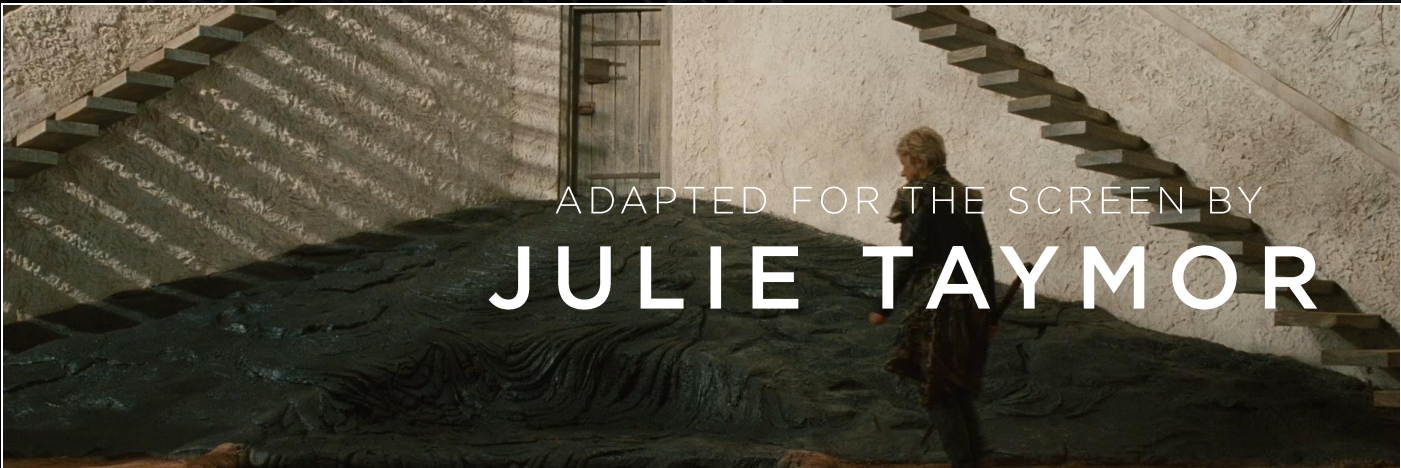


WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE



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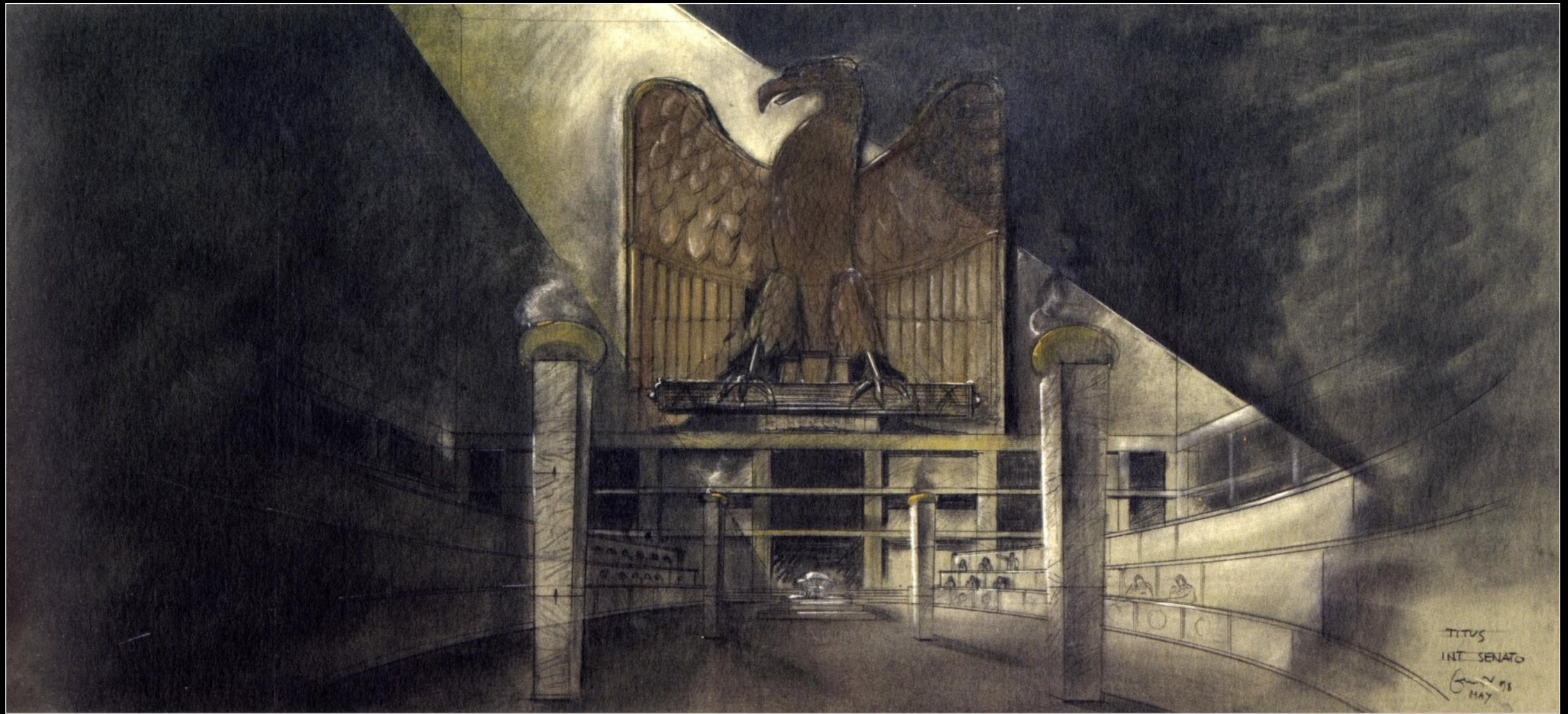
WILLIAM 1564-1616 SHAKESPEARE

Shakespeare was an English poet and playwright widely regarded as the greatest writer of the English language, as well as one of the greatest in Western literature, and the world's preeminent dramatist. He wrote 37 plays and 154 sonnets, as well as a variety of other poems. Already a popular writer in his own lifetime, Shakespeare's reputation became increasingly celebrated after his death and his work adulated by numerous prominent cultural figures through the centuries. His works have been translated into every major living language, and his plays are continually performed all around the world. In addition, many quotations and neologisms from his plays have passed into everyday usage in English and other languages. Over the years, many people have speculated about Shakespeare's life, raising questions about his sexuality, religious affiliation, and the authorship of his works.



JULIE TAYMOR is the two-time Tony Award winner for *The Lion King*, establishing her as the first woman to receive a Tony for directing a Broadway musical. One of the most imaginative, prolific and respected directors and designers working in the performing arts today, she was also nominated for an Academy Award and the recipient of an Emmy Award as well as numerous other awards. Through her combination of fidelity and invention, Julie Taymor has produced works of rare integrity. In a Hollywood

ruled by compromise and artistic corner-cutting, she has fully respected both ancient works of art and modern companies of screen actors. Her reward is to have created some truly unique movies and plays. Where so many movies impress at the time but fade in the instant you walk out of the theater, her works keep on growing in the imagination. The movie *Titus* was made at the Cinecittà studios in Rome, and such scenes as Saturninus' imperial orgy inevitably invite comparison with *Fellini Satyricon*, especially since Taymor's production designer, Dante Ferretti, worked with the legendary director. There are also touches of Pier Paolo Pasolini, master of the dramatization of emotional extremity in harshly lit landscapes. But the richest influence is Shakespeare's own proto-cinematic imagination. Taymor has the gift of finding visual equivalents for the dramatist's figurative verse. The two locations at the center of her *Titus*, a swamp and a crossroads, are peculiarly haunting. They translate Shakespearean poetry into the language of cinema. At the same time, the film fully respects the original words, reproducing a much higher percentage of text than most other recent screen adaptations of Shakespeare.

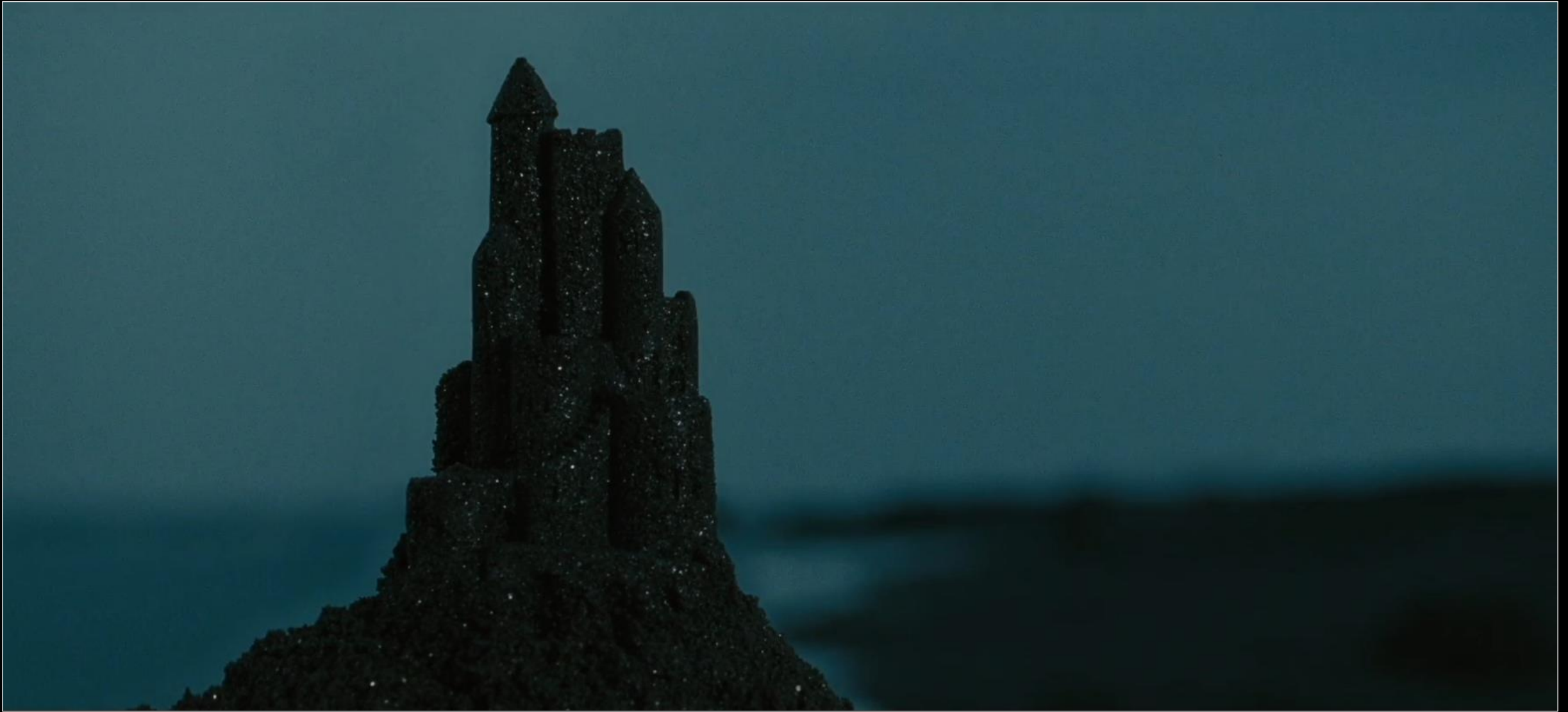


TITUS ANDRONICUS

TITUS ANDRONICUS was young Shakespeare's first box-office smash, the work that made his name, the first of his plays to appear in print (originally published in 1594). It established the vogue for revenge drama that lasted through *Hamlet* to the dark plays of John Webster and beyond. It has become generally known as Shakespeare's bloodiest play. But more important—and unexpectedly—it is his wittiest tragedy. The playgoers of Elizabethan England, where the bear-bating pit stood next to the theatre and the scaffold was a place of public entertainment, had strong stomachs for the representation of bloody revenge, dismemberment, rape, and cannibalism. In our time, the rape of Lavinia and Titus' bloody banquet may seem like the sort of thing that gives Hollywood a bad name. But as we'll discover, the violence in the play does serve an artistic purpose, and precisely because of all its extremities, *Titus Andronicus* is the play for our extreme time, our millennial moment of dark memory and fresh hope.

Ever since the time of Ancient Greek tragedy, Western culture has been haunted by the figure of the revenger. He or she stands on a whole series of

borderlines: between civilization and barbarity, between an individual's accountability to their own conscience and the community's need for the rule of law, between the conflicting demands of justice and mercy. Ancient Roman tragedy was primarily written to be recited rather than acted; but to the English Renaissance playwrights, who thought that these tragedies had been intended for the stage, they provided the model for an organized five-act play with a complex plot and an elaborately formal style of dialogue. The **REVENGE TRAGEDY**, or (in its most sensational form) the tragedy of blood, derived from the ancient Romans favorite materials of murder, revenge, ghosts, mutilations, and carnage, but while the Romans had relegated such matters to long reports of offstage actions by messengers, Elizabethan dramatists usually represented them on stage to satisfy the appetite of the contemporary audience for violence and horror. The subject matter of these plays is murder and the quest for vengeance, and typically include a ghost, insanity, suicide, a play-within-a-play, sensational incidents, and a gruesomely bloody ending. *Titus Andronicus* is definitely in this mode.



A POET'S EPILOGUE

IN 1623, seven years after William Shakespeare's death, his collected plays were published for the first time in the magnificent large-format volume known as the First Folio. The book was prepared for the press by the people who knew Shakespeare more intimately than anyone else: John Hemmings and Henry Condell, the leading members of his acting company the King's Men, and Ben Jonson, his friend, rival, and fellow dramatist. They decided to begin the book not with one of the great tragedies—*Hamlet*, *Othello*, or *King Lear*—but with a magical comedy: **THE TEMPEST**. Shorter than many of the other plays, it was more tightly constructed (and would be more accurately printed) than any other. Most unusually for the plays of Shakespeare's time, it



followed the ancient principle of dramatic unity: there is a single location and a single objective plot. What is more, the action comes close to working in real time: the story unfolds in a single afternoon between the hours of two and six o'clock. The central character is a magician who practices "potent art," who commands over "actors" and puts on a play. At some level,

Prospero is Shakespeare. And at some level, the island on which the action takes place is the performance space: the theater. This extreme artfulness and these connections to the process of making drama may explain why *The Tempest* stands in pride of place at the head of the Folio: it is the showcase for Shakespeare's own art. Nearly two hundred years after his death, when biographers and critics began linking his life to his work, it was discovered that *The Tempest*, **WRITTEN IN 1611**, was also his last solo-authored play. It could thus be read as his valediction, a bravura farewell to the stage. As Prospero retires to Milan and thinks on his grave, so Shakespeare, it is said, retired to Stratford-upon-Avon in order to think on his.



SLAPSTICK is a type of broad, physical comedy involving exaggerated, boisterous actions (a pie in the face for example), farce and violence, and activities which may exceed the boundaries of common sense. While the object from which the genre is derived dates from the Renaissance, theater historians argue that slapstick comedy has been at least somewhat present in almost all comedic genres since the Middle Ages.



Scenes from Act Two of **THE TEMPEST**. The film was directed by **JULIE TAYMOR** and premiered at the Venice Film Festival in September 2010.

TITUS ANDRONICUS

THE TEMPEST

*Use of books and smart-phones is prohibited.
Words with 15 or more letters are worth two
points. All other words are worth one point.*



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