GENRE TRANSGRESSION AND MORAL INTERROGATIONS IN EARLY MODERN ENGLISH REVENGE DRAMA

by

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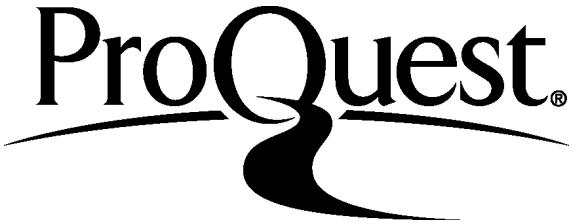

Dedication

For my mother, Lyn Jahn Toohey, who taught me the best revenge involves a magic marker and a writing desk

Abstract

My dissertation investigates the classification of literature into "genres"; it explores not only how writers and critics enact these limitations, but why they might do so and what might be the stakes – socially, politically, and religiously – when writers break out of these "imaginary" barriers. It examines how revenge plays of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England amalgamated aspects of disparate genres as a means of counteracting and questioning a society marked by its oppressive censorship.

While the "naturalization" of genre – the point of view that genres are concrete ideals, not part of a manmade system of classifying works of literature – has been excised from the academy, this perspective dominated the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. To Renaissance critics, genre mixing resembled more iconoclastic forms of boundary crossing; they compared it to treason, class upheaval, and miscegenation. My dissertation reveals that, in the proper historical context, tragicomedies and other mixed genres are not innocent artistic experiments; they are daring and dangerous texts, attacking the monarchy, the Church of England, and even the social structure itself.

My project asks how playwrights, unable to publish satires or openly speak against the monarchy or the court, might have used "genre play" – that is, moments of narrative and formal mixing onstage – to voice treasonous critiques by hiding them on the stage. For example, in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus,* tragedy engages with love poetry to interrogate monarchal justice's irreconcilability with equity. *The Revenger's Tragedy,* by Thomas Middleton, highlights revenge tragedy's contradictory generic roots to stage a critique of the Reformation's methods of conversions and the crown's apathy towards the content of the converts' hearts and souls. In this era, formal violations could be the

method of slipping such dissent past the Master of Revels – the Elizabethan and Jacobean censor. Thus, this dissertation undoes a longstanding belief that formalism and historicist criticism are mutually exclusive studies. It invites other fields make similar interrogations into their own discourses of political dissent and evolution of art forms; the politics of aesthetics may open fruitful discussions in the fields of sociology and history, as well as the humanities.

I ground my work's claims in the criticism of the era. In his "Defense of Poesy" (c.1580), Sir Philip Sidney charges that good tragedy has an instructional *raison d'être*. When done well, tragedy "maketh kings fear to be tyrants, and tyrants manifest their tyrannical humours." Tragedy is a "high and excellent" art because it contains a "high and excellent" lesson; Sidney ties its political purpose to its aesthetic success. He further asserts that genre-mixing would lead to morally poisonous "mongrel" work with an ambiguous message. With Horace as their precedent, Elizabethan writers such as Sir John Harington, George Puttenham, and Thomas Elyot wrote similar tracts. Whereas they hope that good genres will lead to good rulers, playwrights such as Shakespeare, Marston, and Middleton, I argue, posit that genre play is a fruitful form of trespass. What we see is that tragedy became *more* "mongrel" after Sidney. Sidney and many of his fellow critics were not periphery figures – they were favorites of the court and involved in key matters of state. To trespass against their writings on genre's moral purposes was to take a very public and performed stance against the printed writings of members of the monarch's inner circle.

My scholarship posits that with a heavily policed theater, playwrights used "mongrel" tragicomedy to upset not only aesthetic decorum, but also moral and political

theories. Whereas the critics believe tragedy is a corrective for the status quo, these more radical works utilize their mongrel-natures to propose different ethe. A key aspect of these plays' provocative nature has been lost without proper context. These plays, born out of a period of high censorship, use the very criticism meant to police them as one of the only tools of dissent with plausible deniability.

I begin with Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, written shortly after Sidney's charge. My first chapter, drawing from Heather James's criticism, investigates the play's prevalence of language around both sympathy and love poetry. *Titus* shows how rulers continuously reject sympathy – and thus reject one of tragedy's key supposed powers over kings. Starting with the writing of Aristotle and continuing through those of Sidney and his peers, critics believed that tragic spectacle would overcome a ruler's emotions and lead him to govern with sympathy and pity. Consequently, Shakespeare uses his play to conceive new directions for tragedy's influence. Tragedy may be used to evoke pity not in kings, but in fellow citizens; it may not be meant to appeal to those in power, but rather – by means of empathy over sympathy – to unite those without. Through genre-mixing, Shakespeare proposes a new kind of tragedy, one that speaks to populist and anti-monarchal ideals for its pedagogical ends.

Chapter two continues Shakespeare's investigation of genre-play in the meta-theatrical *Hamlet*. In a self-conscious twist on genre's power, the very characters use genre mixing for their endgames. They label Hamlet as a mad lover to redirect the narrative back to the status quo. Yet, Shakespeare shows the characters return to genre-propriety when the romantic comedy ending threatens the reproduction of a mad court. Thus, through his characters' actions, Shakespeare lays bare the ideological investments

of authors ascribing genres to their works.

Chapter three examines Marston's revenge comedy *The Malcontent* to trouble its conclusion of forgiveness. Rather than embrace this Christian ideal, the play posits that mercy perverts justice and even divine will. Their comic ending, which seems restorative to the status quo, is achieved only by forsaking equity and order for the benefit of the criminal. Justice against the high from the low requires more blood than either society or this "comedy" allow.

My final interpretive chapter turns to Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy*, which engages with early modern tragedy's ancestor: the medieval morality tale. Middleton's play heightens a contradiction in the plays: their need to convey the abstract ideals of Heaven and Christianity through the language and incentives of the physical. Debates of virginity become discussions of capital and pleas of mercy are grounded in desire for earthly fame. I argue that Middleton is not only parodying the intensely physical Catholic faith from which these plays sprung, but also interrogating the equally earth-centric means through which the English Reformation was achieved.

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Acknowledgements aka "Payback"

One of the great joys of any revenge story is seeing people get exactly what they deserve. Sometimes payback takes a while – years, even – but eventually, everyone gets precisely what's coming to him or her. So, indulge me for a couple of pages as I even the scales for those who have seen me through my fits and frenzies and allowed this dissertation to reach its bloody end.

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Introduction

"With neither decency nor discretion"

Genres are not manmade categories in constant flux. They are not merely playthings of writers in the midst of artistic experimentation. Genres are naturally occurring phenomena. Every genre is distinct and has a distinct moral purpose; concordantly, both nature and ethics demand their clear demarcation. In early modern England, this belief was the norm. Genres, as David Duff writes, "were static, universal categories whose character did not alter across time" (4). But of course, genres could and often did mix. Anyone who has taken a Shakespeare class knows that. But when those genres mixed, those critics who had outlined the moral efficacy of poetry either refused to acknowledge these mixed genre works as genuine poetry or would outright condemn them.

Most famously, in his "Defense of Poesy" (c.1580), Sir Philip Sidney charges tragicomedy with a loaded accusation; much like genre play itself, this accusation seems tame only through our twenty-first century lens. He laments that English playwrights blend comic and tragic elements "with neither decency nor discretion, so as neither the admiration and commiseration nor the right sportfulness is by their mongrel tragicomedy obtained" (46). When read in the proper historical context, this seemingly light accusation carries multiple damning connotations; the implications of "mongrel" stretch further than exclusion from the Westminster Dog Show. According to the contemporary definitions in the OED, "mongrel" implies anything from a product of racial miscegenation or class mixing to a political turncoat (2, 4a). In short, it is not merely an

insult that the tragicomic genre is low; it is instead an insinuation that a work of an unruly genre challenges the natural order *and* the political order. In this "mongrel" aesthetic violation, political infractions collapse into moral ones.

However, this slippage from the category of aesthetic to those of politics, nature, and morality is hardly surprising when properly contextualized. The only reason that this "slippage" is a "slippage" is that we *now* house aesthetics, morality, nature, and politics in distinct categories. They might occasionally intrude on each other, and I would be naïve to argue that artists (visual, literary, and otherwise) do not merge the two, but their overlap was certainly greater four hundred years ago. While I will be discussing aesthetics, the word itself is notably an invention of the late eighteenth century and originated etymologically from words for sensory experiences,[1] not from any Greek or Latin word that reflected a similar concept. The aesthetic as its own cordoned-off concept was not brought into language at the time of Sidney's writing. Thus, I contest Steven Mullaney's assertion that "The conversation provoked by the popular theater was largely ideological and political rather than aesthetic…Public drama was not customarily graced with the status of literature or, less anachronistically, of poesy" (143). Not only do various early modern critics' intense focus on tragedy trouble the latter half of that claim (as I will show in this introduction), but Sidney's particular criticism that contemporary plays blend elements to create mongrels — observing "rules neither of honest civility nor skillful poetry" (44) — exemplifies how thin (if even extant) the barrier was between aesthetic and moral violations. Poetry and its value as an art form (including drama) were

[1] The OED traces the etymology of "aesthetic" to the ancient Greek word "*αἰσθητικός," meaning* "of or relating to sense perception, sensitive, perceptive." It enters modern language in the eighteenth century via the German word "*Ästhetik"* and the post-classical Latin *"aesthetica"* which interchangeable applies to perception and modern concepts of aesthetics.

still entangled with morality. It should be no surprise that the figure of the tyrant, according to George Puttenham, "being over-earnestly bent and affected to the affairs of empire and ambition [and] to arms and practices of hostility [and who] have not one hour to bestow upon any other civil or delectable art of natural or moral doctrine" had no time for poetry (73). The evil aesthete – a twentieth century cliché thanks in no small part to the Nazi party – was a contradiction to the early modern literary critics. One who understood poetry understood goodness.

Writing about the political ramifications of wordplay in the early modern period, Patricia Parker argues, "the trivialization of language and wordplay as secondary or accessory" is a modern convention; when we consider this period, the linguistic aspects of a work are "inseparable from the social and political" ones (3). Sidney certainly, for example, does not seem to make such a distinction. Rather, he proposes that poetry's aesthetic success relies on its filling its social *raison d'être*. Properly executed, tragedy shall display "virtue exalted and vice punished" (20-21). When done well, "high and excellent [tragedy] maketh kings fear to be tyrants, and tyrants manifest their tyrannical humours" (27). If poetry is to meet Sidney's aesthetic qualifications, it *must* be instructional. Tragedy is a "high and excellent" art because it contains a "high and excellent" lesson. Similarly, George Puttenham argues that one of poetry's initial effects was to turn savageness into civility (61) and "made the first differences between virtue and vice" (63). According to Puttenham, good poetry is moral poetry; poetry is (not) only "laudable…because it is a metrical speech corrected and reformed by discreet judgements [sic]" (75) *but* must function in "praise of virtue and reproof of vice" (76). Sir John Harington argues that any morally decadent poetry is not even pure poetry, but rather a

human perversion of it: ""[W]here any scurrility and lewdness is found, there poetry doth not abuse us, but writers have abused poetry" (272). There seems little room in these defenses to imagine a defense of the arts which do not mention morality, which merely claim "*ars gratia artis.*"

Thus, in an effort to respect some of the period's thinkers' views on poetry, this project leans heavily on a formalist methodology. Admittedly, advocating for a dissertation that stakes large social claims primarily through close reading over archival research (though this project certainly does incorporate the work of historians either to anchor these claims or to fully illuminate their significance), is at times swimming up the stream of genre criticism. Much of twentieth century literary criticism has explained away genre play as something which is not particularly novel and, in fact, inevitable. It has been dismissed as lacking any political bite (Jameson 17), seen as a product of the postmodern age (i.e. as everything gets repackaged and repurposed, blending genres is evitable) (Hutcheon 1), or chalked up as a byproduct of an ever-growing trope savvy public, as Todorov argues.[2] In his essay "Law of the Genre," Jacques Derrida proposes that genres do not mix; instead, every work *takes part* in a genre without *occupying* that genre. He writes:

> And suppose for a moment that it were impossible not to mix genres. What if there were, lodged within the heart of the law itself, a law of impurity or principle of contamination…[There] is precisely a principle of contamination, a law of impurity, a parasitical economy. In the code of set theories, if I may use it at least

[2] Cf. Todorov, Tzvetan. "An Introduction to Verisimilitude." *The Poetics of Prose*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1971.

> figuratively, I would speak of a sort of participation without belonging – a taking part in without being part of, without having membership in a set. (57-58)

Derrida thus creates a system in which we can witness what we may call genre-mixing (e.g. a work with aspects of comedy and tragedy), but we do not actually see genres themselves mixing. While Derrida's argument creates a fascinating lens through which to view genre, its own ingenuity renders it less useful for engaging with the early modern period. Neither Sidney nor any other major critic of the period comes close to Derrida's argument. Derrida's piece goes in part against what he calls the "naturalization" of genre (60), yet this point of view – that genres are pure ideals, not manmade – is precisely what was the dominant view in the sixteenth and seventeenth century.[3] To investigate, therefore, what genre mixing or genre interpenetration would mean in the early modern period requires considering genre primarily from an early modern lens. By the mid-to-late twentieth century, mixing genres may seem as inevitable and perhaps even as unimpressive as these critics construe it to be, but when we consider genre as far more natural, the way that early modern thinkers would have, we find genre-play suddenly a far more daring aesthetic gesture.

Notably influenced by these postmodern thinkers, some early modern scholars have taken similar approaches to genre play. In Lawrence Danson's review of Shakespearean generic scholarship, *Shakespeare's Dramatic Genre,* he seriously considers Shakespeare's genre play and the arbitrary, mercurial nature of genre, but ultimately concludes that genre play is just an inevitability of writing and genre itself (7-13). Linda Woodbridge and Marguerite Tassi note the ubiquity of revenge narratives in

[3] Admittedly, the English playwrights themselves were notoriously less rigid with genre conventions – hence the point of this dissertation.

genres outside of revenge tragedy or even tragedy, but do so to note the omnipresence of revenge in the cultural imaginary (Woodbridge 3-5, Tassi 23-24). Again, genre-play is inevitable. In a move similar to Todorov's, they suggest that the market and its demand for either new stories (as Danson would argue) or for more revenge narratives in all genres (as Woodbridge and Tassie would suggest), is what causes genre play; mixed genres sell better. While cultural zeitgeist and a desire for novelty and creativity were likely factors in this generic play, these motivations might not be the only ones. Their existence does not necessarily defang the other ideological possibilities of genre play – a single outcome can have multiple causes.

For, as I have been alluding to, multiple critics instilled within genres (or more appropriately put, assumed genres had) distinct moral purposes. This claim has roots in antiquity and persisted through the Elizabethan period and into the Jacobean era. Possibly the most important of these pieces is Sidney's "Defense of Poesy," with which I began this chapter. Sidney's work is a focal point for this period's criticism, synthesizing and building on what had come before, and becoming the necessary starting point for later writers, such as Harington (Harington 262-263, 271). But Sidney was by no means alone in his evaluation of genre. As I have mentioned, aesthetics and morality were not separate concepts at the time and the works of various critics highlights that fact. The separate moral, social purposes of genres and their implicit necessary separation were widespread concepts in England by the sixteenth century. Much of this thinking stemmed from Horace's *Ars poetica* – translated in 1567 by Thomas Drant (Norland 19) – which argued that the best poetry is didactic. Horace elaborates on this claim, outlining how poetry's didactic purpose also means its delivery requires proper care. According to him, mixing

genres could lead to an improper expression of poetry's intended messages; the messages would be destroyed and the only outcome would be either boredom or inappropriate laughter (89-113). By the early modern period, many took these warnings even further. As we have seen from Sidney's charge of mongrel, some saw the worst possible outcome as something infinitely more disastrous than simply bad reviews. After all, if poetry and the audience's reaction to it were both expressly tied to the overall morality of the art and the audience, then an artform that could reduce "Thyestes' feast…to the comic sock" (90-91) or could make an audience laugh at the troubles of tragic heroes could be an artform capable of perverting its viewers' moralities. The early modern critics' fear that genre could be dangerous is in some sense the logical conclusion of Horace's initial postulation.

Admittedly, genre play itself – as dangerous as it may have been perceived – was common in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. This project after all is built on that premise and relies on works of genre play for its sources. But I would argue that even if genres were mongrelled regularly, that fact does not mean that genre itself was not taken seriously. In his evaluation of Seneca in Elizabethan England, Howard Norland writes about how ubiquitous this distinction between the two genres was; comedy always had a distinct, lesser purpose. He notes that the belief that tragedy properly taught the rewards and punishments of virtue and vice was commonplace in sixteenth century criticism (19-24); often it was used as a way to educate young boys both in rhetoric and morality. *A Mirror for Magistrates*, a collection of medieval tragedies and exempla for rulers, published in 1559, promises on its title page to show "howe greuous plages vices are punished" (1). Furthermore, tragedies were common classroom material, particularly on account of their instructive nature. In *The Scholemaster*, Roger Ascham argued that

tragedy was more akin to philosophy than either epic or lyric poetry in its ability to examine larger truths;[4] thus the generic difference in poetic works would necessitate a difference in the value and didactic purpose of those same works. In his writing, politician and judge Sir James Whitelocke positively recollected his experience in the 1580s Merchant Taylors' School under its headmaster Richard Mulcaster, citing that Mulcaster's decision to have all students perform "playes to the court" helped teach him "good behaviour and audacitye" (12). Thomas Elyot understood the move from enjoying comedy to preferring tragedies to a moment of maturity for a young man. Comedies, when not overly lascivious and simply an "incitation to lechery" (Elyot 50) may contain instructions for youths. Elyot argues, in fact, that they may teach young men to avoid the seductive snares of vice.[5] However, tragedy for Elyot remained the higher form of learning and the genre that proved more fruitful for the soul. He writes, "And whan a man is comen to mature yeres, and that reason in him is confirmed with serious lerning and longe experience, than shall he, in redyng tragoedies, execrate and abhorre the intollerable life of tyrantes: and shall contemne the foly and dotage expressed by poetes lasciuious" (Elyot 36). Again, the aesthetic difference between genres and the clarity of such genres holds a key position in the preservation of a moral and mature society. To

[4] "In tragedies, (the goodliest Argument of all and for the use, either of a learned preacher or a Civill Gentleman, more profitable than Homer, Pindar, Virgil, and Horace: yea comparable in mine opinion, with the doctrine of Aristotle, Plato, and Xenophon,)" (Ascham 52)

[5] "First, comedies, whiche they suppose to be a doctrinall of rybaudrie, they be undoutedly a picture or as it were a mirrour of man's life, wherin iuell is nat taught but discouered; to the intent that men beholdynge the promptnes of youth unto vice, the snares of harlotts ,and baudes laide for yonge myndes, the disceipte of seruantes, the chaunces of fortune contrary to mennes expectation, they beinge therof warned may prepare them selfe to resist or preuente occasion. Semblably remembring the wisedomes, aduertisements, counsailes, dissuasion from vice, and other profitable sentences, most eloquently and familiarely shewed in those comedies, undoubtedly there shall be no litle frute out of them gathered. And if the vices in them expressed shulde be cause that myndes of the reders shulde be corrupted: than by the same argumente nat onely entreludes in englisshe, but also sermones, wherin some vice is declared, shulde be to the beholders and herers like occasion to encreace sinners" (Elyot 50-51)

mix the lower messages of comedy with the higher ones of tragedy would tempt states of arrested development, as the more valuable philosophical ideas would be mixed with lessons that should have been learned years ago.

Thus, Sidney's text is not a singular moment in this period but is rather the crystallization of decades of criticism about tragedy. While Sidney certainly phrases his contempt of mixed genres in a way that is at once gripping and convenient for building stakes, neither his work nor his views on genre are outliers amongst the opinions held towards poetry, its purpose, and its powers. It would prove to be influential to later thinkers as well; George Puttenham's "Arte of English Poesie" (1589) echoes Sidney's thoughts about tragedies, claiming that kings' "infamous life and tyrannies were laid open to the world, their wickedness reproached, their follies and extreme insolencies derided, and their miserable ends painted out in plays and pageants, to show the mutability of fortune and the just punishment of God in revenge of a vicious and evil life" (85). Puttenham's work, though, notably builds upon Sidney's more implicit class distinction. Whereas Sidney sees tragedy as the genre that speaks to kings (and thus presumably *not* to the masses), Puttenham more explicitly speaks of the corollary: comedy *does not* speak to the monarchy. He argues that comedy is that which "debated the matters of the world, sometimes of…private affairs [or] neighbour's, but never meddling with any princes' matters nor such high personages" (83). Notably, these two genres and their two objects of scorn should not mix, as the merits and flaws of kings and commoners are so disparate.[6]

[6] "In every degree and sort of men virtue is commendable, but not egally – not only because men's estates are unegall, but for that also virtue itself is not in every respect of egall value and estimation. For continence in a king is of greater merit than in a carter, the one having all opportunities to allure him to lusts, and ability to serve his appetites, the other, partly for the

Of course, this improper mixing of the genres of high and low classes, of using the language directed at kings either to speak to the commons or to critique the monarchy, might be the exact aim of some of these works. Their improper form may have been of a way of covertly conveying messages about the issues of the state and the relationship between king and subject. While it is nearly a commonplace that "The Bishops' Ban of 1599, which called for the public burning of the works of certain satirists, undoubtedly affected the development of English satire" (McRae 29), I would postulate that it affected the development of other literary forms as well. This mass-censorship not only caused some satirists – such as Middleton and Marston – to head to the Elizabethan and Jacobean stages (and write two of the plays under discussion), but also may have reinforced a need for social critics to take more care to conceal their targets. Furthermore, while the ban came from the Bishop, it was clearly done with the consent of the state:

> No ban could be issued for any reason whatsoever without the approval and consent of either the Privy Council or the High Commission, and in this case the clauses concerning 'historyes' certainly seem to indicate Council involvement. At the time of the promulgation of the ban Whitgift was a member of the Privy Council while Bancroft headed the High Commission. Both men were past masters in the art of censorship, and both were in constant correspondence with Robert Cecil on the issue of the press. (McCabe 189)

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baseness of his estate wanting such means and occasions, partly by dread of more inhibited and not so vehemently carried away with unbridled affections, and therefore deserve not, in the one and the other, like praise nor equal reward, by the very ordinary course of distributive justice. Even so, parsimony and illiberality are greater vices in a prince than in a private person, and pusillanimity and injustice likewise." (93)

Furthermore, the Master of Revels and his power of censorship would have added to this need for more covert means of dissent. As John Dollimore writes:

> We should remember that dramatists were actually imprisoned or otherwise harassed by the State for staging plays thought to be seditious…Given the censorship, it is not surprising that we find in the drama not simple denunciation of religious and political orthodoxy (though there is that too) so much as underlying subversion. (24-25)

According to Richard Dutton, Edmund Tilney – the Master of Revels from 1579-1610 (a span which contains the entire period under discussion here) – really began to intervene in the public stage in the early 1590s (74), shortly before *Titus Andronicus* was probably first performed. While Tilney and the Privy Council seemed relatively quiet for the majority of the 1590s, they make waves again at the turn of the century, first publishing severe punishments for unlicensed players in 1598 in *Acte for punishment of Rogues Vagabondes and Sturdy Beggars* (Dutton 110) and then consolidating the theaters into two licensed companies – the Admiral's and Chamberlain's Men – in 1600 (Dutton 111). In short, *Titus, Hamlet,* and *The Malcontent* follow on the heels of the Master of Revels asserting his power, whereas *The Revenger's Tragedy* appears shortly after James I ascended to the throne, a fraught political situation that landed at least two satirists – George Chapman and Ben Jonson – in jail for their views on the new king (Dutton 171). Thus, while critical of a court, *The Revenger's Tragedy* is notably clever in how it positions its critiques (Dutton 197).

Thus, the structure of these plays provides simultaneously the means of critique and the means of its concealment. Of course, arguing that structural problems in

Renaissance plays can point to social problems is well-trodden ground. The study around Shakespeare's "problem plays" and their interrogations of social institutions such as marriage, monarchy, and religion has been a fruitful field of scholarship for years. Recently, E.L. Risden in *Shakespeare and the Problem Play: Complex Forms, Crossed Genres, and Moral Quandaries* has discussed how nearly all of Shakespeare's plays are problem plays in that they trouble genre to leave us with greater moral puzzles, hurting sympathetic characters and giving us forced marriages at the expense of closure.[7] Similarly, David Margolies in his book *Shakespeare's Irrational Endings: The Problem Plays* focuses on the "bait and switch" nature of these narratives in terms of audience expectations, again doing so as a means of reaching political or sociological critique. The plays are a series of "contradictions," according to him, but those contradictions are not only generic, but also ones of values wherein characters do not necessarily get their just deserts, be they good or bad.

Thus, where this dissertation will intervene is to consider how the very act of genre play (and not *just* the narrative puzzles gleaned from it) was not merely a product of the market or the nature of genre itself, but could constitute a significant critique. Some recent criticism has already begun such an investigation into this intersection of the aesthetic and the political. In *Desire and Dramatic Form in Early Modern England*, most notably, Judith Haber argues that moments of poetic, non-narrative verse in the midst of dramatic action ("lyric stasis and unconsummated 'frolicking' [amidst] linear narrative" (5)) challenge the orthodoxy of reproductive sexuality and the erotics of patriarchy, "possess[ing] the capacity to interrogate the phallic point upon which that dominant fiction [of perceived reality] rests" (4). The lyric breaks become the moments where

[7] Cf. Risden 3-8 for a more thorough literature review of scholarship around the Problem Plays.

consummation is deferred – sometimes indefinitely (20) – and where linguistic play allows gender slippage (23). While Haber's project of bridging formalism with queer politics has certainly inspired my own,[8] my dissertation will differ in that I will focus on how the action is being not *disrupted* but rather *rerouted* to or from another genre. Thus while Haber's ultimate charting is one of breaks and restarts as the narrative goes from beginning to finale, mine is one that considers paths not taken or those almost taken as the play seems to fulfill (or thwart) the generic expectations necessary for its narrative. Furthermore, while Haber's study remains focused on sexual transgression, I wish to examine how transgression can work in other ways: how might these plays not only question gender norms, but also interrogate larger views of Elizabethan and Jacobean morality and politics, such as the purpose of the family in the state, the courts of equity, and the methods of the English Reformation.

I stake my investigation of these socio-political critiques mainly in the subgenre of revenge tragedy. While much has been written about revenge drama over the years, from more formal studies such as Charles and Elaine Hallett's *The Revenger's Madness: A Study of Revenge Tragedy Motifs*, Linda Anderson's *A Kind of Wild Justice*, and John Kerrigan's *Revenge Tragedy: Aeschylus to Armageddon* to new historicist works such as Thomas Rist's *Revenge Tragedy and the Drama of Commemoration in Reforming England*, Linda Woodbridge's *English Revenge Drama*, and Chris McMahon's *Revenge*

[8] While – with the exception of my *Hamlet* chapter – my work is not what one would traditionally call "queer schlolarship," as it neither engages explicitly with queer critics nor gestures towards queer ideology, my interest in subversion and embracing that which is typically regarded as either low or abomination-like, is inevitably enabled by the work of queer scholarship over the past few decades.

Tragedy, Family, and the State, few of these works consider genre play seriously.[9] Hallett and Hallett's categorical use of tropes reifies the genre, and McMahon and Rist seem to consider the genre a given as they consider their own (admittedly interesting) questions of how these genres work to address concerns of the particular historical moment.[10] Anderson's study of revenge comedy does not consider it to be interpenetration of (a mixed) genre; instead, her book views revenge comedy as its own distinct genre. Furthermore, not only is revenge comedy not "mongrel," but it is actually, Anderson argues, restorative; it focuses on neutralizing threats to the community and those too weak to defend themselves. I will tackle this claim in greater depth in my chapter on John Marston's rather mongrel revenge comedy, *The Malcontent.*

Revenge tragedy proves an ideal genre for these considerations of generic messiness because of its own aesthetic and generic needs and conventions. Namely, for revenge tragedy to follow a generic purity, to not risk mongreling itself, it must disobey other aesthetic rules. Thomas Rist discusses this contradiction in his evaluation of how this excess in *The Spanish Tragedy* shaped an aesthetic that continued for decades and grounded that aesthetic in a political discourse against the practices of the Church of England. He writes:

> …in response to a death like Horatio's, allegedly disproportionate action is proportionate. Thus Isabella spells out the revenge tragedy's paradoxical rationale. As a very drama of excess – and bearing in mind that Reformed

[9] Kerrigan writes about the comic aspects of revenge tragedies, particularly *Titus Andronicus*, from an affect studies lens, but psychologizes it more than politicizes it. Additionally, I would argue that his use of "comic" is more twentieth century than early modern: for him "comedy" implies humor, not "marriage" or "happy ending."

[10] McMahon's project focuses on the privatization of the family around this period in early modern England while Rist's sees revenge tragedies as indicative of a need to hold onto outlawed Catholic practices of memorialization.

> commentators like Sidney or Puttenham considered proportion key to artistry – Isabella's 'proportionate disproportion' provides a hermeneutical key to the drama…so Isabella's claim about proportion implies an aesthetic claim. (43)

Revenge tragedy, in other words, challenges Reformation ideals of moderation, proportion, and conservative mourning. Yet, it does so by codifying those exact challenges. Similar to the old cliché of "the only rule is there are no rules," revenge tragedy proposes a key rule is that other rules must be broken. This idea of a "genre of generic messiness" will be explored in particular depth in my final chapter, in which I consider *The Revenger's Tragedy*'s satire to be an engagement with the always-already mongrel nature of the genre.

Additionally this subgenre[11] rests upon a generic expectation of conspiracies against and murders of rulers and other figures associated with monarchal power. The offenders in most of these plays are dukes and kings and their ultimate retributions are bloody in the extreme. The monarchy, the aristocracy, and their abuses of power are front and center. All major texts discussed in this dissertation include the murders of heads of states – or at least their disposal in some form. Thus, while the debate about the moral valence of revenge tragedy and its condemnation or appraisal of such violent acts has oscillated over the years (McMahon 20-25), these plays are undoubtedly at least *thinking* about the morality of regicide and rebellion. They all begin with a premise that

[11] Revenge tragedy was only "isolated" as a genre in the first half of the twentieth century (Woodbridge 5). Yet, Chris MacMahon notes in response that "the very word *genre* means a 'family,' and…family is not automatically private…a genre is a restricted semiotic economy, artificially cut off form other genres" (20). Therefore, while revenge tragedy may not have been yet isolated *as* revenge tragedy, it still may have had enough unique aspects in it to be recognized at least a particular type of family in the genre of tragedy. Furthermore, as this dissertation will not be considering the presence of other tragic forms in revenge tragedy, the absolute isolation of revenge tragedy from other forms of tragedy is a less pressing concern.

monarchical power can and (in the microcosm of these plays) often will be abused. Whether or not they ultimately endorse or reject killing the monarchs, they all create situations where that question *must* be asked. Moreover, all of these plays expose broken systems beyond the monarchal one: legal (*Titus Andronicus, The Revenger's Tragedy, The Malcontent*), epistemological (*Hamlet*, *The Revenger's Tragedy*), filial (*Titus Andronicus, Hamlet, The Revenger's Tragedy*), and romantic (*Hamlet, The Revenger's Tragedy, The Malcontent*). While this dissertation does not explore all of these broken systems in detail, it does acknowledge that each play begins with an unsolved problem and an unsolved problem that has roots in much deeper problems. The simple correctives of a single genre meant to redirect society back onto the correct path are no longer options.

This dissertation's contribution to the extant scholarship on revenge tragedy lies in its taking seriously the ethical and political ramifications of what has often been dismissed as the genre's attempts to gain or retain audience members; rather than assuming that these plays distort genre for commercial appeal, I investigate the ways in which genre offered a means of interrogating, in its hybrid and transgressive forms, rigid social formations. I will view these generic and classical constraints as realities of early modern theater, considering these formal violations as one possible method of slipping such dissent past the Master of Revels. Studies of formal limits may often seem passé, a relic of New Criticism, but these boundaries and their transgression may in fact lead us into the very serious and very topical conversation of treason. While "treason" may seem a loaded word for what I am describing at first, Rebecca Lemon urges us to consider treason at the time not so much "as a violent action but as a verbal phenomenon" (2).

Lemon argues that "To reduce treason to violent spectacle evacuates it of the varied interpretive work that helps to produce it [ignoring how] the state itself [was implicated] in the production of treason, [expanding] the legal boundaries of the crime to assert its own authority" (3-4). By the reign of Elizabeth, treason's definition had expanded to include accusing the crown of heresy, tyranny, or usurping the crown (Lemon 9). In short, these plays' questioning the crown's capacity for sympathy, the means by which the crown transfers its power and shapes its lineage, the courts of equity, and the methods of the Protestant conversions are hardly mild conversation starters. They are bold performative speech acts.

Whereas Sidney hopes to *appeal* to tyrants – converting them by means of their fears and sympathies – these plays may posit that genre play may be the means by which to convey treasonous concepts through a debauched but concealed medium. Whereas the critics believe that tragedy is a corrective for the status quo, these more radical works utilize their mongrel-nature to propose that the status quo may not need to be corrected so much as completely upheaved. A key aspect of these plays's provocative nature has been lost without proper context. These plays, born out of a period of high censorship, use the very criticism meant to police them as one of the only tools of dissent with plausible deniability.

"Though this be madness, yet there is method in 't": My Mongrel Methodology

This project's scope is to see the potential of formal play as a means of critique. The necessary corollary of this focus is that my project will set aside more explicit methods of social and political criticism in the plays under discussion. Instead my project explores how form itself may result in a social or ethical critique. To that end, I have

chosen four plays that exemplify the range of revenge tragedy's generic experimentation with fields. These four texts examine the genre's mixing with non-dramatic poetic verse (*Titus Andronicus*), comedy – both as a form intruding upon tragedy (*Hamlet*) and the dominant form in which tragedy is present (*The Malcontent*) – and parody (*The Revenger's Tragedy*). Through this range, I endeavor to see not only the critique gained from genre play in general, but the varieties of critiques made possible by the different forms of play. All four of these objects have rich critical histories investigating their engagement with and commentary on the societies in which they were created, all of which I at least gesture towards in each chapter. *Titus Andronicus,* with its concerns over the powers of the crown and England positioning itself in a Greco-Roman lineage (a subject expertly investigated by Heather James),[12] and *The Revenger's Tragedy,* with its obvious commentary on the faded age of Elizabeth and the decadent reign of James, make veiled commentaries – albeit ones which utilize temporal and spatial displacement as a means of protection against censorship.[13] *Hamlet* and *The Malcontent* enjoy a long

[12] "In the milieu of the translation imperii, Shakespeare's dismemberment of Roman imperial authority is astonishing. His choice of Elisabeth's icons to disfigure hardly seems characteristic of the bard frequently assumed to rank among the more politically conservative Elizabethan dramatists….Shakespeare's "utterly surprising and unconventional" engagement of literature and icons supporting the Tudor myth of national origins places the question-mark after his *political* stance. Like an unnerving response in an echo poem, the question of politics haunts even criticism that seeks social restoration through Lucius as Rome's champion of traditional values…Titus Andronicus subjects icons of justice – Astraea, Saturn, Horace's ode, and Elizabeth I's body iconographic – to violent the violet skepticism that his exemplemary characters endure. Shakespeare's play does not hold out the promise of rejuvenation once Roman models make the quantum leap to early modern England: instead, he challenges the capacity of privileged classical models to translate political and literary authority from Troy to imperial Rome to the Elizabethan court." (*Shakespeare's Troy* 81, 83)

[13] Mullaney writes that the play "[makes] explicit and [clarifies] the degree to which the partially resolved cycles of mourning and misogyny in [*Hamlet*] functioned as a processing of Elizabeth herself, the aging sexuality of the Virgin Queen recast in the degraded figure of the sovereign and remarried widow" (158). The idealized Gloriana is also the overtly sexual one: "The ideal lover and the painted lady are one, and both are revealed to be fully male constructions: I will paint her an inch thick, for she was always destined to come to this" (160). In Mullaney's view, the tragedy

critical strain delving into their use of satire, which I discuss early in each of their respective chapters. Yet, while all of these investigations have yielded their own compelling academic discussions, all rely on scholarship that explores content over larger formal or aesthetic concerns.

This project's focus is implied, unspoken critiques, rather than direct references to current events, and thus cannot be fully reliant on a New Historicist methodology. This project certainly owes a debt to the work of New Historicists, and thus I want to stress that I am not *fully reliant* but also not *opposed* to New Historicism as a methodology. All of my chapters in some way concern themselves with a political or societal matter of the time: concepts of sympathy in *Titus*, early modern political theory and its positioning of the familial unit in *Hamlet*, equity and penance in *The Malcontent*, and the English Reformation (and particularly the means by which it was achieved) in *The Revenger's Tragedy*. Ultimately, my engagements with history vary, as these plays use their generic mongrelness to various ends. And the historicist investigation may seem less central because such investigations are often more located at the latter half of my research, rather than the beginning of each chapter.

My project, therefore, is unified *not* by the concerns of each play, but rather by the means through which these plays address these concerns. The main through-line of this project is the mongrel genre, the formal play in these bloody tragedies that might perform other forms of upheaval. In other words, neither the particulars of genre play nor the ultimate messages or themes of the plays perfectly align from chapter to chapter.[14]

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is a meta-critique of the language used around Elizabeth, and yet all of the play has a thin veil of plausible deniability by occurring in decadent Catholic Italy.

[14] As you will see in *Titus Andronicus*, Shakespeare fears a king may not dispense deserved pardons and thus not properly honor the concept of equity, whereas Marston in *The Malcontent*

Not every drama that plays with form will do so in the same way, commenting upon one particular matter either from the same angle or to the same extent. My work instead begins with moments formal play in revenge narratives, but with no assumed goal aside from hypothesizing that – due to the language around genre and the heavy censorship of the time – the formal play likely betrays some ulterior motive. Because these different plays contain different types of messages conveyed through different forms of genre play, a single means of investigation would be a disservice to these multitudes.

Consequently, my methodology must be broad at both inter- and intra-chapter levels to best engage with the potentials and implications of genre play at all times. These plays require a *mongrel methodology,* and I entered this project ever-ready to change my lens and not let it dictate where these readings would go. Thus, queer theory is a hallmark of my *Hamlet* chapter, whereas it is largely absent from the rest of the project. Discussions of equity and debates around its definition appear only briefly in my *Titus Andronicus* chapter, yet they are a central concern as I consider the stakes of Marston's *The Malcontent*. And whereas *Titus Andronicus* is usually one of the Renaissance plays wherein critics most seem eager to engage in source studies, ultimately my engagement there is fleeting; instead, source studies are a central concern in my *Revenger's Tragedy* chapter, discussing the play's debt to medieval morality plays that hasn't been discussed since the days of New Criticism. Rather than argue for a particular type of methodology for the whole project's conclusions and stakes, this project's cohesive methodology comes from its starting point in formalism and genre studies. Through close reading, I explore to what ends either other genres (love elegy, comedy) mongrel tragedy or, in the

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sees pardons as overused devices of the king that make a mockery of the initial intentions of equity courts.

case of my final chapter, the mongrel nature of revenge tragedy, explored via parody, can open up new languages of dissent.

Regarding the plays and the genre mixing I discuss, I had a few requirements.

Firstly, rather than prove that genre mixing does exist (a worthy subject, but one which requires its own project and argumentation), I solely selected plays in which the mixed genre had already been an established part of the critical discussion.

My interest lies more in what is accomplished by mixing genres rather than in proving that there is a mixed genre at all. The *Hamlet* chapter requires the most proving, but even then, the discussion of the Ophelia subplot often entails a discussion of its flirtations either with Plautian comedian or romantic tragedy.[15]

The latter brings me to my second requirement: all forms of genre mixing must consist of revenge tragedy mixing with another genre that is not tragedy.[16]

The codification of subgenres may have already been present in the Renaissance imagination, as my earlier footnote suggests, but such codification does not exist in the literary criticism of the time. Therefore, while Sarah Gates writes extensively of romantic tragedy's underscoring the revenge tragedy narrative in "Assembling the Ophelia Fragments" and makes compelling points regarding the gendering and distinct purposes of tragic subgenres, I still believe that to fold subgenre blending into my claims might be *too* anachronistic; furthermore, it would not address the mongrel natures that critics from Horace to Sidney would critique.

The third requirement was the recognition that satire is inherently at odds with the method of genre play I wish to investigate.

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[15] Sarah Gates's article and James Marino's paper are two examples with which I most engage on this subject in my *Hamlet* chapter.

[16] The arguable exception to this rule is *The Revenger's Tragedy*, as that is more a parody than a mixing of revenge tragedy with another genre. Yet, as I argue, it investigates genre-mixing at revenge tragedy's inception: Senecan tragedy and the (not tragic) medieval morality play.

The 1599 burning of satires proved to be a pivotal moment in English literary history and, even beyond writings such as those I will cite with respect to satire's influence on Shakespeare and Marston, critics have already written extensively on the effects of satire on early modern drama. Andrew McRae in his introduction to his monograph *Literature, Satire, and the Early Stuart State* indeed outlines his objective as tracing how satire inflected much of English culture and language after the 1599 ban; the adaptable discourse "became, in many respects, pervasive: as much an attitude or an inflection as a literary genre" (4).[17] In a way, all of the main characters are satirists, critiquing, questioning, and even lampooning the societies they live in and their rulers. But that satirical strain runs parallel, albeit related, to the methods of critique I investigate. It is explicit – not hidden. It does not need to rely on formal play for its message; rather, its inclusion *becomes* the message. Tragedy becomes less of a mongrel genre as much as it becomes a means of conveying satire. Thus, for a project invested in social criticism that must hide in plain sight as a means of eluding censorship and censure, satire's reductive and explanatory nature runs contradictory to that investigation of formal play.

These three rules are critical not only in culling the other possibilities for genre play – of which there are plenty – but also in ensuring that the mongrel nature of genre play remain consistent with early modern perceptions of it.

Chapter Outline: "Four ex'lent characters" – Titus, Hamlet, Malevole, and Vindice

[17] "From a tradition of literary history, [my project] asks what happened to satire in the decades after the Bishops' Ban of 1599, which evidently brought an abrupt end to a vigorous, late-Elizabethan outpouring of verse satire by writers such as John Donne, Joseph Hall and John Marston…I argue that unconventional and uncanny forms of satire, though less visible than Elizabethan verse within the terms of a literary history concerned with print culture and canonical authors, were in fact vital and influential products of early Stuart culture" (McRae 1).

My project begins with an investigation of Shakespeare's earliest tragedy, *Titus Andronicus* (c.1594). I begin here partially for chronological reasons; it is the earliest of the tragedy's and thus the closet to being a "contemporary" of the work of Sidney (c. 1580, printed 1595), Puttenham (1589), and Harington (1591). Furthermore, it is also possibly the least generically daring. While *Hamlet*'s metatheatrical playing, *The Revenger's Tragedy*'s parody nature, and the mongrel nature of *The Malcontent* all seem to be relative critical common places, *Titus Andronicus* seems more like a "typical" tragedy. One might even construe it as a love letter to – or a rehashed – Seneca. Thus, as both a work that is closest to a "pure" definition of tragedy and one written closest to the writings of some of the later and most prominent Renaissance literary critics, it operates as an optimal transition between the criticism in this introduction and the primary objects of the following chapters – which also happen to all have been written after the 1599 satire ban. It thus provides a test case for whether genre and the works of critics likely were on the minds of the playwrights, rather than simply could be.

My chapter on *Titus Andronicus* begins by engaging many of the critics already cited in this introduction, particularly with respect to their thoughts about tragedy's particular purpose. Starting with the writing of Horace and continuing through those of Sidney and his peers to his followers, critics believed that tragic spectacle would overcome a ruler's emotions and lead him to govern with sympathy and pity. However, in *Titus Andronicus*, rulers continuously and uniformly reject having a sympathetic response to tragedy: Tamora denies Lavinia's pleas for death over rape, Saturninus critiques Titus's begging for mercy for his sons, and even Lucius at the end issues a decree against sympathy. Consequently, Shakespeare uses his play to conceive of new directions for

tragedy's influence. Tragedy may be used to evoke pity not in kings, but in fellow citizens; it may not be meant to appeal to those in power, but rather – by means of empathy over sympathy – to unite those without.

The language of love elegy becomes the means by which the characters explore and enact this new purpose of tragedy. Whereas much criticism to this point has explored how this poetry's placement in a gory tragedy may comment upon the poetic form, my chapter instead explores how the poetry may work as a commentary upon the tragic action – or even how it may create possibilities for new responses to tragedy. The plaint of the lover becomes the plaint of the sufferer, transmitting woes and enabling a connection of empathy rather than sympathy (a difference that I will discuss in my chapter) between the disenfranchised. Following the death of Titus's sons and Lavinia's ravishment, the play increasingly focuses on concerns of knowing and feeling others' pain. Though this lens does not dispute the feminist critiques of *Titus Andronicus* completely, it does complicate them. Titus's desire to take Lavinia's sorrow on as his own is less an act of patriarchal appropriation, and more a desire by a man to let a woman's perspective and emotions overcome his own. Even Titus's murder of his daughter is not so cut-and-dry; it becomes an overwhelming result of empathy's powers, something frightening but rooted in less sinister intentions. This reading is less rooted in modern affect studies and more in early modern understandings of sympathies and their contagious nature.[18] Similarly, it investigates the play's use of the blazon – particularly Marcus's oft-remarked-upon blazon that he delivers when he first sees Lavinia's raped and mutilated body. Whereas Nancy Vickers famously critiqued the blazon as that which

[18] I am particularly indebted to Mary Floyd-Wilson's work on contagious sympathies in her book *Occult Knowledge, Science, and Gender on the Shakespearean Stage.*

takes apart the woman's body, a male "response to the threat of imminent dismember [by] neutralization, by descriptive dismemberment, of the threat" (273), I ask whether the blazon *must always* fetishize the body or if it instead might individualize the body, memorializing what has been lost. Ultimately, this chapter gives its proper due to the admirable work done by feminist criticism over the decades on *Titus*, but also strives to see what Shakespeare does accomplish in a play that seems so invested in the plight of the low.

My second chapter shifts from Shakespeare's earliest tragedy to arguably his most famous one: *Hamlet* (c.1602). However, rather than assume that Shakespeare spent the better part of his career arguing with literary critics, this chapter for the most part leaves the words of Sidney and friends aside, though not genre play. Genre, its powers, its purposes, and its manipulation still are in focus, though in *Hamlet*, Shakespeare seems concerned with matters other than directly challenging critics. Instead, *Hamlet* – a familial drama wrapped in a revenge tragedy – investigates families: their purposes, their politics, and which ones society wants to keep. Rather than engaging with literary critics, Shakespeare uses this play to engage with political ones, particularly the claim that a well-run kingdom resembles a well-run family. In *Hamlet*, we see a royal family in a state of chaos, wherein Hamlet refuses to accept Claudius as either father or king. Hamlet, already a threat to Denmark by proving doubly disobedient, becomes an even greater problem for the state by remaining a potential romantic match for Ophelia even after he kills Polonius. Their possible coupling upsets not only the law, but also

conventional concepts of familial piety and belief in cosmic "crime and punishment" that Renaissance art continuously purported.[19]

This chapter investigates the lengths to which the characters go to assure themselves that they are not in a comic narrative, a narrative wherein a treasonous murderer may marry the daughter of his victim and then inherit the kingdom. This chapter *does not* try to prove that Ophelia still loves Hamlet. Rather, it focuses on Claudius's and others' need to draw definitive answers out of her feelings' ambiguity. By exploring Shakespeare's own investment in comedy as a force as potentially radical as tragedy, this chapter challenges common assumptions in critical theory about the political inclinations of romantic comedy. Whereas tragedy often has the reputation as the more radical genre, this chapter considers how tragedy can be a cleansing force that merely hits a "reset" button on a status quo – no matter if that status quo is just or not. Furthermore, as a result of this investigation, my chapter offers a counter-example to the queer theory commonplace that reproductive futurity is *de facto* conservative. While writers such as Lee Edelman and Stephen Guy-Bray have argued that an investment in children is always-already a stance against true change, I use my reading of *Hamlet* to find the radical potential of reproduction. Particularly, I investigate what is so threatening about the reproduction of Hamlet and Ophelia – a reproduction of anarchic, mad citizens – that leads the court to choose death over that potential reproduction.

My third chapter shifts from *Hamlet*, a revenge tragedy with hints of romantic comedy, to *The Malcontent* (c.1603), John Marston's revenge comedy. This change marks the divide in my dissertation between my two Shakespearean plays and two by his

[19] See Smith 41-44 on how Aristotle's literary convention of the *harmartia* became a necessary tool of Christian morality in the hands of Renaissance classicists and critics.

contemporaries, who were both noted satirists. Furthermore, a necessary part of my investigation in revenge tragedy and genre play was not to assume that only plays in which tragedy "won out" warranted discussion. Thus, I direct my attention to Marston's play, which resembles a revenge tragedy up until the moment that someone should die. By looking at this play, I also hope to add to the ongoing discussion in early modern studies regarding the seeming contradiction of revenge tragedy's popularity in the Christian societies of Elizabethan and Jacobean England.[20] How did observant Christians receive these bloody tales of anti-forgiveness? Was the stage revenger celebrated or condemned? My paper takes these questions of vengeance and mercy in the period and applies them to a play that *does* end in reconciliation instead of bloodshed.

The Malcontent has all the makings of a Senecan tragedy: a twice-usurped crown, royal adultery, an archfiend, and a revenger in disguise. Yet, despite multiple teasings of impending catastrophe, the play lacks a single murder and ends in peace. However, the resolutions that allow this "peaceful" ending trouble, rather than reinforce, forgiveness's place in both Christianity and the justice system. Altofronto's, the rightful duke and hidden revenger, extreme acts of mercy seem to defy earlier discussions in the play of God's will. Furthermore, the ultimate pardoning of characters goes against Renaissance ideals of equity. The issues with tempered judgment for a fictional duke's allies resembles the very real problems with the Elizabethan chancery court, which had become a court of favor for the aristocracy by the early seventeenth century. "Equity" in *The Malcontent* resembles equity in the late Elizabethan English legal system: less a corrective to the harsh letter of the law and more of a means to allow those in privileged positions to escape rightful punishment. Characters commit adultery, usurp the throne,

[20] See Woodbridge 9-29 for a longer unpacking of this debate.

and endeavor to pander the married Duchess and all walk away either happy or with minor wrist-slaps. Ultimately, the play becomes so burdened with the weight of the other characters' sins that Altofronto and others must displace them all onto Mendoza, thereby rendering a formerly comedic villainous parasite into an archfiend. Whether we should read this conception of Mendoza as deserved or not, Altofronto's ultimate sentence of Mendoza to exile instead of death is equally unsatisfying; his punishment is either too lenient or too harsh, never "just right." The "leniency" of the play's revenger creates a scenario wherein justice – divine and earthly – becomes secondary to politics and public persona since even those who are punished are punished unfairly or far too little.

My final chapter takes a different approach to the idea of genre play. Whereas the first three equated genre play (and mongrel genre) with situations wherein one genre interpenetrated another, my final chapter looks particularly at a play that is "guilty" of the excess – the lack of proper moderation or decorum – which Rist sees as so characteristic of revenge tragedy. I argue that Middleton's parodic *The Revenger's Tragedy* (c.1606) calls attention not only to the genre's mechanics, but more importantly to its pedigree: the medieval morality tale. *The Revenger's Tragedy's* roots in medieval morality plays have been well-explored, from the New Critics, such as Irving Ribner and Robert Ornstein, who initially drew the connection, to Jonathan Dollimore, who sees the play as a "black camp" spoof on divine justice. My chapter continues this investigation, but juxtaposes this aspect of its pedigree against its Senecan one. With this focus, we can see how the play addresses the conflicting ideologies of its ancestors. Despite Vindice's claim that heaven likes revenge, *The Revenger's Tragedy* utilizes excessive Senecan attributes to critique medieval moralizing drama and to expose a gross materialism that is always

lying under the morality tale's surface. Middleton's play heightens a contradiction in the plays: their need to convey the abstract ideals of Heaven and Christianity through the language and incentives of the physical world.

My chapter begins with a brief look at how morality plays, such as *Mankind* and *Wisdom*, attempt to convey the divine but can do so only through earthly language. I proceed to investigate how Middleton amplifies and lampoons this tendency in his play, rendering discussions of mercy as instances of fame-seeking and turning a debate on chastity into a treatise on optimal commodity utilization. Any talk of God is tabled, even by the "good" characters. Yet, even if the discussion were centered on the divine, it would have been one of self-interest. *Any* character would choose the jewels of Heaven over the torments of Hell. Middleton's critique of this theological physicality, however, is not simply one against the Catholic culture from which it was born. Rather, his play is a denunciation of both Catholic theology and the Reformation's methods, which did not endeavor to find "windows into men's hearts" and focused instead on similar carrot-and-stick models, promising life, wealth, and freedom if one converted – if only in name.

Throughout these chapters, my focus remains not only on the questions and critiques raised by these plays, but also, and more intently, on the means through which these plays convey those concerns. The importance of this project is not simply showing how these plays commented on the issues of the day – that territory has been tread ad infinitem by New Historicism. Rather, all of these chapters invest in close reading, genre studies, and source studies in an effort to decode pointed critiques, critiques which have become nearly invisible due to changing stances on the importance of genre, the pedagogical and social role of poetry, and the relation of the aesthetic to the political.

These playwrights hid their messages in plain sight, covered just enough to protect them from bans and bureaucrats. This project aims to dust off the extra layers and return these plays to that space wherein they were seemingly innocent and absolutely dangerous.

Chapter 1

Sympathy from the Devil: *Titus Andronicus* and Tragedy's Didactic Purpose

Late in *Titus Andronicus*, upon his capture by Lucius and his men, Aaron – the scheming Moor and mastermind behind most of the violence of the play – brags about the atrocities he has orchestrated. He not only proudly boasts of the bloodshed, but highlights the need to showcase it. It is an authorial moment, a proud claiming of the carnage to which the audience has been subjected for the past four acts. He boasts:

> For I must talk of murders, rapes and massacres,
> Acts of black night, abominable deeds,
> Complots of mischief, treasons, villainies,
> Ruthful to hear yet piteously performed. (V.i.63-66[21])

This introduction ends with a focus not on the acts themselves, but on the reaction of the audience. Tragedy, and all of its bloody deeds, means nothing if it is not "ruthful to hear" and causes suffering its watchers. And still, it also must be "piteously performed": it must arouse the sympathies of the observers through the actions of the players onstage.

In the eyes of many early modern critics, tragedy's effect on affect was one of its main purposes, if not its *raison d'être*. As I have outlined in my introduction, the distinction between the spheres of the aesthetic, the political, and the moral was far murkier in the early modern era than we may currently imagine the distinction. The aesthetic justification for and evaluation of works relied on their social and moral purposes. Tragedy's justification for existence lay in its pedagogical use of evoking an

[21] All words, spelling, and line numbers are from the Arden Shakespeare's edition of *Titus Andronicus*.

audience's pity to greater enlightenment. That belief, prevalent by the early modern period, had its roots in the literary criticism of antiquity.[22] Golden Age Roman poet Horace, in his *Ars Poetica,* argues that powerful tragedy should have a mimetic effect on its audience, going even further from pity (i.e. feeling bad for another's plight) to empathy (i.e. feeling another's plight):

> It's not enough for poems to have beauty: they must have
>
> Charm, leading their hearer's heart wherever they wish.
>
> As the human face smiles at a smile, so it echoes
>
> Those who weep: if you want to move me to tears
>
> You must first grieve yourself (99-103)

Of the thinkers of antiquity, Horace had one of the most profound effects on the belief of the early modern period. Thomas Drant provided a popular – albeit loose – English translation of this work in 1567 (Norland 19). [23] Drant was also in Areopagus,[24]

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[22] I skip Aristotle's *Poetics* in my lineage, even though it had made it to England by this era. While it chronologically comes first, it ultimately was read through the lens of Roman critics who had long ago been established as the means by which to read and evaluate tragedy. As Bruce Smith writes, "Despite Aristotle's challenging ideas, the desks an minds of the sixteenth and seventeenth-century critics remained neatly ordered…they simply interpreted [Aristotle's *Poetics*] according to the rhetorical model of drama set in place by Cicero, Quintilian, and Horace" (40).

[23] Drant's translation of the prior quote:
Put out no puffes, nor thwackyng words
words of to large assyce
If by their words they meane to moue
affects in any wyse.
Not lore enough in Poesis,
let them be sweetlye fynde,
And let them leade to where them liste
the hearers plyante mynde.
The cheares of men as theie will smerke
on those that vse to smyle:
So are theye wrinchd, when theye do weepe
and chaungd within a whyle.
If thou wouldste haue me weepe for the

the same intellectual circle as Sir Philip Sidney – arguably the most famous of early modern English literary critics influenced by Horace's ideas (Norland 34).

While Aristotle's *Poetics* had made its way to England in this era and even may have been read by some of the literati of the period, it was by no means as influential. Even though it chronologically came first, it ultimately was read through the lens of Roman critics who had long ago been established as the means by which to read and evaluate tragedy. As Bruce Smith writes, "Despite Aristotle's challenging ideas, the desks an minds of the sixteenth and seventeenth-century critics remained neatly ordered…they simply interpreted [Aristotle's *Poetics*] according to the rhetorical model of drama set in place by Cicero, Quintilian, and Horace" (40). Thus sixteenth century Italian commentator Francesco Robortello transforming Aristotle's conflicting goal emotions of *eleos* and *phobos* (pity and fear) into a neat single moral:

> With mercy we reach out to the undeserving sufferer; with terror we stand back before the wages of sin…the whole end of tragedy is an act of moral judgment. The emotions of compassion and fear that Aristtole describes as the effects of the play-as-object become part of the deliberative process that Robortello assumes in the play-as-rhetorical event. (Smith 51)

Whereas Aristotle saw ethics in plays as "a means to the end of arousing pity and fear," for Horace, it was the opposite (Smith 38). Emotions were important in so much that they led the viewer to a deeper moral understanding. This view of poetry, wherein emotions were subservient to the moral, is what we see in Sidney's influential "Defense of Poesy."

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firste muste thou pensyfe be.
Thy harmes shall hitte me, when I spye
that they haue harmed the. (195-210)

[24] Cf. "Areopagus" in *The Spenser Encyclopedia* (Gair 55)

In his "Defense of Poesy," Sidney posits that tragedy "maketh kings fear to be tyrants and tyrants manifest their tyrannical humours; that with stirring the affects of admiration and commiseration teacheth the uncertainty of this world, and upon how weak foundations gilden roofs are builded" (27-28) and poetry in general "doth intend the winning of the mind from wickedness to virtue" (22).[25] Tragedy and poetry as a whole have an instructional purpose partially rooted in the "affect of commiseration." Howard Norland notes that, unlike some earlier theories, in Sidney's "the effect [of tragedy] is not to purge these emotions [i.e. catharsis] but to provoke them" (33). This move replicates Cicero's earlier outlined goals for oratory: "to persuade and to move an audience to action" (Noland 33). The ability to feel for another human being in order to grow morally and spiritually is key to tragedy's power. Heather James elaborates, "Readers of poetry, according to Sidney, move from knowledge to practice by choosing to imitate an exemplar's actions; the theater, however, with its passionate speeches and dire spectacles, inspires sympathy to the point of interfering with the playgoers' deliberative exercise of will" ("Dido's Ear" 363). In short, tragedy is so powerful (and so potentially helpful to the common good) because it can surpass individual barriers or wills and force its audience into sympathy.

Sidney was not the only critic of the period to draw from Horace, nor the only one to imagine tragedy's relationship with the aristocracy. Rather, many of the thoughts expressed in *Defense of Poesy* reflect a prominent view of tragedy that was circulating in the literary-minded of early modern England. In his introduction to the first story of

[25] Admittedly, Sidney's work was not in print until 1595, but it had been circulating well before *Titus Andronicus* saw the stage (Norland 31-32). In his 1591 *A Brief Apology of Poetry*, Sir John Harrington bunts certain topics to Sidney's treatise (262). The casualness with which he does so implies that the text was by no means obscure before it saw print.

Mirror for Magistrates, William Baldwin stresses how we might learn from the "wofull misfortunes" and the "histories rufull" (8-9) – and the title of the work indicates that he has a clear audience in mind for this education. Sir John Harrington in his *A Brief Apology of Poetry* says that tragedy represents the cruelty of princes in order to move "nothing but pity or detestation" (272). Victoria Kahn summarizes Renaissance humanism's main ethos as "the conviction that we are best persuaded to ethical praxis by rhetorical practice of literature" (9). Yet, even though Aaron's speech mentions the pain and pity of the audience, we will see that, in *Titus Andronicus*, these modes of counteracting tyrannous behavior repeatedly and pointedly fail. Pity and power do not mix.

The play does more though than simply point out a failure in these critics' arguments. Rather, it tries to reimagine a new form of play that, in turn, can have purposes other than those proposed by critics. After all, the entirety of Aaron's acts collapse into the word "complots" – a combination of plots in both senses of the word.[26] Thus, we should investigate to see where other genres may indeed permeate the tragedy

[26] This moment is not the only one in the play where Aaron seems to be using plot to mean both "conspiracy" and "narrative." When he first intervenes into Chiron and Demetrius's argument over Lavinia – which we will see resembles something more like a Chaucerian fabliaux or Romance than a Senecan tragedy or Ovidian myth – Aaron describes the forest as a place with "many unfrequented plots…Fitted by kind for rape and villainy" (I.i.615-616). Tired of the same old story that Chiron and Demetrius's words evoke, one of "ling'ring languishment" (I.i.610), the Petrarchan cycle and the Chaucerian romance, Aaron proposes to not only to mimic the classics, but to outdo them. His tale will cover "unfrequented plots" - new narratives that deviate from mere retellings of prior tales. While "kind" does not appear in the OED for another 80 years, notably, there is a 250 year lapse after its 1667 appearance (13c). In short, the appearance of definite meanings of "kind" as "genre" are sporadic. However, considering that Sidney's language around genre mixing as a type of crossbreeding implies that genres are "kinds" ("a race, or a natural group of animals," 10a) and contemporary ideas of genre would work with another definition of kind ("That which naturally belongs to or befits one," 2b) we can assume that "kind"'s link with genre could very well have stretched back to the late Elizabethan period.

of *Titus Andronicus* in order to find what this "complot" may be.[27] One of the most prominent ones, love poetry, at times seems nearly ubiquitous in the play. Marcus famously blazons Lavinia upon finding her ravished, mutilated body. Tamora recites a pastoral *carpe diem* poem to Aaron, inviting him to sex just before they kill Bassianus and orchestrate Lavinia's rape. Even abstract concepts are subject to the language of Petrarch and his disciples.[28] Justice is a woman to be caught (IV.iii.4-9), much like the mistress of Wyatt's "Whoso list to hunt" and Titus's union with Revenge (or, at least, Tamora disguised as Revenge) has erotic undertones:

> O sweet Revenge, now do I come to thee,
>
> And if one arm's embracement will content thee,
>
> I will embrace thee in it by and by (V.ii.67-69)

This play mixes "hornpipes and funerals" (Sidney 47) or – according to earlier critic, Thomas Elyot – adds the less mature language of sexual consummation to the more thoughtful and contemplative tragedy.[29] While such language play – like much genre play in our postmodern era – may seem innocuous to the point of not even seeming like genre play at all, there was a clear divide between the two genres in the early modern era. Critics certainly talk about them as distinct categories and modern critical work on *Titus*

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[27] While the obvious other would be dark comedy, I refrain from engaging with this genre as it, in my opinion, too reliant on directorial and acting choices and on anachronistic definitions of the word "comedy." Much work has already been written on this aspect of Titus Andronicus. Cf: Richard Brucher's "'Tragedy, Laugh On': Comic Violence in *Titus Andronicus*", James Hirsch's "Laughter at *Titus Andronicus*", *and* John Kerrigan's *Revenge Tragedy: From Aeschylus to Armageddon*.

[28] "Petrarchan resonances run deeper still. First, the many Ovidian aspects of the play might equally be called Petrarchan, given the latter's constant fascination with the visually-saturated myths of Orpheus, Narcissus, Acteon, and a sustained interest in the theme of metamorphosis that has led Robert During to assert that 'Ovid is omnipresent' throughout *Rime Sparse*" (Stott 76).

[29] "And whan a man is comen to mature yeres, and that reason in him is confirmed with serious lerning and longe experience, than shall he, in redyng tragoedies, execrate and abhorre the intollerable life of tyrantes: and shall contemne the foly and dotage expressed by poetes lasciuious" (Elyot 36).

Andronicus (much of which I will be engaging at length in this chapter) has investigated the implications of this genre blending as such. The questions of these inquiries are still pertinent: why does the language of desire and affection appear so often in a play that draws mainly from Senecan tragedy and the bloodier sections of Ovid? What is love poetry's purpose in a tale of violent revenge and cruelty?

One possible compelling answer is that the language in some way speaks to the rape of Lavinia –love's and violence's discourse are strikingly similar, particularly when they revolve around the act of rape. Heather James explains this link, building on nearly two decades of feminist criticism of the Petrarchan blazon in her seminal essay, "Blazoning injustice: mutilating Titus Andronicus, Vergil, and Rome" from her monograph *Shakespeare's Troy: Drama, Politics, and the Translation of Empire.* She explains, in an argument I will delve deeper into later, that *Titus Andronicus*'s use of the blazon at the moment of rape simply is the endpoint – and a critical one at that – of decades of poetry that commoditized and cut up the bodies of women. She writes:

> English petrarchists reveal a simultaneous revulsion and attraction to the way that petrarchan poetics and particularly the blazon appropriate, objectify, and fragment the lady's body, as John Freccero and Nancy Vickers have shown. Elizabethan petrarchists often use parody to expose the implicit violence against the woman's body, as well as the exclusion of her will…Through the theatrical medium, though, Shakespeare radicalizes the Elizabethan critique of rhetoric; the actor who plays Lavinia offers a living body to quicken our empathy for the fictional woman who has been raped and mutilated, and is now being translated into petrarchan

> rhetoric…Marcus' rhetorical ornamentation painfully intensifies the effect of Lavinia's mutilation, which is to strip her of agency and voice (66)

But should the rape of Lavinia be the lens through which we must always-already read *Titus Andronicus*? While it is certainly an appropriate lens when discussing Marcus's reaction to the raped and mutilated Lavinia in II.iii[30], it might not apply to all the other instances of love poetry in the play. Furthermore, when rape itself is not so much an act of love or eroticism but a perversion of it, should we be so ready to assume the constant presence of superficial similarities? In other words, *could* we read Marcus's (and others') words in a manner that does not recreate the harm done to Lavinia's body, but rather provides him ethical distance from Chiron and Demetrius? As I will argue in this chapter, even traditional Petrarchan verse can privilege the enjoyment and consent of the woman far more than rape ever could.

Thus, this chapter investigates how this genre interpenetration works as a possible means of addressing *Titus Andronicus's* lack of pity between those who suffer and those who inflict suffering. When the typical instructional purposes of tragedy fail, when witnessing a display of suffering does nothing to move a tyrant, but often rather calcifies them in their position, tragedy must adapt. In the play, the Andronici turn to the language of love poetry as they search for a means of coping with their oppression. When kings do not fear to be tyrants and the ruling class is incapable of either sympathy or empathy.[31]

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[30] Many editions sometimes list this scene as II.iv, since they refer to Chiron and Demetrius's initial quarrel over Lavinia and Aaron's suggestion as II.i. Jonathan Bate, however, argues that the stage direction 'manet Moore' clearly means the scene is a continuation of the first act ("Introduction" n158). Thus, the scene number for Act II here differs from other editions.

[31] Admittedly, my linguistic use of these words is anachronistic, though the concepts are not. In this paper, I use "sympathy" and "pity" interchangeably to mean emotional feeling at a distance, and "empathy" to mean something closer to a mimetic emotional connection. However, in the early modern age, "pity" was closer to modern day definitions of "sympathy," whereas

classical tragedy is irrelevant. Thus, a new poetic form must take its place – a mixed genre – and introduce new venues for emotion this unique language can access.

A King Without Pity is a King Without Fear: Sympathy's Failure in *Titus*

After the quote which opened this chapter, Aaron launches into a "greatest hits" of the crimes of Tamora, Chiron, Demetrius, and himself (V.i.89-120). This scene does not work like Claudius's confirmation of his guilt in *Hamlet*. Narratively, this speech is redundant; we already are aware of everything that happened. Furthermore, Titus himself has already been made privy to the information. Additionally, while he and Lucius are separated, we know they are to meet soon, and he could convey that information to Lucius. Even if there were any anxiety that Titus could not do so before he dies, Marcus is also in the loop and could have shared the details at the tragedy's end. So if there is no necessary passing of information at this juncture, why this rather long reprise of the play's events?[32] Is it to remind a forgetful or distracted audience? Or to make us angrier so that we may be all too ready to watch Titus slaughter Chiron and Demetrius? Possibly. But perhaps this reprise is more revealing if we are to think of Aaron as the audience as well as the speaker. For Aaron does not deliver so much a song's "reprise" so much as he is the equivalent of an ancient tragedy's chorus. His speech is as much – if not more – a

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"sympathy" was a concept closer to what we call "empathy." Mary Floyd-Wilson explains, "Sympathy [implied] a mysterious, involuntary, and even contagious emotional experience…Before the eighteenth century, sympathy was not just a somatic feeling but a somatic feeling that breached the boundaries of individual bodies" (9). Whereas "sympathy" currently implies a slight remove, that connotation should not be applied to early modern times. As a result, there may be moments in this paper where I will be quoting a text that uses "sympathy" but use it to mean empathy.

[32] Judith Haber sees these moments of long rehashing of Shakespearean plays as possible explorations of larger questions of the work. She cites, for example how in *Romeo and Juliet* "the moment of 'real,' silent consummation/death is clearly problematized…by the repetitive, seemingly interminable speech of the Friar, which begins by echoing Juliet's promise of brevity…and continues by rehearsing the plot of the play in excruciating detail" (53). In short, the pointlessness (and the repetitiveness) of the Friar's speech is the exact point of it.

mode of reception as it is one of production. As chorus member, he is a representational figure who is supposed to stand for all of us, but in his failure to represent faithfully many audience members' reactions to Titus's loss of his sons, he underlines the unreliability of reaction. Just as he may differ from many viewers, so could many viewers differ from the more traditional choruses of tragedies in terms of their reaction.

Much of the assumptions about tragedy's powers do not come so much from having the right audience than simply from having a listening audience. In his evaluations of both tragedy and comedy, Thomas Elyot sees the viewers' repulsion away from vice as inevitable.[33] George Puttenham believes that while "learned princes may take delight in [tragedies, aversion to poetry] proceeds through the barbarous ignorance of the time, and pride of many gentlemen and others, whose gross heads not being brought up or acquainted with any excellent art" (70). Thus, rulers who decry poetry are simply not acquainted with it. "Ignorance" is the key word here, but Aaron is surely not ignorant of Titus's suffering. Sidney goes the furthest in his beliefs about tragedy's powers, as he imagines that tragedy and its displays of hardships have an ability to reach even the hardest hearts. He tells the story of "the abominable tyrant Alexander Pheraeus, from whose eyes a tragedy well made and represented drew abundance of tears, who without all pity had murdered infinite numbers, and some of his own blood; so as he that was not ashamed to make matters for tragedy yet could not resist the sweet violence of a tragedy" (28). Sidney creates a line between act and spectacle; while a violent act may not affect

[33] Elyot believes that, after reading tragedies, a young man will "execrate and abhorre the intollerable life of tyrantes: and shall contemne the foly and dotage expressed" (36). Regarding the reading of comedies, he writes, "Semblably remembring the wisedomes, aduertisements, counsailes, dissuasion from vice, and other profitable sentences, most eloquently and familiarely shewed in those comedies, undoubtedly there shall be no litle frute out of them gathered" (Elyot 50)

the perpetrator at the moment, the spectacle of such an act, once at a remove, achieves far greater power. Tragedy and the witnessing of suffering therefore have an ability to arouse sympathy in even those who would be deemed heartless – thus reaffirming Sidney's prime belief that the genre (like all of poetry) works to make humans more ethical.

Yet Jonathan Bate notes that even though *Titus Andronicus* is in conversation with Erasmus's belief that fables work as "lessons to the world" (*Shakespeare and Ovid* 105), he argues that Shakespeare "implicitly offers a critique of the very humanism he is embodying" (*Shakespeare and Ovid* 107). While Bate discusses the dangers of learning the wrong lessons, Aaron's reaction shows that characters can display an improper mimesis *even if* they ultimately understand the lesson. Recollecting his viewing of Titus's discovery of his son's severed heads, Aaron reports:

> I pried me through a crevice of a wall
> When for his hand he had his two sons' heads,
> Beheld his tears and laughed so heartily
> That both mine eyes were rainy like to his. (V.i.114-117)

He engages with tragedy in a manner that evokes, as Horace had argued, a proper mimesis of suffering – a type of mimesis this chapter will explore – except Aaron perverts it. He declares that it all "almost broke [his] heart," not with sadness – but instead "with extreme laughter" (V.i.113) – the same laughter that has made him cry. He is the audience member from Hell, in all senses of the term. But he is not alone in his bad reception habits. For when Aaron relates the same story to Tamora: "She sounded almost at my pleasing tale/And for my tidings gave me twenty kisses" (V.i.119-120). Just as he is the antithesis of an ideal visual audience, Tamora is the worst audience member for

vocal narration. Her swoon mocks another proper reaction to tragedy – not mimetic suffering, but a sensory overwhelming after learning of the great woe.

Whereas the various critics seem to assume that the major hindrance to tragedy's effects on affects would be the viewers' receiving or understanding the tale, Shakespeare presents to us a scenario where an audience member who is anything but ignorant (in fact, Aaron is one of the most clever characters of the play) can derive *schadenfreude* from the tragic narrative.[34] Furthermore, this grotesque pleasure can appear in any class of people – even the top. Whereas critics for centuries had argued that tragedy was a discourse aimed towards kings,[35] by this point in the tragedy, we have seen how corruptible the throne could be. In fact, one of Goths has just remarked how much more corrupt the throne almost was - Aaron and Tamora's child after all "mightst have been an emperor" (V.i.30), and one could only imagine what devilish traits that child would have inherited from his parents.[36] But Aaron's reaction to the Andronici's suffering is not abnormal – it is the standard reaction of the Roman court of which Aaron (as Tamora's lover and Chiron and Demetrius's mentor) occupies a favored periphery.

Indeed, from the very beginning of the Andronici's suffering, the family resorts to traditional reasoning around aesthetics – narrativizing their suffering as it happens – not

[34] In this way, perhaps Aaron predicts critics and fans who believe *Titus Andronicus* to be a satire.
[35] "Book I: Chapter 15" of Puttenham's *Art of English Poesie* may be the best summation of this point.
[36] The belief that a child could inherit its parents' humors essentially becomes a type of behavioral genetics for the early modern period and thus would position Aaron and Tamora's son as potentially innately evil. Cf Robert Reed's "Humoral Psychology in Shakespeare's Henriad," Martin Japtok and Winfried Schleiner's "Genetics and 'Race' in *The Merchant of Venice*," and Glen Love's "Shakespeare's Origin of the Species and Darwin's Tempest" for more on inheritance of personality traits.

simply to use pity as a response to their woes, but as a preventer of woes.[37][38] But time and time again, their efforts fail. Lavinia attempts to use tragedy's power to move the tyrant to sympathy and tears, to attain an emotional connection to Tamora, and to sway Chiron and Demetrius with an argument grounded in narrative precedent and fails spectacularly:

> **Lavinia** [*to Chiron*]: Do thou entreat her show a woman's pity.
>
> **Chiron**: What, wouldst thou have me prove myself a bastard?
>
> **Lavinia**: 'Tis true, the raven doth not hatch a lark.
>
> Yet have I heard - O, could I find it now -
>
> The lion, moved with pity, did endure
>
> To have his princely paws pared all away.
>
> Some say that ravens foster forlorn children
>
> The whilst their own birds famish in their nests.
>
> O be to me, though thy hard heart[39] say no,

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[37] Jane Hiles in her essay, "Margin for Error: Rhetorical Context in *Titus Andronicus*" argues that the tragedy's

> plot turns on a series of rhetorical failures. The play abounds in rhetorical confrontations that dramatize the violent struggles for power occurring offstage, and Shakespeare's characters repeated fail to rise to these occasions. Tamora's plea for Alarbus's life, Lavinia's plea for mercy, and Titus's plea for the lives of his sons all fall wide of the mark. Consistently, these failures of language occur because characters mistake the context in which they are speaking and it is axiomatic that discourse depends upon context" (233).

While not knowing the right words at the moment may be one type of failure in the text, my chapter does not so much discredit hers as hope to consider how these failures of speech might simultaneously work as failures on a larger, universal scale.

[38] In the interest of space and limiting redundancy – as well as because he is at that moment nowhere near the position of the court (though he will be emperor shortly afterwards) – this essay does not directly address the scene of Titus's own failure of sympathy towards Tamora in Act I. However, this scene only would further any claims of sympathy not working instead of being a conveniently ignored counter-argument.

[39] The spelling of "heart" as "hart" in the 1600 and 1611 editions creates an additional layer of Lavinia attempting to blend the lines between fables and her reality further. Instead of pleading

Nothing so kind, but something pitiful!

Tamora: I have no idea what it means; away with her!

Lavinia: O, let me teach thee for my father's sake,

That gave thee life when well he might have slain thee.

Be not obdurate, open thy deaf ears.

Tamora: Hadst thou in person ne'er offended me

Even for his sake am I pitiless.

Remember, boys, I poured forth tears in vain

To save your brother from the sacrifice,

But fierce Andronicus would not relent.

Therefore away with her and use her as you will:

The worse to her, the better loved of me.

Lavinia: O Tamora, be called a gentle queen,

And with thine own hands kill me in this place. (II.ii.147-169)

As far as the traditional didactic purpose of tragedy is concerned, this scene enacts a nearly textbook example of "theory vs. practice." Lavinia assumes the ruler, by nature of her station, would be capable of pity, invoking it multiple times in this short scene. However, Tamora does not merely argue against Lavinia's pleas – she states that the whole concept is foreign to her. The words are not simply distasteful – they are meaningless. Yet, Tamora simultaneously gives another reason to deny Lavinia pity. Not only does she apply an extreme version of Puttenham's "ignorance" – a willful ignorance even as the poetry is presented to her – but she also argues that her heart is already

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her humanity, she casts Chiron as a deer just like she had been, and thus for a moment it seems like their tale might be a continuation of the "sympathetic animal" fables.

stopped to pity, a result of Titus's refusal to spare Alarbus in the face of "her maternal plea for mercy [that] is understandable, moving, and just" (Green 321). Tragedy might not be able simply to bring pity into the world at will and in any condition. Much like Portia's famous "Quality of Mercy" speech from *The Merchant of Venice*, Lavinia's words stand in opposition to too many preexisting factors. Pleas for mercy work against blank slates, not human beings. The fact that Tamora does value her own child's suffering over another's displays that even when pity exists, its bounds are limited. Tamora's emotional capabilities only extend as far as her family, particularly for her lost son Alarbus; Chiron and Demetrius are only able to understand the needs and happiness of their mother. Kings may identify with kings in tragedy, which may indeed create the illusion that tragedies appeal to sympathies, as their subjects *are* kings. However, the ultimate message has limited reach. Critics such as Sidney, Harrington, and Elyot fallaciously expect that human emotions and feelings are a constant, that the events of a classical tragedy lead to better governance overall by means of (a nonexistent) universal sympathy.

However, as we have witnessed, this scene not only disputes the universality of pity and identification, but also reveals that rulers may be immune to narrative's very ability to affect a tyrant's behavior or sentence. Lavinia tries to use "poesy" (in the case, the story of the lion) as a means of persuading Tamora; in a way, she attempts Sidney and others' theory in a meta-example. Her interjection "O, could I find it now!" implies that the mere presence of the text itself would be influential enough. Yet, that too fails, as does Lavinia's attempt to appeal to Tamora's later reputation – and her enactment in later

dramas.[40] Despite *Mirror for Magistrate*'s multiple warnings to rulers of "infamye" as punishment for bad behaviors and Plutarch's pithy remark not to upset those who have language and literature (*Theseus* 16.2), Tamora cares little for her later reputation. Ultimately, it seems to be a matter for historians and later poets, not a concern of rulers in the moment.

Furthermore, Tamora's invocation of Alarbus's death illuminates how tales of compassion may not simply be ignored and disregarded, but also be reread and repurposed. Whereas Lavinia views Act I as a narrative of pity, Tamora interprets it as inspiration for vengeance. Narrative is far more volatile than classical or early modern critics might have believed; in the wrong hands, it could be reused and perverted.[41] Ultimately, all Tamora or her sons gain from any pre-existing narrative is the Philomela myth –which they sever from any warning lessons or pitiful language. The violence from Ovid's story remains, whereas the sympathy disappears; the Goths' reception of the tale forsakes any pathos towards Philomela and retains only the mutilation. As Bate observes, "What Chiron and Demetrius have learnt from their reading of the classics at school is not *integer vitae,* but some handy information about how a rape victim was able to reveal the identity of her attacker even though he had removed her tongue because he had left her with hands" (*Shakespeare and Ovid* 107-108). The lesson of tragedy is not so much "do not do what these tyrants have done" as much as "watch for where they go wrong and correct that aspect."

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[40] Lavinia's titling of Tamora as "Semiramus" (II.ii.118) already creates a sense of cultural and historical inheritance that Tamora's acts may be prey to. After all, Lavinia immediately follows the allusion with "nay, barbarous Tamora,/For no name fits thy nature but thy own" (II.ii.119-120).

[41] Admittedly, Lavinia may seem more like the one who is perverting the narrative here. Of course, the fact that even the "heroine" can distort a narrative's message seems to cast suspicion on classical tragedy's pedagogical use.

To be fair, though, we might exempt Tamora, as well as her sons and Aaron, from any expectations of proper behavior in the face of suffering. They are not *born* Roman royalty, they are clearly villains, and the Andronici and their allies often characterize them as inhumane.[42] However, Saturninus – as far as the text allows us to know – may be a bad ruler and a childish one,[43] but he receives no dehumanizing insults; ostensibly, as the emperor's son and potentially the rightful ruler, he should fall within tragedy's scope of power. However, his reaction to Titus's expressions of woe may be even more reprehensible than Tamora's. After all, the queen at least provides motivation for her remorselessness (Titus's murder of her son, Alarbus, in response to similar pleas), Saturninus has no ostensible grudge against Andronicus himself.[44] Yet he dismisses the suffering of Titus and his family as merely the bad behavior of "disturbers of the peace" (IV.iv.6). Saturninus does not ignore or dispute Titus's woe as Tamora does to Lavinia's pleas; the emperor recognizes them, only to dismiss them as trivial:

> …And what and if
>
> His sorrows have so overwhelmed his wits?
>
> Shall we be thus afflicted in his wreaks,
>
> His fits, his frenzy and his bitterness?...
>
> What's this but libeling against the senate

[42] For a brief, non-exhaustive list, Tamora is called "tiger" (II.ii.142), "beastly creature" (II.ii.182), "ravenous tiger" (V.iii.194), and "beastly" (V.iii.198). Aaron is a "devil" (V.i.145, V.ii.86, V.ii.90), "ravenous tiger [and an] accursed devil" (V.i.5), and likened to a fly (III.ii.67). Chiron and Demetrius are "a pair of cursed hellhounds" (V.ii.144).

[43] "The difference in their years…pose[s] a threat to male dominance, which the husband's greater age helped to hold in place. That the Roman emperor depends entirely on Tamora's advice makes him appear feckless, infantile, and uxorious" (Kehler 322).

[44] While Saturninus does invoke Bassianus's murder (IV.iv.53) as means of personalizing his rage, we should take heed of the fact that these two do not have the best relationship while on stage together, nor was Titus himself in any way responsible for the murder, even in Aaron's narrative that frames Martius and Quintus.

> And blazoning our injustice everywhere?
>
> A goodly humour, is it not, my lords?
>
> As who would say, in Rome no justice were.
>
> But if I live, his feigned ecstacies
>
> Shall be no shelter to these outrages,
>
> But he and his shall know that justice lives
>
> In Saturninus' health, whom, if she sleep,
>
> He'll so awake as she in fury shall
>
> Cut off the proud'st conspirator that lives. (IV.iv.9-26)

The very suffering that should be influential to a ruler's emotions becomes an annoyance. While admittedly Saturninus does suspect that Titus's madness is faked (or at least exaggerated), this concession would only illustrate how ineffective theater and performance are as appeals to the crown. Excessive displays of grief do not move the tyrant any more than the initial sight of suffering – there is no enlightenment gleaned from viewing a situation outside of its original setting. Furthermore, just as play-acting has little sway over Saturninus, so did the genuine tears Titus spilled for his sons before their beheading. In short, neither histories nor performances can sway Saturninus. His treatment for an old man, whom he acknowledges has "age [and] honour" (IV.iv.56), is ultimately selfish, unfeeling, and, most importantly, *immovable*.

Yet, Saturninus's reaction *further* disputes tragedy's traditional purpose not only through his disregarding Titus's woes, but also through his arguing that the concept of a king being swayed by emotion is a recipe for a chaotic state. In other words, unlike Tamora and her ilk, Saturninus hides behind laws *as* the reason for his pitilessness.

Rather than assert his right to rule as a tyrant would, Saturninus argues for the justness of his monarchy and his position. Indeed, he constructs the image of the classic John of Salisbury "good" ruler, i.e. one who does not merely use the law for his own pleasure but instead enforces the law (Rouse 695), as he defends himself. He claims that "nought hath passed/But even with law against the wilful sons/Of old Andronicus" (IV.iv.7-9) and, as we have seen, believes *justice* – not merely the power to rule – to reside within him. Indeed, in earlier editions (1600 and 1611), he even masculinizes justice:

> But he and his shall know that iustice liues
> In Saturninus health, whom, if *he* sleep,
> Hele so awake, as *he* in furie shall
> Cut off the proud'st conspiratour that liues. (emphasis mine)

Here, we see a Saturninus who linguistically seems to collapse any boundaries between justice and himself. Even though later editions clarify this distinction and regender justice as female, the effect remains: if Saturninus is not justice, she at least reflects all of his wishes. He does not fear any form of justice or try to suppress it; on the contrary, he is certain that Titus's continued displays of grief will raise justice and entice her fury *against Titus*.

The law therefore is Saturninus's recourse, not that which he tries to flout. He even reiterates the necessity of law in the face of miserable pleas for compassion, claiming he is merely the emissary of the law after Tamora makes a show of calming him:

> **Tamora**: My gracious lord, my lovely Saturnine,
> Lord of my life, commander of my thoughts,

Calm thee and bear the faults of Titus' age,

Th'effects of sorrow for his valiant sons

Whose loss hath pierced him deep and scarred his heart;

And rather comfort his distressed plight

Than prosecute the meanest or the best

For these contempts…

Saturninus: Despiteful and intolerable wrongs!

Shall I endure this monstrous villainy?

I know from whence this same device proceeds.

May this be bourne as if his traitorous sons,

That died by law for murder of our brother,

Have by my means been butchered wrongfully? (IV.iv.27-54)

The crime in his eyes is that the law *could* be superseded or questioned, even for the sake of sympathy. Sympathy, with its power to raise feelings for an old and honorable man over retributive justice, has disgusting possibility. Titus might see himself as appealing to a type of equity, mercy for a man who has served his country valorously, as he asks for exceptions and considerations to be made. He beseeches Saturninus to consider acting not to the letter of the law, but to avoid unjustly punishing an old man.[45] However, Saturninus portrays this appeal, driven by theater's sympathy-inducing powers, as once more a perversion of not merely law, but justice (equity's higher ideal) as well. Titus's use of tragic poetry would not merely undermine the letter of the law, but the spirit as well. Saturninus, in his tirade, does not appeal only to his position as emperor, but a need

[45] See Fortier 81-83 for more on criminal equity.

for justice to stay strong in the face of pleas for excessive mercy, a staple of the earliest writings on justice and equity (Fortier 15-19).[46]

Saturninus's condemnation, which establishes such condemnations in both law and justice, thus works as the perfect compliment to Aaron's failed reception of the same piteous spectacle with which I began this chapter. Whereas Aaron is a willfully perverse audience who intentionally misreads the work, Saturninus reads the work, not his own denial of Titus's pleas, as perverse. Critics' outlined model of tragedy's capacity for social change is ineffective on unreceptive minds not only because their minds actively deny sympathy or mock pity, but also because they see tragedy's aims as antithetical to a healthy society. The king may indeed fear to be a tyrant, but does the tyrant always know he is a tyrant? This lack of self-reflexivity ultimately undoes everything that the earlier cited critics had hoped the genre was capable of.

"Pity the tale of me": Elegy and Empathy

What is the use of tragedy if its ostensible purpose repeatedly fails? We will see that as *Titus Andronicus* refutes this *raison d'être,* it is concurrently arguing for a different one. Tragedy can have use, and indeed can have use grounded in concepts of emotions and learning, but that purpose must be modified into ones of mutual feelings between equals, rather than pity from the high. But a tragedy with a modified endgame needs a modified form. Thus we will see that, when faced with a king unreceptive to the language of classical-style tragedy, the characters turn to the language of Petrarch and love poetry not as another means of convincing a king, but as a means of coping with the

[46] In fact, my third chapter on John Marston's *The Malcontent* will take the opposite position. Whereas Shakespeare seems to critique the ruler who withholds pardons, Marston leans on the idea of excessive pardoning. Of course, part of Marston's critique stems from the political expediency of such pardons.

suffering endured in tragedy. I will show in this next section how the rhetoric geared towards sympathy in turn shifts towards a love poetry centered around concepts of empathy and mutual suffering. When love poetry enters the realm of tragedy, this becomes more its purpose (as the suffering increases) and the violence of tragedy in turn and characters' and audience's reactions to it becomes more of the focus through such poetry.

However before we consider how love elegy can be used as a means of coping with tyranny, we first might need to find a place where love elegy *can* be a productive site for its subjects. Early modern feminist criticism explored the opposite in depth, considering how love poetry – particularly the blazon – does violence upon the woman and her autonomy. This method of reading is indebted to Nancy Vickers and her seminal essay "Diana Described: Scattered Woman and Scattered Rhyme." When confronted with a beautiful woman and the threat of his own destruction by her, a poet's

> response to the threat of imminent dismemberment is the neutralization, through descriptive dismemberment, of the threat. He transforms the visible totality into scattered words, the body into signs: his description, at one remove from his experience, safely permits and perpetuates his fascination…He projects scattering onto her through a process of fetishistic overdetermination. (273, 274)

The blazon therefore works to cut the women into non-sentient objects over which the poet has mastery. "[B]odies fetishized by a poetic voice logically do not have a voice of their own; the world of making words, of making texts, is not theirs" (Vickers 277); thus the man unable to obtain the woman still gains the last word and possession over her body, as well as everlasting aesthetic fame for himself.

Regarding the blazon in *Titus Andronicus*, Heather James takes a related approach, albeit one with a more reparative stance to the play as a whole. As shown in the passage earlier in this chapter, she argues that Shakespeare's use of the blazon interrogates how poets of the English Renaissance had used the form. She writes:

> Shakespeare analyzes poetic devices which distort and fragment the female body and may lead teleologically to rape…[Thus]Shakespeare stages a critique of the petrarchan blazon as appropriative and ultimately mutilating. Epic and erotic poetry meet a simultaneous critique in Lavinia's disfigured and ornamented body because they share an appropriative and colonizing nature. (*Shakespeare's Troy* 67-68)

James reads the tragedy's use of love elegy as not so much replicating the problems, as laying bare the unsetting implications of the commodification of female subjects by poetry. Rather than continuing Petrarch's mission, *Titus Andronicus* acts as an early modern version of the critique that Vickers and other feminist readers would mount centuries later. The characters themselves (for the most part) are classic Petrarchans, but the audience, when witnessing the brutality on stage in juxtaposition to the eloquent, flowery imagery, should see otherwise. While James does question Marcus's speech, she does give his position some consideration:

> [Like] scores of petrarchan lovers, Marcus does not know if his poetry stirs up sympathetic vibrations or if it merely sticks to the surface of the lady's body. Unlike some of these artists, Marcus cares intensely about the woman's will and creates his comparisons in hopes of conforming his mind to hers, not of forming her in the image of his desires (*Shakespeare's Troy* 68)

James commendably appreciates the distinct differences between speakers and situations in this play. Extending her reading of Marcus and his concern for a woman's will, we might wonder if Marcus is the only character in the play to whom a woman's will matters. In fact, upon a further investigation of other instances of love poetry in *Titus Andronicus*, we can see that consent is indeed rarely from the minds of the speakers of elegy.

From the very first moment where love poetry enters the play – Titus's opening speech – we can see how complicated the relationship between the speaker and his love object may be. Titus's speech invites us into the language of blazon, commemorating Rome in her victory like a lover, but soon the object and purpose of these words become murky. He begins:

> Hail, Rome, victorious in thy mourning weeds!
> Lo, as the bark that hath discharged his freight
> Returns with precious lading to the bay
> From whence at first she weighed her anchorage,
> Cometh Andronicus, bound with laurel boughs,
> To resolute his country with his tears,
> Tears of true joy for his return to Rome.
> Thou great defender of this Capitol,
> Stand gracious to the rites that we intend.
> Romans, of five-and-twenty valiant sons,
> Half of the number that King Priam had,
> Behold, the poor remains, alive and dead (I.i.73-84)

The start of this speech seems like a sonnet-esque/lyric love poem. Titus addresses the female-gendered Rome, and originates a physical description – her clothes.[47] Admittedly, his equation of Rome as woman[48] and the move to turning the woman into the object of blazon seem to be following the established arguments all too well. But this move does not continue down such a path. The object of the pseudo-blazon quickly shifts, and Titus compares himself to a female ship and matches his description of her dress for that of his own; he becomes both speaker and object of this elegy. This moment though is not so completely an aberration of typical love poetry as it is simply another common aspect of it: the lover's description of himself. Titus's speech here notably retorts Nancy Vicker's thesis that Petrarchan poetry necessarily carries connotations of rape. Not only does it take attention *away* from the woman's body and positions it onto the man's, but it also turns the poem from an act of seizure into one of entreaty. Titus does not immediately claim Rome for his own or even proceed with his blazon, but instead displays his own dress and tears, and transforms his dead sons into objects of spectacle as a mean of obtaining the consent of Rome and the Romans.

And consent in this scene is key. Rome ultimately does appear to provide some form of it to Titus, as the second half of his opening speech evokes a consummation:

> These that survive, let Rome reward with love;
>
> These that I bring unto their latest home,
>
> With burial amongst their ancestors.

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[47] In fact, this description will eventually be echoed in the last physical description of a woman in this play, when Tamora is condemned to be thrown to the vultures without any "mourning weed" (V.iii.195)

[48] In one of the earliest notable essays on rape in *Titus Andronicus*, "Rape and Revenge in Titus Andronicus," David Wilbern argues that the first female body threatened with violation in the play is Rome herself (172-173).

Here Goths have given me leave to sheath my sword…

Make way to lay them by their brethren

There greet in silence, as the dead are wont,

And sleep in peace slain in your country's wars.

O sacred receptacle of my joys,

Sweet cell of virtue and nobility,

How many sons hast thou of mine in store

That thou wilt never render to me more! (I.i.85-98)

Far from being violent, some of the earliest hints of metaphorical sexuality have a peaceful, even mournful tone. Titus, having made the case of his virtues and his suffering much like the protagonist of a sonnet cycle, asks for Rome to reward him with love. Whereas Vickers and James create a space wherein the language of Petrarch *is* the language of rape, here we see that such a slippage is not so simple. The seeker *asks* for love to be let, and Titus even notes that he has the consent of the Goths to enter his sword into what the Romans would call the "vagina." Most importantly though, Titus's own language around this vagina-placeholder is holy (not appropriative or violent), even in the act of consummation: a "sacred receptacle," a "sweet cell of virtue and nobility."

It is necessary therefore that we do not view the language of *Titus Andronicus* as always-already tainted with rape, no matter how appealing this assumption may be. For even Chiron and Demetrius's rape of Lavinia does not begin as a violent plot, in both senses of the word. It neither has the trappings of Senecan tragedy or the Philomela myth, nor is it approximate to 21st century definitions of rape (i.e. sexual assault). Emily Detmer-Goebel writes "in many early modern rape scenes, the rapist first tries to seduce

the woman into consenting to him; however, Chiron and Demetrius never address Lavinia" (79). While they certainly do not directly speak to Lavinia, they at least imagine a language and behavior of consent that will appear in stark contrast to their later actions. As he argues with Demetrius, Chiron says:

> 'Tis not the difference of a year or two
>
> Makes me less gracious, or thee more fortunate:
>
> I am as able and as fit as thou
>
> To serve, and to *deserve* my mistress' grace,
>
> And that my lord upon thee shall approve,
>
> And *plead my passions* for Lavinia's love (I.i.530-535, emphasis mine)

To be fair, Chiron and Demetrius are always planning to commit illicit acts. However, before Aaron speaks to the brothers, they are hoping to commit "rapere," but not "raptus."[49] They want to seduce Lavinia, to steal her away from Bassianus – with her consent – the same way Bassianus stole her from Saturninus in Act I.[50] While what they are planning is illegal, it is far less sinister. Chiron's language evokes Titus's speech to Rome; it is a language of romance filled with the implicit need for the desired's consent. Chiron boasts, "Aaron, a thousand deaths would I propose/T'achieve her whom I love" (I.i.579-580), and Demetrius asks, "Then why should he despair that knows to court [Lavinia]/With words, fair looks and liberality?" (I.i.591-592).

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[49] Christopher Cannon argues in his seminal article, "*Raptus* in the Chaumpaigne Release and a Newly Discovered Document Concerning the Life of Geoffrey Chaucer" that, while technically there was no legal or linguistic distinction, most cases of "rapere" applied to either (typically willing) abduction or adultery, whereas the courts tacitly used "raptus" to signify a violation of an unwilling woman.

[50] Saturninus does call this act a rape however, telling Bassianus, "Thou and thy faction shall repent this rape" (I.i.409). The word is even capitalized in the 1600 and 1611 editions.

Let me be clear: this portrayal of Lavinia does not necessarily align with more modern conceptions of gender and autonomy. While the assumption that Lavinia would be pliable, would act against her better judgment and morals, must be a love object, and could be "won," all indeed point to some troubling issues with gender, I would argue that some critics go too far by erasing *any* distinctions. For example, when discussing this scene in conversation with the rape, Robin L. Bott argues, "Plotting the rape of Lavinia poses no moral dilemma for Aaron, Chiron, and Demetrius because they have already objectified her…Lavinia's chastity becomes nothing more than a piece of a whole to be stolen from her owner" (199) pointing to how the earlier discussion of their desire makes rape an inevitability. She goes on, "From the outset, Lavinia herself means nothing to her attackers; instead, she is merely a means to several ends. She is used to satisfy sexual lust, to cuckold her husband, and, most importantly, to gain revenge on Titus Andronicus" (199). However, I would argue that, as we have seen, Lavinia is not *merely* objectified in this passage. Chiron and Demetrius's need for her approval points to an autonomy imagined for her. Bott elides these early words and, consequently, her argument shows a continuity, rather than a rupture in the manner of discourse around Lavinia. The expressions of woe from the lover (typically seen as the first step in a misogynistic discourse before the objectifying blazon (Vickers 268-269)) continuously reappear in the play, but their initial goals too seem to be swaying a willing listener – mainly kings, returning us to tragedy's initial purpose.

But we have already seen that a language which emphasizes suffering has no effect on kings; instead, the language of love poetry that is so present in *Titus Andronicus*

opposes the traditional purpose of tragedy. When Titus attempts to use it in Act III as a means of appealing to the tribunes to spare his sons from death, he fails. Titus laments:

> For these, Tribunes, in the dust I write
> My heart's deep languor and my soul's sad tears.
> Let my tears staunch the earth's dry appetite;
> My son's sweet blood will make it shame and blush.
> O earth, I will befriend thee more with rain
> That shall distil from these two ancient ruins
> Than youthful April shall with all his showers.
> In summer's drought I'll drop upon thee still;
> In winter with warm tears I'll melt the snow
> And keep eternal springtime on thy face,
> So thou refuse to drink my dear sons' blood. (III.i.12-22)

This poem resembles the love poetry of the early modern era. Not only is it still pleading for something of consent from a speaker with a pained heart, but also it contains a narrator able to control the forces of nature with his emotions. Much like the narrator from a sonnet sequence, Titus's tears can flood a drought, melt the snow, and control the seasons. But for all the power of his grief, the tribunes are not moved. Titus consequently must shift his attention – in this speech, he turns it to the lower object, the earth. That which can "shame and blush" – which only Lavinia till now has seemed capable of – becomes that which can understand Titus's sorrow. For, Titus argues that the Tribunes

> would not pity me; yet plead I must,
> And bootless unto them.

> Therefore I tell my sorrows to the stones,
>
> Who, though they cannot answer my distress,
>
> Yet in some sort they are better than the tribunes
>
> For that they will not intercept my tale.
>
> When I do weep, they humbly at my feet
>
> Receive my tears and seem to weep with me
>
> And were they but attired in grave weeds
>
> Rome could afford no tribunes like to these. (III.i.35-44)

Titus at last rejects any of hope of eliciting the sympathies of the ruling class. However, Titus does note that pity, and even empathy, are still the desired outcomes. Pity is not so much an impossibility as it must be sought from a different receiver; Titus finds his in the form of the stones. They are an ideal audience: patiently listening, not interrupting his story, and perfectly mirroring his emotions. Titus rejects common sentiments of audiences of the times,[51] for his ideal audience is not of high birth or standing, but far more resembles the lower classes. Indeed, the stone speech seems to invoke the groundlings, as the stones – much like the Shakespearean audience – wait at Titus's feet and could literally have tears fall on them. While many of these speeches usually mock or critique the audience,[52] here Titus's speech commends them over their social superiors.

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[51] In one classic example, in the Induction of *Bartholmew Fair*, Jonson equates the slapstick, simple Stage-Keeper with the groundlings (Ind.48-49) and insults the need to pander to them (Ind.56-58). In fact, much of the induction is structured around mocking the simplicity of the groundlings' tastes.

[52] Notable examples include *King Lear*'s "Men of stones" line (V.iii.258) and Sir Alexander's description of his tapestry in *The Roaring Girl* (I.ii.14-32). Peter Titlestad also remarks that in *Hamlet* "the thick and unwholesome, distracted populace [referred to by Claudius] are the audience, in particular the varied audience of the Elizabethan playhouse" (43).

Though they are "humbly at [his] feet" and plainly attired, they surpass the tribunes of Rome in terms of emotional capabilities.

Titus's need to turn to the low becomes even more apparent, when Titus's lost hand again unveils leaders' compassion as nonexistant:

Titus: If any power pities wretched tears
To that I call. [Lavinia kneels] What, wouldst thou kneel with me?
Do then, dear heart, for heaven shall hear our prayers,
Or with our sighs we'll breath the welkin dim
And stain the sun with fog, as sometime clouds
When they do hug him in their melting bosom.
Marcus: O brother, speak with possibility,
And do not break into these deep extremes.
Titus: If there were reason for these miseries,
Then into limits could I bind my woes.
When heaven doth weep, doth not the earth o'erflow?
If the winds rage, doth not the sea wax mad,
Threatening the welkin with his big-swollen face? (III.i.209-221)

Even though Titus invokes a pitying power, that concept remains a contradiction. The court indeed has found Titus's misery to be a source of laughter and mockery (III.i.239). Even Marcus, Titus's brother and ally (though not a man brought as low as Titus or his descendants), seems incapable of comprehending Titus's woes. Despite his ability to show sympathy (i.e. a pity for Titus's suffering), Marcus here is incapable of empathy (i.e. putting himself *into* the position of Titus). He cannot grasp a mindset that would be

unable or unwilling to stick within the realm of "possibility." The only person we see who is able to understand and connect with Titus's wretched tears in this scene is the lowest character: Lavinia, who kneels at Titus's invocation for pity. At last, we have an audience member who fits the criticism's criteria.

Thus, Titus Andronicus and *Titus Andronicus* might not so much absolutely reject Sidney's and others' ideal purpose of tragedy as much as boldly upheave its class politics. Tragedy *does* have the ability to elicit sympathy and even empathy, but in order to do so, it must change its object. It cannot be above the travails of the low and care only for kings, but instead allow the low to vocalize their woes. Whereas classical tragedy, as described by George Puttenham is about "the doleful falls of unfortunate and afflicted princes" (78), this new tragedy includes the fall of an emperor, but almost as an afterthought. Additionally, the discourse of the low becomes a powerful tool, in that its purpose extends beyond merely getting the sympathies of those in power. For this discourse of suffering, the language of pity that had earlier been invested in obtaining the ear and sympathy of the king and swaying his feelings turns towards empathy. Obtaining pity for or even from the low is no longer the final goal of the discourse; the attainment of fellow and like feeling becomes its purpose. While Lavinia's destroyed state is indeed harrowing for Titus, the play also gives a sense that he – already destroyed and figuratively mangled by the loss of his sons – and she belong together in their dejected states.[53] When Lavinia enters act III, Marcus refers to her as "consuming sorrow" (III.i.61). While Titus takes "consuming" here to simply mean "all-destructive," the word

[53] "The literal dismembers of his hands, his sons' hands, and Lavinia's hands and tongue are emblematic amputation of body parts vital to Titus's social and political strength. The loss of his hand signifies the loss of his military career, the wrongful execution of his sons for Bassianus's murder signifies the loss of Titus's honor, and the mutilation of Lavinia signifies the devaluing of his property." (Bott 200)

had another meaning at the time. Consume's etymological link with "consummate" allowed "consuming" to also mean "completing." Heaping sorrows upon sorrows may have a sense of futility, akin to adding "water to the sea/or [bringing] a fagot to bright-burning Troy" (III.i.69-70), but there is also a sense in which the linking of sorrows is both logical and inevitable. Like must join like for a sense of a complete and fulfilled sorrow. Those who are already low are most able to identify with suffering, and as we will see, witnessing suffering becomes, through a mimesis possibly stronger than Horace's proposed one, an act of suffering itself.

This empathy for pain – the ability to not only pity pain but to feel another's pain as one's own – ultimately leads to a situation where sorrow feeds upon itself. Titus, upon beholding his daughter's mutilated body, claims that the sight of her anguish is the greatest conceivable pain:

> It was my dear, and he that wounded her
> Hath hurt me more than had he killed me dead…
> This way to death my wretched sons are gone;
> Here stands my other son, a banished man,
> And here my brother, weeping at my woes.
> But that which gives my soul the greatest spurn
> Is dear Lavinia, dearer than my soul.
> Had I but seen thy picture in this plight,
> It would have madded me; what shall I do
> Now I behold thy body so? (III.i.92-106)

Knowledge of suffering is not key here; the *spectacle* of suffering from one who has experienced similar is. In her study of early modern beliefs of "sympathies" (which, as I have said, is closer to modern concepts of "empathy") and the theater, Floyd-Wilson writes that, "there is some evidence to suggest that dramatists and spectators believe [theater] could stir an audience member's emotions against her will, in the same way that antipathies or sympathies in one entity might draw or repel the affections of another" (20). While its power over tyrants remains dubious, concepts of theater – show, character, and tableau – still hold sway in other realms. Lavinia's sorrow not only strikes Titus more than any physical grief could, but also affects him more than the off-stage deaths of his sons or the woe of his other one. The very image of it – the witnessing of her downtrodden nature, and thus the rendering Titus as *audience* to her agony – is enough to drive Titus mad. Indeed, the work may be intending to have the same effect on some of the audience members who would catch Titus's tears. Building off Michael O'Connell's argument that the violence of mystery plays would have had a strong resonance with images of Christ's passion,[54] Andrew McConnell Stott posits that the extreme violence of Titus Andronicus may have "structured and trained the very conditions of theatrical empathy" (84).[55]

But Titus's overwhelming sorrow at Lavinia's pain is not without its critics. For instance, Bott laments that in this passage, "Lavinia's pain fades into the background as

[54] Lisa S. Starks-Estes makes a similar connection between Christ's wounds and, here in particular, Lavinia in her essay "*Virtus*, Vulnerability, and Emblazoned" (90-91).
[55] Admittedly, Stott later argues against this same hypothesis since, to him, "Shakespeare's plays violence as both hyperbolically spectacular and grotesquely comic" (85) and therefore the work must be parody. However, despite Titus's laughter at the apex of his miseries and the pie-eating finale, I would argue that not all of the play is parody. Not all scenes of violence need necessarily be categorized as equal, so while other scenes may work as parody, I would be hesitant to side with the critics who write-off the entire text's engagement with violence as such.

her rape and mutilation become one instance in a series of wounds inflicted upon Titus's social and political body" (200).[56] However, Bott assumes too great of a distinction *between* Titus and Lavinia. Here, Titus begins to dissolve the lines between his own identity and his daughter's; this dissolution is reminiscent of Floyd-Wilson's definition of early modern sympathy which "breached the boundaries of individual bodies" (9). Lavinia's pain never fully disappears because this passage unites the two in their pain, rather than subsuming one into another. Douglas Green's critique is similar to Bates's: "Titus's speech re-presents Lavinia as both the occasion and the expression of his madness, *his* inner state. Their 'sympathy of woe…, /As far from help as limbo is from bliss' (3.1.148-149) transforms her irremediable condition into the emblem of his" (322). Green too ignores how Titus allows Lavinia's own pain to *affect* his own state. He might not so much appropriate her as reflect her. He becomes her as much as she becomes him. Yes, her current woe speaks to his other ones, but that might occur because another's suffering can reflect (and possibly even amplify) in the mind of an audience member who *already* sees himself in a similar situation. Indeed, we soon discover that the only non-Andronici who suffers from Titus's misery the messenger who feels the suffering of mimetic empathy: "That woe is me to think upon thy woes,/More than remembrance of my father's death" (III.i.240-241).

[56] Other critics make similar cases against the play as a whole, not this particular scene. Writing on *Titus Andronicus* in *Violence Against Women in Early Modern Performance*, Kim Solga notes there is a "primary focus not on the pain of violation, but on the difficulties of action, honour, justice, and revenge; rape's dramatic representation among the early moderns reflects not what a modern audience might understand about the experience – the victim's heinous bodily and psychic suffering – but rather what rape means to those to whom it is reported, who can access it only as vicarious witnesses" (31). Meanwhile Coppelia Kahn argues in *Man's Estate* that Titus ultimately Lavinia's suffering as his own. However, I would argue that these critiques falter for the same reasons that I list against those about these lines in particular.

What we witness here is empathy's compounding effect in this play. Empathy reflects onto the audience, causing them to suffer and thus rendering them the object for *another's* empathy. Continuing on the early modern concept of sympathy, Floyd-Wilson writes "theater-goers in Shakespeare's London [believe they] were subject to less predictable and more *contagious* sympathies" (21, emphasis mine). This concept of contagion in terms of emotions is key for the play; for when we think of plagues, we do not consider "patient zero" to be any more sick or to have any more capacity for sickness than those who contract the illness. Similarly, in *Titus Andronicus*, suffering induced by empathy is not portrayed as any less than the *original source* of sorrow. Furthermore, this contracted agony can indeed be caught again by one of the prior sufferers. For, in the above passage, Titus lists his brother's grief as cause for his woes alongside his banished and executed sons. This situation becomes more confounding when we consider that the grief of Marcus which Titus laments is indeed caused by Marcus witnessing Titus's own grief; thus a form of mimetic feedback loop is created here, wherein empathy (or early modern "sympathies") feed upon themselves in a closed circuit. Even though Shakespeare has disregarded the ability of tyrants to feel even sympathy – a claim that we have seen repeated in later parts of the play with Aaron's speech and Saturninus's complaint – he soon follows that dismissal with an assertion of empathy's power. Empathy has the power not only to make the empathizer miserable, but to make his misery so great that it becomes contagious and an object for others to pity.

However, for the sufferer him/herself, the formerly debilitating position of misery becomes one of strength. He instructs Lavinia:

Wound [your grief] with sighing, girl, kill it with groans,

> Or get some little knife between thy teeth
> And just against thy heart make thou a hole,
> That all the tears that thy poor eyes let fall
> May run into that sink and, soaking in,
> Drown the lamenting fool in sea-salt tears. (III.ii.15-20)

Once more, Titus utilizes the language of the suffering Petrarchan lover as a means of rewording tragedy's discourse. Misery is no longer *simply* an endpoint for a character whose suffering will be instructional for another. Titus's words here present an option in which misery's power stretches beyond simply creating more misery; oxymoronically, sorrow becomes an emotion capable of destroying itself. Notably, even when Titus believes that sighing and groans (two common Petrarchan sounds) may be ineffective in killing sadness, his use of the knife does not follow an expected course. He does not suggest stabbing the heart or even, more poetically, cutting it out. Instead, the miserable heart's death must come from the very source of its offensiveness: sorrow. The tears necessary for its destruction are, of course, the very drowning tears so prevalent in love poetry. Ultimately, the mimetic and performative powers of misery may work in tandem as a means of uniting fellow sufferers, creating a space where the linguistics of Petrarchan poetics provide some form of refuge for the victims of tyranny. Titus imagines himself as Lavinia, vocalizing how he would act were he unable to strike his breast. He dissolves his position into that of Lavinia. However, he does such imaginative work *in order to* make Lavinia mirror his own person, so that she would perform the very acts he had conceived (i.e. forcing her heart into submission).

While Bott reads these moves as an appropriation of Lavinia's suffering and encroaching onto her personhood,[57] as we have already seen, we really must keep in mind how much Titus is willing to let his P.O.V. become Lavinia's. To be fair, "Titus is shown to be too confident an authority of Lavinia's experience. He is an unreliable, although sincere, interpreter of Lavinia's raped body, which again emphasizes their dependence on her words" (Detmer-Goebel 83). However, we must remember that Lavinia has no opportunity for words here and therefore the only textual option is silence. Marguerite Tassi notes that there were cases in early modern England where men speaking for women were not so much situations of appropriation as ones of ventriloquizing, particularly when a woman wanted to achieve legal retribution (53). Thus, female whetting – i.e. goading the man to speak and act for her – was a powerful performative act (Tassi 57). She goes on to argue about *Titus Andronicus* in particular that Lavinia's own role in the revenge – and her will in Titus's rants – is often downplayed by critics bringing in anachronistic ideas:

> Titus's revenge is a father's revenge; yet his revenge is also Lavinia's revenge. She is not a ghost, like Hamlet's father, nor is she mad, like Ophelia. Unlike these other inciters seeking appeasement, Lavinia can participate in the brutal, bloody rite her father undertakes to avenge her rape and mutilation…His usurpation of the [Procne's] role might be seen not so much as a patriarchal assumption of the rights of revenge, but rather as a sign of the feminization of the male avenger, of

[57] Jean Howard makes a similar claim about Titus's reaction to the revelation of Chiron and Demetrius's crimes, arguing that "because of her handless, tongueless state, it is easy for Lavinia's desires to be obscured by the force of Titus's immediate appropriation of her rape for his own ends" (6).

> revenge as a feminine gendered action, the action of a vulnerable, grieving, disempowered member of the aristocratic community. (Tassi 98, 101)

Titus's imaginations of himself as Lavinia are indeed less the loss of Lavinia's identity than the loss of Titus's own self into the Lavinia-induced sorrow. Yes, he proposes the solution, but it is a solution that can only be gained by contracting her contagious sympathies. Ultimately, Lavinia may not have words, but in early modern discourse, she could speak through Titus by means of her emoting sympathies.[58]

Thus, *Titus Andronicus* changes the endpoint for this language of woe from seeking some either love or fame to the language of woe being the endpoint. The performative act of vocalizing grief needs no further purpose. Petrarch's inability to achieve the woman through verse ultimately transforms into his own aesthetic canonization (Vickers 276-277): his monument more lasting than bronze, to borrow a term from Horace. Many of his followers attempt likewise. However here, even though "the sympathy of woe is…as far from help as limbo is from bliss" (III.i.149-150), it may never need to strive for help itself. The vocalization of anguish and the attempt to connect with others in agony through that performative action is – for the most part – all that *Titus*

[58] Admittedly, this reading which focuses more on empathy between people than the notable and important differences of gendered behavior risks something similar to what Robertson critiques as "the humanist positioning of the story of the rape of Lucrece as foundational to the story of republican liberty, a celebration of liberty that occludes the material suffering of the female body" (217). Similarly, Bott argues that readings of Lavinia's rape that attempt to read it in dialogue with larger social repercussions ultimately see raped women as merely a fixable and excisable part of a larger problem (206). By no means am I trying to cover up the horrors done to Lavinia with the potential of empathy. Instead, I would hope that this paper would showcase that one of the possible necessities for dealing with rape and rape culture would be a cessation of *othering* of rape victims. Where I see the potential in *Titus Andronicus* is in Titus's attempts to completely lose himself in his daughter's pain and a voiceless Lavinia, and his endeavors to strive to find her voice.

Andronicus imagines love poetry to be capable of.[59] Therefore, we see the characters continue vocalizing their woes, even *without* determinant other goals. While Young Lucius may request that Lavinia be made "merry with some pleasing tale" (III.ii.47), Titus promises only "sad stories chance in the times of old" (III.ii.84); in other words, Titus promises Lavinia that he will read her *Titus Andronicus*. Doomed to pitiless kings, the characters seek to hear how others coped with similar fates. However, the play does not omit the concept of memorialization; its use of the Petrarchan blazon endeavors the achievement of commemoration, though to arguably different ends than those which Petrarch and his followers strived for, or those for which *Titus Andronicus*'s use of the blazon has been critiqued.

The Ghostly Blazon: Petrarchan Poetry as Memorialization

Titus Andronicus and feminist scholarship have an uneasy relationship in many respects, from the aforementioned issues of rape to Tamora's depiction and ultimate fate. Yet, the subject of its use of the blazon is particularly fraught. Jean Howard remarks how Marcus's famous Act II blazon upon finding the ravished Lavinia aestheticizes the rape:

> Marcus is in rhetorical overdrive, trying to use language to master the horror of what he sees…This speech, in which Marcus attempts to master his grief, nonetheless stands at a remove from Lavinia's suffering and from the cold facts of

[59] Andrew McCarthy touches upon expression as a necessary endgoal, not a midpoint, in his essay "King Lear's Violent Grief." He writes in particular about *Titus*, "Over the course of his career, Shakespeare was deeply interested in exploring grief's physical and psychic ramifications and how expressing sorrow is a necessary release. The belief that '[g]rief pent up will break the heart' was proverbial in early modern England, and Shakespeare repeatedly employed this sentiment in his plays. It is evident as early as *Titus Andronicus*, where upon finding his niece raped and mutilated, Marcus cries out, 'Sorrow concealed, like an oven stopped,/Doth burn the heart to cinders where it is' (2.4.36-37). For Marcus, one must give sorrow expression; otherwise there are negative internal consequences" (157). Thus, while critics had been postulating as to larger purposes for expressions of grief, there also was a mindset that grief's vocalization was a necessity even without a larger intended teleology.

> her mutilation, facts that have been prettified and distanced by his cascade of comparisons. (8-9)

However, whereas Jean Howard views the language as a covering up of the rape and the violence done to Lavinia's body, Heather James (as we have already seen) reads the juxtaposition of the language and the physical representation of a ravished and mutilated body on stage as irreconcilable. The horror cannot be assimilated into poetry; instead it remains to interrogate the thrust of the poetry:

> The encounter of Marcus and Lavinia stages a collision of readerly and dramatic modes of representation [building on Ovid's exploition of] the differences between violent events and their ornate descriptions. Shakespeare's medium stages the difference between things and descriptions more sharply, for his audience has no escape from the spectacle of Lavinia's mutilated body ornamented by imagery and citations….Marcus's speech identifies…the violent poetics that separates decorative signifiers from their gory referents. (*Shakespeare's Troy* 62, 64)

Thus, while James is critical of Marcus's speech, she believes that critical nature is indeed invited by – perhaps even begged for by – the text itself; she argues that the text both interrogates the blazon *as* rape and grafts together Rome's history of imperialism with its narratives of rape. Andrew McConnell Stott takes a similar approach to James, again reading the conflict of the poetry's signified and its work as a signifier as deliberately flawed:

> Marcus' blazoning of Lavinia…constitutes an important pivot in the visual thematics of the play as it shows the world of quotidian sight having reached the

> point of its unraveling, thereby heralding a systematic erosion of the surface in which conventional modes of address are no longer equal to the things they describe. (82-83)

The purpose of the blazon, according to Stott, is to show that we have reached a point where language has indeed failed. But, I would ask, why would Shakespeare still choose the blazon over the other forms of address that would similarly fail? Would not Senecan philosophy be as ineffective at this point in the narrative?

Whereas James sees the language (though not Shakespeare) as violent and Stott argues it is intentionally inadequate, I wonder if we can even recuperate the blazon – even Marcus's blazon – itself. Undoubtedly, the events of the tragedy may interrogate the language of the blazon, but can – and should – we *only* read one way? How might the Lavinia blazon ensure that she is not a mere revisiting of the Philomela myth? The utilization of the blazon at a moment of rape may indeed critique the language of that poetic form as James compellingly argues; however, it *also* might introduce a second critique, one that applies to the Senecan/Ovidian narrative. This modern form intrudes into a script marked by quotation of classics, and thus it brings a more personal, differently minded form of address into the tragedy.

One result of this collision of quotation and modern form is that the play has stumped critics who seek to credit a classical author as inspiration. Charles and Michelle Martindale claim "neither the language nor the dramaturgy of *Titus* owe much to Seneca" (47) and Jonathan Bate in *Shakespeare and Ovid* dismisses "the odd tag from Seneca [as quite possibly] derived at second hand" (103). Meanwhile, Robert Miola in both his essay "Rome and the Family" and his book *Shakespeare and Classical Tragedy* argues for

Shakespeare's debt to not only Thyestes, but also *Phaedra* and *Troades*. A.J. Boyle cites *Titus*'s linguistic debt, along with a moral and philosophical one, to Seneca's universe (186).[60] Even Bate changes his mind by his introduction to The Arden Shakespeare edition, writing that "'Senecanism' in a broader sense is key to the rhetoric of the drama'" ("Introduction" 29). Investigations are not so quick to immediately credit Ovid either, despite the multiple explicit citations of his work. The Martindales continue, "most of the writing in the play is classical in a generalized way, without owing anything directly to particular Latin writers…*Titus* contains more eloquent writing than is usually recognized, but it is seldom nuanced or detached in the Ovidian way" (48). Even Bate concedes that *Titus* is not fully indebted to Ovid, noting that a "good imitator is eclectic to the point of promiscuity, which is why *Titus* invokes Hecuba, Lucrece, Livy's Virginius, Coriolanus, Dido and Aeneas, and a host of other exempla" (*Shakespeare and Ovid* 105). I would argue that this simultaneous ability and inability to find Senecan traits, as well as a desire to both credit and discredit Ovid's influence, only points to how mongrel the nature of this text is. It provides the reader traces of both Ovid and Seneca, but wraps them in a language that invites a citational study yet confounds it at the same time. As we will see, the collision of the Petrarchan memorialization into the brutality of the other texts marks *Titus* as distinct from any of its predecessors, and indeed may be one of the reasons critics have such a hard time ascertaining Shakespeare's direct inspirations.

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[60] For example, Boyle discusses Shakespeare's use of both *Phaedra* and one of Seneca's letters to preface Lavinia's rape and to express Titus's pain on discovering the culprits as a "double allusion [that] not only conveys the cosmic dimension of Titus' outrage within a Sencanesque world of cosmic neglect of human suffering, but anticipates the inner strength, the steely indifference to pain and calamity, that will be the hallmark of Titus' response" (145). However, we have and will continue to see how Titus's response may not be so "steely indifferent," but in fact, rather full of the emotion of a poet who has lost his love.

Memorialization in the form of fetishism (as seen in Petrarch's poetry) may be a type of brutalization, but here brutalization leads to another kind of memorialization. The characters who experience violence are commemorated through pitiful, artful poetry. The language shifts from merely the Senecan, in which "the hero…undergoes an explosion of passion ('furor') which elicits on the one hand grief and lamentation, and on the other consolation in the wisdom of stoic philosophy" ("Introduction" 30) and instead remains in the moment of lamentation. Shakespeare's language emphasizes a suffering that may not allow the character recourse in a larger philosophy. Rather than being universalized, their suffering in particular is personalized as the speakers endeavor to emphasize how much *has* been lost. Thomas Rist notes, "in its earlier presentations, one of the recurring features of revenge tragedy is the emphatic value it attaches to extensive funerary performance, the genre thus defying the reductions of that performance by the Reformers as, indeed, their counter-valuation of its ritual as idolatry" (17). Rist argues that revenge tragedy thus centers around how to memorialize someone and how they live on, more honored and more beloved, *despite* being physically destroyed. The blazon here works in a way similar to that of a tomb, or even to the eventual revenge itself which stands in for the proper funerary rites (Rist 36). I have already shown how the play refutes tragedy's main didactic purpose – instead of a sorrow that teaches the mighty pity, it unites the low. However, it may also though find consolation in a smaller way. The blazon-elegy replaces the solace of tragedy, the tomb; however, like a tomb, it provides a consolation that stretches far shorter yet individually far deeper than the larger claims of philosophy which Bate characterizes as the turn of Senecan tragedy. The blazon-eulogy Marcus

delivers characterizes and individualizes Lavinia just as much as it may aestheticize her suffering.

And indeed, the blazon-eulogy does mark a significant departure from similar scenes of Ovid or Seneca. Ovid's scene manages to "undercut, distance or complicate, from time to time, the reader's response, and puzzle us about the episode's tone" (Martindale 49). For instance, "Ovid's polished description of the severed tongue of Philomela quivering on the ground, and in particular the unexpectednesss but exactitude of the simile used to describe it, creates a certain aesthetic detachment, even pleasure, which coexists with the horror" (Martindale 49-50). Ovid writes:

> [Philomela's] tongue was still voicing her sense of outrage and crying her father's
> name, still struggling to speak, when Tereus gripped it in pincers
> and hacked it out with his sword. As its roots in the throat gave a flicker
> the rest of it muttered and twitched where it dropped on the blood-black earth;
> and like the quivering tail of an adder that's chopped in half,
> it wriggled and writhed its way to the front of its mistress' feet.
> Even after this crime, though the story is scarcely believable
> Tereus debaunched that bleeding body again and again. (VI.555-562)

Philomela's own pain and loss disappear at this moment as the tongue becomes its own separate entity, ostensibly suffering in a way distinct from Philomela's. Ovid's description works not so much to commemorate all that Philomela once was as actively turn to parts for the sake of the whole. Ovid never provides a proper mourning for Philomela herself. When next she appears, a year has passed and the narration is more concerned with her inability to escape than her pain of mutilation. Instead, the scene here

ends not with any emotional note, but a piece of grotesque sexuality that turns the focus once more back on the blood than on the bleeding woman (and also is undercut by Ovid's aside of dubious credibility).

Similarly, Seneca's description of Atreus's mutilation of Thyestes's sons works not to enter their defining traits into eternity, but rather to transform them from humans into pieces of flesh. In his popular Elizabethan translation of *Thyestes*, Jasper Heywood describes the scenes as follows:

> From bosoms yet alive outdrawn the trembling bowels shake,
> The veins yet breathe, the fearful heart doth yet pant and quake…
> …and [Atreus] straight asunder cuts
> The bodies into quarters all; and by the stumps anon
> The shoulders wide, and brawns of arms he strikes off everichone.
> He lays abroad their naked limbs and cuts away the bones;
> The only heads he keeps, and hands to him committed ones.
> Some of the guts are broach'd, and in the fires that burn full slow
> They drop; the boiling liquor some doth tumble to and fro
> In mourning cauldron. From the flesh that overstands aloft
> The fire doth fly and scatter out, and, into the chimney oft
> Upheap'd again and there constrained by force to tarry yet,
> Unwilling burns. The liver makes great noise upon the spit.
> Not eas'ly wot I if the flesh or flames they be that cry,
> But cry they do. (IV.133-150)

The narrator – similar to Ovid with Philomela's tongue – transfers the personification in this passage onto the body parts. The veins and heart are those which breathe, pant, and quake instead of the children themselves. Seneca's transferred epithet thus again creates a scenario where the formerly intact body is never invoked. The separate body parts phantasmically emit the cries that the children never will. However, whereas Marcus's own passage will focus on the various parts of Lavinia's body, he never loses sight of their overall relation to his niece. Unlike Ovid's or Seneca's descriptions, Marcus's marks out the separate pieces in an endeavor to reconstruct a whole.

Thus while there might be something unnerving to the modern day audience about Marcus's praise of Lavinia's hands as he sees the stumps, there are greater ends achieved than simply linguistic discomfort. Let us reexamine some of the oft-critiqued lines:

> …what stern ungentle hands
> Hath lopped and hewed and made thy body bare
> Of her two branches, those sweet ornaments
> Whose circling shadows kings have sought to sleep in
> And might not gain so great a happiness
> As half thy love. (II.iii.16-21)

Marcus's blazon does not cover up the rape, as Howard argues. In fact, his first words recreate the mutilation in two ways. Not only does he acknowledge the mutilation's acts and repeat them, but he also has them recommitted by a severed pair of hands, their owner unknown and unseen. However, he does shift soon to sweeter words, and those words become an everlasting commemoration of the greatest traits of Lavinia, a eulogy

for the intact Lavinia that once was.[61] Her lost complete body enters the space of memory, returning in the only (and indisputably inferior) way that it ever can. Unlike the typical Petrarchan narrator, Marcus does not achieve aesthetic immortality through his poem – Lavinia, however, does. Through the high praise of her hands, Marcus identifies that his horror and sorrow come not from the mutilation of *a* female form, but from the mutilation of *this* particular one. The very loss of Lavinia's hands creates a space wherein he attempts to argue as their unique importance.

He achieves similar ends with his poetic language around her tongue:

Fair Philomela, why she but lost her tongue,
And in a tedious sampler sewed her mind;
Bu, lovely niece, that mean is cut from thee.
A craftier Tereus, cousin, hast thou met,
And he hath cut those pretty fingers off,
That could have better sewed than Philomel.
O, had the monster seen those lily hands
Tremble like aspen leaves upon a lute
And make the silken strings delight to kiss them,
He would not then have touched them for his life.
Or had he heard the heavenly harmony
Which that sweet tongue hath made,
He would have dropped his knife and fell asleep,

[61] Admittedly, this speech can still come off as inappropriately reminding Lavinia herself of what she has just lost (as she's standing there bleeding in front of him). Ultimately, as we have seen and will see for the rest of the chapter, these moments in *Titus* endeavor to imagine other purposes for poetry, but too show them as always-already tainted with reality. Poetry is a means of attempting to cope with reality, but those attempts are often compromised by such events.

As Cerberus at the Thracian poet's feet. (II.iii.38-51)

Multiple feminist writers have critiqued this speech as simply subsuming Lavinia's suffering into prior narratives. Kim Solga writes, "Marcus points her body toward literature, calling her Philomel as he attempts to fill the uncanny gap her bleeding body makes with the speech she cannot provide" (44). Robertson also notes that the Lavinia narrative is mainly a conflation of other narratives of rape (214-215) – for her, the main difference is not Lavinia's fate, but that, unlike Philomela, her Procne must be a man. Even Miola – more a classicist than a feminist early modernist – observes that Ovid's tale is used since his rape victim is the "archetypal expression of ravished innocence and suffering" ("*Titus Andronicus*: Rome and the Family" 210). However, the text itself – particularly Marcus's blazon – does not invite such easy equations and ciphers. While Aaron is quick to not simply compare Lavinia to Philomela but identify her as Philomela ("His Philomel *must* lose her tongue" (II.ii.43, emphasis mine)), Marcus's mentions of the myth refute the simple equation of Lavinia as Philomela (or Lucreca, or Virginia). While Chiron and Demetrius *are* Tereus both in the above passage and earlier in Marcus's speech ("But sure some Tereus hath deflowered thee" (II.iii.26)), Lavinia is notably juxtaposed *in opposition to* Philomela. Lavinia has suffered more and, when she was complete, could have outsewed Philomela. Marcus's blazon picks and chooses aspects from the Philomela myth, but as he attempts to personalize it to Lavinia, he complicates the reading of Lavinia's own personal trauma against any single cypher.

In fact, the final allusion of Marcus's speech diverges from the Philomela/Tereus myth altogether. He instead reads later in *The Metamorphoses* to the story of Orpheus and Eurydice. Furthermore, while the initial assumption would have Lavinia as Eurydice,

the lost woman who has no role but to be rescued (and indeed is doomed never to be), she instead occupies the position of Orpheus - though, like her comparison to Philomela, she never fully becomes him. She is not even denotatively Orpheus. Marcus's actual language only directly compares the "craftier Tereus" to "Cerberus at the Thracian poet's feet." The audience is left to assume that Lavinia is indeed "the Thracian poet": an oblique identifier that does not directly name Orpheus and indeed allows imaginative space for alternative interpretation.

Yet, this turn to Orpheus and Eurydice further complicates the poem by introducing *another* genre (or at least another type of narrative) to the blazon, which has already been superimposed onto the Senecan tragedy and Ovid's rape narrative. The genres stack upon each other in this scene – revenge tragedy turning to blazon turning to love tragedy. And through this turn, through conceiving of rape by blazon and blazon by lost love, Marcus's speech ultimately asks us to conceive of a rape that is not predestined. The precedent of the narratives of Lucrece or Philomela must forever constrain them; Aaron, when he says that Philomel-Lavinia "must lose her tongue," attempts to apply this predestination onto her. However, Marcus's speech denies that any of the rape or mutilation for Lavinia was inevitable. Furthermore, his speech argues that Lavinia's narrative cannot be so quickly grafted onto the story of Philomela (nor those of Lucrece or Virginia to which Lavinia's woe will be compared later). Instead his speech shows that the Philomela narrative has countless other possibilities. Even though Titus chooses to mimic Procne, the ultimate outcomes of the revenge are different. The rapists themselves are eaten rather than punished as Tamora is, Tamora dies before she can chase Titus as Tereus does to Procne and Philomela, and, while Titus kills Lavinia out of (what I will

argue) empathy, he never must face the torment of Procne's collateral damage.[62] While the rape might be the moment that truly shifts the play into the realm of Seneca or the darker moments of Ovid, we should note that the rape *does not* merely mean a recitation of those moments. The victim of the rape is *not* Philomela; equally importantly, she still remains *not* Philomela immediately following the rape. At this moment of invited comparison, Marcus's blazon continues to individualize Lavinia. A Philomela-esque rape does not cause the prior narrative to cease or be superseded.

Empathy's Death: The Failure of the New Tragedy

The play ends by finally taking these two aspects of the tragedy – the empathy-inducing expression/sight of woe and the personalization of suffering – as the primary motivator for *Titus Andronicus*'s catastrophe and resolution. Shakespeare tests his concepts of empathy to sometimes disastrous results, questioning the productiveness of empathy that was touted in Act III. Ultimately *Titus Andronicus* confirms that kings are not only incapable of empathy, but indeed are not even to be trusted with carrying out the edicts of sympathy. The personalization required for empathy undoes the universalization necessary for sympathy.

The tragedy first warns that empathy's power over the witness may be a type of *over-powering*. The same mimesis of emotion that empowered in Act III leads to catastrophe in the final scene. The dialogue between Titus and Saturninus about

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[62] Ovid describes Procne's conflict of emotions as she prepares to kill her son:

> While he kissed her and whispered, 'Oh darling mother, I love you so much!'
> Her natural feelings were stirred and her anger abated a moment;
> Her eyes were moist as she failed to control her unsettling emotions.
> But once she saw that maternal claims were making her purpose
> Waver, she turned away from her child to the face of her sister (VI.626-630)

Procne must remind herself not of Itys's own sins (as Titus invokes as he prepares to kill Chiron and Demetrius), but has to remember *who* she is really punishing ("Oh Procne, think who you're married to, then remember your father!" (VI.634)) to summon the will to kill her son.

Virginius's murder of his daughter feeds on the possibility that empathy is not an emotion to be embraced, but one rather to be ended:

> **Titus**: Was it well done of rash Virginius
>
> To slay his daughter with his own right hand,
>
> Because she was enforced, stained and deflowered?
>
> **Saturninus**: It was, Andronicus
>
> **Titus**: Your reason, mighty lord?
>
> **Saturninus**: Because the girl should not survive her shame,
>
> And by her presence still renew his sorrows.
>
> **Titus**: A reason mighty, strong, and effectual;
>
> A pattern, precedent, and lively warrant
>
> For me, most wretched, to perform the like.
>
> Die, die, Lavinia, and thy shame with thee,
>
> And with thy shame thy father's sorrow die. (V.iii.36-46)

The suffering Titus cites in Act III as his connection to Lavinia, his mimesis of her emotions, is not a sustainable-state. It should not be permanent, but instead must be acted out of. Empathy needs to be a transient state. And Titus's motivation is indeed empathy. While much of the thrust of Bott's and Robertson's articles is to show that this passage works as Titus's final assertion of his ownership of Lavinia as he rebrands *her* rape as *his* humiliation, Titus never owns the shame. He may imbue Lavinia with it, but he never affirms it himself. In fact, depending on the production, Lavinia's own shame may not even be superimposed but arise from the character herself as a result of rape's connotation in her society. What he does own is his sorrow. We might do better by the text therefore

to read his murder of Lavinia at face value, as the result of empathy that has gone too far.[63] Lucius too claims another's pain as motivation for murder as he kills Saturninus: "Can the son's eye behold his father bleed?/There's meed for meed, death for deadly deed" (V.iii.64-65). And while here sympathy (for I would hesitate to say that Lucius fully feels Titus's own pain) is linked to revolutionary action, it notably also synchs with the vindictive, eye-for-an-eye law that Saturninus cited in Act IV.

In fact, the play ultimately posits that none of the possible responses to tragedy are truly fruitful. The Roman Lord, upon viewing the corpses of Titus and the rest, says "Let Rome herself be bane unto herself [and] do shameful execution on herself!" (V.iii.72-75). The first response to tragedy is perhaps the most empathetic, as it proposes a direct mimesis between the viewer and the spectacle. Having witnessed the suffering onstage, Rome should *overidentify* with the characters to an extent that it would join them in death – unable to live without its reflected selves living anymore. Yet this kind of over-suffering – similar to that of Titus's for Lavinia – only results in destruction of both

[63] Pascale Aebischer in her study of violated Shakespearean women on stage, expresses great horror at "the sheer endorsement Titus receives from critics and performers alike for wresting [Lavinia] into another myth which prescribes her destruction…It is as if everybody were secretly relieved to be rid of the obscenity her mangled body forces on us, as if there existed a conspiracy to refigure murder as euthanasia or assisted suicide" (57). While I wish neither to express joy or relief at Lavinia's death, nor to endorse Titus, I do find it useful to consider how – misguided as it may be by present standards – Titus's act is fueled by empathy. The empathy may be wrong-headed and extreme, but I am arguing that that is exactly the point of this scene. Aebischer vocalizes similar disgust at how directors all strive to show a "tacit consent" by Lavinia for her death (58-60). While again, Aebischer has reason to abhor the idea that a rape victim would prefer death, there may be ways to complicate this reading without foregoing our feminist sensibilities. Howard, when picking up after Aebischer and discussing this same theatrical tradition, writes about one production of this scene that Lavinia "took charge of her death, though whether she did it from a sense of shame or from weariness with the agony of her disfigurements remained unclear. In either case, [BBC Director Jane] Howell's staging of Lavinia's death rescues her from the role of passive pawn in a male revenge plot, but her exercise of agency shows that she has interiorized the cultural imperative that as a raped woman, she must die" (7-8). Ultimately, Lavinia's consent in her death – and Titus's "mercy" killing – can work not so much to endorse the death of a rape victim, but instead to illustrate how much additional suffering is pushed on her by the society she lives in.

the sufferer and the self. It ends the suffering without creating a better world. Following this speech, Marcus[64] posits another possible response to woe and another potential outcome of too much empathy:

> My heart is not compact of flint nor steel
>
> Nor can I utter all our bitter grief
>
> But floods of tears will drown my oratory
>
> And break my utterance even in the time
>
> When it should move ye to attend me most,
>
> And *force* you to commiseration.
>
> Here's Rome's young captain: let him tell the tale
>
> While I stand by and weep to hear him speak.[65] (V.iii.87-94, emphasis mine)

The most sincere form of suffering – an inability to speak, induced by tears – is also a form of suffering that cannot produce action. The very woe that should move audiences needs to be reigned in, even if it could compel audiences to the point where their own autonomy in the matter is undone. They would be *forced* into empathy, but it would be an

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[64] Of course, some editions have Marcus's speech as a continuation of the Roman Lord. Either way this identity confusion can cut in my argument's favor. Either the confusion of Marcus's line *for* those of the Roman Lords shows how similar their perspectives are, or the Roman Lord, even after he tries to hand the spotlight over to Lucius, seems to need to clarify that perhaps listening to overindulgent suffering is perhaps not the best direction to take, as it is an argument which ultimately silences itself.

[65] Originally, the Roman Lord had said:

> When it should moue you to attend me most,
> Lending your kind commiseration
> Heere is a Captaine, let him tell the tale,
> Your hearts will throb and weepe to heare him speake.

Thus we see that the earlier version portray a slightly gentler empathy. It is not forced, merely lent. However, the attitude of the Roman Lord towards his own words versus that towards Lucius's foreshadows what I will argue is Lucius's return to sympathy over empathy. Whereas the Lord desires, but does not force, "commiseration," Lucius's mere speech (not his actual woe) ostensibly will force his entire audience's hearts into great suffering.

empathy similar to that of the Act III – a commiseration between those in the lower strata – an empathy that could only lead to destruction or silence.

Ultimately though, Lucius returns to sympathy, not empathy (for the emotion clearly works unilaterally). While he delivers a story full of sympathy-inducing devices, he himself is now in control of his emotions. He speaks of his "father's tears despised" (V.iii.100) and finally turns the object of sympathy to himself:

> Lastly myself, unkindly banished,
> The gates shut on me, and turned weeping out
> To beg relief among Rome's enemies,
> Who drowned their enmity in my true tears
> And opted their arms to embrace me as a friend.
> I am the turned-forth, be it known to you,
> That have preserved her welfare in my blood,
> And from her bosom took the enemy's point,
> Sheathing the steel in my adventurous body.
> Alas, you know I am no vaunter, I;
> My scars can witness, dumb although they are,
> That my report is just and full of truth. (V.iii.102-114)

Sympathy here becomes not only a means of obtaining the favor of those in power (as critics had argued), but as we soon learn, a means of *obtaining* political power. Immediately after this speech, Marcus is appointed emperor of Rome. Of this speech James astutely writes:

> [Marcus] suggests that if his tragic speech is to gain performative power, his audience must choose to respond sympathetically to his oratory, heightened as it is by the dire spectacle of corpses on the scene. Invoking the example of Aeneas's influence over Dido, Marcus and the other Romans imitate a paradigm of tragic performance and apt listening in order to rouse themselves. By entering into what is an essentially theatrical relation of audience to performer, the Romans also model their emerging political contract. Welcoming the coup, the lords give what Lucius would otherwise take: they consent to have commiseration forced out of them. ("Dido's Ear" 367)

As James observes, the sympathy in this final scene does not come from the ruler watching the spectacle; instead, the ruler (or very-soon-to-be-ruler) *is the spectacle.* Sympathy is not that which influences him, but a tool he employs to secure power. However, while James writes, "At the extremes of Shakespeare's imagination is an audience subjected to the revolutionary content of tragedy by means of sympathetic identification" ("Dido's Ear" 366), I would argue that Lucius's assumption of power is far less revolutionary. As the son of the properly elected emperor (we could consider Titus's abjuration of the crown the more revolutionary act that sets the play and Rome into tumult), he is the conservative choice.

Yet, what is particularly non-revolutionary about Lucius is that he ultimately does not create a new order. He is, in the end, another ruler unable to be ruled by, or even consider, sympathy. He tacitly denies Lavinia, one of the most pathetic characters, the commemoration Titus receives at the play's end (there are no suggestions that anyone kiss her corpse). Furthermore, and more importantly, his first decrees as emperor, and the

final decrees of the play, are *against* pity. He condemns Aaron to die of starvation and orders that "If anyone relieves or pities him/For the offence he dies" (V.iii.179-180). As for Tamora, the play ends on sentencing her to a pitiless end on account of her own pitilessness: "Her life was beastly and devoid of pity,/And being dead, let birds on her take pity" (V.iii.198-199). [66] While these characters may not necessarily deserve kind fates, we should note how much Lucius's demands of justice over sympathy once more replicate Saturninus's behavior in Act IV. Ultimately, we again have a ruler unable to position himself, if not outside of himself, at least outside of his direct family and allies. All he has just witnessed as audience does not make him fear to be a tyrant once he assumes power.

Conclusion

But is Lucius's newfound emperorship the only reason he disregards pity? Or does the exact new purpose which *Titus Andronicus* proposes for tragedy undo any larger use for it? *Titus Andronicus* establishes that the power of tragedy lies in individualism –

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[66] The earlier editions of Titus underscore this reciprocity over mercy further: "Her life was beastly and devoid of pitty,/And being so, shall haue *like want* of pitty" (emphasis mine). However what is lost is this more explicit eye-for-eye language is gained in the more later quote by a more graphic implication of Tamora's grisly fate – indeed possibly a better emphasis of Lucius's new Saturnine nature. The later editions also cut some extra lines which followed this sentence:

> See iustice done on Aron that damn'd Moore,
> By whom our heauie haps had their beginning:
> Then afterwards to order well the state,
> That like euents may nere it ruinate.

Ultimately, while this speech feels repetitive (possibly why it has since been relegated to the realm of footnotes), it does emphasize how much Lucius's succession creates a continuity between monarchs. Not only does he further emphasize punishment and justice, but also he shows that he has not learned anything regarding the fraught nature of vengeance in this play. Whereas the revenge cycle textually begins with Titus and Tamora (and in fact, most arguably with Titus's refusal of pity in the first act), Lucius's ultimately bunts that issue and instead establishes Aaron as the locus of causality. Pity, or lack thereof, and quests for justice/vengeance no longer are problematic to Lucius; he instead can dismiss the events of the tragedy as merely the machinations of a sadist.

however, as we have seen through Tamora's reading of Act I against Lavinia's, Saturninus's invocation of his brother's death in IV.iv, and in Lucius's replication of Saturninus's decree in the final scene, individualism directly opposes any form of the universal didacticism which critics wish tragedy to achieve. Tragedy's power may lie in a performative expression of personal grief and the specificity of those lost or maimed by the events of tragedy, but that power is limited. Commiseration among the low may spread to those close to the action at best, but it cannot reach the king, and its effects on those affected are dubious.[67] *Titus Andronicus*'s image of tragedy may allow for moments of unity and may create more fitting monuments, but it cannot ultimately reconcile its new tragedy with anything near the power that Sidney and others had imagined for the genre. For the critics invested their argument and the genre's force *in* the concept of generalization, of being able to swap in Philomela or Lucrece when narratively and thematically convenient, or for any audience member to imagine himself in the position of any character on stage. With the dismantling of this type of poetry and the erection of Shakespeare's substitute, poetry becomes a balm that only temporarily alleviates suffering via commiseration, rather than a force for change. Tragedy allows Lucius's family an outlet during Act III and the language to transform his sorrows into sovereignty and his father into a legend, but it cannot, as much as we might wish it to, instruct him to be a better ruler or be a pedagogue for pity when legal revenge is within his grasp. In the end, Lucius's words sentence not only Tamora, but the writings of

[67] Franklin Hildy posits that audiences chose their positions in the early modern English theater based upon how much they wanted their emotions to be affected. He writes that "the existence of the 'penny galleries' referred to by Middleton and others makes it clear that there was no strictly economic distinction between those who stood in the yard and those who occupied at least part of the galleries. So perhaps it is time to consider the possibility that a great many audience members selected their location in the theatre based not simply on what they could afford but on how that location influenced their appreciation of the event" (6).

Sidney, Horace, and others for even assuming tragedy could have the powers that they ascribe to it.

Chapter 2

Can You Ignore the Love Tonight?: *Hamlet* and its Comic Strain

In *Titus Andronicus,* characters tacitly use the tactics of Sidney and Horace, appealing to sympathy; however, their motivations ultimately stem from a reasoning of emotions, not aesthetics. Similarly, while the impositions of Petrarchan language – the blazon and the plaint of the lover – are moments of Shakespearean genre play, Shakespeare's characters do not consciously explore their engagement with aesthetics *as such*. *Hamlet* however – a play written roughly a decade later into Shakespeare's career and one typically seen as more psychologically and aesthetically sophisticated than his first revenge tragedy (as well as more self-consciously theatrical[68]) – portrays genre-savvy characters (particularly the figures of the court), who endeavor to shift the direction of the narrative and thus the genre itself.

Ironically given the genre's association with death and destruction, in the play's latter half, Shakespeare portrays the court to have an overwhelming desire to inhabit a tragedy. This desire seems at once surprising and apt: surprising because the desire of characters to embrace death is unexpected; apt because a generation of critics have drawn attention to the rebellious potential of tragedy, in contrast to the quiestist tendencies of comedy. Whereas comedy – particularly romantic comedy – has a long critical tradition

[68] Robert Schwartz touches upon a commonplace in popular interpretations of Hamlet: "Hamlet is largely a play about playing, a work often self-conscious of its own theatricality and of the essentially theatrical nature of human experience" (40). This reading of *Hamlet* is widespread, but by no means stale. Critics have complicated it, such as Martin Mueller, who writes that what marks *Hamlet* apart from its contemporaries is its self-consciousness not only of its own theatricality, but also of its literary pedigree. It becomes a play littered with citations of both its Elizabethan and its Greek ancestors (Mueller 22-23). Richard Halpern also has expanded on this commonplace, noting that the form of Hamlet often invades the content. *Hamlet*'s action constantly risks contamination or conflict with its self-conscious theatricality (Halpern 474).

of being the more sinister of the genres, the (sub)genre that supports the status quo/ruling ideologies,[69] tragedy has had the reputation of inhabiting a more radical ideology. This reputation is largely in part thanks to the John Dollimore's landmark *Radical Tragedy*. Dollimore, in his seminal monograph, writes how a wide range of tragedies work as "a critique of ideology, the demystification of political and power relations and the decentering of 'man'" (4). More paranoid readings of tragedies tend not to critique the tragic structure itself, but issues in the tragedy (in other words, the tragic nature of *The Revenger's Tragedy* is not as troubling as its misogyny nor is the narrative scaffold of *Othello* as problematic as its depictions of race). While Sidney saw tragedy's

[69] Comedies typically come under attack particularly for the marriage plot. Reparative readings of comedies often tend to focus more on the fluidity of identity. Alison Findlay sees the feminist potential in Shakespeare's comedies to come from the cross-dressing, wherein "heroines can radically destabilize conventional gender roles [since] masculine costumes offers a means to woo and express feelings of love like [men]" (106). In his introduction to *Radical Comedy in Early Modern England*, a book with a title that promises reparative readings abound, Rick Bowers explicitly writes of his disinterest in the "teleological and romantic plot lines" of "New comedy," instead focusing on "strongly defined comic performances that accentuate the absurd and irrational within the context of social possibility in England" (7).
Yet, marriage itself is often less smiled about upon by feminist critics. Michael Friedman writes that it symbolizes a woman's surrender of her "will toward self-determination" and condemns her to silence; a wife's "relinquishment of her most effective weapon against male domination, her voice, represents her capitulation to a procreative machine controlled by powerful men, including the husband to whom she surrenders herself and/or the Authority figure who approves of the match" (201). Catherine Bates excoriates marriage as "literary shorthand for the control of human sexuality by law" and likens it to an almost sci-fi-esque assimilation into a hive mind: "Since the couple is the basic building block of the social group, matrimony celebrates not only the union of one particular happy couple but, more importantly, the absorption of that couple into the larger group as a whole. Ultimately the individual is subordinate to the group." Marilyn Wilson notes that one should not confuse the strong women of Shakespeare as a support of strong women by Shakespeare. Rather, she reads the comic strain of the 1590s – particularly the narratives of marrying rich women – as wish-fulfillment for young middle-class men struggling at the time (14) and cautions reading Shakespeare's powerful women as empowering for women as so much as reflections of the power wishes of the men writing and playing them (23-24).
Even when the gender and sexuality is not the focus, the Shakespearean marriage is still suspect. Richard Levin critiques the "festive romantic" critical tradition by writing that in comedies, "success depends on such considerations as birth, wealth, good looks, intelligence, cunning, and on occasion the willingness to *forsake* ideals – not to *adhere* to them" (21). The marriages become more of a celebration of winners who are willing to sacrifice their morals for social gain and to exclude their enemies (21-28).

reconstructive potential in its ability to "maketh kings fear to be tyrants, and tyrants manifest their tyrannical humours" (27), modern criticism praises tragedy either for its ability to elucidate the cost of maintaining society (Liebler 7-8) or, enabled by the works of queer theorists such as Leo Bersani and Lee Edelman, for its embrace of the death drive.[70]

Yet, the tragedy portrayed by *Hamlet* is, despite tragedy's radical potential, quite conservative[71]. Edelman himself has written that Hamlet's need to "remember" his father and house his memory renders Hamlet into a "memorial, wherein the [father] attains to the presence of life" and thus feeds into "the fantasy [of immortality through the Child] which underwrites the *or*der of survival through reproductive futurism" ("Hamlet's Wounded Name" 100). Edelman further critiques that not only is Hamlet a defender of patriarchal order in the highest sense, but also "a soldier pledged to defend the sexual norm" (102). He ultimately concludes that Hamlet *is* let, i.e. "hindered" or "prevented." The normativity that guides and constrains Hamlet's world and our own causes us all

> to be let, constrained or prevented by the power that gives us permission to be, even while it incites, perversely our passion to constrain what appears as perverse…Hamlet is let and left in the knot of his name which he, though without children, must leave to the world he leaves behind, affirming a hetero-temporal

[70] One such example is Carla Freccero's reading of *Romeo and Juliet* as not queer for its "homoeroticism [nor] the substitutability of the objects of love" but for its refusal of "futurity and maturity to its youthful protagonists who…kill themselves and each other, again and again, in the name of a fantasy that wards off the meaninglessness of the void it harbors. In this way, *Romeo and Juliet* undoes and indicts, even as it constructs, the modern myth of romantic love" (303-304).

[71] Here I use the word divorced by its current political connotations and instead draw on Edelman's definition in which all of politics "remains, at its core, conservative insofar as it works to *affirm* a structure, to *authenticate* social order" (No Future 3)

> subjectivity so deeply in the debt to the dead that it needs to invent the future to pay off what is mortgaged to the past. (104)

The tragedy of *Hamlet* is nothing but a means to reify the ideals of the dead, prior generations. It imagines no new society, schema, or mores, but rather exterminates the future to uphold the past. Despite Edelman's investment in the death drive as queer (which I will explore soon) and the proliferation of bodies by the end of Shakespeare's tragedy, Edelman refuses to read the play *as* potentially radical. Rather, Hamlet's revenge and ensuing bloodbath is the ultimate fulfillment of reproductive futurity's promise: children exist to carry on their parents' missions. James Marino argues similarly in a paper delivered at the Huntington Library called "Ophelia's Desire." In his talk, he noted that Hamlet's revenge and ultimate death and Ophelia's madness and death – all of which gain prominence at the expense of any romance with Ophelia – work to ensure that the younger generation can never move past an obsession with the wants of the older generation. Rather than portray an Oedipal complex, wherein the son supplants the father, *Hamlet* posits more of a Kronos complex, wherein the father devours the son and makes the son's goals and identity subservient to his own.[72]

Both of these critics have incisively revealed the conservative nature of the tragic form how it applies to Hamlet's father, the once and rightful king, and – more importantly – possibly even unqueered the very death drive that Edelman was

[72] "Old Hamlet's Ghost does not explicitly desire that his family line be destroyed. He implicitly demands it. The dead king has two male heirs, his brother and his son. He sends the second to kill the first. And young Hamlet accepts this, as an obedient son. He renounces his future. Like Oedipus at the end of Sophocles's play, Hamlet accepts the judgment of the dead and relinquishes his own claims to kingship. The possibility that Hamlet might take the throne himself is never spoken of again; that option, the life path for which Hamlet was born, becomes something repressed, unthinkable and unspeakable." (Marino 16)

instrumental in queering. Where I wish to add to this investigation of tragedy's service to the status quo is to suggest that tragedy might not only benefit the Ghost's wishes, but might also be able to aid a corrupt court. Tragedy can maintain any status quo, even that which centers around a usurping tyrant. Much as Edelman argues that all of politics is conservative in so much that it never strays too far from a certain, fixed image of society (*No Future* 3), so does tragedy rarely surpass a similar image. At the end of the play, Denmark may be under new rule, but it is a rule and a system not too dissimilar from the former one. Tragedy's deaths and successions are all too similar to the endless line of kings and dead fathers of which Claudius speaks in Act I.ii (89-92). What I will argue in this chapter is that *Hamlet*'s imagining of a more radical possibility lies in a small, almost hidden strain of romantic comedy, which the court in the latter acts repeatedly tries to obscure, dismiss, or quash by genreing their story as tragic.

Be Prepared: A Brief Review of *Hamlet* and Genre Criticism

Despite being Shakespeare's (and renaissance drama's) most famous revenge tragedy, *Hamlet* enjoys a long critical history that has explored the other genres interpolated into its tragic narrative. It has been seen as the precursor to the detective story (Madelaine 11) and a descendant of Plautine comedy (Miola 81). Its simultaneous debt and contribution to comedy is well-worn critical territory. Prince Hamlet's own satirical, biting opinions on the court, Denmark, and life as a whole imply the influences of both the popular formal verse satire of the 1590s and the subsequent satirical plays of Marston and Jonson (Taylor 377-378). Linda Woodbridge argues that this use of satire is

not mongrel at all, but in fact the logical move for both revenge tragedy and the revenger himself. Satire, Woodbridge argues, is another way to "get back" at the court.[73]

My admiration for Woodbridge's argument, along with the abundance of writings on satire in *Hamlet,* is partially why I will be avoiding that particular type of genre mixing here. Furthermore, as I discuss in my introduction, I want to investigate the evolution of genre play in this period as a result of the banning of satires, not the evolution of satire itself. Commendable scholarship already has explored satire's shift from the written word to the stage. I endeavor to focus in particular on the later moments of the Ophelia subplot, which use aspects of romantic comedy to show the unnerving implications of tragedy's ability to revert any changes to "normalcy." What emerges in these later scenes are hints not only of the upheaval of societal and familial orders, but even of the preference of one type of mind over another.[74] Thus, rather than turning to satire as the play's dominant form of genre mixing, I turn instead to romantic comedy.

While not as thoroughly investigated as *Hamlet*'s satirical strain, this romantic plotline has been subject to critical investigation. Sarah Gates discusses its closeness to romantic tragedy in "Assembling the Ophelia Fragments: Gender, Genre, and Revenge in Hamlet." She writes that Ophelia "takes an ambiguously achieved revenge…but from within the form that is most appropriate to her gender, the courtly love tragedy [but] her love tragedy is truncated and distorted by the demands of [Hamlet's] revenge plot so that

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[73] "[The] assumption that comic moments in tragedy were unintentional, ineptly undermining tragic effect, ignores the modus operandi of satire…Asking whether two genres (satiric and tragic) clash in Hamlet's wise-cracking character, Donald Hendrick notes Renaissance interest in Diogenes and Aleander and proposes satirist truth-seekers as politically necessary. As satirist *and* revenger, Hamlet exposes truth, and insofar as satire *is* revenge, "Hamlet does not delay revenging because he is *never* not revenging" (71)." (Woodbridge 47)

[74] While I may not go so far as to say this reading fully delves into the realm of "disability studies" (such would require far more space than I have here), my reading at least imagines fruitful possibilities from the procreation of Ophelia and Hamlet's "madness."

she must enact her role alone" (230). Gates explores how Ophelia employs romantic tragedy towards an agenda, i.e. her revenge against Hamlet and her father. However, because Ophelia is a woman, she cannot enter the realm of revenge tragedy and thus may only utilize the tools available form romantic tragedy.[75] As both potential narratives are ultimately tragic, this reading does not explore the tension between Ophelia's and the "main" narrative. Rather, Gates's exploration focuses on these subgenres complementary nature. Romantic tragedy and revenge tragedy are the pink and blue versions of the same plot: ideologically similar tools for the disenfranchised to strike back with the gender-appropriate means.

While Susan Snyder locates most of *Hamlet*'s comedy in its satirical nature and word play (Snyder 91-136), she briefly engages with romantic comedy: "Polonius behaves as if he were in a comedy. Suspicious of his children, spying on Laertes and interfering in Ophelia's love affair, he casts himself first as the traditional obtrusive father" (108). Her overall point, though, is that Polonius, much like Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet*, must die because he is out of place in a tragedy; his death – like Mercutio's – sends the play hurtling towards tragedy. Marino's aforementioned paper centers on the Ophelia plot, but to the ends alluded to above. He did note though that Ophelia's plot is somewhat anomalous in Shakespeare's oeuvre in that she is the one daughter who listens to her father's wishes not to see a certain man:

> She is the only daughter in Shakespeare who does not attain the lover whom her father forbids. What is exceptional here is usually obscured by discussing Ophelia as if she were a real person, governed by the laws of history and plausibility. [But

[75] "In view of her treatment by this father, the working out of her fate in madness and equivocal death can be constructed not as a botched attempt but as a perfect act of revenge, devastating to lover and family but equally powerful as a memorializing of her love for them." (232)

> Ophelia] is not governed by the laws of nations or of nature, but by literary conventions. And the conventional result of Polonius's command in an Elizabethan or Jacobean playhouse should be Ophelia's imminent elopement. A stage father who forbids his daughter to see her lover is essentially reading the first of the banns of marriage. This rule is most obvious in comedy, but also clearly in force in tragedy – ask Baptista or Capulet – and no daughter, even in the comedies, has a father more comic than Ophelia's. (Marino 9-10)

Whereas *Romeo and Juliet* is a romantic comedy that turns into a tragedy halfway through, Marino portrays *Hamlet* as a romantic comedy that stops in Act I. Martha Tuck Rozett argues that while there are romantic comic elements in *Hamlet*, the isolated nature of Hamlet's character ultimately renders the play as purely tragic, whereas tragedies such as *Romeo and Juliet* and *Antony and Cleopatra* unite their protagonists in death in a pseudo-comic form (152-153).

In short, while there has been valuable criticism regarding *Hamlet*'s romantic nature, it typically remains focused on either the first half being a botched romantic comedy (similar to the rhetoric around *Romeo and Juliet*)[76] as we have seen above, or in the case of Gates, on the romantic plot's tragic nature. The possibility of a romantic comedic conclusion existing in the latter half of the play (i.e., after Hamlet murders Polonius) remains uninvestigated. Yet, I would argue that in the later Ophelia scenes

[76] "Shakespeare places Romeo and Juliet…in typically comic situations: [they] must overcome social and political obstacles to be united; both are surrounded by variations on comic character types who contribute to complications in the love plot; and [they] entangle themselves in tragic renditons of the pattern of misunderstanding and confusion leading to clarification and reunion so prevalent in Shakespeare's romantic comedies" (Rozzett 153)
"Critics have indeed always recognized the preponderance of comic materials in *Romeo and Juliet* though nearly all modern productions severly cut the carefully placed comic scenes in Act 4." (Knowles 70)

(including Hamlet and Laertes's confrontation at her grave), the play has not fully relinquished the possibility of the marriage-plot ending. What we see, however, is that whenever this possibility is broached, either by Hamlet or Ophelia, the other characters dismiss it. What this chapter will argue is that in this play, Shakespeare depicts characters who display a kind of *genre-awareness*. In this manner, my work is similar to Gates's, who sees Ophelia as compelled to use the language of romantic tragedy as the only tool available to women. However, I would argue that Gates's analysis is ultimately closer to that of my *Titus* chapter, wherein the characters may recognize the need for the language of a genre, but do not necessary see themselves as utilizing all of the literary and ideological powers of the genre itself. The characters in *Hamlet* are far more trope and genre-savvy than those of *Titus Andronicus*, and this savviness furthers the investigation of one of my project's central assumptions: *genres have power*. Genres can give power to those who oppose tyrants…but they also empower the king and his court. And, in the case of *Hamlet*, the tragedy promises the most comfortable resolution for those already in power. In the schema of tragedy, Hamlet may not be so much the purging force, but in fact he who must be purged. The hint of romantic comedy and even the possibility of procreation between Hamlet and Ophelia poses a threat to the state of Claudius's court and perhaps all of Denmark.

"He Lives in You": Claudius's Kingdom, Futurity, and the Queer Death Drive

The idea that a comic plot that would end in heterosexual coupling and reproduction could be an anti-authoritarian disruption of the status quo might seem to ignore the last twenty years of queer theory, as well as some of the most pertinent political theory of Shakespeare's time. After all, children allow society to perpetuate

itself. In his sixteenth-century treatise *On Sovereignty: Six Books of the Commonwealth*, French philosopher Jean Bodin writes:

> The law says that the people never dies, but that after the lapse of a hundred or even a thousand years it is still the same people. The presumption is that although all individuals alive at any one moment will be dead a century later, the people is immortal by succession of persons, as was Theseus' ship which lasted as long as pains were taken to repair it (49)

Society can persist as "the same people," regardless of the passage of time, because of procreation. Heterosexual coupling and its ensuing procreation not only maintains the existence of *a society*, but maintains *the very society* that procreates. Bodin's image seems to predict the asexual reproduction of an amoeba, copying itself perfectly and thus achieving a type of immorality.

Over four centuries later, queer theorist Lee Edelman picks up this idea, but critiques exactly what Bodin praises. Whereas Bodin sees the copying via heterosexual reproduction as a hopeful way to perpetuate his world, Edelman views this replication and the obsession with the Children who symbolize this method as a means of trapping any true change. He writes that politics

> transmit [social order] to the future in the form of its inner Child. The Child remains the perpetual horizon of every acknowledged politics, the fantasmic beneficiary of every political intervention…How could one take the *other* "side," when taking any side at all necessarily constrains one to take the side *of*, by virtue of taking a side *within*, a political order that returns to the Child as the image of the future it intends? (*No Future* 3)

To produce a Child therefore is to reproduce the status quo, a status quo that occasionally leans left or contains the trappings of a revolution, but which always returns to the firm, conservative stance, replicating what has come before. Dana Luciano unpacks Edelman further, arguing that the Child offered "temporal stability" and modeled private time into a cyclical model, always repeating itself generation after generation (283).

Stephen Guy-Bray notes a particular link between these theories of reproductive futurity and early modern English politics in his introduction to his book on the subject, *Against Reproduction:Where Renaissance Texts Come From.* He writes:

> reproduction in the English Renaissance was increasingly influenced by and indispensable to civil law as well…Over the course of the Renaissance in England, the reproductive and reproducing body became not merely a source of religious concern and control but a vital part of the economic and cultural life of the country. (10-11)

He attributes this concern, among other things, to a desire for social stability, as "to produce a child is to reproduce a particular vision of society" (15). In fact, this cycle which replicates endless copies of "a particular vision of society" sounds very much like the necessary corollary to the argument which Claudius attempts to sell Hamlet as he endeavors to persuade him out of mourning (I.ii.87-101). People die, but their children live to procreate and die, so that their offspring may do likewise. Families perpetuate and those families all become discernible microcosms of the well-functioning state.

This argument was common in Renaissance monarchical theory. Bodin parallels a well-run household with a well-run kingdom:

> [Family] is not only the true source and origin of the commonwealth, but also its principal constituent…I understand by domestic government the right ordering of family matters, together with the authority which the head of the family has over his dependents, and the obedience due form them to him…Thus the well-ordered family is a true image of the commonwealth, and domestic comparable with soverign authority. It follows that the household is the model of right order in the commonwealth. And just as the whole body enjoys health when every particular member performs its proper function, so all will be well with the commonwealth when families are properly regulated. (48)

Bodin asserts that both family and kingdoms only function with submission and "union under a sovereign ruler" (49). The kingdom works when everyone submits to the king *and* all families properly submit to the father. Ordered households are necessary for an ordered kingdom. Bodin's theories were clearly popular and influential, as King James would espouse a similar point of view in his *The Trew Law of Free Monarchies*, published in 1598:

> By the Law of Nature the King becomes a natural Father to all his Lieges at his Coronation: And as the Father of his fatherly duty is bound to care for the nourishing education, and vertuous gouernment of his children; euen so is the king bound to care for all his subiects. (65)

Neither Bodin nor James examine the consequences were a kingdom to consist of disobedient families (as seems to be the case in Denmark). They note that a well-functioning state resembles and consists of functioning families, but in *Hamlet*, the first family is in a state of disorder.

For, from his first appearance, Hamlet refuses to adhere to either the accepted structures of society or the natural order. He defies the natural law, the hierarchies whereby father governs wife and children and king governs subjects and kingdom. He tacitly declines Claudius's invitation to accept him as a father, which – according to the theory just discussed – would double as a entreaty to accept him as king:

Claudius: …We pray you throw to earth
This unprevailing woe, and think of us
As of a father, for let the world take note
You are the most immediate to our throne,
And with no less nobility of love
Than that which dearest father bears his son
Do I impart toward you. For your intent
In going back to school in Wittenberg
It is most retrograde to our desire,
And we beseech you bend you to remain
Here in the cheer and comfort of our eye,
Our chiefest courtier, cousin, and our son.

Queen: Let not thy mother lose her prayers, Hamlet.
I pray thee stay with us, go not to Wittenberg.

Hamlet: I shall in all my best obey you madam. (I.ii.106-120)

While Hamlet does not directly rebut Claudius's request to think of him as a father, he never accepts it. Instead, he follows the request to remain in Denmark, but not *Claudius*'s request to do so; therefore, he does not necessarily heed Claudius's consideration for his

"cheer and comfort" nor does he take on the position that Claudius offers of "chiefest courtier, cousin, and…son." Instead his reply, "I shall in all my best obey you madam," is pointedly deferential to the mother and the queen (and even then, his "I'll try my hardest" reply typically does not end well in most familial confrontations), but not father and king.

Hamlet's potential disordered family – one that does not follow Bodin's or James's outline both in terms of filial and monarchal allegiance – and his potential threat of reproducing this disordered family with the mad Ophelia (who, too, is potentially both disobedient to the court and contrary to her father's wishes) is where *Hamlet's* radical potential lies. Tragedy, which cleans the play and Elsinore of Hamlet and Ophelia, thwarts this potential and maintains a clearer status quo. Whether that status quo is Claudius's reign or the reign of the filially obedient, properly masculine, and very sane Fortinbas is ultimately irrelevant. Hamlet may be his father's son as Edelman and Marino argue, but his behavior at the play's beginning (and later in the play when his madness is more prominent) equally argues that he is not merely another son in a long line of sons. He is a chaotic agent. And his potential reproduction with the equally-chaotic Ophelia is where I will center my argument for the radical potential of *Hamlet*'s averted comedy – the very radical potential that conservative and purgative tragedy will thwart by preventing such reproduction.

For while queer theorists such as Edelman and Guy-Bray argue that reproduction is always-already conservative (using Edelman's definition of the word), Renaissance gender theory has explored the potential for pregnancy to be queer or radical as well. Judith Haber, for example, argues that John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* challenges the orthodoxy of reproductive sexuality and the erotics of patriarchy, using the Duchess's

Duchess's pregnancy to create ideologies and narratives outside the accepted societal boundaries (73). Thus, Haber outlines a pregnancy-centric feminine discourse that *is* threatening to the status quo. Through the Duchess and her pregnancy, Webster manages "to construct a subjectivity that is specifically female, to reimagine speech, sexuality and space…in 'feminine' terms" (Haber 72-73) and "makes painfully clear the illusion of male purity, wholeness and unity depends upon a violent appropriation of the female body" (Haber 74). Procreation *can* be conservative, but only when the procreation is a mere replication. The Duchess's fertility is so threatening because it centers on the female body, and thus promises a more feminine society in its wake.[77] Procreation is not *de facto* conservative; quite the opposite, what the procreation promises to create contains the heart of its politics.

While *Hamlet* does not conceive of pregnancy (no pun intended) in the same way as Webster's work, its comedic anarchy partially lies in Ophelia's potential pregnancy. After all, the coupling of Hamlet and Ophelia throughout the play is notably fertile. Polonius's initial fears notably revolve around Ophelia becoming pregnant ("Tender yourself more dearly/Or…you'll tender me a fool (I.iii.106-108)). Hamlet warns Polonius about Ophelia's propensity to conceive (II.ii.181-182) and, in his "break-up scene" with Ophelia, curses her with chastity (III.i.135). In short, Ophelia and Hamlet's relationship is, even for Shakespeare, a relationship particularly centered around sex and procreation. If Hamlet and Ophelia were to receive their happy ending, it would necessarily include consummation and children. Shakespeare never allows the audience to forget that fact.[78]

[77] Haber has a particularly beautiful reading of the Duchess's imagined feminine world in her third act soliloquy, wherein all regal power is put to the use of feminine sport (75-79).
[78] This aspect of the Ophelia-Hamlet relationship might also explain why, as an educator, I have found both high schoolers and younger college students confused with the Ophelia subplot of

Even at Ophelia's grave, Gertrude reminds us of her son's potential copulation with the girl.[79]

As I said, Bodin's and King James's theories of families and the state rely on well-run families. They do not explore the consequences of the heir apparent being a melancholic malcontent. More importantly, Bodin's theory of society's perpetuation (as well as those of Edelman, Guy-Bray, and Luciano) relies on the theory that the society, which consistently sees and replicates itself in The Child is a well-ordered, structured one. What the averted romantic ending of *Hamlet* posits, however, is a situation wherein a mad king would marry a mad love and the ensuing replication would be one of madness – a madness that may be the revolutionary answer that escapes the conservative repetition that so many thinkers, from Bodin to Edelman, believe procreation necessitates.

The Circle of Madness: Hamlet and Ophelia's Anarchic Futurity

Thus, the court's feeling towards Hamlet's coupling with Ophelia looks very different in Act III than it does after Hamlet's murder of Polonius. Shortly before the "get thee to a nunnery" exchange, Gertrude and the others imagine that Hamlet's coupling with Ophelia would not lead to the procreation of madness, but rather would correct Hamlet. The view of comedy's potential here is more in line with the type of comedy that C.L. Barber outlines in his landmark monograph, *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy*: a comedy that gives shape and voice to natural, chaotic voices, and in giving shape, provides form and limits as well (6-15; 36-51). Comedy does allow "customary license to

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Hamlet. The average high school's puritanical requirements regarding sex in the curriculum often result in a subplot with nonsensical speeches and cloudy motivations.

[79] "I hoped thou shouldst have been my Hamlet's wife:
I thought thy bride-bed to have decked, sweet maid,
And not have strewed thy grave." (V.i.233-235)

flout and fleer at what other days commanded respect," but the "humor…puts holiday in perspective with life as a whole" (Barber 7-8). He writes, "the release of that one day was understood to be a temporary license, a 'misrule' which implied rule, so that the acceptance of nature was qualified. Holiday affirmations in praise of folly were limited by the underlying assumption that the natural in man is only one part of him, the part that will fade" (10). Hamlet as mere melancholic lover can be easily corrected and integrated into the existing social order.

Hamlet just needs to get the girl and the play will end happily ever after. Gertrude vocalizes this desire for a one-step happy ending:

> **Gertrude**: And for your part, Ophelia, I do wish
> That your good beauties be the happy cause
> Of Hamlet's wildness. So shall I hope your virtues
> Will bring him to his wonted way again,
> To both your honors
> **Ophelia**: Madam, I wish it may. (III.i.37-41)

Gertrude's solution to Hamlet's "wildness" recalls the blazon. While she does not go as far as Petrarch or Marcus, fetishizing the woman's body into various objects, she does break up Ophelia into "parts": beauties, virtues, and honors. They are aspects of Ophelia, but not Ophelia, as evidenced by the maid's own response that she wishes "it" may work. By accenting the itemizing nature of the blazon – i.e. by having Ophelia's own response to the list of virtues highlight how her role in the romance plot has reduced her into an object – Shakespeare shows how much the romantic plot becomes a tool. The "it" of Ophelia becomes indistinguishable from the "it" of the marriage plot: both operate as the

solution to a problem rather than an independent entity or a harmless object. In these characters' hands, the romantic comedy plot is indeed a plot of the other variety: a scheme. Ophelia and the comedic plot would redirect the play from one of tragedy's potential chaos and "wildness" to comedy's productive nature. Her solution provides the necessary form to Hamlet's chaos, the containable form that Barber outlines. Now Hamlet is nothing more than an easy problem with an easy solution (of course, resting on how easy Ophelia actually is).

The problem for the court arises when Hamlet does not remain a mild annoyance and a rude malcontent. Once he crosses an event horizon, the court's valence towards him must change. Hamlet's murder of Polonius and revelation of knowing Claudius's fratricide render him more than a foolish, melancholic lover. As Synder has remarked, Polonius's murder signifies the death of the out-of-place comedic moments. Additionally, Ophelia's remaining scenes eliminate the possibility of her being an easy solution. Her madness (and not of the cute lover variety) and Hamlet's own madness and murders transform the play irrevocably into tragedy. I will argue in the remainder of this chapter that many of the characters embrace this push towards tragedy. They need tragedy – even embrace it – because the tragic narrative is the only way to prevent the romantic comedic plot's revolutionary outcomes. Shakespeare portrays the court as either misreading or assigning definites to ambiguities to further aid the tragic narrative in the language of the court.

Tragedy does have its social benefits. In Liebler's concept of 'festive tragedy,' "Tragedy represents the consequences of perverting, inverting, or neglecting the ordering, containing properties of civic and social rituals, understood as required for the

preservation and functioning of a community" (9). Whereas comedy licenses disorder as a means of containing it and reinscribes the proper social norms via marriage (as was originally conceived for Ophelia), tragedy deals with uncontrollable ruptures to or questions of the status quo, ultimately addressing them by purging multiple characters, including the tragic hero. Liebler elaborates that the hero's "removal, or sacrifice, in turn reconfirms or reinscribes the community in the image it has chosen for itself, or more accurately, in the image chosen by its particularly surviving structures of authority" (16). Thus, tragedy would be the neater solution, i.e. once Hamlet is not fixable and instead requires purging, the court endeavors to ensure that all will read the ensuing narrative as a tragedy.

In a manner, the characters' behavior and antipathy to the comic strain in the final acts echoes and predicts part of Barber's own analysis of comedy's misrule potentially crossing genres and its anarchy tainting everyday life.[80] Thus, whereas in Act III, Gertrude (as well as Claudius and Polonius) hope Hamlet to be a Petrarchan-style lover (i.e. someone who is only mad because of his inability to have his love), by Act V in the graveyard, they rebut Hamlet's more obvious behavior as and language of such a lover:

Hamlet: I loved Ophelia – forty thousand brothers

Could not with all their quantity of love

[80] "In creating Falstaff, Shakespeare fused the clown's part with that of a festive celebrant, a Lord of Misrule, and worked out the saturnalian implications of both traditions more drastically and more complexly than anywhere else. If in the idyllic plays the humorous perspective can be described as looking past the reigning festive moment to the workaday world beyond, in *1 Henry IV*, the relation of comic and serious action can be described by saying that holiday is balanced against everyday and the doomsday of battle. The comedy expresses impulses and awareness inhibited by the urgency and decorum of political life, so that the comic and serious strains are contrapuntal, each conveying the ironies limiting the other. Then in *2 Henry IV* Shakespeare confronts the anarchic potentialities of misrule when it seeks to become not a holiday extravagance but an everyday racket." (Barber 13-14)

Make up my sum. What wilt thou do for her?

King: O, he is mad, Laertes.

Queen: For the love of God, forbear him.

Hamlet: 'Swounds, show me what thou'lt do.

Woul't weep, woul't fight, woul't fast, woul't tear thyself,

Woul't drink up easel, eat a crocodile?

I'll do't. Dost come here to whine

To outface me with leaping in her grave?...

…Nay, an thou'lt mouth,

I'll rant as well as thou.

Queen: This is mere madness,

And thus awhile the fit will work on him.

Anon, as patient as female dove

When that her golden couplets are disclosed,

His silence will sit drooping. (V.i.258-277)

Hamlet speaks with a sense of exaggeration that rivals any of his other brief forays in courtly love. These other, earlier moments are all undone by the context: Hamlet's mad appearance to Ophelia is more ghostlike than lover-like and, in the play, it immediately follows his oath to feign madness, while Imitaz Habib has argued that Hamlet's letters to Ophelia are possibly part of a larger "horrible practical joke" (23).[81] [82] Meanwhile,

[81] Ophelia enters describing the prince:

…pale as his shirt
And with a look so piteous in purport,
As if he had been loosed out of hell
To speak of horrors – he comes before me. (II.i.78-81)

Hamlet's speech in the graveyard is melodramatic but unrehearsed. Indeed, it goes against Hamlet's initial impulse to hide (V.i.211) and thus stands out as one of Hamlet's least rehearsed scenes in the play.

Furthermore, it is formally different from many of Hamlet's prior artificial, rehearsed "mad scenes." Whereas most are in prose (the postscript to his "Never Doubt I Love" poem, his conversation with Polonius, the "Get thee to a nunnery" scene), this one is in poetry.[83] It uses more contractions and, while both utilize anaphora, this speech repeats words with far greater and quicker frequency. In short, I would argue that this scene is the one time we see an unmediated "Hamlet as lover," the one time Hamlet fully transitions from "figure of revenge tragedy" to "unrequited lover." While the Ophelia subplot gestures to romance for the first three acts – particularly as a solution to the problems of the characters – this moment is the one in which Hamlet himself seems to at last embrace the possibility of romance – even if it may be romantic tragedy. What we will see is that this embrace of romance invites, at least momentarily, the possibility of a world of mixed-genres, and thus a world less-governed by rules, particularly the moral rules which critics assumed genres to purport.

Even though Polonius quickly concludes that Hamlet must be in love, the more literal reading would interpret Hamlet as a near-perfect copy of his father. He is a ghostly figure, escaped momentarily from damnation to convey the unspeakable crimes that have been committed.

[82] "Reading as a subversive strategy of manipulation shades off into misreading: we would like to read other and want them to misread us…Hamlet's poem is difficult to read because Hamlet, like Beatrice, does not wish to be understood satisfactorily, wishes to be misread. Patricia Fumerton has suggested that in Elizabethan cultural taste the little, privately circulated love poem with its curious mix of artifice and sentiment…is a representation of an impulse of self-revelation that is also implicitly an instinct of self-concealment, an invitation to a reading of the self that only yields a misreading of it (104-111)." (Habib 21)

[83] RSC actor and UK National Theater director Rob Clare argues that poetry in Shakespeare might imply a more – not less – natural manner of speaking. In a presentation delivered at University of Southern California, he advocated for "marking the line" – i.e. breathing and varying manners of speech not at punctuation but at line breaks – noting that it led to a more realistic style of speaking (and would explain why printers would spend the extra money to print in poetry and thus use more paper).

I would go so far as to argue that this moment of the play, when read individually, may allow for the possibility of not only romantic tragedy, but even romantic comedy. Even though Ophelia is ostensibly dead by this point in the play, we should remember that *Hamlet* postdates *Much Ado About Nothing* – a romantic comedy that uses the faked death of the heroine as a key plot point. Furthermore, Ophelia's death (much like Hermione's would be years later in *The Winter's Tale*) is offstage, only related to us Greek-tragedy-style by Gertrude. In other words, the reimagining of Hamlet as romantic lover at this moment might not only upset the cause-and-effect laws of genre, wherein murders and lawbreakers are punished, but even upset the law of tragedy which aligns with the law of nature, i.e., the dead stay dead.

At this moment of the play, despite the other characters' inclinations, *Hamlet* flirts with its potential for a romantic and comic ending. Yet, in response to Hamlet's potential as a lover and his promise to outdo anyone in love speeches and Petrarchan language of suffering, Gertrude and Claudius have one explanation: madness. Whereas before, Gertrude hoped that "Hamlet's wildness" had the "happy cause" of Ophelia's "good beauties," now when she is confronted with clearly motivated protestations (and the simple explicit statement of "I loved Ophelia") she does not view those through the same lens. Madness becomes not that which needs to be explained, but the explanation itself. It is no longer in comedy's domain as the chaotic which must be rectified; rather, it is tragedy's disturbance to the peace, which must be purged by any means necessary.[84]

[84] Hallett and Hallett argue that madness is "the central motif" of revenge tragedy, binding everything else together, for "the whole structure of the revenge tragedy can be understood in terms of the revenger's efforts to free himself from the restraints that forbid the act of vengeance, a process that involves moving from sanity to madness" (9).

Thus, Gertrude's dismissal of Hamlet's Petrarchan rambling as "*mere* madness" invalidates any hint of love, while simultaneously rewriting Hamlet's displays as properly in the purview of tragedy. In Gertrude's words, Hamlet's feelings of love are artificial and temporary. They are nothing real or lasting, but the "couplets" of Venus (the "female dove"), namely fancy love poetry with little substance. She gives his taunts and threats to Laertes no gravity of feeling, but rather dismisses them as symptoms of his madness. His love is not sincere, but another role he takes on in his addled state. Any hints of actual romance are symptoms of the revenger's madness and will pass soon, returning him to silence. Gertrude's interpretation of Hamlet's Petrarchan moment is one of citation. Thus, she transforms him into the mirror of the dead and mad Ophelia, who similarly (allegedly) spoke nothing substantial before meeting her own eventual silence. What we see in this scene is that the court – and Gertrude in particular – actively assign no meaning to Hamlet's words, which even on their surface-level *have* meaning. Because Hamlet has shifted in their estimation from mad lover to murdering mad man, any hints of love need to be reinscribed as acts of the merely mad. It is more comfortable to assume that characters are more flat, contained within a single genre. The revenger with a great love (who is not the motivator for his revenge) has a more troubling story: his swift death and cleansing become less comfortable (since a human being, not a cypher, is dying) and the moral of the story becomes equally fraught for the same reasons.

In fact, we see this reaction even earlier in Ophelia's own madness scene. The scene itself is an ambiguous one (unlike Hamlet's in the graveyard), but what's remarkable is how the characters actively disregard any ambiguity and over-read the scene to have a single, definitive meaning. When the characters see Ophelia driven mad,

they avoid any assumptions involving a love with Hamlet. Whereas the Gentleman/Horatio[85] first diagnoses Ophelia, saying "she speaks much of her father" (IV.v.4),[86] Claudius laments, "O, this is the poison of deep grief it springs/All from her father's death" (IV.v.75-76). The key word in this assumption is "all." The speaking "much of her father" (which I will interrogate soon) transforms into speaking *only* of her father. Similar to the graveyard scene, they avoid any hints of romantic comedy and marriage in order to keep the genre and morals behind their choices simple. The simplified genre of tragedy creates a narrative that becomes more comfortable for the status quo and avoids the potential madness that Hamlet's bloodline and regime would promise.

The court leans instead towards the explanation that most leads to a cleansing and thus assumes the most tragic outcome: Ophelia's sadness and her madness are driven primarily by her father's demise and therefore by the loss of someone who can never be

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[85] The Second Quarto (1604/1605) and the First Folio (1623) both have that line, but the earlier version gives it to the gentleman, whereas the latter one gives it to Horatio. It appears that since then it has been a game of editor's choice to see who gets to speak such a covertly important line. Perhaps Heminges and Condell noticed the uncertainty that came with the Gentleman delivering the diagnosis. The change to Horatio may have, in fact, been a decision made post-Shakespeare that would give the audience more reason to believe that Ophelia actually does speak much of her father. Whereas the original text had the words in the mouth of someone who may be a sycophantic courtier, Heminges and Condell's edition transfers them to arguably the most trustworthy figure of the play. Of course, this need to change the speaker may point ultimately towards how doubtful the line initially seemed.

[86] One critic, John Draper, even uses this line as an indicator that *Hamlet* greatly diverges from its source material in this aspect:

> In the *Bestrafte Brudermord*, the love of her "sweetheart" Hamlet unbalances her mind; but, in this respect, Shakespeare seems to have changed his source; and in the first quarto and the later texts, she goes mad from grief at Polonius' death: she "speaks much of her father," and hardly refers to the abortive love affair with Hamlet. (57)

Draper, like Rist, uses the sentence-with-two-speakers as his sole proof for the cause of the grief. He perhaps even assumes too much, giving Shakespeare credit for changing a plot point that he actually left quite in tact. Again, we see that the investment in this singular line is able to counteract the possibility of continuity between sources.

regained. Indeed, their reading of this scene has become what many critics assume to be the simple fact of the scene. For example:

> Polonius's death has consequences almost immediately in the madness and death of Ophelia, another example of the chaos wrought when *passion* is let loose. She, too, falls prey to excess. (Hallett and Hallett 210, emphasis mine)
>
> Ophelia is preoccupied not only with her dead father, but also with her own burdensome virginity. (Charney 200)
>
> Un-calmness also characterizes Ophelia's remembrance of Polonius. Horatio observes that in her madness she 'speaks much of her father' (IV.v.4) and repeatedly her inconsistent talk focuses on his funeral. One song particularly emphasizes its enacted 'hugger mugger': 'At his head a grass-green turf, / At his heels a stone' (IV.v.31-2) reverses the 'correct' order of burial…suggesting – in the manner of preceding revenge tragedies – that the 'reversal' of her mind derives from the 'reversal' of his burial rite. (Rist 200)

None of these critics are "wrong," per se. After all, as I have said, Ophelia's motivations in this scene are obfuscated by her madness and her choice of emoting via citation. Thus, the interpretation of Polonius's death as motivation has merit and cause. But what these critics ignore is the ambiguity; the presence of one motivation's merits does not make it the sole motivation. Hallett and Hallett, for instance, ignore the very passion of Ophelia that they invoke. Charney notices Ophelia's talk of something relating to sexuality, but his use of "her virginity" points towards something that is ultimately solitary, personal, and existent only through a lack of sex, i.e., certainly not Hamlet. Meanwhile, Rist's account is probably the most telling of the three. His supposition relies on *Hamlet* being a

revenge tragedy; as such, it must place itself comfortably in the canon of revenge tragedy, armed and decorated with the tropes and themes of burial. Ophelia's madness must descend from Polonius's death in order for *Hamlet* to be a revenge tragedy.[87] But perhaps *Hamlet* also must *be* a revenge tragedy in order for Ophelia's madness to descend from Polonius's death (or more specifically, the improper nature of his burial).

These circular proofs rest too firmly on one another and I question what would happen if they were unsettled, i.e. if ambiguity is allowed to reenter the conversation. To accomplish this end, I will lean more heavily on the possibility that her loss or love of Hamlet may be the cause of her madness. I do so not to advocate that such should supplant the former as the definitive reason, but rather to see what both the characters, and perhaps even the critics, may be attempting to suppress by ignoring this possibility.[88] Notably all three cited critics base their conclusions on other characters' words, not Ophelia's. In her first scene of madness (the first part of Act IV, scene v), Ophelia never directly mentions her father. Rist describes her words as "inconsistent," the Gentleman/Horatio says "Her speech is nothing" (IV.v.7), and Laertes says of her words: "This nothing's more than matter" (IV.v.168); yet, multiple parties derive meaning from her words to assert that she is distressed singularly over her father's death. Aside from the

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[87] Oddly, earlier in their book, Hallett and Hallett note that Ophelia is the supreme example of

> the softly feminine characters, unable to bear the tyranny of violence, [who] sometimes function as mirror or 'reflectors'…of the revenger; they reveal an aspect of *his* madness which it is inconvenient to make otherwise explicit. They invoke sympathy, or pathos rather than moral indignation, and our response to them spills over onto the revenger, for he, too, suffers as they do (Hallett and Hallett 58).

Yet, they refuse to chase this point to the possible conclusion that Ophelia's reflection of Hamlet's madness might indeed imply some causal, or perhaps even romantic, link.

[88] Granted, my focus here will be more on the characters' attempts than the critics'. Whereas the latter are all obviously autonomous individuals who may not be conscious of their suppressing, the former are fictional characters created by the author who has also created the ambiguity itself. Thus, their attempts at suppression of the narrative ambiguity are far more pointed than any second party's.

aforementioned two lines ("she speaks much of her father" and "it springs/All from her father's death"), Laertes links the mortality of "a young maid's wits" to "a poor man's life" (IV.v.158-159) and Claudius insists everything is "Conceit upon her father" (IV.v.45). Again, while I would not be so bold as to argue that Ophelia's madness may not stem from Polonius's murder, I would like to posit that such a cause may not stand so monolithically. Why, in a play about lying and deception, about trickery and illusions, about how you can never really know what generates an antic disposition, are so many critics so willing to take the diagnoses of both a character so ungrounded that his very identity flip-flops between editions and of a murderous, incestuous, usurping tyrant?

After all, the abortive love affair with Hamlet haunts the scene *as much* as the dead Polonius. To ascribe solely to either reading would force an attachment of meaning and logical connections to the words of a madwoman, while simultaneously disregarding others. Indeed, some critics rightfully have called attention to the lack of an absolute readability of Ophelia. In one of the most recent and compelling articles, "The Mediation of Poesie: Ophelia's Orphic Song," Scott Trudell writes that Ophelia's position as poet – particularly a divinely-inspired, Orpheus-like poet – allows her a spot of authority as a counter-commentary to the events of *Hamlet* and the character of Hamlet. Her mad words allow her a position from which she can say and mean both two things at once and nothing at all:

> The convergence of sex and death in Ophelia's wild orchids – whether they are called "dead men's fingers" or the shepherds' obscene, unnamable alternative – may imply the sorrowful lament of an abandoned lover, the excessive melancholy of a sex-crazed madwoman, recrimination against the cruel Danish prince, or

> perhaps a broader condemnation of the patriarchal system that cast her aside. There is no way of knowing for sure; the "fantastic" imaginative possibilities of Ophelia's garlands remain enigmatic, keeping her would-be interpreters guessing and helping to inspire innumerable evocations and responses… Her songs about deflowering and death [echo] the confluence…between Orpheus's lovesick, enthralling music and the sexualized violence that is its culmination. (Trudell 59, 66)

Thus Ophelia can speak of a longing for Hamlet and a mourning for either her lost virginity or her lost father simultaneously. Sexual desire, sexual violence, and even violence done by the former lover all conflate in her unreadable language. All are possible interpretations and yet none are definitive interpretations.

Caralyn Bialo, in her article, "Popular Performance, the Broadside Ballad, and Ophelia's Madness," similarly troubles the court's and other critics' assumptions with an interpretation of Ophelia's words as intentionally obtuse. She writes:

> When Claudius conjectures that her songs are "conceit upon her father," she interjects: "Pray you let's have no words of this. But when they ask you what it means, say you this," and she launches into another song (IV.v.44 and 45–6). Ophelia interrupts Claudius's attempted exposition with a song, demonstrating that, in this moment, she exists outside of the representational form that *Hamlet* has identified as elite. Her madness cannot be rhetorically encapsulated; it must be performed and witnessed. (297-298)

Yet Bialo does argue that the ballads work towards a purpose: to counteract the common reading that Ophelia, when she does think about Hamlet, regrets succumbing to his

desires. Thus Ophelia's songs may go as far as to refute Polonius's advice. When read in their historical context, these ballads celebrate deviations from chastity. Bialo notes that the song "He is dead and gone, lady" is less "a reference to her father [and in fact] closer in tone to mournful love ballads" (301). Furthermore, Bialo reveals that the refrain of "a-down, a-down" recalls a song "The Miller in His Best Array," which portrays the protestation of chastity as merely a piece of flirtatious role play (303). Finally, of the "St. Valentine's Day" song, a song often read as Ophelia vocalizing her regret over losing her virginity, she writes:

> In this song, Ophelia inhabits the voice of a woman who has either acquiesced to or instigated a sexual relationship, while she also imaginatively rehearses the consequences against which her father warned her. The ballad woman has had sex with a man whom she believes loves her, as Ophelia believed Hamlet loved her, and as a result he leaves her deflowered and broken, as Polonius feared Hamlet would leave Ophelia. The male respondent's matter of fact tone implies that the woman deserves to be abandoned, but when this logic is read under the rubric of the song's moral that young men are duplicitous, the woman is pardoned for her boldness. Ophelia's song thus permits her both to lament her predicament and to vindicate her own desire in the face of her father's injunctions. (304)

Whereas Trudell argues towards an overlap of violence and sex to a point that discernibility becomes impossible, Bialo invites the possibility of an Ophelia who divorces her desire for Hamlet and enjoyment of intercourse from future violence done to herself and her family by his actions. Bialo's reading at one point may seem more definitive but they too allow for an Ophelia of multiplicities.

To read Ophelia's view as simply in love with Hamlet would be equally ill-guided. Ophelia's behavior in this scene troubles *any* firm, unmoving analysis of her madness. Her behavior and motivation are nigh-indecipherable, providing multiple conflicting interpretations. What we can see for certain is that the characters lean towards only one reading: the tragic one. As quoted before, Ophelia's words are "the poison of deep grief" (IV.v.76). The romantic aspects that the critics discuss and I will examine further are by no means intended as the monolithic or definitive; to posit such for any reading of Ophelia would be problematic. Instead, I focus on these moments to see what the characters might gain by avoiding them.

For, from the very moment she enters, Ophelia is searching for the lost prince of Denmark:

> *Enter* Ophelia [*distracted, with her hair down, playing on a lute*].
>
> **Ophelia**: Where is the *beauteous* majesty of Denmark?...
>
> **King**: How do you, pretty lady?
>
> **Ophelia**: Well God *dild* you! They say the owl was a baker's daughter. Lord, we know what we are, but know not what we may be. God be at your table!
>
> **King**: Conceit upon her father.
>
> **Ophelia**: *Pray let's have no words of this*, but when they ask you what it means say you this:
>
> "Tomorrow is Saint Valentine's day, *Song.*
>
> All in the morning betime,
>
> And I a maid at your window,
>
> To be your Valentine.

Then up he rose and donn'd his clo'es,

And dupp'd the chamber-door,

Let in the maid, that out a maid

Never departed more." (IV.v.21-55, emphasis mine)

Someone says that Ophelia is upset about her father and yet she enters asking for Hamlet. She calls him "beauteous," a word perhaps as sexual and dirty as Polonius feared "beautified" to be (II.ii.111). The very concepts which disgusted Polonius and which he condemned as perverse are now the ones she embraces. Claudius later takes the mention of fathers and daughters to be talk of Polonius, but only by disregarding what might be a nod to dildos[89]. Furthermore, after his attempt to attach this scene's meaning to Polonius, Ophelia refutes him (as noted by Bialo) and provides another interpretation: a meaning linked to lovers, maids and St. Valentine's Day, and to draw form Bialo, a meaning that very much critiques Polonius's advice.

Again, I do not strive to make the case that there is no chance that Polonius could be the subject of Ophelia's words; rather I want to emphasize how impossible it is to make any definitive conclusion with Ophelia. Note how every piece of evidence for the Polonius reading is paired with one for a Hamlet reading. Even one of the most "telling" lines from Ophelia – or at least telling to later critics –tells us nothing. Though she could ostensibly be talking about Polonius as "he [who] is dead" (IV.v.184) and "he [who] is gone" (IV.v.189), the words could easily refer to Hamlet. He has seemingly disappeared

[89] According to the OED ("dildo" n1), "Dildo" had become a popular ballad word in the late 1500s and early 1600s. It also concurrently had its present meaning (as any reader of "The Choice of Valentines" aka "Nashe's Dildo" would know). While editors often cite it as "thank you" (a corruption of "God yield you") (Thompson and Taylor n377), "dild" itself does not appear in the OED. I would argue that the fact that Ophelia is a young lady singing the very types of ballads which would includes mentions of "dildo" (nonsense word or otherwise), that reading "dild" as "dildo" is hardly a stretch.

forever and thus is "dead and gone." Yet, there is a third reading: Hamlet has had his way with Ophelia and thus is gone after he "died" with her. This ecstasy of love and sorrow over its loss could be what has led to Ophelia's madness. Ultimately, there may be more readings; the key here though is that even the most definitive lines of interpretation opens itself up to proliferation.

The same could be said when Ophelia potentially comes closest to showing true grief for Polonius; for even here, the play denies us any conclusive words. She says to the King:

> I hope all will be well. We must be patient, but I cannot choose but weep to think they would lay him i' th' cold ground. My brother shall know it, and so I thank you for your good counsel. Come, my coach! Good night, ladies, good night. Sweet ladies, good night, good night. (4.5.68-73)

Again, I will concede that there is most certainly a reading that allows Ophelia to be weeping at her father's death. But this reading must read a single line with great sincerity amidst a giant mass of nonsense and meaningless love songs. This reading must ignore the fact the "him" remains irritatingly vague when "my father" would have worked equally well. This reading must ignore that Ophelia's thoughts are distracted at the moment. She addresses the court as ladies even though she is surrounded by predominantly men (the only other woman present is Gertrude), and she thanks them for their counsel, when everyone has only said various iterations of "Hey Ophelia, how's it going?" The only characters that have given her counsel are Laertes and Polonius. Yes, Ophelia can be singing of her father; however, she could just as easily believe herself to be in the past, back in Act I, thinking of poor King Hamlet laid in the cold ground. She

could be empathizing with Hamlet, having lost a father herself…or she also could be mourning the loss of a second Hamlet, one whom she lost due to such good counsel. Or she could be speaking nonsense.

Ophelia's words are meaningless, directionless, and, as Trudell argues, opposed to the humanist assumptions of poetry which other aspects of *Hamlet* so endorse. They trouble the powers of poesy, for they are mongrel themselves, mixing funerals and weddings, either by juxtaposing them against each other or by being so vague that the subject of the words could be either of the two. All that we can conclude is that we cannot conclude anything. No moment in IV.v is as conclusive as the characters believe (or is commonly held to be true in *Hamlet*'s reception and performance history). One moment that multiple productions stage as a moment of great emotional breakdown is not actually necessitated by the text itself:

> There's rosemary, that's for remembrance; pray you, love, remember. And there is pansies, that's for thoughts…There's rue for you, and here's some for me; we may call it herb of grace a' Sundays. You may wear your rue with a difference. There's a daisy. I would give you some violets, but they wither'd all when my father died. They say 'a made a good end – (IV.v.173-178) [90]

Ophelia is listing the flowers, occasionally adding commentary. Rosemary is for remembrance, rue can be worn with indifference, and the violets withered after Polonius

[90] The Royal Shakespeare Company's 2010 production and the 2000 film directed by Michael Almereyda both have her cry copiously at this line. Others have her deliver the line calmly, but ultimately make it a catalyst. Sir John Gielgud's 1964 Broadway staging has Ophelia giving a more blasé delivery, only to sob almost immediately afterwards at "He is dead and gone." Laurence Olivier's 1948 film and Franco Zeffirelli's 1991 film also present an indifferent delivery of the line, but then proceed to cut heavily from the script in order to imply that saying the line leads Ophelia to commit suicide. Only the Kenneth Branaugh version seems to provide the type of delivery that I think the text truly calls for.

bit the arras. Her emotional relation to her father's death potentially reads as rather cold or indifferent, which may not be too surprising if one considers the mental anguish he put her through in the prior acts.

While a daughter not mourning her father may seem perverse, this scene is abundant with potential perversities. There *may* even be a perverse connotation to the "good end" that Polonius met when he "died" at the hands of Hamlet. The other two appearances of violets are tied up with sexuality, virginity, and desire. Laertes compares Hamlet's love (or rather, lust) for Ophelia to "A violet in the youth of primy nature" (I.iii.7) and later he will cry at Ophelia's grave, "from her fair and unpolluted flesh/May violets spring" (V.i.228-229). Violets seem to stand for youthful innocence, and this would be the preferred interpretation by the court, namely that Ophelia lost her innocence when she lost her father. Yet they also bring to mind sexuality and desire: Polonius experienced the quenching of desire and the loss of innocence when he got to experience Hamlet's sword.

I wish once more to stress here that I am not trying to present not a simple argument that Ophelia is merely sad for Hamlet or that she did not get the symbolic sexual encounter that her father did, but that the characters so endeavor to ignore all of the hints of this more perverse reading so that they may only have the clean and tragic one. Laertes himself is outraged that Ophelia *cannot grasp* that she is supposed to be in a tragedy. After she dolls out the herbs, he says, "Thoughts and afflictions, passion, hell itself/She turns to favour and to prettiness" (IV.v.181-182). He transforms any of Ophelia's own signs of joy or fixations on "prettiness" (in other words, trappings of romantic comedy) into further signifiers of the madness and rage of Senecan tragedy.

Gertrude even shows revulsion over sex (and a preference for death, coldness, and chastity) as she describes Ophelia's death and her ornamentation with the flowers "That liberal shepherds give a grosser name/But our cold maids do dead men's fingers call them" (IV.vii.168-169). As she describes Ophelia's death – a not asexual moment for Shakespearean heroines (Haber 53, 57) – Gertrude alludes to the image of Ophelia wreathed by penises but only to call attention to the perversity of such an idea. She mentions sex so that she may explicitly banish it and replace it with an unequivocal depiction of double death.[91]

The perversity of the hints of romantic comedy must be ignored. But these hints remain, in both Hamlet's speech and in the other readings of Ophelia's words. The issue for us is that we must piece together a motivation for the characters' dismissal of this strain, since (as they are ignoring it) they never give direct motivation for such a dismissal. Ultimately, to turn to earlier versions of *Hamlet* (or *Amleth*) that do involve marriage,[92] I would venture to argue that these two mad characters are so perfectly well-matched to the point that there *could* be an ending wherein they marry and procreate. Yet, this procreation would not be the proper and society re-inscribing procreation of which Bodin writes and which Edelman and other queer theorists have spilled so much ink critiquing. Rather, this procreation would be a more threatening type of procreation: one which does not replicate current society, but a mad one. Furthermore, it would be a

[91] To once more return to *Romeo and Juliet*, the equivalent of this language would be Juliet saying, "O happy dagger, this is thy sheath! And by 'dagger,' I mean 'cold blade of deadly metal' and don't get any naughty ideas into your heads as I stab myself."

[92] Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor note that Amleth, Hamlet's literary predecessor, has "more adventures following his successful revenge, and…marries twice" (67). Ophelia, they write, resembles both a nameless maiden sent to tempt Hamlet and "his first wife, the equally nameless daughter of the King of England, [who] is…divided in her loyalties between the hero and her father" (n142).

recreation of the figures who have challenged the status quo, through schemes, murder, and embarrassment of the court. It would be an upheaval of society that Edelman would most likely refer *as* queer.[93] Indeed Hamlet and Ophelia also flirt with inhabiting Edelman's figure of the *sinthomo*sexual, the figure who "finds something *other* in the words of the law, enforcing an awareness of something else, something that remains unaccounted for in the accounts we give of ourselves, by figuring an encounter with a force that loosens our hold on the meanings we cling to" (*No Future* 86). Their at-times nonsensical, often ambiguous words threaten the stability of language on which a "sane" society rests. In both scenes, we have seen Gertrude, Claudius and others attempt to wrest these words to definite meaning. But let us consider a society ruled by amibiguity, by nonsense; Hamlet and Ophelia offer a society ruled by and propagated by the sinthomosexual.

Conclusion: Genre Undisputed, Respected, Saluted

Thus, the court rules that *Hamlet* must be a tragedy for the same reasons they work so hard to decipher the words of Ophelia and link them to one logical cause: society needs meaning. Hamlet *must* die, for any comedic ending (even the heterosexual reproductive one) has now become a threat of disorder, a hint that murder may be able to escape its proper retribution. Linda Woodbridge argues that revenge tragedy works to show that justice will always be attained, despite the protections of class and wealth (9, 12); thus it the court's wishes to be in a revenge tragedy after a prince has murdered someone below his rank become understandable. Hamlet's happy marriage to Ophelia would show that it's not who you kill, it's who you know. Society would *not* be re-

[93] See *No Future* 3-7 for Edelman's outlining of queer as that whose negativity "resides in its challenge to value as defined by the social, and thus in its radical challenge to the very value of the social itself…the queer disposses the social order of the ground on which it rests" (6).

inscribed properly with happy future generations but with the mad offspring of a mad murderer and his mad love. The anarchy that comedy unleashes but contains would become the norm. We would be left with a mad play, wherein the only retribution for murdering a girl's father is her hand in marriage. Thus, the characters so push for the play to be a tragedy and to contain only tragic hints because it is a far more comfortable possibility. In tragedy, rules are followed. Genrefying the play as tragedy returns the characters and the audience to the inevitable progression which Claudius outlines in his I.ii speech, the progression in which the words of King, nature, and God align into a clear order, one discernibly and comfortably predictable, if not also rigidly inescapable.

Most importantly, in this world of clear order, ambiguity becomes the court's greatest enemy and threat. Hamlet's first threat comes in the form of his both following and not following Claudius's command (doing what he wants, but agreeing to Gertrude's request). From there, the court continuously tries to assign meaning to him: he is mad from love and then merely mad. The court clearly clarifies Ophelia's multi-caused madness as madness and dismisses her words as nonsense, and yet they receive sense in so much as to create a teleological narrative for the court to follow. Tragedy, which can truly have only one end (and the end which awaits us all), is the clear and firm answer to ambiguity. It kills ambiguity dead, making the rest into silence. Yet, in *Hamlet*, comedy promises more: more meanings to Ophelia's songs, more motivations and facets of Hamlet, and more generations of madness and uncertainty. Reproduction here is not conservative; rather, reproduction is an endless guessing game, wherein no one knows exactly what madness and anarchy might come with the next generation.

Chapter 3

Tragicomedy Means Always Getting to Say You're Sorry: Equity and Mongrel Forgiveness in John Marston's *The Malcontent*

Late in John Marston's *The Malcontent*, Bilioso delivers a speech that is reminiscent of those made by Lucius in *Titus Andronicus*, Antonio in *The Revenger's Tragedy,* or the Prince of Verona in *Romeo and Juliet*. He tells the disguised Malevole and Pietro of the pronouncement of Pietro's father-in-law, "I will conceal the great duke's pleasure; only this was his charge: his pleasure is, that his daughter die; Duke Pietro be banished for banishing his blood's dishonor; and that Duke Altofront be re-accepted. This is all: But I hear Duke Pietro is dead" (IV.v.81-85). It is a classic "wrap up" speech, a distribution of punishments that provides the catharsis after a bloody and tragic tale of intrigue. This speech posits a proper tragic ending for the non-existent *The Tragedy of Pietro, Duke of Genoa*. Those that sinned, through usurping and adultery, would face or already would have faced proper punishment. The usurping Pietro would have died, his adulterous wife would be exiled, and Mendoza too would, at some point, face punishment, and, thus through the deaths of the evil, society would be purged for the better.[94] With these deaths the tragedy would end, as Naomi Conn Leibler writes of the genre, appropriately: "Their removal, or sacrifice, in turn reconfirms or reinscribes the community in the image it has chosen for itself" (16).

[94] "These [tragic heroes] who draw our gaze are both protagonists and antagonists of their communities; each is dramatically constructed as bi-valent…each also represents the conflicts, ambiguities, contradictions, and fears that threaten the community, and for that reason must be destroyed. Tragic heroes are their communities' *pharmakoi*, constructed by and at the same time constructing their communities. Because they constitute the site of all that the community stands for, including its conflicts and crises, they must be removed, taking, if only temporarily, those conflicts and crises with them." (Liebler 16)

Yet, the play *does not* end in this manner. We are merely in Act IV. Rather, Marston proposes this resolution, only to discard it shortly afterwards. Along with his dismissal of this tragic ending, he also does away with the need for the play to follow both the lawmaker's orders and tragedy's generic requirement of purging. The latter part of this play is abundant with scenes of forgiveness and reconciliation; these scenes transform the conclusion's trajectory from inevitability tragic to certainly comic. Arguably, Marston creates the "Christian revenge play" by forsaking death and vendettas for mercy.[95] Marston replaces tragic loss and sacrifice with a reconstitution of society by means of marriage and renewed brotherhood, rather than by tragedy's purgative force. By doing so, however, Marston reinscribes a society of misrule; the world of *The Malcontent* lacks purging and thus, by the end, remains full of the very elements and people that the tragedy should have cleansed from it.

Marston transforms the tragic narrative, wherein usurpers and adulterers meet near-divine wrath, into a narrative of chaos: cosmically, locally, legally. Neither the moral necessities of tragedy nor the decrees of the other duke are heeded, evident in Pietro remaining alive, in Genoa, and happily married at the end of the play. Actions occur without proper consequences (e.g., Marquerelle receives little punishment for her attempts to pander the chaste Maria to the evil Mendoza; she only must retire to the suburbs where brothels were plentiful). Crimes go without due punishment, as seen through Mendoza's living despite attempting multiple murders. The pronouncements of a duke ultimately are optional suggestions, as with Aurelia, who too remains alive and

[95] Linda Woodbridge argues that there is not actually any reason to see a Christian society's love of revenge plays as antithetical (29-40). However, for decades, critics have discussed the anti-Christianity of the revenger's goals (for some examples, see Bowers 184-189, Braden 203, Prosser 6)

happily married in Genoa, despite her father's order. While my first chapter suggests that tragedy could be given a new purpose by mongreling it with love poetry and my second investigates how tragedy must quell any sense of comedy to deliver its own conservative message, this chapter delves into the consequences of an averted tragic narrative. What we may see here is not so much a suggestion of how things should be, as happened in Titus Andronicus, or an investigation of the genre's more sinister ideology, like in Hamlet, but instead the utilization of mongrel art as a means of critiquing the real world. In the play, the wicked do not face the punishments of tragedy, but instead receive the forgiveness and promises of longevity that comedy provides; ultimately, this arc – we will see – resembles too much that of Marston's own England and less that of Sidney's vaulted tragedy.

For part of what Sidney praises about poetry – and here tragedy seems to be a key aspect of poetry – is that it *lacks* all the problems of truth. It has no great obligation to verisimilitude. He writes:

> therein [history] a man should see virtue exalted and vice punished, truly that commendation is peculiar to poetry, and far off from history; for indeed poetry ever sets virtue so out in her best colours, making fortune her well-waiting handmaid, that one must needs be enamoured of her…And of the contrary part, if evil men come to the stage, they ever go out (as the tragedy writer answered to one that misliked the show of such persons) so manacled as they little animate folks to follow them. But the history, being captive to the truth of a foolish world, is many times a terror from well-doing, and an encouragement to unbridled wickedness. (21)

Sidney argues that tragedy presents a coherent world in which he who does evil will meet his inevitable punishment. This inescapable teleology lies in stark contrast with history, which cannot present such a virtuous world; indeed, Sidney praises this contrast as one of poetry's key virtues. The exact trade of lies that Plato laments is what Sidney touts as poetry's greatest asset to society.[96] Poetry does not attempt to trick the reader by claiming truth, but rather merely shows the world as it should be (Sidney 34). It distills reality into ideals and then contorts those ideals into the best possible worlds, rather than the one currently in existence. Poetry thus is less a purporting of reality and more of a wish for reality – or even an escape from it. Whereas nowadays "escapist" seems to be a term to denounce fluffy popular fair, Sidney's ideal art has the same agenda.

Marston's play denies us that escape. The scales of justice never fully balance and the wicked's manacles are – at their firmest – still loose. Even the most punished character of the play is given a sentence deemed lenient even by the sentencer. Thus, while the play teases us with the generic expectations of tragedy, brandishing the wickedness and sin of men, it delivers the conclusion of a comedy. Because the good and evil receive similar treatments (except for Mendoza, though I will address him further towards the end of the chapter), there is a disconnect between one's fate and one's morality. *The Malcontent* thus contains all the problems of history without necessarily its truth. This revenge tragedy's mongrel nature puts it in danger of critical dismissal, as a play that fails to offer proper closure, and as a play that fails to deliver the Horatian dictum, to teach and delight. How can a play teach us if it denies the representation of virtue?

[96] For more on Plato's aversion to poetry, see particularly Book X of *Republic* 595a-c, wherein Plato (as Socrates) denounces all imitative poetry as "likely to distort the thought of anyone who hears it" and suggests its banning from his ideal society.

This chapter explores how Marston's *Malcontent* instead, through its mongrel genre, critiques the real world by reflecting a greater amount of verisimilitude and exposing the ills of the world in which it was written. While the term of "verisimilitude" is admittedly anachronistic, there did seem to be an increasing interest in something approaching realism at the time. Plato had been steadily gaining popularity in England since the late medieval period and by the seventeenth century was not only fashionable in intellectual circles (as evidenced by Sidney's need to refute Plato multiple times throughout his *Defense*), but appearing in popular discourse as well (Hutton 70-72). Neoplatonic aesthetic and literary theory required that art be "lively," meaning "lifelike," either exhibiting what was or what could feasibly be (Alexander 143). Furthermore, the rise of two theatrical genres in the period seem to imply a closer desire for realism. The first, tragicomedy (of which *The Malcontent* is arguably an example), has been linked by John Roe as directly benefiting from the public's investment with Neo-Platonism (108). The second, city comedy, shows a larger interest in art that exhibited the world that the theater-goers already knew. Whereas city comedy may accomplish so in terms of people types and locations, tragicomedy – with its mix of hornpipes and funerals – recreates the world by more accurately portraying the deeper truths of many theatergoers' lived experiences. In early seventeenth-century London, the wrong people would experience the outcome of a comedy instead of a tragedy, and vice-versa. Towards the end of this chapter, I will show how the Chancery Courts particularly seemed to pose a threat to the assurance that the wicked would exit manacled. Marston's play – which promises but does not deliver tragedy – ultimately critiques not only the neat morals that tragedy was

meant to have, but also implies that society's own averted tragedies, enabled by a system of favoritism, lie in a justice system that – despite its claims – is ultimately autocratic.

Table of Malcontents: A Lit Review

The scholarship on *The Malcontent* tends to have a few key focuses. One is on this play's relationship to Marston's own history of satire and the 1599 burning of his satires. Thus admirable work has delved into this play's debt, or lack thereof, to the burning of Marston's satires.[97] However, for reasons similar to those of my *Hamlet* chapter, I will not be focusing on explicit moments of satire. Not only is this territory that has been expertly explored already, but – as I outlined in the introduction – the use of satire as critique is not this project's primary interest. Rather, its goal is how genre-play – not inclusion of satire (veiled or otherwise) – acts a form of critique independent of more readily recognized forms. Furthermore, as I will be using the third quarto as my text, I will not be engaging with the differences between the quartos or the play's production history, particularly its origin as a play for a boy actor troupe.[98]

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[97] John Kerrigan believes that – no matter what –the "barking Satyrist…would have merged, in due course, with…the stage revenger, but osmosis was positively encouraged by the official burning and banning of verse satires (including Marston's) in 1599" (205). Mark Thornton Burnett calls *The Malcontent* Marston's "most satirically dense work," and believes that Marston personally puts much of himself into the satirical character of Malevole (349). George Hunter takes issue with the argument that Marston was only writing theater due to the satire bans; however, he does still concede a connection: "The notion that Marston became a dramatist *because* his poems had been burned seems too simplifying, though the chronological fact must be allowed. The playhouse provided, in fact, an obvious extension (rather than a diversion) of the talents Marston had shown (xxi). Michael Cordner reads the potential for *The Malcontent* to "be read as a compensatory fantasy" wherein a ruler must learn the value and necessity of satire and playing the satirist in a corrupt world (176-177). Janet Clare writes, "It is in *The Malcontent*, his first Jacobean play, that Marston recovers both the objects of his non-dramatic satire and articulates strong defences of the satirist's art" (200), focusing particular on the radical critique of the body politic in Altofronto's final speech.

[98] Over-analyzing this last aspect is particularly tricky regardless. Whereas R.A. Foakes sees this historical aspect as necessary reason to conclude that that the play is overly bombastic in its production with "child-actors consciously ranting in oversize parts" (236), Michael Cordner

The genre studies' seminal work regarding revenge comedy is Linda Anderson's *A Kind of Wild Justice.* Here she argues that revenge comedy is not simply revenge tragedy with a happier ending, but rather is a restorative genre; comic revengers protect, maintain, and at times even reestablish "the social order threatened by the actions for which he or she takes vengeance" (21). They are calmer and more reasonable, and equally likely to rehabilitate wrongdoers as they are to harm them (19-20). Yet, later critics have noted that while revenge comedy may indeed restore the status quo, it might not accomplish such restoration so unquestioningly. Rather, revenge comedy can show that the return to normalcy that it achieves is a problematic one; an uneven system is allowed to remain uneven. *The Merchant of Venice* in particular – with its prevalent anti-Semitism and solution by means of legal *deus ex machina* used against the Jew – has received significant attention regarding to what extent revenge comedy preserves the status quo.[99] Particularly of interest to this chapter will be these critics' engagement with mercy and its relationship with equity – a fraught concept in England by the early seventeenth century. Mercy posing as equity, they argue, becomes a dangerous equivocation for anyone but the privileged elite. Whereas many legal critics have read

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argues that such readings rely upon "the debatable assumptions such scholarship makes about early modern childhood and its relationship to adulthood" (169).

[99] Rebecca Lemon examines the instability of the law and its enforcers, noting that the focus on the law's intractability does not stay consistent between characters as the play progresses. She writes, "Not only are laws prejudicially constructed but they are capriciously enforced as well. At times, custom reigns, but at other moments, it is suspended to suit a character's best interests" (565). Thomas Bilello writes of the lack of justice as the main consideration in the final verdict: "Portia's judgment has little to do with justice or equity. Instead, she is motivated more by her desire to protect Antonio, her new husband's confident. Indeed, by inserting herself by artifice into the legal proceedings to enforce the bond, Portia converts the law to an instrumentality of her will" (12). Stephen Cohen notes that Shylock's bond promises the possibility of an elimination of class privileges that is ultimately thwarted by Portia, who is from and stands in the interest of the ruling class: "For Shylock, the bond's utility is not economic…but sociopolitical, through its power as an instrument of common law to nullify the class privilege that protects Antonio from Shylocks' vengeance" (43).

"Portia's victory as Shakespeare's endorsement of the ethical importance of equity to mitigate the impartial but at times overly-strict justice of the common law" (Cohen 37), Lemon reminds us that even though "flexible law…allows judges to temper their justice with mercy [it also] favors those in power. Discretion, innovation, and pragmatism are all the tools of those who govern" (567). This chapter undoubtedly owes a debt to these writers' investigation into *Merchant*'s engagement with equity, as later in the chapter I will be investigating *The Malcontent*'s own fraught use of equity/mercy. The two plays ultimately may be making similar but distinct claims about the limits and abuses of equity and mercy. *The Malcontent* ultimately may be more unnerving because the bending of the law is not done for any greater good. Despite how unsettling *Merchant*'s conclusion may be, it is also the conclusion that prevented Shakespeare's audience from seeing a Jew eviscerate a Christian onstage without consequence; in other words, the (il)legal acrobatics ensure that "good" wins the day. *The Malcontent*, meanwhile, will flirt far more with tragic possibilities (*The Merchant of Venice*, after all, never puts the full affairs of state at stake) and when it finally does show mercy, does not necessarily use it to so clear an end.

The result of such flagrant abuses of equity is jarring.[100] Then again, most of the play's second half may fit that adjective just as well. As the first registered tragicomedy in England (Cordner 186, Leonard 61), it is rather direct with its mongrel nature. In fact, in his article "Embracing the Mongrel," Nathaniel Leonard argues that Marston's work

[100] "Marston's games with revenge play expectations are indeed radical, and its performers need to attune themselves closely to his delight in leaving his audience unsure of where he is taking them…The scene of Altofronto and Pietro "begins with an incipient threat of murder, proceeds through a ferocious tongue-lashing, and concludes abruptly wit the enlisting of a shattered, dumbstruck Pietro to assist Malevole and Celso in their action against Mendoza" (Cordner 179-180)

stands apart from both the Italian tragicomedy of Giovanni Battista Guarini and the later English tragicomedies of John Fletcher in that the latter two "reject the notion that a tragicomedy is built around two meshed plots; it is instead a play that achieves a comic resolution while flirting with tone, trajectory, and grandeur of tragedy" (62). He writes of *The Malcontent,* as well as Marston's *Antonio* plays:

> These plays question the very foundation of Aristotelian generic distinctions by casting doubt on the assumed permanence of each plot's comic outcome. Instead of relying on a miraculous comic reversal to achieve resolution, these plays gesture to future, potential events beyond the action of the plays themselves – events that would be necessary for those plots to create closure. Violence and revenge tragedy logic, which the protagonists seem to avoid by using virtual moments of social ritual, appear to be necessary, in the end, for each narrative to achieve a stable conclusion. When seen through the lens of Marston's generally reflexive approach and his use of staged moments of cultural expression, this manipulation of each plot's potential violence results in these plays exhibiting two distinct characteristics that are not traditionally associated with tragicomedy – incompleteness and suspense. (65)

The play flaunts its mongrel nature to the point where it cannot be contained within the definition of "tragicomedy." There is too much lacking from its resolution, too much that has been invited by its first half pulled from a revenge tragedy, for the comic ending to satisfy the audience or for it to feel like it was intended all along.[101] Whereas tragicomedy *may be* less a mongrel genre than its own codified genre with rules, *The Malcontent* is

[101] In fact, in the final section of this chapter, I will be investigating how the play does indeed seem to rewrite its first acts from the final acts, having it more resemble a serial in terms of logic than a single cohesive work.

unabashedly mongrel. It has political intrigue, adultery, a twice-usurped dukedom, and yet *no* deaths. Characters threaten revenge and death upon each other, but the actions are only promised, never completed.

Senecan't: Biting the Thumb at Antiquity

The play even calls attention to that which it resembles but is not a part of – Senecan references are abundant. Malevole, the disguised Duke Altofront, compares Mendoza, who is sleeping with the current Duke Pietro's wife, to Aegithus, Clytemnestra's lover who conspires with her (and in some versions takes part) in the murder of her husband, Agamemnon (I.v.10). Act III *even cites* Senecan philosophy…only to criticize both Seneca and his philosophy:

> **Pietro**: Oh would I ne'er had known
> My own dishonor! Good God, that men should desire
> To search out that which, being found, kills all
> Their joy in life! To taste the tree of knowledge
> And then be driven from out paradise! –
> Canst give me some comfort?...
>
> **Bilioso**: Marry, I remember one Seneca, Lucius Annaeus Seneca –
>
> **Pietro**: Out upon him! He write of temperance and fortitude, yet lived like a voluptuous epicure, and died like an effeminate coward. (III.i.14-28)

Pietro's language indeed sounds like a Senecan philosophizing chorus, the chorus whose words were inherited by the early modern stage and put into the mouths of individual characters (Boyle 155-156). His shame over cuckoldry becomes oversized and universalized to encompass all men. His focus shifts from his "own dishonor" to "men"

and ultimately to Adam, the first man. His initial suffering becomes a contemplation on the human condition; his pains become the pains that stemmed from the first time woman hurt man and man was cursed for having too much knowledge.

Yet, just as the play adopts Seneca's style, it deflates it. Pietro breaks from his Senecan rant, acknowledging that it provides no consolation ("Canst give me some comfort?"). When Seneca receives explicit mention in this play, he is immediately labeled as a fraud: an insincere man whose words are incongruous with his biographical history. Seneca has appealing language (so appealing that Pietro adopts its style unknowingly), but those words cannot work in reality (and nor can they provide comfort). Just as Sidney noted that history will counter the lessons of poetry, so does the history of the author undo the efficacy his philosophies.[102] Marston refuses to work in ideals, setting his plays instead in a debased world. The philosophies upon which tragedy is founded rely on a type of hypocrisy; one must distill a good message from a bad source, just as one must turn the inconsistent and sometimes cruel outcomes of history into a recurring series of morality tales.

Thus the play cites and alludes to Seneca, but can never fully ascribe either to his philosophies or to his tragic form. The darkest aspects of Senecan tragedy (both his own and those inspired by his works) are lightened. Seneca is the punchline of this particular joke, whereas his works become the targets of a series of punchlines throughout the play. The characters, we see, engage with tragic concepts and tragical precedents from antiquity, but their engagement is factually loose. While they attempt to harness the

[102] Granted, Sidney himself uses a similar tactic when dealing with Plato's own assumed moral superiority. John Roe calls to attention Sidney's turn to ad hominem attacks in his *Defense of Poesy*; Sidney brings to the conversation "Plato's authorizing of 'abominable filthiness' (charge of homosexual tendencies)" so that he may "lesson the strength of Platonist [moralist] opposition to poetry with such tactics" (103)

powers of antiquity for their poetic narrative, sometimes the history that comes with antiquity troubles the argument. For example, when she is about to be forced to marry Mendoza, and thus betray her honor to her exiled husband, Maria positions herself as a Lucrece figure. She cries:

> O my dear'st Altofront! Where'er thou breathe,
>
> Let my soul sink into the shades beneath,
>
> Before I stain thine honor! 'Tis thou hast.
>
> And, long as I can die, I will live chaste…
>
> She that can be enforced has ne'er a knife.
>
> She that through force her limbs with lust enrolls
>
> Wants Cleopatra's asps and Portia's coals. (V.iii.24-31)

Like the duke's sentence that began this chapter, this speech proposes another classic catharsis. The death of the pure Maria would be both tragic and display an exemplary case of chastity. Yet, Maria never mentions Lucrece or Virginia, the two classical precedents for suicide as a response to rape.[103] Instead her classical touchstones are *not* women who died for chastity. Rather, they are women who died to follow their lovers into the grave, rather than necessarily to prevent their bodies from being unfaithful. Cleopatra – certainly not a figure of sexual temperance - dies either to join her husband in death or to avoid capture. Her gesture is possibly romantic, but it could also be an act of

[103] For those of you who are unfamiliar with their stories: Lucrece, a Roman noblewoman, was raped by Sextus Tarquinius, son of the last Roman king. After she reveals the rape and the culprit to her husband Collantinus and his friend Brutus, she kills herself out of shame. Virginia, a Roman plebian girl, was lusted after by Appius Claudius, a Roman decimvir (an aristocrat). Clauidus had devised a means to legally rape Virginia. Virginius, realizing he could do little to stop it, kills Virginia to preserve her chastity. *Titus Andronicus* notably changes the story's sequence of events, having Virginius murder his daughter *after* she is raped.

pride.[104] Portia likewise dies to follow her husband, but not to avoid rape. Thus, Maria's rewriting of the classics changes the moral and charge of these accounts. Histories become poetry, wherein every great women dies to avoid shame. Yet, by transforming the stories as such, Maria unwittingly calls attention to the fallacy behind these moralistic stories: they are all perversions. In the hands of poetry, any narrative can become a proper tragedy with the right message, even if the history does not match up. Furthermore, the very moral that Maria endeavors to extricate from these tales – suicide is a commendable means of preserving chastity – is itself a fraught moral. Christian thinkers for centuries, most notably Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, had decried suicide as a means of preventing or response to rape (Robertson 297, Greenstadt 317, Watt 468-469).

In a pseudo-Platonic move, Marston shows that to seek comfort in or advice from these sources can be dangerous, as one is going to falsehoods for advice. In fact, unlike Plato's, his stance seems to be less against the idea of poetry as a whole and more against its attempted neatness. On one hand, trying to distill pure Christian morals on chastity from the deaths of Cleopatra or Portia will lead to misreading the source materials. On the other hand, even turning to "better" sources (the unmentioned tales of Lucrece and Virginia) still proves unsatisfactory for the intended moral. Yet, there seems to be no

[104] In Shakespeare's play (which admittedly postdates Marston's), Cleopatra voices her fears over humiliations at the hands of the Romans, particularly what it would mean to for her reputation to spread by means of "Some squeaking Cleopatra boy…I'th'posture of a whore" (V.ii.207-221). While she does speak about how she will once more "meet Mark Antony" (V.ii.229) and enacts a reunion during her suicide scene (V.ii.283-287), Judith Haber notes "the self-conscious theatricality" in this grandiose dying moment, recalling the "excellent falsehood" that Antony had praised her for earlier in the tragedy (57). Admittedly, Shakespeare's version postdates Marston's tragicomedy, so I mean this comparison less as a moment of citation by Marston and more as a means of clarifying that – in the public imagination – Cleopatra was most likely not a figure of chastity.

moral *at all* in this situation, no feasible outcome that *could* be moral. As Robertson notes, Aquinas condemns Lucrece's choice of suicide and yet *still* partially puts the onus of rape's shame onto her. Once a woman is confronted with either the threat or the reality of rape, she must either face shame or damnation; neither poetry nor history offers an alternative. The world ultimately defies clear methods of navigation … particularly for a woman. The ideals that Sidney sees in poetry – which blend the stories of history with the consolations of philosophy – fail.

Altofronto more comically undoes Sidney's claims about poetry's lessons, literally reducing the tales of Seneca to a punchline. As he attempts to console Pietro after the Duke has discovered his wife's infidelity, he lists a series of other men who have been cuckolded. In this discussion, he rewrites classic tragedies and Senecan – or Seneca-esque – narratives as far more comic:

> **Malevole**: Do not weep, kind cuckold; take comfort, man. Thy betters have been *beccos*: Agamemnon, emperor of all the merry Greeks that tickled all the true Trojans, was a cornuto; Prince Arthur, that cut off twelve kings' beards, was a cornuto; Hercules, whose back bore up heaven, and got forty wenches with child in one night –
>
> **Pietro**: Nay, 'twas fifty.
>
> **Malvole**: Faith, forty's enough, o'conscience – yet was a cornuto. (IV.v.55-62)

Malevole's narrative defangs not only the tragic thrust of these works, but also further diminishes their gravitas. In his words of consolation, he brings up a string of men who were indeed cuckolds and for whom their cuckoldry was instrumental in their downfall. The tragic impetus of cuckoldry becomes the misstep of comedy. What should be a

pedagogical moment for Pietro where he would learn how even the greatest men may be destroyed by their unfaithful wives is alchemized into a consoling tale (i.e. "you're in good company"). Whereas T.F. Wharton postulates that in the play, "both political failure and success are verified in terms of potency and sexual dominance" (182), noting how conquest of Aurelia and Maria seems to be linked to political conquest, he notably stays away from this passage, wherein unfaithful wives seem to be the *necessary* ticket to entering the ranks of classic heroes.

Furthermore, the narratives in general become "cute." Agamemnon goes from the head of an army defined by its infighting (after all, what would *The Iliad* be without Achilles antipathy towards his leader?) to the authoritative "emperor" of a group of merry Greeks who "tickled" the Trojans. The descriptor "merry" doubly sanitizes the story. A "merry man" could be "a companion-in-arms or follower of a knight" (OED 1), thus either implying a sense of true comradery or fidelity that the original narratives lack. Additionally, "merry" concurrently did have its current connotation (1a, 1b) of "pleasantness" and "joyousness," as well as one of being cheerful due to "drunkenness" (1c). A bloody war of power struggles and deaths caused by the Greeks' lack of clear authority becomes a type of prank war between two rival fraternities. Meanwhile, Arthur is demoted to prince, cutting off kings' beards in an equally prankish move and making them boys like him. Hercules's narrative is reduced to a *fabliau* of how many woman he could bed in a single night. Thus, the morals of tragedy, the fall of great men through their *hamartias*, the abuses of kings and the sacrifices of noble men, are lost as these tragic tales turn comic. Just as Lucrece's sacrifice is not only never achieved but given to "looser" women, these men's exploits are minimized, and their downfall through

cuckoldry is either downplayed or downright inverted. The loss of the tragic, the infringement of the comic, is the loss of the clear and direct moral which poetry so promises.

Through these repeated instances of mongrelized poetry, of poetry that *is* inaccurate, Marston not only highlights his play's mockery of the Senecan trajectory, but also marks the mutability of poetry. The problem of the early modern critics' argument is that poetry is made to fit a very specific purpose; this fixed teleological *raison d'être* ignores both poetry's potential volatility and even how many events must be changed to bring poetry to that purpose. Marston's work might seem odd when compared to its contemporaries, but there might be something *more real* (or at least, more reflective of history) in its oddness. History itself is mongrel – a nonstop mix of funerals and hornpipes – and the growing interest in Neoplatonism may have demanded an art that felt more lifelike. Therefore, Marston's play mocks Seneca not only on the grand scale, but on the smaller scale, always picking at the neatness of Seneca and the didactic tragedy that he represented in the early modern period. From this formal play, however, we see larger concerns arise about what tragedy meant to instruct – particularly crime and punishment. As I will explore in the next section, these concepts are upset first by troubling the revenger's own position as agent of divine wrath.

In Mal We Trust: Altofronto's Positioning as Divine Agent

The very position of the revenger is one that either reifies or supplants the place of God's wrath. In the next chapter, I will explore Vindice's relationship with the divine in *The Revenger's Tragedy* in depth as he interprets the thunderclaps as applause for his murders and acts as a morality-tale reckoner. But the relationship between the revenger

and God's avenging angel was already quite solidified by this period, even if the plays sometimes left the viewer wondering whether the revenger was enacting a job meant for him or which he had stolen. The first popular revenge tragedy of the high period of English Renaissance drama, *The Spanish Tragedy* by Thomas Kyd, portrays Revenge as a divine agent who sanctions the bloodshed on stage. Titus prays to the gods for vengeance, only to carry it out himself. Hallett and Hallett note that the revenger seeing himself as divine agent is a typical step in his descent into madness (27). Woodbridge even argues that Elizabethan audiences may have seen revengers as akin to Christian martyrs (25). Kerrigan writes that revenge tragedies, in fact, might have resonated with Jacobean audiences as depictions of God's will occurring on earth, writing, "Given the providential ideology of most post-Reformation drama – its belief that punishments enacted in the world are an expression of heavenly wrath – it is hardly surprisingly that [revenge narratives] should flourish in Jacobean tragedy" (202).

The Malcontent is no exception to this issue, and – as I will prove – the play strongly aligns Altofronto's intended revenge with God's will. From early in the play, Malevole/Altofronto make clear that the role of the revenger is to be God's avenging hand on earth. He first advises Pietro how to deal with his cuckoldry, saying:

> But adultery! – O dulness! – should show exemplary punishment, that intemperate bloods may freeze but to think it. I would damn him and all his generation; my own hands should do it. Ha! I would not trust heaven with my vengeance anything. (I.iii.146-151)

While the advice may seem blasphemous, it actually furthers the sense that the revenger works as a substitute for God; Altofronto's position as the wrongfully ousted Duke who

seeks to to regain his throne furthers his alignment with divine will. Not only would he be asserting his right as king, but equally, perhaps even more importantly, would renew a fear of sin: freezing "intemperate bloods." His act is an exemplum which would lead to better moral behavior. Furthermore, Altofronto may be disinclined to trust Heaven with the job because he– as God's instrument – has already been entrusted to enact the divine work himself. For his job does indeed contain aspects of the divine: he does not seek merely to perform a human act (i.e. to kill the adulterer), but rather hopes to "damn him [with his] own hands" (i.e. to place adultery properly in Hell). Therefore, Heaven may not be relied upon to commit the murder itself – a fair assumption, as revenge narratives rely on an existing, unchecked injustice (Woodbridge 16-19) – but the revenger may work with Heaven in the later damnation.

In fact, even when alone and not as his concocted persona of Malevole, Altofronto continues to purport that the true purpose of revenge is damnation. The revenger's murder of his target seems either inconsequential or merely a means of expediting this final judgment. He argues:

> The heart's disquiet is revenge most deep:
> He that gets blood, the life of flesh but spills,
> But he that breaks heart's peace, the dear soul kills…
> Duke, I'll torment thee; now my just revenge
> From thee than crown a richer gem shall part:
> Beneath God, naught's so dear as a calm heart. (I.iii.158-172)

Malevole's plan seems not to defy divine law, but to adhere to it (or at least, a revenger or revenger-sympathizer's interpretation of it). His revenge is "just" and he all but says that

his plan ("keep calm and revenge on") is smiled upon by God. But, more importantly, Malevole has obtained power over Pietro's soul. His dominion stretches beyond sparing or destroying the flesh; Malevole can kill the soul or steal the "richer gem" from the Duke. As Larry Champion observes, Altofronto, like Hamlet, "perceives himself to have a particular relationship with Divine Will" (375).[105] Except, whereas Hamlet seems to be hubristic in his view of such a relationship (the common high school reading is that such hubris and the prince's need for Claudius's damnation are Hamlet's *harmartia*), Altofronto never receives even a slap on the wrist from the events of the play. As revenger, Malevole stands as God's proxy not only for performing physical punishments, but for enacting divine ones as well. Whereas Pietro's soul should already have been harmed by his treachery to his brother, it is his victim brother who has the pleasure of damning him: parting him from his soul and killing it.

Indeed Malevole/Altofronto seems to be positioning himself as either God's weapon or His personal assistant, reminding Him of His various obligations and scheduled duties. After he has heard of Mendoza's plan to murder Pietro so that he may steal the dukedom, Altofronto shouts:

> …O heaven, didst hear?
> Such devilish mischief? Sufferest thou the world
> Carouse damnation even with greedy swallow,
> And still dost wink, still does thy vengeance slumber?
> If now thy brows are clear, when will they thunder? (III.iii.126-130)

[105] See Cordner's "*The Malcontent* and the *Hamlet* Aftermath" for a particularly compelling article on the play as *Hamlet*-parody.

This speech, while perhaps questioning God's plan, is not purely blasphemous. The main thrust of the speech is to know the extent that God must "suffer." The word's dual connotations, where it either can more mean "to wait" or "to feel pain," changes Malevole's thrust from one of simply impetuous impatience to one of proper fealty. God, of course, not only can suffer, but in Christianity, *must*. A certain amount of pain was necessary for man's ascension, and thus Altofronto speech seems to be searching for the limit merely. He needs to know when will the brows thunder, how much damnation must be invoked before vengeance can act. If he is indeed God's instrument, this speech would work as an inquiry as to when it would be proper to take up arms.

Yet the problem in this work is that God's thunder is never felt. Unlike Titus, who acts as Vengeance's agent, and Vindice, who sees Heaven as the appreciative audience for his murders, Altofronto never wakes Heaven. Admittedly, to my knowledge, no early modern English revenge play is solved by direct action of Heaven. Still, though, divine instruments act, driving and sometimes solving the plot: the revenger, the ghost, Revenge in *The Spanish Tragedy*, the thunder to which Vindice alludes, etc. Here, Altofronto's fear not only comes true, but is reinforced by his own actions. By the end of the play, he winks at the very trespasses against which he had formerly raged.

The criticism regarding the ending typically focuses on the fragility of a society wherein evil goes free. William Hamlin notes the anxiety with which we should encounter the conclusion wherein none of Malevole's valid claims about society have been addressed, arguing that the ending

> foregrounds genre expectations to an almost ludicrous degree and thereby draws them powerfully into question. Moreover, the providential optimism embedded in

> several of Altofronto's late speeches hangs in curious suspension with the vehement pessimism expressed by Malevole…The play offers no sense whatsoever that the explicit resumption of Altofronto's ducal role negates or dissipates any of the claims Malevole has made. (310)[106]

Ultimately, the restoration of the society – indeed, the restoration to the point that most of the threats and villains (with the exception of Mendoza) have been restored to the *exact position* they were before the unsettling began – implies nothing curative. The broken system is back to merely cracking. Nathaniel Leonard takes a more apocalyptic stance, implying that everything we have just seen will happen all over again:

> Altofronto metes out his decisions almost off-handedly, showing mercy that borders on the irrational. He chooses to punish Mendoza, who has seized Genoa, plotted multiple murders, and attempted to marry Altofronto's wife, by kicking him out. The man who wrongfully ruled Genoa before Mendoza, Pietro, is told to look to his wedding vows. In dropping his malcontent disposition, Altofronto appears to part company with the political savvy and intelligence that have defined him during the previous five acts…How can a duke retain control if he will not even punish those who tried to usurp his authority? What kind of duke allows a man who wrongfully occupied his dukedom to remain in his court? (82-83)

Leonard pointedly uses the irrational surplus of pardons to question the stability of the state – and particularly Altofronto's dukedom and its peaceful maintenance – in light of Altofronto pardoning everyone who has wronged him and abused their position.

[106] Cordner's interpretation is rather similar to Hamlin's; he writes that Altofronto "does not announce a commitment to reformation as a consequence" (176), but believes that Altofronto has learned better than to try to ever completely fix society.

However, there are equally pressing judicial and theological problems that remain with such pardoning. Pardons, after all, were not meant to be acts of pure mercy, but rather those of equity; they were initially introduced into the English legal system as a means of distinguishing between the crime of murder with intent and that of manslaughter (or cold-blooded and justifiable homicide) (Baker 515-516). The slippage of pardon from being an act of equity – "the theoretical remedy for injustice produced by the misuse of law" (Cohen 39) – to an act of mercy speaks to the unfortunate slippage between the two ideas by the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Bilello 17). The just equity that relied on pardons to ensure that the law was not unilaterally applied inappropriately became the unjustified and excessive pardonings of those in favor of the crown.

While most other characters show the slightest plea for mercy, Bilioso may best exemplify the abuse of Altofronto's liberal mercy, a mercy that borders on apathy towards justice. Bilioso is "a fellow to be damned" (IV.v.105) who defies the very tenets of Christianity by "flatter[ing] the greatest and oppress[ing] the least" (IV.v.106). Altofronto shouts at him later, "By the Lord, thou art a perfect knave. Out, ye ancient damnation!" (V.iii.90-91). Yet, once Altofronto is back is a position of power (that is, once he is amongst "the greatest" whom Bilioso flatters), he does not deliver damnation; instead, he relents and jokingly dismisses his frenemy. His final words to Bilioso are "You to my worst friend I would hardly give;/ Thou art a perfect old knave. – All-pleased, live" (V.vi.162-163). The proper ordering of saving the good and damning the wicked – the ordering that defined Altofronto's earlier speeches as Malevole and were almost reminiscent of a Last Judgment – is replaced by another type of perfection: a perfect villainy, a kind that pleases without correction. Despite all of his bluster in the

play's second half, when finally able to deliver judgment upon Bilioso, Altofronto cannot even properly insult him. He speaks only in negatives and even his former insult is echoed as a strange form of praise. Even though he is no different than Mendoza in his means and potential aims (Finkelpearl 191), Bilioso, the "perfect knave" worthy of damnation, is granted mercy for no reason.

Thus, the real problem of Altofronto's positioning himself as God, or God's agent, does not stem from his taking on the duty of revenge for himself. After all, punishing the wicked and killing those who have committed treason are both his right as ruler and his role as the corrective revenger. But Altofronto more problematically trespasses from doing God's work to infringing upon his territory when he begins to *pardon and forgive* in the place of God. "The Duke's religion" (IV.v.95) becomes the religion of the play's second half. Admittedly, the regent, to an extent, was meant to have some type of divine mercy flow through him (Cohen 45-46, Geng 26, 138). Yet, Altofronto plays fast and loose with where God's power ends and his begins. For when Pietro seeks pardon, the pardon comes not from God, but from Altofronto himself:

> **Pietro**: I here renounce forever regency:
> O Altofront, I wrong thee to supplant thy right,
> To trip thy heels up with a devilish sleight,
> For which I now from throne am thrown; world-tricks abjure,
> For vengeance, though't comes slow, yet it comes sure.
> O, I am changed; for here, 'fore the dread power,
> In true contrition I do dedicate
> My breath to solitary holiness,

My lips to prayer, and my breast's care shall be

Restoring Altofront to regency.

Malevole: Thy vows are heard, and we accept thy faith. (IV.v.123-133)

Pietro's reconciliation with Altofronto becomes a type of unthinkable reconciliation of Heaven and Hell, wherein the fallen devil seeks amends with the holy. Pietro's reconciliation with his brother evokes a beseeching of God for forgiveness: he abjures worldly deceit and prays to the absent ruler, promising devotion. And Altofronto, like a Greek god in disguise (or Christian God turned man), hears his apostrophic prayer. While Pietro is sensible to seek the forgiveness of the man he wronged, he ultimately seems to be giving Altofronto the ultimate power of forgiveness and the ability to accept his vows and faith.

The "accept" and "faith" in this phrase make it a particularly odd phrase. While "accept" does have some contemporary connotations of belief (e.g. "I accept this argument") (3a), the more popular and older definition implies that he who accepts now has possession of the item (1a, 1b). In fact, in multiple examples and particularly those involving faith, God is the one doing the accepting. To accept "faith"[107] in particular seems to be elevating Altofronto to the figure of faith, the figure doing the accepting, and thus the new religious idol who is capable not only of accepting faith, but also of granting absolution for all sins. In fact, in one reading of this scene, Altofronto becomes even more Christ-like, taking on the sufferings of the world so that his enemy who had tried to harm him, Pietro, may live a happier life, as to rule is to be miserable (Cordner 185).

[107] While faith could mean a "pledge" (2) rather than "a system of religious belief" (6), its combination with "accept" should give the reader pause. While technically, Altofronto says nothing more than "I believe your promise" he notably does not say "I believe your promise." In other words, this sentence here is tricky and has me trying to justify the methodology of close reading once more, because Altofronto is saying two very different (albeit similar) things at once.

Whereas before Altofronto's revenge positioned him as the instrument of God's wrath, by the play's latter half, he has usurped God's greater power: His forgiveness. Altofronto has taken on the abilities and domain of not only God, but Jesus. Pietro says that his "vows stand fixed in heaven" (IV.v.141) even though they were only made to Altofronto. Altofronto embodies the problems of Catholicism (at least to a Protestant): man supplants God in this religious hierarchy. Much like a priest, Altofronto assumes that God's power flows through him and – like a clergyman of Luther's nightmares – diverts attention away from God and to himself. For Altofronto's response to Pietro's vows oversteps his earthly place. He says, "He needs must rise who can no lower fall" (IV.v.144). If one considers how Satan-like Pietro had sounded in his prior speech, then Altofronto's words might promise the ultimate act of forgiveness – one not even expected in Christianity. The figure at the bottom of hell, the ultimate sinner and thus the lowest in the universal hierarchy, *must* rise. While forgiveness is certainly a Christian virtue, the implications of Altofronto's forgiveness is unsetting for early modern Christian theology. It feels out of place, a proto-Unitarian Universalism appearing two hundred years before its time and without the proper theological scaffolding.

But this nontraditional system of forgiveness extends beyond Altofronto, becoming a recurring issue in the play. In Pietro's first attempt to forgive his wife, Aurelia after discovering her adultery, he tells her "An't please you, lady, we have quite forgot/All your defects" (II.v.25-26). Pietro turns a cliché on its head and *does not* forgive, but rather forgets. Mercy is less an act of accepting his wife's faults than willfully ignoring their existence. Similarly, once Aurelia recognizes her sin, she believes that she is absolutely beyond the province of Heaven's mercy:

Why, why, I can desire nothing but death,

Nor deserve anything but hell

If heaven should give sufficiency of grace

To clear my soul, it would make heaven graceless;

My sins would make the stock of mercy poor.

Oh, they would tire heaven's goodness to reclaim them. (IV.v.4-9)

Aurelia creates a system in which her forgiveness is indeed possible, but not ideal. Her forgiveness would cheapen Heaven, perhaps not only abstractly but also literally.[108] Aurelia seems to believe that her pardon "would make heaven graceless" and "would make the stock of mercy poor." She imagines a system wherein not only can the lucky elite gain unwarranted forgiveness, but that forgiveness will ultimately mean that someone else will be cheated out of needed-merits later on.

Yet, the play's system of forgiveness merges this problematic aspect of Catholicism – unwarranted forgiveness for the rich at the future expense of others – with something that feels distinctly Protestant: repentance and absolution are possible without penance (even if that penance was merely paying for indulgences). Penance – the outward manifestation of one's repentance – was a staple of Catholic theology. Not only was one meant to commit good deeds to show one's reformed soul (Shuger 558), but also one must punish the body for the sins of the body.[109] Yet, Protestantism, which stressed

[108] Such a literal cheapening would refer more to a Catholic theology, whereby forgiveness and grace could be achieved merely through the reappropriation of merits, the surplus of grace Heaven had in store from the passion of Christ and the deaths of martyrs (Shaffern 24-25).

[109] "[P]enances are understood as retribution for violations of divine justice; that is, their purpose is not to heal or purify the sinful soul but to punish it for having sinned. As Allen explains, God punishes sinners 'for the revenge and hatred of sin, and satisfying of justice.' Hence 'if any man yet doubt why, or to what end, die Church of Christ thus greviously tormentheth her own children

an inward faith over any external deeds, turned away from this system.[110] Aurelia ultimately obtains repentance without penance. Merely saying that she is sorry is sufficient. She soon asks, regarding her loss of "soul, body, fame, and honor" (IV.v.41): "But tis most fit: why should a better fate/Attend on any who forsake chaste sheets?" (IV.v.42-43). The play never does answer this question. Aurelia does not necessarily display anything resembling a Reformed concept of grace, and thus the idea of "internal over external" which so defined the Reformation is taken to its extreme. Aurelia does little to reflect an inward grace or salvation, but obtains it. However, Aurelia's forgiveness may have less to do with religion than it does with genre. Aurelia's redemption works to minimize the amount of sad people and broken couples by the play's end. In fact, to return to her question of "why her?," the answer may simply be "because the play is a comedy" and thus, for her to receive a more "fitting" catastrophe would be unfitting for the genre. Because the genre is mongrel, a wife can be adulterous with a usurper but finish the play with an ideal fate. But the questions that arise from this mongrel unfitness – issues of the means of and the degree of warrant for redemption – remain.

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by so many means of heavy correction, ... let him assuredly know, that she could not so satisfy God's justice' any other way." (Shuger 559)

[110] "Protestant writers from the Henrician period on consistently reject this model, and with it, the language of debt and payback. The Marian martyr John Frith thus writes, 'Call ye that justification freely by his grace, to lie in the pains of purgatory?... Nay, nay, Christ is not greedy to be avenged.'…Tyndale makes the same points: if a sinner trusts in Christ, 'his weakness, infirmity, and frailty is pardoned, and his sins not looked upon'; nor is God like worldlings, who 'cannot forgive without amends making.' Penitential disciplines like fasting do not satisfy for sin, but help sinners 'to subdue the body, that the Spirit may wait on God.'" (Shuger 562-563)

For Altofronto's abundant forgiveness upsets any sense of the proper retribution that the revenge play typically invites,[111] thus denying the corruption-correction that the genre provided; it also infringes on the power of the divine to forgive. Mercy becomes less of a subject of law or the church, as it becomes a subject of whim, wherein the monarch – rightfully or not – speaks for heaven. It cheapens forgiveness in meaning and allows for a system of absolution that requires nothing but quick penitence to the right person. In fact, the idea of forgiveness becomes burlesqued by the lower characters. These mockeries reflect the adulterated pardons that already have started to pepper the play. In the scene that comes shortly after the reconciliation of Pietro and Altofronto, we see that forgiveness has become a means of furthering one's own position:

> **Passarello**: I'll drink to the health of Madam Maquerelle
>
> **Malevole**: Why, thou wast wont to rail upon her.
>
> **Passarello**: Ay, but since I borrowed money of her. I'll drink to her health now as gentlemen visit brokers, or as knights send venison to the city, either to take up more money or to procure longer forbearance. (V.ii.15-21)

While not explicitly forgiveness, Passarello's reconciliation with Madam Maquerelle evokes the new friendship of Altofronto and Pietro, against whom Malevole was wont to rail. Yet, Passarello's motivations are not pure; rather, they are tied to his monetary position. Passarello's forgiveness and wishing his former enemy well is socially advantageous for him. This "low plot" parallel reflects Altofronto's union with Pietro: for all of the talk of forgiveness and atonement, their reconciliation is certainly bolstered by the fact that they share a common enemy. The shift in plot and character dynamics that

[111] "If we consider that the logic of revenge tragedy relies on the inability or the unwillingness of the proper authorities to take action in order to create a situation where the individual must act to see justice done, then Altofronto is just such an authority refusing to act." (Leonard 83)

defines the play's latter acts is only credible because Altofronto's pardon is indeed mutually beneficial.

When we do see an explicit mention of forgiveness in the final act, it is even more blasphemous. In a late conversation between Malevole and Madam Maquerelle, the bawd makes light of Heaven's pardon:

> **Malevole**: Now, in the name of immodesty, how many maidenheads has thou brought to the block?
>
> **Maquerelle**: Let me see. Heaven forgive us our misdeeds! (V.iii.91-93)

Though the confession is done in the name of a vice (immodesty) and ostensibly as a brag, Maquerelle asks Heaven to forgive her sins. This plea is one of the only times that a character actually implores Heaven for forgiveness (rather than for damnation), and it seems more like a command than a plea. It lacks the elaboration (or the sincerity) of the earnest pleas for forgiveness. And yet, it is the only time that one asks heaven, rather than a human, for absolution.

Ultimately, beyond any simple fear for society as a whole, there seems to be more existential concerns in *The Malcontent*. Not only do we see a world wherein evil may run free to perform evil again, but we also must consider the conditions under which evil may receive grace and an undeserved absolution. For even if we were to discover (*Stand By Me* or *Animal House*-style) Pietro, Bilioso, and Aurelia were never to sin again and Altofronto were to peacefully live out the rest of his days as duke, the play would still be leaving us in a world wherein evil is not punished and nothing aside from knowing the right person and being conveniently on his side at the right time is necessary for absolution. The play will underscore this idea particularly in the figure of Mendoza, who

I will discuss in the next section. For, as we will see, either he is the ultimate example of the sinner who remains not properly punished (even if he may not pose a further threat to the rest of society), or he is the unfortunate fall-man for the free passes that every other character receives, despite their vices.

Mendoza: Fiend or Scapegoat…or Does It Matter?

The abundance of mercy is not without its complications; the play and its backstory are filled with sin, and for reconciliation between all the other characters to be possible, someone must embody that sin and thus tacitly exculpate all of the others.[112] That someone is Mendoza, the Machiavellian schemer. Mendoza certainly is not purely an innocent victim of circumstance: he schemes to usurp, murder, and rape. But then again, he is not alone: Pietro, Bilioso, and Aurelia all in some manner commit treason and give in to baser desires. And yet, only Mendoza suffers at the end. What this section will prove is that whether or not he is the unequivocal and only villain is irrelevant; either way, the play's depiction of mercy is unnerving. Ultimately, by focusing on Mendoza's fate, we either see a scarcity or a surplus of mercy; it's never "just right."

Even some of the critics most skilled in reading the unsettling parts of Marston's tragicomedy do not question Mendoza's role as arch-villian. Leonard writes:

> Mendoza's unapologetic treachery against those who he believes are helping him to carry out his machinations…serves to reinforce the qualities that he shares with Senecan villains. Mendoza's soliloquy continues the logic of classical revenge

[112] To be fair, this "odd man out" is a staple of revenge comedies. Anderson discusses the character "whose actions motivate other characters to unite against him" and who is ultimately punished to ensure that he is no longer a threat to society (e.g. Malvolio, Falstaff, Shylock, etc.) (57). However, these other plays lack *The Malcontent*'s abundance of pardons proceeding these characters' labeling as the fiend. Mr. Ford may be overly suspicious of his wife and Sir Toby may be a drunk, but they are not usurpers of the throne like Pietro or conspiring adulterers like Aurelia.

> drama as he plots revenge against those who have not yet wronged him. Much like Atreus in *Thyestes*, Mendoza becomes obsessed with the imagined wrongs others have committed and will commit against him, in this cast eh fact that his supposed minions will retain a tyrannical control over him after they have completed his orders. (79)

Yet, Leonard's depiction of Mendoza relies more on Mendoza's later speeches. Indeed, towards the end of the play, the comparison of Mendoza to Atreus in *Thyestes* or his Renaissance offspring (Iago, Richard III, Barabas, etc.) is fair. For example, when Mendoza believes that he has killed Malevole and is about to have his way with Maria, he says in soliloquy:

> Now is my treachery secure, nor can we fall;
> Mischief that prospers, men do virtue call.
> I'll trust no man: he that by tricks gets wreaths
> Keeps them with steel; no man securely breathes.
> Out of deserved ranks, the crowd will mutter, "Fool";
> Who cannot bear with spite, he cannot rule. (V.iv.75-80)

Like the famous historical schemer, Mendoza sets himself up as a monarch who has achieved his rule by means of Renaissance whack-a-mole. He's the last one standing after his game of treachery and murder. His speech evokes some of Richard's (I.iii.323-337, IV.ii.60-65, IV.iii.36-43), both in his paranoia and his need to secure his throne with ever-more bloodshed. Yet, this reading relies on layering this aspect of Mendoza onto his earlier appearances, where he is certainly a schemer, but a much less threatening one. Other critics have noted the awkwardness in depicting Mendoza as the arch-fiend of the

play. While Geckle does describe Mendoza as Machievellian (114-119), he also notes the Machievellian nature of Altofronto, who "has learned the black arts required to manipulate men" (191). Champion, in fact, sees Mendoza and Malevole as two halves of the same character, a splitting of hero-villains such as Tamburlaine, Barabas, and Richard III into morally neater versions (366).Wharton notes that Mendoza's own stratagem of political conquest by means of sexual conquest is not extraordinarily villainous, but merely plays by the rules established by Marston's world (184). In short, Mendoza is not so much the exception to the world trying to conquer it – as Tamburlaine is – but just another character speaking the same scheming, Machievellian language as everyone else.

But this interpretation of Mendoza and Genoan society does not work towards closure: a society of Machievels and Atrei not only will fail to survive (as I discussed in prior critics' readings of the ending), but also is a society that lacks any Judeo-Christian assurances of retribution or justice. Moreover, Altofronto would have to recognize his reconciliation with Pietro and his followers as a far more opportunistic act: just one more schemer temporarily joining arms with another. Thus, the characters (and to an extent, the play…but not so cleanly) must redirect the blame for Altofronto's initial ousting onto Mendoza. The play rather awkwardly retcons[113] its backstory, so that Pietro is more or

[113] A retcon, or "retroactive continuity," (used in the verb form here: "to retcon") is a term that originated in discussions of theology, but employed more frequently in discussions of serialized narratives. When Elgin Frank Tupper first coined the term, he explained it as the concept that "history flows fundamentally from the future into the past, that the future is not basically a product of the past" (100). Since then, however, the word finds most frequent application in discussions of serial writers changing past events in a story for the purpose of future narratives, often with the implication that such was not the case when the story was initially penned. Notable examples include season 9 of *Dallas* being a dream to bring back Bobby, Doyle having Sherlock Holmes merely fake his death so that the series may continue, Darth Vader being Luke Skywalker's father despite the statement in the original film that Vader killed Anakin (thus necessitating *Return of the Jedi's* explanation that it was a spiritual death), and Hal Jordan's exoneration of his slaughter of the Green Lantern Corps with the revelation that he had been

less exonerated of his crimes (or, at the very least, his complicity diminishes). As Mendoza attempts to force Maria to marry him, she cries: "Thou ever-devil, 'twas thou that banished'st/ My truly noble lord…by thy plots, by thy black strategems" (V.vi.8-11). In the beginning of the final scene, Maria completely rewrites the catalyst of the play's events. Her words transform Mendoza from the opportunistic parasite/lecherous schemer into an arch-fiend/mastermind. He is no longer simply the man who slept with Aurelia and then took advantage of the aftermath of Pietro's discovery (the first four acts imply that such was his involvement and nothing more); he is now a type of Richard III-figure. According to Maria's words (which he does not dispute, nor does any other character), he has been playing the long-game, using tricks and plots worthy of the devil.

She further characterizes Mendoza as the devil as she continues to resist. In her words, Mendoza's vices are far beyond the scope of what the earlier acts of the play had suggested. She laments:

> O thou far worse than Death! He parts but soul
>
> From a weak body, but thou soul from soul
>
> Disseverest that which God's own hand did knit.
>
> Thou scant of honor, full of devilish wit! (V.vi.14-17)

Mendoza's treachery has progressed to the point at which he is guilty not only of earthly harm, but of heavenly harm as well. Similar to Pietro, he is transformed by his trespasses

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possessed by the evil entity, Parallax. As you can infer from these examples, retcons are almost always awkward, (at least) mildly nonsensical, and defy the earlier logic of a work. Thus, I use this word as a means of calling attention to how unfounded the quick revelation that Mendoza was behind all the crimes in the play's backstory feels. While such use might feel anachronistic, I would argue that Marston might indeed be one of the original users of the retcon. Whereas *Antonio and Mellida* ends as a comedy with the reconciliation of the families, *Antonio's Revenge* regenres the sequel into revenge tragedy through the use of a retcon. Mellida's father, Piero, reveals that his reconciliation with Antonio's father, Angrugio, was not sincere, but indeed an act to lure him into a false sense of security.

from a sinner into a fiend – and, in Mendoza's case, possibly into the Devil himself. He is the character most able to do harm to God's own creation and to the immortal soul. Because of his status as the new archfiend, Mendoza seems to inherit Pietro's own devilish faults. He is not only the new (and explicitly named) devil, but he also is now the one guilty of the crime of banishment and the character who *most* poses a threat to both the state and God's creation. While the earlier acts of the play do not hint at this at all – despite the fact that we do hear Mendoza's unmediated thoughts in soliloquy in those acts as well (I.vi.83-98, I.vii.84-90, II.i.1-30) – both Mendoza and the other characters' words towards the play's end imply that such has always been the case. Mendoza is not only an adulterer, not only a schemer, not only a usurper, but in fact the worst sinner ever to have lived.

Thus, by its need to change Mendoza from opportunist to mastermind in order to exonerate its other sinners, the play consequently must emphasize the necessity of Mendoza's destruction. Altofronto's mission has shifted from ousting the parasite who temporarily holds the crown into purging the state of the villain behind all of its woes. He must recorrect history's path. We do see this mindset in some of his later speeches. Immediately following Mendoza's Richard-esque speech and his departure, Altofronto cries:

> Death of the damned thief! I'll make one i' the masque…The great leader of the just stands for me. Then courage Celso,
>
> For no disastrous chance can ever move him
>
> That feareth nothing but a god above him. (V.iv.83-93)

Altofronto does indeed seem to swear the death of Mendoza in a manner that evokes the revenger killing his enemy in his play (a la Antonio or Hieronemo), but his speech calls to mind figures other than revengers. He now sounds like the figure who must rightfully kill the usurper in a history (particularly Richard from *Richard III*). God is indeed on his side, but God as leader of the just - of justice, not mercy – the God whose wrath provides the necessary justification of revenge stories.

Thus, because Mendoza has been so elevated in evil that his death now seems to be a necessity for the restoration of a properly functioning and righteous state, the play's resolution cannot help but be both unsatisfying and potentially troubling. When he is finally caught by Altofronto and his allies, he does indeed plea for mercy and forgiveness (the same that other characters had received without full warrant), but unlike them, he is denied:

> **Mendoza**: Where am I?
>
> **Malevole**: Where an arch-villain is.
>
> **Mendoza**: O, lend me breath till I am fit to die!
>
> For peace with heaven, for your own souls' sake,
>
> Vouchsafe me life!
>
> **Pietro**: Ignoble villain, whom neither heaven nor hell
>
> Goodness of God or man, could once make good!
>
> **Malevole**: Base, treacherous wretch! What grace canst thou expect,
>
> That hast grown impudent in gracelessness? (V.vi.119-127)

Malevole says that Mendoza is in his own personal hell – the lowest place possible – yet, unlike the other characters who are able to seek atonement and rise from their low

positions (despite their own protestations of their own inability to be forgiven), Mendoza cannot rise. He becomes the sole receptacle of the sins of the other characters; he inherits Pietro's need for damnation and Aurelia's mercy-challenging depths of sin, just as he has full blame for Pietro's coup. Furthermore, whereas Aurelia could be forgiven but at great cost to Heaven and Pietro is assured that his faith has been heard and received, Mendoza is simply and utterly unforgivable. This lack of absolution for Mendoza means one of two possibilities: either he truly is the arch-fiend, a fiend more loathsome than the lowest of the low, or Altofronto once more has overstepped his power as God's and has taken the place of God, as he decides who does and does not deserve pardon. This point becomes even more fraught when we note that Mendoza is the one character who seeks to save his soul instead of seeking human forgiveness. He mentions not only how his death would affect the others' souls, but also his need to be "fit to die": to confess and prepare his soul for salvation upon death. Pietro and Malevole rebuke this need, questioning the place of Mendoza in both a grand design and God's abilities to purge. But their comments reveal the questionable motivations of Altofronto's prior forgiveness of the unforgiveable. He is not so much seeking an overall cleansing (i.e. a pardoning of all) or even a sense of actual justice (his mercies go beyond the purview of equity), but rather a cleansing much like spring cleaning. His forgiveness is more aimed at convenience and usefulness than justice or mercy. Pietro is forgiven, much like Madam Maquerelle by Passarello, because he holds use for the Duke at that point in the narrative and shows allegiance to Altofronto *as* a god-like figure. Similarly, Pietro can forgive Aurelia because she has re-vowed her love for him. Mendoza, as the scapegoat of the other characters' crimes, has no other use but to be outed.

If Mendoza were indeed forgivable, then as I have already noted, Altofronto transgresses the bounds of his position by denying him his deserved mercy. However, if he is indeed the damnable mastermind that the characters perceive him to be – the very fiend of Hell – then Altofronto *again* oversteps his position by granting mercy where he should not. He says to Mendoza:

> Slave take thy life.
>
> Wert thou defensed thorough blood and wounds,
>
> The sternest horror of a civil fight,
>
> Would I achieve thee; but prostrate at my feet,
>
> I scorn to hurt thee. 'Tis the heart of slaves
>
> That deigns to triumph over peasants' graves (V.vi.129-134)

Altofronto spares Mendoza's life partially due to a technicality and partially to save face; to kill Mendoza, after all, would make him a slave just like the fiend himself. He does not agree with Mendoza's own reasons – the state of the salvation of his soul or the souls who would sully themselves by damning him — but rather confirms that, in other circumstances, the murder of Mendoza would be justified. His lightened sentence is less an act of clemency and more a calculated move to propagate the proper image of himself. Thus, if Mendoza is the arch-fiend, the Richard III usurper who has posed a poisonous threat to the entire state, Altofronto has *not* done his duty by purging him; instead, he allows the fiend to live for his own earthly fame.

We thus see that Altofronto's final act of mercy both goes too far and not far enough. If Mendoza is a flawed human like the others, he is denied forgiveness so that the others may be exonerated and the comedic ending may be preserved by their happy

resolutions. If Mendoza is a fiend, he is not bloodily purged from society so as not to taint the comedic ending with gore. Either way, the comedic ending reflects the unsatisfactory aspects of history that Sidney laments: the bad are not necessarily punished, or sometimes not to the proper extent. Of course, that unequal distribution of justice was one of the current concerns in early modern England. The Court of Chancery – originally created as a means of providing swift and uncomplicated justice to all of the king's subjects (Baker 98, 103-104) – over the years had become a court of the king's favor and a means of protecting favored subjects from common law courts (Cohen 40-45).

Altofronto begins the play as a corrective figure of justice (in the guise of Malevole) to an unjust government; he takes the law into his own hands, but for the sake of the meaning of the law. However, as the play proceeds, he uses his bending of the law not as "a correct to what is *legally* just" (Bilello 13, emphasis mine), but as a means of forgiving who is politically close to him or (if we are to read his punishment of Mendoza as light) a man whose death would reflect poorly on Altofronto's reputation. While mercy was ostensibly a Christian virtue, it was distinctly different from justice, and its imposition from an ecclesiastical context into a legal one was a concern of the judges of the period (Geng 149-154). To return to critics' assessment of *The Merchant of Venice*'s denouement, "Flexible law favors those in power. Discretion, innovation, and pragmatism are all the tools of those who govern" (Lemon 567). Altofronto's use of mercy and pardons ultimately recalls the same problems appearing in the English courts of equity: such a pliable interpretation of the law ultimately transfers equity into a means of ensuring that justice was subservient to the monarch's pleasure.

Conclusion

Mercy in this play ultimately is shown to be irrational, erratic, and dangerous. Whereas Altofronto at first seems entrusted to do God's vengeance on earth, he instead usurps his province as forgiver, but doing so without the proper motivations and often for his own agenda. Altofronto and others forgive with no reason aside from expediency, until Mendoza either becomes the figure who unfairly bears the onus of all the play's crimes or who does not receive proper punishment. While Sidney's own theory of poetry would argue that such a mongrel tragicomedy debases poetry's purpose, Marston's tragicomedy's mongrel nature instead argues for another reason for poetry. Poetry need not reflect a better world. Whereas Shakespeare's *Richard III* transformed history into a morally instructive tragedy, a tale that guarantees that the fallen king deserved his fate, *The Malcontent* – with its own uncomfortable version of Machievellian characters on both sides of the story – taints a moral genre with the messiness of history. Instead, poetry can show how far corruption's reach can spread; even the hallowed genre of tragedy — a genre wherein evil was guaranteed to suffer and wherein justice would always prevail, regardless of who held the crown — was no longer immune to the monarchal self-interest which the courts of equity had begun to represent.

Chapter 4

Let's Get Physical!: Conveying Heaven Through Earthly Language in Medieval Morality Plays and Middleton's The *Revenger's Tragedy*

> "No power is angry when the lustful die
>
> When thunder claps, heaven likes the tragedy" (Middleton, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, V.iii.49-50)[114]

These lines, which equate the applause of audience with that of heaven, are some of the most famous of Middleton's[115] *The Revenger's Tragedy*; their coy nudging of the audience, their leaning (though not breaking) the fourth wall seem, in a microcosm, to exemplify the uniqueness of *The Revenger's Tragedy* – it is a revenge play written in the mindset of the revenger himself (Frost 42, Hallett and Hallett 223). Many critics have remarked on the metatheatrical nature of these lines and this play's intersection of revenge and theatricality.[116] This moment, as the cited critics note, has something to say

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[114] All words, spelling, and line numbers for *The Revenger's Tragedy* are as they are appear in *The Norton Anthology of English Renaissance Drama.*

[115] To be fair, Middleton's authorship is still not 100% certain. However, most scholarship seems to have turned away from the Tourneur theory and embraced the Middleton one (see Corrigan 281-285 for a particularly compelling review of the shift).

[116] "In the following pun on 'claps' heaven is brought down to the level of a passive audience applauding the melodrama: 'When thunder claps, heaven likes the tragedy' (V.iii.47). Vindice becomes the agent of the parody and is invested with a theatrical sense resembling the dramatist's own." (Dollmore 140)

"Vindice's revenges are, however, self consciously theatrical and self-referential, affirming only the cleverness of their creator; for him, the play is the thing, period, and justice is wholly poetic – a situation succinctly summarized in one of his best-known lines, 'When thunder-claps, heaven likes the tragedy' (5.3.48, cf. 4.2.197-8; 5.3.42)." (Haber 64)

"[T]he plays' self-subverting theatricality raises serious questions about its metaphysics. Is the thunder that responds so promptly to Vindice's cues in Act 4, scene 2 and Act 5, scene 3 something we take as the voice of God or simply as a stagehand hitting a piece of sheet metal? Dollimore is certainly wrong to assume that the comic artificiality of the device "conclusively discredit[s]" providentialism (140), but it certainly interrogates it. God, we are allowed to suspect,

about not only the intersection of play-acting and revenge, but also the divine or justice. In fact these lines – as a key example of Middleton's hyperawareness of the genre and his desire to hyperbolize it – draw out a tension in the very genre of revenge tragedy itself.

The genre, at least according to Middleton's characterization, creates ethically acceptable bloody spectacles, tales wherein the viewers may indulge in the thrill of watching bloodshed because only the lustful die. Thus even as revenge tragedy is most frequently analyzed in its connection to Seneca's bleak brand of paganism and philosophy,[117] revenge tragedy in fact *simultaneously* has overlooked roots in a theatrical tradition that sought to vocalize the views of Heaven.[118] Indeed, these tales of "crime and punishment"[119] seem to propose a moral drive unseen in their Senecan predecessors. In

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may be nothing more than "noises off," or He may be a joker as given to mocking equivocation as Vindice himself." (Lindley 49)

[117] Boyle writes that in the works of Senecea there is a "moral blackness" (52), particularly in *The Thyestes*, wherein the gods and afterlife clearly exist (as exhibited by Tantalus), but prayers of vengeance to them go unanswered (51-53). Either the gods are powerless or do not care. Yet *Medea* has an equally bleak, though different, conclusion. He writes of the ending (shortly after Jason declares that there are no gods), "The gods are there. They are simply not Jason's; nor are they those of Corinth. The world is a larger and more uncontrollable place than Corinthian society thinks. There is structure and order but they are not man-made, nor subject to human models of morality and sense" (125-126). In Seneca's world, there are gods, but they are either against us or apathetic. The certainty of moral cause-and-effect which help codify the morality plays as such is not only absent, but vehemently denied.

[118] Consider the end of Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* which ends with the promise of eternal rewards for the good (including the revengers) and damnation for the wicked. The embodiment of Revenge ends the play, saying:

> Then haste we down to meet thy friends and foes,
> To place thy friends in ease, the rest in woes.
> For here, though death hath end their misery,
> I'll begin their endless tragedy. (IV.v.45-48)

The play ends thus with an assurance of justice for all the characters, a divine justice which mirrors the vigilante justice of Hieronemo and Bel Imperia.

[119] While bloody and anarchic, revenge tragedies do present a rather forceful vision of worlds wherein sin always meets its comeuppance. Linda Woodbridge, in fact, argues that revenge tragedies ultimately are very morally conservative, imagining countless correctives to society's ills. They are not so much explosions against justice, but rather a stronger enforcing of *fairness* in all senses of the word. Even the radical violence of the crimes can be attributed to a type of interest which the offender has earned for his initial misdeed (9-21).

Thyestes, the only divine reaction after Thyestes has eaten his children is for Phoebus to change the sun's path (1035-1036); Atreus faces no punishment. Vindice's quote, however, highlights one of the key differences between the works of Seneca and their Elizabethan and Jacobean descendants: Heaven cares…a lot. The literal power that decides the fate of man, the playwright, indeed drives a world of just retributions, retributions so just that even the revenger must often answer for his crimes.[120] And yet, the Senecan tradition remains. Thus, a tension lingers between these two genres of theater – the bloody revenge play of ancient Rome and the moralistic representation of man's virtue and vice, typical of medieval English theater. This tension may be at the heart of Elizabethan and Jacobean revenge tragedy and, indeed, may be partly the cause for so much critical volleying over the plays' moralizing –or amoral – stance towards their vindictive protagonists.[121] Yet Middleton's play, I will argue, is acutely aware of its genre's duality. In fact, despite the character's claim that heaven likes revenge tragedy,

[120] The valence position that these plays have towards their revengers' death is admittedly highly disputed. The older assumption seems to be that the revenger, having killed too much and gone beyond the law, must himself die to right the moral order. Hallett and Hallett's reading exemplifies this school of thought: "Moral law requires that the man who is guilty of murder must render up his own life in atonement, and aesthetic feeling demands, especially where so violent an act as the act of revenge is involved, that this law be adhered to without hedging" (98). This point of view seems to be particularly the case with *The Revenger's Tragedy* in New Criticism, which criticizes Vindice for taking on all the vices of the court that he critiques. For example, Robert Ornstein pronounces that Vindice "goes to his death precisely because of the courtly impudence which he once mockingly assumed" (115). However, not all critics read the endings so bleakly or simply. Chris McMahon notes that, "the pursuit of revenge more often destroys the capacity of the family to prosper" (42), but ultimately does not view the revenger's self-sacrifice as necessary condemnable or bad; he sees the act of revenge as producing a necessary "moment of sovereignty" for the household, rather than simply "surplus honor" (43). Woodbridge argues that the deaths should not be read negatively at all, as the revengers die satisfied, sacrificing themselves for what they believe in and choosing a higher law over law of man (23-29), making them types of martyrs.

[121] While many critics cited here in some way discuss the actual morality of revenge (particularly in *The Revenger's Tragedy*), there has also been a long debate over whether or not these plays were *intended* to be praiseworthy or condemnable stories. Cf McMahon, 21-25, 27-28 and Woodbridge 22-58 for a rather comprehensive review of this strain of criticism.

The Revenger's Tragedy utilizes excessive Senecan attributes in order to lodge a critique of medieval moralizing drama. Through moments of exaggeration, Middleton exposes a gross materialism that is always lying just under the surface of the medieval morality tale.

Middleton's genre play in this tragedy is notably different from those I have discussed in my prior chapters. Whereas Shakespeare either interpenetrated the codified Senecan-style tragedy with other kinds of poetry (love lyric) or theatrical subgenres (romantic comedy) and Marston created a comedy that emerges from a darker Senecan narrative, Middleton here is firmly within what we would call "revenge tragedy." Thus his play arguably boasts a generic purity that the drama analyzed in other chapters does not. And yet, because his play is a revenge tragedy in every detail, indeed in excess, many have labeled it a parody. Leslie Sanders's notes that it rehearses and considers the appeals of revenge tragedy even as it burlesques it (25). Critics even see its parodic nature as possibly generative. William Stull marks it as a turning point in revenge tragedy which completely explodes *The Spanish Tragedy* model for something far more messy and complex (35). Meanwhile, Brian Jay Corrigan reads it as a work born from Middleton's personal and artistic crisis. He writes, "Middleton combined a ready understanding of and appreciation for the genre he sought to dismiss…he commented upon an art form in the wane and possibly hastened its demise. While doing so, Middleton helped develop the "foundation of future revenge tragedies" (292). Yet, rather than viewing the play as a parody or burlesque of its own genre, however, this chapter instead argues that, in his very fidelity to revenge tragedy Middleton shows how much the genre has "always-already" been a mongrel. It need not mix with another genre to

break aesthetic decorum. Rather, it plays up the juxtaposition of revenge tragedy's ancestry of two ideologically opposed genres: the Senecan tragedy and the morality play.

Middleton's indebtedness to Seneca should be obvious by this point in my project. But his work – and arguably all of Elizabethan and Jacobean theater – has equally strong roots in the medieval morality play. As David Bevington famously argues in *From Mankind to Marlowe: Growth of Structure in the Popular Drama of Tudor England*, the tragedies of the Elizabethan period evolved out of the earlier morality play tradition.[122] J.M.R. Margeson in *The Origins of English Tragedy* also credits the morality play as that which gave way to a particularly English sense of tragedy.[123] Rather than show merely the cruel course of fate, English tragedy in the sixteenth and seventeenth century took on a worldview inherited from its medieval ancestors: violent downfalls gained significance and every event had a proper cause (Margeson 112). Howard Norland elaborates:

> The morality play became increasingly secularized as the sixteenth century proceeded, but only when its motifs were incorporated into the rediscovered forms of tragedy and comedy…did the morality find its most significant role in the development of English drama. As it became assimilated with the more mimetic genres, it began to wane as an independent entity, and by the end of the sixteenth century it had virtually passed out of existence as an independent dramatic form [becoming part of other genres, such as tragedy]. (47)

[122] See in particular Chapters XII-XIV and XVII ((“The Transition to Chronicle”, “The Transition to Romance”, “*Tamburlaine the Great,*” and “*The Conflict of Conscience* and *Doctor Faustus*”).
[123] See in particular Chapters II, V, and VI (“Fruits of Rebellion: The Morality Play” “’God’s Revenging Aspect,” and “The Web of Evil: Villain Tragedy”)

In short, the morality play disappeared only because some of its key traits became nearly ubiquitous in Renaissance drama. The very obsession for fairness that Linda Woodbridge claims is recurrent in the Elizabethan and Jacobean theater (5-7) indeed seems to have its roots in the logic of these medieval plays. However, as Woodbridge notes, "Unfairness was like the weather: everyone talked about it. But revenge plays did something about it" (6). Thus, while many plays shared the concerns of their ancestors, revenge plays seem to aim once more to put divine reckoning on stage in some manner.

Margeson notes how revenge tragedies combined Senecan themes of "horror and violence, the strong passions, [and] the networks of villainous intrigue" with medieval plays' need to shown cruel figures brought low (149). Vice takes on a Senecan flair, only to meet the downfall it always faces in morality plays (Margeson 150). While he only gestures to *The Revenger's Tragedy* and other Middleton plays, other critics have discussed at length Middleton's indebtedness to the structure of the morality play. Specifically, he toys with the audience's familiarity with these narratives of retribution in his own revenge tales (Garner 281). Much like older works such as the Macro Plays (*The Castle of Perseverance*, *Mankind*, and *Wisdom*), his works often portray morally-minded humans confronted by temptation in the form of fiends and either succumbing to or learning the error of such sins. The challenge becomes how to interpret the moral strain of Middleton's bloody works. Generations of critics have grappled with this question. A traditional strain of criticism on the plays, evident in the work of New Critics, reads the play as ultimately ethical, though a bit skewed in how it delivers its message. Robert Ornstein, for example, praises the play's moral structure, arguing that "far from exploiting irony for irony's sake, *The Revenger's Tragedy* is cast in an ethical design as

sophisticated and intellectual as that of Jonson's greatest comedies" (112). He even defends Vindice as "the only possible moral order, one that is warped in nature and eminently corruptible because it has no higher purpose than the accomplishment of revenge" (111). Irving Ribner agrees, "The play embodies a distinct moral vision, and this involves more than a belief in the inevitability of divine retribution or in the futility of human vengeance" (75). He builds on the play's heritage, directly remarking on "the medievalism in the play":

> The characters, with their allegorical names, move across the stage like figures in a medieval dance of death, their actions patterned and ritualistic…the play itself is one large dramatic symbol of which the morality play features are an appropriate part, and this total dramatic symbol is medieval both in its grotesqueness and in the view of life for which it provides the emotional equivalent. The unmitigated viciousness of the characters and the unrelieved sinfulness of the action become merely ludicrous when viewed in the naturalistic perspective. Action and character in this play are deliberately unreal, with exaggerated quality of all symbol, and the theme they emphasize is one of impermanence, change and mutability, the futility of life on earth which renders so urgent a hope in the life beyond. (76)

In short, Ribner reads Middleton's (or, as he believes, Tourneur's) bombastic style as intentionally medieval and pointedly working for his very moral message. His incredibly meta-theatrical parody works on behalf of an ideological nostalgia,[124] a nostalgia that seeks to reclaim the artificiality and excess of medieval theater because it had worked so

[124] In a way, Ribner's reading of *The Revenger's Tragedy* predicts the postmodern pastiche which sometimes parodies, but only in an attempt to reclaim a lost time and genre, e.g. the 21st century musical, *The Drowsy Chaperone*, which yearns for the simpler days of 1920s Broadway.

well to teach morality. Ribner therefore reads the parody-like nature of *The Revenger's Tragedy* not as a burlesque of the Senecan thread through Renaissance tragedy, but rather as characteristic of its morality-play tradition. In Ribner's eyes, the excess is not so much a subversion of the revenge genre as a reclamation of its predecessor.

More recently, Renato Rizzoli has continued the argument that *The Revenger's Tragedy* may be traditionally moral. He does not deny that it is a parody, but posits that the parody comes at the expense of the so-called morality evident in most other revenge plays. The play mocks the idea that revenge could be a moral act. He writes, "the deliberate questioning of the revenge tragic paradigms is marked by a constant metatheatrical discourse…[the melodramatic moments] enact Vindice's apparently moral and providential revenge only to dismantle and question it both in its empathetic dimension and in its ideological assumptions" (97-98). He reads the quote which began this chapter as the final confirmation of "the irreverent parody of the providential element reduced to a stage effect" (110), the final unmasking of revenge as nothing but a corrupt, decadent, immoral act that covers up its sinfulness in theatrical trappings.

If a strain of Middleton criticism reads *The Revenger's Tragedy* as a moral interrogation of revenge and violence, the dominant discourse in more recent criticism – if it touches the issue of parody – takes this play not only *as* aesthetic parody, but also as an ideological one.[125] John Dollimore famously reads the play as a "black camp" take on

[125] Arthur Lindley reads the play as ultimately denouncing revenge as "simply another unchecked appetite," arguing that the final depiction of revenge works as a "sustained and timeless critique of the conservative impulse in politics (52). Steven Mullaney sees the play as mostly misogynistic yet undercut by its end wherein Vindice, the misogynist *par excellence*, becomes a blabbermouth –a failing which the play has linked with women. He writes that the end "is so uncharacteristic of theatrical misogyny in the period and so explicit that it allows one to entertain, at least, the possibility that Middleton conceived the play with all its excesses not as yet another, and in many ways culminating, instance of stage misogyny but as a critique and critical examination of the

a morality tale, one which reduces the divine to a stage-trick and points to a larger void in a greater moral universe:

> [T]he traditional invocation to heaven becomes a kind of public stage-prompt ('Is there no thunder left…?') and God's wrath an undisguised excuse for ostentatious effect…the conception of a heavenly retributive justice is being reduced to the a parody of stage effects…Discussions of the extent to which a play is indebted to older dramatic forms are often marred in this way by an inadequate discrimination between the dramatic use of a convention and wholesale acceptation of the world view that goes (or *went*) with it. Obviously, the distinction becomes more than usually crucial when, as is the case here, the convention is being subjected to parody. (140-141)

Dollimore's investment is in the depiction of retribution as artificial. He, very insightfully, investigates how this play reveals the divine vengeance of morality plays (and religion in general) to be nothing more than a stage-trick. God's thunder is never anything but some clanging metal off to the side.[126]

Of *Women Beware Women,* one of Middleton's other burlesques of morality and its motivations, Alexander Leggatt, like Dollimore, finds Middleton's engagement with

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tradition" (161-162). However, Judith Haber feels that the play is both a parody and a simultaneous reaffirmation of said Jacobean misogyny. She writes, "While the text effectively anatomizes and criticizes the structures of misogyny and the erotics of patriarchy, it simultaneously delights in them, never seriously attempting to imagine an alternative" (61).

[126] While I am certainly indebted to Dollimore, my reading ultimately differs from his in that I step back from the discussion of "moral" retribution and instead consider the logic and arguments that these plays present in favor of acting morally. Middleton's thunder may be artificial but God's may not be to the audience; thus regardless of the reality of such thunder, I argue that Middleton might be asking if the fear of thunder (or desire for heavenly rewards) dictates behavior. Dollimore judges the over-physicalization of the divine as the rendering of heavenly vengeance into a parlor trick; my project will differ by considering how this play, this pseudo-morality, is *excessively* physical in all matters regarding morality, ethics, and theology.

Christianity more of an interrogation than endorsement. He writes, "Middleton's characters even at their most religious cannot get beyond Christianity as a superior form of fire insurance" (150). Practicing Christianity and abiding by all its doctrines are merely ways for characters to protect themselves from flames.[127] Yet, this "Christianity as fire insurance" issue is not the misreading of the canon of English morality tales, but in fact, the logical conclusion of them and, thus, their failing. These prescriptive tales ultimately seem to teach by action over instructing by philosophy. Sin *must* be physicalized as fire, and Christianity's worth (and the value of a virtuous life) therefore becomes merely a means *of* fire insurance.

In navigating these opposing critical traditions – Middleton as moralist vs. Middleton as atheist – I wish to investigate the ways in which the two strains of generic influence on Middleton, morality drama and Senecan revenge play, ultimately expose a morality darker than any of its dramatic predecessors. With so many lascivious humans and no true figures of ideal virtue,[128] the characters who are simply "not as bad" ultimately become the "moral" characters, despite their attachments to other vices. All characters are motivated by self-interest and try to "teach morality" by means of

[127] This scene under discussion is possibly one of Middleton's most cutting attacks on the lengths Christians will go to so that they can avoid the flames of Hell. In it, the Duke – who has been sleeping with Leantio's wife, Bianca – finally sees the light and repents his coveting another man's wife. However, his solution is to make amends by killing Leantio so he can be in a proper, Christian marriage with Bianco, whom he so desires.

[128] Even Gloriana, the symbol of lost purity (and the bygone Elizabethan age) is not free from scrutiny. Stephen Mullaney argues "the dichotomy between true and painted beauty…does not hold for long. Seeking terms appropriate for praising her chaste beauty and beautiful chastity, Vindice cannot master such culturally charged oxymorons without recasting them as contradictions. So beautiful was she, he continues as if in praise, that she could do what painted beauties could not: provoke desire in men otherwise inaccessible to sexual allure" (159). Judith Haber elaborates on Mullaney's claim, writing "As [Vindice's opening] speech progresses, purity repeatedly becomes a form of artifice and chastity is transformed into seduction. And the movement of the speech presages the metamorphosis, later in the play, of the dead chaste Gloriana into a stage prop and temptress" (63). Gloriana thus is both pure and the exact type of artifice-fueled whore whom Vindice so despises.

selfishness. All moral lessons of this play – grounded in the physical world, never directly interacting with the divine –are mediated through the immediate here-and-now of mortal life and thus carry the taint of the "fallen" world.

Revenge Drama's Moral Ancestors

With the exception of *Everyman* (which is indeed widely accepted among medieval scholars *as* an exception),[129] the extant fifteenth century morality plays follow a very formulaic, almost constrictive plot. The embodiment of the human soul or species (be it *The Castle of Perseverance*'s Humanum Genus, the eponymous Mankynde, or *Wisdom's* Anima) initially pledges a life of devotion and an embrace of all forms of chastity. This pledge is usually addressed to an allegorized figure of goodness: a good angel, Mercy, or Wisdom. A Devil figure – Malus Angelus, Mischief, Lucyfer – tempts the human. The human might at first rebuke the fiend, but ultimately falls prey to seduction. Embodiments of sins enter, treating the audience to a great deal of humor be it scatological (*Mankind* does such to excess) or topical (e.g. *Wisdom*'s jibes at the corrupt legal system). Finally, the human reemerges, destroyed by the life of sin (Mankynde is "Ny dede in the cryke" (776), vomiting from too much drink, whereas Anima in *Wisdom* reappears deformed and surrounded by demons). Finally, the human repents and accepts penance as the only way to return to God's good graces.

We can see this model executed rather clearly in Middleton's play in the attempted seductions of Castiza and Gratiana. Both are pure women who initially seem committed to a life of virtue. They are met by the fiend (Vindice as Piato, acting on

[129] "That *Everyman* is atypical of medieval English drama is becoming a commonplace. While the occasional scholar will still attempt to show the play's continuity with other medieval English drama, critics point regularly to the representation of evil in *Everyman* as lacking the spirit of the 'vice' characters more familiar from Macro manuscript plays like *Mankind* or *Castle of Perseverance*." (Ladd 57)

behalf of one of the play's multiple Satans: Lussurioso) who then seeks to tempt them to sin. Through Vindice's sister's and mother's reactions, Middleton shows both the rebuked and successful temptations by sin. Gratiana turns to sin and that choice is even physicalized in her daughter's changed manner of dress, a shift that recalls Anima's transformation. Finally, both Castiza and her mother – after their turns – must face denouncements and predictions as to what lives of sin reap, and then must seek purification and repentance (less so for Castiza, who claims her turn to sin was an act). This last aspect is key. Gratiana only returns to virtue through threats of violence, damnation, and worldwide shame. One of the key arguments she then presents to Castiza, we will see, is the horror of poverty.

I say that this last aspect is key because of how these arguments ground themselves in physical, tangible repercussions. If the structure of the overall subplot is reminiscent of one from a morality play, the logic and reasoning of its conclusion are certainly reflective (perhaps fun-house mirror-style) of its medieval predecessors. For, one recurrent trope that should become quickly apparent in these plays is the need to physicalize the philosophical problems of sin.[130] When Anima reemerges, deformed by a life of indulgence, Wysdom decries:

Se what thi ende ys, thou myght not fle.

[130] Christine Richardson and Jackie Johnston argue that the division of "real" vs. "abstract" should be avoided when discussing the works of the medieval period because people would have believed that "Reality consists not in the material world around us, but in the eternal principles such as truth, goodness and beauty; real entities, not just abstract names" (98) and that "the division between 'real' and 'personified' is fluid" (99). Thus, I try to refrain from using these terms, and instead use divisions such as "philosophical/divine/allegorical" versus "earthly/secular/tangible." While the medieval audience may indeed have not viewed a physicalization of Mercy or Malice as unreal, the appearance of such a physicalization of the divine or infernal would certainly have hit a different register than a representation of the quotidian.

Dethe to every creature certen ys.

They that lyve well, they shall have blys;

Thay that endyn yll, they goo to hell! (874-877)

The physicality of sin's effect on the body extends beyond the play and towards the audience themselves. The prior drama – the tug of war over the mortal mind – gives way to a direct connection to the audience by means of universalization, both through the shift to second person and by the guarantee that every creature (yes, even you in your seat right now) *must* die. The audience is not only appealed to in this direct address, but by the reliability of the concept: to be sinful is to be ugly.[131] The larger, philosophical or theological dangers of sin may be difficult for a layman to fully grasp, but he can certainly understand and share a desire not to be hideous.

Having thus doubly extended the implications of the drama to the audience, the play then delivers an easily-digestible "how to" guide for salvation in the last two lines. The ambiguous "bliss" – which could either mean heavenly salvation or simply happiness no different from earthly joy – is the promise of a virtuous life rather than "heaven" itself. Hell, however, is the punishment for a bad life, but I would argue that hell *does* tend to be more physical than Heaven. Whereas writers often conceive of Hell in terms of physical punishments, Heaven's rewards are rarely so clearly outlined or demarcated.[132] Partly, the

[131] This equation would also have had "scientific" backing both in the time of the morality plays and in Middleton's own time. Physiogomy had been equating a hideous exterior with sinful behavior (Baumbach 590, Ziegler 304). This concept had its root in the writings of Pseudo-Aristotle who wrote, "But if bad proportions mean villainy, a well-proportioned frame must be characteristic of upright men and brave: only the standard of the right proportions must be sought in the good training and good breeding of the body" (1249).

[132] Consider how one of the most famous medieval works on the repercussions of a one's life – *The Divine Comedy* – spends far more time physicalizing Hell (and even Purgatory) than Heaven. While Beatrice does become more beautiful as Dante ascends and there are feelings of joy or warmth in Heaven, we do not see a corollary earthly reward for virtues to match punishments in

issue here (as we will see later in talks of rewards in morality plays) is that while Hell can torture its inhabitants by sinful human methods, most physical pleasures of the world typically involve indulgence in some sin, and therefore would not be fit for Heaven. The material Hell is communicable through language and imagery; the spiritual Heaven is impossible for humans to grasp fully. Thus, the play will promise Hell for sin, but proffers the vague, yet enjoyable sounding, bliss for virtue. Both of the options that it brandishes as the fate of immortal souls – happiness or torture – are ultimately rather tangible.

Similarly, the atypical morality play, *Everyman*, physicalizes the problems of a sinful life not only by hinting at divine torture, but also by showcasing how this lifestyle leads to allegorical isolation and poverty. Elizabeth Harper and Britt Mize argue, "*Everyman*'s purpose is to dramatize spiritual peril and the means of salvation, but its method in doing so reflects earthly concerns that are both concrete and particular" (265). Though *Everyman* advocates forsaking the world, its logic remains trapped in the realm of the physical. It may portray Fellowship as fickle and Goods as heartless, but Everyman himself still wants the fellowship of someone (who turns out to be Good Deeds) and, as I will discuss next, the wealth of God. Ultimately, *Everyman* shows that a life without

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Hell (as one Dante scholar once said to me in conversation, "It's not like there's a level of soft, fluffy pillows in Paradise"). To be fair, Dante does stress that the tortures of Hell are merely the icing on the very miserable cake. We are often reminded that "the horrendous physical pains of Hell are in additional to that single negative pain…[sinners] have eternally lost God" (Ryan 142). However, the entire existence of *The Inferno* emphasizes how much that larger existential torture is simply *not enough* for the purposes of the poem (be the purpose to warn readers from sin, or delight in the justice of God). At times, Dante physicalizes the effect of sin on the sinner, as seen in his depiction of Satan and his distance from God's light (Ryan 143). Satan's isolation from God's metaphorical warmth is concretized in the ice of the ninth circle of Hell. However, while I again must emphasize that the mere fact that Dante spends so much time on these "superfluous" tortures illustrates how much he does need to demonstrate a physical, tangible consequence for sin. And while these consequences are sometimes merely the materialization of what was already happening to the soul, other times, they are more a retaliation for what the sinner had done: the *contrapasso* for which Dante is so famous (Bondanella XXXIX).

Good Deeds will in turn lead to a man being spiritually poor and lonely, even as it tries to assure its audience that money and companionship are not priorities.

In short, these stories warn against sin by grounding the philosophical and spiritual messages in physical terms. They preach piety over sinfulness by threatening various physical punishments. Similarly, rewards are compared to, in some manner, earthly treasures. This comparison, of course, has root in the New Testament, which purports that a life of earthly poverty will lead to heavenly abundance and wealth (Boyde 108-109). For example, Wysdom, in its play, is said to be "better than all worldly precyosnes" (33). According to the play, one should not shun precious wealth for its inherent sinfulness; rather, one should choose wisdom since wisdom is simply a better bargain (we will see similar logic in Castiza's and Gratiana's final vaunting of chastity). Wysdom presents himself as the superior option, but without fully discrediting the scale according to which wealth is judged. Likewise, *Everyman* compares Penance to "a precious jewel" (557) and Knowledge a "ghostly Treasure" (589). Confession is not transformed into a monetary unit, but is physicalized as a "cleansing river" (536) – any virtue here, in short, needs a positive tangible equivalent. Heaven and salvation become a collection of luxuries. *Everyman* further turns the spiritual matters into worldly matters with its economic language around Christ: Everyman's soul has been "bought" by Christ and now he must settle his accounts books.[133] In short, these works reduce (or at least

[133] "Everyman presents two discrete planes of economic activity, two different systems of values that find expression predominantly in terms of the possession or movement of wealth. The first is the literal, mundane frame of reference, that of earthly riches [the other] a metaphorical economy: a system of spiritual relationship and values whose representation often makes use of the language of wealth as an instructive analogy, a way of accommodating theological and metaphysical ideas to a more familiar conceptual paradigm." (Harper and Mize 275).

transform) broader concepts of the divine, the benefits of religious devotion, and the detriments of sinful living into a carrot-and-stick model of rewards and punishments.

And yet, despite this equation of the worldly with the spiritual, these works all ultimately share a common anxiety over worldly goods and the mortal realm in general. Mercy in *Mankind* warns "Pryke not yowr felyctes in thyngys transytorye/Beholde not the erth, but lyfte yowr ey uppe" (30-31), as if the only problem with riches were their transitory nature, that "you can't take them with you," and not any concerns about the nature of wealth itself. Meanwhile Mankind himself laments his forced attachment to his physical body:

> Oh thou my soull, so sotyll in thy substance,
>
> Alasse, what was thi fortune and thi chaaunce
>
> To be assocyat wyth my flesch, that stynkyng dungehyll? (202-204)

Similar to *Wisdom*'s argument for choosing Wysdom over wealth, Mankind's forsaking of the worldly is less the product of deep thinking and possible sacrifice than the very obvious decision. His flesh is undesirable because it so resembles feces; his desire to rid his soul of it is more akin to emptying the chamber pot than a pious wish to be free of the pleasures and temptations of the world. The choice is even more obvious when one considers how much the play is concerned with shit ending up in the wrong places. The Three Ns, after all, about how shit could appear on one's breeches even if he has "wype hys ars clen" (337-342) and Nought complains that he has "fowl arayde my fote" (784) while relieving himself in a creek. The play continues to link evil with earthly treasures, even connecting the seeking of payment by the players themselves to the summoning of Tytivillus (though, as I will shortly explore, this summoning is admittedly complicated).

The Castle of Perseverance, which casts avarice and covetousness as its key temptations, features even more explicit denunciations of worldly wealth. The Bonus Angelus stresses Christ's own poverty and thus the New Testament's particular antipathy towards wealth:

> Why schuld he coueyt werldys goode,
>
> Syn Criste in erthe and hys meynye
>
> All in pouert here þei stode? (350-352)

The play reinforces this viewpoint soon afterwards by showing the Malus Angelus's affinity for the accumulation of riches:

> Take þe Werlde to þe entent
>
> And late þi loue be þeron lent.
>
> Wyth gold and syluyr and ryche rent
>
> Anone þou schalt be ryche. (389-392)

Yet, the play does not actually seem to be making arguments for and against wealth; rather, it is simply damning the concept by association. Wealth is bad because the Malus Angelus endorses its accumulation. Poverty, meanwhile, is admirable, but for no reason other than the fact that Jesus was poor. In short, this play's philosophizing on wealth amounts to nothing more than celebrity endorsements and peer pressure.

Everyman has a bit more of a complicated relationship with wealth. Roger A. Ladd reads the play as not simply part of an anti-avarice tradition, but due to the depiction of Goods as cash, to be part of a particularly English anti-mercantile satire (Ladd 61-66). However, *Everyman*, which believes charity may get merchants to heaven, is far less antimercantile than *Piers Plowman,* which refuses to imagine a situation

wherein merchants may save themselves (Ladd 69-71). Thus *Everyman* does condemn the love of money, but also stresses that the use of money for charitable purposes can be a means of salvation. In other words, Goods can easily become Good Deeds, particularly in the economy of Catholic salvation.

In short, these plays are, in turn, enacting anxieties around wealth, anxieties that Ineke Murakami in his reading of *Mankind* attributes to "a nostalgic investment in feudalism against an emergent capitalism" (20). Further, Patrick Boyde argues that distrust around wealth accumulation increased in the late middle ages due to the acts of St. Francis and similar reconsiderations of Christianity and of the exultations of poverty in the New Testament.[134] Yet, to read these plays as solely instruments of a conservative movement, unable to be critical or in some way challenging, would be an affront to the texts. Murakami notes that the plays would "deform religious conventions to send messages… generally in earnest service to a transcendent Other (God or commonwealth) perceived to be the optimal force for all" (7). In other words, in hopes of *restoring* a more proper interpretation of morality, these plays could take stances that challenged the contemporary religious hierarchy (hence, *Mankind*'s often-commented upon Lollard sympathies).

But equally important is the fact that these plays are all problematized by the very physical apparatuses that they employ to convey their messages. These plays, after all, are commercial in nature – an aspect most explicitly seen in *Mankind*'s bid for money – and revel in the exact things they condemn. This particular moment shows a self-awareness of the play's double-bind between advocating the spiritual virtues and needing

[134] Cf "Christian values through Dante's eyes" from *Human Vices & Human Worth in Dante's Comedy*

the physical vices. The players may be villainizing money, but simultaneously almost certainly *do* want to get paid. They seek their audience's coins in return for delivering the very demons all should wish to leave the earth. Other critics have dealt with these issues, particularly the amusing nature of the vices, by arguing that the audience is not only meant to laugh at their antics, but then reflect on the implications of such laughter. In his landmark book on morality plays, Robert Potter writes that "we are meant to acknowledge with laughter our recognition of the common weakness of humanity, which being general can scarcely be blamed. In this way the morality play is first of all a liberation from individual guilt" (36). Meanwhile, Stanton Garner Jr. sees *Mankind*'s Three N's as particularly troubling: "To an extent unusual even for the moralities the play has drawn the audience into its entertaining middle and implicated them in its action: the three N's have led the audience in the singing of a scatological 'Cristemes songe' (331-43), pranced among them, and even made them pay to see the devil Titivillus" (279-280). Thus he reads Mercy's denouncement of Mankynde's fall to also be indicative of mankind's – particularly the audience's – own fall "from the strictures of mindfulness to the distractions of performance in its amoral – and immoral – theatricality" (280). These works thus are often aware of the fine line they tread in their attempted lessons. The very apparatus of the lesson could undo the purpose of the lesson itself, if misread or twisted. While critics have discussed the humor of these works to great length under this lens, less work has been done considering how these poems and plays stress a turning from the world, but only by using the language of the world to implore such a turn.

Recognizing the vexed legacy of the morality tradition, in which one is cautioned against worldly delights but only through means which endlessly invoke touchstones of

material imagery, allows us to assess Middleton's inheritance of this genre more accurately. As we shall see, Middleton takes this always-present tension between worldly and divine and amplifies it. He *does* misread and twist the lesson of the morality plays to show the perversity and, more importantly, the materiality and materialism that underlies narratives of morality. He does this by matching the logic of the morality play with the logic of Seneca's tragedies, wherein the only real victors are those who triumph in the here and now (as Boyle has shown, neither Medea nor Atreus need fear divine retribution for their atrocities). As a result, in the always-already mongrel revenge tragedy, we see that the moral victory of the medieval in some way may match the more physical victory of the works of Seneca (which ultimately seems to exaggerate the materialistic tension already present in morality plays). His work, which places the morality tale into a less allegorical, more realistic setting, burlesques the double bind which the prior playwrights had merely flirted with.

Who Wants to Be a Righteous Millionaire?: *The Revenger's Tragedy* and Virtue's Earthly Rewards

Despite being set in a secular world, Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy* is almost excessively a morality play. The work may not have a true devil, but it does provide a pantheon of fiends who are ready to lead others to Hell. And even though it may not have the embodiments of Mischief, Gluttony, or Mercy walking about, as the earlier Ribner quote notes, the names of many of the characters (Lussurioso, Castiza, Ambitoso, etc.) seem to invoke that this world is indeed populated by people who exemplify those virtues and vices. Yet, this excessiveness complicates the play's ethical thrust. Middleton's play's engagement with its morality play nature, both in its

exaggeration of its tropes and its extreme juxtaposition of that nature against the Senecan play's disposition to seek justice in *this* life, ultimately compromises the moral drive of the play even as it overperforms the required beats. From the beginning, the play overdoes the generic requirements. While other Jacobean tragedies often present an evil court, usually one figure stands as ringleader. Similarly, an archfiend leads the other vices in the morality plays. However, Middleton plays up not only the luxuriousness of the entire court (thus undermining the Duke's status as ringleader), but also the viceful nature of the court. The Duke is both the Malus Angelus/Tytivillus /Lucyfer and simply one of a host of vices (such as the Three Ns of Mankind or the Seven Deadly Sins). Vindice introduces the Duke and his villainous court, saying:

> 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 the devil;
> Four ex'lent characters. (I.i.1-5)

As much as Vindice's own anger is ostensibly directed against the Duke, he does not depict the other characters as any less sinful. Lussurioso (whose very name conflates him with Vindice's first accusation against his father) is as steeped in evil as his father. Meanwhile, the bastard and the duchess – neither of whom seem to have done Vindice any wrong – are equally damned. In a manner, this world more resembles the world of Seneca, a world where Vice is not contained into certain characters, but almost omnipresent (consider how, with the exception of perhaps the children in the plays, neither side could be aligned with Virtue).

Thus, as the play builds on the typical clichés inherited from morality plays into revenge tragedy, it simultaneously defangs the moral drive of the tale. By making a court as vile as the Duke himself, a court made up entirely of evil exempla, Middleton makes the Duke unexceptional in his exceptional sinfulness. In the pantheon of vices, the personal nature of Vindice's Senecan bloodlust becomes all the more apparent. In light of the fact that the Duke is no better or worse than the rest of his court, Vindice's singling out of the Duke as the target of his revenge suddenly might appear purely personal. Furthermore, as Thomas Rist notes, the abundance of motives for Vindice similarly troubles the clear narrative of retribution that Vindice wishes to set out:

> However, although presenting *two* funerary motives for vengeance doubles a standard reason for grievance, the different explanations of Vindice's anger – especially when expressed, as here, without relation, present a disconcerting inconsistency to Vindice…The implication…is that despite the fictions of remembrance, the true cause of vengeance is not the skull or the father but the tragic genre. (100)

Vindice's thirst for vengeance becomes either petty or the product of generic necessity; while the infernal echoes are still present in the description of his enemies, Vindice's plethora of reasons strip his vendetta of any divine connotations. Middleton creates a morality tale that is distinctly amoral. One's fate is no longer tied to how evil one is, but rather dictated by the disposition of the man one crosses.

This world, with so many fiends and no real angels, with only the illusion of moral cause-and-effect, creates scenarios in which the characters navigate issues of morality without the certainty allowed to Mankind, Humanum Genus, and the like. In a

manner, it very much is a morality tale set in a morally ambiguous Senecan *mise-en-scene*. The play's great moralizer, Vindice, after all, collapses morality and practicality as he considers the ethical transgressions of familial shame, breeches of confidence, and exposing parental impiety. Before sharing his mother's behavior with Lussurioso, he says:

> Now must I blister my soul, be forsworn,
> Or shame the woman that received me first.
> I will be true; thou liv'st not to proclaim:
> Spoke to a dying man, shame has no shame. (II.ii.36-39)

While Vindice initially presents both options (lying or ruining his mother's reputation) as possibilities that would damn his soul, he soon reveals that one damnable offense is, in fact, a morally-malleable one. The deed depends not so much on the act itself but merely the longevity or the ultimate outcome of the offense. If shame is able to lose its intrinsic properties by the death of Lussurioso, than the sin of shaming one's mother would lose not only its damnable properties, but its sinful nature itself. A sin is not a sin without a physical marker. Just as morality plays promised physical retributions for sins, *The Revenger's Tragedy* requires material evidence for the sin itself.[135]

Yet, here we actually see Middleton diverge from the logic of the medieval morality play. He certainly is engaging with it, yet he seems to be turning its methodology against itself. For the "ends justify the means" reasoning he gives Vindice – which seems born from the need for every virtue and vice to be tangible in some manner – recalls not good counsel, but rather a fiend. Lucyfer in *Wisdom,* for example, purports a

[135] To actually draw this out in logic, let S be "Sin is committed" and R to be "Sin faces a physical repercussion." Morality plays operate under a logic of "S ➔ R." Middleton's tragedy thus presents its necessary counterpositive: "~R ➔ ~S"

focus on the here-and-now, on earthly treasures, exactly because of the immediate effects, rather than the effects on the soul that are utterly detached from any earthly repercussions:

> Here ys a man that lyvyt worldly,
>
> Hathe wyffe, chylderne, and servantys besy,
>
> And other chargys that I not specyfye!
>
> Ys yt leeful to this man
>
> To leve hys labour usyde truly?
>
> Hys chargys perysche, that Gode gaff duly,
>
> And geve hym to peyer and es of body? (405-411)

Similar to Lucyfer, Vindice bunts the actual issues of divine crime versus divine good to consider instead the question of what action would cause earthly harm or propagate earthly good. His moralizing does not consider – or at least consider seriously – a realm fully beyond earthly matters. But Middleton's play ultimately will imply that there is no other way to reason but Lucifer's way. He exposes that the only means of swaying the earthly people are through earthly consequences.

Everyone Gives a Damn Bout Their Reputation

As a result of this external focus, we see that when moralizing in this play happens, it often revolves around conceptions of reputation. *The Revenger's Tragedy* interrogates not only the *very* physical rewards, punishments, and markers of behavior, but also the social world. This concept of reputation/honor seems at first to occupy a type of liminal space between the earthly and the abstract, a type of guarantee that how one behaved morally will reflect how one is known on earth. This guarantee seems present in

the morality plays, wherein virtue is beautiful and vice hideous.[136] The very interior qualities are inherently tied to physical attributes, which are then publicized to the world. As I have already noted, Wisdom brandishes the hideousness of Anima as its threat against leading a sinful life. Furthermore, the sheer nature of the exemplum begs the viewer to *look* at the exemplum in judgment or praise. *How* we look to others, whether we are praised or damned (in both senses of the word) becomes incredibly important.

For the structure of the morality tale relies on abasement and humiliation necessary to convey the dangers of a sinful life. The most notable example is Anima from *Wisdom* who, after her temporary fall, "apperythe in the most horrybull wyse, foulere than a fende" (902.1). The reprimands against her center on her new ugly appearance: "Thou hast made thee a bronde of hell,/Whom I made the ymage of light" (916-917), "Dysfygure you never to the lyknes of the fende!" (1115). The need to avoid such mortification and disfiguration becomes as much of a concern as avoiding the sin itself – in short, it is a matter of pride.

While the Macro Plays seem to present that the only way to avoid such humiliation and disfiguration is through God, Middleton shows that there is a disconnect in reputation and behavior. Consider the Duke's lament regarding Junior Brother's crime:

> His violent act has e'en drawn blood of honor
>
> And stain'd our honors,
>
> Thrown ink upon the forehead of our state,
>
> Whcih envious spirits will dip their pens into

[136] "Dressed was used extensively in the moralities to symbolize a character's nature, as is evident in the elaborate costumes worn by the figures in *Wisdom*. Wisdom (Christ) is dressed in regal purple and ermine, while Anima (Soul) appears as a maid in rich attire, and Lucifer enters "in a dewylls array wyhtout and withyn as a prowde galonte" (Norland 41)

After our death and blot us in our tombs,

For that which would seem treasure in our lives

Is laughter when we're dead. (I.ii.2-8)

Obviously, when we consider the crimes for which Vindice has already indicted the Duke in the prior scene (i.e. the excess of villainy of which I spoke earlier), the Duke's concern with the honor of his court reeks of hypocrisy. He condemns the Junior Brother less for his "violent act" itself than for how it endangers his and the rest of the court's reputations. Yet, the more notable is that the Duke's honor has not yet already been stained. Mere minutes after Vindice has decried that the Duke and his family have spent a decade committing heinous sins, we discover that the court has till now had a pure reputation among the populace. The financial crippling of families (I.i.124), prostituting of the poor, and murders by the father and rightful heir do not seem to attract much attention – only when a more periphery figure (the youngest step-son) commits a rape on a noble women is the Duke's place in history threatened. Even though this scene asserts that "The faults of great men through their cerecloths break" (I.ii.16) the Duke's imperviousness to such slander – both to this point and indeed after his death – renders this line sadly ironic.

Once more, the play's excess – its need for the court's sinfulness to be expansive both in acts and time – in turn interrogates concepts of moral repercussions. Middleton divorces reputation and character - the reputable are not necessary the non-sinners, but the judicious sinners who discriminately choose their offenses so that they face no repercussions.[137] Even though concerns of honor and reputation permeate much of the

[137] There may be a way to even read these lines as a possible defense of James I and VI. Typically, the decadent court is read as a critique of James's court:

play's talk of sin and punishment, from early in the tragedy, Middleton has already shown that those accolades are worthless, divorced from the true nature of sin; yet, simultaneously, he has also shown that those are indeed one of the prime motivators of moral behavior.

For Middleton goes as far as to expose very ideals of tragedy as an artform – its *raison d'être* which we have seen earlier discussed by Horace, Sidney, and others and interrogated by Shakespeare in *Titus Andronicus* – as nothing more than means for a ruler to obtain good PR. The characters reduce Sidney's own pleas for mercy and compassion into a debased practicality. Mercy does not stem from higher ideals, as it does in the famous *Merchant of Venice* speech or as we see at the end of *The Castle of Perseverance* or *Mankind*, from Misericordia and Mercy respectively:

> O þou Fadyr, of mytys moste,
>
> Mercyful God in Trinite!
>
> I am þI dowtyr, wel þou woste,
>
> And mercy fro heuene þou browtyst fre.
>
> Schew me þI grace in euery coste!...

> Bullied by petitioners, prodigal with money and titles, dominated by favorites and sycophants, unwilling to assume the quotidian duties of the monarchy, James quickly became an upopular figure…That the genre altered in the political climate of James's absolutism is strongly suggested by the Jacobean plays' habitual and steady portrayal of rulers as self-authorizing tyrants…What is evident is an intense topical interest in tyranny and its effects on subjects' personal and property rights, including and signifying the sexual rights of men. (Allman 33-37)

Yet, this moment with Junior Brother might trouble immediately lumping *The Revenger's Tragedy* in with the strain in Jacobean tragedy of purely critiquing James I and VI. What we see in this moment in the play is that an *always* corrupt court, which has *always* abused its power, finally is being exposed for its flaws because one member has upset the wrong people. An investigation of the period reveals that one of the key trespasses of James – the claims to absolutism by either him or his supporters that Allman notes were viewed as tyrannical and an imposition upon the rights of Englishmen – did not simply appear upon his ascension to the throne. Rather the seeds and discussions were already present in the last fifteen or so years of Elizabeth's reign (Sommerville 107-110).

And mercy, Lord, haue on þis man

Aftyr þi mercy, þat mekyl is,

Vnto þI grace þat he be tan,

Of þI mercy þat he not mys! (*The Castle of Perseverance*, 3316-3330)

Mercy: Aryse and aske mercy, Mankend, and be associat to me.

Thy deth schall be my hevynesse; alas, tys pety yt schuld be thus.

Thy obstinacy wyll exclude thee fro the glorius perpetuite.

Yet for my lofe ope thy lyppys and sey 'Miserere mei, Deus!'…

The justly of God wyll as I wyll, as Hymselfe doth preche:

Nolo mortem peccatoris, inquit, yff he wyll be redusyble.

Mankynde: Than mercy, good Mercy! What ys man wythowte mercy?

Lytll ys our part of paradise were mercy ne were. (*Mankind* 827-834)

Mercy in the second quote is not simply a Christian ideal; rather it is *the* Christian ideal. Mercy is that which defines God as God and allows humans to become closer to him. It is its own reward, the very bliss of paradise. Yet, we can see that, even in my unpacking and certainly in this quote, there is a slippage between mercy as ideal and mercy as action, (possibly due to the difference in medieval thinking of "real vs. abstract" as outlined by Richardson and Johnston in my earlier footnote).

Middleton's play, however, if it does not parse the idea, at least leans more heavily on the act-side, rather than the ideal. Rather than considering mercy to be a reward in and of itself and a sign of closeness to God in a spiritual sense, Middleton only considers how showing mercy brings one closer to God in terms of fame. Ambitioso and Supervacuo burlesque one of the foundations of *An Apology for Poesy* in their attempts to

get a pardon from the Duke for Lussurioso's attempted regicide. Ambitioso says to the Duke:

> **Ambitioso:** A duke's soft hand strokes the rough head of law
>
> And makes it lie smooth…
>
> Your Grace may live the wonder of all times,
>
> In pard'ning that offense which never yet
>
> Had face to beg a pardon…
>
> **Supervacuo:** He's the next heir – yet this true reason gathers:
>
> None can possess that dispossess their fathers.
>
> Be merciful (II.iii.73-87)

The motivation that the Duke's stepsons present him is far more Greek in origin – *kleos*. It harkens back to Plutarch's own concept of the cultural heritage of a king (as Lavinia herself did shortly before her rape in *Titus Andronicus* and Hamlet alludes to when advocating good treatment of the players (II.ii.461-464)), seeing no intrinsic value in the act of forgiveness, but rather in the fame gleaned by forsaking all deserved rights of retribution. Morality once more is about the end-point for the actor. Furthermore, forgiveness seems contingent on the offender's potential to act further – in other words, the offender's ability to realize his intended crime eventually. Supervacuo notes that mercy should come from the Duke because Lussurioso has no hopes of obtaining the dukedom should he murder the Duke. The lesson on forgiveness here is not one of offering the other cheek (as famously advocated in Matthew 5:39-41), but rather only ignoring the first blow once the attacker has no power or incentive to strike the second cheek. The virtue of mercy is only possible when its granting has the guarantee that there

will be no possible physical negative consequence and an ostensible reward for granting it.

But, while the motivation for virtuous behavior is certainly burlesqued in this scene (and in the Duke's eventual pardon which is couched in the idea that attempted regicide is not so bad compared to how many women he has defiled, raped, and murdered), much of *The Revenger's Tragedy*'s investment in the concept of honor is locked up in the sexual behavior of women. Much work has been done on this play's fixation on chastity.[138] Peter Stallybrass writes, "Vindice tirelessly seeks to find in woman's body the privileged container of an impermeable honor…What is demanded of woman is both her obedience and subjection and, at the same time, her assertion of a separateness and self-encloser foreclosed to the courtier, who is dependent upon the circulation of patronage" (216). Haber expands this point to include Antonio's reaction to his wife's death: "The discussion of the rape and suicide of Antonio's wife in the first act suggests in a simple way the appropriation involved in viewing female chastity as reflective of male honor. Her rape is conceived as an assault on Antonio's masculinity....[Similarly] the rape of Gloriana has effectively castrated [Hippolito and

[138] Early modern feminist criticism has a deep interest in the ulterior motivations for men's obsession with chastity. Haber notes that Vindice's obsession on his sister's chastity is sexualized and that his praise of Castiza's reproach of Piato's advances "unmasks the desire for chastity *as* desire and makes evident that the ideal of inviolability is necessarily involved in – is ultimately identical to – forced entry and violation" (65). Eileen Allman meanwhile considers how not only Vindice and Hippolito, but also the author, actors, or audience might have a personal, selfish investment in a female character's chastity. She writes that characters such as Castiza might stand in for "men [who] occupy nonphallic positions in society [who have realized] their voices are silenced, their social and familial authority is usurped, and their sexuality is controlled" (19). These men (be they the authors, actors, or audience) might then, through the actions of Castiza, see authority "relocated to a world of virgute where anyone, again in theory, can claim it [since it has been] degendered and depoliticized, or, more accuratedly, repoliticized to disempower the tyrant and to empower the subject" (20). In short, we see in this strain of criticism, even beyond the realm of honor and reputation, investments in chastity are often suspect and almost always tied to personal interest and not a pure devotion the ideal of chastity itself.

Vindice]" (66-67). What Stallybrass observes and Haber unpacks is that the investment in chastity is in fact, an investment in honor – particularly the honor of the men associated with the women. Except I would venture to use a more earthly synonym: reputation. Where honor, I would argue, seems to conflate morality and reputation, these scenes definitely juxtapose the two, but in a manner that does not absolutely allow them to collapse into each other. The abstract virtue of chastity (one of the seven main virtues) is important here because it has tangible currency. As a source of reputation, it becomes a valuable tool for men in the world to enter and remain in important aspects of the social arena.[139] McMahon in his chapter "Surveillance and Consumption in *The Revenger's Tragedy*" even argues that Vindice must examine and test his sister's chastity so that the privatization of his family may be reified. Thus, chastity is important for reasons well beyond anything related to piety: it is honor, clout, and perhaps even status as a cordoned-off independent unit. He writes, "Virginity, as the puropoted opposite condition [of the whore who brings disease, poverty, and spiritual death] becomes a libidinously charged sign by which the private family's relation to civil society can be constructed and interrogated" (113).

Often Castiza is the focus of discussions of chastity in this play. We will investigate her trial later as we view the play's most ostensibly moralizing moment – a moment that most resembles the classic morality play structure. Yet, hers is not the only sexual reputation of a woman under scrutiny – because, again, we see that this play must multiply and outdo its generic brethren. Both mothers in this play, Gratiana and the Duchess, face trials and investigations by their children for their sexual integrities. These

[139] Cf. Coppelia Kahn's chapter on " 'The Savage Yoke': Cuckoldry and Marriage" from *Man's Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare* for an in-depth analysis for the use-value of chastity in marriage.

moments not only recall, but play up and subsequently question, prior heroes' and villains' concerns with their mothers' sexual behaviors. In a scene that not only recalls but trumps Chiron and Demetrius's reaction to Tamora and Aaron's bastard in *Titus Andronicus*, Ambitoso laments with his brother, Supervacuo, about their mother's sleeping with their bastard step-brother:

> **Supervacuo**: …Seen and known,
>
> The noble she's, the baser is she grown.
>
> **Ambitioso**: If she were bent lasciviously, the fault
>
> Of mighty women that sleep soft – oh, death! –
>
> Must she needs choose such an unequal sinner,
>
> To make all worse?
>
> **Supervacuo**: A bastard, the Duke's bastard!
>
> Shame heaped on shame!
>
> **Ambitioso**: Oh, our disgrace! (IV.iii.8-14)

While the selfishness of Ambitioso and Spurio should not be too surprising – after all, they are members of a debauched court –we should note how this selfishness seems inextricably tied with a preoccupation on sin. Whereas Chiron and Demetrius's concern is purely reputation ("Thou hast undone our mother" (IV.ii.77)), the two sons here recognize that the shame increases the severity of the sin; the "unequal sinner" Spurio makes all worse, but what exactly he worsens –the Duchess's soul or her family's disgrace – remains unclear. Even though much of the conversation does center around reputation, to dismiss the sons as concerning themselves solely with reputation would have to omit a few key lines, particularly the last couplet of the scene: "Come, stay not

here; let's after and prevent,/Or else they'll sin faster than we'll repent" (IV.iii.17-18). In short, because of this simultaneous (perhaps indivisible) obsession with sin and reputation, Ambitioso and Supervacuo are as much Hamlet with Gertrude as they are Chiron and Demetrius with Tamora.

Furthermore, this scene's linking of sons' preoccupation on their mother's moral integrity with their own desires for stronger reputation finds an immediate echo in the following scene. Vindice and Hippolito's own saving of Gratiana from the position of bawd initially may seem more morally motivated; it is a triumph of good over evil in a model that recalls the renunciations of sin that end most morality plays. However, it is similar to its predecessor in its concern with earthly matters. Indeed, immediately after Ambitioso and Supervacuo exit, Vindice enters insulting Gratiana on the very basis of a reputation: "Oh, thou for whom no name is bad enough!" (IV.iv.1). The scene builds on the prior's concerns, evoking not only its morality play past, but its more recent predecessors. We see two Shakespearean mothers with sons overly concerned about their sexuality; Gratiana echoes Gertrude[140] and Tamora[141]. Gratiana's own damnation here is also one of reputation. She risks losing her title as mother[142] (IV.iv.8-10) and having a name that could turn "Green colour'd maids…red with shame" (IV.iv.67). So while the

[140] **Gratiana**: "What, will you murder me?" (IV.iv.2)
Gertrude: "What wilt thou do? Thou wilt not murder me" (III.iv.20)
[141] **Gratiana**: "Are you so barbarous to set iron nipples/Upon the breast that gave you suck?" (IV.iv.5-6)
Lavinia (to Tamora's sons about their mother): The milk thou suckst from her did turn to marble;/Even at thy teat thou hadst thy tyranny" (II.ii.144-145)
[142] Interestingly though, Jennifer Panek notes that the reputation of mother *is* always-already corrupt in the play: "Puns on 'the mother,' moreover, fix anxieties about mothers even more firmly within the maternal body. The play's first reference to 'the mother' associates it with permeability and untrustworthiness" (425). Perhaps what Gratiana risks losing is less title as *a* mother but the title of *the Mother*, i.e. the one worthy of Vindice and Hippolito.

talk of damnation is present,[143] it remains as steeped in preoccupations of reputation as Ambitioso and Spurio's own talk of fame is with damnation.

Thus, Middleton conflates the concerns in this play – and by extension, the plays to which he alludes – but not to the benefit of the heroes. Vindice's, Hippolito's, and even Hamlet's need for their mothers' chastity are equally thirsts for mortal pride. Middleton, by expanding the opportunities for morality tales in this play (i.e. by having more than one woman's chastity at risk), by even expanding that concern onto the antagonists and providing them with similar language, Middleton unveils this aspect of morality as an ultimately selfish concern. Even though *The Revenger's Tragedy* uses the language and scenarios of the morality tale, its concerns are anything but moral. As we will see in the next section, even the most classically morally-didactic scene invokes the devices of the vices (money, pride) as its lures.

The Moral of the Story

Indeed at the play's height of its moralizing – Gratiana's forsaking the life of a bawd and Castiza proving her chastity – Middleton cannot even imagine a pure morality; this moment is ultimately intrinsically tied to a love of earthly rewards. This scene has all the proper requirements for a truly didactic scene (and may be, in its own twisted way): a sinner seeing the errors of her ways, failed attempts at seduction, purity threatened by material pleasures, and an ultimate affirmation of the good and righteous path. As I have said, this scene most mirrors the morality plays of medieval England. However, in the end, the characters view the good and righteous path as the path most likely to achieve

[143] "A bawd" Oh, name far loathsomer than hell!" (IV.iv.11), "Who shall be saved, when mothers have no grace?" (IV.iv.26), "Oh hell unto my soul!" (IV.iv.29), "Oh, nimble in damnation, quick in tune!/There is no devil could strike fire so soon." (IV.iv.34-35), as well as Gratiana's plea for absolution (IV.iv.50-55).

money. While *The Revenger's Tragedy*'s late medieval predecessors all shared an anxiety around money (even if that desire was compromised by a need to relate Heaven to the earthly), Middleton's play completely disregards any Christian antipathy towards wealth. In this world of so many other sins, greed seems forgotten, quotidian, or absolutely accepted a priori. In fact, greed seems to *become* the moral. In the trial of Castiza's chastity and Gratiana's goodness, Middleton incorporates so many other conflicts that he is able to pull a narrative slight of hand; by the scene's end, he delivers an amoral moral. The arguments for and against chastity – which the characters so obsess over – bunt many of the matters at heart of such a debate and instead transform the scene from a moral dialogue into a type of treatise on obtaining and securing riches.

Once the plot of Lussurioso and Castiza has moved beyond Lussurioso's initial lust and onto the matter of whether Castiza will or will not sate that desire, the matter of lust becomes trivial. Whereas typically characters in morality plays seem to indulge in the sin for the joy of indulging in the sin,[144] neither Lussurioso nor Vindice seem to expect the temptation of pleasure to work for Castiza. Rather than appealing to lust – to which Castiza seems to not so much conquer as simply be numb to – Vindice (in the guise of Piato) hinges his argument upon a valuing of earthly welfare – not necessarily carnal pleasure – over spiritual good. He says to his mother:

> **Vindice**: …Madam, I know you're poor,
>
> And, 'lack the day,
>
> there are too many poor ladies already.

[144] One particularly pertinent example comes from *Wisdom*, after Wyll becomes debased:

> I am so lykynge, me seme I fle!
> I have atastyde lust! Farwell, chastite!
> My hert ys evermore lygth!
> I am full of felycte! (565-568)

Why should you vex the number? 'Tis despised.

Live wealthy; rightly understand the world,

And chide away that foolish country girl

Keeps company with your daughter: chastity.

Gratiana: Oh, fie, fie!

The riches of the world cannot hire a mother

To such a most unnatural task!

Vindice: No, but a thousand angels can…

Would I be poor, dejected, scorned of greatness,

Swept from the palace, and see other daughters

Spring with the dew o'th'court, having mine own

So much desired and loved – by the Duke's son?

No, I would raise my state upon her breast

And call her eyes my tenants. I would count

My yearly maintenance upon her cheeks,

Take coach upon her lip, and all her parts

Should keep men after men, and I would ride

In pleasure upon pleasure. (II.i.79-103)

While Vindice deems chastity foolish, his argument against it (or her, if you will) does not stem from an incitement to lust. His speech is not a carpe diem poem, such as what Marlowe had already written in "The Passionate Shephard to his Love" or which Marvell would write in "To His Coy Mistress," nor is it a fiendish incitement to sin, such those with which *The Castle of Perseverance* is abundant. Castiza's own desires and her

indulging or abstaining from them are not the issue as much as Gratiana's own "pleasure" is.[145] Vindice reduces Castiza to a good to be utilized, not a woman who must choose between sin and virtue. As McMahon notes, Vindice's "pretended seduction involves a lengthy analysis of the relative cost/benefits of chastity and 'whoredom'" (108).

The speech is one far less of morality and far more of economics, bookkeeping, and mathematics: Gratiana should not add to a surplus, she should obtain her full exchange value on the commodity she has, and, perhaps most importantly, she should call in a well-earned debt. McMahon elaborates:

> When Vindice is testing the honour of his mother and sister…he will describe chastity as a 'treasure' that can only realise its value through exploitation. The argument of the seducer is that "you [virgins] cannot come by yourselves without fee": remaining chaste is an imprudent miserliness preventing "advancement" and "treasure" (2.1.153-6). (114)

Thus Vindice's argument is less immoral than it is merely *amoral.*[146] Even in his performance of the villainous pimp, he does not provide an antithesis to classical ethics in the manner that may befit a typical fiend (be he from the medieval or early modern

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[145] Panek argues, "There is even a suggestion that prostituting Castiza may be a source of vicarious titillation for her mother: Vindice tempts Gratiana to see her daughter as a youthful extension of her own body, hinting that she herself would be willing to do his bidding 'if [she'd] that blood now which [she] gave [her] daughter"'(II.i.69)" (425). However this aspect is notably muted – if present at all. While Gratiana does exclaim that "Oh, if I were young,/I should be ravished" (II.i.195-196)) in response, I would still argue that the enticing nature of the ravishment comes not from any bodily pleasure but from the promise of goods. Gratiana, if anything, is more jealous over the lack of commodities she has rather than her inability to have pleasurable intercourse.

[146] To be fair, McMahon makes an interesting case that Vindice is actually trying to pervert morality by arguing that saving chastity is akin to miserliness. However, while I admire his reading, I do not believe that direction is so easily apparent in the initial presentation of Vindice as fiend and thus Vindice could still be read as amoral and not simply immoral.

era).[147] In short, Vindice does not so much destroy morality as politely push it aside to make way for the more pressing issues of supply, demand, and fair market values.

To have a villain advocate practicality over ideals, though, would only be mildly playing with the genre. After all, we have already seen that advocating one's earthly welfare was a tactic utilized by the devils of medieval drama; while nowhere near as prominent as the "sin for sin's sake" or "sin cause it's fun" speeches, they certainly were not alien to the genre. However, Middleton's resolution to this subplot ensures that economics remain at the heart of *The Revenger's Tragedy's* concerns. For Gratiana's eventual rebuttal is not an affirmation of morality over practicality, or even of thinking of the next world over the present one (the admittedly tenuous space between religious morality and utilitarianism that many morality tales occupy), but instead a counterpoint to Vindice/Piato on his own terms. When Castiza is prepared to prostitute herself to Lussurioso, Gratiana reprimands her:

> What will the deed do, then?
>
> Advancement, true–as high as shame can pitch!
>
> For treasure, who e'er knew a harlot rich?
>
> Or could build, by the purchase of her sin,
>
> An hospital to keep her bastards in?
>
> The Duke's son? Oh, when women are young courtiers,
>
> They are sure to be old beggars.
>
> To know the miseries most harlots taste,
>
> Thoud'st wish thyself unborn when thou art unchaste. (IV.iv.138-146)

[147] Consider, for a particularly exemplary case, Aaron's speech in V.i of *Titus Andronicus*, which began my first chapter.

The speech is remarkably old-fashioned. The blank verse of much of the play gives way to a series of couplets, a constant rhyming that evokes the language of a medieval play. The "more natural" dialogue is replaced by a stylized and heightened language that contains a neat moral. Except, this "neat moral" is, in fact, quite messy. Gratiana's speech notably does not stress how advancement, treasure, or a good husband are not as important as proper behavior in the eyes of God. That question is bunted, perhaps even dismissed as unimportant through the play's final ignoring of that matter in this dialogue. Rather, in the end, Gratiana is only able to sway her daughter by assuring her that she will not attain what she desires through prostitution.[148] Sin is not a price to pay for wealth and fame; instead, sin is to be avoided in the *interest* of greed. MacMahon unpacks Gratiana's argument arguing that, by holding onto her precious chastity, "a daughter does not only find salvation, she and her kinsfolk are better positioned to exploit the value of her virginity on the marriage market," becoming of greater value both to herself and to her family, who may use a daughter's virginity as a valuable marker of their worth in civil society (113-114). Meanwhile:

> The penalties for such irrational trading…supposedly begin to accumulate even on this side of the grave…The shortfalls of honour that are incurred by unwisely trading one's symbolic capital for short-term luxuries ultimately have a negative effect on finances. The financial benefits of being a prince's mistress are purportedly inadequate to the costs incurred. Trading virginity for money and

[148] Admittedly, the director must decide whether Castiza is testing her mother or whether Castiza's proclamation of "I did but this to try you" (IV.iv.149) is to exonerate herself from any culpability in what she had planned to do. As McMahon notes, "Presuming Castiza is, as she seems to be, a chaste maiden, her use of her brother's techniques [i.e. surveillance by means of deceit] seems to help legitimate those practices. Yet, it is ultimately undecidable as to whether Castiza was actually willing to be prostituted" (111). Similarly, Haber writes, "it is impossible conclusively to establish her motives; we have no firm ground upon which to stand" (68).

> advancement is not likely to pay good dividends in the long term, not even this side of the grave. (MacMahon 121-122)

In short, while salvation is still in MacMahon's evaluation of the scene, he mainly focuses on how much it becomes a discussion on how best to deal with an investment. Whereas Vindice first portrayed chastity as a rainy-day fund, Gratiana finally persuades Castiza by comparing it to an investment that has not fully matured or one for which she would not be getting the optimal value. Yet, I would go further to say that while salvation may be in the mind of the viewers due to what they already know about chastity, the argument is almost completely money-centric. By centering the discussion of Castiza's morality *around* a debate of how to best utilize the commodities of her beauty and her chastity, Middleton turns the conventional morality tale, wherein vice is punished and virtue rewarded, into a discussion on through which method one can best obtain profit and earthly fame. We see that actual preaching of morality-for-morality's-sake is foolish in *The Revenger's Tragedy*. Middleton's play is so overflowing with sin, with a court wherein each member outdoes the last in sinfulness, an erotic icon of chastity, and a villain revenger,[149] that avoiding sin may not be an option. Rather, the concerns need to be more immediate.

Morality Reformed

In this world of exaggerated sin, endless exempla, and proliferated narratives, which focuses intensely on the worldly consequences of actions, we might suspect that Middleton is merely exposing what had been always lying at the heart of the morality

[149] Labeling Vindice as an example of "He who fights with monsters…" was common in the age of New Criticism and has continued into more recent investigations, such as Rizzoli's already-cited one, Robert Jones's *Engagement with Knavery*, or Arthur Lindley's "Abbatoir and Costello: Carnival, *The Revenger's Tragedy* and the Mental Landscape of Revenge." Even Vindice calls himself one (III.v.153)

tale. I have already shown how morality plays use the language of physicality to appeal to their audiences, despite any attempts to consider more philosophical or theological concepts. But we could also glean from the narratives presented that morality plays ultimately rely on narratives of self-interest. They present a multitude of reasons for a human to live a moral and devout life, and all of their most compelling ones involving benefiting or protecting the human making the choice. Admittedly, the afterlife – the main motivator of *The Castle of Perseverance* and strongly gestured to in *Everyman* – often treads this line and was a topic of rumination for some Christian thinkers. St. Augustine in Letter 145 writes of people who sin out of fear of Hell:

> But it is useless for anyone to think that he has triumphed over sin when he refrains from sin through fear of punishment, because, even though the impulse of the evil passion has not been carried into action exteriorly, the evil passion is still the enemy within. And who could be held innocent before God who would willingly do what is forbidden, if you would remove what he fears?....Therefore, he who refrains from sin through fear of punishment is an enemy of justice, but he will be a friend if he refrains from sin through love of justice; then he will truly fear sin. For he who fears hell does not fear to sin, he fears to burn. (165)

Augustine argues that any act of morality that is not motivated by love of morality itself is not truly moral. *The Castle of Perseverance*'s brandishing of Hell's firepit as a warning to those who would live a sinful life is merely preaching self-preservation. Notably, Augustine juxtaposes the divine "fear [of] sin" against the physical and earthly fear of flames. Any moral that only relies on humans to fear what they already know to fear (burning in Augustine's case, or death, isolation, or disfigurement in other cases) is not a

real moral at all. It teaches not a "love of justice" but rather continues an already familiar and obvious path of self-interest.

And these plays do have self-preservation or self-interest at their heart. *Mankind* compels its audience not to listen to the Three Ns, warning them that doing so could lead to either a hangover or a hanging. *Wisdom* shows that sinning turns one into a demon both in action and, equally importantly, in appearance. And, as I originally noted with *Everyman*, the play teaches its audience how to ensure that each of them can have an eternal companion and the jewels of Heaven and that none of them will face Hell's fire. *The Revenger's Tragedy* takes this tenet of the morality play and amplifies it, to a point where it cannot be downplayed by the play's conclusion. There is no conservative moral message that makes all the materialism ultimately permissible. The same logic is used by all: the Duke and his debauched court, as well as Vindice, Castiza, and the other "good" characters.

At first, this ultimate criticism could seem to render Middleton's plays strangely conservative. They are mocking a medieval morality tradition born out of a "less enlightened" Catholic culture. Kurt A. Schreyer, in his dissertation on the debt to mystery plays in the early modern period, discusses the antipathy towards medieval drama in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, noting how preachers linked it with popish pageantry and even defenders of poetry and theater (such as Harrington, Puttenham, and Sidney) chose to create a direct lineage between contemporary theater and that of antiquity, omitting anything that occurred between the fall of Rome and the rise of the Church of England (70-71).[150] Morality plays, vestiges of England's popish past, are ripe

[150] To be fair, Schreyer does spend much of the remaining chapter investigating how these plays still enjoyed performances and popularity despite these denunciations. In short, preachers and

for satire. They are remnants of Catholic ideology and, in many ways, embody the differences between the former and current religions of the state. Middleton's emphasis on physicality in the morality of Catholic Italy might be nothing more than a burlesque of the physicality of the Catholic religion: the emphasis on earthly works over faith, the connections between money and salvation, the literalness of the Eucharist, as well as the aforementioned pageantry and idolatry of present in Catholic ceremonies and churches.

The obvious problem with that assumption, however, is that these critiques must ignore all *The Revenger's Tragedy's* potential commentary on early seventeenth century England, from its obsession with stage revengers and their bombastically planned revengers to the parallels between the murdered Gloriana and the dead Gloriana, Queen Elizabeth. Yet, I would add that a further investigation of the spread of Protestantism and the ways that it distinguished itself from Catholicism reveals that the selfishness of *The Revenger's Tragedy*'s morality applies equally to the dominant religions of England (I use the plural to distinguish between the Church of England and the growing Puritan factions). Middleton is, of course, known for attacking Puritanism as much as Catholicism;[151] he is a satirist, not a partisanist. After all, contemporary tracts against

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other vocal members of the Church of England were so upset about these plays exactly because these remnants of the Catholic past and pageantry would not just disappear. Cf "Banning Drama: A Sixteenth-century Perspective on the Mysteries" from *Period Pieces: Remnants of Mystery Drama in Shakespeare*.

[151] Donna B. Hamilton's introduction "The Puritan Widow *or* The Puritan *or* The Widow of Watling Street" from Oxford's *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works* does a particularly strong job of addressing Middleton's satire against Puritans:

> In *The Puritan Widow*, Middleton plays to [England's need to present Protestantism as united in the wake of the Gunpowder Plot] by taking the rhetoric one step beyond merely associating puritan and papist. Satire in *The Puritan Widow* consists of conflating the two, of literalizing the identification of one with the other, a system whereby Middleton manages, in the same actions, to satirize Puritans while also representing those Catholic practices which Protestants most abhorred. Especially important to this method is his defining all Puritans by the characteristics of those who were most extreme. (510)

Catholic ideology ultimately rely on the same argumentative logic as morality tales. In preaching one of the "less material" aspects of Protestant faith – faith, not works – Puritans often needed to brandish damnation as the reason for following their faith:

> The late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries witnessed a flurry of what can be termed 'Puritan complaint literature' [which excoriate] well-meaning churchgoers who say their prayers at night, and know at least the basics of the catechism. Their principal values are social ones – the importance of good fellowship, charity and peace among neighbors – yet they have managed to miss the point of the Reformation, believing that men would be saved by their good works, and even that all in the end might go to heaven. (Marshall 168-169)

Once more, the hellpit is the ultimate threat. Once more, God must be loved and adored first and foremost (even before doing good deeds) on account of a fear of burning, not a love of God. Good deeds are deemed less important than faith because they have less use-value – they will not get a man into heaven.

More importantly, the very spread of Protestantism relied on a similar type of fear and on desire for self-preservation, and not on any actual swaying of the heart by means of the better argument for Protestantism itself. Peter Marshall notes of the English Reformation, "There is impressive evidence of compliance with the (minimal) demands

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Hamilton unpacks how Middleton's portrayal of the Puritan characters of the play ultimately shows them as rather Catholic: "self righteous about their holiness [but] they are driven by lust, deceit materialism, and self-interest" (511). They engage in rituals that evoke transubstantiation, exorcism, the Eucharist, and other piece of Catholic "hocus-pocus." Yet, while she does talk about the Puritans' antipathy towards Corporal Oath mocks Puritan and Catholic resistance to the 1606 oath of allegiance, she does not so much unpack the mockery *of* the oath itself through the farcical character of Corporal Oath. While Hamilton's portrayal of Middleton's views towards Catholics and Puritans is spot-on, I would argue that the figure of Corporal Oath would indeed trouble the possible conclusion (which Hamilton, to be fair, never makes, but which might be inferred from her depiction of Middleton's hatred of extremism) that Middleton is a middle-of-the-road, Church-of-England-loving moderate.

of official religion. But it is difficult to know what further it tells us about faith" (173). In other words, Catholicism by name may have been forsaken in England, but that may have been the extent of the foresaking. Marshall notes that much of the pageantry remained, and much of the deeper philosophical shifts, such as predestination, were largely omitted from sermons (158-163). In fact, the motivation for conversion (both from those demanding the conversion and from those converting) was mostly detached from any theological concern. Marshall writes:

> The reasons why Catholics were not *en masse* forced to become Protestants were more complex, involving the mismatch of 'religious' and 'political' motives for enforcing conformity. Elizabethan and Jacobean bishops were genuinely interested in the souls and consciences of Catholics; when they could, they required recusants returning to the Church of England to participate in special liturgical rituals repudiating Rome as a heretical Church. But, other than during the alarm-ridden 1580s, when genuine religious conversions seemed a prerequisite of political loyalty, the secular authorities were more interested in conformity as a taken of outward obedience, in according with Queen Elizabeth's famous disinclination to make 'windows into men's hearts'. While insisting on uniformity in church attendance, Elizabeth was happy to allow the meanings of such attendance to remain ambiguous. (199)

Former Catholics converted to save their lives or their fortunes; the secular officials cared not if the Catholics' theological position had shifted as long as they no longer posed a threat to the monarchy and the state. The logic of the Reformation revolved around how the individual could best live long and prosper. It is a reasoning very similar to that

employed by Gratiana against whoredom. Just as promiscuity's true evil is never really a concern, so was Catholicism's moral inferiority to Protestantism not a concern to Queen Elizabeth and her men. She did not need to see into men's hearts, or to know that they had chosen the Church of England for its moral superiority; she only needed them to make the choice that was most expedient for both parties.

In short, there was a strong, dominant strain of earthly concerns in the English Reformation. Whereas the Catholic Church endeavored to make the physical into the spiritual, much of the process of converting the Catholics relied on the physical with an absolute ignoring of the spiritual. Jonathan Michael Gray's *Oaths and the English Reformation* centers itself around this thesis:

> If oaths were a language of the Reformation, then oaths are important not only because they communicated the Reformation but also because they constituted the Reformation. The English Reformation was just as much about its method of implementation and response as it was about the theology or political theory it transmitted. (5)

The English Reformation, the victory of the Protestantism over the grossly physical Catholicism, was itself an act grounded in the physical. It was a possibly a movement of theological or philosophical shifts, but it was equally one about "who said what," regardless of the content of their hearts or their particular motivations.

And so Middleton's tragedy, if we are to anchor it and its parody of religious motivations and moral imperatives in the environment from which it arose, would seem to critique the methods of religious conversion (an act not dissimilar to the redemption of morality play protagonists) as much as it does Catholicism. The conversion shows neither

love of God, nor love of justice, nor love of Queen Elizabeth or King James, and none of that seems to matter to any party. Rather, just like Gratiana's and the Duchess's sons, whose concerns for chastity are tied up with concerns of reputations, the Duke, who pardons for fame, and Castiza, who chooses chastity for its monetary rewards, the figures of the English Reformation were acting out of a need to preserve physical body and earthly wealth. They all seem to fear burning, in the fires of their captors or those of the rebels.

Conclusion

Middleton delivers a revenge tragedy that, by means of exaggeration, exposes the contradiction inherent in the genealogy of the genre: it is a series of morality tales told with the moral bleakness of Seneca. But, by exploring this contradiction, Middleton's play becomes less about the morals themselves and rather more about how these morals are delivered. They are interrogated and parodied, and ultimately, as we see in the Castiza scene, any talk of God is bunted. Yet this bunting of God ultimately is inconsequential. Even if the discussion were centered the divine, it would have been a discussion of greed. The jewels of Heaven would have to be chosen over the torments of Hell. While morality plays all – to certain extents and to varying degrees – have an awareness of this double bind of forsaking and embracing the physical world, all of them ultimately cannot stop reifying the basic structure of their messages. Middleton's play, however, is not so trapped. He is freed from both the constraints of the morality play by the Senecan amoralism and from becoming just another Senecan rehash by the exaggeration of its plots. Furthermore, the exaggeration present in *The Revenger's Tragedy* and the exaggeration of its contradictions allows its commentary to be present, but masked

enough from censure. This play becomes nearly impossible to read as simply moral because it fails to deliver a simple moral. Critics still cannot agree on our ultimate valence towards Vindice, or even towards Vindice's philosophizing (e.g. is the play misogynistic or a parody of such? Does it advocate or decry revenge? Is Vindice's disguise a revenger's guise gone too far? Where exactly does the revenger's show begin or end?). In its engagement with religion, the play is neither pro-Catholic nor is it anti-Catholic. It exposes issues with the logic of the morality tale without bothering to imagine an alternative, if one is even possible. The endless parody of the play makes it very much like a Vindice, a malcontent and a critic of the current system, but one that never does present a path of righteousness. After all, that would risk others choosing it for all the wrong reasons.

Conclusion: Genres of the Future Past

For the past four chapters, I have argued that genre play has an ulterior motive. Each of the plays selected as my primary texts – *Titus Andronicus, Hamlet, The Malcontent*, and *The Revenger's Tragedy* – in some way stage a critique of a social or political structure or entity in early modern England in a way not fully, clearly articulated by the text (and particularly its events) if the text is divorced from any prior genre expectations. These expectations are "tacit agreements between author and reader (or audience) that make possible certain types of artist representation of reality" (Duff x-xi), better known as "genre conventions." Genres are only possible with them: happy marriages belong in comedy, eating children belongs in (Senecan) tragedy, and blazons belong in elegy. These conventions create the genres and, in turn, they create the tools for genre subversion.

Shakespeare's plays seem to engage most directly with the critics themselves, wondering at the problematic implications of giving art a clear, political (and conservative) *raison d'être. Titus Andronicus*'s critique, on the one hand, is against the ruling class: they are utterly incapable of sympathy or empathy, unable to imagine feeling anything for anyone outside of their immediate circle. On the other hand, the tragedy also stages a meta-critique against the belief that tragedy *could* affect that class. While it proposes potential purposes for tragedy – commiseration among the low, the individualization of victims of violence via commemoration – its ultimate stance is that poetry, in all of its forms, is not powerful enough to take on the monstrous behavior of men. It utilizes both critics' expectations of tragedy's sympathetic powers and the belief

that blazon was a poetic form for love poetry, not tragedy. The moments in which these different poetic forms intersect are where these new possibilities emerge, and that same language reappears as Shakespeare highlights their ultimate failure. *Hamlet*, with its strain of romantic comedy in the play – even long after Hamlet murders Polonius – also investigates tragedy's investment in the status quo. Tragedy might not only function as an attempt to reason with kings, but it might also show that any unwelcome elements from society will always be purged. The elements of romantic tragedy, just like the potential coupling and procreation of the rebellious and mad, will be ignored or suppressed until they no longer exist and any account of them seems dubious as best.

The latter two plays and playwrights less directly engage with critics or with the purposes of tragedy; rather, they focus more directly on the problems of early seventeenth-century England. *The Malcontent* promises us the cleansing of tragedy in a world of usurpers, adulterers, and schemers, but subverts expectations repeatedly. Instead of bloodshed, it delivers endless scenes of forgiveness and cannot even properly punish its scapegoat. Rather than fully rallying around this abundance of forgiveness to a Christian end, it instead uses this excess to hint at another, similarly flawed system wherein those who deserve punishment (and for whom we would expect punishment) do not receive it: England's equity courts. *The Revenger's Tragedy*, meanwhile, exaggerates expectations (both in the amount of sins and the punishments of sinners) to call attention to its dual heritage of Senecan tragedy and morality plays. But by highlighting this background, it critiques the means by which the morality tales would convey their messages. Morality is never the ultimate goal: glory, heavenly treasure, and comfort are. In this manner, the logic of the morality tales of England's Catholic past resembles the

methods and motivations by which England's Protestant Reformation was achieved. Or in other words, the new religion(s) of England operate on the same flawed premises of their predecessors.

The problem with the hidden messages of all of these plays is that they *are* hidden. They rely on genre being static, on the viewer having the same expectations for a work written two months ago as one written two thousand years ago. Shakespeare can be radical as he reimagines the language Titus uses for a Senecan narrative because Seneca was still the rubric by which tragedy was judged (Duff 4). As I noted in my introduction, generic expectations are presently not so rigid (even if genre was never truly rigid to begin with). Plot twists may occur and genre blending may happen, but they are not outrages when they occur. Quite possibly the genre-rule-breaking example from modern culture that most resembles an early modern level of daring is over fifty years old: the murder of Marion Crane in *Psycho*. It upset every Hollywood narrative expectation set forth by the previous few decades of movie making by killing its protagonist mid-film, eliminating any sense of security and larger karmic morality for the viewer (Thomson 1-3, 62-63). For a brief moment, movies no longer were the spaces in which one could escape from the problems of reality; and *Psycho* rather nicely vocalizes the subcultural dissent of the fifties that gave way to the cultural unrest of the sixties. But, as Thomson notes, by now everything that *Psycho* did – the bloodshed, the sex, the toilet flushing, the killing of the star – is old hat (67). The tactics of Hitchcock no longer shock. If anything, they are the status quo's status quo – the establishment upon which the future canon of film was built.

If Hitchcock's film has this problem at the ripe age of fifty-six, how well can *Titus Andronicus* – nearly four-hundred and twenty years old – or *The Revenger's Tragedy* – four-hundred and ten years young – fare? Titus's Thyestean feast still has its gross-out factor and Vindice's "nailing the half-dissolved tongue to the floor" technique might still shock audiences, but they do little more than shock. Plays may comment on our current society with some directorial choices, but those choices need not (and very often to my knowledge do not) utilize or even recognize the genre play as a source of this commentary. A production of *Titus Andronicus* I saw nearly a decade ago set it against the Iraq War, with Titus as a Jack-Bauer-esque terror-fighter, to comment on the cyclical nature of violence in our country's reactions to terrorism; to my memory, the blazon was not a key part of its message. Ultimately, particularly with Shakespeare, Renaissance plays become effective tools of commentary because they are the quintessential examples of their genres, not the subversions (*Romeo and Juliet* is *the* tragic love story, *Macbeth* is *the* tale of ambition, *Othello* is *the* narrative of jealousy, and *Hamlet* is simply *the* tragedy).

I entered this project wondering if genre play could have not only a political, moral, or social purpose, but also *power*. Except, as I uncovered what truly worked in these plays, I have seen that *Titus Andronicus*, to an extent, was right – we cannot expect too much of tragedy to change the world. After all, the messages could not have been too obvious or they would never have gotten past the Master of Revels…and someone would have made this argument decades ago. This is not to say that these messages were lost at the time, that they did not have any effect; we simply cannot know that. However, what I can say more confidently is that the average viewer does not see *Hamlet* as a treatise on

purging anarchic forces by means of ignoring comic narratives or *The Revenger's Tragedy* as a cutting attack on the ways through which Catholic-to-Protestant conversions were achieved (again, if that were the case, I would not have written this dissertation).

So I end this project by wondering what we do with the information I have uncovered. How do we recoup this particular brand of subversion when these plays are now the canon against which (much lighter) subversion occurs? Ultimately, many of the major concerns of these plays *are* still relevant. The lack of empathy between classes and the desire to purge undesirables may be more easily translatable at first glance, but one need only say "affluenza" or compare the average sentence for a white male for drug possession against one for a person of color to see how present Marston's concerns about equity and uneven sentences may be today. The Catholic-Protestant conflicts may be subjects of the past, but religion, its proponents, and their actual motivations are not. Therefore, I would argue that these plays still have use, and in fact, still have uses grounded in their use of genre play. How to refigure this genre play for a twenty-first century audience – be it through other tropes or assumptions (perhaps those as deeply held now as Marion Crane's immortality was in the first half hour of *Psycho*) – will be the work of future directors and actors. What this means for the academy, however, will be to take the stakes of genre play seriously into consideration when designing future Shakespeare and Renaissance syllabi. For many students, it may not matter much, but just like the authors of these plays, we cannot expect every audience member to take action or even to catch the message. Like the weeping Titus praying that some stones will catch his tears and hear his woes, the best we can hope for are some key students to catch our message.

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