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The Protagonist as Playwright and Stage Manager in Two Elizabethan Revenge Tragedies

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Abstract. Revenge in the Elizabethan drama was an elaborate and protracted business. In Henry Chattle's *The Tragedy of Hoffman* (1603), the protagonist Clois Hoffman employs a storm, a curtained cave, his father's skeleton, an iron crown, sundry accomplices, disguises, and stratagems to appease his pent-up wrath and late-blooming lust. In Cyril Tourneur's *The Revenger's Tragedy* (1606), it takes Vendice nine years, the skull of his beloved, a panderer's disguise, the complicity of his victim's appetites, and a bloody mask to achieve his objectives. Even when a quicker option presents itself, the revenger will not deign to stab his victim in the back, but will — like Vendice gaining Lussoroso's confidence, and Hamlet watching the king at prayer — forgo sudden advantage for a more appropriate, complete and penetrating finish.

Despite explicit moral and legal sanctions, private revenge was a popular subject in the Elizabethan theatre if not in social reality. Elizabethan playwrights drew freely on the concerns and convictions of Senecan tragedy and compounded their plots with Machiavellian intrigue and created — in such revengers as Hieronimo, Hamlet, Hoffman, Vendice — some of the most memorable characters of the Elizabethan stage. A drama of revenge emerged, at its worst wallowing in lurid sensationalism, but at its finest exploring the uncharted complexity of a two-minded revenger such as Hamlet.

Revenge in the Elizabethan drama was an elaborate and protracted business. In Henry Chettle's *The Tragedy of Hoffman* (1603)[1] the protagonist, Clois Hoffman,

(1) Or *A Revenge for a Father*, eds. Harold Jenkins and Charles Sisson (Oxford: Malone Society, 1961); this edition is cited throughout.

employs a storm, a curtained cave, his father's skeleton, an iron crown, sundry accomplices, disguises, and stratagems to appease his pent-up wrath and late-blooming lust. In Cyril Tourneur's *The Revenger's Tragedy* (1606),[2] it takes Vendice nine years, the skull of his beloved, a panderer's disguise, the complicity of his victim's appetites, and a bloody mask to achieve his objectives. Even when a quicker option presents itself, the revenger will not deign to stab his/her victim in the back, but will — like Vendice gaining Lussorioso's confidence, and Hamlet watching the King at prayer — forgo sudden advantage for a more appropriate, complete and penetrating finish:

> My loved lord.
> Oh shall I kill him o' the wrong-side now? No.,
> Sword thou wast never a back-bitter yet.
> I'll pierce him to his face, he shall die looking upon me...
>
> (II, ii, 89-92)

This seems ironically judicious, but the point of revenge is never merely the death of the revenge object; it requires death in a fashion commensurate, in the revenger's tortured mind, with the degree and exquisiteness of his own suffering. Murder alone will not suffice, not even that of the revenger's principal quarry. As Charles and Elaine Hallett observe, revenge calls for more than a tooth for a tooth:

> The act of revenge does not correct an imbalance and restore order, purely and simply, with the even exchange of eye for eye, tooth for tooth. Revenge is itself an act of excess in terms of the multiple murders that the revenger commits.[3]

As the revenger's compensation comes to exceed his original losses, and as he begins to indulge in intrigue for its own delights, the revenger is transformed from hero to villain. This is a crucial shift, and its handling marks the relative importance of *Hoffman* and *The Revenger's Tragedy* in dramatic literature. Both "heroes," despite their early claims to the audience's sympathy for their causes, prove villainous well beyond reasonable retaliation. Their own excess occasions their eventual punishment. The difference between the two revengers is that while Hoffman maintains a blind self-righteousness to the end, Vindice proves capable of some introspection, admitting to Hippolito that "T'is time to die when we are ourselves our foes" (V,iii, 110).

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(2) Ed. Brian Gibbons (London: Ernest Benn, 1972); this edition is cited throughout.

(3) Hallett, Charles and Elaine, *The Revenger's Madness: A Study of Revenge Tragedy Motifs* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980), p. 11.

Given his charge, the principal revenger becomes a most deliberate and active person, and the elaborateness and protraction of his revenge arise not so much from doubt as from his sense of opportunity and comprehensive design. Both Hoffman and Vindice know precisely what they want to happen, when and how. Even when unexpected circumstances call for a shift in strategy, they prove nimble, adaptable, and, at the very least, patient in their single-mindedness and even able to crowd "nine years vengeance ... into a minute" (III,v,121). They are ultimately foiled not for want of intelligence but by the hopeless confusion of their morality. There is method in their madness: disturbed though they may be, Hoffman and Vindice, even in their disguises, never feign detachment. They are relentlessly alert to opportunity from start to finish, and remain supremely aware that they are principal performers in their own "tragic business" (III,v,97).

The terms and means of revenge are vastly more remarkable than the deed itself. Vindice plots revenge on the Duke who had poisoned his beloved Gloriana by dressing up her skull "in tires" so that the Duke, expecting a zestful bedmate, might kiss it and himself be poisoned:

> Now to my tragic business. Look you brother,
> I have not fashioned this only for show
> And unless property, no — it shall bear a part
> E'en in its own revenge. This very skull,
> Whose mistress the Duke poisoned with this drug.
> The mortal curse of the earth, shall be revenged
> In the like strain and kiss his lips to death.
> As much as the dumb thing can, he shall feel;
> What fails in poison we'll supply in steel.
>
> (III,v. 97-106)

For Hoffman, whose father had been executed as a pirate after dutiful service to the Duke of Luningberg, nothing less than the annihilation of the Duke's family will do when he vows revenge "On him, or any man that is affied, / Has but one ounce of blood of which he's part" (I,i,72-73). Beholding the skeleton to which the gallows had reduced his father, Hoffman insists that "I will not leave thee until like thyself / I've made thy enemies. Then hand in hand / We'll walk to paradise — again more blessed" (I,i, 23-25). Thus Hoffman captures the young Charles Luningberg, and kills him with the same burning crown that boiled his father's brains, and strips the corpse clean down to the bones.

The gruesomeness derives from a tradition associated with Senecan drama and its source-myths, and with the sanguinary excesses then typical of foreign narratives. Elizabethan audiences and readers were familiar with carnage and so the typical

revenge play might have been, as Percy Simpson suggests, a "get-penny," a pandering to the public demand for gory entertainment. But while some of the violence in *Hoffman* and *The Revenger's Tragedy* is arguably gratuitous, it can be argued just as well that, in these two examples, the revenges occur as they do because they are made to assume the form and structure of a "performance," a condition requiring a dramatic design aided by dramatic effects.

Both *Hoffman* and *The Revenger's Tragedy* open in a blatantly theatrical register: *The Revenger's Tragedy* with a spectral pageant in Vindice's mind, foregrounded by Vindice himself addressing Gloriana's skull, and *Hoffman* with the revenger summoning intemperate nature to his cause and pledging his revenge upon his father's bones, hidden in a cave behind a curtain. Hoffman treats his execution of the young Charles as a scene in a play:

> Go, let him. Come, Lorrique:
> This is but the prologue to the ensuing play,
> The first step to revenge. This scene is done;
> Father, I offer thee thy murderer's son.
>
> (I,i, 236-39)

As Hoffman later indicates, the play he has in mind is no mere dumb show but high tragedy. Both Hoffman and Vindice refer frequently and consciously to a "tragedy" being enacted. Ironically foreshadowing his own punishment, Vindice remarks upon the dying Duke: "When the bad bleeds, then is the tragedy good" (III,v, 11. 198). Even more explicitly, Hoffman hangs up Charles' bones beside his father's with a whisper of his ambitions:

> He was the prologue to a tragedy
> That, if my destinies deny me not,
> Shall pass those of Thyestes, Tereus,
> Iocasta or Duke Jason's wife.
> So shut our stage up [Close curtain]: there is one act done
> Ended in Charles' death. 'Twas somewhat single:
> I'll fill the other fuller ... .
>
> (I,iii, 407-13)

In this event, it is reasonable to assume that the tragedy in question is the "primary" play (i.e., *Hoffman* or *The Revenger's Tragedy*) itself; that is, the character reminds the audience that it is watching a theatrical performance, a "good" tragedy that conforms to what by that time a popular tragedy had become: a show full of Italianate depravity in high places with its fittingly horrible punishment. However, it seems just as likely that the character is referring to its tragedy, its revenge-in-performance, its procurement of the downfall of the mighty.

Both readings can simultaneously be obtained if we consider "performance" not merely as the swaggering of a self-conscious theatre, but also in terms of ritualistic or ceremonial action realized by theatrical means. This action involves the revenger's assumption and discharge of his responsibility towards the murdered father or lover, and the accompanying fulfillment of his need for emotional and material compensation. The "performance" is itself theatrical because it should be as inventive as it is effective; the revenger's frequent resort to disguise and mimicry, his assumption of another "character" both guarantees his survival and advances his plot. The "performance" also takes on ritualistic aspects because, as the revenger perceives it, the gravity of the injury demands fine, severe, and deliberate redress, using the keenest and most appropriate forms of punishment he can think of and impose. Furthermore, as the performance theorist, Richard Schechner suggests, a "performance" is a system of opposition leading to a transformation, a crucial opposition being that between the need to get things done and to entertain.(4) This dualism is embodied in revenge, which is both a plan of action and a kind of show, and the execution of which results in the creation of separations between his old and his new "actor" self, and between the revenger and his audiences.

For his survival and his pleasure, the revenger employs theatrical pretences in his performance, and both Hoffman and Vindice make these pretenses obvious to all but their immediate victims. Indeed they delight in it with an artist's sensibility, and it is Vindice's revelation of and self-congratulation upon his excellent perfomance as a revenger thak kills him.

The self-referentiality in *Hoffman* and *The Revenger's Tragedy,* therefore, provides not only a reminder of the artificiality of the theatrical event, but also some suggestion that the revenge itself is a virtual play-within-a-play. Within the "primary" or mainframe play, the revenge can be seen as a "secondary" play, scripted, stage-managed, and acted by the revenger himself, comprising but distinct from the masque used to bring about the catastrophe. The masque, in this scheme, is a play-within-a-play-within-a-play.

This structure satisfies what the Halletts, in their discussion of the revenger's "delay," see as the revenger's need to create a subjective world he can control, his motives lying there beyond question:

> The process through which the revenger hardens himself to carry out the entreaties of the ghost is a process of reshaping the world .... The delay might be defined as the pause

(4) Richard Schechner, "From Ritual to Theatre and Back: The Structure/Process of the Efficacy-Entertainment Dyad," *Essays on Performance Theory* (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1977), p. 90.

necessitated by the revenger's need to construct his world-within-a-world, that private, self-justifying world which will foster the act the external world would never sanction.

The delay leads to and ends at the play-within-the-play, for entrance into this self-created illusory world is what finally allows the revenger to act.(5)

If the revenge itself is a play-in-performance, it must have some kind of integral dramatic structure, and must also exhibit the essential characteristics of drama: plot, character, and spectacle. In both *Hoffman* and *The Revenger's Tragedy,* the revenges comprise a sequence of stages or steps, a sequence that, broadly, though inexactly, corresponds to the exposition, complication, climax, and resolution of a plot. These stages are affirmation and oathtaking, deception and entrapment, confrontation and revelation, punishment and reaffirmation. The execution-by-coronation scene that opens *Hoffman,* which Hoffman himself calls his own "prologue to the ensuing play," reveals these steps and provides a preview even of things to come. Hoffman affirms his purpose and resolution: revenge on "any man that is affied" to his father's killers. When a storm delivers him a victim, he disarms Charles under false pretences, entraps him with Lorrique's assistance (revealing his true intentions at the same time), kills Charles in high fashion, and concludes the episode by warning of further revenge and offering his victim to his father. Hoffman clearly relishes his role as producer and stage manager. He directs Lorrique precisely: "Say thou hast met the kindest host alive" (I,i, 96), and Lorrique, warming up to his part as "villain," entreats the dissembling Hoffman to "entertain him and me his/Follower with the most conspectus pleasures" (I,i, 11. 136-37). Hoffman plunges into mock obsequiousness with gusto, but is too eager, and reveals his father's skeleton to the horrified Charles. Hoffman drops all pretences, but his production is far from over. Indeed, the face-to-face confrontation between the revealed revenger, his victim, and the deceased is an integral part of the performance. Hoffman calls forth Lorrique and stages the coronation with brutal irony:

> You placed my father in a chair of state
> This earth shall be your throne. Villain, come forth.
> *Enter Lorrique* [*with the burning crown*]
> And as thou mean'st to save thy forfeit life,
> Fix on thy Master's head my burning crown ....
>
> (I,i, 207-09)

This, of course, is how Hoffman himself is executed by the counter-revengers at the end of the play. Between the death of Charles and the capture of Hoffman extends the bizarre range of Hoffman's scheming. Assuming the identity of the dead Charles, Hoffman shows up at the court of Prussia and is crowned heir to the duke-

(5) Hallett, p.10.

dom. Hoffman quickly employs the members of the court as his unwitting players, with himself and Lorrique partaking of the action as intriguers in various other disguises. Dressed like a hermit, Hoffman delights in persuading the lovers, Lodwick and Lucibella, to don Grecian habits and to hide in a chapel while he works on Mathias, who will unknowingly kill Lodwick. Lorrique assists him as a kind of property-master, doubling as his ECHO:

> Well, God-a-Mercy, friend, thou got'st me grace.
> But more of that at leisure. Take this gown:
> My cloak, a chair: I must turn melancholy.
> *Enter Mathias*
> [Aside to Lorrique]
> Second what ere I say, approve my words,
> That we may move Mathias to mad rage.
>
> (II,iii, 759-63)

For Hoffman, whose very first act in the play is to banish melancholy, this is acutely conscious acting. His next victim is the Duke of Austria. Back in the guise of Charles, Hoffman stabs Austria without being seen. He schemes against Saxony and Ferdinand next:

> Now, scarlet mistress, from thick sable clouds
> Thrust forth thy blood-stained hands, applaud my plot,
> That giddy wonderers may amazed stand
> While death smites down suspectless Ferdinand.
>
> (III,ii, 1357-60)

In the meantime, he procures a royal pardon and a position as a court taster for the upstart Jerom. This casts Jerom as Ferdinand's poisoner, advised by the ever-helpful Lorrique posing as a French doctor. When Ferdinand dies, Hoffman/Charles directs the proper ceremonies:

> Lords, take this body. Bear it to the court,
> And all the way sound a sad, heavy march,
> Which you may truly keep. Then, people, tread
> A mournful march indeed ....
> [Aside.] Art thou not plumped with laughter, my Lorrique?
>
> III,ii, 1653-57, 1663)

Lying within the scope of Hoffman's design, these murders are merely subsidiary to that of his arch-enemy, Luningberg himself, "that false Duke whom I will kill, or curse my star,, (IV,i, 1674-75). At this point, Hoffman's programme falters. His downfall begins fortuitously with the remote and sudden death of Luningberg by

natural causes. This is an act of God well beyond Hoffman's anticipation. He applies his charm on the widowed Duchess, but more unexpected turns arrest his progress: he falls in love with the Duchess, Lucibella discovers the skeleton, Lorrique betrays him, and the counter-plot takes shape.

New as they might be to the game, the counter-revengers understand "proportion," as Mathias declares in employing Lorrique in a "plot" against Hoffman:

> ... Revenge should have proportion:
> By sly deceit he acted every wrong,
> And by deceit I would have him entrapped.
> Then the revenge were fit, just, and square,
> And 'twould more vex him, that is all composed
> Of craft and subtlety, to be outstripped
> In his own fashion than a hundred deaths.
>
> (V,i, 2200-06)

The counter-revenge follows the pattern: the conspirators perform a ritual pledging, entrap Hoffman through deception, confront him with his victims, punish him in equal measure, and affirm the moral superiority of their position. The counter-revenge sustains the form and the sensibility of a performance: Lorrique mimics his master's keenness for theatrical metaphor when he offers his services to the counter-revengers as "Prologue to your scene of wrath" (V,i, 11. 2172). When Mathias addresses Hoffman as a "smooth-tongued hypocrite," the original meaning of "hypocrite" as "actor" is recoverable.

Cheated out of complete success, Hoffman is likewise denied the fullness of his performance. Having been unable to reveal himself sooner without tipping his hand, Hoffman is denied his final audience. When Mathias presses him for the details of his villainy, Saxony aborts the exchange by fetching the burning crown: "Talk no more to him; he seeks dignity" (V,iii, 11. 2580). The grandeur in extolling "high revenge ... the bliss of the souls" turns in the end for Hoffman into glum mutterings about hell.

In *The Revenger's Tragedy,* the principal revenge, among many others culminates in the Duke's assignation with Gloriana's skull, his humiliation by Spurio and the Duchess, and his execution by Vindice and Hippolito. As a piece of theatre, it is a magnificent production even in its goriness. The casting brings together the major players in the present business: Vindice as himself and in disguise as Piato, Hippolito as the faithful complotter, the criminal Duke, the vestigial Gloriana, and the secondary revengers Spurio and the Duchess. The setting is more than functional: it is a well-used trysting place "wherein 'tis night at noon" (III,v, 19), a localization of the

court's venery and inverted morality. Vindice's properties and effects argue romance perverted: a head-dress and a skull, perfumes and poisons, torches and darkness, music and tonguelessness. The plotting is intricate, and shows much premeditation and prior management: the climax of this revenge is a scene-within-a-play-within-a-play. Spurio's dalliance with the Duchess which the Duke is forced to witness as a crowning insult. Vindice touches up the darkness with the humor that distinguishes him further from the high-strung Hoffman, warning the Duke that his appointed lady has "somewhat a grave look with her" (III,v, 136).

This scene outdoes Hoffman in sheer theatricality, but its sensationalism has been well prepared for, both within and without the play. The playwright's obsession with physical decay, as even the most unsympathetic critics grant, is a sustained indictment of the moral corruption in court society. Bodies become corpses because justice is dead, and " 'Tis no shame to be bad, because 'tis common" (II,i, 11. 117). Blood is spectacular, but spectacle comes integrally with the melodramatic projection of life that the author of *The Revenger's Tragedy* has chosen. This consideration of context invests Vindice's revenge with more than dramaturgical integrity. As Jonas Barish argues, Vindice for his villainy is an agent of the good: "*The Revenger's Tragedy,* even before it is a tale of the good contaminated, is a tale of good versus evil."(6) Good or evil or both, Vindice's program is coherent, and his keen sense of theatre and performance provides for well-rounded action. He first dispenses with the Duke and then concentrates on the freshly-accountable Lussorioso. Taken as single action, the revenge is incomplete until Lussorioso, "as impious steeped" as the old Duke, dies. Like Hoffman, Vindice seeks an end to the enemy line: "Sword I durst make a promise of him to thee, / Thou shalt disheir him," he swears of Lussorioso (I, iii, 174-75). In achieving the deaths of both the Duke and his son, Vindice goes through the necessary motion of a revenge-performer: he pledges their destruction, gains their confidence under false pretences, confronts them with the objects of their crimes, captures and executes them to the accompaniment of his all-important revelation: " 'Tis I, 'tis Vindice, 'tis I!" (III, v, 165), and" ... 'twas Vindice murdered thee!" (V, iii, 11. 78). And in the end, despite the proud folly of his superfluous confession of the murders, Vindice reaffirms the essential correctness and beneficiality of his actions:

> But we hate
> To bleed so cowardly: we have enough —

(6) Jonas Barish, "The True and False Families of *The Revenger's Tragedy,*" in *English Renaissance Drama: Essays in Honour of Madeleine Doran and Mark Eccles,* ed. Standish Henning, Robert Kimbrough, and Richard Knowles (Carbondale, Ill. Southern Illinois University Press, 1976), p. 154.

I'faith we're well — our mother turned, our sister true,
We die after a nest of dukes! Adieu.

(V,iii, 124-26)

As a revenge-performer, Vindice demonstrates a psychological and moral complexity in Vindice that elevates him above Hoffman in dramatic manipulation. Hoffman's ranges and delights are simple-minded, but Vindice is intelligent enough to realize that disguise, character-creation, and role-playing are more than a matter of costume and voice, and involve basic questions of identity. Vindice charts his transformation with a fretful regularity: "I'll quickly turn into another," he resolves (I,i, 133); two scenes later he asks Hippolito, "what, brother, am I far enough from myself?" (I,iii, 1). Called a "good son" by his mother, Vindice cries out. "Oh I'm in doubt / whether I'm myself or no!" (IV,iv, 24-25). The strain of Vindice's transformations erupts in ludicrous laughter in the opening of the final act when he, commissioned to muder his previous incarnation Piato, considers the Duke's body in Piato's clothes:

That's a good lay, for I must kill myself! [*Points to corps*] Brother that's I: that sits for me: do you mark it. And I must stand ready here to make away myself yonder; I must sit to be killed, and stand to kill myself.

(V,i, 3-6)

Vindice' ultimate claim to an identity rests on the singular fact of murder; his old "nature" accompanies his victims in their departure:

[*Whispers*] And I am he!
Tell nobody. -- [*Lussorioso dies*] So, so. The duke's departed.

(V,iii, 79-80)

As the principal performer in his own play, the revenger constructs and assumes new, false, or subsidiary personalities, which, in the extreme, may impinge upon and even overcome his original character. As this "strange composed fellow" realizes, the revenger crosses a fatal threshold when he becomes his own enemy.

The use and ultimate failure of disguise is weighed further by the suggestion that the revenger, almost by definition, is already in disguise. By usurping the prerogative of God and State in the punishment of evil, he assumes the role of Justice. Not surprisingly, the tenor and manner of the revenge-performance is often uncritically self-righteous. Typically, Hoffman claims the moral high ground. As his opening speech shows, Hoffman believes himself engaged in "a cause that's right," commanded by heaven to kill his father's enemies. His reward will be "paradise," and he is, unrepentant to the end, critical of himself only for having been diverted from his mission by unworthy desire. As Philip J. Ayres notes, Hoffman "never doubts his divine

agency."[7] It takes Lorrique to perceive and reveal, early on, Hoffman's essential villainy: Hoffman, he says, is an

> ... honest villain. H'as conscience in his killing of men.
> He kills none but his father's enemies, and their issue.
> 'Tis admirable; 'tis excellent; 'tis well; 'tis meritorious;
> Where? In Heaven? No: Hell.
>
> (II,iii, 661-64)

Lorrique's judgement is ironic but inevitable. The revenger as plotter had to be thwarted by a larger hand: religion, the law, and the Elizabethan playwright himself, not to mention an audience titillated by Italianate intriguers.

Within the play, however, is another audience of the revenge-performance, indeed several audiences. The revenger's enemy must be his most intimate and valued patron. For both Hoffman and Vindice, manifest approval from the balcony on high is also welcome: Hoffman calls for "blood-stained hands" to emerge from the heavens and applaud his plot, while Vindice takes a bow to what he imagines is God's favor: No power is angry when the lustful die: / When thunder claps, heaven likes the tragedy" (V,iii, 46-7). The revengers also perform before the society of the play, accomplice and victim among them. Even when revenge seems perfunctory (as when Hoffman secretly stabs Austria) Hoffman derives a performer's pleasure not only from the murder but also from the consternation he produces in the immediate company. This audience is corruptible, as the counter revenge in *Hoffman* and the Castiza-Gratiana sub-plot in *The Revenger's Tragedy* prove. Even so their sins are venial compared to the revenger's, the enormity of whose bloodlust being the calculated moral of the larger play he figures in.

(7) Philip P.J. Ayres, *Tourneur: The Revenger's Tragedy* (London: Edwin Arnold, 1977), p. 14.

شخصية البطل كروائي ومخرج مسرحي في مسرحيتين مأساويتين من العصر الإليزابيثي

علي بن أحمد الغامدي

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ملخص البحث. إن موضوع الانتقام في المسرحية المأساوية الإليزابيثية هو موضوع مهم، لم يوجد اعتباطًا وإنما تم تخطيطه وإتقانه. ففي مسرحيته «مأساة هوفمن» والتي كتبها المسرحي الإليزابيثي هنري شاتل في عام ١٦٠٣م، نجد أن بطل المسرحية كلويس هوفمن يضطر إلى استخدام وسائل عدة وسبل شتى ليصل إلى مبتغاه وهو الانتقام من خصمه. فمن هذه الأشياء والسبل نجده يستعمل عاصفة، ومغارة ذات ستارة على بابها، وجمجمة والده المتوفى، وتاج من الحديد، وشركاء عديدون يساعدونه في تنفيذ مخططه الانتقامي.

أما في مسرحية «مأساة المنتقم» التي ألفها الكاتب المسرحي الإليزابيثي سيرل تورنر في عام ١٦٠٦م، فنجد أن بطل المسرحية فندز لا يهمه أن ينتظر فترة تسع سنين يخطط فيها كيف ينتقم من خصمه ولا يضيره أن يستعمل أشياء شتى في سبيل تحقيق هدفه مثل جمجمة محبوبته، وغطاء وجه ملطخ بالدماء، واستغلال شهوات خصمه العديدة ليصل إلى مبتغاه، حتى عندما تحين الفرصة أو الفرص لأبطال هذه المسرحيات لتحقيق هدفهم وهو الانتقام السريع، مثل أن يجد فرصة لطعن خصمه من الخلف كما حدث لفندز أو أثناء الصلاة كما حديث في مسرحية «هاملت،» عندما وجد هاملت فرصة لقتل كلوديوس فإنه لا يفعل شيئًا من ذلك، فالبطل في مسرحية الانتقام يفضل أن يكون انتقامه محاطًا بهالة من الوجاهة والأبهة. ويتم أمام الملأ ليتناسب والمغزى المهم لهذه المسرحيات.