



## The World of the Villain: Shakespeare's Tragi-Moral Paradigm

Dr. Shafaat Yar Khan<sup>1</sup>  
Dr. Muhammad Aslam<sup>2</sup>

### ABSTRACT:

This research re-evaluates the tragic paradigms in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* by highlighting his dramatic techniques for crafting the villain Aaron as a tragic character. Through close reading of the play, this research proves that Shakespeare used the same dramatic techniques for crafting Aaron as he used for tragedizing his heroes, especially Macbeth and Richard III. He humanized Aaron by permitting him to plead his case in self-revelation. He also effected a contrast of Aaron as the villain with the morally ambiguous world he inhabits. This prompts audience to embrace the moral complexities regarding him as a tragic figure whose change of fortune evokes pity. This new light on Shakespeare's techniques of crafting his villains has pedagogical implications for the teaching of characters with obtruse morality. Its theoretical implications necessitate reconsideration of the philosophical paradigms of tragedy in discussions of villain figures like the Joker in popular media.

**Key Words:** Aaron, Tragic Villains, Shakespearean Villain, Titus Andronicus, Philosophy of Tragedy

---

<sup>1</sup> Professor of English Literature – University of Central Punjab, Lahore ([shafaatyk@yahoo.com](mailto:shafaatyk@yahoo.com))

<sup>2</sup> University of Central Punjab ([m.aslam@ucp.edu.pk](mailto:m.aslam@ucp.edu.pk))





## 1. Introduction

This article studies Shakespeare's techniques of tragedising his criminals/villains to establish that contemporary attempts, especially in popular media, to treat criminals as tragic fail to achieve artistic greatness because they fall short of developing a philosophy of the tragic. The popular meaning of tragedy as a tale of undue suffering, or of the tragic as evoking pity has been controverted in literary discussions to establish that just a back-story, or a painful experience does not qualify a character to be called tragic. To be tragic, characters need a tragic flaw with its philosophical implications for human morality, and other traits that win audience sympathy. This is true for villain protagonists like Macbeth and Richard III as well as for villain antagonists like Shylock and Caliban. Through the study of Aaron in *Titus Andronicus*, this research problematizes the status of Shakespeare's villains by tracing in them the elements of the "tragic". Shakespeare presents them not only as antagonists but also endows them with hamartia causing a fall as retribution of their acts. This research proposes that since the fall of the villains evokes pity, Shakespeare's villains qualify to be called tragic. After enlisting Shakespeare's techniques for tragedising of Macbeth, this article applies them to Aaron, the villain in *Titus Andronicus* to establish that he is a tragic character like Shylock and Caliban. Finally, it uses these techniques for tragedising villains to study the popular media character of the Joker to establish that attempts to tragedise his character remain melodramatic rather than rising to the tragic. The dramatic techniques identified in this research can be used to study other villains whose impress on the audience is a sense of the tragic but who are neither heroes nor heroic, just as Shylock and Caliban are tragic figures representing marginalized communities.

## 2. Literature Review

Recently, critics' interest has shifted to the problems of evil, subversiveness and retribution (Norden, *Changing Face of Evil*. 2007; Genc & Lenhardt, *Global Perspective*, 2011). It is still difficult to fix a definition of tragedy as an abstraction. It has been called "the holy grail of literary criticism" (Brenton, *Freedom in chaos*). Terry Eagleton titled a chapter "A Theory in Ruins" to discuss its characteristics and identified it as a collection of the binaries like "the alterable and the inevitable, the truly tragic and the merely piteous" as the distinctions on which the conception of tragedy turns (*Sweet Violence*, p. 21). The protagonist, as the name suggests was the first character in the tragic form which was originally just a "goat song" or a choral singing of the faults and falls of historical characters. With the introduction of the first character (protagonist), a human person with a voice to defend himself was introduced. What was originally a contest or agon between the chorus and an accused character, further developed to have a noble hero with a tragic flaw. Thus, Aeschylus' Prometheus & Clytemnestra, Sophocles' Oedipus (especially at Colonus), or Euripides' Medea do not suffer any fall due to a flaw. These dramas, though termed tragedies, contextualise characters' actions with a paradigm of morality leading to a better sense-awareness, which in turn expands audience's sense of the moral forces that govern human life. The agon thus dramatizes a "struggle for a selfhood" (Bell, *Tragic scepticism*, p. xii) as a direct result of the conflict.





Tragedy's transformations of its forms and concepts defies giving a single definition. No one today agrees with Bradley that tragedy is the story of a single high-placed hero who suffers and eventually dies after losing former happiness, or believes Steiner that tragedy is dead because humankind no longer feels "the intolerable burden of God's presence" (353). Conflict, mental anguish, psychological depth, and an end that evokes audience pity, however, continue as hallmarks of tragic characters. Tracing the strains of the tragic in Shylock's appeals to be treated as human or interpretation of Caliban's defiance through postcolonial theory are now universally accepted.

Tragedy started by centralising action around a criminal, a prospect that dominated Elizabethan tragedy since Marlowe's Barabas (Boyer, *Villain as hero*, p. 2). A humanist view of villains as equally tragic as the hero was made possible with Robert Greene who used "different narrative strategies to make the criminal world look more picturesque and vibrant" (Vasylyna, *Narrative strategies*, p. 11). The villain was, thus, redefined as "a man who, for a selfish end, wilfully and deliberately violates standards of morality sanctioned by the audience or ordinary reader" (Boyer, *Villain as hero*, p. 8).

Many recent works discuss sympathy with the villains as a dramatic technique (Kerr, Lemmings, and Phiddian, *Passions, Sympathy and Print Culture*, 2016, p. 128; Falzon, *Experiments in Film and Philosophy*, 2023, p. 55). Donohue Jr. (*Dramatic Character*, 2015, 103) shows how Richard III played by Garrick won audience sympathy. Benjamin Poore (*Neo-Victorian Villains*, 2017) establishes that popular entertainment of the Victorian period had many anti-heroes and sympathetic villains like Dick Turpin, Claude Duval, Francis Varney, and Jack Sheppard who blurred the distinction between heroes and villains. Mulvey-Roberts (*Handbook of the Gothic*, 2016, p. 179) shows how villains represent the desire to sympathise with the socially persecuted. These works indicate that the villain as a tragic character deserving sympathy is a popular subject now. However, Shakespeare's portrayal of tragic villains has deep philosophical and dramatic implications.

Shakespeare's rejection of the Aristotelian theorisation of hero for a tragic villain enabled him in *Macbeth* to explain the psych-moral experience of his crime. The protagonist became the hero though the agony of a criminal lived through the events of a "sympathetic-degenerative plot" (Booth, 1951, p. 17) which aroused audience pity. As Booth explained Shakespeare's crafting of *Macbeth*, "take a 'noble' man, full of 'conscience' and 'the milk of human kindness,' and make of him a 'dead butcher,' yet keep him an object of pity rather than hatred (Booth, 1951, p. 17). Booth also delineated Shakespeare's techniques for arousing audience pity. Rhetorically, any character could be transformed into a tragic figure (Booth, *Rhetoric of irony*, p. 18). Shakespeare's "master-rulebook" (Booth, *Rhetoric of irony*, p. 2) created a potentially good person evidence of whose goodness is made available, falls to a real temptation, but is never shown to be actually committing any horrible acts, so that audience pity is aroused with every step of his degeneration (Heilman, 1967, pp. 19-20).





Macbeth as a tragic villain related to the trend in Elizabethan tragedy of evil-doers as tragic heroes deserving pity (Boyer, 1914). Suffering and excruciating agony became the hallmark of a tragic figure. Heroes who become villains evoke tragic sentiments of pity and fear (Boyer, *Villain as hero*, p. 21, pp. 1-2, 86-95, 130-1. 221-2). In such studies, villain is used for the protagonist who commits immoral acts. Antagonists who oppose the central character/s and are not central to the plot except as perpetrators of crimes against the protagonists are not included in this.

The study of Macbeth as a tragic villain has led critics to agree on Shakespeare's techniques of tragedising his villains. The villain-hero is created an ambiguous character with contrasting traits (Heilman, *Criminal as tragic hero*, p. 13). The audience identify with him because he expresses essential human feelings and his "immediate, unanalysed imaginative experience" is shared by the audience. Shakespeare kept the villain at the centre of attention by giving him great poetry, expressing the torture of his gradual self-realisation (Booth, *Macbeth as a tragic hero*, p. 23) until we feel that "the self-torture has already expiated the guilt of the crime" (Booth, *Macbeth as a tragic hero*, p. 22). His crimes are committed off-stage, but the burden of their guilt and self-examination are felt and expressed on-stage so that the expression of his guilt convinces the audience that despite his wickedness, he has not lost their admiration. Thus, the moral defectiveness is balanced by a moral triumph inscribed in self-expression (Heilman, *Criminal as tragic hero*, p. 13) so that the audience see through his eyes. In this way, Shakespeare's villain is humanised and comes to represent the human experience sharable with the audience (Boyer, *Villain as hero*, p. 115, pp. 118-119).

As Heilman aptly puts it, if Macbeth were only the history of people overthrowing a criminal and a tyrant, it would have become "political melodrama" rather than be high tragedy (Heilman, *Criminal as tragic hero*, p. 12). Trivial literature is sentimental and the characters give us "an inadequate or false sense of reality". They call into action too few of our human potentialities. Hence 'tragedy' is an honorific genre because its literary structure pushes us to learn the truth so we know ourselves more fully by passing imaginatively through revelatory experiences (Heilman, *Criminal as tragic hero*, p. 14). Tragedy, thus,

Tragedy augments people's knowledge of themselves by making them imaginatively understand human "moral capabilities to which [they] may ordinarily be blind" (Heilman, *Criminal as tragic hero*, p. 15).

When Boyer began his study of *Villain as Hero in Elizabethan Tragedy* (1914), he found out that many Machiavellian criminals were protagonists and that there were many kinds of villains. In his view, Aaron's intellectual ability and courage failed to arouse admiration and yet compared villains like Iago and Eleazar (Boyer, *Villain as Hero*, p. 103, pp. 134-136, 136-8) throughout his study mentioning him no less than fifty times. He viewed his malice to be "universal, inhuman, and inexplicable" (p. 118).

This research contends that if evil intentions of the villains are understood to be faults similar to the hamartia of the tragic hero, the revenge-mongering Aaron can be considered tragic. However, critics before the 21<sup>st</sup> century were reluctant to accept that Aaron could be tragic. But critics who do not take the centre of the family fail to deconstruct Aaron's presence in the play. Chernaik thinks that because his





blackness is oft mentioned in the play, “Aaron the Moor, ... is the ultimate, unassimilable outsider, who revels in his transgressive villainy and, like the other characters, equates the physical signs of blackness with evil” (Chernaik, *Myth of Rome*, p. 75). Misunderstanding Aaron completely, Lawlor says “Aaron the Moor is flat evil ... is a fiend...” whose place is in a fiery hell” (Lawlor, *Tragic Sense*, 60-61). Aaron’s child, he concludes, shows that the events of the play are taking place in the real world. Eldred D. Jones considers Aaron’s melancholy to be a pose. He starts his discussion In his article “in Titus Andronicus” (Jones, Aaron and Melancholy, pp. 178-179) with a straightforward

Aaron, the villain in Titus Andronicus, is one of those artists in villainy who take delight in evil for its own sake. The author gives him no obvious motives for his crimes ... His whole life is devoted to the execution of a vengeance the cause of which is never clear... . (p. 179).

Emily C. Bartels points out Aaron as a stereotyped Other but her concern is the Moors and the Muslims in Elizabethan literature (Bartels, Making more, p. 439). In her view “What puts the play, the state of Rome, and Titus himself in crisis is the breakdown of distinctions between "ours" and "theirs," and the destabilization of legitimating rights.” She does not take into account the fact that the play is much more about the breakdown of family ties than with stylised narratives of otherness. Rhodes calls Aaron “the outsider’s outsider, or barbarian’s barbarian” (Rhodes, *Shakespeare the Barbarian*, p. 108). Boyer acknowledges, “... the poet endows Aaron with courage, love for his child, an acid humour, and an intellectuality which, though not great, is superior to that of his associates”, but does not think that these qualities evoke any sympathy (Boyer, Villain as Hero, p. 107). In his opinion, a tragedy with Aaron as hero would have been a failure. This research will establish that not only did Shakespeare give Aaron the stuff of hero, he also establish a probable cause for his villainy fulfils the requirements of both necessity and consistency.

We can contrast the requirements of necessity and consistency in the crafting of Aaron with several re-creations of the Joker. He was created as Batman’s antagonist and represents chaos. Over the years, he has been given many origin stories. Many back-stories have been invented to endow him with the qualities which would evoke spectators’ sympathy tragedy. With every new appearance, he is made a different person with a different biographical background and different psychological makeup accounting for the motivation of his crimes. Also, he exists in a world where screen experience and commercial expediency decide what he would be like. No internal consistency dictated by probability determines his creation.

### Research Questions

- 1) Which dramatic techniques have been principally associated with tragedisation of characters?
- 2) What is the moral structure of the world in Titus Andronicus?
- 3) How is Aaron contrasted with the world he inhabits?
- 4) What evidence of the use of dramatic techniques is there that Shakespeare humanized Aaron?
- 5) Which techniques of tragedisation can be highlighted in the presentation of Aaron?

### 3. Research Design

This research tests the hypothesis that Shakespeare tragedised his villains as he did Macbeth. It uses Shakespeare’s dramatic techniques of getting audience’s pity and fear for him as highlighted by critics like Wayne Booth and Heilman. By applying these techniques to the characters in *Titus Andronicus*, especially Aaron the Moore, this research establishes that Shakespeare used the same dramatic techniques for Aaron as he had used for Macbeth.







#### 4. Methodology

For the analysis of tragic characteristics of Shakespeare's villains, this research applies the theoretical perspectives of tragedy in which there are some commonly accepted features of heroes and villains. It problematizes those features by identifying in villain figures the tragic characteristics which are commonly associated with heroes. Similar studies by Booth (1951) and Heilman (1967) on Shylock, Macbeth, and Richard III have identified their tragic features. As tragic heroes, they are endowed with tragic flaws like narcissism, envy, overreaching ambition, and desire for power. Through close reading of the play, this research sought evidence of similar flaw/s in Aaron to establish that his flaw is reflective of moral corruption in the world of Titus Andronicus. It is a common opinion that heroes' self-awareness raises them above villains. This research contests this view and identifies the traits of heroes in Aaron and argues for the novel idea that up against a corrupt moral order, he chose to oppose the corrupt order and be a villain. This research sought evidence that Shakespeare gave Aaron a moral choice born of self-awareness and social consciousness superior to that found in other characters. It sought textual proof to establish that this dramatic technique causes moral ambiguity which blurs the distinction between hero and villain. Caught in conflict, Aaron faces moral choices giving opportunities for self-revelation which humanise them. He is humanized with his expressions of moral anguish and self-analysis. Anagnorisis, as self-identity reinforces his humanity so that his downfall (peripeteia) leads to tensions which are not released in a catharsis.

#### 5. Data Analysis

Though the least popular of Shakespeare's plays because of the crude spectacle of savage evil, characters in *Titus Andronicus* have the seeds of later villains. Shakespeare's control of dramatic causation and the techniques employed to define and delineate characters' failings contribute to the plot. The tragedy focuses on a morally decayed and indifferent tyrant whose actions provoke the opposition of a loyal patriot.

Shakespeare's creation of the world of the villain is simple but direct. After ten years of war with Goths, the Roman general, Titus Andronicus, having lost twenty-one sons brings his prisoner the Queen of the Goths, Tamora, Aaron the Moor, and her three sons. Despite Tamora's pleas, he sacrifices her eldest son to his own dead sons, making Tamora's vow revenge on him. Having won the affection of the emperor Saturninus, she soon succeeds in getting two of Titus' sons beheaded for the murder of emperor's brother and his daughter Lavinia raped by her sons Chiron and Demetrius. They cut off her hands and tongue so she cannot name them. Titus's third son Lucius is banished from Rome and seeks alliance from Goths against Rome. Titus starts feigning madness and having captured Tamora's sons, kills them. Then he cooks them and feeds them to their mother, after which he kills both her and his own daughter, Lavinia. Meanwhile, Aaron escapes with his son born of Tamora, but is captured. He agrees to confess many crimes, even those which he did not commit, only to save his son. He is buried alive.

The brutal action in *Titus Andronicus* causes "14 killings, 9 of them on stage, 6 severed members, 1 rape ... 1 live burial, 1 case of insanity, and 1 of cannibalism - an average of 5.2 atrocities per act, or one for every 97 lines. (Hulse, *Wrestling*, p. 106). The spectacle forces the audience to ask 'why' not only for the villainy by Tamora and her sons, but also by Titus. Aaron inhabits a world dominated by human cruelty destroying familial ties. Family determines the language, characterization, and dramatic structure of the play. Scores of references to the filial ties intertwine the private and the public worlds. The first few minutes of the act-long first scene spotlight the familial and the political with two royal brothers contending for the imperial crown.





They are defined by their diction - Bassianus argues by virtue, honour, justice, and nobility, while Saturninus refers to swords and arms. At this time, Titus enters, victorious but bearing the bodies of 21 of his sons lost in war. He has also brought the captured Goth Queen Tamora, and her three sons, and her slave lover Aaron. He allows his son Lucius to sacrifice Tamora's eldest son, Alarbus to his sons and refuses to listen to Tamora's pleas, thus defying the central concern of the play – family love. Not having learnt from his sons' deaths, he kills his son Mutius for defying his paternal power, and finally his daughter Lavinia.

Tamora's appeals by "A mother's tears in passion for her son" and calls upon Titus by his own love for his sons (1. 1.109-113) are answered with Lucius' declaration, "Alarbus' limbs are lopp'd,/And entrails feed the sacrificing fire,/Whose smoke, like incense, doth perfume the sky." (1. 1.149-51), provoking the Goths' revenge (2. 1.141-5). The scene contrasts parents' griefs. Titus' refusal denies Tamora the maternal rights. Tamora is justified in revenge for what is done to her. On both sides, justice is problematised. The tragic paradigm here is far more complicated than the simple explanation that Shakespeare dramatised the fall of characters who chose unjust means to realise just ends. Tamora's tears for her son contrast her later orders for the murder of her son by Aaron. Shakespeare demands multiple possible ways of looking at the characters with various evaluations of their acts. The adversaries of evil and victims of the villains turn out to be as much evil as the tragic characters in their tragic deeds. They all exist in a real world with palpable consequences of actions so that a chain of causation and effects defines the psycho-moral principles governing human behaviour.

Titus also refuses to be Emperor when his brother, Marcus, representing the tribunes offers him the crown, and unwisely nominates Saturninus. When Saturninus desires to marry Titus's daughter Lavinia, a family quarrel starts because she loves Bassianus, and Titus kills his son, Mutius, because he was helping Lavinia escape the marriage with Saturninus. When Lucius accuses Titus of being unjust, Titus disowns him. But, then Saturninus decides to marry Tamora (1.1.318-331), who has sworn revenge for her son, the family feuds take a new turn.

Names are important. Saturninus sounds like Satyrinus; and Titus' surname is Pius sounding like pious, which Tamora accuses of "irreligious piety!" Tamora is a blend of Aaron and amour. Sex and sensuality dominates her relation with Saturninus whom she promises to "handmaid be to his desires,/A loving nurse, a mother to his youth." (1.1.334-335), and Saturninus announces to "consummate our spousal rites" at the Parthenon.

The next movement introduces Aaron with a soliloquy revealing that he has been Tamora's lover and has "in triumph long/Hast prisoner held, fettered in amorous chains". His romantic power over Tamora is contrasted with Demetrius' sensual view of love expressed in "She is a woman, therefore may be won" (2.1.85).

In this world where family values determine state politics, Aaron the Moor stands at the margins of the action and yet interferes with its dynamics by motivating the key players. Critics who see Aaron as evil incarnate, miss the leading motif of the play – filial love. Aaron is the only one who displays a genuine filial love while all others this one human passion. They act out a Senecan tragedy. Titus killing Lavinia to end her misery is hardly Shakespearean; Shakespeare's dramatization of the love between fathers and daughters (Lear-Cordelia, Ophelia-Polonius) would not allow this ending. Shakespeare's plot from the first scene is dominated by loss of filial love leading to tragedy. He starts the two scenes with public soliloquies to reveal his "... very excellent piece of villainy" (2.3.07) whose cause even Tamora doesn't know. But the germs of villain's melancholy are expressed in Tamora's noting that he is sad (2.3.10) and confirmed in Aaron's





"Saturn is dominator over mine" (2.3.31) because "Blood and revenge are hammering in my head" (2.3.39). Tamora's expression of "my lovely Moor" with "my spleenful sons" (2.3.190-191) establishes the contrast of two attitudes of life.

Romantic love also becomes a concern when love and aesthetics appear in Act II, Scene III, with the pastoral setting for the love between Tamora and Aaron. It starts with poetry capturing the romantic sights and sounds of the forest reminiscent of Ovid and Spenser.

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 chequer'd shadow on the ground.

(2.3.15-18)

Then immediate reference to "The wandering prince and Dido" sheds new light on Aaron, perhaps in a postcolonial way. He is not a slave, but a wandering prince like Aeneas, who was made a slave because he was abducted from his kingdom. Aaron's melancholy contrasts with the pastoral pleasures available. His response is not strange as he has just now buried a pot of gold to cause mischief.

No, madam, these are no venereal signs:  
Vengeance is in my heart, death in my hand,  
Blood and revenge are hammering in my head.

(II. 3. 40-42)

Vengeance, and not sex, is on his mind; he is one who rejects sex, the physical expression of love. Aaron is the only one who understands the spiritual value of sex and despite all the sexual gibes in Act 4, Sc 3, he is still the one who establishes family values rather than destroy them.

## 6. Findings

Aaron is admirable by being the cleverest in the play (Chernaik, *Myth of Rome*, p. 75). Difference is made by the side one is on. Antony Sher tells how, in South Africa, audience gave a resounding applause of approval to Aaron's speech (as cited in Chernaik, *Myth*, p. 75). Shakespeare gives him wit and sardonic cynicism and inscribes that as a slave he is as well read as people around him who are ignorant of the deeper meanings of the classics. Aaron has cultural literacy (Bartels, *Making more*, 439). He refers to Philomela and recognises Titus' message to be from Horace (4.2.20). Shakespeare makes him absent during murder and rape just as he never shows Macbeth and Richard performing the evil deeds.

It is noteworthy that Aaron remains silent in the beginning gets a voice when and Saturninus has become king as a result of Titus' wrong choice. Like others of Shakespeare's villains he starts his career with a soliloquy, (Act II, Sc. 1) proving that he has psychological depth which Shakespeare wants us to plumb. The soliloquies express his love for Tamora seeing her secure from 'Fortune's shot', 'thunder's crack', 'pale envy's threat'ning reach' (11. 1. 10-12). His 'imperial mistress' (113) is bound to his love "Than is Prometheus tied to Caucasus" (117), so he will not 'wait upon' her but rather 'wanton with her'. Soon she becomes a siren and a pagan goddess, and his motivation is revealed. As a slave, he can never contrive what he wants – the destruction of the Roman Empire; but he can use Tamora and get it done. "In speaking and defining (or not defining) himself, Aaron enforces his own alienation" (Bartels, *Making more*, p. 446). Shakespeare contrasts him with Demetrius and Chiron quarrelling over Lavinia. Aaron questions their love for her and asks: "What, is Lavinia then become so loose,/Or Bassianus so degenerate,/That for her love such quarrels may be broach'd/Without controlment, justice, or revenge?" (2, 11, 11).







Aaron's comments on Rome tell us about his world: "The Emperor's court is like the house of Fame, /The palace full of tongues, of eyes, and ears". Chernaik calls Titus Andronicus "a play in which Romans and Goths compete in behaving barbarously, with a nightmarish descent into murder, rape, mutilation, and cannibalism" (Chernaik, *Myth of Rome*, p. 2). Politics motivated by personal hatred moves the plot and gods do not exist in this world (Wilders, *Lost garden*, pp.54-55). For Aaron there are no gods, no providence, and thus no retribution. In a world that has no gods, Aaron is committed to total evil. "Let fools do good, and fair men call for grace: /Aaron will have his soul black like his face." (3.1.212). But, Lucius who calls him "barbarous Moor,/This ravenous tiger, this accursèd devil" (5.3.4-5) was ecstatic on smelling the Alarbas' burning flesh "Alarbus' limbs are lopp'd,/And entrails feed the sacrificing fire,/Whose smoke, like incense, doth perfume the sky." (1.1.149-51). Shakespeare continues this contrast in various reactions to his new-born child. Aaron tries to protect the child against Roman's and Goths' attempts to kill it to hide Tamora's adultery and Rome's disgrace' (4.2.61). For them, the child's complexion is "dismal ... loathsome as a toad", while the child is Aaron's "first-born son and heir" (4.2.68-9, 86, 94, 101). Same Lucius orders to "hang the child" in its father's sight (5.1.51).

Act 4, scene 2 highlights the importance of family values. When to the nurse tells that the mother wants the new-born child dead, Aaron says to her sons, "Stay, murderous villains, will you kill your brother!". In a world in which Titus would kill his son to keep his loyalty to the king, Tamora's sons would kill each other for Lavinia, Aaron would kill anyone who threatens his son: "Now, by the burning tapers of the sky/That shone so brightly when this boy was got,/He dies upon my scimitar's sharp point/That touches this my first-born son and heir" (4. 2. 94 -101). Aaron, a slave, still thinking of making his son his heir strengthens to the argument that he was a prince who was enslaved and thus has animosity to vent on his masters. In refusing to obey Tamora to kill the child, he speaks the most expressive lines on father's love, denied to Titus:

My mistress is my mistress: this my self,  
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 in Rome.

(4.2.111)

Family love does not exist in Rome and the only one who has any amount of it is a sworn villain. Shakespeare makes the Goths capture Aaron and then uses a Goth soldier to express his paternal love by proxy. Whom Lucius call "the incarnate devil" was found speaking the most important terms of endearment in the whole play:

'Peace, tawny slave, half me and half thy dam!  
Did not thy hue bewray whose brat thou art,  
Had nature lent thee but thy mother's look,  
Villain, thou mightst have been an emperor;  
But where the bull and cow are both milk-white,  
They never do beget a coal-black calf.  
Peace, villain, peace!'- even thus he rates the babe-  
'For I must bear thee to a trusty Goth,  
Who, when he knows thou art the Empress' babe,  
Will hold thee dearly for thy mother's sake.'

(5.1.20-39)





Even if we disregard postcolonial comment about complexion, Shakespeare's intention of emplotment of the defeat of Aaron's hope, and to contrast Aaron's filial love with Lucius' order "First hang the child, that he may see it sprawl- /A sight to vex the father's soul withal" is obvious. We are also reminded that it was Lucius who had demanded Alarbus to be made a sacrifice, and who has brought an army of Goths against Rome (Bartels, *Making more*, 446). Kewes calls Lucius' attitude a conundrum, "which cuts across political and confessional fault lines" (Kewes, *Bogus Rome*, p. 569). It is doubtful that he will "heal Rome's harms" (5.3.147), or rule with the savagery he meted out to Alarbus. As Rhodes points out, "Sympathetic parenting is not much in evidence among either Romans or Goths, and least of all in Titus himself, and it is left to Aaron, the absurdly monochromatic villain, to bring a note of ordinary humanity into the Shambles" (Rhodes, *Shakespeare the barbarian*, pp.108-109).

To save the child from harm, Aaron promises "I'll show thee wondrous things" and tot stop Lucius from killing the child, Aaron consents to speak of "murders, rapes, and massacres,/Acts of black night, abominable deeds,/Complots of mischief, treason, villainies,/Ruthful to hear, yet piteously perform'd;" (5.1.64-67), none of which he has committed, but only witnessed the Goths and the Romans perform. Aaron's crimes establish a paradigm rather than speak of real incidents. When Lucius calls him a devil, Aaron the atheist desires to be a devil: "So I might have your company in hell/But to torment you with my bitter tongue (5.1.151-152). Aaron's verdict on his civilised enemies makes Lucius command "Sirs, stop his mouth, and let him speak no more" (5.1.153) for the truth he speaks is too much to bear.

*Titus Andronicus* is not about a political feud or the maligning of the foreigner figure. All the characters on both sides lack filial love or the love of humanity. The absence of filial love is first manifested in the lack of humanitarian values as in Titus' first decision to have Alarbus tortured to death despite Tamora's motherly pleadings. Titus kills his own son and destroys his family even before Aaron or Tamora has made any attempt against him. His own actions set in motion the villainy of the play.

## 7. Conclusion

Shakespeare tragedised more than one character in a play and villains were often beneficiaries of this technique. Thus, Shylock and Claudius win audience sympathy by being tragic characters. This research found out that the Roman Empire in *Titus Andronicus* is decayed and degenerated ruled by incompetent ruler and moral values are in jeopardy. The Romans are contrasted with Goths who are called to save Rome. The play begins and ends with Roman sacrificial deaths. The plot of *Titus Andronicus* is built on the maligning of the central characters and Titus' own savage integrity. The play contrasts civilization and barbarism making the audience ask if civilization can be saved with savagery. The central characters are not unambiguously good or heroic, and their actions become strong reasons for villains to be evil. Villains have ambiguous personalities with qualities that win audience sympathy, if not admiration. This problematises audience response and evokes feelings of pity.

Shakespeare's intention of forcing the audience to question their preconceived ideas and to shift their perspectives effects morally discomfoting tendencies. The strategic shift in perspectives presents the villains as opposing a corrupt social order and, their morally questionable intentions only amplify the evils prevalent in their social orders. Aaron's catalogue of crimes establishes that he merely reflects the evil in the characters around him. He only embodies the evil prevalent in the world of the play. Aaron is a villain by confession, but others around him can be called villains by their actions. In his death are inscribed the repeated failure of the Romans' to be





civilised, showing that even after his punishment, all is still not well. Aaron is the only tragic figure of the play who is capable of loving a woman and his son by her. His admirable intellectual and aesthetic qualities win audience praise and inscribe a sense of waste that such a person as he, surrounded by characters less worthy of respect than he, is caught and punished by authorities whose own moral stature is doubtful.

## 8. Recommendations

This study recommends that in discussion of the ‘tragic’ and in pedagogical practices regarding the fine discussions of hero-villain opposition, Shakespeare’s techniques of tragedising his villains be included. It contends that the moral ambiguities Shakespeare created for the discussion of characters like Shylock and Macbeth be applied to other villains so that his true moral perspective be made clear to upcoming scholars. The study also necessitates reconsidering the use of the term ‘tragic’ in popular media discussions as this sublime term has philosophical implications far beyond the superficial techniques used in popular media to win temporary sympathy for popular media figures characters like the Joker.

## References.

- Bartels, Emily C. (1990). *Making More of the Moor: Aaron, Othello, and Renaissance Refashionings of Race*. Shakespeare Quarterly, Vol. 41, No. 4, (Winter, 1990), pp. 433-454 Published by: Folger Shakespeare Library Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2870775> Accessed: 24/07/2008 05:45
- Bell, M. (2002). Shakespeare’s Tragic Skepticism. Yale University Press.
- Clarence Valentine Boyer. (1914). *The Villain as Hero in Elizabethan Tragedy*. London, G. Routledge and Sons, limited; New York, E.P. Dutton & Co.
- Brenton, Howard. (2002). “Freedom in Chaos” review of Terry Eagleton's *Sweet Violence* in The Guardian, Saturday 21 September 2002. Stable URL: [https://www.theguardian.com/books/2002/sep/21/highereducation.news?CMP=share\\_btn\\_url](https://www.theguardian.com/books/2002/sep/21/highereducation.news?CMP=share_btn_url)
- Chernaik, Warren. (2011). *The Myth of Rome in Shakespeare and his contemporaries*. Cambridge University Press.
- Hulse, S. C. (1979). *Wresting the Alphabet: Oratory and Action in “Titus Andronicus.”* Criticism, 21(2), 106–118. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23102751>
- Jones, Eldred D. (1963). *Aaron and Melancholy in Titus Andronicus*. Shakespeare Quarterly, Vol. 14, No. 2. (Spring, 1963), pp. 178-179.
- Kerr, Heather. David Lemmings, Robert Phiddian (eds.) (2016). *Passions, Sympathy and Print Culture: Public Opinion and Emotional Authenticity in Eighteenth-Century Britain*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kewes, P. (2016). *I Ask Your Voices and Your Suffrages: The Bogus Rome of Peele and Shakespeare’s Titus Andronicus*. The Review of Politics, 78(4), 551–570. doi:10.1017/S0034670516000589
- Lawlor, J. J. (1950). *The Tragic Conflict in Hamlet*. The Review of English Studies, 1(2), 97–113. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/510608>
- Lawlor, John. (1960). *The Tragic Sense in Shakespeare*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company.
- Mulvey-Roberts, Marie. (eds.) (2009). *The Handbook of the Gothic*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Norden, Martin F. (2007). *Changing Face of Evil in Film and Television*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.





- Poore, Benjamin. (Ed) (2017). *Neo-Victorian Villains: Adaptations and Transformations in Popular Culture*. Leiden/Boston: Brill Rodopi
- Rhodes, N. (2003). Shakespeare the Barbarian. In J. Richards (Ed.), *Early Modern Civil Discourses* (pp. 99-114). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Wilders, John. (1978). *The Lost Garden*. London: Macmillan.

