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From Dread to Mockery: The Scenes of Death in *The Spanish Tragedy* and *The Revenger's Tragedy*

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Pointing out the preoccupation with the theme of death in late Elizabethan and Jacobean England, Michael Neill maintains in his book *Issues of Death* that "tragedy . . . was among the principal instruments by which the culture of early modern England reinvented death" (3). Arguing that the Protestant denial of purgatory caused great anxieties about "the possibility of 'death as eternal annihilation'" (48), he understands revenge tragedy as a response to people's anxieties not only about being suddenly taken away by death to the realm in which they no longer have hope for redemption but also about being harassed by the dead who, "precisely because they are now beyond the help of their survivors, have become practically insatiable in their demands upon the living" (46). Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* and Thomas Middleton and

Cyril Tourneur's *The Revenger's Tragedy* seem to provide pertinent examples of this genre through their obsession with dead bodies, disinterred skeletons, and bloody murders.[1] In "Senecan Drama and Its Influence on *The Spanish Tragedy* and *The Revenger's Tragedy*," Belgin Sakiroglu notices the similarities between these two revenge tragedies and attributes them mainly to the influence of Senecan drama on English drama. According to Sakiroglu, one of the most important similarities between these plays is that the theme of revenge is carried out by the main characters "step by step so human pain and horror are set in a wider context" (67).[2] Despite these similarities, a closer examination of the scenes of death in *The Spanish Tragedy* and *The Revenger's Tragedy* reveals that unlike *The Spanish Tragedy* which directly engages in the dialogue about the anxieties produced by the Protestant abolition of purgatory, *The Revenger's Tragedy* communicates a different kind of sentiment about death that cannot be completely explained through the notion of fear of eternal damnation.

My contention is that the representations of death in *The Revenger's Tragedy* are much more theatrical and artificial than those in *The Spanish Tragedy* and that this difference is crucial to comprehending the different views of death that these two plays exhibit. The issue of theatricality in revenge drama has in fact drawn some scholarly attention. For example, positing "the

1) *The Spanish Tragedy* was published about two decades earlier than *The Revenger's Tragedy*. Specifically, the former was written between 1582 and 1592, and the latter was first performed in 1606 and published in 1607.

2) Though Sakiroglu does not clarify exactly what the "wider context" is, her comment on the "emotion and the pathos of pain and death" in Senecan drama that is crucial to "a new conception of the tragic, a conception unlike the support of Greek tragedy" (67) implies that the portrayal of pain and horror in Renaissance revenge tragedy can help elucidate the ways in which the Renaissance era redefined the concept of the tragic and understood the meaning of human existence.

value of death as entertainment" (223) in revenge tragedy in her essay on *The Spanish Tragedy*, Molly Smith asserts that there were interconnections between theater and public punishment and that both "provided entertainment to upper and lower classes" (218). According to Smith, despite this similarity, the theater and the scaffold serve fundamentally different functions in that whereas "Theater establishes distance between spectacle and spectators . . . the authenticity in the enactment of public punishment makes its distance considerably more nebulous" (220). This distinction Smith draws between the theater and the scaffold is significant in its implication that the theater provides a safer site than the scaffold to enjoy the spectacle of death. That is, the more secure the distance between spectators and spectacles is, the more possibility there is for the audience to enjoy the spectacles of death. As Smith herself points out, *The Spanish Tragedy* is an interesting case because its presentation of the scenes of death undermines the audience's sense of security in enjoying the scenes of death by drawing "attention to the nebulous nature of the boundary that separates spectators from the spectacle" (228). James Shapiro's interpretation of *The Spanish Tragedy* also centers around the blurring of the boundaries between "theatrical and state violence" (107), which in Shapiro's view is the primary source of the play's transgressive power. Although both Smith and Shapiro provide insights into the complex nature of the representations of death in *The Spanish Tragedy*, their readings do not extend to considering the emotional and psychological dimensions of the scenes of death in the play, which are important in fully understanding the play's response to the anxieties about death as annihilation both in the physical and spiritual realms. Besides, not many critics have undertaken a thorough examination of the differences between *The Spanish Tragedy* and *The Revenger's Tragedy* in terms of theatricality of the scenes of death, which I

believe can generate a more comprehensive understanding of Elizabethan and Jacobean England's attitudes toward death. As I will demonstrate later, the emphasis on the theatricality and artificiality of the scenes of death in *The Revenger's Tragedy* considerably weakens the emotional and psychological significance of the representations of death that is quite prominent in *The Spanish Tragedy*.

One of the obvious similarities between *The Spanish Tragedy* and *The Revenger's Tragedy* is the overwhelming presence of dead bodies. The corpses in both plays are seldom accorded proper funeral rites and are in most cases left unburied, producing a strong impression of the power of death to bring an end to our existence in the most sudden and brutal manner when there is no hope for repentance or redemption in purgatory. *The Spanish Tragedy*, for example, begins with a ghost, Don Andrea, whose passage to the underworld was interrupted because his rites of burial were not performed. Being almost a reanimated corpse, Andrea's presence on stage, along with his description of the dreadful sight of dead people in the underworld, makes the audience anticipate more corpses that are to appear on stage later on. Numerous verbal accounts of death that follow perform a similar function of preparing the audience for the upcoming bloody scenes full of dead bodies. Following closely the General's account of the battle, the Viceroy of Portingale imagines the moment of the death of his son, Balthazar. Finally, Horatio is murdered by Lorenzo and Balthazar and turns into a dead body in Act II, Scene v. Paradoxically, but not coincidentally, Horatio is more powerfully present on stage as a dead body than as a living person. According to the stage directions, Lorenzo and Balthazar hang Horatio first and stab him later, making sure that Horatio's death occurs in full view of the audience. Moreover, as evident from Lorenzo's verbal pun on the pose of Horatio's corpse that "Although his life

were still ambitious proud, / Yet is he at the highest now he is dead" (2.4.60-61), Horatio's dead body is not only at the center of the stage but also hanging high in the air so that the audience cannot miss the sight of it. Horatio's corpse makes its appearance once more on stage towards the end of the play, revealing itself as the driving force behind his father Hieronimo's bloody revenge on Lorenzo and Balthaza. The play ends with "a dead march" of the King of Spain and the Viceroy of Portingale bearing the dead bodies of their children.

The Revenger's Tragedy also abounds with dead bodies. The play begins with the spectacle of the skull of Gloriana, Vindice's fiancée, who was poisoned by the Duke. Seeing the image of death in the proud courtly procession, Vindice presents Gloriana's skull to the audience as the foreboding of approaching deaths. The image of death invoked by her skull is appalling especially because it emphasizes the power of death arbitrarily to end one's existence regardless of one's physical beauty. It does not seem a coincidence, then, that what the audience witnesses next is the corpse of a beautiful woman, Antonia's wife, who kills herself after having been raped by the Duchess' Younger Son. Gloriana's skull then reappears on stage, this time to be used to poison the Duke, who also turns into a corpse in full view of the audience. In the very next scene, the dead body of the Duchess' Younger Son appears in the form of "a bleeding head" lest the audience should forget the horrible sight of the Duke's corpse even for a moment. Near the end of the play, the Duke's dead body appears on stage again, and the play soon ends with a massacre.

Although both plays are similarly replete with dead bodies, the dead bodies in each play serve quite different functions, which are closely related to the fact that the emotional and psychological dimensions of the scenes of death are

much deeper and more complexly developed in *The Spanish Tragedy* than in *The Revenger's Tragedy*. Whereas Hieronimo, the avenger of *The Spanish Tragedy*, is focused mainly on revenging his son's unjust death, Vindice, the avenger of *The Revenger's Tragedy*, has several revenges to take. For Hieronimo, Horatio's dead body is a sign of his grief and pain:

> See here my show, look on this spectacle.
> Here lay my hope, and here my hope hath end;
> Here lay my heart, and here my heart was slain;
> Here lay my treasure, here my treasure lost;
> Here lay my bliss, and here my bliss bereft;
> But hope, heart, treasure, joy, and bliss,
> All fled, failed, died, yea, all decayed with this. (4.4.89-95)

Here, Hieromino reveals his son's dead body in his attempt to explain to the King, the Viceroy, and the Duke what has driven him to murder their sons and daughter. Interestingly, Hieronimo uses the term "spectacle," which seems to suggest the theatrical value of Horatio's corpse. The following lines, however, make it clear that the significance of Horatio's dead body for Hieronimo lies in the emotional value he attaches to it. To Hieronimo, Horatio's corpse is not something the sight of which he can enjoy from a distance—it rends his heart making him realize that all his "hope, heart, treasure, joy, and bliss" are gone. Hieronimo bitterly mourns Horatio's death, and his grief is his motivation for revenge. It is important to note here that Hieronimo has been keeping Horatio's corpse not because he believes it can serve a useful purpose for his revenge but because he is emotionally attached to it. The value of Horatio's dead body as a *memento mori* thus emphasizes the depth of Hieronimo's grief. Even for the King, the Viceroy, and the Duke, Horatio's body is not a spectacle to enjoy

because it ultimately reminds them of their children's death. Earlier, I mentioned that Horatio's presence on stage is more powerful when he is dead than when he is alive, and it is because of the emotional and psychological significance his dead body has for the characters. In short, Horatio's corpse has an individualized, emotionally symbolic meaning in the play.

In *The Revenger's Tragedy*, on the other hand, dead bodies are hardly an object of mourning; instead, they are used to suit the purposes of the living people who are completely devoid of any emotional attachment to the dead people. That is, none of the dead bodies in *The Revenger's Tragedy* is imbued with the kind of emotional significance that Horatio's dead body has for Hieronimo. Unlike Hieronimo who merely "shows" Horatio's corpse to explain his motive for revenge, Vindice uses without any sort of scruple his fiancée's dead body for other purposes than simply avenging her death. At first, the death of his fiancée seems to be his primary motivation for revenge. The fact that he does not mind profaning her body with the blood of the Duke, however, suggests that he is interested not so much in revenging her as in taking revenge itself. Indeed, it is quite doubtful whether Vindice mourns her death at all:

> Thou sallow picture of my poisoned love,
> My study's ornament, thou shell of Death,
> Once the bright face of my betrothed lady,
> When life and beauty naturally filled out
> These ragged imperfections; (1.1.14-18)

Vindice's feelings about Gloriana here are so abstract that the skull does not seem to be an individual reminder of Gloriana; instead, her skull is merely a symbol of female corruption and vanity that has driven him to bitterness

towards the whole world. Admittedly, Gloriana's death is not a recent event for Vindice as Horatio's is for Hiernomino; many years have passed since Gloriana died, and Vindice's memory of her is thus much less vivid. The way he contemplates his revenge plans at the beginning of the play, however, intimates that for Vindice, revenging his dead fiancée is only the beginning of his more important project of avenging anyone he dislikes—as stated earlier, Vindice is bent on taking several revenges even at the beginning of the play. On this account, Gloriana's dead body has more an instrumental value than an emotional value for Vindice. In other words, he does not hold onto her skull because it has a personal meaning for him—he is ready to use and dispose of it when necessary.

The dead body of Antonio's wife is subject to a fate quite similar to Gloriana's skull's. Antonio and other lords seem at first to grieve over her death, attaching some emotional value to her dead body: "Draw nearer lords and be sad witnesses / Of a fair comely building newly fallen, . . . Violent rape / Has played a glorious act" (I.iv.1-4). Decorating her dead body with a prayer book and setting it up in an emblematic pose that suggests her chastity, they almost mystify her death and call her a "precedent for wives" (1.4.26). This does not mean, however, that her death has a personal, emotional meaning for them; rather, they merely use her body to reinforce their own gender and sexual ideology that emphasizes the chastity of women and forces women "to die with poison than to live with shame" (I.iv.48). In other words, her suicide is merely one occasion for them to solidify the values of their male community. This is why Antonio is simply content with the fact that "being an old man [he had] a wife so chaste" (1.4.78), not bothering to struggle with the idea of revenge either in the Renaissance or modern sense.

More importantly, the dead bodies in *The Revenger's Tragedy* serve mainly

as a source of sensual pleasure for the characters, especially for Vindice, again emphasizing the lack of the depth of emotional dimensions in the representations of death in the play. Vindice uses Gloriana's skull to poison the Duke precisely because it enhances his pleasure of killing, which explains why it takes so long for the Duke finally to die. The Duke's death is a gradual process, starting from his lips, moving on to his teeth, tongue, and finally his heart. Even before he finally kills the Duke with the Duke's own dagger, Vindice imagines more cruel and sensual ways to torment the already dying Duke: "If he but wink, not brooking the foul object / Let our two other hands tear up his lids / And make his eyes, like comets, shine through blood" (3.4.197-98). Vindice also tries to magnify his perverted pleasure by using the Duke's corpse for revenging other people, which is why he becomes greatly enraged when he finds out that he cannot fully use it: "Ah the fly-flop of vengeance beat 'em to pieces! Here was the sweetest occasion, the fittest hour to have made my revenge familiar with him. . . And oh I'm mad to lose such a sweet opportunity" (4.4.14-20). By using the word "sweet" repeatedly, Vindice makes clear that the true motive for his revenge is the sense of pleasure that arises from creating bloody and gory scenes. I do not wish to completely dismiss the moral associations that dead bodies carry in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, and Huston Diehl's interpretation of the dramatic function of the Duke's fatal kiss with Gloriana's skull aptly illuminates the ethical significance of Gloriana's dead body. Pointing out that "in the Renaissance tragedies, the kiss more often ironically conveys a character's unconscious or unacknowledged motives, desires, and commitments," Diehl holds that the Duke's poisoned kiss serves as a vehicle of dramatic irony in that when he "kisses a poisoned skull, believing it to be the face of the young and beautiful woman he hopes to seduce, the audience sees the painted face and the poisoned

skull as one and the same thing, like a *trompe l'oeil*" (208). The fact that Gloriana's skull holds some moral significance for the audience, however, does not lessen the importance of the instrumental value it has for Vindice. As stated earlier, Vindice not only uses a portion of his dead fiance's body to kill the Duke but also takes immense pleasure in the process of killing him.[3)]

Given this almost blasphemous view of dead bodies that does not grant them any significant emotional or psychological significance but merely stresses their utility, it is not surprising that there is a stronger emphasis on the corporeality and physicality of dead bodies in *The Revenger's Tragedy* than in *The Spanish Tragedy*. The images of dead bodies are much grosser and more vivid in *The Revenger's Tragedy* than in *The Spanish Tragedy*. For example, although Horatio's body occupies a central position on the stage in *The Spanish Tragedy*, the play does not offer a detailed description of his dead body. It is not that the play refrains from displaying the death scene and Horatio's dead body, but it is important to note that Horatio's dead body is discovered by his father Hationimo, the last person to enjoy contemplating grisly details of Horatio's murdered body. The only specific term Hieronimo uses to describe Horatio's corpse is "bloody," which is not enough to demonstrate the corporeality of Horatio's dead body. *The Revenger's Tragedy*, on the other hand, deeply indulges in all kinds of gruesome details of dying or dead bodies, as evident from Vindice's obsession with how to murder the Duke. Death is thus more a disembodied entity than a visualized image in *The Spanish Tragedy*, while death in *The Revenger's Tragedy* is figured in a highly

3) On this account, I do not agree with J. L. Simmions' reading of Vindice as a revenger who, despite his "worthy desire to bring about justice" (64), ends up being corrupted and overwhelmed by the evil methods of revenge he adopts. Vindice's perverted desire to enjoy the process of revenge without any moral conflict points to the irrelevance of the question of justice to Vindice.

materialized and physical form. As a source of sensual pleasure without any power to emotionally affect the living characters, dead bodies in *The Revenger's Tragedy* are treated quite irreverently and casually.

The heavy emphasis on the corporeality of dead bodies in *The Revenger's Tragedy* is significant because it collapses the distinction between the dead and the living, eliminating emotional significance from living bodies as well. Comparing Vindice's "assumption of the role of Revenger" with "Gloriana's skull dressed up in tires," Karin S. Coddon perceptively remarks that "if a corpse is a body without subjectivity, then Vindice is on a certain level 'dead'" (76). Coddon's comment on the status of Vindice's body is noteworthy in that it brings to light the deeply theatrical nature of his character. Seeing the remnants of Gloriana's dead body merely as a useful murder weapon, Vindice cannot provide plausible reasons for wanting to revenge her death other than the fact that he has taken the role of revenger. The highly theatrical nature of Vindice's character makes it hard to see him as a living person who is capable of actually "dying." In contrast, Hieronimo is intensely struck by the sight of his son's dead body and undergoes a complicated psychological process until he finally decides to take his revenge on his son's death.[4] It is this serious

4) Ronald Broude's explication of the meaning of the word revenge in the Renaissance era further elucidates the difference between Hieronimo and Vindice in their understanding of revenge as well as their attitudes towards the dead bodies of those they feel obligated to revenge. Explaining the difference between revenge and retribution in modern usage—whereas revenge is understood to be motivated by personal desires to harm another for a wrong done to oneself, retribution implies "'just or deserved punishment'" (39)—Broude maintains that "the Renaissance word *revenge* had a more extended meaning than the modern one, a meaning more nearly equivalent to today's *retribution*" (39). Given his commitment to justice, Hieronimo's act of killing his son's murderers fits into this notion of revenge, and his attitude toward revenge accounts for his emotional investment in his son's corpse. Vindice's irreverent treatment of Gloriana's dead body, on the other hand,

attitude toward death and revenge that clearly distinguishes the realms Hieronimo and Horatio respectively inhabit. While Horatio as a dead person is already out of reach of living people, Hieronimo's emotional and psychological struggle with the injustice of his son's death makes him look like a living person who has no choice but to have to grapple with "the possibility of 'death as eternal annihilation'" (Neill 48).

It is no coincidence, then, that there is a stronger affinity between Vindice and the ghost, Don Andrea, than between Vindice and Hieronimo. Vindice's imagining of the moment of the Duke's death in the earlier part of the play nicely illustrates the uncanny resemblance between Vindice and Andrea:

> Oh shall I kill him o' the wrong-side now? No,
> Sword thou wast never a back-biter yet.
> I'll pierce him to his face, he shall die looking upon me;
> Thy veins are swelled with lust, this shall unfill 'em:
> Great men were gods if beggars could not kill 'em. (2.2.89-92)

In this scene, Vindice is contemplating various ways to kill the Duke, going over the Duke's body parts one by one. The most crucial question for Vindice here is not whether he should kill the Duke, but how to kill him, which is strikingly similar to Andrea's preoccupation with finding the best ways to torment the souls in hell. The following passage clearly reveals that Vindice embodies Andrea's view of revenge:

> Ay, these were spectacles to please my soul (4.5.12)

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makes it hard to see him as a revenger even in the modern sense. Devoid of any significant personal or emotional significance, Gloriana's skull serves for Vindice merely as a vehicle for injuring *anyone* he feels like injuring.

Place Don Lorenzo on Ixion's wheel,
And let the lover's endless pains surcease—
Juno forgets old wrath, and grants him ease; (4.5.33-35)

False Pedringano for his treachery,
Let him be dragged through boiling Acheron,
And there live, dying still in endless flames,
Blaspheming gods and all their holy names. (4.5.41-44)

The entertainment value of death for Andrea is manifest here—the spectacles of death greatly "please my[his] soul." After expressing his satisfied feelings about the horrible sight of death, Andrea devises ways to torment people who are already dead, just as Vindice elaborates on his revenge plans. For both of them, death is neither an object of fear nor a subject for serious meditation; instead, death is purely a source of pleasure. Andrea has of course no fear of death because he is already dead. Although he is a mortal being, Vindice shows no sign of fear when his death is sentenced, and casually says "we have enough— / I' faith we're well. . . / We die after a nest of dukes! Adieu" (5.3.126-27). The fact that Vindice is closer to Andrea, the personification of revenge, than to a character with the psychological depth like Hieronimo again reinforces the theatrical dimension of Vindice's character and of the play itself.

Interestingly, towards the end of each play, there seems to be an inversion in the way death is represented. The execution of Pedringano in *The Spanish Tragedy* and that of the Duchess' Younger Son in *The Revenger's Tragedy* supply an efficient example. For both characters, their moments of death catch them when they are off guard. In Pedringano's case, he has a firm belief in Lorenzo's intervention and is simply unable to realize that he is going to die until the very last minute. Not unlike Pedringano, the Younger Son in *The*

Revenger's Tragedy believes that he is saved when the keeper takes him out of the prison, and says, "Slave, call'st thou that bad news! I thank you brothers" (3.4.21). The Younger Son's death, however, does not take place in public because of the special request of his brother Ambitioso: "Pray let him die as private as he may,/ Do him that favour, for the gaping people/ Will but trouble him at his prayers/ And make him curse and swear and so die black" (3.4.19-22). Due to Ambitioso's "kindness," the audience loses the opportunity of witnessing and enjoying the execution of the Younger Son, while Pedringano's execution does take place on stage. Considering the emphasis on the entertainment value of the scenes of death in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, it would make more sense if the Younger Son's execution were put on stage rather than Pedringano's. This "inversion" between these two execution scenes does not mean, however, that Pedringano's execution has a more entertainment value than the Younger Son's. On the contrary, as Shapiro points out, the theatrical distance between the audience and Pedringano as a spectacle of death is significantly disturbed when "Pedringano's mistaken belief that his execution is merely theater" (103) turns out to be false. The emphasis of the execution scene therefore is more on the disconcerting nature of Pedringano's situation than on the gross details of his execution. In fact, like other corpses in the play, Pedringano's dead body itself hardly gets any attention. In the Younger Son's case, even though his execution scene is omitted, his "bleeding head" appears on stage emphasizing the corporeal and material rather than emotional aspect of his death.

It is in this context that the final death scene in *The Spanish Tragedy* and the last massacre scene in *The Revenger's Tragedy* need to be understood. The two plays present rather unexpected methods of revenge: whereas Hieronimo's revenge plan is a very elaborate one, Vindice and his fellows simply stab one

another, which is surprising given Vindice's preoccupation with the question of how to kill. In Hieronimo's case, he stages his own revenge drama in which actors, to borrow David Cutts' words, "actually kill one another instead of pretending to kill one another" (153). Hieronimo explains the significance of what his audience has just witnessed in the following lines:

> Haply you think, but bootless are your thoughts,
> That this is fabulously counterfeit,
> And that we do as all tragedians do:
> To die today, for fashioning our scene,
> The death of Ajax, or some Roman peer,
> And in a minute starting up again,
> Revive to please to-morrow's audience. (4.4.76-82)

In this passage, Hieronimo challenges the onstage audience's belief in the fictionality of the scenes of death in his play, which in some sense extends to the theater audience's belief. Despite the onstage audience's wish that their children might revive, Hieronimo tells them that it is never going to happen; death has finished its work, and it is irreversible. Resulting in the death of three main characters, Balthazar, Lorenza, and Bel-Imperia, Hieronimo's "naturally performed" tragedy raises a question about the boundary between theatrical representation and reality, and it has already received critics' attention. As mentioned above, for Shapiro, this "blurring of representational boundaries" (107) signifies the play's "transgressive potential" (108) by undermining the authority of state violence. Cutts focuses on the effects of the scene for the audience, arguing that the blurring of the boundary between theatrical representation and reality "undermines the audience's . . . supposed detachment from the stage actions" (153). In addition to the significance of the

collapsing of representational boundaries these critics point out, it is also important to notice the emotional force of Horatio's body on which Hieronimo heavily relies in making his argument about the finality of death sound more powerful and ominous to his audience. The reappearance of Horatio's dead body is significant especially because it reinforces the sense of loss of their children for the King of Spain and the Viceroy of Portingale. Once again, the play draws on the emotional and psychological dimensions of the representations of death in order to evoke the annihilating power of death.

The massacre scene in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, on the other hand, takes place so quickly that it is almost ridiculous. It is as if someone kills another every two lines, filling the whole stage with corpses but leaving no time for mourning. For Vindice, death is almost a joke—even his own death is not a serious matter to him.

> May not we set as well as the duke's son?
> Thou hast no conscience: are we not revenged?
> Is there one enemy left alive amongst those?
> 'Tis time to die when we are ourselves our foe.
> When murderers shut deeds close this curse does seal 'em:
> If none disclose 'em, they themselves reveal 'em! (5.3.109-112)

Vindice's self-conscious tone here obviously points to the deeply theatrical nature of the whole situation. Now that he is done with his role-playing as a revenger, it is time for him to face the end of the play, which is possible only with his own death. His disclosure of his own crime without any reasonable motivation can be understood in this regard. His role is determined by the narrative imperative, and because no one is available to reveal his crime and bring an end to the play, he himself has to do it.[5] It is virtually impossible

to find any emotional significance in any character's death in the play, and only the entertainment value of death is emphasized from beginning to end.

The Spanish Tragedy and *The Revenger's Tragedy* offer very different re-inventions of death: whereas *The Spanish Tragedy* directly addresses the anxieties about death as permanent annihilation by disturbing the audience's detachment from the situation of death, *The Revenger's Tragedy* makes fun of the whole idea of death and revenge by heightening the theatricality of the scenes of death. This is why despite the less gross images of death, the scenes of death in *The Spanish Tragedy* produce more uneasy feelings in the audience. More importantly, the view of death evinced in *The Revenger's Tragedy* is more secular than the understanding of death presented in *The Spanish Tragedy*—the religious concept of the spiritual realm in which the dead could eternally suffer is practically irrelevant and of no concern to the characters in *The Revenger's Tragedy*. Given this difference, the parallels between the two plays are quite revealing in understanding the relationship between these two different modes of revenge tragedies. As mentioned above, there are numerous self-conscious, meta-theatrical comments in *The Revenger's Tragedy* which imply that it is a mock revenge tragedy bordering almost on satiric comedy. The parallels between *The Spanish Tragedy* and *The Revenger's Tragedy* thus suggest that *The Revenger's Tragedy* is a satirical response to *The Spanish Tragedy*. In understanding death mainly in corporeal and material terms, *The*

5) As Scott McMillin correctly observes, what Vindice reveals at the end of the play is not entirely accurate, but no one particularly cares "to have the ironic and bloody business explained" (277), leaving one with "a sense of discrepancy between the story so satisfactorily closed for the Duke and the events which have been seen to occur in this plot" (278). McMillin's remark on this gap between the impulse to "close" the revenge plot and the narrative incompleteness of the ending supports my reading of the artificiality and theatricality of the ending of the play.

Revenger's Tragedy somehow "overcame" the Elizabethan anxieties about death as eternal damnation.

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Abstract

This essay aims to reach a more comprehensive understanding of Elizabethan and Jacobean England's attitudes toward death through a close investigation of the scenes of death in *The Spanish Tragedy* and *The Revenger's Tragedy*. Whereas *The Spanish Tragedy* directly speaks directly to the anxieties about death as permanent annihilation, which were caused by the Protestant abolition of purgatory, *The Revenger's Tragedy* communicates a different kind of sentiment about death that cannot be completely explained through the notion of fear of eternal damnation. I contend that the representations of death in *The Revenger's Tragedy* are much more theatrical and artificial than those in *The Spanish Tragedy* and that the emphasis on the theatricality and artificiality of the scenes of death in *The Revenger's Tragedy* considerably weakens the emotional and psychological significance of the representations of death. Only the entertainment value of death is emphasized in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, making its view of death much more secular than the understanding of death presented in *The Spanish Tragedy*. In understanding death mainly in corporeal and material terms, *The Revenger's Tragedy* somehow "overcame" the Elizabethan anxieties about death as eternal damnation, and in this sense, despite its lack of psychological depth, *The Revenger's Tragedy* is more proto-modern than *The Spanish Tragedy*.

Key Words

Thomas Kyd, Thomas Middleton and Cyril Tourneur, *The Spanish Tragedy*, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, revenge tragedy, scenes of death, anxieties about death, eternal annihilation, theatricality

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