The "fly-killing" scene in *Titus Andronicus* (3.2)


The *Norton* 3rd ed., true to its "single-text policy," prints only the quarto text (1594). In the Folio text (1623), the play has an additional scene, 3.2, in which the Andronici act out their woes so far. The editors say, "Shakespeare probably wrote the fly-killing scene at a later date for a revival of the play."

Read it closely. How consistent is it with the text of the play you know?
Grasping with thy teeth, and be this dismal sight
The closing up* of our most wretched eyes.

[TITUS] Ha, ha, ha!


[TITUS] Why, I have not another tear to shed.

Besides, this sorrow is an enemy,
And would usurp upon my wat'ry eyes
And make them blind with tributary tears.

Then which way shall I find Revenge's cave?—
For these two heads do seem to speak to me.
And threaten me I shall never come to bliss
Till all these mischiefs be returned again
Even in their throats that hath committed them.

Come, let me see what task I have to do.

[He and LAVINIA rise.] — sad

You heavy people, circle me about,
That I may turn me to each one of you
And swear unto my soul to right your wrongs.

[MARCUS, LUCIUS, and LAVINIA circle TITUS. He pledges them]

The vow is made. Come, brother, take a head,
And in this hand the other will I bear.

And Lavinia, thou shalt be employed.
Bear thou my hand, sweet branch, between thine arms.
As for thee, boy, go get thee from my sight.
Thou art an exile and thou must not stay.
Hie* to the Goths, and raise an army there,
And if ye love me, as I think you do,

Let's kiss and part, for we have much to do.

[They kiss.] Except [all but LUCIUS]

LUCIUS Farewell, Andronicus, my noble father,
The woefull man that ever lived in Rome.
Farewell, proud Rome, till Lucius come again.
He loves his pledges dearer than his life.
Farewell, Lavinia, my noble sister:
O, would thou went as thou tofore* hast been!
But now nor Lucius nor Lavinia lives
But in oblivion and hateful griefs.

If Lucius live he will requite your wrongs.
And make proud Saturnine and his empress
Beg at the gates like Tarquin and his queen.
To be revenged on Rome and Saturnine.

[Exit]

3.2

A banquet.* Enter ANDRONICUS, MARCUS, LAVINIA, and the boy [YOUNG LUCIUS]

[TITUS] So, so, now sit, and look your eat no more
Than will preserve just so much strength in us
As will revenge these bitter woes of ours.

[They sit]

9. Paying tribute (to sorrow, the enemy).
2. Tarquin and his family were banished from Rome.
1. Yews; hostages (family members left behind in Rome).
3.2 Location: In Titus's house.
What dost thou strike at, Marcus, with thy knife?  

MARCUS At that that I have killed, my lord—a fly.

TITUS Out on thee, murderer! Thou slay'st my heart.

MARCUS Why, even eyes are eloquent in this matter.

A deed of death done on the innocent.

TITUS Becomes not Titus' brother. Get thee gone.

I see thou art not for my company.

MARCUS Alas, my lord, I have but killed a fly.

TITUS 'But? How if that fly had a father, brother?

How would he hang his slender gilded wings.

And buzz lamenting dirges in the air?

Poor harmless fly.

That with his pretty buzzing melody

Came here to make us merry—and thou hast killed him!

MARCUS Pardon me, sir, it was a black ill-favoured fly;

Like to the Empress' Moor. Therefore I killed him.

TITUS O, O, O!

Then pardon me for reprehending thee,

For thou hast done a charitable deed.

Give me thy knife. I will insult on' him,

Flattering myself as if it were the Moor.

Come hither purposely to poison me.

MARCUS Fie, fie, how franticly I square my talk,

As if we should forget we had no hands.

If Marcus did not name the word of hands!

Come, let's fall to: and, gentle girl, eat this.

Here is no drink! Ha'ark, Marcus, what she says.

I can interpret all her martyr'd signs.

She says she drinks no other drink but tears,

Bowed with her sorrow, mason'd upon her cheeks.

Speechless complainer, I will learn thy thought.

In thy dumb action will I be as perfect.

As begging hermits in their holy prayers.

Thou shalt not sigh, nor hold thy stumps to heaven,

Nor wink, nor nod, nor kneel, nor make a sign,

But I of these will wrest an alphabet.

And by still practice learn to know thy meaning.

YOUNG LUCIUS Good grand sire, leave these bitter deep laments.

Make my aunt merrily with some pleasing tale.

MARCUS Alas, the tender boy in passion moved

Doth weep to see his grandsire's heaviness.

TITUS Peace, tender sapling, thou art made of tears.

And tears will quickly melt thy life away.

MARCUS strikes the dish with a knife.

1. Sighs were thought to draw blood from the heart.
2. Osten a term of something soft.
4. Mixed with water, like beer for brewing.

4.1 Location: Titus's garden.

5. Pleading myself with the thought that.

1. That is, here to protect me.