

BITTER BUSINESS AND SPOKEN DAGGERS: GEORGE PEELE'S SENEKANISM
AND THE ORIGINS OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S ETHOS OF
REVENGE IN *TITUS ANDRONICUS*

by

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to Zenda Koch for her endless supply of material (and maternal) care.

H. L. Mencken said, "Morality is the theory that every human act must be either right or wrong, and that 99 % of them are wrong." William Shakespeare, thankfully, was rarely wrong.

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ABSTRACT

For nearly three centuries, scholars and critics have argued that *Titus Andronicus*, Shakespeare's earliest revenge tragedy, lacks for thematic and characterological consistency and dramaturgical merit. Many have suggested that *Titus* was not written by Shakespeare—or not written by him alone. In 2002, British scholar Brian Vickers presented a comprehensive study of the authorship of the play, concluding that *Titus* was co-written by Shakespeare and his early modern contemporary George Peele. Critical literary scholarship has not caught up with Vickers's settlement of the authorship question and there exists a lacuna in the analysis of the play, namely, for my purposes, how do the disparately authored scenes reflect sourcing influences and intratextual character development regarding revenge as a literary descendant of classical drama and as an ethical enterprise of moral agents. Shakespeare's subsequent treatments of the ethical dimensions of vengeance, as both a public and private manifestation of the quest for justice and a psychological response to injury, spawn from the complex tropology in *Titus*—both those he assumed from Peele and those he introduced into the text himself. A study of the moral philosophy espoused in the joint composition of *Titus* affords the opportunity for a deeper understanding of how early modern playwrights addressed the desire for revenge as a psychological and moral activity and how the jointly composed play launched Shakespeare's subsequent negotiation with the revenge tragedy genre and the ethos of revenge in his later revenge tragedies.

INTRODUCTION

Pleading passionately for her son's life near the beginning of act 1 of *Titus Andronicus*, Tamora, queen of the vanquished Goths, urges Titus to be compassionate and humane and not to permit the ritualistic sacrifice which Titus has ratified. "Wilt thou draw near the nature of the gods? / Draw near them, then, in being merciful. / Sweet mercy is nobility's true badge" (1.1.117-119).¹ Tamora's appeal for mercy strikes a theme that resonates throughout the Shakespearean canon, particularly in his tragedies and later romantic plays. For twenty more years, Shakespeare would continue to work out "the quality of mercy" in juxtaposition with the human desire for vengeance and how these psychological and moral constituents could be represented on stage with dramatic effect and cultural resonance.

Titus Andronicus begins and ends with an election and a funeral. Between the ceremonial appointments of succeeding Roman emperors and the obsequies of dead Andronici in the opening and closing moments, the play portrays fourteen killings—nine of which occur on stage, two acts of criminal mayhem and two beheadings resulting in three severed hands, two heads, and one tongue. The play's plot pivots on a vicious rape and a cannibalistic banquet. A "merry jest" (5.2.172) is used to trick a desperate father into cutting off his own hand. A mother gives sanction to her sons to ravish a new bride to satisfy her vengeance and their lust. A respected Roman patriarch and military hero publicly murders two of his own children. A villain is sentenced to death by partial burial

¹ All textual references to Shakespeare's plays hereafter are taken from *The Norton Shakespeare, 3d Edition*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt et al. (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2016) unless otherwise noted. References to *Titus* are from the First Folio edition.

and a dead empress's body is unceremoniously thrown to the beasts and birds of prey. The carnage can seem overwhelming with "an average of 5.2 atrocities per act, or one for every 97 lines" (Hulse 106). Is there a moral lesson to be found in this play? More interestingly, does *Titus* reveal how a playwright can project larger themes of moral progress or ethical growth?

For nearly three centuries, scholars and critics have argued that *Titus Andronicus*, Shakespeare's earliest revenge tragedy, lacks both literary and dramaturgical merit despite its immense appeal to late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century audiences. Modern critics, however, have located within *Titus* a great deal more theatrical inventiveness and literary quality. The evolution of modern criticism and literary theory permits us to observe two simultaneous authorial activities in *Titus*. First, we see the dramatist positioning the ethical dimensions of vengeance—and the injury and distress that precedes it—in a theatrical form that operates through stable and consistent characters, giving those characters a realistic sense of moral agency, and propagating that agency in directions that have moral suasion. "Despite the characters' relative lack [of] inwardness in this play (especially when compared with the later tragedies) Shakespeare's psychology of trauma in *Titus Andronicus* nevertheless achieves a good deal of complexity, bringing out characterological, situational, and cultural dimensions while also suggesting trauma's elusiveness and intractability" (Willis 51). Second, we see how a dramatist wrestles with what Linda Woodbridge describes as the "cultural work that literary revenge performs" (5) using and refining the motif of vengeance beyond its

classical roots and the theatrical spectacle of rage and violence that defined the Roman origins of the genre and its early modern iterations.

In 2002, British scholar Brian Vickers presented a comprehensive study of the authorship of *Titus Andronicus* concluding that the play was co-written by Shakespeare and his early modern contemporary George Peele. The suggestion that *Titus* was not written by Shakespeare—or not written by him alone—has been proffered and debated by critics and scholars for over three hundred years. Vickers's attribution argument has, in the minds of most, provided a convincing determination of the matter. It has also created a new demand for critical exploration of the play. One of the issues that Vickers's conclusion raises is of a tropological dimensions, or the constructed ethical intentions, of the play. The fact that *Titus* was a joint composition affords the opportunity for a deeper understanding of how the jointly composed play launched Shakespeare's subsequent negotiation with the revenge tragedy genre and the ethos of revenge as portrayed in early modern English drama. The critical scholarship has not caught up with Vickers's settlement of the authorship question. Consequently, there exists a lacuna in the analysis of the play, namely, for my purposes, how do the disparately authored scenes reflect authorial sourcing and intratextual consistency (or inconsistency) in their treatment of revenge as a literary descendant of classical Roman drama and as a generic supplication of other early modern revenge dramas, like Thomas Kyd's seminal work *The Spanish Tragedy*?

Titus Andronicus stands out in the Shakespearean canon both as a source and a repository of early thematic and generic development in Shakespeare's revenge drama

authorship. *Titus* was the first play in which Shakespeare draws explicitly from storylines found in the classical sources of Horace, Ovid and Livy; his first entry into the tragedy genre generally, and revenge drama specifically; and the first place that Latin philological practice and rhetorical styling are located in his dramatic text. Thus, *Titus* serves as the anchor of Shakespeare's theatrical treatment of revenge as an enterprise involving characters exercising their moral agency in circumstances that compel a desire for retaliatory vengeance. Shakespeare's subsequent treatments of the ethical dimensions of vengeance, as both a public and private manifestation of the quest for justice and a psychological response to injury, spawn from the philosophical and classical genesis in *Titus*—both those he assumed from Peele and those he introduced into the text himself, and from the dramaturgical and characterological composition of his first entrant in the popular genre.

The arc of Shakespeare's movement through the revenge tragedy genre requires a more direct recognition of how the ethos of revenge was preliminarily developed and ultimately resolved in *Titus*. In a literary context, *ethos* describes the means by which a character displays ethical reasoning and moral purpose through a "process of philosophical striving, in which a person's every resource is marshaled in the service of moral growth" (Coodin 184). An examination of ethos in any particular literary work, consequently, is the critical exploration of how specific characters display conformity to socially acceptable behaviors and the personal intellectual and emotional development that should lead to ethical flourishing. More broadly, a critical consideration of the ethos of revenge should assist us in understanding how revenge literature illuminates human

moral progress. This study will investigate the collision of themes, sources, and styles located in the *Titus* text through a careful consideration of its characters as moral agents. It will investigate Peele and Shakespeare's collaboration and how the intersection of the two authors' rhetorical and sourcing influences and exposition of characters shaped a theatrical narrative which set the path for Shakespeare's ethical conception of revenge in his dramatic literature.

The first chapter of this study will discuss the framework for investigating the tropological dimensions of early modern dramatic literature. Specifically, I will demonstrate that theatrical presentations in the late Elizabethan period reflected the confluence of two intellectual forces: an increasing sophistication in portraying psychological realism and the renaissance of classical moral thought. Of course, the collusion of these forces in early modern theater was not a sudden occurrence, but a gradual inclusion of broader intellectual currents into the theatrical culture. The composition of *Titus Andronicus* is a particularly illuminating moment in the evolution of early modern dramatic literature. By the mid-sixteenth-century, English playwrights were discovering, imitating, and popularizing the sensational revenge tragedies of the Roman playwright Lucius Annaeus Seneca. The infusion of classical Senecan dramaturgy joined with a new humanist appreciation of the mechanisms of moral reasoning and progress and the didactic authority of dramatic discourse. *Titus Andronicus* was composed on the fault line of this amalgamation of intellectual influences. More than any other play of the early modern period, *Titus* reveals how a dramatist could negotiate the vivid

sensationalism of tragic injustice and reflect and promote new conceptions of how humans operate as moral agents.

The second chapter explores how George Peele brought Senecan themes of revenge and emotional extremity to the opening scenes of *Titus*. Peele's career as a dramatist was a curious blend of late sixteenth-century intellectual activities. He was a well-educated classicist poet who explored the boundaries of dramatic genres and technique in an attempt to compose theatrical conflict and character in commercially viable ways. Peele's early plays consistently displayed an authorial interest in making London theater vividly expressive. His plays, while lyrically provocative and inventive, lacked a clear ethical purpose. Peele's contribution to the opening scenes of *Titus* demonstrate these dramaturgical tendencies and initiate a play that is expressive, stylistically arresting, and theatrically complex, but lacking in characterological focus or tropological direction.

The final chapter explores how Shakespeare melded the stately theatricality of the opening scene of the *Titus* story and the bold characters that Peele introduced, and projected a different philosophical assessment of how revenge operates in the minds of persons suffering from psychologically injury and a desire to visit retributive justice on their oppressors. In his early career, Shakespeare displayed a proficiency for "fixing" plays began by other dramatist. With *Titus*, Shakespeare brought a focused psychological realism to the boldness of Peele's preliminary story, and oriented it with a sense of consciousness interiority and moral projection. By the early 1590s, early modern scholars and aristocratic thinkers were discovering the ancient moral philosophy of Aristotle and

his meta-ethical computation of how human happiness is promoted by what he called “practical virtue.” Aristotle’s prescription for virtue was centered not on adherence to ethical rubrics or moral duty, but on a useful process of conscious reflection and the habitual pursuit of moderated reaction to the natural conflict between human passion and rationality. Shakespeare’s contribution to *Titus* incorporated Aristotle’s moral process into the principal characters of the play and set the tone for how he would represent the desire for revenge as an internal ethical conflict and source of moral suasion in his future tragedies.

CHAPTER ONE

TITUS ANDRONICUS, CO-AUTHORSHIP, AND THE COMPOSITION OF THE
ETHOS OF REVENGE IN EARLY MODERN DRAMA

So the truly eloquent man—the one to seek out—will establish proof, and can delight and sway his audience. To prove is an essential, to delight provides charm, to sway guarantees victory.

-Cicero

Poets, indeed, do merely make to imitate, and imitate both to delight and teach, and delight to move men to take that goodness in hand, which without delight they would fly as from a stranger; and teach to make them know that goodness whereunto they are moved.

-Sir Phillip Sidney

During his lifetime, *Titus Andronicus* was one of Shakespeare's most successful plays. Its critical admiration and commercial success is demonstrated by the flattering regard paid to it in the only extant contemporary literary account of the 1590s. In 1598, Frances Meres cited the play in his effusive praise of its author: "As Plautus and Seneca are accounted the best Comedy and Tragedy among the Latines: so Shakespeare among the English is the most excellent in both kinds for the stage. For Tragedy, [witness] his *Richard the 2*, *Richard the 3*, *Henry the 4*, *King John*, *Titus Andronicus*, and his *Romeo and Juliet*" (317-18). Less than five years after its initial performance and publication *Titus* was considered worthy of inclusion in an Elizabethan literary review with Spenser's *The Fairy Queene*; Shakespeare was regarded by Meres as "the English Seneca."

The play's success is further demonstrated by its robust publication history. Early modern quarto publications of popular plays were used by play-goers as supplemental entertainment. They were purchased either prior to or shortly after theater attendance.

The frequency of publication of a quarto stands as evidence that a play remained in stage production. *Titus* was published in quarto form three times prior to the First Folio in 1623, an indication that for the remainder of Shakespeare's life, "the play was still popular enough on the stage to attract readers" (Hughes 13). The historiography of the play suggests that the latest possible date for its premiere was on January 24, 1594 (Taylor and Loughnane 491). Shortly thereafter, on February 6th, it was first published in quarto form (Q1), and then reprinted two additional times, in 1600 (Q2) and 1611 (Q3)², indicating a level of readership uncommon for a stage play. "Many of Shakespeare's plays were not published at all in his lifetime" (Bate, "Arden" 97), so the publication of a single play thrice in 17 years is a remarkable testament to its popular esteem.³ Shortly thereafter, critical mention of *Titus* evaporated, and its esteem, presumably, declined. We know little about the play's reception or performance history during the seventeenth-century. Prior to the Restoration, English theatrical culture suffered the closure of the public theatres in London from 1642 to 1660, a puritanical measure designed to thwart the "lascivious Mirth and Levity" (Milling and Thomson 439) of public entertainment. *Titus* does not seem to have weathered the Interregnum theater prohibition well. In its original form, the First Folio preserved it and its place in the Shakespearean canon. For nearly two centuries thereafter *Titus* lived exclusively in adaptation.

² Despite the fact that the 1611 publication was an octavo printing, scholars have commonly referred to as a quarto, and upon discovery of the 1594 quarto it has been designated as Q3 (Bishai 23).

³ Only seven plays were printed three or more times before the First Folio in 1623: *Romeo and Juliet*, *Richard II*, *Richard III*, *Henry IV, Part 1*, *Hamlet*, and *Pericles*, and only *Richard III*, *Henry IV, Part 1* and *Hamlet* were printed three times before Shakespeare's retirement in 1611.

The first Restoration adaptation of *Titus* was published in 1687 by playwright and translator Edward Ravenscroft. Ravenscroft attributed original authorship of *Titus* to another, unnamed playwright, and described Shakespeare's role in the collaboration as relatively minor. In the quarto of his German language adaption of *Titus*, Ravenscroft wrote that theatrical legend has long suggested that Shakespeare "only gave some Master-touches to one or two Principal Parts or Characters" (Bate, "Arden" 79) of the original *Titus* script. Thereafter, critics increasingly found it implausible that the renowned English dramatist could have penned a play so violent, vile, and difficult to stage. Even Ravenscroft declared the precursor of his successful adaptation "a heap of Rubbish." This sentiment remained long-lived and nearly universal. Well into the twentieth-century, the play was derided and dismissed by critics as a young playwright's failed effort. T. S. Eliot described it as "one of the stupidest and most uninspiring plays ever written" (Eliot 82). Northrop Frye disparaged it as "a brutal melodrama" (Frye 2). Even today, "*Titus Andronicus* is still generally considered Shakespeare's worst play" (West 62). The verdict of "bad taste," "dreadful puns," amateurish use of literary allusion, and inconsistent dramaturgical design continued to mar the play's reputation for three hundred years and generated much debate that, despite its inclusion in the First Folio, it did not deserve inclusion in Shakespearean canon (Bate, "Arden" 1).

Certainly, the play's early success owed much to the popularity of its genre. The presentation of vengeance became a common, even ubiquitous, feature of early modern theater and dramatic literature. Beginning with the proto-generic revenge plays of Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville, namely *Gorbuduc* (1561), and culminating with

Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* (c. 1587), early modern audiences witnessed a revival of this classical genre of revenge tragedy following the robust academic attention and translation of Senecan drama from 1559 to 1581. The academic and aristocratic interest in Senecanism came in two waves, marked by the translations of Senecan plays by the Oxford classicist Jasper Heywood in the early 1560s, and subsequently by the publication of Thomas Newton's anthology of Seneca's theatrical works in 1581. It was from this intellectual history, and the differing imprint it left on Shakespeare and Peele, that *Titus* and its inconsistent meditation on the ethos of revenge was composed. In both its classical and Tudor-era iteration, the genre was marked by plots "whose leading motive is revenge and whose main action deals with the progress of this revenge, leading to the death of the murderers and often the death of the avenger himself" (Thorndike 125). Late Elizabethan dramatists further distinguished the genre by infusing their works with plots in which avenging characters sought their bloody vengeance out of a sense of frustration with the public administration of justice which the narrative presented as incapable of redressing to their personal grievances. Thus, Elizabethan revenge dramas, like their Roman predecessors, contended with the fundamental psychology of injurious trauma and a compulsion for vengeance. Unlike the Senecan iteration, however, Tudor dramatists also struggled with the place of private retaliation in early modern society, a Christian society situated amidst the development of Renaissance humanism and the nascence of modern statehood and their attendant changes in ideas of justice and moral philosophy.

By the nineteenth century, critics such as Edward Dowden, G. C. Verplank, Charles Knight, and George Brandes began to express a gradual appreciation for the scant merits of Shakespeare's first effort at revenge drama. Such laudations remained tempered by a residual distaste for the play's themes and violent staging demands. Nevertheless, the recognition of its literary worth, and its worthiness in the canon, began to take root.⁴ Whether the play's rehabilitation has been fully achieved is debatable. Its brutality in performance has been assuaged by cultural and literary shifts in theatrical sensibility by twentieth- and twenty first-century audiences. Critics have long continued to lament its uneven characterizations, narrative inconsistency, and overwrought use of classical allusion (West 62). The increasing frequency of its performance on the stage and a "growing body of literary apology" (Hughes 31) suggests that *Titus* has only recently found favor in modern literary criticism and a theatrical appeal not seen since Shakespeare's lifetime.

Recent scholarship has proven to the satisfaction of most scholars that *Titus Andronicus* was co-authored by Shakespeare and his fellow Elizabethan poet and dramatist George Peele. In some quarters, this conclusion has been accepted with

⁴ Other reluctant praise was proffered by G. C. Verplanck, *The Illustrated Shakespeare*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1847: "[F]or its times, [*Titus*] was very far from giving the indication of an unpoetical or undramatic mind. One proof of this is, that it was long a popular favorite on the stage. It is full of defects, but these are precisely such as a youthful aspirant, in an age of authorship, would be most likely to exhibit"; Charles Knight, *Studies in Shakspeare*. London: W.S. Orr, 1851: "After the first scene of *Andronicus*, in which the author sets out with the stately pace of his time, we are very soon carried away, by the power of the language, the variety of the pause, and the especial freedom with which the trochees are used at the ends of lines, to forget that the versification is not *altogether* upon the best Shakspearean model"; and George Brandes, *William Shakespeare: A Critical Study*. Vol. I. London: William Heinemann, 1898. II vols.: "Although, on the whole, one may certainly say that this rough-hewn drama, with its piling-up of external effects, has very little in common with the tone or spirit of Shakespeare's mature tragedies, yet we find scattered through its lines in which the most diverse critics have professed to recognize, Shakespeare's revising touch, and the ring of his voice."

reluctance. In his introduction to the 1995 Arden edition, Jonathan Bate was unflinching in his insistence that William Shakespeare was the sole author of *Titus Andronicus*. *Titus* was authored by Shakespeare alone, Bate assured at the time: “I believe that the play was wholly by Shakespeare” (Bate, “Arden” 3). The debate itself, he suggested, was a speculative preoccupation and an exercise in academic fastidiousness— “there ought not be a dispute about the authorship” (79). Yet, over the course of three subsequent commentaries, Bate retreated from this position, not only accepting the possibility that *Titus* was co-written by Shakespeare and Peele, but also publicly advocating the co-authorship theory himself. By 2007, in his introduction to a combined edition of *Titus and Timon*, Bate asserted his own arguments for Peele’s co-authorial hand. Explaining the internally disparate linguistic and stylistic character that run throughout the play, Bate asserts:

If the play has a fault, it is that the formality of both language and action in the opening scenes create a sense of stiffness that suggests classicism at its most tedious. This is probably not Shakespeare’s fault: modern scholarship has persuasively demonstrated by means of close stylistic analysis that *Titus Andronicus* was begun by another dramatist, George Peele, who had a high-level classical education and a taste for large-scale symmetrical stage encounters spoken in high-flown rhetoric. We don’t know whether the play was written as a purposeful collaboration or whether Shakespeare came in to do a rewrite or to complete an unfinished work. Nor do we know at precisely what point the writing became his alone (Bate and Rasmussen xii-xiii).

Within twelve years of the publication of his introduction to the third Arden edition, Bate transformed from insistent skeptic of a co-authorship theory to reliable advocate of the position that *Titus* was a collaborative work. Some, like William Weber, have come to accept the attribution of co-authorship with a note of defeatist disdain: “The two-sided

debate between disintegrationists and conservators raged for decades. We are all disintegrationists now” (Weber 69-70).

The decisive gambit in the attribution debate which began with Ravenscroft in 1687 was Brian Vickers’s 2002 book *Shakespeare, Co-Author: A Historical Study of Five Collaborative Plays*. Vickers’s book is an impressive piece of scholarship. For each of the five plays he contends were co-authored (*Titus*, *Timon*, *Pericles*, *Henry VIII*, and *Two Noble Kinsmen*), Vickers gives a detailed accounting of their publication history, including a description of the ownership and locality of each extant copy of the text’s original quartos. Vickers then thoroughly reviews the history of the authorship debate of each play. Finally, and exhaustively, he does a careful stylometric analysis in which he compares the compositional and linguistic tendencies of possible co-authors to the same tendencies exhibited by Shakespeare, both within the play at issue and his larger body of work. In his analysis of *Titus*, Vickers gives particular weight to Peele’s use of meter, feminine iambic endings, the use of the vocative case, alliteration and polysyllabic adjectives. He concludes that using these measures to detect the play’s “linguistic fingerprint” demonstrates that George Peele wrote Act 1, 2.1 and 4.1, and that Shakespeare wrote the remainder, the latter point buttressed by the existence of Shakespeare’s better and more prolific use of Aristotelian tropes and schemes. The claims Vickers makes over 95 pages of often aggressive argumentation is compelling. Even the reluctant Weber calls Vickers’s work a “monumental study of [the] collaboration” issue, consisting of a “copious assessment of prior scholarship,” and “a significant new rhetorical analyses of the play” (70).

Peele and Shakespeare constructed the plot and characters in *Titus* during the theater closings of 1592 and 1593, a period in which both were writing other dramas and poetry containing revenge motifs. The Roman revenge story they devised in *Titus* is representative of their respective approaches to vengeance as an animating motivation and is replete with both the revival's philological and topical conceits: a protagonist, a heroic and admirable adherent to the social and political climate of his times, suffers a series of demoralizing losses or thwarted hopes at the hands of a foe. With stylistic flourish, he bemoans his losses or fallen state, and forecasts his ceaseless desire to avenge his misfortune on the malicious antagonist who delivered it. His desire for private redress is restricted by the availability of public justice to which he has either limited or no access because the wrongs he has suffered are not deemed sufficient to warrant official sanction, or because the avenger occupies a station that places his foe out of the reach of public remedy. Faced with such limitations, the avenger must take it on himself to privately redress his loss. The compulsion to avenge is coupled with a psychological reaction to his loss that borders on mania, either real or pretended. His loss seems so phenomenologically overwhelming or disturbing, and its cause so unnecessary or unjust, that his initial resort to violence seems justifiable by the extreme passion he experiences. The path to retribution, however, quickly becomes deformed by an unrelenting and unhinged emotional reaction. To the revived Senecan sensibilities of the 1580s, the quest for revenge appears disordered and a reflection of the moral dangers that necessarily arise when a reasoned, stoic approach to misfortune gives way to a lack of emotional regulation. The presentation of the extremity of *Titus Andronicus*'s theatricality in the

early Peele scenes of the play are a fitting extension of Peele's late-sixteenth-century Oxford style, characterized by Bate as "tedious" classicism, "large-scale" staging, and "high-flown rhetoric." In its earliest scenes, the "Part A" scenes—to use Vickers's designation—of *Titus*, its plot and the formation of its characters, particularly Saturninus, Tamora, Aaron, and Titus himself, are designed to compel a reaction of extreme passion in the avengers and their allies which belies emotional equilibrium or conscious concern for psychological moderation. More interesting, however, is how Shakespeare works from this distinct stylistic introduction and re-orientates the remainder of the play, Part B, its plot and characters, with an ethos reflective of his expansive sense of reflection and introspection, the hallmarks of Renaissance humanism.

In appropriating Senecan source material and style for early modern stage performance, George Peele and other dramatists referred to collectively as the "University Wits" fashioned texts for actual stage production. Senecan plays were "closet dramas," more akin to philosophical dialogues that may not have been intended for performance, or at least rarely used as such. Whether the University Wits and the drama enthusiasts at the English Inns of Court fully appreciated the historicity of Senecan's play is unknown. The theatrical texts Peele and his fellow Senecans produced were infused with "a drama of furor, the classical competitive ethos, heroic anger diffused uncontrollably with a primal force of unreason that cannot be managed or diverted" (Gillies 367). The avenging protagonists are characterized by an explosive extremity, and their expression is displayed with bombastic and exorbitant rhetoric. Ideologically, their response to injury is untrimmed by any reflexive introspection or pious moorings. The

sinister musings of Tamora and Aaron in the “Peele scenes” of *Titus* animate this distressing plight, and the language of their drive and schemes reflect the Senecan sensibilities from which they were conjured.⁵ However, the rhetorical devices and textual content of the remaining scenes, the “Shakespeare scenes,” display a different characterological orientation. Shakespeare’s contribution to *Titus* relies far less on the Senecan stylings of Peele and his Kydian theatricality. Shakespeare positions Titus, Tamora and Aaron with a humanist sensibility. The incongruity that many have observed in the play’s text can be explained by this shift from its initial classicism to its subsequent Renaissance humanism.

The early construction of the character of Aaron the Moor, one of the principal villains in *Titus Andronicus*, reveals the divergent approach these two playwrights used to locate agency in a theatrical context situated in a maelstrom of injury and retribution. Aaron is the second theatrical antagonist of African descent constructed by Peele, following Muly Mahamet, the usurping villain in *The Battle of Alcazar* (1588). Although Aaron is on stage for nearly the entirety of act one, Peele makes him a silent witness to the lurid events that open the play. Throughout the triumphant procession, the sacrifice of Alarbus (adaptations of the play may permit the interpretation that Alarbus is, in fact, Aaron’s son), the emperor Saturninus’s wooing of and betrothal to Tamora the Queen of the Goths (Aaron’s mistress), and the overwrought strife and thinly-veiled peace between Saturninus and Titus, Aaron stands by silently. It is not until 2.1 that Peele gives Aaron’s

⁵ Weber steadfastly insists that Shakespeare wrote 4.1, and recently argued this point convincingly. Nevertheless, I will proceed to ascribe 4.1 to Vickers Part A on the strength of his claims, and substantial consensus they have achieved.

voice through an expository monologue that reveals his amorous history with Tamora and the scope of their designs for Roman destruction. As related by Aaron, these plans are distinct and unrelated to the garish events that open the play. Yet, throughout his lengthy expositional speech we learn nothing of Aaron's interiority or the effect the events of the first act have on him. Moreover, the plan for civic destruction that Aaron first reveals in Part A of the play is not to bring low Titus Andronicus and his sons as an act of retribution, but to destroy Saturninus and the entirety of the empire. Aaron's motive seems purely political, and his wrath is directed to the empire that vanquished and imprisoned him and the Goths and the emperor who, ironically, just enthroned the Moor's illicit lover as Rome's new empress:

To wait, said I? To wanton with this queen,
 This goddess, this Semiramis, this nymph,
 This siren that will charm Rome's Saturnine
 And see his shipwreck and his commonweal's.
 (2.1.18-24)

As Aaron proceeds in the next scene to encourage the ravishment of Lavinia, Titus's only daughter, by Tamora's sons Demetrius and Chiron, we see him not as an intentional aide to Tamora's determination for vengeance, but a moral anarchist, intent on the broadest possible destruction of everything Roman. There is no sense that he is acting out of a desire for personal vengeance or that his taste for destruction is grafted to a larger pursuit of justice or moral equilibrium. His animus is cruelty for cruelty sake, which in a play that displays lurid violence would have some resonance, but seems incongruous for a revenge tragedy. The source of his fury is never developed, unlike the lyrically expressed desire he has for Tamora:

Now climbeth Tamora Olympus' top,
 Safe out of fortune's shot, and sits aloft,
 Secure of thunder's crack or lightning flash,
 Advanced above pale envy's threat'ning reach.
 As when the golden sun salutes the morn
 And, having gilt the ocean with his beams,
 Gallops the zodiac in his glistening coach
 And overlooks the highest-peering hills,
 So Tamora.

(2.1.1-9)

In this respect, Aaron is initially drawn as a lustful and diabolical reprobate who will soon conspire to the carnal domination of Titus's only daughter. His treachery and maliciousness is unfettered and purely reflexive. To be sure, Peele's Aaron is eloquent in his exposition and lyrical in his treachery. He speaks in a patter of imagery, shifting from metaphor to metaphor:

The emperor's court is like the house of Fame,
 The palace full of tongues, of eyes, and ears:
 The woods are ruthless, dreadful, deaf, and dull;
 There speak, and strike, brave boys, and take your turns;
 There serve your lusts, shadow'd from heaven's eye,
 And revel in Lavinia's treasury.

(2.1.127-132)

The character of Aaron we see in Part A of *Titus Andronicus* is a Peelean villain in every respect, which is to say he is a self-descriptive rogue who colorfully, and bluntly, expresses his actions sentiently, but not reflectively.

Shakespeare puts the character of Aaron to a very different use. Shakespeare writes Aaron as a devious trickster, an ingenious plotter, and a devilish principal in pursuit of his own purpose and interests. Shakespeare's Aaron is pithy, clever and full of guile. In his first lines of Part B of *Titus*, we immediately observe the difference. After having inspired Tamora's sons Demetrius and Chiron to take Lavinia for their own

covetous use, Aaron gamely participates in the criminal enterprise, planting evidence against Titus's sons with glee and strategic deliberation:

He that had wit would think that I had none,
To bury so much gold under a tree,
And never after to inherit it.
Let him that thinks of me so abjectly
Know that this gold must coin a stratagem,
Which, cunningly effected, will beget
A very excellent piece of villainy.
(2.3.1-7)

Later, after Aaron viciously facilitates the amputation of Titus's hand in a vain attempt to win the release of the latter's falsely accused sons, Aaron revels in the delight of a villainous deed done well:

I go, Andronicus, and for thy hand
Look by and by to have thy sons with thee.
[Aside] Their heads, I mean! O, how this villainy
Doth fat me with the very thoughts of it!
Let fools do good, and fair men call for grace.
Aaron will have his soul black like his face.
(3.1.198-203)

What is most striking about Aaron's expressiveness extends beyond the comical shrewdness of his language. He ponders, thinks, and reflects. He displays a sense of perceptiveness as he contemplates not only his motives, but the confluence of his intentions with the considerations of others: "He that had wit would *think*," "Let him that *thinks*," and "this villainy / Doth fat me with the *thought* of it!" Shakespeare's Aaron projects inspection and agency. He is not merely a poetic exhibitor of the sensational and metaphoric imagery and revulsion he displayed in Peele's Part A. The character of Aaron that Shakespeare animates is self-possessed and concerned with mental processes: his and others. He is consciously aware of his evil nature and his ownership of it; he is not merely

its narrator. Even when Shakespeare's Aaron speaks metaphorically, his allusions divulge his interiority. Addressing Tamora in their only exchange on stage, he does not merely describe himself with comparative language; he *reveals* himself:

Madam, though Venus govern your desires,
 Saturn is dominator over mine.
 What signifies my deadly-standing eye,
 My silence and my cloudy melancholy,
 My fleece of woolly hair that now uncurls
 Even as an adder when she doth unroll
 To do some fatal execution?
 No, madam, these are no venereal signs:
 Vengeance is in my heart, death in my hand,
 Blood and revenge are hammering in my head.
 (2.3.30-39)

The distinction between how Peele employs Aaron as an outlandish and expressive fiend and how Shakespeare uses the same character to articulate interiority is instructive of how these two playwrights grant agency to their characters and how they imbue them with moral, which is to say reflective, purpose and ethical dimension.

Drama is engaging and compelling precisely because it displays the acquisition or loss of moral profit. Dramatic literature is, distinct from all other forms of written storytelling, the mode that presents moral suasion in the most concrete terms because of its immediacy. Theater demands a particular approach to representation and mimesis, the quality of "lifelikeness, or likeness to an essential and unvarying nature" (Hutson 80). This essential representational nature of dramatic literature was first described by Aristotle in his *Poetics*, and reinforced in the early modern period by Phillip Sidney's *Defence of Poesy* (1595): "[A]n art of imitation, for so Aristotle termeth it in his word *Mimesis*, that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring foorth—to speak

metaphorically, a speaking picture; with this end, to teach and delight” (Sidney 114).

The rapid expansion of theatrical arts in Elizabethan England, both in the number of plays and the sophistication of their dramaturgy, is testimony to the evolution in understanding of the nature of post-classical mimetic representation.

An examination of a play’s ethical projection requires the observation that the essential quality of mimesis in dramatic literature is not merely *what* a play represents, but *that* it represents. The mimetic intentions of dramatic literature are, obviously, essential to understanding it contextually, especially when discerning the moral philosophy contained therein. Shakespeare’s works were, of course, “preliminary mimetic constructions, not broadly in Aristotle’s sense as imitations of human actions but more precisely in Sidney’s sense as representations or ‘notable images’ of the virtues and vices—as representations, to use Hamlet’s phrase, that hold the mirror up to nature ‘to show virtue her own feature’” (Beauregard 10). The ethical vector on which a play is propelled, and which supports and reveals its moral currency, is only visible after we excise the mimetic conceits that dominated the early modern dramatists as they separated and distinguished themselves from the more abstract, moralistic, and allegorical nature of medieval theater. By no small measure, the popular esteem that Shakespeare has possessed for 400 years lies not only in his poetic genius or his often-regaled insightfulness into the “human condition,” but exists by virtue of the fact that he exercised these talents at this particular epoch of intellectual and literary history, and his skill at mimetic staging is essential to a proper historicist and literary understanding of his tropological activity.

Theatrical mimesis is not only the heart of dramaturgy; it is the driving paradigm of the playwright. The immediacy, pacing, and visual nature of Elizabethan theater both demanded and reflected a degree of representational realism and compositional force and consistency that earlier morality plays, with their blunt sanctimony, did not. Sidney's description of the poet's important social and intellectual function captured the epistemological truth of *imitatio* that pervaded the late sixteenth-century intellectual and literary life. His description emphasized that poetics reached beyond a subjective reflection on reality to capture the reality in an objective sense: poetics both described reality and forged reality:

Only the poet, disdainful to be tied to any such subjection, lifted up with the vigour of his own invention, doth grow in effect another nature, in making things either better than Nature bringeth forth, or, quite anew, forms such as never were in Nature, as the Heroes, Demigods, Cyclopes, Chimeras, Furies, and such like: so as he goeth hand in hand with Nature, not enclosed within the narrow warrant of her gifts, but freely ranging only within the zodiac of his own wit (Sidney 113).

Sidney insisted that poetics, generally, and dramatic poetry, specifically, gain their power because they demonstrate through art the inevitable nature of truth (Hunter, "English Drama" 160). Altman is more precise when describing the mimetic presentation of truth in Tudor theater. Mimesis, he contends, converts the general to the particular and thesis to hypothesis. "[The] *hypothesis* returns the question that has been abstracted from the particulars of experience to its natural setting, so that the issue can be examined with greater attention to its specific ethical and emotional content" (Altman 66). Certainly, all previous dramatic epochs claimed this metaphysical ground. But the Renaissance drama that Sidney praised reflected an aesthetic turn as it sought "to translate the melodrama of

what is seen into ideas and generalisations that help redeem it from mere sensationalism” (Hunter, “Rhetoric” 107).

Sidney’s literary apologia was not prescriptive, but normative. He did not merely identify the intellectual and epistemological force of the poet with an aspirational directive. Rather, Sidney insisted that the poet’s act of creative expression of human activity is necessarily superior to the philosopher and the historian in that the poet possessed a capacity to animate and illuminate the boundaries and dimensions of conscious activity. In the four subsequent centuries since the publication of *The Defense of Poesy*, countless other literary theorists have made the same claim. But Sidney’s enunciation of this premise is particularly useful if for no other reason than that we know it had purchase on the writers of his day, most specifically Shakespeare himself. In *A Midsummer Night Dream*, Theseus extols the poet in Sidney’s terms:

The poet’s eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven.
And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet’s pen
Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.
Such tricks hath strong imagination
That if it would but apprehend some joy,
It comprehends some bringer of that joy.
(5.1.12-20)

Shakespeare and Peele approached theatrical mimesis in markedly different ways. Their methods were rooted in two distinct senses of how the theater should engage its spectators. Their co-authorship bridged the conceptions of mimeses that preceded and followed *Titus*, and reflected divergent mimetic theories. Peele’s representationalism was that of the classical period, a rhetorically “brilliant and bombastic style” (Hunter 107) that

promoted entertainment and erudition with elaborate staging and flourishing rhetoric of long set speeches (Bate and Rasmussen xii). The play's initial handling of Aaron's character demonstrates how Part A of *Titus* is epitomized by this mimetic approach. Peele's Aaron is retrospectively expository. Shakespeare's consciously reflective and forward-thinking Aaron embodies a distinctly different "mimetic theory in [which] plays are not modes of logical discourse exploring general ideas and ethical issues, but rather are dramatic representations of visual images of the universal forms of moral philosophy—moral types or essences, if you will, which are much more specific and integral to the representations of character" (Beauregard 10). To put it in Sidney's words, in *Titus* Shakespeare was uniquely positioned to expound upon ideas that "deal with matters philosophical: either moral, or natural, or astronomical, or historical... which most properly do imitate to teach and delight, and to imitate borrow nothing of what is, hath been, or shall be; but range, only reined with learned discretion, into the divine consideration of what may be, and should be" (Sidney 115). Revenge drama, in particular, places these literary forces and their intellectual and emotional yield in sharp relief because of the human compulsion for vengeance as a remedy to inequity. As Woodbridge points out, "Sidney's *Apology* advocates poetic justice, to help literature instill virtue as real life—eminently non-fair—cannot. And we often strain to make tragedies fair" (Woodbridge 39). At least that is the hope as moral courage, or its absence, is observed in others and trounced by unjust circumstances presented on the stage.

Shakespeare's entrance into play-writing marked a moment of punctuated equilibrium in the evolution of drama, in which humanist psychological realism flourished and transparent didacticism retreated. "The expression of philosophy is not the proper aim of Shakespearean drama, and there is a critical distinction between what he calls 'explicit morality or didacticism and the far subtler enactment of moral insights and teachings'" (Beauregard 14). Sidney's *Defence* was published in 1595, and it is fair to presume the point, that "the highest purpose of all poetry is to instruct" (West 71) was widely accepted as an essential epistemological value among poets and playwrights in the early 1590s when *Titus Andronicus* was written. As a uniquely situated and intentional act of mimesis, early modern "plays are not modes of logical discourse exploring general ideas and ethical issues, but rather are dramatic representations of visual images of the universal forms of moral philosophy" (Beauregard 10).

Examination of *Titus Andronicus* and its collaborative authorship allows us to observe how Peele, with his educated classicism and Senecan style, did this work quite differently than Shakespeare. In academic circles throughout mid-sixteenth-century England, Seneca was thought the exemplar of creative dramatic practices, and his tragedies idealized the execution of them. First and foremost, the early moderns thought, Senecanism was didactic because "the concern with teaching is apparent in all the tragedies of Seneca, where the insistent moralizing of the *sententiae* and the closely allied *loci communes* produces a very different tone" than drama had previously allowed (Waith 27). In the earliest iteration of Senecanism in the English Renaissance, in the 1560s, his tragedies drew the attention of law students studying both at the universities

and the Inns of Court. Legal education was, then as it is now, focused on legal precedents or “illuminating theories by example” and the poetic and rhetorically rich plays of Seneca, both in their “performative sense,” their didactic quality, and their attention to discrete instances of emotional conflict was consistent with intellectual activity of the profession. Legal education and “Senecan drama reveals the same tendency: its greatest power is not, as with Greek tragedy, the cumulative effect of a whole play, but rather the thrill of separate dramatic moments” (27). Senecan characters inhabited horrific circumstances and situations that tested their moral courage and capacity, and in doing so displayed the disruption to virtue that emotional extremity inspired. Seneca’s plays were, in this setting, the acme of practical wisdom, where poetic sensibilities, rhetoric activity, and moral realism blended in instructive ways.

Titus Andronicus was composed in this intellectual and civic milieu. George Peele brought to the project and its eponymous character the pathos of Senecanism: a leader of rhetorical power bound to the civic virtues of a classical protagonist. Peele introduced his audience to Saturninus, a brutish and an inconsistent tyrant. Aaron was constructed as strange, malevolent, and foreign: a menacing force of emotive and physical violence. Tamora was conceived by Peele as dethroned queen, an anguished captive, and desperate mother wrought with humiliation and fear. She is forced to witness her son’s summary execution, and determined to pursue a rather mundane brand of revenge. Into this preliminary structure, Shakespeare turned the story away from the Senecan rhetorical style of externalization that dominated Peelean storytelling and reoriented the play to espouse Aristotelian conceptions of practical virtue by imbuing the characters Peele

initiated with dialogue that highlighted the internal struggle of each, and counterpointing their plight with the dangers of imbalance and excessive anger and the harm they cause. This type of tropological engagement was something new. I will now turn to an exploration of how George Peele's previous dramatic compositions foreshadowed his dramaturgical activity in the Part A scenes, followed by a description of how Shakespeare Part B moderated the composition of *Titus Andronicus* through his subtle characterological and ethical mimesis to display the familiar authorial touch seen in abundance in his later revenge dramas.

CHAPTER TWO

GEORGE PEELE'S CLASSICIST APPROPRIATION OF SENEKAN STYLE AND
MOTIFS IN *TITUS ANDRONICUS*

The wise man therefore always holds in these matters to this principle of selection: he rejects pleasures to secure other greater pleasures, or else he endures pains to avoid worse pains.

-Cicero

Attempts to attribute dramatic works of the early modern period like *Titus Andronicus* to the pen of George Peele are nothing new. For nearly two centuries, "Peele's hand has been sought in nearly every masterless play of his epoch" (Sampley, "Peele Authorship" 689). Following Ravenscroft's earliest intimation that Shakespeare's contribution to *Titus Andronicus* was slight, dozens of scholars have attempted to prove that the play was the work of some other playwright. Ravenscroft's 1687 contention was merely speculative, premised on the post-Restoration perception of the play's poor quality, and drawn, by his own admission, from a vague 70-year old account of "some[one] anciently conversant with the Stage" (Bate, "Arden" 79). The first serious attempt to challenge Shakespeare's authorship came from Edward Capell in 1768. Capell, "a great scholar and editor," coupled a historicist approach with an early approximation of modern stylometric analysis to assert with some probity that *Titus* lacked Shakespeare's thematic and metrical styling (Vickers 153, 154-55). Five years later, in 1773, George Stevens proffered the first published suggestion that *Titus* bore the mark of a Peele work. Stevens' suggestion was based solely on a minor vocabulary usage: the word "palliamment" (1.1.182), meaning "robe," appears only one other place, in Peele's

1593 poem *The Honour of the Garter* (157). As Vickers outlines in considerable detail, the debate has raged ever since. Building upon the work of dozens of earlier authorship scholars dating back to Cambridge University editor Dover Wilson in 1948 (Wilson 21), Vickers' changed the foundations of criticism of the play with his multivariate stylometric determination that *Titus* was co-authored by Shakespeare and Peele. Vickers' conclusive attribution of Peele's proper place in the figurative frontispiece of *Titus Andronicus* has largely settled the question of the cause of the play's long-bemoaned stylistic inconsistencies. Vickers investigates the authorial activity in *Titus* in nearly every conceivable way. He exhaustively combs through Peele's earlier works to define and distill what he calls "Peelean diction," by which Vickers means, *inter alia*, Peele's vocabulary, linguistic stylings, metrology, versification, punctuation, source usage, allusion techniques, and staging practices. However, this resolution has only begun to stir the attendant matters that arise from its disparate authorship, such as the dramaturgical inclinations of its authors, its place in the evolution of the revenge drama genre, the cultural function of vengeance and violence in the Elizabethan literature, and, for my purposes, the confluence of these issues with Renaissance developments in moral philosophy and the historical progression of descriptive and normative ethics.

To suggest that we know little about George Peele is an understatement. In terms of biography we have a few more details about Peele than we do about Shakespeare. And the details that we do know have not been illuminated by the crucible of popular and scholarly investigation. For instance, there is a thin trail of reference left by Peele at Christ Church at Oxford where he matriculated in 1579 at the age of 23. We are aware

that he remained associated with the theatrical activities as an amateur dramatist at Oxford for many years after graduation, during which time he received a small stipend for translating and adapting classical dramas for stage production by legal students (Braunmuller vii). Historical records indicate that he married in 1580, and moved to London in 1581 to try his hand as a poet and playwright. In 1584, his first professional composition, *The Arraignment of Paris*, was published (Benbow 8). We know that in 1596 he died a pauper at 40 years of age in relative obscurity. The only reference to his death comes from Meres: “As Anacreon died by the pot: so George Peele by the pox” (Meres 324). Like nearly all the University Wits, including Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Nashe, and Robert Greene from Cambridge, Peele died young. Only his fellow Oxonians John Lyly and Thomas Lodge survived the age of 41.

The history of Peelean scholarship is a case study in critical inertia. Our sense of Shakespeare’s perspicacity is greater, of course, because centuries of critical scholarship have scrutinized every detail of his plays and poetry. Peele scholarship does not afford us the same insights into the nature of his works or his authorship. Only four biographies, ten anthologies, and a few dozen other scholarly sources have attempted to interpret Peele’s plays and poetry. The relatively small amount of criticism devoted to Peele’s works has resulted in an unflattering consensus as to the aesthetic qualities of his plays. George Hunter is dismissive of Peele’s originality when he observed “it is hard to believe that Peele saw in Shakespeare’s mode of writing anything that required his imitation” (Hunter, “English Drama” 193). In his seminal book on pre-Shakespearean English drama, Wolfgang Clemen did not parse words in his broadsided assessment of the

Peelean dramatic canon: “[T]he work of George Peele marks a retrogression as far as the process of ‘dramatizing’ the set speech and making it an integral part of dramatic composition” (Clemen 163). Peele’s twentieth-century biographer A. R. Braunmuller relegates his subject into a secondary class of talent, “a lesser artist” whose works interest us not for their own merit, but because of the place they occupy in our study of the intellectual history and literary culture in which they were written. “Peele offers us a chance to observe a working Elizabethan writer” notes Braunmuller, “whose literary product owes less to the artist’s own individual nature than it does to the corporate natures of the audiences he sought to entertain” (Braunmuller 6, 7). Long regarded as a second-rate talent, Peele has been largely relegated to a minor player in the Elizabethan literary community.

In his own time, however, Peele was not without his devotees. In his 1589 preface to Robert Greene’s *Menaphon*, Thomas Nashe paid homage to Peele, declaring, “I dare commend him unto all that know him as the chief supporter of pleasance now living, the Atlas of poetrie, and *primus verborum artifex*,⁶ whose first increase, *The Arraignement of Paris*, might plead to your opinions his pregnant dexterity of wit and manifold variety of invention, wherein (*me iudice*) he goeth a step beyond all that writ” (Nashe 17). Such ebullient praise, however, was either narrowly shared or briefly lived. By 1598, Meres makes only a passing reference to Peele in *Palladis Tamia*. Meres casts hagiographic esteem to Shakespeare, Spenser and Nashe, but only mentions Peele sparingly to the

⁶ “the premiere artesian of words”

bottom of his lists of English iterations of great Italian poets and the writers of classical tragedies before dismissively noting his premature death (Meres 319, 324).

That Peele's literary reputation has known little reform in 400 years is unfortunate. Quantitatively, his oeuvre is impressive and rivals Shakespeare's prolificacy. Between 1584 and 1594, Peele produced six full length plays and six long form poems.⁷ Moreover, Peele wrote in each of the theatrical genres in vogue in the last two decades of the sixteenth-century. He composed at least one history play, two comedies, and three tragedies which innovatively melded classical and medieval sources into pastoral, mythological, and biblical dramas. By every available measure, Peele's dramatic production was well-regarded though did not lead him to a reliable income. Braunmuller asserts that the breadth of the genres he tried are indicative of a struggling yeoman artist who wrote as his sole means of support: "The single unifying element [of Peele's artistic efforts] appears to be an economic one: Peele wrote to earn money" (10). Unlike his more successful contemporaries, Peele was without a sustaining benefactor or a close association with an established theater company. He was an early modern iteration of a freelance writer, striving for a commission wherever he could find one. His stylistically diverse literary production implies that he used his pen to appeal to a sustainable audience, desperately hoping to strike a vein of financial success. He appears to have

⁷ If, for the sake of a liberal tabulation, we include his apocrypha, the tally of Peele's plays rises to at least eleven from his earliest composition for the London stage, *The Arraignement of Paris*, until *Titus*, his last known composition. During a comparable span, Shakespeare is credited with the composition of thirteen plays.

lacked frequent patrons at a time when patronage was essential to a literary career, and complained of such in the Prologue to *The Honour of the Garter*:

Plaine is my coate, and humble is my gate,
 Thrice noble Earle, behold with gentle eyes
 My wits poore worth: even for your noblesse...
 And you the Muses, and the Graces three,
 You I invoke from Heaven and *Helicon*.
 For other Patrons have poore Poets none
 (*Garter* 585)

Whether his struggle to eke out a place in the Elizabethan literary scene accounted for his broad generic exploration, or whether his scattered generic diversity was a cause of his inability to attract an economically supportive audience we will probably never know.

What we may discern, however, is that the character of his literary production was very much embedded in and a reflection of his times, which likely accounts for why his stylistically and thematically anachronistic plays were not produced after his death. Additionally, his compositional style reflected his abiding and almost single-minded sense of the theatrical value of ornate lyricism and his commitment to emerging English patriotism which was the principle imprint he sought to place on the late 1580s and early 1590s London theater. His plays, while interesting to an Elizabethan theater-goer in the 1590s for their lyrical quality and contemporary sensibilities, are awkward to enact due to their necessarily complex staging and lack of psychological depth or realism.

Thomas Nashe's contemporary assessment of Peele's lyricism, his "dexterity" and "manifest variety" does not seem overwrought. Hunter and Clemen's suggestions that Peele lacked a useful inclination to critical imitation or was hopelessly retrogressive seems unduly harsh. Peele may have, indeed, been the giant of poetry and the "premiere

artisan of words” in the 1580s and 1590s, but a more realistic appreciation for his talent professes that he was a better poet than a playwright. His verse was a rich, lush tapestry of poetic agility. He had a strong command of blank verse, vivid expression and metrical precision. As a dramatist, however, his compositional style was troubled by his formulaic set speeches and unnecessarily congested and drifting stage command. The fault for the flatness of his dramatic composition is not a lack of literary talent or creative imagination. He simply did not possess a clear and consistent dramaturgy; in many respects, his plays read like a series of poetic recitations by stilted characters in front of dumb shows. Peele’s classicalism, as Bate points out, came at the expense of the increasingly popular emphasis of dramatic realism.

Peele’s plays have been broadly classified within the standard Aristotelian genre taxonomy that have been used and deferred to for centuries prior to the advent of modern criticism. *The Arraignment of Paris* (1581-84) is classified by scholars as a pastoral play drawn from mythic sources.⁸ *The Battle of Alcazar* (1588) is regarded as a history play, as is *Edward I* (1590-91). *The Old Wives’ Tale* (1590-94) and *The Life and Death of Jack Straw* (1590-93) are considered comedies in the fashion of other late 1580s and early 1590s plays like John Lyly’s *Endymion* (1588) and the anonymously authored *A Knack to Know a Knave* (1592).⁹ Whether some of Peele’s plays should classify as revenge dramas is a complicated question that begs the threshold criterion of what constitutes a

⁸ Dating Peele’s plays is as complicated a task as crediting him for extant works that long were presumed anonymous. For my purposes, the dates of his plays are based on those ascribed by Bradley Irish.

⁹ Aristotle’s demarcation of comic theater rested on his assertion that such plays were “an imitation of relatively worthless characters; not, however, covering the full range of villainy, but merely the ugly and unseemly” (*Poetics*, 49a32).

revenge drama. An argument could be made that prior to his composition of the Part A scenes of *Titus Andronicus*, Peele was not a revenge dramatist in any conventional sense, or more precisely, in the understated sense that Woodbridge and Kerrigan define the genre.¹⁰ Peele can hardly be described as writer of revenge tragedies of the Aristotelian or Shakespearean form, what Derek Dunne describes as “the group of plays written for the public playhouses that dwell predominantly on the theme of revenge, and have as their focus a protagonist who achieves his revenge at the play’s climax” (Dunne 3).¹¹ His plays were not plotted with the tropes of Greek or late Elizabethan tragedies, such as reversals, recognition, and pathos. Rather, Peele’s plays were “rhetorically tragedies” in the Senecan fashion in which “the dominating role of the set speech and counter-speech” were used “as a specific form of dramatic representation in which events were explained or described in retrospect instead of being directly exhibited on stage” (Clemen 24-25). *Titus Andronicus*, however, is a conventional revenge tragedy, and Peele’s foundational contribution to it justifies a critical assessment of his works to the extent that they included vengeance themes, however casually or obliquely expressed, for their tropological reflections on revenge and retribution as a human activity. There is some incongruence in viewing Peele as a dramatist who incorporated vengeance as a motivated pursuit in most of his plays. His use of vengeance as a device was neither as textually

¹⁰ Woodbridge is careful not to be drawn into a specific definition of the revenge genre, but, relying on Roland Broude, broadly includes dramas wherein the principle plot expounds “extralegal retaliation” or “punishment meted out by the commonweal” against a villain in order to address economic, political, or “deep societal wrongness” (Woodbridge 19-20). Kerrigan suggests the revenge drama is located in theatrical presentations in which an “avenger, isolated and vulnerable, can achieve heroic grandeur” for a “long and agitated grievance” (Kerrigan 3).

¹¹ “Aristotle identifies three elements of the tragic plot: *peripeteia* or surprising reversal, *anagnōrsis* or recognition, and that ‘act involving destruction or pain’ which he calls *pathos*” (Kerrigan 5).

prominent as other more conventional revenge dramatists of the late sixteenth century or as true to philosophical and ethical profundity of the genre as was Seneca. This incongruity may be partly owing to Peele's generic experimentation. Conversely, Peele's uneven handling of revenge as a motif may be the necessary consequence of his underdeveloped dramaturgy.

Peele's dramatic canon owes much to the influence of Seneca in his plays. Peele's plays, regardless of genre, were marked by "the form of Seneca: the five acts each divided by a chorus, the lengthy deliberative speeches, and the quick verbal exchanges" (Winston 31). When Peele's mind first turned toward drama in the late 1570s as a student at Christ Church at Oxford, these devices were not new, but had reached their greatest purchase in academic and aristocratic circles. The first wave of the English Senecan revival was initiated by Heywood's English translations of Seneca's *Troades* (1559), *Thyestes* (1560), and *Hercules Furens* (1561). Heywood gave access to the classical revenge tragedies of Roman antiquity and through them "Seneca provided an important paradigm of tragic style, character and action" (Miola 12). Yet, Heywood did more than simply making the ancient texts available to mid-sixteenth-century readers. He demanded their imitation. In what Dennis McCarthy and June Schlueter deem "the most significant literary event to occur at the dawn of English theatre," Heywood,

exhorted the best young writers at the Inns of Court to try their hand at Senecan tragedy. His prefatory poem [to *Troades*] packages the challenge in a dream meeting with Seneca, in which he recommends several law students by name to the ancient tragedian. The effect was powerful and immediate. Surviving plays by three of those students—Thomas Norton, Thomas Sackville and Christopher Yelverton—responded by producing tragedies in the Senecan style (McCarthy and Schlueter 85).

As quickly as Heywood invited imitation, imitators heeded the call, beginning with Norton and Sackville's *Gorboduc* (1561). Then, in 1581, while Peele began commuting between his professional ambitions in London and his modest financial sources at Oxford, fellow Oxonian Thomas Newton compiled *Tenne Tragedies*, an anthology of recent translations of Seneca's extant plays, and set off the second wave of the Senecan revival. With the composition of Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* the Elizabethan "revenge tragedy became a recognizable dramatic archetype" (Irish 117). Peele's classicist education and professional works stood astride this generic evolution. Consequently, while he may have thought himself as a generic *avant-garde*, as Braunmuller and Cheffaud suggest he did, who tried to blend the conventional usage of lyricism and plotting of successful plays, his plays never hit the mark of critical and commercial success.

Like his fellow University Wits and the other court playwrights of the 1560s, 1570s, and 1580s, Peele was a product of the intellectual rediscovery and refashioning of Seneca's works. Seneca's intellectual reach was considerable because he "was the only tragic dramatist that most Elizabethans knew, and he presented as a model of *bona fide* tragedy a play in which the central problem was treated from distinctly different viewpoints, inviting, in effect, a 'circumstantial' approach to the nature of evil and suffering" (Altman 231). Peele was far more dedicated and indebted to the stylistic characteristics of the revival than he was to the philosophical imperatives of Seneca as an intellectual. "Seneca himself lived through and witnessed, in his own person or in the persons of those near him, almost every evil and horror that is the theme of his writings,

prose or verse. Exile, murder, incest, the threat of poverty and a hideous death, and all the savagery of fortune were the very texture of his career” (Kerrigan 470). Seneca’s tragedies reflection this “circumstantial approach” to moral dilemmas.

Peele was obviously drawn to the way that Seneca wrote tragedy: the language he used, the dramaturgical arrangements he developed, and, most importantly, the stylized horror and extremis in which he positioned his characters were singularly derivative. Peele displayed great powers of imitation of classical structure, themes and style. Tropologically, however, his plays do not probe the deeper stoic sensibility of Seneca’s dramas. “[W]hile [Seneca] took up the subjects of mythology and philosophy, h[is plays were] not considered a great source of mythological learning, and his philosophical works receive only passing attention” by mid-sixteenth-century translators and imitators (Winston 36). To Peele, the allure of Senecan drama was less in its deeper moral edification and more in its impressive theatrical flourish. Peele, chiefly among Senecan imitators, saw that a Senecan protagonist was “a generally representative man who suffers the vicissitudes of fortunes and operations of justice” (49). He, of course was not alone in his appreciation for Senecan spectacle or the edifying difficulties that attend nature’s inconstancy. In Alexander Neville’s dedication to his 1563 translation of Seneca’s *Oedipus* he commends the tropological insights that the Senecan theatrical experience imparts:

[O]nely to satisfye the instant requestes of a fewe my familiar frendes, who thought to have put it to the very same use, that Seneca hymself in his invention pretended: Whiche was by the tragicall and pompous showe upon stage, to admonish all men of theyr fickle estates, to declare the unconstant head of wavering Fortune, her sodaine interchaunged and soone altered face, and lyvely to expresse the just revenge, and fearful punishments of

horrible crimes, wherwith the wretched worlde in these our miserable daies pyteously swarmeth” (Neville A3v).

Neville’s appreciation of Seneca’s creative “invention” captures much of why Seneca resonated with Peele and is reflected in Peele’s own works: fortune’s inconstancy, the suddenness of changes in fate, the just demands of vengeance, and the pitiable condition of life in which these constituents of destiny propel humankind. Neville also captures the reason why such stories were ripe for the stage: they made for great “tragical and pompous show” and they possessed some capacity to teach men “of their fickle” state. But neither Neville’s description of the allure of Senecan models or Peele’s reliance upon Senecan style and themes do justice to the more profound tropology that Seneca sought.

Seneca’s tragedies incorporated and sustained his broader philosophical ideas. Seneca was the great stoic ethicist of Roman antiquity. Unlike the other great classical stoic influences, such as Zeno of Citium or Epictetus, Seneca wrote little of the ontological or epistemological ideas that undergirded stoic thought. Neither his plays nor his philosophical prose expounded on the foundational ideas of atomist cosmology, or the deistic nature of the universe—what classical stoics called the *Logos*. Seneca was concerned with ethics and ethical abstractions: how should people act in accordance with the complex cosmic reality, and what forces and challenges must people perpetuate and resist in order to live in both internal and external harmony. As the risk of greatly oversimplifying Seneca’s important and sophisticated contribution to stoic ethical theory, it is not inaccurate to view his plays, as opposed to his more didactic prose writing, as addressing a single ethical theme. Human beings occupy a unique position in the universe because they possess the capacity to reason. Our reasoning powers permit us to mitigate

our baser instincts, instincts that tend to disrupt our psychological coordination. The pursuit of such harmony, or *oikeiôsis* (“alignment” or “affinity”), demands that we resist excessive passion, and particularly inordinate anger and attachment to worldly things, and psychologically orient our lives to a peaceable acceptance of life’s multitudinous difficulties and losses. In his prose writing, especially his letters, or “epistles,” he explains and expands these ideas in the form of stoic advice in very specific situations. His plays, however, approach stoicism through abstraction by placing disharmonious characters—characters ruled by violent passions—into grievous situations in order to observe how the combination of dire fate and disordered rage cause both internal and external calamity. His tragedies involve the most heinous and unnatural circumstances, from a loving and devout father being served the remains of his slaughtered children by his brother in *Thyestes* to a young queen’s lust for and eventual seduction of her stepson in *Phaedra*. Seneca’s plays depended on the expression and exhibition of characters experiencing a deep sense of moral anguish as they are propelled toward a desire for vengeance, the ultimate manifestation of human irrationality and the great psychological malady to *oikeiôsis*. In short, Seneca’s tragedies argue against emotional excess and the cession of reason. They imaginatively present the inevitable destructive force produced by a disordered collision between passion and reason. In this regard, Seneca’s characters inhabit a chaotic universe and his plays rely on this backdrop to convey their emotional and psychological struggle within it. The tragic circumstances of his characters reveal the all-too-human constraints imposed by inane passion and their performance reveals the infelicity of human emotion.

To extend his ethical reflections, Seneca's plays employed violent and sensational situations in which compelling moral agents met their "miserable days" and "piteously swarm" as Neville described. Without a deeper appreciative for his metaphysical meaning, or if transposed on an early modern culture in which Christian ontology oriented audiences to a different belief in divinity and providence, Seneca's plays present a visceral and rousing catalogue of horrors. Their settings and sensationalistic depictions of suffering and human catastrophe made for an idealized archetype of lurid theater. The early Elizabethan revenge tragedies Seneca inspired were a dynamic cultural expression, even if they misappropriated Seneca's deeper moral purpose. Even without their precise stoic underpinnings, Senecan dramas read and imitated in the early modern period inspired theatrical expressions with a reflective importance. They promoted a new "universe of tragedy [in] a place either of arbitrary shifts of fortune or of ineluctable moral laws. Either way, it is the end of tragedy that counts, and either way that end remains the same: to warn men to put no trust in their own power" (B. Smith 206). Seneca was to Peele a template for linguistic flourish and rhetorical style. And Peele's plays reflected Senecan influence in that he structured dramatic speeches and dialogue in much the same way that Seneca did.

At the exact moment that Peele sought to parlay his success as an Oxonian amateur to the public stage in London, neo-Senecanism was at a crescendo and Peele was singularly located in its orbit to the exclusion of any other perceptible influence. While Joel Altman urges caution before attributing all that was profound and learned about Elizabethan revenge tragedy to Seneca because "it is no longer a critical axiom that

Seneca was ‘responsible’ for Elizabethan tragedy, it seems evident that in one respect, at least, his influence was profound. Seneca was the only tragic dramatist most Elizabethans knew” (Altman 230-31). This was certainly true of Peele, and thus it is impossible to overstate Seneca’s sway upon him. Peele relied exclusively on extended epideictic orations to retrospectively expound his plots, settings, and the motivations of his characters. To the exclusion of more dynamic dialogical interaction between characters, set speeches were the hallmark of Peelean style, what Vickers describes as Peele’s “variegated texture but lack[ing] both uniformity and any organic relation between speech and character” (Vickers 450). Occupying the literary and dramaturgical space between the Senecan revival of the 1560s and its 1580s iterations, Peele’s Senecanism, while impressive in its imitative insights, was wanting for what “later playwrights drew [into their] tragedies to add life to their drama...to animate and sustain the tragedies themselves” (Winston 31). Clemen adds: “Peele does not use all [the] manifold variety in his language as a means of differentiating his *dramatis personae*. There are no signs yet of the association of a particular way of speaking with a particular character, such as we are later to find in Shakespeare and such as was constantly aimed at in the idiom of [Marlowe’s] *Tamburlaine*” (Clemen 167-68). As we will see, this mimetic style not only constrained the situational realism of his plays, but also the moral porosity of his characters rendering them little more than shallow fabulists, or “soulless puppets,” (Clemen 30), capable as they were of ornate elocution.

In at least one respect, Peele did venture away from Senecan restraint and toward the Kydian style that he must have thought popular theater demanded. The earliest

English imitators of classical Roman revenge drama replicated Seneca's placement of violence off-stage. Peele was less constrained in "demonstrating the thematic and atmospheric potential of dramatic revenge" in view of the audience, and making visual spectacle of "the bloodshed and horror" that would characterize revenge dramas for another 20 years (Irish 119). This mode of presentation further explains Peele's tropological limitations. His plays often display a craven appeal to the popularity of violence in late sixteenth-century London, the same culture that relished bearbaiting and grizzly public executions. Peele's plays, consequently, were spectacles of stage violence and blunted the reflexive treatment of avenging violence that Seneca explored with deeper philosophical meaning and the more penetrating psychology of Shakespeare's later reflection on tragic loss, retributive justice, and the physicality of both.

Prior to *Titus*, Peele wrote three plays in which revenge is an important plot device: *The Arraignment of Paris* (1581-4), *The Battle of Alcazar* (1588), and *The Love of David and Fair Bethsebe* (1593-4). Their classicist styling and sensibilities sets the plays on a peculiar footing: while they are lyrically inventive and arresting, they are also simultaneously over-stylized with heightened rhetoric, heavily reliant on Latinate philology and allusion. The moral identity Peele injected into *Arraignment*, *Alcazar*, and *David and Bethsebe*, sought to mirror a Senecan approach to dramatic conflict onto Elizabethan popular sentiment, and in the process muddled the moral philosophy and ethical imagination of both Peele's sources and his audience. He was content to suggest that a simplistic sense of virtue was learnable and suffering avoidable by an unassuming adherence to justice, truth, and fear of the gods. But in the dramatic conflicts that he

composed, Peele displayed a misapprehension of Seneca's deeper, pre-Christian ethical reflections on human suffering. Seneca's "revenge" dramas were focused on a sophisticated contemplation of stoicism and the nature of human anguish: suffering was outside our personal control, thus justifying the stoic "moral conclusion that individuals cannot predict the ultimate direction of their lives" (Winston 51). Peele's works replicated the intensity and emotive framing of Senecan drama, but relinquished the philosophical meditation that Seneca sought to achieve. As an ambitious student and later as a struggling artist, Peele appreciated that "Seneca was indeed in the Elizabethan air" (Arkins 48), and his plays sought to exploit "Seneca's tragedies of atrocity [and their] strikingly popular [and] triumphant endings that audiences clearly enjoyed" (Pollard 1068). His classicist education also permitted audiences to enjoy his erudite use of allusion and literary reference.

The Arraignment of Paris is believed to be Peele's first professional drama written after his relocation to London. *Arraignment* is a short of only 1,233 lines.¹² It is pastoral drama premised on classic mythology and "adopts essential features of both genres" (Clemen 163). Ultimately, the story is an "abject flattery" (Benbow 47) and explicit tribute to Queen Elizabeth, and sets a disjointed allegory by which to arrive at that payoff. *Arraignment* is not a revenge drama in the sense that probes the deep psychological roots or extremity of vengeance as an animating force of moral agents. However, a desire for revenge is a central preoccupation of the play, tempered as it is by its performative context: *Arraignment* "is a court entertainment" (Braunmuller 31). Its

¹² *Titus Andronicus*, by comparison, is twice as long, at 2,558 lines, of which Vickers's designation attributes 783 lines to Peele.

quarto frontispiece makes doubtful that it was, or could, ever be played before any audience that did not include “the Queenes Majeste.” It was not designed for repeated public performance, and we possess no record that indicates that it ever was. *Arraignment* borrows from the traditional genres of the masque and other theatrical forms of court entertainment in its performative intention, and in the fact that without the Queen’s presence its ending would be both nonsensical and impossible to perform. However, *Arraignment* is not a masque or merely an elaborate dumb show. It has a defined structure, narrative and character development, and complex dramaturgy.

The plot of *Arraignment* is appropriated from a nexus of classical Trojan myth and medieval romantic allusions to the Trojan story. Paris, the prince of Troy and husband of Oenone, is named by the Olympian god Jupiter to judge a beauty contest between the goddesses Juno, Pallas or Venus. Paris awards the prize, a golden apple (or “fruite,” or “ball of golde”) to Venus because “she rather pleased me of the three” (3.3.900).¹³ Juno and Pallas, convinced of Paris’s lack of partiality, present a case against him before the fickle and indecisive council of the gods. The Olympian council, in turn, submit the arraignment to Diana, the virgin goddess, empowering her to determine the case. In a moment of high pageantry, Diana decides to award the golden apple to none of the three competitors and, instead, Diana enters the audience in a “collapse of dramatic illusion” (Braunmuller 31), and gives the prize to the actual Queen Elizabeth, “our fayre Eliza our Zabeta fayre” (5.1.136).

¹³ All textual references to Peele’s plays hereafter are taken from *The Dramatic Works of George Peele*, ed. R. Mark Benbow, Elmer Blisten and Frank S. Hook (New Haven: Yale UP, 1970).

The reaction of Juno and Pallas to Paris's original bestowing of the pageant's award to Venus is framed as a dramatic demand for vengeance, and not mere incongruity or peevishness. Juno is particularly indignant in her wish for a damaging and enduring vendetta against Paris:

But he shall rue, and ban the dismal day
Wherein his Venus bare the ball away:
And heaven and earth just witnesses shall bee,
I will revenge it on his progenye.
(531-534)

Moreover, in a small and disconnected subplot, Venus is briefly motivated by a similar desire for vengeance to a slight made against her. She takes offense at a comment by a shepherdess named Thestylis, and devises a "strange revenge upon the maide and her distain to take" (3.5.669), thereby causing her to fall in love with a "foul crooked Churl."

The revenge motives in *Arraignment*, brief and petty as they are employed, foreshadow how Peele will initiate the ethos of revenge in *Titus* in two ways. First, Peele employs revenge as dramatic motivation in *Arraignment*, although this motivation becomes hopelessly muddled by the multitude of characters and the wealth of action crammed in five acts that, on stage, run about 12 minutes each. Peele plays rather loosely with revenge as a theme. A desire for vengeance is expressed by the combative goddesses, but it is not developed as a force that animates their motives. This deficiency is a result of both the motif's brief and underdeveloped reference and the play's overall disunity caused by its "poor development of the action and the author's failure to integrate his plots properly" (Sampley, "Peele Authorship" 690). Amidst a shifting of tone between "two elements...the tragic and the idyllic" (Lesnick 165), vengeance is

used in *Arraignment* as a sort of free floating and ubiquitous aim and lays rather clumsily atop the ill-defined narrative conflict. Thus, the instigation of revenge as a plot driver and character motive is thrown about carelessly and without a deeper psychological resolution. Second, Peele makes use of the revenge theme in a temporal location that has little connection to any ethical system or meditation on the ethical growth attendant with moral agency. *Arraignment* has a classical and mythological setting, and the provocation to revenge is placed in the mouths of peevish and vain pagan goddesses absent any ethical sensibility. The avenging characters, Juno and Venus, have a singular and infantile sense of justice or moral agency. They are merely slighted by the verbal comments of mortals, not an uncommon occurrence in classical mythology. Juno and Venus lack any deeper sense of loss than abject vanity. In *Arraignment*, Peele does not develop vengeance as an instrument of moral agency, nor does he flesh out the broader social, political or psychological manifestation of revenge as a force that creates or destroys characterological virtue.

In *Arraignment's* prologue, Peele starkly sets a strong sense of its initial tragic feel. Ate, the “prologus” and goddess of evil, opens the play with a dramatic overtone that references the eternal compulsion that the gods have to “incite men to wickedness and strife” (Lesnick 165):

Condemned soul, Ate, from lowest hell,
 And deadlie rivers of the infernall Jove,
 Where bloudles ghostes in paines of endless date
 Fill ruthles ears with never ceasing cries,
 Beholde, I come in place and bring beside
 The bane of Troie: beholde the fatall frute...
 Make me begin the Tragedie of Troie.

(Prol. 1-6, 29)

The language is superbly provocative with its ominous references to “lowest hell,” “deadly rivers,” “bloodless ghosts,” and “never ceasing cries.” In its premiere and sole performance, the prologue richly foreshadows a deadly tragedy, “the Tragedy of Troy.” Then, 50 lines later, Peele quickly shifts the tone from the opening’s hellish and supernatural omen to the idyllic setting of the human drama that follows. With lush lyricism, the country goddess Flora describes the Trojan habitat:

As done these fieldes, and groves, and sweetest bowres,
 Bestrewed and deckt with partie collord flowers.
 Along the bubling brookes and silver glyde,
 That at the bottome doth in sylence slyde,
 The waterie flowers and lilies on the bankes,
 Like blazing cometes burgen all in rankes:
 Under the Hawthone and the Poplar tree,
 Where sacred Phoebe may delight to be.
 (1.3.82-90)

In brief juxtaposition, Peele turns the tone from hell-scaped rivers of deadly bloodless ghosts to an alluring pastoral description of the “fair and beautiful” setting of bowers, groves, and variegated delights, demonstrative of Nashe’s praise of Peele as “the premiere artesian of words.”

In addition to Peele’s evocative lyricism, *Arraignement* does have an oblique psychological dimension. While his earliest reference to revenge lacks a discernable meta-ethical projection, Peele offers a deep reflection on the nature of judgment, and specifically on the effect of *judgment about judgment*. The play’s center resides on the unintended effect of Paris’s compulsory role in the Olympian beauty contest, and the consequence of his earnest attempt to give honest assessment upon the vain and temperamental contestants. In act 1.5 Oenone and Paris sing of their love in the same

idyllic tone that Flora used to set their habitat. Oenone has a foreboding fear of the effect of his duty to the contest, and issues a warning to him of the danger that they both face before he pronounces his fateful judgment:

Oenone: Sweet shepherd, for Oenone's sake be cunning in this songe,
 And kepe thy love and love thy choice, or else thou doest her wrong.
 Paris: My vowe is made and witnessed, the Poplar will not starte,
 Nor shall the nympe Oenones love from forth my breathing hart.
 (1.5.314-317)

After this Paris offers his defense with lyrical profundity:

Suppose I gave, and judgd corruptly then,
 For hope of that, that best did please my thought,
 This apple not for beauties prayse alone:
 I might offende, sithe I was gardoned,
 And tempted, more than ever creature was,
 With wealth, with beautie and with chivalrie.
 (4.4.926-31)

Paris recognizes the dilemma he faces. Fatefully, he has become duty-bound to the gods to judge the contest with honesty and sincerity. Yet, with prescience he realizes that the virtuous performance of this duty may not spare him harm. Paris does not grapple with this predicament or probe its effect on his psyche or moral choices. Peele leaves Paris with an undeveloped sense that human activity and disaster often seem correlated but not causal. Thus, *Arraignement* is neither Senecan—in that it does not address the stoic ethic response to the calamities of fate, nor is it Shakespearean—in that it does not use injury to focus reflexively on the possibilities of human agency.

Four years after the completion of *Arraignement*, Peele returned to revenge as a distinct dramatic theme in *The Battle of Alcazar*, Peele's most Senecan play. The play is propelled almost exclusively by set-speeches written in classical epideictic rhetoric. It

reads as a continual prosecution of the savagery of tyranny and the demand for bloody response. The play has prompted an unkind critical history. Clemen regards the play as “a retrograde step” in Peele’s use of rich style and language. (171). Warren Rice panned it as “not a literary masterpiece” (Rice 428). Braunmuller admits the play’s likely Elizabethan allure: “[*Alcazar*] responds very directly to recent international events, but its structural focus on the royal succession also echoes an English audience’s anxiety about their own monarchy,” but ultimately concludes that the play is “unappealing, or stiff, or untragic” (83-84). Chief among its contemporary detractors was Shakespeare, who mercilessly mocked Peele’s bombast in *1 Henry IV*.¹⁴

Alcazar presents a revenge motif that is more recognizable to a modern audience, and closer to the genre’s late 1580s’ conventions. The historical and political tenor of the play, a subject that is beyond my scope here, makes it the most fascinating composition of Peele’s career. In his ubiquitous efforts for a commercial success, Peele drew together numerous, well-researched sources to create a heroic story, one that “had broad affinity with English chronicle histories” (Irish 126) intended for popular appeal. The story is a dramatic telling of the 1578 Battle of Alcácer Quibir, and its domestic and international consequences, and the militaristic adventures of Englishman Thomas Stukeley. Central to my thesis, it represents Peele’s most formal effort to stage a conventional Kydian-styled revenge drama. The play, which “starts as a revenge play” (E. Jones 44), foreshadows the approach Peele would take in *Titus*. *Alcazar* makes prompt, frequent, and explicit allusion to revenge as a motivational force in the minds of its characters. The play then

¹⁴ In *1 Henry IV*, Falstaff’s soliloquy on honor (“Well, ‘tis no matter. Honor pricks me on” (5.1.129) is a mocking allusion to Peele’s *Alcazar*: “Honour, the spur that pricks the princely mind” (1 Prol. 1).

relies on complicated staging with an excessively large cast, and attempts to blend three disparate storylines that are only tangentially related. As a piece of dramatic literature, *Alcazar* does three new things for the Elizabethan stage that appear to be Peelean inventions, and that will be re-tried in *Titus*. First, Peele centers his story on a military hero whose abiding pathos is his self-sacrificial nationalism. Second, Peele introduces the first Moorish character to the English stage, the treacherous and traitorous villain Muly Mahamet. Finally, Peele composed a political story that concludes with the violent deaths of three sovereigns and the ascension of Muly Seth, the brother and uncle of the slain adversaries. To these innovations, Peele adapted three staples of Kydian revenge tragedy: the emotive demand for “Vindicta!”; the addition of a supernatural agency in the form of ghosts to supervise the pursuit of revenge; and the overt suggestion that private justice against a wrongdoer with political authority is necessitated when such circumstances place the villain out of justice’s reach. Vengeance operates as a motif more than as a theme, and its invocation presents as an animating motive rather than a cause of moral reflection. But Peele has started something in *Alcazar* that will resound in *Titus*: Revenge is given a dimension grounded in something deeper than the offense to vanity offered in *Arraignment*. There is a horrific realism to the treachery of Muly Mahamet that demands an act of restorative justice. In this regard, Peele is becoming less about the bombastic and overwrought sensationalism of Seneca, and more conscious of Seneca’s sense of revenge, as an internal emotive driver of loss and tragedy. Still, the play lacks a deeper ethical reflection on the nature of loss, the appeal of revenge to assuage that loss,

and the disharmony that emotionalism causes. Nevertheless, *Alcazar* moves closer to the Senecan employment of horrible fate and the need for justice.

Alcazar is also an example of Peele's innovative attempts at genre dexterity, one in which he attempted to mix the Elizabethan hero play, historical drama, and revenge tragedy. Following closely in the footsteps of Christopher Marlowe, and likely hoping to replicate Marlowe's commercial success in cross-genre works like *The Jew of Malta* (1589-90) and *Edward II* (1592), Peele sought to blend the emerging genre conventions of chronicle histories with the motif of the adventurous and self-sacrificing champion that Marlowe made immensely popular on the Elizabethan stage. Peele, a vigilant observer of the trends of the London stage, surely recognized that the "vengeance had a remarkable life in the so-called hero play, a dramatic form that jump-started the success of Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* (1587); unsurprisingly, revenge was naturally suited to a genre dedicated to the thunderous exploits of emperors and tyrants" (Irish 126). Peele's cross-generic innovations did not end with *Alcazar*. In his final solo written play, *David and Bethsebe*, Peele would try to meld multiple genres into one.

There are surprisingly few extant examples of biblical plays from the Elizabethan era, though there is little doubt that they were performed, usually as a theatrical company's secondary repertoire piece. Annaliese Connolly's examination of Henslowe's *Diary* and the Stationers' register demonstrates that the reliable historical record identifies thirteen biblical dramas were prominently composed and presented in the 1590s by Shakespeare's rival companies. Of these thirteen known plays, we have the texts of only two (Connolly). One of those two is Peele's *The Love of David and Bethsebe*. Paul

White argues that both social and legal issues conspired to discourage if not outlaw such public and profane theatrical exhibitions of biblical themes (134). Whatever accounts for the diminution of biblical dramas, they clearly stood as a distinctive genre, although one for which Shakespeare showed no interest. Peele, on the other hand, with his broad interest in genre experimentation, did. Robert Kilgore argues that Peele composed *David and Bethsebe* for the specific purpose of testing the boundaries of genre amalgamation (11). Peele, it seems, kept looking for an audience, and *David and Bethsebe* was his final attempt to carve out his own place in Elizabethan theatrical life.

David and Bethsebe tells four separate stories about the life of King David drawn from 2 Samuel 13 and 1 Kings 1.¹⁵ The play's use of the latter events of David's life is one that finds favor with Braunmuller, who accounts the biblical source as "one of the finest texts in all of Scripture" (107). In typical Peelean fashion, the separate plots are told sequentially and without any textual integration. The play opens with King David's seduction of and affair with Bethsebe, and his removal of her first husband, Uriah, by military assignment which ultimately results in his death. This plot, from which the play gets its name, is followed by storylines regarding the rape of David's daughter Tamar by her half-brother Ammon and the revenge taken against Ammon by Tamar's brother Absolon; Absolon's rebellion against David; and royal succession of David and Bethsebe's son Salomon.¹⁶ Peele's version of the principle events of David's kingship

¹⁵ All scriptural references to the New Revised Standard Version (Chicago: American Bible Society, 1997).

¹⁶ In both biblical exegesis and Peele scholarship, "Thamar" is often rendered "Tamar" or "Tamora," a character name that Peele will use again.

follows closely the biblical account with one notable exception: Absolon's revenge against Ammon. In the biblical account, Ammon becomes consumed with sexual desire for the virginal Thamar, and devises an elaborate subterfuge to be alone with her in his bedroom. Upon her arrival, Thamar resists Ammon's advances with an accusatory plea that his assault on her will be a cause of great shame for her and a cause of revilement for him. In a finally act of fatalistic desperation, Thamar urges him to seek their father's permission to marry. Ammon ignores this suggestion, rapes her, and immediately begins to loathe her, casting her from his room. Thamar, in despair, flees to her brother Absolon who consoles her and pledges to avenge her rape. Absolon swears to pursue justice with a vow to "hunt occasion with a secret hate / To worke false Ammon an ungracious end" (II.360-361).

Peele's rendition faithfully follows the biblical story to this point, but then diverges from the scriptural source material in ways that create incongruity in the plot and that mitigate the moral ambition of the Old Testament story. As Sampley points out: "A comparison of the play with the Bible shows that the difficulties arise from the fact that Peele omitted several important links in the Old Testament account and in presenting the portions of the story which he retained, neglected to take account of his omissions" (Sampley, *David and Bethsabe* 664). Specifically, in the biblical narrative, David upon hearing of the rape becomes angry but fails to punish Ammon (2 Sam. 13:21). Two years later, Absolon, steadfast to his vow, invites Ammon to a feast, and after getting him drunk commands his servants to kill him (2 Sam. 13:29). In Peele's play, Absolon pleads with David to take immediate revenge, which David angrily agrees to do. David,

however, is far too consumed with his intention to dispatch Uriah, urges Absolon to be patient (“revenge not thou this sin” II. 394), ultimately neglects to address his daughter’s ravishment. Peele compresses the biblical story such that Absolon immediately plots a feast for all of David’s sons, and in short succession kills Ammon himself, and then flees for three years to the kingdom of Geshur, and the protection of his maternal grandfather.

Peele’s adaptation is further distinctive from the source material by the alternation of David’s reaction to Thamar’s rape. Again, in 2 Samuel, David is angered by Ammon’s violation of his daughter, but is unwilling to commit his eldest son and heir apparent to a temporal punishment. Central to the biblical moral is David’s self-serving refusal to justly respond to Ammon’s act of sexual lechery. The biblical writers draw an obvious parallel between David and Ammon, and Bethsebe and Thamar. However, not only is David condemned in God’s eyes for his adultery and the murder of Bethsebe’s husband, but he is further divinely convicted by his failure to rightly restore his own house, a miscarriage of justice that divinity will not countenance. Peele’s account disrupts this parallel by placing David and Ammon’s crimes in a sequence that diminishes the larger purpose for David’s penance and he mitigates the biblical description of David’s moral culpability by enjoining him in the call to avenge Thamar. In scripture, David is guilty of both the commission of his lustful sin and his vain lack of introspection and willful indifference to Ammon’s sinfulness. Peele also confuses the moral effect of David’s punishment by placing at least some of the disorder visited upon the Davidic house on Absolon’s rashness in taking immediate revenge on Ammon.

Why would Peele reorder the story in a way that diminishes the important biblical ethic of David's turn from godliness? The answer is not that Peele misapprehended the biblical story, but rather that he was trying to re-sequence the story for dramaturgical reasons without adding the reflective nature of the original. As White contends, Peele's telling of the David and Bethsebe story was an intentional act of genre blending. *David and Bethsebe* retains all the hallmarks of a Peele's Senecan appropriation of rhetorically lofty set speeches, and his attempt to create a new, engaging, and commercially rewarding theatrical experience. Like his previous forays into the dramatic presentation of vengeance, Peele proved to be a master of poetic presentation but without the psychological mimesis and moral agency that injured characters inhabit, or the broad ethical dimension of the biblical account of David's impiety. Peele composed *David and Bethsebe* at the same time Shakespeare was writing *The Rape of Lucrese*, and its "elaborate psychological analysis" of the Ovidian tale of disordered lust and "the complicated relationship between civic and domestic order, between public and private realms, between sexual and political violence" (Cheney 695). The distinct way of handling the topic of sexual violence and political disorder by these two authors would soon be enjoined on a new play with similar reflections on sexual subjugation, physical violence, and the resulting moral porosity: *Titus Andronicus*.

Peele's use of the motive of vengeance in *Arraignement*, *Alcazar*, and *David and Bethsebe* displayed a classical ethos of revenge, as that concept was developed by Seneca, and the humanist refinement of the moral dimension of vengeance articulated by Shakespeare and later Elizabethan dramatists. Peele employed the emotive power of both

circumstantial anguish and a personal sense of retributive justice to place his characters in conflicts that would entertain theatrical audiences, but without the psychological insight or ethical gravity that occurs when the emotional trauma of intense injury is presented on stage. In *Arraignement* the perceived injury was trivial and vainglorious. In *Alcazar* the retribution was impersonal and lost in the larger political ideas of the play. And in *David and Bethsebe*, the theme was neglected in Peele's attempt to mirror two plots in a disordered allegory and the confusion of genre experimentation. *Titus Andronicus* would be his final effort as a playwright to use the theme of vengeance in a way that animated characters with moral identity and verisimilitude. Of course, we have no way of knowing whether he was able to achieve this purpose on his own because the play that we know was not completed by him. He only began the story and set the initial trajectory of the four principle characters in *Titus Andronicus*. Reading Part A of *Titus* in isolation suggests that he remained bound to his superficial sense of how revenge can inform moral growth. The play that Shakespeare inherited from Peele was marked by the usual dramaturgical problems of a Peelean play. The first act is arresting, flamboyant, and emotionally excessive. It is premised on a triumphant pageant of an imperial election and the return of a virtuous military hero. And it proceeds with the introduction of the play's three villains, Saturninus, Tamora and Aaron, and the eponymous protagonist. The three villains are strangely allied and unevenly presented, lacking the psychological realism that the later acts of the play would permit. A look at each of these four principle characters illuminates the divergent approach that Peele and Shakespeare took to character development and moral animation.

Saturninus begins the play as a spasmodic character. In the first act he displays a tendency to abruptly, often violently, change motivations and behavior in ways that make it difficult to view him with a consistent mental or emotional center. Admittedly, Saturninus is a tyrant, but even his tyrannical nature is displayed with a lack of realistic inconsistency. Saturninus opens the play with a demand for his election to emperorship, but his campaign speech is framed in such a way that it is impossible to see his ascent to political ambition as anything but sophistry. The setting is the gathering of Roman citizenry outside of the Capitol and Senate chamber. The language that Peele uses is classical Senecan epideictic rhetoric:

[To his followers] Noble patricians, patrons of my right,
 Defend the justice of my cause with arms.
 And countrymen, my loving followers,
 Plead my successive title with your swords.
 I was the first-born son that was the last
 That wore the imperial diadem of Rome:
 Then let my father's honors live in me,
 Nor wrong mine age with this indignity.
 (1.1.1-8)

The language that Peele uses to establish Saturninus's electoral argument is noteworthy because it reflects the patriotic and militaristic themes that animate *Alcazar*. Saturninus's speech focuses on a particular appeal to political justice that demands a sense of tradition and an ascent to power that has purchase in early modern English society, not one that realistically defined political means in ancient Rome. And that appeal was not literarily imaginative or poetic. Saturninus expresses his claim to the throne with the words "patrons," "pleaded with swords," "successive title," "first-born son," "father's honors" and this interesting use of language: "wrong mine age with this indignity." This is a

classical Peele seeking to press with little context that Saturninus is a compelling candidate making a righteous and lawful demand for kingship and empery. The ethos of his campaign is made without any development and no prefatory sense of his character. His credibility is premised on his legal “right” and the “justice” of his claim that nevertheless demands the use of “arms” and “swords” in spite of his political reasoning that as “a first born son” who is entitled to “successive title” as an extension of his “father’s honor.” Saturninus concludes his presentation with the self-serving insistence that rejection of his campaign would be a “wrong” and an “indignity.” While his is an appeal to tradition and successive stability, it is offered with no more spirit than an impetuous child. The presentation is hollow—a far cry from the more sophisticated claim to sovereignty that, for instance, the Duke of Gloucester would make in *Richard III* in 1592.

In order to create a political contest in the election of a new emperor, Peele needs a political opponent and places this candidacy in Saturninus’s brother, Bassianus. The political contest between Saturninus and Bassianus has very little to do with an authentic legal claim to the Roman throne. Peele is not reflecting a well-matched contest for sovereignty, but rather is pitting the brothers against each other for reasons that will play out on a personal level later in the scene. Bassianus’s plea is weakly premised on ideas of “graciousness,” “justice, continence, and nobility” (1.1.9-17). And while we later learn that Bassianus possess the virtuous attributes he claims, as a political platform, his argument is undeveloped and lacks any sense of urgency, logical force, or dramatic immediacy. The words that Peele uses, such as “gracious,” “suffer,” “virtue,”

“consecrated,” “continence,” and “nobility” reflect this conveniently constructed conflict. Saturninus and Bassianus are not being genuinely pitted against each other in any authentic contest for power. They are merely being placed in shallow opposition without a dramatic effect. The contest lacks the dynamics of political force that Shakespeare would use in later Roman plays such as *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, in which political rivalry was undergirded with more richly devised claims for stability and political acumen, claims that demand a deeper sense of character.

The electoral dispute between the two imperial brothers is promptly resolved in a way that is purely expository. Marcus Andronicus, the Roman tribune and brother of Titus enters the stage aloft to declare the election decided. In declaring that Titus has already been elected, Marcus begins his set speech with language that is meant solely to move the plot—a Peelean shortcut and substitute for more dynamic storytelling, and fails to build any sense of the larger personal motives or characteristics of the principle roles. “Princes that strive by factions and by friends” Marcus begins before proceeding to give the most epideictic rhetorical speech of the entire play, reflective of Peele loose rhetorical moorings. He describes Titus as “a nobler man, / A brave warrior lives not to stay within the city walls” (1.1.25-26). He announced that “the people of Rome” have elected Titus “for the empery.” Marcus concludes his lengthy speech by urging Saturninus and Bassianus to peaceably,

entreat, by honor of his name
Whom worthily you would have now succeed,
And in the Capitol and Senate’s right,
Whom you pretend to honor and adore,
That you withdraw you and abate your strength,
Dismiss your followers and, as suitors should,

Plead your deserts in peace and humbleness.
(1.1.39-45)

Saturninus immediately jumps from impetuous prince to peaceable citizen, and meekly concedes his campaign: “How fair the tribune speaks to calm my thoughts” (1.1.46).

Following his brother’s concession, Saturninus promptly ends his campaign with patriotic submission:

Friends that have been thus forward in my right,
I thank you all and here dismiss you all,
And to the love and favor of my country
Commit myself, my person, and the cause.
(1.1.56-59)

Saturninus’s demonstration of sanguinity will be short-lived. Having set this initial setting for Saturninus’s character, Peele begins a lengthy and troublesome display of Saturninus’s character throughout act one. Saturninus is presented as irrational to the point of being unintelligible. Despite the considerable attention that Peele gives to Saturninus, Shakespeare will do nothing with the character. Saturninus nearly disappears from the play after act 1.

Following Titus’s triumphant entry into the city and ritual burial of his sons, he is notified by Marcus of his election to the imperial throne to “help set a head on headless Rome” (1.1.185). Titus refuses the title. Having served Rome as a “soldier forty years” he desires retirement, “not a scepter to control the world.” (1.1.193,199). Saturninus immediately sheds his peaceful surrender and returns to his call for armed conquest of the throne:

Romans, do me right.
 Patricians, draw your swords and sheathe them not
 Till Saturninus be Rome's emperor.
 (1.1.203-205)

His call to arms is further occasioned with a sudden curse at Titus, as if picking a fight with the Andronicus family that has no context and need not be made: "Andronicus, would thou wert shipped to hell / Rather than rob me of the people's hearts!" (1.1.206-207). Just as quickly, Titus graciously and patriotically consents to Saturninus's election, causing Saturninus to turn again, and expresses great platitudes to his vaunted general, offering to wed his daughter in thanks for the Titus political support.

Titus Andronicus, for thy favors done
 To us in our election this day
 I give thee thanks in part of thy deserts,
 And will with gentle deeds requite thy gentleness.
 And for an onset, Titus, to advance
 Thy name and honorable family,
 Lavinia will I make my empress.
 (1.1.234-240)

Less than 20 lines later, the fickle Saturninus renounces his betrothal to Lavinia and casts his eye to Tamora, the imprisoned Goth queen:¹⁷

--Clear up, fair Queen, that cloudy countenance.
 Though chance of war hath wrought this change of cheer,
 Thou com'st not to be made a scorn in Rome;
 Princely shall be thy usage every way.
 Rest on my word and let not discontent
 Daunt all your hopes. Madam, he comforts you
 Can make you greater than the Queen of Goths.
 (1.1.263-269)

¹⁷ Even within this small plot point, the text and stage directions conspire to create an additional confusion as to whether Saturninus affected an actual marriage to Lavinia, only to renounce the marriage when he chose Tamora as a more suitable bride. At least one mid-seventeenth-century annotator of the First Folio, William Johnstoune, read it this way (E. Smith 134).

Upon liberating her and her sons, he escorts the Goth's off stage. In his absence, Bassianus professes his love for Lavinia. Titus, failing to realize that Saturninus has renounced the familial union with Lavinia takes umbrage with Bassianus and his sons' support for Lavinia and kills his son Mutius. Following the scuffle, Saturninus returns to the stage and returns to cursing the Andronicus family:

I'll trust by leisure him that mocks me once,
Thee never, nor thy traitorous haughty sons,
Confederates all thus to dishonor me.
Was none in Rome to make a stale
But Saturnine? Full well, Andronicus,
Agree these deeds with that proud beg of thine
That said'st I begged the empire at thy hands.
(1.1.299-307)

Thus, within the space of 300 lines, Peele has presented an imperial candidate who sought election, quickly and peacefully conceded the diadem to Titus, called for an armed coup d'état, rewarded Titus's political support, pledged to marry Titus's daughter, scorned that daughter for the enemy queen, proposed to the foreign queen, and called Titus and his sons traitors. In the remaining 100 lines of the act, Saturninus turns on his brother Bassianus, calls Bassianus's love of Lavinia a "rape," gives imperial authority to Tamora, and accuses Lavinia of unfaithfulness to his love for her. Even as a psychotic despot, the development of Saturninus as a character exceeds the boundaries of believability. Dramaturgically, Peele's handling of Saturninus suggest either a hurried or an immature sense of dramatic structure and verisimilitude.

The Tamora character is similarly consistent. She just as quickly precedes from a humbled prisoner of war and the loving mother of Alarbus, pleading for his life, to a gracious imperial bride ("If Saturninus advance the Queen of Goths, / She will a

handmaid be to his desires, / A loving nurse, a mother to his youth” 1.1.330-332), and, finally, an insincere apologist for the Andronicus family:

The gods of Rome forbend
I should be author to dishonor you.
But on mine honor date I undertake
For good Lord Titus’ innocence in all,
Whose fury not dissembled speaks his grief.
(1.1.434-438)

Peele designs Tamora to reflect sinister intentions, and her shifting motives and alternating allegiances bear on her deeper plans to avenge Alarbus’s execution. But there is nothing subtle or cleverly oblique about Peele’s construction of her character. With effective lyrical force, he portrays her grief at Alarbus’s cruel sentence, but thereafter her words and actions are presented with unartful transparency, and her characterization as a sort of early modern femme fatale is so superficial as to deprive her of any morally compelling commentary on the depth of her loss or the emotional or psychological need for retribution. We never see her reflect on the effect of Alarbus’s death has on her ethos or psyche. We are left to presume that his death had such an effect.

Of course, the final principle character that Peele constructs is Titus himself. In Titus, Peele perfects his version of the archetypical Senecan hero. As we have seen in *Arraignement*, *Alcazar*, and *David and Bethsebe*, Senecan heroes virtue operates through patriotism and noble service. Titus’s arrival at the capital is occasioned by two civic duties: his laudatory procession of his sons fallen recently in battle with the Goths—an indication of Titus’s patriotic solemnity and militaristic sense of honor, and his delivery of prisoners—both as trophies of Roman conquest and gifts to the pro-civic empire. Titus, impassive and long-suffering, sees civic duty as his religion, and his life’s work

and progeny as his contribution to the life of the empire. His role as military commander and progenitor of “five and twenty valiant sons” (1.1.79) are indistinguishable, because his labors, professional and familial, are directed to one end: Roman glory. As he claims, at the moment of his triumphant entry into the city, with coffins bearing his slain sons in tow:

Cometh Andronicus, bound with laurel boughs
 To re-salute his country with his tears,
 Tears of true joy for his return to Rome.
 (1.1.74-76)

Titus’s expression of grief at the great obsequy is eased by his attendant duty to place his sons in the ancient sepulcher, “their latest home / with burial amongst their ancestors.” (1.1.83-84). The Andronici family tomb itself, the “sacred receptacle of my joys / Sweet cell of virtue and nobility,” holds the central power in Titus’s moral sphere because his sons’ patriotic mortal sacrifice the highest moral good. Peele’s Titus practices a sort of civic religion, and he reflects a Senecan awareness of mythic allusion, comparing himself to King Priam as his unburied sons “hover on the dreadful shores of Styx” (1.1.88). Titus’s piety is directed toward the city and the empire and their welfare is his only moral touchstone.

Peele’s treatment of the sacrifice of Alarbus is a further articulation of the patriotic moral center that Titus inhabits. Tamora’s plea to Titus to spare her eldest son is cleverly premised on two claims that she hopes will have sway with Titus. First, she appeals to his sense of noble dignity and begs that he grant clemency because “Sweet mercy is nobility’s true badge” (1.1.119). Second, she entreats him to see patriotism and

military duty as a reciprocal obligation that her sons exhibited in the same way that the slain Andronici sons did:

But must my sons be slaughtered in the streets
For valiant doings in their country's cause?
Oh, if to fight for king and commonweal
Were piety in thine, it is in these.

(1.1.112-15)

But, despite the logic of her plea, Titus is unmoved. In Titus's moral calculus, death is not the great demarcation of human worth. Dutiful sacrifice is the highest value, and as his sons did mortal sacrifice, so too must one of hers. In Titus's mind, there is a moral equivalency between his sons' deaths and the sacrifice of Alarbus that is unregulated by any obligation to traditional deism. The demand for Alarbus's execution by Titus's surviving sons is one worthy of respect: "Religiously they ask for sacrifice. To this your son is marked, and die he must" (1.1.124-25).

Titus's final reaction to the death and burial of his martyred sons is a curious lament, and one that reflects the ethos of Senecan heroes. Life is cruel and callous, and its surrender is strangely inviting.

In peace and honor rest you here, my sons;
Rome's readiest champions, repose you here in rest,
Secure from worldly chances and mishaps.
Here lurks no treason, here no envy swells,
Here grow no damnèd grudges, here are no storms,
No noise, but silence and eternal sleep.

(1.1.151-156)

Similarly, Titus views his declination of the throne as an act of patriotic duty. His role in the empire is as a soldier, not as a statesman. Having served his country for 40 years, he has completed his duty. The crown, he protests, is not an office that fits him. Rather, he

defers emperorship to the reigning family: “Upright, he held it, lords, that held it last,” Titus declares, and passes the role of rule to Saturninus. When Saturninus rewards the Andronicus family with the selection of Lavinia as his wife and empress, Titus greets the news with genuine pleasure: “[I]n this match / I hold me highly honored of your grace.” (1.1.244-45). The honor of his daughter’s appointment as empress is, in fact, so great, that when her surviving brothers attempt to intercede on her and Bassianus’s behalf, Titus sees their gesture as an act of treason. When Lavinia is carried off by Bassianus and Lucius, Titus assures Saturninus that he will “soon bring her back” (1.1.288), and when thwarted by his son Mutius, he does not hesitate to draw his sword and kill Mutius instantly. The murder of one of his four surviving sons seems an odd reaction of a father who, moments earlier, laid his battle-slain sons to rest with majestic piety. But, again, the mortality of his sons is not their principle value to Titus. Their honor and duty to the empire define their worth in his eyes. When Lucius complains that Titus has killed Murius unjustly, Titus is swift to disown them both: “Nor thou, not he, are any sons of mine. / My sons would never so dishonor me.” (1.1.294-95) Titus is as quick to indict and execute one of them for treason as he is to hallow their sacrifice for the country’s cause.

When Saturninus, now preferring Tamora to Lavinia, rebukes Titus and directs his displeasure at the entirety of the Andronicus family, Titus is deeply aggrieved: “Oh monstrous! What reproachful words are these?” “These words are like razors to my wounded heart.” (1.1.308, 314). He continues to blame his sons’ perceived dishonor, and then Marcus’s as well, then to cast any blame for the sudden reversal of Lavinia’s fortune on the inconstancy of Saturninus:

No foolish tribune, no. No son of mine,
Nor thou, nor these, confederates in the deed
That hath dishonored all our family.
Unworthy brother and unworthy sons!
(1.1.343-346)

Only reluctantly will he permit Mutius to be buried in the tomb which is, in his mind, is sanctified as a place for the honored dead.

Peele's construction of plot and characters in *Titus Andronicus* is clearly a reflection and an extension of his usual Senecan dramaturgy. He continues to employ long set speeches and places characters in oppositional conflicts attuned to the lurid nature of the plot. But as with his previous dramas in which revenge is proffered as a motivating force, the characters do not express moral identity, nor do they reflect on their moral process or seek ethical progression. Their behaviors and their words are constructed to permit horrors to be displayed for audience consumption. But Peele does not place his characters in an ethical framework that reveals the larger stoic morality that Seneca sought, nor does he carve a space for them to reflect a realistic sense of moral purpose or internal reflection on the nature of their suffering and the psychological need for retribution. The work of converting Peele's final dramatic effort, the Senecan orientation of the Part A scenes of *Titus Andronicus*, into a viable stage production with moral profundity lie ahead, and with it a different and more substantial emphasis on the moral agency of its characters, their rhetorical engagement, and their encounter with vengeance.

CHAPTER THREE

SHAKESPEARE'S *TITUS*: THE ETHOS OF REVENGE AND
ARISTOTELIAN ETHICS

Let us, therefore, study the incidents of this, as philosophy to learn wisdom from, and none of them as wrongs to be revenged.

-Abraham Lincoln

That to study philosophy is nothing but to prepare one's self to die." The reason of which is, because study and contemplation do in some sort withdraw from us our soul, and employ it separately from the body, which is a kind of apprenticeship and a resemblance of death; or, else, because all the wisdom and reasoning in the world do in the end conclude in this point, to teach us not to fear to die.

-Michel de Montaigne

While we know that *Titus Andronicus* was authored jointly by George Peele and William Shakespeare, we do not know how their collaboration was conducted. Perhaps Peele began a typical Senecan-styled tragedy, with his customary lyrical richness, long set speeches, classical allusion, and which touched referentially on vengeance as an animating motive, but was unable to complete the play beyond what is now designated as acts 1, 2.1, and 2.2.¹⁸ Such a play would be much akin to *Alcazar*—a story of political intrigue merging familial discord and civic ambitions with militaristic overtones and a

¹⁸ Vickers' contention that Peele wrote act 4.1 poses additional complications to any theory of how the play was collaboratively constructed. Vickers insists that in addition to the Peele's authorship of the play's first 656 lines (1.1-2.2), Peele also wrote 130 lines of the beginning of the penultimate act. Thus, Vickers suggests that Peele must have had a larger role in the drafting process or been involved in the completion of the final script. In William Weber's stylometric argument in opposition to the inclusion of 4.1 in the Peele scenes, he premises his textual evidence on this inexplicable attribution of scene division: "The questionable detail in Vickers's claim should be readily apparent: why do the Peele scene appear in a continuous 600+ line section at the beginning of the play *as well as* a lonely scene in the penultimate act?" (Weber 70).

tangential suggestion of the need for “sharp revenge” (*Titus* 1.1.137; *Alcazar* 1.1.88).

After Peele abandoned the play, Shakespeare, a young playwright with only a handful of full-scripted credits to his name, was commissioned to complete what seemed a promising start. Conversely, *Titus* might have been a planned collaboration, with the authors operating from an outline and designated scene assignments. Whether “Peele may have begun the play and cast it aside, or [the] break [in scene composition] simply represent the division of authorship” (Taylor and Loughnane 491) *Titus* resembles other Shakespearean collaborations in one telling respect. In every play in which convincing evidence of co-authorship has been demonstrated, Shakespeare did not write the opening scenes, which suggests that Shakespeare was frequently the inheritor of unfinished works or a “fixer” of plays that had promising beginnings but remained incomplete or unsatisfactory (Taylor, “Collaborate” 7). Jonathan Bate, the once recalcitrant conservator (to use William Weber’s expression for a proponent of sole authorship), has come to appreciate the role Shakespeare seems to have assumed as the mechanic of stalled plays:

Shakespeare seems to have begun as a fixer-up of old plays. Some of his earliest original works were collaborative—perhaps a scene or more for the domestic tragedy of *Arden of Faversham*, almost certainly the Countess of Salisbury scenes in the history play of *Edward III*. There are signs of George Peele’s hand in *Titus Andronicus* and Thomas Nashe’s in *Henry IV, Part I*, though in neither case is it entirely clear whether Shakespeare was revising their earlier work independently or actively co-writing with them. Young Shakespeare was in considerable measure a collaborative author. (Bate and Thornton 43)

The term “collaborative author” in this context may be misleading because there exists no evidence to suggest any of the plays Shakespeare co-authored were the product of a concerted writing arrangement. Co-authorship of early modern dramas may have been a

matter of economic utility, an arrangement that permitted the salvaging of bad plays and the completion of more plays, more quickly. The pressure on producers to build an expansive repertoire for their companies was immense. As Vickers notes, extant theatrical records from late sixteenth-century London reveals that “dramatic companies were evidently used to receiving plays in installments, the ‘act’ forming a unit of composition and payment” (Vickers 28). While the demand for new plays for the London stage was great, so was the supply of such “installments.” Portions of scripts were quickly provided by playwrights in need of a prompt fee. This “hand-to-mouth existence of many Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists” suggests that countless “piecemeal” acts and scenes were delivered to Phillip Henslowe and his rival producers, many of questionable quality and little dramaturgical potential (32). Gary Taylor takes a more romanticized view of the business realities of early modern theater companies. In opposition to Vickers’ more monetized historiography, Taylor suggests that the aesthetic value of theatrical compositions must have been the preeminent concern of playwrights and theater owners. Consequently, collaborative writing must have been a means to a creatively purposeful end. Early modern “collaboration,” Taylor insists, “cannot be explained by simple economics of time or personnel. The motive [to collaborate] cannot be quantitative. It’s not about the numbers. It must be qualitative, and therefore phenomenological. Collaboration in some way improved the human experience” (Taylor, “Collaborate” 4). Of course, we lack the discard of rejected and unworkable scripts to ever know the base realities of theatrical economics and how they shaped the collaborative process.

If Vickers, Taylor, and others are correct, and early modern collaboration was marked by some confluence of economic necessity and the improved quality of dramatic collaboration, then Shakespeare's skill as a "play fixer" was in demand. By Taylor's account, *Titus Andronicus* was Shakespeare's third play, following *Two Gentleman of Verona* (1588) and *Arden of Faversham* (1588), the former authored by him alone, and the latter being the first of his 13 collaborations.¹⁹ The fact that Shakespeare did not draft the opening scenes of any co-authored play suggests he was adept at taking another's composition and projecting the characterological and plot construction in a dramaturgically interesting and useful way. Given the immense popularity of *Titus Andronicus*, Shakespeare showed from the beginning of his career that he could re-work and improve a play, or extrapolate an opening act, with particular aplomb.

Vickers convincingly argues that *Titus* bears the marks of such a collaborative process. The dramaturgical progression of the play reinforces this collaborative theory. George Peele began the play with his usual sense of theatrical pageantry, long set speeches, and with all the principle characters promptly appearing together on stage by the 75th line. By the close of the now-delineated first act, all the characters but Aaron the Moor made significant dialogical exposition. Aaron subsequently dominates the remainder of Peele's Part A with his long expository speech at 2.1. Thematically, the Part A text is rhetorically blunt, although lyrically lush, typical of Peele's playwriting style. Part A is also dramatically strained and inconsistent. The movement of characters on stage; the odd, irregular, and often unnecessary entrances and exits; and the frequent and

¹⁹ Taylor suggests that as many as 18 of the 48 plays that Shakespeare may have written, solely or contributorily, or 38% of his theatrical works, were co-authored.

disorienting changes in motivation and behavior is, unfortunately, the poorer side of Peele's usual struggle to render mimetic realism. In other words, Part A is reflective of the best and worst of Peelean drama. However, by the start of Part B—at 2.3—these awkward constructions abate, and with them, the moral content of the play focuses on the ethos of revenge: how the characters, and Titus in particular, contemplate their circumstances and marshal their intellectual and emotional resources toward retributive satisfaction. Shakespeare, as we will see, provides much deeper reflective contemplation of the psychological utility of revenge. He articulates, in ways that Peele was never able to, how revenge operates as a central driving motive for the play's morally aggrieved characters, the reflexive approach they exhibit toward the injuries and indignities they have suffered, and the desire for retribution that they believe necessary for social justice and personal peace. The suddenness of these characterological and tropological shifts support Vickers's and Bate's understanding that *Titus* was a play that needed fixing, and Shakespeare stepped in to complete a play that had an auspicious, albeit inconsistent, premise.

As English academic and intellectual culture in the 1560s and early 1580s was discovering and imitating Seneca, the late 1580s and early 1590s were looking back even earlier into classical thought. English scholars and writers of vernacular tracks of humanist philosophy and commonplace books were breathing new life into Aristotle's ethical works and ushering in an age of Renaissance Aristotelianism. The exploration of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* in early modern England specifically centered on the nature of practical virtue in the era of reform Protestantism. Aristotle, the humanists

discovered, did not ground ethical adherence in submission to divine command or the interpretation of divine will. Rather, he formulated a normative explanation of ethics premised on virtue-in-practice. He asserted that if a person assented to a virtuous life, consciously reflected on personal moderation and emotional equilibrium, and applied what he called “the Golden mean” to intellectual and moral virtues, the development and habituation of good character and ultimately happiness, would be achieved. By the 1590s, the Aristotelean ethical calculus was gaining new purchase in a Christian England reforming from one thousand years of theology premised on the supremacy of the Roman church.

The conception of moral philosophy as a descriptive or normative outline of proper conduct tested against moral quandaries has been a central meta-ethical theory for thousands of years. Much of classical, medieval, and modern ethics is rooted in deontological precepts that guide human behavior as we negotiate moral predicaments. Post-Augustinian Christian theology was premised on the application of moral precepts into experiential conditions. Morality seen in this context is easily reduced to binary choices between proper and improper behaviors premised on religious interpretations of divine command. This binary sense of good and evil, and the situational choices which attend to them, permits ethical conduct to orient around conceptions of virtues—proper moral intentions and the orderly application of them, and vices—disordered moral priorities and behaviors. However, prior to the Augustinian revolution in Western theology in the fifth-century, classical ethics were premised on a different formulation of moral priorities; the application of those priorities to human experience; and the broader

implications of ethical behavior on human fulfillment and happiness. Ethical systems and moral philosophy premised upon non-theistic foundations did not situate morality on a simple binary of ontological virtue and vice. Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* was the primary articulation of this conception of pre-Christian ethics. Virtue ethics is a broad philosophical framework centered on moral conduct arising from the *cultivation of virtue*. Unlike the deontological focus of objective moral prescription arising in late antiquity, or the Kantian and utilitarian moral reasoning that developed in the late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-centuries, virtue ethics is a purely anthropocentric notion which describes both the source and utility of ethical experience without appeal to an objective or inalterable moral code or the reliance on a quantitative analysis of moral outcome. It is neither categorical—insistent that certain ethical imperatives always be observed, or consequential—requiring a calculus of the effect of moral choosing. Virtue ethics is an entirely internalized sense of moral speculation, rooted in both subjective experience and human psychology.

Aristotle's conception of virtue ethics was centered on a more nascent appeal to human happiness or fulfillment, or what the Greeks called *eudemonia*. He theorized that proper ethical conduct was the necessary result of virtuous contemplation and the behavior that stems from such deliberation. This formulation relies upon a different sense of the word "virtue," or moral excellence, in a meta-ethical context: "Excellence [of character], then, is a disposition issuing in decisions, depending on intermediacy of the kind relative to us, thus being determined by rational prescription and in the way in which

the wise man would determine it” (I.1106b36–1107a1).²⁰ This is a critical distinction. Aristotle did not conceive of virtue as a category in the taxonomy of desirable intentions or behaviors, nor did he define morality by the consequences, personal or cosmic, of right conduct. Rather, he conceived of virtue *as a process* whose ultimate outcome was *eudemonia*, the achievement of which was obtained through phenomenological reflection, conscience and directed modification of behavior, and habitual practice. Put differently, Aristotle’s ethical system was centered on “the focal point of philosophical effort and striving in the cultivation of ethos or moral character” (Coodin 191). Humans, as rational animals, are positioned to understand choices and behavioral imperatives as a consequence of reflective and reasoning powers. Nevertheless, actual experiences, and the reflexive response to them, tend to be driven by emotion and rashness. Aristotle, unlike the Stoics who wrote for the next five hundred years after his death, did not conceive that emotional or passionate reactions could or should be entirely dismissed or avoided. “[I]n the self-controlled person [emotion] is obedient to reason—and in the moderate or courageous person it is presumably still readier to listen, for in him it always chimes with reason” (I.1102b27-29). This interaction between reason and emotion often seems counter-intuitive. Earlier philosophers, such as Plato, and later philosophers, beginning with the Stoics and continuing through David Hume, relegated our emotional reactions as the source of disharmony or oppositional to our rationality. Aristotle, however, argued that when our passions aligned with our calculating reason, we were achieving virtue. He prescribed that the means of achieving *eudemonia* was by a

²⁰ All textual references to Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* are taken from *Aristotle Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. Christopher Rowe and Sarah Broadie (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002).

purposeful and rational fixation on moderation, “the Golden mean,” an experiential medium between reason and emotion. “If the function of a human being is activity of soul in accordance with reason, or not apart from reason...the human good turns out to be activity of the soul in accordance with excellence [virtue]” (I.1098a7-17). The achievement of his “Golden mean” necessarily resulted in what he termed the “virtues” (plural) of moderation, courage, temperance, prudence, and liberality.

The human inclination toward revenge as an emotional reaction to injury and injustice is a topic that Aristotle addressed specifically. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, vengeance is described in relation to the virtue of temperance, and provides an illuminating example of the extremes between emotionally unrelated anger, or irascibility, and the dispassionate failure of censured meekness:

Hence a man who is angry over the right things, with the right persons, and moreover in the right way, at the right time, and for the right interval is praised. He is a meek man. But if meekness is an object of praise, the meek man seeks to be undisturbed and not controlled by passion, but to be angry at the things and for the links of time that reason dictates. However, he seems to sin more on the side of defect, for the meek person is not vindictive but rather forgiving. But the defect—either a certain apathy or something of that kind—is censured, for a man seems to be foolish who does not get angry at the things he should both in regard to the manner, the time, and the persons. Such a one appears not to feel things nor to be pained at them. Moreover, he who does not get angry will not stand up for himself, and it is considered slavish to endure insults to oneself and to suffer one’s associates to be insulted. (IV.1125b35-1126a09)

Aristotle’s description of a virtuous and properly ordered man who “meekly,” or rather acting with reasoned balance, is compelled to vengeance, aptly describes the machinations and motivation that Shakespeare imparts to Titus in the second half of *Titus Andronicus*.

The most profound implications of Aristotelian virtue ethics are twofold. First, virtue ethics suggests that moral enhancement is a cumulative process, a reflexive harvest of experiences, thoughtful reflection, and the habitual internalization of moderate practices—a consequence of that develops as we achieve greater wisdom. “[I]t is thought characteristic of a wise person to be able to deliberate well...about the things that are good and advantageous to him” (VI.1140a25-27). Every human life is replete with situations and predicaments that demand and reward self-interrogation and scrutiny. “[I]n many respects excellence of character seems to be bound up closely to with the affective states; and wisdom too is yoked together with excellence of character, and with this wisdom, given that the stating points of wisdom are in accordance with the character-excellences, and the correctness of the character-excellences is in accordance with wisdom” (X.1178a15-20). Aristotle theorized that the cumulative result of moral investigation resulted in moral advancement and the achievement of a greater sense of internal fulfillment. Second, virtue ethics is incentivized by its quest for human flourishing. The entirety of Aristotle’s systematic ethical process is centered on this incentive, without which, moral progress is a useless endeavor, and with which moral thriving is inevitable.

Both of these applications have purchase on the increasing psychological sophistication and realism of dramatic literature in the early modern period. Virtue ethics suggests a subtle psychological realism that enhances both the entertainment and didacticism of sophisticated theatrical activity. In other words, Aristotle crafted an ethical practice that both explained and justified our moral reflection and our moral imagination.

Aristotle's usefulness to Shakespeare resides in the heuristic value of his moral-philosophical ideas at the level of moral agency in Shakespeare's plays. Aristotle's ideas about the cultivation of virtue and moral character can help provide a qualitatively rich account of the operations of practical reason in Shakespeare. They can also help account for the types of intentional and emotional states that generate speech and action in the plays, and that help scholars account for why Shakespeare's characters do and say the things that they do" (Coodin 56-57).

Morality dramas of the medieval period suggested, to the extent they could, that moral suasion could be attained by a relatively simple moral calculus: confronted with the presence of temptation, a person's moral intellect requires little more than the application of deontological demands. Shakespeare's sophisticated and realistic moral inquiry necessarily incorporates internal reflection, and the behavior that arises from it, because such "episodes [are] most worthy of critical speculation [and] are the ones where audiences must insert themselves and grapple with the plays' most salient unresolved questions" (Coodin 188).

The evolution of revenge drama in the late Elizabethan period illustrates the use of this ethical system. Following Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* and George Peele's *The Battle of Alcazar*, Shakespeare, for example, abandons the Senecan use of characterological abstractions from the stage. Gone are the Kydian and Peelean imaginative agents of horror. The on-stage personification of Revenge gave way to the reflective soliloquies of Christopher Marlowe, in which characters worked out the boundaries of virtue and the incumbent conscious acquisition of wisdom that the Aristotelian ethical system demanded. While dramatic license can enhance the self-reflective demand of Aristotelian ethics, it does little to promote the conception of virtuous moderation that is central to virtue ethical tropology.

Whether Shakespeare read *Nicomachean Ethics* is unknown. We are unaware whether he had access to the first English translation of *Nicomachean Ethics*, John Wilkinson's *The Ethiques of Aristotle, Preceptes of Goode Behavoute and Perfighte Honestie* (1547). Nor do we know if Shakespeare knew specifically of the voluminous works of ethicists and English vernacular writers of the late sixteenth-century who incorporated *Nicomachean Ethics* into their academic works and commonplace books including Levinus Leminius's *The Touchstone of Complexions* (1581); Philippe De Mornay's *The Trewnesse of Christian Religion* (1587); William Fulbecke's *A Booke of Christian Ethicks or Moral Philosophie* (1587). What we do know is that Shakespeare had a familiarity with Aristotelian virtue ethics because of the allusions he made to it, either broadly or with doctrinal specificity, in his dramatic corpus. For instance, in opening lines of *The Taming of the Shrew* (1591), Lucentio and his servant Tranio discuss Lucentio's pursuit of a rigorous university education, and with it the interdisciplinary study of moral philosophy—specifically Aristotelian virtue ethics, metaphysics, mathematics, and rhetoric:

LUCENTIO

And therefore, Tranio, for the time I study
 Virtue, and that part of philosophy
 Will I apply that treats of happiness
 By virtue specially to be achieved.
 Tell me thy mind, for I have Pisa left
 And am to Padua come as he that leaves
 A shallow plash to plunge him in the deep,
 And with satiety seeks to quench his thirst.

TRANIO

Mi pardonato, gentle master mine,
 I am in all affected as yourself;
 Glad that you thus continue your resolve

To suck the sweets of sweet philosophy.
 Only, good master, while we do admire
 This virtue and this moral discipline,
 Let's be no stoics nor no stocks, I pray,
 Or so devote to Aristotle's checks
 As Ovid be an outcast quite abjured.
 Balk logic with acquaintance that you have,
 And practice rhetoric in your common talk.
 Music and poesy use to quicken you.
 The mathematics and the metaphysics,
 Fall to them as you find your stomach serves you.
 No profit grows where is no pleasure ta'en:
 In brief, sir, study what you most affect.
 (1.1.17-40)

Similarly, in *Troilus and Cressida*, Hector describes the practical nature of Aristotle's moral system, and how it relies upon wise and studied reflection and habituation, not something that young men are inclined to appreciate or quickly grasp:

Paris and Troilus, you have both said well,
 And on the cause and question now in hand
 Have glozed, but superficially—not much
 Unlike young men whom Aristotle thought
 Unfit to hear moral philosophy.
 (2.2.163-167)

Finally, in *Othello*, Shakespeare places a complex and oblique corruption of Aristotelian moral calculation in the mouth of Iago. After Roderigo threatens suicide in despair for the loss of Desdemona's love, Iago chides him for his unregulated emotion and his lack of rational command of his will. In words that echo Aristotle's description of the uniquely human capacity for reason and its ability to constrain the extremity of passion, Shakespeare inverts Aristotle's ethical calculus to an amoral conclusion:

RODERIGO

What should I do? I confess it is my shame to be so
 fond, but it is not in my virtue to amend it.

IAGO

Virtue? A fig! 'Tis in ourselves that we are thus, or thus. Our bodies are our gardens, to the which our wills are gardeners, so that if we will plant nettles or sow lettuce, set hyssop and weed up thyme, supply it with one gender of herbs or distract it with many, either to have it sterile with idleness or manured with industry, why the power and corrigible authority of this lies in our wills. If the brain of our lives had not one scale of reason to poise another of sensuality, the blood and baseness of our natures would conduct us to most preposterous conclusions. But we have reason to cool our raging motions, our carnal stings, or unbitted lusts—whereof I take this that you call “love” to be a sect or scion.

(1.3.303-324)

Early modern humanism’s notions of ethos, or the acceptable moral intuition resulting from the cultivation of virtuous moral character, are uniquely reflected by Shakespeare’s characters in *Titus Andronicus*. The play displays Shakespeare’s attunement to humanism philosophy, and particularly to Aristotelian ethics, which placed ethical encounters in dramatic form to promote the moral dimensionality of his characters and demonstrated the operation of moral progress to his audience. Unlike Peele’s *Titus*, Shakespeare’s *Titus* presents vengeance not as an eruptive or a disordered passionate extremity, or an aversion to the Senecan promotion of stoic emotional regulation, but as a cautionary display of emotional immoderation. In other words, Peele’s *Titus* inflated Senecanism by imitation, and “Senecan tragedy inverts Aristotle” (Gillies 368). Shakespeare’s *Titus*, grounded in Aristotelian virtue ethics, gave the play an introspective mimetic quality that Peele’s bombastic opening scene lacked. Additionally, Shakespeare’s contributions to *Titus* were not a classicist illustration of contemporaneous genre conventions, but an ideological expression of the personal and “cultural work that literary revenge performs” (Woodbridge 5).

Shakespeare was not a moral polemicist, and he did not use dramatic literature to promote or illustrate his conception of moral virtue. He was neither an ethicist—seeking to explain how moral philosophy could lead to social cohesion or personal contentment, like Seneca was, or a meta-ethicist—who expounded on the foundational concept of moral value, like Aristotle. But as a playwright he was able to animate his characters with a sense of psychological realism and “engage with them as if they were real people” (Coodin 184). Thus, as has been expressed countless times for four centuries, Shakespeare was able to place his characters in arresting situations that resonated rhetorically and mimetically with common theater-goers without resorting to what Bate describes as the unnatural discourse of “tedious classicism.” Shakespeare’s *Titus* is representational of this style because here we see how he broke from Peele’s classicist flair, literally in mid-text, and set the course for his later theatrical works by drawing characters who reflected, directly or in counterpoint, the increasingly prominence of Aristotelian ethics. The transcendence and utility of practical virtue and its attendant reflective examination of tragic loss and humanist tropological response because Shakespeare’s great addition to revenge tragedy. As Beauregard observes, “this is not to imply that Shakespeare expresses in his plays a full-fledged Aristotelian” moral philosophy; clearly, he says nothing about such discursive questions as the order of the passions or the connection between the virtues. Rather, as a playwright, he simply makes use of Aristotelian conceptions and arrangements of the virtues and vices for dramatic purposes” (11). Shakespeare’s treatment of the revenge ethos of *Titus* reflects a shift away from Peele’s grandiosity and Seneca’s blunt stoic moralizing toward a

philosophical orientation that is less linguistically imitative or philosophically derivative. It is this point that merits the closest attention because it is prescient of Shakespeare's later works in which plot circumstances justifying revenge became less philosophically didactic and more expressive of the conscious and reflective interior life of his characters. "Shakespeare thus reflects the development of characterization in the morality tradition from an abstract allegorization or personification to a rational realism in which the abstract types of moral philosophy are incarnated in the concrete flesh of fictional characters" (11).

One specific textual example from *Titus* illustrates the initial plot construction by Peele, and foreshadows the reorientation that Shakespeare would make from Peele's Part A scenes. As described above, most scholars assign the creation of the play to late 1593 and early 1594, either immediately before or during the plague-shortened winter season. Henslowe's diary records the play's earliest known stage production on January 24, 1594. The Stationers' Register identifies the play two weeks later, on February 6. Shortly thereafter, the First Quarto was published by John Danter and sold by booksellers Edward White and Thomas Mellington (Bate, "Arden" 70). This brief evidentiary recitation of the play's initial public issuance, however, does not align its editorial history. The 1623 First Folio drew from the Third Quarto (1611) which, in turn was derived from the Second Quarto (1600), and all subsequent editions followed suit until 1905 when the only extant copy of the First Quarto was discovered in a library in Sweden and first collated by Evald Ejunggren of Lund University.

The First Quarto contains a passage in the opening act, marked parenthetically below, which all editions before 1905 omitted from publication for want of the original text.²¹ During Marcus's first speech settling the imperial election in Titus's favor and introducing his return to the capitol, he states,

Ten years are spent since first he undertook
 This cause of Rome and chastised with arms
 Our enemies' pride. Five times he hath returned
 Bleeding to Rome, bearing his valiant sons
 In coffins from the field; {and at this day
 To the monument of the Andronici
 Done sacrifice of expiation,
 And slain the noblest prisoner of the Goths.}
 And now, at last, laden with honor's spoils,
 Returns the good Andronicus to Rome,
 Renownèd Titus, flourishing in arms.
 (1.1.31-41)

Without the additional passage from line 35 to 38, editors, readers, and performers for three hundred years presented Titus's return to Rome as an event occasioned solely to inter his battle-killed sons in the family tomb. As I will describe below, this fundamental plot point has significant ramifications for the subsequent revenge motivations and moral agency of Tamora and the Andronici.

Ascribing too much editorial judgment and authorial sourcing to the pre-First Folio quartos is a dicey proposition. It is impossible to know what factors might account for divergent spellings, the sequencing of scenes, the assignment of lines to different characters, and all the other textual anomalies that attend quarto variances throughout the canon. Printer discretion, acting company recollection, and even Shakespeare's own

²¹ As Emma Smith describes, Q1 remained unavailable "for scholarly collation until the eventual opening of the [Folger] library in 1932" (59).

assistance or lack thereof might explain the differences from one quarto to another or from available quartos to the First Folio. In this case, however, I contend that the 1594 Q1 publication is the best source for identifying and discriminating the division of writing between Peele and Shakespeare and the compositional evolution of the original play. Presuming, that the Q1 text most closely represents the collaborative composition of Peele and Shakespeare, the addition of line 35 to 38, or more precisely, the omission of them in subsequent editions, tells a great deal about the intentions of the revenging characters.

Marcus, having just appeared aloft suggesting his immediate entrance from the Senate chamber, has announced that “a special party” of “the people of Rome” has elected Titus “for the Roman empery.” (1.1.20-23.) After ten lines of typically Peelean epideictic oratory praising Titus’s gallantry and service, Marcus announces that the general and emperor-elect has responded to the Senate’s summons (“He by the Senate is accited home”) and is posed to enter the city. Without the missing lines from Q1 and their more specific description of Titus’s intentions for returning to Rome (“slay the noblest prisoner of the Goths”), Marcus suggest to that Titus will soon arrive in triumphal procession “bearing his valiant sons” in their coffins and brandishing his captured royal Goth prisoners. Bassianus and Saturninus promptly call off their legions of supporters and acquiesce to Titus’s election. After entering the city in lavish procession, Titus then addresses the people of Rome, again in the customary epideictic rhetoric of George Peele, expressing his grateful arrival with “tears of true joy for his return” and extolling the lives

of his “five-and-twenty valiant sons,” all but four of whom are brought home for “burial amongst their ancestors.”

In the absence of the “Q1 lines” (35-38) in the modern edition, Titus’s son Lucius then interrupts his father’s presentment before the Roman citizenry with a sacrificial demand.

Give us the proudest prisoner of the Goths,
That we may hew his limbs and on a pile
Ad manes fratrum sacrifice his flesh
Before this earthly prison of their bones,
That so the shadows be not unappeased,
Nor we disturbed with prodigies on earth.
(1.1.96-101)

With no other context, Lucius’s request for a human sacrifice sounds harsh, rash, and impulsive. Yet, Titus complies with equal impulsiveness and condemns Tamora’s son, Alarbus, to satisfy the blood lust and pagan piety of his surviving, battle-weary sons. To this execution order Tamora erupts in horror. She asks the Andronici sons for a moment of leave, and then begs Titus for clemency from this sudden and fatal degradation.

Stay, Roman brethren! Gracious conqueror,
Victorious Titus, rue the tears I shed—
A mother’s tears in passion for her son—
And if thy sons were ever dear to thee,
Oh, think my sons to be as dear to me!
Sufficeth not that we are brought to Rome
To beautify thy triumphs and return
Captive to thee and to thy Roman yoke?
But must my sons be slaughtered in the streets
For valiant doings in their country’s cause?
Oh, if to fight for king and commonweal
Were piety in thine, it is in these.
Andronicus, stain not thy tomb with blood.
(1.1.104-116)

Despite Tamora's maternal pleas, Alarbus is promptly seized and immediately slaughtered by Titus's sons with their "swords upon a pile" where they "hew[ed] his limbs." Tamora, hearing the description of this grizzly act, cries in mortal anguish, "Oh, cruel, irreligious piety!" (1.1.130.)

Peele's presentation of this scene, and the subsequent motivation that it frames for Shakespeare's composition of the remainder of the play's revenge plots, is premised on three points. First, it displays Titus as a dutiful soldier and father returned from battle who is earnestly grieving the loss of twenty-one sons with solemnity and stately dignity. In Peelean fashion, his address to the people of Rome is rife with ceremonial oratory and traditional rhetorical tropes. The First Folio, and all the subsequent editions prior to the Q1 discovery in 1905, makes this an essential element of Titus's arrival at the city, and marks the event as a civic and militaristic celebration. The Goth prisoners are decorative, a display of Roman victory, and humiliated emigrants forcibly brought to the capital for Roman entertainment. Second, the scene suggests a sense of the Andronicus family proclivity for barbarism. Caught in the spirit of Titus's emotional eulogy, Lucius and his surviving brothers seem unable to withhold their grief, and suddenly and impulsively demand retribution in the guise of pagan piety. Again, without the benefit of the Q1 lines, the Lucius's request to execute Alarbus is barbarous in its suddenness and violent impulse. Titus's glorious return is quickly attended by a request for human sacrifice and public slaughter. Finally, and perhaps most consequential to the play's storyline and theme, the scene creates an ambiguous impression of Tamora. Not only is she forced to endure the indignity of the traditional Roman triumph as she is brought with her sons

through the riotous crowd in chains (a fate so mortifying that it inspired Cleopatra to commit suicide in Shakespeare's later play), but she is suddenly beset with Lucius's request, in abhorrent detail, for a grim, vicious, and propitiation, in which her eldest son will be summarily executed. As we will see, it is not only Alarbus's death that inspires her vengeance, but Titus's willful dismissal of her plea for patriotic constancy and mercy, and his refusal or inability to exercise restraint of his violently zealous sons. Her loss will inspire her revenge, and her treatment by Titus will inspire her methods of vengeance, and set in motion Shakespeare's first meditation on the nature and ethos of violence, retribution, and revenge. To Tamora, Titus appears a vicious and permissive parent, who whimsically gives license to his sons to slaughter hers.

But the original Peelean set up of the play, as the long-omitted Q1 lines demonstrate, was markedly different from the version that editors and readers saw for 300 years after the publication of Q2, Q3, and the First Folio. In Peele's original 1594 text, the slaughter of Alarbus is not a reflexive, impromptu bloodletting resulting from the emotional overreaction of Lucius to his father's grief or the impertinent grant of permission of an anguished father to his desolate sons. In Peele's initial published draft, the expiation of Alarbus was long intended and copiously planned part of the triumph. It was fully part of the ceremonial entrance of a conquering military leader into Rome. Marcus announces its forthcoming execution as if it was a matter of military protocol. Titus, he proclaims, has returned to Rome. He will arrive momentarily to bury his dead sons and do the "sacrifice of expiation" by slaying "the noblest prisoner of the Goths." Stand down, Marcus urges Saturninus and Bassianus, and prepare your followers to admit

Titus as the properly elected emperor. This is a suggestion to which they immediately consent. Lucius's suggestion that they execute a prisoner, in Peele's original text, is more ceremonial than emotive. With the omission of the Q1 lines, Lucius appears caught up with a sudden, malicious and spiteful suggestion to execute Alarbus. With the Q1 lines, as the play was originally written and presumably performed at its premiere, Lucius's demand becomes almost liturgical: he makes his request as if on cue to proceed with the announced death ritual. Without the missing Q1 lines, Tamora's plea for mercy is spontaneous, and driven by a sudden sense of horror. With the original lines, her plea sounds premeditated. Originally, Peele's Tamora is full of seething rage exhibited with rhetorical flourish. Shakespeare's Tamora, on the other hand, the Tamora on whom he would center the later action of the play, is woeful and reactive.²²

Yet this exposition of the premeditated nature of the human sacrifice of the preeminent Goth prisoner was redacted from the publication of the play after 1594. Again, it is impossible to know for sure why these critical lines were excised after Q1 because we are unable to attribute their omission to Shakespeare, his publishers, or an errant printer. But I contend that the removal of lines 35 to 38 from act 1 in the 1600 and 1611 quartos and subsequent editions served an intended purpose, and that purpose related to Shakespeare's moral reflection on the nature of vengeance and the agency of moral characters. Shakespeare's characters are reflexive and reflective, and their moral

²² It also bears mention that the redaction of the customary ritual sacrifice of a prominent Roman prisoner was not complete. While Marcus's first speech was expunged of the reference, Titus's first speech was not. Titus proceeds through the ceremony as if the execution is a planned: "Thou great defender of this Capitol, / Stand gracious to the rites that we intend. (1.1.77-78.)

identity is more organically developed. Unlike Peele, Shakespeare did not permit long expositions on retrospective action to dictate the moral progress of his characters. Rather, Shakespeare permits us to see moral identity being developed before our eyes. The consequence is that the tragic sensibility is more arresting, more entertaining, and more instructive of how fate informs human agency.

When Shakespeare takes the play's helm, one thing becomes immediately apparent. He has little use for Saturninus as a character. Peele's schizophrenic development of the new emperor portended a role for the tyrant that would envelop him in the revenge plotting either as an ill-motivated dupe but active participant with his Goth queen, or as a victim himself of the larger political intrigue that Aaron describes at the beginning of act 2. Shakespeare, on the other hand, reduces Saturninus's role to that of a minor character. He appears on stage only three times in Part B. After the discovery of Bassianus's body in 2.3, he steps into the baited trap that Tamora and Aaron set to frame Quintus and Martius. In 4.4, he briefly appears to express his outrage at the Andronici as they assemble a Goth army outside the city and lob arrows at the capital. Lastly, he appears at the final banquet to meet his match in the culmination of Titus's final revenge. Despite his active but inconsistent participation in the Peelean political set up, he becomes nothing more to Shakespeare than a minor perfunctory role. Peele's plays always sought to wed royal power to the machinations of intrigue and ambition, and in doing placed his plots were played on too large a canvas. Shakespeare quickly abandoned this technique in *Titus*, and chose instead to narrow his tragic focus on the closer binding of family ties.

The first characterological move that Shakespeare makes when he takes up the play at 2.3 is to cast Tamora as the matron of vengeance and Aaron as its engineer. Peele, in 2.1, left Aaron as a sort of chorus, expositing on the consequence of Tamora's betrothal to the emperor. Peele frames Tamora's raise as a political turn, and describes it with an allusion to the ascendance of a summit.

Now climbeth Tamora Olympus' top,
Safe out of fortune's shot, and sits aloft,
Secure of thunder's crack or lightning flash,
Advanced above pale envy's threat'ning reach....
Then, Aaron, arm thy heart and fit thy thoughts
To mount aloft with thy imperial mistress
(2.1.1-4,13-15)

When Aaron's thoughts turn to destruction and the power Tamora has to enact them, they are set in political terms and include Saturninus as their foe: "This goddess, this Semiramis, this nymph / This siren that will charm Rome's Saturnine / And see his shipwreck and his commonweal's" (2.1.22-24). Shakespeare will not re-visit the suggestion that Tamora and Aaron seek political ends. The focus of the Goths' retribution will now be personal, and with rape, dismemberment, murder, and entrapment of the Andronici as their tools.

Immediately Shakespeare posits Aaron's destruction as an act of the will. His plans for vendetta are the consequence of a specific internal process of conscious conceit and planning. In his tête-à-tête with Tamora in 2.3 he affirms his commitment to malice as a matter of soulful, mindful and bodily design: "Vengeance is in my heart, death in my hand / Blood and revenge are hammering in my head" (2.3.38-39). Tamora joins in his reflectiveness. Peele gives her speech that is more blunt and her desire for vengeance

one-dimensional. After she assures Saturninus that she alone can extend a peace offering to the Andronici, she assures the audience that her real plan is destruction. “Yield at entreats” she coyly urges her new emperor and husband, and quickly assures us in an aside:

--and then let me alone.
 I'll find a day to massacre them all,
 And raze their faction and their family—
 The cruel father and this traitorous sons,
 To whom I sued for my dear son's life—
 (1.1.449-53)

Shakespeare, on the other hand, allows her a more complex manner as she is able to speak multiple messages to different audiences in a single speech. For instance, in the presence of Bassianus and Lavinia, she explains to Demetrius and Chiron that she has been rudely treated and the victim of the happy couple's own act of vengeance upon her, then turns her victimhood into a passive-aggressive demand for justice from her sons:

they called me foul adulteress,
 Lascivious Goth, and all the bitterest terms
 That ever ear did hear to such effect.
 And had you not by wondrous fortune come,
 This vengeance on me had they executed.
 Revenge it as you love your mother's life,
 Or be ye not henceforth called my children.
 (2.3.109-115)

Her plan is to have Bassianus killed, Titus's sons Quintus and Maritus framed for the murder, and Lavinia ravished is an exercise in thoughtful intrigue and controlled rage. Where she was simply a woeful prisoner and mournful mother the day before, she now is frightfully duplicitous to every character but Aaron. In five short lines at the apex of the play's most vile and pernicious moment, as the newly widowed Lavinia is being dragged

off to her ruin, Tamora plays a different shade of maleficence to each audience. She is simultaneously clever, calculating, and amoral. To Lavinia, she is pitiless. To Demetrius and Chiron, she is wickedly permissive and manipulative. To Aaron, she is licentious and adulterous:

Farewell my sons. See that you make her sure.
 Ne'er let my heart know merry cheer indeed
 Till all the Andronici be made away.
 Now will I hence to seek my lovely Moor,
 And let my spleenful sons this trull deflower.
 (2.3.187-191)

She is simultaneously clever, calculating, and morally porous. Yet, aside from giving her a greater sense of intentionality and a more shaded conscious dimension, Shakespeare does little to develop her as an agent of moral (or amoral) progression. Peele introduced Tamora as the greatly aggrieved queen and mother, forced to serve as symbol of Roman military domination and the victim of Roman civic cruelty. On this trajectory, Shakespeare continued to make her Titus's ruthless foil. She pursues the role of initial avenger, seeking to re-address the "impious" injury that she suffered. However, at no time in play does she attempt to penetrate the deeper meaning of suffering or stride the psychological tightrope of virtue in the face of trauma. In fact, she, like Saturninus, disappears from the play from act 2.3 to 5.2, but for a brief exposition in 4.4 when she dutifully stands by as Saturninus rails about Andronici treason.

The two characters whom Shakespeare features in his exploration of practical virtue are Titus and Aaron. It is through these two oppositional characters that Shakespeare initiates his investigation of Aristotelian contemplation, and how the reflective engagement of characters upon the circumstances they inhabit displays virtue

as a process. Through these two characters, both on their own terms and in juxtaposition to each other, Shakespeare displays how emotional response and a resort to rational processing operates in the human mind to achieve (or consciously reject) virtue. Unlike his co-author, who makes no attempt in his earlier plays or the opening scenes of *Titus Andronicus* to demonstrate how the impulse to revenge maps onto an epistemological inquiry of moral philosophy, Shakespeare immediately infuses the horrors of the play with a deeper reflection on ethical introspection and moral searching.

The full scope of this exposition on the *process* of virtue is the tropological heart of Part B of the play. Yet, to be sure, Titus's movements through acts 3 and 4 are in many ways thematically typical of revenge tragedy in the early 1590s. Shakespeare, as I have mentioned before, does not use the play as an opportunity for moral pontification. He is preparing a performative experience, replete with all the shocks a 1593 audience would clamor for. Shakespeare's Titus bemoans the false accusations of murder against his sons. ("This way to death my wretched sons are gone" 3.1.97.) He laments Lavinia's loss of her hands. ("Speak, Lavinia, what assurèd hand / Hath made thee handless in thy father's sight" 3.1.65-66). He grieves at the banishment of Lucius and the witnessing of Marcus's sorrow. ("Here stands my other son, a banished man; / And here my brother weeping at my woes" 3.1.98-99). He reflects on the nature of public justice as a form of retribution. ("If they did kill thy husband, then be joyful, / Because the law hath ta'en revenge on them" 3.1.125-26.) Then, the culmination of his sorrows and humiliation, he is tricked into losing his own hand. Shakespeare takes a page from Seneca and Peele in the final accumulation of these wretched indignities: he is forced to witness not only the

losing his own hand, but the sight of his daughter Lavinia carrying his severed hand off in her mouth. (“And, Lavinia, thou shalt be employèd in these things. / Bear thou my hand, sweet wench, between thy teeth” 3.1.279-80.) Buried in this catalogue of distresses, however, lies the origins of Shakespeare’s sense moral suasion. He had not yet discovered the stylized soliloquy that would make *Hamlet* the quintessential mediation on introspective suffering and the expression of moral pondering; nor had he found the dramaturgical procedure or tonal quality by which to explore personal moral failings that would find perfection in *Macbeth*. But in *Titus* Shakespeare was exploring the exigence between reflection and action, and he was doing so in ways that explicitly referenced the broad systematized ethic activity advocated by Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Shakespeare’s first presentation of Titus is in act 3.1. This scene, which reveals the depths of the play’s wretched horrors, is the tropological heart of the play. The scene begins with a contemplative exposition in which Titus pleads for the acquittal of his sons. He makes a pitiable petition for their exoneration, relying on his reputation and service to the empire in a quest for Quintus’s and Martius’s release.

For all my blood in Rome’s great quarrel shed,
 For all the frosty nights that I have watched,
 And for these bitter tears which now you see
 Filling the agèd wrinkles in my cheeks,
 Be pitiful to my condemnèd sons,
 Whose souls is not corrupted as ’tis thought.
 (3.1.4-9)

Capturing the themes that Peele developed in act 1, Shakespeare grounds his appeal on the same characterological traits that Titus displayed upon his triumphant entry into Rome: nobility, patriotism, and civic sacrifice. But there is a new sense of introspection

here. Not only does Titus proclaim his service and the sacrifice of his dead sons, but in pleading for the surviving ones, he acknowledges his own emotional connection to the sons whose lives are imperiled for a reason distinct from service to Rome: “For two-and-twenty sons I never wept, / Because they died in honor’s lofty bed” (3.1.10-11). The possibility of losing sons to an injustice is different matter for Titus. “Unbind my sons,” he begs, “reverse the doom of death, / And let me say that never wept before / my tears are prevailing orators” (3.1.24-26). Suddenly, Titus is possessed of an emotional (what Aristotle would call a “non-rational”) sense of dread. As we see Titus contend with a different ethos than any he claims to have experienced before, we see the dramatic irony: he does not fully realize the depths of the suffering that are about to befall him. As he pleads for his sons he is unaware of the greater horror that has been visited on his daughter. This irony makes his reflective suffering seem even more immediate and profound.

Unable to secure the release of Quintus and Martius, Titus is presented with the play’s most visceral horror: Titus’s discovery of Lavinia’s ravishment. Titus’s reaction to Lavinia’s disfigurement and agony reveal an important element of the humanist’s sense of tragedy. Titus’s anguish reveals that suffering is an experience that relies on perception. Titus does not merely come to know of Lavinia’s rape and mutilation; he perceives it experientially, which is to say learns of it and contemplates it simultaneously. Moments before Marcus leads him to Lavinia, Titus chastises Lucius for not appreciating the true moral nature of the empire: “Why, foolish Lucius, dost thou not *perceive* / That

Rome is but a wilderness of tigers?" (3.1.52-53). Immediately, he is to perceive the truth of this observation:

MARCUS

Titus, prepare thy noble eyes to weep,
Or if not so, thy noble heart to break.
I bring consuming sorrow to thine age.

TITUS

Will it consume me? Let me see it, then.
(3.1.58-61)

With the discovery of Lavinia's disfigurement, Titus becomes aware of the depth of his loss. Unlike Peele's treatment of loss and injury, Shakespeare does not merely expound on tragedy in lengthy speeches of retrospection. Shakespeare exposes Titus's injury with contemporaneous introspection. The loss and the reaction to it are experienced on the stage.

For now I stand as one upon a rock
Environed with a wilderness of sea,
Who marks the waxing tide grow wave by wave,
Expecting ever when some envious surge
Will in his brinish bowels swallow him.
(3.1.92-96)

This allusion to the sea is apt, for while Titus sees his plight as a tidal wave of sorrows, he is about to realize that the tide has not crested. Aaron soon appears and offers a reprieve. The emperor will release Quintus and Martius if one of the three Andronici men will sacrifice their hand. The darkly comical moment that follows is emblematic of Shakespeare's treatment of the tragedy. As Marcus, Lucius and Titus argue about who will give their hand, Aaron relishes in adding injury to insult. What follows from this grizzly surrealistic moment, though, is Shakespeare's fullest resort to Aristotelian ethic

process. At the depths of his loss, Titus and Marcus engage in an exchange taken directly from the pages of *Nicomachean Ethics*:

TITUS

For heaven shall hear our prayers,
Or with our sighs we'll breathe the welkin dim
And stain the sun with fog, as sometime clouds
When they do hug him in their melting bosoms.

MARCUS

O brother, speak with possibilities
And do not break into these deep extremes.

TITUS

Is not my sorrow deep, having no bottom?
Then be my passions bottomless with them.

MARCUS

But yet let reason govern thy lament.

TITUS

If there were reason for these miseries,
Then into limits could I bind my woes.

(3.1.208-219)

With two sons condemned to death unjustly, his remaining son banished merely for being his son, his daughter disfigured and his own hand severed by mayhem, Titus reaches the extent of emotional despair and an irrational breaking point. Marcus demands that Titus speak not in emotional “extremes, but with a mind to action and “possibilities.” Titus admits that he is lost in “bottomless passions.” Marcus urges him to give recompense to his emotional state by reflecting rationally and “let reason govern thy lament.” Titus chides at the suggestion. Wisdom evades him in height of his grief. Then, just as quickly as Marcus was demanding a resort to reason and the Aristotelian sense of wisdom it will cause, the emperor’s messenger arrives to deliver the final blow, and the body parts that prove it. He announces that Quintus and Martius have been executed and Titus’s hand was chopped off in vain. In a sudden reversal, Marcus becomes the fool, unable to escape

emotionally extremity. “These miseries are more than may be borne / Ah now no more will I control my griefs” (3.1.241, 257). And just as quickly, Titus becomes the contemplative one. His moral sense is strangely restored by this final indignity, and he expresses this experience with clarity. He ceases his lamentation (“Why are thou still? Marcus asks him. 3.1.261) and begins to laugh. He can no longer respond with the extremity of meekness.

Why, I have not another tear to shed.
 Besides, this sorrow is an enemy
 And would usurp upon my watery eyes
 And make them blind with tributary tears.
 Then which way shall I find Revenge’s cave?
 Come, let me see what task I have to do.
 (3.1.264-268, 273)

In the depths of the horrors of suffering that have made *Titus Andronicus* so reviled over centuries, Shakespeare could have simply plied the Senecan style, and allowed the sufferers to emote their pain and plot their revenge. But Shakespeare finds a different moral center to the play’s most dreadful moment. In Aristotelian terms, he makes the play’s awful pinnacle a reflection on the balance between reason and pain, an emblem on wisdom, and a meditation on morality and action. The reminder of the act, and the play itself, will contend on the worth and satisfaction of this moral paradigm.

Shakespeare’s initial development of Aaron the Moor seems to be more akin to a vile, villainous, amoral character of the Senecan mode. Though Peele’s Part A, Aaron is presented—and only lightly at that—as a stereotypical Romanesque villain. Broude observes that “Aaron derives much of his character and function from the vices whose energy and scheming are so central to the action of these [classical] moralities” (Broude

506). Aaron's initial character is strikingly similar to Peele's Muly Mahamet in *Alcazar*, the first prominent African antagonist of the English stage. Peele's Aaron displays two purposes that suit Roman imitation: harsh and determined wrath—dedicating himself to the annihilation of Rome with a metaphorical destruction of a “shipwreck” (2.1.24), and the licentious union with Tamora, “to wanton with this queen” (2.1.21) and “to serve and to deserve my mistress' grace” (2.1.34). Aaron displays no moral bearings as Peele uses him solely to scheme and enable the ravishment of Lavinia by Demetrius and Chiron. He presses the Goth brothers to see their lust for Lavinia as an opportunity to further Goth violence and vengeful resolve:

Why, lords, and think you not how dangerous
It is to set upon a prince's right?
What, is Lavinia, then, become so loose,
Or Bassianus so degenerate,
That for her love such quarrels may be broached
Without controlment, justice, or revenge?
(2.1.63-68).

Thus, to Peele, Aaron is set as a mere stock character, a dangerous and dark-skinned foreigner, who facilitates ruin and mayhem.²³ Shakespeare, however, develops Aaron to be something different. At first Shakespeare continues to use the Moor as an antithetic foil to a broad sense of civic virtue before intoning him with a deeper sense of agency and psychological complexity. By the final act, Shakespeare's Aaron, while still destructive and violent, acts out of a more brooding and reflexive purpose.

²³ Deborah Willis suggests that the only reason Aaron is introduced into the play at all is to give the machinations of violence and retribution to a male agent, and that only after Aaron initiates the Goth's revenge plot does “Tamora become Aaron's inventive and brutal collaborator in an improvisational theater of revenge” (39).

Prior to act 4, Aaron only makes two brief appearances on stage in Part B. The first of these, in 2.3, expedites the framing of Quintus and Martius for the murder of Bassianus. His second appearance facilitates the final Andronicus indignity: the senseless sacrifice of Titus's hand in exchange for his sons' release. To this point, Shakespeare makes little more use of Aaron than Peele does: to drive the plot of Tamora's revenge on the Andronici. By act 4.2, however, Shakespeare has full control of the trajectory of Aaron's character, and introduces a new plot development: the birth of his son by Tamora. In the final one-third of the play, Aaron evolves into more than a lurid destructor who either serves the function of the avenging Goths or retrospectively expounds the Goth narrative. In the final act, Shakespeare allows him to occupy a third space in the story. As Titus and Tamora contend for vengeance upon each other, Aaron reveals a separate ethos as he reflectively understands and appreciates the shallow motives of the Goths, and proceeds to wreak havoc on Rome for his own purposes.

After Titus has armaments delivered to Demetrius and Chiron in 4.2, only Aaron sees that Titus is setting his plan for revenge in motion. And Aaron seems to delight in the realization that he alone, and not Tamora's foolish sons, realizes the unfolding plot. In an aside, he shares his insight and capacity to appreciate the escalating war of retribution that he began:

Now what a thing it is to be an ass!
 Here's no sound jest! The old man hath found their guilt
 And sends them weapons wrapped about with lines
 That wound beyond their feeling to the quick.
 But were our witty empress well afoot,
 She would applaud Andronicus' conceit.
 (4.2.24-29)

As Aaron chides and ridicules Tamora's sons for their ignorance of Titus's machinations, Shakespeare introduces a late plot turn: Tamora, we learn, has been pregnant throughout the play and has just given birth to a dark-skinned child. Scandalously, the child is obviously not the son of Saturninus, and his birth presents a fatal dilemma for her and the Goths. Tamora's nurse calls the child "[a] devil" and "[a] joyless, dismal, black and sorrowful issue" (4.2.63, 65). Aaron now assumes a new and driving purpose. He must save his son and create his own legacy. He rejects the nurse's suggestion that the child is a racial inferior: "Out, you whore! Is black so base a hue?" (4.2.70) Aaron then prepares to defend his issue and conceives a plan to save his son: "He dies upon my scimitar's sharp point / That touches this, my first-born son and heir" (4.2.88-89). Aaron begins his plot to save his lineage by slaughtering the nurse, the only witness to the biracial birth of Tamora's son, and substituting a white infant in its place:

Not far, one Muliteus, my countryman,
 His wife but yesternight was brought to bed.
 His child is like to her, fair as you are.
 Go pack with him and give the mother gold,
 And tell them both the circumstance of all,
 And how by this their child shall be advanced
 And be receivèd for the Emperor's heir,
 And substituted in the place of mine,
 To calm this tempest whirling in the court.
 (4.2.149-157)

Aaron then flees with the child, and seeks sanctuary with the Goth army, convinced that they will protect both father and son. From this point in the play, Shakespeare separates Aaron from Tamora—we never see him on stage with the imperial family again, and in doing so places within Aaron a moral identity that he lacked previously, while depriving

Tamora of his vile and destructive counsel. From this point, Aaron becomes possessed of a new diabolical nature.

What Aaron does not realize is that the Goth's are now allied with the Andronici and are led by Titus's son Lucius. On his arrival to at the Goth's camp outside the city, Aaron is captured and the child's life placed in jeopardy. Now, infused with an authentic motive, Aaron's character begins to display a sense of ethical realism. Aaron's character remains disconcerting: he continues to exhibit a pathological delight for violent and psychotic behavior. But Shakespeare imbues Aaron with a heretofore absent expression of his conscious process, the means by which he works through his moral reasoning. Rather than present Aaron as a manifestation of pure villainy, Shakespeare reveals Aaron as a moral agent who has acted with a mindful awareness of his purpose and his ethical choices. Aaron, to be sure, remains an unrepentant villain. But his villainy is grounded in an appreciation of the broader scope of moral activity. In his final speeches before Lucius and the Goths, Aaron reveals that he is fully aware that the evil he has wrought was by his conscious volition. He is no longer merely the manifestation of baleful menace. In his final words, he rises above the simply amoral tropology that Peele began, and displays an Aristotelian sense of ethical contemplation and a regulatory choice of behavior. In bargaining for his son's life in exchange for his full confession of the downfall of the Andronicus family, Aaron address Lucius in moral terms, and uses moral suasion to strike a bargain:

Yet for I know thou art religious
And hast a thing within thee callèd conscience,
With twenty popish tricks and ceremonies
Which I have seen thee careful to observe,

Therefore I urge thy oath; for that I know
 An idiot holds his bauble for a god,
 And keeps the oath which by that god he swears,
 To that I'll urge him. Therefore thou shalt vow
 By that same god, what god so e'er it be,
 That thou adorest and hast in reverence,
 To save my boy, to nourish and bring him up,
 Or else I will discover naught to thee.

(5.1.74-85)

After negotiating for his son's life with this appeal to ethical duty, Aaron proceeds to expound on the nature of his villainy with honesty and candor. Up to this point in the play, the audience was aware of Aaron's self-revealed love of villainy. Aaron, however, hides the extent of his inclination for baseless wrath and destruction from the other characters, and more whimsically revealed in plotting as a confederate of war and revenge. But now, in a fuller act of moral agency, Aaron reveals his darker purposes, aware of how they will appear to a person of sounder ethical moderation. In his final confession, Aaron shows that even though his past conduct lacks virtue, he fully understands moral reasoning:

Well, let my deeds be witness of my worth.
 I trained thy brethren to that guileful hole
 Where the dead corpse of Bassianus lay.
 I wrote the letter that thy father found,
 And hid the gold within the letter mentioned,
 Confederate with the Queen and her two sons.
 And what not done that thou hast cause to rue
 Wherein I had no stroke of mischief in it?
 I played the cheater for thy father's hand,
 And when I had it drew myself apart
 And almost broke my heart with extreme laughter;
 I pried me through the crevice of a wall
 When for his hand he had his two sons' heads,
 Beheld his tears, and laughed so heartily
 That both mine eyes were rainy like to his;
 And when I told the Empress of this sport,

She swoonèd almost at my pleasing tale
 And for my tidings gave me twenty kisses.
 (5.1.103-120)

After confessing to his principle role in Bassianus's death and Qunitus' and Martius' executions, Lucius presses him for repentance. Aaron's response is a conscious acknowledgement that he fully understands his moral identity and the choice of extremis he has made and would continue to make if permitted:

LUCIUS

Art thou not sorry for these heinous deeds?

AARON

Ay, that I had not done a thousand more.
 Even now I curse the day—and yet I think
 Few come within the compass of my curse—
 Wherein I did not some notorious ill,
 As kill a man or else devise his death,
 Ravish a maid or plot the way to do it,
 Accuse some innocent and forswear myself,
 Set deadly enmity between two friends,
 Make poor men's cattle break their necks,
 Set fire on barns and haystacks in the night,
 And bid the owners quench them with the tears.
 Tut, I have done a thousand dreadful things
 As willingly as one would kill a fly,
 And nothing grieves me heartily indeed
 But that I cannot do ten thousand more.
 (5.1.124-134,141-144)

That permission never comes. Lucius promptly has Aaron gagged and bound, ceasing the “torment” or his “bitter tongue” (5.1.150).

We see Aaron once more. Of all the play's chief moral agents who either seek or facilitate the torrent of revenge, Aaron is the only one who survives the final banquet. Shakespeare spares him from the murderous feast where all the other principle characters act out their final retribution. Shortly before the climactic moment in act 5, scene 3, as we

await Titus's revelation of the fate and final use of Demetrius and Chiron, Titus initiates a conversation with Saturninus about Livy's legendary Roman character Virginius. At first, Titus's mention of Virginius seems a strange digression and a reflection of his real or pretend madness, his "antic disposition." Quickly, however, we discover that Titus has a particular rhetorical purpose for invoking the Virginius story. The conventions of Senecan revenge drama demand the avenger's death. Those same conventions also require the full awareness of the avenging act by the avenged. Before he dies, the scope of Titus's revenge must be revealed to his foe, Tamora. Ideally, the revelation of his retributive success should demand of Tamora a moment of pained introspection. Titus wants her to know that her earlier victory over him was fleeting and that the consequence of her destruction upon his family is even more harmful than she anticipated. Titus wants Tamora to know that he intends to snatch her triumph from her. For the dramatist in Titus, is it sufficient that he merely announces that her sons are the principle ingredients of the pie on which she "daintly hath fed"? His revenge has a preface: the killing of Lavinia before Tamora's eyes.

To assure that Tamora fully appreciates the destruction that her wickedness has wrought, Titus references the story of Virginius, the Roman centurion who killed his daughter rather than permit her to suffer the dishonor of ravishment. He raises this point in rhetorical guise. Facially, he is addressing Saturninus and requesting his imperial advice: what is the proper duty of a father whose daughter has been dishonored? Surreptitiously, he is revealing to Tamora his knowledge of her attempts at retribution.

He also wants her to see the full consequence of her treachery. Only then will he proceed to exhibit his vengeance upon her.

TITUS

My Lord the Emperor, resolve me this:
Was it well done of rash Virginius
To slay his daughter with his own right hand,
Because she was enforc'd, stain'd, and deflow'r'd?

SATURNINUS

It was, Andronicus.

TITUS

Your reason, mighty lord?

SATURNINUS

Because the girl should not survive her shame,
And by her presence still renew his sorrows.

TITUS

A reason mighty, strong, and effectual,
A pattern, president, and lively warrant
For me, most wretched, to perform the like.
Die, die, Lavinia, and thy shame with thee,
And with thy shame thy father's sorrow die!

(He kills her.)

SATURNINUS

What hast thou done, unnatural and unkind?

TITUS

Kill'd her for whom my tears have made me blind.
I am as woeful as Virginius was,
And have a thousand times more cause than he
To do this outrage, and it now is done.

SATURNINUS

What, was she ravish'd? Tell who did the deed.

TITUS

Will't please you eat? Will't please your Highness feed?

TAMORA

Why hast thou slain thine only daughter thus?

(5.3.35-54)

Of course, Tamora is fully aware of what happened to Lavinia and why Titus is killing her. The last time Tamora and Lavinia were present together on stage, Tamora was urging her sons to rape her. Lavinia's mutilated appearance at the banquet scene can

hardly come as a surprise to Tamora. While Titus appears to engage Saturninus with this ethical query, and then suddenly—like a “rash Virginius”—acts on the counsel he receives, it is Tamora for whom this conversation is intended. Saturninus may not be aware of Titus’s similarity to Virginius, but Tamora is, and her reflection upon it, Titus hopes, will give her pause. Tamora’s vengeful conceit, nevertheless, obliges her to feign shock and surprise at Titus’ filicide. She repeats the question that Saturninus asked seven lines earlier: “Why hast thou slain thine only daughter thus?” Perhaps, she failed to hear the Emperor’s question in the commotion following Titus’ murder of his daughter. Perhaps she feels compelled to repeat the question to appear unaware and innocent of Lavinia’s fate. One can imagine that during the final exchange between Titus and Saturninus, Tamora consumed more pie.

The banquet marks the end of the revenge cycle for Tamora and Titus. Aaron, however, is permitted to survive to the play’s end. With Saturninus, Tamora, Lavinia, and Titus lying dead on the stage, and Lucius appointed emperor, Shakespeare saves the final accord of justice for Aaron. Lucius’s sentence, that Aaron be set “breast-deep in earth and famish him. / There let him stand, and rave, and cry for food” (5.2.177-78) seems an unsatisfying end for the play’s chief architect of horror. All the other agents of revenge are slain. Yet, this ending gives Shakespeare a final comment on the ethos of revenge. Tamora and Titus met their own destruction in a cosmic sense. The injuries that prompted their vengeful wrath were returned to them on stage. Aaron, however, is given one final reflection on his moral failure. In response to his sentence, he closes the play with a brooding reflection:

Oh, why should wrath be mute and fury dumb?
 I am no baby, I, that with base prayers
 I should repent the evils I have done.
 Ten thousand worse than ever yet I did
 Would I perform if I might have my will.
 If one good deed in all my life I did,
 I do repent it from my very soul.

(5.2.182-188)

Wrath in extremis, he suggests, is a vice that destroys from within. Aristotle would surely agree that his moral growth is inhibited by his failure to wisely balance his passion with his reason. Other Shakespearean avengers would learn this lesson on the way to their tragic destruction. In his first revenge tragedy, Shakespeare lets us anticipate Aaron's contemplation of the ethos of revenge.

Unlike Peele, Shakespeare orients the *Titus* antagonists, both situationally and rhetorically, with a complex blend of allusion to both broader source materials, namely from Ovid, Horace and Livy, and with a sense of moral agency that reflects the emergent popularity of Aristotle's ethical system. Shakespeare is, in other words, less reliant on the emotive eruptiveness of Senecan style and more reliant on Roman literary tradition and Renaissance humanism. In his subsequent theatrical wranglings with the ethical dimensions of revenge, Shakespeare would move far past the crude representation of the genre and its armature in *Titus*. A proper appreciation of the generic and tropological themes and structure of later plays demands a closer inspection of the naissance of Shakespearean revenge drama. A more thorough understanding of the larger role that vengeance takes in his later works requires a discernment of the nexus of Peele's initiation and rhetorical styling of the early scenes of *Titus*, Shakespeare's ensuing contribution and resolution of the conceit of the play, and the intersection of the two: how

the collaborative philological and thematic elements of *Titus* sets the course for Shakespeare's ethos of revenge. Shakespeare's collaboration in *Titus* situates the moral arc of his approach to the ethics of revenge and permits him to proceed both as a stylist and a substantive storyteller toward a more sophisticated and disparate treatment of the human impulse for vengeance and how that impulse works in the human mind, whether revenge is central organizing principle in works such as *Hamlet*, or as a focused motif in the plots and subplots of numerous other tragedies, comedies, histories.

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