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STUDY OF SHAKESPEARE THOUGHTS OF WOMEN IN THE MOVIE "TITUS"

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Study of Shakespeare Thoughts of Women in the Movie "Titus"

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Abstract – In most of the plays written by William Shakespeare, Some act of revenge is still there, & no exception is Titus Andronicus (1593-1594). As Titus Andronicus' main subject is revenge, in the study tries to discuss this issue. The thesis discusses the concept of revenge and its characteristics, and the influence of Seneca on Elizabethan revenge authors generally, in particular William Shakespeare, & influence of The Spanish Tragedy by Thomas Kyd & Jew of Malta's Christopher Marlowe.

Key Words – William Shakespeare, Titus Andronicus, Revenge

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INTRODUCTION

Titus Andronicus, possibly in collaboration with George Peele, is a tragedy of William Shakespeare, thought to have been composed between 1588 & 1593. It is considered Shakespeare's first tragedy but is often regarded as an attempt to emit his contemporaries' violent and bloody vengeance, which was immensely popular with audiences during the 16th century.

The play is performed in the final days of Roman rule, telling the storey of the Roman army's imaginary general Titus, who is embroiled in a period of retribution against Tamora, the Queen of Goths. It's the most gruesome and brutal work of Shakespeare. It was one of his less respected plays historically. It had fallen by the end of the 17th century, but was extremely common in its day. Mostly due to what was considered its distasteful graphic brutality, the Victorian era disapproved. But its image started to rise by the middle of the 20th century.

In Elizabethan the theme of vengeance was common because "it touched upon important issues of today: social issues of personal honour and feudal unlawful survival; the political issue of tyranny and resistance; & supreme question of providence with its provocative disparities of human revenge and divine righteousness." In many Elizabethan playing, vengeance is considered a duty of the wounded to protect themselves and their families in restoring honour without understanding that vengeance declines rather than enhances honour, since honour is noble and cannot form a base or cause of something significant, as the want of revenge. In this scenario, the evening person is motivated not only by passion, malice & resentment of some personal injury but also by a sense of sacred duty. The topic of revenge was frequently used in the middle of the 1580s to the early

1640s. Almost everyone, including Thomas Kyd, Christopher Marlowe, William Shakespeare & George Peele played in the battle of Alcazar (1590). In this context, nearly every major playwright contributed to the subject. John Marston also wrote about with this theme in his play Antonio's Revenge (1600), which "is a drama that masterfully focuses on all elements of a tradition of vengeance. "5 At the same time, the Tragedy of Hoffman by Henry Chettle, The Tragedy of The Revenger's Trague display a number of other revenge plays which also demonstrate" a profound understanding of the moral and spiritual implications of vengeance. The White Devil (1612) & Duchess of Malfi (1614) of John Webster, of Tis Pity She is a Slut (1630-33) & Broken Heart (1630-33) of John Ford & Cardinals (1641) of James Shirley are other late vengeance plays that have been critical of religious , moral, and theological disintegration.

Titus Andronicus (1593-1594) is the first vengeance play of William Shakespeare, and "one of the most gruesome and bloodiest of all plays,"¹³ preceded by the dramatic vengeance conventions in the Elizabethan theatre. It concentrates on vengeance ideas, particularly how an individual reacts when he is pushed too far.

Shakespeare introduces different cases of retribution in the play. Titus Andronicus, a great Roman emperor, wins the war against the Goths, captures Tamora the queen and his three children and convicts her elder son, Alarbus, for a twenty-one children, who were killed in the war, to death in revenge.

Tamora asks Titus to be respectful to her son and to her as his mother. Titus denies his feeling inspired by his orgy and triumph. He treats the sacrifice of

Alarbus as a religious obligation. This barbaric Roman rite launches the chain of vengeance:

Titus: They call for a sacrifice religiously:

Your son is notorious for this and he has to die,

Take care of your groaning shadows.

Such case of retribution is seen in Tamora's reverence for the sacrifice of Alarbus as a "cruel irreligious devotion" (I. i. 131). Her two sons, Chiron & Demetrius, urge her to take "sharp vengeance" against Titus:

Demetrius: The same gods that the queen of Troy had,

With sharp revenge opportunities

In his tent by the Thracian Tyrant,

Might the Queen of Goths favour Tamora,

The queen was Goths & Tamora

To leave her enemies with the bloody misdeeds.

Tamora therefore never hesitates to hurt Titus or some family member. The first chance is that Tamora agrees, in vengeance on Titus, to marry Saturninus the Emperor of Rome, as Lavinia the daughter of Titus rejects to marry Saturninus. The marriage between Saturnin & Tamora is a direct example of revenge. When Tamora promises revenge, we recognize that Saturninus:

Tamora: I'm going to find a day to destroy all of them,

And raze your party & your kin,

The cruel dad & his traitorous girls,

Whom I sued for the life of my beloved son,

And let them know what the Queen 's going to let

On the streets, kneel and in vain pray for forgiveness.

Lavinia begins Tamora 's scheme for revenge against Titus. She exploits Lavinia 's appetite & encourages her sons to rape her. Tamora worries about her vengeance alone. This allows her a "worked fiend"¹⁵ and intentionally makes her deaf to the pity & compassion of Lavinia. Thus, the rape by Lavinia is Tamora's retaliation against Titus illustrated by Shakespeare:

Tamora: Recall boys I to the tears in vain,

To save the sacrifice of your brother,

Yet heinous Andronicus wouldn't stop,

So take her away while using her as you want,

The worst the better love of me was for her.

In order not to disclose their identity, Chiron & Demetrius not merely violate Lavinia, they also cut off their language & hands. This is another example of barbaric retribution represented by the mutilation of Lavinia. In addition, they kill Bassianus, her husband. Their desire to revenge Bassian is driving them because he wins Lavinia. The assassination of Bassianus thus shows the retribution of Chiron & Demetrius on Bassianus and Titus.

In the role of Aaron, the villain in this play, Shakespeare specifically depicted the theme of vengeance in Titus Andronicus. He's the man of Tamora. In Titus' rebellion for Tamora he plays a great part. It provides Titus with schemes to kill Titus entirely, but Aaron does not suffer a personal injury from Titus, as Fredson Bowers remarks: "Aaron is never hurt himself, & reason against which he has been defeated and captured, whatever grudges he has against Andronici."

Titus Andronicus is his most horrific play in Shakespeare's revenge tragedy. He has been heavily criticised for his overwhelming cruelty and definitely was not one of his most famous works. The play, however, generated more interest in gender studies & feminist literature approach. The female characters' simplistic, sophisticated & polarised portrayal almost looks at the sex-conscious reader; this is an open invitation to closer examination. Although in Elizabethan literature virgin-whore duality was very popular, Titus Andronicus is severe.

After that, Lavinia and Tamora are discussed against a backdrop of perceptual femininity in Shakespeare's time & female characters in the play.

WOMEN IN THE ELIZABETHAN AGE

Before discussing the roles of the women characters in Shakespeare's play it is important to focus on the historical context and the roles of female in the Elizabethan Age. That era was marked by a vast contrast between Queen Elizabeth, the head of state and thus the most powerful person in England, and a society that was in general extremely misogynist and patriarchal. The presence of three powerful women in the 16th century – Queen Elizabeth, Mary Tudor and Mary Stuart – should not belie the fact that the common woman in that time was very much limited in her power and independence. Women Early Modern England relied on men from social, economic & sexual backgrounds. Married women in particular could not, without their husbands, be public, they were pretty much tied to their households. Women were commonly viewed as less reasonable than men, and so male safety and guidance were often required. Since they were not deemed to be able to provide for themselves, they were responsible to the male duty of regulating their sexuality; the daddy was obliged to guarantee that his father married to his daughter as a

virgin & husband was obliged to control his wife to generate none but his heirs[2].

Women are thought to be passive objects, men active subjects or "he is the agent, female the patient," as the Carroll Camden puts it. This idea of male dominance above women is represented in theology and philosophy and furthermore substantiated by medical science: "The fact that female sex organs were inside was viewed as a sign of female inferiority, of women's colder and damper nature which had not produced the heat necessary to push them out". The most powerful image showing the unequal distribution of power indeed comes from sexuality: The man is the one who penetrates, the woman the one being penetrated.

The virtues "obedience, chastity, silence & piety" were required to live by women. The problem for patriarchal society was women not meeting these standards.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF FEMININITY

It seems important to explain the main words of femininity and construction before beginning an examination of the construction of femininity. Femininity means a description of women's characteristics – opposed to femaleness, which define biological sex, both culturally & socially. As category of gender, femininity is centred on the category women, so it is just a discursive construction, it is a socio-cultural superstructure for the biological sex. It is based on the demands and desires of women in general. It is very much organised. Most scholars go so far that the debate that produced the category of femininity is restricted to men. The article 'Femininity' in the International Encyclopedia of Women says:

"Many commentators describe femininity as the ideal of womanhood, of being female, whereby women are defined as several from & inferior to men. To be feminine, in this view, is to conform to men's images of what women should be and how women should behave."^[6]

As denoted in the previous chapter the gender characteristics are explained and substantiated by the sciences. The aim of gender studies is to break such biologicistic doctrines and analyze how gender is constructed, for which reasons and with which consequences.

Shakespeare's revenge tragedy *Titus Andronicus* is very much dominated by male characters. Moreover, they are distinguished as extremely male: emperors, warriors, vengeers. Unlike the male mass, only three women appear on the stage, of which only two have an important role. These two women are most interestingly formed in antithesis: Tamora, the mighty, cruelty and lascivious mom on one side, and Lavinia, the impotent, compliant & innocent daughter on the other hand. There is only one other woman appearing on stage, the nurse in act 4 scene 2 who is left out in

the following as she doesn't seem to be of great importance. She doesn't even have a name and her rather short presence on stage ends with her being killed by Aaron.

Tamora and Lavinia are just like other female characters in Shakespearean plays presented in relation to male characters rather than independent; as Kahn observed: "Shakespeare depicts all his women characters as sisters, daughters, wives, or mothers". We can understand that women were simply men dependent and characterised by their relationship with a certain man at the time. This is understandable. "The idea of women, with the exception of how they contribute to marriage or their utilize men is practically impossible," he said. "As virgins (unmarried women), women or widows" The first performance of Tamora on stage is her three sons, who describe her from the very beginning as mother. She was later Saturnino's wife, Rome's emperor. Moreover, it never appears alone on the stage, but is often associated with men: her husband, her sons or her lover Aaron. From the beginning, Lavinia also is called the daughter of Titus Andronicus, Rome's successful general & sister of her children, the majority of whom died in battle as valiant soldiers. The male characters on the contrary are shown as independent persons; Saturninus for example is an aspirant to the title of the emperor of Rome, shown without any familiar or other relations.

The female characters in *Titus Andronicus* are not only presented as dependent but they are also extremely simplified and stereotyped. Lavinia and Tamora are furthermore presented as two completely opposing kinds of women, the virgin and the whore. This polarisation was quite common in the Elizabethan theatre.^[9] Mann tries to explain that fact psychologically:

"The polarisation of female characters in Elizabethan drama [...] also spoke to deep prejudices in the male psyche increasingly brought to the fore by the growing prominence of women in society and the 'Problem' this was perceived to create."

The attributes of femininity are discursive constructs, constructed within an exclusively male discourse. In theatre it is obvious that this femininity is constructed, the author makes up the characters and embellishes them with certain attributes. However the characteristics are rarely completely made up and detached from reality, in fact they mirror reality and actual existing ideas that are predominant within a certain era. Characters in plays are thus created according to the existing images of men and women. In the case of the Renaissance woman these are constructed according to ascriptions by men as women generally did not take part in the public discourse.

Lavinia

Lavinia is the only daughter of Titus Andronicus, a Roman general who devoted himself to defending Rome and fighting the hostile Goths. The rest of the family is, at least as far as the reader gets to know, all male. Lavinia has 26 brothers, 21 of whom died on the battlefield; Titus himself and his brother Marcus apparently do not have wives and neither does Lucius though he has a young son to take care of. Lavinia is defined as the good and marriageable daughter, humble and chaste.

Lavinia corresponds to the role model of a good woman as it was expected by men in the English Renaissance. She is humble and obedient; her first action on stage, kneeling down in front of her father and praising him, is defining her as the good and virtuous daughter. She adores her father and acts according to his expectations. She does not even conflict if she is already engaged in Bassiano when her father wants to hand her over for marriage to Saturninus. In objection raised by Bassianus and said to have Lavinia, who "put in justice but his own"[11], he did not refute or acknowledge Lavinia. She doesn't seem to have a will of her own, she doesn't demonstrate it at least. She merely submits to the men's wishes. It is the men who fight out who is going to marry her; Saturninus and Titus on the one side, Bassianus and Lavinia's brothers on the other. Her opinion is not asked for and thus she keeps quiet.

Obedience is one of the virtues Lavinia fulfils, chastity another one. There is no reason to doubt that Lavinia is virginal at the beginning of the play, This makes her desirable for marriage and thus valuable for her father. As displayed in the previous chapter a woman was supposed to be incapable of taking care for her own virginity, instead men are responsible for that. In Lavinia's case it is apparently not only her father but also her brothers. They know about their sister's engagement with Bassianus and make sure that she is not given to another man. Marital chastity is taken care of by the husband by never leaving her alone in public. It furthermore seems to be natural for Lavinia, she is proud of being chaste and obviously appalled by Tamora's adultery with Aaron.

When Lavinia reveals the criminals by writing in a sand, Titus is inspired to take vengeance. There is therefore another case of vengeance in which Lavinia is working hard to write suspects' identities. Titus is being led by Lavinia to avenge. Without her, Titus did not realise them & so could not gain his revenge.

To take vengeance on Tamora, Titus utilizes a banquet as an excuse. The banquet of Titus is a case of Titus's retribution on Tamora Shakespeare's Titus Andronicus shows. Titus takes this opportunity when Tamora & her sons arrive at Titus 's house. The throats of sons of Tamora are cut off and a pie of their meat is cooked. One might imagine how awful this action is, but less than the second part, of Titus'

revenge, when their mother consumes the paste made from Tamora's sons:

Titus: Why are both in this pastry baked.

Which your mother fed with meekness,

Eat the flesh she bred herself.

Though cruel & inhuman, "[t]he prevailing horror is appropriate for Tamora to eat her own son." Without possessing compassion or mercy Tamora already gave brutal and dreadful blows to Titus. As a fighter, and even as a man, she defeats him.

CONCLUSION

William Shakespeare deals with the theme of revenge in great detail in his play Titus Andronicus in which he uses extremes to display the theme that the pursuit of revenge leads to tragedy. Shakespeare reveals through Titus Andronicus, that much of the actions of the characters are motivated by vengeance. Every character looks like he has his own timetable and takes vengeance until the bitter end. Shakespeare thus manages to explain how retribution impacts human nature negatively. The results of retribution on the human character are signals that evil will corrupt and change goodness. Since vengeance makes us act blindly, it leads to the degradation of human nature, leading to the corruption of mankind. Elizabethan playwrights like William Shakespeare thus tackle the issue of revenge in their plays one way or the other to instruct people not in compliance with their passions, though emotions and acts of revenge can neither be avoided nor regulated.

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