncated, logical, clinical, and ritualistic language—it is very much representative of the idea of the masculine or the patriarchy, which Lavinia is forced to participate in:

> Hail Rome, victorious in thy mourning weeds!
> Lo, as the bark that hath discharged his fraught
> Returns with precious lading to the bay
> From whence at first she weighed her anchorage,
> Cometh Andronicus, bound with laurel boughs (1.1.73-77)

Here, the warrior Titus's language is harsh and ritualistic, representing the harsh and ritualistic nature of the Romans. As Mary Laughlin Fawcett explains, "At the root of the Andronici use of language is a profound commitment to ritual and ceremony, enacted on repetitions that lead inexorably toward death" (Fawcett 271). Titus uses words that allude to ceremonial usage to make the audience feel as if they are in attendance of said ceremony. The Andronici, as Mary Laughlin Fawcett describes, "make the body bear the weight of each syllable and sentence, they

write themselves out of the body… while they become words, they reduce their enemies to bodies. Thus, it is fitting that Titus becomes a cook, thoroughly transforming the speaking heads of his enemies into pure physicality, pure paste" (Fawcett 272). The Andronici and their method of language use embody nearly every desirable, masculine quality. This important because it aligns the morals of the Androinici with the morals of Rome. First and foremost, men were considered to be logical, clinical, and to hold all the power, whereas women were seen as occupying the opposite roles.

The presence of powerful women, such as Tamora and Lavinia, threatens this establishment. While the Roman empress is an outright threat because her exotic nature denies her the ability to conform to societal expectations, Lavinia is a tool used by the Roman patriarchy to further their goals, but who also threatens those goals through her literariness. In contrast with the Roman manner of speaking, the Goths' manner of speaking is romantic and very much based on emotion, which indicates both the exotic other and the feminine. Tamora's speech forces her into the role of an emotional, angry woman. But, while she is simply existing, her speech is romantic, fluid, anything but meticulous and calculating like the speech of the Andronici,

> The birds chant melody on every bush,
> The snake lies rolled in the cheerful sun,
> The green leaves quiver with the cooling wind
> And make a checkered shadow on the ground. (2.3.12-15)

Tamora's speech, and the Goths' speech in general, is constantly in opposition to that of the Andronici. However, Lavinia manages to serve as an intermediary between these two forms of speaking because she simply cannot speak—her logical, Roman way of speaking has been

stripped from her character in order to force her into this intermediary role which simultaneously confines her permanently to her father's house and language and allows her to transgress into the realm of the barbaric.

After her rape and mutilation, Lavinia and her father become one entity, sharing one hand and one tongue between the two. However, the two appear to have always been reliant on one another. Lavinia demonstrates this even before the loss of limbs by greeting her father with the words "In peace and honor live Lord Titus long" (1.1.160). Here, Lavinia repeats her father's mourning words but goes further to turn them around, just as she turns Tamora's words around in the green world. Titus's original words read, "In peace and honor rest you here, my sons;" (1.1.159). Lavinia's repetition of her father's words demonstrates two concepts, first that Lavinia is obedient and dedicated to her father, and second that Lavinia is a part of her father and vice versa. In this manner, Lavinia's repetition of her father's words testifies to the patriarchal nature of language, or the father-tongue. The idea of the father-tongue becomes quite literal after Lavinia loses her own tongue, her connection to the father-tongue. Without the means of forming her own words, Titus must take it upon himself to create a new connection for her, by becoming her voice, and therefore her tongue. Titus commands Lavinia, "Bear thou my hand, sweet wench, between thy teeth" (3.1.281). The placement of Titus' severed hand in Lavinia's empty mouth transforms Titus into a sort of ventriloquist in order to be able to speak for Lavinia, further isolating her from the plot of the play. A new form of language is necessary to place Lavinia back into the position of an active character.

Titus's hand in Lavinia's mouth symbolizes his attempt to give her a new means of utilizing language. Just like how Lavinia's severed hands mirror Chiron and Demetrius' severed heads, the severing of Titus' hands mirrors the severing to Lavinia's tongue. Many of the

grotesque atrocities committed in *Titus Andronicus* are reflected, amplified, and also, simply referred to. As Weber describes, the slashed necks of Chiron and Demetrius reflect the fountain of blood that pours out of Lavinia's mouth following her rape and mutilation (699). The replacement of tongue for hand, also, represents a replacement of speech for writing, which reflects Lavinia's communication of her defilement and her violators.

Lavinia is restricted by the patriarchal rules of the patriarchal society she lives in, allowing her few means of agency. Lavinia serves as the right hand of her family, providing a feminine quality to the male-dominated Andronici clan (Packard 295). As she is the right hand, it is only fitting that she takes her father's right hand in her mouth. Further, as the right hand of her family, it is fitting that Lavinia is confined to her father's house following her rape and mutilation. As Sara Eaton eloquently explains, Lavinia "begins the play potentially unruly in her speech and her humanist education, her writing, her teaching, is rendered a macabre and reified image of the chaste, silent, obediently wife and daughter after her mutilation – or because of it and is from her rape enclosed in her father's house" (66). Through the placement of Titus's hand into Lavinia's mouth, and the connotations provided linking the hand of the father to the father-tongue, Lavinia is forced to uphold the patriarchy. Through her confinement to her father's house, Lavinia is forced to fit into a different role than was required of her prior to her rape and subsequent mutilation. Forcing Lavinia into a new role proves that her literacy placed her in jeopardy because this new role is a gruesome reality.

Throughout *Titus* Lavinia functions as an intermediary between the educated and the barbaric, particularly through her forced acquisition of new forms of power and communication. She begins as morally superior to all characters in the text through her notorious guarding of her chastity and loyalty to her family. Lavinia's morality, provided through her literary wealth of

knowledge, threatens Tamora's evil goals and Rome's established systems of order and power. So, Lavinia must either be destroyed or diminished in order to allow the gruesome action of the play to continue. Therefore, Lavinia is raped and handicapped in order to allow Tamora to thrive in her new environment. Lastly, because Lavinia no longer possesses any means of communication and because words become physical reality, the characters of *Titus Andronicus* are forced to create a new way to use language and avoid further disaster. This new use of language serves to connect and unite the characters in order to reach a conclusion.

CONCLUSION

In *Titus,* language drives the action and violence of the play. Because Lavinia cannot use language in conventional ways, her effect on the plot is placed on hiatus until she finds a way to communicate with her family. Lavinia is a possession, but she is a possession with power, capable of using her status and position to advance, deter, or change the action of the play. As such, Rowe describes how "Lavinia functions in *Titus* as a space where the political distribution of signs of agency is worked out" (Rowe 297). Partially because she is the prized possession of Rome, and partially because she represents Rome, Lavinia serves as the locale for investigation in the play. Quite literally, the Andronici investigate what has happened to Lavinia, but through Lavinia, the Andronici also investigate what has happened to Rome.

The final revenge killings lead to the conclusion that through Lavinia the Goths, the Roman royals, and the Andronici are united by Ovidian violence. Lavinia is not and has not been powerless at any point in the play; even though she lacks a tongue and hands, Lavinia is capable of serving as a middle ground between barbarity and civility and of threatening the establishment of order and power in Rome. She lacks hands and a tongue, she reeks of desperation, but she is not powerless. Through her silence, as Sara Eaton describes, Lavinia "becomes a visible woman of letters and a product of that extremity, capable of reproducing a humanist world in and on her body. Her missing tongue and limbs confirm her as an object of value and desire, signifying how her world violently possesses and exchanges women through a dislocation of words and hands" (67). Lavinia exists as a possession of first her father, then Bassanius, then her father. Despite being possessed and silenced, Lavinia manages incredible feats. Lavinia's silence serves a multitude of purposes, two of the most prominent being first to assert pathos in her rhetoric, and

the second that for Lavinia to speak and point out her accusers would threaten the reestablishment of order in the *Titus*.

In *Titus,* Lavinia's literacy instigates the action of the play through its references to the Ovidian rape narrative, which Lavinia communicates through in order to control the outcome of the tragedy. Lavinia is given very few spoken lines throughout the course of *Titus* Andronicus, however, her role's significance in the play is astronomical. The image of Lavinia immediately after her rape and mutilation is seared into the minds of the audience, permanently. Lavinia's silence after her rape and mutilation doesn't stop her eloquence, rather, it enhances her presence (Fawcett 266). Even without conventional means of conversation, Lavinia is capable of communicating her rape. She uses her capabilities to place her in a position of authority over the plot of the play. Lavinia's rape and mutilation confine her to her father's home and attempt to ensure her silence. As Packard describes, "her rape forcibly removes her from the narrative of personal and Roman purity, the play uses her to necessitate recognition of its many other narratives" (Packard 282-283). If Lavinia had not been silenced, the play would have a shorter and more direct plot. Lavinia's silence is necessary to ensure the trials and tribulations of the other characters as they compete to achieve vengeance, particularly the Goths, as her silence hinders her ability to control the Ovidian rape narrative. Her maintenance of power and position post-mutilation establish Lavinia as a worthy adversary. Sara Eaton explains, "Her missing tongue and limbs confirm her as an object of value and desire, signifying how her world violently possesses women through a dislocation of words and hands" (Eaton 67). Lavinia's literariness allows her to control the Ovidian rape narrative, establishing a new method of communication, and co-authoring the ending of the tragedy.

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