

Mythology and literature point the way in *Titus Andronicus*

The Rome of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* is one in which Cicero, Horace, Ovid, Virgil and Seneca *lived* and with whose works the characters are, to varying degrees, familiar; it is through such texts as the *Aeneid* and the *Metamorphoses* that they relate to, make sense of, and order their world. They find story parallels to contemporary events, associate themselves with the characters, and mirror by their actions what their literary counterparts did.

❖ **The killing of Alarbus (precedent found within Book Twelve of Virgil's *The Aeneid*—first published in 19 B.C.)**

- From Rome's founding text, the *Aeneid*, Titus found a precedent for his sacrifice of Tamora's eldest son, Alarbus. Aeneas had sacrificed Turnus, the King of the Rutulians, as retribution for his murder of Pallas, his surrogate son. Turnus' death removed the last obstacle thwarting Aeneas' founding of the city of Rome, an act which ended a war and brought about peace. Titus, via Alarbus' sacrifice, hoped to save Rome and ensure her future by ending the conflict between the factions of dueling brothers Saturninus and Bassianus.
- When Titus ignored her pleas for clemency and mercy, Rome superseded Tamora as a parent over her three children. She could no longer protect them from violence and harm, to provide for them, to ensure their well-being and happiness. The only way she could be restored as a parent to her children was by marrying Emperor Saturninus. Not recognizing the parallel to the *Aeneid*, Tamora vowed the destruction of the Andronici

❖ **The proposed marriage of Lavinia to Saturninus—though she was betrothed to Bassianus (precedent found within Books Eleven and Twelve of Virgil's *The Aeneid*—first published in 19 B.C.)**

- In the *Aeneid*, Lavinia (daughter of Latinus, King of the Latins) was forced to break her betrothal to Turnus and marry instead the new king, Aeneas—it is through their marriage that Rome was founded. Titus, to mirror the text, wanted Lavinia to marry Saturninus, thereby breaking her betrothal to Bassianus, so that the conflict enveloping Rome could truly be ended.
- Titus' sons, not recognizing the parallel and its significance, attempted to thwart the breaking of Lavinia's betrothal: in the eyes of

Titus, their actions jeopardized the restoration of peace and the preservation of Rome—they ceased to be his flesh and blood and become the Rutulians, Rome’s first enemies. Thus, when he slayed Mutius, Titus killed not his son but a barbarian. The sons of Titus ignited a civil war.

❖ **Young Lucius’ delivery of the scroll to Chiron and Demetrius (quotation came from Book One, poem 22 of Horace’s *Odes*—published in 23 B.C.)**

- Titus had young Lucius deliver a scroll to Chiron and Demetrius which contained a quotation from by Horace (Book 1, poem 22): “The man of upright life, and free from crime, has no need of the moor’s javelins or arrows.” Being ignorant of the classics, the two boys failed to recognize its significance: Aaron, being well versed in them, immediately recognized that they had all been discovered.

❖ **Ovid’s *Metamorphosis* (precedent found in Book Six; first published in 8 A.D.)**

- In order to communicate to her father where, when, and by whom she was raped, Lavinia drew his attention to the pages concerning the rape of Philomel in the copy of Ovid’s *Metamorphosis* in the family library.

❖ **The Feast of the Centaurs (general mythology)**

- At the wedding feast of Pirithous and Hippodamia, one of the invited guests, a centaur, attempted to abduct and rape the bride; following his example, the other centaurs present at the feast followed suit. The ensuing battle between the families of the newlyweds and the centaurs was barbaric in its horridness. Titus was determined to upstage their violence at the feast he was about prepare.

❖ **Virginius murders his daughter Virginia (found in the *Ab Urbe Condita Libra* by Titus Livius, completed by 9 B.C.)**

- Among Livy's surviving writings is that of *The History of Appius and Virginia*. The daughter of Centurion Lucius Virginus, the beautiful Virginia was happily betrothed to a tribune. Lusting after her, a judge named Appius—the most senior of a body of 10 men who then currently ruled the empire—falsely claimed that she was the daughter of one of his household slaves who had been stolen at birth and claimed by Virginus' wife as her daughter. When Virginia was taken into the state's custody, Virginus returned on leave and tried to plead with the ruling tribunal to release her; they refused him permission to speak and ruled in favor of Appius. Recognizing that his daughter was lost and would be subject to the vile caprices of Appius—a fate he considered worse than death—Virginus stabbed her to death in front of the council and assembled populace.
- Titus questioned Saturninus as to the propriety of Virginus' act; receiving his appropriation, Titus proceeded to murder Lavinia.