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Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* and the Gender of Revenge

DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

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I declare that the following MA thesis is my own work for which I used only the sources and literature mentioned, and that this thesis has not been used in the course of other university studies or in order to acquire the same or another type of diploma.

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Souhlasím se zapůjčením diplomové práce ke studijním účelům.

I have no objections to the MA thesis being borrowed and used for study purposes.

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Rationale and Methodology

In many ways, this thesis acts as an extension of the immersive opportunity in the world of vengeance that retribution narratives offer to their audiences. It pays special attention to Shakespearean revenge tragedies, such as *Titus Andronicus* (1594), *Othello* (1603), and *Hamlet* (c.1599-1601), which continue to be examined academically as well as performed on stage. The focus of my analysis of these revenge tragedies is gender and the way it changes the approach that revengers have to their traumatic injuries. This choice of plays was based on the gender of the revengers, a fact that in itself makes the choices somewhat self-evident, given the limited number of prominent female revengers in Shakespeare's plays.

Shakespeare's revenge tragedies have been discussed at length and the issue of gender in his revenge plays is addressed in several monographs, such as *Women and Revenge in Shakespeare: Gender, Genre, and Ethics* (2012) by Marguerite Tassi and *Revenge and Gender in Classical, Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (2018), edited by Lesel Dawson and Fiona McHardy. Although both monographs are extensive, and they encompass a long period of time, they, by the very nature of their focus, do not take into account literature that was published after the Renaissance. Although they do not examine more recent works, they are still useful in terms of defining the background of more modern revenge narratives and allow for further exploration of the way in which revenge has been portrayed in literature in later centuries. These monographs act as an invaluable tool for my own research and have allowed me to comment on how certain elements of Shakespearean revenge continue to be represented in postmodern cinema.

The first and major part of this thesis is concerned with the differences in gender and the experience of trauma in revengers in Shakespeare's plays, focusing on Tamora, Lavinia, and Titus in *Titus Andronicus*, Othello and Iago in *Othello*, and Hamlet in the eponymous tragedy. These are of course not the only revengers in Shakespeare, as many comedies, tragedies, history plays, and romances feature elements of revenge, and a number of characters are in some way associated with vengeful behaviour. One of them is Richard III,[1] who admits that his deeds are at least partly motivated by desire to obtain revenge for his physical handicap. The revenge elements in comedies change the mood of the play, in some instances they seem to highlight the absurdity of each perceived offence, while the opposite happens in the tragedies. This is most notable in *Twelfth Night*[2] when in the end Malvolio promises the rest of the characters of the play that he will have his revenge.[3] His declaration has a comedic effect since he is clearly not ingenious enough to plan and execute a plan to obtain retribution, as he allowed himself to be deceived so easily. The audience's perception is what ultimately makes the play a comedy since the ways in which Malvolio was tricked are constructed in such a way that they elicit laughter.

The Tempest's revenge elements are centred around Prospero, who, after being exiled and deprived of his rights, manages to disempower his usurping brother, and restore justice by orchestrating Miranda's marriage to Ferdinand, the heir to the throne of Naples.[4] The play also features Caliban's thwarted revenge on Prospero for taking the island from him, which, depending on the interpretation, can be played out

[1] Michael Torrey, "'The plain devil and dissembling looks': Ambivalent Physiognomy and Shakespeare's 'Richard III'," *English Literary Renaissance* 30, no. 2 (Spring, 2000): 123-53, JSTOR.
[2]Julian Markels, "Shakespeare's Confluence of Tragedy and Comedy: *Twelfth Night* and *King Lear*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 15, no.2 (Spring, 1964): 75-88, JSTOR.
[3] Allison P. Hobgood, "'Twelfth Night's' 'Notorious Abuse' of Malvolio: Shame, Humorality, and Early Modern Spectatorship," *Shakespeare Bulletin* 24, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 1-22, JSTOR.
[4] Duke Pesta, "'This Rough Magic I Here Abjure': Shakespeare's 'The Tempest' and the Fairy-Tale Body," *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 15, no.1 (Spring 2004): 49-60, JSTOR.

as comedic, but is increasingly presented in recent productions as resistance to colonial oppression. Likewise, in *The Merchant of Venice*, Shylock seeks repayment from Antonio for his mistreatment. Shylock's quest to obtain a pound of flesh and the religious undertones surrounding him and Antonio give the play a dimension of revenge that contrasts with the more light-hearted romance of Portia and Bassanio. Given that the threads of revenge in these plays are not their main concern, they are not included as subjects of this dissertation, but their gender aspects would certainly merit inclusion in a more comprehensive discussion of the topic.

Male revengers prevail in Shakespeare's work, but those female ones that do appear are striking and prominent characters,[5] including Tamora, Lavinia, and also Margaret of Anjou, who appears in the first tetralogy of Shakespeare's history plays, i.e. *Henry VI* (Part 1, 2, and 3) and *Richard III*.[6] Out of the three, Tamora is the main example of a female revenger who breaks away from the expected role she is expected to play in a patriarchal society. As Marguerite Tassi eloquently states, "feminine vengeance comes in conflict with male priorities and male modes of vengeance, and can shed light on the unequal treatment of male and female victims."[7]

Lavinia and Margaret to a lesser extent conform more to gender roles, although each eventually find a way to disrupt the patriarchal order to advance their causes. Margaret's disruption of the patriarchal order differs slightly from Lavinia's due to her

[5] Tassi also mentions how other characters such as Lady Capulet, Lady Macbeth, Ophelia, Gertrude, and Beatrice while not physically seeking revenge are nevertheless involved in their incitement, whether deliberately or not. Tassi breaches these subjects on chapters 2 and 3 of her monograph, entitled respectively "Valorous Tongues, Lamenting Voices: The Expressive Ethics of Female Inciters in Shakespeare's Plays" and "Reporting the Women's Causes Aright: Wounded Names and Revenge Narratives in *Hamlet, Titus Andronicus,* and *Much Ado About Nothing"* in *Women and Revenge in Shakespeare*.

[6] Martha A. Kurtz, "Rethinking Gender and Genre in the History Play," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 36, no. 2 (Spring 1996): 267-87, JSTOR.

[7] Marguerite A. Tassi, *Women and Revenge in Shakespeare* (Susquehanna: Susquehanna University Press, 2011) 32.

display of “traits associated with men in heroic culture.”[8] Gender plays a major role in the many ways through which revengers experience trauma, process it, and eventually decide to seek revenge. It must be noted that the aftermath of traumatic events does not always lead the victims to seek revenge, in many cases the victims cope and process their emotions in non-violent ways. Another character who can be seen as motivated by revenge is Cordelia in *King Lear*, who is Shakespeare’s only daughter character who seeks retribution, as she returns to Britain from exile to force her sisters to give up their rights to rule.[9]

In order to analyse these revengers, this thesis draws on trauma theory, gender studies, and a potential new interdisciplinary field which I call “revenge studies” and which this thesis seeks to further by pursuing the topic across disciplines and genres. This thesis draws in particular on two existing academic works on the subject, “‘The Gnawing Vulture’: Revenge, Trauma Theory, and *Titus Andronicus*” (2002) by Deborah Willis and “Cannibalism and the Act of Revenge in Tudor-Stuart Drama” (2004) by Raymond Rice. These two sources informed my research at the time I first started to examine revenge narratives and their link to trauma theory in Shakespeare. Bessel van der Kolk’s *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (2019), one of the most influential recent works on the subject of trauma in the field of psychology, was also useful to accurately understand the consequences of trauma in human psyche and the complexities involved in the processing of traumatic injuries.

Characters of revengers, as portrayed in both older and modern works of literature discussed here, exhibit complex traumatic injuries, coping mechanisms, and

[8] Marguerite A. Tassi, *Women and Revenge in Shakespeare* 117.
[9] Cordelia as a revenger is examined in further detail by Marguerite A. Tassi in “The Avenging Daughter in *King Lear*” in *Revenge and Gender in Classical, Medieval and Renaissance Literature (*Edinburgh University Press, 2018): 111-21

belief systems. Through trauma theory, as formulated by van der Kolk, it is possible to explore the depth of the injury, the importance of the processing it, and its outcome. Trauma theory allows for the trajectory of an injury to be traced from beginning to end, and in many cases that end is either the death of the revenger or the death of those around them, sometimes both. Trauma theory also allows for a deeper understanding of the wide-reaching repercussions of a traumatic injury in a community and highlights the devastation that one single injury can have on multiple generations.

When focusing on gender and revenge in this analysis, I used as points of departure Douglas Green's "Interpreting 'Her Martyr'd Signs': Gender and Tragedy in *Titus Andronicus*" (1989), Heidi Schlipphacke's "*Inglourious Basterds* and the Gender of Revenge" (2012), and Lesel Dawson's "Introduction: Female Fury and the Masculine Spirit of Vengeance" (2018). While working with these essays that operate on the intersection gender studies and revenge studies, and it became clear that revenge both in Shakespeare's plays and in the works of postmodern cinema examined here is a strongly gendered issue that requires careful examination. Apart from analysing how gender affects each revenger, I also examined the similarities between male and female revengers. The analysis of each revenger in this thesis highlights these connections and expands on them.

It must be ascertained that while this thesis focuses mainly on female revengers, it is not meant to disregard in any way those revengers that define themselves beyond the male/female binary. Unfortunately, however, the research done for this thesis up to this date has not yielded any results of these types of revengers. It is not possible at this time to ascertain the reason for the lack of data in this respect. However, if in the future revengers beyond the binary emerge, they would merit analysis just as the male and female revengers do.

Given the canonical statues of Shakespeare's plays and their worldwide circulation, it can be claimed that Shakespeare's revengers have influenced the way in which revenge is perceived in the modern era, particularly in popular culture, and apart from trauma theory, gender studies, and revenge studies, this thesis, in the second part, also explores the link between Shakespearean revengers and figures from recent popular culture influenced by them, namely the female revengers in films by American director and writer Quentin Tarantino (1963). The focus on Tarantino's characters was prompted by the similarities that exist between his films and Shakespeare's plays. Both authors explore the extremes of human emotion and the depths to which a character is willing to go to achieve revenge: Tarantino's films deal with a combination of stylisation and excess of violence, blood, and gore, and *Titus Andronicus*, which is the main focus of this thesis, is also known for featuring extreme violence, mutilation, cannibalism, rape, and "warlike women."[10]

As this thesis seeks to argue, there are strong thematic connections between the plays and the films in relation to female revengers, and characters and themes are the main focus here. An inevitable degree of simplification is naturally involved in comparing plays, as written texts, and works of cinema. The obvious main differences between the plays and films include the fixed cast, and the decision-making from the director, who controls everything the audience sees and hears, while in reading the plays, much more is left to the reader's imagination. To analyse the films, I also worked with a screenplay of both, and noted the similarities in the lack of directions for the actors in both cases. The screenplays also had little in terms of description of the setting of the scene, much like Shakespeare's texts. The lack of directions became evident once I began to analyse the films since it allowed for creative exploration.

[10] Marguerite A. Tassi, *Women and Revenge in Shakespeare* 117.

Additionally, the films allow for the inclusion of technology, and pop culture references, which can enhance the audience's connection to the film. Naturally, these elements have been part of modern productions of Shakespeare in the United Kingdom and abroad as a bridge for the distance between contemporary world and Elizabethan society. A productive area of inquiry would therefore have been a comparison of between recorded stage adaptations, which impose film performance on the ephemerality of theatre production, where the interpretation of the play may differ significantly according to the particular cast and on individual occasions, and film versions of the plays, for instance Julie Taymor's *Titus* (1999). However, this thesis chose a different focus, which the following pages hopefully justify.

Currently, the pool of Western revenge films in which women take centre stage is still limited.[11] Additionally, out of these films, only a few show revenge acted out in visceral fashion, though not as visceral as Shakespeare's, such as Damian Szifron's *Wild Tales* (2014), Alejandro G. Iñárritu's *The Revenant* (2015), and T. J. Miller's *Deadpool* (2016). Tarantino's fascination with the extremes of human emotion and his focus on women revengers echoes back to Shakespeare's own striking exploration of female revenge. The second part of the thesis therefore focuses on Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds* (2009) and *Kill Bill vol. 1* (2003) and *Kill Bill, vol. 2* (2004), also to point out on a specific example the continuing resonance of Shakespeare's revenge characters, and this thesis seeks to explore ways in which Tarantino's Shosanna and Beatrix reflect traits of Shakespeare's Tamora and Lavinia.

[11] There are other filmmakers who also explore the link between revenge and excess, and feature major female characters, such as Park Chan-wook in his *Sympathy for Lady Vengeance (2005),* a film in which a woman who is wrongly accused of murdering a child, after serving a prison sentence, finds and tortures the real murderer. However, given that this film is set in Korea, it seems inappropriate to analyse it from a Western perspective as well as equate it to the works of Shakespeare without properly contextualising the cultural, political, and social background of Korean society.

Critics such as Chloe Kathleen Preedy, Alessandra Abbatista, Sara Ahmed, Janet Clare, Lesel Dawson, and Edith Hall have explored the many ways through which female revenge and anger can be expressed and the importance of this expression in *Revenge and Gender in Classical, Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (2018). This collective monograph explores topics such as revenge as a feminine urge, the importance of family in revenge narratives, cursing and gossip as less-overt means of revenge, and death as a consequence of revenge. Essays included in the monograph are confined to classical, mediaeval, and renaissance literature, and as such they offer a starting point for research of modern female-led revenge narratives.

Articles on female revenge in modern media, such as Tarantino films, have been published as part of a monograph entitled *Quentin Tarantino's* Inglourious Basterds*: A Manipulation of Metacinema* (2012). The volume features essays such as Heidi Schlipphacke's "*Inglourious Basterds* and the Gender of Revenge" and Eric Kligerman's "Reels of Justice: *Inglourious Basterds*, *The Sorrow and the Pity*, and Jewish Revenge Fantasies." As illustrative as these articles are of how revenge and gender are interlinked, they are focused only on one film, which narrows the field of modern female revenge criticism considerably. Up to this date, there does not seem to exist a comprehensive monograph focusing on modern revenge narratives in relation to cinema and gender.

1. 2. Early Revenge Tragedies

As Kent Cartwright explains, "Elizabethan playhouse drama represented a considerable break from its predecessors in treatments of religion, of aestheticism, and of medium."[12] The Elizabethan era plays used a combination of wordplay, wit,

[12] Kent Cartwright, "Defining Tudor Drama," *Early Theatre* 16, no. 1 (2013): 7.

references to contemporary politics, historical events, and moral dilemmas. One of the major dilemmas these plays explored was revenge and whether it was justified, necessary, or even unavoidable. Revenge in Elizabethan drama[13] was presented as an expected, and in some cases necessary, reaction to a traumatic injury. The scale of the traumatic injury did not appear to deter victims from seeking revenge. Relatively minor offences could trigger an act of revenge just as easily as major traumatic events. The only real metric to decide whether an event was worthy of revenge was for the victims to evaluate whether the injury received was severe enough to threaten their sense of self and consequently the place they inhabit in the social and political spheres. Whether a situation was objectively unjust did not alter the appeal of the tragedy given that only the revenger could determine whether to seek revenge or not.

Elizabethan revenge tragedies offered an opportunity for the audience to immerse themselves in a world dominated by the arbitrary, and often morally suspect, rules of the revenger. Examples of prominent Elizabethan and Jacobean revenge tragedies include Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* (1587), John Marston's *Antonio's Revenge* (1602), George Chapman's *Revenge of Bussy d'Ambois* (1603), Thomas Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy* (1606), Henry Chettle's *The Tragedy of Hoffman* (1607). Especially the early revenge tragedies of this period are often marked by the influence of Roman drama and Seneca's plays in particular.[14]

In the introduction to *Revenge and Gender in Classical, Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, Lesel Dawson explains that cursing had been historically used as an outlet for vengeful thoughts and said that it "had an important psychological

[13] Kathleen Kuiper, "Revenge Tragedy," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, last updated January 31st 2022, https://www.britannica.com/art/revenge-tragedy

[14] Donald Reynolds Dudley, "Seneca: Roman philosopher and statesman [4 BCE - 65 BCE], *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, last updated February 9th, 2023, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Lucius-Annaeus-Seneca-Roman-philosopher-and-statesman/Stature-and-influence

and social function" for women, "providing a legitimate outlet for potentially disruptive feelings through an established ritual that was recognised as meaningful by the civic community."[15] The same can be said of revenge tragedies as a whole, given that traumatic injuries continue to be suffered, female revengers in media offer an outlet for negative feelings such as impotence and anger, as well as some potentially positive feelings such as pleasure and satisfaction.

In an essay about revenge narratives and the pleasure that can be obtained from revenge, Richard T. McClelland states that the appeal of revenge lies in the fact that it is possible for virtually everyone to identify with the major emotional components of revenge, such as anger, indignation, and resentment. Apart from the potential for identification, however, revenge tragedies are often tools through which traumatic events can be processed. McClelland refers to this potential by stating that revenge is a form of self-defence just as much as it is a form of justice.[16] These claims may seem contradictory at first, and McClelland does not analyse them further.

It is possible to view revenge as an act of self-defence, although not in the traditional sense of the word. Self-defence is usually thought of as a defensive action that takes place at the same time someone else is attempting to harm a second party. If that is the case, then revenge would need to occur almost at the same time as the traumatic injury but most of the time this is not the case. Many revengers are either forced to wait or choose to wait a certain amount of time before they enact their revenge. The length of time that transpires between the traumatic experience and the revenge varies. In some cases, revenge may come years after the initial injury, such as in Alexander Dumas' *The Count of Monte Cristo* (1846), to give an example of

[15] Lesel, Dawson, "Introduction: Female Fury and the Masculine Spirit of Vengeance," *Revenge and Gender in Classical, Medieval and Renaissance Literature (*Edinburgh University Press, 2018): 12.
[16] Richard T. McClelland, "The Pleasures of Revenge," *The Journal of Mind and Behaviour* 31. no. ¾, (Summer and Autumn, 2010): 198.

another work firmly embedded in popular imagination, while in others it may happen within days, such as in *Titus Andronicus.* In these cases, the physical act of revenge is necessarily executed *after* the traumatic injury.

Studies on abuse sustained in family, friendships, and romantic relationships highlight the many different ways through which trauma manifests itself during and after the traumatic injury has been sustained. Given that each traumatic injury is unique, it stands to reason that each response from the victim be unique as well. This is particularly evident in Tamora and Lavinia, both women in the same play, who sustained traumatic injuries but who processed the events in very different ways.

In order for revenge to be an effective form of self-defence, it must transcend the physical restraints of time. The effects of trauma on the psyche oftentimes are more prolonged than those present in the physical bodies of trauma survivors. Revenge then can be conceived as an attempt of self-defence against further deterioration of the psychic state of mind. In *The Body Keeps the Score*, van der Kolk makes the claim that "trauma is not just an event that took place sometime in the past; it is also the imprint left by that experience on mind, brain, and body."[17] Revenge can be a self-defence mechanism against that imprint left behind by trauma, and at the same time it can be an attempt at containing the trauma.

Approaching revenge in this way appears to have contributed to the appeal of revenge tragedies. Revenge narratives also offer a way through which the shortcomings of the judicial system can be amended.[18] This type of retribution can be particularly appealing to women, who were (and still are) at a disadvantage in judicial systems. In order for a regular person to become a revenger it appears as though two

[17] Bessel A. van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, read by Sean Pratt (London: Penguin, 2019), audiobook, 16 hours 16 minutes.
[18] Marguerite A. Tassi, *Women and Revenge in Shakespeare* 36.

key events need to occur. First, they must be victims of some kind of trauma inflicted by someone else, and second, they must see no way to obtain retribution other than through their own means. This is apparent in early revenge tragedies such as *Othello, Hamlet* and *Titus Andronicus* and in recent novels such as Suzanne Collins' *Mockingjay* (2010), Victoria Helen Stone's *Jane Doe* (2018), and Layne Fargo's *They Never Learn* (2021).

As appealing as revenge narratives might be to women, when examining early revenge tragedies, Raymond J. Rice stated that the "community of revengers is thus a quintessentially active and masculine one from which women are excluded, with any attempt by women to join such a community constructed as an inherently transgressive act."[19] This appears to be by design since male characters have historically been given more agency and control over situations than female ones. Stories of female revenge in Renaissance drama were shocking to spectators in no small measure because of their unexpectedness. Female revengers break away from the stereotype of what a woman must be in order to explore the limits of their character and determination. This breakage from the traditional role of a woman is often presented as a public spectacle through which the revenger attempts, paradoxically, to heal a wound that was inflicted in a public and humiliating fashion.

The performative aspect of revenge is crucial for the processing of trauma. Humiliation is linked to this performative aspect, as Deborah Willis points out, "[the] experience of humiliation leads the revenger not only to double his or her violent deeds but also requires a public performance to repair self-image."[20] In order for that public performance to be as successful as possible, the revenger needs to be in control of

[19] Raymond J. Rice, "Cannibalism and the Act of Revenge in Tudor-Stuart Drama," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 44, no. 2, (Spring, 2004): 300.
[20] Deborah Willis, "'The Gnawing Vulture': Revenge, Trauma Theory, and Titus Andronicus," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 53, no.1 (Spring, 2002): 33.

the space where the revenge will be performed. James J. Condon explains this as the revenger engaging in spatial contest and control from the very start of the play.[21] Obtaining control of the space does not necessarily mean that the revenger will openly challenge their adversary for the space they occupy. The spatial contest can be subtle and happen behind the scenes, although in many cases it happens openly and deliberately. Given that "[it] matters how you fight back"[22] the revenger will seek to recreate as many elements from their trauma in their spectacle in an effort to process the suffering they have experienced. These traumatic re-enactments are often accompanied by an excess of violence and feeling.

1. 3. Postmodern Revenge Narratives

The performative aspect of revenge along with the necessary excess that it brings are two of the reasons, and perhaps the most important ones, thanks to which revenge and its effects are well suited for the stage. Shakespeare's revenge tragedies offer to the spectator a dissection of the performance of revenge as well as to the many ways through which excess can manifest. In *Titus Andronicus* Tamora, Lavinia and Titus all seek to perform their revenge in front of an audience, with Tamora even donning a disguise that adds to that performative aspect. In contrast, Hamlet is more literal, given that he prepares an actual play to denounce his uncles' crimes. Othello and Iago both also make their revenge into a spectacle, with Iago in particular being very concerned with addressing the public humiliation he feels he was dealt. *Titus Andronicus, Hamlet,*

[21] James J. Condon, "Setting the Stage for Revenge: Space, Performance, and Power in Early Modern Revenge Tragedy," *Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England* 25 (2012): 62-3.
[22] Deborah Willis, "'The Gnawing Vulture': Revenge, Trauma Theory, and Titus Andronicus," 23.

and *Othello* will be the three plays examined in the first chapter of this thesis, which will also focus on how gender affects the execution of revenge.

Excess, apart from being an important component of early revenge tragedies, is also present in modern revenge stories in film, many of which have their roots in Shakespeare. Filmmaking allows for excess to be taken to its extreme through the use of props, editing, costumes, and makeup. One of the many modern masters of excess in film is director Quentin Tarantino, who has conceived multiple revenge narratives, out of which two revolve around female revengers.

Tarantino has been inspired by Shakespeare to some degree, and his inspiration appears to be most prominent in the conception of characters that find themselves in extreme situations and who are forced to resort to less than noble means in order to survive. Laurent Bouzerau, when speaking of Tarantino's characters, describes this as "Tarantino definitely [succeeding] at fascinating us with scum."[23] The "scum" take centre stage in most of Tarantino's films, with the exception of *Inglourious Basterds,* and their moral failings are both intriguing and, to a certain degree, easy to identify with. Whether these characters are presented as heroes, anti-heroes, or villains, each of them has grey moral compasses that complicate their role in each of the stories.

Several essays have explored Shakespearean tendencies in Tarantino's work. Richard Burt and Scott L. Newstock in their 2010 essay "Certain Tendencies in Criticism of Shakespeare on Film" examine similarities in style, plot structure, and characterization. In fact, they quote Tarantino in an interview from 2007 in which he said "[I] had a thought maybe that I might have been Shakespeare in another life. I

[23] Laurent Bouzerau, *Ultraviolent Movies: From Sam Peckinpah to Quentin Tarantino* (New York: Citadel Press, 2000), 74.

don't really believe that 100 percent [...] but then people are constantly bringing up all qualities in my work that mirror Shakespearean tragedies and moments and themes."[24] In fact, Tarantino's films are also often staged like plays. The camera angles and scenography make it seem as though characters were entering and exiting the stage. This is particularly prevalent in *Inglourious Basterds,* in which Sgt. Donny Donowitz comes out of a tunnel to pummel a Nazi to death. Donowitz appears from the darkness, as though from backstage, and takes centre stage in a structure that is made to look like Greek theatre.

Tarantino's films are also close to Shakespeare's plays in the way they present excess in revenge and the "character's reaction to violence, not violence itself."[25] Tarantino's revengers, much like Shakespeare's, become obsessed with the idea of revenge to the point that it consumes everything about their character, until only the desire for retribution remains. This is particularly prevalent in female revengers, who have been brutalised to such a degree that their very selves are overshadowed by revenge, and they are completely transformed as they set out to obtain retribution. Shosanna Dreyfus from *Inglourious Basterds* and Beatrix Kiddo from *Kill Bill (vol. 1 & 2),* the main subjects of the second chapter of this thesis, experience that transformation as a key part of each of their revenge narratives.

[24] Richard Burt and Scott L. Newstock, "Certain Tendencies in Criticism of Shakespeare on Film," *Shakespeare Studies*, ed. by Susan Zimmerman and Garret Sullivan (New York: Rosemont Publishing & Printing Corp, 2010), 101.
[25] Bouzerau, *Ultraviolent Movies: From Sam Peckinpah to Quentin Tarantino*, 88.

Chapter Two: Shakespeare's Revenge Tragedies

2.1 *Titus Andronicus*

2.1.1. Tamora

Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* opens with a public scene of Titus' triumphant return to Rome after defeating and conquering the Goths. The house of Andronicus seems to bask in the good graces of the people of Rome as well as its emperor. Titus and his family find their notoriety and power threatened by Tamora, and to a lesser extent by her sons and her lover.

Tamora's character is composed of three main parts: she is Tamora the queen, Tamora the mother and Tamora the woman. It is important to note that that last part refers not only to her biological sex but to her sexuality and her relationships with the male characters around her. These identities do not exist in a vacuum, they are intertwined and influence each other throughout the play and, as Tamora's character develops and changes, these three parts change too.

Tamora's sense of self is threatened by Titus in various ways but perhaps the most poignant is when Titus prepares to kill Tamora's firstborn Alarbus. The aggravating circumstance in this instance is that Alarbus's death is intended to be a ritual sacrifice that also involves dismembering him. Tamora is horrified and tries to move Titus to reconsider by appealing to his nobility, stating "[sweet] mercy is nobility's true badge: Thrice noble Titus, spare my first-born son."[1] Tamora calls him thrice noble as an attempt at flattery, suggesting that someone as noble as him would surely show mercy towards a mother begging for her child's life.

[1] William Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus,* ed. Jonathan Bate (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 1.1.122-23. References are to act, scene, and line.

Ultimately, Tamora's pleas are ineffective and she is forced to witness her son's death. Since Alarbus died as part of a ritual sacrifice there is also no body to bury and therefore Tamora experiences none of the closure that a burial ceremony could bring. By stating "[let's] hew his limbs till they be clean consumed"[2] Lucius is suggesting that the dismemberment and burning will happen almost at the same time if not *at* the same time, effectively erasing any hope for retrieving Alarbus' body for funeral rites.

Adding to the loss of her child and the inability to find closure through burial rites of her own, Tamora is also experiencing the loss of herself as Alarbus' mother. While it is true that she does have other children they are unable to diminish her grief because one child cannot be replaced with another. Tamora's loss is a gaping wound that cannot be healed by any of her other children. This is further cemented by the way in which Tamora decides to continue with her revenge later in the play even after she becomes pregnant and gives birth to Aaron's son.

In fact, Tamora goes as far as to send her new-born baby away in order for her to be able to continue being close to Saturninus to achieve her revenge. Tamora's relationships with her other two sons, Chiron and Demetrius, are also affected by her need for revenge. They appear by her side disguised as Rape and Murder and become entangled in Tamora's revenge, which ultimately leads to their deaths in Act 5, scene II. Tamora is so consumed with the idea of revenge that she is willing to give up everything to obtain it.

Tamora's damaged sense of self cannot be put together until she feels that she has obtained the retribution she feels she is owed. Titus presented himself as a threat to her immediate family as well as her country and this threat is so expansive that the

[2] *Titus Andronicus,* 1.1.132

lines between Tamora the mother and Tamora the queen become irreversibly smudged.

Tamora arrives in Rome at a disadvantage since she arrives as a captive. She is paraded around Rome as a trophy, an object that has been won and which serves no purpose other than ornamentation. This is both humiliating and also a slight to her sense of self since she is not used to being without power. She is not tied to either a husband or a father and to suddenly lose that independence must necessarily come as a shock. There is no captured King of the Goths so she is the highest-ranking captive Titus has. It must be noted, however, that Tamora is not completely powerless since even in her captivity she has a certain level of influence that distinguishes her from her fellow Goths. This influence is advanced by Saturninus when he chooses her for his bride and it gives Tamora more power than she could ever have as a prisoner of war.

By defeating the Goths and taking Tamora prisoner Titus has also managed to culturally, politically and geographically displace her. The mere act of displacement would be enough to prompt Tamora to seek revenge but the injuries she experienced don't end there. Tamora's displacement implies in itself a loss of identity as well since she goes from being a Goth to essentially becoming a Roman. In her own words "Titus, I am incorporate in Rome, A Roman now adopted happily"[3]. Whether or not she is happy to become a Roman does nothing to change the fact that Tamora has to learn to accept the loss of her old identity and her newly acquired one. Outwardly she may appear pleased to become a Roman but her actions suggest the opposite. Adding to all the losses she has suffered, Tamora also experiences public humiliation since the

[3] *Titus Andronicus,* 1.1.467-8.

loss of her son, her country, her martial defeat and the loss of her freedom are all exposed to the public eye.

Publicly Tamora attempts to act in a way that will preserve the little power she has left but no matter what she does it is impossible to ignore the fact that she is a woman in a patriarchal society. Tamora, by virtue of existing, disrupts the established order in the first instance when Saturninus discards Lavinia and sets his sights on Tamora. There is a shift in power after Saturninus chooses Tamora over Lavinia.

Tamora's status as empress then is linked to her sexuality and her gender. Tamora's sexuality also begins to appear as a force of disruption. Lavinia and Bassianus interrupt Tamora and Aaron in a private moment and Lavinia states 'Jove shield your husband from his hounds today: "Tis pity they should take him for a stag."[4] The implication that Tamora is cuckolding her husband is clear and Tamora takes offence to the statement as well as the interruption of what she hoped would be a moment placed firmly in the private sphere.

Chiron and Demetrius arrive and the tension rises. After Bassianus is killed by Chiron, Lavinia calls Tamora barbarous and insists that "no name fits thy nature but thy own."[5] Implying that nobody could ever be as ruthless and cruel as Tamora. Being that they are in private, Tamora feels no need to correct her or hide her nature, indeed she seems to accept Lavinia's words when she asks Chiron for the dagger that was used to kill Bassianus. Tamora then says "[your] mother's hand shall right your mother's wrong."[6] This acknowledgement of Tamora's plans for revenge along with the visual of her receiving the dagger from Chiron carry significant weight in the presentation of Tamora as someone with a new identity.

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[4] *Titus Andronicus*, 2.2.70-1
[5] *Titus Andronicus*, 2.2.119.
[6] *Titus Andronicus,* 2.2.121.

Tamora stands as the complete opposite of Lavinia and in very reductive words can be said to be the 'bad woman' to Lavinia's 'good woman', particularly when it comes to their sexuality. Furthermore, Tamora's sexuality appears to be all-consuming, threatening to destroy Lavinia, Bassianus and Saturninus. Tamora also recognises that unrestrained sexuality in her sons and endorses it by allowing her sons to do what they want to Lavinia. Additionally, Tamora calls herself "lascivious Goth", as if she recognised that unrestrained sexuality in herself, by claiming that Lavinia and Bassianus used those same words to describe her.

When discussing Tamora Douglas E. Green states that "the avenger mirrors the enemy, commits the very evils for which retribution is sought" and that "[every] desire she voices threatens Titus, Rome, and the patriarchal assumptions of the audience."[7] Tamora's desire for revenge coupled with her perceived unrestrained sexuality firmly places her in the role of Other and transforms her into an example of what an unwomanly and inhuman nature looks like. This is best exemplified in Lavinia's own words "[o] Tamora, thou bearest a woman's face-."[8] The implication of these words is that though Tamora may look like a woman, she is not one, according to the standards of Roman society. Tamora does not act like a woman and does not think like a woman, which leaves those around her perplexed as to her role in the social fabric.

In an essay focused on gender, nature, and culture, Sherry B. Ortner postulates that the scheme of woman being closer to nature and men being closer to culture is "a construct of culture rather than a given of nature."[9] The concept of separation of the

[7] Douglas E. Green, "'Interpreting "Her Martyr'd Signs': Gender and Tragedy in Titus Andronicus," Shakespeare Quarterly 40, no. 3 (Autumn, 1989): 321.
[8] *Titus Andronicus,* 2.2. 136
[9] Sherry B. Ortner, "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?," *Feminist Studies* 1. no. 2 (Autumn, 1972): 28, JSTOR.

male and female and by extension of nature and culture present in *Titus Andronicus* becomes most blatant in the treatment of Tamora as a mother by Titus. Women are able to grow life within their bodies and give birth to that life whereas men can only participate in the process of procreation in a smaller way, biologically speaking. Taking this into account it becomes clear that Tamora is defying not only her role in the patriarchal society she has been brought into but also the expectations that come with her gender. This defiance destabilised the social structures around Tamora and ultimately made them crumble.

Tamora then goes from being the victim to becoming one of the perpetrators of violence, even if at the time she has not hurt or killed anyone with her own hands. Tamora orders her sons to take Lavinia away and allows them to do what they please with her. It is also during this scene that Tamora's ultimate goal is revealed when she says "[ne'er] let my heart know merry cheer indeed/ Till all the Andronici be made away."[10] Tamora's revenge is set in motion and follows the idea presented by Willis that "vengeful acts commonly exceed rather than equal the original wrong."[11] Revenge is not symmetrical because the injury suffered is never truly a one-layer injury.

Tamora's identity morphs throughout the play but the most poignant transformation occurs after she makes the decision to destroy the Andronici and becomes Revenge. Tamora states before meeting Titus, "I will encounter with Andronicus/ And say I am Revenge, sent from below / To join him and right his heinous wrongs."[12] By literally becoming Revenge she is claiming a new, powerful and untainted identity that could potentially cleanse all past transgressions with blood. Revenge as a character is non-human, as Tamora states it is a being sent from below,

[10] *Titus Andronicus,* 2.2. 188-9.
[11] Willis, "'The Gnawing Vulture': Revenge, Trauma Theory, and Titus Andronicus," 32.
[12] *Titus Andronicus,* 5.2. 2-4

and appears to inhabit a realm of possibilities outside the human. Tamora, and subsequently Revenge, are threatening Others to Titus and his family.

Titus and Tamora-Revenge seem to "recognize each other as potential revengers, as potential members of a specific community, because the Other, the symbolic order, renders them recognizable as bodies, and more importantly, as gendered bodies."[13] Tamora's revenge, apart from being transgressive to the status quo, is also much more difficult to achieve than Titus' when taking into account the fact that she has to contend with her gender while planning and executing her revenge.

In an essay on *Titus Andronicus*, Deborah Willis makes the claim that "[it] matters how you fight back"[14] when speaking about trauma and revenge. Tamora's chosen method for revenge mirrors the way in which Titus has hurt her. While Titus himself has experienced the loss of his children during the war, Tamora is the only one who has carried these children inside herself and then watched them die. This coupled with the added injuries to her identity as a queen and as a woman create an all-encompassing need to seek revenge.

Revenge as a coping mechanism for trauma cannot erase the pain that the characters have already experienced and indeed it "both contains and fails to contain the potentially overwhelming emotions trauma unleashes."[15] Tamora is relieving the bloodshed she experienced while she is causing more bloodshed of her own. Where at first she is presented as a character who is experiencing deep grief and who garners sympathy, as the play continues she is presented as less sympathetic and more bloodthirsty and ruthless. Tamora's trauma unleashes cruelty within her and she is

[13] Raymond J. Rice, "Cannibalism and the Act of Revenge in Tudor-Stuart Drama,' *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 44, no. 2, (Spring, 2004): 300.
[14] Willis, "'The Gnawing Vulture': Revenge, Trauma Theory, and Titus Andronicus," 23.
[15] Willis, "'The Gnawing Vulture': Revenge, Trauma Theory, and Titus Andronicus," 34.

determined to inflict pain upon others as a way of coping with her own pain, potentially hurting innocent people in the process.

As Willis states "[traumatic] events, in a sense, help to create the grotesque, maimed bodies and minds, confounding limits, undermining assumptions about what is appropriate and reasonable."[16] The trauma that Tamora suffered warped her sense of self and tainted the way in which she perceives the world around her. The limits of what would be appropriate to do to cope after a loss are destroyed by the trauma she has endured so that there is nothing that could potentially make her desist in her actions.

Trauma has a unique way of altering the mind and the way it reacts to past offences. Tamora's eagerness for revenge turns it into a spectacle, revenge spills from the private sphere and into the public sphere so that there are no safe spaces remaining. This is a mirroring of the way in which Tamora suddenly was left without a safe space in which she could escape her trauma. Willis describes this process as "recreating trauma in the attempt to contain it."[17] The problem with this approach, as is shown in the play, is that there are no limits to revenge since these have been eaten away by trauma itself. The revenger is both victim and perpetrator and the only way to end the cycle of suffering seems to be with the end of the revenger's life. There does not seem to be any hope for rebirth after revenge, revenge is the ultimate, final goal.

When analysing Tamora's cannibalism, Rice states that "by constructing a woman's desire as simultaneously devouring - cannibalistic - as well as incomplete and inferior, the patriarchal order can effectively locate potentially transgressive behaviour originating outside the male community."[18] Tamora's potential for death is

[16] Willis, "'The Gnawing Vulture': Revenge, Trauma Theory, and Titus Andronicus," 46.
[17] Willis, "'The Gnawing Vulture': Revenge, Trauma Theory, and Titus Andronicus," 51.
[18] Raymond J. Rice, "Cannibalism and the Act of Revenge in Tudor-Stuart Drama,' *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 44, no. 2, (Spring, 2004): 301.

so frightening that she is presented as a cannibal and indeed it also seems to reflect a deep-seated fear of males being devoured by women since all the bodies that have been inside her have been male. Tamora's pregnancy can then be equated with the consumption of her sons at the end of the play in a twisted way, with the main difference being that cannibalism entails the end of life while pregnancy is the opposite.

Cannibalism and revenge in Tamora are especially jarring to the spectator because of the prevalent social and cultural perceptions that define women as less violent than men. The mere idea of a pregnant woman attempting to avenge the death of her firstborn is disturbing because of the paradox of a woman being both a person who can bring life into the world while at the same time attempting to extinguish it.

Tamora's need for revenge becomes so powerful that she seems to almost forget her sense of self the closer she comes to her goal and, incidentally, to her own destruction. Her revenge becomes self-destructive once it becomes clear that there will not be healing after it has been achieved. It can even "take self-mutilating, even suicidal form"[19] since it becomes an all-consuming urge. Death is the only force strong enough to stop the revenger and, paradoxically, death is also the only force that can bring peace to a revenger's tortured soul and the only possible outcome at the end of the play. Tamora dies without closure because there really is no closure to be had, no amount of revenge can undo the damage that has been done.

2.1.2. Lavinia

[19] Willis, "'The Gnawing Vulture': Revenge, Trauma Theory, and Titus Andronicus," 50.

Lavinia, in contrast to Tamora, has a well-defined place in Roman society. Lavinia is young enough to still be under her father's care and she acts like a dutiful daughter ought to. She is of marrying age and conducts herself with as much care as possible to preserve her virtue and therefore appears subdued and non-threatening to others. Lavinia appears shrouded in the safety of her father's house and reputation, in fact she becomes a desirable woman to Saturninus thanks to the fact that she is Titus' daughter. However, as soon as she is pulled from the safety of the domestic sphere and into the public sphere she loses all desirability and is cast aside.

Lavinia is Tamora's opposite. Where Tamora is brash and unrestrained, Lavinia is careful and obedient. Lavinia is aware of all the social rules that apply to her gender and follows them to the letter. The males around her know what is expected of them, at least on the side of the Romans, and they act according to their own cultural and social traditions. Without Tamora's intervention, Lavinia would have gone on to live the prototypical life of a Roman woman married to a Roman man. Tamora's disruptive nature forces Lavinia out of her socially accepted role and makes her vulnerable in the face of strange men from different cultural and social backgrounds.

However different Lavinia and Tamora are, they are both women and they are viewed by men similarly. Lavinia's vulnerability is explicitly described by Demetrius when he speaks about her by saying "[she] is a woman, therefore may be wooed; She is a woman, therefore may be won; She is Lavinia, therefore must be loved."[20] The implication of these words is that men, and in this case Demetrius and his brother, are entitled to women's attentions, particularly those of Lavinia. A woman is perceived as an object by them, her agency is not taken into account and all that matters is that she is present for men to do what they please with her. Lavinia is a woman and that is all

[20] *Titus Andronicus,* 1.1. 582-4.

that matters in this declaration, just because she exists, because her body is present she becomes an object instead of a person. That is, Lavinia is relegated to a secondary position in the female/male binary.

Perhaps one of the most disturbing claims in Demetrius' statement is that because she is Lavinia, she must be loved. Taking into account what happens next it becomes clear that love is a euphemism for sexual domination. She must necessarily be dominated by a man sexually because she is Lavinia. Her agency is trampled even before she appears on stage and her womanhood and virtue is destroyed by her rape and mutilation. Demetrius and Chiron seem to react to Lavinia's womanhood as though it were a threat, seeking to tarnish it and eventually destroy it in such a way that it becomes impossible for it to be healed in the future.

Lavinia's rape implies not only an injury to the self but also an injury to her identity. Like Tamora, whose identity is composed of Tamora the mother, Tamora the woman and Tamora the queen, Lavinia's identity is also composed of different parts. Lavinia is a woman as well as a daughter and her rape prevents her from being able to fully inhabit these identities as she had before. Because she has been raped her perceived value, at least for the men around her, has decreased and she brings shame to the Andronici and dishonour to her father. There is no hope of Lavinia recovering her earlier status and the only option she has moving forward is to die.

Lavinia's sexuality, like Tamora's, is both destructive and self-destructive. While Tamora has a lover, Aaron, and is unafraid of meeting him and being intimate, Lavinia has never had a lover and her first sexual interaction was through rape. Tamora's agency manifests itself sexually through her relationship with Aaron while Lavinia's lack of agency is highlighted by her virginity first and her rape second.

Surprisingly Lavinia begins to take on a much more active role after the rape and mutilation and for a while claims her own agency. Mutilation and rape become methods of reconstruction even as they have been used to incapacitate her. Lavinia is driven forward by a desire for revenge and it is that which allows her to find ways with which to communicate with her father. First she finds Ovid's *Metamorphosis* and then leafs through the text until Titus begins to understand what she is doing. Titus eventually asked "Lavinia, wet thou thus surprised, sweet girl/ Ravished and wronged as Philomela was [...]."[21] At her ascent, Titus asks for more information, though it is not quite clear how she could provide it. Marcus is the one who shows her how she can use his staff to write on the ground, and she does.

Lavinia can't talk so Titus takes over and reads her words, effectively becoming her mouthpiece. It seems natural that Titus would become the instrument of Lavinia's revenge. However, it is Marcus who first swears to avenge Lavinia and only after does Titus take on the role of avenger. Perhaps the reason for this is simply that Titus is so overwhelmed by the news that he first needs to process the news and only after that is done can he begin to act. This would be the reason for him to cry, "*Magni dominator poli / Tam lentus audis sclera, tam lentus vides*?"[22] This is effectively a plea to God and a reproach as well. Once Titus manages to calm himself he begins in earnest to think of revenge.

At first glance, Lavinia's revenge seems more subdued than Tamora's because she is not herself going out and seeking revenge. Lavinia is letting the men around her take charge of the revenge even if she is the one that has set them in motion. By letting the men act she appears as a less dangerous woman than Tamora, she continues to

[21] *Titus Andronicus,* 4.1.51-2
[22] *Titus Andronicus,* 4.1.81-2

behave as she should by letting the men take care of the planning and execution of their revenge.

By the time Titus discovers what happened to her, Lavinia has also been made into a double of Alarbus. Since Tamora is counting on Titus enduring the same amount of suffering she did when Alarbus was killed and dismembered as a ritual sacrifice it makes sense that Lavinia would mirror Alarbus at that point in the play. This is explained by Willis when she states "Lavinia takes the place of Alarbus [...] As Alarbus' body was desecrated, so Lavinia's will be violated through rape."[23] This mirroring of the families is present throughout the play but in moments of high tension it is easier to discern who is taking the place of whom and for what purpose. Alarbus, much like Lavinia, had no real way to escape his fate and could only hope that his mother and brothers would mourn him and avenge him. Lavinia is unable to stop the rape and mutilation but she is able, after all is said and done, to seek revenge through her father.

Lavinia's gender, however, ensures that even after revenge has been accomplished she will not be able to regain her past position in the social sphere. Lavinia has lost her virginity and is therefore not valuable anymore. Titus cannot bear the fact that she has been raped, almost as though the rape of his daughter was an injury against himself. Perhaps this is due to his perception of Lavinia as belonging to him, as being under his protection and therefore any slight against her is a slight against him. This also places Lavinia in a state of non-being since she would not be considered a separate entity from her father and therefore once the revenge is complete, there is no real need for her to continue existing. Once Lavinia's worth is non-existent, the only thing she can offer her father is her death to rid him of the shame of having a raped daughter.

[23] Willis, "'The Gnawing Vulture': Revenge, Trauma Theory, and Titus Andronicus," 40

2.1.3. Titus

Titus is the third revenger in the play and, as it has already been established, he acts as Tamora's opposite. The many ways in which they oppose each other are accompanied by mirroring moments which create a symmetrical equilibrium throughout the play that remains unbroken even as both characters perish. An undercurrent of gendered differences permeates all of their interactions and heightens the tension exponentially.

Titus' identity as a father is threatened by Tamora and the trauma generated by the loss of his sons turns Titus into a mirroring image of Tamora as he pleads for his sons' lives. He states, "High emperor, upon my feeble knee/I beg this boon with tears not lightly shed"[24] and continues to beg for mercy through act 3, scene 1 where he says "[the tribunes] would not pity me; yet plead I must."[25] Unlike Tamora, Titus has a long time to beg for his sons' lives and he is not present at the time they are killed. An added traumatic event happens at this same time when Lucius, Titus' other son, is banished after attempting to save his brothers.

At the same time Titus is attempting to process the deaths of his sons and the banishment of Lucius he is also painfully aware of Lavinia's predicament. Titus' relationship with Lavinia seems to be of a more intimate nature than his relationship with his sons and once again Lavinia appears almost as being a part of him instead of a human being in her own right. Titus states "[it] was my dear, and he that wounded her/ Hath hurt me more than had he killed me dead"[26] and "[but] that which gives my soul the greatest spurn/ Is dear Lavinia, dearer than my soul."[27] The way in which Titus

[24] *Titus Andronicus,* 2.2.288-9
[25] *Titus Andronicus,* 3.1. 35
[26] *Titus Andronicus,* 3.1.92-3
[27] *Titus Andronicus*, 3.1.102-3

describes Lavinia sheds light on the deep attachment he has when it comes to her. Not only is Lavinia his only daughter but she is also the only one of his children who depended on him completely, at least until her short-lived marriage.

It's possible then to infer that Titus and Lavinia often interacted in the private sphere, in situations in which Lavinia perhaps sought out her father for comfort and protection. Being exposed to the public sphere and the dangers in it led to Lavinia's injuries. Injuries that Titus was unable to protect her from so that Titus not only feels like a wretched father but also powerless. The logical next step for Titus is revenge. The reasoning could very well be that since he couldn't protect Lavinia from the dangers of the world, he can at the very least avenge her and attempt to bring some comfort to her as well as regain some of the honour lost to the Andronici.

Indeed, the Andronici appeared to have a place of reverence in the social fabric and even though Lavinia's rape contributes to their fall from grace she is not the main catalyst for that fall. Titus' reputation as a warrior was such that the people of Rome happily followed his lead when he declared Saturninus emperor. Titus himself says when he returns "[cometh] Andronicus, bound with laurel boughs [...] Thou great defender of this Capitol."[28] He is aware of his military prowess and of the power he holds once he is back in Rome. Perhaps it is hubris, then, which blinds him to Tamora and the dangers she represents not only for him personally but for his whole family.

The more Titus interacts with Tamora at the start of the play, the clearer it becomes that he has underestimated her. First Titus says to Tamora, "[now], madam, are you prisoner to an emperor/ To him that for your honour and your state/ Will use you nobly and your followers"[29] and later is surprised when Saturninus decides to

[28] *Titus Andronicus,* 1.1.77-80
[29] *Titus Andronicus,* 1.1.262-4

marry Tamora. Saturninus states “the emperor needs [Lavinia] not/ Nor her, nor thee, nor any of thy stock”[30] to which Titus replies by crying “[o] monstrous! What reproachful words are these?”[31] Perhaps Titus assumed that because he had bested Tamora in the field of battle that would be the end of it but clearly she had other plans.

Titus’ loss of power begins in that scene as he, and his family, are cast aside and become secondary to Tamora and her sons in the eyes of the emperor. A few lines later he is told by Marcus “[thou] art a Roman, be not barbarous”[32] as if Titus’ actions were pushing him further and further away from civilization, embodied by Rome, and towards the realm of the barbarous or, in other words, of the Other. Apart from his identity being threatened by this loss of power, it came combined with public humiliation since Saturninus very blatantly made his thoughts known on Titus and his family.

As is the case with Tamora, Titus’ injuries continued piling up one after the other, pushing him towards revenge. Titus’ revenge is just as public as his humiliation, the thought of quietly disposing of Tamora and her sons does not seem to cross his mind. This could be due to a belief that “humiliating one’s enemy can be best achieved by outdoing him”[33] and both Titus and Tamora are determined to outdo each other. Titus goes as far as to kill Tamora’s sons, cook them and then feed them to her, outdoing Tamora in the process.

Titus chooses a public setting for his revenge since “[humiliation], a wound that is produced in public, seeks healing through public spectacle.”[34] Marcus claims right before the feast scene that Titus’ plans will bring his pains to “an honourable end”[35]

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[30] *Titus Andronicus*, 1.1.304-5
[31] *Titus Andronicus,* 1.1.313
[32] *Titus Andronicus,* 1.1.382
[33] Willis, “‘The Gnawing Vulture’: Revenge, Trauma Theory, and Titus Andronicus,” 41
[34] Willis, “‘The Gnawing Vulture’: Revenge, Trauma Theory, and Titus Andronicus,” 48
[35] *Titus Andronicus*, 5.3. 22

which implies that it is not only Titus who believes public spectacle will reinstate his honour, but those around him do as well. Before the final spectacle is presented, however, there is a smaller spectacle that takes place when Chiron and Demetrius are apprehended. Instead of calling them by their names, Titus uses the false names that Tamora herself gave to him when she attempted to convince him of her identity as Revenge. Titus says "[the] one is Murder and Rape is the other's name"[36] and then orders Publius to bind and gag them. This scene is witnessed by Publius, Caius and Valentine and once they have been seized, Titus and Lavinia come back on stage so that in total five people witness their deaths. Publius, Caius and Valentine are not Titus' intended audience for his revenge and indeed Chiron and Demetrius' deaths are only part of a bigger plan. Since this moment is not the final revenge scene, Titus does not linger for long in it. After Chiron and Demetrius are killed, everyone exits the stage expeditiously, only two lines later.

Titus' main act of revenge is towards Tamora and it is an elaborate affair. First he dresses like a cook as it is stated after line 25 in scene iii of act 5 and then he calls Tamora "dread queen"[37] which is a hint towards his perception of Tamora. Titus claims that he is dressed as a cook for the entertainment of Tamora and her husband but gives no more explanation than that.

Before he proceeds with his revenge, though, Titus seems to take a small detour to justify Lavinia's death. It appears that this justification is more for his own peace of mind than for Lavinia's sake as well. After Saturninus said of Virginius' daughter "the girl should not survive her shame/ And by her presence still renew his sorrows"[38] Titus agrees with the statement and punctuates his own position regarding

[36] *Titus Andronicus,* 5.2. 156
[37] *Titus Andronicus,* 5.3. 26
[38] *Titus Andronicus*, 5.3. 40-1

Lavinia's shame by saying "[die], die, Lavinia, and thy shame with thee/ And with thy shame thy father's sorrow die."[39] For Titus, Lavinia's death was justified and acted as some sort of balm against her father's pains. The life of Lavinia was then not for her benefit but for his and once she is dead, Titus' offspring are almost all gone as well.

Once Lavinia is taken care of, Titus needs to act quickly, while his audience is in shock, in order to achieve his final goal. He incites Tamora to eat, avoiding questions about Lavinia, and once he finally discloses that it was Chiron and Demetrius the ones responsible for her rape he reveals that he killed them and baked them in the pie that Tamora already ate. Titus exclaims "[eating] the flesh that [Tamora] herself hath bred/ 'Tis true, 'tis true, witness my knife's sharp point"[40] at which point he stabs Tamora and kills her. Titus' last jab at Tamora must have produced an uproar, even if short-lived, due to the implication of cannibalism. Titus achieves revenge by pushing to the limit of what is acceptable and then going beyond it. Revenge does not have an 'acceptable' or 'just' stopping point because the revenger will always seek more and in this search they will often meet their end. This happens with Titus right after he kills Tamora when Saturninus kills him.

Perhaps the most complete and yet simple explanation for the essence of revenge comes from Lucius' after Saturninus kills Titus and he claims "[there's] meed for meed, death for a deadly deed."[41] Both Titus and Tamora perished in their quest for revenge and once they are gone it is up to the surviving members of their family to deal with the aftermath of their revenge, whether they want to or not. The question of whether the surviving members of their families will eventually decide on seeking their own

[39] *Titus Andronicus,* 5.3. 45-6
[40] *Titus Andronicus,* 5.3. 61-2
[41] *Titus Andronicus,* 5.3. 65

revenge remains unanswered. The play ends with the threat of a cycle of revenge and an anxiety that cannot be put to rest.

2.2 *Othello*

2.2.1. Othello

When thinking about Shakespeare's male revengers, Othello is probably one of the first figures that comes to mind, even if his revenge plot in the play is not as all-encompassing and intricate as Iago's. Unlike the revenge of Titus Andronicus, Othello's revenge revolves around jealousy, and as Barbara A. Schapiro points out that "Iago would have no power over Othello were Othello not in love."[42] Othello's identity presents himself as a man (and subsequently as a lover), as a Moor, and as a warrior, his vulnerabilities are present in the three parts of his identity, and Iago seizes the opportunity he sees by utilising these to his advantage.

Othello is a general and has proved himself to be a real asset to the state during armed conflicts. Much like Titus, he is treated with a certain level of respect, at least militarily-wise, that further cements his position in the societal fabric of Venice. In Act I, scene III, the Duke calls him "[valiant] Othello"[43] while in act II, scene 2, he is described as a "noble and valiant general".[44] The public perception of Othello as a warrior is favourable but this perception is at the same time threatened by Othello's race, which is something that is not seen in other male Shakespearean revengers, such as Titus Andronicus. Othello's military prowess appears to be pushed to the side in the first act by Brabantio's claims that he has used witchcraft to beguile his daughter

[42] Barbara A. Schapiro, "Psychoanalysis and the Problem of Evil: Debating Othello in the Classroom," *American Imago* 60, no.4 (Winter 2003): 484

[43] William Shakespeare, *Othello,* ed. M.R. Ridley (London: Routledge, 1992), 1.3.48. References are to act, scene, and line.

[44] *Othello*, 2.2.1

and for a few moments Othello the warrior is replaced by an undesirable Other, a threat to the status quo.[45]

Throughout the play, Othello's threat of Otherness is heralded by Iago, who continues to push the narrative of Othello being more beast than man in the public spheres. One of the first examples of this is when Iago says to Brabantio, out loud and in front of Roderigo, "an old black ram/ Is tupping your white ewe"[46] and not much later "your daughter cover'd with a Barbary horse; you'll/ have your nephews neigh to you."[47] Iago makes sure to cement the fear in Brabantio of Othello's Otherness in order to set up the foundation for his future machinations.

Othello's Otherness sets him at a disadvantage in the playing field of revenge. It can be assumed that a certain amount of bias will be used against Othello once he decides to take up action against Desdemona. As a black man, Othello is more likely to be seen as the guilty party than as the victim of Iago's revenge. As Cacicedo points out, Othello does not see himself as a savage but rather as a justiciar, even though those around him do not see him in the same way.[48] Othello's revenge is a tool to process the emotions he is experiencing but is also a way to contain the humiliation experienced. "[Revenge] both contains and fails to contain the potentially overwhelming emotions trauma unleashes."[49] In Othello's case revenge is also a way to contain the humiliation he feels at having been cuckolded by his wife. Othello's honour, which is intrinsically linked to Desdemona's sexual desires, needs to be

[45] The Other as a concept is defined as someone who does not fit within the norms of a social group due to one or various reasons such as race, religion, sex, etc. This concept is not limited to literature and is now being used in other fields such as gender and postcolonial studies. Janelle Marie Evans, "Questing to Understand the Other without 'Othering': An Exploration of the Unique Qualities and Properties of Science Fiction as a Means for Exploring and Improving Social Inequity," *Meridians* 16, no.1 (2018):144-56, JSTOR.

[46] *Othello*, 1.1.89-90

[47] *Othello*, 1.1.111-12

[48] Alberto Cacicedo, "Othello, Stranger in a Strange Land," *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies* 18, no. 1 (2016): 24

[49] Willis, "'The Gnawing Vulture': Revenge, Trauma Theory, and Titus Andronicus," 34

cleansed through revenge. As Othello's identity begins to unravel, his Otherness starts to take centre stage.

In the private sphere, Othello is absorbing a blow to his sense of self and his honour when Iago begins convincing him of Desdemona's unfaithfulness. Iago begins eroding Othello's security and confidence on Desdemona and in his own words he will "pour this pestilence into his ear"[50] so that gradually he begins to doubt. Once Othello has been poisoned it appears as though all his insecurities, and one could make a case that these represent more broadly male insecurities when confronted with women, begin to work against him, making him paranoid and angry.

Desdemona's handkerchief at this point becomes the symbol of her betrayal but it is also an item of foreshadowing. The stark white handkerchief with strawberries embroidered on it brings to mind splashes of blood on a white bed sheet, perhaps of a nuptial bed. The handkerchief symbolises the expectations that are placed on Desdemona's gender by society. In order for Desdemona to be perceived as a good, desirable woman she needs to be a virgin until she arrives at her nuptial bed. There are no such expectations placed on Othello and this double standard is perceived throughout the play. Iago manipulates Othello's insecurities until he is convinced that Desdemona, by virtue of being a woman, does not have the same morals men do. Othello's paranoia eventually bears fruit when he says "[arise], black vengeance, from thy hollow cell"[51] and later "[...] my bloody thoughts, with violent pace/ Shall ne'er look back, ne'er ebb to humble love/ Till that a capable and wide revenge/ Swallow them up."[52]

[50] *Othello,* 2.3.347
[51] *Othello,* 3.3.454
[52] *Othello,* 3.3.464-7

Othello's inability to conceive he might be wrong could come from confirmation bias or a sense of self and security too damaged to see beyond the pain he is experiencing. At any rate Othello's perceived loss of honour is a threat to his social status both in the private and the public sphere. Since Desdemona, as a woman, is linked to Othello by marriage, anything that she does can be perceived as an injury to his honour. In this way, Desdemona resembles Lavinia, with her worth being dictated by her sexual purity and by her connections to male figures.

Once Othello has deemed Desdemona a definite danger to his honour and social position, he enacts his revenge. On act 4, scene III, Othello orders Desdemona to go to bed and dismiss her handmaid Emilia but it is not until the second scene of the fifth act that Othello obtains retribution for the alleged offenses As he looks as Desdemona he first says "I'll not shed her blood"[53] and then "[yet] she must die, else she'll betray more men"[54] as though he considered leaving or divorcing her but he feels the correct course of action, and perhaps also the honourable one, is to kill Desdemona so she will not become a source of danger to other men. The danger does not mean that she would kill these men or injure them bodily but rather that she would stain them through her actions. It is an echo of Iago's words to Brabantio when he spoke of Othello as being lascivious and bringing dishonour upon his house through his sexuality.

To Othello, Desdemona has become the dreaded Other that threatens the stability of every aspect of his life. One could go as far as to say that Othello fears Desdemona's sexual desires in the same way that Titus was threatened by Tamora's. Female desire appears dangerous and cannibalistic, threatening to consume the male

[53] *Othello,*5.2.3
[54] *Othello,* 5.2.6

bodies that surround it. The fact that Desdemona is to die on her marital bed is significant in the way it signals the shattering of the safety of the private sphere. Furthermore, Othello strangles her, cutting off her air and effectively rendering her unable to speak and defend herself. The same fate was dealt to Lavinia when she had her tongue and hands cut off, effectively silencing and eradicating any means by which the truth could be brought to light.

Revenge is meant to bring about some measure of healing but before Othello is able to experience that, he is interrupted by Emilia. As she accuses Othello of murder, she also blames Iago for lying and thereby poisoning Othello's mind. She says to Iago "your reports have set the murder on"[55] referring to all the times Iago had spoken to Othello to plant seeds of jealousy and distrust in his mind. As she prepares to reveal everything Iago has done, he stabs her in order to prevent her from speaking, but she perseveres and manages to explain what happened before she dies. Emilia, much like Desdemona, becomes a threat to the established patriarchal order and the reward for her defiance is death.

Othello's revenge against Iago appears somewhat muted and anti-climatic. After all that Iago has done to him, Othello does not seem to have enough energy left to obtain adequate retribution. Perhaps it is also the crushing guilt he is experiencing preventing him from killing Iago, which would have been expected of him after all the pain he has caused him. Instead of doing so, Othello wounds Iago and then tells him "I'ld have thee live/ For in my sense 'tis happiness to die."[56] Whether or not it would be merciful to kill Iago is not discussed, but it seems as though Othello is expecting Iago to be punished so severely in life that death would have been an act of kindness.

[55] *Othello,* 5.2.188
[56] *Othello,* 5.2.290-1

However, Othello does not live to witness Iago's punishment or even to ensure that it is delivered. He is so consumed by his grief and guilt that he turns his gaze inwards.

At this point in the play, Othello's revenge becomes self-destructive, because while Iago manipulated him to kill Desdemona, it is still Othello himself who performed the deed. Othello's final act of revenge is against himself as he mortally stabs himself. Othello's name and reputation is destroyed ultimately not by Iago but by Othello himself as the truth of his actions comes to light. Self-destruction is part of the revenge process and is linked to the quality of excess, as Willis points out, "revenge's excess is not always directed against "others": rather, it can take self-mutilating, even suicidal form."[57] Othello is not the only male revenger who is ultimately destroyed by his revenge. While Titus Andronicus and Hamlet do not kill themselves, they are indirectly destroyed by the enactment of their revenge. Similarly, Tamora and Lavinia do not kill themselves but they are also killed because they were seeking revenge, albeit in different ways.

2.2.2. Iago

One of the very first points Iago makes clear at the start of the play is his intention to obtain revenge on Othello for not promoting him. From line eleven of the first scene of the first act, he starts talking of how Othello wronged him, and in line fifty-eight he states "[in] following him, I follow but myself."[58] Iago's main purpose is therefore to serve himself and in order to do so, he must seek revenge. In order for him to start the process of revenge, however, Iago must first make arrangements. These preparations

[57] Willis, "'The Gnawing Vulture': Revenge, Trauma Theory, and Titus Andronicus," 50
[58] *Othello,* 1.1.58

include finding allies, or at least easily manipulatable people, and presenting himself in such a way that it would allow him easy and intimate access to Othello.

In an essay about *Othello,* Barbara A. Schapiro presents Iago as having experienced a "sickening loss of being as a result of Othello's passing him over for promotion"[59] and that passing over as a traumatic "overwhelming narcissistic blow."[60] Iago's inability to cope with being passed over is indeed a blow to his identity as a warrior and therefore revenge must be pursued in order to heal that wound to his sense of self. At first glance Iago's reaction to being passed over for promotion might seem extreme but it is important to remember that revenge will always exceed the offences that fuel it in order for the revenger to believe they will achieve satisfaction. Iago's character represents "a distillation of the force of trauma in which other psychic qualities have been obliterated."[61] The lack of coping mechanisms and the endangerment of the self continue to push Iago to go further and he is not satisfied with verbally torturing Othello but seeks to completely destroy his life.

In the pursuit of his revenge, Iago also manages to present himself as an honest man, someone who cares about Othello and is his friend. Therefore, Iago presents his identity as a warrior along with the perception of his honesty and goodness to those around him as a disguise, he appears to be an honourable man who only seeks to help his friends. Keith Oatley speaks of this as "Iago [creating] a simulated world to transform Othello's perception, and ultimately his sense of himself.[62] Iago manages to convince not only Othello but also Roderigo, Cassio, Montano and even Desdemona.

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[59] Barbara A. Schapiro, "Psychoanalysis and the Problem of Evil: Debating Othello in the Classroom," 486

[60] Barbara A. Schapiro, "Psychoanalysis and the Problem of Evil: Debating Othello in the Classroom," 486

[61] Barbara A. Schapiro, "Psychoanalysis and the Problem of Evil: Debating Othello in the Classroom," 487

[62] Keith Oatley, "Simulation of Substance and Shadow: Inner Emotions and Outer Behavior in Shakespeare's Psychology of Character," *College Literature* 33, no. 1 (Winter 2006): 21

In the second act Othello goes as far as to refer to Iago's honesty and love when he divests Cassio of his rank and nobody questions Iago's involvement in Othello's decision. The success of Iago's revenge plan relies on him appearing as a non-threatening man, a man who would never do anything dishonourable and who is charming to both sexes. Iago's mastery of his crafted identity is such that he is not discovered until it is too late to save Desdemona and Othello.

Emilia seems to be the only character in the play who realises something is not right with Iago, but as she is his wife, she does not confide her suspicions to anyone. Iago is openly cruel to her, calling her a "foolish wife"[63] and sending her away once he decides he has no more use for her. Emilia's appearances are short throughout the play, she is often seen doing what Iago demands of her and otherwise does not interfere with the action.

It is only towards the end of the play that Emilia seems to find her agency and finally acts against her husband. Othello says to Emilia "thy husband knew it all"[64] and for a few lines she seems dumbstruck, repeating Othello's words until she realises that Iago was the instigator of Desdemona's misfortune. Emilia finally rebuffs Iago's honesty and says "may [Iago's] pernicious soul/ Rot half a grain a day! he lies to the heart"[65] and later on when Iago arrives, she says to him "[you] told a lie, an odious damned lie/ Upon my soul, a lie, a wicked lie!"[66] Iago's carefully constructed veneer of innocence and honesty begins to crack and he attempts to kill Emilia to silence her.

Iago's ire at being exposed is not surprising since he fully intended on profiting from Othello's revenge. Iago kills Emilia for exposing him and attempts to escape

[63] *Othello,* 3.3.307
[64] *Othello,* 5.2.140
[65] *Othello,* 5.2.156-7
[66] *Othello,* 5.2. 181-2

punishment. As it often happens in revenge tragedies, however, the revenger is unable to fully escape the consequences of their own revenge, which once again prove to be self-destructive. Othello would have perhaps been justified in killing Iago, but instead of doing so, he lets him live so that, in Lodovico's words, the authorities will decide about "the censure of this hellish villain/ The time, the place, the torture."[67] The play ends a few lines later, so the audience is not privy to Iago's punishment, but it seems certain that he will be subject to.

2.3 *Hamlet*

2.3.1. Hamlet

Hamlet's transformation into a revenger is different from other Shakespearean revengers, as it seems to begin before he even enters the stage for the first time. From the start of the play, it seems as though Hamlet's future has been already decided and his physical presence or absence ultimately changes nothing. When Hamlet finally appears on stage and endeavours to speak to the Ghost, he thinks almost immediately of action by asking it "[what] should we do?"[68]

Given that the play begins once Hamlet's father is dead, it is impossible to observe the relationship between the father and the son. Hamlet's relationship with his mother and uncle are good indicators of how deeply his father's murder has affected him. Gertrude is still alive but she has married Claudius and Hamlet takes their marriage as a sign that she condones the murder and has moved on from the original familial structure (composed of Hamlet the father, Hamlet the son, and Gertrude) and is building a new one. Hamlet the son, however, is unable to find his place in the new

[67] *Othello,* 5.2.369-70

[68] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet,* ed. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 1.4.57. References are to act, scene, and line.

structure since he is unable to stop seeing Claudius as the reason why the original familial structure was destroyed in the first place.

As it often happens in revenge tragedies, the original injury is layered. Hamlet has lost his father, lost his original familial structure, lost his place as a son and, ultimately, his place as king. Had Gertrude not married Claudius, Hamlet could have retained at least his prerogative to the throne, which could have somewhat mitigated the feeling of loss. Gertrude sums up Hamlet's distress in Act 2, stating that the reason for his distemper is "[his] father's death and our hasty marriage."[69] As the play progresses it becomes more apparent that Hamlet feels ultimately betrayed by his mother's marriage to Claudius, and in his view, she cannot undo the damage she has caused, no matter what she does. Gertrude's gender seems to mark her as irredeemable. Much like Tamora, Lavinia and Desdemona, once Gertrude has made a mistake in judgement the only conclusion to her character arc is death.

While it is true that Hamlet continues to be the Prince of Denmark, the fact remains that he has not inherited the throne after his father's death due to her mother's marriage to Claudius. The only way this particular injury could be restored would be by removing Claudius from the throne, but it is clear from the start that this is not a step that neither Claudius nor Gertrude are willing to take. Hamlet absorbs these injuries to his sense of self and appears to be processing them in the way of distemperment. He builds up a front of insanity, of seemingly incoherent ramblings in order to maintain the secrecy of his plan and thwart Polonis' attempts at espionage. Hamlet's madness adds a layer of theatricality to his revenge and at the same time increases the tension that everyone arounds him experiences, as they wait for him to completely lose his mind. Hamlet's 'madness' is, of course, mostly composed of

[69] *Hamlet,* 2.2.57

melancholy and anger, the perfect components of revenge. Keith Oatley speaks of Hamlet's madness as a "depiction of inwardness [...], and the problems of understanding shifting inner goals and their repercussions,"[70] suggesting that this madness is akin to a process of transformation. Hamlet's memories of his father, the life he lived before the murder, everything that made Hamlet who he was, must necessarily undergo a transformation under the light of the murder. Hamlet's madness, as feigned and planned as it was, is ultimately an expression of this internal transformation which will end with revenge.

As much as Hamlet wants to appear mad, he is remarkably adept at self reflection, particularly when he speaks with Ophelia in act 3, scene 1 and says, "I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious, with more offences at my beck than I have thoughts to put them in, imagination to give them shape, or time to act them in."[71] Hamlet's ability to pinpoint his less than agreeable qualities suggest that is aware of how his plans for revenge are affecting him and how they will appear to those around him, but he still is incapable of forgetting about revenge entirely. Hamlet's main regret, it seems, is that he does not have enough imagination or time to bring his many offences to fruition. Hamlet's speech appears also to be a warning towards Ophelia against associating with him, given that he is not a free person and not a good one, in his own estimation.

Hamlet's accomplishment of his revenge will have a serious impact not only on him but also on people around him, such both women, whether he intended them to be affected or not. The women in the play become collateral damage to the male revenge and it is the men who decide whether or not revenge should be sought after

[70] Keith Oatley, "Simulation of Substance and Shadow: Inner Emotions and Outer Behavior in Shakespeare's Psychology of Character," 27
[71] *Hamlet,* 3.1.123-6

their deaths. Hamlet reacts to his mother's murder with much less violence than he did his father's, perhaps because he is too busy attempting to avenge his father.

After Ophelia's death, Hamlet is confronted by Laertes, and the odds do not appear to be in his favour anymore. Once Hamlet and Laertes are engaged in a swordfight it becomes clear that the only possible resolution to the play will be through violence and death. Hamlet appears keen on making a spectacle of his revenge and that may be because "a wound that is produced in public, seeks healing through public spectacle."[72] This would also appear to be the reason for why Hamlet did not kill Claudius in private, even though he had the occasion to do so. Through the public spectacle of sword fighting, which is also formalised and a socially accepted way of seeking retribution, Hamlet is not necessarily re-enacting the trauma of his father's death in an exact manner, but he does appear to seek "repetition and overtopping"[73] as the fight progresses. By that time Claudius knows that Hamlet is completely set on revenge and prepares to poison him in a final attempt to cut his revenge short. However, Gertrude drinks the poison instead of Hamlet and dies, and Hamlet resolves to kill his mother's murderer, as Claudius is now responsible for the death of both his parents.

Gertrude's death adds another layer to Hamlet's injury which he is unable to process, as events unfolding hectically around him. Laertes confirms that the King was to blame for Gertrude's death and alerts Hamlet to the fact that he has been poisoned and will die not soon after. Hamlet realises that he has little time left and kills the king.

Hamlet's imminent death accelerates his plans and prevents him from fully mourning his mother and at the same time from enjoying his revenge. Hamlet's last

[72] Willis, "'The Gnawing Vulture': Revenge, Trauma Theory, and Titus Andronicus," 48
[73] Willis, "'The Gnawing Vulture': Revenge, Trauma Theory, and Titus Andronicus," 48

desire is for the truth of what happened to be told, even though he will not be present to reap the benefits of unmasking Claudius. Hamlet's revenge is ultimately successful but the fact that it comes at the cost of his own life makes the audience question its worth. There is no answer to that question, of course, and as Hamlet so aptly observes before he dies, "[the] rest is silence."[74] Ultimately it is only through death that Hamlet is able to stop being consumed by grief and anger.

[74] *Hamlet* 5.2.342

Chapter Three: Shakespearean Influences in Quentin Tarantino's Films

3.1 *Inglourious Basterds*

3.1.1. Shosanna Dreyfuss

Much like Tamora in *Titus Andronicus,* Shosanna disrupts the established patriarchal order from the moment she is introduced in the opening credits. In fact, as Heidi Shclipphacke points out, "her name appears on the screen slightly (about one second) longer than the other names."[1] Shosanna, like Tamora, is almost completely alone in a world governed by men. The only other female character in *Inglourious Basterds* is Bridget von Hammersmark, and she plays a minor role in the film.

Like Tamora, Shosanna has suffered various injuries to her sense of self and her identity. Just as Tamora witnessed the death of her sons, Shosanna is the sole survivor of her family after they are murdered under Nazi orders. Shosanna's need for revenge comes from "trauma in the nuclear family and the attempt to reconstitute this family."[2] Shosanna understands that she cannot bring her parents and brother back. Even if she one day decided to rebuild her family at a later time by having children of her own, that 'new' family would never be able to take the place of her original nuclear family. In this way, Shosanna's loss has altered her past, her present and her future.

While Shosanna is not taken from her home, like Tamora was, she is forced to abandon it nevertheless in order to escape Hans Landa and the soldiers. Shosanna is geographically displaced by the brutality of murder while at the same time she is experiencing a forced dispossession of her identity as a Jewish woman. Given the fact

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[1] Heidi Schlipphacke, "*Inglourious Basterds* and the Gender of Revenge," in *Quentin Tarantino's Inglourious Basterds: A Manipulation of Metacinema*, ed. Robert von Dassanowsky (New York: Continuum, 2012), 115

[2] Heidi Schlipphacke, "*Inglourious Basterds* and the Gender of Revenge," 125

that Jewish people were being persecuted, Shosanna cannot live as a Jewish woman openly. She is forced into a new identity of a gentile woman in order to survive. The correlation with Tamora in this instance is strong, particularly when Tamora was forced into a new identity as a Roman in order to survive. This, compounded by the fact that she has lost her whole family and her home, are injuries that she will attempt to heal through revenge. While the audience has been witness to Shosanna's injuries, the audience is kept from seeing any plans of revenge develop concisely.

Shosanna is forced into the role of an Other, an "outsider to both the male-dominated and racist culture [and] partners with a man who can certainly empathize, an Afro-Frenchman."[3] Like Tamora, Shosanna has a black lover and confidant. Unlike Aaron, Marcel remains loyal and supportive of Shosanna even when it becomes clear that he will die by doing so. This identification is in direct opposition of her relationship with the other male figures surrounding her, the Nazis. Shosanna, and later Hammersmark, "are annihilated by and for their connection with male authority."[4] Male figures that are not 'Others' are seen as extremely threatening given that they hold an unrestrained amount of power which they have used and will continue to use against the female figures around them. Shosanna's vulnerable position forces her to plan her revenge only during the moments in which she is completely certain that she will not be discovered.

Because of this, for the first part of the film the audience can only observe Shosanna interact with the Nazis in a forced neutral capacity. She is careful to keep her private life away from public eyes and tries to stop Fredrick Zoller's advances. Zoller continues to insert himself into her life and, ironically, it is thanks to his incessant

[3] Robert von Dassanowsky, "Introduction: Locating Mr. Tarantino, or, Who's Afraid of Metacinema?" in *Quentin Tarantino's Inglourious Basterds: A Manipulation of Metacinema,* d. Robert von Dassanowsky (New York: Continuum, 2012), x

[4] Robert von Dassanowsky, "Introduction: Locating Mr. Tarantino, or, who's afraid of metacinema?" x

pursuing that she is given the opportunity to set her revenge in motion. The audience gets only a slight glimpse of Shosanna's thoughts during a scene in which Zoller comes into a cafe and is recognized by a German soldier, prompting her to ask him who is and making a comment implying that he is not just a regular soldier. Shosanna leaves abruptly after that, ending the scene.

The following scene Shosanna comes face to face with Landa and is forced to sit through an awkward conversation with him. By the end of the scene, the tension Shosanna has been feeling breaks when Landa leaves and she bursts into tears. Immediately after, Shosanna is seen agreeing to play the film starring Zoller in her cinema and it is only then that Shosanna's revenge plans are revealed fully to the audience. "If we can keep this place from burning down by ourselves, can't we also burn it down?"[5] The plan is rather straightforward, all Shosanna and Marcel need to do is have the Nazis inside the theatre, close the doors, and burn it down.

Burning down the theater as revenge is a double act of performance. The theater is in itself a place where people congregate in order to experience the performance that is a film. Burning down a place intentionally is in itself a performative act, one that can be witnessed by people outside the theatre just as it is experienced by those trapped inside it. Apart from that, Shosanna and Marcel create a film that they will play to those trapped inside the theatre in which Shosanna unveils her new identity as the Face of Jewish Vengeance. Shosanna's revenge is as big a performance as it can be. Just as when Tamora transformed herself into Revenge, the layered injuries require a layered and excessive revenge in order to be effective.

[5] *Inglourious Basterds,* directed by Quentin Tarantino (Universal Pictures: 2009), 153 minutes, Netflix. Please note that originally this line is said in French and I have translated it into English for the purpose of this thesis.

From the moment of the first injury, the audience is shown that there is a "reversibility of the relationship between victim and prosecutor"[6] through the camera, by alternating whether Hans or Shosanna are seen from above or from below. This reversibility is crucial to Shosanna as she slowly but surely takes back the control that was initially taken from her. Shosanna's journey from a scared, hurt, Jewish woman towards her new identity as the Face of Jewish vengeance is rooted in that regaining of control. Shosanna breaks away from the stereotype of the victimized Jewish woman and becomes an agent of her destiny, even if that destiny will end in her own destruction.

Furthermore, Shosanna transcends mortality by essentially becoming the "phantom of her film."[7] The scene in which Shosanna's face on screen is towering above plumes of smoke is reminiscent of all-seeing deity looking down at her accomplished revenge, even if the real Shosanna has already been killed by Zoller, it is her phantasmic double which endures. Shosanna essentially remakes herself in a world beyond human boundaries, in which virtually anything is possible, which is reminiscent of the opening lines of the film, "[once] upon a time in Nazi occupied France…"[8]

Shosanna's death prevents her from deriving enjoyment from her revenge. However, whether or not Shosanna had survived the burning of the theater would not have changed the fact that revenge ultimately cannot "[balance] the books of history."[9] The lack of equilibrium is especially true for female revengers, who have been

[6] Chris Fujiwara, "'A slight duplication of efforts': Redundancy and the Excessive Camera in *Inglourious Basterds*," in *Quentin Tarantino's Inglourious Basterds: A Manipulation of Metacinema*, ed. Robert von Dassanowsky (New York: Continuum, 2012), 45.
[7] Chris Fujiwara, "'A slight duplication of efforts': Redundancy and the Excessive Camera in *Inglourious Basterds*," 52.
[8] *Inglourious Basterds,* directed by Quentin Tarantino.
[9] Heidi Schlipphacke, "*Inglourious Basterds* and the Gender of Revenge," 130.

relentlessly pursuing a measure of healing after experiencing the most extreme type of injury a person can experience, an injury to their selfhood. Shosanna's identity as a woman, as a Jewish person, and as a daughter and sister suffered under the Nazi regime and she was reduced to the status of an Other, or even an animal. Hans Landa mentions himself that his nickname is the 'Jew Hunter' and implies that Jewish people are vermin that need to be hunted and exterminated. Death is the only real way to end the incalculable pain she has experienced. In the same way, Tamora's identity as Goth, as a queen, and as a mother underwent a painful process of alteration after her capture and forced relocation to Rome. Just as death is the only end for Shosanna, it is as well the only means through which Tamora could possibly stop her own pain.

It is after Shosanna's death that questions may arise regarding the fairness of all that has transpired, but there is no clear answer to these questions. Just like Shakespeare, Tarantino is not able to give the audience a sense of closure after the violence on screen is over. There can be no equilibrium for the audience after the film has ended because there is no equilibrium to be found in reality, in Hamlet's words, all that remains is darkness.

3.2 *Kill Bill* (vol. 1 & 2)

3.2.1. Beatrix Kiddo, 'the Bride'

Beatrix is first introduced to the audience as a coma patient who has just woken up after four years. Not much later after she wakes up, Beatrix figured out that she had been raped while she was on a coma and unable to defend herself. The realization that she has been assaulted and the shock that comes with it is magnified by the pain she experiences as the reasons for her being in a coma in the first place become clear. Beatrix survived an assassination attempt on her wedding day in which, unfortunately,

the wedding party, her fiancé and unborn daughter (a child Beatrix had conceived with Bill) were killed. All this information becomes clear to her in a very short amount of time and Beatrix struggles to process the many ways in which she has been hurt while at the same time attempting to figure out what she will do moving forward.

Beatrix's plight is similar to that of Lavinia in regard to the sexual violence but it also has some similarities with Tamora in regards to the violations to her sense of selfhood and the need to regain the power she has lost. Just like Tamora, Beatrix used to hold a great amount of power and a series of traumatic events took that power away from her. It is a lot to process, mentally and emotionally, and as these events become clear in Beatrix's mind, she experiences a feeling of impotence and is overwhelmed. Tarantino's balancing of multiple traumatic events one on top of the other mirrors the way Shakespeare presented trauma as multi-layered in Tamora and Lavinia. Much like the female Shakespearean revengers, Beatrix came to the conclusion that the only way to move forward is through revenge.

Given that much of the violence Beatrix experienced at the start of the film is sexual violence, the truck she uses to leave the hospital where the first part of the film occurs becomes significant. After killing Buck, the man who had raped her and 'rented' her out to strangers to rape, she takes his car keys and subsequently his truck. The keys have a keychain with the words 'Pussy Wagon' on it, and the truck similarly has a decal with the same words in bright pink and red at the back. The name is visibly disgusting to Beatrix but nevertheless she appropriates the truck and uses it as a means to obtain revenge. Given that "[it] matters how you fight back"[10] Beatrix' control of the 'Pussy Wagon' can be seen as a vehicle through which she is reclaiming control

[10] Willis, "'The Gnawing Vulture': Revenge, Trauma Theory, and Titus Andronicus," 23

over her sexuality and, perhaps more importantly, blatantly showcasing this regained control to all those who may come across the truck.

In terms of sexual violence Beatrix is much closer to Lavinia than she is to Tamora, although there are some marked differences in their approaches to revenge. Lavinia is able to seek revenge alongside the male members of her family, but Beatrix does not have anyone to rely on other than herself. Perhaps it is the self-reliance that Beatrix demonstrates which ultimately enables her to have a different end than most female revengers in her position.

Beatrix' first target, Vernita Green, is a woman who uses an alias (Jeannie Bell) and leads a nonviolent life in California. It is of note that Beatrix chose Green as her first target given that she has a daughter, and is married. Green has everything that was taken away from Beatrix, who is not able to regain the peaceful family life she once envisioned now that she has awakened from the coma. The fact that Green is able to have the idyllic life Beatrix wanted after attempting to kill her appears unfair to her.

Beatrix's relationship with Green mirrors Tamora and Lavinia's relationship in certain areas. Tamora is the opposite of Lavinia and she has lost everything while Lavinia's life continues unchanged, at least for the first part of the play. Just as Beatrix decides to destroy Green's life, Tamora endeavoured to do the same to Lavinia by allowing her sons to rape and mutilate her. Both Tamora and Beatrix see their counterparts experiencing a life they cannot enjoy themselves and the only way to deal with the pain of that realisation is through revenge.

Before they engage in a fight, Beatrix makes it clear that she won't kill Green in front of her daughter. Beatrix is unwilling to subject an innocent person to the horror of having a family member killed in front of their eyes. However, the one thing Beatrix

is not able to do is forgive Green and let her live. Beatrix appears gracious enough not to want to taint a child's memory of her mother but she is also being driven by pain and her need for revenge is too strong to refuse. By taking these decisions, Beatrix appears as Tamora's opposite, given that Tamora allowed his sons to rape and mutilate Lavinia.

Beatrix is aware that "trauma does not stop with the individual victim; rather, family members and others close to the victim experience a form of secondary trauma."[11] This peculiarity of trauma is also part of why the cycle of revenge can continue even after the revenger is dead. This means that whoever remains alive (family, or some other close relation) could turn to revenge against family or other close relations to the late revenger. In Beatrix's case, Green's daughter could become a future revenger intent on avenging her mother's death in an attempt to cope with the trauma of her murder and the impotence she experienced by watching Beatrix go unpunished.

Once Green is dead Beatrix has no reason to remain in that location. At this point it doesn't seem as though Beatrix is seeking excess in her revenge, after all she didn't hurt Green's child and husband. Beatrix's revenge will become excessive later on, perhaps because the journey of her revenge creates a snowball effect in which the inability to feel satisfied by killing those that have hurt her spurs her towards being more violent. It's important to remember that trauma injures not only the physical self but that it also affects the revenger's sense of self and the way in which they perceive their place in society. Beatrix is unable to stop herself from excessive violence because she feels displaced socially. All of Beatrix's relationships have been destroyed, she is

[11] Willis, "'The Gnawing Vulture': Revenge, Trauma Theory, and *Titus Andronicus*," 25

mourning her unborn child, the future she could have had with that child and the person she would have become had she been given the opportunity.

Beatrix's recollections of the traumatic events she experienced "seem to be happening not in the past but in the present, so that [she] has no distance from them."[12] Throughout the film, Beatrix's flashbacks appear between one act of revenge and the next, suggesting that she is re-experiencing these events at the same time as she is moving from one target to the next. The recollections of traumatic events bring to mind Tamora's own remembrances throughout the play, remembrances which she is unable to stop carrying with her as the play advances.

Beatrix goes to Japan to find her third target, O-Ren Ishii. Even though Beatrix is making the decision to leave the United States herself, the act of leaving amounts to a geographical displacement that she cannot avoid if she wants her revenge to be complete. This geographical displacement is similar to Shosanna's and Tamora's displacement and the changes in their identities that follows that displacement once they find themselves in unfamiliar places. Beatrix finds herself in unfamiliar territory and surrounded by strangers who she cannot trust. She is alone, even though she is surrounded by people, especially when she arrives at the House of Blue Leaves because those that surround her mean her harm.

In an essay regarding revenge in film, Jean Ma states that the success of the revengers "is contained within this larger horizon of entropy and decline."[13] This can be seen in Kill Bill very clearly since one death leads to another and one act of violence entails a retaliation that far exceeds the violence enacted in the first place. The decline of the environment in which Beatrix found herself seemed to accelerate after she met

[12] Willis, "'The Gnawing Vulture': Revenge, Trauma Theory, and *Titus Andronicus*," 25
[13] Jean Ma, "Circuitous Action: Revenge Cinema," *Criticism* 57, no. 1 (Winter, 2015): 66

with Elle Driver, another member of the group who had massacred her loved ones, closer to the end of the second film. Elle seems to believe that Beatrix is dead and her only regret was not being the one who killed her. Elle and Beatrix's fight is different from the others due to the fact that they both trained under the same martial arts teacher. In spite of this, Beatrix appears to be powered by something beyond her training. Elle is the last enemy she will face before coming face to face with Bill, who is the mastermind behind the massacre, and Beatrix seems to be invigorated by this fact.

Until this moment Beatrix has enacted her revenge on one man and three women. The importance of the gender of Beatrix's targets is on the fact that one would expect a woman to have greater empathy for another woman's pain, especially when it comes to their children. The fact that these three women agreed that Beatrix and all of her loved ones should die brings an extra element of shock into the narrative. Beatrix experiences their violence as an injury to her identity as a woman, as well as a mother and wife. By deciding to leave her life of crime behind, Beatrix was transformed into an outsider who threatened their way of life and the only way to address that transformation was by killing Beatrix.

The culmination of the decline of the environment of the film comes when Bill is formally introduced. He is one of the few characters who doesn't have a last name. The lack of a last name is significant in the way that it severs any familiar relationships and makes him appear as an isolated individual. Even though the audience was introduced to Budd, a brother of Bill's, Bill presents himself and is seen by the characters as someone without any ties. Given that he also does not have a last name, it can be assumed that he does not have any means to pass on a legacy of any kind, not even a name.

After meeting Bill once more, Beatrix is told that the daughter she had believed dead is alive and being raised by Bill. Curiously, the daughter's name is stated as B.B. Kiddo, supporting the idea that Bill is not passing on any legacy to his daughter. Beatrix, naturally, reacts with shock and anger at the news. The fact that Bill had been present when her daughter was born and then took her away from Beatrix aggravates the injury to her motherhood. Now Beatrix understands that not only was she tortured by the thoughts of her dead daughter but now knows that she was alive and being raised by her mother's would be murderer.

However, Beatrix's quest for revenge is momentarily derailed. She creates a pseudo-domestic scene with Bill and B.B. in which they have dinner and watch a film, a parody of a life Beatrix had only dreamed of. The parody of domesticity only seems to amplify every layer of Beatrix's trauma and highlights the many ways in which such an ordinary, domestic scene could never be attainable for her. Beatrix's narrative, like most revenge stories, are tales of displacement in which retribution appears as a means to escape from the past.[14] The escape is an illusion that shatters under the weight of reality. In Beatrix's case, as she kills Bill she is seen shedding tears. The weight of the present trauma and the uncertainty of a future in which trauma must be dealt with can prove to be insurmountable obstacles for most revengers.

Beatrix, unlike Shosanna, Tamora and Lavinia, does not die after completing her revenge. Perhaps Beatrix survives because unlike other female revengers, she has someone to live for, someone that relies on her continued survival, her daughter. Beatrix has managed to obtain revenge and save her daughter from living a life with Bill, who had the means to turn her into a weapon just as he had with Elle and Beatrix herself. Whether or not Beatrix and B.B. will eventually have a happy life is not

[14] Jean Ma, "Circuitous Action: Revenge Cinema," *Criticism* 57, no. 1 (Winter, 2015): 64-6

something the audience is privy to. The film ends as one would not expect a revenge story to end, with Beatrix and her child on the road, laughing, and looking forward to the future.

This is ultimately what most revengers seek but are unable to achieve, some sort of relief to the trauma that plagues them. Beatrix is unable to bring back those that she has lost from the dead with her revenge and the only one that does come back from the dead is her child. The return of her child goes a long way in healing some of Beatrix's trauma and brings hope for the future into the narrative. It appears that one way, if not the only way, for revengers to achieve the healing of the trauma involves actually being able to return to a balanced state. When there is no balance to be obtained, there is no hope or healing, only death.

Chapter Four: Conclusion

Although there are powerful characters of female revengers dating back to the Elizabethan period, as this thesis demonstrates, for centuries, figures of male revengers prevailed in art, but this long-held perception of revenge as a prevalently masculine pursuit appears to be changing, both in the areas of criticism and in literature. Ian Reilly, in an essay on revenge and the male and female bodies of revengers, stated that it is not a common occurrence for questions about "violence perpetrated by men against men" to be raised.[1] He pointed out that the opposite is true for female characters who engage in violence, as though there was a double standard in terms of what is considered normal and acceptable for men and how that same thing is most definitely not acceptable for women.

Female revengers are not a new figure in literature and other pieces of media, but it appears as though their gender had not been studied as a major component of their essence until relatively recently. Scholars who mentioned Shakespeare's female revengers either disregarded their gender by not focusing on it at all or mentioned it as a sort of afterthought, as though a female revenger were no different than a male revenger. This disregard for female revenge is criticised by scholars such as Raymond J. Rice in "Cannibalism and the Act of Revenge in Tudor-Stuart Drama," in which he stated that the "gender-specific language employed by this community gives cultural definition to the bodies of those employing the language."[2] Rice further claims that by only defining certain bodies, in this case male bodies, the inevitable conclusion was that female bodies were not recognized as possible revengers. In *Bodies That Matter,* Judith Butler expanded on the importance of language as a means to give emphasis

[1] Ian Reilly, "Revenge is Never a Straight Line: Transgressing Heroic Boundaries: Medea and the (Fe)Male Body in *Kill Bill*," *Studies in Popular Culture* 30, no. 1 (Fall, 2007): 27.
[2] Raymond J. Rice, "Cannibalism and the Act of Revenge in Tudor-Stuart Drama," 300.

to which bodies are considered to be important and which aren't. This disregard for female revengers based on their gender became, paradoxically, evident in the absence of analysis focused on how women experience traumatic injuries and later seek retribution.

Tamora, Lavinia, Shosanna and Beatrix have all experienced physical violence from men, and have been in situations in which they were unable to immediately repel the men injuring them. Lavinia and Beatrix also experienced sexual violence, which is perhaps one of the most traumatic types of violence a person can experience, if not the most traumatic. These two types of violence were focused on the physical bodies of the women, and in the case of Lavinia, the violence left a tangible mark on her body that reminds her of the traumatic event. However, even when there were no tangible marks of violence, the consequences of trauma left an imprint on the minds of these female revengers.

Female revenge seems to stem primarily from two sources of traumatic injury. The first one is sexual assault, the brutality of which often comes back to haunt the victim even after the event has passed. As Bessel van der Kolk explained in *The Body Keeps the Score*, trauma has a way of coming back even decades after it has happened. Essentially, "the past is alive in the form of gnawing interior discomfort."[3] It is no wonder then that Lavinia and Beatrix experience so much of their desire for revenge through the remembrance of their respective rapes. Lavinia's mutilation acts as an extension of that assault, and it presents in a literal way how victims of sexual assault are often unable to speak of their experiences.

[3] Bessel A. van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score.* Read by Sean Pratt. London: Penguin, 2019. Audiobook, 16 hours 16 minutes.

The second source of traumatic injury appears to be connected to an injury to a close relation, in the cases of Tamora and Shosanna, their families. Shosanna's entire family was killed by the Nazis and she is the only remaining Dreyfuss who can seek revenge, the onus falls on her to seek retribution. In the case of Tamora, it is not because she is the only survivor that she seeks revenge but rather because she is the mother of Alarbus. The rage and impotence she experienced as a mother was so great that it would have been unthinkable to her not to make Titus pay in kind for what he had done. Alarbus' brothers, or even Aaron, could have chosen to seek revenge but only Tamora could experience the loss of Alarbus in such a visceral and personal way. After all, Tamora brought Alarbus into the world, she raised him and cared for him and that bond being severed appears to affect Tamora more than the death of Alarbus affects his brothers and Aaron.

In the case of male revengers, it appears that an injury to their status, social or political power is the main motivation for revenge. This is the case for Titus, whose first injury comes at the hands of Saturninus as he dismisses him as well as his daughter and later chooses to marry Tamora instead. Given that Lavinia acts in many ways as an extension of Titus, her rape and mutilation are also injuries to his honour and social standing. Othello believes his reputation has been tainted by Desdemona and being passed up for promotion appears to be a slight to his social and military status for Iago. Finally, Hamlet suffers the death of his father as a traumatic injury in itself but also appears to be uniquely upset by his mother's incorrect mourning and her relationship to his uncle, as though her actions were a personal slight against him.

While these are different ways in which traumatic injuries are experienced, the result tends to be an excess in repayment. Revenge often exceeded the original injury and created a shockwave that carried the violence beyond the person the revenger

had chosen as their target. In this way, revenge became cyclical, and to a certain extent could also become unstoppable as new injuries were created and new revengers were made. The idea of revenge as a tool to heal, contain, or stop all trauma is flawed and cannot be applied to all revenge stories. Shakespearean revenge tragedies demonstrate revenge's inability to stop trauma and the message seems to be that revenge only exacerbates traumatic injury.

This is not the case for all revenge narratives, however, since many modern revengers appear to have managed to heal or at the very least contain trauma through revenge. This is the case for Beatrix Kiddo, a main character in the second chapter of this dissertation. It must be noted that other stories of female revenge succeeding against trauma exist, but these are beyond the scope of this thesis.[4] Further research in this field is necessary to understand the importance of female revenge and the effect these narratives will have in modern literature and other types of media. Additionally, while this thesis has studied female revenge characters, these have all been written by men, and a study of female revengers written by women would enrich the field of modern literature as well as trauma theory. It is of importance to note that while this thesis focuses on female revengers, it is not dismissing in any way other figures of revengers which may define themselves beyond the male-female binary. These figures are beyond the scope of this thesis and while I have not been able to find revengers that define themselves beyond this binary scope, that does not negate the fact that in the future this new kind of revenger would be beneficial to study, especially in the field of gender studies.

The exploration of other, minor Shakespearean revengers through the gender lens merits further study. The importance of characters such as Lady Capulet and

[4] Among these are *Jane Doe* by Victoria Helen Stone and *Hunted* (2017) by Meagan Spooner.

Lady Macbeth as inciters of revenge in the plot of *Macbeth* and *Romeo and Juliet*, as well as their familiar relationships with the main characters could potentially lead to an interesting dialogue moving forward. Especially given that these and other plays continue to be reimagined on stage and film, such as Taymor's *Titus* and David Michôd's *The King* (2019). Studying the dimension of these characters' actions on the plot as well as the importance they are given by modern directors will be a worthy undertaking.

As the preceding chapters hopefully prove, this thesis succeeded in analysing the role that gender plays in the processing of trauma and its effects on the characters as they seek revenge. Gender and the social norms that come with it are key factors in the revenger's behaviour. The combination of Elizabethan drama and postmodern cinema offers a breadth of perspective to trace the figure of the female revenger and its development. The exploration of gender in revenge with a focus on women will be of benefit for future research not only in gender studies but also in studies centred on revengers that go beyond the gender binary. In a longer study, more examples could have been included and discussed in more detail, and focus with more nuance on the differences between the media, and on concepts such as the performative elements of gender and revenge in them. As the pool of works featuring female revengers is likely to grow in the future, likely also those directed by women, more avenues for future explorations of the intricate links between gender and revenge will emerge.

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Abstrakt

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá analýzou rozdílů a podobností v rámci problematiky genderu mstitelů v Shakespearových hrách *Titus Andronicus, Othello* a *Hamlet*. První část práce se zaměřuje na různé druhy traumat, které prožívají Tamora, Lavinie, Othello, Jago a Hamlet, a dále na způsob, jakým gender a s ním související společenská a politická omezení ovlivňují zpracování traumatu v daném díle a to, jak tyto události vedou k pomstychtivému a násilnému chování.

Dále práce zkoumá souvislosti mezi Shakespearovými tragédiemi pomsty a moderními filmovými vyprávěními o pomstě režiséra Quentina Tarantina. Ženy mstitelky ve filmech *Hanebný parchanti* a *Kill Bill* (1. a 2. díl), Shosanna a Beatrix, sdílejí podobné rysy se Shakespearovými ženami-mstitelkami v *Titovi Andronikovi*. Tato druhá část práce se dále zamýšlí nad tím, jakým způsobem gender dále ovlivňuje reakci mstitele na traumatické prožitky, a jaké jsou odlišnosti ve vyústění zápletky v těchto příbězích ve srovnání se Shakespearem. Na závěr tato práce přináší návrhy pro zkoumání problematiky ženské pomsty v moderních příbězích.

Práce čerpá z teorie traumatu, genderových studií a studií pomsty a zkoumá, jakou roli hraje gender v tom, jak postavy zpracovávají traumatické prožitky a jak se snaží dosáhnout odvety. V tomto ohledu se práce dotýká i způsobů, jímž postavy žen-mstitelek narušují patriarchální normy v alžbětinské době i v moderní společnosti. Co do sekundární literatury práce vychází zejména z monografie *Revenge and Gender in Classical, Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (2018), již sestavily Lesel Dawson a Fiona McHardy, a z odborných článků jako "'The Gnawing Vulture': Revenge, Trauma Theory, and Titus Andronicus" (2002) z pera Deborah Willis a "Cannibalism and the Act of Revenge in Tudor-Stuart Drama" (2004), jehož autorem je Raymond Rice.

Klíčová slova: tragédie pomsty; William Shakespeare; postmoderní film; Quentin Tarantino; genderová studia; trauma

Abstract

This thesis analyses the differences and similarities in terms of gender in the revengers in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* (1594)*, Othello* (1604)*,* and *Hamlet* (1602)*.* The first part of this thesis focuses on the different types of traumatic injuries that Tamora, Lavinia, Othello, Iago, and Hamlet experience and the way gender and its social and political constraints affect their processing of trauma and the way through which this leads to vengeful violence.

Additionally, this thesis explores the link between Shakespeare's revenge tragedies and modern cinematic revenge narratives by filmmaker Quentin Tarantino. The female revengers in *Inglourious Basterds* (2009)*, Kill Bill, vol. 1* (2003), *and Kill Bill, vol.2* (2004), Shosanna and Beatrix, share similarities with Shakespeare's female revengers in *Titus Andronicus.* This second part of the thesis is also concerned with the way in which gender continues to affect the revenger's response to traumatic injuries, and the changes in the resolution of these narratives when compared to Shakespeare's. Finally, this thesis provides suggestions for further research in the field of female revenge in modern revenge narratives.

This thesis draws on trauma theory, gender studies, and revenge studies in order to analyse the role that gender plays in the processing of a traumatic injury and the obtaining of retribution. Additionally, this thesis analyses the many ways in which the characters of female revengers subvert patriarchal norms both in Elizabethan society as well as in modern society. The main secondary sources this thesis engaged with are the monograph *Revenge and Gender in Classical, Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (2018), edited by Lesel Dawson and Fiona McHardy, and articles such as "'The Gnawing Vulture': Revenge, Trauma Theory, and Titus Andronicus" (2002) by Deborah Willis and "Cannibalism and the Act of Revenge in Tudor-Stuart Drama" (2004) by Raymond Rice.

Keywords: Revenge Tragedies; William Shakespeare; Postmodern Cinema; Quentin Tarantino; Gender Studies; Trauma