"When thunder claps, heaven likes the tragedy":

Searching for Sources of Authority in Elizabethan and Jacobean Revenge Drama

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Abstract

This thesis explores how Elizabethan and Jacobean revenge tragedy uses classical models as sources of authority for the revenger as well as for the task of revenge in a corrupt and confusing world. In the morally and theologically perplexed Reformation world, the classical tradition provided an attractive alternative to the age's fraught Christianity, especially in the theatrical realm, where playwrights could build on an existing cultural awareness of works like Seneca's plays to create new narratives. By focusing on three plays that make up a rough chronological survey of the genre, I argue that *The Spanish Tragedy*, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, and *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois* are examples of how Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights employ the revenger as sub-dramatist figure and a figure in tune with classical sensibilities. The revenger's position is liminal to both his society and to the structure of the plays, which allows him to function as an authorial figure, a figure of authority, and an agent of revenge. The revenger takes action, but can do so only under the auspices of a greater authority, which in these plays is represented by supernatural messengers and tokens. Revengers deal with the frustration and confusion of an unsure world by creating an active narrative under super-societal sanctions that only the classical model can provide.

Résumé

Cette thèse étudie la façon dont la tragédie de vengeance Elisabéthaine et Jacobine emploie certains modèles classiques comme sources d'autorité, tant pour donner forme à la figure du vengeur que pour énoncer les principes qui justifient son action vengeresse au sein d'un monde corrompu et trompeur. La tradition Classique offrait des solutions possibles aux problèmes moraux et théologiques posés par la Réforme, solutions parfois jugées plus séduisantes que celle apportées par une Chrétienté en crise. C'était tout particulièrement le cas dans le domaine théâtral, où les dramaturges pouvaient s'appuyer sur la connaissance commune d'œuvres, notamment celles de Sénèque, pour inventer de nouvelles intrigues. Je propose de centrer mon étude sur La Tragédie Espagnole, La Tragédie du Vengeur et La Vengeance de Bussy d'Ambois, trois pièces qui couvrent à peu près la chronologie du genre, afin de montrer comment les auteurs de théâtre des périodes Elisabéthaine et Jacobine utilisent le personnage du vengeur pour lui faire jouer un rôle de dramaturge ainsi que pour composer une figure où s'incarnent des idées issues de la pensée Classique. Que ce soit dans la société où il vit, ou par rapport à la structure même de la pièce, le vengeur occupe une place à part. Ceci lui permet d'intervenir en tant que metteur en scène du drame, en tant que figure d'autorité et en tant qu'agent de l'action vengeresse. Le vengeur accomplit sa vengeance, mais il ne peut y parvenir qu'en se plaçant sous les auspices d'une autorité qui le dépasse, laquelle se manifeste au moyen de messagers et de signes surnaturels. Les vengeurs répondent aux frustrations et aux mensonges d'un monde incertain en mettant en scène une action qui s'appuie sur des principes que seul le modèle Classique peut proposer.

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Introduction

"When thunder claps, heaven likes the tragedy" (*The Revenger's Tragedy* 5.3). When Vindice utters these words in Thomas Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy*, he asserts that his actions are pleasing to a higher power, in response to the theatrical sound cue that precedes his line. The question, however, is: what is this higher power that so approves revenge? The revenge genre has a long history reaching from, as John Kerrigan puts it, "Aeschylus to Armageddon," but this work will focus on Elizabethan and Jacobean revenge drama as seen through the lens of three plays: Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy*, and George Chapman's *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois*. This period of revenge drama is notable for its use of classical texts, especially the plays of Seneca, and is a particularly rich example of the genre's evolution. This work, therefore, is concerned with the extent to which these early modern plays take seriously Seneca's legacy, and provide spaces to explore the classical tradition as an alternative to the era's fractured Christianity. The figure of the revenger is a perfect locus for these concerns as he exists as a character liminal to both his society and that of the play, but one who is required to act and therefore requires assurance of his cause's rightness. Revengers deal with the frustration and confusion of an unsure world by seeking a super-societal sanction for their actions that only the classical model can provide. This thesis will read revenge tragedy as a continual form of literary adaptation that explores questions of authority through the sub-authorial role of the revenger. The power of this role emerges from the genre's willingness to engage seriously with its classical tradition and thus gives the classically-inspired revenger the authority to act in ways that are off limits in a Christian society.

The study of Elizabethan and Jacobean revenge tragedy has prompted a number of

different approaches. Frederick Bowers' 1940 book attempts to classify revenge plays into various movements, beginning with Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, and progressing through ever more decadent incarnations. Although Bowers' early survey provides a useful basis of study, it sees the development of revenge tragedy as having a fixed trajectory: "the progression of the Kydian hero to villain-revenger was inevitable owing to the standards of English morality" (275). This view allows little room for a sense of internal development, as Bowers sees the genre as falling into relatively strict categories predetermined by moral conditions of its time. In comparison, later critics such as Charles and Elaine Hallett are less interested in an overriding sense of morality than the emotions inherent in the enacting of the revenges themselves, and turn their attention to the psychology of the revenger himself. Rather than exploring "the history of the genre or audience attitudes," as Bowers does, the Halletts instead seek to examine the "revenge experience" by focusing on the "passion of revenge" as a specific phenomenon, not an incidental source of action (5). Prompted by their interest in "revenger's madness" they look to explore the revenger's psyche, as does John Kerrigan, although he combines this focus with a wider study of cultural influences. Kerrigan is interested in the revenger's human nature, but explores sources that range far beyond those of early modern drama; he says that "to think about revenge tragedy is to approach an understanding of forces which drive behaviour across many levels—always including the linguistic; forces which, for better or worse, are unlikely to be 'purged' from the human sphere" (367). Kerrigan's interest in this linguistic behavior prefigures more recent critics like Woodbridge, who criticizes the "genre policing" of Eleanor Prosser and the "pigeon-holing" of the Halletts, and instead offers a broader view of what should be called a revenge tragedy in order to explore "the cultural work that literary revenge performs" (Woodbridge 5). Although I will stick more closely to the Halletts' sampling of plays, my

interest also lies in the genre's cultural work, and how it provides space to explore authority. For the purposes of this thesis, however, I focus on defining the revenger's role within a specific context rather than attempting to identify every cultural influence that produced the genre.

The sheer number of plays produced speak to the genre's popularity, but also show a marked development of the genre within the time frame.[1] Even in the works of a single author, such as Shakespeare, we may see a movement from a more classically-inspired tragedy like *Titus Andronicus*, with its Ovidian speeches and Senecan bloodbaths, to *Hamlet*, the greater refinement of which Everett praises by saying: "the revenge play before and outside Shakespeare can be a mechanical, shallow and violent form… *Hamlet* is incomparably more" (quoted in Woodbridge 3). To prop up *Hamlet*, however, it is not necessary to tear down other works, and these so-called "mechanical, shallow, violent" plays hold their own interests. Additionally, as Woodbridge notes, both *Titus* and *Hamlet* are "sensational revenge plays," and instances of revenge can be found in all but a few of Shakespeare's theatrical works (3). Despite Shakespeare's rich treatment of revenge themes, however, my three primary texts are drawn from his rough contemporaries to provide a fuller picture of the genre. Each of these plays is indicative of a movement within the genre, and together they provide a diverse sampling of the genre itself and its classical sources.

The Spanish Tragedy enters into a dialogue with classical revenge drama, specifically Seneca, by using many of its tropes and creating a pagan framework around the nominally Christian world of the play's mortal characters. To support this framework, the play establishes a classical picture of the afterlife and introduces the character of Revenge in a choric function. Tying the two worlds together, the play's resident ghost rises from the pagan underworld to

[1] Woodbridge discusses close to fifty revenge tragedies in her book, *English Revenge Drama: Money, Resistance, Equality.*

observe the main action with Revenge and provides context for Hieronimo's gradual movement away from Christian ideas of vengeance and towards the bloodthirstiness that defines a Senecan revenger. *The Revenger's Tragedy*, in comparison, contains a character set on his course of revenge from the beginning and grapples with ideas of death and commemoration. To bring these issues to light, the play focuses on dead bodies rather than ghosts; its treatment of the Lucrece myth invites classical concepts of revenge and justice into the narrative, creating a conversation with changing Christian ideas of remembrance. My last text, *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois* explores its protagonist's devotion to Stoicism, drawing on a contemporary culture of philosophical discussion, and considers whether revenge can be virtuous. Although Christianity is a clear presence in the play, it is Clermont's devotion to his classical school of philosophy that guides his hand and approves his actions.

Seneca is also a Stoic, and though there is some amount of disagreement over the extent to which that philosophy influences his plays, C. A. J. Littlewood makes a compelling argument that "Seneca's isolationist Stoicism, determined to present a soul from within and in defiance of a hostile public reality" looks to the cosmos for coherence rather than to the dramatic world (57). In Elizabethan and Jacobean revenge drama, the dramatic world reflects contemporary Christian society, but the cosmos retains the classical influences of its predecessors, as *The Spanish Tragedy* makes explicit with its framework. Boyle agrees when he states that "the moral universe of Renaissance tragedy is anything other than consistently Christian" and that "it shows more affinity to Seneca's tragic world than to any Christian theistic construct, generally projecting itself as hostile, morally perplexing if not amoral or perverse" (186). Early modern revenge tragedy, therefore, often moves the dramatic action to its own Christian world, but keeps the

universe in classical space more congenial to the revenger's situation.[2] This kind of construction shows a real engagement with classical tragedy, where themes are developed into new forms rather than being taken out of context.[3]

Kerrigan, commenting on the longevity of the genre, suggests that "revenge tragedies last beyond the epoch of their production because retributive attitudes are ingrained… but they are also machines for producing ethical deadlock: moments of trial within and beyond character in which rhetoric is, in the liveliest sense, an agent of action."[4] In Kerrigan's estimation, the words themselves become action and, in application to *The Spanish Tragedy*, he notes that "Hieronimo moves between crises of judgement which generate passionate but highly formal utterances" (29). The revenger's adapted language thus provides a link to its sources by maintaining a degree of an earlier linguistic style, but takes on a new life, and keeps evolving. Just as *The Spanish Tragedy* marks the transition of classical to early modern text, *The Revenger's Tragedy* plays with the conventions of the genre, and according to Boyle "is permeated with references to itself as tragedy, often of an overtly humorous nature… [projecting] itself from the start as a paradigm of revenge tragedy… and then deploys the genre's conventions in a self-consciously caricaturist fashion" (201). Self-consciousness is common to all these plays, and provides a look at the adaptation process which *The Revenger's Tragedy* takes to extremes by its parodic nature. Stull, in fact, goes to far as to argue that *The Revenger's Tragedy* moves beyond mere adaptation and "demolish[es] Kydian tragedy once and for all… set[ting] the stage for a new kind of tragedy

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[2] In discussing the tension between the "deeply Christian era" and the revenge tragedy inhabiting it, Woodbridge concludes that these plays' popularity "suggest that audiences can resist ideology or park it at the theater door and accept a play's terms" (Woodbridge 32).

[3] As I will discuss later, writers like Nashe express a concern over the mining of Senecan tragedy. In light of how most early modern authors treat Ovid, Seneca seems to get off rather lightly, but as Ovid's own work was itself a plundering of the traditions before it, this seems only fair. Since Seneca's plays are specific versions of various myths rather than a large work combining many, like Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and *Fasti*, it was easier to engage with Seneca's plays as whole texts.

[4] Kerrigan compares revenge theatre to law courts here (29).

altogether… focused not on external intrigues but on internal conflicts" (quoted in Corrigan 289). Despite these new readings, adaptations, and developments, keeping a direct line to the classical cosmos affords an easier fit with the adapted elements. Even with the confusions of classical revenge, there is a level of comfort and precedent to be found in this infinitely adaptable non-Christian authority.

The potential comforts of the classical tradition become especially apparent against the religious turmoil of the post-Reformation era, where the established study of antiquity could provide a stable alternative to a rapidly changing Christianity. As Steven Mullaney describes the contemporary religious climate:

> The English Reformation itself was hardly a tidy affair, marked as it was by the succession of no less than five official state religions, each claiming the status of unrivaled and absolute truth and all within the space of a single generation; one of the results was to displace and destabilize the very notion of the orthodox or the absolute… During the same period, individuals commanded an increasingly greater access to heterodox ideas and ideologies… disseminated not only by direct and unmediated access to a printed text but also by diverse processes of re-presentation and representation in official and unofficial forums ranging from the pulpit to the tavern. (Mullaney 142)

One of these forums was the tradition of weekly set-piece sermons at St. Paul's Cross, a kind of "ecclesiastical supermarket" in which the most popular preachers of the day competed for precedence, and a variegated audience could "shop around" in a practice known as "sermon gadding."[5]

[5] Archer also quotes "an imagined conversation," from 1589 in which a Londoner compares his local preacher to one found in Southwark, and finds the latter far more edifying (138).

This rich religious culture, however, could lack focus or direction due to its increasingly heterogeneous nature, and created an atmosphere in which various viewpoints had to vie for attention— if one preacher bored him, a man could merely follow another whose views seemed more edifying.[6] "Antipopery" as Archer notes "was the cement that held otherwise conflicting Protestant views together," but despite the best efforts of many, there was still a Catholic presence in the country, and despite their unification against Catholicism as "antireligion," many of the Protestant views were conflicting ones (141). Although Protestantism brought an opportunity for a personal exploration of faith, the various interpretations on offer had the effect of muddying authority and creating a fractured religious identity behind the façade of antipopery. Rist also specifically criticizes the concept of anti-Catholic unification by dismissing the suggestion that "Protestant interpreters each viewed Catholicism as the same, absolute Babylon" since "especially in regard to the dead… too many Protestants maintained that 'Babylon' in their own rituals" (26). Of course, much of the funerary pomp of popish Rome could be traced back to classical Rome, and as such provided a way of bypassing the confusion of religion for classical practice.

Rist's view of Protestant funeral practices also supports his larger argument that "remembrance of the dead is… the focal context for revenge tragedy and its religion" (26), which promotes the idea that remembrance of the dead in these plays becomes a religion in and of itself. Michael Neill, who is likewise concerned with death, in particular "the mapping of its meanings," additionally sees "the extraordinary burgeoning of tragic drama in late Elizabethan and Jacobean England" as a "crucial part of this secularising process: tragedy was among the principal instruments by which the culture of early modern England reinvented death" (*Issues of*

[6] By the turn of the century fourty-four parishes in London held lectureships, leading to a wide variety of learned ecclesiastical opinion in a confined area (Archer 138).

Death 1). The reinvention of death also requires a reinvention of memorial practices, and Stephen Greenblatt reads Claudius' chastisement of Hamlet's extreme grief as a reflection of contemporary preachers' attempts to "wean their flock away from Purgatory and prayers for the dead and obstinate condolement" (247). Revenge, however, provides a displacement of this grief into action rather than Hamlet's "obstinate condolement" and "impious stubbornness" (*Hamlet* 12.2.92-4), and has the potential to turn paralyzing grief into active commemoration.

To prompt active remembrance, most revenge tragedies turn to ghosts, and certainly Hamlet is urged out of his lassitude simply by the news of his father's ghost, before he has seen it himself; even before hearing the news, Hamlet has been picturing his father in his mind and dwelling on that image. As Kerrigan notes, "memories are very powerful tools in provoking anger and revenge," and "ghosts, as seen in Hamlet, are visual representations of memories, used to urge the character to keep remembering until revenge is at hand" (170). In addition, the ghost's supernatural status sets it apart from the other characters, which in a production like *The Spanish Tragedy* creates opportunities for the ghost to function in a choric capacity. Although *The Revenger's Tragedy* does not contain a ghost per se, it exists in an atmosphere of death and the centrality of the skull invites the audience to imagine a ghost attached to it, especially as it becomes a major actor in its own revenge. Ghosts, therefore, or the suggestion of ghosts, act as supernatural indicators of divine favor within the worlds of these plays; their presence and reactions to the deaths of the revenger's foes serve to sanction the revenger's actions. In *The Spanish Tragedy*, the ghost of Andrea exists as an arbiter of the play's structure and the spectator role it takes alongside Revenge serves to connect the play directly to the works of Seneca. Robert Watson sees this arbitration as a triumph of the dead over the living: "Andrea and the figure of Revenge conspire to punish the world of the living and thereby redeem the world of the dead…

portray[ing] the envious dead as more volitional and more fully conscious than the living, who become merely actors in a play the dead can frame" (60). Although I would argue with the assertion that Hieronimo is "merely" an actor (a point I will discuss in the next chapter), Watson offers a good assessment of supernatural power in *The Spanish Tragedy*, as Hieronimo's bloody spectacle functions as a microcosm of the play's action, and sees Andrea turn from spectator to adjudicator when he takes charge of punishing the recently deceased villians. Similar spectacles are set up by Vindice in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, one under the aegis of Gloriana's skull, and the other blessed by the seemingly divine thunderclap Vindice waits for. Clermont, although he does not set up such a spectacle, does engage in a formal and very theatrical duel with Montsurry which ends with a pageant of ghosts dancing over Montsurry's body. Ghosts and revengers share a common liminal space, the overlap of which enables them to communicate. This is the space where the revenger can receive instruction, and exists most naturally in the classically-inspired universe. In support of ghosts' natural ties to the classical tradition, Greenblatt observes that although ghosts "may have helped to fuel contemporary complaints that the theater was unchristian… they did not seem to arouse a specifically theological anxiety" since even rabid antitheatricalists could not "imagine them to be secret agents for the pope's Purgatory" as "their ancestry is manifestly classical rather than Catholic" (153). In a world of ghosts, therefore, the revenger turns more easily to the classical tradition because it provides a basis for the existence of these spirits and the potential for active remembrance.

In contrast to the method of remembrance it can become, revenge in Aristotelian terms is seen instead as a method of correction, which Anne Burnett parses as a "self-engaged and retrospective action taken privately against an equal who has injured one's honor" with the "intention to restore the broken outline of self" (2). In later revenge tragedies, however,

restoration of personal honor becomes an attempt to restore justice and usually involves unequal players; revenge is sought because the inequality between the players prevents the revenger from seeking justice by more conventional means. In light of this change, Burnett suggests that revenge itself has been corrupted by society: "Attic tragedy remembers vengeance as an honorable imperative essential to the preservation of order, whereas most moderns at least pretend to view revenge as an evil" (6). The problem here is that Attic tragedy starts from a place where order is assumed, where later revengers are trying, by their acts, to restore order to an already deeply disordered society. In contrast, Mercer builds upon G. K. Hunter's assertion that Elizabethan revengers "continue to exist in a world where justice is remembered as a value" by stating that justice is *remembered* specifically because it is no longer a reality (5). Instead, these revengers exists in world where "God's justice could be slow, his earthly representatives corrupt, the machinery of the state out of order, so that flagrant wrongs went unpunished" (Burnett 21). This description fits Hieronimo's plaint against his society, "O world no world but mass of public wrongs / Confused and filled with murder and misdeeds" (*The Spanish Tragedy* 3.2.3-4), which sees the world as having broken down from a harmonious whole into contentious fragments. This kind of fragmentation appears not only in religious life, as previously discussed, but also in the litigious practices of the age. The same proliferation of printed material which offered a wide array of theological opinions also caused confusion and contention in the legal world. Indeed, the shift in the sixteenth century towards a wealth of printed legal material "could be potentially counterproductive and liable to a travesty of the 'common erudition' that defined common law, owing to piecemeal use by legal middlemen—the law being unavailable to all in a single authoritative book" (Mukherji 109).[7] Along with the fragmentation of the revenger's society itself, those with the power to reunite the society are often part of the problem. Burnett,

[7] The ineffectiveness of law is parodied by Vindice's melancholic lawyer persona in 4.2 of *The Revenger's Tragedy*.

in particular, observes that those in power are also often the culprits, an observation shared by Eileen Allman who points out that crimes are often "committed by the figure authorized to prosecute and punish them" (34).

Issues of fragmentation also play into the confusing array of ever-changing authority systems that would have confronted an early modern English audience. The years bridging the 15th and 16th centuries were marked by changes of state that affected not only the practice of religion but also the construction of the state itself. In his discussion of these changes, Mullaney posits that the ascension of James after the death of Elizabeth characterized "a significant transformation of the body politic, a reincorporation and regendering of monarchy" that "marked a breach in the body politic as much as a continuation of it" (139). In addition, James' new court provided new material for dramatists. Alastair Bellany's description of Jacobean court life suggests that it inspired contemporary dramatists much as Nero's court did Seneca:

> Scandalous images of the early Stuart court surely worked upon the imaginations of dramatists, playgoers, and readers. Fictional dramas of court scandal, set on foreign shores, did not have to mimic English events precisely, and we do not have to read them as coded contemporary events with a direct correspondence between real and fictional characters in action. But the stage did provide yet another public space in which to wrestle with the implications of court corruption, and playwrights could generate dramatic and political energy from public knowledge of contemporary scandal and from the libelous discourse that fueled that knowledge. (Bellany 122-3)

Although the primary texts dealt with in this thesis were not explicitly inspired by any specific scandals of the Jacobean court, Bellany provides a good analysis of the relationship between

actual court culture and its depictions on stage. The excesses of these early modern courts bear a similarity both in luxury and unconventionality to the courts of the early Roman emperors, particularly Nero; as many, such as Littlewood and Boyle, note there are certain similarities to be drawn between the two— not least the flourishing literary culture these courts engendered as well as the dangers of the courts themselves. In reference to the connection between these societies, Boyle believes that this kind of writing reveals truths about the human condition, noting that the emergence of theatre like this, from societies under similar stresses, suggests that savage and vengeful instincts are not "sublimated at all, but operate fully within the structures of civilization, concealed behind the theatricality of role play" (212). In particular, Boyle's view is important as it applies to his observations about Elizabethan and Jacobean society where he sees the pomp and spectacle of the court as "a secularization and replacement of the theatrical rituals of medieval Catholicism," especially regarding Elizabeth's appropriation "of pastoral and myth to create highly conventionalized and overtly artificial roles for herself and her subjects to play" (204). In keeping with this view, the Elizabethan and Jacobean era becomes a place where secular authority is marked by theatrical spectacle not only from a sense of tradition, but also as a way of coping with the religious upheaval of the time. The monarchical use of theatrical spectacle to treat such wounds, therefore, can also be applied to the theatre as well, where the enactment of spectacular revenges could provide a cathartic experience in the face of societal frustrations. Boyle takes this further when he connects the world of Seneca with these early modern playwrights, concluding that "like their Roman predecessor, Elizabeth and Jacobean dramatists presaged imminent political and social collapse when the performances of the powerful became aberrant" (207). In Boyle's opinion, these plays could serve not only a cathartic function, but also to stand as an explicit performance of governance gone wrong, and the

consequences thereof, thus figuring revenge drama as a theatrical possibility that might become a historical reality. That said, however, confining these conflicts to the theatre, and moreover, to foreign settings, helped to distance affairs of the stage from affairs of state. Watson, in his discussion of *The Spanish Tragedy*, expands this view by suggesting that such plays offered a way for the audience "to witness and approve an extreme act of treason that follows naturally, by the logic of revenge" from their real complaints, while ensconced in the fantasy world of the play (73). The theatre, therefore, provides the audience with a more secure space to explore their frustrations. Mullaney provides an eloquent expansion on this sense of the theatre when he calls it "a prominent affective arena in which significant cultural traumas and highly ambivalent events… could be directly or indirectly addressed, symbolically enacted, and brought to partial and imaginary resolution" (144).

As such, the theatrical experience is able to create micro universes where these ideas can be explored. Littlewood sees self-consciousness in Senecan tragedy as a way by which "representations of spectacles and spectators are formal devices through which actual readers and spectators are made to reflect upon their reaction to dramatic events" (172). These revenge plays engage with classical thought through the same self-conscious theatricality, and this engagement results in situations where the villain is effectively put on trial through spectacle. As Watson and Mullaney suggest, however, these theatrical spectacles as trials can also extend to individuals outside the world of the play, so reactions to dramatic events can double for reactions to real ones. Looking particularly at *The Spanish Tragedy*, Watson expands on his depiction of the theatre as a safe method of engaging in treason:

> The performance of revenge as a play-within-the-play in *The Spanish Tragedy* (as in *Hamlet* and *The Revenger's Tragedy*) may constitute an acknowledgment that

> such satisfactions are possible only at the level of fantasy, where actors stand in for real people and geopolitical treachery stands in for the frustrations of ordinary life. At an aesthetic distance, Hieronimo's final massacre becomes an elaborate sacrifice that exorcises demons of helplessness and perceived injustice, demons so common in the human animal, so heightened in the aspiring minds of the Renaissance, and so focused in the fierce economies of Elizabethan England and Elizabeth's court. (73)

The various levels present in this construction, where the external spectators experience catharsis by witnessing the murder of the spectators within the play, create a situation where the internal and external audiences are at odds; the playgoers are meant to identify with the revenger rather than his victims, but also find themselves in the victims' position of spectator, separated only by their full knowledge of the proceedings. Just as the knowledgeable outside audience derives pleasure from witnessing the spectacle of their oblivious counterparts being murdered within the play, "the revenger draws satisfaction from the impotence of the audience or actor when compared with the authority of the dramatist" (Littlewood 183). Littlewood's assertion about the dramatist's authority ties into the meta-theatrical conventions of the early modern theatre, which make dramatic literature an ideal space to explore questions of authority and engage in conversation with these classical sources. Early modern revenge plays are prone to be extremely self-conscious, just as Seneca's were; Littlewood notes the way Senecan tragedy builds itself into a cocoon of references and allusions and thus "continually reminds its readers of the fictive quality of its dramatic reality" to an extent that "in some respects the characters share the feeling that their lives are roles, their actions a scripted or a staged spectacle"

(7).

Characters aware of their own status as characters brings the self-consciousness to the forefront, and the primary texts for this thesis all reference the revenger as knowing his place in the drama that surrounds him. Within the world of the play, the revenger is the dramatist, and Hieronimo identifies himself as "author and actor" (*The Spanish Tragedy* 4.4.146). This identification relates to the use of *auctor* in Seneca's *Thyestes* and Jasper Heywood's translation of the same. In Seneca's play, the word appears only once, but significantly, referring to Atreus' revenge: *quid sit quod horres ede et auctorem indica* (*Thyestes* 640).[8] Although the literal translation here is closer to "doer," Heywood translates it as "author," thus making Atreus' role as a sub-dramatist explicit. *Auctor*, the root of author ("author," OED) and etymologically similar to actor, provides an understanding of this— in Latin the word can mean both "author" and "doer" ("auctor," Smith and Lockwood), and as such applies to both aspects of the revenger- that of author and of instrument. The revenger, therefore, is cast in a role where the *auctor* requires *auctoritas*, where the revenger becomes the author and the supernatural world provides the authority.

[8] In this line, the chorus asks the messenger who has done the horrors he's just described— the answer is Atreus.

Chapter One

"Author and actor in this tragedy": Seneca, Spectacle, and *The Spanish Tragedy*

In this section, I discuss Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*'s active engagement with classical influences, particularly the plays of Seneca, through his construction of a universe governed by pagan forces and his development and use of the ghost figure. First, I look broadly at the impact of Seneca's plays on 16th century literary culture, and then I show how Kyd builds on this background; Kyd's ghost figure is a prime example of how his use of Classical tropes enters into a conversation with these sources and uses that conversation to form a new, coherent whole rather than a loose collection of references. Finally, I will show how his use of the ghost feeds into the lives of the living characters and influences their development, proving a link between the pagan deities of the play and the actions of the plays' mortals; these actions take the form of theatrical spectacles that are presented for the approval of the play's internal deities as well as the external audience watching the production.

The firmly pagan universe of *The Spanish Tragedy* provides an alternative to the uncertainty of Hieronimo's initial Christian beliefs, and over the course of the play his tortured ambivalence, grounded in more contemporary theology, turns to bloodthirsty conviction as he adopts the pagan ideals of a grand revenge spectacle. The slide from a nominally Christian world to one ruled by pagan influence is dramatized in 3.13 of *The Spanish Tragedy*, in which Hieronimo undergoes a process that will transform him into the revenger of the later part of the play. Hieronimo, still reeling from his son's death, enters reading, and begins by paraphrasing a well-known verse from the Vulgate:

[Hieronimo reading] *Vindicta mihi!*[9]

Aye, heaven will be revenged of every ill,

Nor will they suffer murder unrepaid.

Then stay, Hieronimo, attend their will:

For mortal men may not appoint their time.

[*Reading* again] *Per scelus semper tutum est sceleribus iter.*

Strike, and strike home, where wrong is offered thee;

For evils unto ills conductors be…

[*Reading* again] *Fata si miseros iuvant, habes salute;*

Fata si vitam negant, habes sepulchrum:

If destiny thy miseries do ease,

Than hast thou health, and happy shalt thou be. (3.13.1-7; 12-5)

Although the speech starts with the Vulgate, the next quotes are from Seneca's *Agamemnon* and *Troades* respectively, so what seems at first to be a Bible in Hieronimo's hands is transformed into a collection of Seneca's plays (Hammond 18). As Hieronimo reads, the text appears to shift before him as he translates each verse and provides commentary on it; the revenger here feels the weight of both a Christian and a classical tradition, but the classical side appears to hold more sway. As Hammond observes: "Hieronimo's Christian resignation dissolves as his Latin pulls him away from St Paul to Seneca, a move which is prepared for as his singular Christian 'heauen' takes on the plural pronoun 'they' which is more apposite to the classical gods" (18). The selected verses, and the way Hieronimo chooses to construe them, allow the transformation not only of the text but of Hieronimo himself as he begins to take on both the active and passive

[9] Romans 12:19. The full quote is: *mihi vindictam ego retribuam dicit Dominus* (For me is vengeance, I will repay, says the Lord). Jerome. *Vulgate Bible*. Bible Foundation and On-Line Book Initiative.

aspects of a revenger. The translation in itself is authorial and the deliberate switching between Latin and English anticipates the multi-lingual play in Act 4. With the *Agamemnon* quote, Hieronimo notes the value of action and specifically of repaying wickedness in kind, while his subsequent use of the *Troades* indicates a willingness to submit to *fata* or, as he translates it, "destiny." Although the construction of the play makes revenge Hieronimo's destiny, his inevitable transformation to revenger also requires an active choice to embrace his role as sub-dramatist in the play.

Although Hieronimo quotes only the *Agamemnon* and the *Troades*, Kyd owes a huge debt to Seneca's plays in general and, in particular, to the *Thyestes*, which provides a model for the play's narrative structure and is important both in its own right and in contemporary translations. The works of Seneca, particularly his tragedies, exerted a significant influence on the writers of the day.[10] In his 1589 preface to Greene's *Menaphon*, Thomas Nashe condemns playwrights' reliance on Seneca: "English *Seneca* read by candlelight yeeldes manie goode sentences… he will afford you whole *Hamlets*, I should say handfuls of tragical speeches… The sea exhaled by droppes will in continuance be drie, and *Seneca* let blood line by line and page by page, at length needes die to our stage" (quoted in Boyle 141). Nashe's language brings his concerns vividly to life with the violent imagery of playwrights dissecting Seneca for piecemeal use and bleeding him dry; he sees the appropriation and misuse of classical sources as violent and criminal act and moreover a lazy one, where these lesser authors cannibalize Seneca for their own purposes. As this complaint only postdates Kyd's very popular tragedy by a few years, it seems likely that *The Spanish Tragedy* was at least a part of the literary culture that so annoyed Nashe. Despite Nashe's criticism, however, the use of Seneca in theatrical endeavors was based

[10] Seneca also wrote philosophical works which will be discussed in Chapter 3.

in a longstanding engagement with his works in Latin,[11] which blossomed into a period of translation and adaptation that considered the works in whole, not just as a source for "goode sentences." Jessica Winston, in her exploration of this engagement, proposes "two distinct phases" of Elizabethan encounter with the works of Seneca, that of translators working in the 1560s, and that of dramatists in the 1580s and 1590s, noting that "later playwrights imitated aspects of the tragedies, but earlier ones engaged with them comprehensively and in their entirety" (30). The influence of Seneca, then, seems to move from translation exercise to adaptation to inspiration, with the earliest phase setting a rich grounding for the dramatic usage which Nashe would later disparage, but also establishing a clear connection of interests and concerns back to Seneca himself. This translation phase of the mid-1500s also shows how interest in translating Seneca's works fostered a flourishing creative community. Although translators may have worked individually, their translations became part of a larger literary culture that that encouraged conversation and collaboration. [12] Framed in this way, the translation process illustrates an essential part of a literary community that provided a learned and social atmosphere for translators to, as Winston describes it: "associate with friends and potential patrons and sharpen their Latin skills and literary abilities" (42).[13] This social and collaborative atmosphere bred not the dissection Nashe criticizes, but a natural continuation of the Romans' own practices of translation and adaptation, from Terence's reliance on Menander's plays to Catullus' riffs on Sappho to Cicero's desire to make Greek philosophy accessible to a Roman

[11] "Editions of Seneca's dramatic corpus circulated as early as the thirteenth century and abounded in the centuries which followed. From the late fifteenth century his plays were performed regularly in European theatres, in universities, schools, and Inns of Court" (Boyle 141).

[12] Winston also notes that Heywood "works with other authors in mind, praising eight contemporaries—including Thomas Sackville, Thomas Norton, and Thomas North… for their achievements in poetry and translation," which appears to have been common at the time, as Studley does much the same thing in the prefatory poem for his *Agamemnon* (32).

[13] The importance of this kind of social activity will be further discussed in Chapter 3, in the context of Clermont and Guise's discussions of Stoic philosophy.

audience.

Jasper Heywood's 1560 translation of the *Thyestes* is a particularly good example of how, even during the mid-century, translators were already building on Seneca and providing a bridge from the original Latin to the dramatic uses of Senecan themes by Kyd and others.[14] As previously discussed, the idea of the revenger as *auctor* or author has a performative aspect which speaks to the revenger's need to control the narrative. Heywood's translation of Atreus' desire for a specific audience shows how even his more literal translations begin to adapt the text towards his own free compositions. In the original Latin, Atreus prepares for his revenge with the following words:

> utinam quidem tenere fugientes deos
> possem, et coactos trahere, ut ultricem dape
> omnes viderent—quod sat est, videat pater (*Thyestes* 893-5)

Lamenting the fact that he is unable to hold the gods as witnesses to his spectacle, Atreus nonetheless privileges Thyestes' knowledge of the deed before all else. Seneca's construction of the last line, with the *pater* placed at its end, emphasizes the importance of the father as a witness, maintaining that it is enough (*quod sat est*), to have only the object of the revenge plot as audience. Heywood maintains the concern of the original, particularly in Atreus' thwarted wish to "holde" (*tenere*) "the gods that flee" (*fugientes deos*), but also makes some interesting changes:

> Wolde god I coulde against their wills
> Yet holde the gods that flee,
> And of reuengyng disshe, constrayne them witnesses to be:

[14] Heywood is particularly notable for his 1559 *Troas*, "the translation which preceded and in part caused the explosion of English Senecaism in the 1560s" (Boyle 155)

But yet (whiche well enough is wrought,) let it the father see (2291-6)

Here, Heywood reduces Seneca's vengeful sacrificial feast (*ultricem dapem*) to a "reuengyng disshe" which indulges the horror of Atreus' cannibalistic plot by inviting the reader to picture the meal itself. In addition, Heywood's translation of the exclamation *utinam* as "wolde god I coulde," is a perfectly acceptable colloquialism, but raises an interesting verbal picture; by setting this singular god against the gods he would "constrayne," Heywood suggests a god apart from the gods of the play, which speaks to the contemporary Christianity of his society, pulling the pagan classical text into the present. These choices, along with an expansion of the chorus' role, show how Heywood's translation begins to work with its source to produce new material, a process which has its fullest expression in his original coda to the *Thyestes*.[15] This final speech serves to elaborate on the previous developments, while maintaining Heywood's usual practice of generating new material in the same style.[16] In the added speech, Heywood paints a picture of the lower realms, then makes specific mention of ghosts and gods, asking why the latter do not react but hoping for some sign:

Why gapste thou not? Why do you not
O gates of hell vnfolde?
Are you likewise affrayde to see, and
Know so wretched wight,
From whom the godds haue wryde theyr looks,
and turned are to flight?
…ye scape not fro me so ye Godds,

[15] For more information on Heywood's translations of *Thyestes* chorus' see Ker and Winston (567-70).
[16] In speaking of the *Troas*, Frederick Kiefer notes that while Heywood ''depart[s] from the original in many particulars,'' he ''remain[s] fairly close to Seneca in spirit." (Quoted in Ker and Winston 566). Ker and Winston then go on to describe Heywood's practice of moving Seneca's lines around, but that "Heywood does not simply import lines to a new location. Rather, he combines allusions in order to imitate Seneca" (566).

still after you I goe,

and vengeance aske on wicked wight

your thunder bolte to throe (2781-8, 2809-12)

Heywood lays out a summation of his own which relies upon the rest of the Seneca as studied, but puts the search into perspective and calls for retribution on evil-doers, even specifically calling upon the answer of thunder, as Vindice will later do in *The Revenger's Tragedy.* This kind of pastiched ending demonstrates a high degree of self-consciousness by its active engagement with the text, and lays the groundwork for later works like Kyd's, which move beyond the liberties of translation to more original material.

Structurally, the beginning of *The Spanish Tragedy* has much in common with the *Thyestes*.[17] Both begin with a conversation between the ghost of the character behind the plot and a supernatural creature— in Kyd, the personification of Revenge, in Seneca, a Fury. Both ghosts describe the horrors of the underworld, and Kyd's Andrea recounts his experience in explicitly classical terms as he references Minos, Aecus, Rhadamanth, and finally Pluto and his queen as his posthumous judges. Despite this, however, both ghosts have been pulled from the underworld, and by their displacement appear as liminal figures in the play, watching the living, but not interacting with them. When Tantalus questions his removal, "Quis inferorum sede ab infausta extrahit… quis male deorum Tantalo invisas domos / stendit iterum?" (*Thyestes* 1; 3-4), we see that he has not been reintegrated with the living world, merely shown it [*invisas*]. Similarly, Andrea notes his passage from the underworld: "Forthwith, Revenge, she… bade thee lead me through the gates of horn, / Where dreams have passage in the silent night" (1.1.81-3).[18]

[17] Boyle includes a good discussion of the logistics of this in *Tragic Seneca* (194).
[18] The topography of the underworld Andrea describes relies heavily on Book 6 of the *Aeneid*, and his reference to the "gates of horn" makes the connection explicit: *sunt geminae Somni portae, quarum altera fertur/*

Kyd's use of 'gates of horn,' strengthens the classical allusion and Andrea's speech introduces the figure of Revenge as his guide, much as the Fury holds sway over Tantalus. In addition, Andrea also does not return to the living world, but remains on its borders as a spectator. Kyd makes this explicit by assigning Andrea and Revenge the Classical function of the Chorus: "here sit we down to see the mystery / And serve for Chorus in this tragedy" (1.1.90-1).[19] Revenge, like Seneca's Fury, provides an omniscient view of the proceedings, thereby confirming Andrea's description of a classical underworld and creating an outer framework for the play; Revenge's presence makes it clear that the play's universe is ordered by pagan deities, even if those involved in the play's main action are unaware of these forces.

Due to its non-involvement, Kyd's choric ghost poses something of a problem when it comes to the typical role of the Renaissance dramatic ghost in serving as a catalyst for the revenger. In Thelma Greenfield's attempts to puzzle out this atypical ghost, she notes the differences between Andrea and the steadfast Revenge who "remains untouched… while Andrea chafes and changes" (34). Andrea's evolution both emphasizes Revenge's inhumanity, and provides a good look at Andrea as a kind of ghost-in-training; as a human spirit under the tutelage of Revenge, he sits at the juncture between the "lover-wanderer in the classical underworld" and a more typical Elizabethan ghost (Greenfield 42).[20] In the differences between the evolving Andrea and Revenge, however, Greenfield sees a competition that becomes a "morality contest between humankind and divinely ordained constraints and compulsions" (41).

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cornea, qua veris facilis datur exitus umbris (*Aeneid* 7.893-4). That Andrea is sent through the gate of horn lends him credibility as a truthful spirit.

[19] Kyd's use of the word 'mystery' introduces a religious quality to the proceedings, which recalls the religious imagery of Atreus' killings.

[20] Greenfield here is exploring the debate between Aecus and Rhadamanth about what part of the underworld Andrea should be sent to; Aecus marks him as a lover because of his relationship with Bel-Imperia while Rhadamanth cites his soldiery and death in battle (*Spanish Tragedy* 1.1.40-9). In addition, his role as a student and spectator creates a link between the "suprahuman play watchers" and the audience, who are likewise endowed with the ability to see "larger, longer necessities than earth-bound eyes can normally behold" (Greenfield 42).

This reading attempts to group *The Spanish Tragedy* into a tradition of moral plays, specified by Greenfield as places where "man… repeatedly asserts his power of self-determination against greater powers in competitions that finally concern his status in both worlds" (36-7). Although there is much to be said for Hieronimo's self-determination in the face of worldly obstruction, the sort of competition Greenfield describes arises only if the revenger's actions run counter to divine will— if he appropriates a divine revenge that does not belong to him. *The Spanish Tragedy*, however, dispenses with *vindicta mihi* in favor of a partnership between revenger and the play's "greater powers," where the former becomes an instrument of the latter, but maintains self-determination through his specific actions. This partnership creates its own tensions, but the evolution of Andrea's ghost helps to reconcile these by acting as a focal point of intent and permission. The ghost simultaneously represents an embodiment of the reason for the revenge itself as well as a link to the outer structure of the play and, by extension, that structure's divine approval.

As noted by many, *The Spanish Tragedy* deviates from classical revenge narratives with the introduction of a secondary revenge plot as well as the conflation of the ghost and the chorus. The revenge plots in *The Spanish Tragedy*, however, stack neatly on top of one another and the layers enhance the main thrust of the central plot. Andrea's death lays the groundwork, but since he is killed in battle (albeit in a dishonorable way),[21] he does not neatly fit the mold of one who needs revenging— it is Horatio's death that brings the plot into focus and establishes Hieronimo as the driving force of the play. Horatio, however, serves as a second Andrea by essentially assuming Andrea's identity. This process begins in 1.4, during his conference with Bel-Imperia, when Horatio relates his recovery of Andrea's body:

[21] Against what would be considered honorable in battle, Andrea's horse was "paunched" by Balthazar's men, and then Balthazar "[took] advantage of his foe's distress" (*Spanish Tragedy* 1.4.20-6).

….I recover'd him:

I took him up, and wound him in mine arms;

And wielding him unto my private tent,

There laid him down, and dew'd him with my tears,

And sigh'd and sorrow'd as became a friend.

…I saw him honour'd with due funeral

This scarf I pluck'd from off his lifeless arm,

And wear it in remembrance of my friend. (1.4.34-43)

Horatio's actions over the dead body of his friend— his removal of the corpse to his "private tent," and his embraces of the body and his tears— depict an extreme physical closeness between the two; Horatio first bestows tears on the dead body and then removes Andrea's scarf as a token, in much the same way that his father will later keep Horatio's bloody kerchief. In both cases, the act of carrying such a token encourages a kind of active remembrance, but in the case of Horatio, Bel-Imperia turns that active remembrance into much more— she uses Horatio's affinity with and resemblance to Andrea to turn Horatio into a replacement for her dead lover. The scarf, therefore, not only illustrates a tangible link between Andrea and Horatio, but serves as a bridge in the transference of Bel-Imperia's affections: "twas my favour at his last depart. / But now wear thou it both for him and me… Be sure, while Bel-Imperia's life endures, / She will be Don Horatio's thankful friend" (1.4.48-9; 51-2). Bel-Imperia's promise of friendship, however, develops further when she decides to pursue vengeance through her new attachment: "Yes, second love shall further my revenge! / I'll love Horatio, my Andrea's friend, / The more to spite the prince that wrought his end" (1.4.66-8). It is telling also, that this development meets with no objection from Andrea's ghost; Andrea appears to approve, and the confluence of

Andrea and Horatio under the aegis of Bel-Imperia's favor does a great deal to unite the revenge action of the play. This union ties together love and revenge, setting up Horatio's inevitable demise, and providing the first link in the chain that connects Hieronimo with the play's supernatural elements, specifically Andrea's ghost.

As described by Marjorie Garber, a "ghost… is a cultural marker of absence, a reminder of loss" (129), but in *The Spanish Tragedy*'s it is the ghost itself that is absent from the play's main action. Instead, Horatio, as Andrea's replacement, also becomes a stand-in for both the man and the memory; his affinity with Andrea and his assured doom give him a ghostly presence. What happens to Horatio during this process is perhaps best described by what Joseph Roach terms "surrogation," defined broadly as a method by which "culture reproduces and re-creates itself," expanding that to the continuing practice of "survivors attempt[ing] to fit satisfactory alternates" into "vacancies… in the network of relations" (2).[22] To Bel-Imperia, who has lost her lover, Horatio is an attractive surrogate due to both his similarity to and relationship with the deceased Andrea, while the play uses Horatio to fill the void left by an uninvolved ghost. As Garber notes, a "peculiar characteristic of ghostliness [is] that the ghost is a copy, somehow both nominally identical to and numinously different from a vanished or unavailable original" (16). To this end, the replacement of Andrea with Horatio creates a hybrid revenge subject built on both their deaths and brings Hieronimo, as father of a murdered son, to the forefront as the play's primary revenger.

Horatio's death, unlike Andrea's, is a true murder and a much better subject for revenge;[23] Andrea's comments show his involvement with Horatio's plight and his still-human

[22] Roach also notes the dangers inherent in this method which "rarely if ever succeeds," due to the inevitable inexact fit of the replacement, and the process' inherent "uncanniness which… may provoke many unbidden emotions, ranging from mildly incontinent sentimentalism to raging paranoia" (Roach 16).

[23] It is worth noting, however, a certain similarity in the manner of their deaths—not only do they share a common

reactions to the scene before him:

> Brought'st thou me hither to increase my pain?
>
> I look'd that Balthazar should have been slain:
>
> But 'tis my friend Horatio that is slain,
>
> And they abuse fair Bel-Imperia,
>
> On whom I doted more than all the world,
>
> Because she lov'd me more than all the world (2.5.1-6)

Andrea here questions both the significance of his role as a spectator and the overall justice of the case, while affirming his love for both his friend and Bel-Imperia. He seems to expect that Revenge's spectacle is there to provide a resolution to his own wrongs, but instead he is disappointed and pained by the events he observes, as further injustices are visited on his friends. While Andrea's pain indicates that his spirit still possesses human feeling, Revenge maintains an unearthly steadiness in response, setting the drama on a far grander stage:

> Thou talk'st of harvest, when the corn is green:
>
> The end is crown of every work well done;
>
> The sickle comes not, till the corn be ripe.
>
> Be still; and ere I lead thee from this place,
>
> I'll show thee Balthazar in heavy case. (2.5.7-11)

Revenge, in chiding Andrea for his impatience, does still promise justice and retribution- but not yet, and his use of agricultural imagery illustrates a natural order to the events of the play. These promises, however, exist apart from the play's main action; within the sublunary world of the play, the question of justice remains unresolved. Greenfield states that "while Revenge embodies a fixed significance only in slow time to be revealed, Andrea's quick reactions to the events of

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murderer, but both are ambushed by a number of attackers.

the main play grow and change through acquiescence, anguish, and an ultimate reconciliation with Revenge, until the ghost himself (like Hieronimo) will turn justicer" (35). These interactions display Andrea as a kind of everyman character, whose humanity remains sympathetic to Hieronimo and the outside audience. This humanity contrasts with the unearthly, omniscient Revenge, and their physical proximity does much to heighten this distinction. Over the course of the play, however, Andrea moves away from his humanity, adopting the unearthliness of Revenge, and taking a more active role in the outer structure of the play, much as Hieronimo will do within the play's main action.

Echoing Andrea's growing inhumanity, Hieronimo's journey within the play turns him towards the play's divine forces as he moves away from secular justice and towards his liminal role as a revenger. At first, however, Hieronimo, in his capacity as marshal, attempts to seek justice by more conventional means, announcing his intention to "plain me to my lord the king, / and cry aloud for justice through the court" (3.8.69-70). Despite his repeated cries for justice (the word appears seven times) in 3.12, Hieronimo is thwarted by Lorenzo, a defeat that leads to a turning point in both Hieronimo's tactics and his role in the structure of the play. In his response to Lorenzo, Hieronimo situates himself between worlds and begins his transformation into the vicious revenger who emerges from the emotional tumult of 3.13:

> I'll… ferry over to the Elysian plains,
> And bring my son to show his deadly wounds.
> Stand from about me!
> I'll make a pickaxe of my poniard,
> And here surrender up my marshalship:
> For I'll go marshal up the fiends in hell

To be avenged on you for all of this. (3.12.71-8)

Hieronimo, having previously dismissed suicide,[24] instead envisions a new role for himself as a guide of the dead— someone able to produce the dead victim to shame the murderer. Additionally, he enforces his increasing liminality with the short line "stand from me," confirming his singular status and the desire for a separation from his community. Finally, the wordplay about his rank of marshal completes the transformation by promising to exchange the weapon representing his earthly marshalship for a tool that will help him accomplish his aims as the liminal revenger he is becoming. Hammond describes this process as a journey through Hieronimo's mental landscape: "spaces of the mind where he can shape figures of revenge" (19). These mental exercises suggest a choric function and anticipate Hieronimo's authorship of the tragedy he will enact in the play's final scene. By mentally removing himself from society, Hieronimo gives himself the necessary distance from his previous life to commit to the revenger's role, a process which finds its fullest expression in 3.13.

As previously discussed, 3.13 of *The Spanish Tragedy* shows a clear shift to the classical sensibility that accompanies Hieronimo's determination to revenge his son. Over the course of the scene, Hieronimo finds himself drawn ever deeper into classical imagery, moving away not only from the idea of a Christian heaven but towards the specific judges of the underworld described by Andrea at the start of the play. With this construction, Kyd draws Hieronimo into ever closer sympathy with the ghostly Andrea, and when Hieronimo ventures deeper into these classically influenced "spaces of the mind," he misconstrues an old man both for Horatio's ghost and a Fury (3.13.132-57). Although Hieronimo does not see an actual ghost, his mistaken perception still calls him to revenge: "What not my son? Thou then a Fury art, / sent… to

[24] "For if I hang or kill myself, let's know / Who will revenge Horatio's murder then? / No, no! Fie, no! Pardon me, I'll none of that" (3.12.17-9).

summon me… before grim Minos and just Rhadamath, / To plague Hieronimo that is remiss, / And seeks not vengeance for Horatio's death" (3.1.3.152-7). This misconception returns us to the idea of surrogation, with the imagined ghost as Garber describes it: "a memory trace… a sign of something missing, something omitted, something undone" (129). The old man serves as a surrogate for Horatio's absent spirit, a blank canvas onto which Hieronimo can project his unfulfilled cries for justice, just as the living Horatio became a surrogate for the dead Andrea. In addition, the transformation of Horatio's imagined ghost to a Fury in Hieronimo's mind sees Hieronimo's desire for justice turn towards concrete plans for revenge. This shift more firmly aligns Hieronimo with Andrea, who was sent on his own mission by the same judges Hieronimo names. In this way, Hieronimo is haunted, despite the fact that he is never visited by the play's resident ghost; through this chain of surrogacy, Hieronimo's determination to revenge allows him to tap into the pagan outer structure of the play, and makes him an instrument of its denizens.

By becoming such an instrument, Hieronimo gains the opportunity to revenge his wrongs and the authority from which to act. Woodbridge explores this authority by noting that "Hunter argues that Hieronimo administers divine justice, not human revenge: this puppet is '*instrument* rather than agent'" (32). "Puppet," however, is perhaps the wrong word, since Hieronimo's role as instrument involves an active element as an authorial figure. Although the larger construct of the play may be beyond his control, Hieronimo quite literally writes the tragedy's final sequence by staging his revenge as a play, and in a nice bit of meta-theatre, Hieronimo declares his role at its close: "princes, now behold Hieronimo, / Author and actor in this tragedy" (4.4.145-6). By acknowledging his dual role as author and actor, Hieronimo not only recognizes his functions within his own play, but his place in the larger production— as both an author with control over

his own narrative and as an actor in Revenge's divine scheme. Both roles are essential to his identity as a revenger, and as such, Hieronimo must be known for what he is. With the "behold" at the end of his speech, Hieronimo presents himself to the audience and demands comprehension, completing the earlier display of his dead son: "Behold the reason urging me to do this! / See here my show, look on this spectacle!" (4.4.86-7). In Hieronimo's case, the specific audience is just as important as the action, and it is important to note who exactly is doing this beholding. To this end, the description of Horatio's dead body as a "spectacle" is repeated from Hieronimo's initial discovery of his son's murder: "Say what murd'rous spectacle is this? / A man hanged up, and all the murderers gone, / And in my bower… This place was made for pleasure, not for death" (2.4.71-4). Echoing the incongruity of brutal death in a bower, Hieronimo likewise stages a spectacle whose aim seems to be the pleasure of its viewers, but ends instead by evoking their horror.

The audience, therefore, is of paramount importance, just as it was to Seneca's Atreus; Hieronimo plans the destruction of children before their elders to mirror what was done to him. As Littlewood parses it, "the protagonists of *Medea* and *Thyestes* perceive their revenge as an amplified reflection of the wrong which they have endured… revengers judge themselves by their power to produce these effects and to stage a wrong surpassing that which they have suffered" (180). The balance of the efficacy, then, falls on the side of viewership, which Littlewood identifies as the "essential part of the act of revenge" where the "spectacle of the victim's recognition" overtakes the crime itself (180).[25] Of course, in Hieronimo's drama, it is

[25] Littlewood uses the example here of Seneca's Medea, who mourns for a crime lost for being done without a spectator: *derat hoc unum mihi, / spectator iste. nil adhuc facti reor: / quidquid sine iste fecimus sceleris perit* (*Medea* 992-4). Although Littlewood speaks of the classical plays, the paramount importance he places on the act of viewing extends forward to the early modern era, where staging could help to clarify the meta-theatrical aspects. As there is some debate as to whether Seneca's plays were staged or not, the layers introduced in a truly theatrical production heighten this element of the drama.

not only the audience, but the participants who are important in his plan; he practices a kind of revenge which recruits the victim of the revenger as a passive and unknowing participant in the revenger's drama.[26] In the tragedies of Seneca, the spectator was participant enough, but here, Hieronimo convinces the murderers of his son to take part in a play which nearly recalls the circumstances surrounding Horatio's death and results in their own. This conceit combines the aspects of Hieronimo as instrument and author, and the play he constructs becomes his weapon.

Ian McAdam gives an interesting reading of Hieronimo as an instrument when he notes several critics' deconstruction of Hieronimo's name into *hieros nym* (sacred name) and the fact that he shares it with St Jerome, translator of the Vulgate Bible (37-8). He then uses this etymology to propose that "symbolically, therefore, Hieronimo like Paul is an instrument of Christ, the sacred Word, and his rhetorical assertions and eventual linguistic "mastery" in the play reflect a secular translation of the spiritual empowerment of an inspired member of the elect" (McAdam 37-8). Although Hieronimo's empowerment derives from Revenge rather than Christianity, he does function as a translator of divine will; in his dual role as author and instrument, Hieronimo provides his own inspired translation of Revenge's knowledge. This connection becomes explicit through Hieronimo's use of linguistics in his play, *Soliman and Perseda*,[27] which has each character speaking a different language.[28] One of his intended victims, Balthazar, objects to the variety of languages by pointing out the potential for incomprehensibility: "But this will be a mere confusion / And scarcely shall we all be understood" (4.1.174-5). Hieronimo's reply— "It must be so; for the conclusion / Shall prove the

[26] For more on various responses to revenge in Seneca's plays, see Littlewood 181-2.
[27] For more on the use of language in *Solimon and Perseda*, see: Carla Mazzio, "Staging the Vernacular: Language and Nation in Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*," *Studies in English Literature* 38: 2 (Spring 1998): pp. 207-32.
[28] The languages used are Latin, Greek, Italian, and French. It is also worth noting that Bel-Imperia, who knows the plan, is the only actor to receive an explanation for their language assignment: "I know that / Bel-Imperia hath practiced the French" (4.1.171).

invention" (4.1.176-7) — lays out his authorial plan while Balthazar's lines highlight the unknowing passivity of the intended victims. When the conclusion arrives, Hieronimo makes good his words: "Here break we off our sundry languages / and thus conclude I in our vulgar tongue" (4.4.73-4), as he uses the change in language to formally signify a tonal shift that bestows an understanding of the true events upon the spectators. As he had stated to Balthazar, "it must be so," for by his literal translation, he also translates the confusing events, transforming them from a fictitious narrative to a very real display of revenge. Hieronimo's spectacle punishes his victims for their crimes, but inherent in this punishment is the importance of the process and the witnesses to that process— it is not enough merely to punish, there must be a didactic element where the villainy of the original perpetrators can be seen and understood. As Littlewood says of Seneca's characters, "the victims and also the guarantors of moral order in the universe are forced to observe the revenge and their own inability to prevent it" (180). In *The Spanish Tragedy*, the victims and guarantors are unable to prevent the bloodshed, because they cannot understand what is happening to them until Hieronimo switches to their "vulgar tongue" to make all known. Despite the clarity of Hieronimo's linguistic shift, it is the appearance of Horatio's (by now, obviously dead) body that truly translates the spectacle; by producing the body "the hopeless father of a hapless son" (4.4.82) conveys to his audience that what was done to him has been done to them- now they too are "hopeless fathers," as their unknowing, "hapless sons" already lie dead at their feet.[29]

With the unveiling of the Horatio's body, Hieronimo draws back the curtain on the real tragedy and also in a way enacts his son's funeral games, games that are also being watched by Revenge and the ghost. As well as the presence of the body as both prop and witness, Hieronimo

[29] Like Thyestes, these fathers also participate in the unknowing consumption of their children— they consume their sons' deaths through their eyes as spectators rather than through their mouths as diners.

again produces Horatio's bloody handkerchief, which acts as a memento and a spur in the same way that Gloriana's skull will do in *The Revenger's Tragedy*.[30] In respect to both body and handkerchief, Rist notes that "the precedent of classical theatre provides further reason for considering memorials of the dead as stimuli for vengeful emotion" (11).[31] By exposing his son's body, Hieronimo lays bare the impetus for his actions, and by restoring the kerchief to the body he shows he has completed his role and now seeks to end things on his own terms: "thus I end my play: / Urge no more words, I have no more to say" (4.4.150-1). Controlling the narrative in order frames the revenger's actions in a proper light, and Hieronimo is willing to go to the length of biting out his own tongue to preserve his version of events, before he finds a way to kill himself. The revenger's inevitable demise serves to contextualize his narrative— once the revenge is complete, the author's work is done, and the instrument becomes superfluous, having been meant for only one task.

In exploring the role of the revenger, Woodbridge discusses Wendy Griswold's assertion that in Seneca "human actors are… agents of the ghosts and gods, who are carrying out their own feuds and rivalries through the manipulation of men and women," while Renaissance "revenge tragedy horrors are human, not divine, in inspiration" (87). What Woodbridge truly objects to, however, is "modern critics' insistence that audiences denied revengers free will as a precondition to sympathizing with them" (32). The idea of free will is certainly called into question given the outer structure of *The Spanish Tragedy*, which so closely aligns with the Senecan world, especially given Revenge's foreknowledge of the plot. Despite this outside structure, however, the revenger still makes his own authorial choices and undergoes an internal transformation by pledging himself to revenge; believing that fate has chosen them to take the

[30] As Neill notes, "the action of revenge tragedy often manifests acute anxieties about the proprieties of burial" (265), something that will be discussed at greater length in the next chapter.
[31] Rist also cites Aeschylus' *The Libation Bearers*, an early example of the revenge narrative taking this turn.

business of revenge in hand is attractive to characters who become revengers. In *The Spanish Tragedy*, we are shown transformation on both sides of the divide, for as Hieronimo evolves into a bloodthirsty revenger, Andrea, watching from the outside, takes on the aspect of Revenge and requests power over the newly deceased (4.5.30). Just as Andrea begins the play with a graphic depiction of the classical underworld, he closes with one too; whereas before he had been the judged soul, wondering at his surroundings, here he judges others and consigns them to these now-familiar surroundings. Revenge's final lines: "though death hath end their misery / I'll there begin their endless tragedy" (4.5.47-8) illuminate the levels of theatricality at work, and lock the play into a broader tradition of classical tragedy. The transformations are complete, the interior actors are subsumed back into the outer structure of the show, the ghost moves on, and Revenge as justice holds sway over this orderly pagan universe.

Chapter Two

"A ghost play without a ghost": Corpses and Commemoration in *The Revenger's Tragedy*

Neill calls *The Revenger's Tragedy* a "ghost play without a ghost" ("Middleton and the supernatural" 301). The label is apt, for despite its macabre fixation on dead bodies, the play neglects to indulge its audience with spirits.[32] This fixation, however, creates a world appropriate to ghost plays, where an obsession with commemoration of the dead engenders a haunted atmosphere; the numerous corpses scattered throughout the play seem to suggest that unseen ghosts lurk only just offstage. Chief among these assumed spirits is the murdered fiancée of the play's eponymous revenger, the beautiful Gloriana, whose death occurs prior to the play's action and whose skull represents the potential of supernatural influence. Under these conditions, the play needs no introduction, and the revenger is able to launch immediately into his revenge plot.

Where *The Spanish Tragedy*'s Hieronimo takes until 3.13 to arrive at a place of revenge planning, Vindice, begins the play with script firmly in hand:

> Duke—royal lecher! Go grey-haired adultery;
> And thou his son, as impious steeped as he;
> And thou his bastard true-begot in evil;
> And thou his duchess that will do with devil;
> Four ex'lent characters (1.1.1-5)

The script calls for these characters to pass him by as he speaks, and this set-up allows Vindice

[32] Neill goes on to say that "in Middleton's world it is human guile that holds the audience's fascinated gaze, while the supernatural, though seldom quite absent, keeps sliding unnervingly out of view" ("Middleton and the supernatural" 305).

to play with conceptions of authorial control from the start, introducing himself as an observer and a narrator to the audience.[33] In addition, the anaphora of "and thou" in lines 2-4 creates a list of stock introductions which functions as an abbreviated *dramatis personae* and doubles as Vindice's hit list. Unlike Hieronimo, Vindice does not require nearly four acts to find his resolution— he arrives in the play as a fully-fledged revenger with his script already written. Considering that it has apparently taken nine years to get Vindice to this point,[34] it may not have been an easy process, but it is also one that the audience does not need to suffer through with him. The lack of grappling with the question of revenge gets the play off to a fast start and provides a clear outlook on the rightness of Vindice's cause. The passage of time, however, also serves to enhance Vindice's emotional state, and though he may not be preoccupied with the rightness of revenging his wrongs, he is certainly still preoccupied with the wrongs themselves.

Vindice's wrongs find a focal point in Gloriana's skull, which he carries around with him.[35] In the absence of a ghost, most of the authority that would come from such a spirit instead resides in the skull. In their examination of Vindice's mental state, the Halletts note that the skull is able to take on "many of the same functions that were served by the ghost," especially remarking on the skull as a memento mori that holds Vindice's "emotions at a high pitch" (229). If Vindice springs into the play a fully-formed revenger, his extended ruminations on the skull certainly serve to keep him in that state. In his opening speech, after he has introduced his enemies, Vindice turns to skull and addresses it directly:

> Thou sallow picture of my poisoned love,
>
> My study's ornament, thou shell of death,

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[33] Vindice's frequent asides to the audience keep him in this role and ensure the privileging of his relationship to the audience over all others, even though he is far from the only one with soliloquies.
[34] If we are to take Vindice's later line "now nine years vengeance crowd into a minute" (3.5.122) at face value.
[35] "Still sighing o'er death's vizard?" (1.1.49) his brother Hippolito asks upon his first entrance, implying that the family has become used to Vindice's retirement with the skull in the last near-decade.

Once the bright face of my bethrothed lady

When life and beauty naturally filled out

These ragged imperfections (1.1.14-18)

The description begins with a play on "my study's ornament," indicating the skull as a physical presence as well as reminding us of Vindice's preoccupation with it, as he projects an image of the living Gloriana onto the skull's bare bone. Vindice's shift in address, from the "thou" used directly towards the skull to "these… imperfections," emphasizes the difference between the skull itself and the skull as a representation of its late owner— the skull is both Gloriana and not Gloriana, and it seems to take on each of these aspects in turn, depending on Vindice's interaction with it. These interactions illustrate the close relationship Vindice has with the skull, but also conjure a claustrophobic atmosphere, an echo-chamber effect where Vindice is in fact speaking only to himself. The Halletts fear this kind of effect when they question the skull's authority, suggesting that it is "a dumb god [whose] commands are only the commands one's emotions draw from interaction with it" and that "Vindice's authority for the deed comes only from his own will," rather than communication with an outside entity (230). The skull's silence is troubling in this respect, particularly in comparison to what Neill calls the "extraordinary transformative power" that a ghost, like the one in *Hamlet*, has once it speaks (*Issues* 223).[36] Indeed, the ability of Hamlet's father's ghost to speak for itself— and to so directly engage with the main actor of the play, after previously shunning attempts at verbal communication— provides a powerful, explicit mandate that a non-speaking or assumed ghost cannot.

In the absence of a ghost, the silent bodies littered throughout the play are used as props,

[36] Neill also compares *The Spanish Tragedy*'s Andrea unfavorably with Hamlet's ghost, as the former does not speak directly to anyone involved in the play's main action.

and given voice only through the machinations of the living.[37] Unlike the more communicative spirits that give direction to Hamlet and Clermont or the observant spectre of Andrea, however, Gloriana's skull is a physical thing that can, and will, participate in the revenge itself. Just as Vindice assumes various personas throughout the play, the skull also serves various functions including its use as a murder weapon. When Vindice enters with the disguised skull and explains its purpose to the surprised Hippolito, he takes pains to emphasize that the skull is no mere prop: "I have not fashioned this only for show / And useless property; no, it shall bear a part / E'en in its own revenge" (3.5.99-101).[38] With his words, Vindice grants the skull agency by applying active terms to it; he considers the skull a vital part of the conspiracy as he intends it to "kiss [the Duke's] lips to death" (3.5.104). This, then, makes the skull, like its guardian, an instrument of revenge, and creates a partnership between the two where both are working on behalf of the other— Vindice orchestrates the revenge on the skull's behalf, and the skull becomes his weapon in the acting of it. In the anticipatory moments before the Duke's death, Vindice holds a mock conversation with the dressed-up skull, adding to the illusion that it is a living person and further confirming its status as a co-conspirator. In addition, the two seem to merge as Vindice supports the skull physically by carrying it to its victim and in the tandem nature of the revenge act: "what fails in poison, we'll supply in steel" (3.5.106).[39] If an actual skull was used in the original production, it would be obvious to the spectator as a prop on the stage, but also as an unburied body for, as Rist proposes, "theatrical skulls present material links- or at least undecipherable illusions of them— not just to dead persons, but also to the places of burial from which their

[37] In Alex Cox's 2002 film adaptation, *Revenger's Tragedy*, Christopher Eccleston's Vindice makes this explicit by using Gloriana's skull like a ventriloquist's dummy, squeaking "Revenge! Revenge!" through clenched jaws as he manipulates those of the skull.
[38] Again, Vindice calls the skull "it" recognizing it as an object removed from his love, just as he does in the opening scene; he recognizes the skull has having belonged to his mistress, but it is not her.
[39] This was made grotesquely explicit in the National Theatre's 2008 production of the play, where Rory Kinnear as Vindice stood behind the propped-up skull and offered the Duke his own gloved hand to kiss.

remains were removed" (10). In this context, Rist's theory that Gloriana was originally represented by a real human skull, draws special attention to the skull's provenance. Since the audience sees a physical skull, but *only* a skull, we must assume that Gloriana is, at most, only partially buried, and the skull's presence helps to underline the queasy, haunted feeling of the play, while linking Vindice to the world of the dead by association. Gloriana is incomplete, unburied and unrevenged, and Vindice's treatment of her skull illustrates what Neill calls "the dangerous persistence of unburied human remains" (*Issues* 165).

The authority that the play grants to the skull pays special attention to the needs of the dead body, and displays an awareness that spirits hang nearby these physical remembrances or require certain things to be at rest, even if they do not explicitly say so.[40] As such, funerary rites and remembrances are of paramount importance to the genre of revenge tragedy,[41] and indeed to other genres that deal with the same issues. In the classical tradition we see the importance of proper funeral commemoration of the body both in plays such as *Antigone*, and epic poetry like the *Iliad.*[42] *Antigone*, especially has a foot in both camps as the title character's concern for her brother's proper burial raises laws of the gods over the king's command and gives her the same liminal status as a revenger.[43] The importance of the body, or the body-talisman, is similarly important to issues of commemoration in the revenge genre. Beyond this personal relation between the holder of the physical remembrance, however, there is the importance of the body as a locus for a social sense of revenge; a spirit or possession can create an energy of its own and

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[40] As Eamon Duffy says, "the dead were widely conceived of as anxious about the neglect of the living, and on occasion menacing towards those they feared would neglect them" (quoted in Watson 60).

[41] "Such preoccupations help to reveal how, as Ariès has shown, the Renaissance continued to preserve the ancient pagan superstition that happiness beyond the grave was somehow contingent upon proper disposal and preservation of one's mortal remains" (Neill, Issues of Death 265).

[42] In the epic, Achilles' treatment of the bodies of Patroclus and Hector are both extreme; one shows the unwillingness to let go of the body (or a physical manifestation thereof) and the other a desire to destroy and debase the body as an act of revenge.

[43] I will discuss this aspect of *Antigone* further in Chapter 3.

thus its own authority. The object representing a dead person, whether it is Andrea's scarf or Gloriana's skull, acts as a spur to the revenger, reminding him constantly of his aims and providing a connection with the dead. Even *pius* Aeneas (perhaps the mildest of classical epic heroes) is moved to rage and revenge by one of these emblems, when the sight of Pallas' belt on Turnus prompts him to kill Pallas' murderer. Indeed, Aeneas ascribes the action to the slain Pallas rather than himself: *Pallas te hoc volnere, Pallas / immolat et poenam scelerato ex sanguine sumit* (*Aeneid* 12.948-9).[44] The language frames the action as a sacrifice, especially through the use of *immolat* which refers specifically to sacrificial rituals and *poena* which assumes a punishment or retribution is owed. In these cases, something is demanded by the gods, just as Antigone perceives her brother's burial to be necessary due not to filial, but general piety. This sense of rightness can appear, as previously discussed, in the form of a ghost which "stands for the spirit of revenge in the universal sense in which revenge is a primitive urge for justice sensed by each individual" (Halletts 229-30). Although this "spirit of revenge" does not take physical form in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, as it does in Kyd's work, Middleton maintains an atmosphere that suggests a ghost might show up at any moment.[45] A similar atmosphere exists during the ghost watch at beginning of *Hamlet*, and throughout *Julius Caesar*.[46] Though only Brutus sees an actual apparition, and an unusual one at that,[47] Caesar's spirit is widely regarded to be on the move. Indeed, immediately following Caesar's death, Antony describes Caesar's spirit as "ranging for revenge / with Ate by his side come hot from Hell" (*Julius Caesar* 3.1.270-1). Even without a supernatural sighting, Antony uses Caesar's body as a focal point to induce a

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[44] "Pallas gives you this wound, Pallas makes this sacrifice and assumes retribution from your guilty blood."
[45] Middleton plays on this anticipation in *The Second Maiden's Tragedy* when a ghost does in fact show up—just not when it is expected. As Neill describes, "Middleton teases the conventional expectations of the genre, for the Tyrant's impious outrage… is framed by the ridiculous timidity of the soldiers who accompany him. No ghost appears, despite the compounding of their master's blasphemy" ("Middleton and the Supernatural" 300).
[46] Quarto 2 of *Hamlet* makes a specific comparison between the two (Hibbard 355).
[47] For more on ghosts in *Julius Caesar* see Garber, 52-73.

pervasive sense of the departed and his will.

In *The Revenger's Tragedy*, the body of Antonio's wife becomes, like Caesar's bloody corpse, a focal point for the inducement of vengeful action. Lady Antonio, however, is more closely related to an earlier classical incidence of this kind of vengeful action— she is an echo of Lucrece, the dishonored virtuous wife, who sees suicide as her only recourse. Though we never meet her living, her husband Lord Antonio stages a viewing of her body in 1.4 that functions as public theatre: "Draw nearer, lords, and be sad witnesses / Of a fair, comely building newly fall'n / Being falsely undermined" (1.4.1-3). By eulogizing her, the spectators dehumanize her, setting her up as a shrine to virtue; she is described in architectural, not human, terms, compounded by Hippolito's reference to the body as "the ruins of so fair a monument" (1.4.67) . It is this virtue, this "miracle" of chastity that stands in contrast to the world around it. Additionally, Antonio brings a ceremonial level to the proceedings when he specifically appoints his companions as "sad witnesses" (1.4.1) to the damning evidence of the court's corruption: the body of his wife. In his description of the events that lead to this moment, he specifically illustrates the necessity of his wife's suicide in reference to the corruption which had defiled her: "Her honour first drunk poison, and her life, / Being fellows in one house, did pledge her honour" (1.4). Again, the architectural imagery creates a reliquary for her honor, which is elevated by her death: "her funeral shall be wealthy, for her name / Merits a tomb of pearl" (1.4.69-70). This is a heraldic funeral and, as Rist defines it, its "ideal end [lies] not in the common earth to which the body of the deceased [is] committed, but in the splendidly ornamented tomb where its social symbolism [is] to be preserved for all time" (47). The fallen building is rebuilt into "a tomb of pearl," thus transforming Lady Antonio's body into a permanent and visible accusation against the corrupted society that killed her.

Such markers invite revenge against rulers who allow this kind of society to flourish, and recalls the scene Shakespeare describes in *The Rape of Lucrece*: "They did conclude to bear dead Lucrece thence; / To show her bleeding body thorough Rome, / And so to publish Tarquin's foul offence" (*Lucrece* 1850-3). Middleton would have been familiar with the poem, and indeed, his look at the myth in his 1598 *Ghost of Lucrece*, serves both as commentary on the earlier work and a preview of issues that arise in *The Revenger's Tragedy*.[48] As Mark Hutchings describes, "in *Ghost*, unwittingly or not, Middleton first grapples with the ideological problematic of male writers ventriloquizing female characters," a theme common to both Lord Antonio's wife and Gloriana (24). These are not only female characters, however, they are dead female characters, and the social impact of their deaths makes the personal act of revenge serve also as a strike against the tyranny of a corrupt society. Although Vindice is not present during the action of 1.4, Hippolito must be speaking for his brother when he takes up Antonio's grief: "My lord, since you invite us to your sorrows, / Let's truly taste 'em, that with equal comfort / As to ourselves we may relieve your wrongs" (1.4.19-21). Of course, Vindice has, in effect, already "tasted" Antonio's sorrows, as Antonio's wife is of a piece with Gloriana, and thus he must attack the root of the problem. Just as in the original Lucrece myth it is the ruling Tarquin's son who commits the rape, past wrongs are compounded with present wrongs and potential future wrongs to point towards a dire need for change.

In this play, society has become entrapped in a cycle of corruption that needs to be broken. As is best described by the Halletts, *The Revenger's Tragedy* sets "one seduction in the past, one in the future, and one in the present, and distributes the ages of the debauchers to indicate the ongoing nature of the problem" (225). This distribution clearly shows where the current corruption has originated, with the Duke, and predicts a similarly corrupted future, as

[48] Corrigan uses this as evidence in Middleton's favor in the authorship question of *The Revenger's Tragedy*.

Lussurioso follows in his father's footsteps. Woodbridge comments on this kind of sexual corruption by noting that "a wider Renaissance culture associated power abuse with lechery… a ruler's sexual excess was shorthand for many kinds of out-of-control behavior" (185). This takes an even more extreme form in *The Second Maiden's Tragedy*, which postdates *The Revenger's Tragedy* by several years: "for a long line of Lucrece imitators who met defilement with suicide, death ended a woman's tyrant problems. Not so [in *The Second Maiden's Tragedy*]: the Tyrant skulks into the cathedral at night and carries off her body" (Woodbridge 175). These actions, blasphemous in a Christian or a pagan world, illustrate Allman's suggestion that "theatrical tyrants rule not for God, but as God" and "their sexuality, therefore, can depart… from the cultural standard" (41-2). Allman brings the theatrical tyrant into a position where he stands as a false front of authority by considering it within his power to create his own cultural standard without deference to the divine. While *The Revenger's Tragedy* embraces the Duke's ability to create a new cultural standard, however, the play also shows him to be aware of his impending mortality. The Duke may cavort as if he is Jove, but although he is a "royal lecher," and takes full advantage of the society of sexual excess he has created, he knows he is not a god. The Duke's frail humanity is further emphasized by his offspring— instead of fathering great heroes, he produces an equally lecherous heir, and a bastard who turns the court's corruption back on itself by his incestuous adultery. Spurio's dishonored, dishonorable mother is inherent within him, and his liaison with the duchess completes a cycle of petty revenge. In addition, Antonio's description of his wife's rape echoes Spurio's account of his conception; these are repeated crimes in which nearly everyone is implicated. This rotten society is beyond any current help, and Vindice's actions are typical of revengers in such plays such as *Titus Andronicus* and *The Atheist's Tragedy* in that he "purifies corruption" and "cleanses the court through assassinations"

by killing a "tyrant… who has abused subjects' rights" (Woodbridge 168).

Vindice undertakes revenge not only not on his own behalf but embraces a vendetta against the culture that gave birth to the wrongs against him; after dispatching the Duke, his original target, he proclaims vengeance on the very structure of society: "the dukedom wants a head, though yet unknown / As fast as they peep up, let's cut 'em down" (3.5.219-20). As previously discussed, Vindice starts the play ready to go, plan already in mind, but he gathers more and more plots as he progresses through the play; what began as a mission to revenge the deaths of his father and Gloriana becomes a full-scale assault against the court. Just as Hippolito vows in steel to share in the enactment of revenge against Lady Antonio's assailant, Vindice makes a similar promise on his blade when he learns of Lussurioso's designs upon his sister. In the hands of the brothers, however, these become more personal and wide-ranging. The original revenge for Lady Antonio was to be limited to Youngest Son, and only if the court were to fail to apply justice, but Vindice and Hippolito extend their reach far beyond the original perpetrator. The second part of the Lucrece story, of course, features the revenge taken for it, and the subsequent birth of a new order. Once Vindice has weeded the "nest of Dukes" (5.3.125), he also looks to Antonio to restore an idealized past: "your hair shall make the Silver Age again, / When there was fewer but more honest men" (5.3.85-6). Vindice is relying on the wisdom of the past to make good the future, both in the character of the older Antonio, and also by referencing the wisdom of the classical tradition.[49]

Against these classical influences, Allison Chapman suggests that "Middleton directs his authorial gaze laterally towards the ground-level textual debates of his own day" (243). She concludes that Middleton "was not interested in using other texts in order to display his erudition

[49] This is also a problem Seneca and many of his fellows grappled with— looking back at a lost, idealized Rome while living in a present corrupted society.

or to create a vision of English literature's relationship to the classics" (249). That said, to engage laterally with contemporary works practically necessitated engagement with the classics, given the extent to which the classical tradition informed the literature of the time. Middleton's lateral view, therefore, necessarily included other texts based in the classics, as we have seen with his response to Shakespeare's *Rape of Lucrece*, and his own revisiting of the myth in *The Revenger's Tragedy*. Rather than try to create an overarching structure of virtue, as George Chapman does in *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois*, Middleton's parodic take on the genre is an exploration of influences on society. The "witty violence" (Brucher quoted in Corrigan 291) displayed by Vindice bridges the gap between the humorous send-up of the revenge genre and the societal ills that lie behind it; Vindice's character participates in the deconstruction of the genre he inhabits, but the world surrounding him gives him ample cause for action. *The Revenger's Tragedy* exults in Vindice's excessive violence while playing with the genre's conventions, but the theatricality with which Vindice carries out his killings is not merely dark comedy.[50] Boyle proposes that "the ritualizing of the revenger's violence in Renaissance drama is not simply the indulgence of decadent contemporary taste, but a self-conscious reflection of and on the ritualized, legally sanctioned violence of the culture, exposing that violence as itself a theatre of power" (185).

The spectacular trappings of Vindice's killings display theatre as a form of sacrifice where, as Boyle says, "theatrical vengeance becomes real vengeance, theatrical death, real death" (202). In both 3.5 and 5.3, Vindice stages apparently pleasurable activities for his victims which then turn bloody. Both scenes emphasize their theatricality through the use of music, in

[50] In discussing Middleton's influence, Tanya Pollard notes that" Vindice's poisoning plot conjoins Hamlet's morbidity with the farcical homicidal glee of Barabas from Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* (c. 1590), the violent erotic passion of Kyd's *Tragedy of Soliman and Perseda* (c. 1592), and the playful opportunity of a city comedy prankster" (291).

particular, the masque in 5.3 which reads as a "carefully planned juxtaposition of harmony and horror, of passions gone wild but enacted to ordered musical accompaniment" (Austern 192). These spectacles, however, are private spectacles, as opposed to the open theatre of *The Spanish Tragedy,* and the only spectators that matter are heaven and the victims themselves— the former to approve and the latter to understand their fates. Indeed, spectatorship itself becomes part of the punishment when spectacles such as these are specifically orchestrated to increase the pain and suffering of the viewers. Along with their physical assaults on his person, Vindice and Hippolito force the Duke to observe his wife's adulterous relationship with his bastard son. It is this realization which seems to cause the most intense pain as the Duke cries "O kill me not with that sight" (3.5.186) when he is threatened with seeing, quite literally, what his lechery has wrought. Since it is the Duke's lechery that has brought him to this pass, the Duke appropriately begins his own torment by kissing Gloriana's skull before he is aware of its true meaning. By imitating his past sins, the Duke is immediately and effectively punished for them when, this time, his sin kisses back.

This enforced understanding of the events plays a major part in the enacting of revenge, as was discussed in the previous chapter, and goes hand in hand with the revenger's need to control the narrative. Vindice wishes to make his authorship known, a desire that gets him in trouble later on, but can enjoy full scope in the private spectacles of 3.5 and 5.3. To the Duke Vindice announces "'Tis I, 'tis Vindice, 'tis I" (3.5.165) and the construction, framing his name with double I's, strengthens the idea of Vindice as a physical manifestation of revenge. This sentiment is later echoed when Vindice makes sure of Lussurioso, privately revealing to him both his identity and his deeds: "'Twas Vindice murdered thee… murdered thy father… and I am he" (5.3.77-9). In Lussurioso's final moments Vindice grants the knowledge of his true identity

to the dying man, something that eludes Lussurioso throughout the play, even though he has been introduced to the revenger under his own name.[51] For this reason Lussurioso survives the mass killing of the lords perpetrated by Vindice and his accomplices— Lussurioso cannot die ignorant of what has befallen him and so must survive to be enlightened. In addition, by identifying himself, Vindice fulfills his own promises from earlier in the play. Upon first hearing of Lussurioso's plan to seduce his sister, he swears "Sword, I durst make a promise of him to thee: / Thou shalt disheir him; it shall be thine honour" (1.3. 168-9) and in the next act graduates to a more concrete plan of action: "O, shall I kill him o' th' wrong side now? No! / Sword, thou wast never a backbiter yet. / I'll pierce him to his face; he shall die looking upon me" (2.2.90).[52] In both cases, Vindice addresses himself directly to his sword, personifying it (much as he does the skull),[53] and in the second instance drives home the importance that Lussurioso be cognizant of his fate.

Lussurioso, with whom Vindice deals under a number of guises, produces in Vindice a special level of rage with his duplicitous ways. Due to Vindice's own duplicitousness, he is able to catch Lussurioso in all of his lies, and Lussurioso's false piety in 4.2 infuriates him. Although Vindice often reacts to Lussurioso with barely- suppressed violence, the events of 4.2 move him to a new level of exasperation:

> … 'Tis my wonder
> That such a fellow, impudent and wicked,
> Should not be cloven as he stood,
> … Is there no thunder left or is't kept up

[51] Vindice's name literally means "revenger," a point I will return to later.
[52] In keeping with the vengeance meted out to the Duke, Vindice both sexualizes the future killing of Lussurioso and comments on its appropriateness: "thy veins are swelled with lust, this [sword] shall unfill 'em" (2.2.91).
[53] Perhaps this is another case of murderous instruments acknowledging one another.

In stock for heavier vengeance?

[*Thunder*]

There it goes! (4.2.192-7)

In keeping with the anticipatory atmosphere of the play, the moment seems ripe for a supernatural occurrence and, at this point, thunder obliges. That the thunder needs such an obvious cue, however, uses the meta-theatrical to create a comic situation by exposing the artificiality of the stagecraft. Woodbridge agrees, noting that "like much in this parodic play, thunder-on-cue is grotesquely comic, but the point remains: heaven favors revenge" (33).[54] Although the thunder signals approval, heaven takes no action beyond the meteorological cue—since Lussurioso is not "cloven as he [stands]" and the actual enactment is left to Vindice. Upon embracing this latest revenge plot Vindice reaffirms his role, and when Hippolito warns him that "we lose ourselves," in reference to Vindice's distraction over the thunder, Vindice replies "but I have found it" (4.2.198). Although Vindice's "found" refers to a solution to their current problem, it seems to have a larger significance beyond the moment; in the absence of heaven's action, but the presence of its approval, Vindice has "found" his identity as a revenger.

The next time thunder makes its appearance, it marks the killing of Lussurioso and his lords, effectively confirming God's or at least Nature's approval: "No power is angry when the lustful die; / When thunder claps, heaven likes the tragedy" (5.3.47-8). Woodridge interprets this instance of thunder as heaven's endorsement of the comedy of the situation as well as the tragedy: "heaven applauds… because heaven appreciates blood, gore, and a good joke," going on to propose that "the play's condign recoil must have amused heaven" (276). This recoil Woodbridge reads as Vindice's undoing due to his "inability to control his own tongue" after he robs speech from others by nailing down the tongue of the Duke, as Simmons notes, and issues

[54] For more on revengers calling on lightning and thunder, see Woodbridge, 32-33.

the command for Lussurioso to "tell nobody" (5.3.79) as he kills him (Woodbridge 276). These elements, however, also can be seen as manifestations of a need to control the revenge narrative. The revenger will say as much or as little as he likes, as witnessed when Hieronimo bites out his own tongue to end his narrative, but there is a common obsession with relating a specific version of events, even when the revenger must appoint a proxy to speak for him, as Hamlet does with Horatio. Told to "remember," by the ghost, Hamlet ends his narrative by saying the same to his audience.

Neill identifies the revenger as "the agent of that remembrance upon which a restored social order is felt to depend; but he has ceased to be a social man, for in his willed surrender to the claims of the dead he invariably 'loses' or 'forgets' himself (*Revenger's Tragedy*, IV.iii.201; IV.iv.24-5.84-5)" (252). Rapt as he is by the "claims of the dead," Vindice conjures for himself a whole range of companions out of the air, and his more grounded accomplice Hippolito is often maddened by Vindice's apparent distraction. In 3.5, Vindice proclaims himself "lost… in a throng of happy apprehensions," (3.5.29-30), in anticipation of the Duke's murder— the pitch of his excitement is "able / to make a man spring up and knock his forehead / Against yon silver ceiling" (3.5.2-4). Vindice might well imagine his head knocking against the heavens, for he is more out of the world than in it: as he states early on, his "life's unnatural to [him], e'en compelled / As if [he] lived now when [he] should be dead" (1.1.120-1). Secluded for nine years with only a skull for company, Vindice has certainly ceased to be a social man by the time we meet him. As Rist states, "a Hamlet or Hieronimo works up to a mournful fury, but Vindice is furious from the start… we never see Vindice in anything other than vengeful mode, suggesting he *has* no other mode" (100). This assertion is borne out by Vindice's very name, and in a play rife with allegory, there are few characters for whom *nomen non est omen*; most characters have

names that relate directly to their status or disposition, and Vindice's name refers to both. In conversation with Lussurioso, Vindice self-identifies "a revenger," by translating his name while his scene partner stays in ignorance of its true significance (4.2.170-4). Vindice's self-awareness of his removed status, however, can result in the kind of loss of identity that Neill talks about, because his identity is predicated on a specific action.

Since Vindice's true identity is chained to his actions, he also loses himself in the various characters he embodies over the course of the play. Vindice's protean qualities enable him to present himself as an instrument to others, and twice his conceits are referred to in specifically musical terms: first when Lussurioso calls Hippolito "the subtle instrument / to wind up a good fellow [Piato]" (1.2.38-9) and second when he is trying to appear different to Lussurioso: "I'll string myself with heavy-sounding wire, / Like such an instrument that speaks merry things sadly" (4.2.28-9). Like, Hamlet however, they may play upon him but they cannot fret him—instead he does the reverse to those that would use him. By offering himself to others as an instrument, Vindice effectively turns their confidence to his advantage, but the manipulation required to do so creates confusion in his own character. The culmination of this comes when Lussurioso hires Vindice, as himself, to kill his previous incarnation, and Vindice manages it by substituting Duke's dead body for the fictional Piato. The irony of this situation delights Vindice:

> That's a good lay, for I must kill myself. 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. I could vary it not so little as thrice over again. (5.1.2-6).

Vindice's punning creates a division of the self as he repeatedly plays with the concept, trying it out several different ways. As drunk on the idea as he will claim the supine "Piato" is, Vindice

again loses himself in his "happy apprehensions," and has to be recalled to the task at hand by Hippolito. Although he still has one task left to complete, this symbolic self-murder anticipates Vindice's real death, as his identity continues breaking down after his departure from his original purpose.

By stabbing his original enemy dressed as himself, Vindice illustrates Neill's concept that "revenge, as the fiercely exacting irony of such moments insists, is an action which, through its very attempt to revive and atone for the violated past, finishes by reenacting the crime of violation" (*Issues* 251).[55] Revenge is a dangerously cyclical business and, as Neill goes on to say, "the dream of remembering the violated past and destroying a tainted order is fulfilled only at the cost of repeating the violation and spreading the taint" (*Issues* 251). Vindice, in seeking to destroy, the "tainted order," of his society finds himself increasingly improvising on his original script and becoming too caught up in the thrill of his actions; by becoming too confident in his authorial role, he forgets he is also supposed to be an instrument of justice. Vindice reaches the apex of his self-confidence when he admits to the killings, but it also undoes him. This confession, as I have previously noted, is necessary because it allows him to control the narrative by claiming authorship, making the true story clear to his yet unknowing society. In addition, Vindice's fatal admission is a needed acknowledgement of his debt to the spirit of revenge, whose influence he recognizes at the beginning of the play.[56] Once the revenger completes his task, as Vindice has, he ceases to be a revenger, and has no function as either instrument or author. By attempting to carry on despite a lack of purpose, the revenger outlives his narrative and becomes his own enemy. Vindice, therefore, is forced to agree with his death sentence: "are we not revenged? / Is there yet one enemy alive amongst those? / Tis time to die, when we are

[55] Neill uses the staged 'killing' of Piato as an example of this.
[56] Vindice personifies both Revenge and Vengeance when he addresses them directly as a suppliant (1.1.39-44).

ourselves our foes" (5.3.107-9). Accounts settled, Vindice's tragic script has been performed, his period of authorship is at an end, and it is time for him to relinquish his role as revenger and with it, his life.

Chapter Three

"The gods' just instrument": Stoic Virtue and Vengeance in *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois*

In *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois*, George Chapman revisits the world of his earlier play, *The Tragedy of Bussy D'Ambois*, but under different conditions. Where the earlier work was a more conventionally lurid piece, Chapman uses the sequel to effect a development of the Senecan theme through Stoic philosophy. Drawing on the conventional setting of a corrupt court (in this case, a highly fictionalized French one), Chapman provides a familiar atmosphere, but defines his protagonist in terms of his devotion to virtue, not by his thirst for revenge. In contrast to the machinations of earlier revengers like Vindice, who see the deceptions and disguises of court life as necessary evils, Clermont maintains his own persona and stands resolutely apart from such intrigues. His refusal to engage with his opponents on their level emphasizes both his own integrity and the corruption of those around him. From the first moments of the play, Baligny (who is later revealed to be insincere himself) proclaims the corruption of society and its impact on the revenge plot:

> To what will this declining kingdom turn,
> Swingeing in every license, as in this
> Stupid permission of brave D'Ambois' murder?
> Murder made parallel with law! Murder used
> To serve the kingdom, given by suit to men
> For their advancement… (1.1.6)

Baligny's language confirms that this corrupt society is potentially unstable; he defines the kingdom by virtue of Bussy's murder and persistently reaffirms the lawlessness of the state. Like *The Revenger's Tragedy*, this play will also connect the atmosphere of license with the specter of tyranny, where tyranny represents state-sanctioned indulgence in crimes— and where official redress is near impossible to come by. Renel makes the connection explicit by agreeing that "tyrants, being still more fearful of the good / Than of the bad, their subjects' virtues ever / Managed with curbs and dangers and esteemed / As shadows and detractions to their own" (1.1.28-31). Tyrants promote a corrupt society to cover their own crimes and discourage virtue in order to give themselves more scope for their wickedness.

Into this world, Chapman introduces the hyper-virtuous Clermont whose character is sketched by others before he is allowed to speak for himself. Although we know from Baligny that Clermont will be the primary revenger of the piece, he enters silently as one among many. Despite Clermont's initial lack of lines, however, Chapman makes him a showpiece from the start and has the rest of the group comment upon his quiet conversation with Guise. The onlookers construe the subject of the conversation accurately enough, given a typical conversation between Clermont and his patron, but even so the very pursuit of virtue becomes unseemly in their interpretation of the scene:

BALIGNY. The Guise and his dear minion, Clermont D'Ambois,

Whispering together, not of state affairs…

…. but of something

Savouring of that which all men else despise,

How to be truly noble, truly wise.

MONSIEUR. See how he hangs upon the Guise

Like to his jewel.

ESPERNON. He's now whisp'ring in

Some doctrine of stability and freedom. (1.1.146-53)

The reference to Clermont as a "minion" and his comparison to a "jewel" suggests an inappropriate relationship between the two while the repeated emphasis on "whispering" implies secrets and plotting; it is odd that the seemingly beneficial topics Clermont and Guise discuss should be uttered with such secrecy and subject to such scorn. Although the "doctrine of stability and freedom" refers to the mental discipline of Clermont's Stoic philosophy, it also serves as a direct comparison to the imagery of tyranny and instability from Baligny's earlier conversation with Renel. When Monsieur has tired of his observation from afar, he calls for Clermont and Guise to engage in the scene by extending his observations to include them: "Come, you two / Devour each other with your virtue's zeal / And leave for other friends no fragment of ye" (1.1.182-5).[57] Again, Monsieur's language is misleadingly sexual, but Clermont does indeed share a particularly intense relationship with Guise, who functions as patron, student, and friend.[58] Chapman not only uses this relationship to develop Clermont's character and to highlight his pursuit of virtue, but also to draw attention to Clermont's liminal status both as a revenger and as practitioner of virtue.

As discussed in the previous chapters, the revenger is a liminal character who exists in a unique position both in his society and in the action of the play. Although Clermont is unable to introduce himself to the audience in the manner of a Vindice or a Hieronimo, the regard in which his fellow characters hold him helps to establish him as a figure apart. In addition, by virtue of

[57] I will later note Clermont's comparison to Brutus, but this preoccupation with philosophical thoughts on social problems, to the extent of forgetting friends, is reminiscent of Brutus in 1.2 of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*.
[58] Clermont's friendship with Guise is of the true Ciceronian kind— they might have walked out of the pages of *De Amiticia*, a relationship which is sealed in 5.1 and will be discussed in a later part of this chapter.

his association with Guise, Clermont is presented as a guide; those that would twist this guidance into something unseemly are clearly doing so for their own ends, especially since, from the moment he is introduced, Clermont comes across as a solitary honest man in an untrustworthy world. These competing representations of his character serve to emphasize Clermont's liminal position in the action of the play and within his society. Clermont's virtue is even a possible stumbling block in his quest for revenge. Indeed, Clermont lacks the focus on revenge seen in Vindice, Hieronimo, or even a doubtful revenger such as Hamlet. Where revengers are normally obsessed with the idea, Clermont seems perfectly content to wait until he can proceed with the dueling plan outlined by Baligny, even lamenting his revenger's vow in 2.3. In constructing Clermont, however, Chapman frees him from the normal passions of the revenger, even among his compatriots in the play; unusually, Clermont is the leader of "an extended revenge partnership," which Woodbridge likens to a "joint stock company or a class action suit," while pointing out that "like commercial partnerships, these mingle trust and mistrust" (96). Due to the social climate of the play and the fact that one of these partners is the Machiavellian Baligny, these elements of mistrust can scarcely be avoided, and Clermont accordingly appears to be separate from the main body of this group, despite being its most important member. The most extreme example of this is the relationship between the depiction of Clermont, who is reported to "have a D'Ambois spirit / And breathes his brother's valour, yet his temper / Is so much past his that you cannot move him" (1.1.180-2) and that of his sister Charlotte who "stands with the haste of revenge-- / Being full of her brother's fire" (1.1.108-9). It seems, then, that the regular passions of revenge have been divided and parceled among this "joint stock company" with the involved women taking on a role akin to that of classical Furies. Indeed, Baligny places much emphasis on Charlotte's ardor for revenge, stating that he is almost afraid to appear before her

without "the blood / She so much thirsts for, freckling hands and face" (1.1.118). Charlotte's literal thirst for blood combined with Tamyra's violent reproaches towards her murderous husband Montsurry serve to provide an emotional focus for the revenge displaced from the revenger himself, allowing Clermont to pursue a more measured course of action.[59]

It is said, of course, that Clermont also possesses this fiery spirit, but has quenched its power through his philosophy. For Clermont then, the play becomes a narrative about how to execute his promised revenge in harmony with his Stoic principles. Since Clermont has already agreed to the revenge, we have the opportunity to see him mostly unaffected by his mandate even as he struggles to fulfill it, trying to work with what Woodbridge calls his "disabling" Stoicism (41). Clermont's dilemma therefore, is more about the actual enacting of the revenge, rather than the justification of it: "by binding Clermont with this vow, Chapman confronts him with the necessity of revenge and the playwright can focus the debate not on vengeance itself but on the *manner* in which a virtuous man must accomplish it" (Monsarrat 214). By shifting the narrative's focus, Chapman provides commentary on the revenge genre by making Clermont a devotee of Stoic philosophy rather than an advocate of revenge itself. Clermont's adherence to Stoicism has prompted a variety of responses, including Bowers' early assertion that Clermont's "vow is not much more than a repugnant duty" and that, consequently, "the play is, in a sense, propaganda, and as such is a dramatic failure" (148-9). The allegation that the play is lifeless Stoic propaganda, however, has been challenged by later critics such as Monsarrat who believes that Chapman "has created a credible, living Stoic" (217), and Fred Fetrow who calls Clermont "a viable tragic hero" who "comes to dramatic life not so much through his repeated demonstration of stoic principles, as in behavior which is contrary to his philosophy" (230).

[59] In 1.2, Tamyra calls on "Revenge, that ever red sitt'st in the eyes / Of injured ladies, till we crown thy brows with bloody laurel" (1.2.1-3) and reminds her husband of her "tortured fingers and… stabbed-through arms" (1.2.75) that she received from him in the previous play.

Indeed, in the context of revenge tragedy, Clermont's affect is puzzling and, it would seem, at odds with his task and his genre. Millar MacLure notes this as well, suggesting that "Clermont was conceived as paradox… a figure of speech, the mouthpiece as hero" (quoted in Fetrow 229), a view which Gunilla Florby, to an extent, agrees with, believing the work should be read as "a critique of Stoicism rather than a collection of precepts" (259). Clermont's struggle with virtuous revenge creates a dynamic character, as Fetrow says, by offering a critique of both his philosophy and his genre, which becomes a reflection of Seneca's dual legacy; he is Seneca Philosophus in the world of Seneca Tragicus, a new character for a new play that evolves out of Chapman's earlier *Tragedy of Bussy D'Ambois*.[60] As such, this play is both a reaction to and a commentary on not only Chapman's earlier work but also the genre it represents.

I have examined the influence of Seneca's structure and tragic forms on the genre of revenge tragedy in Chapter 1; I will now explore how stoic ideas in general and Seneca's Stoicism, in particular, inform the genre. As Monsarrat has it, "the most important and original aspect of Stoicism was its influence upon the stage…. Stoic and stoical characters, far from indicating a mere coterie interest, reflected a widespread awareness of Stoicism among the educated classes of early seventeenth century England" (7). In terms of Seneca, in particular, his especial influence, however, is slightly more nebulous. Boyle, taking something of Nashe's view regarding the mining of Seneca's tragedies for unconnected quotations, states that "the Stoicism of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama, if Senecan, is from the prose works or from the tragedies, eclectically construed" (179). Monsarrat sees no special Stoicism in Seneca's plays, stating "Seneca may have wished to exhibit mental sickness in order to make the spectator or the reader long for mental health, but it is by no means always clear that the cure is Stoicism rather

[60] Monsarrat explains the importance of separating the two sides of Seneca into "Seneca Tragicus" and "Seneca Philosophus," as he believes that any Stoicism in Elizabethan or Jacobean drama derived from the latter rather than the former (37).

than the Aristotelian golden mean or even Epicureanism" (36). Indeed, Chapman instead takes much of Clermont's Stoical conversation from Epictetus, with at least five passages heavily reliant on his *Discourses*, for which he probably used Wolfius' Latin translation (Florby 196). Epictetus' influence is particularly evident in Clermont's combative discussion with Monsieur in 1.1. Florby observes that, in this scene, "Chapman has set himself an almost impossible task, trying to show that Clermont's quiet analysis is more powerful than any amount of vituperation" (164). Nonetheless, Chapman's approach is successful, and the discussion showcases how Clermont reacts in a hostile environment. In his moment of triumph over Monsieur, Clermont refers to Epictetus to offer the Stoic analysis that "unaccompanied by princely deeds, the title is null and void" (Florby 165).[61]

Chapman also enhances Clermont's Stoic credentials through Guise's effusive and frequent praise. Guise refers to him variously as a second Brutus (2.1.103), a "Senecal man" (4.2.41), and, with his dying breath, as one of "the most worthy of the race of men" (5.4.72). Guise's comparisons are both learned and apt, and reveal his relationship with Clermont to be one rich in classical understanding, taking a page from the contemporary "widespread awareness" of Stoic philosophy. In particular, Chapman's use of comparison to Brutus as a compliment shows Chapman's continued interest in the character of Brutus. Although Brutus was certainly a well-known classical figure at the time, Chapman's interest extended to a closer look at the man in his play *Caesar and Pompey*.[62] Along with his devotion to philosophical studies, Clermont shares Brutus' integrity in the face of tyranny.[63] Baligny's spirited defense of

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[61] This conversation also echoes one of the few instances of Stoicism in Seneca's plays when, as Heywood's translation of the *Thyestes* states, "It is the mynde onely that makes a king" (Monsarrat 36).

[62] Being compared to Brutus is a particularly good compliment since some of the highest compliments paid to Brutus compare him to himself, as is certainly true in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*; this occurs in *Caesar and Pompey* when Pompey compliments Brutus by exclaiming "Said Brutus-like!" (3.1.30).

[63] It is also worth noting here that the historical Brutus was most likely a Platonist, but he is often taken as a Stoic by early modern writers. Interestingly, it seems that Shakespeare's famous depiction of Brutus followed Plutarch

Brutus (although it might not reflect the duplicitous Baligny's own views), serves for a good example of how a Stoic could and should react to societal unrest:[64]

GUISE. In all, Rome's Brutus is revived in him,

Whom he of industry doth imitate.

…. And were not Brutus a conspirator—

BALIGNY. Conspirator, my lord? Doth that impair him?

Caesar began to tyrannize; and when virtue

Nor the religion of the gods could serve

To curb the insolence of his proud laws,

Brutus would be the gods' just instrument. (2.1.103-12)

This image of Brutus as "the gods' just instrument" applies absolutely to Clermont, an image which comes into clearer focus through the words of the ghost in 5.2. Here, however, Baligny anticipates the ghost's arguments by moving chronologically backwards from the example of Brutus to that of Antigone, and thus compounding the longstanding classical concern for the following of "God's unwrit edicts" (2.1.119) over the "king's laws [which] alter every day and hour / And in that change imply a bounded power" (2.1.121-2). Although Baligny is often untrustworthy, his easy shift from Brutus' plural "gods" to the edicts of Antigone's singular "God," nonetheless suggests a cultural comfort in conflating the two that reaches beyond his facile character and works in service of a classical ideal.

In addition, although Clermont is, as Bowers has noted, an unwilling revenger, his "revenger's hesitation" can be seen as "a transformation of the *dubitatio* of Senecan figures"

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closely enough to not write him as a Stoic, but that has been the subject of much debate. For more information, see Monsarrat 139-44.

[64] Although Stoicism advocates a kind of indifference, virtue may be performed by service to the state, which action against tyranny would definitely cover.

(Boyle 182). Clermont's hesitation, however, is different from Hieronimo's or Hamlet's, and his encounter with the ghost of his brother only serves to illuminate this difference. When Bussy's ghost finally does appear in person, so to speak, it gets an expository speech which begins, like Andrea's in *The Spanish Tragedy*, by explaining its provenance: "Up from the chaos of eternal night… once more I ascend / And bide the cold damp of this piercing air" (5.1.1-3). It is interesting, however, that this ghost does not appear until the final act, despite the characters' previous knowledge of its existence. In this way, it functions much like the reappearance of Hamlet's ghost in Gertrude's closet— although Clermont is accompanied by Guise at the time, only Clermont sees the ghost, and the visitation appears to serve a focusing purpose. Indeed, the ghost of Bussy has much in common with the ghost of Hamlet's father; both ghosts are skilled speakers, yet their masterful oratory never quite solves the problem of their doubtful provenance. The fact that Bussy's ghost "ascends" is troubling, and its reappearance after the fact favors Rist's idea of revenge tragedy as inhabiting "a world in which the dead, precisely because they are now beyond the help of their survivors… become practically insatiable in their demands upon the living" (10). Here, however, the insatiability is also displaced to Clermont's fellow revengers, particularly the bloodthirsty Charlotte; along with the displacement of the revenger's negative emotions, Charlotte takes on those of the ghost, thereby cementing her Fury-like status. Indeed, the ghost itself returns in 5.3 to chide her for her impatient attempt to perform the revenge herself, and confirm that "Clermont must author this tragedy" (5.3.46). In this conversation it becomes clear that although Clermont is not the sole communicator with the supernatural, he is the chosen author; Clermont, like Brutus, is the "gods' just instrument," and the narrative of the revenge must be his.

In light of this confirmation, the ghost's oddly measured speech to Clermont in 5.1 takes

on new meaning. The speech seems to be an extremely Christian one in which revenge becomes submission to the divine, but specifically to God's will: "To be His image is to do those things / That make us deathless, which, by death, is only / Doing those things that fit eternity; / And those deeds are the perfecting justice" (5.1.89-91). Again, the ghost's lesson aptly strengthens the idea of Clermont as a liminal figure who, in enacting God's will, lives "deathless… doing those things that fit eternity," but the fact that it is an "ascended" ghost using the first person plural while preaching in this way remains problematic. This somewhat queasy feeling only intensifies with the ghost's previous comparison of the current state of Christendom to a butchered body, "her head / Cleft to her bosom, one half one way swaying, / Another th' other" (5.1.19-21). The gory imagery befits a ghost, but less so a speaker of high-minded Christian thoughts, and the fact that the ghost speaks more frankly in soliloquy than he does to Clermont is additional grounds for unease. Although the ghost may espouse a higher truth, its Christian nature remains a bit dubious, and therefore its final appeal is much more at home with the play's Stoic sympathies: "Away then, use the means thou hast to right / The wrong I suffered. What corrupted law / Leaves unperformed in kings do thou supply, / And be above them all in dignity" (5.1.96-9). This parting shot recalls several earlier moments in the play, in particular the weighing of a king's "corrupted law" against the "unwrit edicts" of Brutus and Antigone's gods. In addition, the elevation of Clermont's dignity fulfills the promise of his earlier argument with Monsieur and the Stoic premise that only princely deeds make a princely name. Finally, the ghost's last appeal references the "wrong [he] suffered" but not his personal pain, declining to emphasize his experiences in the manner of Andrea or, more luridly, Hamlet's father's ghost. Where Hamlet's father offers both an emotional plea and a command to act with "Remember me" (*Hamlet* 1.5.91), Bussy's spirit issues a colder call to appropriate action in the face of

corruption. This emphasis agrees with Seneca Philosophus' Stoic concept of revenge (*pater… caesus est, exsequar, quia oportet, non quia dolet*),[65] which maintains that revenge is predicated on duty rather than personal suffering.

Clermont's reaction to the spirit, after an initial period of surprise, likewise serves to affirm the strength he finds in his Stoic philosophy. Moreover, his response becomes all the more exceptional when compared to Guise's, who as a student of Clermont's philosophy is also not a highly emotional character:[66]

GUISE. But this thy brother's spirit startles me,
These spirits seld or never haunting men
But some mishap ensues.
CLERMONT. Ensue what can;
Tyrants may kill, but never hurt a man;
All to his good makes, spite of death and hell (5.1.136-140).

In a neat statement that confirms his Stoic indifference to calamity, Clermont brushes aside Guise's concerns about the ghost and again returns to the theme of resistance to tyranny, displaying care for only what he can control: his inner life.[67] Again, Clermont remains passionless and his restraint is only heightened by the passions of those around him; this is drawn into even sharper relief when he is confronted almost immediately with news of the Countess, his mistress, having wept her eyes out (5.1.144-8). The Countess' excess of emotion continues the displacement of various kinds of madness traditionally pertaining to the revenger onto his

[65] *De Ira*, 1.12.2. "My father… is murdered, I will revenge (literally, "pursue to the grave"), not because I am grieved, but because it is proper (i.e. my duty)."
[66] In another comparison with Brutus, Clermont's calm appraisal of the ghost calls to mind Plutarch's report of Brutus when faced with an apparition; according to the *Lives*, he is οὐ διαταραχθεὶς, "undisturbed" (*Brut.* 36.4).
[67] As Maus notes, the spirit of Bussy may have been seen to chide Clermont for this practice of "self-sufficiency instead of dependence on God… but this does not really apply to Clermont's version of the philosophy, with its emphasis upon fitting oneself into a universal order; and his conclusion, justifying revenge, is hardly consistent with Christianity" (400).

supporting female cast,[68] as previously seen with Charlotte, while Clermont's response of "all must be borne" (5.1.150) maintains his ability to rise above things beyond his control. Oddly, however, 5.1 does not conclude there, but carries on in an interesting vein which serves to reaffirm Clermont's connection with the living through his connection with Guise. In what will prove their final scene together, Clermont and Guise swear friendship in such a way as to clearly mark the bond as Clermont's most important relationship, which, in keeping with Clermont's devotion to classical principles, upholds the classical ideal of male friendship.[69] This relationship, despite being based on a shared love of virtue, has the effect of making Clermont at once more human and more unbelievable; he engages in potentially emotional behavior, but only when founded upon the highest ideals. Nonetheless, the relationship clearly affects Clermont and will become what Monsarrat calls "the chink in his stoic armor" (216).

Despite the salubrious connection between the two, however, *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois*, is still a revenge play and not a tale of social and political reform. The ghost's insistence in 5.3 that Clermont must be the tragedy's "author," and sole author at that, effectively separates him from the other denizens of the play, and reaffirms his status as a revenger.[70] In addition, the ghost's reappearance in 5.3 reintroduces the idea of the revenger as liminal not only to his society but to the structure of the play itself. After confirming Clermont's place as "author" of the revenge narrative, Bussy's ghost eagerly anticipates the events and Clermont's audience: "the black soft-footed hour is now on wing / Which, for my just wreak, ghosts shall celebrate / With dances dire and of infernal state" (5.3.1.5-7). Again, the ghost reverts to a more

[68] Absent from Clermont are any of the extreme emotional responses found Hamlet, Hieronimo, Vindice, and others.
[69] Clermont defines their friendship thus: "For when love kindles any knowing spirit, / It ends in virtue and effects divine, / And is in friendship chaste and masculine" (5.1.187-9). Similar sentiments can be found throughout classical literature, most specifically in Cicero's *De Amicitia*, but also in Seneca's letters.
[70] Although a character such as Vindice clearly cares about his surviving family (or at least about preserving their virtue), the reader or spectator has no difficulty in distinguishing him as a removed figure, but Clermont's intimacy with Guise muddies these waters.

familiar revenge specter when he is alone onstage, with language much more ominous than the uplifting rhetoric he uses on Clermont. The ghost's prophetic words also effect a scene change by providing a choric function similar to that of Andrea and Revenge; like Revenge, Bussy's spirit both knows the future and will provide an audience to the coming revenge spectacle.

As opposed to the theatrical shows of violence staged by Hieronimo and Vindice, however, Clermont's duel with Montsurry is more like a trial by combat and lacks the former revengers' creative execution. By the ghost's word, Clermont is appointed "author," and as such, he proves himself to be not only as knowledgeable as his predecessors, but something of a revisionist as well. Gone are the cryptic signs of Hieronimo, Titus, and Vindice— Clermont's quarry knows his fate. In addition, although Clermont's method of trapping Montsurry provides the necessary parallel with his brother's demise,[71] he changes the script— where Bussy was surprised by assassins, Clermont stands by the challenge he has been trying to deliver since the start of the play and gives Montsurry a chance to defend himself. The duel is still a potential spectacle, but Chapman uses this predestined trial-by-combat instead of a theatrical event in order to showcase Clermont's virtue: as an honest man, Clermont does not attempt to deceive Montsurry at the vital moment but allows him full awareness of the proceedings. Montsurry's informed acceptance of the duel is key to Chapman's development of the genre and indeed the play gives Montsurry the choice: either to submit to Clermont's honorable challenge or to suffer extended torture by an emotional revenger (Tamyra) before being dispatched by Clermont "like a beast" (5.5.23). Any attempt to shirk responsibility is regressive, and condemns the victim to a bloody, undignified death reminiscent of earlier generations.

Chapman's development allows Clermont to not only maintain his honor, but to teach

[71] Clermont finally corners Montsurry in the same vault where Bussy met his end in *The Tragedy of Bussy D'Ambois*.

Stoic precepts to his victim.[72] In the "declining" world of the play, men like Montsurry are encouraged to give way to their baser instincts, and Clermont's Stoicism leaves room for a kind of reformation.[73] By finally submitting to the duel, Montsurry becomes an enlightened actor-spectator; rather than seeing the full picture to fully understand his pain, as with Vindice's victims, Montsurry instead must understand his fate in order to be reformed. Over the course of the fight (which becomes more of a spectacle as most of the revenge stock-holders enter the scene) Montsurry remains a vital part of the action while undergoing a kind of metamorphosis brought on by Clermont's words and his imminent death. The change has already begun (5.5.75-85), when Charlotte enters the scene and attempts to impose herself upon the duel. Charlotte, who has thus far stood for a kind of Fury, appears here like an impatient Senecan vulture ready to dispatch the wounded Montsurry, reformation or no. In this light, Clermont's response to her: "have patience now; / If next charge speed not, I'll resign to you" (5.5.103-4), reads both at face value and as an attempt to hold off a generic revenge narrative until Montsurry has learned his lesson. After Clermont resumes the fight with Montsurry's blessing, and kills him, Montsurry's dying words of forgiveness declare the process to be complete.

Despite his epitaph of "Noble and Christian" (5.5.113) and attempt to close the matter now that justice has been done, Clermont still occupies the liminal revenge space, having brought an end to Montsurry's narrative but not his own. As promised by Bussy's ghost, the spirits of the play's dead reveal themselves and dance about Montsurry's corpse. Again, Clermont is the only one to witness this, and moreover his commentary serves to illustrate what

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[72] As Montsarrat notes, "Chapman skillfully manages to turn a necessary revenge into a beneficent and virtuous action. Montsurry becomes Clermont's last pupil because the revenger is also a philosopher" (215).

[73] "Roman Stoicism regards vice as a product of misplaced values and poor judgment rather than as a distinct quality present in the universe or identifiable in a vicious man. Potential for virtuous action is rarely lacking in criminals, who may generally be reformed if they can be brought to see the error of their ways" (Broude 52). Of course, Montsurry's crimes are above mere vice, but he can at least benefit peripherally from the principle.

the ghostly dancers are meant to be doing. In addition, the episode confirms that although Montsurry is dead, the tragedy is not done, nor is Clermont's tenure as author. Any apparent Christianity present at Montsurry's demise seems eclipsed by the unsavory sight of spirits dancing, who, as Clermont says, "with joy thus celebrate / This our revenge" (5.5.122-3). Although it might be argued that revenge can take a Christian bent, this kind of celebration, and by dubious spirits, is much more reminiscent of Kyd's supernatural spectators. In addition, although we are prepared to take the presence of the ghosts at face value on precedent, Clermont's confusion about spirits of those he believes to be still alive, including Guise, recall unsure visions from plays like Seneca's *Hercules Furens*."[74] Although these spirits are no Furies urging him on, their appearance, followed by the news that Guise is indeed dead, discomfits him more than previously seen, so much that he takes the step of physically removing himself from his living compatriots: "Let me pray ye all / A little to forbear, and let me use / Freely mine own mind in lamenting him" (5.5.145-147).

Clermont's removal from company is his first step towards suicide, and indeed, as soon as he is left alone he immediately questions the value of living any longer:

> Shall I live, and he
>
> Dead that alone gave means of life to me?
>
> There's no disputing with the acts of kings:
>
> Revenge is impious on their sacred persons;
>
> … I end with him.
>
> But friendship is the cement of two minds,
>
> As of one man the soul and body is,

[74] "Mythological tragedy accepts such ghosts and demons as Epicurean philosophy does not, but by juxtaposing contrasting realities in the same drama Seneca hints at the same subjectivism as Lucretius: the maddened visions of Juno and Hercules are realities which misguided souls make for themselves" (Littlewood 77).

Of which one cannot sever but the other

Suffers a needful separation. (5.5.149-60)

Although Clermont does have one last speech, which delves more deeply in the Stoic teachings of Epictetus,[75] it is only an expansion of what is expressed here. Here, at last, is the chink in Clermont's Stoic armor; the emotional turmoil we see from other revengers only emerges when Clermont is suddenly bereft of his friend and his previously ironclad self-sufficiency begins to break down. Florby also notes this "sudden surge of emotion in the hero" which "confuses our picture of him as a Stoic but… certainly promotes a theatrically more effective ending" (38-9). It is not only emotion and theatrical sensibility, however, that make Clermont's suicide necessary. By living, Clermont would find himself in an untenable position where he would be both alone and unable to act on his dead friend's behalf; he is aware that avenging Bussy was within his scope, but that avenging Guise would "constitute an impious challenge to the divinely established political order," and therefore "chooses the Stoic alternative to existence in a world he cannot better" (Broude 61).[76] Stoic suicides were well known to Elizabethan and Jacobean audiences, and by following this route, Chapman places Clermont firmly in their camp.[77] There is no "Noble and Christian" epitaph for Clermont as he executes his own demise decisively under the auspices of Seneca and Epictetus— "dying well" in preference over "living ill" (Monsarrat 18).

Despite the grand style of Clermont's suicide, however, it draws the comment of "too

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[75] Clermont's speech (5.5.175-92) is a paraphrase of "one of the best-known sections" of Epictetus' *Manual* (Monsarrat 216-7).

[76] Ronald Broude also notes that "the wise and virtuous man is not called upon to reform the world, but merely to do his part in upholding the justice which sustains both society and the universe" (60).

[77] Chapman also deals with the Stoic suicide of Cato in his *Caesar and Pompey*, and as Monsarrat notes, "Chapman is faithful to Plutarch and to Seneca: Cato kills himself because this is the only way of preserving his freedom and integrity" (38).

easy tis to die" (5.5.209) from Tamyra, when the Countess speaks of following his example.[78] In addition, the surviving women create a juxtaposition between the classical ideals of the dead Clermont and the contemporary Christian society of the living. Charlotte, as the last remaining D'Ambois, recognizes the necessity of ending one's narrative appropriately and, after having harangued her brother for much of the play, she enthusiastically approves his final action: "I did love thee ever, / But now adore thee" (5.5199-200). With Charlotte's acceptance, the last of the revenger's madness begins to dissipate and so do the women's Fury-like aspects; Tamyra responds to the Countess' grief by comparing the assembled women to the mythological Fates, and then turns them in a different direction: "hide, hide, thy snaky head! To cloisters fly, / In penance pine!" (5.5.208-9). Thus, Tamyra suggests they forsake the play's Senecan influences by retreating in the opposite direction— to a cloistered life. Charlotte's agreement is, in its way, much the same as Clermont's decision to commit suicide— unable to affect change in a corrupt world, retreat is the only option: "in cloisters then, let's all survive… since wrath nor grief can help these fortunes, / Let us forsake the world in which they reign, / And for their wished amends to God complain" (5.5.210-3). Tamyra's determination to keep her compatriots from death and moreover move them to a convent seems to imply the possibility of Christianity reclaiming dominance, but it is a hollow and somewhat Epicurean development since it also removes any possibility of real action;[79] social isolation and prayer look like a poor substitute for Clermont's more active Stoicism. By their retreat, the women relinquish their roles in the tragedy and are subsumed back into the nominally Christian world of the play, although the greater pagan implications of the play's universe remain, much as they do in *The Spanish Tragedy*. Even

[78] Florby reads this as the voice of doubt, saying "Chapman heaps encomiums on both his heroes and surrounds them with admiring friends, but a small voice keeps breaking in saying "too easy 'tis to die" or words to that effect" (179).
[79] Despite Stoic emphasis on indifference, Epicureanism holds much more with removal from society.

lacking the obvious presence of Revenge as a character, *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois* exists in a world ruled more by classical principles than by Christian faith; even in seeking virtue, classical philosophy provides a better method of reform than trying to reconcile Christianity with a universe inhabited by gleefully dancing ghosts.

Conclusion

Enter *Hamlet*, pursued by ghost

Over the course of my discussion of the dual role of the revenger as both instrument and author, I have frequently referenced *Hamlet*, yet both the play and its title character find ways to separate themselves from the general milieu of revenge tragedy. As Neill astutely notes, "from its very beginning, *Hamlet* manifests a fascination with and an anxiety about narrative more intense than in any other play of the period" (*Issues* 218). This anxiety finds its fullest expression in Hamlet's fascination with the Players, as their facility with fictitious narratives stands in contrast to Hamlet's inability to create a narrative for himself. In discussing Hamlet's preoccupation with the possibilities of theatre, Boyle refers to him as a "failed actor-director in the action of the play at large, in contrast with Hamlet's own players" (197). Indeed, Hamlet is obsessed with acting, but shies away from allowing himself to become an instrument of revenge, which in turn prevents him from taking on a full authorial role. As Hamlet himself comments "I, the son of a dear father murdered / Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell / Must, like a whore, unpack my heart with words" (*Hamlet* 2.2.572-4). The set-up is perfect, Hamlet has been perfectly cast, but he is unable to act beyond his words. As Boyle notes, even the actors are more convincing than he is— Hamlet's desire to act is not borne out by his skill.

Instead of taking charge of either the play or the play-within-the-play as Hieronimo does, Hamlet hovers around the edges, failing to produce an effective adaptation by sliding a few new lines into an already-established drama and offering a slew of last minute directions to a group of already-established actors. This can perhaps be seen as a need for Hamlet to engage more fully with his text— Hamlet's treatment of *The Murder of Gonzago* has far more for Nashe to

complain about than many of Nashe's contemporary targets. Hamlet does show his concern for narrative in other ways, but it only leads to delayed action. His failure to kill Claudius when he has the chance is predicated on a need for Claudius to suffer the same fate as Hamlet's father (a fine sentiment that many revengers could respect), but in preserving that part of the narrative he robs himself of the opportunity to take control of the narrative itself. Unlike the revengers we have just spent time with, Hamlet never quite reaches a level of determination that involves a real plan to kill his uncle. Even in the lead-up to the final scene, as Mercer notes, "all Hamlet need do is wait" and accordingly declare "a readiness to seize whatever opportunity chance may bring" (246),[80] making an unfavorable comparison of Hieronimo's bloody authorship with Hamlet's acquiescence to a plot not of his own making. By failing to engage fully, Hamlet waits for an opportunity rather than creating his own and consigns himself to being an actor, but not a doer.

Although Mercer offers good insight into Hamlet's inconsistencies with many of his fellow revengers, he also makes the interesting claim that "not only is *Hamlet* not a revenge tragedy, it is hardly a tragedy at all," basing this on the opinion that Hamlet "[*begins*] his action shaken with uncontrollable passion" and moves towards "heroic coherence" from "tragic dissolution," not *vice-versa* (246).This however, is predicated on the revenger being a fundamentally unstable character, the same argument that the Halletts make when they say revengers surrender to the irrational. As I have previously discussed, however, a revenger who has accepted his role maintains a degree of clarity that Hamlet often lacks. Although the body counts of Hieronimo and Vindice may be higher, the collateral damage is lower— they kill only who they mean to, and no one by accident. Part of this stems from the fact that Hamlet is

[80] Here, Mercer provides his reading of "there's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come: the readiness is all" (*Hamlet* 5.2.211-4).

interestingly placed for a revenger, being an integral part of the society he might wish to subvert. Although Hamlet wants to strike out at Claudius, Claudius is family and a fellow royal, which makes Hamlet complicit in the system. As opposed to revengers who come from outside the power structure, Hamlet cannot engage in the same kind of anti-tyrannical rhetoric lower-born revengers espouse. Claudius may be a bloody, bawdy villain like Vindice's Duke, but he cannot quite be a tyrant just as Hamlet cannot quite be a revenger.

Despite this, however, Hamlet's lack of clarity and fear of embracing his liminal status make him sympathetic. Unlike a Brutus or a Clermont, he cannot believe himself to be a just instrument of the gods, and the potential of death, not tyranny concerns him.[81] Consequently, Hamlet's musings on action take a very different path. Brutus is more conflicted over the idea of killing *Caesar* than of killing in general, and begins his one soliloquy with "it must be by his death," (*Julius Caesar* 2.1.10) which guards against even the potential of tyranny: "then, lest he may, prevent" (2.1.28). Brutus' dread of unknown tyranny takes a new form in Hamlet's dread of the undiscovered country. Although Hamlet would no doubt empathize with the later Vindice's statement that "since my worthy father's funeral, / My life's unnatural to me, e'en compelled" (*Revenger's* 1.1.119-20) he struggles against the darkness Vindice gladly embraces. Hamlet's reluctance, therefore, departs from the author and instrument roles I have discussed, but he keeps them within sight, making them conspicuous by his failure to adhere to them. Situated near the middle of genre, *Hamlet* in context helps to helps to shine a light on the successes and failures of the revenger's attempt to author a work of justice in an unjust world.

[81] Brutus is not technically a revenger, but in his connection with figures like Clermont, he may be read as one. It could be argued that he functions as a revenger on the behalf of republican Rome, with the memory of his famous ancestor serving as his ghost— Brutus, however, neglects to realize his Republic is already dead and that killing its supposed murderer will not revive it.

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