
REVENGE TRAGEDY IN SHAKESPEARE'S HAMLET AND TITUS ANDRONICUS

Dr. Taofiki KOUMAKPAI
Département d'Anglais
Université d'Abomey/ Calavi-BENIN

Hamlet closely follows the dramatic conventions of revenge in Elizabethan theatre. All revenge tragedies originally stemmed from the Greeks, who wrote and performed the first plays. After the Greeks, came Seneca who was very influential to all Elizabethan tragedy writers. Seneca, who was Roman, basically set all of the ideas and the norms for all revenge play writers in the Renaissance era including William Shakespeare. The two most famous English revenge tragedies written in the Elizabethan era were *Hamlet*, written by Shakespeare and *The Spanish Tragedy*, written by Thomas Kyd. These two plays used mostly all of the Elizabethan conventions for revenge tragedies in their plays. *Hamlet* especially incorporated all revenge conventions in one way or another, which truly made it a typical revenge play. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is one of many heroes of the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage who finds himself grievously wronged by a powerful figure, with no recourse to the law, and with a crime against his family to avenge. Seneca was among the greatest authors of classical tragedies and there was not one educated Elizabethan who was unaware of him or his plays.

There were certain stylistic and different strategically thought out devices that Elizabethan playwrights including Shakespeare learned and used from Seneca's great tragedies. The five-act structure, the appearance of some kind of ghost, the one line exchanges known as stichomythia, and Seneca's use of long rhetorical speeches were all later used in tragedies by Elizabethan playwrights. Some of Seneca's ideas were originally taken from the Greeks when the Romans conquered Greece, and with it they took home many Greek theatrical ideas. Some of Seneca's stories that originated from the Greeks like *Agamemnon* and *Thyestes* which dealt with bloody family histories and revenge captivated the Elizabethans. Seneca's stories weren't really written

for performance purposes, so if English playwrights liked his ideas, they had to figure out a way to make the story theatrically workable, relevant and exciting to the Elizabethan audience who were very demanding. Seneca's influence formed part of a developing tradition of tragedies whose plots hinge on political power, forbidden sexuality, family honour and private revenge.

During the time of Elizabethan theatre, plays about tragedy and revenge were very common and a regular convention seemed to be formed on what aspects should be put into a typical revenge tragedy.

In all revenge tragedies first and foremost, a crime is committed and for various reasons laws and justice cannot punish the crime so the individual who is the main character, goes through with the revenge in spite of everything. The main character then usually had a period of doubt, where he tries to decide whether or not to go through with the revenge, which usually involves tough and complex planning. Other features that were typical were the appearance of a ghost, to get the revenger to go through with the deed. The revenger also usually had a very close relationship with the audience through soliloquies and asides. The original crime that will eventually be avenged is nearly always sexual or violent or both. The crime has been committed against a family member of the revenger. The revenger places himself outside the normal moral order of things, and often becomes more isolated as the play progresses-an isolation which at its most extreme becomes madness. The revenge must be the cause of a catastrophe and the beginning of the revenge must start immediately after the crisis. After the ghost persuades the revenger to commit his deed, a hesitation first occurs and then a delay by the avenger before killing the murderer and his actual or acted

out madness. The revenge must be taken out by the revenger or his trusted accomplices. The revenger and his accomplices may also die at the moment of success or even during the course of revenge.

It should not be assumed that revenge plays parallel the moral expectations of the Elizabethan audience. Church, State and the regular morals of people in that age did not accept revenge, instead they thought that revenge would simply not under any circumstances be tolerated no matter what the original deed was. It is repugnant on theological grounds, since Christian orthodoxy posits a world ordered by Divine Providence, in which revenge is a sin and a blasphemy, endangering the soul of the revenger. The revenger by taking law into his own hands was in turn completely going against the total political authority of the state.

In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare follows regular convention for a large part of the play. In the beginning, Shakespeare sets up the scene, having a ghost on a dark night. Everyone is working and something strange is happening in Denmark. It is as if Shakespeare were saying that some kind of foul play has been committed. This sets up for the major theme in the play which is of course revenge. The ghost appears to talk to Hamlet. It is quite obvious that the play had a gruesome, violent death and the sexual aspect of the play was clearly introduced when Claudius married Hamlet's mother Gertrude. The ghost tells Hamlet that he has been given the role of the person who will take revenge upon Claudius. Hamlet must now think of how to take revenge on Claudius, although he doesn't know what to do about it. He ponders his thoughts for a long period of time, expecting to do the deed immediately, but instead he drags it on until the end of the play. In most revenge plays, the revenger was often anonymous and well disguised, stalking the enemy about to be killed, but Hamlet started a battle of wits with Claudius by acting mad and calling it his "antic disposition", although the whole thing was a ploy to get closer to Claudius to be able to avenge his father's death more easily. The strategy was a disadvantage in that it drew all attention upon himself.

One important part of all revenge plays is that after the revenge is finally decided upon, the tragic hero delays the actual revenge until the end of the play. Hamlet's delay of killing Claudius takes on three distinct stages. Firstly he had to prove that the ghost

was actually telling the truth, and he did this by staging the play "The Mousetrap" at court. When Claudius stormed out in rage, Hamlet knew that he was guilty. The second stage was when Hamlet could have killed Claudius while he was confessing to God. If Hamlet had done it here then Claudius would have gone to heaven because he confessed while Hamlet's father was in purgatory because he did not get the opportunity to confess. So Hamlet therefore decided not to murder Claudius at this point in the play. The third delay was the fact that he got side tracked. He accidentally killed Polonius, which created a whole new problem with the fact that Laertes now wanted Hamlet dead. After he committed this murder he was also sent off and unable to see the king for another few weeks until he could finally do the job.

It can be easily understood that Hamlet very closely follows the regular conventions for all Elizabethan tragedies. First Hamlet is faced with the fact that he has to avenge the murder of his father and since there is no fair justice available, he must take the law into his own hands. The ghost of his father appears to guide Hamlet to Claudius and inform Hamlet of the evil that Claudius has committed. Then Hamlet constantly delays his revenge and always finds a way to put it off until he finally does it in Act V, Scene 2. Hamlet at the same time continues to keep a close relationship with the audience with his seven main soliloquies including the famous, "To be, or not to be..." (Act 3 Scene 1). The play also consists of a mad scene where Ophelia has gone mad because her father Polonius had been killed and because Hamlet was sent off to England. The sexual aspect of the play was brought in when Claudius married Gertrude after he had dreadfully killed Old Hamlet and taken his throne. *Hamlet* also follows almost every aspect of Thomas Kyd's formula for a revenge tragedy. The only point that can be argued is that the accomplices on both sides were not killed because at the end of the play, Horatio was the only one to survive, although if it wasn't for Hamlet, Horatio would have committed suicide when he said, "I am more an antique Roman than a Dane. Here's some liquor left." (Act V Scene 2, 346-347). If Horatio had killed himself, then Hamlet would have followed the Kydian formula as well as the regular conventions for Elizabethan revenge tragedy. *Hamlet* is definitely a great example of a typical revenge tragedy of the Elizabethan theatre era. It followed every convention required to classify it as a revenge

play quite perfectly. *Hamlet* is definitely one of the greatest revenge stories ever written and it was all influenced first by Sophocles, Euripides and other Greeks, and then more importantly by Seneca. *Hamlet* as well as *The Spanish Tragedy* tackled and conquered all areas that were required for the consummation of a great revenge tragedy. Revenge although thought to be unlawful and against the Church was absolutely adored by all Elizabethan people. The Elizabethan audience always insisted on seeing eventual justice, and one who stained his hands with blood had to pay the penalty. That no revenger, no matter how just, ever wholly escapes the penalty for shedding blood, even in error. This was also a very important point that was also dealt with brilliantly by Shakespeare in finding a way to kill Hamlet justly even though he was required to kill Claudius

Shakespeare wanted to show through this revenge tragedy how grief has affected the three young men. Fortinbras is guided by reason; he is not a victim of his grief. Hamlet is inconsolable, and his grief is of the sort that renders him dull, that effaces memory, that makes him guilty of the sin of sloth. Laertes is neither to be consoled nor to be appeared in his own grief. His grief converts to anger and it enrages his heart. In *Hamlet*, passion in combination with grief is what brings about the tragic situation. In Hamlet himself, it is passion which would not yield to the consolation of philosophy. This is interpreted as excessive grief and Hamlet's grief is therefore the grief that makes memory fade, that makes reason fail in directing the will, this makes reason fail in directing the will, and this makes him "guilty of sloth". He could offend Ophelia, kill Polonius, escape on shipboard, and insult Laertes, even kill the king in moments of unreasonable passion. There is need for revenge in *Hamlet* because the king is murdered by his own blood brother; and his ghost cannot rest until death is avenged. Coupled with this is the marriage between the usurper of power and Hamlet's mother. The knowledge of murder and incest is enough to warrant revenge on the part of Hamlet. Of interest is the fact that it is not only Hamlet's revenge that takes place, for in his excessive grief, Hamlet delays in killing the king and this leads to chain of events which necessitate Laertes and Fortinbras taking revenge too. The revenge of Hamlet would not be regarded as tragic, but the combination of revenge on the part of the three young men, Hamlet, Laertes and Fortinbras brings

a tragic situation. Perhaps, if Hamlet had avenged his father's death quickly, he would not have had to kill Polonius and set off another chain of revenge action.

The question often asked concerning the story of Hamlet is why he delayed. Hamlet delays because he wants to justify his killing his uncle. Unfortunately, the delay is not to the merit of the play. When considered as a revenge tragedy, *Hamlet* could also be exonerated in his grief. He is seen as the one who has lost a father so dear to him and instead of the mother grieving with him, she marries the uncle in an unseemly haste. Likewise, Laertes cannot bear it when he loses both his sister and father to the same person, Hamlet. So also is the grief of Fortinbras. When looking at Hamlet as a revenge tragedy, it is relevant to consider the remote cause(s) of the revenge action, its course in the play and its consequence(s). The direct cause of tragedy which had a revenge undertone in the story of Hamlet is the killing of the king. This is sacrilegious and an abomination follows it when the queen marries in an unseemly haste, Claudius the brother of the king. It is a sin against mankind and the cosmic order of nature.

O, my offence is rank, it smells to heaven ;
It hath the, primal eldest curse upon't,
A brother's murder...
What if this cursed hand
Were thicker than itself with brother's blood
Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens
To wash it white as snow.¹

The king is killed and cut off from existence without completing his lifespan. This makes the ghost not to rest and it comes back to disturb and demand for justice from the living, especially young Hamlet, his son. The killing of the king makes Hamlet to kill Polonius while he is eavesdropping. Afterwards, Ophelia commits suicide because of the death of her father. Laertes too, as a result of this, aims to kill Hamlet because of the death of his sister and father. The king after trying to kill Hamlet while on a ship uses Laertes' anger as a tool to instigate him to fight Hamlet in a bout. While the bout is going on, the queen drinks of the poisoned wine prepared for Hamlet by the king. The wine is poisoned just in case Hamlet survives the poisoned rapier of Laertes. The queen dies and both Hamlet and Laertes stab themselves with the poisoned rapier as it is exchanged during the duel. Laertes dies exposing

the king's treachery and Hamlet stabs the king before he dies leaving Horatio to explain the events to Fortinbras.

The play could have taken another course if Hamlet had killed the king on time instead of delaying. This is because it is as a result of his delay that the play took the course it did. Hamlet, when he learns of his father's murder, decides in his mind to avenge the death of his father. In order to remove suspicion from him as regards what he wants to do, he starts behaving madly. He pretends to everyone that he is mad. He stages a play in order to make the king betray his guilt and this makes the king resolve to kill him.

The ghost of Hamlet's father is relevant to the play as a revenge tragedy because it is the ghost that brings the motive for revenge. It also gives Hamlet a fatherly command instructing Hamlet to avenge his death, of which a refusal would have been tantamount to disobedience on Hamlet's part. The ghost claims that it cannot rest unless this revenge action takes place and so Hamlet is obligated to revenge so that it can rest. But what the ghost did not obviously bargain for, was the mass tragedy. Also murdered is the queen whom he has instructed Hamlet not to kill, but the death of the queen can be justified as it can be seen as a retribution for her sins. She commits the unbecoming sin of incest, a sin which shows that she is not saddened by the death of her husband. And in fact, puts her in an accomplice position in the murder case. Her death then could be regarded as atonement for her sin of betrayal, incest and unfaithfulness. The ghost gets his revenge but with the revenge came tragedy; the tragedy of so many people who were directly linked to his murder, a revenge tragedy of so many innocent people. At this point, it is pertinent to examine the relevance of revenge to the theme and how the playwright achieves this dramatically. Revenge as a theme exhibits itself in the play through the sequence of actions in the play and according to the stage direction of the playwright. The showing of a ghost in distress, who is wandering about at the beginning of the play, gives one the impression of a wronged ghost. A ghost that cannot sleep because of a sin committed against it. From there henceforth, the plot is constructed to follow the pattern of a revenge tragedy. The ghost can only speak to Hamlet and when it does, Hamlet refuses to divulge their discussion to the guards, he makes them swear to

an oath of secrecy that they will not tell of the appearance of the ghost.

Titus Andronicus, is considered the bloodiest of Shakespeare's tragedies. Generally *Titus Andronicus* has not been considered as one of Shakespeare's Roman plays, a strange conclusion when apparently the name 'Rome' is uttered more times here than in the other Roman plays put together. At a glance the play deals with issues of whether individuals should have absolute power over others, whether illegal violence is ever justified, and most of all whether personal loyalty should ever supersede civic responsibility. Each of these issues is also central in the later (and unquestionably 'Roman') play, *Julius Caesar*.

Shakespeare's continued use of a Roman setting indicates its popularity with audiences, and it's worth questioning the ways audiences through history have identified Titus' corrupt Rome with their own society. In *Classical Drama And Its Influence* B.L. Joseph explains that 'English society did not need encouragement from outside to develop an attitude to revenge. A cult of revenge is inseparable from that of honour in every incompletely civilised society where law does not dominate.' Some would question whether any society can be completely civilised, or entirely dominated by the forces of law. Hence the ancient revenge story retains its popularity, finding new forms through history.

The leading characters in this crude and horrific revenge tragedy are, on the one hand, Titus Andronicus, his brother Marcus, and his son Lucius. On the other hand were Tamora, who is the queen of the Goths, her son Demerius, and her lover Aaron. Each side vies with the other in a furious and inhuman revenge which brings about one of the most horrific tragedy ever written. Titus assumes his role right at the start as a magisterial authority caught between irreconcilable duties. In loyalty to an emperor childishly feuding with his brother (over the hand of Titus' daughter, Lavinia), he slays his own son. Here is an important aspect of much noir and of revenge tragedy- the fact that someone's basic, human interests are undermined by a higher or more powerful authority, although in this case it is interesting that Titus himself is directly an instrument of that authority. Titus has put Rome before his family, and it turns out to be a pointless gesture. The new emperor Saturninus decides he can

do without marrying Lavinia after all, and so Titus' dreadful act was for nothing. What is more, Saturninus actually begins to jealously resent Titus at this point. He seems to fear the old man's greater popularity, and incredibly, he is even able to imagine Titus is disloyal.

'Full well Andronicus,
Agree these deeds with that proud
brag of thine
That saidst I begged the empire at
thy hands.' (1.1 302-304)

Also in the first scene is the event which starts the whole cycle of violence. This is the slaying of Alarbus, a necessary sacrifice and example in the Romans' eyes, but a needless slaughter as far as the Goths see it. Tamora swears revenge and is almost immediately moved into a position of great power in Rome. Again, this marks out Titus as doomed. After Tamora begs convincingly but in vain for her son's life, we can tell that Titus is going to suffer some unspeakable retribution, especially since there is mention of Gods and of Titus overstepping the mark in some sort of great scheme.

'Wilt thou draw near the nature
of the gods?
Draw near them then in being
m e r c i f u l .
Sweet mercy is nobility's true
b a d g e .
Thrice noble Titus, spare my first
born son.' (1.1 117-120)

This early slaying is a vengeful act committed in accordance with the laws of Titus' society and religion. He has lost twenty-five sons in the war with the Goths, and the killing of Alarbus is to set their souls at rest. Ironically, this one religious killing is the cause of all the other deaths. Tamora quickly gets her revenge, and so must Titus.

With the enmity of the emperor and empress invoked, Titus shifts into the position of the typical revenger. Out of power and favour, he is now more recognisable as a noir protagonist. Titus began the

play as the democratically chosen future emperor of Rome, literally the most powerful and untouchable man in the world. By his own foolish loyalty he has dropped to a status below that of an ordinary citizen, and put himself in great danger. Of the noir protagonist, Russell James has said 'it is the probability of his death that underlines the noir nature of the story'. A high probability of death is common to all of Shakespeare's tragic heroes, but Titus stands out from the others as a man who has shed all his defences. Later in the play the great war hero even cuts off his own hand as a sign of his loyalty to Rome.

The problem for Titus is that the emperor he serves, and eventually opposes, is not so honourable as himself. It is as if he is old fashioned in his patriotism, and in his naïve belief in the Emperor. Saturninus is not loyal to Rome, he only desires to possess it, just as the rapists Demetrius and Chiron desire to possess Lavinia for selfish, lustful reasons. These are not the sentiments that built up the great nation centuries before, the three pillars of 'justice, continence and nobility', which only Titus and some of his family now seem to possess. Against the double-dealing, pettiness and arbitrariness of the new royal family, the honourable, straight-fighting Titus is helpless. Like an unwilling noir hero, Titus becomes isolated from his past life. He has always been away at war with Rome's enemies, but his constant comfort has been a belief in the ideals of the empire he serves. It takes a great deal to shake that belief, and for much of the play staggering examples of Titus' loyalty are seen.

The audience may not like Titus when he kills his son Mutius, but his loyalty and fortitude cannot be questioned, particularly when we are aware of his natural fondness for his family. Titus cries, 'What, villain boy/ barrst me my way in Rome?', and it doesn't matter that it is his son barring his way, only that he is being hindered in his serving Rome, and the hindrance must be removed. It is a mistake to contrast the evil plotter Aaron's affection for his son against Titus' apparent callousness as a father. The point is that Titus denies himself the personal indulgence that others succumb to, and if need be, this includes paternal love. In this respect, he might be called the most civilised character in the play. Unfortunately, with the new power structure in Rome, self sacrifice has become very passe.

The build-up toward the revenge motive often seems

to follow a set pattern. The revenger is first wronged, secondly he discovers the identity of his enemies, and thirdly he attempts to get justice through conventional, legal means. When this fails he turns to his own violent means of revenge. Though Titus pleads with the emperor for Quintus and Martius to have a fair hearing, once he finally discovers the identity of Bassianus' murderers he realistically does not harbour any hope of satisfaction through conventional justice.

The extent to which Titus is overpowered and gone mad with grief is shown in a number of later scenes. There is a repeated image of tears, salt water, and the sea as if the enormity of his grief is truly enough to drown the old man in tears. These long, powerful monologues are a convention of a revenge tragedy, building line by line a feeling of the revenger's grief and instability.

Titus' period of impotent grief eventually erupts into action. He re-awakes as a man entirely lost to the normal world, and absolutely uncompromising in his pursuit of revenge. A mention of the play's excessive violence cannot be omitted from a full discussion, and indeed it is the aspect of the play most focused on by many critics. This morbid interest is aroused not so much by the body count, as the manner of death, the mutilation of the body, and the worse-than-death suffering inflicted on some of the characters, particularly Lavinia. At times Shakespeare seems eager to present us with gory scenes, as he does when Titus, Lavinia and Marcus walk off, carrying two heads and Lavinia with Titus' severed hand in her mouth. If we remember that the whole assortment of body parts was carried on quite easily by one messenger, and that Marcus still has all his limbs, we might think this gory scene a little contrived. But it is done for the spectacle, and it recalls the fact that Shakespeare wrote for an audience of ordinary people, whose other entertainments including bear-baiting, cock fighting and public executions. *Titus Andronicus* is known to have been a popular success on release, and Shakespeare was probably aware that the excessive violence of the play at times weakens its dramatic effect. Later in his career he would be free to take more risks.

One notable omission in *Titus Andronicus* is the Chorus, which would have been found in all classical and much later tragedy, fulfilling the purpose of interpreting the action onstage. Kyd's *Spanish*

Tragedy has a chorus on stage almost constantly in the form of Andrea's Ghost and Revenge. They speak briefly of what has passed at the end of each act. Hamlet lacks a chorus, but his regular soliloquies often serve the same purpose of interpreting the action onstage. Although Shakespeare does not seem keen on the traditional form of a chorus as used by Kyd, it is unusual that he does not use some method to interpret the action in *Titus Andronicus*. More than anything it is the lacking of this chorus function to break up and interpret the scenes of action which has led to the general bad opinion of *Titus Andronicus*.

The play presents a conflict between selfish mankind and the ideas of civilisation he has built up. Titus begins the play feeling he is removed from primitive desires and follows a nobler cause, but when Rome lets him down he becomes human, lusting after revenge. Of course he was deceiving himself anyway, about Rome's righteous conquest of the earth. An empire that invades other countries can only justify itself by a conviction of its moral superiority over the weaker countries. Rome's rulers in the play are hardly morally superior to anyone, and are certainly not guided by anything other than base desires. Rome has lost the veneer of civilisation that justified its supremacy.

Shakespeare's goriest play seeks to remind us not that the world is evil, but that it is indifferent. The worst people may prevail over the best; in fact it is probable that they will as they lack a conscience. Audiences and readers accepting this paranoid outlook, seek a protagonist who might redress the balance, and who must necessarily operate outside the usual channels of justice. Titus cannot rescue the ideal Roman civilisation he so worshipped, it has fallen too far and he has anyway seen that it was hollow. The bloodshed moves from foreign battlefields into the city walls, and the great city reverts back into a wilderness of tigers, corrupted and weakened beyond redemption.

Apart from the fact that both *Titus Andronicus* and *Hamlet* are revenge tragedies; there are certain features which tends to distinguish and draw them together at the same time. These two revenge tragedies of Shakespeare are as educative as well as horrific. But what is worthy of note is the manner which Shakespeare approaches the theme of revenge tragedy in the two plays. One can say without being totally wrong, that Shakespeare wants to show a

double facet of revenge tragedy. It could also be categorized as his own way of showing what leads to revenge tragedy and the way different people accept it, putting it into consideration that people are not the same and must follow the dictates of their mind even whilst taking revenge.

The way in which revenge occurs in the two plays and the format in which revenge is achieved is different and familiar as well. There are quite a number of similarities in the two plays among which murder. Murder occurs in various forms, either as a propeller for revenge or as an antidote for the sins committed. In both *Hamlet* and *Titus Andronicus*, murder is committed in various forms: Titus and Claudius both commit murder; one in triumphant celebration of his victory and the other as a result of his over-ambition for the throne. This initial murder committed differently by the two of them starts a series of revenge actions. The murder committed by Titus necessitates Tamora's revenge action and it leads to a situation whereby there is revenge and counter revenge. On the other hand, the murder committed by Claudius makes Hamlet to demand for revenge of his father. But whilst he is delaying in carrying out the revenge action, he commits another murder which set-off a series of revenge actions.

Talking of a series of revenge actions, this is common to both revenge tragedies, unlike a revenge action of one person, the revenge leads to the revenge of so many people. In *Hamlet* for instance, he takes revenge for his father but delays. This delay causes his accidental killing of Polonius and this necessitates Laertes taking revenge too. Also, in *Titus Andronicus*, the revenge action taken by Tamora is so gruesome and general that it affects not only Titus, who did wrong, but also Saturninus and young Lucius.

Incest is also another dramatic occurrence common to both revenge tragedies. There is incest in both plays as committed by the Queen in both plays. The mother of young Hamlet is the first to commit this incest when she marries Hamlet's uncle and the brother to her late husband. This is an abomination, incest enough to bind the eyes. Likewise, in *Titus Andronicus* there is incest too as committed by Queen Tamora who commits this incest in form of adultery when she has an extra-marital affair with Aaron, a Blackman, despite being married to the king of Rome. There is also suicide common to

both plays but with different intent and reasons. In *Hamlet*, Ophelia commits suicide because she feels defected that the one she loves, Hamlet, is not reciprocating her feelings. She is also sad because of the untimely death of her father, Polonius; whereas Lavinia, the daughter of Titus Andronicus commits suicide because there is apparently no reason to live according to her. She has been raped, mutilated and defiled against her wish. Her virtue as a woman has been abused and so she kills herself as a way out of her misery. Suicide is used by Shakespeare as a way out for people to stop their woes and suffering. But what is worthy of note is that Shakespeare makes sure that suicide is avenged in both plays. But just as there are similarities, there are also differences in both plays.

The format, which revenge takes in the two plays is also different. Unlike in *Hamlet* where revenge is delayed, it is swift and fast in *Titus Andronicus*; of particular interest also is the fact that revenge in *Hamlet* is directed against a particular person unlike *Titus Andronicus* where both the innocent and the offender face death. Tamora hides her intention of killing the sons of Titus as Hamlet did when he wanted to kill the king. But Hamlet's case is understandable because he wants time to justify his killing the king whereas Tamora hides her intention because she does not want to be associated with the revenge at all. That could even explain her employment of Aaron as an adviser and a facilitator.

The two plays, though revenge tragedies, have been able to look at revenge and tragedy from different perspectives. The causes, course and consequences of revenge were highlighted in different ways, and all probable results of revenge were considered. The differences which can occur in individual characters when called to avenge and the way in which they perform revenge was considered individually and collectively. This is necessary in order to show the similarities and differences of the two. But when considering these notable revenge tragedies, the major point to consider is that they are not just tragedies, but revenge tragedies.

¹ Browning, D.C., *Everymans Dictionary of Shakespeare Quotations*. London:

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