

BETWEEN US WE CAN KILL A FLY: INTERSUBJECTIVITY  
AND ELIZABETHAN REVENGE TRAGEDY

by

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A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Department of English  
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

September 2017

DISSERTATION APPROVAL PAGE

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Title: Between Us We Can Kill a Fly: Intersubjectivity and Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy

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Degree awarded September 2017

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## DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Doctor of Philosophy

Department of English

September 2017

Title: *Between Us We Can Kill a Fly: Intersubjectivity and Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy*

Using recent scholarship on intersubjectivity and cultural cognitive narratology, this project explores the disruption and reformation of early modern identity in Elizabethan revenge tragedies. The purpose of this dissertation is to demonstrate how revenge tragedies contribute to the prevalence of a dialogical rather than monological self in early modern culture.

My chapter on Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* synthesizes Debora Shuger's work on the cultural significance of early modern mirrors--which posits early modern self-recognition as a typological process--with recent scholarship on the early modern dialogical self. The chapter reveals how audiences and mirrors function in the play as cognitive artifacts that enable complex experiences of intersubjectivity.

In my chapter on Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, I trace how characters construct new identities in relation to their shared suffering while also exploring intersubjectivity's potential violence. When characters in *Titus* imagine the inward experience of others, they project a plausible narrative of interiority derived from inwardness's external signifiers

(such as tears, pleas, or gestures). These projections and receptions between characters can lead to reciprocated sympathy or violent aggression.

My reading of John Marston's *Antonio's Revenge* explores revenge as a mode of competition. Marston suggests a similarity between the market conditions of dramatic performance (competition between playwrights, acting companies, and rival theaters) and the convention of one-upmanship in revenge tragedy, i.e. the need to surpass preceding acts of violence. While other Elizabethan revenge tragedies represent reciprocity and collusion between characters as important aspects of intersubjective self-reintegration, Marston's play emphasizes competition and rivalry as the dominant force that shapes his characters.

My final chapter provides an analysis of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. I argue that recent scholarship on intersubjectivity and cognitive cultural studies can help us re-historicize the nature of Hamlet's "that within which passes show." Hamlet's desire for the eradication of his consciousness explores the consequences of feeling disconnected from others in a culture wherein identity, consciousness, and even memory itself depend on interpersonal relations.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to Professor Bovilsky. She has supported my work from its inception. Her guidance and her insights have been invaluable. Additional thanks are due to Professor Freinkel, whose wonderful course on Shakespeare and memory provided inspiration and a foundation for my work on *Hamlet*. I offer my appreciation to Professor Saunders and Professor Middlebrook for their support and service on the dissertation committee. I also owe thanks to many of my peers for the wonderful discussions that helped guide me through rough ideas and early drafts of the dissertation. Jordan Green, Kate Myers, and Alexis Kielb were especially supportive, offering many hours of their time to provide valuable input.



For Miriam,  
my life, my love, my other self.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In William Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, a play which is notorious for its brutal and gore-drenched violence, there is a startling moment when consideration is given to a "Poor, harmless fly" killed at the Andronici dinner table (3.2.63). At first, Titus is surprisingly, even poignantly, sensitive to the violence against the fly. As the patriarch of a family suffering its own litany of traumas, Titus empathizes with the grief that he imagines the fly's father would feel for the death of his winged progeny: "But how if that fly had a father and mother? / How would he hang his slender gilded wings / And buzz lamenting doings in the air" (3.2.59-62). This sympathy for the fly and Titus's identification with its father is disrupted by Titus's brother, Marcus, who had off-handedly killed the fly. Marcus redirects Titus's emotional energy, channeling it from empathetic grief to retributive anger, when he tells Titus that the fly was not an innocent victim, but "a black ill-favoured fly" (3.2.66). Marcus metonymically links the blackness of the fly to the blackness of Aaron, an enemy of the Andronici and the person responsible for, among other things, the rape of Titus's daughter and the dismemberment of Titus's hand. In just a few lines from Marcus, Titus's relation to the fly shifts from mournful father-by-proxy to violent animosity as Titus himself picks up the knife to "insult on" the corpse of the fly whose presence Marcus identifies with their enemies (3.2.71).

This project began from my interest in this scene. Is it a poor, harmless fly that is needlessly slain? Or is the fly malicious? I recognize, of course, that the question of the

fly's intent seems absurd. It is difficult to believe either of these possibilities is true. Ostensibly, Titus's anthropomorphism and the oscillation of his emotional responses to its death are meant to reveal the precarious state of his sanity. And yet, despite the absurdity (perhaps even because of it), I find the scene remarkable for its depiction of intersubjectivity. What catches my attention here is the triangulation of identity that this scene produces. On the one hand, the fly's identity is determined by how others perceive it. On the other hand, Titus and Marcus also define *themselves* in relation to the fly and in this relation, they justify or condemn the nature of their own violence. If the fly is harmless and innocent, Marcus is a murderer, and Titus acts as the fly's advocate. If the fly is malevolent, Marcus is a loving brother protecting Titus from an enemy. Our interpretations of the identities and actions of both Marcus and Titus fluctuate within the complex rhetoric and metaphors of selfhood and subjectivity in early modern culture.

Elizabethan revenge tragedies use traumatizing violence to explore radical disruptions of subjectivity. While other early modern genres, such as comedy, tragedy, and history plays, also have characters willingly or unwillingly exploring the protean nature of early modern subjectivity, revenge plays are unique in their emphasis on the annihilation and reconfiguration of identity in the face of trauma. Since traumatic violence is central to how these plays depict disrupted subjectivity, revenge tragedies often stage gruesome spectacles of violence. Seneca's plays, which provide the blueprint upon which Elizabethan revenge tragedies are designed, concealed slaughter and gore from the audience, relegating violence to the unseen space offstage and describing it through dialogue. Unlike those precursors, English plays perform acts of violence before the eyes of

their audiences and use dialogue to supplement and amplify the violence onstage. The spectacle and performance of violence becomes an extralinguistic aspect of the English revenge play, intersecting with the rhetorics of grief, anger, and identity in ways that warrant investigation. The impulse of early modern playwrights to challenge audiences with spectacles of violence has often been elided from our understanding of early modern drama as critics have flinched from the implicit pleasures of violence in revenge tragedies. In 1765, Samuel Johnson faults *Titus Andronicus* for “the barbarity of the spectacles” and the “general massacre...exhibited” which, he claims, “can scarcely be conceived tolerable to any audience.”<sup>1</sup> As late as the 1990s, Harold Bloom was echoing this sentiment, saying of the play, “Boy, is that bad. It’s just a bloodbath. There’s not a memorable line in it” and “I can concede no intrinsic value to *Titus Andronicus*” (Achenbach; Bloom 86).

While the critical aversion to the “barbarity” of plays that exhibit bloodbaths seems to be rooted in concerns with aesthetic achievement (or the charge of aesthetic failure), Cynthia Marshall argues that this form of ostracization frequently occurs when early modern texts fail to align with the grand historical narrative of the teleological development of liberal individualism:

We can account for the negative critical assessment of these works once we acknowledge that our literary culture has valued texts confirming the dominant model of heroic or autonomous selfhood. Works instead illustrative of the impulse toward self-shattering have been, for this very reason, considered inferior and even detrimental to readers.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Jonathan Bate’s introduction to the Arden edition of *Titus Andronicus*, p. 33.

<sup>2</sup> Cynthia Marshall, *The Shattering of the Self: Violence, Subjectivity, and Early Modern Texts*, p. 6. Marshall defines “self-shattering” as “an [audience’s shared] experience of psychic fracture or undoing” in response to “an emotionally demanding text” (1). Marshall argues that the violence of early modern texts provided early modern audiences a cathartic release from the mounting cultural pressures of the “nascent ethos of individualism” (2).

With the critical reassessments of the master narrative of humanism in western history, of which autonomous subjectivity is a key component, a study of the anxieties, disruptions, and reconstructions of subjectivity in Elizabethan revenge tragedies garners special importance.

Recent scholarship on early modern inwardness and intersubjectivity helps in analyzing the disruptions and reconfigurations of the self in revenge tragedies that cannot be fully explained by critical assumptions of autonomous selfhood in early modern culture. These plays provide narratives that explore the limits of identity and subjective experience, sometimes displaying an emerging ethos of individualism and sometimes working to disrupt it. At times, they depict alternative or even radical models of subjectivity. Much work has been done on the political, aesthetic, and generic contexts of early modern revenge plays, but, with the exception of the attention paid to *Hamlet*, few scholars have examined the genre's extensive problematizing of early modern selfhood.

Perhaps the most dominant model of early modern subjectivity in recent scholarship is Stephen Greenblatt's notion of "self-fashioning."<sup>3</sup> According to Greenblatt, "...in the sixteenth century there appears to be an increased self-consciousness about the fashioning of human identity as a manipulable, artful process" (*Renaissance 2*). Greenblatt identifies this prevalence of self-fashioning as a cultural shift in how identity is defined and what

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<sup>3</sup> For detailed discussions of the influence of Greenblatt's work on early modern subjectivity, self-fashioning, and how this work assumes a "one-person model of selfhood," see Nancy Selleck, *The Interpersonal Idiom in Shakespeare, Donne, and Early Modern Culture*, especially pp. 2-16, 21-26. Also see Christopher Tilmouth's analysis of new historicist and cultural materialist assumptions of autonomous selfhood in "Passion and Early Modern Intersubjectivity," pp. 15-18.

practices produce it.<sup>4</sup> Early modern subjects must exert will over their self-formation, Greenblatt argues, or risk having it shaped for them.<sup>5</sup> Greenblatt's work provided a theoretical model for analyzing early modern subjectivity and has proven to be immensely productive and influential for the study of early modern identity and textual representations of inwardness.

Recent scholarship, however, has noted some problematic assumptions in Greenblatt's work and the new historicist and cultural materialist criticism that it inspired. The most pressing problem is the assumption of an atomistic individualism when discussing early modern subjectivity. This assumption relies on a limiting, "dyadic" model of selfhood that posits a sharp boundary between "self" and "other."<sup>6</sup> As a consequence of this model, scholars have either recognized early modern subjects as unified individuals who were essentially modern or they have refused to acknowledge that early modern selves existed at all, arguing that what we interpret as representations of selfhood in early modern texts are "merely modern impositions upon the text, a response to the semiotic mirage, the

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<sup>4</sup> Greenblatt argues that "there is in the early modern period a change in the intellectual, social, psychological, and aesthetic structures that govern the generation of identities" (*Renaissance* 1).

<sup>5</sup> For discussion of how "Greenblatt's Foucauldian discourses of Power" describes self-fashioning as a conflict between the early modern subject and an abstract 'other' "standing over and against the isolated individual and threatening to subject him," see Christopher Tilmouth, "Passion and Early Modern Intersubjectivity," pp. 15-17.

<sup>6</sup> For a powerful account of the problem of autonomous or "atomistic" individualism, see Nancy Selleck, *The Interpersonal Idiom in Shakespeare, Donne, and Early Modern Culture*. Selleck argues that an intersubjective understanding of early modern selfhood provides an alternative to "the currently familiar notion of the other as a foil or anti-self against which the self defines itself—a dyadic model that has dominated critical discussions of early modern identity" (2). Nor is this "dyadic model," Selleck argues, resolved by Foucauldian notions of the self as ideologically determined: "Although Renaissance scholars and critical theorists today readily see the self as a social construct, we still tend to analyze that construct on the basis of a sharp distinction between the self and other..." (2).

reality-effect, of selfhood generated by soliloquies' first-person idioms."<sup>7</sup> Francis Barker, for instance, argues that any analysis of Hamlet's inwardness anachronistically assumes a "metaphysics of interiority" that had not yet emerged in early modern culture.<sup>8</sup> Likewise, Catherine Belsey searches for representations of a unified subjectivity in *Hamlet*. Failing to locate evidence of autonomous individualism, Belsey states that "[b]ecause the speaker necessarily exceeds the 'I' of utterance, the unity promised by humanism inevitably eludes it" (52). Since the "I" of Hamlet's soliloquies fails to prove a "unity," Belsey argues that "the subject of liberal humanism" must be a textual illusion, "a chimera, an effect of language, not its origin" (54).

In his own seminal text, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, Greenblatt oscillates between the two possibilities allowed by the dyadic model of selfhood. He opens his work by claiming "my starting point is quite simply that in sixteenth-century England there were both selves and a sense that they could be fashioned," but confesses by the book's end that what seemed to be autonomous individualism might be better explained by ideological interpellation:

...as my work progressed, I perceived that fashioning oneself and being fashioned by cultural institutions—family, religion, state—were inseparably intertwined. In all my texts and documents, there were, so far as I could tell, no moments of pure, unfettered subjectivity; indeed, the human subject itself began to seem remarkably unfree, the ideological product of the relations of power in a particular society. Whenever I focused sharply upon a moment of apparently autonomous self-fashioning, I found not an epiphany of identity freely chosen but a cultural artifact. If there remained traces of free choice, the choice was among possibilities whose range was strictly delineated by the social and ideological system in force. (256)

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<sup>7</sup> Tilmouth, "Passion and Early Modern Intersubjectivity," p. 14.

<sup>8</sup> See Francis Barker, *The Tremulous Private Body*, p. 58.



Though Greenblatt, Barker, Belsey, and like-minded new historicists are attentive to the complexities that must accompany any possible history of human subjectivity, their reliance on a model of selfhood assumes a subject to be either 1) “pure, unfettered subjectivity” or 2) an ideologically determined illusion of autonomy. The limitation of this model of subjectivity makes difficult any attempt to account for the ways early modern subjectivity and its external or social manifestations are intertwined.<sup>9</sup>

Several recent scholars--such as Nancy Selleck, Christopher Tilmouth, and Katharine Eisaman Maus--have taken up the challenge of Greenblatt’s work by seeking models of subjectivity that can accommodate the careful cultural analysis of new historicism by acknowledging that subjectivity and its social, philosophical, and theological implications are historically contingent. Scholars of early modern intersubjectivity do not deny that individualism is emerging in early modern culture. Rather, they argue that the nascent individualism of early modern culture is steeped in interpersonal relations that *enable* notions of the individual but do not yet conceive of the individual as an “autonomous” subject.<sup>10</sup> These scholars reject Greenblatt’s Foucauldian influence, turning

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<sup>9</sup> Selleck, for instance, argues that “A great deal of subsequent criticism addresses the alienated ‘Other’ in early modern culture, largely ignoring more subtle but equally important ways in which otherness structures Renaissance selfhood. In focusing on threatening rather than more familiar others, we limit our discussion to one model of self, in which identity is constructed in opposition to context. This model...makes it difficult to discover anything but atomized selves” (Selleck 2). Katharine Eisaman Maus makes a similar critique of the assumed dichotomous model of subjectivity in *Inwardness and the Theater in the English Renaissance*. According to Maus, new historicists approach the problem of subjectivity as a divide between experiences of inwardness its public expressions. Maus argues that “[t]he problems posed by the gap between internal truth and external manifestation” are acknowledged in early modern culture, and Maus finds textual evidence of attempts to “remedy” this gap through “the difficult social tasks of intersubjective understanding” (8).

<sup>10</sup> Selleck provides an account of how intersubjectivity resolves the dyadic model assumed by Greenblatt’s work: “[t]o characterize selfhood interpersonally...is not the same as saying there is ‘nothing’ there. It is rather to stipulate that what is there inheres not in the individual, but in the mix – in the precarious engagement with others” (Selleck 18). Tilmouth argues that the theory of intersubjectivity provides an approach “which (like Greenblatt’s) locates identity partly outside the individual, but does so in a more

to Mikhail Bakhtin as their new key theorist for analyzing early modern subjectivity. Selleck, for instance, claims that Bakhtin's "concept of dialogized consciousness...recognizes the interplay of perspectives in a given speaker and casts selfhood as an engagement with, rather than a reaction against, others" (3).

Crucial to this notion of selfhood is the self's tendency "to be engaged with the other's *frame of reference*, and to be shaped by it" (Selleck 3). According to Selleck, Tilmouth, and others, the language of selfhood in early modern texts reveals notions of identity which presume interaction between selves as an essential aspect of identity formation. Selleck argues that the rhetoric of social interactions and interpersonal relations should be foregrounded in our study of early modern subjectivity, as "this language provides its users with conceptions and expectations of identity as an exchange, permeation, borrowing, anticipation—in short, a great variety of other-oriented actions and configurations largely alien to our modern language of selfhood" (Selleck 1).

Rather than approaching the early modern "self" as a discrete, ontological object that is distinct from an abstract "Other," scholars are rethinking early modern subjectivity "as an experience situated at the boundary between the person and those to whom he relates, within the dialogic domain of intersubjectivity" (Tilmouth, "Passion" 16). John Jeffries Martin, for example, argues that we should not approach the self as

a thing (the soul, the heart, the mind, the *res cogitans*, or the like) but rather *as a relation*. The self, on this account, is not 'a ghost in the machine' or a puppeteer directing our outer movements and expressions. ... We might open the body, but we will find no 'self' within. The self has no physical location; it is not our 'core'; rather, it is discerned most clearly as a relation between those dimensions of experience that people describe as *internal* (conscious or unconscious thoughts,

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persuasive way; indeed, in a way that both reflects contemporary trends in communitarian ethics and challenges the Pocockian assumption that spectatorial consciousness developed only in the eighteenth century" ("Passion" 16).

feelings, beliefs, emotions, desires) and those they describe as *external* (speaking or writing, hating or loving, praying or blaspheming, laughing or crying, stealing or buying, and so on). And, in positing such a topography of experience, the body invariably plays a fundamental role; for it is the outer covering of the body--its skin--that serves as a privileged frontier between these two distinct spheres of experience. (15)

My work agrees with Martin, though he focuses more heavily on embodiment than I do.

Martin's analysis of early modern subjectivity as a "relation" between internal and external experience helps rehistoricize the early modern notion of selfhood as a pre-Cartesian concept. In my work, the distinction I trace does not concern mind/body duality (wherein the mind is the essential self). Instead, I explore depictions of selves as private/public hybridities.

Social aspects of the self, such as a character's identity, are intersubjective in ways that make a person's sense of self a site of discursive conflict. How the self is defined, and how characters speak of their experiences of subjectivity, are largely dependent on the rhetoric that is used to describe a person's character. Moreover, revenge tragedies, in particular, represent intersubjectivity through the aspects of selfhood that are tenuous. The madness of the revenger, which is conventional in revenge plays, is often tied to an anxiety about both the inefficacy of rhetoric (such as when victims of violence seek justice) and its potential violence. Though my work is indebted to recent scholarship on intersubjectivity, much of this scholarship tends to view interpersonal relations as inherently positive and productive, resulting in the reification of the self in relation to others.

I would argue that the interpersonal nature of early modern subjectivity also contains the possibility of the *dissolution* of the self, not just in terms of what Cynthia Marshall describes as "self-shattering," which considers the cathartic effect of emotional

distress for the playgoing audience, but also in the sense of characters onstage whose subjectivities come apart at the seams. Often, this dissolution takes rhetorical stances in relation to a decayed, fallen state of the world as a whole (as in *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Titus Andronicus*) or in terms of a desire for oblivion (as in *Hamlet*). If the self exists through relations with others, what happens when those relations are primarily aggressive and violent? While other genres of early modern drama explore the contingent and intersubjective nature of early modern identity and inwardness, revenge plays tend to explore the very limits of intersubjective experience by depicting characters who are so violently dislodged from social and familial roles that they struggle to recognize themselves or make sense of their own actions or inactions. The eruptions of interpersonal violence in Elizabethan revenge tragedies trace the limits of intersubjectivity, revealing how the interpersonal relation between ‘self’ and ‘others’ provides only a *tenuous* possibility for selfhood. Revenge tragedies depict trajectories of radically disruptive relations between the self and others, providing narratives that reveal the destruction of subjectivity (rather than its construction) that follows when interpersonal relations are rooted in violent conflict and aggression.

In addition to issues of intersubjectivity and violence, I will also analyze the theatrical and metatheatrical aspects of revenge tragedies. Scholarship on the history and significance of the soliloquy and the aside in early modern drama reveals useful patterns for how modes of self-addressed speech are used in revenge tragedies. My work on revenge plays considers the implications of the *theatrum mundi* motif and the presence of the audience. These cognitive artifacts enable early modern notions of interiority that are both

private and interpersonal without being self-contradictory. Also important will be my tracing of the converging lines of identity and theatricality with early modern practices of citation or adaptation. There are aspects of self-fashioning happening in these plays, but the self-fashioning of revengers is complicated by the fact that they must conceal or encode their motives, display ambiguous threats, and locate co-conspirators. I will trace how revenge tragedies present theatricality as a citational mode. This citationality of revenge tragedy is linked to intersubjectivity, as revengers do not just inhabit the role of revenger, they also seek to modify, adapt, or surpass prior models of revenge, as would be a common practice while studying rhetoric. The revenge project and the identity of the revenger, I will argue, is not mere mimicry, but expansion and modification of pre-existing materials.

### **Overview of Chapters**

My intention is not to supplant the hard work and brilliant insights of the generations of critics and scholars who preceded me in exploring early modern revenge tragedy. Literary analysis is, after all, a craft, and whatever level of competency I am able to achieve in this project is due, in large part, to the excellent models of analysis and interpretation which are displayed by the many excellent scholars working both past and present. The purpose of my work is to supplement the legacy of scholarship, and to respect the intellectual labors of others by attempting to contribute to our understanding of these plays and continue moving things forward. Literary criticism is most productive, I believe, when it is iterative rather than contentious, and even in my moments of disagreement with the scholarship that informs my own work, I hope it is clear I am working from a position

of deep respect and admiration. To this end, literary criticism often feels like a project of collaboration from a distance. The chapters which follow are specifically indebted to the critical insights of Katharine Eisaman Maus, Nancy Selleck, Christopher Tilmouth, and others. I hope to use their insights in ways that make a contribution to our understanding of early modern subjectivity and Elizabethan revenge tragedy.

The first chapter in this project explores the depiction of self-recognition through others. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate how Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* contributes to the prevalence of a dialogical rather than autonomous self in early modern culture. Audiences and mirrors function in *The Spanish Tragedy* as cognitive artifacts that enable complex phenomenal experiences of intersubjectivity. In my reading of the play, I analyze the rhetoric of Hieronimo's slide into madness following his son's murder. I show how trauma creates a space in which Hieronimo is able to redefine his role and sense of purpose through his relation with others. Key to this reconfiguration is Hieronimo's dependence on finding new models for himself in others that he can identify with and iterate upon in order to become a figure of retribution. In addition adapting his subjectivity to follow the models of grief and action provided by others, culminating in a selfhood through which he takes revenge against his son's murderers, Hieronimo also seeks to become the mirror or model of paternal grief through which the other fathers in the play might actualize their own responses to the murders of their sons (for which Hieronimo is responsible). The play's depictions of grief, anger, and murderous intent suggest conditional aspects of selfhood. If Hieronimo engages in "self-fashioning," it is not a fashioning which is inwardly generated, but one which reveals the self to be pliable

through engagements with others. Hieronimo transitions, in other words, from a figure of civic order to a figure of violent retribution in a process that is not autonomous and self-reliant but relation-dependent and communal.

The second chapter deals with the reconstruction of identity through the reciprocation between Titus and Lavinia, which depicts subjectivity not in terms of an autonomous individuality, but as a permeable, expanded notion of the ‘other self.’ Shakespeare builds upon Thomas Kyd’s thematizing of revenge as a form of violent accusation, a theatrical reenactment of a trauma which cannot be returned to the perpetrator through language alone. But where Kyd uses theatrical spectacle--the play-within-the-play--as a medium for ‘performance violence,’ Shakespeare emphasizes a citational mode of accusation and retribution. In Shakespeare’s play, Lavinia is denied speech and writing, having her tongue and hands lopped away, and in her silence she resorts to citation. Rather than being a text herself (from which Titus initially hopes to “wrest an alphabet”) or being relegated to the role of the ‘handmaiden of revenge,’ she becomes *a textual authority*.<sup>11</sup> Lavinia uses her wounded stumps to turn to the pages in her nephew’s copy of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, citing Philomel’s rape in order to initiate an accusation and recommend a course of Procnean retribution. I will trace the disruptions of Titus and Lavinia’s senses of autonomy, as configured by their social, familial, and political roles in Rome, and will demonstrate how Shakespeare uses practices from rhetorical training, such as citing from and adapting preceding texts, to develop a citational mode of

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<sup>11</sup> See *Titus* 3.2.44.

subjectivity that offers a radical, if ultimately unsustainable, alternative to early modern individualism.

The third chapter explores John Marston's depiction of subjectivity in *Antonio's Revenge* as metatheatrical. In Marston's depiction of intersubjectivity, the self is a collaborative project, and self-recognition is intrinsically linked to how a person is acknowledged in the eyes of others. In this play, that process of self-recognition through acknowledgement is figured through applause. Marston's emphasis on rhetoric as inherently competitive and, therefore, *aggressive*, alters the underlying concern of revenge plays. In Marston's work, retaliation is no longer a question of justice. Instead, Marston links retaliation to concerns of reputation, which is rooted in interpersonal recognition of personal achievements. I will explore Marston's interest in public acknowledgement and the way it gives form and extension to the identities that characters believe themselves to have. In Marston's play, applause becomes a signifier of consensus that provides a perceivable sign of recognition that distinguishes one character's identity from another. Subjectivity, in this sense, is contingent upon the relation between a self and the others from whom a self seeks recognition. What is true about the self, in Marston's play, is that it exists *in the relation between performance and audience*.

The fourth chapter explores subjectivity as intrinsically linked to memory. Unlike the revengers from other tragedies, Hamlet spends most of the play trying to talk himself into taking revenge, rather than trying to talk himself out of it (as is the convention). Hamlet claims he wants to stamp revenge in his brain, wants it to be the fixation of all his thoughts and actions. But it is not. Instead, Hamlet is burdened by the duty he feels in remembrance



for his father. The murder of Hamlet's father is, for Hamlet, less traumatic than the violation done to his memory through deliberate acts of forgetting. What haunts Hamlet is not that his father is dead, or even that his father has been murdered, but that others already seem to have forgotten him and expect Hamlet to forget him as well. As in Marston's play, Shakespeare emphasizes the importance of acknowledgement from others for a character's sense of self, but problematizes the temporality and mutability of acknowledgement. Hamlet combines issues of subjectivity discussed in the preceding chapters, but includes the complication of memory and the foregrounded desire for self-dissolution.

## CHAPTER II

### “THE LIVELY PORTRAIT OF MY DYING SELF”:

#### DIALOGICAL INWARDNESS AND TYPOLOGICAL MIRRORS IN *THE SPANISH TRAGEDY*

Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* (c. 1587) is the first Elizabethan revenge tragedy and establishes many of the themes and conventions of early modern revenge plays. This chapter argues that the narrative of violence, emotional trauma, and revenge in *The Spanish Tragedy* explores the disruption and reformation of early modern identity. In doing so, the chapter synthesizes Debora Shuger's work on the cultural significance of early modern mirrors--which posits early modern self-recognition as a typological process--with recent scholarship on intersubjectivity and cultural cognitive narratology. Using these historical and theoretical frameworks, I trace the significance of the play's depiction of early modern subjectivity by: (a) analyzing how the convention of the early modern soliloquy reveals inwardness as an intersubjective structure in which the self interacts with an imagined audience; (b) discussing how Hieronimo views Bazulto as an early modern mirror or portrait through which he might understand his own fatherly grief and recognize its limitations for procuring justice; and (c) demonstrating how Hieronimo reverses the direction of mirroring and self-recognition by deploying violent spectacle in the play's conclusion. In the play's final act, Hieronimo uses himself as a mirror for the other grieving fathers in the play's final scene and uses the King as a mirror for the world's corruption. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate how Kyd's revenge play

contributes to the prevalence of a dialogical rather than monological self in early modern culture. Audiences and mirrors function in *The Spanish Tragedy* as cognitive artifacts that enable complex depictions of intersubjectivity.

Before discussing the play in detail, it may be useful to provide a brief summary of the plot. The central figure of the play is Hieronimo, a father whose son Horatio is stabbed and murdered by Lorenzo (the nephew of the King of Spain) and Balthazar (the son of the Viceroy of Portugal). Hieronimo finds Horatio's bleeding corpse hung from a tree in the family arbor. Overcome with grief, he hides his son's corpse in order to investigate the murder in secret. He receives a letter from Horatio's paramour Bel-Imperia that accuses Lorenzo and Balthazar of the murder, but Hieronimo fears it may be a trick. Bel-Imperia's accusation is corroborated by a second letter that Hieronimo finds on the body of Pedringano, one of Lorenzo's servants, after Hieronimo oversees Pedringano's execution. Hieronimo attempts to petition the King for justice but Lorenzo intervenes, convincing the king that Hieronimo has gone mad. Hieronimo tries to maintain his responsibilities as Knight Marshal, but when another father (Don Bazulto) petitions for justice for his murdered son, Hieronimo is reminded of his own son's murder and declares there is no justice on earth.<sup>12</sup> To establish peace, the King of Spain and the Viceroy of Portugal arrange a marriage between Bel-Imperia and Balthazar. The king commissions Hieronimo to stage a play in celebration of the wedding. Hieronimo conspires with Bel-Imperia to take revenge against Lorenzo and Balthazar by inviting them to participate in a play.

Hieronimo's script for the play closely mirrors the events of his son's murder. Unbeknownst

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<sup>12</sup> A Knight Marshal is a member of the royal household who acts as a judge. For a more detailed description of a Knight Marshal's judicial role, see Calvo and Tronch's footnote in the Arden edition of the play, pg. 123 fn 25.

to Balthazar, Lorenzo, and everyone present at court (including the King and the Viceroy), Hieronimo and Bel-Imperia use real blades while performing the play and they slaughter Balthazar and Lorenzo onstage. Everyone believes their death is a performance until the play ends and Hieronimo reveals that Balthazar and Lorenzo are dead, as is Bel-Imperia, who committed suicide during her scene. Hieronimo unveils his son's corpse from behind a curtain and explains his reasons for the slaughter onstage. Hieronimo tells Balthazar and Lorenzo's fathers that they will now understand the grief that Hieronimo himself has suffered. Incredulous, the King orders Hieronimo to be seized and demands that he confess his crimes. Hieronimo refuses to speak, biting off his own tongue in defiance. The King orders Hieronimo to write his confession but Hieronimo tricks the king into providing him with a knife to sharpen his pen. Using the penknife, Hieronimo kills himself.

The plot, themes, and rhetorical style of *The Spanish Tragedy* were immensely influential on Elizabethan theater. In *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy*, Fredson Bowers writes: "Elizabethan revenge tragedy properly begins with Thomas Kyd's extant masterpiece, *The Spanish Tragedy* (1587-1589) which presented revenge in kind--blood-revenge, the sacred duty of the father to avenge the murder of his son--and from that sensational theme derived its popularity" (65). Bowers's work remains the starting point for any serious study of early modern revenge tragedy, as he provides rich analysis that reveals the conventions of revenge plays.

Among the many common features of revenge tragedy, Bowers notes that "[a]n important dramatic device is the justifiable hesitation of the revenger, who requires much proof, and, on the failure of legal justice, supposedly lacks a suitable opportunity for

straightforward action" (Bowers 71). The protagonists of Elizabethan revenge tragedies defer violence until it is clear that legal recourse is impossible, either because there is little proof of a crime or because the apparatus of the state is corrupt. According to Bowers, hesitation and the initial attempts to procure justice through legal channels provide evidence of the revenger's moral character. Eventually, Jacobean revenge plays such as Thomas Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy* or John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* will find delight in Machiavellian revengers who hesitate not because they first seek legal recourse, but because they are cold and calculating. In Elizabethan revenge tragedy, however, the restoration of social order is paramount. The revenger's death (often via a stoic suicide) functions as a reconciliation, satisfying the audience's desire for the revenger to succeed while also acknowledging that revenge itself is a violation of social order that cannot go unpunished.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to hesitation providing a sense of moral indecision in revenge plays, Bowers claims that the convention of the revenger's hesitation also appealed to Elizabethan tastes, as "[i]ntrospection had become a national trait" and audiences, delighted with Kyd's use of the "superficial polish" of Senecan rhetoric, "fed favorably on the elaborate Senecan philosophizing" common in revenge tragedies (Bowers 75). While I agree that introspection is a key element of Elizabethan drama, I argue that its ubiquity on the English stage is driven by more than the delight of "superficial polish." Instead, the rhetoric of introspection in *The Spanish Tragedy* reveals a complex structure of inwardness. Drawing from recent scholarship in early modern intersubjectivity and cognitive cultural studies, I

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<sup>13</sup> For a more in-depth discussion of the cultural context of Elizabethan attitudes on revenge, see Bowers 34-40.

will analyze how the play depicts introspection and inwardness as dialogical processes. For example, when Hieronimo claims "I grew inward with revenge" (4.4.46), the word "inward" does not signal a retreat into an isolated self. As Clara Calvo and Jesús Tronch note in the Arden edition of the play, "inward" is used to denote being "closely associated or acquainted" or "intimate" with someone else.

Throughout the play, Hieronimo's introspections use the rhetoric of close associations and intimacies with others. Even while soliloquizing, Hieronimo's rhetoric is structured as a self in discourse with another. Several of his soliloquies attempt to understand and associate with different possible versions of himself while grappling with feelings of grief and anger. Other soliloquies posit imagined audiences that listen or respond to his grievances and help shape his actions. My analysis of *The Spanish Tragedy* argues for a new theory of soliloquy. I will demonstrate how Kyd's use of soliloquy produces an imaginary social auditory rather than a solo auditory. While *The Spanish Tragedy* is explicitly interested in revenge and violence (Revenge is even a character in the play), it also explores the disintegration of a character's sense of self and depicts the process of restructuring whatever remains of his identity. Hieronimo's process of self-recognition following a traumatic event is demonstrative of the early modern structure of subjectivity, a structure that is implicitly dependent on the interpersonal, regardless of whether or not those interpersonal relations are real or imagined. As a consequence of the trauma of his son's murder, Hieronimo's subjectivity is disrupted and he adopts a new identity (as a figure of revenge) by reimagining himself within a new personal narrative, finding a typological model of grief in Don Bazulto, and eventually becoming a model or mirror of grief for

others at the play's conclusion. In this chapter, I will argue that Hieronimo's need to find a "mirror" or model in which he can begin to recognize whatever sense of himself remains after suffering the traumatic loss of his son and his need to find or, perhaps more accurately, to create in others a "loss" that "resembles mine," reveals a complex theorization of a dialogical self (4.4.112).

### **Early Modern Intersubjectivity**

Some 35 years after its publication, Stephen Greenblatt's work on self-fashioning in early modern culture continues to be influential in its analysis of the structure of early modern identity. As I discussed in the introductory chapter, Stephen Greenblatt's work demonstrated ways of reading depictions of interiority on the Elizabethan stage as a social effect, produced through personal relations, cultural procedures, and institutional pressures. However, several scholars have pointed to an unresolved problem in Greenblatt's argument, in that it "entails a notion of self prior to self-fashioning—a discrete entity already in place to be threatened by the encounter with the 'Other'" (Selleck 3). Hidden behind the performances of a self-fashioned subject, Greenblatt's work suggests that there is an autonomous self that does the fashioning or, possibly, that inwardness is itself a textual or performative illusion. The ontology of inwardness is thus framed as a dichotomy: either the self is autonomous, capable of fashioning its public personas, or inwardness is illusory, and there is nothing beneath the various masks of identity. Recent criticism argues that this is a false dichotomy, and suggests instead that the early modern subject's inwardness is first generated in the *relation* between the self and 'Other.' Nancy Selleck, Katherine Rowe,

Christopher Tilmouth, Leonore Lieblien, and others provide an alternate understanding of early modern subjectivity by examining early modern culture's emphasis on interpersonal relations as a condition of self-recognition. Rather than assuming that either autonomous individualism is the origin of inwardness or inwardness itself is an illusion, recent textual analysis provides evidence that early modern subjectivity includes concepts and experiences of inwardness while also acknowledging social relation as a necessary condition of inwardness. Crucial to our understanding of early modern subjectivity is the notion that "Inwardness has been reconceived as an experience situated at the boundary between the person and those to whom he relates, within the dialogic domain of intersubjectivity" (Tilmouth, "Passion" 16).

To reassess the assumption of an early modern self that exists prior to an encounter with an 'Other,' Selleck applies Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the dialogized self to the study of early modern subjectivity. Whereas the modern concept of subjectivity generally assumes a monological self which precedes interpersonal relations, Selleck argues that the early modern subject was "a literally ecstatic self – a self located beyond or outside itself, in 'dialogue' with the other" (4). The recent critical focus on intersubjectivity also brings with it a shift in interlocutors. Greenblatt and other new historicists have tended to engage with the work of theorists such as Foucault and Althusser, figures who emphasize the construction of the subject in relation to "anonymous, homogeneous forces – Greenblatt's Foucauldian discourses of power, for example – standing over and against the isolated individual and threatening to subject him" (Tilmouth, "Passion" 17). This focus on structures of discursive power that chiefly emerge in the centuries after the English



Renaissance has always been an uneasy fit for early modern scholarship. In recent efforts to recontextualize our understanding of early modern subjectivity, scholars have turned to theorists such as Bakhtin, Austin, Wittgenstein, and Merleau-Ponty to provide frameworks for tracing the impact of interpersonal relations and extended, dialogized forms of cognition, forms which, they argue, provide better models for understanding early modern structures of identity. Rather than thinking of formative encounters of the self in terms of an anonymous or abstract 'Other,' these theorists allow early modern scholars to retain the notion of formative encounters while also accounting for the lived experiences between the self and 'others,' wherein these 'others' are also assumed to have personhood.

These new models seek to restore "the social picture" of early modern subjectivity, in which the self "is one of multiple agents engaging (with varying degrees of equality) in a process of exchange and interchange, their competing perspectives, interests, awarenesses and attachments penetrating and (re)shaping one another's consciousness and thereby producing selves born of intersubjectivity" ("Passion" 17). Tilmouth argues that early modern scholarship has imposed "a fluid, diffuse, somehow incomplete sense of self" on the past in order to reify an assumption of "a modern subjectivity which is supposedly complete, autarkic and particularly adept at fortifying its interiority against incursions from without" ("Passion" 16). For Tilmouth, "contemporary trends in communitarian ethics" are more closely aligned with early modern selfhood than new historicist or deconstructionist theorizations of subjectivity ("Passion" 16). By reading early modern subjectivity through dialogical self theory, scholars are challenging the notions of an absent interiority or a nascent individualism that have been frequently theorized in early modern scholarship. In

Tilmouth's assessment, early modern subjects have a developed, individuated interiority, but it is an interiority that is produced and functioning "within the dialogic domain of intersubjectivity" (16). In other words, there is no notion of an independently-formed self in early modern culture, no sense of an interior without the surface tension of a communal exterior. Nor is that surface tension between self and other impenetrable.

As I will show in my analysis of Hieronimo's rhetoric throughout *The Spanish Tragedy*, the boundary between self and other is less rigid than has been assumed by new historicist descriptions of early modern selfhood. I argue that this structure of interpersonal subjectivity might be pushed further outward to include notions of subcommunities which operate within a larger dialogic domain of political power. Like the interpersonal subjectivity of the individual, which navigates between one's sense of self in relation to one's public persona or reputation, subcommunities function interpolitically, negotiating between competing political investments (such as family interests versus state interests) and contrasting subcommunities which both define the (ever-porous) boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, trust and suspicion, affection and aversion. In my reading of *The Spanish Tragedy*, I will examine how Hieronimo's subjectivity is disrupted and reconfigured by traumatic interpersonal encounters with others. In the following sections, I'll analyze: Hieronimo's interpersonal imagination, expressed through his soliloquies; Hieronimo's reliance on others for moments of self-recognition or self-scrutiny; and Hieronimo's attempt in the play's conclusion to become a social mirror that reflects communal grief, guilt, and corruption.

## Hieronimo's Soliloquies and Dialogical Inwardness

In a moment of despair, Hieronimo contemplates ending his own life, soliloquizing the two paths he might take to the underworld. He imagines each marked by the instruments of self-slaughter he carries with him. With a dagger in one hand and a rope in the other, Hieronimo addresses himself:

Away, Hieronimo, 'tis time for thee to trudge.  
Down by the dale that flows with purple gore  
Standeth a fiery tower. There sits a judge  
Upon a seat of steel and molten brass,  
And 'twixt his teeth he holds a fire-brand  
That leads unto the lake where hell doth stand.  
Away, Hieronimo, to him be gone;  
He'll do justice for Horatio's death.  
[Points at the poniard.]  
Turn down this path, thou shalt be with him straight;  
[Points at the rope]  
Or this, and then thou needs't not take thy breath.  
This way, or that way. (3.12.6-16)

Hieronimo's suicidal ideation is the result of paternal grief on the one hand, and frustration with the absence of worldly justice on the other. The absence of justice must feel especially sharp here, given Hieronimo's judicial role in the king's household as Knight Marshal.

Both the dagger and the rope are "stock 'properties' of a would-be suicide" (Boas 405). James Siemon aptly observes that beyond their stock iconography, the rope and dagger have special significance for Hieronimo, since they "recall the circumstances of his son's death by hanging and stabbing" (91). Even beyond their significance for Hieronimo, Siemon argues that the words, objects, and actions in the play are subject to an overflowing of possible meanings that cannot be controlled or regulated by the intentions of the play's characters. For example, regarding Hieronimo's contemplation of the dagger, Siemon

argues that Hieronimo's claim (that he desires justice) is competing with a discursive context introduced with the presence of the dagger and his use of Senecan rhetoric:

Use of the dagger as a signifier in the language of Senecan emotional "fury" deprives it of a role in the evidentiary discourse of justice and forestalls its effective function as an instrument of revenge. Thus...the dagger is successively transformed through Hieronimo's usage from sign of despair, to expression of aggression, to ineffectual pickaxe, and ultimately to mere sign of rhetorically self-defeating madness. (91)

Given Siemon's insight, it is hardly surprising that Hieronimo immediately rejects the possibility of killing himself, leaving justice in the hands of the judge of the underworld or anyone else. Instead, Hieronimo opts for taking matters into his own hands, saying: "Soft and fair, not so; / For if I hang or kill myself, let's know / Who will revenge Horatio's murder then? / No, no, fie, no. Pardon me, I'll none of that" (3.12.16-19).

Hieronimo, in a gesture which displays his rejection of suicide ("I'll none of that"), tosses aside the rope and poniard, only to take them up again moments later, marking them not as items which lead to paths of justice but to a third path invested with revenge:

This way I'll take, and this way comes the King,  
And here I'll have a fling at him, that's flat.  
And Balthazar, I'll be with thee to bring,  
And thee, Lorenzo -- Here's the King, nay, stay,  
And here, ay, here, there goes the hare away. (3.12.19-24)

Hieronimo's punning on 'heir' and 'hare,' which rhetorically transforms Lorenzo and Balthazar from political figures to prey, demonstrates how Hieronimo's transition from figure of justice to figure of revenge invests language with previously unforeseen possibilities. Like the rope and dagger, which transition in their meaning throughout the play from emblems of murder, then to emblems of suicide, and finally of revenge, so too

does the language that designates Lorenzo and Balthazar's roles in the world of the play get rewritten by Hieronimo.

To expand on the significance of Hieronimo's processes of reinvesting or reinscribing words with violent potential, I will borrow further from Siemon's analysis of the play. Siemon engages the play using Bakhtin's theory of signification, in which, as Siemon says, "the word in concrete discourse...is understood to be neither stable nor single in meaning, nor ever isolated from the interlocking chains of communication, but rather a locus of contending voices and evaluative intonations" (Siemon 87). Siemon notes the essential instability of Hieronimo's rhetoric and use of props (such as the cord and dagger) and analyzes words and objects in the play in terms of their abstract instability, showing how they might contain multivalent possibilities (or "plurisignification") for the play's audience or for the structure of the plot (91).

Siemon's analysis of plurisignification in the play, however, limits awareness of the multivalent possibilities of words, objects, and actions to the privileged perspective of the audience. Watching the action unfold onstage, playgoers are able to imagine the various possible meanings of what characters say and do and what certain objects might signify. But is awareness of "plurisignification" of words/acts/objects also available to Hieronimo? Siemon acknowledges that a character's words or rhetoric in the play always contain the possibility of being contested by *another character* (this discursive conflict and its consequences are, Siemon suggests, available to the perspective of the audience), but we might also question whether a character's own words and actions might be a site of discursive conflict *for him- or herself*. Siemon persuasively argues that the play pits

different/differing perspectives (or the competing “referential realities” that characters inhabit) against each other in ways that destabilize for the audience “the notion of an unrhetorized, unconflicted ‘reality’” (92). I argue that we should also consider how the play depicts competing “referential realities” not only between characters in conflict with other characters, but also internally, when characters are in conflict with themselves.

Hieronimo’s soliloquies throughout the play express moments of grief, anger, loss, the desire for justice and frustration with a corrupt world. While the contents of these soliloquies are compelling in their own right, Hieronimo’s soliloquies also raise questions about early modern subjectivity. What remains of a character’s sense of self after that self has been dislodged or disrupted by trauma and loss? How does a character work through grief when the causes of his grief are obscured, dismissed, or misrepresented? What is the function and significance of recognition and empathy in the context of an intersubjective social picture? Following the murder of his son Horatio, Hieronimo inhabits a subject-position that is dangerous for him, a subject-position that does not allow him to work through his sense of grief without signaling to others that he is investigating his son’s murder and planning revenge. He must develop his resolve and his identity as a revenger while keeping his intentions concealed from anyone who might attempt to hinder him. This seems to pose a problem for the claim that early modern subjectivity is inherently intersubjective, that subjectivity itself is produced through social relations and, most importantly, through the cognitive medium of recognition. However, the play provides a depiction of inwardness that, despite its isolation from others (or, even in moments of public outburst, its dismissal or lack of recognition from others), is produced without

needing to invent a cognitive process which subverts early modern intersubjectivity. Hieronimo's reinvention of himself as revenger happens on two levels: 1) through an imagined audience that responds to his expressions of grief, anger, and accusation as proxies for the other characters or figures who fail to acknowledge him onstage, and 2) through moments of 'mirroring,' when Hieronimo recognizes a typological model for himself in Don Bazulto's experience of despair and paternal grief.

Hieronimo's soliloquies provide examples of how self-addressed speech can account for multiple 'referential realities.' His soliloquies provide various faux-social contexts wherein Hieronimo can view himself in different ways as he works toward the role of revenger. Even when Hieronimo soliloquizes, speaking his thoughts in isolation, his soliloquies are structured as imagined intersubjective relations with others. His soliloquies acknowledge, and sometimes give voice to, competing perspectives that may or may not align with the "referential reality" he accepts at the time as true. Early modern inwardness, in this sense, structures inwardness not as self-generated and insulated or isolated from others, but as a *process* of social interaction, even if that interaction is between the self and the self.

Kyd's representation of inwardness, in other words, contains otherness as an essential condition of consciousness. Hieronimo cannot soliloquize or contemplate the conditions of his suffering without framing his thoughts, feelings, or experiences as sites of discursive conflict. Throughout the play, he explains himself *to* himself, and this working out of his suffering is itself conditional on competing referential realities (rather than a single, unified reality) that he himself holds. Hieronimo's soliloquies are not just

denotative--to borrow a line from *Hamlet*, they do not simply “denote” him “truly,” but instead depict the forces of competing influences.<sup>14</sup> Hieronimo pokes and prods at himself, questions himself, encourages himself. His self-addressed speeches, in other words, are not verbalized expressions of a monological inner discourse, but are dialogical, providing polyvocal representations of competing perspectives. In this sense, even the soliloquy becomes a site of discursive conflict, where possible values compete for Hieronimo’s attention and for commitments to (or against) various actions. Hieronimo’s words figure as agentive forces, competing within the play’s literal and discursive conflicts.

In one soliloquy, Hieronimo claims his “woes” themselves are inscribed with agency. Having “surcharged the air / With ceaseless plaints,” he describes his words as “conspiring” with the “blustering winds” in a search for justice, and, in their fury, this coalition of words and winds have “moved the leafless trees, / Disrobed the meadows of their flowered green, / Made mountains marsh with spring-tides of my tears / And broken through the brazen gates of hell” (3.7.3-9). Thus, even when alone and venting his grief and anguish, he does not think himself in isolation. His words have being-in-the-world, despite being unheard by the king -- or God, who resides in “those empyreal heights...countermured with walls of diamond” and is inaccessible to Hieronimo’s petitions for justice (3.7.15-16). The tendency of Elizabethan playwrights to use personification in soliloquies is evidence of how early modern consciousness is structured in terms of interpersonal relation. It expresses a person’s own inward experiences within an intersubjective framework of consciousness.

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<sup>14</sup> See *Hamlet* 1.2.83.



Catherine Belsey argues that representations of inwardness on the Elizabethan stage are largely produced through soliloquy, which provides “the condition of possibility of presenting on the stage a new conception of the free-standing individual” (42). Belsey also states that the use of soliloquy to create “the impression of interiority” marks a shift from Medieval drama’s focus on biblical exegesis to Humanism’s emphasis on subjective experience.<sup>15</sup> Belsey analyzes the structure of the early modern self as, paradoxically, both a “unity and discontinuity” (48). According to Belsey, when the self (the “I”) soliloquizes, there are two selves: 1) an “anterior” self, or “the subject of enunciation,” which is the self which speaks *about* the self, and 2) a self “to be comprehended and dramatized” by the anterior self, which she calls the “subject of the utterance,” i.e. the self that is discussed and/or defined by the anterior self (48-49). The structure of an early modern subjectivity expressed through soliloquy is, therefore, not a monological, atomistic self, but is a self only in so far as it *acts* (both in the sense of *a being which takes action* and in the theatrical sense of the *actor*, a being which personates).

On this point, Belsey and I agree: soliloquy imagines the speaker as inhabiting the role of both *orator* and *audience*. But despite Belsey’s insight into the interpersonal nature of early modern soliloquies, she assumes inwardness is inherently monological:

...the occurrence of ‘I’ in speech is predicated on a gap between the subject of the enunciation and the subject of utterance, the subject who is defined in the speech. Since the subject of enunciation always exceeds the subject of utterance, the ‘I’

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<sup>15</sup> In *The Subject of Tragedy*, Belsey states: “As the literal drama [of the sixteenth century] discards allegory, and morality personifications give way to social types, concrete individuals, the moral conflicts externalized in the moralities are internalized in the soliloquy and thus understood to be within the mind of a protagonist. The struggle between good and evil shifts its centre from the macrocosm to the microcosm” (42). Jonathan Dollimore makes a similar argument in *Radical Tragedy*, claiming that the unified subject of medieval culture gives way to a “decentered, contradictory subjectivity” in the Renaissance (see *Radical Tragedy* pp. xxix, 153-156). For a critique of these views, see David Aers, “A Whisper in the Ear of Early Modernists.”

cannot be fully present in what it says of itself. It is this gap which opens the possibility of glimpsing an identity behind what is said, a silent self anterior to utterance, 'that within which passes show.' (48-49)

When Belsey describes a “gap” between “the subject of the enunciation” and “the subject of utterance,” she posits early modern inwardness as empty of content, as “the self is always ultimately un-speakable, unuttered” (52). Though Belsey identifies soliloquy as the condition of possibility for representing inwardness, the multivalent nature of soliloquy leads her to conclude that early modern inwardness is a textual illusion: “...the subject of liberal humanism is a chimera, an effect of language, not its origin” (54).

While scholars like Belsey rightly emphasize the importance of textuality and performance, they go too far in emptying out the early modern person. To view early modern inwardness through an ontological assumption of the monological self fails to see the model of selfhood (i.e. the interpersonal subject) that is represented in the text. According to Nancy Selleck, the problem here is that “It seems there is either the liberal humanist subject, or nothing” (14). Selleck argues that abandoning a monological model in favor of an intersubjective model resolves the paradox of the self as a void, gap, or absence: “To characterize selfhood interpersonally...is not the same as saying there is ‘nothing’ there. It is rather to stipulate that what is there inheres not in the individual, but in the mix – in the precarious engagement with others” (18). It is not the case that early modern subjects lacked a sense of inwardness, but this inwardness, this sense of a private self, cannot be understood through an atomistic model of subjectivity.

Belsey reads the self speaking to (or about) the self as a gap which marks the self as split into a void, a “lost presence” (53). I argue that what Belsey reads as a gap is really a

relation. Belsey's recognition of the multivalent self is not a paradox; rather, multivalence is a condition of early modern inwardness. Tilmouth describes inwardness as "an experience situated at the boundary between the person and those to whom he relates" ("Passion" 16). This model of intersubjectivity explains why in Shakespeare's *Richard II*, for example, Richard cannot even imagine a solipsistic world without creating for himself an imaginary social network, a virtual world 'peopled' with his own thoughts. Having been uncrowned and deposed from the throne, Richard soliloquizes while being held prisoner in the Tower of London. Richard's elaborate, extended metaphor here is a stunning example of the dialogical condition of early modern subjectivity:

I have been studying how I may compare  
This prison where I live unto the world:  
And for because the world is populous  
And here is not a creature but myself,  
I cannot do it; yet I'll hammer it out.  
My brain I'll prove the female to my soul,  
My soul the father; and these two beget  
A generation of still-breeding thoughts,  
And these same thoughts people this little world,  
In humours like the people of this world,  
For no thought is contented...

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Thus play I in one person many people,  
And none contented: sometimes am I king;  
Then treasons make me wish myself a beggar,  
And so I am: then crushing penury  
Persuades me I was better when a king;  
Then am I king'd again: and by and by  
Think that I am unking'd by Bolingbroke,  
And straight am nothing: but whate'er I be,  
Nor I nor any man that but man is  
With nothing shall be pleased, till he be eased  
With being nothing. (*Richard II* 5.5.1-41)

Richard's soliloquy grapples with the disrupted identity he suffers after being stripped of the crown. His sense of "being nothing" seems to suggest a conceptual model of a monological self, perhaps reaching toward the paradoxical presence/absence of the self described by Belsey. But even as Richard contemplates the possibility of "being nothing," that possibility is endlessly deferred, since even the condition of his sense of nothingness is relational ("I am unking'd by Bolingbroke / And straight am nothing").

Of course, for Richard "being nothing" might simply equate nothingness with not being king. The more salient fact here is that Richard cannot think of himself without thinking in terms of the intersubjective relations that make identity possible: "Thus play I in one person many people," he says, and what is devastating is that he does not know which of these "many people" properly defines him: "And none contented." Ultimately, Richard's crisis is not that his selfhood is empty of content but that he is discontented, as none of the thoughts that "people" his solitary contemplations are able to assure him that he still is the person he believed himself to be. Even while tracing a process of discontentment that seems to define the nothingness of being, Richard's form of inwardness imagines that it always has an audience.

I argue that this interrelation with imagined others is also at work in Hieronimo's depictions of inwardness. In Hieronimo's soliloquy in 3.2, his laments are couched in a metaphor of dictation. When he imagines the "night" as "sad secretary to my moans," Hieronimo's grief over his murdered son is not expressed as solitary, insulated, or private. His moans are prompted and recorded by the personified night (3.2.12). Nor are his thoughts or movements figured as self-generated. Instead, Hieronimo claims they are

caused by “The ugly fiends” that “do sally forth of hell, / And frame my steps to unfrequented paths, / And fear my heart with fierce-inflamed thoughts” (3.2.15-17). “The cloudy day,” too, is personified as a figure who “records” Hieronimo’s “discontents” and “Early begins to register my dreams, / And drive me forth to seek the murderer” (3.2.19-21).

Even when Hieronimo does not employ personification, his soliloquizing isn’t just a record of his private thoughts but is structured as a conversation between various referential realities within himself. Throughout most of the play, following his traumatic experience in finding his son murdered, Hieronimo speaks as a character trying to consolidate incompatible versions of who he might be (or who he might become). Hieronimo often oscillates, sometimes within a single self-addressed speech, between different voices. This is the rhetorical equivalent to a trope in contemporary cinema, in which a character who is conflicted (or who embodies conflicted selves or split personalities) speaks into a mirror or reflection, only to have the self in the reflection speak back to them as if the reflection were another character.<sup>16</sup> For example, in his ‘*Vindicta mihi*’ soliloquy at the start of 3.13, Hieronimo oscillates between using “I” and “thou” while debating with himself whether he should take revenge himself or put his trust in God’s divine justice. He even, at times, speaks to himself by name: “Ay, heaven will be revenged of every ill, / Nor will they suffer murder unrepaid. / Then stay, Hieronimo, attend their will, / For mortal men may not appoint their time” (3.13.2-5). This view that Hieronimo gives voice to is then contradicted by an

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<sup>16</sup> There are numerous examples of this. Two spring immediately to mind for me: Ash talking to himself in the mirror in *Evil Dead II*, only to have the mirror image respond and then reach through the mirror to choke him, and Smeagol talking to his other self—Gollum—reflected in a pool of water in Peter Jackson’s *The Two Towers*.

opposing position: “Strike, and strike home, where wrong is offered thee” (3.13.7).

Hieronimo adopts this position as his own (“I will revenge his death”) and his self-admonition to be patient and wait for God’s justice becomes a warning to be patient “Till to revenge thou know when, where, and how” (3.13.44).

Hieronimo’s commitment to revenge, his adoption of the role of revenger, is therefore structured as polyvocal. His soliloquy places two possible referential realities (Christian and Senecan) in dialogue with each other. In Richard and Hieronimo’s soliloquies, their depictions of the self as multivalent subject-position that incorporates otherness and alterity in the process of self-construction is closely aligned with Hubert J. M. Hermans and Thorsten Gieser’s description of Dialogical Self Theory:

In the tradition of the founding philosopher of alterity, Emmanuel Levinas (1969), otherness is often equated with the face of another human being, while the internal sphere of the self is characterized by sameness and identity. However, such an association between self and sameness does not sufficiently take into account the differentiation, diversity and even oppositions of a multivoiced, dialogical self with its relatively autonomous parts characterized by alterity. Cooper and Hermans (2007) argued that, in the context of DST, the notions of ‘difference’, ‘otherness’ and ‘alterity’ can be usefully extended from the *interpersonal* realm to the *intrapersonal* one. In this way, alterity can be found and experienced not only between the self and the actual other, but also between different *I*-positions within the self. The introduction of the notion of self-otherness is not to suggest that alterity exists within a self-contained, isolated monad. Rather, it is to emphasize that otherness enters the self from the most explicitly ‘external’ realms to the most seemingly ‘internal’ ones, whether expressed by the voices of actual others, imagined others or the different voices of ‘oneself.’ (Hermans and Gieser, *Handbook of Dialogical Self Theory* 7)

Like the “self-otherness” described in Dialogical Self Theory, the condition of inwardness in early modern soliloquies includes alterity and differentiated voices.

## Intersubjectivity and Mirroring

While attending to the multivalence of his soliloquy, Hieronimo is drawn toward Senecan revenge rather than Christian stoicism and finds an external model for his thinking in the book of Seneca's plays that he holds in his hand. Having discussed the intersubjective structure of Hieronimo's soliloquies, I will now turn our attention to another aspect of how the play depicts the recovery and reformation of disrupted subjectivity. I will analyze external models or cognitive artifacts as another mode of self-recognition, showing how Hieronimo's process of recognition is not only a relation of self-to-self or self-to-imagined-audience through soliloquy. Hieronimo's process of recognition is not only a relation of self-to-self or self-to-imagined-other. Kyd's depictions of dialogical selfhood in *The Spanish Tragedy* is not limited to soliloquy. Hieronimo also has moments of self-recognition when seeing his own experiences, recognizing his own interiority, in another person (specifically Don Bazulto) with whom Hieronimo identifies. Using Debora Shuger's work on early modern mirrors, I will analyze the typological nature of reflection in Hieronimo's assertion that Don Bazulto is "the lively portrait of my dying self" (3.13.82-84). Hieronimo sees in Don Bazulto a likeness of grief that allows him to recognize and make sense of his own grief, not just as an emotion but as an essential element in reconfiguring of his sense of self, which has been in a state of disintegration following the trauma of his son's murder.

With recent scholarship on early modern 'mirroring' in mind, I want to turn to an odd moment in Act 3 of *The Spanish Tragedy*. Hieronimo, attempting to fulfill his judicial duties as Knight Marshal (i.e. a court judge), tells himself in an aside: "Now must I bear a

face of gravity, / For thus I used before my marshalship / To plead in causes as a  
corregidor” (3.13.56-58). In prior efforts to avoid slipping into madness or frenzy,  
Hieronimo has already struggled and failed to keep his passionate grief in check. At the  
beginning of this scene, Hieronimo attempts to conceal his grief in order to seem the same  
judicial Hieronimo he was (i.e. to “bear a face of gravity”) prior to his son’s murder. At  
first, all seems routine as Hieronimo prepares to settle various minor disputes. Hieronimo’s  
“face of gravity,” however, gives way when he sees an old man, Don Bazulto, who stands  
off to the side. Hieronimo seems agitated by the old man, which is implied in his slip out of  
judicial rhetoric: “But wherefore stands yon silly man so mute, / With mournful eyes and  
hands to heaven upreared?” (3.13.67-68). Perhaps Hieronimo already recognizes the look  
of a grieving father in need of justice. As it so happens, the “humble supplication / of Don  
Bazulto for a murdered son” echoes Hieronimo’s own petition for justice (3.13.77-78).

Hieronimo himself had attempted to petition the king for justice in the preceding  
scene, exclaiming “Justice! Oh, justice, justice, gentle King!” (3.12.62). But before  
Hieronimo could inform the king of Horatio’s murder, Lorenzo (the king’s nephew and the  
figure most responsible for Horatio’s murder) intervened, impeding Hieronimo’s attempt to  
seek justice for his son. With access to the king hindered, Hieronimo’s anguish was  
exacerbated, causing Hieronimo to lapse into a Senecan fury. While he stabbed his dagger  
into the earth, Hieronimo proclaimed before Lorenzo and within the hearing of the king:

Away! I’ll rip the bowels of the earth,  
And ferry over to th’Elysian plains,  
And bring my son to show his deadly wounds.  
Stand away from me!  
I’ll make a pickaxe of my poniard,  
And here surrender up my marshalship,  
For I’ll go marshal up the fiends in hell



To be avenged on you all for this. (3.12.70-77)

Given the passionate intensity of Hieronimo's rhetoric, it is perhaps little surprise that the King's response was one of confusion, especially since the King seemed unaware of Horatio's murder or Lorenzo's involvement. After Hieronimo's furious exit from the scene, Lorenzo offered a somewhat dubious explanation to appease the King, claiming that Hieronimo was "Distract and in a manner lunatic" because he covets "The ransom of the young Prince Balthazar" owed to Horatio (3.12.86-87).

Hieronimo's attention to Don Bazulto's grief and petition for justice, then, resonates not only as empathy but also as a moment which provides an amendment to Hieronimo's own failed petition before the king. Hieronimo's consideration of Don Bazulto's petition for his murdered son is a model for the consideration Hieronimo himself hoped for when he shouted his own need for justice. Things go awry, however, when Hieronimo reads Don Bazulto's supplication and the likeness of their unresolved injustices agitates Hieronimo's grief, disrupting Hieronimo's role as Knight Marshal. His rhetoric shifts from that of a magistrate back to that of a petitioner, a father caught up in grief: "No, sir, it was my murdered son, / Oh, my son, my son, oh, my son Horatio!" (3.13.79-80). Hieronimo's outburst marks the end of his attempts to maintain the self he was before his son's murder, a self that was defined by his identity as, on the one hand, a proud father and, on the other hand, a magistrate of justice. In Don Bazulto he recognizes the self he has become, neither father nor figure of justice: "Here, take my handkerchief and wipe thine eyes, / Whiles wretched, I in thy mishaps may see / The lively portrait of my dying self" (3.13.82-84).

Hieronimo's use of the word of "portrait" here takes on special significance for early modern subjectivity. While Hieronimo describes Bazulto as his own "portrait" rather than as a mirror, early modern culture often didn't distinguish between portrait and mirror-image as visual metaphor.<sup>17</sup> Hieronimo's claim that Don Bazulto is a "lively portrait" marks a moment of self-recognition and self-reflection. In this "lively portrait" Hieronimo recognizes an image of grief which is 'like' his own, allowing him to see himself, his "dying self," and his own inner experience of paternal grief in relation to an external model.

To understand why Hieronimo sees a "lively portrait" in Bazulto, I will turn our attention to Debora Shuger's recent scholarship on the cultural significance of early modern mirrors. The prevalence of the mirror trope in early modern texts highlights the importance of recognition from others in early modern culture. In early modern England, both real and figurative mirrors were extremely popular.<sup>18</sup> But early modern notions of reflection and of what one expects to find in a mirror were radically different from how we tend to think of mirroring today. According to Shuger, the early modern mirror did not foster "a new awareness of individual identity" or "a new reflexive consciousness" (22). Our contemporary conception of the mirror image imagines the self (as subject) viewing the self (as object) in isolation. The modern, individuated self "stands alone in front of the glass" and is the only thing seen in the mirror: "the mirror faces the one holding it up, so that it reflects only the form and pressure of this individual subjectivity" (Shuger 37). The self-object viewed in the mirror, in this sense, is an entity perceived as isolated and in this

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<sup>17</sup> See Shuger, pp. 30-31.

<sup>18</sup> For a brief overview of the cultural and material history of the mirror in early modern England, see Shuger, pp. 21-22.

isolation, autonomous and unique. This notion of the mirrored self depends on a particular form of self-awareness, a “specular gaze or Cartesian subjectivity where the perceiving ‘I’ separates from and beholds – as in a mirror – an objectified ‘me’” (Shuger 22).

For early modern subjects, however, the mirror was not a glass in which a person could view him- or herself, because early modern subjectivity did not think of the ‘self’ as a discrete, autonomous individual in the modern sense. Renaissance selfhood was not individuated, as it is in the dominant notion of modern subjectivity, but interrelational. The importance of interpersonal relations becomes clear when Hieronimo beholds Bazulto’s grief and identifies with that grief as his own “lively portrait” or mirror. In this moment of (self-)reflection, Hieronimo see himself through another’s eyes in order to speak to himself about the mutual suffering he shares with his “lively portrait”:

See, see, oh, see thy shame, Hieronimo.  
See here a loving father to his son;  
Behold the sorrows and the sad laments  
That he delivereth for his son’s decease.  
If love’s effects so strives in lesser things,  
If love enforce such moods in meaner wits,  
If love express such power in poor estates,  
Hieronimo, whenas a raging sea  
Tossed with the wind and tide o’erturneth thee,  
The upper billows’ course of waves to keep,  
Whilst lesser waters labour in the deep,  
Then shamest thou not, Hieronimo, to neglect  
The sweet revenge of thy Horatio? (3.13.94-106)

Though this is marked by scholars as “an obscure passage brimming with textual difficulty,” what’s clear is that what Hieronimo sees in the “lively portrait” of himself in Don Bazulto’s face is not a one-to-one reflection.<sup>19</sup> Hieronimo does not see a perfect mirror

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<sup>19</sup> Calvo and Tronch’s commentary on the difficulty of this passage is in the Arden edition of the *The Spanish Tragedy*, p. 263.

image of himself in Don Bazulto, but notes both the likenesses of their grief and also the difference in degree between them. Hieronimo specifically comments upon Don Bazulto's "lesser things," "meaner wits," and "poor estates" as contrasts to his own status as Knight Marshal. But despite marking out their difference in degree, Hieronimo does not dismiss the meaningful likeness between his and Bazulto's "sorrows and sad laments" and their similar experience of paternal grief for murdered sons -- the passage can be read more as a self-address on Hieronimo's part than a speech directed at Don Bazulto. The unequal status Hieronimo notes does not seem primarily intended to disparage Don Bazulto, but instead spurs himself on to greater action. In other words, the logic of the passage is that Hieronimo's greater stature requires that he also take greater action than what has been done by Bazulto. Don Bazulto, in his lesser, meaner, poorer subject-position, is able to petition for justice, but this is to strive "in lesser things." Using Bazulto as a baseline for the appropriate action of grieving fathers, Hieronimo claims his "love's effect" should, by implication, compel him to accomplish more than mere petition, especially since his attempt to petition the king has proven ineffectual.

Hieronimo's emphasis on both 'likeness' and 'degree' in self-scrutiny is an example of early modern cognition. Hamlet, too, famously scrutinizes his own inaction using a similar process, comparing the likeness and degree of his own grief to those he sees modeled by someone else. Having been moved to tears by a player's performance of lines from a play depicting the fall of Troy and the death of Priam, Hamlet states:

O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!  
Is it not monstrous that this player here,  
But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,  
Could force his soul so to his own conceit  
That from her working all his visage wann'd,

Tears in his eyes, distraction in's aspect,  
A broken voice, and his whole function suiting  
With forms to his conceit? and all for nothing!  
For Hecuba!  
What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba,  
That he should weep for her? (*Hamlet* 2.2.485-495)

Like Hieronimo, Hamlet admonishes his inaction by finding points of both likeness and difference in an 'other' who figures as a model of comparison that allows for both self-knowledge and self-scrutiny. Through these points of likenesses and differences he is able to define the effect he feels he *should* have on the world, with the player's efficacy at creating affect functioning as Hamlet's point of reference:

What would he do,  
Had he the motive and the cue for passion  
That I have? He would drown the stage with tears  
And cleave the general ear with horrid speech,  
Make mad the guilty and appal the free,  
Confound the ignorant, and amaze indeed  
The very faculties of eyes and ears. Yet I,  
A dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak,  
Like John-a-dreams, unpregnant of my cause,  
And can say nothing. (2.2.495-504)

For Hamlet, the problem is not that he lacks "the motive and the cue for passion," but that he is unable to turn his passion into a transferable affect. Priam's death, like the death of Hamlet's father for Hamlet, provides the player with a "motive" and "cue" for passion, but -- unlike Hamlet -- the player's performance of Hecuba's grief is representative of "actions that a man might play" (*Hamlet* 1.2.84). The player performs Hecuba's grief, but he is not Hecuba and cannot have her grief "denote" him "truly" (1.2.83). Like Hieronimo in *The Spanish Tragedy*, Hamlet reasons that if the player has a lesser cue for passion than he, and yet the player is able to move an audience to tears, then Hamlet's own grief, which runs

deeper than mere theatrical performance (“a fiction...a dream of passion”), should, likewise, have a more powerful effect on the court than the player’s performed grief has had on him. Through this mode of self-scrutiny, Hamlet and Hieronimo are able both to recognize their own subject-positions and to identify their failures to properly inhabit those subject-positions.

But when Hieronimo and Hamlet look into the faces of others in order to recognize themselves, do they see these ‘others’ (or, for that matter, themselves) as individuals? According to Shuger, what is metaphorically ‘seen’ in the trope of the early modern mirror is not one’s individuality, but a character type: “When the mirror is used to reflect ‘my inward self,’ that self tends to be “generic rather than individual” (26). The reflection in this sense is typological, a cataloguing of generic aspects of character. The reflections available in this trope are thus “unindividuated” (Shuger 27). “Unindividuated,” yes, but not devoid of identity. The dominant modern sense of selfhood closely relates individuality and identity -- and to lose one is, it is assumed, to lose the other. But for early modern culture, what resides in the ‘unindividuated’ self is a recognizable (to the self, and to others) pattern of identity. It is not one’s individual uniqueness which grounds one’s sense of self, but one’s sense of recognizability, a sense that depends not only on self-recognition, but also in being recognized *by others*.

As discussed earlier in the chapter, recent scholarship on this process of intersubjectivity argues that new historicism rightly emphasizes the importance of early modern self-fashioning, but these scholars tend to empty out the early modern person, claiming there is no sense of selfhood/personhood in early modern inwardness in order to

make this negative space of selfhood a precursor to modernity and the subjective self that follows. In short, they do not see the dominant model of selfhood that is present in early modern texts (i.e. the interpersonal subject). Instead, such views posit early modern subjectivity as a nascent form of liberal individualism in order to tacitly provide a point of origin for teleological understandings of modern and postmodern subjectivity.<sup>20</sup> But what Hamlet ‘sees’ in viewing himself, using the player as his ‘mirror,’ is not Hamlet-the-individual. His concern is not that his grief is different from the player’s in any specific way, or that it marks him as essentially unique as an individual; rather, his concern is that he has much more cause for grief than the player, but cannot utilize that grief to greater effect on others.

To put it simply, Hamlet is concerned with how he is perceived. He is frustrated that his grief does not affect Claudius, the members of the court, nor (perhaps most distressingly for Hamlet, as I will discuss in a later chapter) Gertrude. Of course, Claudius and Gertrude acknowledge that Hamlet performs some form of grief (“’tis unmanly grief” or “this unprevailing woe”), but they do not recognize or acknowledge Hamlet’s experience of grief, which Hamlet expects others to feel with him. At issue for Hamlet is their inability, or possibly their refusal, to recognize his grief, a grief which he claims is more than the mere

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<sup>20</sup> For a detailed discussion of the teleological assumptions in the history of scholarship on *Hamlet*, see Margaret de Grazia’s first chapter in *Hamlet Without Hamlet*, especially p. 22. De Grazia argues that since the 1800s, Hamlet has served as a model of ‘modern’ interiority for each generation of scholars. She traces the history of modern inwardness, in each of its varying incarnations, which scholars, critics, and theorists have excavated from Hamlet. This excavation is made possible because, according to de Grazia, Hamlet has been isolated and extracted from his historical context -- he is, in other words, a character who has been removed from the plot of the play *Hamlet*, and in this removal he is made to represent whatever currently counts as modern, cutting-edge interiority. Hamlet seems perpetually modern, de Grazia argues, because he is continually retrofitted to fit each epoch’s sense of modern- or cutting-edge philosophy of the self. On a side note, it would be intellectually dishonest to ignore the possibility that my own work on intersubjectivity is guilty of this as well.

show of feeling (“actions that a man might play”) that they suggest it is. Hamlet sees a lesser version of his grief in the player’s performance, but no one recognizes Hamlet’s grief as anything other than “obstinate condolment,” a grief which denotes Hamlet’s childishness rather than a grief deeply felt (1.2.93). Hamlet’s rhetoric throughout the play suggests that his grief does properly “denote” his sense of self, but this grief goes unrecognized. I will take up the question of Hamlet’s grievances again in Chapter 5.

Both Hamlet and Hieronimo scrutinize their own grief using others (the player and Bazulto, respectively) as lively ‘portraits’ or ‘mirrors’ in which they may view themselves in comparison to another whose grief is similar. According to Nancy Selleck, the recognition of likeness in early modern mirrors and portraits often has a didactic function which is closely linked to the social process of configuring one’s sense of self:

...the mirror is almost never seen as a passive reflector...what appears in the ‘mirror’ is not a self-image, nor any other realistic image, but a model – either a positive or negative exemplar. The purpose of such didactic mirrors is not to reflect, but to correct, and so the mimetic process is reversed: that is, when you ‘look into’ such a mirror, the point is not for it to reflect or copy you, but for you to imitate or apply to yourself what you see there. By presenting something other than the self, such mirrors mean to produce a more complex process than just self-recognition – they provoke comparison and make one aware of the similarity or difference between oneself and the model. Ultimately, then, these ‘mirrors’ do aim at the viewer’s self-scrutiny, only the point when the mirror presents such otherness is not just self-knowledge, but also change. In this sense, didactic mirrors are not about conforming to identity, but about destabilizing it. (Selleck 102-103)

Likewise, in *The Spanish Tragedy*, Hieronimo’s engagement with his “lively portrait” demands more from Hieronimo than self-recognition. It also prompts him to alter his response to Horatio’s murder. In his scrutiny of Bazulto’s face, Hieronimo sees “a loving father” whose “sorrows and sad laments” are the “lively portrait” of Hieronimo’s own fatherly grief (3.13.95-96, 84). But Hieronimo does not see a mirror image of himself (in



the modern sense) in the “lively portrait” of Bazulto’s face. What he does see in this ‘lively portrait’ is an *externalized image* of his own grief in another’s face, and in this externalization of the grief he feels, he is able to examine his own grief and the actions he has taken to procure justice for his murdered son by using Bazulto’s grief and Bazulto’s actions as a model for comparison. In this point of comparison between himself and another person, he is able to evaluate his own response to Horatio’s murder, which he finds shamefully lacking: “...shamest thou not, Hieronimo, to neglect / The sweet revenge of thy Horatio?” (3.13.105-106).

Having chastised himself for neglecting revenge, Hieronimo again succumbs to a Senecan fury:

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,  
Getting by force, as once Alcides did,  
A troop of Furies and tormenting hags  
To torture Don Lorenzo and the rest. (3.13.107-112)

Hieronimo’s language, laden with hellish images of the classical underworld, casts Bazulto as a figure of guidance who will lead Hieronimo to revenge:

Yet lest the triple-headed porter should  
Deny my passage to the slimy strand,  
The Thracian poet thou shalt counterfeit.  
Come on, old father, be my Orpheus,  
And if thou canst no notes upon thy harp,  
Then sound the burden of thy sore heart’s grief  
Till we do gain that Proserpine may grant:  
Revenge on them that murdered my son.  
Then will I rend and tear them thus and thus,  
Shivering their limbs in pieces with my teeth. (3.13.113-122)

Hieronimo's rhetoric transforms Bazulto from a "lively portrait" of his grief to an advocate who will help him advance his desire for revenge. The language and imagery here, of descending into hell in order to procure retribution against Horatio's murderers (i.e. Lorenzo and Balthazar), echo Hieronimo's earlier diatribe before the king, when, frustrated by Lorenzo's intervention against his petition for justice, he had stabbed at the earth with his dagger and claimed to "make a pickaxe of my poniard" and in order to "ferry over to th'Elysian plains" and "marshal up the fiends in hell" (3.12.74,71,76). In the vitriol he expressed before the king, Hieronimo refigured his poniard (a symbol of his social status within the royal court) as a pickaxe, a gravedigger's tool (useful for breaking hard foundations and digging toward the land of the dead), and declared an exchange of one kind of "marshalship" for another. With this shift, Hieronimo no longer thought of himself as the king's marshal. Instead, Hieronimo fantasized himself as a martial figure of the underworld, a commander of military power rather than a civil/judicial agent.

In his speech to Bazulto, Hieronimo again transforms objects representative of his judicial role into revenge-objects. He demonstrates how he will "rend and tear" Horatio's murderers to pieces by shredding with his teeth the legal papers -- the declarations, bonds, and leases -- brought to him by citizens seeking his judgment as Knight Marshal.

Hieronimo's tearing of their documents marks the completion of his transition from a marshal of justice to a martial figure of retribution. This scene with Bazulto is the last scene in which Hieronimo attempts to function as a judicial figure. Hieronimo's frantic exit -- telling the citizens whose bonds and leases he's destroyed, "catch me if you can" -- ends

his commitment to justice (3.13.129). From here on out in the play, Hieronimo is committed to his role as revenger.

When Hieronimo returns to the stage, he no longer sees Bazulto as a “lively portrait” of his own grief. Instead, he mistakes Bazulto for his son’s ghost, which effectively provides another presence that shapes Hieronimo’s sense of self:

And art thou come, Horatio, from the depth  
To ask for justice in this upper earth,  
To tell thy father thou art unrevenged,  
To wring more tears from Isabella’s eyes,  
Whose lights are dimmed with overlong laments? (3.13.130-134)

We might, of course, question Hieronimo’s sanity here. In his grief, he seems to have slipped into madness--a plot element that becomes conventional for Elizabethan revenge tragedies--but what Hieronimo believes Horatio’s presence *would* mean is illuminating. Hieronimo imagines that if Horatio were to return from “the depth” to “ask for justice,” his presence would be a sharp reminder that Hieronimo must take revenge, and it seems that Isabella’s tears are an important element in this. Her tears, like Horatio’s imagined presence, signify Hieronimo’s failure to procure either justice or revenge, as her tears themselves are signifiers of temporality, being described specifically in terms of “overlong laments” (3.13.134). Both Horatio’s imagined presence and Isabella’s lamentations function as implicit accusations against Hieronimo’s inaction. This sense of guilt that Hieronimo feels for lagging in his revenge is amplified when Horatio’s face (which he sees when looking in Bazulto’s face) seems to age before his eyes, as if the duration of time since Horatio’s murder grows exponentially: “Had Proserpine no pity on thy youth, / But suffereth thy fair

crimson-coloured spring / With withered winter to be blasted thus? / Horatio, thou art older than thy father” (3.13.144-147).

By the end of the scene, Bazulto does begin to resist Hieronimo’s appropriation of him as a “lively portrait,” but Hieronimo only complicates Bazulto’s resistance by collapsing the distinction between them, blurring the boundaries between self and other by telling Bazulto:

Ay, now I know thee, now thou namest thy son.  
Thou art the lively image of my grief.  
Within thy face, my sorrows I may see.  
Thy eyes are gummed with tears, thy cheeks are wan,  
Thy forehead troubled, and thy muttering lips  
Murmur sad words abruptly broken off  
By force of windy sighs thy spirit breathes.  
And all this sorrow riseth for thy son;  
And selfsame sorrow feel I for my son. (3.13. 158-166)

Here, Hieronimo’s rhetoric closes the difference between the fathers even while acknowledging Bazulto as Bazulto. In Hieronimo’s rhetoric, “thy” and “my” no longer function as external points of comparison for Hieronimo’s inner experience of grief. Instead of acknowledging likeness while asserting difference in degree or achievement, as Hieronimo did earlier in the scene, Bazulto’s external signifiers (tear-gummed eyes, wan cheeks, troubled forehead, sad words and windy sighs) are read by Hieronimo as markers of a grief that is not merely *like* Hieronimo’s grief, but *identical*, a “*selfsame sorrow*” (3.13.166, *my italics*).

Hieronimo also further blurs the distinction between self and other by inviting Bazulto to accompany him: “Come in, old man, thou shalt to Isabel. / Lean on my arm; I thee, thou me shalt stay” (3.13.167-168). Let us consider, for a moment, the strangeness of

Hieronimo's phrasing here. I thee, thou me? Why does Hieronimo avoid simply saying "we"? Perhaps because Hieronimo's tangling of pronouns ("I thee, thou me") blurs the boundary between self and other. The inverted parallelism (i.e. chiasmus) of the line encloses Bazulto within Hieronimo's first-person pronouns ("I thee, thou *me*"), which is suggestive of the inclusion of alterity that structured the inwardness of Hieronimo's soliloquies. Hieronimo's use of chiasmus also creates a kind of reflected image in the language itself. The order of pronouns is reversed, as if his own language stares into a mirror (I-Thou / Thou-I), and the rhetorical flourish emphasizes mutual recognition through "selfsame" reflection. This moment of recognition demonstrates a form of subjectivity that is a relation between the self and other rather than a dichotomy of self/Other, in which the presence of an 'Other' contributes to atomistic notions of the individual.<sup>21</sup> Hieronimo's invitation avoids having a single pronoun become the atomized subject of the line (as would be the case in the sentence "I will stay thee"). Instead, Hieronimo creates a compound subject (as in "I and thou will stay each other"). Far from creating a gap (or, to borrow Belsey's language, a "chimera") between the self and other, Hieronimo's mirrored pronouns are *chimeric* in the sense that self and other are hybridized. I argue it is this intersubjective relation between I and Thou that cannot be properly recorded through a collective pronoun like "we," as the use of "we" acknowledges a unified subject position

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<sup>21</sup> According to Selleck in *The Interpersonal Idiom*, there is a tendency in early modern scholarship to resort to a monological model of subjectivity even while analyzing the self in the presence of an Other: "A great deal of subsequent criticism addresses the alienated 'Other' in early modern culture, largely ignoring more subtle but equally important ways in which otherness structures Renaissance selfhood. In focusing on threatening rather than more familiar others, we limit our discussion to one model of self, in which identity is constructed in opposition to context. This model, I would argue, makes it difficult to discover anything but atomized selves" (2).

but obscures the *relation* between selves. Hieronimo's language acknowledges two subjects (I and Thou) while also intertwining these subjects into a defining relation.

Hieronimo's invitation to Bazulto for the two fathers to bolster each other is then linked to a metaphor of musical accompaniment which further entwines three (Hieronimo, Bazulto, and Isabella) into one without eradicating subject-positions by turning three into "we": "And thou, and I, and she will sing a song, / Three parts in one, but all of dischords framed" (3.13.169-170). The metaphor of the musical chord is likely at the forefront of Hieronimo's mind after casting Bazulto as Orpheus, a mythological figure famed for his musical ability with the lyre: "Yet lest the triple-headed porter should / Deny my passage to the slimy strand, / The Thracian poet thou shalt counterfeit. / Come on, old father, be my Orpheus" (3.13.113-116). Hieronimo, however, associates the Orphic music Bazulto might play not with harmonious melody but with the harsh ringing of trauma: "And if thou canst no notes upon the harp, / Then sound the burden of thy sore heart's grief" (3.13.117-118). In the metaphor of a musical chord, in which "Three parts" (i.e. three distinct notes or voices) become one (a single chord), is the image of a interrelated selves that are simultaneously distinct from each other while also resides in each other to form a collaboration, a shared sense of communal purpose through shared experiences of traumatic grief.

This process of forming the subjectivity of grief, which finds in others, at various times, likeness, difference, identity, discord, and cohesion, is the obliqueness of the early modern mirror image, which works more as a refraction than a reflection. Shuger demonstrates that one "...oddity characteristic of Renaissance mirrors is...[that] they do not

reflect the face of the person who looks into them, so they ignore the viewer's subject-position, his or her 'subjectivity'" (27). Shuger notes that, in early modern culture, "...the object viewed in the mirror is almost never the self. The viewer sees a great many things in Renaissance mirrors, but not, as a rule, his or her own face" (22). The self is present in the mirror, but not as an isolated, monological focal point. Rather, the early modern subject is present obliquely, within an "ontology of similitude" and in relation to encounters with others which influences how the self understands its being in the world:

What Renaissance persons do see in the mirror are instead saints, skulls, friends, offspring, spouses, magistrates, Christ. The mirror reflects these images because they are images of oneself; one encounters one's likeness only in the mirror of the other. Renaissance texts and emblems consistently describe mirroring in these terms, which suggest that early modern selfhood was not experienced reflexively but, as it were, relationally. (Shuger 37)

Instead of providing an optics of individual autonomy, the Renaissance mirror emphasizes the notion of being-in-the-world in its reflection, a notion which includes a convergence of other persons and icons. Among these reflections, the self is recognized and contextualized. Thus, when Hieronimo sees his image (whether living 'portrait' or living mirror image) in Bazulto, he sees himself obliquely, not as an isolated image but as connected through grief to the discord of the world. He doesn't simply see *himself* when he looks in Bazulto's face, which functions for Hieronimo as a refracted mirror image; he sees himself among grieving fathers, wailing with grieving wives and mothers, amid the irrepressible emblems (his son's corpse, his son's blood-soaked handkerchief, the arbour where his son was strung up and stabbed) of "murders and misdeeds" (3.2.4).

Hieronimo's metaphor of communal grief forming a musical chord does express unity, but this unity foreshadows the confusion and destruction which he will direct, quite

literally, in the play's final act. Early modern Neo-Platonic thought echoed earlier classical beliefs in arguing that the universe itself is governed by a principle of harmony, so much so that even the spheres, according to Pythagoras, emit their own music. In *De Institutione Musica*, Boethius reaffirms the Platonic belief that harmony and order are closely linked:

...music is associated not only with speculation but with morality as well. For nothing is more characteristic of human nature than to be soothed by pleasant modes or disturbed by their opposites. This is not peculiar to people in particular endeavors or of particular ages. Indeed, music extends to every endeavor; moreover, youths, as well as the aged are so naturally attuned to musical modes by a kind of voluntary affection that no age at all is excluded from the charm of sweet song. What Plato rightfully said can likewise be understood: the soul of the universe was joined together according to musical concord. For when we hear what is properly and harmoniously united in sound in conjunction with that which is harmoniously coupled and joined together within us and are attracted to it, then we recognize that we ourselves are put together in its likeness. For likeness attracts, whereas unlikeness disgusts and repels. (Boethius 1.180)

Pythagorean and Platonic thought finds a principle of similarity between the musical harmony and an ordered, rational universe, and Boethius claims the presence of harmony and order extends into a theory of social unity.<sup>22</sup> Hieronimo uses this principle of similarity, which imagines musical harmony as a model for the moral and social conditions of the world, but doubts that “musical concord” and “voluntary affection” properly characterize the world he inhabits. Since the macrocosm of the universe is reflected in microcosms (the harmony of the spheres is reflected in the harmony of music, and mathematics, and social relations) Hieronimo's emphasis on disharmony and discord reflects a vision of a disordered, corrupt world. Hieronimo finds similarity between himself, his wife, and Bazulto, but this similarity is not one of harmony and social order but of devastation. For

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<sup>22</sup> See Book 1 of *De Institutione Musica*, especially 1.181: “Plato holds music of the highest moral character, modestly composed, to be a great guardian of the Republic; this it should be temperate, simple, and masculine, rather than effeminate, violent, or fickle.”



Hieronimo, the musical chord they form through the similarity of their loss is explicitly composed of *discord*: “Three parts in one, but all of discords framed” (3.14.170).

Notably, even Hieronimo’s metaphor of musical accompaniment, of becoming a three-part chord, includes a refracted emblem of violence within it, as Hieronimo is reminded of Horatio’s murder even within the language he uses to express some form of consolation between himself, Bazulto, and Isabella: “Talk not of cords... / For with a cord Horatio was slain” (3.14.172). Though intersubjectivity requires moments of relation and recognition between the self and others, I want to be clear that the dialogical structure of Hieronimo’s subjectivity does not necessitate that he be sympathetic toward others. As Knight Marshal, Hieronimo is in a position to hear Bazulto’s petition and to take legal action. Instead, he is reminded of his own grief and is distracted by his own desire for retribution. When Hieronimo no longer needs a mirror or “lively portrait” compelling him to take revenge, the differentiation between Bazulto and Hieronimo is obscured and Bazulto’s own narrative seems to be swallowed up or assimilated by Hieronimo’s. They exit the stage, and this is the last we’ll see of poor Bazulto, who only appears in this single scene. For the remainder of the play, Hieronimo never questions his commitment to revenge, and his concerns about the ethics of revenge also seem to come to an end. Hieronimo observes Bazulto’s grief, considers his petition for justice, and finds that petitions for justice and outpourings of grief in this world are decidedly lacking in efficacy. He absorbs Bazulto’s narrative in order to surpass it (a competitive dynamic that I will discuss in later chapters). To surpass the model of Bazulto’s grief, which supplicates for justice, Hieronimo directs a narrative that sets aside justice for retaliation. It is not until *after*

Hieronimo orchestrates Lorenzo and Balthazar's slaughter that he is able once more to recognize himself in the face of others.

### **Mirroring and Social Conscience**

In the final act of *The Spanish Tragedy*, Hieronimo's revenge famously takes the form of a play. Despite being somewhat concerned by Hieronimo's disturbing behavior, the King tasks Hieronimo with providing entertainment for a celebration of the newly-established peace between Spain and Portugal. Hieronimo dusts off a play he wrote in his youth, a tragedy called *Soliman and Perseda*. In Hieronimo's play, the king's nephew Lorenzo and the viceroy's son Balthazar are cast as characters to be murdered on stage. The plot of this play parallels the circumstances of the murder of Hieronimo's son, Horatio, a crime for which Lorenzo and Balthazar are responsible. Hieronimo's play blurs the line between reality and fiction, as he has arranged for real blades to be used for what the audience on stage (the king, viceroy, and the court) believe to be fictional stabbings.

Hieronimo writes *Soliman and Perseda*, the fatal play-within-the-play, in a perplexing assortment of foreign languages. "Each one of us," Hieronimo says, "must act his part in unknown languages,/ That it may breed more variety," of which Balthazar complains, "But this will be a mere confusion" (4.1.165-166, 172). Confusion indeed. Much of the scholarship on *The Spanish Tragedy* tends to focus on the links between confusion, disorder, and destruction in the play's concluding act. William West states:

It is hard to overstate the negative connotations of the word 'confusion' in early modern England; it is virtually a synonym (along with 'innovation') for ruin. The Homily on Obedience, for instance, recited to all church congregations several times yearly between its composition in 1547 and the suspension of the Book of Common Prayer in 1642, makes confusion something like the limit of all that can

go wrong, warning, 'For where there is no right order, there reigneth all abuse, carnall liberty, enormitie, sinne, and Babylonicall confusion.' The causes of the intense interest in and anxiety about the condition signified by words like "confusion" or "error" (although not only those words), whether represented or real, are complex and multiple. (219)

S.F. Johnson, too, argues that the play's use of (or, at least, references to) a variety of languages other than English contribute to a theatrical effect of confusion which is also allusive, calling to mind the confusion and ruin of Babylon and the Tower of Babel.<sup>23</sup>

Alexandra Ferretti analyzes Hieronimo's thematizing of violations of 'arenas of performativity':

...he has moved an execution outside of the logical, state-sanctioned context of the scaffold; he has rendered the logic behind his justice incomprehensible by placing a hanged body within the illogical setting of both the royal court and a theatrical performance. The King's response, 'Why hast thou done this undeserving deed?' (165), reflects the fact that this transformed context has made Hieronimo's language and action unintelligible to the court." (Ferretti 44)

These scholars argue that violence leads to the disruption, violation, and decay of juridical power and defuses the efficacy of language throughout the play. Characters speak, but their voices are ignored or misunderstood.

While I agree with Johnson's and Ferretti's readings of the play's use of violent spectacle, we still need to account for how Hieronimo responds to the King and Viceroy after the revelation of his revenge against Lorenzo and Balthazar. More confusing than Hieronimo's use of violence is his long speech which reveals his motives for directing Lorenzo and Balthazar's deaths. When the play ends, Hieronimo reveals that the theatrical murders on stage are, in fact, real murders. After explaining his motive for having killed their sons, and after describing the scene in which he found his own son murdered,

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<sup>23</sup> See Johnson's "*The Spanish Tragedy, or Babylon Revisited*".

Hieronimo addresses the viceroy of Portugal and the duke of Castile, the two fathers whose sons' corpses bleed before them:

Speak, Portuguese, whose loss resembles mine.  
If thou canst weep upon thy Balthazar,  
'Tis like I wailed for my Horatio.  
[to Castile] 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? (4.4.112-120)

Whether or not it is justified, Hieronimo's reason for retaliating against Lorenzo and Balthazar is clear: they murdered his son, and due to their birthrights, it looked as though they would get away with it. Hieronimo does spend much of the third act trying to petition for justice, either from the heavens or from the king, only to have his efforts thwarted. Without judicial recourse, Hieronimo takes the matter into his own hands, forming a plot with Bel-Imperia (Lorenzo's sister, but also Horatio's lover) to have Lorenzo and Balthazar murdered in spectacular fashion. But why does Hieronimo need to amplify the anguish of Balthazar and Lorenzo's fathers, especially when neither father was aware of his son's crimes?

While *The Spanish Tragedy* is considered the "first modern revenge tragedy," and in fact establishes many of the genre's conventions (including use of the play-within-the-play), the Elizabethan revenge plays which follow in Kyd's wake differ in that they tend to reserve the revenger's stoking of grief, anger, or fear for the perpetrators whose crimes are being revenged (Erne 96). While revenge plays usually include at least some collateral damage, Hieronimo's revenge is already complete. Bel-Imperia (Hieronimo's collaborator in the revenge plot) performs her suicide as part of the spectacle

of the play. Presumably, Hieronimo also could have killed himself within the performance or, at the very least, during all the confusion immediately after the play. Thus, it seems reasonable to assume that Hieronimo's address to the king and the viceroy has significance. Hieronimo's speech is all the more perplexing given that after he's done speaking, the king has Hieronimo restrained before he can hang himself and demands of Hieronimo: "Speak, traitor! Damned, bloody murderer, speak!/ For now I have thee, I will make thee speak:/ Why hast thou done this undeserving deed?" (4.4.161-163). Rather than speaking again, Hieronimo bites out his own tongue. But if he's unwilling to speak here, why the long speech moments before?

The significance of Hieronimo's address to the two fathers (the Viceroy and Castile) is in his need to once more view his own paternal grief in the face of another, to know his grief has been essentially replicated and that its likeness will carry on after his death. Before he ends his own life, Hieronimo desires to be a mirror or portrait of grief for the surviving fathers in the play, just as Bazulto functioned as a "lively portrait" for Hieronimo. But Hieronimo also goes one step further by turning the king into a mirror for corruption. In the play-within-the-play, Hieronimo stages an accusation, revealing the worldly corruption that failed to provide justice for son's murder, and his use of spectacle draws upon early modern theories of the conscience.

Much has been written on the presence (or absence, depending on the scholar) of divine justice and thus, either explicitly or implicitly, the working of divine control over the action of the play. Geoffrey Aggeler, for instance, sees "the discrepancy between the orthodox Christian beliefs expressed by the living characters with regard to the process of

divine justice and what is revealed in the justice scenes which frame the main plot” as the “central crux” of the play (319). Philip Edwards argues that *The Spanish Tragedy* and the majority of Elizabethan revenge tragedies it has influenced “ruminat[e] with unbelievable freedom, considering the restraints of the time, on the relation of the willed activities of men and women to divine intervention and control” (131). Less has been said, however, about Hieronimo’s own sense of *self*-control or about his own notion of culpability for his actions at the end of the play, regardless of what the dramaturgical design of the play itself might have to say about it. When scholars do comment on Hieronimo’s actions, they tend to describe them in terms of working out justice, either along Senecan lines of talionic retribution or along the lines of Hieronimo functioning as a divine agent, meting out what amounts to divine justice.

A great deal of this confusion about the moral status of Hieronimo’s actions results from the ambiguity of the early modern uses of the word ‘revenge.’ For example, when Erne traces Hieronimo’s transition from Knight Marshal to revenger, he presumes the two roles are eschatologically distinct, the first role (Knight Marshal) defined by Christian ethics and the second role (revenger) defined by Senecan and pagan notions of retribution.

According to Erne, “As long as Hieronimo has not given up hope in the workings of divine justice, he also believes in the possibility of obtaining public justice from the king” (108).

Erne claims that Hieronimo’s expressed desire for revenge during the play’s first half is still aligned with Christian ethics and the desire for public justice:

...the words ‘revenge’ or ‘vengeance’ could denote not only the private retribution of an individual, but also the public punishment exacted by the king or the state. Up to the end of the play’s first part, Hieronimo seeks the latter, as the final lines of the part make clear: ‘But wherefore waste I mine unfruitful words,/ When nought but blood will satisfy my woes?’ (III.vii.67-68). So far, this may sound as if Hieronimo

was already considering private revenge. As the next two lines make clear, however, he is not: 'I will go plain me to my lord the king,/ And cry aloud for justice through the court' (III.vii.69-70). Hieronimo's sanity and his hope for both heavenly and human justice -- all characterizing Hieronimo up to the end of the play's first half -- go hand in hand. (Erne 108)

Erne's reading of these lines, however, presumes *both* lines express the same thing, that Hieronimo has not yet given up on justice and that he is not yet considering revenge.

However, the increasing vehemence in Hieronimo's speech leading up to these lines exceeds the bounds of any rhetoric of justice:

Of false Lorenzo, are these thy flattering looks?  
Is this the honour that thou didst my son?  
And Balthazar, bane to my soul and me,  
Was this the ransom he reserved thee for?  
Woe to the cause of these constrained wars,  
Woe to thy baseness and captivity,  
Woe to thy birth, thy body and thy soul,  
Thy cursed father and thy conquered self!  
And banned with bitter execrations be  
The day and place where he did pity thee! (3.7.57-66)

Hieronimo's repetition of 'Woe' and his condemnation of not only Balthazar's actions, but also "thy birth, thy body, and thy soul" are rhetorical markers of his rising anger. In Erne's own analysis of Pedringano's "double" victimization, in that he is executed on the scaffold after having also condemned his soul by refusing to do penance for his sin given that he expects a pardon, it is clear that Christian ethics *does* distinguish between two kinds of justice (earthly justice against the body and divine justice upon the soul in the afterlife).<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Erne argues: "We are now in a position to understand better why Kyd has the playlet turn on a *pardon* that fails to materialize: the word is meant to carry as much theological as legal meaning. While Pedringano is vainly waiting for the King's pardon, or the legal document containing the remission of his crimes, he refuses to beg humbly for God's pardon. Putting all his hopes in a secular indulgence, he fails to petition for and obtain the remission of sins. Pedringano thereby becomes the double victim, that of intrigue tragedy and that of the Morality play. On the one hand, he is a tool in Lorenzo's intrigue tragedy, on the other, he is the subject of the ultimate Christian tragedy as he suffers death unprepared" (89).

Hieronimo's vehemence and condemnation of not only Lorenzo and Balthazar's actions, but also birth, body, soul, and the entire context ("these constrained wars") that enabled their meeting in the first place is not spoken from the same 'referential reality' that urges Hieronimo to cease in "mine unfruitful words" and "plain me to my lord the King." What these lines suggest is that we cannot assume Hieronimo inhabits a unified referential reality, nor does he transition cleanly from one referential reality (Christian ethics) to another (Senecan fury). Both seem intractably intertwined from the moment Hieronimo finds his son's corpse.

Geoffrey Aggeler, too, presents these same lines ("I will go plain me to my lord the king,/ And cry aloud for justice through the court") as evidence of Hieronimo's commitment to justice and his aversion to retribution. According to Aggeler, the letter from Pedringano, which lends support to Bel-Imperia's letter by accusing Lorenzo and Balthazar of the murder, "has completely restored [Hieronimo's] wavering faith in divine justice" and "he sets out to present his case before the one who is or should be the principal channel through which justice flows into the kingdom" (326). However, even in the passage Erne and Aggeler quote, Hieronimo clearly distinguishes between justice that is morally acceptable and revenge or retribution that is retaliatory, threatening, and unsanctioned:

I will go plain me to my lord the King,  
And cry aloud for justice through the court,  
Wearing flints with these my withered feet,  
And *either purchase justice* by entreats  
Or tire them all with my *revenging threats*. (3.7.69-73, my italics)

Hieronimo's ultimatum here, that either his petition for justice will be acknowledged or he will commit himself to infernal retribution, demonstrates that Hieronimo is aware of the



moral differences between justice and revenge, but that the choice between the two is, in a sense, out of his hands. When Hieronimo's "entreats" fail to "purchase justice" in 3.12, it is clear that Hieronimo sides with diabolical vengeance: "I'll make a pickaxe of my poniard, / And here surrender my marshalship, / For I'll go marshal up the fiends in hell / To be avenged on you all for this (3.12.74-77). *Something* must be done about Horatio's murder, and it is beyond the limits of Hieronimo's imagination to simply let it go. Whatever punishment might await the murderous and the corrupt in the next world is not enough. For Hieronimo, there *must* be a punishment for murder and corruption in *this* world, too, and while he would prefer that punishment be just and administered by the king, he acknowledges that he is more than willing to take revenge into his own hands if the heavens or the king remains inactive.

Ultimately, the play's final act careens into violence. Hieronimo's spectacle of violence, his unveiling of his son's corpse while Balthazar and Lorenzo's bodies bleed onstage, is both an accusation against the king's indifference and a replication of paternal grief. The spectacle is also an especially devastating form of accusation against the world as a whole, which has become (or has revealed itself to be?), according to Hieronimo, a "mass of public wrongs,/ Confused and filled with murders and misdeeds" (3.2.3-4). Hieronimo seeks to transfer his recognition of the world's corruption and the grief this corruption has caused him back to the world and, given that he is successful in doing so, he lives long enough to serve as the world's guilty conscience, recording its misdeeds and presenting them back to itself.

The dominant humanist theory of conscience, according to Tilmouth, is closely linked to the importance of the self's recognition in the eyes of others. Tilmouth argues that humanists begin emphasizing a person's public reputation as a form of an 'open' conscience, wherein one's moral status is not private knowledge, but is a mutually acknowledged between the self and others. Tilmouth argues that the view gains prominence with Hobbes's theory of "*con-scientia*," or "the idea of a public, open, mutual mode of moral consciousness," but is already part of political theory even preceding Hobbes's work, as "...a number of texts emphasize the importance of man's cultivating an external scrutinizing of his soul, in which respect conscience begins to be constituted as something exterior to the self, an experience generated in conjunction with other men" ("Shakespeare's Open Consciences" 503).

Within the theory of *con-scientia*, royal figures serve a special role. According to Tilmouth, the king is not just a political figurehead, but functions as "a collective national conscience, an icon of perfection in which every citizen might share and by which each might construct his own *syntereris*" (Tilmouth, "Shakespeare's Open Consciences" 502). But if the king functions as an exemplar, his public reputation, or how he is perceived by others, is especially important, since "...such sharing of consciousness could cut both ways, its dynamic proving mutually formative" (Tilmouth, "Shakespeare's Open Consciences" 502). In humanist commentary on royal virtue, which imagines the prince as on a world stage (*theatrum mundi*), the prince functions as a 'glass' (or mirror) that the people (citizens or subjects) look to as positive or negative model. To his subjects, an iniquitous prince is "a 'glass' wherein is written authority for all their sins, and so vice will prosper" (Tilmouth,

“Shakespeare’s Open Consciences” 507). Tilmouth argues specifically in terms of the mutually formative consciences in Shakespeare’s plays, but his work seems equally applicable to Kyd. Hieronimo’s need to make the king a spectator of his grief is, perhaps, the most effective way to accuse the world as a whole, as the king is expected to function in early modern culture as the public conscience of his citizens.

Geoffrey Aggeler argues that Hieronimo’s turn from a Christian petition for justice to a Senecan spectacle of bloody vengeance is itself the ‘eschatological crux’ of the play. In Aggeler’s reading of the play, the king’s failure to enact justice models a *laissez-faire* Christian god: “...the King will, by failing to respond to pleas for ‘justice’ from one who maintains these expectations, precipitate catastrophe. Instead of mirroring heaven’s justice, of which he is the divinely sanctioned minister, he will mirror what appears to be heavenly indifference” (322). But Hieronimo adapts the king-as-mirror to his own ends by having the king unwittingly observe two murders and a suicide take place before him, ostensibly for his entertainment. Hieronimo demonstrates a human ability to devastate the image of the king, whether he be a figure of divine justice or heavenly indifference, and to refigure the king’s usual significance as a model for the audience. No longer a mirror of divine justice or indifference, Hieronimo casts the king as a figure who fails to meet his obligations. The king’s victory over Portugal, which opens the play, and his movement toward reconciliation between the two kingdoms, which the king believes Hieronimo’s play is meant to celebrate, is radically subverted and the narrative of kingly victory is hijacked by Hieronimo and turned instead into a gory spectacle. Hieronimo draws back the curtain that conceals his son’s corpse, making publicly visible the “murders and misdeeds” that have

gone unnoticed and uncorrected by the king. In adapting the secretive murders and misdeeds of the court (Lorenzo, Balthazar, etc.) into a stage play, he extracts secret, illegible motive and sin, making it into a legible public display, a performance that is open to the scrutiny of the audience. His strategy maps the psychological onto the theatrical, performs the court's secret guilt on the public stage, exposing it to be shamed and, too, to inaugurate a "glass" or model of grief that the world itself must look upon.

In the end, Hieronimo adopts the Senecan mindset long enough to resort to violence. The revenger's escalation of violence into spectacle cannot repair the world, but it enables a perverse kind of communication. In revenge plays, retribution functions less as "wild justice" (as Bacon phrases it) and is instead a strategy for dealing with the limitation of words.<sup>25</sup> Violence, it seems, has an effect that words and rhetoric cannot match.

Lorenzo, himself a purveyor of violence, says, "Where words prevail not, violence prevails" (2.1: 108) and Hieronimo, in a similar sentiment, asks himself, "wherefore waste I mine unfruitful words, / When naught but blood will satisfy my woes?" (3.7: 67-68). While these phrases are deployed cynically, in that they propose "words" as weak and insufficient for the task at hand ("Where words prevail not" might be read as "when words, inevitably, do fail"), we might also read against the grain of this possible meaning. Rather than surrendering to the cynical possibility of violence being the more effective tool for getting things done, we might read Lorenzo's claim as signaling why the effective use of "words" is not only useful, but necessary. "Where words prevail not, violence prevails." In the mouth of a less villainous character, this would be a declaration of why powerful, effective

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<sup>25</sup> See Bacon's essay, "On Revenge."

language is needed. Words, in this sense, are what keep violence at bay. Words, in this sense, must prevent violence or risk being superseded by it.

In this chapter, I analyzed the dialogical structure of early modern subjectivity, both in terms of how inwardness is depicted through soliloquy and through examples of typological recognition in early modern mirrors. Bazulto provides a 'mirror' or 'model' of fatherly grief for Hieronimo. He functions typologically in the play, allowing Hieronimo to recognize, and identify with, a character type or a recognized social role. In the next chapter, I will analyze a different form of intersubjectivity as depicted in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*. Recognition of the self via another is an important aspect of subjectivity in both *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Titus Andronicus*. The key difference in Shakespeare's play, however, is that Titus does not see his daughter Lavinia as a typological figure. Unlike Hieronimo, who recognizes a likeness of his own grief when looking into Bazulto's face, Titus does not know how to categorize Lavinia's suffering. Rather than recognizing a character type, he acknowledges her suffering as uncategorizable. While Hieronimo encloses Bazulto's suffering and appropriates it as an extension of his own, Titus reciprocates Lavinia's subjectivity, attempting to share in it by mimicking her actions and emulating her wounds on his own body.

### CHAPTER III

#### “LAVINIA, SHALL I READ?”:

#### CITATION AND MIMICRY IN SHAKESPEARE’S *TITUS ANDRONICUS*

Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus* emphasizes violence against the organs of communication. Hands are lopped away, tongues removed and mouths gagged, gestures mocked or ignored outright. In Shakespeare’s play, Titus and his daughter Lavinia each have their sense of identity damaged through physical violence and social ostracization. Feminist readings of the play tend to view Titus’s revenge against Tamora, Chiron, and Demetrius as happening at Lavinia’s expense, claiming that Titus turns her dismemberment and rape into a wound on the Andronici family honor. Such readings view Titus’s revenge against Lavinia’s rapists as a reiteration of Titus’s own patriarchal authority. Recent scholarship on early modern intersubjectivity provides an alternative reading of Titus’s revenge, offering a framework for understanding how Shakespeare depicts the recovery of identity after a series of traumatic events in *Titus Andronicus*. The play uses depictions of violence to explore the limits of identity. I argue that Titus and Lavinia collaborate in reconstructing their identities post-trauma. Though much of the recent criticism on *Titus* reads the play as an affirmation of patriarchal culture, I believe that Titus and Lavinia’s collaborative recovery challenges rather than reiterates patriarchal authority. In my reading, Titus and Lavinia construct new identities in relation to their shared suffering, rather than in terms of Titus’s wounded patriarchal honor, and I will show that it is not Titus but Lavinia who instructs the family in how to take revenge. My argument builds upon recent

reconsiderations of how identity and subjectivity are structured in early modern culture, and I argue that Lavinia's use of citation, her quoting of passages from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, helps us understand how Elizabethans conceptualized identity as not self-generated or stable, but as iterative and performative, existing both in the projection of how a character wants to be perceived by others and in how that projection is received.

### **The problem of Lavinia's silence**

Shakespeare's play focuses on acts of revenge between two families. Titus, Rome's general and the patriarch of the Andronici, returns to Rome after defeating the Goths and taking captive the Goth Queen Tamora, her three sons, Alarbus, Chiron, and Demetrius, and her lover, Aaron the Moor. To appease the spirits of his sons who have fallen in battle, Titus authorizes the ritual slaughter of Alarbus. Tamora pleads with Titus to spare her son, but Titus pays her little attention and Alarbus is killed. While being presented to Saturninus, Rome's recently appointed emperor, Tamora catches his eye and becomes his wife. Tamora, Aaron, Chiron, and Demetrius use their elevated status in Rome to take revenge against Titus and his family. Chiron and Demetrius rape Titus's daughter Lavinia during a hunting excursion in the woods. Rather than kill her, they cut out her tongue and, because they are familiar with the story of Philomel in Ovid, lop off her hands so that she is unable to speak or write about what has happened to her. Chiron and Demetrius also kill Lavinia's husband, who happens to be the emperor's brother, and frame two of Titus's sons for the murder, for which they are subsequently executed. When Titus sees Lavinia, he vows with his family that they will take revenge, though they don't know whom to take revenge

against. While Titus's grandson is studying Ovid, Lavinia chases him, taking the book and opening to the story of Philomel, Procne, and Tereus. Titus realizes Lavinia is quoting from Ovid to communicate what has happened to her. Lavinia then takes her uncle's staff in her mouth and guides it with the stumps of her arms, completing her accusation by writing the names of Chiron and Demetrius in the sand. Titus takes his cue from Ovid's poem by killing Chiron and Demetrius, baking them in a pie, and feeding them to Tamora.

Given the sexual and physical violence that Lavinia suffers, it should come as no surprise that she is often read as a figure of female victimization. Even while her father Titus takes revenge against Tamora, Chiron, and Demetrius, Lavinia seems a character whose tragic silence serves to justify patriarchal authority and male aggression. Titus repeatedly claims insight into how Lavinia's gestures might be translated ("Mark, Marcus, mark. I understand her signs"), yet Titus's translations seem to simply reiterate his own view of the family's devastation: "Had she a tongue to speak, now would she say / That to her brother which I said to thee. / ... O, what a sympathy of woe is this-- / As far from help as limbo is from bliss" (3.1.144-149). In claiming to read into her interiority and declare for her what she wants or needs or feels, Titus seems to vocalize his own interiority at the expense of whatever Lavinia herself might be trying to communicate. Derek Cohen, for instance, argues that when Titus and the other males of the Andronici family attempt to interpret Lavinia's speechless gestures, "she becomes the source of their greatest challenge as they seek to become her voice, to shape her thoughts into language" (81). Cohen suggests that Lavinia's voice and the thoughts she might express are no longer her own when the men of her family ventriloquize for her. With the loss of her hands and tongue,



she cannot effectively communicate and becomes less a character than a cipher in the play, a living text from which Titus tries to “wrest an alphabet” (3.2.44).

Douglas Green argues that Titus appropriates not only Lavinia’s voice, but also her suffering. According to Green, Titus’s identity depends on keeping the two women of the play, Tamora and Lavinia, at the margins of agency. In Green’s argument, Tamora functions as a marginal Other, an oppositional pressure against which Titus’s strength and agency is constructed and maintained. She is the evil and corruption against whom Titus is measured to seem an avenging hero. Green claims that Lavinia functions on “the other pole of the scale” as the marginal Other which “‘articulates’ Titus’ own suffering and victimization” (“Interpreting” 322). Lavinia’s suffering, in this sense, is integrated into a psychological pressure which ultimately functions to bolster Titus’s identity as a revenger, so that he might, as Titus’s brother Marcus says, “rail” against Lavinia’s attackers to ease his own mind (2.3.35). If this is how we understand Titus’s response to Lavinia, then that response is ultimately self-serving. Titus’s attempts to decipher Lavinia’s silence bolster the authority of the male gaze and Lavinia is reduced to a passive text that requires Titus’s mastery.

### **Titus and Lavinia’s relationship as a model of intersubjectivity**

While readings of *Titus* as a play centering on patriarchal ideology have been productive for thinking about the importance of voice for early modern agency, such readings imply a range of misogyny (from explicit to accidental) in Titus’s responses to Lavinia’s suffering that the play itself seeks to avoid. It is possible to consider the crucial

link between Lavinia's loss of language and her loss of self-representation while also acknowledging how Titus and Lavinia's relationship is an interaction rather than a one-sided response. The intersection between agency and language is the play's central concern, as characters throughout the play struggle to properly understand and be understood by others. Acknowledging the significance of Titus's attentiveness to Lavinia's communicative gestures highlights the interpersonal nature of early modern self-representation. To properly understand the nature of Titus's relationship to Lavinia and the strategies Lavinia uses to develop an alternative selfhood we must situate the play within the historical context of early modern subjectivity. Titus's relationship with Lavinia and the repeated emphasis on reading others as texts rely on interpersonal forms of selfhood that precede modern individualism. The play suggests that the interpersonal language of selfhood in early modern culture has a cognitive structure that links identity with personal narrative, and this cognitive structure is itself modeled on popular forms of narrative, such as poetry and early modern theater, and the cultural practices of narrative production taught in humanist classrooms, such as adaptation, allusion, and citation.

At the center of the play's crisis of the interpersonal nature of selfhood is Lavinia. Lavinia cites poetry as a strategy for overcoming speechlessness by situating her silence within a narrative pattern she finds in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Lavinia's strategy of narrative recovery is especially significant since scholars of cognitive cultural studies are finding that "Narrative does not merely capture aspects of the self for description, communication, and examination; narrative constructs the self."<sup>26</sup> *Titus Andronicus*

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<sup>26</sup> See Gary Fireman, Ted McVay, and Owen Flanagan's introduction to *Narrative and Consciousness: Literature, Psychology, and the Brain*, p. 5.

emphasizes acts of reading, writing, and the quoting of texts because identity and agency in early modern culture rely so heavily on language, on communication and self-expression. It would be a mistake to assume that Titus's attempts to 'read' Lavinia are aligned with patriarchal strategies to turn her into an 'object,' i.e. a passive text over which he will assert some form of mastery and which he will interpret as he pleases. As an effect in the play, acts of reading and writing provide a template for thinking about early modern identity and agency.

In language and *through* language a body becomes a person, and embodied actions are identified with agency, which is why Chiron and Demetrius target Lavinia's tongue and hands. They specifically destroy her abilities to speak and write. They seek to erase her identity by eliminating the parts of her body that facilitate self-expression. In his attempts to understand Lavinia's gestures, Titus seeks to be receptive to Lavinia's maimed communication. Titus refuses to accept that the channels of linguistic expression, which are integral to early modern identity, have been taken from Lavinia permanently. Instead, Titus commits himself to the study of her soundless gestures and her wordless attempts to make herself known, and the language of Titus's commitment is steeped in religious devotion:

Speechless complainer, I will learn thy thought.  
In thy dumb action will I be as perfect  
As begging hermits in their holy prayers.  
Thou shalt not sigh, nor hold thy stumps to heaven,  
Nor wink, nor nod, nor kneel, nor make a sign,  
But I of these will wrest an alphabet,  
And by still practice learn to know thy meaning. (3.2.39-45)

In its proper context, it is difficult to interpret Titus's desire to read and translate Lavinia's signs as patriarchal mastery. He seeks to help Lavinia reclaim her personhood, rather than

allowing others to view her as an object of horror (“Ay me, this object kills me”) or a living reminder her loss of self (“This was thy daughter,” Marcus says, to which Titus responds, “Why, Marcus, so she is”) (*Titus* 3.1.62-64).

Titus’s attentiveness to Lavinia’s speechless suffering, and his desire to be instrumental in her recovery of self-representation, display a configuration of subjectivity that is mutually generated rather than autonomous and individualistic. Recent scholarship has questioned claims about the prevalence of Renaissance individualism in order to better understand early modern models of inwardness and identity. In my introduction and in Chapter 2, I have cited recent criticism that seeks to go beyond Stephen Greenblatt’s notion of self-fashioning. While Greenblatt’s work and its influence on new historicist and cultural materialist scholarship has been, and continues to be, immensely productive, some scholars are questioning the critical assumptions implicit in the Foucaultian relations between power and identity, upon which our understanding of self-fashioning is developed.<sup>27</sup> Though it is true that self-fashioning is an emerging cultural practice in early modern London, our critical interest in this practice has created a blind spot which overlooks moments in texts which work against the grain of self-fashioning or which enable returns to earlier, interpersonal models of subjectivity. Recent early modern scholarship on intersubjectivity is working to “reject a model of human activity which is overly cognitive” in order to recover early modern models of inwardness and identity which spring from notions of permeable

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<sup>27</sup> Cynthia Marshall, for instance, argues in *The Shattering of the Self* that the emergence of a private, autonomous interiority (from which a public self can be ‘fashioned’ and performed) overemphasizes the prevalence of liberal individualism, which is only in its nascent form during the Renaissance and which remained in tension with the interpersonal models of identity and selfhood which preceded it. Also see the Introduction to *Passion and Subjectivity in Early Modern Culture*, p. 5; Selleck, *The Interpersonal Idiom in Shakespeare, Donne, and Early Modern Culture*, pp. 2-3.

and contingent embodiment and interpersonal agency which may seem alien or counterintuitive to us today (Cummings and Sierhuis 5).

Only by acknowledging competing theorizations, models, and, ultimately, experiences of early modern selfhood can we begin to understand and properly analyze the complexity of how identity and subjectivity are depicted in early modern texts. Nancy Selleck argues that early modern scholarship has emphasized the historical establishment of an individualism which assumes the existence of an autonomous or “*noncontingent* interiority,” an inwardness which is “a distinct *thing* that one can have and use without reference to the social context that created it” (Selleck 45-46). Cynthia Marshall, too, claims that “Because the narrative terms in which we have understood the so-called birth of subjectivity invest value in the emergent self, we have overemphasized its early dominance...” (*Shattering* 4). This assumed pervasiveness of individualism has obscured the early modern notion of the contingent, relational self--a self which is a “multiplicity of selves” produced through, and dependent upon, social relations and interactions with others (Selleck 47).

While autonomous individualism does become the dominant form of western subjectivity, the transition between ‘past’ and ‘present’ forms of subjectivity and its various cultural practices is never immediate, nor does the emergence of a new subjectivity entirely cast off the assumptions and practices which precede it. Marshall argues there is an unexplored aspect in the depictions of violence in early modern texts that enables “moments of allowable reversion” to traditional models of selfhood or that operate within “an aesthetic of shattering or self-negation” of the self as “a counterforce” to nascent

individualism (Marshall 2, 4). Revenge tragedies -- with their emphasis on traumatic violence which disrupts characters' familial relations, social statuses, and even their sense of self and their notion of being in the world -- provide an avenue for the cultural work of mediating the anxieties created by competing pressures of an emerging individualism. Marshall's work traces early modern audiences' pleasure in theatrical violence, locating it in the audience's experience of 'self-shattering' that is enabled by depictions of physical and emotional pain. Marshall's demonstration of early modern forms of resistance to nascent individualism and the pleasure in feeling one's subjectivity disrupted is useful for examining the rhetoric of grief and the spectacles of violence that are key ingredients in Elizabethan revenge tragedies.

Of course, early modern subjectivity is more complex and varied than a dichotomous opposition between an emerging individualism and the temporary release from individualism found in self-shattering. While Marshall finds moments in early modern texts that provide evidence of the tensions between nascent individualism and models of subjectivity which precede it, and locates practices of self-shattering that provides a cathartic release from the pressures of subjectivity (however temporary that release might be), other scholars have worked to display the nascent individualism of early modern subjectivity as steeped in interpersonal relations that *enable* early modern notions of the individual but that do not yet conceive of the individual as 'autonomous.' Nancy Selleck argues that in early modern texts we find "an alternative language of selfhood that casts it in interpersonal rather than individual terms" (1). The violence in *Titus Andronicus* disrupts language and dislodges Titus and Lavinia's sense of agency. This chapter locates and

analyzes this “alternative language of selfhood” and the alternative mediums of communication (including mimicry and citation) that Titus and Lavinia use to reconstruct their shattered identities.

### **Intersubjectivity, revenge, and the problem of sympathetic identification**

While the narrative focus of *Titus Andronicus* is revenge, even revenge in the play depends on ‘reading’ others and making legible their motives and hidden intentions. According to Selleck, the language of selfhood in early modern texts reveals notions of identity which presume interaction between selves as an essential aspect of identity formation: “this language provides its users with conceptions and expectations of identity as an exchange, permeation, borrowing, anticipation--in short, a great variety of other-oriented actions and configurations largely alien to our modern language of selfhood” (Selleck 1). In *Titus*, Shakespeare depicts other-oriented language through a poetics of sympathy. As Titus and Lavinia’s identities are destroyed through retributive violence, their attempts to restore their sense of agency rely on the language and gestures of shared suffering.

To understand the play’s poetics of sympathy and the importance of this poetics for understanding the play’s depiction of early modern subjectivity, we must first understand the early modern distinction between sympathy and pity. Titus and Marcus’s initial responses to Lavinia upon seeing her wounds mark an important distinction between early modern pity and sympathy. Marcus shows Lavinia pity--he is horrified by Lavinia’s wounds and grieves for her, but he makes an effort to protect himself from too closely

identifying with her pain. Titus, on the other hand, sympathizes with Lavinia, immediately wanting to share in her suffering and feel her pain, even going so far as to cut off his own hand to copy some of her wounds with his own body. Marcus shows Lavinia pity, acting as witness to her suffering, but Titus wants to feel and understand Lavinia's suffering personally. The difference between Marcus's response and Titus's provides a dramatic distinction between pity and sympathy. Let's begin by examining Marcus's pity for Lavinia in detail.

Marcus's initial inclination when finding Lavinia wounded in the woods is to aestheticize her wounds, turning her unspeakable trauma into poetic expression. Initially, Lavinia's appearance stuns Marcus into a liminal state: "If I do dream, would all my wealth would wake me. / If I do wake, some planet strike me down / That I may slumber an eternal sleep" (2.4.13-15). Lavinia's wounds overwhelm Marcus, and he wishes to escape their nightmarish image. Since Marcus neither wakes nor dies, he recoils from Lavinia's wounds using language, turning her wounds into objects of poetry. Marcus cannot bear to witness Lavinia's pain. Unable to escape the image of her wounds, he momentarily dissociates, translating Lavinia's wounds into pastoral images. He attempts to piece her body back together through poetic *blazon*, cataloguing the pieces of her body and attempting to recover them through metaphoric description:

Speak, gentle niece, what stern ungentle hands  
Have lopp'd and hew'd and made thy body bare  
Of her two branches, those sweet ornaments,  
Whose circling shadows kings have sought to sleep in,  
And might not gain so great a happiness  
As have thy love? Why dost not speak to me?  
Alas, a crimson river of warm blood,  
Like to a bubbling fountain stir'd with wind,  
Doth rise and fall between thy rosed lips,



Coming and going with thy honey breath.  
But, sure, some Tereus hath deflowered thee,  
And, lest thou shouldst detect him, cut thy tongue.  
Ah, now thou turn'st away thy face for shame!  
And, notwithstanding all this loss of blood,  
As from a conduit with three issuing spouts,  
Yet do thy cheeks look red as Titan's face  
Blushing to be encountered with a cloud. (2.4.16-32)

The sites of Lavinia's physical suffering--her hewed hands and bleeding mouth--are figured as branches and fountains, as objects of beauty which are incapable of feeling pain.

Marcus's metaphoric description momentarily elides their physical absence with linguistic presence, rendering them for the audience's imagination, "lopp'd and hew'd" though they might be.

Marcus's attempt to reconstruct Lavinia through poetic description is, of course, ineffectual. His poetry is a reflex, a linguistic flinch from the reality of his niece's suffering. Marcus uses pastoral imagery associated with the *blazon*, which celebrates a woman's beauty (and, occasionally, a man's) through metaphor and simile, generally describing womanly features as the finest of nature's materials (such as ripe cherries, ivory, pearls, spun gold, etc.), but as Marcus gradually accepts Lavinia's suffering, his pastoral imagery turns into a poetry of loss:

A craftier Tereus, cousin, hast thou met,  
And he hath cut those pretty fingers off,  
That could have better sew'd than Philomel.  
O, had the monster seen those lily hands  
Tremble, like aspen-leaves, upon a lute,  
And make the silken strings delight to kiss them,  
He would not then have touch'd them for his life!  
Or, had he heard the heavenly harmony  
Which that sweet tongue hath made,  
He would have dropp'd his knife, and fell asleep  
As Cerberus at the Thracian poet's feet. (2.4.41-51)

Marcus' lines here desire an alternate narrative, one in which the "the monster" would have refrained from monstrous violence if he saw and heard for himself the charm of Lavinia's hands and tongue. No longer flinching from Lavinia, Marcus begins to accept his role as a witness to her suffering, but not before lamenting what might have been, if Lavinia's attackers were capable of poetic sensitivity.

Having first flinched from her wounds and then wishing they hadn't happened, Marcus's attention does gradually shift from her wounds to Lavinia herself. Even in his description of her "lily hands" and "sweet tongue," the emphasis is on Lavinia's activities, how her hands light upon a lute or how she uses her tongue to sing a "heavenly harmony," and Marcus begins acknowledging that Lavinia's lopped hands and tongue are not the losses of *objects*, but of instruments of her body. His language, in other words, can no longer commit to the notion of her wounds as a series of inanimate objects--a description in which Lavinia has no presence. Instead, the loss is not just of hands and tongue, but of Lavinia's performance, too, of music and song. The loss is not just her body parts but also the activities or expressions for which she used them and which remain metonymically suggestive of Lavinia as a person of grace and eloquence.

But despite the gradual shift in his description of Lavinia's lopped limbs, Marcus still doesn't sympathize or closely identify with her pain or suffering. Marcus grieves for Lavinia, but his grief also brackets off Lavinia's pain. He clearly feels anguish, but it is an anguish that is caused by the sight of Lavinia's wounds, not an anguish that imagines her suffering as his own or that attempts to imagine suffering from her perspective. Marcus is certainly affected by the sight of Lavinia's wounds, and he wishes he could know what

Lavinia might tell him if she still had her tongue: “Shall I speak for thee? Shall I say ’tis so? / O that I knew thy heart, and I knew the beast, / That I might rail at him to ease my mind!” (2.4.33-35). In these lines, Marcus does not want to know Lavinia’s “heart” in the sense of wanting to feel or identify with her trauma (though Titus will show this desire for close association). What Marcus wants is the secret knowledge of whom Lavinia would accuse. He wants to know who is “the beast” responsible for Lavinia’s mutilation. Marcus admits, whether he realizes it or not, that retaliating against the person responsible for Lavinia’s pain would ease his own suffering rather than Lavinia’s: “That I might rail at him *to ease my mind!*” (2.4.35, my italics). Marcus’s desire to know who is responsible for Lavinia’s mutilation acknowledges Lavinia’s pain without necessarily identifying with it.

The suffering Marcus does identify with, because he imagines it will be similar in kind to his own, is Titus’s: “Come, let us go and make thy father blind, / For such a sight will blind a father’s eye. / One hour’s storm will drown the fragrant meads: / What will whole months of tears thy father’s eyes?” (2.4.52-55). Marcus assumes that the sight of Lavinia’s mutilation will affect Titus as it has affected him. For Marcus, witnessing Lavinia’s suffering is dangerous, and it threatens to overwhelm him with grief. The fact that he initially flinches from her pain by first filtering his perception of her wounds through poetry is psychologically suggestive. He is understandably horrified by the violence Lavinia has suffered. But as he acknowledges her suffering, his response is one of pity. He grieves for her and wants to ease her suffering: “Do not draw back, for we will mourn with thee. / O, could our mourning ease thy misery!” (2.4.56-57). But even as Marcus claims “we will mourn with thee,” there’s a distinction between their suffering (Marcus and

Titus's) and hers: "O, could *our mourning ease thy misery*" (2.4.57, my italics). This implied distance (Marcus grieves *for* Lavinia) is the crucial difference between having pity for someone or having sympathy. Pity maintains a kind of distance. Sympathy does not. The sight of Lavinia's misery causes Marcus a painful emotional response. Marcus wants to ease Lavinia's misery--of course he does--but this is motivated, at least in part, by his need to ease his own misery as well.

Scholars have been puzzled by Marcus's response to Lavinia's bloody, speechless suffering, and the general tendency is to read Marcus's response as inherently patriarchal, a reflexive closure of feminine suffering and shame through masculine procedures of Petrarchan poetics and the authority of male speech. Bethany Packard, for instance, interprets Marcus's description of Lavinia's wounds as a metaphorical doubling of Lavinia's trauma. By reconstruing Lavinia's wounds through florid metaphor, Packard claims, "he repeats Lavinia's dismemberment even as he tries to reconstruct an imagined perfect body" ("Coauthor" 289). S. Clark Hulse remarks that Marcus's aestheticizing of Lavinia's wounds "might be describing a broken water main, not his niece, for all the emotional weight or interior reference his words seem to carry," and Hulse suggests that the scene marks a pivotal shift in the play, with the efficacy of language being replaced by action and bodily gesture ("Wresting" 110). While these concerns of patriarchal authority and the assumed masculine power of speech and poetics are insightful, important, and persuasively argued, we might also consider how Marcus's reaction to Lavinia serves a dramatic function. Contemporary scholarship on the play has not made an adequate distinction between Marcus and Titus's reactions to Lavinia's wounds. Marcus and Titus's

responses to Lavinia are often read as equivalent and emblematic of the denial of female agency throughout the play. But Titus's response to Lavinia is not identical to Marcus's. Rather, Marcus's initial response to her wounds provides a necessary and dramatic contrast to Titus's response.

Notably, much of the criticism and investigation of sympathy is relegated to morality or ethics. To sympathize with someone else was thought to explain and justify moral principles. In this sense, sympathy and its corollaries, such as compassion or pity, are noted for their motivating function: they move someone to feel something for someone else and to act in accordance with that feeling. Someone suffers, and we want to ease their pain or at least share in their suffering. While some emotions or passions can be, and often are, self-contained (such as happiness, contentment, curiosity, fear, anger, sorrow, etc.), sympathy is inherently interpersonal, requiring a process of identification with someone else. According to Jean Marsden, early modern drama inspires "a radical shift" from "the didactic insistence on art's responsibility to 'please and instruct'" as playwrights invest in "a work's ability to provoke an emotion and through that emotion create a human connection between spectator and spectacle" (29).

Moral instruction is assumed in classical and medieval works of poetry and drama, but that instruction is in terms of behavior: a poem or play defines virtues (such as heroism or villainy) through examples, through the actions of its characters. They provide models to emulate or avoid in terms of how to act. The shift from instruction to "a work's ability to provoke an emotion" and "create a human connection," though, provides a new model: not just how to 'act' but also how to 'feel.' Shakespeare models the distinction between pity

and sympathy in Marcus and Titus's responses to Lavinia. What's more, early modern tragedies do not just provide 'models' of emotional response, they are also designed to cultivate and evoke those emotional responses in the audience. Members of the audience see how different characters might respond to horrors and violence on stage, but they also must grapple with their own emotional responses even as they observe and evaluate the responses of the characters rendered before them.

So how does Titus model a different way to feel? And how does this model help us to better understand not only the play, but also the importance of sympathy in early modern cognition? Unlike Marcus, Titus doesn't want to pity Lavinia's pain, he wants to experience it for himself. Feminist and psychoanalytic scholars tend to read Lavinia's wounds as a suppressing of Lavinia's agency. In addition to the ethical failures that lead to the violence she suffers, scholars link Lavinia's wounds with the eradication of her identity. She loses the ability to effectively communicate, becoming a passive, silent subject who require Marcus and Titus's attempts at penetrative insight. They read into her interiority and declare for her what she wants or feels or needs, or how her gestures might be translated. Marcus's description of her wounds, for example, situates agency within the male gaze. He looks upon her wounds, constructing their meaning and using them as the raw material for his own poetic eloquence.

Titus, too, is often seen as a figure of patriarchal authority, a male figure who uses the women of the play to define his own identity at the expense of theirs. Douglas Green, for instance, claims Lavinia's forced silence and her attempt to recover her voice through writing are overloaded with hermeneutic possibility, and it is a sign of Titus's patriarchal

dominance that he “wrests” meaning from Lavinia by interpreting her “signs.”<sup>28</sup> In this kind of reading, Lavinia becomes a text that Titus works to properly read or translate as he fashions himself into the play’s figure of revenge. Such readings ignore that Titus sympathizes with Lavinia, often in extreme ways.

Other scholars, however, have reconsidered Lavinia's silence and questioned whether her narrative arc is one of marginalized or denied agency. Most notable is Katherine Rowe's work, which argues *Titus* is a play that uses the motif of dismembered hands to explore the “mechanical” concept of agency in early modern culture. Rowe argues that hands are defined by their capacity to grasp and are the iconographic link between an intention and an act. Since a hand can be severed from the body, the display of dismembered hands (and their return as “object” or prop in the play) reveals the “contingent and supplementary condition of agency” (Rowe 285). Rowe uses this contingent aspect of agency to explain the breakdown of “the politics of fealty” in the play, and to show how the iconography of “hand in hand” (an image of trust between people, or a ‘grasping’ of hands which symbolizes mutual/reciprocal agency) is refigured in terms of adaptation and recovered agency (Rowe 291-293). Rowe argues against reading Lavinia’s dismemberment and silencing as passive victimization. Instead, Rowe points to Lavinia’s adaptation of her mouth--with which she ‘grasps’ a stick to write an accusation in the sand--as a sign of a recovered agency. She argues that Lavinia herself functions “as an intending agent who deploys manual icons to powerful effect” (301).

Rowe's argument of adaptation is compelling and provides a way to consider the

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<sup>28</sup> See Green, p. 324.

reconstruction of agency in Shakespeare's play. I believe that it is worthwhile to expand upon Rowe's analysis, because Lavinia and Titus link agency and fealty not just through adaptations of 'grasping.' They also reconfigure agency through quotation, through which Lavinia locates narrative patterns to be redeployed by the Andronici. Key to my argument are the moments in the play in which Titus and Lavinia respond to each other by mirroring each other's gestures, linking the motif of citation or quoting with embodiment. Mimicry, in this sense, is a kind of bodily citation, a quoting of pose or gesture. Tracing the play's use of quotation and mimicry makes visible the reconfiguration of Titus and Lavinia's relationship, from the traditional role of father and daughter to a unique reciprocal bond wherein the boundaries between two selves begin to blur. While, admittedly, the co-constitutive identity of Titus/Lavinia does not seem sustainable by the play's end, the play's emphasis on the possibility of private intersubjectivity has been overlooked by critics. Having examined Marcus's response to Lavinia's wounds and how he responds by showing her pity, I will now turn our attention to Titus to explore the problem of sympathy.

### **Titus and Sympathy**

Before Titus sees Lavinia, he performs scenes of grief and pity that are similar to Marcus's. Even before Titus sees Lavinia's suffering, the Andronici seem to have been destroyed from every possible angle--they are dishonored, exiled from court, and two of Titus's sons are to be executed for a murder they didn't commit. For Titus, it seems the earth itself is an open maw thirsting for Andronici blood:

O earth, I will befriend thee more with rain  
That shall distil from these two ancient urns  
Than youthful April shall with all his showers.  
In summer's drought I'll drop upon thee still;



In winter with warm tears I'll melt the snow  
And keep eternal springtime on the face,  
So thou refuse to drink my dear sons' blood (3.1.16-22)

In his lamentation, Titus's tears are distilled into an image of perpetual mourning. Most notable is that this transformation of himself into an endless generator of warm tears is contractual, an exchange. Titus offers to suffer and grieve eternally in order to stave off the very thing that he grieves. He will shed endless tears to end the cause of his sorrow, i.e. the pending execution of his two sons. But are tears an adequate substitute for blood? Even if the tears are endless, can they drown out violence and death? Do tears surfeit the earth's bloody mouth? Titus's tearful rhetoric is a plea rooted in desperation rather than possibility, a desperate strain of language in which declarations of grief are amplified by gesture and pose. The evocative power of Titus's words lies also in their delivery, amplified by the modulation and grain of Titus's voice and evidenced by wet cheeks.

Titus, pitying his condemned sons, presents this perpetual grief as the greatest price he can pay. In this scene, prior to witnessing Lavinia's wounds, his despair seems to mark the limit of possible suffering and, therefore, his tearfulness seems to be the most he can offer to the blood-thirsty earth. But this kind of tearfulness is actually sustaining. Like Marcus's pity for Lavinia's wounds, which includes a desire to ease his own suffering, Titus's tearfulness works to ease his own pain. If this contract (i.e. endless tears in exchange for his sons' lives) between himself and the earth were to be struck, his perpetual tears would also be an endless reminder of his *success* in saving Quintus and Martius from execution. It would not be difficult to imagine these perpetual tears as tears of joy rather than grief. Titus's slip into pastoral language already contains this possibility: his tears are

generative, associated with warmth and an eternal spring (both as a place to draw water and as a season). The image of his own tears falling “on thy face” (i.e. on the face of the earth) to “melt the snow” itself suggests a delicate, lovely intimacy. Although Titus’s pleading with the tribunes and then with the earth itself seems to result from hopeless desperation, his image of becoming a spring of endless warm tears is an optimistic fantasy that temporarily displaces the reality of his sons’ pending executions.

Though Titus is tormented by the fate of his two sons, he does not reach the depth of his sorrow until he sees Lavinia’s suffering. Earlier in the play, when Lavinia makes her first appearance, Titus calls her the “cordial of mine age to glad my heart” (1.1.169). In this earlier scene, Titus displays a tenderness for Lavinia that he doesn’t seem to have for his sons. When Lavinia is brought before him and he witnesses her mutilation, the “cordial” of comfort she represented for him is turned into his most painful wound:

This way to death my wretched sons are gone;  
Here stands my other son, a banished man,  
And here my brother, weeping at my woes.  
But that which gives my soul the greatest spurn  
Is dear Lavinia, dearer than my soul. (3.1.99-104)

Titus’s torment is further amplified by the knowledge that he witnesses true suffering: “Had I but seen thy picture in this plight, / It would have madded me; what shall I do / Now I behold thy lively body so?” (3.1.105-106). Here, Titus claims that even the image of Lavinia’s mutilation, even if it were not true (but a lurid painting? or a dream?), would be enough to disturb his mind. Jean Marsden notes that, for seventeenth- and eighteenth-century theorists, “In no other form of art is distress so distinctly ‘present’ as in drama; it is not fixed in time, as with a painting, nor diluted through the act of reading, as

with fiction or even the silent reading of a play” (“Sympathy” 33). The distress made possible by presence explains why Marcus uses poetry to flinch from Lavinia’s pain. Marcus’s *blazon* of Lavinia’s wounds attempt to withdraw from the dramatic power of Lavinia’s presence. He translates Lavinia’s wounds into poetry in order to momentarily dilute her presence and lessen the spectacle of her horrific pain. This is not to say he is uncaring. Rather, he momentarily protects himself from the threat of an overwhelming sympathy and grief for Lavinia’s wounds. Titus, however, resists this urge.

In contrast to his grief for his condemned sons, the grief that Titus feels for Lavinia is not restorative, regenerative, or sustaining. Some kinds of grief are destructive, driving characters to madness and cyclical violence. In *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England*, Michael Schoenfeldt points to the internal pressure of grief and the necessity to relieve it: “Indeed, when confronting not erotic passion but the emotion of grief Shakespeare repeatedly suggests that suppression is dangerous and ventilation therapeutic” (188 n. 55). Marcus himself feels this onset of grief when he first finds Lavinia and asks her to speak, to tell him who committed this violence against her. When Marcus realizes Lavinia can’t speak, he describes the destructive grief which intensifies with speechlessness: “Shall I speak for thee? Shall I say ‘tis so? / O that I knew thy heart, and knew the beast, / That I might rail at him to ease my mind! / Sorrow concealed, like an oven stopped, / Doth burn the heart to cinders where it is” (2.3.33-37). The most powerful, consuming sorrows are burdens that must be ventilated. To speak one’s grief is to dispel some of its destructive nature.

Dangerous suppression and violent (rather than therapeutic) ventilation of grief provide the dramatic energy of revenge in early modern drama. While revenge is sometimes presented as a strategy for keeping grief at bay, revenge is more likely to be the result of channeling or focusing grief into passionate energy.<sup>29</sup> Rather than working to dispel grief, revenge narratives reveal that grief can be stored and weaponized, turning emotional turbulence into a personal conviction which makes violent action possible. In Shakespeare's *Richard III*, for instance, Elizabeth begins to accuse Richard of his role in the murder of her two young sons, but she refrains from venting her grief through speech so as to maintain its violent energy: "that still use of grief makes wild grief tame, / My tongue should to thy ears not name my boys / Till that my nails were anchored in thine eyes" (4.4.221.9-221.11). Tragedy, in general, reveals the wounds or fissures that expose and reshape the self. Revenge tragedy, in particular, explores what happens when this internal, emotional suffering, this "wild grief" is directed outward and made external. This wild grief forces meaningful expression to leave the realm of articulation and enter the realm of spectacular violence.

In *Titus Andronicus*, we see the transition from the therapeutic possibility of grief (as venting) to the cultivation of pathological grief via a stoppage of tears and a recirculation of grief as energy for retribution. As trauma follows trauma, Titus's initial fantasy of warm, regenerative tears will give way to an image of tears which salt the earth, leaving the world perpetually barren and polluted with grief:

Shall thy good uncle and thy brother Lucius  
And thou and I sit round about some fountain,  
Looking all downwards to behold our cheeks,

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<sup>29</sup> In Shakespeare's *2 Henry VI*, for example, Queen Margaret states "Oft have I heard that grief softens the mind, / And makes it fearful and degenerate; / Think therefore on revenge and cease to weep" (4.4.1-3).

How they are stained like meadows not yet dry,  
With miry slime left on them by a flood?  
And in the fountain shall we gaze so long  
Till the fresh taste be taken from that clearness  
And made a brine pit with our bitter tears? (3.1.123-130)

In these lines, Titus's earlier image of pastoral tears is swept away by the briny muck of tears that are void of hope or purpose. These tears would not exchange Titus's grief for the deliverance or relief of his children. Instead, this grief would envelop all the Andronici. At best, Titus imagines they might become figures of cultural memory, functioning as icons of humanity's deepest misery by modeling themselves after Lavinia's mutilation:

...shall we cut away our hands like thine?  
Or shall we bite our tongues and in dumb shows  
Pass the remainder of our hateful days?  
What shall we do? Let us that have our tongues  
Plot some device of further misery  
To make us wondered at in time to come. (3.1.131-136).

Rather than acting as a figure of patriarchal authority in this scene, Titus is *asking* Lavinia what she would have them do. Titus's inclination is to model himself after Lavinia or to turn to her for direction despite her silence. Despite Titus's collaborative reconfiguration of agency with and through Lavinia, scholars tend to read Titus a figure of oppressive patriarchal power in the play. Douglas Green provides a nuanced and insightful representation of this view of patriarchy:

Indeed, Lavinia's speech--or any uncurtailed mode of signification on her part--could expose to the public (and to the audience) her subjection to the arbitrary wills of men, to the contradictory desires of her father, husband, rival fiancé, brothers, and rapists. Her voice might not only bring down Chiron, Demetrius, Aaron, and Tamora but might also accuse Titus as well. For Lavinia to speak now would undermine the play's design--the reconstitution of patriarchy under Lucius. But the play makes us aware of the price that this reconstitution, this order, exacts from women (and younger sons, and those without power, or those who are otherwise peripheral); they, their pain, and all their experiences are consigned to silence and illegibility" (324).

While I appreciate the Green's assessment of patriarchal power in the play, his description of silence and illegibility as signs of oppression seems less true of the play *after* Titus witnesses Lavinia's wounded suffering. After Lavinia is brutalized by Chiron and Demetrius, her silence does not reinforce patriarchal power but unravels it, and Green's view does not account for Titus's reconfiguration of his relationship to Lavinia.

Though Titus at times describes Lavinia as a text to be read and interpreted, even in these moments Titus's language does not resonate as patriarchal authority.<sup>30</sup> The tone of his language is devotional, intimating careful study and attentive humility. In his attempts to understand Lavinia's gestures, Titus seeks to be receptive to Lavinia's maimed communication and refuses to accept that the channels of linguistic expression, which are integral to early modern identity, have been taken from Lavinia permanently. Instead, Titus commits himself to the study of her soundless gestures and her wordless attempts to make herself known, and the language of Titus's commitment is steeped in religious devotion:

Speechless complainer, I will learn thy thought;  
In thy dumb action will I be as perfect  
As begging hermits in their holy prayers:  
Thou shalt not sigh, nor hold thy stumps to heaven,  
Nor wink, nor nod, nor kneel, nor make a sign,  
But I of these will wrest an alphabet  
And by still practise learn to know thy meaning.

In Titus's metaphor, it is communication with Lavinia which Titus yearns for, not (as for Marcus) just the secret knowledge of whom she might accuse. Her speechless complaints, her unexpressed thoughts, her gestures, become objects of study for their own sake, not simply to spur Titus to revenge in order that he might find ease for himself. Communication

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<sup>30</sup> See 3.1.143-145 and 3.2.35-45.

becomes something akin to communion, the generation of a deeply personal bond between Titus and Lavinia. Titus's attempts to read Lavinia's gestures and speak her words are not a form of ventriloquism. He is not trying to speak *for* her, he's trying attune himself to her "speechless" complaints and "dumb action" so that *she* can communicate *through him*. He wants to be used as a prosthesis, as an instrument that Lavinia can use to overcome the losses of her speech and handwriting.

Titus's sympathy for Lavinia becomes more clear when we contrast his initial response to Lavinia's wounds with Marcus's. Where Marcus flinches, turning her pain into poetry and wanting to ease his mind through revenge, Titus pointedly refuses to flinch. When Marcus brings Lavinia to her father, he warns him: "Titus, prepare thy aged eyes to weep; / Or, if not so, thy noble heart to break: / I bring consuming sorrow to thine age" (3.1.59-61). Marcus language echoes Titus's first lines to Lavinia, in which he welcomes her as "The cordial of mine age to glad my heart," but here Lavinia's presence is imagined as poisonous (1.1.166). Marcus assumes Titus will be overwhelmed and consumed by Lavinia's suffering, and it is notable that he presents her in the past tense, implying an irrevocable loss, which Titus himself corrects:

TITUS

Will it consume me? let me see it, then.

MARCUS

This was thy daughter.

TITUS

Why, Marcus, so she is. (3.1.62-64)

Lucius responds to Lavinia in the way Marcus expected from Titus, saying, "Ay me, this object kills me!" (3.1.64). Titus, however, does not flinch from Lavinia's presence nor does

he seek to ease his own suffering in witnessing her pain. He tells Lucius “Faint-hearted boy, arise, and look upon her,” and turns his attention to Lavinia, saying:

Give me a sword, I'll chop off my hands too;  
For they have fought for Rome, and all in vain;  
And they have nursed this woe, in feeding life;  
In bootless prayer have they been held up,  
And they have served me to effectless use:  
Now all the service I require of them  
Is that the one will help to cut the other.  
'Tis well, Lavinia, that thou hast no hands;  
For hands, to do Rome service, are but vain. (3.1.64, 72-80)

While Marcus's first inclination was to turn Lavinia's wounds into poem, Titus seeks to emulate her wounds on his own body. Nor is Titus's expressed desire to lop off his hand merely lip service. When Aaron comes calling, claiming Saturninus will accept Titus's chopped hand in substitution for Quintus and Martius's chopped heads, Titus is all too willing to find an axe.

Ultimately, Titus seeks to help Lavinia reclaim her personhood, rather than allowing others to view her as an object of horror (“Ay me, this object kills me”) or a living reminder her loss of self (“This was thy daughter”) (3.1.64, 62). Their relationship depicts an intersubjectivity in which two selves overlap. They show that the imagined boundaries between ‘self’ and ‘other’ can be porous. From the moment Titus sees her wounds, Lavinia becomes a complicated figure for Titus. If Titus was a figure of patriarchal authority prior to Lavinia's mutilation, his witnessing of her suffering marks a shift from Titus's authority over Lavinia to something more akin to a symbiosis, a distinctly mutual relationship. Titus's attentiveness to Lavinia's suffering and his willingness to share in her suffering model a distilled, perhaps even extreme, form of sympathy, and reveal how the presence of others



structures early modern subjectivity. Titus and Lavinia's subjectivity is depicted in the play as an *intertwined* selfhood.

With the Andronici traumatized and dishonored, Titus begins constructing a new inner schema with Lavinia as his key point of reference for navigating a world steeped in grief:

I am the sea. Hark how her sighs doth blow.  
She is the weeping welkin, I am the earth.  
Then must my sea be moved with her sighs,  
Then must my earth with her continual tears  
Become a deluge overflowed and drowned,  
For why my bowels cannot hide her woes,  
But like a drunkard must I vomit them. (3.1.226-332).

In his sequence of metaphors, Titus and Lavinia fluidly mix. Titus description of reciprocity is reinforced by Lavinia's mimicry of Titus's movements. As Titus kneels and calls for pity from above ("one hand up to heaven") or below ("And bow this feeble ruin to the earth") (3.1.206-207), Lavinia matches his gestures, kneeling with him in expression of mutually shared grief. Even before this moment, Lavinia has already begun the project of reciprocation, evident when Lucius calls attention to Lavinia's tears the moment Titus first sees his wounded daughter, saying, "Sweet father, cease your tears, for at your grief / See how my wretched sister sobs and weeps" (3.1.136-137).

Titus's defined role as Lavinia's father and Lavinia's designated role as "cordial" of his heart have been suspended by tragic violence. Titus and Lavinia are still linked to each other (perhaps now more than ever), but their relationship is no longer stable nor clearly defined. Titus imagines his sighs of grief merging with Lavinia's, and describes their merged suffering as having its own powerful effect:

What, wouldst thou kneel with me?  
Do then, dear heart, for heaven shall hear our prayers,  
Or with our sighs we'll breathe the welkin dim

And stain the sun with fog, as sometime clouds  
When they do hug him in their melting bosoms. (3.1.211-214)

His sorrow and its outward performance become her sorrow. Her tears, the signs of inward grief, flood Titus's body. Titus and Lavinia become quotations of each other; they mimic and model and refine their grief in relation to each other, symbiotically.

### **Emotional Identification, Counter-humanism, and Revenge**

While sympathy is an important component of Titus and Lavinia's reciprocal identity, Shakespeare's play also expresses skepticism about how sympathy might be used. The play suggests that sympathy--the imagining of another person's experience--is not sufficient on its own to cultivate mercy for others or to curb violence. In this sense, Elizabethan revenge tragedies are test cases for the proper and improper uses of sympathy, or the "emotional identification" cultivated by the humanist curriculum of early modern grammar schools.

According to Leah Whittington, "Students were regularly asked to perform exercises in composition that encouraged emotional identification, as they mentally transported themselves into the psychic world of another (often fictional, often female) person, whose emotional experiences they were meant to make their own" (100). This cultivation of emotional identification, wherein a person practices imagining someone else's traumatic experience as his or her own, is not just meant to sharpen skills in rhetoric and oration, but also provides moral instruction. "The humanist schoolroom," Whittington writes, "...was a laboratory for compassion" (101). Shakespeare's treatment of emotional identification in *Titus Andronicus* reveals that emotional identification, or the

acknowledgment of other minds, does not inherently produce compassion or pity; rather, speculation about the psychic world of an enemy functions as a necessary component of revenge.

Instead of creating a need for mercy, emotional identification becomes instrumental in creating and amplifying another's suffering. For example, in the moments before she is horrifically raped and mutilated, Lavinia pleads with Tamora, Chiron, and Demetrius for mercy and compassion. Demetrius calls Tamora's attention to Lavinia's tears, which are themselves similar to Tamora's own tears when pleading with Titus in Act 1. Here, as in Act 1, compassion fails. The key difference between the two scenes is the attention paid to tears. Tamora's tears and pleas for the life of her son Alarbus are dismissed by Titus, and they fail to inspire compassion or pity because he ignores them, being either unwilling or unable to imagine Tamora's torment himself. In contrast, Tamora does not dismiss or ignore Lavinia's suffering. Tamora is encouraged to recognize Lavinia's tearful torment as a sign that the Goths are approaching their first moment of victory in their retribution against the Andronici family; Demetrius says to his mother: "Listen, fair madam: let it be your glory / To see here tears; but be your heart to them / As unrelenting flint to drops of rain" (2.3.139-141). Here, Lavinia's tears provide evidence that she is effectively tormented, extending *lex talionis* to encompass not only physical injury but also emotive turmoil. Not just "eye for eye, tooth for tooth," revenge reiterates prior moments of cruelty. Demetrius's demand, that Tamora take glory in Lavinia's tears, does not ignore Lavinia's experience of suffering, it does not deny Lavinia's 'psychic world.' The demand itself depends on Tamora recognizing the devastation she causes to Lavinia. The 'glory' Demetrius refers to

is one which explicitly recognizes and understands the horrific experience to which Lavinia is being subjected, and still denies her mercy.

Aaron, too, emphasizes this inverted form of emotional identification, turning empathy into sadism, when confessing to Titus's son the pleasure he took in witnessing Titus's tormented tears:

I played the cheater for thy father's hand,  
And when I had it drew myself apart,  
And almost broke my heart with extreme laughter  
I pried me through the crevice of a wall  
When for his hand he had his two sons' heads,  
Beheld his tears, and laughed so heartily  
That both mine eye were rainy like to his... (5.1.111-117)

Aaron matches Titus tear for tear, but his tears stand on opposite ends of the spectrum of inward feeling; the more Aaron recognizes Titus's despair and grief, the more powerful is his own feeling of glee. Aaron's gleeful tears are an emotive inversion of Titus's grief-stricken tears, but his malicious glee does not ignore or misread Titus's tearful suffering; rather, like Tamora taking 'glory' in Lavinia's tears, it is only possible because Aaron is adept at recognizing Titus's suffering and imagining its inexpressible depth.

Later in the play, while captured outside Rome by Lucius, Aaron confesses to various ways he has committed villainy. Aaron's descriptions of malicious acts are the play's clearest expression of emotional identification as instrumental when causing devastation to the 'psychic world' of others. In his litany of malicious acts, Aaron describes a project of torment using disinterred corpses:

Oft have I digged up dead men from their graves  
And set them upright at their dear friends' door,  
Even when their sorrows almost was forgot,  
And on their skins, as on the bark of trees,

Have with my knife carvèd in Roman letters  
'Let not your sorrow die though I am dead.' (5.1.135-140)

Clearly, Aaron's attunement to suffering does not inspire acts of mercy. Instead, it helps him torment others more effectively. Aaron's horrific torment of these dead men's grieving friends is a project whose success requires a perceptive insight into the emotional lives of others. Aaron even times his psychological violence for maximal potency ("Even when their sorrows almost was forgot") which suggests Aaron is precisely attuned to the emotional lives of others. He imagines what the corpse of a loved one best might say to cause a person's relapse into a state of grief. Rather than restraining Aaron's malicious impulses, his emotional identification secures his sadistic pleasure and increases his desire to torment:

But I have done a thousand dreadful things  
As willingly as one would kill a fly,  
And nothing grieves me heartily indeed  
But that I cannot do ten thousand more" (5.1.140-144).

Aaron's malice demonstrates a perspicacious understanding of how others will feel in response to the horrors he inflicts upon them. His attunement is devastating to the assumption that a humanist education is inherently civilizing. Despite Aaron's capacity for writing in "Roman letters" and his knowledge of Roman orators, Aaron's depravity challenges what is perhaps the premier assumption of humanism, that rhetorical training and eloquence contains a 'civilizing impulse' which is productive of civic order. According to Jenny Mann, the Roman orators that humanists fixed upon (such as Cicero and Quintilian) emphasized the importance of rhetorical training "with reference to the civilizing force of eloquence and the service a wise orator can provide to the state" (202).

This link between rhetorical eloquence and its civilizing power “provided one of the enabling fictions not just of Renaissance humanism but also of the particular form of vernacular humanism articulated by sixteenth-century English writers” (Mann 203).

Despite the play’s evidence of Aaron’s humanist training, his ‘impulse’ is one of civic destruction and disorder, and despite having insight into the experiences of others and having a keen sense of the emotional pain he causes, Aaron is not deterred from inflicting suffering on others. In other words, Aaron’s lack of compassion is not the result of a lack of empathy. Nor is his cruelty the result of solipsism. Indeed, the very pleasure he claims to derive from tormenting others depends on an acknowledgment of other minds. The combination of Aaron’s knowledge of Roman oration, his capability for imagining the experiences of other minds, and his shocking torment of others contribute to a skepticism toward the promises of humanism’s inherent ability to cultivate good citizens.

In addition to challenging humanism’s claim of an inherent ethical cultivation, Aaron’s villainy suggests that humanism might not have any cultivating effect on a character’s ethical behavior at all. Not only is Aaron capable of inflicting horrific suffering on others, he also has no qualms about his actions. Aaron’s claim that he commits acts of physical and psychological violence “as willingly as one would kill a fly,” expresses the ease in which he can take pleasure in cruelty. In *King Lear*, killing flies for sport is Gloucester’s image of terrifying, sadistic cruelty (and from the gods, no less). That the gods “kill us for sport” the way “wanton boys” kill flies, human suffering--and perhaps all human experience--seems to be cosmologically insignificant. What is awful, for Gloucester, about death and human suffering is not that it happens, but that it happens without

teleological grounding. Gloucester imagines access to the inwardness of the gods, of the 'secret motive' behind human death and suffering, and presents the horrifying possibility that the motive may be a trifling, childish cruelty. Such wanton boy-gods are, at best, sadistic in a similar vein to Aaron's. But at least Aaron's form of cruelty (which recognizes and takes pleasure in someone else's suffering) gives attention to the slain flies. Perhaps the more cynical possibility is that the boy-gods aren't killing flies so much as they're killing time, that their childish cruelty is driven by little more than boredom--more cynical because, in this case, the suffering isn't even the point, but a mere diversion. In such a scenario, the most horrific event for one being (whether it be fly or human) is a moment the boy-gods immediately forget--not because the inflicted suffering is too painful to gaze upon, but because it matters so little to the ones inflicting it.

Aaron's claim that he has done "a thousand dreadful things as willingly as one would kill a fly" echoes an earlier scene in the play, when Titus displays an acute sensitivity to violence when his brother Marcus kills a fly. In accordance with the humanist ideal of sympathetic imagination, Titus's attunement to Lavinia's suffering seems to have developed his moral sensitivity, so much so that killing a fly is *not* something Titus would do willingly. Titus's response problematizes the act of killing a fly by marking violence as consequential, regardless of its scope:

TITUS

What dost thou strike at, Marcus, with thy knife?

MARCUS

At that that I have killed, my lord--a fly.

TITUS

Out on thee, murderer! Thou kill'st my heart.

Mine eyes are cloyed with view of tyranny.

A deed of death done on the innocent

Becomes not Titus' brother. Get thee gone.  
I see thou art not for my company. (3.2.52-58)

Titus marks any act of violence against an innocent being as wrong in principle, but what's most surprising about Titus's response to the 'murder' of the fly is the way in which he imagines the grief of the dead fly's father. When Marcus expresses how inconsequential this small act of killing is, saying "Alas, my lord, I have but killed a fly," Titus describes a cognitive map of suffering and grief which magnifies, rather than diminishes, Marcus's act of violence by considering the extent of the suffering such violence causes for the victim's family: "'But?' How if that fly had a father, brother? / How would he hang his slender gilded wings and buzz lamenting dirges in the air!" (3.2.60-62). Titus's castigation of Marcus is all the more surprising in that he argues using pathos in the same way Tamora did when pleading for Alarbus, when she demanded Titus imagine for himself a parent's grief for a slain child:

Victorious Titus, rue the tears I shed--  
A mother's tears in passion for her son--  
And if thy sons were ever dear to thee,  
O, think my sons to be as dear to me! (1.1.105-108)

Both Titus and Tamora's mapping of grief presents violence as an act whose effect is not self-contained or autonomous, but reverberates along unforeseen fault lines.

Even acts of violence, it seems, are intersubjective in their impact. Titus's empathy and anguish for the fly is predicated on his reading of the fly's intent. His emotional identification with the fly, and the fly's father, depends on the fly's victimization, which itself depends on the fly's innocence: "Poor harmless fly," Titus laments, "That with his pretty buzzing melody / Came here to make us merry..." (3.2.63-65). But Marcus, in a



single statement, turns Titus's abhorrence for violence into sadistic glee by presenting the fly's presence as malicious: "Pardon me, sir, it was a black, ill-favored fly, / Like to the Empress Moor. Therefore I killed him" (3.2.66-67). Titus and Marcus both claim insight into the fly's intentions, marking it as 'harmless' or 'ill-favored,' and this marking of the fly's interiority determines whether or not this act of killing is itself a malefaction.

Titus and Marcus grapple with a problem of the mind of others that is more complicated than mere acknowledgment of other minds. While emotional identification makes it possible for Titus to pity and grieve for the slain fly, it also allows him to commend its killing. Katharine Eisaman Maus writes: "Given the ubiquity of such conceptual categories [of inwardness and 'hypocrisy' or 'secret motive'] in the English Renaissance, it is hardly surprising that the 'problem of minds' presents itself to thinkers and writers not so much as a question of whether those minds exist as a question of how to know what they are thinking" (*Inwardness* 7). The problem, then, of emotional identification is that another character's psychic world can be imagined in a multitude of ways.

What aspects of the fly does Titus take as evidence of its victimization? The fly, as victim, is associated with voice and harmony--the fly's buzzing becomes soothing, sympathetic song. The fly as malicious agent relies on a shift from aural to visual evidence; attention paid to the fly's voice shifts to the fly's skin, and the external blackness of the fly becomes the key to penetrating its interiority, its concealed and malicious motivation. What the fly-killing scene reveals is that an act of violence itself is interpreted in relation to the intentions of both the victim of violence and its perpetrator. If the fly be a "poor harmless

fly,” it is marked as an innocent victim of violence, but the violence also marks Marcus as “murderer” and “tyrant.” On the other hand, if the fly be “black” and “ill-favoured” then Marcus’s violence becomes the act of a dutiful brother, and Marcus himself becomes not villainous but valiant. And though Titus chooses to accept Marcus’s reading of the fly, himself taking up Marcus’s knife and doing violence to its corpse “as if it were the Moor come hither purposely to poison me,” all intentions remain hidden and illegible. The problem of violence is that one can never be sure that violence is justified.

Since the publication of Stephen Greenblatt’s influential work on Renaissance ‘self-fashioning,’ there has been much scholarship on the epistemology of early modern inwardness. In *Titus Andronicus*, the private self, which is distinct and concealed from the external, social sphere, is inherently slippery. Characters in the play attempt to display, or recognize in others, tangible signs of human inwardness, but have no way to verify if a reading of these signs is accurate. But this slipperiness is productive rather than limiting. Inwardness, motive, and identity are not stable or ontological, but are the social effects of discursive conflict. If we consider inwardness, motive, and identity as products of competing hermeneutic claims (such as Titus and Marcus’s readings of the fly as “harmless” or “ill-favoured”), the problem is no longer purely epistemic.

There are no guarantees of certainty when considering a character’s motives and intentions even when, as Harry Berger Jr. has shown, a character presents his or her own motives to him- or herself.<sup>31</sup> The more interesting problem is not what someone’s motive is,

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<sup>31</sup> Berger describes the problem of self-representation and its reception in *The Absence of Grace*, p. 14: “The problems that beset this culture are concentrated in the interpretive combat between performer and spectators/auditors, a field of play charged with the tension between aesthetic *jouissance* and suspicion. Since in order to represent themselves to others performers represent themselves to themselves, since they watch themselves being watched, the force of persuasion and the production of meaning are reversible,

but how characters talk about motive, whether it be their own or those of others. To approach interpretations of inwardness, we must first abandon an idea of inwardness as ontological, wherein issues such as ‘motive’ and ‘identity’ are viewed as autonomous objects which can be excised from social relations or from the contingencies of how characters are depicted. Instead, we must think of inwardness, motive, and identity as the subjects of a hermeneutic practice that creates a causal link between an act and the character who performs it. When describing motive, we may not attest a certainty of inwardness or interiority, but we produce an interpretation of what that state of inwardness might be. Even when a character is describing his or her own motive, we might read this as a kind of self-interpretation that a character produces by laying claim to the authority of a plausible and cohesive narrative. When characters in *Titus* imagine the inward experience of others, they project a plausible narrative of interiority in relation to the external signifiers of inwardness (such as tears, pleas, or gestures). Emotional identification, then, itself represents a commitment to one plausible narrative, among many, of another character’s illegible interiority. Revenge tragedies tend to raise the stakes of emotional identification by handling scenarios that depict moments of overwhelming anger and grief.

Scholars often focus on the play’s depictions of physical silencing--such as the dismemberment of Lavinia’s tongue and lopping away of her hands to prevent her from speaking or writing out an accusation--but the play itself emphasizes interruptions of (or

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alienable, circular: they can originate either in the observer or in the performer. This makes courtly negotiation a struggle for control over the power to determine the self-representation the performer conveys not only to others but also to himself or herself (a disjunction that reminds us the determination may include gender).” Though Berger limits his discussion to the courtly practices of *sprezzatura*, I believe similar concerns of self-representation and reception are disseminated in English culture through the popularity of early modern theater, which provides a similar “field of play” for “interpretative combat” onstage.

swerves from) empathetic identification. In the play, Lavinia's silencing itself results from a pragmatic consideration (albeit a horrifically brutal one) which is meant to prevent Lavinia from revealing Chiron and Demetrius's acts of violence, but the silencing is itself not the play's focus. Prior to suffering brutal acts of violence, Lavinia is not silenced until her pleading and her tears provide evocative signs of the efficacy of Tamora's retaliation. Lavinia's physical silencing has been emphasized by scholars as emblematic of denied female agency, but this foregrounding of Lavinia's silencing fails to recognize the play's concern with sympathy. Silencing is itself part of a larger ethical violation, i.e. the refusal to acknowledge suffering, or, even more severe, the acknowledgment of suffering as a means to amplify it. The play shows how imagining someone's pain and recognizing the audible or visible signs of someone's suffering can be used to torment someone more effectively.

While revenge requires its perpetrators to understand the suffering and psychological trauma they cause, the emotional identification which makes this form of retribution possible still contains the possibility of pity or compassion. Revenge must imagine the experience of another's suffering in order to determine how best to produce and amplify it. Emotional identification, however, also threatens to soften a revenger's conviction to traumatize his or her enemy. When it comes to emotional identification, Aaron's capacity to fully understand the immense suffering and grief of others even while he mercilessly torments them is the exception rather than the rule. In contrast to Aaron's seeming propensity for sadism, other characters in the play find their personal convictions for violence and retribution at risk when confronted with signs or performatives of

suffering. When Demetrius draws Tamora's attention to Lavinia's suffering ("...let it be your glory / To see her tears..."), he also warns her against identifying too closely with Lavinia's torment ("...but be your heart to them / As unrelenting flint to drops of rain").<sup>32</sup> Demetrius's imperative that Tamora must harden her heart against the evocative power of Lavinia's tears reveals an anxiety about Tamora's conviction. Revenge requires a character to understand the suffering and psychological trauma they cause, while also avoiding identifying too closely with the victim of physical and emotional violence. If Lavinia's tears were to seep into Tamora's heart, an empathetic or compassionate response to Lavinia's suffering might unravel her project of revenge against the Andronici family.

Titus, too, seems concerned about meeting his enemies face to face, witnessing their response to impending violence, while also buffering his emotional identification to keep his commitment to violence on track. When he has Chiron and Demetrius in his clutches, he compulsively demands that their mouths be stopped up so he be not dissuaded from slitting their throats: "Therefore bind them sure, / And stop their mouths if they begin to cry. ... Sirs, stop their mouths. Let them not speak to me, / But let them hear what fearful words I utter. ... What would you say if I should let you speak? / Villains, for shame. You could not beg for grace" (5.2.159-60, 166-167, 177-178). Titus is compelled to both silence his enemies but also to wonder at their silence, to imagine what they might say if given the chance, and his conviction here seems, perhaps, threatened by the possibility that the words or any performance of suffering (tears, sighs, the grain of the voice itself, etc.) which calls for mercy may be effective in stopping his hand. The ambiguity of the line, "Villains, for

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<sup>32</sup> See *Titus* 2.3.139-141.

shame. You could not beg for grace,” contains conflicting possibilities for why Titus is compelled to silence them. On the one hand, Titus’s line suggests they “could not beg for grace” because they are villains (or, to rephrase, they are incapable of begging for grace), or they could not beg for grace because Titus will not grant them any (in the sense that they would be begging on deaf ears, as Titus cannot be dissuaded from revenge). But if either of these possibilities (or both) are what Titus intends, then why bother silencing them at all? Contrary to his claim that they “could not beg for grace,” Titus’s act of having them bound and gagged, and his compulsive repetition of the phrase “stop their mouths,” suggests he doesn’t truly believe that their words (or, to be more precise and consistent with my emphasis on the relation of intersubjectivity and embodiment, their voices) would have no effect on him. The physical silencing of Chiron and Demetrius is Titus’s tactic for maintaining a face-to-face encounter that will result in violence so long as he can, as in his encounter with the “black ill-favored fly,” mark the ‘other’ as villain.

We should remember, however, that Titus’s ‘othering’ of the fly is not limited to marking the ‘other’ as villain. Titus first views the fly as an ‘other’ which is not set in opposition to his sense of self, but through which he recognizes his family’s own trauma and grief. Scholars of early modern literature are arguing against the anachronistic distinction of the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ that is explicit in Cartesian notions of autonomous selfhood and that remains even in the theoretical, poststructural frameworks that overturned the anachronistic readings of the autonomous early modern self. This vestigial concept of selfhood remains even in much of the scholarship that seeks to carefully recover and historicize early modern subjectivity. New historicism, which shifts the origin of the self

from self-generated to socially constructed, does not escape the the logic of a primal distinction between self and other. In *The Interpersonal Idiom*, Nancy Selleck argues that “Renaissance speakers...share a tendency to locate selfhood beyond subjective experience, in the experience of an other. Fathoming this idiom means recognizing ‘other selves’ in two senses—seeing both how they differ from ours and how they render selfhood a function and property of others” (1-2). An interpersonal / intersubjective understanding of early modern selfhood provides an alternative to “the currently familiar notion of the other as a foil or anti-self against which the self defines itself—a dyadic model that has dominated critical discussions of early modern identity” (2). This “dyadic model,” Selleck argues, is not resolved by Foucauldian or New Historicist notions of the self as a social construct: “Although Renaissance scholars and critical theorists today readily see the self as a social construct, we still tend to analyze that construct on the basis of a sharp distinction between the self and other...” (2). Analysis of the intersubjective nature of early modern identity does not dismiss the insights of New Historicism, but it addresses the limitations of the ‘atomized’ individual, which prevents analysis of willfulness and social response for early modern subjects. According to Selleck, a recovery of early modern intersubjectivity helps us “to move beyond the theoretical impasses of viewing the subject either as wholly independent of or wholly determined by its context” and instead allows us “to understand how subjects also respond to and reciprocally affect their contexts” (6).

Contrary to the ‘dyadic model’ of the self and the other, the Renaissance trope of the ‘other self,’ posits ‘othering’ not as an alienating effect, which differentiates the self by marking in the ‘other’ attributes or characteristics which are opposed to the self, but finds in

an ‘other’ (or ‘others’) points of similarity. According to Laurie Shannon in *Sovereign Amity*, “Classically derived figures of friendship at the center of the humanist curriculum held out a discourse of more than self-fashioning to readers when they cast the friend as ‘another self’ and merged a pair of friends as ‘one soul within two bodies’” (3). As we’ll see, the possibility of finding one’s self in an ‘other’ (or finding ‘another self’) is as important for understanding (inter)subjectivity in *Titus* as the ‘dyadic model’ which emphasizes the play’s use of oppositional ‘othering’ in terms of conflict, retribution, and foreign or alien threat.

The dyadic model is compelling, and is undeniably visible in the antagonisms between Titus’s clan and Tamora’s, but, as Selleck reminds us, an encounter or engagement between a ‘self’ and an ‘other’ is not always one of conflict: “...while the other’s perspective may be different, it does not define the other as wholly alien to the self. It is worth remembering here that ‘other’ means more than just difference—it also refers to similarity, to more of the same (here’s one red chair, and here’s another)” (4). The ‘self’ is not shaped in relation to a single ‘other’, but is interrelated between many ‘others,’ and these ‘others’ shape and condition the self in different ways.

The antagonism between Titus and Tamora is not the only encounter that shapes subjectivity in the play. Titus, Lavinia, and the Andronici certainly find themselves in violent, tragic opposition to Tamora, Aaron, Saturninus, and Chiron and Demetrius, but the Andronici also have profound moments of recognition and reconstructions of selfhood by engaging with each other’s suffering and trauma, of which Lavinia stands as the play’s central figure. Within the play’s narrative of retribution against the Goths there also exists a



narrative of sensitivity and compassion in relation to family trauma, wherein the self recognizes the self in the other.

This intersubjective construction of the self, which finds itself in and through ‘another self,’ is most apparent in the relationship that emerges between Titus and Lavinia. But even Marcus’s initial response to Lavinia, which seems insensitive and self-involved when we emphasize his use of the *blazon*, can be read as a gradual movement toward this dyadic model. To interpret Marcus’s response as a repetition of Lavinia’s wounding via poetry is to miss the depiction of his response as a progression, a movement from an insular response to increasingly wider considerations of how other minds, including Lavinia’s, are affected by the traumatic event that they all inhabit, with Lavinia bearing the greatest load of suffering. Marcus moves from a response that might be represented by the ‘dyadic model’ of selfhood, which is only capable of acknowledging the experience of the autonomous self, to wider and wider intersubjective considerations. He first accounts for his own suffering, wishing to ease his own mind, then he considers how Titus’s suffering will be similar to his own, and finally imagines a communal response to Lavinia’s wounding, saying, “Do not draw back, for we will mourn with thee. / O, could our mourning ease thy misery!” (2.4.56-57). In this acknowledgment of “our” (the Andronici) suffering and Lavinia’s, there is a formulation of a ‘self’ (or ‘selves’) and an ‘other’ that is not antagonistic or oppositional. Selleck associates this alternative model to dyadic othering with Mikhail Bakhtin’s “concept of dialogized consciousness, which recognizes the interplay of perspectives in a given speaker and casts selfhood as an engagement with, rather than a reaction against, others” (3). Key to this notion of selfhood is the self’s

tendency “to be engaged with the other’s frame of reference, and to be shaped by it” (Selleck 3). Along these lines of ‘dialogized consciousness, Marcus recognizes the minds of others (Titus, and the other male relations) will respond in a way that is similar to his own, as a mournful witness to her suffering, but he also acknowledges that Lavinia’s pain and suffering is a different experience of the traumatic event than his own experience as witness. In this formation of ‘self’ and ‘other’ there is the desire to reconfigure subject-relations, to center around Lavinia in an attempt to share the burden of her suffering and ease her pain. In other words, he expects to shape, and be shaped by, Lavinia’s trauma.

Although recent scholarship has discussed the importance of intersubjectivity in early modern culture for articulating a character’s own constructions of inwardness, Shakespeare’s revenge play displays intersubjectivity’s potential violence and explores inwardness and identity as a sites of discursive conflict when articulating the inwardness of others. When characters in *Titus* imagine the inward experience of others, they project a plausible narrative of interiority derived from inwardness’s external signifiers (such as tears, pleas, or gestures). Emotional identification, then, itself represents a commitment to one plausible narrative, among many, of another character’s illegible interiority.

What distinguishes Titus’s response to his enemies from his response to his daughter is his willingness to continually struggle with his understanding of Lavinia’s subjectivity. Lavinia reclaims her agency by refusing to be a ‘text’ to be read, and instead acts as a textual authority, citing from Ovid. Reading the interiority of another person is an act similar to reading and interpreting a text. The authority of an interpretation depends upon one’s mastery over texts, which is displayed through quoting or citing from canonical

works. Despite Titus's "still practice" to learn the meaning of Lavinia's gestures and to become her mouthpiece, he is unable to understand Lavinia's "speechless" complaints until she provides them context. Though Titus's recognizes that Lavinia's sighs, gestures, and tears are meaningful, they only become coherent when she "quotes the leaves." Lavinia's citation provides Titus with the proper narrative, allowing him to properly interpret her wordless gestures.

Lavinia's citational mode is how she finally reclaims her agency. While it is true that Lavinia, in citing Ovid, identifies with Philomel (as Marcus did when he found her in the woods), the moment is not a reiteration of Marcus or Titus's patriarchal authority. Lavinia's citing of Philomel's story does more than just identify Lavinia with Philomel's victimization. Lavinia also provides an annotation, taking Marcus's staff in her mouth to write an accusation in the sand. Lavinia's citing and annotating of the text makes her more than an object of interpretation for the male figures of the play. Despite losing her tongue and hands, the play's metonyms for speech and writing, Lavinia has not lost her exegetic capacity. Where Philomel weaves her narrative into a tapestry, Lavinia cites from Ovid, weaving her narrative with Philomel's as she "quotes the leaves." What's more, Lavinia's identification is not passive. She not only cites from Ovid to illuminate the nature of her wounds, she also openly accuses Chiron and Demetrius and provides the narrative pattern of revenge. In her quoting from Ovid, Lavinia acts not only as Philomel but also as Procne, who interprets Philomel's tapestry and plots revenge against Tereus.

Though Titus has already sworn the Andronici family to revenge, there is no plan or effort to take revenge until *after* Lavinia provides a narrative pattern and precedent.

From Lavinia, Titus learns to annotate texts into threatening accusations. Immediately after Lavinia provides a “precedent and lively warrant” for revenge in her citing and annotating of Ovid, Titus sends verses of Horace to Chiron and Demetrius, verses which he wraps around a bundle of blades. He also has the Andronici wrap their complaints around arrows that are fired into the heavens in a barrage that falls upon Rome. While Lavinia’s tears and gestures are insufficient substitutes for speech and writing, she recovers her agency through acts of quotation and annotation. In her use of citation, Lavinia resists being a text to be read and instead “quotes the leaves” to become a textual authority, providing her father Titus with a “pattern, precedent, and lively warrant” for revenge against their enemies (4.1.50, 5.3.43).

## **Conclusion**

While characters in *Titus* articulate their passions--especially when those passions are intense grief or anger--these are articulations are always outward-facing and interpersonal in nature. When Titus imagines the all-consuming expansion of his grief, he imagines his passions in relation to the world he inhabits, and after he sees wounded Lavinia, his articulations of grief consistently include Lavinia’s inarticulated grief, her “speechless” complaints. Early modern scholars often refer to Montaigne’s *Essais* for evidence of early modern inwardness in a modern sense. Montaigne observes and describes his own inwardness, cataloguing their motions the way a scientist notes how mice move through a maze. What’s important to remember, however, is that Montaigne’s reflexive inwardness is exceptional in early modern culture. Indeed, he has to invent a new literary form in the essay to accommodate the emergence of this cognitive mode.

Certainly, the self-aware, autonomous inwardness which finds early expression in Montaigne's work influences Shakespeare. Hamlet's soliloquizing and his conception of peopling a world which only he inhabits ("O God, I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams") shows Montaigne's traces in Shakespeare.<sup>33</sup> But Hamlet's interiority, too, is difficult for others (and even Hamlet himself) to comprehend. It stands at the margins of early modern subjectivity, where the self can imagine itself as divorced from the world and identity needs no audience, no recognition from others, in order to exist. This possibility of Montaignean reflexivity is not present in Shakespeare's early drama. Characters generally do not soliloquize in *Titus*. Their subjectivity is always conceived relationally, in terms of how they perceive, and are perceived, by others. The complications of subjectivity in *Titus* are not in terms of characters tracing their own interiorities, but in the fact that their interiorities--their private thoughts and feelings--are accepted or contested, or even entirely dismissed, depending on who is present in any given scene.

The play's mimicry and quotation uses repetition in order to decontextualize lines or narrative patterns and give them new possibilities. The hierarchical structure of patriarchy gives way in the face of shared trauma. Titus's responses to Lavinia's suffering and grief, then, are not one-sided acts of interpretation, but serve to highlight mimicry and quotation both as strategies of collaboration and as a depiction of a possible cognitive structure of intersubjectivity. Through collaboration, Titus and Lavinia recover agency that seemed destroyed by trauma, even if that recovery is, by the play's end, forsaken in favor of

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<sup>33</sup> *Hamlet* 2.2.248-250.

retribution. Violence, ultimately, eradicates subjectivity, reducing the complexities of selfhood into the simplicity of role play, of revenger and villain. The bloodletting which consumes the play's closing scene reveals the specific way in which violence, according to Levinas, "does not consist so much in injuring and annihilating persons as in interrupting their continuity, making them play roles in which they no longer recognize themselves, making them betray not only commitments but their own substance, making them carry out actions that will destroy every possibility for action" (*Totality* 21). As Titus and Lavinia serve pies made from Chiron and Demetrius, the world is dislodged from the possibility of mercy or reconciliation. By the end of the bloody banquet, Titus and Lavinia's enemies are dead, but so are Titus and Lavinia. What remains in the wake of violence are not 'selves,' nor even bodies. Only corpses.

## CHAPTER IV

### “ADORE MY TOPLESS VILLAINY”:

#### METATHEATRICAL RIVALRY IN JOHN MARSTON’S *ANTONIO’S REVENGE*

John Marston’s *Antonio’s Revenge* explores revenge as a mode of competition. While characters speak various motives for revenge in the play, these motives are secondary to their desire to surpass the physical and psychological torment produced by preceding acts of violence. Marston suggests a similarity between the market conditions of dramatic performance (competition between playwrights, acting companies, and rival theaters) and the convention of one-upmanship in revenge tragedy, wherein revengers seek to return and amplify the injuries they suffered at the hands of their enemies. In linking revenge logic with marketplace competition, the play shifts the generic convention of one-upmanship from a matter of justice to aesthetics. While other Elizabethan revenge tragedies represent reciprocity and collusion between characters as important aspects of intersubjective self-reintegration, Marston’s play emphasizes competition and rivalry as the dominant forces that shape his characters.

In the opening scene of John Marston’s *Antonio’s Revenge*, the play’s villain Piero, smeared in gore, steps onstage and boasts about murdering Antonio’s father: "Lord, in two hours what a topless mount / Of unpeered mischief have these hands cast up! / I can scarce coop triumphing vengeance up, / From bursting forth in braggart passion" (1.1.9-12). Not only does Piero gloat about the success of his revenge, he also seeks recognition and adoration for the unsurpassed quality of his revenge: "Canst thou not honey me with fluent

speech / And even adore my topless villainy?" (1.1.83-84). Demanding praise for the unsurpassed *quality* of revenge is surprising, since revenge in Elizabethan revenge plays is not usually treated as a praiseworthy act. Generally, revenge is depicted as a last resort, reserved for some form of private justice when all other options have failed. Thomas McAlindon, for instance, defines revenge in English revenge tragedies as "justice without law" (McAlindon 52).

In *Antonio's Revenge*, however, retaliation is no longer primarily a matter of justice. Instead, Marston's play depicts revenge as a means for attaining approbation and applause from an imagined theatrical audience. In demanding adoration, Piero emphasizes not his ability to procure a form of private justice but instead highlights the aesthetic accomplishment of his revenge. In wanting applause, Piero moves revenge from a moral consideration to an aesthetic one. He demands not ethical vindication but validation for an act he frames as a boastworthy theatrical achievement: "I am great in blood, / Unequaled in revenge" (1.1.17-18). Piero's ambition is not just to punish his enemies, but also to rival and surpass preceding narratives of vengeance and villainy.

What is the effect of thinking of revenge in terms of aesthetic ambition and theatrical rivalry? In previous chapters, I argued that Thomas Kyd and William Shakespeare link violence and silence. Since violence does not go unheeded, Kyd's and Shakespeare's revengers resort to violence when language fails to procure justice for the wrongs they have suffered. For example, in *The Spanish Tragedy*, Kyd depicts revenge as a form of violence that includes both accusation and punishment. When demands for justice go unanswered by God and king, Hieronimo stages for the king a theatrical reenactment of



his son's death that reveals the villains' crimes while Hieronimo ends the villains' lives. In Elizabethan revenge tragedies, violence is a consequence of unheard petitions or ignored accusations.

John Marston's take on revenge tragedy, however, overturns the link between silence and violence. Marston's emphasis on rhetoric as inherently competitive and, therefore, *aggressive*, alters the underlying concern of revenge plays. Marston links retaliation to concerns of reputation, or one's outward-facing self, which is rooted in the interpersonal recognition of personal achievements. The reason Piero wants revenge is due to the damage Antonio inflicted on Piero's reputation: "When his bright valor even dazzled sense / In off'ring his own head, public reproach / Had blurred my name—" (1.1.32-34). In Marston's play, language itself becomes both a site and a source of violence, as revenge is predicated upon rhetorical and theatrical competition.

Drawing upon recent scholarship on rivalry in the theatrical marketplace, I will argue that Marston's depiction of revenge logic, which alludes to prior acts of violence while attempting to surpass them, allegorizes the competitive nature of the theater. The emerging practice of public commercial theater provides the model of social relations--particularly the relation between actor and audience--whereby Marston's characters define themselves. I discussed a similar intersubjective model when analyzing Hieronimo's soliloquies in my chapter on *The Spanish Tragedy*. However, unlike in *The Spanish Tragedy*, the intersubjective rhetoric that characterizes Marston's play makes explicit references to the theater itself. In *The Spanish Tragedy*, Hieronimo may utilize the theater when taking revenge, but there is no rhetoric of the theater in the soliloquies and

collusions (with Don Bazulto, Bel-Imperia, etc.) that restructure Hieronimo's sense of self. In this chapter, I will demonstrate that Marston depicts revenge as a medium for aesthetic achievement and portrays violence as a showcase for rhetoric, acting, and intrigue. Since the Elizabethan revenge tragedies that precede *Antonio's Revenge* use revenge to explore the ethical or political dimensions of violence, Marston's depiction of revenge as an *aesthetic* concern marks a radical departure from his contemporaries.

Characters in *Antonio's Revenge* don't speak so much as they extemporize, riffing knowingly on the conventions of early modern revenge plays. The dialogue in the play is not just bombastic but theatrically self-referential, often exaggerating the stock rhetoric of revenge tragedy to the point that Marston's play may seem indecorously tongue-in-cheek. As an effect of self-referential and intertextual rhetoric, the heightened language of Marston's characters (whether expressing anger or grief) always seems strategically deployed, contextualized (even by characters within the play) as "mimic action" which is "apish" and "player-like" rather than voicing authentic sentiment (*Antonio's* 1.5.78, 80). Throughout the play, characters draw attention to the "player-like" quality of their performances. When Antonio learns that his lover Mellida will be executed, he, like Pandulpho, references 'mimic action,' stating: "I will not swell like a tragedian / In forced passions of affected strains" (2.3.104-105). Earlier in the same scene, however, Antonio swelled in just such an affected strain while grieving for his murdered father:

The chamber of my breast is even thronged  
With firm attendance that forswears to flinch.  
I have a thing sits here; it is not grief,  
'Tis not despair, nor the most plague  
That the most wretched are infected with;

But the most grief-full, despairing, wretched,  
Accursed, miserable--O, for heaven's sake  
Forsake me now; you see how light I am,  
And yet you force me to defame my patience. (2.3.11-19)

By calling attention to the practiced performances, the “forced passions,” of staged tragedies, the play generates skepticism towards the tragic rhetoric of its own characters, who seem especially invested in upstaging each other as “unequaled,” “unsurpassed,” or incapable of being “overtopped,” whether it be in performances of grief or in executions of violence. For example, when Pandulpho claims to be “the miserablest soul that breathes” while burying his murdered son, Antonio challenges this claim, saying that no one is capable of “Outmounting” Antonio “in that superlative,” as he is “unmatched in woe” (4.4.53-58).

Despite the play declaring itself a serious tragedy, a “black-visaged show” that seeks to “weigh massy in judicious scale,” the play’s metatheatrical self-referentiality has made the play difficult for scholars and critics to categorize (Prologue 20, 30). R.A. Foakes, for instance, takes Marston’s “fustian” lines, which were written to be performed by the Children of St. Paul’s, as intentionally and parodically melodramatic, especially when spouted from the lips of child actors:

The plays [i.e. *Antonio and Mellida* and *Antonio’s Revenge*] work from the beginning as vehicles for child-actors consciously ranting in oversize parts, and we are not allowed to take their passions or motives seriously. Their grand speeches are undermined by bathos or parody, and spring from no developed emotional situation, so that we are not moved by them, and do not take them seriously enough to demand justice at the end. (“Fantastical” 236)

Marston’s use of (often bombastic) rhetoric and his defiance of conventional expectations for how a revenge tragedy “should” end have left scholars debating whether Marston is

writing serious tragedy or perhaps giving revenge tragedies, which remained popular on the English stage for decades following Kyd's success with *The Spanish Tragedy*, a parodic send-up, turning Senecan speeches of grief and blood lust into exaggerated farce.

In addition to the disruptive possibility of reading the ostensible tragedy as farce, the problem of generic categorization is amplified by the play's performance history. *Antonio's Revenge* likely directly competed with Shakespeare's own *Hamlet*, a play which has certainly weighed "massier" than Marston's in the annals of canonical literature. The plays feature similar plots, and both are assumed to be adaptations of a preceding version of *Hamlet* (referred to by scholars as the *Ur-Hamlet*), which might have been written by Kyd and of which no known copy survives.<sup>34</sup> Shakespeare's play has become an emblem of psychological realism and, over the last few centuries, has been fashioned into a keystone text for understanding the emergence of modern interiority in Western culture.<sup>35</sup> In contrast, early modern scholars have remained skeptical that Marston is even taking his material seriously as a tragedy. Phoebe Spinrad, for example, claims that the play's self-aggrandizing rhetoric leaves scholars wondering whether Marston wants us to sympathize with the urges that characters express for revenge or be revolted by the play's sensationalism, or perhaps we're supposed to throw our hands up and "see his whole world as absurd and not really care" ("Sacralization" 169).

When scholars do take *Antonio's Revenge* seriously as tragedy, they have trouble interpreting Marston's depiction of revenge without framing it in ethical or socio-political

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<sup>34</sup> For further discussion, see W. Reavley Gair's introduction to the *Revels* edition of the play, especially pp. 16-19.

<sup>35</sup> See Margaret de Grazia, *Hamlet Without Hamlet*, pp. 1-7; and Katharine Eisaman Maus's introductory chapter in *Inwardness and Theater in the English Renaissance*.

terms, likely due to the fact that Elizabethan revenge tragedies generally depict revenge as a matter of justice (lawless and wild though it may be). George Geckle, for example, argues that although a few scholars have begun describing Marston's work "within the context of a dramatist who wrote for performance," the "proper" approach to Marston's play is "within the context of the mainstream criticism about him--and that is Marston as a moralist first and theatrical experimenter second" (*John Marston's Drama* 27-28). Likewise, in *Radical Tragedy*, Jonathan Dollimore reads revenge in Marston's play not as experimental metatheater but as socio-political realism. According to Dollimore, revenge tragedies rehearse anxieties about "social and political dislocation" and present worldviews that deny the teleological stability of providentialism. Dollimore claims that revenge tragedies reveal "how individuals become alienated from their society" and Marston's characters, in particular, "are shown to be precariously dependent upon the social reality which confronts them" (29).

While I agree with Dollimore that this is how Elizabethan revenge tragedies tend to work, I argue that the "social reality" of this particular play is not social realism. The play's metatheatricality strikingly contrasts with the social or psychological realism that scholars tend to describe in revenge tragedies. If we read *Antonio's Revenge* as a conventional revenge tragedy, we miss the crucial elements of the play's aestheticizing of revenge. Nor do I think Marston's metatheatricality to be mere farce. Rather than parodying revenge tragedies (as Foakes suggests) or rehearsing anxieties about "social and political dislocation" (as Dollimore claims), *Antonio's Revenge* investigates the anxieties of marketplace competition and theatrical rivalry. By having characters seek adoration and

praise while attempting to surpass not only each other but also other characters from other plays and texts, Marston's play explores revenge in terms of literary recognition rather than social alienation. The play is not *politically* motivated so much as its *theatrically* motivated. Where Dollimore sees Marston's revenge tragedy as responding to the political realities that haunt the English stage, I view the play as a lens through which the English stage views itself.

In *Shakespeare's Stage Traffic: Imitation, Borrowing, and Competition in Renaissance Theatre*, Janet Clare argues persuasively that reading intertextually and with an eye toward the external pressures of theatrical rivalry and marketplace competition between playwrights allows for fresh insight into the textual variations of different printed versions of *Hamlet*.<sup>36</sup> Reading with an understanding of the competitive pressures on playwrights and acting companies also provides answers to some of the tangled questions surrounding Marston's style and tone, and can help explain his disruption of audience expectations when Antonio lives after taking revenge, which is unconventional for a revenge tragedy. Notably, Marston's revenge play is situated smack-dab in the middle of the Poets' War, a time of heightened theatrical rivalry between playwrights. Though *Antonio's Revenge* is not considered to be embroiled in the satirical attacks and counterattacks of the Poets' War (Marston's volleys were the comical satires of *Histriomastix*, *Jack Drum's Entertainment*, and *What You Will*), I argue that *Antonio's Revenge* is shaped by the culture of competition that was intensified by the Poets' War. Written in an atmosphere of rivalry in which "playwrights began the project of assessing

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<sup>36</sup> For Clare's discussion *Antonio's Revenge* influence on Q2 *Hamlet* through the pressures of marketplace competition, see *Shakespeare's Stage Traffic* pp. 181-185.

their own quality” and including evaluative principles within the plays themselves, Marston’s revenge play is compulsively self-aware of its relation to other revenge narratives (Bednarz 11).

Rather than portraying revenge through the lens of psychological realism, as Shakespeare does in *Hamlet*, Marston invites audiences to compare his revenge play with those of other playwrights and to note how his play’s depictions of vengeance exceed all others. While Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* is anxious about direct comparisons between himself and other actors (as I’ll discuss in detail in the next chapter), Marston’s characters not only relish in the possibility of theatrical comparison but, at times, demand that these comparisons be made. Hamlet’s anxiety remains at the level of performance—he worries that his grief fails to stir his mother’s emotions because his grief is unconvincing. Marston, however, introduces theatrical competition at both the level of performance and also in terms of narrative competition. In particular, Marston’s villain, Piero, is driven by the possibility of comparison between his villainy and the villainy depicted in other plays. Piero’s ambition is to surpass all other revengers and villains in the judgment of his imagined audience. With heightened rhetoric, he continually demands attention for the ingenuity and cleverness of his schemes against Antonio’s family. Earlier revenge tragedies (such as *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Titus Andronicus*) depict revenge’s effects on characters *within the play*, but Marston links the visual and verbal extremes of revenge to metatheatrical concerns.

When the intertheatrical and self-referential aspects of the play are ignored, the play’s rhetoric looks like stylistic excess rather than an essential aspect of the play’s

interrogation of revenge logic. Like Dollimore, Spinrad reads *Antonio's Revenge* as psychological realism and finds the play to be conventional, interpreting revenge in the play as a question of justice. If there is anything radical in Marston's treatment of revenge, Spinrad argues, it is the play's use of Judeo-Christian, rather than pagan, imagery, which asks early modern audiences "to accept revenge as Christian" (182). In her final assessment of the play, however, Spinrad does suggest the possibility of intertextual analysis: "it may be that [Marston] was newly interrogating revenge or revenge drama...or that he was simply trying to make a box-office killing (no pun intended) through outrageous one-upmanship" (183). But Spinrad stops short by presenting these as two separate possibilities without than analyzing how they might be linked.

I argue that Piero's early insistence on intertextual and metatheatrical comparisons between his revenge and all other preceding narratives--"Say, faith, didst thou e'er hear, or read, or see / Such happy vengeance, unsuspected death?"--reframes violence and suffering (1.1.66-67). Rather than expecting the audience to sympathize with or be revolted by violence, Marston's play invites the audience to appreciate violence aesthetically. The rhetoric of revenge logic in *Antonio's Revenge*, with its emphasis on overtopping, surpassing, or exceeding others, calls attention to the theater itself as a mode of production, suggesting that the marketplace rivalry between playhouses fosters a similar logic of one-upmanship. Whereas other revenge tragedies explore revenge as a mimetic response to violence, in the sense that their revengers attempt to both mimic and exceed the prior acts of violence inflicted on them by the plays' villains, *Antonio's Revenge* is a mimetic response to the genre of revenge tragedy itself.



One way the play provides a mimetic response to the genre is by making its characters familiar with other revenge tragedies. *Antonio's Revenge* references other revenge tragedies even before its first character speaks his opening lines. The play begins with Piero (the Duke of Venice) having already murdered his rival Andrugio (the Duke of Genoa and Antonio's father) with poison and also having just murdered Feliche, the son of Pandulpho (a gentleman of the Venetian court). Metatheatrical and mimetic excess is clearly visible in the play's opening scene: Piero first enters the play, according to the stage directions, "*unbraced, his arms bare, smeared in blood, a poniard in one hand, bloody, and a torch in the other, STROTZO following him with a cord*" (Marston 57). Piero's appearance -- his clothing unfastened, his bare arms smeared in gore, the props of poniard, torch, and cord -- already functions as a visual allusion to the genre of revenge tragedy.<sup>37</sup> Here, Piero reenacts what early modern audiences have already seen performed in other plays and as he begins bragging about his murderous accomplishments, his unbraced and gore-smeared appearance seems increasingly intentional. He seems to adopt this appearance because it is how revengers are 'supposed' to look in revenge plays.

As characters display their awareness of revenge narratives, Marston's work implicitly challenges the notion of being a self-contained narrative, marking *Antonio's Revenge* as experimental theater. The play functions both as a sequel to another play (*Antonio and Mellida*) that was written within the conventions of another genre (comedy), and as a play that is in discourse with, and comments on, revenge tragedy as a popular

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<sup>37</sup> For example, see Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* 3.12, where Hieronimo enters with a poniard in one hand and a rope in another. In *Hamlet*, too, Ophelia famously describes the danish prince approaching her with "his doublet all unbraced," looking "As if he had been loosed out of hell / To speak of horrors..." (2.1.75, 80-81).

theatrical form. Piero's exultation over having murdered Andrugio and Feliche features rhetoric that is self-congratulatory not only in his accomplishment of "triumphing vengeance" against his enemies, but also in surpassing of all preceding *narratives* of revenge. While Piero does describe his motives for murdering Antonio's father Andrugio ("We both were rivals in our May of blood / Unto Maria" but "He won the fair Lady, to my honour's death, / And from her sweets cropped this Antonio) and Feliche ("as a bait upon the line of death / To 'tice on mischief"), these motives seem secondary to a desire for revenge as an end unto itself. Piero triumphs as if victorious over the competition: "Lord, in two hours what a topless mount / Of unpeered mischief have these hands cast up! / I can scarce coop triumphing vengeance up, / From bursting forth in braggart passion" (1.1.9-12). For Piero, revenge is not just a retaliation for a real or perceived injury to his honor, it is a theatrical competition with other revengers, a game of one-upmanship and a pleasure that he draws out through rhetoric, wanting to keep the triumphant moment alive and present as long as possible. This overtopping and exultant self-indulgence requires an audience--it is rooted in the pleasure of theatricality and bombastic performance:

Say, 'faith, didst thou e'er hear, or read, or see  
Such happy vengeance, unsuspected death?  
That I should drop strong poison in the bowl,  
Which I myself caroused unto his health  
And future fortune of our unity;  
That it should work even in the hush of night,  
And strangle him on sudden, that fair show  
Of death, for the excessive joy of his fate  
Might choke the murder? Ha, Stratzo, is't not rare?  
Nay, but weigh it: then Feliche stabbed,  
Whose stinking though frightened my conscious heart,  
And laid by Mellida, to stop the match,  
And hale on mischief. This all in one night?  
Is't to be equalled thinkst thou? (1.1.66-79)

Piero insists that his "happy vengeance" be acknowledged for its unequalled rarity. His rhetoric emphasizes the intricacy of his revenge as a praiseworthy accomplishment. In Piero's self-aggrandizements, he seems primarily interested in revenge not as a response to a perceived injustice against him, but as showboating, as an ostentatious display of his own unmatched ability to orchestrate "unsuspected death" and to "hale on mischief" (1.1.67, 1.1.78).

The prevalence of histrionic and self-aware lines in the play, which many critics have interpreted as satirical or parodic, has proven difficult to reconcile with the play's stark, serious, and brutally visceral depictions of violence. However, recent emphases on disruptive, decentering approaches to literary analysis in the wake of postmodern art and poststructural criticism have opened the play to reevaluations of Marston's narrative inventiveness. Rick Bowers provides one such reevaluation of *Antonio's Revenge*, arguing that we should not dismiss the play as mere farce but should instead seriously consider the effect of Marston's use of irony and metatheatrical self-awareness. For Bowers, "Marston is nothing if not ironic" and argues that "to take Marston seriously is to understand that his thrust is basically sensational, not moral; a matter of contemporary theatrical and popular culture, not ethical consistency excavated from the classics" ("Marston" 14). Bowers shares in my sense of the play's metatheatricality, which he describes as an "unremitting theatrical self-consciousness, a stylized sense of presentation that explodes consistent morality to retail revenge in all its mimetic ridiculousness" ("Marston" 16).

The *raison d'être* of Marston's play is not moral instruction, as in Spinrad's argument that the play sanctifies revenge with "a religious stamp of approval"

("Sacralization" 182). Instead, the play uses revenge to explore the acquisition of reputation and renown. Bowers's observation--that Marston's play is invested in exploring presentation, not in dramatizing an implicit moral view--helps us make sense of the play's repeated references to applause: "You horrid scouts / That sentinel swart night, give loud applause;" "Hell, Night, / Give loud applause to my hypocrisy;" "Applaud my agonies and penitence;" "Sweet wrong, I clap thy thoughts;" "From hearts, not from lips, applause desires," etc.<sup>38</sup> Marston wants not to instruct but *to surpass*. His purpose for writing is competitive. The play is, in other words, written to excite the audience and secure its approval and admiration, and this admiration is determined by how well the play succeeds, not just on its own terms, but also in relation to its competition with other revenge plays.

Marston's play thematically links the competitive drive of revenge (in which a character works to 'outdo' the violence of their rival/enemy) to the logic of the theatrical competition for audience share. In *Shakespeare's Stage Traffic*, Clare points to the "mercantile nature of play-writing" and calls attention to "'theatre traffic' as a simultaneously competitive and interactive process" (2). In this sense, "...the revenge play becomes a location of dramaturgical difference, as dialogue and competition are played out in the economies of both playhouse and bookstall" (Clare 167). Playwrights themselves demonstrated an awareness of the "mercantile nature of play-writing." In *The Gull's Horn-Book* (1609), Thomas Dekker offers an apt comparison between the theater and the marketplace: "The theatre is your poets' Royal Exchange, upon which their Muses – that are now turned to merchants – meeting, barter away that light commodity of words for a

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<sup>38</sup> *Antonio's Revenge* 1.1.19-21, 1.1.31-31, 2.1.9, 2.2.63-64, 2.5.29.

lighter ware than words – plaudits and the breath of the great beast which, like the threatenings of two cowards, vanish all to air” (qtd. in Bruster 7). In Dekker’s analogy, words on the English stage are peddled in hopes of attaining the applause, which functions as a kind of payment from the audience (i.e. the “great beast”).

In *Antonio’s Revenge*, Piero discloses that his murderous hatred of Andrugio is caused, in part, by Andrugio’s outshining of Piero at the end of *Antonio and Mellida*: “When his bright valor even dazzled sense / In off’ring his own head, public reproach / Had blurred my name—” (*Antonio’s Revenge* 1.1.32-34). Piero’s anxiety about falling short of applause, and perhaps even facing ridicule, represents in microcosm the anxieties of failure within the larger scope of the theatrical marketplace. As Bruster notes, “...the playhouses [were] frequently characterized, by detractors and supporters alike, as markets in miniature” (7). Piero’s sensibility, his drive to be unequalled in revenge, is a playwright’s sensibility. Piero’s interest is not just in revenge, but in the intrigue revenge allows and the theatrical effect it creates. He approaches revenge the way a playwright must, by putting it in competition with preceding revenge narratives and defining success in terms of how well his “rare” execution of vengeance is received or “weighed” by his audience. In this sense, Marston’s villain shares the same purpose as Marston himself: the elevation of his reputation by surpassing rival narratives. After all, Piero seems obsessed not only with the act of revenge but with the aesthetic production of revenge. For Piero and Marston alike, revenge is featured as a form of literary competition.

T. F. Wharton discusses Marston’s literary ambitions in a vein similar to the way Piero talks about himself in the play. Wharton provides historical context for Marston’s

writing in relation to his literary reputation, especially his tendency to use aggression as “an effective tool of literary publicity” (15).<sup>39</sup> According to Wharton, “Aggression was...not merely a matter of temperament” for Marston, but “was the chosen method by which Marston set out to gain literary recognition and force his way into the contemporary canon” (1). Marston wrote aggressive satire and deliberately sought rivalry with other writers in order to secure an audience. Wharton writes: “What we see in Marston’s verse satire is an author propagating his own literary criticism and literary debate. He creates an imaginary audience and engages it in literary debate, or occasionally imagines it conducting the debate quite separately from himself, at the point of literary consumption, the book-stall and the marketplace.” (2). For Marston, literary recognition requires both a receptive public audience and also a marketplace of literary competition. To succeed, there must be rivals worth surpassing, and Marston expects his audience to weigh his work against the competition. According to Wharton, “it is clear that Marston believes that a deliberately stimulated hostility is the best guarantee of his own renown” (4). Marston includes his own tendencies as a writer, to create an ‘imaginary audience’ and to utilize rivalry for self-promotion, in Piero’s revenge logic.

Due to Marston’s representations of literary aggression in the play, there is a parodic quality to Piero’s rhetoric. Critics tend to read Piero's rhetoric in terms of its excess within the play. Elizabeth Yearling argues that Piero's "tirades" expose him as "immoderate," which signals that he is villainously tyrannical (263). According to Yearling, "The *Antonio* plays introduce a policy of linguistic characterization that persists throughout Marston's

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<sup>39</sup> This strategy of aggressive rivalry as a publicity tool is, of course, still with us today. One need only consider rivalries between sports teams or ‘beefs’ in rap music to see the efficacy of aggressive rivalry for publicizing and securing lasting reputations.

career: heroes are critically aware of how they speak, fools are absurdly self-conscious, and villains notice nothing" (264). While there is a lack of moderation in Piero's speeches, their excess is specifically citational, and their citational mode makes them difficult to read as unintentional. His speeches, in this sense, are either critically aware or absurdly self-conscious--perhaps a little of both--but it is difficult to imagine anyone reading Piero as either a hero or a fool. Piero is a villain in a revenge tragedy who is explicitly familiar with the character types and plots of other revenge tragedies. What's more, he does not merely allude to other revenge plays, he also demonstrates an awareness of emerging conventions of the genre itself.<sup>40</sup>

Piero's words and actions are calculated to compete directly not only just with his enemies in the play, but also with the familiar theatrics of popular characters in other revenge plays. Like Kyd's Hieronimo in *The Spanish Tragedy*, Piero displays his poniard and rope to the audience, but unlike Hieronimo he is gleeful in their theatrical iconography and has already used them for revenge. Like Hieronimo, Piero addresses the night, but where Hieronimo expresses a desire for witnesses to record his grieved thoughts, Piero addresses the night as an actor demanding an ovation for the skillful entertainment he has just provided: "You horrid scouts / That sentinel swart night, give loud applause / From your large palms. ... Hell, Night, / Give loud applause to my hypocrisy" (1.1.17-18, 18-20, 31-31). In *The Spanish Tragedy*, the figure of Revenge fell asleep while awaiting Hieronimo's vengeance. In contrast, Piero claims his mischief is so superb that Vengeance itself can hardly refrain from cheering him on: "I can scarce coop triumphing Vengeance up

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<sup>40</sup> In his knowledge of the conventions of the genre he inhabits, Piero is much like the killers in the meta-aware slasher film *Scream*, who use their knowledge of slasher films to murder other characters in the style of slasher films.

/ From bursting forth in braggart passion” (1.1.11-12). While characters in other revenge plays also create imaginary observers to record their thoughts and witness their actions, Piero is unique in that he imagines a specifically *theatrical* audience whose favor he seeks. Piero invites this imaginary audience to evaluate his acts of violence and revenge aesthetically.

Though Piero frames his murders as matters of revenge and assigns himself the role of the play’s revenger (a role that Antonio will usurp), he is, like Shakespeare’s Richard III, enamored with the figure of the stage Machiavel. Both Piero and Richard use gleeful, villainous asides, and both devote energy to wooing a grieving widow. Like Richard, Piero is prone to theatrics, and ‘stages’ scenes to project a public persona concerned with justice and honor. Both Shakespeare’s Richard and Marston’s Piero congratulate themselves for being successful dissemblers. Both Piero and Richard direct others in how to stage a scene, and they seem to borrow from the practice of stagecraft the various roles of playwright, director, and actor. What makes Piero different from Richard III, though, is Marston’s metatheatricality. Piero doesn’t just borrow from stage theatrics, and his use of histrionic villainy is not a metaphor for the court as a world stage. Piero inhabits a world in which theater and the Roman texts that animate its revenge narratives are his primary model for understanding identity.

Even in moments which seem stock for a revenge play, such as when Antonio describes his “horrid dreams” in which he is visited by the ghosts of Andrugio and Feliche, the play calls attention to literary consumption and the theatrical marketplace. While describing his nightmare, Antonio is interrupted by Balurdo, who describes his own



“monstrous strange dream” in which he is haunted by “the abominable ghost of a misshapen Simile” (1.3.39, 61, 64). Antonio’s nightmare of impending doom, so common in revenge tragedies, is displaced by Balurdo’s nightmare of clichéd, unprofitable writing, and Antonio seems, in contrast to Piero, naive throughout the first half of the play for not recognizing the generic conventions of revenge tragedy that are unfolding around him.

The metatheatricality of Marston’s revenge play seems, at first, simply to be an inclusion of the *theatrum mundi* trope common in early modern tragedy. While the trope is most often deployed in philosophical musings on the social status a character is born into, Barbara Baines argues that Marston’s uses the *theatrum mundi* trope in a unique way. According to Baines, Marston uses the trope to draw attention to the artifice of the play itself, to reverse the usual deployment of the trope in order to draw attention to its own fictiveness: “Within the dramatic illusion, Marston’s characters live out the conventions of revenge tragedy because they literalize, or to use Rosalie Colie’s term, unmetaphor, the *theatrum mundi* trope: all the world’s a stage in a play of revenge. They perceive that life has provided them with roles they are destined to play” (280). For Baines, the play’s literalization of the *theatrum mundi* trope creates cognitive distance from the audience, divorcing them from an emotive response to the violence and grief depicted on stage:

By exaggerating the aesthetic sensibility of his characters in such a way that they perceive life in terms of art--that is, they live their lives by consciously creating dramas, poems, imaginative narratives, and emblems--Marston heightens his audience’s awareness of the play as a play and thus limits its participation in the dramatic illusion. The awareness that the audience is watching a play rather than life itself makes the audience acutely conscious of the dictates of the convention and invites an assessment of the generic form. (Baines 280)

In Baines's reading of Marston's use of metatheatricality, the play's distancing effect invites the audience to analyze the play rather than experience it. Thus, in Marston, the *theatrum mundi* trope is deployed not as a metaphor or a philosophical expression; rather, it seems not to be a metaphor at all. As I have shown, Piero, especially, seems aware that he is not 'like' a character in a play--rather, he actively wants to be one. Scholars such as Bowers and Baine, who emphasize the metatheatricality of Marston's work, have noted that *Antonio's Revenge* resonates with a renewed significance since we've grown more familiar with narratives that call attention to themselves as narratives and that challenge audience expectations in order to comment on generic forms, such as in postmodern and absurdist theater.

I agree with Baine's analysis of the *theatrum mundi* trope in Marston's play, but would argue that Baine's analysis doesn't go far enough. The crux of my argument is that Marston's play produces a radical expansion of the *theatrum mundi* trope by recognizing something implicit in revenge logic itself. Not just commenting on the generic form of revenge plays, Marston comments on the relation between a playwright and audiences who have seen many plays from many different playwrights and will see many more. In Marston's revenge tragedy, the world is not a single stage on which his characters are all players--instead, it is a world of competing stages, a world in which success is measured by one's ability to surpass other actors, performances, and narratives ("lesser plots") to capture an audience's attention (5.6.59). This distinction between a metaphor in which the world is a singular stage and one in which the world is a marketplace of competition among theaters, acting companies, and playwrights, more fully explains the metatheatrical qualities

of Marston's play. The competitive nature of Marston's characters (to be unsurpassed in revenge, or to outwoe all others in grief, etc.), combined with Marston's radical deployment of the *theatrum mundi* trope, suggests that revenge tragedies allegorize the nature of the theatrical marketplace.

Marston's expansion of the *theatrum mundi* topos becomes clear if we again contrast Piero with Shakespeare's Richard III. Clare notes Richard III's theatricality and skillful dissembling in Shakespeare's adaptation of history. However, as Clare herself acknowledges, "Certainly, Richard's reputation as a dissembler was commonplace" (57). Shakespeare emphasizes Richard's tendency to 'act' or 'role-play' as a political tactic. In this sense, Richard's form of acting "erases identity and is potentially nothing but semblance, an uncanny potential brought out by this doubling where either could be the other and neither is himself," and in this self-obscuration, Richard enacts a "self-manipulation [that] is closely linked to the skill in manipulating others" (Clare 58). To put it simply, Richard's aim is to conceal his intentions from others, and he (in Shakespeare's depiction) adopts various fictional roles to this end (such as playing the lovestruck, infatuated wooer of Lady Anne). Certainly, Shakespeare's Richard turns the *theatrum mundi* trope to his advantage, making the world his stage by adopting various roles that conceal his villainy and casting others in roles that stack the deck against them.

While there is an undeniable metatheatricality to Shakespeare's play--especially in Richard's gleeful, self-congratulatory asides to the audience--Marston's depiction of Piero traces metatheatricality along other lines. In Shakespeare, and in most deployments of the *theatrum mundi* trope, the 'world as stage' is a philosophical premise. It allows insight into

how characters think about willful deception and manipulation, or perhaps it allows characters to express what it is to be caught up in fate. In *Antonio's Revenge*, though, the *theatrum mundi* trope resonates along several new lines of possibility. First, the trope is literalized. Instead of thinking of role-play as dissembling or concealment, Piero doesn't want to simply adopt the role of villain, he wants to embody it, to become the exemplar of villainy against whom other villainous characters will be judged or compared. While Richard III wants to "play the villain" because it best serves his ambition, Piero's desire to "overtop" all villains is not strategic--it does not function as a means to an end. Rather, it is the end he hopes to achieve. Richard takes pleasure in his villainy, but his ultimate purpose is to become king and to protect himself once he does. For Piero, revenge is personal rather than political, but even revenge--the preliminary motivation for Piero's violence--is subordinated to his desire for recognition. He wants his villainy to be an aesthetic achievement.

The second resonance of Marston's development of the *theatrum mundi* trope is in its self-referentiality. Marston's play calls attention to itself as a play. Characters often speak lines which call attention to the fact that they are characters being played by actors. While this alone is not a trope exclusive to Marston (many plays call attention to the actors who are, or will be, playing roles on stage--the convention of the induction is one example), Marston's configuration of a character who is not just ambitious in the fictional world on stage, but is literarily ambitious, wanting to compete with, and surpass, the depictions of villainy and revenge in other narratives and on other stages is a unique development of the *theatrum mundi* trope. In Marston's work, the trope is not philosophical in terms of identity,

it is philosophical in terms of the poetic development of narrative. The world is not a stage in Marston's play; the world is a competition between stages. Ambition, in this world-view, is not concerned with the accumulation of power (as in *Richard III*), it only wants an audience's attention and applause. Piero's villainy embodies what Wharton describes as Marston's "literary aggression" (15). But with competition and aggression comes the possibility of failure. Piero's numerous demands for comparison, recognition, and applause, while boastful in tone, also suggests an anxiety that he might not secure the approbation he craves. The frequency of his demands for adoration is rooted in an awareness that his audience might find him less compelling than other characters in Elizabethan drama: "Say, faith, didst thou e'er hear, or read, or see / Such happy vengeance, unsuspected death?" (1.1.66-67).

As Piero increasingly invests in his role as stage Machiavel, he also begins shaping events in the play as if he were the play's author and director. Piero's transition from seeing himself as an actor vying for applause to an author-director of the action playing out on stage is necessitated by the fact that he has already murdered Andrugio, whom Piero views as his rival both in love and honor, even before the play begins. Piero's solution to this narrative closure is to claim that his revenge has no conclusion and to extend his rivalry to Andrugio's son Antonio. Piero expresses this through soliloquy, telling the audience that though Andrugio be dead, "think not my hate is dead" (2.1.6.). He outlines the shape his extended revenge will take: he will accuse Antonio of murdering his father, marry Maria (Andrugio's widow and Antonio's mother), clear his daughter Mellida's name (which he

himself slandered to interrupt Antonio's love for her) and have her wedded to Galeatzo, the son of the Duke of Florence.

Piero then rehearses the staged accusation he and Strotzo (his co-conspirator/lackey) will make against Antonio, wherein Strotzo will act as if he were Antonio's remorseful conspirator in the murder of Andrugio and the defamation of Mellida. Piero acts as playwright/director, providing Strotzo lines ("fall on thy face and cry, 'Why suffer you / So lewd a slave as Strotzo is to breathe?") and giving detailed instructions on how to perform his role convincingly, telling him to "Rush" with "Halter about thy neck, and with such sighs, / Laments and acclamations lifen it," and to "Do it with rare passion" and "Swear plainly," (2.5.6, 14, 16-17, 20-21).

This scene of rehearsal is the part of the play most explicitly concerned with theatricality and the performance of players. Notably, Piero views his own plotting and intrigue in terms of theatricality: "O now *Tragoedia Cothurnata* mounts" (2.5.45). Piero rehearses this scene with Strotzo, but does Piero view Strotzo as a collaborator? If Piero views his murder as narrative art, Strotzo seems less a collaborator in Piero's play and more like a test audience. Concerning the quality of his revenge, Piero asks Strotzo, "Is't not rare?" (1.1.81). "Yes," Strotzo replies, likely with a sullen tone, having just been ostracized by Piero for his inferior speech. But Strotzo's monosyllabic affirmation of Piero's villainy is maddeningly unsatisfying for Piero, who seeks praise that would properly validate the "rare" heights of his malicious accomplishment: "No! Yes!, Nothing but 'no' and 'yes', dull lump? / Canst thou not honey me with fluent speech / And even adore my topless villainy?" (1.1.81-84).

Even while seeming to collaborate with Strotzo in writing the upcoming scene in which they will slander Antonio, Piero includes ‘additions’ that effectively write Strotzo out of the rest of the play. After Strotzo exits the stage, Piero reveals that he means to use Strotzo to cast aspersions on Antonio and clear Mellida’s name. Piero plans to then feign righteous fury and choke Strotzo to death using the rope that Strotzo intended to use as a mere theatrical prop, a visual aid for acting out his remorse. His elimination of Strotzo (successfully carried out in 4.3) serves two purposes: 1) it ties up loose ends, so to speak, since Strotzo is the only character aware of Piero’s villainy -- in fact, the letters later found in Strotzo’s study are what brings Piero’s villainy to light -- and 2) it allows Piero to take full credit for the “*Tragoedia Cothurnata*” that he sees himself writing and directing before the audience.

Piero’s desire for singular credit taps into the emerging ‘Cult of the Author’ that celebrates the playwright as the origin of a singular creative vision, and which excludes the practice of collaboration. This changing cultural valuation of the author was emerging at this time in large part due to Ben Jonson, Marston’s theatrical rival. According to Roslyn Knutson, “Ben Jonson would have put himself in such a category, for he seems to have thought that his reputation would be enhanced if he were judged only by his solo work. Jonson collaborated on projects early in his career, but when he published a collection of his poems and plays in *Works* (1616), he omitted his theatrical collaborations” (346). Marston, too, seems enamored with the recognition that a playwright might attain and when his own plays were sought for publication. He worked closely with printers “to ensure the

accurate transmission” of his writing because “Like his rival, Jonson, Marston looked upon his plays as ‘Works’” (Gair 2).

In *Antonio's Revenge*, all acts of violence and revenge are, first and foremost, competitive acts within an imagined theatrical space. All the world's a stage for Piero, and even violence done in secret has an imagined audience from whom he seeks approval and recognition. Having “burned in inward swelt'ring hate,” Piero exults in the success of his malicious betrayal of Andrugio, saying “Hell, Night, / Give loud applause to my hypocrisy” (1.1.60-61). Marston's metatheatrical emphasis, in which world and stage mirror each other, distills competition into an abstract value--and in such a view, to be ‘rare,’ ‘topless,’ or ‘unsurpassed,’ regardless of context, is itself worthy of attention. For Piero, there seems to be no difference between admiration and abhorrence, so long as his acts are unforgettable. This competitive mode turns bodies into props displayed for theatrical effect, as when Piero hangs Feliche's body in Mellida's window as a gruesome prop, or when Antonio turns Piero's son into a Thyestean dish of hot revenge. By using the language of marketplace competition between playwrights, acting companies, and theaters, Marston links the audience's demand for one-upmanship and novelty in theatrical violence to the nature of retribution itself, as a demand for escalations of violence that recirculates and amplifies prior forms of violence in order to supersede them.

Piero advertises his villainy to the audience even as he conceals it by slandering his own daughter. Feliche's body is strung up like a broadside, announcing Piero's peerless violence both to the characters on stage and to the audience, but in different ways. For Marston's audience, Piero's act of hanging Feliche's stabbed body and having it revealed



from behind a curtain is itself citational. Just as the way characters throughout Elizabethan revenge tragedies cite lines from Seneca, Piero's display of Feliche's body is a visual citation of Horatio's body, strung up behind a curtain and revealed by Hieronimo in the final act of Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*. The corpse is thus doubled in its signification. Not just a "gory ensign" announcing Piero's homicide to the other characters on stage, the corpse is also Piero's publication--the text that marks his entry into the marketplace of gratuitous violence in revenge narratives (1.3.131). Like grindhouse cinema, Piero capitalizes on repulsion as a source of fascination. For Piero, the only thing that matters is notoriety, and only the most shocking violence is memorable. Piero's desire to be lavishly praised ("Canst thou not honey me with fluent speech / And even adore my topless villainy"?) is an exaggerated and unrestrained demand reminiscent of the generally more restrained expression of hope for an audience's approval of a work commonly found in a play's prologue and epilogue.

Piero's metatheatrical competitiveness makes him a unique stage Machiavel. In contrast to Piero, Shakespeare's Richard never reveals a convincing reason for his violence, nor does the audience get a sense of what motivates his run for the throne. Even his claim, that he "is determined to play the villain," is duplicitous and raises a question that lingers, unanswered, over the entire play: if he is "determined" to play the villain, is this a self-determination (like a grad student who is 'determined' to finish his or her dissertation within a reasonable time frame?), or is he 'determined' in the sense that playing the villain has been determined 'for him'? Is he determined in a cosmological sense--determined as in fated? Richard seems, like Heath Ledger's Joker in *The Dark Knight*, "a dog chasing a

car" and he "wouldn't know what to do if [he] caught one." But Richard does catch the thing he chases, and the general consensus is that he becomes less interesting when he's holding the throne than when he's pursuing it. Piero, on the other hand, has a less abstract motive. While Richard seems to pursue intrigue, violence, and power for no other reason than that he is determined to do so, Piero has a defined goal--even if it is not his 'confessed' motive of revenge. For Piero, revenge is a means to another end. He wants to be recognized as a villain who surpasses all literary villains, whether they be from the classical (i.e. Senecan) past or the villains of Elizabethan theater. Piero wants applause. Piero wants to glory in the experience of compelling theatrical performance.

Unlike their predecessors in revenge plays, the characters in *Antonio's Revenge* fixate on the theatricality of revenge as an occasion for displays of rhetorical flourish. Piero calls out to the "Night" and "Hell," demanding his audience to "Give me thy ears" as Piero describes the "rare" performance of his "pretense of love" to bring about Andrugio's "unsuspected death" (1.1.49-74). Marston's revenge play 'plays' to the audience; it is a play in which characters act like characters who have seen revenge plays and are working to surpass them all, as when Piero invites comparison between his revenge and other revenge narratives: "Say, faith, didst thou e'er hear, or read, or see / Such happy vengeance, unsuspected death?" (1.1.66-67); "Nay, but weigh it" (1.1.75); "Is't to be equalled think'st thou?... / Is't not rare?" (1.1.78-81). Repeatedly, the rhetoric of the play suggests that successful revenge depends on overtopping all others. Andrugio's Ghost, for instance, tells Antonio to "be peerless in revenge" (3.5.29). After taking his "peerless"

revenge against Piero, Antonio calls on his servants to “Sound doleful tunes, a solemn hymn advance, / To close the last act of my vengeance” and he lays claim to the play’s narrative as an unsurpassed tragedy, saying “Never more woe in lesser plot was found” (5.6.59).

Scholars have recognized the competition and theatrical rivalry that is inherent in the comical satires (especially of the Poets’ War), but the productive energy of competitive rivalry between playwrights and acting companies is ignored when discussing revenge tragedies. Critics are quick to note allusions and intertextual references between revenge plays. However, I would argue that such references signal that the context of literary competition shapes the content of the revenge plays themselves. Not merely ornamental, the moments in revenge tragedies in which playwrights imitate, adapt, or allude to preceding revenge plays are rooted in the principles of competition initiated by the humanist educators, whose classrooms provided the training ground for early modern playwrights. According to Clare: “The practice of imitation began in the schoolroom. Humanist pedagogy was based on the selection of a model, and the replication of its argument and rhetorical strategies. Erasmus had recommended the emulation of ‘a passage from some author where the spring of eloquence seems to bubble up particularly richly’, and advised the student ‘to equal or even surpass it’” (4).

In revenge tragedy, imitation and surpassing are the *modus operandi* of the revenger, who takes a prior offense and returns it to the offender in an amplified form. This use of imitation seems to explore the potential darkness and cynicism of humanism and art. In Marston’s play, Piero is many things: a betrayer of his own kin, a murderer, a thrill-killer,

a liar who knowingly and maliciously makes false accusations, a narcissist, a tyrant, a sadist, immoderate and explicitly theatrical, disruptive, devious, petty, and perverse. But he also represents the dark possibility of *imitatio*, adaption, and poesis. He turns the project of humanist education -- which encourages students to study, imitate, and attempt to surpass prior models -- into a project of invective. He is a poet of the grudge.

To surpass a prior model is also to supplant it, to become the model that others must study and imitate. *Imitatio* is figured in *Antonio's Revenge* not only as villainous ambition but as a physiology of influence. Gail Kern Paster has shown that early modern mind is closely, almost inextricably, linked to the body, so that "psychology and physiology are one" (*Humoring* 14). An understanding of the culture's materialist psychology provides some insight for understanding Marston's literal and figurative uses of 'belking' or regurgitation, the swallowing or sucking of blood, and the consuming of human flesh in *Antonio's Revenge*. Piero, for instance, marks the satisfaction of his revenge against Andrugio as a vomitous expulsion of his body's inner rancor, of which Andrugio is presumed to be the cause:

We were both rivals in our May of blood  
Unto Maria, fair Ferrara's heir.  
He won the Lady, to my honour's death,  
And from her sweets cropped this Antonio;  
For which I burned in inward swelt'ring hate,  
And festered rankling malice in my breast,  
Till I might belk revenge upon his eyes. (1.1.23-29)

In his murder of Andrugio, Piero links the (temporary) relief of hatred to the relief which might be had through purgatives.

In Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, Revenge's presence, sitting and observing (or dreaming of) vengeful action, proliferates 'inward swelt'ring hate' throughout the play. But in *Antonio's Revenge*, the desire for vengeance is transferred or transmitted through the portals of the body in terms of sucking, swallowing, and 'belking' (i.e. burping or vomiting). When Piero theatrically displays himself to Antonio and others as the play's revenger, his 'belking' of malice begins creating revengers in his own image. For example, after Piero accuses his own daughter Mellida (who also happens to be Antonio's beloved) of being "unchaste, / Tainted, impure, black as the soul of hell," Antonio draws his rapier, exclaiming, "Dog, I will make thee eat thy vomit up, / Which thou hast belked 'gainst taintless Mellida" (1.4.3-6). Antonio, like Piero, links outbursts of rhetorical aggression with bodily purging of inner fluids and gasses.

Piero seems to relish Antonio's outburst and encourages him to take violent action even as he doubles down on his theatrical performance, telling Antonio, regarding the 'vomit' of his accusations, "Ram't quickly down, that it may not rise up / To embraid my thoughts. Behold my stomach's -- / Strike me quite through with the relentless edge / Of raging fury" (1.4.6-10). Piero's demand that Antonio ram down the rhetorical vomit that he spews includes the possibility of infection. According to Piero, the vomit that still threatens to "rise up" might "embraid" his mind. W. Reavley Gair glosses "embraid" as "upbraid," which means, according to the OED, to reproach or reproof. This gloss, however, doesn't make any sense, as it would mean Piero's concern is that his own word-vomit might rebuke or scold his thoughts. Given the context of the word, it is more likely Piero means the word in its second sense, which the OED defines as "To plait or braid; to interlace, intertwine."

In this sense, Piero suggests the accusations he “belks” against Mellida, that she is “Tainted, impure, black as the soul of hell,” are themselves infectious, capable of also corrupting any person who speaks or hears them. The negative qualities contained in (rhetorical) vomit contain the possibility of being swallowed up by another person’s thoughts and, by implication, tainting his or her moral character.

The ‘embroiding’ of one person’s words with another person’s thoughts reveal a concern with the nature of rhetoric. George Puttenham, for instance, makes this startling claim in *The Art of English Poesy*:

For the ear is properly but an instrument of conveyance for the mind, to apprehend the sense by the sound. And our speech is made harmonious or melodical not only by strained tunes, as those of music, but also by choice of smooth words; and thus or thus marshalling them in their comeliest construction and order, and as well by sometimes sparing, sometimes spending them more or less liberally, and carrying or transporting them farther off or nearer, setting them with sundry relations and variable forms in the ministry and use of words, do breed no little alteration in man. For to say truly, what else is man but his mind? Which, whosoever has skill to compass and make yielding and flexible, what may he not command the body to perform? He therefore that hath vanquished the mind of man hath made the greatest and most glorious conquest. (Puttenham 281)

Puttenham's description of rhetoric relies on a notion of penetration -- language is an instrument or a vehicle for transferring ideas from one person to another, and this transmission can be made more effective through the poetic, aesthetically-pleasing handling of the meaning or "sense" a person wishes to convey. Style, in this sense, is an art of manipulation. Rhetoric provides a subtle and effective form of coercion, capable of overcoming psychological resistance. A speaker’s words can become an audience’s actions. However, this penetration of another's mind and the vanquishing of another's will is not instantaneous. Puttenham’s characterization of rhetoric is not as a quick thrust or

strike of language. Amplification and repetition are necessary components of his notion of rhetoric as mental conquest:

Then must also the whole tale (if it tend to persuasion) bear his just and reasonable measure, being rather with the largest than with the scarcest. For like as one or two drops of water pierce not the flint stone, but many and often droppings do, so cannot a few words (be they never so pithy or sententious) in all cases and to all manner of minds make so deep an impression as a more multitude of words to the purpose, discreetly and without superfluity uttered--the mind being no less vanquished with large load of speech than the limbs are with heavy burden. (Puttenham 281-282)

Rhetoric is persuasive, capable of 'vanquishing' another's mind when one's words are both pleasing and copious. They overwhelm or overload the mind, but they also invite the listener to willingly be overwhelmed.

Piero fancies himself a skilled rhetorician, reprimanding Strotzo early in the play for interrupting his self-laudatory enumerations of his villainous accomplishments:

“Unseasoned sycophant ... stroke not the head / Of infant speech till it be fully born”

(1.1.37, 39-40). Is Piero's rhetoric throughout the play successful as a kind of Puttenhamian coercion? He does cast others in the roles he writes for them, but these roles pose inherent risks to him. Does he foresee the possibility of being surpassed? If he is aware of the tropes of revenge tragedy and Machiavellian villainy, why did he not seem concerned with his position within the narrative that he, himself, sets in motion? Why push someone into desiring revenge and then be surprised when that revenge comes back on him? He seems self-consciously the author of tragedy, but casts himself in two contradictory roles; he performs as the play's revenger, but this role-play dissembles the metatheatrical role he plays for Marston's audience as the villain, the stage Machiavel who gloats in his ambition

to outperform all other villainy, and in instigating a series of murders, he sets up his own fall.

Baines notes that Piero approaches villainy aesthetically rather than ethically: “More important to him than the deed is the artistry with which it is accomplished and the recognition of his artistry. This self-conscious artistry sets the pattern for all of the characters of the play” (Baines 281). In setting the pattern for “self-conscious artistry,” Piero is more successful than he knows, and perhaps he succeeds in ways he didn’t account for, since Antonio does, whether consciously or not, model himself upon the malice Piero “belks” on stage. The structure of Piero's metatheatrical, narcissistic role-play is transferred to the play's titular revenging hero, Antonio, in troubling ways. While mirroring--and, ultimately, surpassing--the villain in deployments of intrigue, violence, and psychological turmoil is expected in a revenge tragedy, Antonio pushes audience expectation into uncomfortable cognitive dissonance when Piero's suffering and Antonio's malicious brutality in the play’s final act recast the villain as helpless victim and the hero as sadist.

Several scholars have made convincing and influential arguments about Antonio’s brutal murder of Piero’s son Julio (whom Antonio will feed to Piero) as creating an intentional effect, meant to disrupt the audience’s sympathy for Antonio.<sup>41</sup> In the brutality of the play’s ending, Marston forces an early modern audience to take a hard look at revenge as nihilistic, a closed loop of violence creating the desire for violence, so that “the scene retains, even stresses, overstated theatrical imperatives” (Bowers 21). In this sense, Antonio’s bloodlust is not a character study--rather, the troubling nature of the scene calls

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<sup>41</sup> In addition to Bowers, see R. A. Foakes, “John Marston’s Fantastical Plays: *Antonio and Mellida* and *Antonio’s Revenge*,” p. 236; and Philip Ayres, “Marston’s *Antonio’s Revenge*: The Morality of the Revenging Hero,” which deals extensively with the play’s ending as a critique of the Kydian revenger.





Antonio's language in the play's final act is almost indistinguishable from Piero's villainous rhetoric throughout the play. Here, Antonio's fascination with the drinking of blood or the sucking of fumes echoes Piero's soliloquy at Andrugio's funeral, where Piero proclaims "I have been nursed in blood, and still have sucked / The steam of reeking gore" (2.1.19-20). Like Piero in the play's opening scene, Antonio raises his gore-smeared arms to the sky for recognition and approval of his violence. When Piero's vituperative phrases begin falling from Antonio's own lips, the distinction between the two characters begins to blur.

Antonio's other Piero-esque trait which develops over the course of the play is his competitive streak. As we have seen, Piero fixates on the 'rarity' of his murders and intrigues, claiming he is "great in blood, / Unequaled in revenge" (1.1.17-18). Antonio, also determined to display unsurpassable ability, will not be outdone in his experience of grief. Having suffered the murder of his father and the devastating loss of his beloved Mellida, Antonio exclaims: "Behold a prostrate wretch laid upon his tomb; / His epithet thus: *Ne plus ultra*. Ho! / Let none out-woe me, mine's Herculean woe" (2.3.131-133). Antonio's claims to an unsurpassed, "Herculean" woe provides him with the passionate energy necessary for a protagonist to commit to revenge. Antonio, like Shakespeare's Titus (who depicts tears as obstacles to revenge once his mind is set on retribution), declares comfort and commiseration as threats to one's will to vengeance: "Confusion to all comfort! I defy it. / Comfort's a parasite, a flatt'ring Jack, / And melts resolved despair" (*Antonio's* 1.5.48-50). The key to resolve, then, is to bolster it with desperation and anguish:

O boundless woe,  
If there be any black yet unknown grief,  
If there be any horror yet unfelt,

Unthought mischief in thy fiendlike power,  
Dash it upon my miserable head,  
Make me more wretched, more cursed if thou canst. (1.5.50-55)

The herculean labor of the revenger is, in this sense, to bear the weight of immense, unimaginable grief--a grief that contains (at least rhetorically) all the world's grief.

Antonio, like all revengers of the Kydian ilk, declares grief and patience as inadequate responses to a traumatic experience of such grand scope:

That grief is wanton-sick  
Whose stomach can digest and brook in the diet  
Of stale ill-relished counsel. Pigmy cares  
Can shelter under patience' shield, but griefs  
Will burst all covert. (2.3.2-6)

Antonio declares his grief immeasurable, a grief which cannot be compared to other griefs:

I have a thing sits here; it is not grief,  
'Tis not despair, nor the most plague  
That the most wretched are infected with;  
But the most grief-full, despairing, wretched,  
Accursed, miserable... (2.3.13-17)

This immeasurability allows Antonio to configure himself as a convergence point for all grief. Hearing Pandulpho, Maria (Antonio's mother), and Mellida (Antonio's betrothed) exclaim their own griefs, he assigns himself the role of grief's great receptacle:

*Pan.* Woe for my dear, dear son!  
*Mar.* Woe for my dear, dear husband!  
*Mel.* Woe for my dear, dear love.  
*Ant.* Woe for me all; close all your woes in me,  
In me, Antonio. Ha! Where live these sounds?  
I can see nothing; grief's invisible  
And lurks in secret angles of the heart.  
Come, sigh again, Antonio bears his part. (2.3.65-72)

By appropriating all grief, Antonio becomes instrumental in the formation of a subcommunity of revengers who share in the experience of trauma and conspire together to

hold Piero accountable, one way or another. But despite Antonio positioning himself as a convergence point where grief is a shared burden, Antonio's claim to a grief that both contains and surpasses all other experiences of grief, is, like Piero's braggart villainy, self-congratulatory and intensely competitive. When Pandulpho, grieving over the corpse of his son Feliche, declares himself "the miserablest soul that breathes," Antonio challenges Pandulpho's claim, saying no one is capable of "Outmounting" him "in that superlative" and that he alone is "unmatched in woe" (4.4.53-58).

Given the play's penchant for metatheatrical allusions, we should consider how the competitive nature of Antonio's unsurpassed, "Herculean woe" might extend beyond the boundaries of the stage at St. Paul's (2.3.133). For instance, Baines argues that Antonio's superlative claims about grief contain allusions to the rivalry between child and adult acting troupes:

The Renaissance audience would certainly have recognized Antonio's conscious creation of himself as an emblem, since his motto, *Ne plus ultra*, is a variation of a familiar heraldic device derived from the alleged inscription on the pillars of Hercules. Since the Globe theater was traditionally associated with Hercules through his labor of supporting the globe, 'Herculean woe' is a logical allusion to the tragedies of the Globe. 'Let none out-woe me' is Marston's vaunt that calls attention to the fact that he is striving for heightened emotional effect. The likelihood that Marston's line refers to the rivalry of the theaters is reinforced by Shakespeare's allusion to the rivalry between the child and the adult troupes: to Hamlet's question, 'Do the boys carry it away,' Rosencrantz responds, 'Ay, that they do, my lord--Hercules and his load too.' (Baines 485)

Scholars such as Baines, S. L. Bethell, and Michael Shapiro have noted the play's metatheatrical allusions and its self-referentiality, which creates "a dual perspective," the audience being made aware of the figures on stage both as 'actors' and as 'characters' (Baines 279).

Antonio's "Herculean woe" is, like Piero's "rare" villainy, invested in theatrical rivalry, marking him as a character not only in competition with the other characters on stage, but also in competition with other stages and the characters of other playwrights. Marston's characters present themselves in ways which allude to preceding revenge plays, and the metatheatrical referentiality implicitly asks the audience to compare the aesthetic quality of *Antonio's Revenge* to the plays it alludes to. After declaring himself "unmatched in woe," Antonio directs his (less grieved) co-conspirators (i.e. Pandulpho and Alberto) to dig a grave for Feliche. As they dig into the earth with their daggers to make a grave, Antonio creates a scene which alludes to Hieronimo's mad stabbing of the earth in *The Spanish Tragedy*. However, the allusion also works to exceed Kyd's play in a literal sense, by tripling the number of revengers who ravage the earth with their blades. Where Kyd has a single character who grieves and digs the earth, Marston has three.

In addition to the competitive inclusion of allusions to other revenge narratives and other playhouses, *Antonio's Revenge* is also insistently self-referential. When Antonio first appears on stage he wakes with an optimism which befits the resolution of *Antonio and Mellida*, the prior play, but which is here steeped in dramatic irony. We already know what Antonio doesn't: that his happiness has ended in the night with the murder of his father. Unlike Piero, a character in a play who acts like a person who wants to *be* a character in a play, Antonio does not see through the metafictional fourth wall throughout most of the play. His first lines are tuned to display his unawareness that he is in a tragedy: "Darkness is fled; infant morn hath drawn / Bright silver curtains 'bout the couch of night, / And now Aurora's horse trots azure rings, / Breathing fair light about the firmament" (1.3.1-4).

Antonio's description emphasizes an airy brightness which seems almost like an aubade. Such a description forms a naive contrast to the setting and trappings of the stage itself. Antonio describes a morning light which seems more spring than winter, which itself would already be contradicted by the likely season of the play's performance, which the prologue describes as

The rawish dank of clumsy winter ramps  
The fluent summer's vein; and drizzling sleet  
Chilleth the wan bleak cheek of the numbed earth,  
Whilst snarling gusts nibble the juiceless leaves  
From the naked shudd'ring branch, and pills the skin  
From off the soft and delicate aspects. (Prologue 1-6)

If the prologue truly does call attention to a nasty winter, it is not difficult to imagine the audience feeling their suspension of disbelief strained when Antonio describes a warm, bright dawn.<sup>42</sup> Perhaps even more ironic would be Antonio's claim that the "infant morn hath drawn / Bright silver curtains 'bout the couch of night."

While Antonio is speaking metaphorically, his lines are again contradicted by the stage being *literally draped in black*, which, too, is a detail of the stage emphasized by the prologue, which warns anyone unwilling to be disturbed by violent tragedy to "Hurry amain from our *black-visaged shows*; / We shall affright their eyes" (prologue 20-21, italics mine). In annotating this line for the Revels edition, Gair notes that "the stage was draped in black" and cites a line from a play by Wood: "The stage of heav'n, is hung with solemn black, / A time best fitting to Act Tragedies" (55). It is not until Antonio begins speaking of his "horrid dreams" in which he saw "two meager ghosts" that his lines seem to fit the black-visaged show.

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<sup>42</sup> The play was likely written to be performed in the winter of 1599. See Gair's discussion in the Revels intro, pp. 12-15.

Although the play is titled *Antonio's Revenge*, much of the first half of the play is devoted to Piero. It is not until Antonio commits to revenge that he begins monopolizing the stage. The audience's understanding of the play's plot is mostly provided by Piero's conversations with (and often *at*) Strotzo or through Piero's asides and soliloquies. Katharine Eisaman Maus argues the importance of recognizing the early modern convention of the villain's use of soliloquy and the aside. For playgoers, Maus argues, confidence in the "self-disclosure" of stage Machiavels is assumed to be "entirely reliable" (*Inwardness* 54). For the first three acts of *Antonio's Revenge*, Maus's claim rings true and the audience has access to Piero's inwardness through his "self-disclosures" on stage. But Antonio's brutal silencing of Piero in the play's final act problematizes the audience's relation to Piero by reversing Piero's role as perpetrator of malicious violence to that of violence's victim, while also disrupting the audience's access to Piero's self-disclosure.

As Piero is silenced, the audience's access to Piero's self-disclosure is limited to his tears. As visible and material signifiers of his now-undisclosed inwardness, Piero's tears require interpretation or translation. Antonio, leading a trio of revengers (Pandulpho, Alberto, and Maria), provokes Piero's speechless tears by removing his tongue and bringing him pieces of his son on a platter. The revengers then read meaning into Piero's tears for the audience. But as Piero's theatrical rhetoric, with its performative self-disclosures, is closed off to the audience by Antonio, Maria, and Pandulpho, so too is the assumed "special intimacy with the audience" that revealed Piero's inner maliciousness and provided the warrant for an audience to condone retribution against him. Rather than marking a moment of successful retribution -- "He weeps!... / I have no vengeance if I had

no tears,” Pandulpho exclaims (5.5.44-45) -- Piero’s tears cause the justifications (or, perhaps, rationalizations) of violence to seem suddenly and shockingly inadequate. Piero’s tears replace his earlier verbal self-disclosure’s villainy. The audience must view these tears as their own event, signaling suffering and providing evidence of human cruelty. The tears, rather than celebrating retribution, short-circuit the desire to see retribution played out. The suffering is too much, forcing the audience to question any motives capable of creating such tears. Rather than inaugurating a consensus of revenge as restoration and civic recalibration, it creates a sense of culpability which includes the audience. If violent retribution is a kind of accusation that exceeds language, then tears reflect back that accusation, leaving no one innocent in the face of suffering. Antonio, after taking revenge, commits himself to constant remembrance of Mellida via “true affection’s tears” (5.6.40).

Marston’s ending reveals the mutability of the self in relation to experiences and interpersonal relations, a view which was increasingly important when theatrical competition heated into a full-blown ‘poets’ war.’ As James Bednarz states, theatrical rivalry between Jonson, on the one hand, and Marston, Dekker, and Shakespeare on the other, became a major theatrical conflict concerning “the epistemological, literary, and ethical assumptions upon which [Jonson] based his assertion of poetic authority” (3). While Jonson worked to establish neoclassical principles of drama as the standard to which English theater should be held and which would “establish for himself and for his age a new paradigm of poetic authority,” Marston, Dekker, and Shakespeare “were willing to object to what Thomas Greene calls Jonson’s ‘centered self’ and Jonathan Dollimore terms the philosophy of ‘humanist essentialism’” (Bednarz 3). Jonson’s poetic authority derives



from this humanist essentialism, his poetic authority pinned on a stable, self-determined identity that assumes it can view itself and name itself in a way preceding (and is thus, independent of) social recognition. The public theater is where Jonson's opponents, including Marston, depict an opposing ontology to Jonson's 'centered self' by providing "insight into the insubstantial and transient condition of human consciousness" (Bednarz 3). Though *Antonio's Revenge* is not considered to be a play which Marston wrote as part of his involvement in the Poets' War, the play explores self-aggrandizing claims to poetic authority and shows them to be subject to the mutability of human experience, as is Marston's depiction of subjectivity. In the play's final act, Piero's bombastic rhetoric is literally, materially silenced as his tongue is torn from his mouth. He is transformed by the play's revengers through their violence and rhetoric, as they remove his ability to speak as a stage Machiavel and compel him to both experience and perform their own victimization. In place of Piero's self-congratulatory exaltation, the revengers force him to produce tears, showing him to be an aggrieved father capable of feeling despair, anguish, and pain in a way that mirrors the suffering he has caused for them.

Even if Piero's acts of malicious violence were of the "rarest" form, as he aspired, Antonio and his co-conspirators surpass them: not just killing Piero's son, but bringing him cooked pieces of the corpse to eat; not just politically silencing Piero's complaints, but removing his tongue; not just taking pleasure in Piero's tears, but openly mocking them; not just plotting Piero's death, but fantasizing an endless, eternal recurrence of his murder: "Sa, sa; no, let him die and die, and still be dying. / And yet not die, till he hath died and died / Ten thousand deaths in agony of heart" (5.5.73-75). Piero's subjectivity is shown to be

mutable, pliable to human experience and subject to material conditions. Likewise, Antonio and the other revengers – especially Pandulpho, who is established as the voice of Neostoic philosophy in the play – are also subject to change, their sense of themselves and their views of the world radically altered by trauma and their violent, retributive response to it, so much so that they leave the play in self-imposed exile, functioning as the play's living embodiments of traumatized memory. They are no longer the untainted figures of ideal love, order, and stoic virtue that they were at the start of the play, and they have performed moments of violence which are arguably more brutal than Piero's – who himself sought to surpass and overtop all other acts of villainy. They've outstripped topless villainy.

Marston's play toys with the mutability of the audience as well. Piero, in his metatheatrical addresses to an audience beyond the diegetic boundaries of the stage, casts the audience at times (whether the audience accepts it or not) as his auditors, and in this sense he commands how the audience should respond to him, demanding that they judge his actions not in moral or ethical terms, but aesthetically. He demands, in other words, that they respond to him as a character in a play, and that they judge his murders in terms of how 'rare' they are compared to those of other stage villains. By the end of the play, Antonio reconfigures the audience's relation to the play, making the audience extensions into his own adopted role as a living traumatic memory, inviting them to share in his tears and requesting that the tragedy of Mellida's death be remembered and not Piero's villainy. Antonio describes Mellida's death as a loss incapable of being surpassed. He suggests that if a tragedy ever is written which is able to surpass what we've just seen staged, it cannot be about some other character's tragic death. Only a more powerful adaptation of Mellida's

death would suffice. Perhaps Antonio's greatest form of revenge against Piero is not in killing him, nor silencing him, nor tormenting him with his son's corpse. Antonio does not just recast Piero as a victim, nor does he simply silence him, he also silences the *applause* Piero so stridently wished to hear, the approval and recognition which would validate Piero's aspiration of being the rarest of villains. *This* is Antonio's revenge.

As Christopher Tilmouth points out, applause is an act of "labeling" and "determining," asserting approval and appreciation for what has been observed in a person (or, in this case, a character).<sup>43</sup> As I discussed in a previous chapter, an audience (whether real or imagined) is an early modern cognitive artifact, providing the possibility of reception, recognition, or social acknowledgment for a character's sense of self. As a particular mode of interpersonal response, applause provides an extension of the self through which a person/character recognizes him- or herself. But tears suggest a different kind of audience investment. To applaud an act and to be moved to tears by it are determined by radically different emotional responses. When Piero wants applause, he wants others to take pleasure in his acts (just as he does) and he wants validation that he has succeeded in surpassing all previous forms of villainy and revenge, that his murders and

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<sup>43</sup> See Tilmouth's analysis in "Passion and Intersubjectivity in Early Modern Theater" of the intersubjectivity of applause in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*:

Like a twentieth-century behaviourist, Ulysses grants no reality to mental powers conceived as existing *in potentia*. For him, self-definition, the affirmation of one's lordship, can only arise in performative contexts. This is the more true because *what* a person's capacities are, *how* they are interpreted, depends upon the context which receives and constructs them. It is the audience which puts 'form' on a man's parts and actions, labelling them as virtues, powers, or neither, and thereby determining how that individual will know himself. Furthermore, that forming applause is capricious, affirming identity today only to deconstruct it tomorrow. Ajax, as yet unwanted, in Ulysses's words ' *knows not* what' he is (127); but he will come to know himself anew once the Greeks begin forming him in their applause. Meantime Achilles, having withdrawn from public service, faces, phenomenologically speaking, annihilation, a ceasing to be, because *his* form is lost as soon as compatriots cease to regard him. (19)

intrigues are indeed 'rare,' a word he endlessly repeats when discussing his own actions. If others applaud Piero, this applause gives form and extension to his sense of malicious grandeur, solidifying the identity he believes himself to have by providing a perceivable sign of recognition and acknowledgment of his identity from others. In this sense, applause forms a consensus of recognition. Piero's sense of self is closely tied to reputation and recognition. What is true about Piero's self is what both Piero and others agree upon concerning himself. In removing Piero from the metatheatrical roles of actor, writer, and director, Antonio cuts Piero off from the theatrical applause through which he constructs and validates his sense of self.

In replacing Piero's access to the audience with his own, Antonio reconfigures the audience's relation to the play. In the play's closing lines, Antonio identifies tears as a more powerful show of an audience's approval of a staged tragedy than applause:

And, O, if ever time create a muse  
That to th' immortal fame of virgin faith [i.e. Mellida]  
Dares once engage his pen to write her tragedy,  
May it prove gracious, may his style be decked  
With freshest blooms of pure elegance;  
May it have gentle presence, and the scenes sucked up  
By calm attention of choice audience;  
And when the closing Epilogue appears,  
Instead of claps, may it obtain but tears. (5.6.60-69)

Within the theatrical space of the tragic stage, tears are most often markers of grief (whether genuinely felt or feigned), but beyond the stage, in the realm of the audience, Antonio marks tears as material signs of the proper form of aesthetic appreciation. Marston's lines here, written for Antonio, also seem to reference the competition the play faces from other theaters. After all, Antonio expresses the hope of success he has for the playwright who

pens the tragedy of Mellida's death, which Marston, in a sense, has just done in the play the audience has attended.

The speech is still more meta-theatrically complicated, as Antonio speaks both as a character 'in the play' and also speaks as the play's epilogue, expressing what he hopes the play achieved and what the achievement might obtain from the audience if they were to show their approval. Regardless of how we might read Antonio's final lines, they seem counter in tone and content to the reading some scholars endorse of the play as a kind of parody of revenge tragedy. It is clear – given the continual emphasis in the play on overtopping or surpassing – that Marston is interested in writing a tragedy that surpasses all those that came before it. If his play is extravagantly violent and, at times, psychologically disturbing and morally problematic, this is not the result of a parodic mode, which would be over-the-top for the sake of satirizing the genre of blood tragedy. Rather, it seems Marston attempts to write the revenge tragedy to end all revenge tragedies. The play's spectacle and violence are extreme because of this competitive mode, which directs the writing of the play and explicitly places it in comparison to the violence and spectacle of the revenge tragedies that precede it. Like Antonio and Piero, who continually cite their words, actions, and emotions as more 'rare' and in a unique position to claim the superlative of 'most' (most villainous, most grieved, most worthy of revenge, etc.), Marston seeks to write a play that stands as the pinnacle of revenge narratives. Heather Anne Hirschfeld notes how rivalry and animosity function as symptoms of feared displacement (443). How might this illuminate the threat and amplification of competition in Antonio's *Revenge*? In the play's final lines, Antonio reimagines the play with Mellida as its central

figure rather than Piero, usurping the theatrical legacy that Piero so stridently desired. What revenge could be more successful than that?

## CHAPTER V

### “MUST I REMEMBER?”:

#### MEMORY, AFFECT, AND ACTING IN SHAKESPEARE’S *HAMLET*

In this chapter, I will analyze anxieties about consciousness and ‘being’ in *Hamlet*. The character of Hamlet has traditionally been read as a precursor of modern consciousness. I argue that Hamlet’s performances of ‘inwardness’ are not unique or a radical break from other characters on the English stage. What is unique about Hamlet is not that he has “that within” as a new form of interiority, but that Hamlet feels his performances of grief to be relatively ineffective.<sup>44</sup> He feels his grief lacks social and interpersonal impact. This produces an anxiety about consciousness itself. It is not that Hamlet feels his inwardness is unique because is it insulated from others -- it is this insulation itself which he finds devastating, and it is something that he does not develop for himself. Rather, his insularity is forced upon him by how he is treated or received by others. This anxiety results in a strange kind of suicidal desire. He does not want to simply die (as death itself may have an afterlife, a consciousness which continues on even after the body has expired), he wants to cease to exist altogether. He wants to no longer have a consciousness at all. In place of consciousness, he desires that what has eluded his dead father: memorialization.

In my reading of *Hamlet*, I argue that recent scholarship on intersubjectivity and cognitive cultural studies can help us rehistoricize the nature of Hamlet’s “that within which

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<sup>44</sup> See *Hamlet* 1.2.76-86.

passes show.” Hamlet’s desire for the eradication of his consciousness explores the consequences of feeling disconnected from others in a culture wherein identity, consciousness, and even memory itself depends on the structure of interpersonal relations. Explaining Hamlet’s dilemma through the lens of intersubjectivity and cognitive cultural studies helps us better understand not just Hamlet’s ‘inwardness’ in relation to its historical context, it also helps us understand how the structure of early modern consciousness shapes experiences and descriptions of death, metaphors of corrupt materiality (of human bodies, of the earth itself, etc.), the function of early modern misogyny, and anxieties about social memory.

In revenge plays, violent trauma destroys characters’ identities. The injustice of a crime (usually a murder) leaves victims confused about who they are, how they should act, and how they understand the world around them. Along with their emotional devastation, revengers also face an epistemological disruption. They feel as though the world they knew up to that point was a lie. To take revenge, characters must first realize that no one else will right their injustices. It all depends on them. They must take matters into their own hands. This means creating a new sense of self--a self that wants to punish others for their corruption. In most revenge tragedies, pleas for justice go unheeded, and since words and rhetoric are ineffective, revengers resort to physical violence to make their point. Revenge becomes their singular obsession, a kind of radical commitment, and their retributive violence draws attention to the injustices of the world while punishing those responsible.



Though *Hamlet* has the hallmarks of a revenge tragedy, its protagonist in fact handles revenge unconventionally. Despite being in a revenge tragedy, Hamlet doesn't easily fit the role of the revenger. The injustice of the play is, for Hamlet, not his father's murder but how easily and quickly everyone seems to forget his father. Hamlet saw his father as a model or a mirror for himself, and with his father dead and perhaps deliberately forgotten by all of Denmark, Hamlet faces the possibility that he might be as inconsequential as his father's memory. To recover his sense of self, then, Hamlet turns not to vengeance but to restoring his father's place in Denmark's memory.

Unlike other revengers, who become figures of violence, Hamlet turns his attention to the technology of theater. He determines "acting" rather than action to be the most effective way to move others to remembrance. For Hamlet, theatrical performance is capable of producing emotional responses in others. To take a kind of revenge, Hamlet becomes not a revenger but an actor, as his burden of grief and memory might be transferred to others if he generates affect through acting. Only when facing his own death does Hamlet turn to retributive violence, and even then only momentarily. In the end, Hamlet does not want to right a wrong so much as he wants to be remembered.

### **Hamlet as Unconventional Revenger**

*Hamlet* has all the hallmarks of a revenge tragedy: a murdered father, whose Ghost cries out for revenge; a corrupt, villainous King; grief and madness; the topos of disillusionment with the world (*contemptus mundi*); suicidal ideation; the Kydian play-within-the-play. But Hamlet, the play's central character, does not easily fit the role of the revenger.

First, Hamlet's status as prince of Denmark removes the sense of social disempowerment which most revenge tragedies tend to explore and which powers revenge plots. Other Elizabethan revengers tend to seek legal recourse to right the wrongs they have suffered and only resort to revenge when the proper channels of justice have failed. They turn to revenge in order to seek justice. Revenge plays are interested in disillusionment with, or the decay of, a fair and harmonious social order, and "private revenge is a vote of no confidence in official bodies charged with providing fair treatment" (Woodbridge 6). In contrast, Hamlet never mentions justice and rarely speaks of revenge, despite having more political power than the typical revenger.<sup>45</sup> When he does speak of revenge, he reprimands himself for lacking proper motivation: "How all occasions do inform against me / And spur my dull revenge."<sup>46</sup>

If *Hamlet* is a play interested in exploring disillusionment with the social order, it does not follow the theme of disparity that is central to Elizabethan revenge tragedies. Kay Stockholder, for instance, argues that Hamlet's rank as prince makes him an odd figure for revenge:

Only in *Hamlet* is the revenger of a rank equal to that of his antagonist...The lack of social disparity between the avenger and his victim obscures in *Hamlet* the integral links between caste and family resentments that are central to the revenge tradition from the *Spanish Tragedy* through the plays of Webster, Tourneur, Chapman and Middleton, all of which assign their avengers a lower place in the social order than their victims" (Stockholder 95-96).

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<sup>45</sup> The only occurrence of the word "justice" in *Hamlet* appears during Claudius's attempt at prayer in Act 3: "Offence's gilded hand may shove by justice / And oft 'tis seen the wicked prize itself / Buys out the law..." (3.3.58-60). For textual evidence of Hamlet's political support from the people of Denmark, see Claudius's concerns in 4.3.1-11 and 4.7.10-25.

<sup>46</sup> *Hamlet* 4.4.32. Hamlet's line echoes the Ghost's, who appears before Hamlet "to whet thy almost blunted purpose" (3.4.107). Also see 2.2.506-522.

Given Hamlet's position as prince of Denmark and the ostensible successor of his father's throne, if Hamlet were to take action against Claudius, there is a reasonable expectation that the form of action he would take would involve political conflict rather than private retribution. This is the kind of retaliation that fills Shakespeare's history plays and that we see from other rivals to the throne in *Hamlet*. Young Fortinbras, gathering an army and threatening Claudius with martial conflict, provides an example of the form of action one might expect from Hamlet. Laertes, too, angry at the injustice of his father's murder at Hamlet's hands, leads a rebellion and threatens to overthrow Claudius:

The ocean, overpeering of his list,  
Eats not the flats with more impiteous haste  
Than young Laertes, in a riotous head  
O'erbears your officers. The rabble call him lord  
And, as the world were now but to begin,  
Antiquity forgot, custom not known,  
The ratifiers and props of every word,  
They cry 'Choose we: Laertes shall be king!'--  
Caps, hands, and tongues, applaud it to the clouds:  
'Laertes shall be king, Laertes king!' (*Hamlet* 4.5.99-108)

But Hamlet himself never seems interested in leading a rebellion or taking the throne.

It is not even clear at the start of the play that revenge against Claudius might be necessary. The ubiquity of *Hamlet* as a touchstone of western culture makes it difficult to remember that Claudius's role as the play's villain is not apparent at the beginning of the play. Old Hamlet's death happens before the play begins and the audience does not immediately know that the king was murdered nor that Claudius was the murderer. This is unusual for a revenge tragedy, whose audience often sees the play's initial, instigating violence onstage or knows the villain's motive from the start.

The identity of the villain might be a mystery to the play's revenger, but it is rare for this to be a mystery to the audience. If we can imagine an audience that does not already know the plot of *Hamlet*, the initial conflict between Hamlet and Claudius makes Claudius seem diplomatic rather than villainous. Hamlet is visibly dissatisfied with Claudius's marriage to Gertrude, and with acerbic wit Hamlet voices his frustration that everyone is celebrating their marriage so soon after his father's death. Claudius, however, acknowledges the quickness of their marriage and directs the court's attention to the looming threat of young Fortinbras's aggressions along their border. Without the knowledge that Claudius murdered his brother to advance to the throne, Hamlet's frustration seems petty in contrast to Claudius's concern with reports that Fortinbras is raising an army. Neither Hamlet nor the play's audience has reason to suspect Claudius's crime until it is revealed by the Ghost of Hamlet's father in Act 1.4.

Even after Hamlet is told by the Ghost that Claudius murdered Hamlet's father, Hamlet does not seem committed to revenge.<sup>47</sup> Unlike Elizabethan revengers like Hieronimo, Titus, or Antonio, who must restrain their grief and fury in order to plan their retribution, Hamlet seems to lack the passionate intensity for revenge. Heather Anne Hirschfeld argues that "[r]evenge in *Hamlet* is a means of revisiting a traumatic scene, not

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<sup>47</sup> Though the Ghost appears "In the same figure, like the king that's dead," it is debatable whether the Ghost is the ghost of Hamlet's father or a "goblin damn'd" (1.1.40, 1.4.40). Hamlet decides to speak with the Ghost despite being uncertain it is really his father, saying: "Be thy intents wicked or charitable, / Thou comest in such a questionable shape / That I will speak to thee: I'll call thee Hamlet..." (1.4.42-44). Horatio is less willing to give the Ghost the benefit of the doubt, warning Hamlet:

What if it tempt you toward the flood, my lord,  
Or to the dreadful summit of the cliff  
That beetles o'er his base into the sea,  
And there assume some other horrible form,  
Which might deprive your sovereignty of reason  
And draw you into madness? (1.4.69-74)

one for resolving it” (Hirschfeld 439). Rhodri Lewis argues that Hamlet not only fails to engage in the conventional fury of revenge rhetoric, but seems to actively avoid the ethos of retribution: “In reacting to the Ghost’s words, Hamlet uses his rhetorical skills not to body forth his fury at Claudius’s fratricidal treachery or to stir himself up, but to shield himself from the inconvenient truth that, despite having the details of his father’s murder presented to him in the most singular fashion, he is possessed by neither the passion nor the will to vengeance” (Lewis 635). Hamlet is, of course, noted for his introspection, and while this usually helps revengers hone their anger and sharpen their resolve, Hamlet’s inwardness seems to be an obstacle to him taking action.

Does Hamlet want revenge? And if so, revenge against whom? He does not seem *angry* at Claudius so much as disgusted by Claudius’s inferiority to his father. Even when he learns that Claudius poisoned his father, he does not seem especially vitriolic toward Claudius. There is not a moment in the play when he struggles to restrain himself from slaughtering him. Hamlet even passes up a good opportunity after he tests the conscience of the king and is convinced of his guilt. Hamlet reasons that killing Claudius while he prays is not adequate retribution (since his father was murdered unshriven). But this is a rather unconvincing equivocation, especially since his description of when he might send Claudius into the realm of death lacks the passionate heat that we hear from revengers like Hieronimo, Titus, and Antonio. Rather than pressing forward with the vow of remembrance he has sworn to the Ghost, which also implies the duty of a son to avenge a murdered father, Hamlet delays and defers. Even Hamlet’s description of how he might kill Claudius is surprisingly pedestrian, as he imagines finding Claudius in a moment “That has

no relish of salvation in't" when he might "Then trip him that his heels kick at heaven" (3.4.92-93). This is not exactly the kind of hot, Senecan rhetoric we expect from a revenge tragedy. As we will see, Hamlet shows more passionate intensity in response to the player's speech about Hecuba's grief than he does for revenge against Claudius.

### **The Problem of Inwardness**

The prevailing explanation for Hamlet's seeming aversion to revenge is that he is a contemplative person rather than a 'man of action.' Hamlet's interiority has long been the subject of scholarly debate. The *topos* of Hamlet as a purveyor of inwardness, as the model of modern consciousness itself, first developed in the eighteenth century, but it has an ineluctable persistence.<sup>48</sup> In *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, for instance, Harold Bloom states that "The internalization of the self is one of Shakespeare's greatest inventions, particularly because it came before anyone else was ready for it" (409). Bloom's suggestion that Hamlet anticipates modernity echoes Upton Sinclair's assessment of Hamlet in 1922:

If you read the vast mass of criticism which has grown up about the figure of Hamlet, you learn that Hamlet is the type of the "modern man." Shakespeare was able to divine what modern man would be; or perhaps we can go farther and say that Shakespeare helped to make the modern man what he is; the modern man is more of Hamlet, because he has taken Hamlet to his heart and pondered over Hamlet's problems. (Sinclair 48)

Of course, when Sinclair states that Hamlet is the very model of modernity and that "the modern man" is defined by Hamlet's problems, he does not mean that the modern man is a melancholy prince who sees his father's ghost or whose uncle has usurped the throne. The

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<sup>48</sup> See Margareta de Grazia, *Hamlet Without Hamlet*, especially 1-7, for further discussion.

claims of Hamlet's modernity point to Hamlet's interiority, his contemplations of consciousness and existence, and his incapacity of action.

So how did *Hamlet* become the key text for thinking about the emergence of modern subjectivity? It is not as if expressions of interiority are absent from Shakespeare's other plays. In *Titus Andronicus*, one of Shakespeare's earliest plays and a popular revenge tragedy, characters fixate on private experiences of grief, hide their intentions from others, soliloquize, theorize the quality and nature of their existence--all things commonly associated with Hamlet's unique inwardness.

What makes Hamlet 'seem modern' is his recognition of a divide between *seeming* and *being*. Gertrude tells Hamlet that his father's death "'tis common" since "all that lives must die, / Passing through nature to eternity" and she questions Hamlet's show of grief for his father, asking "Why seems it so particular with thee?" (1.2.72,75). Hamlet, in response, calls attention to Gertrude's passing use of "seems," using the word to trace surface displays of grief which he contrasts with authentic feeling:

Seems, madam! nay it is; I know not 'seems.'  
'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother,  
Nor customary suits of solemn black,  
Nor windy suspiration of forced breath,  
No, nor the fruitful river in the eye,  
Nor the dejected 'havior of the visage,  
Together with all forms, moods, shapes of grief,  
That can denote me truly: these indeed seem,  
For they are actions that a man might play:  
But I have that within which passes show;  
These but the trappings and the suits of woe. (1.2.76-86)

Hamlet claims that the exterior self is always falsifiable because external signs of inner experience, whether these signs are in appearance (such as Hamlet's "inky cloak" and his

“customary suits of solemn black”) or in “dejected ’havior” (sighs, tears, etc.), can be mimicked. By implication, then, Hamlet suggests that only “that within,” or his interior, subjective experience, defines his true self.<sup>49</sup>

Mary Thomas Crane notes that “Hamlet’s claim to have ‘that within which passes show’ (1.2.85) has become one of the most debated lines in early modern literature since it seems to make a definite statement about a highly contested topic, the nature of subjective interiority and its relation to the existence (or nonexistence) of the human ‘individual’” (*Shakespeare’s Brain* 116). According to Katharine Eisaman Maus, “The point of such distinctions is normally to privilege whatever is classified as interior” and Hamlet’s claim to “have that within which passes show” suggests an interiority which “is beyond scrutiny, concealed where other people cannot perceive it” (*Inwardness* 4). Hamlet’s seeming modernity is in his mapping of *seeming* and *being* onto *external* displays of the self and the *internal* experience of emotion. In this sense, Hamlet’s claim to “have that within which passes show,” which pairs interior subjective experience with *being*, seems to theorize an ontology of the self that is aligned with the autonomous individualism associated with modernity.

The problem, however, is that even though Hamlet claims his inwardness is inscrutable to everyone but him, in the context of the play he does not seem to really believe this himself. If Hamlet knows the authenticity of his own grief, why does he work so hard to convince himself and others that he truly grieves? As I will argue, Hamlet is not

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<sup>49</sup> For a detailed historical account of early modern distinctions between seeming and being, and the epistemological difficulties inherent in Hamlet’s claim that he has “that within which passes show,” see Katharine Eisaman Maus’s introduction to *Inwardness and Theater in the English Renaissance*, pp.1-33.



satisfied with his own claim of having “that within.” To demonstrate Hamlet’s frustration with his own inwardness, and to explain why Hamlet’s inwardness is not a precursor of modern, autonomous individualism but is instead rooted in early modern forms of intersubjectivity, I will turn our attention to issues of memory, theatricality, and audience reception in the play.

### ***Hamlet and Memory***

For Hamlet, the injustice of the play is not his father’s murder but how easily and quickly everyone seems to forget his father. What is the relation between revenge and memory? Is vengeance a problem of memory, of being unable to forget? It seems to incorporate this, but being unable to forget does not “denote” vengeance truly. There’s also an anxiety about memory--not that one is unable to forget, but that forgetting (at least in this play) is too easy. In *Hamlet*, the problem is not being unable to forget, but being unable to remember. It is memory that is difficult in *Hamlet*. What *Hamlet* reveals about revenge is that it takes effort to maintain--it is, at best, a short-term goal. It requires passionate intensity, but the energy for revenge in *Hamlet* is not an endless well. Unlike those who experience loss in other Elizabethan revenge plays, such as in *Titus* or *The Spanish Tragedy*, Hamlet has had time to grieve, to let passionate intensity dissipate and settle into “common” grief. Hamlet has trouble mustering a sustainable grief and anger to direct at Claudius--his most violent fantasy against Claudius involves kicking up his feet. The possibility of a Kydian revenge plot is questioned when revenge is initiated after the initial trauma has begun to heal. *Hamlet*’s question, of whether revenge is possible when the grief and anger of loss are no longer fresh and sharp, is a question that redirects the genre of

revenge tragedy. Jacobean revenge plays--such as *The Revenger's Tragedy*--will explore what revenge is when it is cold and calculated. Revenge, in Jacobean theater, will be characterized as a long-term goal, a project carefully orchestrated and that borrows from Machiavellian villainy rather than Senecan fury.

To reiterate, Hamlet's grief for his father is not initially a response to a violent crime. After Hamlet learns that his father was murdered, his grief retroactively becomes grievance. In this play, trauma is not a situated within a singular moment, event, or action; instead, trauma is a kind of echolocation, a resonance of meaning distributed across multiple wounds and moments of trauma, encompassing both physical trauma and traumatic recollection. Hirschfeld argues that *Hamlet* deploys a "hermeneutic logic...of trauma, or the interpretive structure by which a prior devastation, precisely because its full horror cannot be comprehended at the moment it occurs, [but] is realized or recognized only through subsequent devastation, the impact of which is always conditioned by the earlier event" (425). The meaning or significance of trauma, Hirschfeld claims, is always in repetition or doubling of some prior violation. This hermeneutic of trauma which haunts *Hamlet*, and which gives shape to the narrative structure of tragedy in general, is derived from the Christian doctrine of the Fall, in which Adam and Eve disobey God, resulting in a corruption of body and soul which infects the totality of material existence: "...it is not just the taint of the transgressive act itself but also the resultant corruption that is transferred--literally bequeathed--to all the world" (Hirschfeld 427).

This corruption, triggered first through violation (the eating of the forbidden fruit and the consequence of expulsion from Eden) and its consequence (the penalty of

mortality) realized through violence (Cain slaying Abel), is a traumatic realization repeated with variation throughout early modern revenge tragedy. Elizabethan revenge often bears out Hirschfeld's reading. Hieronimo's grief for his murdered son, Horatio, in Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* sets the precedent for staged tragic grief which triggers a transference (usually performed as a moment of cynical recognition) from the corruption of a single act to a corruption of all the world. When Hieronimo and the parade of Kydian revengers who follow in his wake (Titus, Antonio, etc.), suffer a personal loss, so too does he lose all the world, which becomes a negative presence, exclaiming: "O world! no world, but mass of public wrongs, Confus'd and fill'd with murder and misdeeds!" (*Spanish Tragedy* 3.2.2-4). The world itself (or, perhaps more accurately, the world Hieronimo knew) is absent, is "no world," and in its place exist only violations. Titus, too, unable to repair the series of traumas suffered by himself and his family, views the world as a setting for his family's dumb show of perpetual tears, which he imagines as salting the earth and consuming all in mire and slime. These lost worlds can evoke the repeated Edenic traumas and loss.

But for Hamlet? His initial traumatic event, unlike those in the bulk of earlier revenge plays, precedes the play's opening. Something is *already* rotten in the state of Denmark. The play opens in a world in which disillusionment and the transfer of corruption from private loss to a Kydian "mass of public wrongs" has already occurred. The murder of Hamlet's father, when revealed to Hamlet, does not rattle him. If anything, he seems energized by it, at least momentarily. He wants to stamp revenge into his brain, wants it to be the fixation of all his thoughts and actions. But it is not. The violation of the living body of Hamlet's father is, for Hamlet, less traumatic than the violation of his

memory. Hamlet is drawn to the Ghost not because it speaks truths about murder and misdeeds, but because it is a more pervasive presence of his father than memory alone.

“I’ll call thee Hamlet, / King, father, royal Dane,” Hamlet says to the Ghost (1.4.44-45). Hamlet (the son) in this address defines three roles modeled for him by the name “Hamlet.” The name, as more than a name, as a kind of nomenclature, presents a troubling proposition for the younger Hamlet. No longer doubled between father and son, the name “Hamlet” became Hamlet’s responsibility following his father’s death. In the void left by his father lies a filial obligation that rests entirely on Hamlet’s shoulders. If “Hamlet” is both a name and a set of duties, young Hamlet only meets the requirement of being a “royal Dane.” He is not (yet) king nor father. His earlier snarky retort to Claudius, that he is “too much in the sun” (1.2.67), is also an apt self-criticism. Hamlet can no longer be too much “in the son,” he must become like his father.

Hamlet must become like Hamlet. But if Hamlet must be like Hamlet, there are unacknowledged roles attached to the nomenclature that surface with the arrival of the Ghost. Since Hamlet says “I’ll call thee Hamlet” not to his father, but to the Ghost, what unspoken attributes go unrecognized alongside the model of king, father, and royal Dane? The Ghost itself commands Hamlet to “remember me” and also makes allegations which mark “Hamlet” as a name for victimization, since Old Hamlet was poisoned while in a vulnerable state of sleep, damned by an unshriven death, and forgotten through Claudius’s usurpations as king, husband, and father. To be “Hamlet,” then, is a traumatic victimization that risks obscurity in being forgotten unless someone is commissioned to remember. “Hamlet” names not just an obscured victimization, it also names the burden of memory,

the obligation to remember. But how can the young Hamlet be “Hamlet” in this way?

Hamlet cannot be both the memory-bearer and also the memory to be borne.

Other readers of the play have pointed to Hamlet’s resistance to the burden of remembrance. Hester Lees-Jeffries writes that “*Hamlet*, both character and play, is deeply troubled by memory” and “The Ghost’s ‘Remember me!’ is a crucial, if vexed, injunction, but we would do equally well to pause on Hamlet’s no less vital and anguished plea, ‘Must I remember?’, and append a silent addition: ‘and if so, how?’” (Lees-Jeffries 7-8).

Lees-Jeffries’s comment suggests that the burden of memory that is imposed on Hamlet is more complex than it would initially seem. Hamlet uses metaphors of books and wax writing tablets to describe committing revenge to memory:

Ay, thou poor ghost, while memory holds a seat  
In this distracted globe. Remember thee?  
Yea, from the table of my memory  
I’ll wipe away all trivial fond records,  
All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past,  
That youth and observation copied there,  
And thy commandment all alone shall live  
Within the book and volume of my brain,  
Unmixed with baser matter. Yes, yes, by heaven. (1.5.96-104)

But the metaphor immediately fails. Hamlet’s anger at Claudius seems parasitic on his anger at his mother. Even when Hamlet is compelled by the voice of the Ghost to swear vengeance, Hamlet thinks of his mother *before* he thinks of Claudius:

O most pernicious woman!  
O villain, villain, smiling, damned villain!  
My tables,—meet it is I set it down,  
That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain;  
At least I’m sure it may be so in Denmark:  
*Writing*  
So, uncle, there you are. Now to my word;  
It is ‘Adieu, adieu! remember me.’

I have sworn 't. (1.5.105-113)

Despite Hamlet's attempt to clear his brain of "baser matter" in order to record the "commandment" to take revenge, he cannot clear his mother ("O most pernicious woman!") from his mind.

At least, the context here makes it seem as if he cannot clear his mother from his mind--but if this is a reflex, an uncontrolled slip into a "baser matter" in the "book and volume" of his brain, is this a 'base matter' which cannot be erased or overwritten? Both Hamlet and the Ghost seem concerned that a murdered father can be forgotten but a "pernicious woman" cannot be, suggesting Gertrude's violation of dead Hamlet's memory is more devastating than Claudius's fratricide. Steven Mullaney argues that Hamlet's grief is "produced as much by Gertrude's sexual vitality as by his father's death" (Mullaney 153). This grief, caused by the unintentional remembrance of his "pernicious" mother ("pernicious" because of her transferred affection and sexual appetite: "she would hang on him, / As if increase of appetite had grown / By what it fed on"), suggests Hamlet is, like Janet Adelman's interpretation of Richard III, a figure who is threatened by the possibility of maternal independence, of women who are not figured through their relationships with men.<sup>50</sup> The play's concern with Gertrude's sexuality is also similar to the patriarchal anxiety described by Coppelia Kahn in her discussion of *Titus Andronicus*: "Eluding [proper patriarchal control], the maternal womb burgeons aggressively, pollutes patrilineal descent, and destroys civil order..." (*Roman Shakespeare* 55). I argue that Hamlet's desire to erase his mother's betrayal from memory is rooted in the culture of misogyny described by these

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<sup>50</sup> See Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays, Hamlet to the Tempest*, pp. 2-3.

critics. Claudius can kill the living body of Hamlet's father. But Gertrude, Hamlet seems to worry, is capable of killing his living memory.

Memory is a vital component of revenge tragedies, and Hamlet swears to remember. The Ghost describes how he was murdered (as in a game of “Clue,” we learn that Claudius did it with poison in the orchard) and evokes the ethos of revenge as familial obligation: “If thou hast nature in thee, bear it not” (1.5.81). The link between remembrance and vengeance is common in revenge tragedy, but memory tends to be a rather simple affair in other revenge plays. Usually, the revenger carries with him some simple prop which signifies the persistence of their memory (Hieronimo, for instance, keeps his dead son's blood-soaked handkerchief in *The Spanish Tragedy*). But Hamlet's metaphor for remembrance (“the table of my memory... / Within the book and volume of my brain”) theorizes memory more complexly and abstractly. His use of a writing tablet has garnered scholarly attention. In a landmark article on Hamlet's memory, Peter SALLYBRASS, Roger Chartier, J. Franklin Mowery, and Heather Wolfe discuss the paradoxical nature of writing tables, their ability to “memorialize the ability to forget” (Sallybrass et al. 413). Writing tablets may act as “memorial prostheses” that aid memory, but the need for them is also a constant reminder that their contents can easily be forgotten or erased (Sallybrass et al. 413).

If writing tablets are useful tools for recording things that might easily be forgotten, what use do they serve in revenge? There is some question as to why Hamlet would even need to clear the ‘baser matter’ of his brain in order to make room for the Ghost's injunction to “Remember me!” Why *wouldn't* Hamlet remember? Why does the Ghost

need to demand that Hamlet remember at all? Ghosts and murders tend to make an impression. The revelation that Hamlet's father was murdered by Claudius does not seem like the kind of information that might slip Hamlet's mind. Generally, early modern revengers are incapable of forgetting. It is the pervasive memory of a wrongful death that tends to drive revengers toward actual moments of madness in revenge plays. Several scholars have noted this seeming discrepancy in the play. Stephen Greenblatt claims it would be "fairly ludicrous" for Hamlet to forget the revelation that his father was murdered by his uncle (*Hamlet in Purgatory* 207). Lewis agrees with Greenblatt, arguing it is unimaginable that Hamlet might forget what the Ghost reveals to him, which makes it "[a]ll the more notable, then that both the Ghost and Hamlet himself appear to believe otherwise: for them, Hamlet's ability to preserve and to reverence the memory of his father is very much open to question" (Lewis, "Hamlet, Metaphor, and Memory" 612). The fact that neither Hamlet nor the Ghost trusts Hamlet's memory increases the onus on scholars to explain how remembrance functions in the play.

Lewis argues there is an important distinction between "memory" and "recollection" in Aristotelian theories of memory, also known as *ars memoriae* or the art of memory (618). Where memory simply brings a past image or event to mind, recollection "involves deliberate mental activity" which "depends upon the use of the reason in tandem with the imagination and/or memory" (Lewis 619). In other words, recollection is a chain of mnemonic associations, a "reconstructive and heuristic act, analogous to following a trail while hunting" (Lewis 619). Like metaphor, which creates meaning or significance by asserting unfamiliar resemblance between two things, recollection places memories in



relation to other memories or ideas in order to tease hidden truths to the surface. What *Hamlet* suggests, though, is that recollection might not require *deliberate* mental activity. Hamlet's recollection may be involuntary. Even as Hamlet attempts to wipe away "all trivial fond records" from his memory, Hamlet cannot help but recall his mother's betrayal of his father's memory.

Hamlet's attempt to isolate and record a single memory ("thy commandment all alone shall live / Within the book and volume of my brain") immediately fails, because Hamlet's memory of his father cannot be divorced from the associations that give his father's memory meaning. Along these lines, Margareta de Grazia argues that Hamlet is conflicted by memory and how it determines the nature of his revenge. De Grazia argues that despite the Ghost's demand for remembrance and retribution, Hamlet cannot forget his own frustration in being disenfranchised from the throne. In remembering that his father lost the throne to Claudius, Hamlet cannot help but remember that he, too, is denied the throne. De Grazia argues that the "Ghost's disclosure" allows Hamlet to "express his resentment" (De Grazia 89). In remembering Claudius's betrayal of Old Hamlet, young Hamlet is unable to forget the wrongs that he presently suffers as a consequence of his father's death. According to de Grazia, the imperative to remember and avenge the wrongs suffered by Hamlet's father is not powerful enough to override Hamlet's desire to remember and avenge the wrongs he himself suffers. What Hamlet cannot forget, cannot erase from his memory, is that "at his father's death, just at the point when an only son in a patrilineal system stands to inherit, Hamlet is dispossessed -- and, as far as the court is concerned, legitimately" (De Grazia 1).

De Grazia also provides a reasonable explanation for why Hamlet thinks of his mother while claiming to record Claudius's guilt in his memory. Is Hamlet disgusted with Gertrude's sexual appetite because it betrays his father's memory, as Mullaney's analysis suggests? Or, as de Grazia suggests, is he angry at the possibility that Gertrude might provide Claudius with an heir, further displacing Hamlet's claim to the throne?<sup>51</sup> Either is possible, nor are they mutually exclusive. Perhaps it should come as no surprise that Hamlet has trouble focusing solely on revenge against Claudius. If anything, Hamlet adopts the Ghost's own confusion on the matter. At first, the Ghost warns Hamlet to forget about Gertrude while taking revenge:

...howsoever thou pursuest this act,  
Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive  
Against thy mother aught: leave her to heaven  
And to those thorns that in her bosom lodge,  
To prick and sting her. (1.5.84-88)

However, the Ghost, too, seems to forget whether it is Claudius's act of murder that needs to be revenged or Gertrude's sexual appetite. After describing the murder, the Ghost evokes the ethos of revenge as familial obligation: "If thou hast nature in thee, bear it not" (1.5.81). But what is the "it" that Hamlet must not bear? Though the description of the murder precedes the Ghost's imperative to "bear it not," the lines that follow it suggest it is not murder that is unbearable: "Let not the royal bed of Denmark be / A couch for luxury and damned incest" (1.5.82-83).

The association, then, between remembering Old Hamlet's murder and remembering Gertrude's sexual appetite for Claudius is first made by the Ghost. This

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<sup>51</sup> See de Grazia pp. 87-91, 105-108.

mnemonic chain of murder, revenge, and “damned incest” helps explain why Hamlet seems to be resistant to the role of the revenger.<sup>52</sup> The disdain in Hamlet’s rhetoric when thinking of Gertrude, however, seems to exceed whatever anger he has for Claudius. The vehemence with which Hamlet talks about Gertrude (or to her, as I will discuss later in the chapter) suggests that Hamlet’s grievance is more complex than a concern with succession alone. Since Hamlet never expresses a desire for the throne, even privately, it is unlikely that Hamlet’s disgust with Gertrude’s remarriage is rooted in royal ambition.

Gertrude’s remarriage may explain why Hamlet’s memory swerves from Claudius. But it still does not explain Hamlet’s concern with remembrance itself. Perhaps Gertrude forgets her husband, but why must Hamlet imagine his brain as a “book and volume” devoted to a single memory? Perhaps Hamlet’s metaphor is pure hyperbole, designed to convey single-minded devotion common for revengers. But the vastness of textual space that Hamlet imagines must be reserved for a single memory suggests that any other memory recorded alongside it threatens to subsume it. According to Stallybrass et al., if Hamlet’s purpose is to secure permanence for his memory, the metaphor is itself contradictory:

A supplement or ‘adiunckt’ to memory, whether in the form of a book or of writing itself, would cast suspicion on the reliability of a speaker’s memory. A supplement would ‘import’ (both ‘introduce’ and ‘signify’) the very thing that it would cure: ‘forgetfulness.’ But this general claim takes on a specific charge when the ‘adiunckt’ is an erasable table, designed for a form of writing that can be wiped away at any moment. Such a supplement suggest the difficulty of making any complete separation between remembering and forgetting. A technology of memory, the tables are also a technology of erasure. (Stallybrass et al. 417)

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<sup>52</sup> For further discussion of Hamlet’s resistance to his role as the revenger, see Emily Bartels, “Breaking the Illusion of Being: Shakespeare and the Performance of Self,” pp. 173–75; Mary Thomas Crane, *Shakespeare’s Brain*, p. 118; and Rhodri Lewis, “Hamlet, Metaphor, and Memory,” p. 635.

Stallybrass et al. argue that Hamlet's project of remembrance is doomed to fail from the start. After all, Hamlet's vow of remembrance is predicated on an act of forgetting. If all prior memories recorded in the tables, books, and volumes of his brain can be wiped out in order to record the Ghost's commandment, then how can Hamlet trust the permanence of what he now records there?

While Stallybrass et al. show the contradictory nature of Hamlet's metaphor, Lewis argues that Hamlet chooses the metaphor of writing tables *because* it provides the possibility of erasure or forgetfulness. According to Lewis, Hamlet's metaphor not only lacks permanence, it actively reverses the established order of remembrance (Lewis 615). Writing tables, with their erasable surfaces, were meant to function in tandem with commonplace books as a way to practice or record ideas before deciding whether or not they were worth writing permanently in ink. Lewis claims that

Hamlet's shift from the 'table of my memory' to the 'book and volume of my brain' reflects the relationship between writing tablets and commonplace books: the sixteenth-century student would have made a record of the things that he had read or audited on the former, but then transferred them to the latter as a site of more permanent and better organized data storage. (Lewis 615)

As a metaphor, Hamlet maps the functions of writing tables and commonplace books onto the cognitive processes of memory storage.

Copying writing from the writing table to forms of permanent inscription (books and volumes) is akin to transferring something from short term memory into long term memory. But rather than imagining some forms of inscription as temporary or malleable (such as the wax surface of writing tables) and some forms as permanent (books and volumes written in ink), Hamlet imagines he can erase either form of memory at will. Thus,

while Hamlet's soliloquy claims he will erase the 'baser matter' of his brain to make permanent the Ghost's commandment, Lewis notes that Hamlet's metaphor implies a *deliberate* form of forgetting or erasure. To understand Hamlet's metaphor, Lewis argues "it is vital to distinguish between the processes of forgetting and of erasure; the former is involuntary and accidental, whereas the latter is by definition a deliberate act of mnemonic effacement, the conscious obliteration of what one has learned or experienced in the past" (Lewis 616). There arises, then, a distinction between two kinds of forgetting: 1) an accidental or involuntary forgetting, and 2) a deliberate act of forgetting or erasure. For Lewis, Hamlet resorts to the metaphor of memory as a writing table precisely because it allows for the possibility of deliberate erasure.

Rather than his brain being a "book" of permanence, Lewis argues Hamlet's memory "is supplanted by the memory as 'table'" or a wax tablet on which writing is impermanent, and Hamlet's rhetoric of remembrance instead constructs a displacement of an imperative he does not want to internalize:

What Shakespeare gives us within it is a self-deluding confection, the young Prince's in-adequately drawn attempt to compensate for the absence of the feelings that he had anticipated when the Ghost began his narration. In reacting to the Ghost's words, Hamlet uses his rhetorical skills not to body forth his fury at Claudius's fratricidal treachery or to stir himself up, but to shield himself from the inconvenient truth that, despite having the details of his father's murder presented to him in the most singular fashion, he is possessed by neither the passion nor the will to vengeance. (Lewis 635)

Lewis's distinction between accidental and deliberate acts of forgetting provides insight and compelling analysis of Hamlet's discourse on memory. What Lewis does not consider, however, is whether this the issue of deliberate forgetting first arises at this particular moment in the play. In fact, the possibility of deliberate acts of forgetting or erasure is more

potent and occurs earlier in the play than Lewis's analysis accounts for. Acts of deliberate forgetting is a problem that Hamlet seeks to remedy by turning to the theater as a technology of memory.

To explain why theatricality serves as a desirable mnemonic practice for Hamlet, we need to understand Hamlet's larger concern with the differences between public and private forms of memory. For Lewis, deliberate forgetting is an act that is uniquely Hamlet's. But when Hamlet is compelled by the Ghost to "Remember me!," he already has a mode of deliberate forgetting in mind because he has already seen it at work in social memory. Hamlet turns from "book," "volume," and "tables" because their purpose is limited to personal, private memory. What Hamlet records in private memory will only be remembered *by Hamlet*. But affective power of the theater has the radical potential to transfer private memories and griefs to an audience, generating a collective, subjective experience that is socially shared.

### **Having "that within which passes show"**

I want to return the question I posed earlier: If Hamlet knows the authenticity of his own grief, why does he work so hard to convince himself and others that he truly grieves? Maus helps us answer this question when she describes two key aspects of Hamlet's claim of inwardness: "For Hamlet, the internal experience of his own grief 'passes show' in two senses. It is beyond scrutiny, concealed where other people cannot perceive it. And it *surpasses* the visible, its validity is unimpeachable. The exterior, by contrast, is partial, misleading, falsifiable, unsubstantial" (*Inwardness* 4). Maus's work on early modern inwardness provides an excellent assessment of the private *truth* of Hamlet's experience of

grief. For Maus, Hamlet's claim to "having that within which passes show" is deployed as an epistemological claim; his grief is a fact that only Hamlet can verify. The problem, however, is that Hamlet's self-representation becomes painfully insular. Robert Weimann argues that Hamlet faces a "profound crisis in representativity ... with the rupture, in Hamlet himself, between what is shown and what is meant, and his related capacity for both dissociating and associating his own feigning and his 'I know not seems'" (Weimann 282). Hamlet's grief may be self-evident and beyond scrutiny *for him*, but resorting to a claim of unimpeachable inwardness displaces the essential reciprocity of self-representation. Hamlet's dissatisfaction with "what is shown and what is meant" is not a question of whether or not his "seeming" is a false representation. The problem is not that Hamlet's "nightly color" and all its trappings of represented grief are *capable* of being misrepresented or misunderstood by Gertrude and Claudius. The problem, for Hamlet, is that his representation of grief has no affective power. He is not worried that he is a divided self so much as that he is like (to borrow a line from *Macbeth*) the "poor player / That struts and frets his hour upon the stage" but leaves the audience unmoved (*Macbeth* 5.5.24-25). I argue that Hamlet's concern is not with the unimpeachable nature of his inner experience but instead raises questions concerning the importance of reception by others. Hamlet is not satisfied with having an inscrutable interiority. He is frustrated that his grief has no impact on others.

If we think of Hamlet's claim of "that within which passes show" in terms of the culture's longing for intersubjective recognition, Hamlet's claim serves two purposes. First, it counters the disapproval of Hamlet's grief as "obstinate condolment" that exceeds the

bounds of “filial obligation” (1.2.91-93). In the context of Claudius and Gertrude’s attacks on Hamlet’s grief as immature and excessive, Hamlet’s claim to an authentic inward experience of grief is deployed as an accusation, contrasting his grief with their own performances that lack an internal component and therefore do not resemble his experience. Only in a state of corruption--in which all shows of grief for the dead king are assumed to be ritual displays, theatrical and performative but empty of ‘true’ feeling--is Hamlet’s grief illegible. Hamlet has not invented a new, modern form of inwardness or subjectivity--instead, Hamlet’s accuses others. “Of course my grief seems like a show to you,” he seems to say, “because no one here ever really felt grief when my father died.”

The second purpose of Hamlet’s claim is to insulate him from the problem of others failing to recognize his grief properly. If *only* Hamlet recognizes the authenticity of his grief, how can his grief be affirmed? In *The Spanish Tragedy*, Kyd provide one possible solution to this problem by having Hieronimo relate to imagined observers who recognize and affirm his grief. Hamlet’s grief, however, is not recognized as authentic feeling but as an ostentatious display that is out of place with the performances of grief at court. Hamlet attempts to refigure this lack of recognition as evidence for the authenticity of his grief. The illegibility of Hamlet’s inwardness is conditional, not ontological--it is premised on a consistency of everyone else’s mimicked or inauthentic grief.

Hamlet’s not-so-subtle loathing of Claudius and Gertrude at court and Hamlet’s first soliloquy once the court has vacated express contempt for the deliberate erasure of his father’s memory. Hamlet’s initial discontentment in the play, even before meeting the Ghost and learning of his father’s murder, is that his father’s death seems to leave little imprint on



the culture of Denmark. Hamlet intuits one of the central problems of memory: if he forgets something, it is lost and cannot be recovered. But this is only true if we conceive of memory as personal, private, non-transferable. If Hamlet alone is the arbiter of his father's memory, then that memory is his burden to bear--his mind must be wiped clean in order to keep his father's memory alive and ever-present. But this is not the only way memory can function. Memory can also be social. We can have shared memories, or cultural memories. Hamlet notes just this kind of social memory when he greets the players, and it is his inability to transfer his father's memory to others, his failure to convert his father's memory into a social memory, that he finds so galling.

Psychologists distinguish between “generic event memory” (or memory which fits a general schema or a common cultural practice), “episodic memory” (which is the recall of a specific event which occurred to a particular person at a particular time--this form of memory tends to involve specific details from a person's past), and “autobiographical memory” (or memory which is significant to a person's narrative construction of his or her self--these are formative memories). In “The Psychological and Social Origins of Autobiographical Memory,” Katherine Nelson gives the following examples:

...what I ate for lunch yesterday is today part of my episodic memory, but being unremarkable in any way, it will not, I am quite sure, become part of my autobiographical memory. It has no significance to my life story beyond the general schema of lunch. In contrast, the first time I presented a paper at a conference is part of my autobiographical memory: I remember the time, place, and details of the program and participants, and I have a sense of how that experience fits into the rest of my personal life story. It is important to make this distinction at the outset, because, as recent research has established, very young children do have episodic memories, but do not yet have autobiographical memory of this kind. (Nelson 8).

When Claudius dismisses Hamlet's grief for his dead father as immature and unnatural, his reprimand of Hamlet suggests the passing of Old Hamlet should fall into a kind of 'generic event memory.' Hamlet's experience of grief is interchangeable with any son's experience of grief for a father who has died. The rhetorical strategy is to reveal the experience "common" and Hamlet's treatment of it as therefore "unnatural." Claudius relegates Hamlet's grief as out of sync with the general schema of grief (which, presumably, Claudius, Gertrude, and the court model as their view of a proper response to Old Hamlet's passing). Gertrude, too, presses Hamlet to refrain from experiencing his father's death as "particular" to him:

QUEEN GERTRUDE

Good Hamlet, cast thy nighted colour off,  
And let thine eye look like a friend on Denmark.  
Do not for ever with thy vailed lids  
Seek for thy noble father in the dust:  
Thou know'st 'tis common; all that lives must die,  
Passing through nature to eternity.

HAMLET

Ay, madam, it is common.

QUEEN GERTRUDE

If it be,  
Why seems it so particular with thee? (1.2.68-75)

Claudius and Gertrude transfer the memory of Old Hamlet's death from the 'particular' (or episodic memory, with its emphasis on the specifics or particularity of the event), which keeps Old Hamlet's death sharp and present in memory, to an acceptance of death as part of a common schema of grief, which has implications for generic or appropriate degrees of grief, including grief's intensity and duration. Hamlet feels his father has not been grieved with adequate intensity and duration. Gertrude's grief, in particular, he feels is over much

too quickly and, as a consequence, he questions her displays of grief as mere shows of intensity--“Like Niobe, all tears” rather than an authentic display of grief (1.2.149).

For Hamlet, this situation is especially troubling because the lack of reception he has of his own grief is counterproductive to the work of mourning. Instead of helping Hamlet work through his loss, the resistance to his performance of grief and the accusations they make that his grief is common, unnatural, or merely a hollow appearance (“Seems, madam! nay it is; I know not ‘seems’”) force Hamlet’s hand. Left to defend his grief, he doubles down on it, fixates on it, to such an extent that memory and grief threaten to become a key aspect of his identity, a burden of memory Hamlet expressly does not want (“Must I remember?”). In pushing Hamlet to accept a brief show of grief as a common, natural response to a father’s death, Claudius and Gertrude inadvertently prompt Hamlet to make his father’s death a formative memory, an aspect of autobiographical memory that he attempts to force others to accept with him. Nelson describes autobiographical memory as “specific, personal, long-lasting, and (usually) of significance to the self-system. Phenomenally, it forms one’s personal life history” (8). Not only is Hamlet grappling with his father’s grief, he is also alienated by it. He both grieves and is put in a situation where he must defend or justify his grief. Hamlet cannot forget his father because he cannot forget that everyone else seems to forget his father and that they fail to recognize Hamlet’s experience. In his conflict with Claudius and Gertrude, Hamlet misperceives what is becoming autobiographical. It is not grief itself (though he misrecognizes it as that) but the experience of having one’s isolation from others marked (when they don’t share one’s feeling) and having one’s experience denied that becomes autobiographically significant.

According to Nelson, children develop autobiographical memory in order to develop a sense of self. This development requires categorizing certain memories as significant to the self, and organizing these formative memories into a personal narrative. Research on memory shows that repetition, or “reinstatement,” is necessary to solidify memory. For a memory to persist, it must be recalled with some frequency or risk being forgotten. But autobiographical memory requires reception by an audience. In sharing memories the self is integrated into the community. According to Nelson, “sharing memories with other people performs a significant social-cultural function, the acquisition of which means that the child can enter into the social and cultural history of the family and community” (12). Nelson argues that this kind of recall is inherently intersubjective and language-dependent:

...human language is unique in serving the dual function of mental representation and communication. These dual functions make possible its use in establishing the autobiographical memory system. And because such memory is at once both personal and social, it enables us not only to cherish our private memories, but also to share them with others, and to construct shared histories as well as imagined stories, in analogy with reconstructed true episodes. (Nelson 13).

This approach to understanding the significance of shared memory is called the “social interactionist model” in cognitive psychology.<sup>53</sup> This model helps establish a links between self-construction, memory, and social reception (both of the shared memory and its significance). Smith argues that “Through social interaction with adults, children learn how to narrate their memories, what memories are valued, what stories can be told” (Smith 90). Smith also notes that, following Nelson’s model, “Thus autobiographical memory becomes

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<sup>53</sup> See Sidonie Smith, “Material Selves: Bodies, Memory, and Autobiographical Narrating” in *Narrative and Consciousness*, p. 93.

possible with the achievement of certain linguistic skills--the familiarity with narrative” (Smith 93). Smith argues that autobiographical memories are formed and structured in relation to the normative pressures implicit in facing an audience: “We might say that as autobiographical memory...emerges, the child learns complex narrative forms--in terms of the agents of the narrative, the action in the narrative, the emotional valence of the narrative, the ideological context of the narrative, the mode of presentation, and the appropriate forms of address” (Smith 93). The social interactionist model informs my thinking about Hamlet's concern with memory, and about how and why the dismissals of his memory and grief are isolating for him. Hamlet's anxiety about the burden of his father's memory (“Must I remember?”) and the inadequacy of his metaphor of memory as writing tablet or commonplace book are the consequences of Hamlet's memory being dismissed or ignored by others. While Hamlet's performance of grief invites others to share in his remembrance of his father, Claudius, Gertrude, and all the court seem to engage in deliberate acts of forgetting. Claudius notes this deliberate transition from remembering Old Hamlet to a joint focus on self-remembrance in his first lines in the play:

Though yet of Hamlet our dear brother's death  
The memory be green, and that it us befitted  
To bear our hearts in grief and our whole kingdom  
To be contracted in one brow of woe,  
Yet so far hath discretion fought with nature  
That we with wisest sorrow think on him,  
Together with remembrance of ourselves. (1.2.1-7)

Hamlet cannot bear to have his father fade not fully remembered or deliberately forgotten, but to be the sole arbiter of his father's memory, as we have seen, causes him to be isolated and misrecognized. While the writing tablet may externalize the Ghost's

injunction to ‘remember me,’ it does not free Hamlet of the burden of his father’s memory. To do that, Hamlet realizes he must externalize this injunction using a different technology of memory--not the writing tablet or the commonplace book (which are memory aids *for an individual*) but the technology of theater, which Hamlet theorizes as a technology of social memory. I will now turn our attention to Hamlet’s theorizing of the theater as a medium for conveying autobiographical memory, for transferring private memory into public discourse.

### **Theatricality and Reception**

Thus far, I have argued that Hamlet saw his father as a model or a mirror for himself, but with his father dead and willingly forgotten by all of Denmark, Hamlet faces the possibility that he might be as inconsequential as his father’s memory. To recover his sense of self Hamlet turns not to vengeance but seeks to restore his father’s place in his mother’s memory. In this section, I argue that unlike other revengers, who become figures of violence, Hamlet turns his attention to the technology of theater. He determines “acting” rather than action to be the most effective way to move others to remembrance. For Hamlet, performing his grief is the way his burden of grief and memory can be transferred to others. To take a kind of revenge, Hamlet becomes not a revenger but an actor. Only when facing his own death does Hamlet turn to retributive violence, and even then only momentarily. In the end, Hamlet, too, wants to be remembered.

Mary Thomas Crane notes that “Hamlet’s claim to have ‘that within which passes show’ (1.2.85) has become one of the most debated lines in early modern literature, because it seems to make a definite statement about a highly contested topic, the nature of

subjective interiority and its relation to the existence (or nonexistence) of the human ‘individual’” (*Shakespeare’s Brain* 116). Yet I believe that what is unique about Hamlet is not that he has “that within” as an expressed form of subjectivity interiority, but that Hamlet feels his performances of grief to be relatively ineffective. I argue that readings of Hamlet’s “that within” as evidence of a unique individualistic interiority has misconstrued the crux of this line. Hamlet feels his grief lacks social and interpersonal impact. This produces an anxiety about consciousness itself. In my reading, Hamlet’s claim of having “that within which passes show” does not express autonomous inwardness but Hamlet’s insulation from others--and the insulation itself is what devastates him.

Recent scholars argue Hamlet’s distinction between the interior self and exterior signs or actions, needs proper historical context. Discussing Hamlet’s criticism of the external “actions that a man might play,” David Hillman asks “...what kind of exterior is Hamlet referring to here? He includes not merely clothes and words but even corporeal signs--sighs, tears, facial expressions--which clearly emerge from the interior of the body. It is as if the inside and its outside *can* be fully separated--as if the body’s skin were an epistemological boundary” (Hillman 85). Grace Tiffany argues that Hamlet’s claim to have “that within which passes show” does not deny the possibility of representing interior experiences of grief, but doubts whether visual representation is adequate. According to Tiffany, Hamlet’s claim “is often presumed to invoke a radical distrust of all theater’s capacity to represent inner states of mind. I would suggest, however, that Hamlet’s words, taken in their entirety, suggest not that his inner state cannot be represented but that it cannot be represented visually” (Tiffany 313-314). While Hillman locates an

epistemological boundary spatially, with the body's skin marking the division between interior experience and external expression, Tiffany argues that Hamlet's concern is with two competing modes of representation, one of them related to theater and theatricality:

He condemns the shows of mourning—the 'inky cloak,' the 'customary suits of solemn black,' the 'fruitful river of the eye,' the 'dejected havior of the visage,' the 'trappings and the suits of woe'—as mere 'shapes of grief,' inauthentic 'actions that a man might play' (1.2.77-84). His description of a grief that 'passes show' suggests a Protestant distrust of theater's power to present truth to the eye yet Hamlet nowhere suggests that truth might not be articulated when freedom is given to speak. His heart breaks because he 'must hold [his] tongue' (1.2.159). (Tiffany 313-314)

I agree with Tiffany's suggestion that Hamlet expresses a concern about modes of representation, but I would reconsider her conclusion that Hamlet expresses "distrust of theater's power to present truth to the eye." After all, Hamlet does not claim that his outward signs, shows, or suits of woe are false or at odds with the grief he feels within. His frustration that they fail to "denote" him "truly" is a realization that the authenticity of his emotions alone is not enough to generate pathos. His experience of inwardness is ineffective for moving others, for creating an affect or a shared response of grief. We see this more clearly when Hamlet meets with the acting company that arrives to provide the court's entertainment.

Earlier, I argued that Lewis and Stallybrass et al. were correct in assessing the tension between remembrance and forgetting in Hamlet's discussion of writing technologies, but that tension only accounts for the problem of personal, private, or individual memory. The play itself dramatizes social concern with the disruption or obfuscation of the remembered past. Hamlet's metaphoric linking of (private) memory with writing does not resolve the tension between remembrance and forgetting, since the



metaphor itself is contradictory. In Lees-Jeffries analysis of Hamlet's writing metaphor, "memory becomes at once imperative and fixed," while simultaneously "provisional and able to be rewritten" (Lees-Jeffries 25). Private memory is like a wax tablet or a commonplace book in which a person jots down what he or she *personally* wants to commit to memory, but these inscribed memories have little effect on what, or how, others might remember Hamlet's father. In Hamlet's metaphor of memory as a form of private writing, Hamlet intuits one of the central problems of individual memory: whatever he records in the "book and volume" of his brain is at risk of being forgotten not just by him but by others, given that the record of his memory seems locked in Hamlet's interiority. If Hamlet alone is the arbiter of his father's memory, then that memory is his burden to bear--his mind must be wiped clean of all other content in order to keep his father's memory alive and ever-present. Even more troubling for Hamlet is his sense that private memory is an insufficient form of remembrance. It is his inability to transfer his father's memory to others, his failure to generate his father's memory into a social memory, that he finds so galling. If Hamlet alone remembers his father, it does not seem much different from his father being forgotten altogether. For a person's memory to matter at all, it must reside within social discourse, and since Hamlet's memory of his father is personal, private, and nontransferable, his father may already be all but forgotten.

The form of memory Hamlet requires must be social (and, as Nelson's research has shown, some memories must be made social in order to persist at all). Hamlet's exchange with Ophelia provides evidence that Hamlet weighs the worth of a person's life in relation to social memory:

HAMLET

O God, your only jig-maker. What should a man do  
but be merry? for, look you, how cheerfully my  
mother looks, and my father died within these two hours.

OPHELIA

Nay, 'tis twice two months, my lord.

HAMLET

So long? Nay then, let the devil wear black, for  
I'll have a suit of sables. O heavens! die two  
months ago, and not forgotten yet? Then there's  
hope a great man's memory may outlive his life half  
a year: but, by'r lady, he must build churches,  
then; or else shall he suffer not thinking on, with  
the hobby-horse, whose epitaph is 'For, O, for, O,  
the hobby-horse is forgot.' (3.2.118-128)

For Hamlet, the inscription of “a great man’s memory,” whether it be recorded in wax, parchment, or stone, amounts to little, and as the play proceeds, Hamlet continues to lose trust in the power of private memory and writing itself, as books becomes meaningless “words, words, words” (2.2.189). Stallybrass et al. note that “The play moves relentlessly away from the kind of records that, stored in a library, might protect the remembrance of the old king for posterity” (Stallybrass et al. 419). This is true, but writing is not the only way memory can function. Hamlet doubts both writing and private memory as adequate forms of remembrance, but in their place he imagines remembrance through a new medium, not in individual brains, erasable writing-tables, or in books and volumes but in theater, with the playhouse functioning as a site of living, repeatable social memory.

Hamlet notes just this kind of social memory when he greets the players who arrive to seek patronage. Here, Hamlet identifies the function players perform as arbiters of social memory:

Good my lord, will you see the  
players well bestowed? Do you hear, let them be well  
used, for they are the abstract and brief chronicles of  
the time: after your death you were better have a bad  
epitaph than their ill report while you live. (2.2.460-464)

Hamlet contrasts the practices of inscription (such as a “bad epitaph”) with the efficacy of the theater as a technology of memory. Having linked *individual* memory with the technology of writing, Hamlet realizes that the *social* memory of acting companies has a lasting permanence that individual memory does not--hence Hamlet’s claim that the player’s opinions of a person can have further reaching consequences than that person’s tombstone. As Lees-Jeffries notes, “Different but very complementary perspectives on memory are introduced when the Players arrive” because they “are traders in memories” (Lees-Jeffries 26, 27).

Hamlet requests lines from a play he remembers hearing the actors perform, telling the First Player, “One speech in it I chiefly loved / ... if it live / in your memory, begin at this line” and Hamlet himself recites a few lines from memory (2.2.383-386). The speech Hamlet requests from the First Player recounts Priam’s death at the hands of Pyrrhus during the fall of Troy . Lees-Jeffries notes the link between memory and trauma in Hamlet’s request. After all, the speech deals with the death of a king--Hamlet has dead fathers on the brain. Lees-Jeffries reads Hamlet’s request as a partially-failed attempt to “fully ‘remember’ the trauma of his father’s death” since “he cannot remember the speech, which vividly imagines (and in a way that mirrors the temporal out-of-joint-ness that Hamlet himself is experiencing) a scene of violence and its shattered aftermath” (Lees-Jeffries 27).

But Hamlet's request here is not a failed remembrance. Hamlet is not concerned that his own memory might be faulty. The speech is not how Hamlet himself wants to remember his father, but provides a model for how he wants *Gertrude* to remember. When Polonius complains the speech is too long, Hamlet's encouragement to the player to continue ("say on: come to Hecuba") is telling. Rather than requesting a speech which expresses a son's grief or desire for revenge (such as lines common in any revenge tragedy), Hamlet asks to hear a description of Hecuba's grief for Priam. The request reveals again Hamlet's fixation on a wife carrying the burden of memory and grief. It was Gertrude's failure to properly grieve like Hecuba that drew Hamlet's ire in his first soliloquy:

...within a month:  
Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears  
Had left the flushing in her galled eyes,  
She married. O, most wicked speed, to post  
With such dexterity to incestuous sheets! (1.2.153-157)

Hamlet is moved by the description of Hecuba's grief, rather than Priam's death, because he yearns for the time (though all too short, over "within a month") when his mother's grief resembled his own, before hers proved false. Following the description of Hecuba's grief, Hamlet's "that within" is made visibly readable, as evident when Polonius says in an aside: "Look where he has not turned his colour and has / tears in's eyes" (2.2.457-458).

The player's ability to move Hamlet to tears is, for Hamlet, a notable difference between his private feeling of grief (his sense of "that within" which fails to affect Gertrude or anyone else at court) and the power of theatrical performance. Unlike inwardness or Hamlet's inscribed memory, theatrical performances are designed with audience reception

in mind. Alastair Fowler argues that the presence of “involved spectators” in early modern poetry and fiction reveals a “need to negotiate through such surrogate figures” that “stems from a widespread change in sensibility, and in the consciousness of art” (Fowler 66). According to Fowler, this “widespread change” is in the role of the spectator. Unlike the detached or “comparatively disengaged” narrators of medieval fiction, the observations of the early modern spectator influence or shape what is observed: “What I want to notice here is that the witness is also a participant... Viewers actively involved like this differ from modern readers, as they do from the dreamers and narrators of the Middle Ages. They belong to a distinctively Renaissance phase of mimesis” (Fowler 66). The audience’s reception was so intrinsic to a work that early modern paintings, poems, and plays often depict or dramatize audience response in the art itself.

The player’s speech provides a model of how to anticipate an audience’s response and shape it through skillful, dramatic rhetoric. Heather James argues that the Player’s account of Priam’s death projects an imagined audience and that the audience’s reception is built into the descriptive moment in the speech:

The Player’s description of Pyrrhus’s sword constitutes a meditation on the relation of action to pity, felt not by Pyrrhus but by the unknown viewer. This spectator can be glimpsed in three response-related adjectives applied to the persons and events described in the speech: ‘senseless’ Ilium, Pyrrhus’s ‘declining’ sword, and Priam’s ‘milky’ head. Ilium figures as the first surrogate spectator, one in such deep sympathy with Priam that ‘he’ is first to respond to the imminent threat to the king’s life. As the Player takes care to emphasize, however, Ilium is insensate: only if we project a viewer’s sympathies onto the citadel can we imagine ‘senseless Ilium / Seeming to feel [the] blow’ of Pyrrhus’s fell sword. Under the powerful sway of sympathy, the citadel comes fully into ‘his’ own as a personification: in compassion for the fallen king, Troy’s citadel is humbled when it ‘Stoops to his base,’ and then rises to action when ‘Tak[ing] prisoner Pyrrhus’ ear.’ As an allegorical personification of sympathy followed by decisive action, the citadel functions as a model for imitation. (James 379)

As James demonstrates above, the language used to describe Pyrrhus's violence also directs the audience's sympathies. The language used, along with the player's delivery (grain of the voice, theatrical performance, etc.), compel the audience (Hamlet, but also the theater-goers watching as Hamlet watches the Player's the performance) to identify not with Pyrrhus's wrath but to pity Priam. And when the depiction of Priam's death adopts the frame of Hecuba's gaze, the Player's dramatic recounting provides an impetus to transfer Hecuba's personal experience of grief into an artifact of social memory. Through the technology of theater, Hecuba's experience becomes the audience's experience.

We might recall here that Mullaney argues that the theater as a technology invested in audience reception, and the transference of social memory arose in response to a historical period of radical instability. According to Mullaney, early modern plays were often a repository for social memories that shifting regimes might prefer deliberately forgotten.<sup>54</sup> Hamlet's interest in using the theater both to restore his father to social memory and to reveal Claudius's guilt aligns with Mullaney's insight that the early modern theater functions as a response to "a dissociated past" created by "deep and structural attacks on social memory" (Mullaney 77). Hamlet's realization of the importance of theater does not, however, solve Hamlet's problem with memory. In his soliloquy, immediately following the player's speech, Hamlet will recognize that theatrical performance alone is not enough. A

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<sup>54</sup> Mullaney states:

In the space of a single generation, from 1530 to 1560, there were no fewer than no fewer than five official state religions, five different and competing monotheisms, incompatible versions of the one god, the one faith, the one truth, the one absolute. What one monarch declared to be sacred and timeless, the next declared to be heresy or worse, in a reformation and counter-reformation by state decree, which was also a family feud, with one Tudor half-sibling divided against another in the name of God. One of the results was a lasting sense of unsettlement, another was a lasting cynicism. (71)

performance must be capable of moving an audience, of generating affect, in order to be memorable.

Once Hamlet is alone and can contemplate the player's speech, he initially seems disdainful of theatrical performance:

Is it not monstrous that this player here,  
But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,  
Could force his soul so to his own conceit  
That from her working all his visage wann'd,  
Tears in his eyes, distraction in's aspect,  
A broken voice, and his whole function suiting  
With forms to his conceit? and all for nothing!  
For Hecuba!  
What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba,  
That he should weep for her? (2.2.486-495)

Hamlet acknowledges that the player's performance of grief was "a fiction...a dream of passion." While Hamlet's soliloquy seems, at first, to recoil from the fictional portrayal of emotion, what Hamlet finds "monstrous" is not the player's ability to skillfully perform an affecting show of grief for Hecuba; rather, what's "monstrous" is the gap in skill between the player's ability to move his audience to sympathy and Hamlet's inability to do so himself. Hamlet's concern is not with the Player's performance of grief (which moves Hamlet to tears, *despite* having no true "motive and cue for passion"), but with his *own* failed performance. Hamlet is unable to grieve in a way that moves others to share in it.

Shankar Raman states that "the player brings Hamlet visage to visage with his own failure to transform himself in the way the player so successfully has" (Raman 129).

Hamlet *does* have the inner experience of grief which the player merely acts out, but even with the emotive energy of authentic grief, Hamlet fails to draw any response from others aside from dismissal (suggested in Gertrude's question, "Why seems it so particular with

thee?”). Hamlet calls attention to his failure to properly dramatize his grief by imagining what the player of the Hecuba speech might do, “Had he the motive and the cue for passion / That I have?”:

He would drown the stage with tears  
And cleave the general ear with horrid speech,  
Make mad the guilty and appal the free,  
Confound the ignorant, and amaze indeed  
The very faculties of eyes and ears. (2.2.497-501)

A skilled actor with a traumatic wound would be capable of turning Hamlet’s experience of private emotion into a devastating social affect, a powerful shared grief which an audience would find unforgettable. But despite having this deep reserve of emotion, Hamlet realizes that he lacks the theatrical skill to use his grief to move Denmark into a state of mournful remembrance. As Raman so bluntly puts it, “Hamlet is thus a bad actor” (Raman 129).

Like a bad actor, Hamlet fails to move anyone other than himself to feel what it is like to lose a father. This failure, this lack of reception, is what turns Hamlet’s attention back on himself. Hamlet’s self-referentiality does not solve or resolve the problem of his ineffective performance of grief, but announces his confusion about it. The Player, who feels no true grief for Priam, moves Hamlet to tears; Hamlet, who believes himself to have a “motive and cue for passion,” has his grief dismissed by Claudius and Gertrude before the members of the court. The problem is not, as Hamlet initially retorts, with the trappings and suits of woe, or that grief can be a part a man might play--the problem is that this part (as the player proves) could be played by someone better than Hamlet.



## Speaking Daggers

Hamlet lacks the necessary skill to turn his private memory into social memory. He fails to find a proper medium to convey his private memory, except in a limited sense: speaking daggers to his mother. John Kerrigan states that, unlike other revengers on the early modern stage, “...Hamlet never promises to revenge, only to remember” (Kerrigan 114). Yes, but this requires some additional explanation. For Hamlet, memory is more important than revenge against Claudius. But it is not more important than his revenge against Gertrude. Hamlet’s revenge does take place in the play and is, in fact, successful, but it is not revenge along conventional lines of early modern revenge tragedies. Hamlet uses rhetorical daggers rather than literal ones, and he strikes at Gertrude’s conscience rather than at her physical body. Even Gertrude momentarily expects conventional revenge, fears that Hamlet seeks physical retribution:

HAMLET

Come, come, and sit you down; you shall not budge;  
You go not till I set you up a glass  
Where you may see the inmost part of you.

QUEEN GERTRUDE

What wilt thou do? thou wilt not murder me?  
Help, help, ho! (3.4.17-21)

For Hamlet, forcing Gertrude into a state of remembrance is itself an act of revenge (after all, he is ‘speaking daggers,’ which employs the iconography of a revenger’s concealed weapon). However, it also disperses the need for revenge. Hamlet wants revenge against Gertrude precisely because she doesn’t remember, and her lack of remembrance displaces the burden of a great man’s memory onto Hamlet. Her sexual appetite is above all, for Hamlet, evidence that Gertrude has forgotten Old Hamlet and has replaced him with

Claudius. Ironically, Hamlet's project of revenge (speaking daggers, and forcing his mother to remember his father so that he no longer has to), when successful, also undoes the need for revenge. The assurance of Gertrude's remembrance allows Hamlet to forget. And indeed he does.

Despite the Ghost's reminder not to harm Gertrude, made while Hamlet confronts his mother, Hamlet is no longer interested in revenge or memory following Gertrude's internalization of guilt and her acceptance of the burden of Old Hamlet's memory. When Hamlet returns to Denmark from England, for instance, he is almost immediately distracted from revenge against Claudius when he happens upon the Yorick's skull. Again, Hamlet is reminded of the burden of memory, as Yorick's skull again triggers Hamlet's guilt in forgetting:

Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio.  
A fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy. He hath  
borne me on his back a thousand times, and now how  
abhorred in my imagination it is! My gorge rises at it. (5.1.174-177)

While anguishing over poor Yorick's skull, Hamlet's contemplation is interrupted by Ophelia's funeral. Perhaps Hamlet is only disturbed by death when a person seems not to inspire remembrance in others. When Ophelia is properly, devastatingly mourned by her grief-stricken brother, Hamlet suddenly enters into a mode of competitive rhetoric (similar to Antonio's, discussed last chapter), jumping into Ophelia's grave and declaring that he has the greater claim to grief.

Some scholars argue that the play's interest in inwardness ends once Hamlet returns from England. Crane, for instance, argues the play shifts from an examination of internal cognition to external influences on behavior: "The graveyard scene similarly suggests that

inner cognitive process can never be known, and the play's previous preoccupation with such process is replaced by a focus on other biological processes, such as decay and digestion, or else on legal process, which attempts to define intentionality from outside" (*Shakespeare's Brain* 143). However, Crane assumes here that the "inner cognitive process" is separate and distinct from what's "outside" the self. In *Cognition in the Globe*, Evelyn Tribble argues that cognition is not fundamentally an internal operation, but is distributed "across body, brain, and world" (5). Rather than interpreting Hamlet's preoccupations with "inner cognitive process" as distinct from "biological processes," "legal process," and "intentionality from outside," it may be useful to view inner and outer processes in terms of what Tribble terms "distributed cognition." According to Tribble and scholars of "theory of mind," it is a fundamental misunderstanding to think of cognition as an exclusively interior cognitive process. Cognition, in this sense, is not just the presence of private thoughts. Instead, cognition is an interactive process, a distribution of thinking which includes not just thought-processes, but also the social and cultural apparatuses which allow certain kinds of thinking (such as "legal process") possible.<sup>55</sup> Tribble notes that 'cognitive artifacts' offload some of the cognitive load into the 'surround' itself. Thus, Hamlet uses certain cognitive practices (such as rhetorical training, which he weaponizes, speaking 'daggers' to his mother, and his rhetoric is supported by the visual aid of Old Hamlet and Claudius's portraits, which Hamlet uses to cue his mother memory) is able to unload the burden of his father's memory onto Gertrude. Hamlet grapples with two

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<sup>55</sup> For a compelling account of early modern inwardness and external display as mutually analogous, see Maus, *Inwardness and Theater in the English Renaissance*. Maus argues that "the public domain seems to derive its significance from the possibility of privacy--from what is withheld or excluded from it--and vice versa" (29).

imperatives: “Remember me” and revenge me. He seems reluctant to do either (“Must I remember?” And the Ghost appears to reprimand Hamlet for being slow to revenge). Hamlet’s solution is, in part to turn remembrance into theatrical performance, to memorialize, distributing the cognitive burden of memory to an audience. Like Hamlet turning to a wax tablet or a book as a cognitive artifact which can remember for him, Hamlet uses rhetoric and theatricality as cultural, cognitive artifacts within which he can deposit the memory of his father’s death and the affect of grief or sorrow in the loss, in order to free himself of cognitive burden.

Others remember (Gertrude, via Hamlet’s rhetoric, which penetrates her interiority and forces her to view herself as he sees her--and the audience of the Mousetrap, which turns Claudius’s murder into a stage plot) so that Hamlet does not have to. With the Ghost’s imperative (“Remember me!”) fulfilled, having been dispersed through rhetoric and theatrics, Claudius’s death happens almost as an afterthought. Kerrigan notes that Hamlet, even when finally striking at Claudius, does not do so as an act of vengeance for his father:

...[Hamlet] does not revenge his father. The weapons finally used to kill Claudius (the venomous rapier and poisoned drink) mark Hamlet's attack as spontaneous retaliation, not long-delayed retribution: the King dies for the murder of Gertrude and the Prince, not for the murder in the orchard. (“Hieronimo, Hamlet, and Remembrance” 119)

Concerning revenge, Kerrigan notes that: “Old Hamlet is not even mentioned by his son in the last, violent minutes of the play — an omission which seems the more striking when Laertes, who is being hurried off by the fell sergeant death with yet more despatch than the prince, finds time to refer to Polonius” (Kerrigan 119). An excellent point. Hamlet never truly takes revenge in the play, not in the traditional manner. Hamlet retaliates against

Claudius for poisoning him and his mother, not for the murder of his father. If anything, as Kerrigan notes, Hamlet seems to finally take revenge against Claudius for poisoning Gertrude. Hamlet's violence against Claudius reenacts Hamlet's own (impending) death and Gertrude's: Hamlet stabs Claudius with the pointed tip of the rapier and then forces Claudius to drink poison from Gertrude's cup. Neither actions recall the murder of Old Hamlet, and even Hamlet's final castigation suggests it is his mother, not Old Hamlet, who is being revenged: "Here, thou incestuous, damned Dane, / Drink of this potion. Is the union here? / Follow my mother" (5.2.309-311).

## **Conclusion**

Facing his own death, Hamlet commissions Horatio to be the bearer of his memory:

O God, Horatio, what a wounded name,  
Things standing thus unknown, shall live behind me!  
If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart  
Absent thee from felicity awhile,  
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain,  
To tell my story. (5.2.328-333)

Hamlet's commission of remembrance is also a repetition of the Ghost's imperative to "Remember me!" The play suggests that being forgotten is a fate worse than death. Earlier in the play, due to the distress of being unacknowledged or unrecognized by others, Hamlet expressed a desire to cease thought, to resolve into a dew, to be a figure without impulse, passion, or form. Even death, if it be "an undiscovered country" in which consciousness must roam eternally (if the Ghost is any indication), was not a solution to isolated subjectivity. After all, even in death, the Ghost cannot forget that he might be forgotten.

As social recognition eluded him throughout the play, Hamlet finally settles on a form that does not require his self-consciousness or self-awareness. Hamlet wants to be translated into story, to become social memory. He wants to become narrative itself. Horatio's living breath is figured as a vessel for Hamlet's living memory, and the transmission of this memory becomes the reason for Horatio's continued breathing. Hamlet lives, not as "words, words, words" in a commonplace book or wax tablet, but as living memory, recollected through Horatio's mouth. Where other revenger tragedies restore social or civic order (as, one could argue, this play does to), Hamlet seems to restore not order so much as the affective power of narrative memory. He wants stories of the dead to be impactful rather than easily, deliberately forgotten. He wants his own loss, and--by proxy--his father's loss--to affect the world. He wants to pass on "that which passes show" to those who hear his sad tale. Kerrigan, too, notes Hamlet's desire to become social memory: "If the graveyard focuses Hamlet's imagination on his approaching end, it also reminds him of the possibility of survival through memory. As he has cherished his father, so he hopes to be cherished. That is why Horatio is so important to him at the end of the play..." (Kerrigan 120).

By the play's the end, Hamlet wants to *be* a memory without being burdened *by* memory. He wants others to remember him, so he need not himself remember. He wants to be the story, but not the storyteller nor the audience. Only in imagining himself as narrative does Hamlet finally find an end to his own problem of subjectivity by becoming a subject, in the sense that he becomes a topic, an object of inquiry which demands, like the Ghost, to be remembered, to be interpreted, to be made meaningful through our ceaseless

contemplation of him. Horatio must not die, nor can he rest from bearing Hamlet's memory. Horatio is, perhaps, the narrative embodiment of textual scholarship itself, it is the role we inhabit when Hamlet is a figure on whom we think, write, or teach.

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