

(ARTICLES)

“To be a warrior and command a camp”: The Representations of the Foreigners in *Titus Andronicus*

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Titus Andronicus, Shakespeare’s first Roman play, was published in 1594. England at that time was under the threat from foreign powers in Catholic countries (Doran 51-61) while the most serious problem in the country concerned about the successor of Elizabeth I. In 1588, Spain sent its Armada to invade England, and the menace lasted for a long time until the end of Elizabeth’s reign. In order to intercept the recovery of Spanish naval power and refill the exchequer with Spanish silver, Elizabeth conferred privateers such as Sir John Norris the government commission (Williams 325-48). Parma was still advancing in the Netherlands, and the French Catholic League threatened the Channel ports (Hammer 154-82). England at that time was also having troubles with Ireland which would eventually develop into the Nine Years War, in particular Tyrone’s Rebellion, continuing from 1594 to 1603 (Williams 349-59).

In the meanwhile, the problem of an increasing number of the Moors in Elizabethan England was causing concerns even of for Queen Elizabeth. “An open letter to the Lord Maiour of London and th’Aldermen his brethren, and to all other Maiours, Sheryfes, &c.,” which was registered on the 11th of July 1596, states:

Her majestie understanding that there are of late divers blackmoores brought into this realme, of which kinde of people there are already here to manie, consideringe howe God hath blessed this land with great increase of people of our owne nation as anie countrie in the world, whereof manie for want of service and means to sett them on worck fall to idleness and to great extremytie. Her majesty’s pleasure therefore ys that those kinde of pople should be sent forth of the lande, and for that purpose there ys direction given to this bearer Edwarde Banes to take blackmoores that in this last voyage. . . . (*Acts of Privy Council* 16)

Furthermore, according to “An open warrant to the Lord Maiour of London and to all Vyce-Admyralles, Maiours and other publicke officers whatsoever to whom yt may appertaine,” registered on the 18th of July 1596, Elizabeth I allowed a German merchant to take the Moors in England to Spain and Portugal in exchange for her eighty-nine subjects who had been

imprisoned by the Spanish and the Portuguese (*Acts of Privy Council* 20).

This play, written against such a backdrop, describes the end of the Roman Empire, presenting the issues of the hereditary monarch and the war against foreign countries. In this essay, the term “a foreigner” is defined to refer to the Goths and the Moors in ancient Rome. The threat of foreign countries as well as swelling number of the Moors in England is presented by those people. Foreigners such as Tamora, Queen of the Goths, and Aaron, a Moor, who is brought to Rome with the Goths, are described as having power enough to prevent Titus from building male friendships. Since Titus kills Alarbus, Tamora’s eldest son, as a sacrifice in memory of his sons who were slain by the Goths, she revenges herself upon Titus. Louise Noble argues about the reason why they have such power:

. . . both Aaron and Tamora merely employ the disturbed situation they find in Rome—exhibitions of cruel and rapacious imperialism supported by a revenge logic that fuels perceptions of insult and dishonor—to their own advantage.
(690)

Since the setting of the time is when the Roman Empire, not functioning properly, is losing its strength, they can exert influence upon Roman males. Lavinia, Titus’s daughter, can be regarded as in the same situation with the foreigners; she is a woman and hence cannot belong to the male world, where only Roman males have controlling power. Therefore, the foreigners and Lavinia can be categorized as “others,” who are excluded from the male world. The existence of “others” clarifies the nature of the Roman concept of male honour, which is important in constructing male friendship and to which Titus feels strongly bound.

In “A Lamentable Ballad,” one of Shakespeare’s probable sources of the play, the Blackmoor is portrayed as a mere savage, referred to as “filthy,” “savage,” and “vile” (73, 103, 119 quoted by Bullough VI 74). Contrastingly, his master, a lord in Rome, is described as gallant and noble while his wife as virtuous, and his two children, as fair. Since his master, hoping to amend his attitudes, punished him for his offence in the woods; for this he revenges himself upon the whole members of his master’s household. Despite the master’s repeated entreaties, he rapes the wife, killing her and their children cruelly in the highest tower, whose gates are bolted so fast that nobody can enter; in order to save his wife’s life, the master, told by the Moor to do so, cuts off his own nose by himself and dies. Thus, the Moor in the ballad shows neither affection nor intelligence, and does not construct any bondship with others.

By contrast, in Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus*, Tamora and Aaron are described as intelligent and clever, speaking in blank verse throughout the play. Looked down on by the Romans as outsiders, they are affectionate towards their own families, proud of their own races and themselves. In comparison of *Titus Andronicus* with “A Lamentable Ballad,” it is clear that Shakespeare presents people of other races as possessing their human complexities in the play. The social climate at the time when the play was written, seem to have influenced Shakespeare’s representations of the foreigners, especially the Moor. Michael Wood suggests that the Moors were not so rare in Shakespeare’s England: “. . . he must also have met ‘moors’ of North Africa, and even West African, origin” (273). Shakespeare does not portray black people as monsters,

but since their numbers had been growing in Elizabethan England especially since the 1570s (Ian Smith 298), he rather seemed to have been concerned with the influential power Moors had in society.

Though a foreigner, Tamora deeply involves herself in the politics of the Roman world of power where only Roman males are supposed to have dominance. Making use of her female sexual attraction, she marries Saturninus, the emperor, and attempts to revenge herself on Titus, who has killed Alarbus, her eldest son, at the beginning of the play. As Naomi Conn Liebler points out, the Roman sacrificial custom is nothing but a barbarous act for Tamora: “the tragedy is set in motion by conflicting ritual observance, a set of relatives, a clash of cultures” (145). Her cruelty is emphasized through the process of her revenge, but it stems from the cruelty of the Roman custom of sacrifice itself. She feels strong bondship with Alarbus, who has the possibility of restoring the honour of the Goths, whereas Titus fails to build a family bondship with his children. Tamora’s sense of honour is thus based on the royal lineage of the Goths.

Tamora consistently keeps her own sense of self, displaying her authority as a patriarch of the royal family of the Goths. She orders her sons to kill Bassianus and violate Lavinia:

Tamora: Revenge it as you love your mother’s life,
Or be ye not henceforth called my children.

Demetrius: This is a witness that I am thy son.

[stab him]

Chiron: And this for me, struck home to shew my strength. (2.2.114-7)

Being insulted by Bassianus and Lavinia in the previous scene, she entertains her utmost hatred against them. Nonetheless, before her sons come to her, she puts up with their insults, saying, “I have patience to endure all this” (2.2.88). She even pretends that she is offended by Titus, but not by them. However, in response to Lavinia’s ardent plea to protect her from her sons’ attack, she pitilessly turns it down:

Hadst thou in person ne’er offended me,
Even for his sake am I pitiless.
Remember, boys, I poured forth tears in vain
To save your brother from the sacrifice,
But fierce Andronicus would not relent. (2.2.161-5)

Here, she tells a lie to her sons with regard to her motivation for her revenge upon Bassianus and Lavinia. Being blamed for her own “foul desire” (2.2.79) by them, the enraged Tamora tries to conceal her affairs with Aaron from them, pretending to revenge herself upon the Romans for the sake of her eldest son. Throughout the play, exerting her controlling power over her sons, she regards her family bondship with them as essential.

In the latter part of the play, however, she abandons her own child she bore to Aaron. According to the Nurse, Tamora says that her black baby “shall die” (4.2.84). The difference in her attitudes towards the deaths of Alarbus and her black baby comes from their lineage; Alarbus is her successor of the Goths while the baby is the outcome of her adulterous relation with Aaron, his black skin possibly bringing her adultery into light. Alexander Leggatt states

that “There is nothing here of her feeling for Alarbus; she is more like Titus killing Mutius in response to being dishonoured; once again the two adversaries mirror each other” (15). The reason why she does not feel any love for the baby lies in its skin colour. While Aaron, the Moor, can be accepted as her servant and lover, she cannot accept him as the member of her family, nor their baby as her child. She considers her baby as an outsider who is inferior as he does not belong to the Goths. She tries to maintain her identity as Queen of the Goths by killing her own baby, adjusting herself to her ideal image of the royal family of the Goths by excluding it.

In contrast to Tamora, Aaron entertains deep affection for his baby. He identifies himself with it, calling it “my flesh and blood” (4.2.86). When Demetrius and Chiron, to whom the baby is actually a half-brother, insist on killing it, he retorts against them :

My mistress is my mistress, this myself,
The vigour and the picture of my youth.
This before all the world do I prefer,
This maugre all the world will I keep safe,
Or some of you shall smoke for it is Rome. (4.2.109-13)

Although Tamora, Demetrius and Chiron, the members of the royal family of the Goths, do not regard the baby as a family member, for Aaron, it is his “first-born son and heir” (4.2.94). Aaron, who has not built up any bondship with others, feels strong familial ties with his black baby.

The contrasting attitudes of Tamora and Aaron towards their baby highlight the importance of family as “a public unit.” Jonathan Goldberg argues the sense of belonging to one’s family in Renaissance England:

The family in the Renaissance is inevitably a public unit. Marriages occurred between families; diplomacy was carried on through marriage; kings more and more stressed their legitimacy by pointing to their lineage and invented ancestries to further the sense that genealogy was destiny. (7)

In Renaissance England, family was an important unit by which to decide one’s position in society. Family was the fundamental social institution, and therefore, central to social order. The members of a family were supposed to share a common form and common ideals (Amussen 35-8). Following this concept of England at that time, Tamora and Aaron think that the baby can decisively influence their social position; by accepting the baby as a family member, Tamora will be ruined while Aaron can reconstruct his sense of self.

Though the Goths and Aaron are both outsiders seen from the perspectives of the Romans in the play, they are not situated in the same condition; Aaron, the Moor, is considered by other people inferior to the Goths owing to the colour of his skin. As to the racial prejudice against black people, Virginia Mason Vaughan states: “The association between damnation and blackness became commonplace in Elizabethan discourse” (24). On the other hand, it can be said that Aaron has constructed his sense of self on his being a Moor. With regard to racial identity, Dympna Callaghan argues:

Skin color thus bears an arbitrary rather than necessary relation to the essential racial identity negritude is assigned to express. It is precisely this inessential

status that made negritude vulnerable to the obsessive economy of the visual.
(80)

Although despised by other races, Aaron emphasizes his pride on the blackness of his skin. He retorts to the Nurse, “. . . is black so base a hue?” (4.2.73).

Tamora for him is a tool to achieve his political ambition for power. In Deborah Willis’s view, Aaron is Tamora’s collaborator in her act of revenge upon the Romans: “. . . Tamora becomes Aaron’s inventive and brutal collaborator in an improvisational theater of revenge” (39). And yet, Aaron seems take the initiative in their attack upon the Romans. When Tamora is married to Saturninus, Aaron plans to make use of her high position in the Roman society:

Then, Aaron, arm thy heart and fit thy thoughts
To mount aloft with thy imperial mistress,
And mount her pitch whom thou in triumph long
Hast prisoner held, fettered in amorous chains
And faster bound to Aaron’s charming eyes
Than is Prometheus ties to Caucasus.

Away with slavish weeds and servile thought! (1.1.511-7)

Though an outsider, he starts to relate himself to the male world of power in Rome through his sexual relationship with Tamora, the Roman Empress.

Aaron also regards Demetrius and Chiron as his tools to achieve his ambition to ruin the Romans. His inciting of Tamora’s sons to rape Lavinia and kill Bassianus functions as a part of his strategy. In front of them, he politely calls them “lord,” but uses the term “an ass” (4.2.25) in referring to them. He does not have any sense of loyalty towards them; when they insist on killing his child, he abuses them openly:

Sooner this sword shall plough thy bowels up.

(Draws his sword and takes the child.)

Stay, murderous villains, will you kill your brother? (4.2.90-1)

His deep antipathy towards them is revealed in this scene, when he refers to the brothers as “murderous villains,” addressing them, “thou,” instead of “you.”

Aaron’s way of associating himself with Roman society is unique; he tries to obtain actual power, not a high social position. He himself seems to be deeply conscious that he can neither become the leader of Rome nor construct friendship with white males who can lead the Goths or the Romans. According to MacFaul’s definition (152-3), Aaron can be categorized as a “fellow-traveller.” In this essay, a “fellow-traveller” is defined as a man who does not try to obtain male honour but accompanies men who seek for it, understanding the code of male honour in the society. The reason why he travels with men is that he seeks for honour. Consequently, a “fellow-traveller” is not a friend of men with whom he acts. Although Aaron is not concerned to embody the Roman ideal of honour, he still wants to gain great influence on Rome. He tries to reconstruct his own identity as a powerful black commander through his child, who has “royal blood” (5.1.49) of the Goths.

He obviously thinks that his baby’s life to be better and of more value than his. His

words to his baby, “To be a warrior and command a camp” (4.2.182), indicate his great hopes for his child. Having lived a life despised by people of other races, he hopes that his son may be able to lead the Goths as a warrior of royal blood. He thinks that only his baby will help him to succeed in the Roman male world of either Romans or Goths.

His paternal love for his baby makes him totally different from the parents such as Titus and Tamora, who ruin their children in order to maintain their honour. To save his baby’s life, Aaron negotiates with Lucius, proposing that he should give useful information to him:

Lucius, save the child,
And bear it from me to the empress.
If thou do this, I’ll show thee wondrous things
That highly may advantage thee to her. (5.1.53-6)

Even though he is such a villain, saying, “nothing grieves me heartily indeed/ But that I cannot do ten thousand more” (5.1.143-4) of hideous deeds, he reveals to Lucius who is the true father of the baby, who has killed Bassianus, raped and mutilated Lavinia. However, he is not penitent of his evil acts at all in the final scene of the play:

Ten thousand worse than ever yet I did
Would perform if I might have my will.
If one good deed in all my life I did
I do repent it from my very soul. (5.3.186-9)

What makes him negotiate with Lucius is his wish to save his baby’s life. Although he, unlike Titus, can perform manipulation and cunningness from the beginning of the play, it is the first time that he negotiates with others. He has changed his way of living for the sake of his son.

In the meanwhile, not understanding the concept of male honour in the society, Titus cannot even become a “fellow-traveller” but remains a destroyer in various respects throughout the play. And yet, in the end he succeeds in deceiving Tamora, making her eat pasties of her own sons’ flesh. He states:

Hark, villains, I will grind your bones to dust,
And with your blood and it I’ll make a paste,
And of the paste a coffin I will rear
And make two pasties of your shameful heads,
And bid that strumpet, your unhallowed dam,
Like to the earth swallow her own incense. (5.2.186-91)

He is not satisfied with his murder of Demetrius and Chiron, but wants to revenge himself upon her in the cruelest way. A. B. Taylor states:

Trapping the human tiger, Tamora, he brutally
butchers her “young ones,” matters reaching a
crescendo, as in Ovid, with the human beast
unwittingly devouring its own kind. (69)

Taylor argues that, by having her eat meat pies made from her sons’ flesh, Titus makes Tamora a “tiger,” denying her intelligence and affection towards her sons. Titus at this moment employs a

kind of cunningness which he had nothing to do with in the earlier part of the play.

As to the descriptions of the black baby, in “The Tragical History of Titus Andronicus, & c.,” a source material Shakespeare used, there is no description of the relationship between the mixed-blood baby and its parents. Though it is written that Queen of the Goths had a baby with the Moor, how it is dealt with after birth is not told:

. . . she grew pregnant, and brought forth a Blackmoor Child: This grieved the Emperor extremely, but she allayed his Anger, by telling him it was conceived by the Force of Imagination. . . . (Bullough VI 39)

It becomes clear that Shakespeare intentionally emphasizes the future possibilities of the Moorish baby. At the time the play was written, the issue of foreign policy became serious in England; England had been in financial difficulties owing to sea warfare against Spain and reinforcement to Henri IV of France (Hammer 154-82). On the other hand, the succession problem of Queen Elizabeth I attracted a great deal of attention from people in England; since she had no child, who would ascend the throne was widely noticed. In such social situation, Shakespeare presents a new perspective on this issue of succession through Aaron’s baby with the royal blood of the Goths.

At the end of the play, Saturninus, the Roman emperor, dies without an heir. This gives a great impact on the political situation in Rome and the Goths; the Roman Empire is to be destroyed by Lucius’s attack together with the Goths. The survival of the children in the play, Young Lucius and Aaron’s baby, suggests the intermixture of the races in the future Rome. As to Aaron’s mixed-blood black baby, Ian Smith argues:

Yet, in a play where death and murderous execution reign in excess, Shakespeare’s emphatic resistance to the absolute, brutal logic of revenge in saving Aaron’s son constitutes a crucial aporia that amounts to an apologia. (287)

The survival of this child, whom Aaron ardently loves because of his skin colour, marks the end of the continuance of revenge of the older generation. The fact that Lucius saves the life of Aaron’s baby highlights a difference between Titus and Lucius, his son. As has been discussed, in the earlier part of the play, Titus murders Alarbus, Tamora’s eldest son no matter how desperately she begs him not to do so, considering Roman military culture as the most important. Concerning the representation of the survival of Aaron’s baby, Loomba argues:

Lucius’s decision to let the issue of their miscegenation, the black baby, live signals an end to the violence but it cannot be read as a sign of racial tolerance. (85)

Loomba regards the baby between Tamora and Aaron not as a symbol of a new value system but as that of the distasteful events happened in the Roman society.

Hadfield refers to the society presented in this play as “a society that finds it impossible to end conflict and transform itself from a culture of war to one of peace” (156). However, what makes Lucius save the baby comes from his new sense of values, which directs his attention to those of “others.” The value system Lucius supports does not depend entirely upon violence but

upon negotiations, which Titus never learns to understand.

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