

Winter 2024

## THE MAKING OF A PLAYWRIGHT

# Titus Andronicus

**Synopsis:** Shakespeare's first tragedy is a revenge drama between Roman General Titus and Goth Queen Tamora, with their children caught in between. Quick shifts in political power and differences in ethics and morality between constituencies drive much of the action.

### Discussion Topics:

- Cycles of Violence: Revenge cycles often involve disproportionate responses where the retribution exceeds the original wrongdoing. How does Shakespeare structure the revenge cycles and ameliorate audience disengagement?
- Fragility of the Rule of Law: Revenge based societies can only happen when the rule of law is weak or ineffectual. Rule of Law can only happen when almost everyone in a society agrees on a common set of rules all have to abide by, and a strong system to uphold it. How does the play depict the lack of a common set of rules and the system that enforces those rules? What aspects of American life are currently threatening the rule of law?
- Filled with ghastly on-stage violence, the critical reception has often been cold to the extent some critics like T.S. Eliot even denied Shakespeare's authorship. What are some of the tonal shifts in the play that make it difficult to stage and/or accept? Are there characters that stand out and can inform future Shakespearean plays?

\* A short presentation on Elizabethan theater will precede the discussion.

**Folger Text Link:** <https://www.folger.edu/explore/shakespeares-works/titus-andronicus/read/>

Carnegie-Stout Public Library also has paper copies of the play.

### Other Resources to Consider:

*Titus* by Julie Taymor (film, 1999)

*A Thousand Times More Fair: What Shakespeare's Plays Teach Us About Justice* by Kenji Yoshino  
(Chapter on Titus and revenge cycles)

**Discussion: Feb. 11, 2024 @ 2 PM**

Carnegie-Stout Public Library 360 W 11th Street, Dubuque, IA