

Avenge seeks Revenge: Madness, an offspring

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ABSTRACT

Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* follows the Senecan model of revenge tragedy. The revenge motif becomes the driving element of the play. Victorious Titus has forfeited his twenty-one sons vanquishing the Rome's enemies. At the beginning of the play, Titus has conquered Goths and brought Tamora, the queen of Goths, her three sons and Aaron the Moor as captives. As an act of avenger, for dead Titus' sons, the first-born son of Tamora is killed for sacrifice. This stirs the revenge motive in Tamora, who in turn kindles the libido of her sons Chiron and Demetrius and ultimately Lavinia becomes the victim. Lavinia's hands and tongue had been ripped off to conceal the identity of the person who had done her the deed. When the truth is revealed, the enraged father takes revenge over Tamora's sons. Things would not have been of much interest if Shakespeare had made Titus to kill Tamora's sons by normal means- strangle or hang or stab to death. Titus goes beyond those means. He acts insane. His sign of madness is revealed when he slits the throat of the rapists, grinds their bones to dust, makes a paste of it with their blood and bakes it into a pie and serves it to their mother Tamora at the banquet. The mental aberration of Titus may have resulted to such a cruelty. And this paper tries to justify madness as an offspring of revenge motifs.

KEYWORDS:

Revenge; tragedy; madness; cruelty.

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The human mind is a most intrinsic and complex system. We undergo various emotions. The questions relating to the query why we feel the way we do have given birth to various psychological notions. This paper attempts in psychoanalysis of the eponymous character Titus Andronicus and tries to justify that the intense revenge motif disrupts the inner peace and leads to madness.

"Revenge is a kind of wild justice" (45) says Bacon. The Bard who is widely esteemed for his in-depth understanding of human nature also acknowledges this view

in his revenge tragedy, *Titus Andronicus*. It is based on the Senecan model of revenge tragedy. The play is built over the acts of vengeance, which is the prime driving force in Senecan tragedies.

The play centers on the eponymous character Titus Andronicus. At the beginning of the play, Titus returns Rome after defeating the Goths in the war which lasted for ten years. Tamora, the Queen of Goths, her three sons - Alarbus, Chiron, and Demetrius and Aaron, the Moor are brought Rome as captives. Despite Tamora's desperate pleas, Titus sacrifices her eldest son, Alarbus, to avenge the deaths of his own sons during the war. Tamora and her two surviving sons vow to

obtain revenge on Titus and his family. And thus avenged starts seeking its revenge.

The plot for revenge is constructed by Tamora. Saturninus, the lately elected Emperor of Rome offers to marry Lavinia, the daughter of Titus. As she was already betrothed to Bassianus, Saturninus' brother, in rage Saturninus marries Tamora and thereafter things become easier for her. She keenly starts plotting against the Andronicus family. Her power of rule and freedom gives embodiment to her revenge motif.

The first to fall prey to Tamora's revenge motif is Lavinia. She kindles the libido of her living sons – Chiron and Demetrius. According to Freud, sex is the fundamental motive of life. By Freudian concept, the term 'libido' refers to the desire for sexual activity. The libidinal energy is controlled by the 'id', the pleasure seeker, which emerges from the unconscious mind. Their 'ego' ought to have arbitrated between the demands of the libido as well as the idealistic principles imposed by the 'superego'. But as there was an external stimulation to their burning desire, their 'ego' yields to the demands of the libido. Chiron and Demetrius kill Bassianus and drag Lavinia deep into the forest to execute their brutal deed. In order to conceal their identity as the rapists they cut off her tongue and hands so that their names can neither be pronounced nor be penned.

Innocent Lavinia becomes a victim to Tamora's revenge. She had been battled with the loss of her husband, raped, and her tongue and hands had been ripped off. Her torments in turn results mental aberrations in her father Titus.

A desolate upheaval to Titus psyche is added by Aaron, the secret lover of Tamora. He sends forged letters to Saturninus stating that Titus's sons, Quintus and Martius to be the murderers of Bassianus. Enraged at the loss of his brother, Saturninus sentences Titus's sons to death. Aaron visits Titus and falsely tells

that the Emperor will spare his sons, if either Titus, Marcus or, Lucius, chops off one of their hands and sends it to him. Aaron has Titus's left hand cut off and sends his severed hands to the Emperor. In return, a messenger brings Titus, Martius and Quintus's severed heads, along with his own severed hand.

Despite these extended causes for Titus's mental turbulence, his own thirst for revenge also disturbs him. The burning urge to revenge his conspirators is speeded when Lavinia reveals the identity of the rapists as Chiron and Demetrius. The growing spirit of revenge yields certain behavioural changes in Titus. His behavioural changes can be seen evidently from Act III of the play. The brave and victorious Titus who has seen much brutal bloodshed in war grows unconditionally sympathetic towards the parents of the fly when Marcus kills it.

In Act IV Scene III Titus brings his fellow men to shoot arrows at the constellations. Those arrows are attached with petitions regarding his plight on Earth addressed to the God of Justice. This act is also evidence to his insanity. His agony is revealed when he addresses the arrows to stoop to his wish,

... pierce the inmost centre of the earth:
Then, when you come to Pluto's region,
I pray you, deliver him this petition;
Tell him, it is for justice and for aid,
And that it comes from old Andronicus,
Shaken with sorrows in ungrateful Rome.
(Act IV, Scene III; lines 12-17)

Though Titus acts paradoxically, this madness might have resulted from his accumulated depression and the burning desire for revenge. He sarcastically comments,

...there's no justice in Earth nor hell,
We will solicit heaven and move the gods
To send down Justice for to wreak our
wrongs. (Act IV, Scene III; lines 51-53)

In the article, "Psychology of Depression - Psychodynamic Theories" it is

quoted that according to Freud, “the conscious and unconscious parts of the mind can come into conflict with one another, producing a phenomenon called repression.”

(<https://www.mentalhelp.net/articles/psychology-of-depression-psychodynamic-theories/>)

Repression is defined in “Freudian Repression: Definition & Overview” as a state which refers to “the ego's efforts to subconsciously keep anxious thoughts and impulses out of our awareness and keep them buried and hidden.” (<https://www.mentalhelp.net/articles/psychology-of-depression-behavioral-theories/>) In repression an individual yields to the pleasurable instinct ‘id’ by subduing the conscious impulses.

Being a noble Roman General, Titus’s conscious mind very well knows that plotting against the Emperor and his supporters is a misdeed. At the beginning of the play, Titus held the Emperor with high esteem. He even killed his son Mutius for being against the Emperor and supporting the marriage of Bassianus and Lavinia. This morality eventually decreases when his whole family falls prey to Tamora’s revenge motif. Soon, he yields to his savage immoral revenge instinct of the ‘id’, his conscious thoughts are subdued, and he plots against the Emperor and his supporters. Though his moral instincts botched, his revenge instincts growled, ultimately leading into madness.

Titus’s urge towards revenge blinds his rational mind. His appetite is only satisfied by the cold bloodiest revenge. The height of his brutality can be understood when he slits the throat of the rapists, grinds their bones to dust, makes a paste of it with their blood and bakes it into a pie and serves it

to their mother Tamora at the banquet which is conducted to bring reconciliation between Titus and the Emperor. They serve as evidences to his madness.

Titus even kills his daughter Lavinia when Saturnius opines, “the girl should not survive her shame.” (Act V, Scene III; line 41) He feels Lavinia’s death will remove the shame on her. Innocent Lavinia is killed by her own father as an honour killing. He kills Lavinia and proclaims,
Die, die, Lavinia, and thy shame with thee,
And with thy shame thy father’s sorrow die. (Act V, Scene III; lines 46-47)

Conclusion

To conclude, *Titus Andronicus* is a play where Tamora and her people revenge against Andronicus family, for avenging her son as a deed of sacrifice. When the whole family suffers under their acts of vengeance, the fatherly figure is distressed. The building agony evokes the spirit of revenge. Titus’s accumulated depression and strong appetite for revenge results in mental aberrations. From psychological perspectives we can say that one’s ‘id’ yields to its desires when there is an external stimulation and conscious repression.

This play can be considered as an epitome of the dangers caused by revenge. The Rome which conquered the Goths is later eaten up by them by their revenge motif. Even Titus who is considered as a noble Roman General is stooped low to a mad man because of his revenge motif. Though revenge is a wild justice, it disrupts the harmony and social well being of an individual. Thus avenge seeks its revenge and madness is the offspring of the burning revenge motif in the play *Titus Andronicus*.

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