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REVENGE AND STORYTELLING IN ENGLISH DRAMA, 1580-1640

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by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation proposes that storytelling functions as a catalyst for revenge in early modern English revenge tragedy. Chapters on Kyd's The Spanish Tragedy, Shakespeare's first tetralogy, Cary's The Tragedy of Mariam, and Ford's 'Tis Pity She's a Whore examine the ways in which storytelling perpetuates acts of vengeance by individuals, families, and nations. Two premises shape the central argument. First, revengers come from within an intimate circle of family and friends; second, the desire for revenge is maintained, and the act of revenge later justified, through story-telling within this circle. Crimes ostensibly committed against an individual affect those nearest to the injured party, particularly close friends and family. Consequently, the revenger almost always comes from one of these two groups. While the revenger obviously seeks to punish the wrongdoer, he or she can not stop there, for punishment is not enough; the wrongdoer must understand that he or she is paying the penalty for a previous misdeed. And, in order to redeem the reputation of a wronged friend or family member and restore the family honor, the revenger must justify his or her actions by telling the victim's story publicly. This account distinguishes the principled revenger from the common criminal.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

“Revenge...is, in very large measure, an act of communication.”¹

The majority of early modern literary critics, focusing on the last act of revenge plays, carefully balance their sympathy with the revenger’s plight against the destructive nature of revenge. But little attention has been paid to the fact that the bloodshed that commonly concludes these plays is not inevitable in the opening scenes. Throughout most of the play, the victim occupies himself or herself with series of attempts at communication, often in the form of storytelling: gathering information (What, exactly, happened? Who was involved? What were their motives?), corroborating incomplete or contradictory accounts of events, enlisting support, and seeking justice formally through existing legal channels. With chapters on Kyd’s The Spanish Tragedy, Shakespeare’s first tetralogy, Cary’s The Tragedy of Mariam, and Ford’s ’Tis Pity She’s a Whore, this dissertation examines the complicated relationship between revenge and storytelling in early modern English revenge tragedy. In what ways is revenge action catalyzed through the act of storytelling? In what ways does storytelling perpetuate the cycles (as well as the individual acts) of revenge that characterize early modern English revenge tragedy?

¹ Peter A. French, The Virtues of Vengeance (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001) 12.

How do revengers utilize storytelling to confer a fixed meaning upon their violent acts?

Can a violent act even be considered revenge without subsequent explanation and justification?

Readers and theatergoers since the ancient Greeks have been drawn to revenge tragedy's energy and emotional intensity. As John Kerrigan states, "vengeance offers the writer a compelling mix of ingredients: strong situations shaped by violence; ethical issues for debate; a volatile, emotive mixture of loss and agitated grievance."² Literary scholars have likewise been drawn to the subgenre of revenge tragedy, and their combined efforts have produced a remarkable body of scholarship in this field. The theme of revenge has commonly been treated in one of two ways: first, as the struggle of a wronged individual to obtain justice honorably in an unjust and unpredictable world; second, as a commentary on the tensions inherent in a society in transition from a hierarchical power structure with traditional networks of interdependence and obligation to a more merit-based system that allowed for some social mobility. In this system, traditional forms of justice no longer seem sufficient (indeed, revenge tragedies often contain a legal system that is not merely inadequate but corrupt), but they have not yet been replaced by something more effective.

² John Kerrigan, Revenge Tragedy: Aeschylus to Armageddon (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997) 3.

Two observations underlie the readings that follow. First, revengers come from within an intimate circle of family and friends³; second, the desire for revenge is maintained, and the act of revenge later justified, through story-telling within this circle. Crimes ostensibly committed against an individual, such as murder or rape, affect intensely those nearest to the injured party, particularly close friends and family; consequently, the revenger almost always comes from one of these two groups. Characters in these plays do not take up the cause of a stranger or acquaintance. While the revenger obviously seeks to punish the wrongdoer, he or she cannot stop there, for punishment is not enough. Revenge is a very personal matter, and when it is inflicted, it is important that the wrongdoer understand the reason why. If the wrongdoer does not know that he or she is paying the penalty for a specific prior act of harm or injury committed against someone, then the act of revenge has misfired. And in order to redeem the reputation of a wronged friend or family member and restore the family honor, the revenger must publicly justify his or her actions by telling the victim's story. This account plays a pivotal role in distinguishing the principled revenger from the common criminal (who disregards an existing rule or the law for individual, material gain).

Storytelling has the potential to incite future acts of revenge and to justify violence that has already been committed. The victim of a crime may feel the emotion of

³ Peter French has also made this point, stating that “The avenger often is linked in some crucial way to the person or persons who were injured, harmed, slighted by the target. The avenger might be the injured party or a friend or relative of the injured party” (French, 67).

revenge, characterized as “a desire to repay injuries by inflicting hurt in return,”⁴ but has not yet acted upon this impulse. He or she provides an account of the crime to others in the community, either officially or unofficially, thus putting social and legal mechanisms of justice and reparation into effect. A victim satisfied by others’ responses to the tragedy is unlikely to proceed from this initial emotion to violent action; some form of public retribution⁵ is deemed adequate (for example, Shakespeare’s merry wives are content to stop at the humiliation of Falstaff once he is recognized openly as a fool). On the other hand, the stories referred to above can provide a dissatisfied victim with specific details necessary to carry out his or her revenge, such as the identity of the guilty party; in this instance, revenge is not an emotion but an action: “to inflict punishment or exact retribution for (an injury, harm, wrong, etc., done to oneself or another)”⁶; “to maintain, uphold, or vindicate (one's cause, etc.) by some act of retribution or punishment.”⁷ In these definitions, revenge is characterized as both active and responsive. The story told

⁴ The Oxford English Dictionary, “revenge,” 1b.

⁵ This distinction between public and private vengeance has been elucidated by Rene Girard, who states, “Once the concept of interminable revenge has been formally rejected [by a society], it is referred to as private vengeance. The term implies the existence of a public vengeance, a counterpart never made explicit...our society calls it the judicial system” (Girard, Rene. Violence and the Sacred. Trans. Patrick Gregory. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972): 15).

⁶ The Oxford English Dictionary, “revenge,” 2a.

⁷ The Oxford English Dictionary, “revenge,” 2c.

by a revenger to justify his or her past course of action becomes an integral part of revenge.

Cautioning us that the early modern word “revenge” had a more extended meaning than the modern one, a meaning more nearly equivalent to today’s “retribution,” Ronald Broude points out that it was the subject of “searching reevaluation” during the sixteenth century, as the Tudor and Stuart dynasties “sought to adapt medieval English socio-legal institutions to the needs of a Renaissance state.”⁸ He asks us to understand the revenge play as a form of response to the basic questions of crime and punishment posed by the transformations then taking place in political thought and practice. In England (as well as France and Europe at large), the aristocracy was in a situation of crisis arising from the loss of its traditional powers before an increasingly centralized monarchy; the aristocracy’s traditional manner of settling injustices was one of the areas that the government was endeavoring to control, and many of these playwrights address the connection between revenge and aristocratic concepts of status and honor. In other cases, early modern revenge tragedies reflect how difficult it was for those who were not aristocrats to obtain justice within an entrenched social hierarchy. In this period, access to justice was often a function of patronage and of rhetorical skill. For social inferiors revenge was often the only means of addressing a wrong perpetrated by superiors; but, in order to do so, the revenger had to shatter central rules of social and moral behavior. To contradict openly someone of higher social standing by sharing publicly one’s own

⁸ Ronald Broude, "Revenge and Revenge Tragedy in Renaissance England," Renaissance Quarterly 28.1 (1975): 39.

version of events would have been presumptuous at best. Hamlet, Antonio (of Marston's Antonio's Revenge), and Vindice (of The Revenger's Tragedy) all violate communal norms in their efforts to tell their stories.

Storytelling is integral not only to the revenge act but to drama as well, enabling characters to respond to the world of the play. This claim may seem counter-intuitive, but vibrant and dynamic storytelling is characteristic of “a medium where, as a rule, narrator physically confronts listener.”⁹ Drama (far more than poetry or prose) depends upon its characters for its narrative; as Barbara Hardy observes, “Unlike the novels and stories of prose fiction, drama can dispense with a narrator, and it usually does so: one of its defining properties is the articulation in dialogue, a dialogue of individual and equally privileged voices or characters.”¹⁰ These characters become storytellers by necessity – recalling facts, drawing connections, anticipating developments, testing those expectations and perceptions against the world in which they act.¹¹ Movements of actors across a stage are generated through, and in conjunction with, a high degree of narrative activity on the part of its characters; their stories shape and direct the words, thoughts, and actions of each other. Stanton Garner describes this activity as “inevitabl[e]” in “a medium where character voice replaces authorial voice, and where characters must

⁹ Stanton B. Garner, Jr., The Absent Voice: Narrative Comprehension in the Theater (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989): 52.

¹⁰ Barbara Hardy. Shakespeare's Storytellers (London: Peter Owen, 1997) 24-5.

¹¹ Anthony Brennan. Onstage and Offstage Worlds in Shakespeare's Plays (London: Routledge, 1989).

defend themselves in actual space, provides dramatists with an opportunity to make storytelling and other narrative gestures central to dramatic activities.”¹² Throughout the course of a play, characters must formulate and reformulate the stories they tell in constant interaction with the other characters and the objects around them. These interactions, and the energy that infuses them, are distinctively theatrical.

Even more than other genres, Elizabethan and Jacobean revenge tragedies draw upon stories and storytellers to achieve their full dramatic potential. In part this is due to the fact that early modern revenge tragedies have their roots in classical theater, particularly the work of Seneca.¹³ One distinguishing characteristic of Senecan drama is the figure of the *nuntius*, or messenger, who brings news of events that occur off-stage. One might expect drama to have outgrown such intrusions of storytelling, yet these conventions persist. For example, in early modern drama, the crime that needs to be revenged usually is described in a story rather than depicted on the stage. So what purpose do such narrative interruptions serve? Tension builds as the characters (and the audience) engage with competing and often contradictory accounts of events. These stories encourage the listeners (both on stage and in the theater) to understand not only what happened but why it happened.

¹² Garner, 52.

¹³ For more information see James Barrett, Staged Narrative: Poetics and the Messenger in Greek Tragedy (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

An act of vengeance is, by definition, a reaction to something that has already occurred,¹⁴ and in revenge tragedy characters fight over conflicting accounts of the past – individual, familial, communal, even national. Occasionally the original crime is staged in a revenge tragedy, but more commonly it is not; in either case, the emphasis of a revenge tragedy is placed on individual and communal responses to that initial event. But amending the past destabilizes the present and makes the future uncertain. The difficulties facing Hamlet, perhaps the best known of Elizabethan revengers, revolve around acts of storytelling and comprehension. Characteristic of this play (which is full of gifted storytellers, including the Ghost, Gertrude, Ophelia, and Hamlet himself) is the repetition, variation or revision of events the audience has already seen acted and/or discussed on the stage.¹⁵ From his first meeting with his father’s Ghost, Hamlet is forced to verify the story of his father’s murder and to initiate the action that will resolve it; he seeks narrative analogues to the experiences of others; and he ends his life specifically by recasting it as “story” (5.2.349).

Critical analysis of the violent deeds committed by Hamlet and other early modern revengers must take into account the stories that motivated such acts as well as the stories told about them afterwards. Generations of audiences, readers, and critics have

¹⁴ See the Oxford English Dictionary.

¹⁵ As Barbara Hardy observes, “Multivocalism was not invented by James Joyce, and Shakespeare too tells the same story from different point of view, at different times, in different moods...Shakespeare layers arts and acts of narrative, inviting the audience to compare the shifting revisions of life and art” (Hardy, Shakespeare’s Storytellers, 22).

condemned, have sympathized with, have been troubled by, and have applauded both the revenger and the order that the revenger attacks - often all at once. This complicated, multifaceted response emerges from the numerous perspectives afforded by characters telling their stories on the stage.

Revenge

English revenge tragedy has been regarded primarily as a subgenre of Renaissance drama since 1902, when Ashley Thorndike defined it as a “distinct species of the tragedy of blood...a tragedy whose leading motive is revenge and whose main action deals with the progress of this revenge, leading to the death of the murderers and often the death of the avenger himself.”¹⁶ Building upon Thorndike’s definition, storytelling is integral to creating the desire for revenge, pivotal to the act of revenge, and necessary to vindicate the revenger’s actions.

The main action of revenge tragedy often comprises acts which are bloody, violent, and destructive, a fact which has led scholars to address the ethical and moral aspects of these plays. It can be difficult to determine whether or not the (often) worthy ends (establishing justice, punishing criminals, restoring honor, ending corruption, etc.) can be justified by such means. Since the publication in 1931 of Lily B. Campbell’s influential article “Theories of Revenge in Renaissance England,” one group of critics

¹⁶ Ashley H. Thorndike, "The Relation of Hamlet to Contemporary Revenge Plays,"

PMLA 17 (1902): 125.

has argued that the sheer number of documents condemning revenge in the sixteenth century suggests that readers would have perceived revengers as villains. Though Campbell herself recognized that playwrights took a variety of approaches to the question of revenge and remarked that there were “wide differences of philosophical purpose and understanding among the individual plays of that type,”¹⁷ the prominence she placed upon contemporary religious and philosophical texts that expressed opposition to revenge led many who followed her to conclude that audiences and playwrights condemned revengers in Renaissance drama, primarily on religious grounds, for spiritual failure and unjustified violence. In the eyes of these critics, the condemnation of revenge by the Elizabethan legal and clerical establishments was so overwhelming that however much an audience might sympathize with a revenger, that individual’s actions could not be approved of. For example, Percy Simpson asserts that “in most of the plays it is a misnomer to talk of revenge as a ‘duty’; it degenerates into stark vindictiveness and brutalizes the avenger.”¹⁸ Eleanor Prosser, too, holds that Elizabethan audiences saw revenge as a “reprehensible blasphemy” that endangered the revenger’s soul and made him “evil as his injurer in the eyes of God.”¹⁹ Charles and Elaine Hallett have argued that “the revenger, whoever he is, whatever the moral quality of his intentions, has launched

¹⁷ Lily B. Campbell, "Theories of Revenge in Renaissance England," Modern Philology 28.3 (1931): 296.

¹⁸ Percy Simpson, "The Theme of Revenge in Elizabethan Tragedy," Studies in Elizabethan Drama (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955) 37.

¹⁹ Eleanor Prosser, Hamlet and Revenge (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1971) 6-7.

himself on a predictable course of action,” on a journey “from sanity to madness.”²⁰ In support of this view of the revenge theme, Campbell and others drew upon a wealth of Renaissance and biblical commentary that they felt could fairly characterize the moral disposition of audiences, Renaissance and contemporary, towards the actions of dramatic revengers. Their readings of Renaissance plays deal with the moral issue of revenge from what they deem a Christian perspective.

At the same time, however, it has seemed equally apparent to others that this orthodoxy does not accurately describe the experience of most viewers and readers or fairly characterize what goes on in revenge plays. The competing perspectives found in revenge tragedies, due in large part to the multiplicity of stories and storytellers these plays contain, actively resist straightforward interpretation. For instance, a Christian reading of revenge does not apply to most instances of comic revenge; “to the extent that tragic revenge is motivated by malice or madness,” Linda Anderson asserts, “the attitude toward revenge expressed in tragedy is almost the antithesis of that expressed in the comedies.”²¹ The act of revenge takes many forms and occurs in a variety of contexts, and its primary dramatic significance does not always lie in its moral and ethical aspects. To damn revengers for their actions at the end of the play without taking fully into account what provokes them is basically to ignore the experience just witnessed. Helen

²⁰ Hallett, Charles A. and Elaine S. Hallett Hallett, The Revenger's Madness: A Study of Revenge Tragedy Motifs (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980) 7,9.

²¹ Linda Anderson, A Kind of Wild Justice: Revenge in Shakespeare's Comedies (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1987) 22.

Gardner has pointed out that, unlike other tragic heroes the revenger usually “has not created the situation in which he finds himself and out of which the tragedy arises”; he has been placed “in a situation which is horrible, and felt by him and the audience to be intolerable, but for which he has no responsibility.”²² Attempts to express outrage about these terrible circumstances through formally recognized channels are thwarted and frustrated by those whose interests lie in controlling and containing information about the tragedy; a wronged individual who obtains a reasonably fair hearing in a public forum such as a court does not become a revenger. Early modern revengers do commit terrible acts of violence, but a significant part of their satisfaction comes from publicly revealing stories about these “horrible” and “intolerable” situations.

Various recent commentators, observing that the revenger has experienced a significant loss, have looked beyond anger to other emotions that contribute to his or her need for vengeance. For example, Arthur Kirsch states that, while “vengeance composes the plot of the revenge play, grief composes its essential emotional content, its substance”²³; according to Susan Letzler Cole, the act we are continually led to expect, “revenge as a function of mourning,” is often “aborted, deflected or neutralized” during the course of the play by the experience of grieving;²⁴ and Robert Watson observes that

²² Helen Gardner, The Business of Criticism (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959) 41.

²³ Arthur Kirsch, The Passions of Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1990) 21.

²⁴ Susan Letzler Cole, The Absent One: Mourning Ritual, Tragedy, and the Performance of Ambivalence (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1985) 5.

revenge tragedy may alleviate deep psychological anxieties about mortality by sustaining the human need to believe, first, “that our rights, our desires, and our consciousness continue to matter beyond our deaths” and, second, that revenge can “symbolically restore us to life by defeating the agency of our death, conveniently localized in a villain.”²⁵ Therefore, the revenger’s madness, cited by the Halletts as evidence of evil, may be seen more as a function of a character’s frustration and powerlessness than of his or her efforts to avenge wrongs. Storytelling enables characters in revenge tragedies to address not only staged events but also those that antedate them in the play’s past and those projected beyond the play’s concluding present. Without the revenger’s stories, the audience lacks the context to understand what they have witnessed.

From a cultural materialistic perspective, Jonathan Dollimore describes revenge as a means by which society’s bereaved and dispossessed victims may achieve social reintegration through “the creation of a sub-culture dedicated to revenge”—for example, by forming alliances with others who are similarly afflicted or committed.²⁶ To support his argument, Dollimore draws upon such alliances in the family scenes in Titus Andronicus and in Hamlet’s bonding with Horatio and, indirectly, Fortinbras. Catherine Belsey has taken Dollimore’s point a step further, seeing the potential for encouraging revolutionary modes of thought in revenge plays. She maintains that because revenge

²⁵ Robert N. Watson, The Rest Is Silence: Death as Annihilation in the English Renaissance (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994) 200.

²⁶ Jonathan Dollimore, Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1984) 21.

“exists in the margin between justice and crime,” it “deconstructs the antithesis which fixes the meanings of good and evil, right and wrong” and poses political as well as moral questions. Revenge plays do not, she contends, resolve these issues; rather, they raise questions about divine, political and personal authority – “whether it is nobler to suffer in Christian patience or to take arms against secular injustices.” To take revenge can be portrayed as “an overriding imperative” because “not to act is to leave crime unpunished, murder triumphant or tyranny in unfettered control.” And “to the extent that [these plays] consequently endorse revenge, they participate in the installation of the sovereign subject, entitled to take action in accordance with conscience and on behalf of law.”²⁷

Other scholars have argued from a historical perspective that the strong tradition of secular defenses of revenge in the early modern period suggests the likelihood that early modern audiences would have identified with and cheered on the great dramatic avengers. The talion principle (*lex talionis*) of punishment by the state found in many ancient law codes is frequently cited by early modern revengers as justification for their actions; revengers do not self-identify as criminals but as vigilantes, wronged individuals who uphold the law themselves when the state is unable or unwilling to do so. An early application of the talion principle appeared in the Code of Hammurabi in section 229: “If a builder constructed a house, but did not make his work strong, with the result that the house which he built collapsed and caused the death of the owner of the house, that

²⁷ Catherine Belsey, The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama (London: Methusen, 1985) 116.

builder shall be put to death.” The more familiar formula is found in the biblical book of Exodus: “If...hurt is done, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, bruise for bruise, wound for wound” (Exod. 21: 23-24). Some legal historians view the talion principle as barbaric, which, however, is something of a misunderstanding of its role in ancient legal systems. The talion principle was created by the state as a limiting or braking device on individual revenge-taking, to prevent cycles of revenge from forming and spiraling out of control; in other words, the state would see that an eye was received for an eye, or a tooth for a tooth, but the violence was to stop there and not expand to the whole community. The principle, as Hans Boecker notes, “originated in the administration of justice characteristic of nomadic tribes,”²⁸ and its primary purpose was to control the extent of retaliatory response regardless of the tribal affiliations of the avenger and the target of vengeance. The ancient Greeks and Romans, from whom early modern English revenge drama inherited so much (although these later plays are distinguished by their ambivalence towards the often violent acts of vengeance they portray), viewed revenge as the necessary and appropriate response to a wrong or perceived wrong; such acts were one’s duty. While revenge can be seen as the product of a victim’s search for evenhanded justice, Katharine Eisaman

²⁸ Hans Jochen Boecher, Law and the Administration of Justice in the Old Testament and the Ancient East (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980): 174.

Maus observes that the acts of revenge in the early modern drama “register a troubling discrepancy between the desire for equity and the means of fulfilling that desire.”²⁹

In addition to the talion principle, Fredson Bowers finds the origins of revenge tragedy in the Anglo-Saxon tradition of “wergeld” (derived from the combination of the Old English words “wer” [man] and “geld” [payment]), which refers to the exact price set upon a person’s life, to be paid to the family of the victim by the family of the murderer. The wergeld system does not question the right of the offended party to seek compensation for its losses. As Ronald Broude states in a larger project arguing that the concept of revenge in England “predates the sixteenth-century concern with distinguishing among socio-legal systems and their forms of retribution,”³⁰ the wergeld system was perceived as absolutely necessary in situations where strong and effective punitive mechanisms for dealing with crime simply did not exist: “The tradition of self-government was strongest...in those times, places, and circumstances where no state or similar authority was available to provide redress for wrongs”³¹ Many early modern revenge tragedies occur under similar circumstances, where authority is unable or unwilling to dispense justice.

Whatever the origins of the revenge tradition, by the early modern period, legal authorities no longer recognized revenge as a legitimate option for dealing with violent

²⁹ Katharine Eisaman Maus. Four Revenge Tragedies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995): ix.

³⁰ Broude, "Revenge and Revenge Tragedy in Renaissance England," 42.

³¹ Broude, "Revenge and Revenge Tragedy in Renaissance England," 43.

crimes. In 1615, Francis Bacon sought to justify the strictness of the laws governing dueling and private revenge in England:

[W]hen revenge is once extorted out of the Magistrate's hands, contrary to God's ordinance, 'mihi vindicta, ego retribuam,' and every man shall bear the sword, not to defend but to assail; and private men begin once to presume to give law to themselves, and to right their own wrongs; no man can foresee the danger and inconveniences that may arise and multiply thereupon...It may grow from quarrels to bandying...to trooping, and so to tumult and commotion; from particular persons to dissension of families and alliances; yea to national quarrels.³²

The illegality of revenge was by this time so firmly established that one could unhesitatingly describe the crimes of a revenger as a direct threat to the law itself.

Yet several conventions and codes supported the practice of revenge, in certain circumstances. Where feudal ideas of honor persisted, the concept of revenge was contradictory; one who publicly turned the other cheek at an injury lost honor and dignity, but responding in kind could result in being sentenced to death in a court of law. While fully acknowledging the religious and ethical traditions that condemned revenge, Fredson Bowers also observes that "many an Elizabethan gentleman...felt obliged by the more powerful code of honor to revenge personally an injury offered him" because the tradition of redress by private action "was still very much alive, particularly among an

³² Francis Bacon, The Works of Francis Bacon, ed. Basil Montagu, vol. 6 (London: William Pickering, 1825) 110.

aristocracy which prided itself on its individuality.”³³ The desire for revenge was limited neither to the English nor the aristocracy. Historian Edward Muir analyzes the impact of revenge in early modern Italian history, addressing the ways in which revenge narratives perpetuated vendettas between families in the Friuli region in the sixteenth century.³⁴ Philip Ayres has identified a large number of revengers in Elizabethan narrative literature whose actions are presented as “heroic and praiseworthy.”³⁵ Harry Keyishian, by differentiating “authentic revenges” (defined as justified retribution for real injuries) from “acts of vindictiveness” (defined as malicious aggressions incited by fraudulent or imagined grievances), demonstrates that revenge as depicted in the theater could potentially be “an affirmative and redemptive activity despite religious and social prohibitions against it.”³⁶ As John Sibly has pointed out, the pursuit of revenge was certainly sanctioned in the struggle against national enemies; the Oath of Association, by the signing of which many of Elizabeth’s subjects acknowledged a duty to pursue her killers in the event of her assassination, “as well by force of arms as by all other means of

³³ Fredson Bowers, Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy 1587-1642 (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1959) 16.

³⁴ Edward Muir, Mad Blood Stirring: Vendetta and Factions in Friuli During the Renaissance (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

³⁵ Philip J. Ayres, "Degrees of Heresy: Justified Revenge and Elizabethan Narratives," Studies in Philology 69 (1972): 465.

³⁶ Harry Keyishian, The Shapes of Revenge:Victimization, Vengeance and Vindictiveness in Shakespeare (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1995) ix.

revenge,” implicitly sanctions a subset of revenge acts, those against tyrants and usurpers, and thereby licenses the rebellions against Richard III, Claudius, and Macbeth, each a “*successful, crowned, usurper* [italics are the author’s].”³⁷ The issue of revenge raises questions about the role of people in relation to states, as, historically, subjects whose primary obligation was to display obedience and devotion to their rulers evolved into citizens obliged to participate in their own governance.

Overview

Thomas Kyd’s The Spanish Tragedy, the focus of the first chapter of this dissertation, is widely known as the groundbreaking play that ushered in the early modern revenge tradition. In this play, revengers make use of storytelling in two particular ways: to provoke others to take action and to justify their own actions to others. These techniques were subsequently adapted by other early modern playwrights for their own dramatic ends. The first section of this chapter focuses on the recent death in battle of Don Andrea, a young Spanish nobleman. The ghost of Don Andrea does not originally demand retribution for his untimely demise, but as he overhears the still-living give five quite biased accounts of the battle in which he died, he is provoked to revenge. Storytelling is a tool used by characters in revenge tragedies to manipulate and control the emotions of others, who then act. The second section of this chapter discusses

³⁷ John Sibly, "The Duty of Revenge in Tudor and Stuart Drama," Review of English Literature 8 (1967): 52.

Hieronimo's revenge of the murder of his son, Horatio. Unable to obtain justice from secular or spiritual authorities, despite repeated attempts to tell his story, Hieronimo kills the guilty parties as part of the performance of a play, and then justifies his actions to the assembled company. Hieronimo's revenge is strategic, purposeful, and public, for it gains him a means through which he can air his (legitimate) grievances.

The second chapter of this dissertation examines storytelling in Shakespeare's 1 Henry VI. Many characters in Shakespeare's first historical tetralogy, of which 1 Henry VI is the first play, are obsessed with questions of revenge and driven by rage and the imperatives of family honor to seek compensation for losses and violations they have suffered. But Shakespeare takes pains to distinguish among them. First, vengeance against foreign foes is not just respectable but admirable and praiseworthy. Tales of glorious deeds in battle by heroes such as Henry V and Lord John Talbot are told and retold, and become part of a shared national identity. By having a state adopt the language of revenge, Shakespeare collapses the distinction (made by Bacon, among others) between vengeance and war. Revenges against foreign foes are presented in this first age of nationalism as necessary and honorable; stories of these revenges motivate deeds that advance the interests of the nation as a whole.

Revenge against domestic enemies, however, is far more threatening to the commonwealth. Squabbles such as those between York and Old Clifford escalate into animosity between entire families; factions form, and eventually the social network devolves into the bloody and divisive Wars of the Roses. Unlike Talbot, who defends his homeland, many characters in these plays fight not for England but for York or Lancaster; each faction holds grievances against the other, long lists of atrocities

committed and injustices never rectified. As the two sides repeatedly summon their followers to bear witness in diametrically opposed ways to the same charged stories of lineage and succession, each effort to secure closure prompts further debate. These stories, with their insistence that past wrongs be revenged, consume the lives of extended families; because the Yorkists and the Lancastrians happen to be powerful members of the English aristocracy, the English nation is devastated.

As in the previous plays, the high social status of the families involved in Elizabeth Cary's The Tragedy of Mariam means that personal conflicts have serious political implications for individuals, families and the nation at large. Once again, the futures of individuals, families, and nations are not only shaped by but bound up in the past. The royal death with which this play opens interrupts the link between the past and the present, opening up a space in which revenge can occur and history can be rewritten. This chapter argues that three characters—Mariam, Doris, and Salome—achieve revenge not with physical violence but through acts of verbal violence: prayers, curses, vows, and slander. The repetitious references to bygone acts, to the never-forgotten sources of mutual accusations, to legitimacy claims, and to the constantly recurring reinterpretations of the past create and recreate history. Within this play, the social aspects of storytelling—issues of talking versus not talking, who is allowed to talk and who must keep silent, and who or what finally talks and tells despite all efforts to prevent talking and hearing—are of major import.

'Tis Pity She's a Whore, Ford's well-known tale of sibling incest and revenge, is the text of the final chapter of this dissertation. The central dynamic of the play is the incestuous relationship between a young Italian scholar, Giovanni, and his sister,

Annabella. Soranzo, Annabella's husband, is interested in the incest and resulting pregnancy only insofar as it makes him a cuckold and subjects him to public humiliation. To restore his good name, Soranzo plans to subject Annabella to a shaming ritual and then kill her and Giovanni during his birthday feast. But Giovanni kills Annabella first, to preserve her reputation, and then upstages Soranzo by presenting his own version of events to the assembled company. At the play's conclusion, both the assembled company and the stage audience are called upon to determine whether or not the acts of revenge were justified. They must pass judgment in a battle of storytelling, and in doing so debate and, if necessary, recreate the customs of their community.

Conclusion

Arguments both for and against revenge were plentiful in the early modern period, a fact that would have generated intense confusion and inner turmoil for the person faced with the obligation to avenge a family member or a loved one. There is no reason to think that an Elizabethan audience would not have been ambivalent about the major moral questions that these plays tend to provoke. As Anne Pippin Burnett summarizes, "the Stoic's hypothetical act of angry un wisdom, easily repudiated by a reasonable man, no longer existed. In its place there was a current deed, abhorrent and damnable, but one to which a good man might be prompted 'by Heaven and Hell' (Hamlet 2.2.280)."³⁸ And for vengeance to be successful, the target must understand that

³⁸ Anne Pippin Burnett, Revenge in Attic and Later Tragedy (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998) 19.

he or she is suffering injury or being killed as a penalty for his or her actions that triggered the revenge behavior of the avenger. Achieving such understanding requires communication, which in early modern revenge tragedies commonly occurs in the form of storytelling.

Chapter 2

“Where words prevail not, violence”: Storytelling, Revenge, and the Search for Justice in Thomas Kyd’s The Spanish Tragedy

“We are promised a mathematical perfection of total recompense, where justice and revenge are identical.”³⁹

In the epigraph, G. K. Hunter captures much of the allure of the opening scene of Thomas Kyd’s The Spanish Tragedy, which is arguably the first early modern English revenge tragedy.⁴⁰ This play that set the stage for the vibrant revenge tradition that

³⁹ G.K. Hunter, "Ironies of Justice in The Spanish Tragedy," Renaissance Drama 8 (1965): 93.

⁴⁰ Most early modern scholars consider The Spanish Tragedy to be the groundbreaking play that ushered in the early modern revenge tradition. However, revenge as a primary motive in tragedy can be found in the earliest extant representations of the dramatic form. Aeschylus’s Oresteia, focusing on Orestes’ revenge on his mother and her lover for murdering his father Agamemnon, established the archetypal pattern of revenge tragedy, and both Sophocles and Euripides wrote tragedies in which revenge was the dominant motif, but it was Seneca’s tragedies that most strongly influenced the dramatic treatment of revenge in Elizabethan tragedy. Four of the ten tragedies ascribed to Seneca in the sixteenth century – Agamemnon, Thyestes, Medea, and Troades – especially emphasize revenge as a destructive force that revels in violence and sensationalism, qualities which

subsequently evolved and flourished during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century. The desire for “total recompense” that he expresses is powerful and can motivate the wronged to seek what Sir Francis Bacon famously referred to as “a kind of wild justice.”⁴¹ Certainly Kyd’s contemporaries were drawn to such possibilities. Lukas Erne asserts that The Spanish Tragedy was “probably the most successful play of the entire period up to 1642.”⁴² This play was revived over decades, provided with additions, taken to the Continent, translated, and several times adapted; it was printed no fewer than eleven times between 1592 and 1633, a number exceeded by only one other play.⁴³ The reputation of Thomas Kyd as an important Elizabethan dramatist rests on this one work,

inspired the Elizabethan translators of his tragedies. The first extant tragedy composed in English, Gorboduc (1562), includes in its tragic development the revenge of a mother on her son for killing his brother, which provokes the people to vengeance on the mother and father, thus wiping out the royal family. John Pickering’s Horestes (1567) combines morality play elements with a version of Orestes’ revenge. And subsequent Inns of Court tragedies – Gismund of Salerne (1567-68), later revised by Robert Wilmot and retitled Tancred and Gismund (1591), and The Misfortunes of Arthur (1588) – also depend upon revenge as a primary motif.

⁴¹ Brian Vickers, ed., Francis Bacon: The Major Works (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) 347.

⁴² Lukas Erne, Beyond the Spanish Tragedy: A Study of the Works of Thomas Kyd (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2001) x-xi.

⁴³ The anonymous Mucedorus, which passed through fourteen editions by 1639.

although scholars know that he also translated Robert Garnier's academic Senecan play, Cornelia, from the French. There is also some reason to believe he wrote an earlier version of Hamlet, but that play does not survive. Kyd's early successors did not ignore his importance. In 1623, Ben Jonson praised "sporting Kid" [sic] as one of Shakespeare's most notable "peeres" in the prefatory material to the First Folio,⁴⁴ and more than forty years after his death, the playwright Thomas Heywood referred to "famous Kyd."⁴⁵ Modern literary critics recognize what T.S. Eliot characterized as Kyd's "extraordinary dramatic (if not poetic) genius."⁴⁶ Kyd successfully imitated and integrated motifs and techniques inherited from his predecessors writing in the revenge tradition: for example, the Machiavellian villain, the play-within-a-play, the themes of madness and delay, and the mixing of tragic and comic elements. As Howard Norland says, "The fact that no

⁴⁴ Ben Johnson, "To the Memory of My Beloved Author," The Norton Facsimile of the First Folio of Shakespeare, ed. Charlton Hinman, Second ed. (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Co., 1996) 9.

⁴⁵ Thomas Heywood, "The Hierarchy of the Blessed Angels," Poetry of the English Renaissance, 1509-1660, ed. J. William Hebel and Hoyt H. Hudson (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1957) 544.

⁴⁶ T.S. Eliot, Selected Essays, 1917-1932 (London: Faber and Faber, 1932) 142.

direct source for the plot of the play has been discovered attests to his skill in integrating elements from earlier works and adapting them to his particular purposes....”⁴⁷

Storytelling is under-recognized as one of these elements. While classical revenge tragedy did include occasional moments of storytelling, such as anonymous messengers reporting on events that had occurred off-stage, Kyd developed this motif in such innovative ways in The Spanish Tragedy that it subsequently became integral to the genre of Elizabethan revenge tragedy.

Storytelling would seem to presuppose an audience of some sort, at the very least one interlocutor. But this community is, at least in part, what makes the initial promise of vengeance as justice discussed by Hunter difficult to achieve. Retribution taken by one character affects not only the offending individual but the entire web of social relationships to which both parties belong. In the first of two acts of revenge central to the plot of The Spanish Tragedy, the ghost Don Andrea overhears five descriptions of the battle in which he died. These descriptions are not incidental to the events moving the play forward – they are those events. It is not the battle itself, but the narrative uses made of that battle, which initiate the action of The Spanish Tragedy, ultimately leading those with whom Andrea was closest in life to murder the man responsible for killing him.⁴⁸ In

⁴⁷ Howard B. Norland, "Kyd's Formulation of the Conventions of Revenge Tragedy," Tudor Theater: "Let There Be Covenants..." ed. Andre Lascombes (Bern: Peter Lang, 1998) 69.

⁴⁸ Howard Norland states that the obligatory nature of early modern revenge, particularly for blood relations, had precedents in classical tradition: “in ancient Greek drama as well

the second act of revenge, Hieronimo, unable to achieve satisfaction from established secular or religious channels, plans and executes violent retribution on the two men responsible for the (staged) murder of his son, Horatio. But the ideal of such “mathematical perfection” becomes ever more elusive, for six die in the process of punishing two for the death of one.⁴⁹ Both revenges have unexpected and unintended consequences; another hurt does not requite the original loss, as expected, but creates fresh injustices for others.⁵⁰ There are simply too many variables for an equitable resolution. And so the audience is left not with numbers but with narrative as Hieronimo attempts to explain adequately and justify his actions to the assembled company.

as in Seneca, the obligation is typically implicit if the revenge is to redress an injury or crime against a family member” (“Kyd's Formulation of the Conventions of Revenge Tragedy,” 74-5).

⁴⁹ Bel-imperia, Isabella, Hieronimo, Villuppo, Pedringano, Serberine, and the Duke of Castile all die directly or indirectly as a result of revenge taken on Balthazar and Lorenzo for the murder of Horatio.

⁵⁰ As Watson explains, “Revenge commonly proposes to repeal a loss by imposing an equivalent loss on the entity that caused it, and blood-revenge implies that life can be restored like stolen property” (The Rest Is Silence: Death as Annihilation in the English Renaissance 56).

Storytelling as Provocation to Revenge: The Death of Don Andrea

The first part of Kyd's The Spanish Tragedy concerns the death of Don Andrea, a young Spanish nobleman recently killed while fighting the Portuguese during the Battle of Alcantara. Since the audience is informed of the back story in the first scene, the rest of the play explores why and how the series of events unfolded as they did. Andrea's death is not staged; there are no poetic reflections on mortality the night before battle, no climactic fight scenes, no noble gestures of self-sacrifice, no last gasps of air. Instead, the genius of the early part of Kyd's play lies in the way that he allows the story of Andrea's final moments to evolve. As the events surrounding Andrea's death are told and retold by various characters within the play,⁵¹ the material is continually reshaped to accommodate the needs of the teller in the moment of telling. These narratives of past

⁵¹ Wolfgang Clemen remarks on the distinctive nature of what he refers to as "report speech" in Kyd's play.

Previous convention dictated that such discourse "had to be accepted as an objective account of what happened, and it would have been superfluous to give more than one version of the same event."

The Spanish Tragedy, however, contains reports given from several different points of view, and their relative value is of dramatic significance. These varying reports all have their consequences in the events of later scenes; they become mainsprings in the action of the play. (English Tragedy before Shakespeare: The Development of Dramatic Speech (London: Methuen 1955) 104.)

events influence the characters' understanding of the present, leading them to pursue courses of action that impact the future. Kyd is less interested in the rather unremarkable death of a young nobleman during battle, a common enough occurrence, than in how and why this event leads to the destruction of the royal lineages of two European nations. The motive is revenge. And the weapon is storytelling.

The Spanish Tragedy opens as the ghost of Don Andrea enters the stage with the figure of Revenge and briefly tells the audience about his life and the events that have transpired since his untimely death.

When this eternal substance of my soul
 Did live imprisoned in my wanton flesh,
 Each in their function serving other's need,
 I was a courtier in the Spanish court.
 My name was Don Andrea....(1.1.1-5)⁵²

This speech immediately prompts a question. If his name was Don Andrea, what is it now? He is a liminal being, not Don Andrea but a nameless thing that used to be Don Andrea. His identity is dislocated, yet, because no other name is forthcoming, he is still referred to as Don Andrea. As the scene continues, the audience learns from Don Andrea how he came to be killed in battle.

For in the late conflict with Portingale,
 My valor drew me into danger's mouth

⁵² References to this play can be found in Thomas Kyd, "The Spanish Tragedy," Six Renaissance Tragedies, ed. Colin Gibson (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997).

Till life to death made passage through my wounds. (1.1.15-17)

This initial version of events is brief and matter-of-fact. Don Andrea seems less concerned with how he died than with what has transpired since. Charon at first refused to take Don Andrea as a passenger across the river Styx, because he had not yet been buried. Only when his friend Horatio performed the proper funeral rights was Don Andrea allowed on board. But his troubles did not end there. When Don Andrea came to the judges of the Underworld, they did not know where to place him. His story defied simple classification, because in life he was both a soldier and the lover of a woman named Bel-imperia; in death, the judges could not decide whether he belonged with the soldiers or with the lovers.⁵³ The result was a strange bureaucratic standoff. The judges sent him to Proserpina for the final decision, and she sent him from the underworld back to earth, with Revenge as a companion and interpreter, to witness the death of the man

⁵³ Jonas Barish argues that the three judges Don Andrea faces in the underworld – Aeacus, Rhadamanth, and Minos – “compromise a perfect trinity of thesis, antithesis and synthesis” (“The Spanish Tragedy, or the Pleasures and Perils of Rhetoric,” Elizabethan Theatre, ed. John Russell Brown and Bernard Harris (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1967) 68). Aeacus recommends that Andrea, a lover, sent to the fields of love; Rhadamanth proposes to send him, as a soldier, to dwell with martialists; Minos, finally, arbitrates the difference by referring the question to Pluto. The journey toward Pluto deals in a like manner with infernal geography; on the right, the path leading to the fields of lovers and warriors; on the left, the steep descent to hell; in between, the entrance to the Elysian fields, where Pluto holds court.

who slew him – in effect, to watch the end of his story. In brief, Don Andrea has not died properly, at first because he had not been buried and now because his story has not been fully told; his untimely death has not yet been avenged.

In creating the ghostly Don Andrea, Kyd draws upon the classical model of revenge tragedy, as exemplified by the works of Seneca, which commonly used supernatural figures to narrate, reveal information, and sometimes direct a course of action in the drama.⁵⁴ The ghosts of Seneca were also known actively to demand redress of past injury or injustice. For example, Medea conjures up in her mind the image of her murdered brother, demanding retaliation as she takes revenge on Jason by killing their children. And the trope of the vengeful ghost certainly influenced the Elizabethans and their successors; Hamlet would be the best-known example. But, remarkably, Andrea's ghost does not initially call for vengeance; he appears to regard his demise as a basic fact of existence. His own description of his death, against which all subsequent accounts necessarily will be measured, contains no hint of rancor. He does not even name his slayer. Death is, after all, one of those things that happen in war, and he appears to have died within the ordinary rules of combat. Andrea is merely sharing with Revenge what little he knows of how he came to be at this precise spot, and he is looking for nothing in return, except perhaps an explanation of why he is here. Revenge's calm assurance that they are here to see "the author of thy death, Don Balthazar.../ Depriv'd of life by Bel-imperia" (87-9) is, as Carol McGinnis Kay claims, "startling," for "Revenge's cavalier assumption that Don Andrea demands a blood revenge does not coincide with Don

⁵⁴ Norland, "Kyd's Formulation of the Conventions of Revenge Tragedy," 71.

Andrea's manner or speech."⁵⁵ But the two otherworldly figures remain on the stage, and by the end of the play Don Andrea has been provoked to violence by the stories he overhears.

After the Induction, during the opening conversations among the living when the play proper starts, a disjunction is immediately established between what the audience knows and what is known at the Spanish court. During a visual display of procession and heraldry, the Spaniards congratulate themselves on the late victory and stress the unimportance of the losses. The Spanish General, who appears only in this one scene and is referred to by his title alone, tells the King, "All well, my sovereign Liege, except some few / That are deceased by fortune of the war" (1.2.2-3), and then reiterates "Victory, my liege, and that with little loss" (1.2.7). In contrast to the uncertainty and indeterminacy of the Induction, the second scene gives an image of social order and political stability. Scott McMillin, recognizing that in Elizabethan thought political order usually has religious implications, astutely observes that "When the General brings word of victory, the King responds by referring the issue to heaven—"Then blest be heaven, and guider of the heavens, / From whose fair influence such justice flows" (1.2.10-11)—and the Duke of Castile quickly fulfills the ceremonial possibilities of the event by showing (in Latin) the King's alignment with God (12-14)."⁵⁶ But Kyd's audience knows that the victory

⁵⁵ Carol McGinnis Kay, "Deception through Words: A Reading of The Spanish Tragedy," Studies in Philology 74 (1977): 22.

⁵⁶ Scott McMillin, "The Figure of Silence in The Spanish Tragedy," ELH 39.1 (1972): 28.

came at a price. The “cheerful countenance” of the General during his report that the King comments upon would surely have bruised Don Andrea’s ego. And, as G.K. Hunter observes on a larger scale, “We, seeing Andrea sitting on the stage, know that the ‘little loss’ can be too easily discounted and that the ‘some few’ may yet blemish the complacency of the court and the overconfident assumption that justice is already achieved.”⁵⁷

Don Andrea’s account of his experiences during the battle was limited; revenge, at this point, is not necessarily called for. More is clearly expected from the General, the second teller of the story of Don Andrea’s death. The Spanish King, delighted with the General’s initial declaration of victory over the Portuguese, urges him to give more details so that “[w]ith deeper wage and greater dignity / We may reward thy blissful chivalry” (20-1). Thus encouraged with promise of reward, the General provides a more detailed report. His elaborate speech is the second longest in this play of long speeches, ornamented by the figures of rhetoric and touched by literary allusions.

The General initially describes the battle as a nearly equal struggle which raged for three hours between two powerful armies. As Jonas Barish observes, language of this order and design amounts to a re-imagining of the event described, turning the battle into a “nearly heraldic formality”⁵⁸:

Where Spain and Portingale do jointly knit
Their frontiers, leaning on each other’s bound,

⁵⁷ Hunter, “Ironies of Justice in The Spanish Tragedy,” 94.

⁵⁸ Barish, “The Spanish Tragedy, or the Pleasures and Perils of Rhetoric,” 69.

There met our armies in their proud array,
 Both furnished well, both full of hope and fear,
 Both menacing alike with daring shows,
 Both vaunting sundry colours of device,
 Both cheerly sounding trumpets, drums and fifes,
 Both raising dreadful clamours to the sky. (1.2.22-29)

The stylized, repetitive structure of the clauses places the armies as mirror versions of one another. All is action and reaction, movement and counter-movement; even the border between the warring nations is “jointly knit.” The General’s rhetoric “transforms the event which it purports to describe into a formality of language suitable to the ceremonial moment in which it is offered.”⁵⁹ This detailed description of the battle includes vivid accounts of mutilated and dismembered bodies:

On every side drop captains to the ground,
 And soldiers, some ill-maimed, some slain outright.
 Here falls a body scindereed from his head,
 There legs and arms lie bleeding on the grass,
 Mingled with weapons and unbowelled steeds,
 That scattering overspread the purple plain. (1.2.57-62)

It is difficult not to think of Don Andrea at this point in the General’s story. But the King is highly satisfied by an account which ultimately details Spain’s success in battle. Molly

⁵⁹ McMillin, “The Figure of Silence in The Spanish Tragedy,” 29.

Smith argues that this passage “captures the value of death as entertainment,” an idea further emphasized throughout the play in a variety of ways.⁶⁰

The General’s account does provide some additional information. While the Spanish and Portuguese armies were closely matched for much of the battle, eventually Don Andrea forced the Portuguese to fall back, and their prince, Don Balthazar, urged them on. The General says simply that “in that conflict was Andrea slain” (71), thus clarifying the identity of Andrea’s slayer. Then, according to this Spanish General, Balthazar was rude and insulting as he stood over Andrea’s body and taunted the Spanish forces. This poor sportsmanship was checked by Horatio, who challenged Balthazar to single combat, and “straight the prince was beaten from his horse” (79). This is surprising because Don Andrea had not revealed that Horatio had captured Balthazar but identified him merely as the friend who conducted the burial rites necessary for his entrance into Hades. The Portuguese fled again, with the Spanish army in pursuit. The General’s account is quite shrewd: since the Portuguese are portrayed as good fighters, a victory over them is something to brag about, but they can also be rude and cowardly, in contrast to the consistently heroic Spanish soldiers. The General’s words have their desired effect, for the King thanks him for “these good news” (85) with the gift of a chain and the promise of more reward later.

When the army returns from battle in the latter part of scene two, the King learns to his—and the audience’s—surprise that Balthazar is claimed by not one but two

⁶⁰ Molly Smith, "The Theater and the Scaffold: Death as Spectacle in The Spanish Tragedy," SEL 32.2 (1992): 223.

Spanish warriors. Despite the fact that the General just provided a lengthy oration about the battle, it would seem that the whole story still has not been told. In this third rendition of the events that occurred during the conflict, Horatio and Lorenzo disagree about which of them, in law, has custody of the Portuguese prince as prisoner. In a manner reminiscent of Aeacus and Rhadamanthus in Hades, these two men argue over “competing claims to truth”⁶¹ and provide evidence to support their assertions: Lorenzo grabbed the reins of Balthazar’s horse and seized his weapon, while Horatio’s threats forced him to yield that weapon. Both men agree to this account, and Balthazar himself testifies that he yielded to Lorenzo “in courtesy” (161), to Horatio “perforce” (161), “And, truth to say, . . . to both” (165). Carol McGinnis Kay expresses her surprise that the General had not mentioned even Lorenzo’s presence in his version of events; “Surely he knew about Lorenzo’s part in Balthazar’s capture, because Lorenzo, Horatio, and Balthazar all agree that he at least shared in the deed. And since Lorenzo is the King’s nephew, why did the General pass up the opportunity to praise the King’s kinsman to the King?”⁶² The text does not provide a clear answer to this question.

The King, after hearing competing stories of events on the battlefield, must now determine which heroic warrior deserves recognition for Balthazar’s capture. Hieronimo’s narrative of events, described as a “brief discourse” (1.2.16) and a “form of battle” (1.2.17), pleases the king, whose reaction to the young soldier’s story is telling: “These words, these deeds, become thy person well” (95). While the King responds both

⁶¹Hunter, "Ironies of Justice in The Spanish Tragedy," 94.

⁶² Kay, "Deception through Words: A Reading of The Spanish Tragedy," 24.

to the “good news” (1.2.85) and to the heroic actions described in Hieronimo’s tale, his response – “these words, these deeds” - is structured in such a way as to suggest that there is no separation between word and deed, and that discourse itself is a form of battle. Hieronimo’s words have the potency to move the king to action, “putting in question a clear distinction between representation and action.”⁶³ Lorenzo, too, links words and deeds later in the play when he comments to Balthazar about his attempts to win Bel-imperia’s love: “Where words prevail not, violence prevails” (2.2.108). Although perhaps not as effective as physical force, the rhetoric of persuasion hinted at in Lorenzo’s comment reveals the ability language has to effect change.

In the scene immediately following the king’s exchange with Hieronimo and Lorenzo, the Viceroy of Portugal hears two competing versions of the fate of his son Balthazar on the battlefield. Alexandro, a Portuguese courtier, tells of Don Balthazar’s survival in battle and eventual capture at the hands of Spanish forces; Villuppo presents a counter-narrative that describes Don Balthazar’s murder at the hand of Alexandro and the potential desecration of his corpse by Spanish forces. His speech lacks the rhetorical fullness of the Spanish General’s account, for the ceremony before the throne of Portugal is one of defeat and personal loss, and, as Scott McMillin states, “the perfect lie requires little eloquence anyhow.”⁶⁴ Alexandro reports that “still the prince survives / ... / In Spain, a prisoner by mischance of war” (1.3.43-5). Villuppo’s counter narrative begins:

⁶³ Thomas P. Anderson, Performing Early Modern Trauma from Shakespeare to Milton (Burlington: Ashgate, 2006) 145.

⁶⁴ McMillin, "The Figure of Silence in The Spanish Tragedy," 30.

Then hear the truth which these eyes have seen

...Till Alexandro, that here counterfeits

Under the color of a duteous friend,

Discharged his pistol at the prince's back. (1.3.59, 65-7)

The Viceroy must decide between two plausible accounts of the event. While the audience is aware that Villuppo is lying, the Viceroy is not possessed of this information and must choose the version that he thinks best represents reality.

Villuppo tells the Viceroy of Portugal the "ill news" (53 and 56) that Alexandro deliberately shot Balthazar in the back and insists that he speaks only "truth which these mine eyes have seen" (59). According to Villuppo, Balthazar was fighting with the Spanish Lord-General, Alexandro fired in their direction, and Balthazar fell. The fickle Viceroy responds to the tale of his son's death with "Ay, ay, my nightly dreams have told me this" (1.3.76) and immediately has Alexandro imprisoned. Carol McGinnis Kay posits that "Our first inclination might be to give Villuppo the benefit of the doubt; after all, he might have seen Alexandro fire a pistol, just as Horatio unseated Balthazar, and made an honest mistake about cause and effect."⁶⁵ But any idea of an honest mistake is soon ended by Villuppo himself, who tells us in soliloquy that he has deceived the Viceroy and destroyed a rival with his "envious, forged tale" (93), falsely describing the past to gain advantage from the present situation. The Viceroy sentences Alexandro to death, and then, in a manner reminiscent of the previous scene at the Spanish court, directs, "Villuppo, follow us for thy reward" (92). Two acts later, such pecuniary gain is revealed

⁶⁵ Kay, "Deception through Words: A Reading of The Spanish Tragedy," 25.

to be Villuppo's motive when he confesses that he lied "for reward and hope to be preferred" (3.1.95). These wrongs eventually are righted, for Villuppo's treachery is exposed just in time to prevent the burning alive of his slandered rival; then the liar is duly punished. C.L. Barber, contrasting the outcome of Villuppo's misdeeds with the helplessness Hieronimo experiences in the previous scene after the murder of his son, Horatio, describes this as "an exemplum of public justice working and state business going forward."⁶⁶ But it's only by luck that Villuppo's lie is exposed. The lack of justice in ensuing scenes of the play is much more apparent.

The final version of the battle is presented in 1.4 by Horatio to the beautiful and independent Bel-imperia, Don Andrea's former mistress.⁶⁷ Their conversation – coming as it does after three scenes devoted mainly to public pomp and splendor – has a certain quiet provocativeness. In this, Bel-imperia's first appearance on stage, she is seen alone with Don Horatio. They talk of her dead lover, his best friend; the two are united by their temporary isolation where previously all had been staged ceremony and crowds.

⁶⁶ C.L. Barber, Creating Elizabethan Tragedy: The Theater of Marlowe and Kyd (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988) 134-35.

⁶⁷ Eric Griffin observes the interpretive complexity of Bel-imperia's name; "any attempt to make Bel-imperia stand for simply 'beauty,' 'glory,' or 'Elizabeth' reduces her interpretive richness. For while we can read Bel-imperia's name after *bella*, so we can read it as though derived from *bellum*, suggesting her relation to 'war'" ("Ethos, Empire, and the Valiant Acts of Thomas Kyd's Tragedy of 'the Spains'," English Literary Renaissance 31 (2001): 198-99).

Horatio's description of the battle naturally focuses on the circumstances of Don Andrea's death. The account falls into two parts: Andrea's actual death and Horatio's care for the body.

Horatio's account has the major characteristic common to the earlier versions save that of Don Andrea: he tells his story for personal gain. Like the General, Horatio must know what will please his listener, for his words are carefully chosen. Andrea is praised for his bravery, courage, and ability; apparently, as Horatio explains to Bel-imperia, he was so excellent an opponent that he was defeated only through supernatural intervention. Don Andrea was engaged in hand-to-hand combat with Balthazar when, "wrathful Nemesis,... / Envyng at Andrea's praise and worth," ended the Spanish prince's life when she

Brought in a fresh supply of halberdiers,
Which paunched his [Don Andrea's] horse and dinged him to the ground.
Then young Don Balthazar with ruthless rage,
Taking advantage of his foe's distress,
Did finish what his halberdiers begun,
And left not till Andrea's life was done. (1.4.16-26)

As Kay notes, "These explanations of supernatural power and unchivalric opportunism have appeared in none of the earlier stories – indeed, they directly contradict the account given by the Spanish General to the King."⁶⁸ Balthazar's halberdiers break the convention of honor by ganging up on the battling knight, giving an unfair advantage to

⁶⁸ Kay, "Deception through Words: A Reading of The Spanish Tragedy," 26.

Balthazar. The circumstances are suspicious, but do not seem to call for blood revenge. As Michael Henry Levin asks, "...can the victorious warrior be condemned for the nature of his victory? Isn't common morality suspended during battle?"⁶⁹ Horatio would seem to respond to these questions with "no" and "yes," respectively.

Horatio is not motivated by vengeance in this scene; by telling Bel-imperia about the battle in which her former lover died, he is seeking to gain her affection in the present. As McMillin states, this exchange of stories functions "not so much to examine the past as to participate in the forming of present relationships and the opening of future possibilities."⁷⁰ But Bel-imperia immediately brands Balthazar a murderer, condemning him for the nature of his victory and accusing him of immorality and dishonorable conduct during battle:

He shall, in rigor of my just disdain,
 Reap long repentance for his murderous deed.
 For what was't else but murderous cowardice,
 So many to oppose one valiant knight,
 Without respect of honor in the fight? (1.3.71-75).

Fearing that Don Andrea's corpse suffered desecration, Bel-imperia then asks if Don Andrea's body was lost. Turning the conversation to himself, Horatio explains that he rescued Don Andrea's body and ensured that it had a proper funeral:

⁶⁹ Michael Henry Levin, "Vindicta Mihi!": Meaning, Morality, and Motivation in The Spanish Tragedy," SEL 4.2 (1964): 319-20.

⁷⁰ McMillin, "The Figure of Silence in The Spanish Tragedy," 30.

No, that was it for which I chiefly strove,
 Nor stepped I back till I recovered him.
 I took him up and wound him in mine arms,
 And welding him unto my private tent,
 There laid him down and dewed him with my tears. (32-6)

Horatio's speech about his care of the body (32-43) effectively redirects Bel-imperia's attention from Don Andrea to himself. The transference is duplicated in physical terms as Horatio speaks of taking a scarf from Andrea's body which he now wears in remembrance of his dead friend. No words of love pass between them at this point, but Horatio surely must know that the favor could have come only from Bel-imperia, and he must just as surely be pleased with her immediate response: she identifies the scarf as hers and expresses her hopes that Horatio will now wear it "both for him and me" (48). In this way, Roger Stilling states, "The mantle of the dead man passes by means of one of the great Romance symbols to the one most worthy to succeed him"⁷¹

But Bel-imperia will not allow Horatio to succeed Don Andrea in her affections until some unfinished business has been attended to. The niece of the King of Spain does not want Horatio merely as her next romantic partner, although she states in a soliloquy immediately following her discussion with Horatio that he "proves my second love" (61). She plans to enlist this young warrior's aid in killing Balthazar, thus requiting the murder of Don Andrea: "Yes," Bel-imperia states, "second love shall further my revenge" (66).

⁷¹ Roger Stilling, Love and Death in Renaissance Tragedy (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976) 28.

And she decides that their increasing romantic involvement will not remain a private affair but will become known throughout the Spanish court as well, “the more to spite the prince that wrought his [Don Andrea’s] end” (68).

At this point, it is important to remember that, in the Induction, the character of Revenge revealed that Don Andrea had been summoned to witness

..the author of [his] death,

Don Balthazar, the prince of Portingale,

Deprived of life by Bel-imperia. (1.1.87-89)

rather than Hieronimo’s vengeance on Lorenzo. Bel-imperia’s demand for retribution, not Hieronimo’s, activates the supernatural machinery of the play. It is Bel-imperia who scorns Andrea’s slayer, and Bel-imperia whose second love prompts the chain of events that enables her to avenge her first. Her involvement with Horatio leads to his murder, a second provocation of revenge that subsumes the revenge for Don Andrea as it reinforces the power of revenge.⁷²

⁷² Howard Norland observes that this doubling of the revenge motif “recalls Seneca’s Agamemnon where the ghost of Thyestes cheers the death of Agamemnon as revenge on Atreus through his son, but this satisfaction is superseded by the revenge of Orestes on Thyestes’ son Aegisthus and Clytemnestra” (“Kyd’s Formulation of the Conventions of Revenge Tragedy,” 73-74).

Storytelling as Justification of Revenge: The Death of Horatio

Don Andrea's death during battle would seem to have little to do with Hieronimo's revenge for the murder of Horatio, which constitutes the main action of the rest of The Spanish Tragedy. But, as Philip Edwards states, "...Kyd is immensely concerned with the web of consequence."⁷³ The reasons behind Horatio's murder are multifaceted, and the motivations behind Hieronimo's revenge are even more so. The murder of Horatio and the revenge of his murder both respond to previous actions and are themselves the origins of future events. Each action is surrounded by layers of causation. Kyd must begin his play somewhere, of course, and he chooses to bury his start in those early scenes about the war on the borders of Spain and Portugal. The death of Balthazar, promised to Don Andrea by Revenge in the first scene, comes to pass; likewise, Hieronimo has his revenge, and Bel-imperia has hers. Their revenges might appear to be successful, because in each case an individual guilty of murder is killed. But for each of these characters revenge occurs in a grimly different manner from the way he or she wished or planned it; they do not feel that they have received adequate reparation for the wrongs they have suffered, and thus remain frustrated. In the space between the appearance of successful revenge and the satisfaction of the revenger lies storytelling.

Hieronimo is usually considered to be the protagonist of this play, although the weight of narrative recitation discussed previously prevents him from playing more than

⁷³ Philip Edwards, Thomas Kyd and Early Elizabethan Tragedy (London: Longmans, Green & Co. , 1966) 27.

a slight role in the first act.⁷⁴ When he does appear, Hieronimo is depicted as a worthy and loyal servant of the state. In the second scene, as Spain celebrates its recent victory over Portugal, he attends the King discreetly until it becomes clear that Horatio was the hero of the battle, and then he is brought into the conversation because of his son's valorous accomplishment: "But now Knight Marshal, frolic with thy king, / For 'tis thy son that wins this battle's prize" (1.2.96-97). All of Hieronimo's speeches in the rest of the scene relate to Horatio. Hieronimo's other appearance in the first act is equally straightforward and also emphasizes his role as a high-level functionary of the court. When the Spanish King entertains the Portuguese Ambassador at a banquet, Hieronimo is called upon to stage a series of symbolic dumb shows, brief dramatizations of the mutual accord between their nations that supposedly formed following the recent battle. So in his two appearances in the opening scenes, Hieronimo acts only at the bidding of the King, and his role is defined by two functions, his pride in a valorous son and his skill at devising pageants, both of which return in terribly changed form at the conclusion of the play.

⁷⁴ D.J. Palmer argues that Hieronimo's situation in the first act resembles that of a minor character in Seneca, extended to heroic proportions; "The figure of the bereaved father is paralleled in other tragedies by those witnesses of calamity who appear briefly but lament at length the victims of human wickedness or divine wrath" ("Elizabethan Tragic Heroes," *Elizabethan Theatre*, ed. John Russell Brown and Bernard Harris [New York: St. Martin's Press, 1967]: 18).

Horatio is presented sympathetically as well, as a hero recently returned from battle, as a loyal friend, and as “our Knight Marshal’s son” (1.2.76). He is the appropriate object of his admirable father’s pride and hope, and it is easy to understand how such a remarkable young man might catch the eye of the King’s beautiful niece. In the first scene, as the story of the battle of Alcantara is told and retold, the audience is also made aware of the nascent courtship of Horatio and Bel-imperia, of Hieronimo’s deep emotional investment in his family, and of Hieronimo’s long and distinguished career in the service of king and state. These three aspects of the play are finely interwoven. As C.L. Barber states, “If Kyd did not give body and force to this larger and prior context, as the dynamic basis for a paternal piety consistent with his fine old man’s social piety, the wrong Hieronimo suffers would be merely individual, whereas the play makes it a wrong which brings into question the whole social process.”⁷⁵ Judged purely on his merits during these early scenes, Horatio would appear to be a worthy partner for Bel-imperia (he is certainly superior to the opportunistic and aggressive Lorenzo), but he lacks a suitable lineage. The court of Spain is an aristocracy, not a meritocracy, and the liaison Horatio is entering into could prevent a dynastic marriage that will unite his country (as represented by Bel-imperia) with Portugal (as represented by Balthazar). This threat is addressed by the childless Spanish king’s nephew, Lorenzo, who is also Bel-imperia’s brother, and the crown prince of Portugal, Balthazar.

⁷⁵ Barber, Creating Elizabethan Tragedy: The Theater of Marlowe and Kyd 25-6.

The death of Horatio differs markedly from that of Don Andrea.⁷⁶ It is a definite crime (as the death of Andrea was not) and makes Balthazar into a definite criminal (as in the battle he was not). Balthazar and Lorenzo break in on the lovers during a tryst in the arbor. Bel-imperia, thinking quickly, tries to save her lover with a bold lie, proclaiming “I loved Horatio but he loved not me” (2.4.58), but to no avail. Balthazar and Lorenzo first hang Horatio and then stab his body. The stabbing would seem to be excessive, since Horatio is already dead, but as Katharine Eisaman Maus says, the act is “technically superfluous, but symbolically satisfying for the aggressors, who thereby assign an ignominious death to a perceived traitor of social hierarchy.”⁷⁷ Bel-imperia cries out for

⁷⁶ Peter Sacks minimizes the differences between the deaths of Don Andrea and Hieronimo, claiming that “retribution is sought regardless of whether or not the deceased had been murdered.” He describes revenge as “an action in which the survivor assumes for himself the power that has bereaved him...The violence suffered is returned, paid back; the griever has shifted the burden of loss and anger to another bearer, thus, by some strangely arithmetical tally, canceling out his sense of violation and passivity” (“Where Words Prevail Not: Grief, Revenge, and Language in Kyd and Shakespeare,” English Literary History 49.3 (1982): 579).

⁷⁷ Katharine Eisaman Maus, “The Spanish Tragedy, or, the Machiavel's Revenge,” Revenge Tragedy, ed. Stevie Simkin (New York: Palgrave, 2001) 92. It should be noted that Don Andrea, Bel-imperia’s former lover, was also below her royal caste.

help, specifically calling to Hieronimo for assistance, but she is quickly silenced by Lorenzo and taken off-stage.⁷⁸

The violent murder of Horatio creates as revenger the individual who has the best claim to justification in his action, the father of the victim and the chief judicial officer of the Spanish court. Hieronimo, awakened by Bel-imperia's cry, hurries to the arbor, only to come across the dead body of his son. Hieronimo at first responds with incredulity, and then says to his wife, Isabella, who has followed him from their bedroom, "To know the author were some ease of grief, / For in revenge my heart would find relief" (2.5.40-41). In this, his first reference to the subject, Hieronimo sees revenge as a means of assuaging his great loss. Then Hieronimo takes up Horatio's bloody handkerchief, the one received

⁷⁸ For further analysis of this scene, see David Cutts, who argues that such treatment is a form of censorship. Not only do the murderers restrict Bel-imperia's speech on the actual night of the crime (that is, when Lorenzo orders Balthazar, "Come, stop her mouth" (2.4.63)), but when Bel-imperia threatens to divulge the identity of the author of Horatio's murder, she is imprisoned. The reason for this, as Bel-imperia quickly realizes, is "[T]o clap me up where none might come at me, / Nor I at any to reveal my wrongs" (3.10.31-32). Cutts also says that "The same awareness of the need for censorship prompts Lorenzo to arrange the deaths of Serberine and Pedringano and to prevent Hieronimo from speaking with the king" ("Writing and Revenge: The Struggle for Authority in Thomas Kyd's the Spanish Tragedy," Explorations In Renaissance Culture 22 (1996) 149).

from Bel-imperia, and vows to Isabella to keep it with him and not to inter Horatio's body until his death has been avenged.⁷⁹

As D.J. Palmer says, at this point Hieronimo has no thought of exacting revenge with his own hands; "There is no need to assume that he means more than a determination to bring the murderers to justice."⁸⁰ Bringing the guilty parties to court would satisfy his own grieving heart and fulfill a duty he owes to Horatio. But Hieronimo has to discover the identity of the murderers before he can invoke the procedure of law, and to do so he must proceed slowly and carefully, for he is not a member of the greater nobility with a social status beyond the reach of the law. In fact, Hieronimo defines his tragedy in terms of his helplessness to confront those of higher rank; as Philip Edwards

⁷⁹ For more on the social and familial pressure placed on Hieronimo to take revenge for his son's death, see Norland ("Kyd's Formulation of the Conventions of Revenge Tragedy," 77). For example, when Bel-imperia meets Hieronimo after he has received her letter, she chides him for not having fulfilled his obligation to avenge his son's death and suggests that his inaction proves that he does not love his son. She asks, "Is this the love thou bear'st Horatio?" Then after calling Hieronimo an "unkind father" she declares, "Hieronimo, for shame, Hieronimo, / Be not a history to after-times / Of such ingratitude unto thy son". And she concludes, "Shouldst thou neglect the love thou shouldst retain / And give it over and devise no more, / Myself should send their [the murderers'] hateful souls to hell" (4.1.1-28).

⁸⁰ Palmer, "Elizabethan Tragic Heroes," 19.

states, “he is the little man moving in the dangerous world of those who ‘will bear me down with their nobility’ (3.13.38).”⁸¹

Hieronimo learns the identity of his son’s murderer in a letter from Bel-imperia, but he decides, reasonably, to confirm the information before acting on it. After all, it would be foolhardy to rush off to accuse a member of the royal family of murder. Despite these legitimate concerns, Hieronimo believes that his best chance to obtain retribution for the murder of his son lies ultimately within the earthly justice system. As Peter Sacks states, “Since the end of the fourteenth century...the individual had had to yield this act of revenge to the agents of the state. His anger would have to find indirect satisfaction in the official execution of the law.”⁸² But Hieronimo is barred repeatedly by Lorenzo from the access to royal authority that he formerly enjoyed by virtue of his position as Knight Marshal. He expresses great bitterness that he, an officer of the law, should have to sentence offenders but cannot bring the book to those who have outraged him:

This toils my body, this consumeth age,
That only I to all men just must be,

⁸¹ Edwards, Thomas Kyd and Early Elizabethan Tragedy 36.

⁸² Sacks continues, “When, therefore, the principle and operation of justice were found wanting, the revenger would be faced not only with the original burden of his anger, but with an intensely privatized version of that anger. He would find himself suddenly outside the law, hence outside society, and frequently...outside the public institution of language” (“Where Words Prevail Not: Grief, Revenge, and Language in Kyd and Shakespeare,” 579).

And neither gods nor men be just to me. (3.6.8-10)

And so Hieronimo decides to confront the King directly:

I will go plain me to my lord the King,

And cry aloud for justice through the court,

Wearing the flints with these my withered feet,

And either purchase justice by entreats

Or tire them all with my revenging threats. (3.7.67-73)

But when Hieronimo finally does see the King, his concerns are not taken seriously, despite his heartfelt pleas for “Justice, O justice to Hieronimo!” and “Justice, O justice, justice, gentle king!” (3.12.27, 63). The King is discussing with Lorenzo the possibility of a marriage between Bel-imperia and Balthazar and does not wish to be disturbed.

Hieronimo believes that he deserves better treatment at the hands of his monarch, but is unable to demand it. Kevin Dunn describes Hieronimo at this point as “[p]ossessing the power of office but lacking sovereignty, needing to act on his affections but without the legitimacy to do so.”⁸³ Hieronimo keenly feels the powerlessness of his social position. All he can do is tell his story to someone who can take action on his behalf.

Since the available forms of earthly justice are insufficient, Hieronimo appeals to the “sacred heavens” to take revenge. This is a man who earnestly believes that the gods must be on his side; if the heavens are indeed just, it simply is not possible that such an extreme crime should remain unpunished for long. Hieronimo asks,

⁸³ Kevin Dunn, "'Action, Passion, Motion': The Gestural Politics of Counsel in The Spanish Tragedy," Renaissance Drama 31 (2002): 47.

...if this unhallowed deed,
 If this inhuman and barbarous attempt,
 If this incomparable murder thus
 Of mine, but now no more my son,
 Shall unrevealed and unrevenged pass,
 How should we term your dealings to be just,
 If you unjustly deal with those that in your justice trust? (3.2.5).

Here Hieronimo has two complaints: Horatio's murder is "unrevealed" and "unrevenged." Simply punishing the guilty party is not enough; the murder must be publicly acknowledged as a crime. Hieronimo, continuing to receive no satisfaction, declares that he finds the heavens "impregnable"—"they / resist my woes and give my words no way" (3.7.17-18). Miserable, on the brink of madness, Hieronimo decides to go to Hades by himself in search of revenge:

Though on this earth justice will not be found,
 I'll down to hell, and in this passion
 Knock at the dismal gates of Pluto's Court,...
 Till we do gain that Proserpine may grant
 Revenge on them that murdered my son. (3.13.108-110, 120-21)

But Hieronimo casts aside the dagger and piece of rope by which he would gain admittance to the underworld, and then he reconfirms his obligations with a rhetorical question: "If I hang or kill myself, let's know / Who will revenge Horatio's murder then?" (3.12.17-18). Again and again he calls on the justices of Hell:

Go back, my son, complain to Aeacus,

For here's no justice; gentle boy, be gone,

For justice is exiled from the earth:

Hieronimo will bear thee company.

Thy mother cries on righteous Rhadamanth

For just revenge against the murderers. (3.13.137-42).

All that Hieronimo can see is that he, the magistrate, the proponent of civil order, is living in a world where justice is impossible. Unable to process this reality, Hieronimo continues to descend into madness.⁸⁴ His wife, Isabella, experiences similar difficulties responding to the tragedy that has befallen her. Demanding an end to the “monstrous” story of her son’s murder—“Tell me no more!” (4.2.1)—she commits suicide, “[s]ince neither piety nor pity moves / The king to justice or compassion” (4.2.2-3).

⁸⁴ A.L. Kistner and M.K. Kistner distinguish between “[m]adness which accompanies despair,” such as that experienced by Hieronimo, and “the fixed and constant loss of mental powers which we commonly consider madness.” They locate the origin of Hieronimo’s madness in the Senecan frenzy; “it is an expression of the despairing state of mind, brought on by overpowering emotion, grief too great to bear without outlets (revenge, suicide, or madness itself); and it alternates with more normal, logical periods, although the logic of the saner interludes is primarily motivated by despair” (A.L.Kistner and M.K. Kistner, “The Senecan Background of Despair in the Spanish Tragedy and Titus Andronicus,” Shakespeare Studies 7 (1974): 5).

As Steven Justice states, “Hieronimo’s tragedy is not so much that of a man who makes the wrong choice as that of a man to whom the right choice is unavailable.”⁸⁵ And so, lacking legitimate means to engage a problem of overwhelming proportions, Hieronimo determines to take matters into his own hands; he will feign a calm indifference and await a suitable opportunity for retribution: “Till to revenge thou know, when, where, and how” (3.13.44). There are simply no other options open to Hieronimo; his attempts to obtain justice by due process of law were thwarted, for the King would not hear his account of injustice, and his prayers to the heavens were ignored.

Hieronimo develops a rather complicated, crafty revenge scheme. He decides to stage a play that he had written years before as a young student, a multi-lingual tragedy entitled Soliman and Perseda. As Katharine Eisaman Maus states, “The resources of theater are...peculiarly available to Hieronimo, whose career as a lawyer and court poet depended upon his literacy.”⁸⁶ The roles in Hieronimo’s play will be assumed by various member of the court. Instead of the company acting the parts, as would be expected, careful casting and detailed stage directions enable Hieronimo and Bel-imperia to murder Lorenzo and Balthazar right in front of their unsuspecting kin, the King of Spain and the Viceroy of Portugal.

⁸⁵ Steven Justice, "Spain, Tragedy, and The Spanish Tragedy," Studies in English Literature 25.2 (1985): 278.

⁸⁶ Katharine Eisaman Maus, "Introduction," Four Revenge Tragedies ed. Katharine Eisaman Maus (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) xvii.

Hieronimo achieves his main objective of revenge, but loses control over his creation when Bel-imperia truly commits suicide rather than feigning it as the script indicated. According to the text of Hieronimo's play, Perseda, played by Bel-imperia, must die. Knowing that the events in his tragedy were to be performed so as to include not the "counterfeit" (4.4.77) but the actual slaying of Lorenzo and Balthazar, Hieronimo planned to revise the end of his play so that Bel-imperia might survive. Hieronimo acknowledges the gap that exists between himself as author and the play that he had written:

...though the story saith she should have died,
 Yet I of kindness, and of care to her,
 Did otherwise determine of her end. (4.4.141-43)

As David Cutts says regarding this scene, "that which has been set down in writing, apparently has the capacity to govern or determine the outcome of events even more than the author himself does."⁸⁷ Even the author is limited in his capacity to alter the story.

Bel-imperia's unexpected death leaves Hieronimo alone to explain their actions to the court, who only gradually realize that a murder has been committed. Narrative is required, for Hieronimo's purpose in staging this play is not merely to extract fitting compensation for Horatio's death, but to explain his motives, to justify his actions, and to protect his reputation. The revenger uses his power over his enemies to force them, or their surviving kin, to see things from his perspective. "See here my show, look on this

⁸⁷ Cutts, "Writing and Revenge: The Struggle for Authority in Thomas Kyd's The Spanish Tragedy," 153.

spectacle!” exclaims Hieronimo at the end of The Spanish Tragedy, displaying the mutilated body of Horatio and his handkerchief dipped in Horatio’s blood. Then, finally possessed of his monarch’s complete and undivided attention, Hieronimo carefully explains that he and Bel-imperia have killed Lorenzo and Balthazar in revenge for the murder of Horatio.

...hanging on a tree I found my son,
 Through-girt with wounds, and slaughtered as you see.
 And grieved I, think you, at this spectacle?
 Speak, Portuguese, whose loss resembles mine:
 If thou canst weep upon thy Balthazar,
 ‘Tis like I wailed for my Horatio.
 And you, my lord, whose reconciled son
 Marched in a net, and thought himself unseen,
 And rated me for brainsick lunacy,
 With ‘God amend that mad Hieronimo!’ -
 How can you brook our play’s catastrophe? (4.4.111-21)

Neglected by those who would amplify the differences between those who command and those who obey, Hieronimo defiantly insists upon the similarities between king and subject, aristocrat and commoner.

Hieronimo, having finally spoken his piece, succinctly concludes his narrative: “Urge no more words; I have no more to say” (152). Considering the effort Hieronimo has just made to give as much information as possible, one can imagine his frustration as the King—apparently in sincere astonishment—cries, “Hold, Hieronimo! / Brother, my

nephew and thy son are slain!" (153-4). Such a discovery need scarcely be announced after Hieronimo's eighty-line explanation. But the stage audience responds by ignoring everything that he says and interpreting his actions as treason, not revenge, demanding that Hieronimo "inform the king of these events" (157):

King: Why hast thou done this undeserving deed?

Viceroy: Why hast thou murdered my Balthazar?

Don Cyprian: Why hast thou butcher'd both my children thus? (165-7)

What follows is described by Carol McGinnis Kay as "an almost ludicrous exchange between Hieronimo and the court, as he continues to tell why he and Bel-imperia killed Lorenzo and Balthazar, and his audience continues to ask why they did so."⁸⁸ To this litany of needless questions Hieronimo replies, "O, good words!" (168), revealing his awareness that words in this society contain little value.

Moments before his death, in one of the most unforgettable acts of violence on the early modern stage, Hieronimo "bites out his tongue" (4.4.191). Although he has confessed to everything, he defies the authority of his questioners by literally dislodging the instrument of speech from his body. As Carla Mazzio states, "In a play where individual speech acts have the power to shape destinies and nations, and where discourse itself is often imagined in the material form of tongues and bodies, it is hard to imagine that Kyd's representation of Hieronimo's madness at this point lacks method."⁸⁹ Indeed, it

⁸⁸ Kay, "Deception through Words: A Reading of The Spanish Tragedy," 35-6.

⁸⁹ Carla Mazzio, "Staging the Vernacular: Language and Nation in Thomas Kyd's The Spanish Tragedy," SEL 38.2 (1998): 221.

is not long after Hieronimo says, “Here break we off in our sundry languages / And thus conclude I in our vulgar tongue” (4.4.75-6) that he, quite literally, concludes his discourse with the vulgar spectacle of a mutilated tongue. Katharine Eisaman Maus observes that the final scene visually reinforces the central point of Hieronimo’s long soliloquy:

Ranging the corpse of his socially inferior son alongside the bodies of the heirs apparent, Hieronimo stages and voices a radically leveling sentiment: that one dead child is very much like another, that paternal love feels essentially the same for noble and commoner, that his suffering is worth as much as the suffering of princes.⁹⁰

Although the king recognizes Balthazar and Lorenzo’s dead bodies, he leaves unacknowledged Horatio’s corpse, “underscoring the invisibility of the inspiration for revenge and the possibility that the matter remains unknowable.”⁹¹

Conclusion: Controlling the Story

The Spanish Tragedy closes neither with Hieronimo’s play-within-a-play nor with its gruesome, bloody aftermath but with a return to the frame provided by Don Andrea and the ghost, who have witnessed the events of the play alongside the theatrical audience. In the Induction, Revenge had told the ghost of Don Andrea that he was brought back to “see the author of thy death...deprived of life” (1.1.87, 89), and at the conclusion of the play this objective has been accomplished. “Ay, now my hopes have

⁹⁰ Maus, “The Spanish Tragedy, or, the Machiavel’s Revenge,” 101.

⁹¹ Anderson, Performing Early Modern Trauma from Shakespeare to Milton 153.

end in their effects,” Don Andrea says in the beginning of the last scene (4.5), and then he proceeds with obvious relish to catalogue the substantial loss of life that occurred directly or indirectly from the revenge of his own death:

Horatio murdered in his father’s bower,
 Vild Serberine by Pedringano slain,
 False Pedringano hanged by quaint device,
 Fair Isabella by herself misdome,
 Prince Balthazar by Bel-imperia stabbed,
 The Duke of Castile and his wicked son
 Both done to death by old Hieronimo,
 My Bel-imperia fall’n as Dido fell,
 And good Hieronimo slain by himself.

Ay, these were spectacles to please my soul. (4.5.1-12)

While this list contains both friends and enemies of Don Andrea, as clearly indicated by the adjectives that precede their names (“vild Serberine,” “fair Isabella”), he does not immediately distinguish between these “spectacles”; they all are said “to please [his] soul.”⁹² The sheer number of deaths and the degree of violence makes it difficult for Don

⁹² Smith observes that Don Andrea’s response is similar to several other reactions to death in the course of the play: the court witnessing the “Tragedy of Soliman and Perseda” had commended the actors; Villuppo had reveled in anticipation as he plotted the death of Alexandro; the clown had marveled at the plot to send Pedringano to his “merry” death. “[T]he play blatantly presents its multiple deaths as dramatic

Andrea (or the audience, for that matter, who has viewed the same series of events as Don Andrea and Revenge) to respond to the scene with thoughtfulness and discernment; it all becomes part of the spectacle.

But Don Andrea does not remain satisfied for very long, because a few lines later he indicates that he still wants to “work just and sharp revenge” (16) on his enemies: he wants to control the outcomes of their stories. While the question of Don Andrea’s fate in the afterlife remains unsettled – in fact, it appears to have been forgotten – Don Andrea convinces Revenge to allow him to determine the fates of the dead, which he proceeds to do in a distinctly partisan manner. As Norland observes, “Neither the judges who had considered Don Andrea’s fate upon his arrival in the underworld nor its rulers, Pluto and Proserpine, appear to have any part in the dispensing of justice.”⁹³ Retribution is personal, highly biased, and distributed according to the prejudices of the victim. Don Andrea sentences his enemies (Balthazar, Lorenzo, their servants, and the Duke of Castile) to eternal punishment, while he directs his friends (Horatio, Isabella, Bel-imperia, and Hieronimo) to the pleasures of the Elysian fields.

Don Andrea’s choices are far more complex than simply directing his enemies to eternal punishment and his friends to eternal pleasure; he determines how the stories of

entertainment, but through Hieronimo’s taunting condemnation of his audience’s expectations, it also raises questions about theater’s very stratus as a framed spectacle and about the value of death as public entertainment” (“The Theater and the Scaffold: Death as Spectacle in The Spanish Tragedy,” 229).

⁹³ Norland, “Kyd’s Formulation of the Conventions of Revenge Tragedy,” 85-6.

their lives will be remembered and understood. Don Andrea's decisions regarding the fates of the other characters, like the judges' debate about him prior to the opening scene, discount their complexity and reduce each of them to one thing. Horatio has been friend, warrior, lover and murder victim; Don Andrea classifies him as a warrior: "I'll lead my friend Horatio through those fields / Where never-dying wars are still inured" (4.5.17-18). That accurately reflects the last relationship the two men had before Don Andrea's own death, but it takes no account of the new life that was beginning for Horatio just before his murder, his new love for Bel-imperia. As for Bel-imperia herself, Don Andrea will place her among the "vestal virgins" (4.5.22). This decision, while indicative of Don Andrea's admiration of and respect for Bel-imperia, would seem to be incongruous, jarringly inconsistent with what the text reveals about their previous relationship.

Andrea's placement of Hieronimo is both reductive and ironic: "I'll lead Hieronimo where Orpheus plays, / Adding sweet pleasure to eternal days" (4.5.23-24). As the creator of the play Soliman and Perseda, Hieronimo has indeed shown himself to be an artist, but an artist in murder. And Hieronimo has fulfilled so many other roles: court official, man of law, bereaved father, religious inquirer. Lorenzo (not Balthazar) is punished as an aspiring lover, and Castile is treated as severely as Horatio's murderers, although his only offense has been his disapproval of Bel-imperia's affair. "Kyd's Hades," Katharine Eisaman Maus says, "seems as capricious and nepotistic as the court of Spain: it reproduces rather than compensates for the defects of this world."⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Maus, "Introduction," xxiii.

The final lines of the play belong to Revenge, who acquiesces in the biased judgments to be meted out by Don Andrea:

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 there begin their endless tragedy. (45-8)

Revenge announces that there has been no closure: the real tragedy has not even begun. The fifth act of the The Spanish Tragedy (Kyd's play was written in four acts) would seem to occur out of view of the audience, in the underworld, as Don Andrea takes further revenge in Hades on enemies who are already dead. Violence follows violence, but it never seems to be enough. Perfect recompense remains elusive.

While many lives are lost and much is destroyed during the course of The Spanish Tragedy, the play stops short of regicide, for both the King of Spain and the Viceroy of Portugal survive the last act. Significantly, they are left without progeny after the death of Lorenzo, Bel-imperia, and Balthazar, which profoundly affects the future of their countries. There are no obvious successors to inherit the throne. Regime change, while not immediate, must necessarily occur. But, because so few survivors remain at the Spanish court, at this point revenge must come to an end—at least among the living. The number of people involved in this revenge remains finite, even if their tragedy in the afterlife is to be “endless.”

Such limits are not observed in the devastating revenge cycle depicted by Shakespeare in the first tetralogy. In this series of plays, the subject of the next chapter, the family squabbles of the English nobility escalate through biased and partial

storytelling to such an extent that the entire population of the nation is negatively affected. Gregory Colon Semenza remarks on Kyd's ability to "demonstrate at once the visceral appeal of revenge and the devastating repercussions of enacting it"⁹⁵; Shakespeare's first tetralogy follows in this tradition.

⁹⁵ Gregory Colón Semenza, "The Spanish Tragedy and Revenge," Early Modern English Drama: A Critical Companion, eds. Garrett Sullivan, Patrick Cheney, and Andrew Hadfield (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) 50.

Chapter 3

Vengeful Relations: Shakespeare's 1 Henry VI

I grieve to hear what torments you endured,
But we will be revenged sufficiently. (1.4.57-8)

The theme of revenge permeates Shakespeare's first historical tetralogy.⁹⁶ In the first act of Shakespeare's 1 Henry VI, the valiant Lord Talbot discusses with his compatriot the Earl of Salisbury the hardships that he recently has suffered as a prisoner

⁹⁶ For critical commentary on the appropriateness of treating the four plays 1, 2, and 3 Henry VI and Richard III as a tetralogy, see Nicholas Grene, Larry Champion, Keith Dockray, Dominique Goy-Blanquet, Barbara Hodgdon, David Scott Kastan, Tom McAlindon, and Harry Keyishian. Patricia-Ann Lee, while acknowledging that Shakespeare's histories actually consists of two separate cycles (Richard II to Henry V, and Henry VI to Richard III) created at different times, argues for reading these series of plays as an epic which commences with Richard II and concludes with Richard III; read in this way, echoing Polydore Vergil's formulation, Shakespeare "[begins] with the deposition of an anointed king ... [and] ends with the deposition of an evil usurper and with the crowning of Henry VII as the restorer of unity and order" (Patricia-Ann Lee, "Reflections of Power: Margaret of Anjou and the Dark Side of Queenship," Renaissance Quarterly 39.2 (1986): 204).

of the French. Talbot does not focus on the physical privations that a prisoner of war might be expected to face, such as inadequate food, shelter or medical care, but rather emphasizes the wounds inflicted upon his reputation: first, the French wanted to ransom Talbot for an unnamed individual described only as “a baser man of arms by far”, but he refused until he was exchanged for a prisoner of greater nobility and more honorable reputation “called the brave Lord Ponton de Santrailles” (1.4.30, 28); and second, the French treated Talbot “with scoffs and scorns and contumelious taunts” in the “open marketplace,” as “a public spectacle to all” (1.4.39-41). The story that Talbot tells leads Salisbury to extend his sympathy, but it serves another purpose as well; the damage to Talbot’s honor (and, since he is widely recognized as the champion of England and the English cause, to the reputation of his country as well⁹⁷) provokes Salisbury to become personally invested in the situation and to join Talbot in vengeance. Talbot’s reputation has been compromised by the French, and he and Salisbury respond to verbal aggression as warriors would to other violent acts of war. As a result of Talbot’s narrative, the “I”

⁹⁷ Mary Mroz also sees in Shakespeare’s history plays a strong emphasis placed on the public cause of the nation as a whole. “No revenge is too severe for injury to national honor...There is even stronger motivation for revenge on the enemy who has shed noble English blood. It is the shedding of the blood of the commonwealth, therefore an injury demanding revenge both as a patriotic duty and as one ensuing from class ties” (Divine Vengeance: A Study in the Philosophical Backgrounds of the Revenge Motif as It Appears in Shakespeare's Chronicle History Plays [Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1941]: 130).

and “you” of the first line, speaker and listener, join in grief to become a “we” actively united in revenge against a common enemy. While the nature of the response is not precisely delineated, it will be “sufficient” to restore the honor of Talbot and the English people.

In scene after scene in the first tetralogy, a character describes wrongs suffered at the hands of another and, in so doing, inspires the interlocutor to take vengeance either with him or on his behalf. A character within the world of the play listening to the story as it unfolds (reacting to or even making judgments about the events and action within that fictional world) can give such a scene a high degree of immediacy.⁹⁸ Shakespeare takes pains to distinguish among these narratives and differentiates between those with “genuine” moral grievances and whose actions may be depicted as just and heroic, and those whose causes are factional or personal. Talbot and King Henry V act to protect and strengthen their country against foreign threats; because of this conduct, they are valorized in 1 Henry VI as paradigms of English manhood. Their examples serve the greater good of the nation and promote loyalty to king and country. The motives of characters such as Talbot and Salisbury in the passage discussed above are presented as

⁹⁸ Rawdon Wilson, commenting upon the functions of narrative within drama, argues that “An internal character who perceives the story from within, offering the narratee and extended audience a vicarious set of eyes, draws the events closer. Focalized by an internal character, narrative events can seem forcefully present, drawn into the forefront of the imagination, underscored and highlighted...” (Rawdon Wilson, Shakespearean Narrative [Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1995]: 33).

fully sanctioned by other characters within the world of the play and by God, and the audience is expected to share in the pleasure of just retaliation against the French for the death of Henry V.⁹⁹ While Shakespeare does acknowledge the military losses suffered by the English forces, their cause is consistently presented as honorable; history, as told by Shakespeare, gives moral, if not military, victory to the English. While the legends of Henry V and Talbot live on to great acclaim after their deaths, the leader of the French, Joan la Pucelle, is remembered negatively because she denies her patrimony and is burned as a witch. The other great conflict of 1 Henry VI, the Wars of the Roses, has its roots in the verbal altercations that occur during numerous scenes in this play. The

⁹⁹ Robert Rentoul Reed argues that Shakespeare's plays provide examples of three types of punitive retaliation: the revenge of justice; the revenge of honor; and the revenge of passion. Of these three, only the first is granted a wide social acceptance, for only it comes under God's laws. The second is condoned if the subsequent injury is not in excess of the motive, and the third, being animalistic, has no societal acceptance whatsoever. According to Reed, "The revenge of justice, the first and only category worthy of commendation, always entails a judgment made by God. Take, for example, the execution of Cambridge and his fellow conspirators, who have plotted Henry V's death, as the case is presented by both Holinshed and Shakespeare: public officials carry out the punishments, but the beheadings have been ordered by the King, who acts under a law which, in the name of God and as the deputy of God, he has sworn to uphold. Revenge when sanctioned by God is justice" (Crime and God's Judgment in Shakespeare [Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1984]:43).

English nobles repeatedly squabble amongst themselves, retelling tales of slighted honor and unrighted wrongs. Tellers of these stories provoke a response, spurring listeners to take action. However, the motives of these tellers are subject to interrogation and can be seen to issue from excessive pride, malice, and self-interest. Their vengeful efforts culminate not in martial glory and honor but in the violent destruction and death found in 3 Henry VI and Richard III.

This chapter argues that the displays of vengeful blood and violence for which Shakespeare's first tetralogy is known are provoked, perpetuated, and subsequently justified by acts of storytelling. Modern scholars have been drawn to the more sensational aspects of these plays, particularly in 3 Henry VI and Richard III, yet the reasons behind the revenge, the murder and the mayhem are often treated superficially. Revenge requires a motivation and an explanation if it is to be distinguished from criminal behavior; acts of storytelling in the drama provide the social and political critique necessary to separate the rationale behind a violent act from mere rationalization. This motivation, this explanation for most of the action of the first tetralogy, can be found in the opening scenes of 1 Henry VI.

“We mourn in black; why mourn we not in blood?”: Avenging the death of Henry V

Barbara Hodgdon’s reference to 1 Henry VI as “the ‘Talbot play’ of past critical tradition”¹⁰⁰ succinctly captures the vital role that this character plays in Shakespeare’s rendition of late medieval English history, as well as the degree of scholarly attention he has garnered.¹⁰¹ Yet Talbot first appears only in act one, scene four of this play.

¹⁰⁰ Hodgdon argues that the center of the play is not Talbot himself but the opposition and struggle between Talbot and Joan la Pucelle (The End Crowns All: Closure and Contradiction in Shakespeare's History [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991]: 55).

¹⁰¹ For a fuller discussion of these issues see: David Riggs, Shakespeare's Heroical Histories (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971); Alexander Leggatt, "The Death of John Talbot," Shakespeare's English Histories: A Quest for Form and Genre, ed. John W. Velz (Binghamton: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1996); Jean E. Howard, and Phyllis Rackin, Engendering a Nation: A Feminist Account of Shakespeare's English Histories (London: Routledge, 1997); and James A. Riddell, "Talbot and the Countess of Auvergne," Shakespeare Quarterly 28.1 (1977). Also, see E. Pearlman, who draws upon the comments of Thomas Nash, Shakespeare’s contemporary, to argue that for early modern audiences “the heroic Talbot” was “the most memorable character” of 1 Henry VI (William Shakespeare: The History Plays [New York: Twayne, 1992]: 25). And Nicholas Grene sees the Henry VI-Richard III plays as “an interlocking

Shakespeare's audience enters history in medias res, at the funeral of King Henry V, with a plaintive and extended lament for a lost leader of the English. The loss of Henry V and the search for a leader to replace him provide the impetus behind much of the ensuing action. The stories that circulate in the aftermath of the king's death, particularly in the first three scenes, frame Talbot's subsequent altercations with the French as acts of revenge.

The opening lines of 1 Henry VI require the audience to confront a series of highly significant events that occurred prior to the first scene: the past glories of Henry V, the "several factions" disturbingly mentioned as the cause of England's losses in France, the heroic Talbot now "took prisoner" (1.1.145) and the disruption of rule which is to be remedied by the coronation of "young Henry" (1.1.169) (who is conspicuously absent in the first few scenes of the play). Clearly, the historical action that the play seeks to dramatize does not begin at the moment the play's represented action does. The past has meaning in the present, and actively influences the decisions and choices made by the characters during the course of the play. As the story of Henry V is told and retold by the English nobility in the period following his death, the emphasis shifts from the tale to the teller, from the events themselves to the characters' responses. The story of Talbot, England's renowned hero, and the story of Henry VI are continually reflected and refracted through the prism of Henry V. The life of this warrior king serves as an

series with a narrative rhythm building across the parts rather than in the individual plays" (Shakespeare's Serial History Plays [Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002]: 23).

exemplum, a model of virtuous action; his death at the hands of the French requires those who would follow his example to revenge his death.

The Duke of Bedford, uncle to the young king Henry VI and Regent of France, speaks his opening lines as a procession of mourners, clad in wailing robes, enter to a dead march and arrange themselves about a stark theatrical image, the coffin of the late monarch, Henry V. The formality of the scene intensifies the solemnity of Henry V's funeral procession, sounding the enormity of both the England's loss and its consequences for the future of the nation. Gesturing toward the proscenium, Bedford begins his elegy for Henry V as follows:

Hung be the heavens with black, yield day to night!
Comets, importing change of times and states,
Brandish your crystal tresses in the sky
And with them scourge the bad revolting stars
That have consented unto Henry's death –
King Henry the Fifth, too famous to live long!
England ne'er lost a king of so much worth.

Poetically, his words imply a cosmic sense of loss, “importing change of time and states” (1.1.2). Literally, they point to an Elizabethan stage convention for the performance of tragedies.¹⁰²

¹⁰² The roof projecting over the stage would have been shrouded in black, giving the theater the ambience of a funeral church. See Michael Neill, Issues of Death: Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997) 281-83.

For the Duke of Gloucester, uncle and Protector to the young king Henry VI, Henry V's death is associated with an inability to speak. His response in the presence of the deceased king's effigy indicates the level of his grief: "What should I say? His deeds exceed all speech" (1.1.14). In other words, the impact of Henry V's death goes beyond his immediate ability to articulate loss, a common trope in response to death during the period.¹⁰³ But the death of a king is an event which requires public articulation, and so speechlessness turns to praise as Exeter, Bedford, and Winchester eulogize the king as his royal effigy passes. Exeter directly addresses the task at hand ("Upon a wooden coffin we attend..." [1.1.19]), and Bedford requests the protection of the deceased ("Henry the Fifth, thy ghost I invoke: / Prosper this realm, keep it from civil broils" [1.1.52-53]). For fifty-six lines, interrupted by an ominous disagreement between Winchester and Gloucester, the bereaved lords dwell on the merits of the deceased ("Virtue he had, deserving to command"), the grim finality of his passing ("Henry is dead and never shall revive"), and England's abject helplessness without him ("Arms avail not, now that Henry's dead"). As the play opens, the assembled nobility and the play's audience together bear witness to the "victory" not of the French but of "death."¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Anderson, Performing Early Modern Trauma from Shakespeare to Milton 2-3.

¹⁰⁴ The influence of the dead upon the living is significant in other plays by Shakespeare as well. For example, Julius Caesar demonstrates the power that can emanate from the offstage world and from absent characters. Anthony Brennan argues that Caesar is "a consistently growing focus of interest in the play," and as evidence points to the Lupercalian ceremony, the dramatic and effective use of Caesar's corpse by Antony, the

The body of the dead king is, literally and figuratively, center stage, yet even before burial Henry V is presented “not as a man but as a rhetorical construct fashioned out of hyperbole, as a heroic image or heraldic icon.”¹⁰⁵ Henry V’s extensive achievements are connected directly to the brevity of his life; he was “too famous to live long” (1.1.6). Bedford’s eulogy recalls in the victor of Agincourt a king of superhuman stature and strength:

His brandished sword did blind men with his beams;
 His arms spread wider than a dragon’s wings;
 His sparkling eyes replete with wrathful fire,
 More dazzled and drove back his enemies
 Than midday sun fierce bent against their faces. (1.1.9-16)

The dead hero-king, a figure of such epic stature that mundane history could hardly hold him, is conjured as the historical myth previously/subsequently celebrated in the coda to Henry V, the warrior monarch who occupied “small time, but in that small, most greatly

conjuring references to the names of the characters, and the emergence of Caesar’s ghost in pursuit of revenge (Onstage and Offstage Worlds in Shakespeare's Plays [London: Routledge, 1989]: 246).

¹⁰⁵ Michael Hattaway, ed., The First Part of King Henry VI (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 5.

lived” (Epilogue, 5).¹⁰⁶ Believing such a man could not have been felled by any ordinary foe, the English nobles initially target their rage at what Bedford calls “the bad revolting stars” (1.1.4). The more pragmatic Exeter, however, soon shifts the blame to a more tangible enemy: “the subtle-witted French / Conjurers and Sorcerers, that, afraid of him [Henry V], / By magic verse have contrived his end” (25-27). Whether Exeter believes sincerely in French witchcraft or not, whether he believes that French words (“magic verse”) killed Henry V, his tactic rallies the dispirited Lords to defend England’s recent conquests, to mourn not “in black” but “in blood” – to take revenge.

The devastation of England without its hero king is tempered, particularly early in this first play of the tetralogy, by the positive potential for sustaining and reviving his grand heritage. 1 Henry VI illustrates how the leader of the past can remain a vital presence in those who properly emulate (and thus renew) him in the present; initially, retelling tales of Henry V’s victories against the French becomes a source of pride and unity for the English. Note the contrasting implications of the opening lament for Henry V, discussed previously, and the following exhortation to him (found in Shakespeare’s Henry V):

Awake remembrance of these valiant dead,
 And with your puissant arms renew their feats.
 You are their heir; you sit upon the throne;

¹⁰⁶ William Shakespeare, "Henry V," The Norton Shakespeare, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine Eisaman Maus (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1997).

The blood and courage that renowned them
 Runs in your veins; and my thrice-puissant liege
 Is in the very May-morn of his youth,
 Ripe for exploits and mighty enterprises. (1.2, 115-121)

When a dead leader serves as a shining contrast to the dismal present, he seems lost indeed. But when he serves to inspire present leaders to avenge his wrongs, to renew his feats, and to retain what he has gained, then he does not belong only to the past but becomes “that ever-living man of memory” (4.3.51). The evoked image shifts from the negative to the positive, from lost leader to inspirational model.

Late medieval literary culture, particularly in England, was dominated by stories known as exempla about such inspirational models. The authors of these writings seek to discover for their readers patterns of behavior to celebrate or execrate as examples for future action.¹⁰⁷ The emphasis on proposing models of conduct can be understood as a consequence of the general moral outlook of many humanists, described by Victoria Kahn as “the belief in the importance of the active life and the conviction that we are best

¹⁰⁷ John D. Lyons observes that exempla are frequently concerned with, even equated with, narration: “one medieval glossary equates the terms by sticking them together, *exemplare narrare*” and “within clerical milieux narration seems to be a major signification of the term” (Exemplum: The Rhetoric of Example in Early Modern France and Italy [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989]: 11).

persuaded to ethical praxis by the rhetorical practice of literature.”¹⁰⁸ Polydore Virgil, an English historian living in the early Tudor period, plainly locates the value of history in its examples:

Histories, of all other Writings, be most commendable, because it [sic] informeth all sorts of people, with notable examples of living, and doth excite Noble-men to insue such activity in enterprises, as they read to have been done by their Ancestors; and also discourageth and dehortheth wicked persons from attempting of any heinous deed or crime, knowing, that such acts shall be registred in perpetual memory, to the praise or reproach of the doers, according to the desert of their endeavors.¹⁰⁹

Similarly, in an effort to promote the early modern theater to its detractors, Thomas Nashe sought to demonstrate that plays could provide not images of vice and debauchery but paradigms of English manhood. To “proove Playes to be no extreme; but a rare exercise of virtue,” he specifically mentions Shakespeare’s 1 Henry VI:

First, for the subject of them (for the most part) is borrowed out of our English Chronicles, wherein our forefathers valiant acts (that have line long buried in rustie brasse and worme-eaten bookes) are revived, and

¹⁰⁸ Victoria Kahn, Rhetoric, Prudence, and Skepticism in the Renaissance (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985) 9.

¹⁰⁹ Polydore Vergil, "De Rerum Inventoribus," trans. John Langley, Polydori Virgilii De Rerum Inventoribus (New York: Burt Franklin, 1971) 29.

they themselves raised from the Grave of Oblivion, and brought to plead
 their aged Honours in open presence; than which, what can be a sharper
 reprove to these degenerate effeminate dayes of ours?

How would it have joyed brave Talbot (the terror of the French) to thinke
 that after he had lyne two hundred yeares in his Tombe, hee should triumphe
 againe on the Stage, and have his bones newe embalmed wit the teares of ten
 thousand spectators (at severall times), who, in the Tragedian that represents his
 person, imagine they behold him fresh bleeding.¹¹⁰

As Nashe's words demonstrate, 1 Henry VI was recognized in its own time as containing
 heroic exempla.¹¹¹ Talbot stands in the play as an ideal of physical and moral excellence.
 However, an exemplum was not a static piece of writing, but active and dynamic; as
 Larry Scanlon states, "the exemplum's enactment of authority in fact assumes a process
 of identification on the part of its audience...It persuades by conveying a sense of

¹¹⁰ Thomas Nashe, "Pierce Penilesse: His Supplication to the Divell," The Works of
 Thomas Nashe, ed. R. B. McKerrow, vol. I (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958) 212.

¹¹¹ This, of course, is the thesis of Riggs, Shakespeare's Heroical Histories. See also D.W.
 Robertson, Preface to Chaucer (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962) 171-285;
 Dieter Mehl, Middle English Romances of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries (New
 York: Barnes and Noble, 1969) 253; John Burrow, Ricardian Poetry (London: Routledge,
 1971) 78-92; Judson Boyce Allen, The Ethical Poetic of the Later Middle Ages (Toronto:
 University of Toronto Press, 1982); J. Allan Mitchell, Ethics and Exemplary Narrative in
 Chaucer and Gower (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004).

communal identity with its moral lesson.”¹¹² That is, an exemplum depends upon a community of readers to produce and create its authority, and then to live up to the model it presents. And as David Scott Kastan has argued, “the inability of the rest of the nobles to emulate [Talbot’s] heroic example is precisely that which leads to the disintegration of the fabric of English society.”¹¹³ In the world of the first tetralogy, those who tell stories of men such as Henry V and Talbot are no longer able to inspire their listeners to avenge these great losses. Vengeance is taken for individual gain, not for the greater glory of king and country.

The legend of Henry V was not created by Shakespeare; the playwright’s depiction of this monarch as the great English patriot-king builds upon medieval precedents. Henry himself was the patron of a whole group of both national and personal histories primarily aimed at establishing him both as a devout Christian prince and as an injured party whose rejected claims to the throne of France justified war. Henry V expected that the demonstrations of his personal piety and historical precedents would convince others of his legal right to rule France; according to these writings, he had been denied what was his by birth. Henry V used military force to avenge these losses and to preclude any blemishes from tarnishing his honor. Among the historians and writers he employed was John Lydgate (1370?-1449), whose career as a writer is inseparable from

¹¹² Larry Scanlon, Narrative, Authority, and Power: The Medieval Exemplum and the Chaucerian Tradition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 35.

¹¹³ David Scott Kastan, Shakespeare and the Shapes of Time (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1982) 119.

his close association with kings Henry V and Henry VI. In Lydgate's Troy Book, the speaker reveals that the book was commissioned by the Prince (the future King Henry V) precisely because the Troy story is filled with narratives of exemplary aristocratic martial behavior – that is, the “worthynes” of “verray kny[gh]thod” and the “prowesse of olde chivalrie” (Pro. 76-78). Readers of the Troy Book should, as Prince Henry himself does in respect to his “bokys of antiquite,” pursue “vertu” by “example” of the ideal knights that the work depicts (Pro. 80-82). Subsequently, a twenty-line panegyric presents Prince Henry himself as a living ideal knight for the reader to model.¹¹⁴ Subsequently, Raphael Holinshed (1530?-1580?) in his Chronicles wrote “...a majesty was he [Henry V] that both lived and died, a pattern in princehood, a lodestar in honor, and a mirror of magnificence; the more highly exalted in his life, the more deeply lamented at his death; and famous to the world always.”¹¹⁵ Henry V's cultural resonance as “a pattern,” “a lodestar,” and “a mirror” would have been quite familiar to Shakespeare from the sources he drew upon as he wrote the first tetralogy.

In 1 Henry VI, the idea that England's heroic historical heritage can live anew in the present is first voiced by the awed enemy. The French, having just boasted of their newfound ascendancy over the “famished English”(2.1.7), are comically reduced by the

¹¹⁴ Robert J. Meyer-Lee, "Lydgate's Laureate Prose," John Lydgate: Poetry, Culture and Lancastrian England, ed. Larry Scanlon and James Simpson (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006) 46.

¹¹⁵ Richard Hosley, ed., Shakespeare's Holinshed: An Edition of Holinshed's Chronicles (1587) (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1968) 142.

ensuing rout and, as the Duke of Alençon's haughty ridicule changes to wondering admiration, he evokes for the first time the story of Edward III that will serve so often through both tetralogies as an emblem of England's past glory:

Froissart, a countryman of ours, records
 England all Olivers and Rowland's bred
 During the time Edward the Third did reign.
 More truly now may this be verified,
 For none but Samsons and Goliases
 It sendeth forth to skirmish. (1.2.29-34)

England has produced and continues to produce not only individual heroes but a nation of remarkable men (“**all** Olivers and Rowland's bred,” “**none** but Samsons and Goliases,” emphases mine). Jean Howard and Phyllis Rackin observe that in Alençon's statement, as in the case of Froissart's actual chronicle, what the French historian writes is English history.¹¹⁶ Both the French historian's record and the legendary symbols of ancient

¹¹⁶ According to Jean Howard and Phyllis Rackin, the motivation of the French is defined in strikingly different terms than that of the English. “More than a record of heroic names and glorious deeds or an aggregate of individual biographies, dynastic history tells a connected story, authorizing present power in genealogical myths of patriarchal succession. The Dolphin and his courtiers make no claims to textual or dynastic authority. They do promise Joan immortal fame, but they cite as precedents an eclectic assortment of famous women from world history and legend – including, among others, Deborah, St. Helen, and the Greek courtesan Rhodope (I.ii.105, 142; I.vi.22)...If the

French chivalry, situated in time by reference to the reign of an English king, are subsumed into a chronicle of English heroic achievement.

The emerging political identity of England as a sovereign nation is entwined with the personal and familial histories of the sovereigns of that nation. And the same lineage that validates the powerful positions of the English nobility in late medieval England entitles them to claim France as well. Therefore, the English nobles have a vested interest in perpetuating the legend of Henry V as a valiant warrior king and in fighting to maintain the lands that he has conquered across the English Channel. Traditionally, the continuity and solidarity of the aristocracy was highlighted by the kind of heraldic funeral with which 1 Henry VI opens. Aristocratic funeral pageants, Katharine Goodland notes, “reinforced the status quo”¹¹⁷; throughout medieval Europe, it has been asserted, “death

women succeed, they will be rewarded by personal fame – or infamy – but the heterogeneous collection of famous names, united only by their sex, carries the implicit message that although extraordinary women can enter the historical record, female achievement is always isolated and exceptional, and it can never provide the basis for the construction of a national history...The French struggle to destroy that [the English] legacy, but there is no sense that they have a historical legacy of their own to preserve” (Engendering a Nation: A Feminist Account of Shakespeare’s English Histories, 56-7).

¹¹⁷ Katharine Goodland argues that aristocratic funerals “represent[ed] the existing social hierarchy in processional form,” observing that “The most publicly visible event of the heraldic funeral was the grand procession in which the embalmed body of the deceased was carried through the streets. The canopied hearse was at the heart of the cortege, with

ritual was not so much a question of dealing with a corpse as reaffirming the secular and spiritual order by means of a corpse.”¹¹⁸ Jennifer Woodward takes this one step further, arguing that an aristocratic funeral was a public performance of the transfer of political power, and not a vehicle for the channeling of grief: “the primary purpose of the heraldic funeral was social and concerned with the public persona of the dead nobleman, rather than the burial of his private body. The church ceremony was about the transfer of the undying title, not taking leave of the dead.”¹¹⁹ Mourners, by their presence at the royal

relatives, townsfolk, nobleman [sic], governmental and religious officials, and the poor organized according to rank from front to rear” (“Obsequious Laments”: Mourning and Communal Memory in Shakespeare's Richard III,” Shakespeare and the Culture of Christianity in Early Modern England, ed. Dennis Taylor and David Beauregard [New York: Fordham University Press, 2003]: 54-5).

¹¹⁸ R. C. Finucane, “Sacred corpses, profane carrion: Social ideals and death rituals in the later middle ages,” in Joachim Whaley, ed., Mirrors of mortality: studies in the social history of death (New York, 1982), 4. For a clear exposition of the power of ritual, see David I Kertzer, Ritual, politics and power (New Haven and London, 1988), esp. 1-14. Also see David Cressy, “Death and the social order: The funerary preferences of Elizabethan gentlemen,” Continuity and Change 5(1) 1989, pp. 99-119. Clare Gittings, Death, Burial, and the Individual in Early Modern England (London: Croom Helm, 1984).

¹¹⁹ Jennifer Woodward, The Theatre of Death: The Ritual Management of Royal Funerals in Renaissance England, 1570-1625 (Rochester: Boydell Press, 1997) 35.

funeral, witness and affirm the creation of the new monarch as well as mark the passing of the recently deceased monarch and the continuity of the realm. This duality is evidenced by the ritual statement “The king is dead; long live the king.”¹²⁰

The necessary funeral rites for a dead king are in process as 1 Henry VI opens, but the laments for Henry V are cut short, leaving the all-important public transfer of royal title incomplete. Repeated disruptions, full of the immediacy and urgency of the living world in which the play occurs, do not allow the characters on stage much time for the dead. Rawdon Wilson’s description of the effects of narrative within drama are relevant to this scene: “Embedded within dramatic action, narrative interrupts that action, shifts all attention (the narratees within the drama as well as the audience itself) to another fictional world, with its distinct time scheme, its own space and its internal

¹²⁰ Thomas Anderson states with reference to this declaration that “Royal succession and civic cohesion are maintained, literally, in the space of a period. As efficient as it is in efforts to overcome loss and maintain community, the ritual pronouncement is haunted. The sense of collective identity generated by the ritual of royal succession is a virtual civic consciousness with a ghostly agent whose presence depends on the force of the proclamation...The structure of the language of the demand, ‘Long live the king,’ in fact, belies its impossibility: the status of ‘the king’ in the imperative is ambiguous. On one hand, it appears to be the object of the command ‘to live’; on the other, however, it bears traces of the subject – the same subject declared dead in the space before the period” (Performing Early Modern Trauma from Shakespeare to Milton, 93).

characters.”¹²¹ The characters within the world of the play are distracted from their stated objective of mourning their dead king by the messengers’ updates regarding the latest news of the war. The death of Henry V is final - it cannot be altered or undone – but what is yet to come is decidedly uncertain. There is a distinct lack of consensus regarding the future of the English realm since Henry VI is as yet too young actively to assert his patrimony.

In addition to moments of feuding among the English nobility, particularly the bickering of the Bishop of Winchester and the Duke of Gloucester which will be discussed in detail later in this chapter, three separate messengers further disrupt the dirge, heralding incipient chaos with news of “Sad tidings...out of France, / Of loss, of slaughter, and discomfiture” (1.1.58-9). The messengers themselves in this case are not of interest; they serve only a single functional purpose. Anthony Brennan observes that in drama “characters can be rounded out not only by the way they deliver news but by the way they receive it,”¹²² and this is true of the English nobility. The first messenger informs the assembled company that “Guienne, Champagne, Rheims, Orleance / Paris, Guysors, Poitiers, all are quite lost” (1.1.60-61). Significantly, heraldic terms are used to describe the loss as a destruction of the English nobles’ dynastic identity: “Cropp’d are the flower-de-luces in your arms, / Of England’s coat one half is cut away” (I.i.80-81).¹²³

¹²¹ Wilson, Shakespearean Narrative, 191-92.

¹²² Brennan, Onstage and Offstage Worlds in Shakespeare's Plays, 14-15.

¹²³ This imagery recurs at significant moments later in the play. At Orleans, Talbot charges his troops to “either renew the fight, / Or tear the lions out of England’s coat”

The second messenger reveals that the trouble has spread: “France is revolted from the English quite, / Except some petty towns of no import. / The Dolphin Charles is crowned king in Rheims” (1.1.90-92). Things go from bad to worse as the third messenger reveals that “Lord Talbot was o’erthrown” (1.1.108). Katharine Goodland argues that the messengers’ dispatches undermine Henry V’s heroic stature and cause the audience to question Bedford’s elegiac hyperbole, for it suggests how precarious is the achievement of a man whose “deeds exceed all speech,” who “ne’er lifted up his hands but conquered” (1.1.15-16); “the funeral procession that purportedly enacts continuity, the survival and immortality of the dignitas, instead manifests discontinuity and discord.”¹²⁴ The internal and external fissures in the kingdom which are exposed here deepen during the rest of the play and the tetralogy as a whole.

(1.5.27-8). Similarly, Richard Plantagenet spends much of the play attempting to recapture the lands and title he feels he should rightly have inherited from his father, the Earl of Cambridge, both of which had been lost when Cambridge was put to death for treason. Richard’s family honor and his identity are only restored to him when King Henry reinstates him in “the whole inheritance...that doth belong unto the house of York, / From whence you spring by lineal descent” (3.1.163-65). “Rise, Richard, “he says, “like a true Plantagenet, / And rise created princely Duke of York” (3.1.171-72).

¹²⁴ Goodland, ““Obsequious Laments”: Mourning and Communal Memory in Shakespeare's Richard III,” 58.

For now, all has not yet been lost. Bedford's response to the unfortunate news brought by the first messenger hints at the power of stories to provoke others, even the dead, to action:

What say'st thou, man, before dead Henry's corse?

Speak softly, or the loss of those great towns

Will make him burst his lead and rise from death. (1.1.62-64)

The need to avenge the death of Henry V and regain "those great towns" casts a long shadow over the ensuing action of this play and the tetralogy as a whole.

"No other weapon but his name": The living legend of John Talbot

Much of the action of 1 Henry VI is generated from an inability to replace the recently deceased monarch whose funeral opens the play. As the play progresses, and as England begins its slow descent into the chaos of civil war, the deaths of England's great warriors continually punctuate the action. Salisbury is cut down at Orleans, and Bedford at Rouen. But despite all, the valiant spirit of Henry V is kept alive in 1 Henry VI by the character of Lord John Talbot, who, for a time, represents both the dead hero-King and the son as yet too young to fight.¹²⁵ Talbot, renowned for his martial exploits, has

¹²⁵ Shakespeare takes some liberties with historical fact when presenting the young Henry VI. Historically, this successor to Henry V was crowned king of England at nine months old. It has been argued that Shakespeare excludes Henry VI from the funeral of his father because of his extreme youth. But when Henry VI does appear on stage in act three,

garnered praise from no less a warrior than Henry V himself; as Henry VI later recalls, “I do remember how my father said / A stouter champion never handled sword” (3.4.18-19). Talbot fights to maintain the lands won in France and to avenge the death of his king; were others to share that enterprise with him, the play makes clear, the great leader Henry V would not be “lost” at all but would “revive” as a result of these exploits.

The premise that stories of great martial valor could inspire similar actions in the men who listen to them would have been familiar to early modern audiences. Thomas Heywood in An Apology for Actors (1612) commends “our domesticke histories” as follows:

What English blood seeing the person of any bold English man presented
and doth not hugge his fame, and hunnye at his valor...What English
Prince should hee behold the true portrature of that [f]amous king Edward
the third, foraging France, taking so great a King captiue in his owne

scene 1, it is not as an infant, but rather as a young man. Henry VI’s age is not given, and he is not yet old enough to rule unaided by a protector, but he is nevertheless old enough to be eligible for marriage and consulted concerning the pre-contract. Frey asserts that king’s absence during the first two acts of the play allows the audience to view the development of the political, social, and military problems with which Henry is to be confronted.; “By allowing us to view the development of that situation, with all its jealousies, intrigues and dangers, before Henry appears, Shakespeare lessens the possibility that Henry himself may be blamed for the results of his reign” (The First Tetralogy: Shakespeare’s Scrutiny of the Tudor Myth [The Hague: Mouton, 1976]: 11).

country, quartering the English Lyons with the French Flower-delyce, and would not bee suddenly Infram'd with so royall a spectacle, being made apt and fit for the like atchievement. So of Henry the fift.¹²⁶

As the above passage indicates, plays about England's warriors were not merely inspirational; they also helped to define an English identity. "English blood" is that which is stirred by the exploits of "any bold English man." Other affiliations - of region, of religion, of class, of family and clan, of trade - are subsumed by and subordinate to being "English," which involves fighting for a particular ideal of government, staying true to a given image of virtue and narrative of the past, and fighting against England's enemies, particularly the French. Such a reputation for courage does not belong personally to a warrior such as Henry or Talbot, but, according to Coppelia Kahn, is "a family possession and a national asset."¹²⁷ The often bloody military altercations with the French in which these men engage are framed as necessary and appropriate responses to undue provocation; they do not initiate these conflicts, but they revenge past wrongs to

¹²⁶ Arthur Freeman, ed., An Apology for Actors by Thomas Heywood (New York: Garland, 1973) Sig.B4r.

¹²⁷ Coppelia Kahn, Man's Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981) 52.

restore their lost honor. And their stories offer a competing narrative to the military accomplishments of France's Joan la Pucelle.¹²⁸

The association between Henry V and Talbot is evident in the opening scene, which divides its focus between the dead and living heroes, turning from the lament for Henry to news of Talbot's (for once unfortunate) exploits in France. Talbot's recent losses in battle are noteworthy precisely because they are so uncharacteristic. For example, the Bishop of Winchester, upon hearing of "a dismal fight" between the English and the French, immediately responds: "What? Wherein Talbot over came, is't so?" (1.1.105, 107). As a loyal soldier and servant of the crown, Talbot cannot of course replace the king himself, but he can and does maintain the heroic heritage of that king, and his current deeds are accorded from the beginning a great deal of respect and recognition by his peers. Long before he appears on stage the audience hears about "stout Lord Talbot," "valiant Talbot," the "worthy leader" and "friend" who "enacted wonders with his sword and lance. / Hundreds [of French soldiers] he sent to hell, and none durst stand him" (1.1.106, 121, 143, 150, 121-22). Bedford, out of loyalty and friendship,

¹²⁸ Leo Braudy states that "Joan in her armor, Henry V in his monkish tonsure, combine the piety of a national history sanctioned by God with a determination to defend that history through force of arms. Chivalry itself, and the chivalric image of Jesus as a Christian knight, was less and less the code of a particular noble class than a series of stories, metaphors, and images that evoked a national past that could be shared by many" (The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and Its History [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986]: 270-1).

immediately leaves the funeral of Henry V to prepare to rescue his recently captured countryman, taken prisoner by the French after an unsuccessful battle.

While reporting to the assembled English nobility the latest news about the war with the French, the third messenger shares a particularly revealing anecdote. Talbot's soldiers, inspired by the "undaunted spirit" he displayed while fighting, began shouting his name as a rallying cry and continued the battle with renewed vigor (1.1.127). The action of this brief story indicates that Talbot has such force and prominence as a military figure that his name alone – without additional qualification or emendation – is sufficient to inspire others to greatness; as Jacqueline Vanhoutte says about Talbot, "He is not only heroic in himself but is the source of heroism in others."¹²⁹ This story, especially during the funeral of another great military leader, will add to Talbot's renown and the web of associations connecting him to Henry V. Timothy Hampton states that the very name of an exemplar functions as "a single sign which contains folded within it the entire history of the hero's deeds, the whole string of great moments which made the name a marked sign in the first place"; in other words, "the name is a noun with a verb phrase (the various great deeds) condensed inside it."¹³⁰ The very name of Talbot has become a story

¹²⁹ Jacqueline Vanhoutte, Strange Communion: Motherland and Masculinity in Tudor Plays, Pamphlets, and and Politics (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2003) 155.

¹³⁰ Timothy Hampton, Writing from History: The Rhetoric of Exemplarity in Renaissance Literature (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990) 25. The image of unfolding to describe the connotative function of the name is suggested by Kenneth Burke's essay on naming, "What Are Signs of What? A Theory of Entitlement," in Language as Symbolic Action

of such force and intensity that those who hear it are inspired to risk their own lives and join him in revenge against the French for the death of Henry V. In the second act of the play, at least one English soldier reaps a practical harvest from Talbot's "renowned name":

The cry of 'Talbot' serves me for a sword;
For I have loaden me with many spoils,
Using no other weapon but his name. (2.1.79-81)

The larger-than-life stories circulating about Talbot are a formidable weapon indeed, capable of inspiring the English in their military endeavors and unsettling the French. The other brief anecdote that the third messenger shares concerns Falstaff's cowardice during battle, which led to Talbot's capture by the French army. These two stories, taken together, suggest that English victory in battle depends more on the English upholding the standards that they have set for themselves than on the strength or weakness of the French forces.

In his first actual appearance on stage, Talbot's achievement is once again tied inextricably to his name. He tells the Earl of Salisbury of his imprisonment as the two assess the besieged Orleans from a turret, remembering how

In iron walls they deemed me not secure;

(Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966), 359-79. Burke has raised similar questions in the opening pages of The Rhetoric of Religion: Studies in Logology (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1970).

So great fear of my name 'mongst them were spread
 That they supposed I could rend bars of steel
 And spurn in pieces posts of adamant. (1.4.49-52)

And it soon becomes clear that these stories are not without substance. When Salisbury is fatally shot moments later by the Master Gunner of Orleans, Talbot virtually enacts the process of renewing in his own person the brave English heroes who preceded him. At this point in the first tetralogy, it is still expected that when an English hero dies the torch can pass to his comrades. So it is with the dying Salisbury's last, unspoken message to Talbot:

Speak, Salisbury; at least if thou canst speak.
 How far'st thou, mirror of all martial men?...
 In thirteen battles Salisbury o'ercame;
 Henry the Fifth he first trained to the wars.
 Whilst any trump did sound or drum struck up
 His sword did ne'er leave striking in the field.
 Yet liv'st thou, Salisbury?...
 He beckons with his hand and smiles on me,
 As who should say, 'When I am dead and gone,
 Remember to avenge me on the French.'
 Plantagenet, I will, and like thee,
 Play on the lute, beholding the towns burn.
 Wretched shall France be only in my name...
 Frenchmen, I'll be a Salisbury to you. (1.4.73-106)

The exemplary “mirror of all martial men” who first tutored Henry V in the art of war will continue, now that he and Henry are both dead, to inspire others as he is reflected in Talbot. Retaining his own potent heroic identity (“Wretched shall France be only in my name”), Talbot will also keep Salisbury’s alive by emulating him (“Frenchmen, I’ll be a Salisbury to you.”).

In the ensuing scenes, after a temporary setback at the hands of Joan la Pucelle, Talbot carries out his vow to avenge the death of Salisbury. Talbot denounces the English soldiers who retreated before her armies as collaborators: “You all consented unto Salisbury’s death, / For none of your would strike a stroke in his revenge (1.5.34-35). Describing their lack of revengeful passion as fundamental disloyalty, Talbot in effect accuses them of treason. He can, by contrast, boast that he has fulfilled his duty. In defiance of historical fact, but with excellent dramatic sense, Shakespeare has Talbot bury Salisbury in France. The historical Salisbury was buried in England. Shortly after entering the reconquered Orleans, Talbot commands:

Bring forth the body of old Salisbury
 And here advance it in the market place,
 The middle center of this cursed town.
 Now have I paid my vow unto his soul:
 For every drop of blood was drawn from him
 There hath at least five Frenchmen died tonight.
 And that hereafter ages may behold
 What ruin happened in revenge of him,
 Within their chiefest temples I’ll erect

A tomb, wherein his corpse shall be interred;
 Upon the which, that everyone may read,
 Shall be engraved the sack on Orleans.
 The treacherous manner of his mournful death,
 And what a terror he had been to France. (II.ii.4-17)

Talbot's desire here, as in his military campaign to secure Henry's French conquests, is to preserve and augment the historical record of English martial achievement. Salisbury is an older colleague whom Talbot succeeds, much as one generation succeeds another; he is not a historical figure for Talbot in the same sense that Edward III was or that both Salisbury and Talbot himself are for Shakespeare's audience. But, as Robert Jones observes, this is "a distinction without a difference,"¹³¹ for Salisbury is the latest name added to a long line of English military heroes. Talbot intends to inspire his countrymen to avenge Salisbury by engraving in stone the story of "the treacherous manner of his mournful death."

That there is no discrepancy between Talbot's actions and his reputation for noble conduct is further demonstrated by his interactions with the Countess of Auvergne in the second act. Having just retaken Orleans, Talbot accepts a courtly invitation to visit the Countess of Auvergne. The audience is informed that the Countess plans to capture Talbot, but the hero himself arrives at her castle apparently ignorant of her intentions. Upon Talbot's entrance the Countess mocks Talbot's physical appearance while

¹³¹ Robert C. Jones, These Valiant Dead: Renewing the Past in Shakespeare's Histories (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1991) 6.

simultaneously acknowledging his formidable reputation, asking “Is this the Talbot, so much feared abroad / That with his name the mothers still their babes?” (2.3.16-17). She repeatedly calls attention to the difference between Talbot’s unimpressive physical presence (presumably in the person of the actor who played his part) and the verbal record of the historical Talbot’s heroic honor. What she sees – “a child, a silly dwarf...this weak and writhled shrimp” (2.3.22-3) – convinces her that “report is fabulous and false” (2.3.18). Once convinced of his identity, however, she triumphantly proclaims him her prisoner. Talbot responds with laughter and a riddling retort, and within moments he has blown his horn and called in his waiting troops.

This scene demonstrates that it takes a community to create and sustain Talbot. If he had tried to fight the Countess on his own, if he had not brought his troops for additional support, Talbot would have been captured. As his men enter, Talbot asks, “How say you, madam? Are you now persuaded / That Talbot is but shadow of himself? / These are his substance, sinews, arms, and strength, / With which he yoketh your rebellious necks, / Razeth your cities, and subverts your towns, / And in a moment makes them desolate” (2.3.60-65). Without his troops, a commander is powerless, a mere shadow. The Countess fails to trap Talbot, Edward Berry states, because “she conceives of heroism in conventional terms; for her it implies vaunting self-assertion and tremendous physical strength. Talbot escapes her trap because he recognizes the

insignificance of bodily force and the vulnerability of a man alone.”¹³² The Countess comes to understand that Talbot is indeed (and in deed) all that his name has promised.

Victorious Talbot, pardon my abuse.

I find thou art no less than fame hath bruited,

And more than may be gathered by thy shape.

Let my presumption not provoke thy wrath.

For I am sorry that with reverence

I did not entertain thee as thou art. (2.3.67-72)

The Countess intended to bring about the fall of England’s greatest living military hero – she contrived to “as famous be by this exploit / As Scythian Tomyris by Cyrus’ death” (2.3.5-6) - but in the end the episode “confirms Talbot’s fame rather than establishing her own.”¹³³

Talbot is in no real danger during his encounter with the Countess of Auvergne; his chief French nemesis is Joan la Pucelle. Like Talbot, she is a military leader who has led her troops to victory, and, like Talbot, her reputation precedes her. While the source of la Pucelle’s power remains unclear throughout much of 1 Henry VI - is she a divinely inspired saint, carrying out the will of God, or is she a witch whose malevolent activities are motivated by the devil? – both la Pucelle and her enemies agree that her martial skills set her apart from other women. Joan invites the Dauphin to try her courage in combat in

¹³² Edward Berry, Patterns of Decay: Shakespeare's Early Histories (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1975) 7.

¹³³ Kastan, Shakespeare and the Shapes of Time 19-20.

order to prove “that I exceed my sex’ (1.2.90). No sooner has La Pucelle lent her mystique to the French than the Master Gunner’s boy, heretofore utterly ineffective as a marksman, kills Salisbury and Gargrave as they stand on the turrets overlooking Orleans. Talbot himself invests this deed with metaphysical significance: “What chance is this that suddenly hath cross’d us? / ...Accursed tower! Accursed fatal hand / That hath contriv’d this woeful tragedy!” (1.4.71-76). In both cases, the only possible explanation is supernatural assistance. La Pucelle claims it comes from “God’s mother”: “her aid she promised, and assured success” (1.2.78, 82). Talbot’s astonishing inability to defeat la Pucelle in their only encounter leads him to conclude that she must be a witch: “My thoughts are whirled like a potter’s wheel; / I know not what I am, nor what I do: / A witch by fear, not force, like Hannibal, / Drives back our troops and conquers as she lists” (1.5.19-22). This uncertainty is resolved towards the end of the play when la Pucelle’s activities are shown unequivocally to be the result of black magic; her familiar spirits appear on stage and she admits that she “was wont to feed [them] with my blood” (5.3.14). But ultimately, as Edward Berry states, “The problem that Joan’s witchcraft poses...is that it seems to originate in no special curse and, even more curiously, to issue no concrete results. That Joan’s encounter with Talbot ends in a standoff is emblematic of that nature of the war as a whole; despite her diabolic leadership, the French forces never gain more than a temporary victory until the end of the play, at which point they acquire through Henry’s negligence rather than their own might an ignominious peace.”¹³⁴ Ultimately, the French are shown to be neither morally nor martially superior to the

¹³⁴ Berry, Patterns of Decay: Shakespeare's Early Histories 13.

English. Even though Joan is allowed a few temporary military successes, the play makes it clear that the real cause of the English failure lies with the English themselves.

The English military leaders, especially Talbot, blame their setbacks on lack of support from home and treachery. Words like “treachery,” “treacherous,” “traitor,” and “betray” abound in the play. In the first scene, when Exeter responds to the announced loss of French territories with the questions “How were they lost? What treachery was us’ d?” the first messenger replies:

No treachery, but want of men and money.

Amongst the soldiers this is muttered –

That here you maintain several factions:

And whilst a field should be dispatch’ d and fought,

You are disputing of your generals... (1.1.69-73).

The messenger’s analysis of the situation is supported by the bickering that occurs between Winchester and Gloucester immediately prior to his entrance. The third messenger in the same scene has a story to tell of Sir John Falstaff’s cowardice at Orleans leading to the “general wrack and massacre” of the English forces and in particular to the capture of Talbot. And when Talbot himself appears in scene four he bitterly reviles “the treacherous Falstaff.” Falstaff briefly crosses the stage as he flies from the fighting at Rouen. He appears once more during the coronation in Paris, when he is charged with running from combat once again, in the battle of Poitiers, an act which resulted in the loss of the battle and the deaths of twelve hundred men. For this shameful display Talbot strips Falstaff of his garter, the insignia of his knightly order, and banishes him on pain of

death. The problem lies not only with Falstaff but in the failure of the nobility to live up to the ideals they profess.¹³⁵

Eventually, Talbot finds himself defeated by the forces of the French while his would-be allies Somerset and York debate over who is most at fault for abandoning him. At Talbot's death, the very moment when la Pucelle's powers should be most dramatically displayed, Shakespeare reduces them to insignificance because neither she specifically nor the French forces more generally cause the downfall of England; the English themselves do. This point is repeated unequivocally no less than five times. After the disruption of Henry's coronation, Exeter ominously asserts that

No simple man that sees
 This jarring discord of nobility,
 This shouldering of each other in the court,
 This factious bandying of their favorites,
 But sees it doth presage some ill event.
 'Tis much when sceptres are in children's hands;
 But more when envy breeds unkind division:
 There comes the ruin, there begins confusion. (4.1.187-94)

Sir William Lucy expands on this important lesson:

The fraud of England, not the force of France,
 Hath now entrapp'd the noble-minded Talbot;
 Never to England shall he bear his life,

¹³⁵ Pearlman, William Shakespeare: The History Plays 28.

But die betray'd to fortune by your strife. (4.4.36-39).¹³⁶

Consumed by their own ambitions, the English nobles cannot refrain from petty squabbles, name-calling and duels, or from undermining each other's achievements. These factional, wrangling Lords who bring on England's Wars of the Roses are the very opposite of Talbot's dedication to a code of chivalry, best reflected in his single-minded service to his king and his country.

The Wars of the Roses Begin

I'll either make thee stoop and bend thy knee,
Or sack this country with a mutiny. (5.1.61-2)

Henry VI succeeds as an infant king to a Protectorate destabilized by aristocratic rivalry and competition. The English nobles increasingly rely on slanted and partial storytelling as a key weapon in their fight for public influence and control of the kingdom. As a result, the fighting between Gloucester and Winchester (1.3) leads to the more dangerous quarrel between Somerset and Richard Plantagenet in the Temple garden (2.4), where the floral insignia of subsequent civil wars is chosen, which grows into the negligent and irresponsible squabbling between York and Somerset (4.3, 4.4). The inability of York and Somerset to work together towards common military goals undermines the English war effort in France and costs Talbot his life. Personal grievances escalate and involve family members, friends, and other supporters in a cycle of revenge

¹³⁶ See also 3.1.65-73; 3.1.187-201; 4.3.47-53.

that, over time, devastates the nation. As England descends further into the Wars of the Roses, the factionalists draw upon stories not as sources of positive exempla to model for the larger social good but in a willfully biased and destructive fashion for revenge and their own personal gain.

The first conflict to develop - between Duke Humphrey of Gloucester, Henry's uncle and Protector of the Realm, and Henry Beauford, Bishop of Winchester, his great-uncle - is certainly unseemly and disruptive. There are, as Agnes Heller observes, some motives for their mutual hatred. Gloucester became the protector of the realm, and Winchester, who is older, was disqualified from this office because he was born illegitimately.¹³⁷ This quarrel, appearing in four scenes, is carefully scaffolded; the hostility between the antagonists rises progressively in intensity with each interaction. Their initial encounter, in 1.1, is merely ten lines of bickering quieted without much difficulty by the Duke of Bedford. The second exchange, in 1.3, involves the physical barring of Gloucester and his men from the Tower by Winchester and his men and requires intervention by the Mayor of London. And Gloucester threatens Winchester with physical harm: "Priest, beware your beard, / I mean to tug it and to cuff you soundly. / Under my feet I stamp thy cardinal's hat; / In spite of Pope or dignities of Church, / Here by the cheeks I'll drag thee up and down" (1.3.47-51).

¹³⁷ But, as Agnes Heller argues, these and similar motivations "do not 'explain' either the depth of hatred or the wickedness of the acts" (The Time Is out of Joint: Shakespeare as Philosopher of History [Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002]: 194-95).

The third clash in 3.1 progresses to more severe violence and even larger numbers of people. The followers of Gloucester and Winchester pursue the quarrel of their masters to such an extent that the Mayor of London reports to the King:

The Bishop and the Duke of Gloucester's men,
 Forbidden late to carry any weapon,
 Have fill'd their pockets full of pebble stones;
 And, banding themselves in contrary parts,
 Do pelt so fast at one another's pate
 That many have their giddy brains knocked out.
 Our windows are broke down in every street.
 And we, for fear, compell'd to shut our shops (3.1.78-85).

This sort of violence, now affecting the lives of ordinary Englishmen and women, threatens to explode into anarchy. Supporters of either side are restrained only with difficulty from acts of street rioting and rock throwing, even in the presence of the king and their respective masters. Winchester darkly threatens Gloucester with not just bodily injury but death; "Abominable Gloucester, guard thy head, / For I intend to have it ere long" (1.3.87-88). As of yet, neither of the two has physically harmed the other; Jonas Barish observes that "The weapon, in short, at least for the moment, is language."¹³⁸ The two men are apparently reconciled in act 5, but Winchester privately clarifies for the audience his true purpose: "So help me God, as I intend it not!" (3.1.142).

¹³⁸ Jonas Barish, "Shakespeare's Violence: A Preliminary Survey," *Themes in Drama*, ed. James Redmond (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 112.

With each encounter the mounting verbal charges and countercharges escalate until Gloucester accuses Beauford of lewdness and treachery (“saucy priest”, 3.1.45) and Winchester denounces Gloucester as ambitious and “unreverent” (3.1.49). Name-calling might not seem very dramatic, but the capacity of discordant words to disrupt the peace or jeopardize the stability of the realm was an increasing concern of the English state by the end of the sixteenth century. In De pace Regis et regni (1609), a summary of “the great and generall offences of the realme,” legal theorist Ferdinando Pulton identifies discordant words first in his list of perils to the peace of the kingdom:

I haue thought it good to begin with the very roote and principall cause of [offenses to the realm], which are Menaces, Threatnings, and other bitter words, beeing as streames gushing out of contentious spirits, and venemous tongues, their naturall fountaines and springheads, from whence do ensue sometimes Assaults, Batteries, Riots, Routs, Unlawfull assemblies, Forces and Forcible entries: some other times Forgeries, Periuries, and Oppressions: and oftentimes Maihmes, Manslaughters and Murders...And we seldome heare of any the said enormities effected, but they tooke their beginnings of menaces, threats, slaunders, or other euill words.¹³⁹

Malicious language is dangerous to the stability of a community because of its provocative nature; “Incitements to physical violence,” Lindsay Kaplan states, “begin

¹³⁹ Ferdinando Pulton, De Pace Regis Et Regni (London: 1609) Br-Bv.

with verbal instigations and result in social disruption.”¹⁴⁰ Gloucester and Winchester each recognize the other’s language for what it is, an act of aggression, and respond accordingly.

While the growing enmity between Gloucester and Winchester does nothing to help the English cause, far more dangerous and threatening are the factions formed by the nobles of the kingdom that will evolve into the Wars of the Roses. In the Temple Garden scene, Shakespeare imagines an event (for which his sources offer no precedent) in which a set of young and passionate noblemen who are engaged in legal study disagree about some “nice sharp quilllets of the law” (2.4.17). The initial quarrel ostensibly surrounds Richard Plantagenet, whose father, Richard Earl of Cambridge, was executed for treason during the reign of Henry V, although, as Robert Ornstein perceptively states “at stake is not a point of law but feudal enmity and ambition.”¹⁴¹ As dramatized in Henry V, York’s father was executed for leading an insurrection against the Lancastrians, but they had usurped the throne from Richard II. In fact, York’s claim to the throne is better than Henry IV’s. Dispossessed of his titles, Plantagenet is particularly sensitive to insult by the other nobles, so when Somerset dismissively states “We grace the yeoman by conversing with him” (2.5.81) the proud Plantagenet vows to “redress” his “bitter injuries” (125-26). At first the bystanders try to defuse Plantagenet and Somerset by making jests of

¹⁴⁰ M. Lindsay Kaplan, The Culture of Slander in Early Modern England (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 20-21.

¹⁴¹ Robert Ornstein, A Kingdom for a Stage: The Achievement of Shakespeare's History Plays (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1972) 36.

disagreements, but the situation becomes heated, and one by one the assembled nobles choose those “dumb significant” of their antagonism, the essentially meaningless white and red roses. Further insults to manhood and ancestry lead to “blood-drinking hate” on both sides. Warwick is left to prophesy that “this brawl today, / Grown to this faction in the Temple garden, / Shall send, between the red rose and the white, / A thousand souls to death and deadly night” (124-27).

How does a disagreement among a group E. Pearlman describes as “young men...filled with hot tempers and adolescent energy”¹⁴² grow into a civil war that affects an entire nation? Plantagenet and Somerset each feel their honor challenged by the other. And quarrels concerning matters of honor were recognized in the early modern period as particularly dangerous. As Chief Justice Edward Coke explains in De Libellis Famosis (1606):

...for although the libel be made against one, yet it incites all those of the same family, kindred or society to revenge, and so tends per consequens to quarrels and breach of the peace, and may be the cause of shedding of blood, and of great inconvenience.¹⁴³

¹⁴² Pearlman, William Shakespeare: The History Plays 29.

¹⁴³ William E. Mikell, ed., Cases on Criminal Law (St. Paul: West Publishing Company, 1908) 585.

In other words, Coke argues here that familial and social ties will escalate the significance and damage of an insult to one who is ostensibly a private individual. And that is exactly what happens in 1 Henry VI.

Early during the argument in the Temple Garden, the young noblemen claim not to care much about fine points of historical detail; such minutia does not interest them. But once they have already lined up against one another on the basis of conflicting and unspecified “truths” that each side claims to be self-evident (20-24), these same lords use stories readily enough as weapons to hurl at one another rather than as a means to resolve the rights or wrongs of a case:

Warwick: Now, by God’s will, thou wrong’st him, Somerset.

His grandfather was Lionel Duke of Clarence,
Third son to the third Edward, King of England.
Spring crestless yeoman from so deep a root?

Richard: He bears him on the place’s privilege,
Or durst not for his craven heart say thus.

Somerset: By him that made me, I’ll maintain my words,
On any plot of ground in Christendom.

Was not thy father, Richard Earl of Cambridge,
For treason executed in our late king’s days?
And by his treason stand’st not thou attainted,
Corrupted, and exempt from ancient gentry?

His trespass yet lives guilty in thy blood,
And till thou be restored thou are a yeoman.

Richard: My father was attached, not attained,
 Condemned to die for treason, but no traitor;
 And that I'll prove on better men than Somerset,
 Were growing time once ripened to my will.
 For your partaker Pole, and you yourself,
 I'll note you in my book of memory
 To scourge you for this apprehension.
 Look to it well and say you are well warned. (82-103)

This argument is no longer legal and theoretical but personal and highly charged. In this exchange the “third Edward, King of England” has become little more than the source of the blood that supports some claims to the throne and denies others, rather than the famous ruler of that time when “England all Olivers and Rowlands bred,” as he is remembered by the French.

Richard Plantagenet's determination to “scourge” Somerset is strengthened in the next scene during a prison encounter with the dying Edmund Mortimer, a victim of Lancastrian ambition, who explains the wrongs the House of York has endured. Plantagenet eagerly seizes the heritage Mortimer proffers him during their conversation:

And therefore haste I to the parliament,
 Either to be restored to my blood
 Or make my will th' advantage of my good. (127-29)

Mortimer's anti-Lancastrian review of the succession from Edward III through Henry VI fuels Plantagenet's anger and provides him with ammunition to use against his enemies. His ambition is dangerous and selfish, and it is difficult to line up comfortably with him

here. But the house of Lancaster is not more inviting. To be on a “side” first and foremost, and thereby to foment factional strife, is the great wrong here, by contrast with Talbot’s simple loyalty to king, country, and the heroic heritage he upholds. The significant contrast between Talbot’s remembrance of the past and Mortimer’s (or Richard’s via Mortimer) is the use each makes of his greater and lesser forebears. Edward II and Henry V, whose times and deeds shine with historic precedents for Talbot, shrink in Mortimer’s account to the same stature as their disappointing successors, Richard II and Henry VI. Their accomplishments, or lack thereof, mean nothing. They “count” only insofar as their standing on the genealogical charts proves the speaker’s claim to the throne.

Chapter 4

A War of Words: Punitive Storytelling in Elizabeth Cary's The Tragedy of Miriam

Elizabeth Cary's The Tragedy of Mariam (published 1613) may at first seem like an unusual choice for an examination of a topic as dynamic and bloody as revenge tragedy.¹⁴⁴ Cary's play has traditionally been read as one of a group of closet dramas written in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England, a type of play intended not for staged performance but to be read by an audience of educated aristocrats, either alone or within small groups. The restricted nature of such elite men and women reading closet drama together seems to be at odds with the sensational visual spectacle characteristic of revenge tragedy performed on a public stage. But these two genres are more closely connected than most scholars realize, for they share common roots in

¹⁴⁴ Reading Elizabeth Cary's The Tragedy of Mariam as a revenge tragedy is uncommon, but not without precedent. As part of a larger project studying the role of women as readers and audience members of early modern English drama, Alison Findlay acknowledges the significance of revenge in Mariam, arguing from a feminist perspective that revenge tragedies "tap into fundamental fears about women, relating to maternal power and to female agency" (A Feminist Perspective on Renaissance Drama (Malden: Blackwell, 1999) 49).

Seneca, an author Cary is known to have read.¹⁴⁵ While critics have acknowledged that the form of Cary's play shares many characteristics with other closet dramas – long soliloquies and monologues, the stichomythic dialogue (a Senecan convention where characters speak alternate single lines), the reduced number of actors on stage (two or three), and a chorus – fewer have observed that its themes are Senecan as well: family factions, unsubstantiated rumors, murder, lies, blood, tears, death, tyranny and injustice, long-held grievances and short tempers. The Tragedy of Mariam challenges current understanding of the early modern revenge tradition by drawing critical attention to previously overlooked acts of verbal violence and punitive storytelling.

Recent commentary on early modern closet drama and revenge tragedy does not often overlap. While criticism of revenge tragedy almost always opens with Kyd's The Spanish Tragedy, discussions of early modern closet drama generally begin with Mary Sidney's The Tragedie of Antonie, a translation of Robert Garnier's neo-Senecan tragedy Marc Antonie printed in 1592. Over the next fifteen years, Sidney's work became a model for a group of overtly political, anti-tyrannical plays (some of which were English translations of Robert Garnier's other neo-Senecan tragedies) composed by a circle of playwrights that included Samuel Brandon, Samuel Daniel, Fulke Greville, William

¹⁴⁵ Although we may not be able to date accurately the moment when Elizabeth Cary read any particular work, the author of Cary's biography, The Lady Falkland, Her Life, writes that her mother read and translated Seneca as a young woman "afore she left her father's house" (Elizabeth Cary, The Tragedy of Mariam, the Fair Queen of Jewry, ed. Barry Weller and Margaret W. Ferguson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

Alexander, and Elizabeth Cary. Cary's critics who locate The Tragedy of Mariam within the dramatic tradition of closet drama tend to emphasize both its suitability as a form of political critique and its unsuitability for the stage. These emphases derive from what contemporaries regarded as Garnier's tendency, embraced by many of his English followers, to rework Senecan themes in an effort to criticize tyranny and promote political reform.¹⁴⁶ As Marta Straznicky has argued, even Sidnean closet dramas with an apparently domestic slant, such as Thomas Kyd's Cornelia (1594), Samuel Brandon's Octavia (1598), and Elizabeth Cary's The Tragedy of Mariam (1613), have been linked with the more overtly topical plays through their use of political discourse.¹⁴⁷

The Tragedy of Mariam has sparked a particularly lively conversation among scholars interested in issues of genre and gender. Some critics, such as Sandra Fischer, argue that that closet drama is particularly appropriate for a woman such as Cary because

¹⁴⁶ Like earlier plays by Mary Sidney and her followers, Cary's drama uses ancient Roman materials to debate the "duty" to resist "lawful authority" if it degenerated into tyranny.

On the political context of Garnier's drama, see Gillian Jondorf, Robert Garnier and the Themes of Political Tragedy in the Sixteenth Century (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969). On Sidney and the politics of translation, see Danielle Clark, "The Politics of Translation and Gender in the Countess of Pembroke's Antonie," Translation and Literature 6 (1997).

¹⁴⁷ Straznicky, Privacy, Playreading, and Women's Closet Drama, 1550-1700 14-15.

such “marginal genres” afford an author “vicarious action” without significant risk.¹⁴⁸

Others, such as Nancy Gutierrez, address the issue of genre in terms of Cary’s transformation of it: genre is theorized initially as a patriarchal construct and, through the author’s refashioning, becomes a vehicle for Cary’s self-expression as a woman writer.¹⁴⁹

More recently, Marta Straznicky has studied the ways in which a play that is not intended for commercial performance can nevertheless cross between private playreading and the public sphere through the medium of print; “a woman writer can use the elite genre of closet drama to engage in political discourse without exposing her views to an indiscriminate public...a woman can avoid public censure by insisting that her play not be staged while also issuing it in print.”¹⁵⁰

The Tragedy of Mariam, like the Senecan models on which it is based, gains much of its emotional intensity by depicting conflict within a family: as Elaine Beilin has pointed out in reference to Cary’s work, “[m]arriage is the battlefield of the play.”¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ Sandra Fischer, “Elizabeth Cary and Tyranny, Domestic and Religious,” Silent but for the Word: Tudor Women as Patrons, Translators and Writers of Religious Works, ed. Margaret Patterson Hannay (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1996) 228.

¹⁴⁹ Nancy Gutierrez, “Valuing Mariam: Genre Study and Feminist Analysis,” Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature 10.2 (1991): 241.

¹⁵⁰ Marta Straznicky, Privacy, Playreading, and Women's Closet Drama, 1550-1700 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 1.

¹⁵¹ Elaine Beilin, Redeeming Eve: Women Writers of the English Renaissance (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987) 167.

Feminist critics have read the play as dramatizing Cary's own unhappiness in the early years of her marriage or, extending this argument, as foregrounding Renaissance prescriptions about marriage from the point of view of the female subject. More recently, critics have noted Mariam's treatment of tyranny and obedience, and emphasis has been placed upon the play's political and intellectual contexts. Intertwining these two threads of critical conversation allows for an examination of Mariam's treatment of the obligations and bonds of marriages that are public and dynastic. When issues of political allegiance and marital fidelity become so entangled, what obligations do the parties involved have to one another? What recourse is available to one whose spouse does not fulfill these responsibilities? Upon what grounds may such unions, if unsuccessful, be dissolved?

Scholars consistently recognize honor (in men) and chastity (in women) as definitive attributes of identity in the early modern period. Less commonly acknowledged is the fact that this formula rests on a paradox, or at least a possible point of tension: one's identity is closely connected to one's reputation, but one's reputation is socially derived. Honor and chastity are not inherent but assigned by others, matters of public opinion rather than intrinsic possessions. The stories that circulate about an individual create a kind of social capital that remains in flux, not static but constantly in the process of being renegotiated. Since, in the early modern period, masculine identity is typically dependent upon and figured through female chastity (or its absence), this paradox is frequently the cause of considerable anxiety. As Mark Breitenberg has said, for their honor "[h]usbands are dependent upon their wives' reputation for chastity - that is,

dependent on something ultimately beyond their control, despite considerable effort to the contrary.”¹⁵²

Given the importance placed on public opinion in the early modern period, this chapter argues that injuring the reputation of an enemy could be as effective a form of revenge as inflicting physical violence. Storytelling influences the thoughts and actions of others and has material, tangible consequences; revenge is not limited to what one does, but can include influencing others to actions they would not have taken of their own accord. In Cary’s play, stories themselves become instruments of revenge. Like Hieronimo’s play-within-a-play that concludes The Spanish Tragedy, like the accounts of the deaths of Henry V and Talbot meant to inspire English soldiers to victory in Shakespeare’s 1 Henry VI, the stories told by Doris, Mariam, and Salome are intended to be witnessed by others, and subsequently re-witnessed in communal memory. These characters remain conscious that they speak to a succession of present and future audiences, and so they strive to determine the response of these onlookers and, if possible, even to ensure that the scene will continue to affect the communal memory.

“Oft have I begged for vengeance”: Doris’s Prayers and Curses

The very first sentence of the Argument with which The Tragedy of Mariam begins reveals that “Herod, the son of Antipater...repudiated Doris, his former wife, by

¹⁵² Mark Breitenberg, Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996) 98.

whome he had children.” The character of Doris, who exists only by default on the margins of Josephus’s narrative, her position implicit simply in the historical fact that Mariam was Herod’s second wife, becomes important in Cary’s play as a foil to the titular character. And it is this action of divorce, in part, which sets off the chain of events that culminates in Mariam’s death.¹⁵³ While Herod intends to strengthen his position as monarch by divorcing Doris and marrying Mariam, as the play opens this series of decisions has created dangerous factions not just within Judea but within the royal family: two women claim Herod as husband and father to their (male) children. Doris, keenly aware of the injustices that she has suffered and unable to vindicate herself through secular means such as the courts, employs prayers and curses as tools of revenge against Mariam, whom she asserts caused Herod to abandon her and thus deprive her of

¹⁵³ Historically, Herod divorced Doris during the late 40s BCE and took on a new set of allegiances that he believed would be more advantageous. Samuel Sandmel describes divorce and remarriage in Judea during the time of Herod’s rule as “unusual, among Jews” but acceptable (Herod, Profile of a Tyrant (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1967) 78). Having earlier usurped the throne of Judea, and consequently aware that his position as king was unstable, Herod sought to approximate legitimate succession by marriage to the granddaughter of his two rivals, Aristobolus II and Hyrcanus II (the king of Judea), through Alexander (Mariam’s father) on the one side and Alexandra (Mariam’s mother) on the other. This granddaughter, Mariam, held “the dual attractions of her beauty and royal blood” (Laurie Shannon, Sovereign Amity: Figures of Friendship in Shakespearean Contexts (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002) 71-72).

her rightful status as queen of the Judean court. In this play, prayers and curses are both forms of execration, in which stories are told to persuade some supernatural power to inflict evil on some one or some group. Doris repeatedly calls the validity of Herod's second marriage into question in an effort to restore what she believes to be her son's patrimony; in response, Herod and Mariam ignore her, considering her no real threat to themselves or their kingdom, and other characters within the play largely follow their example. Literary critics, too, have often considered Doris a passive and uninteresting minor player in the world of the Judean court; present-day readers, disregarding the power that execrations¹⁵⁴ held for the early moderns, have overlooked the fact that Doris does achieve revenge by the most effective means at her (albeit limited) disposal: stories in the form of prayers and curses, which convey her grievances to supernatural powers and convince them to act on her behalf. Since she is unable to obtain justice by speaking with secular authorities, she also tells her story to her son, Antipater, stating that Mariam's children are "bastards" and that "foul adultery blotteth Mariam's brow" (2.1.256, 278), with the hope that her stories eventually will motivate him to take revenge by killing Mariam's sons and reclaiming the throne.

Doris's claims that she has been wronged by Mariam – and thus her motivation for revenge – depend upon her belief that Herod could not legally "repudiate" her.

¹⁵⁴ Keith Thomas discusses in detail "the magical notion that that the mere pronunciation of words in a ritual manner could effect a change in the character of material objects" (Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) 33).

Doris's account of the dissolution of her marriage is carefully constructed to establish her innocence. Her story stresses that "Mariam's purer cheek / Did rob from [her] the glory" (2.1.223-24) and she refuses to acknowledge her rival's marriage as legitimate, claiming that Mariam's "soul is black and spotted, full of sin" because Herod and Mariam "in adultery liv'd nine years together, / And heav'n will never let adultery in" (4.8.576-8). Certain that she is innocent of any wrongdoing, and considering herself morally superior to Mariam (if perhaps aesthetically inferior and/or of less select breeding), Doris claims that her own marriage to Herod remains legitimate. She considers herself "Herod's lawful wife" (4.8.584) and asks:

What did he hate me for: for simple truth?

For bringing beauteous babes for love to him:

For riches: noble birth, or tender youth,

Or for no stain did Doris' honor dim? (4.8.591-4)

Doris's claims are validated by other characters within the world of the play. For example, Herod's brother, Pheroras, while arguing for his right to marry the woman of his choice in the face of Herod's opposition, corroborates Doris's story by saying "He, for his passion, Doris did remove. / I needed not a lawful Wife displace" (2.1.31-2). By comments such as this, which indicate that the cause of divorce was simply Herod's "passion," Cary emphasizes that it is not the divorce itself but the lack of just cause for the divorce that is the issue; Herod's divorce and remarriage to Mariam is characterized by his passion and political ambition.

Doris appears in only two scenes in this play. The audience meets her for the first time in Act 2, scene 3, as Doris returns to Judea after nine years with her son, Antipater,

and “nothing but the sense of wrong” (226) to obtain retribution for what she has suffered. Believing (like the rest of the court) that Herod is dead, Doris expects to obtain no satisfaction from him; rather, she hopes to act on the particular enmity she bears toward Mariam and Mariam’s children. Doris tells her son, and the audience, that she has often “begg’d for vengeance” from God for her miserable lot in life. Herod would not leave Mariam and return to her, and the text does not indicate that family or friends came to her aid, and so Doris “with dejected knees, aspiring hands / ...pray’d the highest power to enact / the fall of [Mariam]” (2.3.248-50). The effectiveness of this request depends upon the persuasiveness of her story. While praying for vengeance against a sexual rival is theologically anomalous, Doris’s strongly felt sense of injustice, combined with hardships suffered after she was abandoned, lead her to such behavior; as Michael Schoenfeldt says, “[A]s something to which God willingly subjected himself in the incarnation and passion, suffering can register...divine accessibility.”¹⁵⁵ But it appears that something went wrong. While Doris claims to have had “revenge...according to [her] will,” her vengeance “did not light” on the right person: “I wish’d it should high-hearted Mariam kill, / But it against my whilom lord did fight” (2.3.251-254). Doris seems to be drawing a direct connection between her nine years of prayers for revenge on Mariam and recently circulating stories of Herod’s unexpected death. Worldly justice and secular authority have failed her, but storytelling enables Doris to find some vindication for her wrongs from a higher power.

¹⁵⁵ Michael Schoenfeldt, Prayer and Power: George Herbert and Renaissance Courtship (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991) 15.

Stories are the only weapons that Doris wields against her enemies. When Doris's son, Antipater, suggests they should poison or stab Mariam's children, she admits that "revenge's foulest spotted face / By our detested wrongs might be approved" (2.3.66), but ultimately she rejects carrying out such acts of private vengeance and instead calls upon the heavens. Reliance upon godly retribution might, in some circumstances, be construed as the more virtuous choice, but the text does not indicate that the former queen is motivated by such morality. Doris expresses to her son her fears that Mariam and her family are "too strong to be by us remov'd," and decides that "weakness must to greater power give place" (2.3.279, 282). Doris and Antipater appear to have no family or friends willing to take up their cause and avenge their wrongs, no one to strengthen them in their time of need. And so they pray, since the heavens are the only audience they have for their story. They soon discover that Herod is alive, not dead, and it could be argued that Doris's prayers for the death of Mariam are ultimately effective in that Herod kills her. But, as Alison Findlay observes, "[t]he Chorus's purported message that vengeance belongs to God is undercut...since Doris's experience does not promote faith in this idea."¹⁵⁶ There is no indication in the play that Doris or her children will be restored to their former positions; therefore, in terms of reparation, it is ineffective. The fantasy sequence that Doris spins during her first appearance on stage, in which Herod is not dead but returns and recognizes Antipater as heir, providing his eldest son with "glorious fortunes," is never realized (2.3.262).

¹⁵⁶ Findlay, A Feminist Perspective on Renaissance Drama 78.

Since the higher powers with whom Mariam shares her stories do not respond entirely as she had intended, Doris turns her frustrated energies to cursing.¹⁵⁷ In addition to praying, cursing was one means by which someone in Doris's disempowered position could express her dissatisfaction because a curse magically imposes adversity on the victim. Through her curses Doris believes that she is able to exert some control over Mariam's future and to shape the story of her victim. The larger community may see future misfortunes suffered by Mariam as evidence that the truth of Doris's stories have been confirmed. Keith Thomas points out that curses were employed by the weak against the strong, never the other way around; "It was when children had outgrown normal means of parental control that the dreadful weapon of the father's curse was invoked; and it was when ordinary supplications had failed that the beggar turned upon the rich man who denied him relief."¹⁵⁸ Doris, the cast-off first wife, is certainly in a weaker position

¹⁵⁷ Ashley Montagu usefully distinguishes between the acts of swearing and cursing: "One swears when the promise of relief and the achievement of effect are immediate. One curses when relief may be immediate but the effect of one's curse may be somewhat delayed. And so one's imprecations and expletives are generally couched in language suitable to the requirements of the present moment, whereas cursing is essentially couched in language that refers to the future. One swears at an enemy when he is within reach, one curses him when he may not be within immediate reach" (The Anatomy of Swearing (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001).

¹⁵⁸ Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England 509.

than Mariam, but a keen sense of injury inspires her to fight back lest her silence regarding Herod's remarriage be taken for either consent or indifference.¹⁵⁹

Doris has the opportunity to curse Mariam directly when the two women unexpectedly encounter each other during the fourth act. Mariam, who has learned that she is to be executed, is interrupted in a moment of private anguish. She is unaware of the identity of the person suddenly before her, and asks "What art thou that dost poor Mariam pursue, / Some spirit sent to drive me to despair?" (4.8.578-9). Doris, well aware of the woman to whom she is speaking and of their relationship to each other, immediately answers the question with a story that emphasizes her own blamelessness and Mariam's guilt: "I am that Doris that was once belov'd, / Belov'd by Herod, Herod's lawful wife: / 'Twas you that Doris from his side remov'd, / And robb'd from me the glory of my life" (4.8.583-6). The contrast here is telling: Doris has been obsessed with her rival for nine bitter years, while Mariam isn't sure Doris is quite real. Up to this point, Doris has been nothing to Mariam but a story occasionally whispered about court as an example of Herod's volatility and unpredictability. For Doris to achieve revenge, Mariam must listen to the story Doris herself tells. The above lines, which are repetitive, almost incantatory in nature, emphasize Doris's self-identity as Herod's beloved wife and recast "poor

¹⁵⁹ As James C. Scott says, attacking someone's character does not make much sense "unless there are shared standards of what is deviant, unworthy, impolite...What is in dispute is not values but the facts to which those values might apply" (Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986]: xvii).

Mariam” as the guilty party. Kenneth Gross states that, “[f]rom a rhetorical point of view, cursing calls attention to itself,”¹⁶⁰ and this is indeed the point here; Doris wants Mariam to attend to her, to hear her story, and to acknowledge her role in it.

Openly rejoicing that Mariam’s good fortune has come to an end, Doris quickly claims responsibility for her adversary’s abject state:

These thrice three years have I with hands held up,
 And bowed knees fast nailed to the ground,
 Besought for thee the dregs of that same cup,
 The cup of wrath that is for sinners found.
 And now thou art to drink it: Doris’s curse
 Upon thyself did all this while attend... (4.8.597-602)

This image of Doris, with “hands held up” and “bowed knees,” echoes the earlier description of her with “dejected knees, aspiring hands” (2.3.248) as she told the story of how Mariam wronged her. The fact that the two women drink out of the “same cup” hints at the reciprocity characteristic of revenge. Revenge can be accomplished through storytelling by calling upon supernatural powers to carry out justice, even if the speaker lacks the physical strength and force needed to murder an enemy. The boldness of Doris’s assertion in the passage above is unusual, for the very latency of a curse is part of what makes it so powerful; as Kenneth Gross states, “Curse puts itself beyond the domain

¹⁶⁰ Kenneth Gross, *Shakespeare's Noise* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001)

of immediate proof (even if history of testimony proves its power in the end).”¹⁶¹ But Mariam’s impending execution would seem to offer Doris evidence of her own powers. Just as she previously believed her prayers were responsible for Herod’s death, Doris now considers herself to be the main actor behind Mariam’s downfall. And Mariam herself, while steadfastly maintaining her innocence to the end, acknowledges that Doris’s “curse” (rather than Herod’s tyranny or Salome’s treachery) “is cause that guiltless Mariam dies” (4.8.608).

The “success” Doris experienced with her previous curses hangs over the remainder of the scene, in which she carefully and intentionally proceeds to curse Mariam’s children with maledictions that will “pursue” them to a fate “worse” than their mother’s untimely death (4.8.603). She believes that the divinity found her earlier story convincing, thereby vindicating her, and so she raises the stakes. Highlights include the physical pain of “flaming fire,” the emotional pain of betrayal at the hands of their “nearest friends,” and the “suspicious hate” of their community. All of this is to occur at some unspecified point in the future, when the children are old enough to suffer deeply, and, presumably, to understand that Doris is the author of their misery. Doris concludes, “And Mariam, I do hope this boy of mine / Shall one day come to be the death of thine (4.8.623-4). While Doris’s arguments concerning the efficacy of curses are not particularly convincing, Mariam takes this threat to her lineage seriously and beseeches Doris: “Curse not mine infants, let it thee suffice, / That Heav’n doth punishment to me allow” (4.8.606-7). According to historical accounts (which would have been known to

¹⁶¹ Gross, Shakespeare's Noise 168.

Cary as she wrote this play), Doris's son, Antipater, eventually did kill two of Mariam's sons; Antipater was executed by Herod just before Herod himself died around 4 B.C.¹⁶²

As Cary directs her audience's attention in the next scene to the consequences of Mariam's death (the unstaged execution takes place between the end of Act IV and the beginning of Act V), it is easy to overlook the fact that this exchange between Doris and Mariam is the final time that the title character appears. And while in Act V the Nuntio reports to Herod Mariam's final words on the scaffold, the last time in the play that Mariam speaks for herself her comments are directed at Doris: "I hope the world shall see, / This curse of thine shall be return'd on thee" (4.8.625-26). Mariam's final words acknowledge the power and efficacy of her rival's story even as she seeks to avoid its terrible effects. She recognizes that the two women are battling for control over the same story. As Mariam prepares herself for death, Doris quietly slips out of the scene and survives.

"I will not to his love be reconcil'd": Mariam Tells Her Own Story

Like Doris, Mariam is beset by marital difficulties: her husband has executed her grandfather and brother without just cause. To avenge the murders of her kin, Mariam severs the political and marital ties that bind her to her husband; she "forsw[ears] his

¹⁶² See Michael Grant, Herod the Great (New York: American Heritage Press, 1971) 195-201, 10-12), and Peter Richardson, Herod: King of the Jews and Friend of the Romans (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996) 286-94.

bed” (3.3.134). Mariam will sleep with Herod no longer because he murdered her kin, which reflects her anger at him and her continuing allegiance to her natal family.¹⁶³ However, the private becomes public as stories about this decision begin to circulate about the Judean court. Mariam effectively rewrites both of their futures, limiting the number of Herod’s legitimate offspring (sons to inherit the throne and defend his kingdom, daughters with whom he can form alliances). Mariam undermines Herod’s authority as king as well as husband by publicly revealing that she has vowed to act in a manner that not only breaks her previous (wedding) vows to Herod but is in direct opposition to his interests. Mariam is not physically violent, and her retribution comes at the high cost of her own life, but the stories she tells and the stories told about her damage Herod nonetheless.

One of the central debates in recent criticism of the Tragedy of Mariam concerns the degree to which the titular character contributes to her own demise. In addition to the words and actions of Mariam herself, it is necessary to consider how Mariam’s position as second wife destabilizes her political status at court. Doris’s very existence threatens the little security Mariam has as the wife of a notoriously inconsistent and unstable man. While Doris herself no longer plays a significant role within the court, her story still circulates and indirectly influences the course of events. In this way the story of Doris serves as an exemplar. For instance, in the second scene of the play, Alexandra uses the threat of Herod’s return to Doris as a way of persuading Mariam to “proper” pleasure at

¹⁶³ The text does not explain why Mariam didn’t consider this a problem before her marriage to Herod.

his demise: “ Who knows if he, unconstant wavering Lord, / His love to Doris had renew’d again?” (1.2.123-8). Underlying Alexandra’s comments is the fear that, since political expediency led Herod to divorce Doris for Mariam, there is little to stop him from returning to Doris if that should be to his advantage.¹⁶⁴ Danielle Clarke draws upon this scene to argue that Mariam’s status as a second wife enables her sexual reputation to be questioned.¹⁶⁵ A space has been created where competing stories can be told. And, by corollary, if Mariam’s marriage to Herod is not legitimate, then the children of that union are bastards. Mariam recognizes this fact and defends her sons’ places in the succession, stating:

He not a whit his first-born son esteem’d,
Because as well as his he was not mine:
My children only for his own he deem’d,

¹⁶⁴ In response to Alexandra’s suspicions, Mariam points out that Doris’s “time of love was passed” and that she was already “disgraced” in Herod’s eyes before he embarked on his second marriage to Mariam. This speech acknowledges on the one hand Herod’s use of divorce as an instrument to remarry while on the other hand seeking to secure Mariam’s honor by eliminating Mariam as the active agent in the severing of that marriage. Mariam maintains throughout the play that she did not cause Herod to alter his affection for his first wife.

¹⁶⁵ Danielle Clarke, "'This Domestic Kingdome or Monarchy': Cary's The Tragedy of Mariam and the Resistance to Patriarchal Government," Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England 10 (1998): 185.

These boys that did descend from royal line (1.2.140-43).

For their future Mariam's children depend not merely on the identity of their father, which is not in question, but on the more elusive quality of Herod's "esteem"; Doris and Antipater understand just how little that is worth. As queen, Mariam secures Herod's legitimacy in part by guaranteeing the succession, and the succession is guaranteed by ensuring the paternity of Herod's children; in other words, Mariam's power in the play is dependent upon her chastity. For this reason, both Doris and Salome (separately) seek to undermine Mariam's virtue; physically murdering Mariam is unnecessary if a few carefully placed stories will negate her influence and power, damage her reputation beyond repair, and lead Herod to demand her execution.

Mariam does not mitigate her potential vulnerability to accusations of adultery with the creation of a silent and obedient (and therefore chaste) public image. In the very first line of the play, which is spoken by Mariam – "How oft have I with public voice run on" – Cary draws her audience's attention to the fact that the titular character is not (and has not been) silent. Alexandra Bennett discusses the opening soliloquy of The Tragedy of Mariam in some detail, observing that modern enthusiasm for the phenomenon of a Renaissance woman speaking in public at all can lead scholars to overlook what it is she is speaking about; "Far from 'running on' about the injustice of Herod's tyranny," she states, "the miseries of her marriage, or the repression of women, Mariam explains how she has publicly declaimed in the past against deceit – against the false sentiment she detected in Caesar's expressions of grief at the death of his rival Pompey."¹⁶⁶ Speaking

¹⁶⁶ "Female Performativity in The Tragedy of Mariam," SEL 40.2 (2000) 299.

out against deceit would seem to be a good thing, but in doing so Mariam questions and challenges the stories told by those in power, such as Caesar, even if she has not yet directly criticized Herod. She insists on adding her stories, her perspectives, to public discourse and not simply echoing the party line. Such a woman is potentially quite dangerous, because she challenges authority on multiple levels.

In all, Mariam speaks about eleven percent of the play's lines.¹⁶⁷ At several points in the play Mariam's interlocutors specifically mention her penchant for correcting and amending, directly and indirectly, the stories other tell. Salome, for example, after successfully provoking Mariam to quarrel with her, remarks "Now stirs the tongue that is so quickly mov'd" (1.3.227); later in the play, when Mariam refuses to mask a vengeful grudge against Herod, Sohemus, Salome's husband, fears that her intemperance will cause her to be "by her self undone" and observes that "unbridled speech is Mariam's

¹⁶⁷ Elaine Beilin makes this observation. She goes on to state that "64 percent [of the lines in the play] will be devoted to diverse elements such as Salome's attack on Jewish law and morality; Constabarus's attack on women; Alexandra's realpolitik; Doris's maternal passion and vengefulness; the Sons of Babas' history lesson; and the views of the chorus. Herod, who does not appear until Act 4, does speak a full 25 percent of the play's lines, yet by then his voice can only be heard in the context of previous speakers, and he himself delivers a final account of his reign that ultimately confirms the highly critical opinions of the characters who have previously anatomized it" ("Elizabeth Cary, The Tragedy of Mariam and History," A Companion to Early Modern Women's Writing, ed. Anita Pacheco (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002) 137).

worse disgrace, / And will endanger her without desert” (3.3.183-4). Yet Mariam’s verbosity does not provide sufficient cause for Herod to execute her; the problem is the “unbridled” nature of her storytelling, which does not adequately reinforce Herod’s governance.

Upon learning that the stories of Herod’s death circulating throughout Judea are false, Mariam fatally decides to quit a life of hypocrisy. Rather than dissembling to ensure her political position, rather than feigning joy she does not feel, she expresses to Sohemus her distress regarding Herod’s return (3.3). In the course of this exchange, the audience (along with Sohemus) first learns of the decision Mariam has made:

Mariam: I will not to his love be reconcil’d,

With solemn vows I have forsworn his Bed.

Sohemus: But you must break those vows.

Mariam: I’ll rather break the heart of Mariam (3.3.133-36).

The vow itself, full of dramatic potential, is not staged. Rather, the audience sees these vows in the process of becoming a publicly circulated story. Cary emphasizes their gravity (they are “solemn”) and their permanence (unlike her wedding vows, these will not be broken). In return for this confidence, Sohemus reveals that he had been charged to murder her if Herod dies away from Judea. His subsequent failure to complete his task writes both their death warrants, for Herod believes that Mariam must have engaged in “criminal conversation” for Sohemus to be so swayed.¹⁶⁸ Herod, collapsing distinctions

¹⁶⁸ While a modern reader might not understand why the act of speaking to someone besides her husband could place a wife’s chastity in question, this belief was commonly

between public speech and sexual promiscuity, believes Mariam capable of a crime which she does not actually commit. As Megan Glasscock argues, “Regardless of Mariam’s ‘being’ pure and chaste, on the surface she ‘seems’ to be guilty of adultery, and it is this point of weakness which Herod’s sister, Salome, later exploits in her own unforgiving machinations.”¹⁶⁹ The circulation of unregulated stories about Mariam, whether based in truth or not, undermines Herod’s kingship.

When Salome later causes Herod to question his wife’s chastity, Mariam’s refusal to dissemble, to tell him a story he wants to hear, seems to provide the answers he seeks. Mariam does not greet Herod joyfully after his long absence; she pointedly reminds him that, had he wished to please her, “my brother nor my grandsire had not died” (4.3.30); she wears “dusky habits” that proclaim her allegiance to mourning and vengeance rather

held in early modern society. The constantly open mouth of a talking woman was associated with the always-open genitalia of a whore, and so a woman who spoke publicly was, logically, also an adulterer (Karen Newman, Fashioning Femininity and English Renaissance Drama (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991) 134. See also Suzanne Hull, Chaste, Silent & Obedient: English Books for Women, 1475-1640 (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1981) and Peter Stallybrass, "Patriarchal Territories: The Body Enclosed," Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe, ed. Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan, and Nancy J. Vickers (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1986).

¹⁶⁹ Megan Glasscock, "The Unforgiven in The Tragedy of Mariam," Publications of the Missouri Philological Association 24 (1999): 24-5.

than to him (4.3.4).¹⁷⁰ While such actions are not necessarily indicative of adultery, they certainly reflect a shift of allegiances back to the family of her birth, and Mariam does nothing to reassure a distrustful Herod of her sexual and political fidelity to him. In response to both Salome's slanderous accusations and Mariam's own behavior, Herod directly refers to his wife's "breach of vow" (4.4.184), correctly seeing Mariam's conduct not only as a denial of sexual rights, but as undermining his authority as husband and governor. Mariam does not say much in this scene to defend herself: in response to the almost ninety lines of fury, insult, and despair that rush from Herod, Mariam speaks only four lines. The audience can assume that it wouldn't make a difference if Mariam did explain herself because Herod would not accept her story before his own. He does not even acknowledge that she might have a story independent of him. Mariam's repudiation of sexual relations, according to Danielle Clarke, amounts to "a nullification of the bonds and obligations of marriage,"¹⁷¹ but Herod does not understand that, by murdering his wife's brother and grandfather, he was the first to break the alliance that was presumably

¹⁷⁰ Herod, as a man particularly receptive to discourse that affirms his authority, is irritated by this; Heather Ostman states that he is "susceptible to language that creates an unrealistic image of his power and that reinforces his self-appropriated identity as the rightful monarch" ("Backbiters, Flatterers, and Monarchs: Domestic Politics in The Tragedy of Mariam," Images of Matter: Essays on British Literature of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, ed. Yvonne Bruce (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2002).

¹⁷¹ Clarke, "'This Domestic Kingdome or Monarchy': Cary's The Tragedy of Mariam and the Resistance to Patriarchal Government," 188-89.

formed when the two families became connected through marriage.¹⁷² Herod will, of course, punish Mariam, and Mariam's final appearance on stage occurs as she is on her way to her execution. Yet Herod cannot decide whether she is guilty of treason, of adultery, or simply of talking too much. As Karen Raber states, "according to the doctrine which makes domestic and political patriarchy mirror images of one another" marital infidelity and political treason are "indistinguishable."¹⁷³

Cary's play does not conclude with Mariam's execution. Even after her death, Mariam maintains control over her own story by sending a message through the Nuncio.¹⁷⁴ Herod asks him to relay his wife's last words:

O say, what said she more? Each word she said

¹⁷² Maureen Quilligan observes similarities between this scene in The Tragedy of Mariam and what she calls a "rhetorical tour de force" in Shakespeare's Richard III, when the title character justifies his seduction of Anne of Warwick; "What though I killed her husband and father? / The readiest way to make the wench amends / Is to become her husband and her father" (I.i.153-55)" (Maureen Quilligan, Incest and Agency in Elizabeth's England (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005) 127).

¹⁷³ Karen L. Raber, "Gender and the Political Subject in The Tragedy of Mariam," SEL 35.2 (1995): 338.

¹⁷⁴ Recent scholarship has drawn attention to the relationship between the scaffold and the stage, and more specifically to the theatricality of public executions, in early modern Europe. For more information see Frances Dolan, "'Gentlemen, I Have One Thing More to Say': Women on Scaffolds in England, 1563-1680," Modern Philology 92.2 (1994).

Shall be the food whereon my heart is fed.

Nuntio: 'Tell thou my lord thou saw'st me loose my breath.'

Herod: Oh, that I could that sentence now control.

Nuntio: If guiltily, eternal be my death.

Herod: I hold her chaste even in my inmost soul.

Nuntio: 'By three days hence if wishes could revive,

I know himself would make me oft alive.' (5.1.71-8)

Mariam's message is carefully worded to ensure retelling, and eventually it is corroborated by the report of Salome's treachery.¹⁷⁵ Her death is an event that has already been turned into story; as Herod tells the Nuncio, "But forward in thy tale" (5.1.83). When Herod attempts to challenge the physical fact ("But art thou sure there doth no life remain?"), the messenger at last bluntly announces: "Her body is divided from her head" (5.1.87, 90). Herod descends into hysterics. Mariam, by remaining faithful to the story she wrote for herself, has had her revenge.

¹⁷⁵ Maureen Quilligan observes that Mariam's last words, as reported by the Nuncio, have two meanings; "her death, her loss of breath, is at the same time a means of freeing her speech, such as one might 'loose' an arrow or a hawk to fly freely" (131). This implication is emphasized as Herod (with another pun) wishes he could recall his own sentence of judgment against her, and at the same time laments that he is unable to "control" her speech – that is, to impose a restricted meaning on her last words (Incest and Agency in Elizabeth's England).

“Revenged by slight”: Salome’s Slander

Salome, the most successful revenger in The Tragedy of Mariam, is also the most active in seeking retribution. As sister to the king, she enjoys privileged access to the centers of political and social power without the concurrent obligations of silence, obedience and chastity expected of a wife. Stories of Herod’s death, which spread throughout Judea immediately prior to the first act of the play, cause Salome to fear for her place at court, since the previous royal family could reclaim the throne and utterly dispossess her. A quarrel with Mariam and Alexandra very early in the play demonstrates that her concerns are justified, and she vows revenge. Upon Herod’s return, Salome dedicates herself to this goal, and her machinations lead Herod to sentence Mariam to death. Salome achieves her revenge by slandering Mariam,¹⁷⁶ telling Herod stories that she knows to be untrue, in what Margaret Ferguson describes as a series of “powerfully amoral and apparently successful verbal exploits.”¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁶ Slander is an injury which is inflicted by words or signs as opposed to actions. Several of the terms denoting slander reflect its basis in speech; both defamation and infamy both suggest a diminishment in fame, usually accomplished by means of speech (OED).

Speech must be disseminated to have an impact. That is, the story must be circulated to the detriment of the slandered.

¹⁷⁷ Margaret W. Ferguson, "The Spectre of Resistance: The Tragedy of Mariam," Staging the Renaissance: Reinterpretations of Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama, eds. David Scott Kastan and Peter Stallybrass (New York: Routledge, 1991) 244.

Salome's ability to engage in these "verbal exploits" derives from her status as sister to the king. In most male-female relationships depicted in early modern literature, such as that between father and daughter or husband and wife, the presence of the male character acts as an obstruction to the independence of the female figure. A sister, in contrast, tends to gain both autonomy and legitimacy from her brother. While a brother does act as a male guardian, preventing her from being viewed with the suspicion generally given to unattached women, he does not exert the same degree of control over her as a husband or father. While Salome is a married woman, she enjoys freedom that is remarkable for a woman at the Judean court because other characters in the play are wary of antagonizing the king; the blood that Salome shares with Herod provides her with a source of power and prestige much greater than that contained in the role of either wife or mother. For Salome to remain independent, Herod must continue to exist; this is the reason why Salome feels threatened by the unsubstantiated stories of Herod's death circulating throughout Judea as the play opens.

The benefits of social status and power that Salome enjoys as a result of her relationship with her brother do not come without cost. The first words Salome speaks reveal the gulf that exists between her and the other women at court: "More plotting yet?" (1.3.1). The particular grudge that Salome bears against Mariam is reinforced later in this scene when Mariam insults her:

Though I thy brother's face had never seen,
My birth thy baser birth so far excell'd,
I had to both of you the princess been.
Thou parti-Jew and parti-Edomite,

Thou mongrel: issu'd from rejected race,
 Thy ancestors against the Heavens did fight,
 And thou like them wilt heavenly birth disgrace. (1.3.232-8)

By deeming Salome her inferior – ethnically, dynastically, physically and morally – she is not so subtly insulting Herod as well.¹⁷⁸ The direct comparison made between Mariam's royal descent from King David and Herod and Salome's less distinguished family line hints at the power struggle which lies beneath these remarks, as does repeated use of the familiar "thou" and "thy" instead of the more formal (and more respectful) "you" and "your." Since the elder of her rival's two sons will succeed to the throne upon her brother's death, and since she can no longer manipulate her brother into carrying out her wishes against the will of others at court, Salome fears that her social status will sharply decline following Herod's death.

Of course, as the chorus hints early on, Herod was never put to death, and newly circulating stories of Herod's sudden return allows Salome to begin her revenge against Mariam; remarkably, Salome is "barely touched by remorse as she plots Mariam's death

¹⁷⁸ Dympna Callaghan has argued convincingly that Cary outlines the difference between Salome and Mariam as one of racial bifurcation, Salome representing a derogated racial other in the face of Mariam's "white" purity ("Re-Reading The Tragedy of Mariam," Women, 'Race,' and Writing in the Early Modern Period, ed. Margo and Patricia Parker Hendricks (London: Routledge, 1994) 163-77).

and the murders that will free her to marry the man she currently finds attractive.”¹⁷⁹

Remembering her previous altercations with Mariam and Alexandra, Salome is moved to comment resentfully:

I scorn that she should live my birth t'upbraid,
 To call me base and hungry Edomite.
 With patient show her choler I betrayed
 And watched the time to be revenged by slight.
 Now tongue of mine with scandal load her name,
 Turn hers to fountains, Herod's eyes to flame. (3.2.61)

Salome's inability to forgive or forget such a slight inspires a plot to discredit Mariam in Herod's eyes. In her determination to ruin Mariam, Salome plans to circulate untrue stories about her sister-in-law:

First, jealousy – if that avail not, fear -
 Shall be my minister to work her end:
 A common error moves not Herod's ear,
 Which doth so firmly to his Mariam bend...
 I'll make some swear that she desires to climb,
 And seeks to poison him for his estate. (3.2.85-88, 91-92)

Salome's understanding of the domestic hierarchy works to her advantage; she knows exactly what kind of story to tell to achieve her goals. Since Herod's love for Mariam

¹⁷⁹ Betty Travitsky, "Husband-Murder and Petty Treason in English Renaissance Tragedy," *Renaissance Drama* 21 (1990): 186.

remains strong, Salome vows “[Mariam] shall be charged with so horrid crime, / As Herod’s fear shall turn his love to hate” (3.2.90-91).

Salome devises a plan to tell a story to incriminate Mariam as her husband’s murderer while at the same time freeing herself from her current husband, Constabarus, so that she can marry her most recent lover, Silleus. As Ostman argues, Salome’s manipulation of Herod “depends on her acknowledging the assumptions of patriarchy and then her defiant insistence on the equality between the sexes.”¹⁸⁰ Salome devises for Mariam a motive not of hate or revenge but of a desire “to climb...for his estate” (3.2.91-92). Thus, the threat to Herod’s authority as husband and king is the seed for Salome’s destructive strategy. Salome’s plan is comparable to Iago’s in Shakespeare’s *Othello*, in which Iago recognizes that the best way to destroy Othello is through his wife, specifically by slandering Desdemona, suggesting the existence of an adulterous affair between her and the trusted Cassio.¹⁸¹ Trusting a receptive listener in Herod, as Iago trusts in Othello, Salome, too, will slander Herod’s wife to him, but she knows that more inflammatory than simple jealousy is the insurrection of his wife, her desire to appropriate his authority as head of the household and the state as her own. To achieve her ends, Salome persuades another brother, Pheroras, to tell Herod the untrue story that

¹⁸⁰ Ostman, "Backbiters, Flatterers, and Monarchs: Domestic Politics in The Tragedy of Mariam," 196-97.

¹⁸¹ Previous scholarship that connects Cary’s Tragedy of Mariam with Shakespeare’s Othello includes Boyd M. Berry, "Feminine Construction of Patriarchy, or What's Comic in The Tragedy of Mariam," Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England 7 (1995).

she divorced her husband Constabarus because he had plotted against the king by refusing to fulfill Herod's order to execute the sons of Babas:

But tell the King that Constabarus hid
 The sons of Babas, done to death before:
 And 'tis no more than Constabarus did.
 And tell him more that [we] for Herod's sake,
 Not able to endure [our] brother's foe,
 Did with a bill our separation make,
 Though loath from Constabarus else to go. (3.2.70-76)

In other words, Salome claims to hate her husband because he threatened her brother. By covering her transgression with this lie, Salome reveals in her hypocrisy the legitimacy of Mariam's own reasons for withholding her sexual favors from Herod. If Salome assumes that Herod would forgive her for claiming the freedom to divorce, since she claims to be divorcing a man who threatens her brother, then Mariam's natal family likewise deserves her continued loyalty.

Salome also understands that upon Herod's return (at least initially), she cannot move quite so freely, that (in order to achieve her desire) she must "prevent" her brother's suspicions, and thus she tells Silleus's Man: "Commend my heart to be Silleus' charge, / Tell him my brother's sudden coming now / Will give my foot no room to walk at large, / But I will see him yet ere night, I vow" (3.2.115-18). And, finally, the strategically dissembling Salome instructs her brother Pheroras in how to speak with Herod about the matter of her husband Constabarus, fully aware that certain matters "from [her] mouth would lesser credit find" (3.2.82) – "a detail, invented by Cary, which

underscores the relationships among desire, perception, and meaning, as well as the advantage of working (if need be) by indirection.”¹⁸² Salome does not promote the existing status quo, but knows how to manipulate it to her advantage.

Once the groundwork has been laid by others, Salome incites Herod’s rage over Mariam’s supposed adultery through stories, much as Alexandra earlier fed Mariam’s anger by retelling stories of Herod’s murderous deeds. After listening to him prove over and over Mariam’s beauty, his own love for her, and his reluctance to command an order of death, Salome pointedly asks,

Then you’ll no more remember what hath pass’d,

Sohemus’ love and hers shall be forgot?

‘Tis well in truth: that fault may be her last,

And she may mend, though yet she loves you not. (4.6.469-72)

To paraphrase, Salome asks if Herod will be able to forgive Mariam for the suspicions cast upon her character and actions, as well as forgive her for not showing the unquestioning love which he expects of a wife. Salome’s strategy proves to be effective, for Herod, swiftly manipulated by her words, answers with a decided no, and then immediately orders Constabarus put to death. The possibility that Mariam, “the ‘emblem’ of the king’s household,” has now completely evaded his control and seeks to usurp her

¹⁸² Shari A. Zimmerman, "Disaffection, Dissimulation, and the Uncertain Ground of Silent Dismissal: Juxtaposing John Milton and Elizabeth Cary," *ELH* 66.3 (1999): 574.

husband's power seals her tragic fate as well.¹⁸³ The very problem of defamation is its ability to be believed and thus inflict damage on its victim. But even an unbelievable story circulating throughout Judea will hurt Mariam's reputation; as Gowing states, "the very existence of gossip, even more than its content, can be discrediting."¹⁸⁴

How is the listener to determine whether the accusation is true or false, if the victim is or is not deserving of ill repute? The actions and intentions of the victim must be investigated in trying to resolve this question. But Herod cannot know whether Mariam has been faithful, he can never know the secrets of her heart; no matter what evidence she might offer, it is impossible for her to provide irrefutable "proof" of her inner desires. Mariam is innocent of the charges Salome brings against her, but this is not a fact amenable to staging. What the audience actually sees is Mariam in conversation with her brother-in-law. If she were guilty, if she and Constabarus actually were having an affair, early modern stage conventions dictate that the audience would not be shown much more than their conversation. Interestingly, though, the Chorus does not single Salome out as a villain, and the play shows that her revenge succeeds. As a direct result of Salome's actions, which Salome considers to be a response to previous injustices committed against her, Mariam has died.

¹⁸³ Ostman, "Backbiters, Flatterers, and Monarchs: Domestic Politics in The Tragedy of Mariam," 198.

¹⁸⁴ Laura Gowing, Domestic Dangers: Women, Words and Sex in Early Modern London (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) 121.

To conclude, revenge drives the plot of Cary's The Tragedy of Mariam. Doris, Mariam, and Salome each achieve retribution against their enemies through an intentional and considered storytelling. By drawing upon a repertoire of prayers, curses, vows and slander, these characters shape the perceptions of those around them, thus effectively altering the outcome of the play. Reading The Tragedy of Mariam as a revenge tragedy complicates and enriches critical understanding of both Cary's play and the early modern revenge tradition.

Chapter 5

The Court of Public Opinion in Ford's 'Tis Pity She's a Whore

Two marriages follow in rather quick succession in John Ford's Tis Pity She's a Whore (written 1629-1633), both conspicuously involving the same young bride. In the second scene of the play, the incestuous relationship between a young Italian scholar, Giovanni, and his sister, Annabella, is privately formalized through the exchange of rings and vows of deeply felt mutual love; their relationship is subsequently consummated. Fearing social reprisal, the two remain quiet about their affair. In the third act, Annabella contracts herself in marriage in public and before a priest to Soranzo, a young man of whom her father approves but for whom she has little affection. Literary scholars have focused the majority of their critical attention on the admittedly sensational affair between the two siblings, arguing over the legitimacy of the contract into which they enter; Soranzo's role as wronged husband, which directly leads to his becoming a revenger, has been largely overlooked.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁵ John Ford has been subject to radically different assessments. The polarization of opinion that defines the Ford critical tradition even today had its seeds in the early nineteenth century. While Ford's plays were praised by Charles Lamb for depicting "grandeur of the soul," other editors and commentators from the nineteenth century forward have been unnerved by the warmth which with Ford portrays his main characters' incestuous affair (notably William Hazlitt, who disparaged Ford as

Soranzo is both Annabella's husband and a revenger. These roles are intimately connected. He takes retribution on his wife for her infidelity because he is her husband, and as such her infidelity has the greatest affect upon him; Soranzo's acts of revenge also reinforce his status as Annabella's husband, for her sexual life concerns him only because they are married in the first place. In the early modern period, a wife's private infidelities

“extravagant” and “artificial,” and William Gifford, who referred to Ford's “detestable set of characters.” Critics who support this position unfortunately forget that incest was a popular topic of Elizabethan dramatic representation at least from Thomas Preston on. In his Elizabethan Essays of 1932, T. S. Eliot shifted the focus of debate from Ford's morals to his style, which he found superficial and derivative; while some critics agreed with Eliot, others have praised Ford's skill at depicting psychological conflicts. For recent critical discussions of incest in the Renaissance, see Quilligan, Incest and Agency in Elizabeth's England., Lisa Hopkins, “Incest and Class: 'Tis Pity She's a Whore and the Borgias ” Incest and the Literary Imagination, ed. Elizabeth Barnes (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002)., and Zenon Luis-Martinez, In Words and Deeds: The Spectacle of Incest in English Renaissance Tragedy (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002). Lois Bueler provides an overview of early modern English plays dealing with incest, spanning 1559 to 1658 (“The Structural Uses of Incest in English Renaissance Drama,” Renaissance Drama 15 [1984]). Marc Shell has reviewed much of the same material with particular application to Shakespeare's work (The End of Kinship: Measure for Measure, Incest, and the Idea of Universal Siblinghood [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988]).

compromised her husband's public honor and his reputation within the larger community. Honor and reputation had value, and their loss was not to be lightly borne.

In the absence of strong secular or religious authority in Parma, and in accordance with Parma's revenge ethic, Soranzo seeks justice for his wrongs not through the legal system but in the court of public opinion; to restore his reputation, Soranzo decides to expose and then murder Annabella and Giovanni at a public banquet, fully expecting their admission of incest to justify and exonerate the murders he himself commits. In other words, Soranzo plans to attack his wife and her lover verbally as well as physically, destroying their reputations even after death to recoup his own honor and standing in the community. At the play's conclusion, Soranzo interrupts his own birthday celebration to tell his guests of his wife's infidelity; by emphasizing the ways in which he has been wronged, Soranzo attempts to shape the story for his own ends. Giovanni and Annabella, who are both dead, are unable to amend, challenge or correct Soranzo's version of events.

This moment of narrative inserted into an early modern revenge drama might be surprising if it were not so common. Ford has been described as "the last of the great Elizabethan tragic writers on the one hand and...the somewhat bookish exploiter of these great predecessors' visions on the other"¹⁸⁶ Early modern revengers from Hieronimo to Hamlet to Vindice tell their stories to justify their actions. Indeed, it is precisely such accounts which help to distinguish a revenger from a common criminal. While the revenger obviously seeks to punish the wrongdoer, he or she cannot stop there, for

¹⁸⁶ R.J. Kaufmann, "Ford's Tragic Perspective," Texas Studies in Literature and Language 1 (1960): 522.

punishment is not enough; the wrongdoer must understand that he or she is paying the penalty for a previous misdeed. And, in order to redeem the reputation of a wronged friend or family member and restore the family honor, the revenger must explain his or her actions publicly. The lurid, startling murders with which 'Tis Pity She's a Whore concludes have overshadowed the tale Soranzo tells to the guests at his birthday banquet of how he has been wronged by Annabella and Giovanni; but this story is a central part of Soranzo's revenge. Like Kyd's *Hieronimo*, Soranzo organizes a communal gathering (in this case a birthday party) that he then uses as a forum in which to explain and justify his violent actions.

The beginning of the play quickly and unequivocally establishes the incestuous nature of the relationship between Giovanni and Annabella, but, surrounded by a corrupt and immoral society in Parma, the couple generates a degree of sympathy from the audience which might otherwise elude them. Drawing upon the familiar family drama of Renaissance tragedy, 'Tis Pity She's a Whore extends the complex sister-brother relations found in plays including Shakespeare's Measure for Measure, The Duchess of Malfi (published in 1623 with a commendatory verse by Ford), James Shirley's The Traitor, and Ford's own The Broken Heart. Ford's siblings are alike in age, temperament, and upbringing, and they share a deeply felt mutual affection and attraction. No other character in the world of the play would be a better match for either of them. Soranzo is first introduced as one of several unsuitable suitors seeking Annabella's hand in marriage. Two points are in Soranzo's favor: first, he receives the blessing of Annabella's

father, Florio, to proceed with the match; and, second, he is not related by blood to his bride.¹⁸⁷

During the course of the play, Annabella and Giovanni mark their devotion to each other with vows (I.ii.249-59), a betrothal ring (II.vi.36-42), and a child. In strictly theological terms, only the first of these is necessary to make this a marriage. A marriage in early modern England could be created simply by the exchange of words of consent: the sacramental marital bond was made, indissolubly, by the speaking of the words,

¹⁸⁷ Kathryn Jacobs observes that “virtually every time a Renaissance dramatist depicts a marriage contract onstage, someone – be it husband, wife, or an influential third party – makes an issue of the legality of the contract” (Marriage Contracts from Chaucer to the Renaissance Stage [Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001]: 116). Sometimes, as in The Duchess of Malfi (Webster), The Miseries of Enforced Marriage (Wilkins), and The Witch (Middleton), the legality of the marriage is openly challenged, and the couples themselves assert the validity of a marriage not publicly recognized. Sometimes, as in the supposed precontract of Witgood with the ‘widow’ of A Trick to Catch the Old One (Middleton) or in the Gallipot subplot of The Roaring Girl (Dekker and Middleton), the contract is openly fraudulent. Other times the contract itself is not in doubt, but the nature of the contract, or the degree to which the parties have been bound, is. This is the case in The Maid’s Tragedy, All’s Well That Ends Well, Measure For Measure, The Witch of Edmonton, The Atheist’s Tragedy, The Widow, The Merry Devil of Edmonton, The Wild Goose Chase, and many more. Often, in fact, the uncertainty is essential to the plot.

whether or not there were witnesses present.¹⁸⁸ As early as 1143, in the case of Richard de Anesty, it had been ruled that “a marriage solemnly celebrated in church, a marriage of which a child has been born, was...null in favor of an earlier marriage constituted by a mere exchange of consenting words.”¹⁸⁹ Such “consenting words” are powerful; Annabella and Giovanni’s vows, which assert their individual preferences, shape their futures by circumscribing their choices. These words shape their identities and affect how they perceive themselves as individuals, each other, and society at large. Constancy and predictability can be found within these limits.

Marriage, as a sacrament in the Catholic Church, was not to be set aside in the early modern period – that is, there was to be no divorce – except under the most extreme circumstances. An unsatisfactory marriage could at best be dissolved *a vinculo*, declared null and void, and such declaration could be based upon impediments or irregularities in

¹⁸⁸ As Shannon McSheffrey argues, proving such a marriage had taken place was extremely difficult, for the church courts were unable to enforce a contract of marriage without two admissible witnesses. “The distinction between the contract made privately between the two parties and a properly witnessed one was well recognized...The former, enforceable only in the internal forum of the conscience, was called a ‘marriage before God,’ emphasizing both its sacramental and unprovable nature” (Marriage, Sex, and Civic Culture in Late Medieval London [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006]: 25).

¹⁸⁹ Frederick and William Maitland Pollock, A History of the English Law before the Time of Edward I, 2 ed., vol. 2 (London: Cambridge University Press, 1968) 367.

the manner in which the marriage was originally contracted. Incest was one such impediment.¹⁹⁰ Two types of incest were generally recognized in early modern Europe: affinity (sexual relations or intermarriage with non-blood relatives with whom there was a problem because of inheritance) and consanguinity (shared blood).¹⁹¹ Ford's concern in 'Tis Pity She's a Whore is with the latter. The single (but not insignificant) obstacle to Annabella and Giovanni's marriage is the familial bond that they already share as brother and sister.

Consanguinity was a particularly far-reaching impediment to marriage, or at least it could be, for the Catholic church was not consistent in calculating or defining it; as Bruce Boehrer asserts, "Depending on whether one reckoned kinship using the Roman or the German mode of calculation, one could discover forbidden kinship alliances as much as seven generations away from oneself in any direction (through brothers, sisters, brothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, parents, grandparents, and so on)."¹⁹² But Ford's play is about incest between siblings, not fifth cousins. And not only is their blood relationship

¹⁹⁰ Bruce Thomas Boehrer, Monarchy and Incest in Renaissance England: Literature, Culture, Kinship and Kingship (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992) 19. See also Diana O'Hara, Courtship and Constraint: Rethinking the Making of Marriage in Tudor England (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).

¹⁹¹ Susan J. Wiseman, "'Tis Pity She's a Whore: Representing the Incestuous Body," Revenge Tragedy, ed. Stevie Simkin (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001) 212.

¹⁹² Boehrer, Monarchy and Incest in Renaissance England: Literature, Culture, Kinship and Kingship 20.

close, but it is also fully known to both parties; these siblings were not separated at birth, or completely unaware of each other, or believed dead, as in some other early modern plays that treat the theme of incest. Annabella and Giovanni act with full knowledge of their relationship to each other:

A: You are my brother Giovanni.

G: You My sister Annabella; I know this. (I.ii.228-29) ¹⁹³

The incest is as intentional and deliberate as Ford can make it. The characters consciously choose each other.

A crucial aspect of sexual misbehavior such as adultery or incest was its publicity or notoriety; indeed, it was one's reputation rather than one's actions that was important in a society that placed huge importance on rumor and fame. And, as one critic has noted, this knowledge comprised "both what other people knew about a person and what they thought they knew."¹⁹⁴ While fornication was not viewed lightly by the authorities in early modern Europe, greater confusion and anxiety surrounded incest because this act is undiscoverable from external evidence. Knowledge of this particular crime is dependant upon narrative; a single woman's pregnant body might reveal that she committed fornication (although it does not disclose with whom), but someone must expose the familial relationship between those involved if the guilty parties are to incur additional punishment for incest. It was simply impossible to distinguish from external evidence

¹⁹³ John Ford, *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, Renaissance Drama, ed. Arthur F. Kinney (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999).

¹⁹⁴ McSheffrey, *Marriage, Sex, and Civic Culture in Late Medieval London* 175.

whether a child born out of wedlock was merely illegitimate or the product of incest. For this reason, as Richard Adair points out, in cases of pregnancy resulting from an incestuous relationship it was fairly common practice in early modern Europe to marry the woman off to an eligible man as quickly as possible.¹⁹⁵ In the world of Ford's play, Soranzo is that eligible man.

The marriage of Annabella to Soranzo is hastily arranged by Giovanni's tutor, Friar Bonaventura, in an effort to separate the siblings once he learns of the "unnatural" affection between Giovanni and Annabella. The Friar speaks clearly against incest to Giovanni and Annabella in each of the seven scenes in which he appears: "[I]n thy willful flames / Already see thy ruin" (I.i.66-67); "Thou hast told a tale, whose every word Threatens eternal slaughter to the soul" (II.v.1-2). Counseling prayer and spiritual repentance, Friar Bonaventura forcefully tells Giovanni at the conclusion of the first scene of the play:

Hie thee to thy father's house, there lock thee fast
 Alone within thy chamber, then fall down
 On both thy knees, and grovel on the ground:
 Cry to the heart, wash every word thou utter'st

¹⁹⁵ Richard Adair discusses several bridal pregnancy cases involving a woman alleged to be pregnant by an uncle or a brother-in-law although married to another man. Sometimes, the husband-to-be was bribed into masking the match (Courtship, Illegitimacy, and Marriage in Early Modern England [Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996]: 161).

In tears (and if't be possible) of blood:
 Beg Heaven to cleanse the leprosy of lust
 That rots thy soul..." (I.i.69-75).

In his prayers Giovanni is to tell the story of his sins (specifically, incest) for the purpose of achieving divine forgiveness and redemption. But the Friar also advises absolute secrecy, secrecy which comes at the expense of those, such as Soranzo, who arguably have a right to information that directly concerns them. The situation becomes increasingly urgent when Annabella becomes pregnant, for the siblings' affair can not remain hidden from those around her for much longer. The Friar tells her,

...despair not; Heaven is merciful,
 And offers grace even now; 'tis thus agreed,
 First, for your honor's safety that you marry
 The Lord Soranzo, next, to save your soul,
 Leave off this life, and henceforth live to him. (III.vi.34-38)

The Friar's priorities are disturbing, for he speaks of saving Annabella's reputation before saving her soul. The deceitful marriage he proposes is neither an effective nor a moral solution to the problem at hand. Not once does the Friar consider that the marriage he advocates will be unjust to Soranzo and fatally compromise the supposed sanctity of marriage, while confusing genealogy in the process.¹⁹⁶ Soranzo is simply the least

¹⁹⁶Alison Findlay points out that a child born out of adultery was more "disturbing" to early modern English society than an acknowledged bastard because a "mother could corrupt property transactions covertly." Furthermore, "failure to detect the spurious

objectionable of Annabella's choices for a husband; the two other potential suitors who appear during the course of the play, Grimaldi and Bergetto, are, respectively, a murderer under the protection of the Church and a kind, dim-witted youth in love with another woman.¹⁹⁷ "Marriage for Annabella to Soranzo may be the only practicable solution to a sorry situation," Cyrus Hoy admits, "but our estimate of the Friar is not heightened by his share in bringing it about."¹⁹⁸ All that matters to the Friar is that it will construct another legal, social, and moral barrier between the sinning lovers.

The Friar does not quickly arrange a marriage for Giovanni as he did for Annabella, but he suggests instead that Giovanni find another young woman upon whom to bestow his affections:

Look through the world,
 And thou shalt see a thousand faces shine
 More glorious than this idol thou adorest.
 Leave her, and take thy choice; 'tis much less sin. (I.i.59-62)

bastard had serious consequences for the patriarchal family; woman's infidelity could transfer estate and title to the son of another family altogether" (Illegitimate Power: Bastards in Renaissance Drama [Manchester: Manchester UP, 1994]: 15-16).

¹⁹⁷ Alan Sinfield, Literature in Protestant England, 1560-1660 (London: Croom Helm, 1983) 90-1.

¹⁹⁸ Cyrus Hoy, "'Ignorance in Knowledge': Marlowe's Faustus and Ford's Giovanni," Modern Philology 57.3 (1960): 153-54.

Several critics have acquitted Bonaventura of charges of ineptitude and immorality on the grounds of the “pragmatism” of this solution.¹⁹⁹ The Friar knows he is pushing Annabella toward a loveless marriage, but he intends thereby to save the young lovers from the far worse “ruin” that incest guarantees (I.i.67). The reasons incest is considered particularly sinful are explained by Montaigne in Of Moderation:

¹⁹⁹ Both Rowland Wymer and Derek Roper use this word (Webster and Ford [New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995]: 124), (John Ford, 'Tis Pity She's a Whore, ed. Derek Roper [Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992] 12). Friar Bonaventura has been judged diversely, and often harshly. Irving Ribner thinks his “religion only offers moral equivocation whose shallowness is immediately apparent” (Jacobean Tragedy: The Quest for Moral Order [New York: Barnes and Noble, 1962] 168-69). For Robert Ornstein, “the Friar represents not traditional morality as such but a peculiarly legalistic, authoritarian religious ethic” and his advice succeeds only “in dragging Giovanni and Annabella into spiritual and moral degradation” (The Moral Vision of Jacobean Tragedy [Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1960]: 208-09). A. P. Hogan speaks of “The Friar’s crabbed and frozen orthodoxy” (“'Tis Pity She's a Whore: The Overall Design,” Studies in English Literature 17.2 (1977): 305). Ronald Huebert sees him as a “pedantic theorist” and an exponent of “scholarly morality” (John Ford: Baroque English Dramatist [Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1977]: 125). Yet one cannot help noticing that it is Annabella’s marriage and Soranzo’s discovery of her pregnancy that lead to her regeneration; for Mark Stavig the Friar is “the symbol of true religion” (John Ford and the Traditional Moral Order [Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968]: 120).

The love we beare to women is very lawful; yet doth Divinitie bridle and restraine the same. I remember to have read in Saint Thomas, in a place where he condemne marriages of kinsfolkes in forbidden degrees, this one reason amongst others; that the love a man beareth to such a woman may be immoderate; for, if the wedlocke, or husband-like affection be sound and perfect, as it ought to be, and also surcharged with that a man oweth to alliance and kindred; there is no doubt but that surcease may easily transport a husband beyond the bounds of reason.²⁰⁰

Nonetheless, it seems remarkable that the Friar trades so easily in sin, substituting one form of illicit sexuality for another; he succeeds “only in dragging Giovanni and Annabella into deeper spiritual and moral degradation.”²⁰¹

As others, such as Soranzo and the Friar, become tangled up in the siblings’ affair, what began as a private concern has public ramifications. Annabella and Giovanni’s entrance into secret and sexual relations does not undermine the argument that family and community constraints nevertheless operated. As Diana O’Hara states, “It is clear that individuals made secret promises to one another, but with betrothal and publication through formal representative groups, such actions moved immediately from

²⁰⁰ Michel de Montaigne, "Of Moderation," trans. John Florio, The Essays of Michel De Montaigne (Menston: Scolar Press, 1969).

²⁰¹ Ornstein, The Moral Vision of Jacobean Tragedy 209.

within the interpersonal to the institutional sphere.”²⁰² Annabella and Giovanni’s kinship as brother and sister prohibits them from creating a story of their relationship as husband and wife that would be accepted by the larger community; they can never move beyond secret promises and vows to a formal, public statement of their commitment to one another in marriage. This inability to secularize and popularize the siblings’ relationship opens a space for Annabella’s marriage to Soranzo; as this second relationship is formalized, it moves outward in customary stages from interpersonal to the small groupings, and then to the society at large, where there is then widespread acceptance at the community level.

Annabella agrees to marry Soranzo only at the urging of the Friar and her father, Florio (who at this point is unaware of his children’s relationship).²⁰³ There is no indication that she loves him or feels affection for him. And Annabella is not the only one with a sexual past. The wedding ceremony is marred by the appearance of Hippolita,

²⁰² O’Hara, Courtship and Constraint: Rethinking the Making of Marriage in Tudor England 37-38.

²⁰³ Florio may well believe that Annabella will be happy with Soranzo, but this is not necessarily his only reason for encouraging the match. Verna Foster suggests that “there is some worldly vanity to be flattered in the acquisition of a noble son-in-law, despite his known adultery. Therefore, anxious for his daughter’s health, and contrary to his earlier intentions, he assumes the right to marry her to his own liking....” (“Tis Pity She's a Whore as City Tragedy,” John Ford: Critical Revisions, ed. Michael Neill [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988]: 196).

Soranzo's former mistress. Soranzo, "distracted" by "lust" (II.ii.28), has seduced Hippolita into adultery, and he helped persuade her husband Richardetto to travel to Leghorn in the hope that he would not survive the dangerous journey. Now that Hippolita believes herself to be widowed (Richardetto returns to Parma in secret, disguised as a physician, during the course of the play), she publicly demands the fulfillment of Soranzo's vow to marry her. Since it suits both his prudence and his inclination to make a good marriage with Annabella, Soranzo refuses on the grounds that their liaison was sinful, "a piece of priggish sophistry which deceives no one but himself."²⁰⁴ As Hippolita's love for Soranzo turns into hatred, she spews recriminations and curses on her former lover and his bride. These recriminations and curses are indeed "ominous," as noted by the Friar; they hint at Annabella's secret pregnancy:

May'st thou live
 To father bastards, may her womb bring forth
 Monsters, and die together in your sins
 Hated, scorned and unpitied! (II.97-100)

Hippolita then dies, literally choking on her own venom after accidentally drinking poison intended for Soranzo. While Hippolita originally possesses the audience's sympathy because Soranzo has treated her "skurvily" (II.ii.103), she loses her appeal

²⁰⁴ Dorothy M. Farr, John Ford and the Caroline Theater (New York: Harper & Row, 1979) 41.

when she chooses to vindicate her honor through violence and crime.²⁰⁵ A.P. Hogan, discussing Hippolita's attempt to revenge herself on Soranzo, points out that "Love dominated by...possessive jealousy need not be incestuous to be lust."²⁰⁶ This comment is also applicable to Soranzo's relationship to Annabella.

Even before Soranzo's marriage to Annabella, the tale of his adulterous affair with Hippolita is widely known in Parma. Annabella's "tut'ress," Putana, jokes that Soranzo's reputation as a lover makes him a good catch for her young charge (I.ii.82-94), and Hippolita herself admits to knowing that their relationship is not a secret:

'Tis now no time to reckon up the talk
 What Parma long hath rumored of us both.
 Let rash report run on; the breath that vents it
 Will, like a bubble, break itself at last. (IV.i.42-5)

Hippolita's revelation about her former lover is not shocking enough to cause his new wife or her family to contest the hours-old marriage. Such tales of marital infidelity characterize the rumor and gossip that circulate throughout the world of the play; the social environment of Parma has been described as "a slippery text of rumor and

²⁰⁵ Hippolita is only one of Soranzo's enemies. Grimaldi and Richardetto, each bearing his own grievance, also inform the audience of the nature of their intended revenges on Soranzo. (See III.v and II.iii.)

²⁰⁶ Hogan, "'Tis Pity She's a Whore: The Overall Design," 311.

innuendo, suspicion and false accusation.”²⁰⁷ The characters worry repeatedly about their reputations and their inability to prevent rumor (true or false) from proliferating, and about what can and cannot be reliably known about them. Later, when Annabella’s marriage to Soranzo sours, “much talk” quickly spreads the word (IV.ii.13). As Brian Opie remarks, “Society...is perceived as profoundly dangerous for the individual...The power invested in language, whether for creation (naming) or destruction (scandal) of an individual is enormous.”²⁰⁸ The stories told about an individual not only reflect reality, they help to shape it.

In contrast to Friar Bonaventura, Annabella’s “tut’ress” and confidante, Putana, actively supports Annabella in her affair with Giovanni, expressing amused tolerance, even outright encouragement of her charge’s incestuous wishes. In her opinion, “’twere nothing” (II.i.53). The relationship of Annabella and Putana has been compared to that of Juliet and her Nurse in Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet, and Desdemona and Emilia in Othello; Raymond Powell observes a similar contrasting pattern in all three of these pairs: “between, on the one hand, a high-minded, self-authenticating romantic idealism that defies both worldly prudence and the constraints of family and social position, and, on the other hand, the voice of a coarser-grained, pragmatic realism in varying degrees

²⁰⁷ Susannah B. Mintz, "The Power of 'Parity' in Ford's 'Tis Pity She's a Whore," Journal of English and German Philology 102 (2003): 289.

²⁰⁸ Brian Opie, "'Being All One': Ford's Analysis of Love and Friendship in Love's Sacrifice and the Ladies Triall," John Ford: Critical Revisions, ed. Michael Neill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 254.

sympathetic, skeptical, and compromised.”²⁰⁹ Yet even Putana stresses the need to maintain appearances and keep the matter from “the speech of the people” for the sake of their reputations. Putana’s discourse is utterly sexual – as her name blatantly suggests. She strongly vindicates the pleasures of the flesh: “Commend a man for his qualities, but take a husband as he is a plain-sufficient, naked man: such a one is for your bed.” As Denis Gauer observes, “Such a statement resolutely does away with all the social, religious, affective, economical, and even biological codes commanding matrimony.”²¹⁰

Yet even before Putana comes to understand that Giovanni is the true object of Annabella’s affections, her interactions with Annabella’s suitors are problematic.²¹¹ At first she favors Soranzo, but later promises to praise Bergetto. Her motivation, like Florio’s, is financial: to Bergetto’s uncle she attests, “Truly I do commend him to her every night before her first sleep, because I would have her dream of him, and she

²⁰⁹ Raymond Powell, "The Adaptation of a Shakespearean Genre: Othello and Ford's Tis Pity She's a Whore," Renaissance Quarterly 48.3 (1995): 583.

²¹⁰ Denis Gauer, "Heart and Blood: Nature and Culture in Tis Pity She's a Whore," Cahiers Elisabethains 31 (1987): 48-9.

²¹¹ Larry Champion compares Putana, who sells her support for the men who seek Annabella’s hand in marriage, to the character Nell Quickly in Shakespeare’s The Merry Wives of Windsor. Ultimately, Champion argues, such behavior leads to Putana’s downfall; “It is the similar assurance of ‘everlasting love and preferment’ (i.203) which prompts her to reveal in IV.iii, that Annabella is pregnant by Giovanni” (“Ford's Tis Pity She's a Whore and the Jacobean Tragic Perspective ” PMLA 90.1 (1975): 84).

hearkens to him most religiously” (II.vi.15-17), and then receives some money. For this gratuity Putana promises, “now I have a feeling of your mind, let me alone to work” (III.vi.22-23). She may also have a commission from Soranzo; she mentions that he is “liberal, that I know” (I.ii.95) while extolling him to such an extreme that Annabella remarks, “Sure the woman took her morning’s draught too soon” (I.ii.102-04). Putana’s seemingly innocuous position as a servant and the influence she holds over others in her household, particularly Annabella, enables her to trade in the reputations of others. As long as public perception of events can be controlled, reality matters little – but then Annabella becomes pregnant, and reality becomes visibly manifest.

In Parma, secrets do not remain hidden for very long, and an undisclosed pregnancy necessarily has a finite shelf life. Soranzo inevitably learns of Annabella’s infidelity and pregnancy and, true to character, his response is a mixture of rage and self-interest. Calling her a “famous whore” and a “rare, notable harlot” (IV.iii.1, 4), he emphasizes the public nature of her indiscretion and its effect on him, expressing no concern for her physical, psychological or spiritual well-being. Soranzo quickly realizes that he has been duped into marriage, and asks: “Was there no man in Parma to be bawd / To your loose cunning whoredom else but I?” and “[C]ould none but I / Be picked out to be cloak to your close tricks, / Your belly sports?” (IV.ii.6-7, 10-12). Soranzo berates his wife for her “hot itch and pleurisy of lust” (IV.iii.8), he vows to drag her “lust-be-lepered body through the dust” (IV.iii.61); he calls her “a damned whore” who “deserves no pity”

(IV.iii.78-79). The cruelty of the language gives the scene its power and intensity.²¹² At first Annabella listens to Soranzo's ravings, but when Soranzo demands to know the name of the man who has cuckolded him, Annabella repeatedly refuses to reveal her lover's identity and laughs at her husband's righteous conjugal wrath. She remains in control of her, and her child's, story. This ill-judged indifference to his pain drives Soranzo into violent fantasies of power and revenge, and he physically attacks her (he threatens to "pull thy hair, and thus I'll drag / Thy...body"; to "rip up thy heart / And find" her lover's name there; to "Tear the prodigious lecher joint by joint" with his teeth; to "hew thy flesh to shreds" (IV.iii.53-56, 59). In response, Annabella sings. A.P. Hogan explains that what sounds like rant is really part of the logic governing 'Tis Pity She's a Whore; "Soranzo, like Giovanni...repudiates love for honor and, to gratify his outraged ego, visualizes himself as omnipotent Death."²¹³ While Soranzo might enjoy the illusion of his omnipotence, he is not omniscient, for he does not have access to the one piece of information he seeks: the identity of the man who has cuckolded him.

A young woman in Annabella's position was often pressured to name the father of her child. To provide some maintenance for an illegitimate baby, and to keep the church from the expense of having to support the child, ecclesiastical authorities of the early modern period insisted that the mother of the illegitimate child name its father; a

²¹² Carol C. Rosen, "The Language of Cruelty in Ford's 'Tis Pity She's a Whore," Drama in the Renaissance, ed. Clifford Davidson, C.J. Gianakaris, and John H. Stroupe (New York: AMS Press, 1986) 317.

²¹³ Hogan, "'Tis Pity She's a Whore: The Overall Design," 312.

woman could be pressured in childbed by the midwife to name the father, and similar claims of paternity were made a condition of reconciliation and admission of the child to baptism.²¹⁴ Once both parents were named, performing ecclesiastical penance in a white sheet was the most likely consequence of their actions.²¹⁵ Ford's Friar could not choose to follow this path because Annabella and Giovanni are siblings, and such a blood relationship cannot be changed. For married women, such as Annabella, many cases were presumably never discovered, and, of those that were, the churchwardens often settled things quietly in the interests of "reconciliation and harmony"; they believed that "[t]o drag an affair out into the open might well make it worse, lead to complete marital breakdown, and poison the life of the community."²¹⁶ Perhaps the Friar expected Soranzo

²¹⁴ Peters, Women in Early Modern Britain, 1450-1640 84.

²¹⁵ Martin Ingram, Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England, 1570-1640 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) 338-40. Information about sexual conventions is hard to find. However, the law does offer certain insights into the possible fate of sexual offenders and particularly the female body. As Wiseman states, "If a woman had committed fornication, she might be declared a common whore and punished with banishment by the church authorities. She might be put on good behavior for a year, fined, whipped, put in the stocks and required to confess, wearing a white sheet in front of the church. Such punishments appear to reflect the economic, familial, physical, social and symbolic values associated with cases of women contravening the imperative to be chaste" ("'Tis Pity She's a Whore: Representing the Incestuous Body," 213).

²¹⁶ Adair, Courtship, Illegitimacy, and Marriage in Early Modern England 158.

to accept his cuckoldry quietly and settle into a stable marriage with his new wife, and for Annabella to end her incestuous relationship with Giovanni.

In early modern times, becoming the father of a legitimate child enhanced a man's status with his kin and his neighbors; it demonstrated that he was a complete man, blessed by God. A childless marriage, on the other hand, reflected ill upon a man so that he lived "in great discontent, esteeming himself to be in hatred with God and nature"; lacking the comfort of children, "for which he chiefly married," he was shamed before all other men, "seeming himself to be lesse then a man."²¹⁷ Soranzo could have acted as if Annabella's child was legitimate, and his public standing in the community would have risen. And even if Soranzo divorced his wife and disowned the child, Annabella could have claimed (albeit dishonestly) that someone other than Giovanni had fathered her baby, because "[i]n general, the woman's identification was taken as decisive by the authorities, and, even when they were in some doubt as to its validity, the desirability of preventing the burden of maintenance falling on the parish caused them to cast such scruples aside."²¹⁸ If Annabella and Giovanni had united behind the same story, they could have saved each other.

Yet this is not what happens in the world of the play. Just as Annabella tells Soranzo that she would rather die than reveal the name of her lover, Soranzo's servant, Vasques, enters and encourages his master to refrain from killing his wife; "'Twere most

²¹⁷ Roland du Jardin, A Discourse of the Married and Single Life (London: F. Kingston, 1621) 25-6.

²¹⁸ Peters, Women in Early Modern Britain, 1450-1640 86.

unmanlike” (IV.iii.80). At this point, tragedy could be averted if Soranzo really believed what “reason tells me”: to “remit / All former faults and take thee [Annabella] to my bosom” (IV.iii.147, 148-49). But Soranzo is directed by egoism and self-interest, not by charity, and so he listens when Vasques instructs him to feign reconciliation with Annabella in order to discover the name of her lover, thereby to take revenge more effectively; “to know what ferret it was that haunted your cony-berry - there’s the cunning” (IV.iii.162-4). Later, as part of his plan to “tutor him better in his points of vengeance,” he inflames Soranzo’s imagination against his wife in a manner similar to Iago’s machinations against Othello (IV.iii.240)²¹⁹:

Vasquez: Am I to be believed now? First, marry a strumpet that cast herself away upon you but to laugh at your horns? To feast on your disgrace, riot in your vexations, cuckold you in your bride-bed, waste your estate upon panders and bawds?

Soranzo: No more, I say no more!

Vasquez: A cuckold is a goodly tame beast, my lord.

Soranzo: I am resolved; not another word. (V.ii.1-8)

Like Iago, Vasques seems to derive a malicious pleasure from goading his master further than his purposes strictly require, but his central the point remains: like all men in patriarchal societies who find their honor “intimately intertwined with that of the women

²¹⁹ For further discussion of Vasques as a “deft, plausible and successful manipulator,” like Shakespeare’s Iago in *Othello*, see Powell, “The Adaptation of a Shakespearean Genre: Othello and Ford’s *’Tis Pity She’s a Whore*,” 585.

they [claim] to control,”²²⁰ Soranzo can expect to lose face publicly as a result of Annabella’s affair. Regaining his public standing matters more to him than any affection he may (or may not) feel for his wife, and so Soranzo plans retribution.

Vasques goes to another servant, Putana, to acquire the information he needs for his master; he believes that, as Annabella’s “tutress” and confidante, she is likely to be aware of such intimate details of her mistress’s life. And he is right. Putana, who considers nothing sinful unless it is made public, has actively facilitated meetings of the lovers. While Putana does not want the story of Annabella’s affair to circulate and become common knowledge, for that would not be in her charge’s interest, she readily assumes that Vasques’ attitude towards illicit sex is as casual as her own since he is a fellow servant. And Vasques pretends to be sympathetic to Annabella’s plight, asking “say she be with child, is that such a matter for a young woman of her years to be blamed for?” (IV.iii.183-4). So Putana reveals to Vasques the name of Annabella’s lover, who in turn tells Soranzo that his rival is Giovanni; in return for this information, banditti employed by Vasques bind up the old woman, gag her and put out her eyes. As typified by Vasques, the secular response to incest seems characterized less by moral revulsion than prurient vindictiveness: “Why, this is excellent and above expectation. Her own brother? Oh, horrible!” (IV.iii.265-6). Together Soranzo and Vasques concoct a fantasy of public vindication whereby Giovanni, having enjoyed free access to Annabella so that “he may post to hell in the very act of his damnation” (V.v.36), will be exposed and

²²⁰ Guido Ruggiero, Binding Passions: Tales of Magic, Marriage and Power at the End of the Renaissance (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) 59.

murdered in front of his own father and all the dignitaries of Parma. Soranzo, like Hippolita before him, craves an audience for his story to affirm that he has been wronged and to restore him to his previous place in the social hierarchy.

The prevalence of gossip – which is itself a form of casual storytelling - throughout the city of Parma means that it is only a matter of time before Soranzo can expect to be identified publicly as a cuckold, and thus humiliated. But, before this happens, if Soranzo can successfully convince the men of importance in Parma that his wife’s lover was a man with no respect for other men’s property (such as a wife), and that such a man poses a threat not only to one household but to the wider social order, then his place in the community might be restored. Annabella, too, must be brought to justice, and, most damning of all, she must be labeled a whore for sleeping with a man not her husband. In addition to the private betrayal of spouse and family, a whore was also a public threat, a dangerous woman who was capable of offending many; for example, Shakespeare’s character Othello resolves as he enters Desdemona’s chamber “Yet she must die, else she’ll betray more men” (V.ii.6).²²¹ In the male imagination, once a woman had initially transgressed she would repeat the sin over and over again,

For if a woman

Fly from one point, from him she makes a husband,

She spreads and mounts then like arithmetic,

One, ten, a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand,

²²¹ Shakespeare, The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice.

Proves in time sutler to an army royal.²²²

While a husband was considered to be under a certain obligation to keep his wife sexually satisfied, and a wife who strayed called his virility into question, a whore by definition could not be sated by any man. Therefore, a man with a whore for a wife could not be blamed for her transgressions.²²³ His masculinity, unlike that of a willing cuckold, or wittol, was not permanently compromised.

A noticeable discrepancy exists between the shame of the cuckold as victim, and the mere disapproval directed at the perpetrator. The source of the cuckold's shame is patriarchal marriage, which determines "that men have property in woman, and that the value of this property is immeasurably diminished if the woman at any time has sexual relations with anyone other than her husband."²²⁴ The nature of this property is hard to define, but it is closely allied to the status conferred by honor – the honor of having a chaste wife. A wife, like any other property, can be 'stolen' from her husband by another man if he sleeps with her. But the loss of a wife's chastity is more than a material loss to a husband. As Coppelia Kahn states, "[the cuckold's] dishonor and the scorn he endures

²²² Thomas Middleton, and William Rowley, "The Changeling," Renaissance Drama: An Anthology of Plays and Entertainments, ed. Arthur F. Kinney (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999). See II.ii.60-64.

²²³ For further information, see Kahn, Man's Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare.

²²⁴ Keith Thomas, "The Double Standard," Journal of the History of Ideas 20 (1959). See especially pages 203-204.

are for him a loss of status in the community and particularly among his male peers that matters, in most cases, as much as the loss of his trust and her affection.”²²⁵

One important distinction between male and female honor was that men, unlike women, had the possibility to restore their honor fully after it had been lost. A woman’s sexual reputation was arguably the sole component of her honor, so that as Ruth Kelso has recognized in her study of Renaissance texts for women, “let a woman have her chastity, she has all. Let her lack chastity and she has nothing.”²²⁶ For men, however, whose honor rested more clearly upon a wider basis of concerns than simply sexual reputation, honor was recoverable. “Ages and sexes have their distinct laws,” Fulke Greville wrote in the 1630s, “our reputations not easily shaken, and many ways repaired; theirs [women’s], like glass, by and by broken and impossible to be healed.”²²⁷ Furthermore, husbands were expected to respond and take action if their wives shamed them by committing adultery; it was seen as “primarily a matter of household discipline,” whereas women were advised to be passive and patient even if their partners were

²²⁵ Kahn, Man's Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare 121-22.

²²⁶ Ruth Kelso, Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1956) 24.

²²⁷ As cited by Cynthia Herrup during her discussion of the fate of the Countess of Castlehaven after her sexual honor had been questioned in the public arena of a courtroom (“To Pluck Bright Honour from the Pale-Faced Moon”; *Gender and Honour in the Castlehaven Story*,” Transactions of the Royal Historical Society 6 (1996): 155). See also pp. 155-58.

unfaithful.²²⁸ The main condition for the recovery of male honor was that its restoration be witnessed and affirmed publicly by others; as Elizabeth Foyster argues, “Men needed their contemporaries to recognize their attempts to restore honour, informally in front of neighbors and servants, or formally in the courtroom.”²²⁹

At the beginning of the final act of 'Tis Pity She's a Whore, then, a standard revenge triangle centered on the unfaithful wife has been created. Soranzo the husband, having discovered the identity of his wife's lover, plots revenge against them both. “Conventional revenge,” comments Lois Bueler, “is to be enacted at the conventional banquet.”²³⁰ Soranzo's birthday dinner will become a courtroom, and the partygoers will serve as judge and jury at the trial of Annabella and Giovanni for incest. Patricia Parker has drawn a number of interesting parallels between plays performed in the early modern

²²⁸ Ingram, Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England, 1570-1640 253; Anthony Fletcher, "The Protestant Idea of Marriage," Religion, Culture, and Society in Early Modern Britain: Essays in Honour of Patrick Collinson, ed. Anthony Fletcher and Peter Roberts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 171; K.M. Davies, "Continuity and Change in Literary Advice on Marriage," Marriage and Society, ed. R.B. Outhwaite (London: St. Martin's Press, 1981) 61; Lisa Jardine, Still Harping on Daughters: Women and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare (London: Columbia University Press, 1983).

²²⁹ Elizabeth A. Foyster, Manhood in Early Modern England: Honour, Sex and Marriage (New York: Longman, 1999) 147-48.

²³⁰ Lois E. Bueler, "Role-Splitting and Reintegration: The Tested Woman Plot in Ford," SEL 20.2 (1980): 340.

theater and trials conducted in the early modern courts, emphasizing the ways in which both demanded the telling of a credible story “to see or spy out secrets, or in the absence of the directly ocular, to extract a narrative that might provide a vicarious substitute.”²³¹

In Ford’s play, Soranzo intends to stage a judicial narrative that will definitively condemn Giovanni and Annabella in the eyes of their community for their incestuous relationship. By ruining their reputations beyond repair, Soranzo hopes to save himself, for he understands that, in a very real sense, he is on trial, too, and his masculinity is at stake. Parma is a patriarchal society, and a patriarchy - derived in part from the Latin word for father - values not merely masculinity but fatherhood.²³² And Annabella is pregnant with another man’s child.

In the final scene of the play, Soranzo and Vasques miscalculate their intended victim, for Giovanni effectively usurps the feast arranged for his public humiliation and uses it for his own ends. Giovanni had killed Annabella immediately before attending the banquet, intending thereby to save her “fame” (V.v.84), her good reputation²³³; he also

²³¹ Patricia Parker, Shakespeare from the Margins: Language, Culture, Context (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996) 259.

²³² Oxford English Dictionary online

²³³ Shannon McSheffrey argues that the threat of notoriety served a crucial role in discouraging sexual misbehavior; “it was one’s reputation rather than one’s actions that was important in a society that placed huge importance on rumor and fame – knowledge that embraced, in other words, both what other people knew about a person and what they

protects their relationship from the public shame of Soranzo's revenge, although he clearly also delights in outwitting his rival: "Revenge is mine" (V.v.86). Giovanni enters the banquet with Annabella's heart on the end of his dagger, and – thus dramatically ensuring the full attention of his audience – proceeds to make his own case.

Having stolen the moment from Soranzo, Giovanni argues for a reverse love triangle, stating that he is, in fact, Annabella's husband, that he loves her, and that he married her first; Soranzo is in the wrong. This is quite startling. As Donald Anderson has commented, "To have an incestuous adulterer seek vengeance upon the cuckolded husband surely is a remarkable variation on a familiar theme, but the playwright makes it credible."²³⁴ Giovanni, by retreating to his more socially acceptable role Annabella's brother, could have claimed that he killed his sister to preserve his family's honor. But he asserts his status as Annabella's husband. And so two men claim the same young woman as wife; nothing less than the definition of marriage itself is at stake.

Giovanni asserts that he killed Annabella to save her, for her honor, her public reputation, is more significant than her life itself. By stabbing her to death, he proclaims that he has saved her fame:

Revenge is mine; honor doth love command...

How over-glorious art thou in thy wounds,

Triumphing over infamy and hate! (V.ii.86, 103-04)

thought they knew" (McSheffrey, Marriage, Sex, and Civic Culture in Late Medieval London 175).

²³⁴Donald K. Anderson, Jr., John Ford (New York: Twayne, 1972) 100.

Giovanni defiantly faces Soranzo, with Annabella's heart upon his dagger, affirming publicly his undying love for his sister, and to claim "brave revenge" as he fatally stabs Soranzo before falling – unrepentant – at the hands of the banditti.

The gruesome and shocking spectacle of the excised heart has generated much critical commentary. However one interprets this potent image, it is crucial first to recognize its multiplicity of meanings. For instance, Richard Madelaine considers the many possible meanings of Giovanni's dagger – a "token of a sincere lover's violent griefs," a "phallic symbol," an "instrument of murder and revenge," an "executioner's knife" – before concluding that it constitutes a "sensational stage image" of "lust and its consequences."²³⁵ Michael Neill reaches a very different conclusion by cataloging the "bewildering set of alternative meanings" Giovanni himself attributes to the heart: it is a "spectacular token" of his masculine power, a "symbol of profane sacrifice," a "bizarre erotic parody of the eucharist," a "conventional petrarchan emblem of his own passion," an allusion to "the spectacular imagery of public justice," an "emblem of Envy," and, most strangely, "the newly delivered offspring of their passion." For Neill, this dizzying accumulation of possible interpretations paradoxically empties the heart of significance, rendering it a piece of "raw meat."²³⁶ How is an audience – either the revelers at Soranzo's birthday party within in the world of the play or the people sitting in the theater

²³⁵ Michael Neill, "'What Strange Riddle's This?' Deciphering 'Tis Pity She's a Whore," John Ford: Critical Re-Visions, ed. Michael Neill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 33.

²³⁶ Neill, "'What Strange Riddle's This?' Deciphering 'Tis Pity She's a Whore," 162-3.

watching and listening to that world - to know that the piece of flesh held before them is a heart, much less that it is Annabella's heart? After so dramatically obtaining the attention of those around him, Giovanni tells his story.

Giovanni does die at the banquet at the hands of the banditti, and in that respect Soranzo achieves his goal, but he has lost control of the story he meant to tell. For example, Giovanni foretells that others will recall their story after the couple's death and remember not their incest but the deep love he and Annabella shared:

If ever after-times should hear
Of our fast-knit affections, though perhaps
The laws of conscience and of civil use
May justly blame us, yet when they but know
Our loves, that love will wipe away that rigor
Which would in other incests be abhorred. (V.v.68-73)

For Giovanni, conscience and civil justice are superseded by love. This passage is followed by a second opportunity to comment further in the Cardinal's closing words, which are less conclusive, and certainly less optimistic, than Giovanni's:

We shall have time
To talk at large of all; but never yet
Incest and murder were so strangely met.
Of one so young, so rich in nature's store,
Who could not say, 'tis pity she's a whore? (V.vi.156-60).

This conclusion reflects not only the character's astonishment, horror and pity; these sensations are also felt by the audience. The Cardinal's words stress their own

metadramatic character; this is the most astonishing combination of incest and murder on the stage ever, a story of witting, consummated, and revealed incest. As Nathaniel Strout reminds us, “That heart on his dagger at the end of the play is [Annabella’s] after all, not just an embodied figure of speech.”²³⁷ After having heard and seen it all, the spectators are also asked to talk about the events they have just witnessed, even beyond the temporal and spatial boundaries of theatrical performance. The final question begs a response. Revenge is followed by further stories.

²³⁷ Nathaniel Strout, "The Tragedy of Annabella in 'Tis Pity She's a Whore," Traditions and Innovations: Essays on British Literature of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, ed. David G. Allen, and Robert A. White (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1990) 163.

Conclusion

Early modern revenge tragedy is in many ways a form of competitive storytelling. A successful revenger is the character who tells the most persuasive story about the past, thereby attempting to fix meaning on his or her acts and to influence the future. For example, in Kyd's The Spanish Tragedy Hieronimo struggles to expose, and Lorenzo to conceal, the story of the events surrounding Horatio's murder and the corruption of the nobility. In Shakespeare's 1 Henry VI, England's Talbot and France's Joan of Arc each maintain that God and right are on their side in a series of skirmishes and battles as linguistic as they are military. In Carey's The Tragedy of Mariam Doris, Mariam, and Salome craft narratives that (re)establish for themselves and/or their children elite positions in the very top of the Judean social hierarchy. In Ford's 'Tis Pity She's a Whore, Soranzo and Giovanni both publicly assert the privileges and responsibilities of marriage to the same young woman. In each of these cases audiences on the stage and in the theater must witness and respond to inconsistent, sometimes even directly contradictory, accounts of events which occur on and off of the stage. At stake are finite resources of great value: thrones; titles; social status; spouses; honor.

As the preceding chapters have established, revengers are notably dependant upon their communities for recognition of their causes and acceptance of their versions of events. Since they do not usually survive the last act, revengers who wish to make a lasting impact upon the world of the play must speak persuasively and memorably. These

stories must not only outlive their tellers but convince friends and strangers to invest in their cause. If the storytelling is successful, then the action of the play continues to resonate beyond its staged conclusion. Stories beget more stories. The sheer volume of arguments both for and against revenge in the early modern period suggests that early modern theater audiences would have been able to negotiate the competing claims to authority and truth found within revenge tragedies, and receptive to discussing the problematic events just staged.

A revenger seeks opportunities to explain how he or she has been wronged, but going public with one's story is not without risk because individuals in the early modern period could be charged legally with spreading the kind of stories likely to cause trouble within families and between neighbors. Such laws were seen as necessary by the authorities because personal gossip was rife in the early modern period, and, according to Adam Fox, analysis of the records of defamation "has made familiar that environment of chatter and rumor-mongering generated by the intimacy of small town and village life where privacy was typically scarce and people were encouraged to know the business of others."²³⁸ Irregularities often came to the attention of the churchwardens and constables simply on the basis of communal suspicion. The social effects of insults were compounded by the grave economic consequences of a bad reputation, for the socially discredited individual stood to lose profits, employment, and lodging. For early modern

²³⁸ Fox, "Rumour," 602.

men and women, “honor had economic value.”²³⁹ For example, a carpenter criticized for drunkenness, laziness, boastfulness, or an ill-behaved wife could lose clients; an apprentice about whom neighbors gossiped might never find a new job; a man or woman whose marital affairs were criticized might lose a job or get into difficulties with a landlord. The national and political news of the day usually circulated in much the same way as local gossip. Professional carriers, chapmen, and traveling tradespeople were often the brokers of news, “circulating information and spinning webs of communication in ways which few other sources could provide.”²⁴⁰ Revengers must use these existing “webs of communication” deliberately and strategically to convince others within their communities to acknowledge their personal grievances and accept their version of the story.

While this dependence upon and preoccupation with storytelling is noteworthy, more revealing is the fact that early modern Britons were “avid consumers” of legal narratives.²⁴¹ These men and women recognized that the consequences of crime extended beyond wronged individuals and that criminal behavior threatened the peace of

²³⁹ Roger Chartier, A History of Private Life: Passions of the Renaissance, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, ed. Philippe Aries and Georges Duby, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1989) 584.

²⁴⁰ FOX, "Rumour," 601-02.

²⁴¹ Cunningham, Imaginary Betrayals, 15-6.

the community and the commonwealth.²⁴² As a result, they were invested in discussing and monitoring their neighbors, especially those who found themselves petitioners of or accused by the law. Scholars have been unable to determine the precise composition of audiences for these stories, but Karen Cunningham posits that readers likely “included groups interested in both old and new thinking, lawyers and students, gentry with business interests in London, the greater gentry, well-to-do citizens and merchants, and the greater nobility.”²⁴³ Like early modern revenge tragedies, in the early modern courts the presentation of a case depended upon stories constructed by, in turn, the prosecution, the witnesses, and the defense. The final outcome confirmed which story had won. Storytelling translated contested events into a legally comprehensible medium. Laura Gowing says that “As people use narrative techniques to convey selective interpretations of behavior to others, so story-telling performs a similar function for witnesses testifying in court, aiming to provide the judge with the evidence for a decision... Unlike other courts, there was no jury to interpret the material of witnesses and litigants: stories went straight to the judge.”²⁴⁴ But the narratives of litigation did not work simply as material for judicial decision-making. Few cases reached the point of final sentence, and the

²⁴² Garthine Walker. “Keeping it in the Family: Crime and the Early Modern Household.” The Family in Early Modern England. Eds. Helen Berry and Elizabeth Foyster. The Family in Early Modern England (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) 68-9.

²⁴³ Cunningham, Imaginary Betrayals, 15-6.

²⁴⁴ Laura Gowing. Domestic Dangers: Women, Words and Sex in Early Modern London (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) 42-3.

expectations of litigants must have been geared to the articulation of complaint and conflict, rather than a judicial decision.²⁴⁵

For revengers, who operate outside of the existing legal system, storytelling is similarly tactical. They are motivated to express their dissatisfaction with the injustices they have suffered and hope that their actions will be validated by the larger community. But their audiences, recognizing that revenge is more complicated than a legal dispute between two people since the judiciary itself is called into question, must determine whether or not remedying these individual wrongs is worth the sacrifice of social unity and peace. Even just hearing the stories told by revengers can cause social stress, what Guido Ruggiero calls “the violence of verbal disruption.”²⁴⁶ The revenger must upset the status quo in order to promote social and legal change.

Achieving this objective requires the consent of and participation by the larger community, whose response to acts of revenge can be difficult for the revenger to shape and influence.

²⁴⁵ David Sabean says that the array of stories told by early modern litigants in the courts would have mirrored the ways in which “social knowledge” was commonly processed by the community. The reputations of community members were worked out “in the give-and-take of discussion between neighbors, friends, and family members. It is emphatically not a single ‘truth,’ a coherent story with only one version, but rather a continuing discussion around a single theme, a reckoning of the probabilities, a fluctuating judgment” (Power in the Blood, 195).

²⁴⁶ Ruggiero, Violence in Early Renaissance Venice, 125

In Kyd's The Spanish Tragedy, the Spanish court is negatively affected by two murders. During the course of the play, competing desires to control and shape information cause multiple stories to circulate about the deaths of Don Andrea and Horatio. After killing his son's aristocratic murderers, Hieronimo explains his motives to the assembled court in great detail and then commits suicide, but events do not go as he planned. The stage audience, misunderstanding what has been said, respond by questioning each other about the very information just provided. The King of Spain and the Viceroy of Portugal survive the last act, but they are left without progeny after the deaths of Lorenzo, Bel-imperia, and Balthazar, which profoundly affects the future of their countries. There are no obvious successors to inherit the throne. Hieronimo has succeeded in his revenge insofar as regime change will necessarily occur, although not immediately; but the rightness of his cause is not recognized. Those left behind at the Spanish court do not fully understand that a grieving parent wanted nothing more than to receive justice for his child's murder.

The Spanish Tragedy closes neither with Hieronimo's play-within-a-play nor with its gruesome, bloody aftermath but with a return to the frame provided by Don Andrea and the ghost, who have witnessed the events of the play alongside the theatrical audience. In the Induction, Revenge had told the ghost of Don Andrea that he was brought back to "see the author of thy death...deprived of life" (1.1.87, 89), and at the conclusion of the play this objective has been accomplished. But Don Andrea is not satisfied; he still wants to "work just and sharp revenge" (16) on his enemies: he wants to control the outcomes of their stories. While the question of Don Andrea's fate in the afterlife remains unsettled – in fact, it appears to have been forgotten – Don Andrea

convinces Revenge to allow him to determine the fates of the dead, which he proceeds to do in a distinctly partisan manner. Don Andrea's choices are far more complex than simply directing his enemies to eternal punishment and his friends to eternal pleasure; he determines how the stories of their lives will be remembered and understood. The final lines of the play belong to Revenge, who acquiesces in the biased judgments to be meted out by Don Andrea:

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 there begin their endless tragedy. (45-8)

Revenge announces that there has been no closure: the real tragedy has not even begun. The fifth act of the The Spanish Tragedy (Kyd's play was written in four acts) would seem to occur out of view of the audience, in the underworld, as Don Andrea takes further revenge in Hades on enemies who are already dead. Violence follows violence, revenge follows revenge, story follows story, but it never seems to be enough. Perfect recompense remains elusive.

Revenge is no more proportional or controlled in the devastating revenge cycle depicted by Shakespeare in the first tetralogy. In this series of plays, the family squabbles of the English nobility escalate through biased and partial storytelling to such an extent that the entire population of the nation is negatively affected. This escalation is caused by battles between England's Talbot and France's Joan of Arc which are as linguistic as they are military. Narrative sanctions the war. Talbot's storytelling skill, his ability to set the present within the privileged narrative of historical legend, is essential to the French

campaign and to the English success. Larger than life figures such as Henry V and Talbot are initially remembered for the large shadow they cast, not just for what they accomplished themselves but the deeds which they inspired in others. The Wars of the Roses are caused when the younger generation doesn't live up to the self-sacrificing examples of the previous generation, instead placing themselves and their personal advancement ahead of the common good.

As the first part of this tetralogy concludes, the audience is drawn to support neither the house of Lancaster nor the house of York. To be on a "side" first and foremost, and thereby to foment factional strife, is the great wrong here, in contrast to Talbot's simple loyalty to king, country, and the heroic heritage he upholds. The significant difference between Talbot's remembrance of the past and Mortimer's (or Richard's via Mortimer) is the use each makes of his greater and lesser forebears. Edward II and Henry V, whose times and deeds shine with historic precedents for Talbot, shrink in Mortimer's account to the same stature as their disappointing successors, Richard II and Henry VI. Their accomplishments, or lack thereof, mean nothing. They "count" only insofar as their standing on the genealogical charts proves the speaker's claim to the throne.

In Carey's The Tragedy of Mariam Doris and Mariam fight to control the story of the Judaeian monarchy after Herod's presumed death. These two women – both with male children – claim to be Herod's wife, but there can only be one queen and one heir. When Herod is discovered to be alive, Herod's sister Salome complicates the situation further by reminding Herod of his allegiance to his natal family. Three women (working separately and at times in direct competition with each other) use storytelling in their

revenge against rivals who challenge their social status and power. By drawing upon a repertoire of prayers, curses, vows, and slander, these characters take revenge while shaping the perceptions of those around them, thus definitively influencing the outcome of the play. Doris and Salome survive, but as the play concludes Mariam has been put to death and the Chorus expresses ambivalence as to her guilt or innocence:

This day's events were certainly ordain'd,

To be the warning to posterity:

So many changes are therein contain'd,

So admirable strange variety.

This day alone, our sagest Hebrews shall

In after times the school of wisdom call. (5.1.289-94)

Certainly it is to be expected that Mariam's story resonates in the immediate future, and the stage audience must determine precisely what they were "ordained" to learn from this "warning to posterity." After they have learned their lesson, Mariam is to be held up as a paradigm for future generations, much like Talbot and Henry V. Unlike in Shakespeare's first tetralogy, though, her example is ambiguous, neither clearly positive nor clearly negative.

Ford's 'Tis Pity She's a Whore concludes with the dignitaries of Parma battling over the implications of Annabella and Giovanni's affair. Like The Tragedy of Mariam, there is the larger social problem of defining marriage, since two men seem to be married to the same woman. Giovanni's and Soranzo's acts of revenge against each other both attempt to shape the communal interpretation of events through the stories they tell.

Giovanni does die at the banquet at the hands of the banditti, and in that respect Soranzo

achieves his stated goal, but he loses control of the story he meant to tell. After thoroughly upstaging his rival at a banquet, Giovanni foretells that others will recall their story after the couple's death and remember not their incest but the deep love he and Annabella shared:

If ever after-times should hear
 Of our fast-knit affections, though perhaps
 The laws of conscience and of civil use
 May justly blame us, yet when they but know
 Our loves, that love will wipe away that rigor
 Which would in other incests be abhorred. (V.v.68-73)

For Giovanni, conscience and civil justice are superseded by love. This passage is followed by a second opportunity to comment further in the Cardinal's closing words, which are less definitive, and certainly less optimistic, than Giovanni's:

We shall have time
 To talk at large of all; but never yet
 Incest and murder were so strangely met.
 Of one so young, so rich in nature's store,
 Who could not say, 'tis pity she's a whore? (V.vi.156-60).

This conclusion reflects not only the character's astonishment, horror and pity; these sensations are also felt by the audience. The Cardinal's final words stress their own metadramatic character; this is the most astonishing combination of incest and murder on the stage ever, a story of witting, consummated, and revealed incest. The request for continued discussion is plain and clear. After having heard and seen it all, the spectators

are also asked to talk about the events they have just witnessed, even beyond the temporal and spatial boundaries of theatrical performance. The final question begs a response.

Revenge is followed by further stories shared after the formal conclusion of the play.

The individuals who seek revenge in early modern tragedies tell stories to gain the support of the larger community which ultimately judges them. Early modern England could not accept or dramatize a view of society in which the virtuous are at the mercy of the vicious, without recourse; but neither could it sanction the individual's right to private revenge. The disruption that would accompany private revenge is as threatening as the disorder that would plague a community in which the wicked went unpunished. As Julia Dietrich states, "the individual who will not wait for the Last Judgment but appoints himself as a revenger is finally recognized in the drama as necessary to the society. But he cannot be embraced by it."²⁴⁷

²⁴⁷ Julia Dietrich, "Justice in this World: The Background of the Revenger in the English Morality Drama," The Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies 132 (1982) 111.

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CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

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