

ละครโศกนาฏกรรมแนวล้างแค้น : ศิลธรรมเบื้องหลัง ความสับสนอลหม่าน

บทความนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อนำเสนอคุณค่าของบทละครโศกนาฏกรรมแนวล้างแค้นว่า มิใช่เขียนขึ้นเพื่อสนองความต้องการของผู้ชมที่จะชมความสยดสยองและหวาดเสียวบนเวทีละครเท่านั้น แต่ยังมีผลให้ผู้ชมตระหนักว่าความยุติธรรมที่เที่ยงแท้แน่นอนแทบจะหาไม่ได้ในสังคม อีกทั้งเห็นถึงความเลวร้ายในกมลสันดานของมนุษย์ และ ความหลงเหลือทางด้านศิลปะในสังคมที่มีระบอบการปกครองที่แบ่งชั้นวรรณะ บทละคร 3 เรื่องที่นำมาใช้สนับสนุนแนวคิดดังกล่าว ได้แก่ เรื่อง *The Spanish Tragedy* ของ Thomas Kyd เรื่อง *Hamlet* ของ Shakespeare และเรื่อง *The Revenger's Tragedy* ของ Cyril Tourneur

Revenge Tragedy: The Morality Beneath the Mayhem

The purpose of this article is to emphasize the value of revenge tragedy, which is not written merely to satisfy the audience's predilection for horror but, through mayhem and sensational forms of chaos on stage, is designed to illustrate an impartial justice that hardly exists in society, human malice, and the disruption of morality in hierarchical society. The plays selected to exemplify these ideas are Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Cyril Tourneur's *The Revenger's Tragedy*.

Revenge Tragedy : The Morality Beneath the Mayhem

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It is generally postulated that revenge plays were written to satisfy the appetite of the audience for violence and horror because of the nature of their plots. Their basic plot often starts with the attempt of an individual who has an obligation to prosecute a crime done to him, his relatives or lover, by someone who is usually out of the reach of ordinary justice because of his social importance or power, and ends with a bloodbath. With this assumption, many people tend to think that revenge plays are seldom about justice, but are rather excuses for violence and other sensational forms of chaos. Superficially, this belief seems to be true because revenge plays, especially revenge tragedies, are full of bloodshed and multiple corpses; however, mayhem and sensational forms of chaos, in fact, are deployed to serve ends other than themselves. They are shown to be the result of the vileness of the human mind and the depravity of a hierarchical society in which the ruler is heedless or abuses his power and this in itself makes an individual seek revenge in a private capacity because impartial justice can never exist in such a society. The plays which best illustrate that revenge plays deal with justice and depict human malice, corrupt society and moral implications through violence and sensational forms of chaos are Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Cyril Tourneur's *The Revenger's Tragedy*.

In *The Spanish Tragedy*, Hieronimo is portrayed as a typical hero of revenge tragedy who finds himself surrounded by a world of injustice and starts seeking private

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revenge for his murdered son. Even though the Biblical commandment, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord”, was strictly adhered to by English people in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, I think that the audience could not have helped feeling sorry for the injustice that Hieronimo suffers, at least at the beginning of the play, and perhaps would have been reminded of situations when revenge was found justifiable among the Christians; as Gamini Salgado, in “Introduction to *Three Jacobean Tragedies*,” points out, “revenge could be where a wrong had been done, but the victim was unable to obtain legal redress, either through lack of witnesses or because of a loophole in the existing law. ... [T]he most striking justification of revenge,..., was the situation of blood-revenge for murder” (15). Hieronimo’s tragic plight is not written only for a sentimental purpose. In fact, it is used to illustrate injustice in society.

Kyd makes it plain that Hieronimo is driven to seek private revenge by injustice, as we can see in the development of his character from an honest man who trusts in the legal system to a cunning man who outdoes his enemies with an intricate and murderous plot. When finding the dead body of Horatio, Hieronimo vows to take revenge and keeps the “handkercher besmeared with blood” as a reminder of his obligation to his son. Even though he does not know who has murdered his son, Hieronimo, who believes in divine justice, mournfully asks Heaven not to let the criminals go unpunished:

O sacred heavens! If this unhallowed deed,
....
Shall unrevealed and unrevenged pass,
How should we term your dealings to be just,
If you unjustly deal with those that in your justice trust?
(3.2.5-11)

Kyd’s portrayal of Hieronimo appealing to Heaven typifies the common practice of the English playwrights, who were influenced by Seneca, in having their heroes ask for justice from Heaven. Another good example can be seen in

Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*. When Titus learns that Lavinia has been ravished and mutilated by Tamora's lustful sons, he cries, "Ruler of the great heavens, dost thou so calmly hear crimes, so calmly look upon them" (4.1.80-1, Latin adapted from Seneca's *Hippolytus*, English translated by Eugene M. Waith). Interestingly, Kyd's Providence is presented in the mixed form of pagan gods and Christian God; as Phillip Edwards, in *Thomas Kyd and Early Elizabethan Tragedy*, puts it, "Revenge is of the pagan nether world, Justice is of the supernal Christian heaven" (36). It is reasonable that Hieronimo assumes that God is on his side since he always gets information after he prays to heaven. First, he gets Bel-imperia's note telling him that Lorenzo and Balthazar are the murderers and then Pedringano's letter to Lorenzo to confirm Bel-imperia's statement.

As knight-marshal, Hieronimo believes that he can rely on the legal system, since he has got evidence to bring the malefactors to punishment:

I will go plain me to my lord the king,
And cry aloud for justice through the court,
(3.7.69-70)

However, the failure of the legal system in society is portrayed in the scene where Hieronimo's attempt to see the king is thwarted by Lorenzo. I think that though the King is just, as seen in his judgement on the rewards for both Horatio and Lorenzo in act 1 scene 3, he is too obsessed with his own affairs and unaware of Horatio's death. Therefore, the king's inability to understand his plea, together with Lorenzo's interference, make Hieronimo give up hope of legal redress.

Moreover, Kyd uses subplots to show injustice in society. We can find the parallel between the Portuguese subplot and Hieronimo's case. The Viceroy believes Villuppo's lie that Balthazar was shot to death by Alexandro. Without a trial, he sentences him to death. Alexandro would not have survived if the ambassador had not returned to save his life in time. This subplot not only accentuates the fact that there is

no justice in society but also shows the contrast between the Viceroy's character and Hieronimo's. While the Viceroy abuses his power in his hasty judgement which nearly takes an innocent man's life, Hieronimo, who has no power, proves to be more prudent, as seen when he gets Bel-imperia's letter and does not rush to accuse Lorenzo and Balthazar. Another subplot which is used to emphasize Hieronimo's striving for justice by a means of law is the Bazulto supplication episode. Bazulto and Hieronimo share the same fate. Their sons are murdered and they hope that they can find justice through a legal system. Arthur Freeman, in *Thomas Kyd: Facts and Problems*, proposes that this scene is intended to show injustice caused by "a too tardy law" which is the reverse pattern of injustice nearly done in the Viceroy's "haste in judging" (84). It can be seen that this subplot mimics Hieronimo's plea to the King. Bazulto sees Hieronimo as the agent of justice in the same way that Hieronimo hopes in the King, but Bazulto's hope proves to be futile since both the King and Hieronimo are alike in that they are so preoccupied with their own affairs that they become heedless of other people's urgent problems. Though Hieronimo can see himself in Bazulto as he cries, "Thou art the lively image of my grief"(3.13.162), he still cannot respond to Bazulto's demand for justice. All he can do is to express sympathy to "the same self sorrow" (3.13.169).

Driven by disappointment in the legal system, Hieronimo is faced with the dilemma whether he should wait for divine justice, as he knows that "mortal men may not appoint their time," or whether he should undertake the role of revenger himself as he ponders, "the safe way to crime is always through crimes"(3.13.6, English translated by Katharine Eisaman Maus). Therefore, it is clear that Hieronimo has freewill to choose, though Kyd shows that he is destined to be used as a divine instrument for Andrea's justice and Hieronimo decides to take on the role of revenger himself. After this decision, Hieronimo is portrayed as a cunning man who outdoes his rivals in intrigues. His hatred under the cloak of friendship and feigned madness, a role-playing which is influenced by Senecan tragedies and which Shakespeare also adopts for use in *Titus Andronicus* and *Hamlet*, can deceive his enemies, and even

Belimperia and Isabella. Hieronimo is not aware that in assuming the role of revenger, he will become a Machiavel like the evil Lorenzo.

Like *The Spanish Tragedy*, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* depicts the injustice in society and broadens its scope to the corruption of society and the conflict between "Vindicta Mihi" and an individual's obligation to do justice for wrongs. Hamlet's disturbed state of mind, which definitely makes the audience sympathize with him, is caused by the conflict between the Ghost's call for revenge and Christian morality. The Ghost does not appear like the Senecan spirit of revenge, which serves the function of exposition in its monologue, as seen in *The Spanish Tragedy*. It directly demands that Hamlet avenge its murder committed by Claudius but leave his mother to be punished by her guilty conscience:

Let not the royal bed of Denmark be
A couch for luxury and damned incest.
But howsomever thou pursuest this act,
Taint not thy mind nor let thy soul contrive
Against thy mother aught. Leave her to heaven
And to those thorns that in her bosom lodge
To prick and sting her.

(1.5.82-8)

It is impossible for Hamlet to restore justice for the Ghost via the law since the murderer is the king; as C. J. Sisson, in *Shakespeare's Tragic Justice*, points out, "Evil-doing in a king must be borne patiently, for he is subject only to God" (65). Therefore, only God can punish the tyrant. The impartiality of divine justice, in contrast to partial human justice, is shown in Claudius's fear at his prayer as he says that he cannot hide the truth and get away with his crime in Heaven as he can do in the human world:

In the corrupted currents of this world
Offence's gilded hand may shove by justice;
And oft'tis seen the wicked prize itself
Buys out the law. But 'tis not so above.

There is no shuffling. There the action lies
In his true nature

(3.3.57-62)

Moreover, Claudius's crime is linked to the problem of moral uprightness in society. Marcellus remarks that the appearance of the Ghost shows that "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark" (1.5.90). Claudius is portrayed by the Ghost and Hamlet as the core of evil and rottenness in the Danish court. The Ghost compares him to the serpent in the murder scene. Also, Hamlet describes the differences between the magnanimous soul of his father and the sensual appetite of Claudius by comparing his father to mythological gods like Hyperion, Mars and herald Mercury and Claudius to the lustful satyr. Hamlet views Gertrude's incestuous marriage to Claudius as a symptom of the moral degeneration of society. Gertrude is condemned by her son for allowing herself to be stripped of virtue, shown in his use of her metaphorical leaving "a heaven-kissing hill" and "this fountain mountain" and seduced by sexual appetite and lust "to batten on this moor" (3.4, 59, 66-7). Thus, Hamlet's motive for revenge is also broadened to the responsibility for restoring the former order and moral uprightness in society.

However, Hamlet is different from other heroes in revenge tragedies. He sees himself as the instrument of divine justice like Hieronimo, but as a melancholic man, he cannot simply move towards his end without being haunted by guilty conscience, as is illustrated in his crying:

The time is out of joint. O cursed spite,
That ever I was born to set it right.

(1.5.196-7)

Even though Hamlet takes the role of revenger, he still vacillates between his obligation to the Ghost and morality. His first movement to seek private revenge is like that of other heroes in revenge tragedies. He assumes the role of a mad man like Hieronimo and Titus. His first "antic disposition" (1.5.180) is illustrated in Ophelia's

account of his visit to her closet. He can make Polonius believe that his madness is caused by “the very ecstasy of love” (2.1.102). In the nunnery scene, Hamlet still carries on his role as a mad man. His cruel treatment of Ophelia might be because Hamlet knows that Ophelia is being used to pry into his madness and that he may be being watched by Polonius as he asks her, “Where’s your father?” (3.1.130-1). Also, it is possibly because he transfers his disillusion with his mother’s frailty to her as he attacks her chastity and declares, “I did love you once” (3.1.115) but he wants her to go to the nunnery now. However, after the initial step of revenge, Hamlet does not further his plan. Instead, he becomes reluctant to do it, as is shown through his doubt whether the Ghost is a devil in disguise coming to lead him into mortal sin. Given that his suspicion of the Ghost’s veracity is a real cause of his delay, he is still inactive. When the play, which Hamlet calls “*The Mousetrap*,” proves that the Ghost is telling the truth as he tells Horatio, “I’ll take the ghost’s word for a thousand pound” (3.2.280-1), he is still unable to kill Claudius at his prayers, reasoning that he not only wants to kill him but damn his soul as well. Also, the closet scene shows Hamlet’s torment in taking the role of revenger. After accidentally killing Polonius by mistaking him for Claudius, Hamlet laments his role as a divine agent again. He is not only a punisher in Claudius’s case, but he must be punished for his savage passion in killing Polonius:

Heaven hath pleas’d it so,
To punish me with this and this with me,
That I must be their scourge and minister.
(3.4.175-7)

Shakespeare also uses the story of Pyrrhus’s revenge on Priam and the subplots of Fortinbras and Laertes to accentuate Hamlet’s dilemma. The First Player’s crying after reciting the story of Pyrrhus, which is identical with Hamlet’s situation, makes Hamlet condemn himself for his irresponsibility in relation to the actual murder of his father as he soliloquizes, “O What a rogue and peasant slave am I” (2.2.544). Also, Shakespeare employs both Fortinbras and Laertes as a foil of Hamlet. Both of them are men of action, which sharply contrasts with the dilatory Hamlet. In act 4 scene 4, Fortinbras is portrayed as a young active man who leads his troops to fight against

Poland for a worthless plot of land. Harold Jenkins, in "Introduction to *Hamlet*," makes an interesting note on the role of Fortinbras, "it is not as a son seeking to recover what his father lost that he is ultimately juxtaposed with Hamlet. Yet he can still contrast with Hamlet as a man of action in a daring enterprise, and the sight of his army risking death for a worthless patch of ground comes to Hamlet as a rebuke" (136). In contrast to Hamlet, Laertes is presented as a typical hero of revenge tragedy. When he learns that his father has been killed, he promptly takes action to do justice for him. Unlike Hamlet, who is afraid of being seduced to damnation by the Ghost and does not take any further action after his success in probing Claudius's guilt, Laertes goes to threaten Claudius's life with the crime he does not commit and vows to take revenge regardless of the consequences: "I dare damnation" (4.5.133). Furthermore, in contrast to the scene where Hamlet spares Claudius's life at his prayers, Laertes swears to kill Hamlet even though he is in a sacred place like a church: "To cut his throat i' th' church" (4.7.125).

However, in the graveyard scene, it seems to me that Hamlet can find a resolution to his conflict. To Hamlet, the duty to revenge seems meaningless after he contemplates the senselessness of human existence. Barton, in "Introduction to *William Shakespeare: Hamlet*," points out that the tongueless skulls of men who once have been lawyers, politicians and courtiers make Hamlet imagine their vanished existence and the vanity of ambition, as epitomized by the arts of language (46). I think that the meditation on the mortality of man makes Hamlet stop seeking private revenge and leave vengeance to God, since he does not take any further action from now on. On the contrary, we find him leaving everything, including his own life, in the hands of destiny, as he tells Horatio in the next scene:

Our indiscretion sometime serves us well
When our deep plots do pall; and that should learn us
There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will—
(5.2.8-11)

It is not surprising that Hamlet becomes a victim in Claudius's plan at the end. He may abandon the idea of private revenge but Claudius and Laertes still want to take his life. Therefore, I think that Hamlet, despite being aware of the evil plan, still plunges into that trap because he does not care much about life after he adopts the idea of God's providence: "There is 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" (5.2.215-8).

Tourneur's *The Revenger's Tragedy* deals not only with injustice but also with moral corruption in society. Like Hieronimo and Hamlet, Vindici cannot find a way to legal redress for justice since the criminal is the Duke. The motive for his revenge is the death of his betrothed Gloriana and that of his father. Gloriana is poisoned by the Duke because she will not consent "Unto his palsy-lust" (1.1.34) while his father dies in neglect and discontent because "the Duke did much deject him" (1.1.122). Because of his plight, the audience are definitely on his side at the beginning of the play. Vindici's inability to find justice via the legal system because of the Duke's power is clearly indicated in the trial of Junior Brother. Instead of sentencing him to death for raping Antonio's wife and causing her to commit suicide, the Duke defers the judgement, as the Duchess asks him to "Call him not son-in-law" (1.2.24). Spurio also comments on the injustice of human judgement, since he knows that the delay of death sentence means the chance that Junior can get away with his crime:

Delayed, deferred—nay then, if judgement have
Cold blood, flattery and bribes will kill it.
(1.2.89-90)

Hippolito also shares Spurio's view that bribes can eradicate the impartiality of human justice since "Judgement speak all in gold" (1.4.61). Also, Antonio comments that the deferral of the sentence influenced by the Duchess typifies the injustice of human legal procedure of the present time: "Judgement in this age is near kin to favour" (1.4.55).

Tourneur emphasizes that Vindici's motive for revenge is justice by comparing it to the perverted reasons for revenge of the other characters in the play. For instance, the Duchess and the bastard Spurio commit incest because of their lust as the Duchess herself calls him "my love's true-begot" and reveals that she has sent him "many a wealthy letter," "Swelled up with jewels" (1.2.110,111,112) and Spurio also responds to her lust as symbolically portrayed through his wearing of her jewels. However, both claim that their incest is revenge against the Duke. To the Duchess, it is because the Duke does not spare Junior, while to Spurio, it is because the Duke made him a bastard.

Tourneur makes it plain that besides seeking private revenge in order to do justice for his lover and father, Vindici considers himself an agent of divine justice whose task is to purge all villains, represented by the ducal family, and bring order and morality back to society. In act 4 scene 2, he assumes that the thunder he hears after he asks heaven "Is there no thunder left, or is't kept up/ In stock for heavier vengeance?" (4.2.196-7) is a sign of heavenly approval of his role as a revenger. To Vindici, the moral corruption in society is caused by lust, as he describes how adulteries are commonly committed in a family:

Some father dreads not (gone to bed in wine)
To slide from the mother, and cling the daughter-in-law,
Some uncles are adulterous with their nieces,
Brothers with brother's wives. O hour of incest!
(1.3.57-61)

However, their sin is covered by their hypocrisy, metaphorically represented by their dress and the mask which they wear in society, so well that no one "can perceive this" except "that eternal eye/ That sees through flesh and all" (1.3.64-6). Another example which shows the decadence of society is when Vindici, disguised as Piatto, is ordered by Lussurioso to seduce his own sister, Castiza, to consent to his lust. Vindici's success in turning his own mother, Gratiana, into a bawd confirms his view that society is controlled by lust and greed: "A right good woman in these days is

changed into white money with less labour far" (2.2.26-7). Tourneur's idea that society is corrupted by lust and money is commonly shared among Jacobean dramatists. Vindici's role as a pander to seduce his own mother and sister is similar to that of Flamineo in Webster's *The White Devil*. However, Cornelia does not allow herself to be controlled by greed like Gratiana. She tries unsuccessfully to persuade her children to abandon the heinous adultery as she cries, "What? Because we are poor/ Shall we be vicious?" (1.2.322-3). Tourneur makes it obvious through his speech to the new Duke Antonio at the end of the play that Vindici considers the ducal family the core of depravity and that it needs to be eradicated: "Your hair will make the silver age again" (5.3.85). Antonio's silver hair represents the age of peace and justice, which disappears during the rule of the white-haired old Duke.

Like Hieronimo and Hamlet, who disguise themselves as mad men, Vindici assumes the role of the malcontent, Piato. It can be said that Tourneur adopts the role of malcontent Vindici from Marston's Malevole in *The Malcontent*, since both Vindici and Duke Altrofonto disguise themselves as the malcontent and outdo their rivals with more sophisticated intrigues. Malevole, in order to regain his throne, deceives both Pietro and Mendoza. He uses their vileness as his tool to do justice for himself. Pietro trusts him because he tells him about his wife's adultery with Mendoza but Pietro is never aware of his ulterior motive. Malevole wants to destroy his relationship with his wife since he knows that Pietro's throne is supported by Aurelia's relatives. Also, he makes Mendoza believe that he is an accomplice in his crime but double-crosses him at the end. Likewise, Vindici is best at his role as malcontent because both the Duke and Lussurioso trust him. He is a pander for both of them and he kills the Duke in his role as a pander. He can deceive Lussurioso twice as Piato first and Vindici later. Like Hieronimo, Vindici does not realize that in achieving his aim, he is also corrupted. He forgets the ingenuity of his revenge and delight in his Machiavellian skills as he tells Hippolito:

I'm lost again: you cannot find me yet
I'm in a throng of happy apprehensions.
(3.5.31-2)

In this situation, he not only fails to perform his duty as an agent of justice but also brings chaos to society; as Peter B. Murray, in *A Study of Cyril Tourneur*, puts it, "In the World of *The Revenger's Tragedy* human justice fails partly because any man who has lived long enough to understand life is bound to be too corrupted himself to judge others. Those who seek justice are no less corrupted than those who seek sensual pleasure or power" (228).

It can be seen that the heroes in these three plays have to assume the role of revenger because it is impossible for them to find justice in a corrupt society where the malefactors are powerful and out of the reach of ordinary justice. In order to emphasize the vileness of the human mind and moral laxity in hierarchical society, the dramatists employ violent scenes and sensational forms of chaos on stage. In *The Spanish Tragedy*, Kyd uses violent scenes to signify human vileness. Take the scene of the murder of Horatio, for example. Lorenzo not only stabs him to death but also hangs his body in the harbour. This scene is not intended to frighten the audience only. It shows that hatred can make man become savage like an animal. Lorenzo despises Horatio because both of them once had a conflict in claiming Balthazar as their prisoner. Moreover, Lorenzo feels that his family pride is injured by the relationship between Bel-imperia and Horatio because Horatio is inferior in social rank, as seen in his jest after hanging Horatio's body in the harbour:

Although his life were still ambitious, proud,
Yet is he at the highest now he is dead.
(2.4.59-60)

Lorenzo does not see the fact that those below him in social rank and power are also humans. He kills Horatio because of his sexual relationship across class boundaries and he wants Serberine and Pedringano dead after the murder in order to

keep his crime secret. To Lorenzo, Serberine and Pedringano's lives mean nothing:

For die they shall—
Slaves are ordained to no other end.
(3.2.120-1)

Lorenzo represents the aristocratic class who abuse their power and also exploit and fail in their obligation to their subjects, as seen in the murder of Horatio and the false hope of survival of Pedringano respectively. He never realizes while he manipulates and destroys the life of those who are inferior in rank and power, his life is also controlled by Revenge, who is above him in the hierarchy of power; as Peter B. Murray, in *Thomas Kyd*, puts it,

If men could see those above themselves, they
might realize that they are manipulated in the same
way that they manipulate others; and they might
then learn to treat other men more humanely. (31)

Therefore, from this violent scene, the audience should realize that God creates everything in order. Peace in society consists in obeying those who are naturally superior and ruling those who are inferior in the hierarchical order and chaos will occur if either party fails to perform its duty as exemplified by the bloodshed at the end of the play.

Like other conventional revenge tragedies which end with a bloodbath, *The Spanish Tragedy* ends with a holocaust. Kyd surely does not present it only to gratify the audience's appetite for horror. Also, he wants the audience to see the consequences of the disruption of hierarchical order in society. The violence which happens can be explained in terms that both the ruler and the subject fail to perform their function dutifully. Hieronimo's speech addressing the court audience represents the frustration and grief of the ruled who have to suffer when the ruler is ignorant and fails to provide justice:

Speak, Portuguese, whose loss resembles mine:
If thou canst weep upon thy Balthazar,
'Tis like I wailed for my Horatio.
(4.4.113-5)

Hieronimo wants them to learn that humans, no matter what class they belong to, are equally in pain when they lose the person they love; as Katharine Eisaman Maus contends,

Neglected by those who would amplify the differences between those who command and those who obey, Hieronimo defiantly insists upon the similarities between king and subject, aristocrat and commoner. To prove that identical losses produce identical grief he uses theatre, the most powerful tool the Renaissance had to assert the resemblances among human beings, and to induce empathic identification (xvii)

However, it is certain that Kyd wants the audience to see that in seeking private revenge, Hieronimo is also corrupted. He fails to perform his duty in accordance with his order in the hierarchy, as seen in his decision to take private revenge and ignore the Biblical commandment: "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." The outcome of subverting the hierarchical order assigned by God is nothing but chaotic. The fact that innocent people like Bel-imperia and Castile have to die in this tragic event also shows how easily private revenge can get out of hand, as seen in Hieronimo's speech:

Poor Bel-imperia missed her part in this:
For though the story saith she should have died,

Yet I of kindness, and of care to her,
Did otherwise determine of her end;
(4.4.139-42)

Therefore, from this tragic ending, it is clear that chaos will occur if people in society fail to perform their duty righteously. The ruler fails to provide his subject with

justice and the subject does not leave vengeance to God but assumes the role of God in judging and subverting the order created by God.

In *Hamlet*, the violent scene at the end of the story is employed to illustrate the wickedness of the human mind and support the idea of God's Providence. Shakespeare also uses the traditional form of murderous stratagem in a ceremonial show in the last act but in a slightly different way. It is not a scheme conceived by the revenger Hamlet, but it is Claudius's murderous stratagem. Claudius's vice, which Shakespeare demonstrates throughout the story, as exemplified by his murder of the previous king and attempt to take Hamlet's life by sending him to be executed in England, culminates in his double deadly schemes in the fencing match. His corruption is cloaked with his kindness as a stepfather. He intends to poison Hamlet by proposing a toast to him:

Stay, give me drink. Hamlet this pearl is thine.
Here's to thy health.

(5.2. 283-4)

However, it is the sympathetic Gertrude who drinks and dies instead of Hamlet. Besides this, Claudius also smears poison at the tip of the rapier. This time, Hamlet is killed as Claudius plans. However, like Hieronimo, whose private revenge gets out of hand, Claudius and Laertes are also killed by their poisoned sword.

Interestingly, before Hamlet dies, he asks Horatio to report his story to the unknowing world. I think Hamlet wants to use his tragic life to teach people, or the audience in particular, about the inanity of revenge and about God's providence, as we can see in the scene before Hamlet and Laertes start fencing. Hamlet denies his responsibility for killing Polonius by claiming that his madness did it. It is not farfetched to contend that "madness" here refers to the role of an avenger that he takes. Therefore, it is not the "real" self of Hamlet:

And when he's not himself does wrong Laertes,
Then Hamlet does it not, Hamlet denies it.
Who does it then? His madness.
(5.2.231-3)

Before dying, Laertes's comment on Hamlet's killing the king, "He is justly serv'd" (5.2.333), also shows the idea of God's providence. At last, Hamlet is an agent of divine justice, though he does not plan it himself. Also, Laertes's asking Hamlet to "exchange forgiveness" is a sign that he may also see the pointlessness of revenge even though it is too late for him. Therefore, the audience can see that divine justice is sacred since it is exactly what Claudius fears at his prayer.

The violent and sensational scenes in *The Revenger's Tragedy* are deployed to illustrate the moral corruption of society and human vice. Tourneur is superb in creating the moral implication in the scene in which the Duke is poisoned by Gloriana's skull and forced to watch the Duchess kissing with his bastard. The skull is used not only as a memento mori for Vindici, like the "handkercher besmeared with blood" for Hieronimo, but also as a means to get revenge, as Vindici announces after the Duke is poisoned: "The very ragged bone has been sufficiently revenged" (3.5.153). The duke poisons Gloriana because she does not submit to his lust and now he is killed by his lustful kiss. The audience can see the negative consequences of lust, one of the factors which has a corrupting effect on society. Tourneur also uses the sensational scene between the Duchess and the bastard to emphasize the moral perversion in the court. Both of them find that committing adultery is sweet and pleasurable:

Spurio: Had not that kiss a taste of sin, 'twere sweet.
Duchess: Why, there's no pleasure sweet but it is sinful
Spurio : True, such a bitter sweetness fate hath given
Best side to us is the worst side to heaven.
(3.5.201-4)

Murray also makes an interesting note on this scene, “The moral perversion of the court goes deeper than any carnal appetite. The viper and the brood are satisfied only if their fornications are secret and sinful: only incest and rape truly gratify” (236). The sex scene between the Duchess and Spurio is used not only to convince the spectators that they deserve punishment for their sexual transgression but also to punish the Duke mentally. The Duke, who has been lustful throughout his life and killed a lot of women as he himself soliloquizes— “Many a beauty have I turned to poison/ In the denial, covetous of all” (2.3.129-30)— is made to suffer by the scene of his family’s incest. It is possible that this scene may remind the audience of the only virtuous lady in the play, Castiza. As suggested by her name, she is the paragon of chastity who never succumbs to lust and greed like all the villians in the ducal court. Also, this scene makes the audience aware of the change in Vindici’s motive for revenge. He is corrupted by his Machiavellian scheme and finds it pleasurable. This in itself makes him not different from the corrupted ducal family.

Another violent scene which draws the audience’s attention to morality and human vice is the ending. Tourneur also adopts the technique of using ceremonial entertainment as a scheme to purge all the villians. While Lussurioso is entertained by the masque, he is killed by Vindici and the group of the masque of revengers. Tourneur is excellent in depicting the vicious mind of human beings when he portrays that Ambizioso, Supervacuo and Spurio also disguise themselves as the other group of masquers, intending to kill Lussurioso. All these characters are good examples of people who adore power and are destroyed by their own self-destructive forces of evil. After the massacre, Vindici and his brother, Hippolito, are also executed by the new Duke Antonio. It is clear that Tourneur wants the audience to realize that the villian is not yet eradicated. Vindici is also transformed by the corruption of the court. Being proud of his mischievous schemes, especially of the murder of the Duke, he brags, “We may be bold/ To speak it now. ’T was somewhat witty carried,/ Though we say it; ’twas we two murdered him” (5.3.95-7). Antonio surely sees the corruption of the ducal family in these two brothers as he says, “You that would murder him would

murder me” (5.3.104). Vindici’s acceptance of the death sentence illustrates that he also sees his own malice as he tells his brother, “ ’Tis time to die, when we are ourselves our foes”(5.3.109). Therefore, Tourneur makes it clear that the violent and sensational scenes in *The Revenger’s Tragedy* are the consequences of vicious human nature and the moral laxity of society.

The Spanish Tragedy, *Hamlet* and *The Revenger’s Tragedy* are excellent examples to illustrate that revenge plays are really about justice in society. It can be seen that the heroes in these three plays have to seek private revenge since they have no possible way to legal redress. Moreover, these three plays also point out the controversial issues of divine justice and a personal obligation to right wrongs. Significantly, the bloodshed scenes and other sensational forms of chaos are not used solely for entertainment as has been generally assumed. In fact, they are an effective device that the dramatists employ to reflect the decadence of hierarchical society and human vileness and confirm the idea of God’s Providence.

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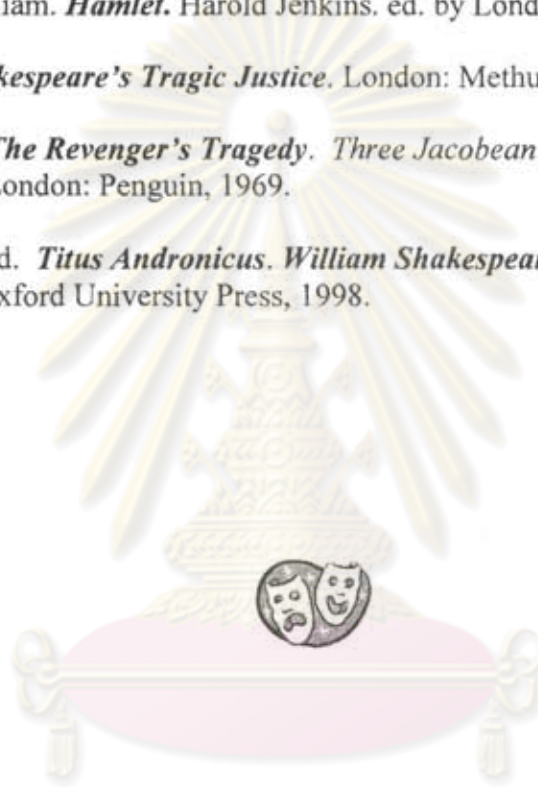
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