

A COMPARISON OF HAMLET TO CONTEMPORARY
REVENGE PLAYS

A THESIS
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH
IN THE GRADUATE DIVISION OF THE
TEXAS STATE COLLEGE FOR WOMEN

DEPARTMENT OF
ENGLISH

BY

ELISABETH BAUGH MEENACH, B. A.

DENTON, TEXAS

JULY, 1948

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Texas State College for Women

DENTON, TEXAS

July, 1948

We hereby recommend that the thesis prepared
under our supervision by Elisabeth Baugh Meenach
entitled _____

A COMPARISON OF HAMLET TO CONTEMPORARY
REVENGE PLAYS

be accepted as fulfilling this part of the requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts.

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PREFACE

During Shakespeare's career, which stretched roughly from 1589 to 1611, the revenge play developed into a distinct type of tragedy.

The revenge plays were almost entirely popular adaptations of elements borrowed from the tragedies of Seneca. In Chapter I, therefore, the writer will discuss in some detail the characteristics of Senecan drama, give a brief account of the history of Senecan tragedy in sixteenth-century England and its evolution into the popular revenge tragedy, and outline the general features found in revenge drama as a whole.

Selected for comparison to Hamlet are eight plays which are the most important ones written within this given period. For analysis they will be divided into two groups. The first group, consisting of four plays produced on the stage before the final version of Hamlet, will be examined in Chapter II. These early revenge plays, which set the fashion for this type of tragedy in the Elizabethan period, include Kyd's The Spanish Tragedy, the first revenge play to be presented on the English stage, Marston's Antonio's Revenge, Chettle's Hoffman, and Tourneur's The Atheist's Tragedy.

In Chapter III the second group of revenge plays, those which followed Hamlet, will be analyzed. These later revenge plays include Tourneur's The Revenger's Tragedy, Chapman's The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois, Webster's The White Devil and The Duchess of Malfi, and although they contain the same general elements present in the earlier tragedies of blood, they show a quality of decadence and corruption, of sadism and sheer malice which marked the new trend in revenge drama. In order to point out more clearly the similarity of the dramatic elements and stage materials in all these plays, both Chapter II and Chapter III will be divided into six sections under the topic headings of Plot Motives, Characters, Soliloquies, Dramatic Scenes and Details, Elements Which Differentiate One Play from Another, and Moral Implications.

Although the Ur-Hamlet play and the 1st Quarto Hamlet had their place in the development of revenge tragedy, only the final Hamlet will be considered in this study. By the same method of analysis used in the two previous chapters, the writer will attempt to show in the final chapter of this thesis that Shakespeare worked with the same conventional elements and stage techniques which other playwrights were using, and yet by an emphasis upon the moral and spiritual rather than on the physical and by a humanizing and psychological development of character reflecting

not only the thoughts and feelings of his own age but the moral philosophy of succeeding ages, Shakespeare composed the finest of the revenge plays as well as one of the world's literary masterpieces.

The writer wishes to express her sincere appreciation to Dr. Ivan Schulze for his guidance and encouragement throughout the writing of this thesis.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE	111
CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE REVENGE PLAY IN THE ELIZABETHAN PERIOD	1
II. THE REVENGE PLAYS PRECEDING <u>HAMLET</u>	19
III. THE REVENGE PLAYS FOLLOWING <u>HAMLET</u>	79
IV. <u>HAMLET</u>	148
BIBLIOGRAPHY	190

CHAPTER I
THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE REVENGE PLAY
IN THE ELIZABETHAN PERIOD

The master influence of Greek and Roman literature upon Renaissance drama on the Continent in turn greatly affected the course of English tragedy in the Elizabethan period. In England, more than on the Continent, Roman classicism took precedence over the Greek and was confined to the plays of Seneca.¹ No author was more highly regarded than Seneca, nor was there one who exerted a deeper influence upon the Elizabethan mind and the Elizabethan form of tragedy.²

One of the principal types of tragedy of the Elizabethan period was the revenge play, or tragedy of blood. It was this variety of tragedy more than any other which owed its origin and development directly to the strong influence of Seneca. Senecan tragedy found its way onto the English stage by means of translation, imitation, and adaptation. Since it became both an inspiration and a model for revenge tragedy, a description of the dominant traits

¹Ashley H. Thorndike, Tragedy (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, n. d.), pp. 32-33.

²Seneca His Tenne Tragedies translated into English, ed. Thomas Newton Anno 1581; T. S. Eliot, introductory essay, I, pp. v-vi (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1927). Hereafter this essay will be referred to as T. S. Eliot, Introductory Essay to Seneca His Tenne Tragedies.

or characteristics of Senecan drama will be of service.

Seneca, a Roman philosopher of the first century A. D., composed his tragedies as moral dialogues for private declamation, or simply as didactic essays for the instruction of his readers. It is doubtful that these plays were ever acted on the Roman stage, nor were they intended to be stage productions.¹ The plays themselves are not "playable," having many situations which would be impractical for stage presentation.² Because they were so well suited for recitation, it is thought that they were probably written to be declaimed by a single person, an "elocutionist," before an "imperial highbrow audience of crude sensibility but considerable sophistication in the ingenuities of language."³

In composing his plays, Seneca borrowed his themes from Greek mythology, choosing those highly sensational stories which dealt with acts of violence and depravity such as family feuds, murder of parents by children or children by parents, revenge, suicide, lust, adultery, and incest. The tone of melodrama and excitement was sustained by insanity, acts of fiendish cruelty, and calamitous misfortune. Crime and its retribution was the central motive of each

¹Thomas Marc Parrott and Robert Hamilton Ball, A Short View of Elizabethan Drama (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, n. d.), p. 36.

²T. S. Eliot, Introductory Essay to Seneca His Tenne Tragedies, p. xi.

³Ibid., pp. viii-ix.

story, and the supporting scenes were always tragic, without comic relief. Seneca opened his plays with lengthy explanations of preceding events and presented only the last phase of action as the drama itself.¹

These bloody deeds in the plays of Seneca always took place behind the scenes, never on the stage itself, and were reported by a messenger called the Nuntius. Although many deaths occur, the fact that they are remote from the stage and at the same time enveloped in long, aphoristic speeches by the messenger, tends to lessen the effect of horror. Because the drama of action takes place entirely within the drama of words, the real action concealed from the audience, the plays of Seneca have been compared to the modern "broadcasted drama."² There is very little connected plot as we know the term or as it came to be developed in the Elizabethan revenge plays. Seneca held the interest of his listeners, not by the story itself which was well known, but by a cleverness of dialogue combined with narration and beautiful description; his element of suspense was created almost entirely by means of verbal effects.³

Seneca, as the literary exponent of Roman Stoicism, incorporated his moral philosophy into his plays, expressing

¹Thorndike, op. cit., pp. 32-33; Parrott and Ball, op. cit., p. 35.

²Eliot, op. cit., pp. ix-xi.

³Ibid., pp. xxiv-xxv.

it chiefly in the moralizing and reflective soliloquies, sometimes in the chorus, and often in the very pose adopted by the hero. Whatever the medium, Seneca always directs attention toward the individual by emphasizing the self-consciousness or self-dramatization of the hero, the emotional attitude of "I am myself alone," and the tragedy of the individual. The principal character, most often the hero, speaks in long self-revelatory soliloquies in which he displays a detailed analysis of his own emotions, thoughts, and moods of passion with an "absence of Athenian religion, a pagan cosmopolitanism, and an almost modern introspection."¹ The monologues tend to be ranting, oratorical, and often bombastic. These expressions, although crude, represent an early attempt at psychology by showing an interest in the way in which a character's emotional and mental processes respond to circumstances and events.²

The chorus contributes to the philosophical element of the plays, more than to the action itself. Taking the place of the Presenter in medieval plays, it appears usually after each of the first four acts, moralizing upon the action and prophesying its outcome, but sometimes uttering lamentations or even singing hymns in praise of some deity.³

¹Thorndike, op. cit., p. 34.

²Parrott and Ball, op. cit., p. 35.

³Thorndike, op. cit., p. 34; Parrott and Ball, op. cit., p. 36.

Roman Stoicism is revealed particularly by the attitude of self-dramatization which the hero assumes at any moment of tragic intensity. Especially in the death scene is the hero able to dramatize himself effectively. All attention is directed toward him, and by remaining conscious to his final breath, he preserves his personality and character and selects this moment to utter his most sententious maxims. The posture of dying offers the best opportunity for expressing Senecan morality.¹

Whether in the form of Olympian gods and goddesses or the inhabitants of the underworld, Seneca makes much use of supernatural allusions and personages. References are made to Acheron, Charon, the Stigian lake, and other infernal regions; spirits and ghosts are called up from the underworld; fretting Furies from Hell torment those mortals who have "corrupted consciences" and "inflamed minds."² The most important of the supernatural visitants and one which represented the most exact carry-over into the Elizabethan revenge plays is the Ghost, which, when appearing as a personage, plays a definite role. Sometimes it comes to incite hatred and seek revenge as the Tantalus in Thyestis;

¹T. S. Eliot, Selected Essays 1917-1932 (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, n. d.), pp. 110-119. See also T. S. Eliot, Introductory Essay to Seneca His Tenne Tragedies, p. xiv.

²Seneca, His Tenne Tragedies translated into English, ed. Thomas Newton, 1581 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1927; London: Constable and Company, Ltd.), I, p. 190.

at other times it is only spoken of as having been seen as the Ghost of Achilles in the Troas.¹ Whatever shape these supernatural beings assume, in general they represent vengeance seeking justice and retribution for crimes or mortal sins committed on earth.

The characters in the plays of Seneca are types rather than individuals; they are not made humanly vital, and all seem to speak in the same kind of voice, usually ranting and declamatory. Each character recites in turn, comparable to the way in which an actor declaimed in a Greek tragedy.²

The characters

behave like members of a minstrel troupe sitting in a semicircle, rising in turn, each to do his "number," or varying their recitations by a song or a little back-chat.³

The leading character in every play, in conflict against one or more opponents, engages in a plan of intrigue. With the hero is his faithful friend or confidant; the villain or chief opponent is accompanied by his accomplice; the heroine is served by her nurse.⁴

The style of Seneca's plays is identified by his abundance of declamatory rhetoric, oratory, and bombast. Seneca maintains a consistency in his writing, seldom rising

¹Eliot, Introductory Essay to Seneca His Tenne Tragedies, p. xlviii.

²Ibid., p. ix.

³Ibid., p. x.

⁴Thorndike, op. cit., p. 34. See also Parrott and Ball, op. cit., p. 36.

above or falling below his level.¹ His style is artificial, sonorous, with constant use of antithesis, hyperbole, and stichomythia, an epigrammatic speech-and-reply dialogue in alternating lines, which he altered by allowing the sentence of one speaker to be caught and twisted by the next so as to cross one rhythmic pattern with another. His lines are filled with aphorisms and sentiments, allegories and abstractions. The long speeches are monologues, exhortations, arguments. The solemnity and weight of Seneca's iambic pentameter is responsible for the evolution of the English blank verse cadence.² He divided his plays into five acts, a technique of dramatic structure which was adopted by all regular English drama.

When the first translations of the plays of Seneca had been made into English, Seneca had already penetrated Italian and French drama. By the end of the fifteenth century, his work had become the established model among the Italians. Translations of his dramas were not only a regular part of the Italian school curriculum but were being presented on the stage as well. In 1552 Jodelle's Cleopatre Captive marked the beginning of Senecan influence in France.³ In England Jasper Heywood made the first translation of

¹Eliot, Introductory Essay to Seneca His Tenne Tragedies, p. xvii.

²Ibid., p. xxx. See also Parrott and Ball, op. cit., pp. 34-35.

³Thorndike, op. cit., pp. 37-38.

Seneca, that of the Troas, in 1559; Thyestis followed in 1560, and Hercules in 1561. Aedipus by Alexander Nevyle was translated in 1560 and was printed in 1563. Octavia by Nuce appeared in 1566. Studley translated Agamemnon, Medea, and Hercules Aetaeus in 1566, and Hippolytus in 1567. In 1581 Thomas Newton translated Thebais and collected all ten plays in a volume which was published under the title Seneca His Tenne Tragedies Translated into English.¹

In England as on the Continent the early imitations of Senecan drama were composed for special performances before a small and select audience either of the court or university.² Plays of Seneca and Latin plays in imitations of Seneca were produced at the universities. In 1551 Troades was acted in Latin at Trinity College, Cambridge. This presentation was followed by four other plays of Seneca in the Latin between 1559 and 1561. During the 'sixties, at the two universities and the Inns of Court were written and performed numerous Latin plays in strict imitation of the Senecan model.³

Fashion at the Royal Court followed the lead of the universities. Gorboduc, the first English tragedy in regular

¹Eliot, Introductory Essay to Seneca His Tenne Tragedies, p. xlv. See also Felix E. Schelling, Elizabethan Drama 1558-1642 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, n. d.), I, p. 97.

²Thorndike, op. cit., p. 36.

³Eliot, Introductory Essay to Seneca His Tenne Tragedies, p. xlxvi.

form, was written in slavish imitation of Seneca, by Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville, and was performed for Queen Elizabeth during the Christmas festivities of the Inner Temple in 1561-1562.¹ The story resembles Seneca's Thebais and concerns a legendary British ruler who, by dividing his kingdom between his two sons, sets off action which involves the murder of four royal personages, a general slaughter of commoners by the nobles, and a resulting civil war. The murders, committed offstage, are related by messengers; a chorus appears at the end of each of the first four acts; a dumb show is enacted at the beginning of each act; with the possible exception of Gorboduc, the characters have no individual personality, and the nobles and henchmen are stereotyped. Other Senecan features include a superabundance of stilted, moralizing speeches, and an array of supernatural visitants. The play observes the Senecan structure of five acts and is written in blank verse, the first ever spoken on the English stage.² Two other early court tragedies rigidly imitating Seneca were Jocasta by Gascoigne and Kinelworth, acted by the Gentlemen of Gray's Inn in 1566, and Tancred and Gismunda, or Gismond of Salerne, acted before the Queen at the Inner Temple in 1568. The latter was the first English tragedy to employ the theme of love as a central motive. The

¹Thorndike, op. cit., p. 38.

²Ibid., pp. 38-54. See also H. C. Schweikert (ed.), Early English Plays 900-1600 (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, n. d.), pp. 296-297.

Misfortune of Arthur is another Senecan court drama written in 1588 by Thomas Hughes, and although performed too late to be considered an influence in the transition to the popular stage, it is significant for its attempt to use British legend as Seneca had employed the classical myth.¹

As the Latin university plays had affected court drama, so in turn did the plays of the Royal Court influence the drama of the popular stage. Senecan tragedy, the prevailing type of tragedy in learned and court circles, was gradually being assimilated into popular drama where the emphasis on sensationalism, melodrama, and extravagant discourse attracted audiences to the public theaters. The Lamentable Death of Locrine, acted in 1586,² was one of the first examples of Senecan drama transferred to the popular stage. The authorship, though unknown, has been assigned to George Peele. Based upon the legend of Locrine, a mythical king of England, the story is told in chronicle play order. The plot centers around a bloody family feud and a war between the Huns and the Britons, and the violent action is brought onto the stage. Although the lines of the play still retain the abundance of rhetoric and classical allusions characteristic of the court plays, the serious scenes are mixed with "farce and boisterous horse-play."³ Senecan

¹Thorndike, op. cit., pp. 54-60.

²Schelling, op. cit., I, 136.

³Ibid., p. 256.

elements include two ghosts, a dumb show, prologue and epilogue, a chorus, double revenge,¹ and the entire play "bristles with horror, bombast, and Senecan imagery."² Wherein the court plays were rigid in the manner of their model, Locrine embodied a mixture of the popular and romantic elements.³

By the time The Spanish Tragedy and Ur-Hamlet were produced, Elizabethan playwrights were under the influence not only of Seneca but of their English predecessors as well. With the first step having already been made toward the adaptation of Seneca to the public stage and with Seneca "at his finger's end,"⁴ Thomas Kyd in 1587⁵ composed The Spanish Tragedy. Considered to be the first tragedy of revenge presented on the English stage,⁶ it was one of the most successful tragedies throughout the Elizabethan period and influenced the whole course of popular revenge tragedy. Kyd is credited not only with this distinctive production but also with the authorship of the Ur-Hamlet play, now non-

¹The facts in this paragraph were taken from Thorndike, op. cit., p. 107; Schelling, op. cit., pp. 256-257; and Eliot, Introductory Essay to Seneca His Tenne Tragedies, p. xlvii.

²Schelling, op. cit., I, p. 578, Footnote 2.

³Ibid., p. 97.

⁴Parrott and Ball, op. cit., p. 74.

⁵A. H. Thorndike, "The Relation of Hamlet to Contemporary Revenge Plays," PMLA, XVII (1902), p. 130. Hereafter this will be referred to as Thorndike, PMLA.

⁶Schelling, op. cit., I, p. 553.

extant, which was known to have been acted before 1589.¹

The Senecan tragedies of the popular stage differed from those of the academic circle chiefly in that they brought the action with all its blood and violence onto the stage where it was acted out in view of the audience rather than performed offstage and reported by a messenger; dramatic action took the place of discourse and narration. In the earlier popular revenge plays all emphasis was upon the physical aspects rather than upon the moral and spiritual.

The immense and prolonged success of this type of dramatic production is demonstrated by the series of revenge tragedies which flourished in this period. Since they had a great many elements in common, these characteristics should be observed before an analysis of the specific plays selected for this study is offered. Ashley H. Thorndike defined the revenge drama as

a tragedy whose leading motive is revenge and whose main action deals with the progress of this revenge, leading to the death of the murderers and often the death of the avenger himself.²

In a more detailed fashion John Addington Symonds described the revenge play as

a romantic story of crime and suffering, a violent oppressor, a wronged man bent upon the execution of some subtle vengeance, a ghost or two, a notorious

¹Thorndike, PMLA, p. 130.

²Ibid., p. 125.

villain working as the tyrant's instrument, and a whole crop of murders, deaths, and suicides to the end of action.¹

Some elements appear almost without fail in a tragedy of blood. For example, the plot is centered around a revenger who is seeking retribution for the murder of a loved one, conventionally a father for his son or vice versa, but sometimes a brother for his sister, or even a man for his betrothed lady. After the first vow of vengeance, the revenger engages in a complicated series of intrigues which include improbable disguises and the use of much cunning and trickery. Working against him is either the conscious counter-intrigue of his intended victim or the plots of other persons which, although totally outside the revenge circle, nevertheless hinder his movements. During the course of his maneuvers, the revenger is beset with hesitation, and while manifesting a real reluctance toward his task or deliberating upon the moral justification of revenge, he almost invariably passes up a golden opportunity to slay his adversary.

Emphasizing the main plot is a minor revenge subplot which shows a marked similarity in the details of its enactment but a contrast in the effect upon its participants. Running parallel to the revenge motive are elements of lust, depravity, and sheer malice, which as motivating

¹J. A. Symonds (ed.), Webster and Tourneur (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, n. d.), Introduction, p. ix.

forces are barely perceptible in early plays but which grow in intensity to such an extent that in the later plays these elements of moral corruption override and submerge the basic blood-for-blood reprisal.

Supernatural agents consistently play an important part in a revenge play. Appearing in the form of the wronged victim, a ghost rises from the underworld to incite vengeance for his murder. Sometimes the ghost takes a part in the dialogue and directs the action, and at other times it appears merely as a stage effect. In addition to these spectral apparitions much use is made of natural phenomena such as blazing comets, storms, and fiery skies, all of which serve as portents. Other superstitions of the day are employed as ominous forebodings.

Reinforcing the atmosphere of sensationalism which permeates these revenge plays is madness, both real and feigned. Insanity is portrayed in varying degrees of intensity, from exhibitions of wild, frenzied ravings and grotesque antics to merely a display of ironic cynicism.

Slaughter, suicide, and torture create a riot of terror and horror in revenge tragedies. Nearly all of the principal characters are slain by some violent means. Most frequently the playwright uses the stock devices of poisoned cups, stabbing, hanging, and strangling, but occasionally he employs a more ingenious method such as the kissing of a

poisoned object or the placing of a burning crown on the victim's head. Almost every play becomes a "chamber of horrors"¹ not only by reckless murder and bloodshed but also by such theatrically effective displays as the exhibition of dead and dismembered bodies, a bleeding head or a dead man's hand, the brandishing of swords and daggers, the flaunting of a bloody handkerchief or the victim's skull as a symbol of death and revenge. Moreover, funerals and dirges, tombs and charnel houses, the songs and lamentations of mad people as well as the many graveyard and night scenes produce a thoroughly gruesome atmosphere.

An abundance of soliloquies forms an essential and important element in every revenge tragedy, although the themes of these reflective speeches may differ somewhat in each play. Particularly in the earlier plays, they are meditative broodings concerning the hero's overburdening sense of duty to revenge, the wrongs of fate, and the ills of the world. At times they are purely objective in nature and relate forthcoming events, or by revealing the speaker's thoughts, they may serve as a character portrayal. In the late plays of the period they take on a tone of obscenity and bitter cynicism and find for subjects the sensuality of women, the corruption of the courts, and hypocrisy and greed.

Together with the soliloquies, most of the revenge

¹Thorndike, Tragedy, p. 200..

plays contain a profusion of long, bombastic speeches on the philosophical significance of virtue and evil, life and death. Some attempts are made at moral implication, but except for the work of Shakespeare these are as unconvincing as they are unsuccessful.

Certain prevailing character types are found in every revenge play. Since the setting of each play is laid within some court circle, the plot involves royal personages or the nobility. The revenger may be either the hero or the villain, but he accomplishes his revenge only after much intrigue and in so doing usually loses his own life. The villain, black with sin, is either the Machiavellian villain or the conventional malcontent. In the later plays great interest is shown in the development of his role, particularly in the psychological effect that crime has had upon his character. Side by side with the hero is his friend or confidant. An accomplice, spurred by greed for gold, helps the villain to commit his crimes and is usually done away with after he has served his purpose. With the exception of such a character as Vittoria in The White Devil, little stress is given to feminine roles. The early playwrights spent no effort in the delineation of their characters; types rather than individuals, they are puppets who act according to the necessities of the plot. In the later plays, however, the characters are presented more realistically and attain a certain degree of dramatic impressiveness.

Among the spectacular scenic details which are regularly found in revenge plays are banquets, receptions of ambassadors, wedding celebrations, warring political upheavals, both domestic and foreign, family feuds, duels and sword fights. Used with dramatic effectiveness are dumb shows, masques or a play-within-the-play. Throughout the plays are such conventional techniques as the wearing of the black, the reading of a book before a soliloquy, and the swearing of oaths, usually on the cross of the sword. Exaggerated expressions of emotion are displayed by gestures of falling to the ground in a show of grief and the stamping or stabbing of a dead body in a demonstration of hatred.

The first and early group of revenge tragedies which embody these characteristics includes The Spanish Tragedy by Thomas Kyd, 1585-1587, to which Ben Jonson made his additions in 1599-1600; Antonio's Revenge by John Marston, 1599-1600 (1602);¹ Hoffman by Henry Chettle, 1602; and The Atheist's Tragedy by Cyril Tourneur, 1602-1603 (1611). Shakespeare presented his final version of Hamlet in 1604 after which followed a series of revenge plays comprising The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois by George Chapman, 1606 (1613); The Revenger's Tragedy by Cyril Tourneur, 1607; The White Devil, 1611-1612; and The Duchess of Malfi, 1613-1614 (1623), both by John Webster. Although there were many revenge plays

¹Dates in parentheses represent dates of publication.

written during this period, only these important ones will be included in this thesis.

CHAPTER II

THE REVENGE PLAYS PRECEDING HAMLET

The four important revenge tragedies which preceded the stage production of Shakespeare's final version of Hamlet developed many conventional dramatic techniques and helped to establish the revenge tragedy as a distinct and popular type of theatrical production.

After the prolonged success of The Spanish Tragedy and the Ur-Hamlet, Marston revived the interest in revenge plays with his Antonio's Revenge. Following the new trend and Jonson's and Shakespeare's lead as they revised respectively the two earlier plays, Chettle wrote The Tragedy of Hoffman and Tourneur, The Atheist's Tragedy.

An analysis of these plays by plot motives, soliloquies, character types, and dramatic scenes and details will show the similarity of their material. It will be noted also the manner in which each writer handled his material and the elements which differentiate one play from another. Finally, attention is given to the moral implications, if present, that each play includes.

Plot Motives

The fundamental motive of The Spanish Tragedy is the revenge of a father for the murder of his son. The murder

of Horatio and the subsequent action by Hieronomo leading up to the final culmination of his revenge make up the motivating force of the entire play. Other motives are subsidiary, but important in weaving together the plot and in emphasizing the principal motive.

Hesitation on the part of Hieronomo, his constant meditation and reflection before finally fulfilling his revenge, helps to stretch the play into its necessary five acts. Hieronomo needs much inciting and an abundance of proof. He is beset with doubt, indecision, disbelief, and even thoughts of suicide before he is aroused sufficiently by exhortations on the part of Isabella and Bel-Imperia and the irrevocable proof offered by the letters from Bel-Imperia and from Pedringano to carry out his revenge. When he reads the blood-written letter from Bel-Imperia, he is disturbed by doubt, thinking the accusation against Lorenzo some form of treachery. After he intercepts the letter Pedringano intended for Lorenzo and is thoroughly convinced of Lorenzo's guilt, he vows immediate justice from the king, yet contemplates suicide, and when he has a chance to tell the king, delays and lets the opportunity slip by. Again restirring his emotions toward revenge, he begins his trickery as he soliloquizes,

No, no Hieronomo, thou must enjoin
Thine eyes to observation, and thy tongue
To milder speeches than thy spirit affords,
Thy heart to patience, and thy hands to rest,

Thy cup to courtesy and thy knee to bow
Till to revenge thou know when, where, and how.¹

Then, finally, in the last act, impelled by the fiery words of Bel-Imperia, he determinedly plans the play, sets his stage, and takes revenge.

Madness is an essential motive throughout and helps lend authenticity to his delay. In some instances Hieronomo feigns madness, often with ironic implications, such as the giving of direction to the two Portuguese in which he talks in abstractions about the path from a guilty conscience. Near madness is evidenced in the scene in which the king mentions the ransom money due Horatio; frantically calling for justice, Hieronomo bursts into a furious display of rage. Jonson intensifies the insanity of Hieronomo by adding the scene in which Hieronomo discourses with the Painter. The talk of the tree on which Horatio was hanged and the description of the picture Hieronomo wished painted of himself emphasize his tormented mind. Hieronomo's madness becomes most real when the old man petitions Hieronomo about his murdered son; Hieronomo, in his hallucination, sees Don Bazulto as Horatio grown old and returned to earth to chide him for his delay. The sub-title of Quarto 2, 1602, "Old Hieronomo is mad again," shows how important the portrayal

¹Thomas Kyd, The Spanish Tragedy, IV, vi, ll. 210-215, Elizabethan Plays, ed. Hazelton Spencer (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1933). Hereafter this will be referred to as The Spanish Tragedy.

of madness was in the stage presentation.¹ To heighten this effect Isabella, Horatio's mother, becomes so insane with grief that she commits suicide.

Intrigue, both by and against the revenger, provides an important element in the plot. Hieronimo proceeds toward the accomplishment of his revenge first by a pretended reconciliation with Lorenzo, making it more convincing by the dramatic flourish of his sword and the declaration that he will fight anyone who spoke against him; then later he tricks Lorenzo into being an actor in the play. When Lorenzo asks him what part he will play, Hieronimo ironically answers, "I'll play the murderer, I'll warrant you."²

Lorenzo's intrigues are numerous. To satisfy his ambition, he sets out to marry his sister, Bel-Imperia, to Prince Balthazar. Upon discovery of her love for Horatio, he pays Pedringano gold to spy upon the lovers. After playing upon the passions of Balthazar, Lorenzo, together with Balthazar, surprises Horatio in the garden and murders him, afterwards kidnaping Bel-Imperia and holding her prisoner to prevent her disclosure of the crime. By means of a diabolical double-play, Lorenzo not only rids himself of Serberine, who knows too much, but also his accomplice, Pedringano, who is caught in the actual act of murder by guards whom Lorenzo

¹Thorndike, PMLA, p. 143.

²The Spanish Tragedy, V, 1, l. 127.

has placed there for that specific purpose. His cat-and-mouse play with Pedrangino leads to what little grim humor there is in the play. Sending a Page to the prison with a box which was supposed to contain his pardon but which in reality was empty, Lorenzo bolsters the confidence of Pedringano to such an extent that he jests with the hangman up to the very moment of his execution and is strung up in the midst of impudent remarks.

Lorenzo further protects his schemes by interrupting any attempted conversation between Hieronimo and the King. After being questioned by his father, the Duke of Castile, he is on his guard but makes his one mistake by allowing himself to fall into the snare Hieronimo has laid for him in the play.

The main situation is emphasized more strongly by its contrast to a minor but similar situation. Hieronimo's grief is reinforced by the Viceroy's grief over the supposed death of his son. This sub-plot contains a villain in the person of Villuppo, who deceived the Viceroy into believing that Balthazar is dead, shot in the back by Alexandro. At the precise moment Alexandro is to be burned at the stake, the ambassador enters, reveals the treachery, and Villuppo is apprehended. Throughout these scenes, the Viceroy continually bewails the loss of his son and utters exaggerated lamentations in a manifestation of his love and grief.

Another contrasting situation is offered by the petition of the old man whose son has also been murdered.

Violent and bloody murder forms another definite element in the motives of the play. Ten of the characters meet death in some extreme manner during the course of the action. Horatio is hanged and stabbed; Serberine is stabbed by Pedringano who is afterwards executed by hanging; Isabella stabs herself in a fit of insanity; and in the play within the play Hieronimo stabs Lorenzo; Bel-Imperia kills Balthazar and then herself; after being captured, Hieronimo stabs the Duke of Castile and then turns the knife against himself. The play ends with the two kings on the stage among five dead bodies.

The love element, though ostensibly the cause of Lorenzo's intrigue, is actually a thinly defined motive. The proposed marriage alliance of Bel-Imperia to Prince Balthazar is the purpose of the extravagant entertainment given the Portuguese and upon its completion hang the ambitious desires of Lorenzo. Horatio, by taking the place of Andrea in Bel-Imperia's affection, seems about to thwart these plans, and it is for this reason that he is murdered. Balthazar is determined to win her love or to lose his life trying, and Lorenzo is even more determined that he shall succeed. Bel-Imperia, after having witnessed Horatio's murder, having suffered imprisonment, and having been forced by both kings to accept Balthazar's proposal of marriage, develops a sudden fierceness and aids Hieronimo considerably

in accomplishing his revenge in the last scene.

Again in Antonio's Revenge, the central theme is revenge, that of a son for his father. Antonio's father, Andrugio, has been poisoned, and his friend Feliche, butchered by Piero. Before his father's death was announced, an ominous dream led Antonio to anticipate some kind of disaster. Two ghosts had appeared to him, one with his breast "fresh pounc'd with bleeding wounds,"¹ the other in the shape of his father crying "Revenge." Outside, the sky was glowing with flames, fires, and a blazing comet.

Upon learning of the death of his father and Feliche, Antonio suspected villainy and, after the revelation of his father's ghost, required no additional proof; yet the hesitation element is present. Since Antonio was already on the verge of madness over the loss of his father, the fickleness of his mother who was planning to marry Piero, and the adulterous accusation against his betrothed Mellida, the Ghost's words only added to his confusion. He hesitates, becomes frantic and irresolute, voices long and passionate laments of his grief, and with sword already drawn neglects an opportunity to kill Piero, excusing his delay by saying,

¹Antonio's Revenge, I, i, l. 107, The Works of John Marston, ed. A. H. Bullen (London: John C. Nimmo, 3 vols., 1887), I. Hereafter this will be referred to as Antonio's Revenge.

No, not so;

This shall be sought for; I'll force him to feed on
 life
 Till he shall loath it. This shall be the close
 Of vengeance' strain.¹

In wild frenzy he wastes his vengeance upon Piero's innocent son, stabbing him because he has Piero's blood in his veins, and upon advice of the Ghost decides to don a fool's costume so that he can roam the court and await a further chance to reach Piero. Finally in the last scene after much dissimulation and many maneuvers, Antonio accomplishes his revenge sensationally by means of a masque while the Duke is at the banquet celebrating his forthcoming marriage.

Antonio's madness, both real and feigned, forms an important motive. In the first part of the play his madness is almost real and is depicted as something terrible. One disaster after another has been heaped upon Antonio. The announcement of his father's death and the discovery of Feliche's body, together with the charges against Mellida's chastity, happen almost simultaneously. Added to these is his mother's submission to the marriage proposals of Piero. Already torn with grief and despair, he becomes so frantic after the encounter with the Ghost that when Maria finds him raging and frantically vowing revenge, she is almost correct in thinking him insane.

Antonio's madness reaches its climax in the stabbing

¹Ibid., III, 1, ll. 136-139.

of Julio. His mad discourse to the child illustrates the depraved state of his tormented mind:

Come, pretty tender child.
It is not thee I hate, not thee I kill.
Thy father's blood that flows within thy vein,
Is it I loathe; is that revenge must such.

.

Now barks the wolf against the full-cheek'd moon;
Now lions half-clam'd entrails roar for food;
Now croaks the toad, and night-crows screech aloud,
Fluttering 'bout casements of departed souls;
Now gapes the graves, and through their yawns let loose
Imprison'd spirits to revisit earth;
And now, swart night, to swell thy hour out,
Behold I spurt warm blood in thy black eyes.¹

After Antonio stabs Julio and sprinkles his blood around the hearse, he cries,

Lo, thus I heave my blood-dyed hands to heaven,
Even like insatiate hell still crying, More!
My heart hath thirsting dropsies after gore.
Sound peace and rest to church, night-ghosts, and graves:
Blood cries for blood, and murder murder craves.²

Antonio never feigns madness. Instead he plays the part of his mother's fool after the Ghost bids him assume a disguise. Dressed in a fool's attire, he makes his appearance with "a little toy of walnut shell and soap to make bubbles."³ With the possible exception of his fool's talk of blowing bubbles, Antonio exhibits very little irony. His madness is wild and ranting, terrible and often sadistic, but not ironical.

¹Ibid., III, 1, ll. 174-191.

²Ibid., ll. 208-212.

³Ibid., stage direction to IV, 1.

An instance of near insanity is seen when Maria appears in a distracted condition. She approaches the tomb twice with "her hair about her ears,"¹ but after the Ghost tells her to assist his revenge, she is thereafter resolute.

Intrigue and counter-intrigue play a large part in the plot. Antonio's stratagem consists almost entirely in his portrayal of the fool. Disguising himself in this fashion, he instructs Alberto to start the rumor of his death by announcing that in a fit of insanity he has thrown himself from the turret-top into the sea. Maria joins the party of her son against Piero; Antonio is further aided by Pandulpho, his friend Alberto, and Balurdo whom they release from the dungeon. Together they plan their attack on Piero. In the final banquet scene, having the moral support of Galeatzo, son of the Duke of Milan, as well as that of the people of Venice who have become incensed over the black deeds of the Duke, the trio finally accomplish their revenge by enticing Piero to stay alone with them.

Piero pursues his course without hesitation. In the opening scene, he acquaints the audience with his murder of Andrugio and Feliche. His hatred for Andrugio is based upon jealousy, for Andrugio having won the hand of Maria has always been his rival. Now that his daughter, Mellida, is betrothed to Antonio, he pretends a reconciliation and renewed friendship, but while celebrating their

¹Ibid., stage direction within III, 1, 1. 54.

children's engagement, he poisons Andrugio's drink. He and his accomplice, Strotzo, have killed Feliche, Antonio's friend, and have hung his body at the bedside of Mellida, so that by accusing her of infidelity, he can stop her marriage. His plans are summed up when he proclaims that he intends to

Poison the father, butcher the son, and marry
the mother, ha!¹

After denouncing her as unchaste, he imprisons her to await punishment. When Strotzo enters to announce Andrugio's death, he pretends deep grief for his "firmly-reconciled friend."

Later he tries to implant in Pandulpho, Feliche's father, the idea that Antonio is to blame for his father's death. Saying that it is only to rid the world of vice that he wants to see Antonio punished, he tries to force Pandulpho to swear to Antonio's treachery. Upon Pandulpho's vehement refusal Piero, in rage, not only banishes him from Venice but confiscates his lands.

Piero invents an ingenious device by which he rids himself of Strotzo and at the same time frees Mellida and lays all blame of the villainy upon Antonio, thereby furthering his scheme. At the trial of Mellida, Strotzo rushes in with a cord about his neck, throws himself at Piero's feet and strongly laments the part he has played in helping

¹Ibid., I, i, l. 105.

Antonio to kill his father and plant Feliche in Mellida's bedroom. In a pretended rage, Piero was to grab the cord threatening to kill him but finally freeing him; instead he actually strangles Strotzo.

Piero attempts to further his power and ambition by marrying Mellida to Galeazo, the Milan nobleman. Mellida's death halts this scheme, and because of his failure to kill Antonio, he finds the tables at last turned and he himself put to death.

A contrasting situation, which serves to emphasize Antonio's grief, is found in Pandulpho's reaction to Feliche's death. The old man tends to philosophize a great deal, and at first views the loss of his son in an extremely stoical fashion, stating that he would not cry or "run raving up and down";¹ if his son was innocent, then he will be thrice-blest, and if guilty, weeping would do no good. At one point, Antonio and Pandulpho vie with each other as to who is the more grieved, and in the final scene, as each wants revenge for his loved one, they start to argue about which of them actually killed Piero.

Death and slaughter have a prominent place in the play. Six characters die with much exhibition of torture and bloodshed. Andrugio has been poisoned, and Feliche both butchered and hanged before the play begins. The play opens

¹Ibid., I, 11, l. 314.

with the entrance of Piero just after Feliche's murder, 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.¹

Antonio mercilessly stabs Julio and appears on the stage in much the same condition as does Piero; Mellida swoons upon hearing of Antonio's death and later dies; Strotzo is strangled by Piero and Castilio at the trial; and finally amid much torture and bloodshed, Piero is murdered in the banquet scene.

Marston makes the sex element a very distinct underlying motive. It is Piero's passion for Maria and jealousy of Andrugio that leads to all his villainy. His constant wooing throughout the play, his exhibition of love in the dumb show before Act III, his exultation at the banquet when Maria seems to return his love are examples of the way in which the persistent presence of lust acted as a motivation for his crimes.

Antonio and Mellida provide the idyllic love element. Although he can never believe that she is guilty, the accusation against Mellida is one of the causes of Antonio's madness, and he rushes to her bedside in his fool's disguise when he learns she is dying because of his rumored death. He speaks of the loss he feels when he soliloquizes after her death,

¹Ibid., stage direction to I, '1.

O heaven, thou may'st indeed: she was all thine,
All heavenly: I did but humbly beg
To borrow her of thee a little time.¹

Finally when his revenge is completed, he commands a hymn to be sung, "Mellida is dead," and for memory of her love vows to live the rest of his life in a religious house. The play closes with a long speech bewailing her death.

The Tragedy of Hoffman is a story the scene of which is laid in Germany, and its dominant motive is the revenge of a son for a father, but there is no ghost to direct it. The play adds a second revenge which develops after Hoffman has accomplished several of his demonical crimes and which unites the other characters into a revenge plot against him.

The audience learns at the beginning of the play that Hoffman's father had served his state well, but through treachery had been proclaimed a pirate. After being captured and executed by means of a burning crown placed on his head, his body was hanged. Upon intercession of Martha, Hoffman had been released from imprisonment; some time later he had succeeded in stealing his father's skeleton and had kept it in his cave. In his first speech he displays the bones and determinedly vows revenge upon all who have the murderer's blood in their veins. By disguise, dissimulation, and deceit, he carries out his revenge against five of his victims before the counter-plot of the others brings him to his doom.

¹Ibid., IV, 11, 11. 4-6.

This counter-revenge develops in the last act after the confession of Otho's murder and the discovery of Hoffman's deceitful disguise. Martha, acting as a decoy, leads Hoffman into the cave and his death-trap.

The hesitation motive is present but is not due to any doubt, irresolution, or reflection on the part of Hoffman. He sets about his course with unswerving resolution, seizing every opportunity to advance his plots, and building upon each situation as it occurs to suit his advantage. Only when he passes up his chance to kill Martha, then falls in love with her and is consumed with passion, does he neglect his revenge. Since Martha does not appear until the latter part of the play, a large portion of his revenge has already been accomplished, but in this brief interlude his disguises are pierced, and his seizure results.

Intrigue and counter-intrigue make up an essential part of Hoffman, and the various plots and schemes continue from the first of the play to the very end. Deceit, disguise, and dissimulation are constantly at work.

From the opening of the play until the discovery of his iniquity in Act V the entire play of intrigue belongs to Hoffman. In the first lines of the play he vows revenge and takes advantage of the convenient shipwreck which places Otho in his hands. After recalling his father's fate, he kills Otho immediately with a red-hot crown, then takes

Lorrique, Otho's servant, as his willing accomplice. Together they go to Heidelberg where Hoffman, impersonating Otho, is adopted as heir by Duke Ferdinand in place of the booby Jerome.

Enjoying an honored position at court and hypocritically assuming virtue and sympathy, Hoffman begins his intrigue in earnest. First he disguises himself as a hermit, tells Lodowick that his life is being plotted against and sends him in the garb of a Grecian and in the company of Lucibella to a deserted chapel. Then he calls in Lodowick's brother, Mathias, to whom he relates how Lucibella has fled with a Greek, incites him to follow and exact revenge. Mathias in his excitement stabs both Lucibella and Lodowick; Lucibella recovers, but Lodowick's death marks his first step toward complete vengeance.

As soon as the Duke of Saxony and the Duke of Austria arrive on the scene, Hoffman cleverly arouses distrust between them. When they begin to argue, Hoffman stabs the Austrian duke in such a way as to make it appear that the Saxon duke has been to blame. Thus his second victim falls.

In his pose as a peacemaker, he reconciles Jerome's insurrection and more firmly entrenches himself in the affection of Ferdinand. Jerome's request to be his father's official Taster gives Hoffman the idea for his third scheme.

Lorrique, disguised as a French doctor, persuades

the foolish Jerome that it is his duty to poison Hoffman. The poison is to be put in Ferdinand's cup from which Hoffman always drinks. Jerome, who thinks he also has the antidote, readily assents. Refusing the drink and assuming bewildered innocence, Hoffman watches both Jerome and Ferdinand drink and die.

Up to this point, Hoffman has succeeded very well, but his height of good fortune has been reached, for Martha comes to mourn the death of the Austrian duke, and Hoffman in the meantime has become too over-confident. He passes up his chance to kill Martha while she is asleep. Instead, by giving a false account of Otho's death and of his own attempts to rescue him, he persuades Martha to acknowledge him as her son.

The turning point comes, and the counter-intrigue is conceived when, through the confession of Lorrique, the remaining characters learn of Hoffman's villainy. To escape his deserved punishment, Lorrique consents to help them trap Hoffman. True to his pledge, he cunningly plays upon Hoffman's passion for Martha and implants in his mind the idea of taking Martha to the cave. Lorrique, however, has by this time become too well pleased with his own power, and Hoffman has begun to distrust him. Since he has served his purpose and is no longer of use to Hoffman, he is mercilessly struck down.

Martha, however, succeeds in playing the coquette and leads Hoffman unsuspecting to the cave. Unrelenting to the very end, Hoffman is killed, as his father and Otho had been, with a burning crown.

Because of the lack of the usual reflection and meditative introspection and the omission of any passionate conflicts of thoughts and emotions within the hero, this play, probably more than the other revenge plays, depends almost entirely upon intrigue and counter-intrigue for its dramatic structure.

Madness appears only in the pathetic condition of Lucibella. Hoffman is never mad nor does he feign madness at any time. Lucibella's insanity has a definite purpose in the play, for it is the instrument by which Hoffman's iniquity is discovered.

At the same time her lover, Lodowick, was killed, Lucibella was wounded. After her recovery, she becomes insane and appears first "through her wounds and grief, distract of sense"¹ at Lodowick's tomb. She talks wildly of gathering flowers,

I am going to the rivers side
To fetch white lillies and blow daffodils
To stick on Lodowick's bosom where it bled
And in mine own.²

¹Henry Chettle, The Tragedy of Hoffman, Old English Drama, Students' Facsimile Edition, IV, p. 40. Since this text is a photostatic copy of the original manuscript, the acts are not divided into scenes and the lines are not numbered. Hereafter this will be referred to as Hoffman.

²Ibid.

Refusing to believe her lover dead, she beats at the door of his tomb and cries that she has a message for him from heaven. Then she turns to Hoffman and in her wild talk, strikes an ironic, jabbing note at him:

Ay, but a knave may kill one by trick
Or lay a plot, or sign, or cog, or prate,
Make strife, make a man's father hang him,
Or his brother, how think you, goodly Prince?
God give you joy in your adoption;
May not tricks be used?¹

Fleeing the scene, she is later described as running through thickets, heedless of the briars, and is last seen climbing a steep cliff.

Attired in rich clothes, Lucibella makes her second appearance carrying several bones which she has found. Her account of finding the cave, the clothes, skeleton, hermit weeds, and the crown cause Mathias and Rodrigo to investigate. They overhear Lorrique's false report to Martha of the burial of Otho. When Lucibella enters, Martha recognizes the clothes as those of her son, and Lorrique is forced to confess the murder. Lucibella partially regains her sanity and helps in the final revenge on Hoffman.

Lucibella is never so insane as not to suspect Hoffman and, during the course of her mad ravings, hits at him pointedly. Her insanity is made dramatically effective both for its irony and for its denouement of the tragedy itself.

Although there is no single or distinct contrasting

¹Ibid., p. 41.

situation, Hoffman's grief and avowal of revenge is set off against that of his victims. Lucibella's grief drives her to madness, but even in her distraction she seeks revenge for her lover's death. Martha mourns her son, Otho, and her husband, the Duke of Austria; the Saxon duke and Mathias, joined by Rodrigo, are portrayed in their laments for Lodowick, Ferdinand, and Jerome. All seek revenge against Hoffman as he does against them.

The element of slaughter continues from the first scene to the last. Hoffman's father has already been murdered as the play opens, and his body is displayed. Since his father was killed by means of a burning crown, Hoffman deals Otho the same fate. Pursuing his plot to kill all those who are related to his father's murderer, he succeeds in causing four murders by trickery. Mathias in a fit of jealous rage kills Lodowick; Jerome poisons not only himself but his father, Ferdinand; Hoffman himself secretly stabs the Duke of Austria in a brawl. For his part in the poisoning plot, Stilt is led away to be tortured and finally killed. Hoffman strikes down his accomplice, Lorrique, in his last effort to avenge before he himself is entrapped and destroyed by a red-hot crown. Altogether, nine of the characters meet death by violent means.

The love element forms an important dramatic motive, for it is Hoffman's passion for Martha that leads ultimately

to his downfall. Having fallen in love with Martha, he neglects his revenge schemes, centers his attention upon her, and so is led to his doom.

Lodowick and Lucibella provide the idyllic love element, which also aids, though indirectly, in the dramatic structure of the play. Lucibella's love and grief for Lodowick drives her insane after his death, and in turn her mad wanderings result in the discovery and identity of Hoffman.

The Atheist's Tragedy, the setting of which is laid in France, has as its fundamental motive the revenge of a son for his father, directed by a ghost, but revenge is left to Providence. While Charlemont is away at war, D'Ambille driven by greed for money and power murders Montferrers, his own brother and the father of Charlemont. The ghost of his father appears to Charlemont, relates the events which have taken place in his absence, and bids him return. Instead of urging revenge upon Charlemont, the ghost tells him to leave it unto the "King of kings."¹

Hesitation in carrying out the ghost's command is present in Charlemont's actions but is reversed from that found in preceding plays. Charlemont, consumed with hatred for D'Ambille, wants to take vengeance immediately; he

¹Cyril Tourneur, The Atheist's Tragedy, II, vi, p. 286, Webster and Tourneur, Introduction and Notes by John Addington Symonds (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, n. d.). Lines are not numbered in this text. Hereafter this will be referred to as The Atheist's Tragedy.

fight with D'Ambille's son, Sebastian, and except for the intervention of the ghost would have disposed of him and D'Ambille on the spot. The ghost appears and reminds him again to have patience. After a little irresolution, Charlemont gives up all inclination to revenge and leaves it to the judgment of heaven. Gradually reversing D'Ambille's fortune, Providence does not effect its full vengeance until Act V.

Intrigue is confined entirely to the villain, but it has a prominent part in the play. D'Ambille's plots are motivated by his greed for gold and his ambition for power. He begins his intrigues to the ultimate end of having all the wealth and power centered in his own family lineage.

First, he must destroy his brother's rival house. He urges Charlemont to go to war and even gives him a thousand crowns to outfit himself properly according to his rank. After his departure, he exclaims,

Well! Charlemont is gone; and here thou seest
His absence the foundation of my plot.¹

His next step is to make a marriage alliance between his elder and sickly son, Rousard, and Castabella, daughter of Belforest, a wealthy and powerful baron. Even though Castabella is betrothed to Charlemont, D'Ambille overcomes this obstacle and succeeds in having the wedding ceremony performed immediately by bribing the Puritan chaplain to assist him and by securing the approval of Belforest.

¹Ibid., I, ii, p. 256.

At the wedding banquet Borachio, disguised as a wounded soldier, enters and, after reciting a vivid account of battle, tells of having seen Charlemont lying dead on the beach with the waves lapping over his body. Borachio even brings a red scarf similar to the one worn by Charlemont as evidence of his death. The aged Montferrers, grief-stricken and feeling that his own death is near, writes a will leaving his property in its entirety to D'Ambille.

Late that night after the banquet, D'Ambille and Borachio take advantage of the servants' drunkenness to perfect their murder plans. While D'Ambille and others are guiding Montferrers to his home through the night, the drunken servants enter, fight with their torches, and leave the scene in darkness. D'Ambille shoves Montferrers into a gravel pit where Borachio is waiting to hit him with a stone. When the torches are relighted and the confusion subsides, Montferrers is of course discovered dead. D'Ambille affects a great exhibition of grief, cursing the servants for their drunken stumbling.

D'Ambille is now at the top of fortune's wheel, but Providence does not allow him to remain there. Charlemont returns home, and the rumor that the ghost of Montferrers is walking abroad fills the villain with terror. D'Ambille imprisons Charlemont for the debt of a thousand crowns but is thwarted by his son, Sebastian, who releases Charlemont.

In another attempt he sends Borachio with a pistol to the churchyard to kill Charlemont. The words of Borachio are significant in indicating the religious belief of the times:

The churchyard? 'Tis the fittest place for death.
Perhaps he's praying. Then he's fit to die,
We'll send him charitably to his grave.¹

The plan goes astray, however, for Borachio misfires and is himself killed by Charlemont.

D'Ambille's hopes for perpetuating his line are frustrated by the slaying of Sebastian in a brawl and by the sickliness of Rousard. After finding Charlemont and Castabella together in the churchyard, he gives vent to his anger at Destiny by having them both imprisoned on the charge of adultery. At the trial, D'Ambille acts as executioner, but as the ghost predicted, Providence takes revenge for D'Ambille dashes out his own brains with the axe.

Madness is evidenced only in the distraction of the villain. Beset by hallucinations, he thinks he sees the ghost of Montferrers in the churchyard; further disturbed by the inflictions sent by a revenging Providence, he enters the trial in a deranged condition calling for "Judgment! Judgment!"² He raves wildly about the wrongs of Fate, the power of wisdom, and the peace of conscience. Only when he is dying does he confess his crimes and admit the presence

¹Ibid., IV, 11, p. 306.

²Ibid., V, 11, p. 329.

of a Supreme Power.

The situation of the hero, Charlemont, is contrasted to that of the villain. Charlemont is saddened by his father's death and the loss of his betrothed Castabella to Rousard. His calmness and steadfast belief in the ultimate triumph of virtue is brought into sharp contrast with the distraction and frustration of D'Ambille, who, by the death of his sons and the thwarting of his ambitions, tries to revenge himself upon the innocent.

The slaughter element is present in much bloodshed and violence. Montferrers is murdered in a ghastly scene; Charlemont kills Borachio in defense of his own life; Sebastian and Belforest mortally wound each other in a brawl over Levidulcia, who in turn commits suicide; Rousard, oddly enough, dies a natural death; and D'Ambille finally kills himself accidentally with the executioner's axe.

The valiant love of Castabella and Charlemont provides a strong controlling force beneath the main motive. As a contrast to the purity of their love which remains constant throughout the play there is much show of lust and unloosened passion which results in the deaths of Sebastian, Belforest, and Levidulcia, and in the severe punishment administered to Cataplasma, Soquette, Fresco, and Snuffe.

Soliloquies

Kyd used soliloquies principally as the medium through which he tried to express after the Senecan model some profound

philosophy.¹ Although exaggerated in expression and delivered in a ranting declamatory style, they are significant for the fact that in The Spanish Tragedy for the first time there was an attempt to touch the revenge motive with a deeper dramatic meaning, that of a character's struggle within himself at the same time he was trying to carry out a self-imposed obligation.²

The Viceroy's one soliloquy is a hysterical expression of love for his son and grief and despair over his supposed death.³

Through Hieronomo's six soliloquies, however, we see the expression of his wild, frenzied, and often insane grief at the murder of his son, the confusion of his tormented soul, and his rage against the wrongs of fate.

O eyes! no eyes, but fountains fraught with tears;
O life! no life, but lively form of death;
O world! no world, but mass of public wrongs,
Confus'd and fill'd with murder and misdeeds.⁴

Later he exclaims,

Yet still tormented is my tortured soul
With broken sighs and restless passions,
That, winged, mount and, hovering in the air,
Beat at the windows of the brightest Heavens,
Soliciting for justice and revenge.⁵

¹Thorndike, PMLA, p. 144.

²Schweikert, op. cit., p. 523.

³The Spanish Tragedy, I, ii, ll. 5-42.

⁴Ibid., III, ii, ll. 1-4.

⁵Ibid., III, vii, ll. 10-14.

Vowing revenge again and again, he is consumed with doubt as to the truth of Bel-Imperia's letter, and hindered by indecision and delay in going to the king for justice even after Pedringano's letter proves Lorenzo's guilt. Deploring his hesitation in neglecting his obligation, he says,

Then shamest thou not, Hieronomo, to neglect
The sweet revenge of thy Horatio?¹

but later he contemplates suicide as the best means of escape. Finally aroused by Bel-Imperia's admonitions, he plans his method, and just before the play within the play shows himself fully determined to take his revenge.

Antonio's Revenge abounds in long soliloquies which show Marston's effort at psychological and philosophical expression.

In Piero's soliloquies, the audience is made acquainted with his hatred for Andrugio, his lust and depravity, and the sadistic turn of his mind. He speaks with apparent joy about his past crimes and his trickery, and he revels in the tortures which his corrupt mind has conceived for his victims.

Antonio's five soliloquies concern his grief for his father and for Mellida, his thirst for revenge in their behalf, and his complaints against the iniquity of the world. Reading from Seneca's De Providentia,² he makes contrasts

¹Ibid., IV, vi, ll. 276-277.

²Antonio's Revenge, p. 133, footnote 1.

and sums up his own problems:

Pish, thy mother was not lately widowed,
 Thy dear affied love lately defam'd
 With blemish when thy wrotest thys;

 No more, no more; he that was never blest
 With height or birth, fair expectation
 Of mounted fortunes, knows not what it is
 To be the pitied object of the world
 O, poor Antonio, thou may'st sigh!¹

The soliloquy at his father's tomb shows his unbalanced mind oppressed with grief for his father. Visiting the grave at midnight with lighted tapers, he speaks of his father as "O, blessed father of a cursed son"² and says that because of the grief he feels,

Once every night, I'll dew thy funeral hearse
 With my religious tears.³

Just after he talks to Maria through the grate of the dungeon, Antonio rails against the wickedness present in the world and in human nature, and the rottenness and corruptness of Piero. Soon after this scene, driven to madness by hatred for Piero and his urge for vengeance, he releases his pent-up emotions by stabbing Julio, calling upon the Ghost to

suck this fume:
 To sweet revenge perfume thy circling air
 With smoke of blood.⁴

¹Ibid., II, 11, 11. 49-62.

²Ibid., III, 1, 1. 23.

³Ibid., 11. 21-22.

⁴Ibid., III, 11, 11. 204-206.

Finally, after the death of Mellida, Antonio in the fool's habit speaks of his bereavement, falls to the ground, and moans,

I turn my prostrate breast upon thy face,
And vent a heaving sigh. O hear but this!
I am a poor, poor orphant -- a weak, weak child,
The wrack of a splitted fortune, the very ooze,
The quicksand that devours all misery.¹

Although the soliloquies are ranting, exaggerated, and melodramatic utterances, they depict rather clearly the mounting passions and driving emotions of both Piero and Antonio.

The Tragedy of Hoffman has little of the reflective element. Hoffman has four soliloquies, but these are bragging speeches and have none of the meditating or philosophizing that characterize those of Hieronimo and Antonio.²

Hoffman's first soliloquy, which opens the play, is a characteristic speech of grief and avowal of revenge and provides a good picture of the grimness of Hoffman's intentions:

Hence clouds of melancholy!
I'll be no longer subject to your schisms.
But thou, dear soul, whose nerves and arteries
In dead resoundings summon up revenge,
And thou shall have't, be but appeased sweet hearse,
Thou dead remembrance of my living father!
And with heart of iron, swift as thought
I'll execute justly; in such a cause
Where truth leadeth, what coward would not fight?
Ill acts move some, but mine's a cause of right.

¹Ibid., IV, 11, 11. 12-16.

²Thorndike, PMLA, pp. 184-185.

See the powers of heaven, in apparition
 And frightful aspects, as incensed
 That I thus tardy aim to do an act
 Which justice and a father's death incite.
 Like threatening meteors antedate destruction.¹

In the long soliloquy closing Act I, Hoffman declares that this murder of Otho is only the Prologue to what will follow. He sets forth his plan to proceed to the palace of the Duke and to play the part of Otho.

His two other speeches are short; one expresses with swaggering satisfaction the way in which the destinies are favoring him;² his last speech gives a glimpse both of his over-confident exultation in his newly-acquired power and of his expression of desire for Martha.³

Hoffman's soliloquies show an absence of any conscientious scruple, a complete callousness toward the sufferings of others, and a consuming exultation in his own success.

Lorrique has a few asides which reveal mainly his thorough willingness to be Hoffman's accomplice and his hope for gratifying reward.

In the chapel scene when Lucibella is watching over the sleeping Lodowick, she voices a sad note of premonition in which she feels some apprehension of approaching danger.⁴

¹Hoffman, I, i, p. 1.

²Ibid., II, p. 19.

³Ibid., V, p. 53.

⁴Ibid., III, p. 26.

The nearest approach to a reflective soliloquy is by Martha, who after reading Latin verses, moralizes as follows:

'Tis true, the wise, the fool, the rich, the poor,
The fair and the deformed fall; their life turns
Air: the King and the Captain are in this alike.
None have free hold of life, but they are still.
When death heaven's steward comes, tenants at will.
I lay me down, and rest in thee my trust,
If I wake never more, till all flesh rise
I sleep a happy sleep, sin in me dies.¹

There is a great deal of soliloquizing and rhetorical philosophizing in The Atheist's Tragedy.

Charlemont's four soliloquies present a good picture of his character and his morals. After the ghost's initial appearance, Charlemont utters a bewildered disbelief² that he has really seen an actual spectre at all and satisfies himself that it is only a fearful dream. It takes a second appearance to convince him.

At his father's grave, he expresses his grief and woe at the loss of both his father and Castabella, yet there is a strain of thoughtfulness in the midst of shock:

I prithee, sorrow, leave a little room
In my confounded and tormented mind
For understanding to deliberate
The cause and author of this accident.³

It is during his stay in prison that Charlemont presents his philosophic views and moralizes in his interpretation

¹Ibid., IV, p. 49.

²The Atheist's Tragedy, II, vi, p. 286.

³Ibid., III, ii, p. 293.

of punishment and the justice of God:

I grant thee, Heaven, thy goodness doth command
Our punishments, but yet no further than
The measure of our sins. How should they else
Be just? Or how should that good purpose of
Thy justice take effect by bounding men
Within the confines of humanity,
When our afflictions do exceed our crimes?¹

Charlemont's last soliloquy is spoken at the grave-
yard where he reflects on the sweet rest that death brings:

. . . . Perhaps the inhabitant was in his lifetime the
possessor of his own desires. Yet in the midst of
all his greatness and his wealth he was less rich
and less contented than in this poor piece of earth
lower and lesser than a cottage.
.
He enjoys a sweeter rest than e'er he did
Amongst the sweetest pleasures of this life,
For here there's nothing troubles him.²

D'Ambille's soliloquies concern his views of Provi-
dence and the forces governing humanity.³ In a conversation
with Montferrers early in Act I he first expresses his
atheistic belief of a predestined fate as he says,

. . . . I am of a confident belief
That even the time, place, manner of our deaths
Do follow Fate with that necessity
That makes us sure to die. And in a thing
Ordained so certainly unalterable
What can the use of Providence preveill?⁴

His first real soliloquy further reveals his faith
in his own power and the length to which his ambition carries

¹Ibid., III, 111, pp. 296-297.

²Ibid., IV, 111, pp. 307-308.

³Thorndike, PMLA, pp. 195-196.

⁴The Atheist's Tragedy, I, 11, p. 251.

him, for to insure the continuation of his lineage, he plans to ravish Castabella.¹

D'Ambille's terrified soliloquy in the graveyard, however, when he comes upon the death-head shows his uncertainty and his extreme fear of the supernatural. He admits that he has begun to feel the "loathsome horror" of his sin, and seeing a cloud moving across the sky, he thinks in his terror that it is the ghost of Montferrers returned to "vex his conscience."²

Later his courage is restored somewhat as he handles his gold pieces and reflects upon their power. He describes them as the "ministers of Fate,"

. . . . the stars whose operations make
The fortunes and the destinies of men.³

From wealth he begins to contemplate the power of human wisdom:

Thus while the simple, honest worshipper
Of a fantastic providence, groans under
The burthen of neglected misery,
My real wisdom has raised up a state
That shall enterprise my posterity.⁴

In his final speech just before he dies, D'Ambille refutes his atheism and confesses the power of God over nature.⁵

¹Ibid., IV, 11, p. 306.

²Ibid., IV, 111, p. 315.

³Ibid., V, 1, p. 323.

⁴Ibid., p. 324.

⁵Ibid., V, 11, p. 336.

Sebastian, although by no means a worthy character, has a frank, straightforwardness which is unusual in a revenge play character. He speaks two prose soliloquies; in the first¹ he curses Rousard for forcing marriage upon Castabella against her will; in the second, he reflects upon his own situation, decides to bail Charlemont out of prison, and mildly curses the evils of the world. He ends his musings with the ironic conclusion that if all his curses were carried out, the world would say, "Blessed be he that curseth."²

Castabella soliloquizes once, at which time she laments the death of Charlemont and blames Providence for the martyrdom of her distasteful marriage.³

Even Levidulcia speaks a long moralizing soliloquy, just as she is about to commit suicide, upon the inevitable punishment of sin.⁴

The soliloquies, particularly those of D'Ambille and Charlemont, are significant for their unity, in that they present a connected argument which points to the moral of the whole play, the omnipotence of God's power.⁵

¹Ibid., I, iv, p. 265.

²Ibid., III, 11, p. 296.

³Ibid., II, 111, p. 272.

⁴Ibid., IV, v, p. 332.

⁵Thorndike, PMLA, p. 196.

Character Types

The characters in The Spanish Tragedy represent types which appear again and again in Elizabethan plays. They are portrayed with very little delineation and shading.

Lorenzo, the source of all evil in the play, is the "villain par excellence," the first Machiavellian villain to appear on the popular stage. "Full of demonical devices and free from conscientious scruples,"¹ he allows nothing to stand in the way of his ambitions, and accomplishes three murders before being killed himself.

Pedringano is his accomplice who for his greed for gold allows himself to be ensnared in Lorenzo's schemes.

Hieronomo, the principal character, cast as the Marshall of Spain, is a poet and a scholar interested in plays and in philosophy.² Prone to meditate and argue with himself, he struggles with the problems of revenge, fate, and death until the sense of his responsibility to revenge and his continual delay create such an oppression within him that he is driven to frenzy and real madness. Even in his madness, however, there is constant irony. When he finally becomes resolved to act, he manifests great cunning, dissimulates with Lorenzo and Balthazar, and adroitly plans the play as means of revenge.

¹Ibid., p. 146.

²Ibid.

Ben Jonson, in his revisal of The Spanish Tragedy, was chiefly concerned with vitalizing the character of Hieronomo, and the few situations which he added did not alter the plot. The greater part of the additions deal with Hieronomo whose meditative speeches are made more elaborate, his irony more poignant, and his madness more intense and real. Jonson constantly strove to show a tortured mind confused by grief.¹ The scene between Isabella and Hieronomo after Hieronomo finds Horatio's body adds enormously to the pathetic quality of Hieronomo's bereavement, for he was unable to believe that the dead youth could possibly be his son. In the second addition,² in which Hieronomo's speech with Lorenzo is enlarged, there is an example of his irony. He tells Lorenzo,

I reserve your favor for a greater honor.
This is a very toy, my lord, a toy.³

and adds further,

In troth, my Lord, it is a thing of nothing:
The murder of a son or so --
A thing of nothing, my Lord.⁴

The long meditative speech by Hieronomo about a son's relationship to his parents, his talk of Heaven, Hell, Nemesis, Furies, and revenge show Hieronomo's bewildered mind

¹Ibid., pp. 177-178.

²The Spanish Tragedy, III, 11, 11. 66-76

³Ibid., 11. 67-68.

⁴Ibid., 11. 74-76.

half-crazed with grief.¹ By the servant's description of Hieronomo later as "distraught," "lunatic and childish," Jonson draws a sharper picture of Hieronomo's madness which is intensified by his wild ranting about the tree on which Horatio was hanged, and more notably by his conversation with the Painter who also had had a son murdered. After Hieronomo asks him,

Canst thou paint a tear,
or a wound, a groan, or a sigh? Canst thou
paint me such a tree as this?²

his frenzy mounts, and he says that he himself must be portrayed,

still with distracted countenance going along,
and let my hair heave up my nightcap.
.
Make me curse, make me rave, make me cry, make
me mad, make me well again, make me curse hell,
invoke Heaven, and in the end leave me in a
trance.
.
Oh, no, there is no end; the end is death and
madness.³

The scene is fantastic, but the insane element comes to the fore with a shuddering impression of reality.

Jonson's last addition depicts Hieronomo taunting the two kings and exulting in his revenge. Although Jonson did not change the structure of the play, he made the character of Hieronomo "notable in both thought and expression."⁴

¹Ibid., IV, iv, ll. 2-48.

²Ibid., IV, vi, ll. 107-109.

³Ibid., ll. 145-164.

⁴Thorndike, PMLA, p. 181.

The characters in Antonio's Revenge again represent types rather than individuals.

Piero is another Machiavellian villain but is driven to his crimes by jealousy and lust more than by ambition, although his plan to make a political marriage for Mellida shows that the desire for power is also present. His villainy is characterized by cruelty, sadism, and love of evil for its own sake. Apart from the crimes which advance his particular scheme, his callousness and barbarity are further shown in that he never makes any pretense at grief for his daughter's death, throws Balurdo into the dungeon for no reason, to be kept there in rags and fed upon the "slime that smears the dundgeon' cheek,"¹ and at the banquet even drinks a toast to the dead.

Strotzo is the accomplice not only by attending the murders of Andrugio and Feliche but also by helping to accuse Mellida and fasten the blame of all the treachery on Antonio. After he has served his purpose, Piero conceives a most adequate plan for destroying him.

Antonio is the scholar and the clever deviser of masques, the philosopher who studies Seneca and who tends to soliloquize and meditate at each crisis. He is driven to the verge of madness by the burden of crimes which he must revenge.² Already in a state of emotional confusion

¹Antonio's Revenge, IV, 1, l. 273.

²Thorndike, PMLA, pp. 164-165.

by the death of his father, the impending marriage of his mother, the charges against his betrothed, he is further maddened by the message of the Ghost. He wavers, hesitates, philosophizes, and after having killed an innocent child in mad frenzy, finally sets himself upon a course of action. When resolved to act, he is cunning in his stratagem and violent in his acts.

The first glimpse of Antonio's grief is found in his reply to Lucio's invitation to supper, "But my pined heart shall eat on nought but woe."¹

Showing very little irony, Antonio is in general ranting, wild, and over-emotional. "A stage rooter, he tore a passion to tatters and appealed to a taste that delighted in extravagant violence."²

In spite of his melodramatic raving, he has a few touches of real life.³ The fool's speech shows a more vital philosophizing and a more acute sense of wrong, for it was "the stings of anguish," the "bruising stroke of chance," which sent him into madness "as one confounded in a maze of mischief."⁴

In the play of Hoffman Lorrique represents the conventional accomplice who becomes too satisfied with his

¹Antonio's Revenge, II, 11, l. 8.

²Thorndike, PMLA, p. 165.

³Ibid.

⁴Antonio's Revenge, IV, 1, ll. 51-56.

own success and who, after having served his purpose, is destroyed.

Hoffman, the hero of the play, is actually more like the absolute stage villain. He is quite different from the avengers of the other tragedies for he is oppressed neither by thought, conscience, nor a want of resolution. Never driven to either mild distraction or madness, he resembles the other heroes only in irony and his use of stratagem, and even in these respects he resembles Lorenzo and Piero more than the heroes.

The only weak link in his chain of revenge deeds is his passion for Martha, and after his capture, he loudly raves against himself for his susceptibility. Apart from this trait, however, he is ever tricky, cunning, hypocritical, unscrupulous, energetic, unrelenting, and even in the last torture scene shows no cowardice. At the same time he is carrying out his clever plots, he ironically assumes virtue and sympathy.¹

His irony is particularly noticeable in his speech welcoming Otho, in which he declares his love and admiration for him at the precise moment he is planning to seize him. Full of irony also is his intercession plea for Jerome's forgiveness, his sympathetic replies to Lucibella's taunts, and his loud declamation that there is "villainy, treachery,

¹Thorndike, PMLA, pp. 191-192.

and villainy,"¹ all of which, of course, has been of his own design.²

The Atheist's Tragedy contains the stock list of characters found in most revenge plays. Borachio is the minor character who plays the accomplice. According to the custom of a revenge play, he meets his death, but in this play he is killed by the hero in self-defense.

The two principal characters are the hero, Charlemont, and the villain, D'Ambille. Although they embody the usual characteristics, they are developed in a new way and tend to depart from the conventional puppet-like hero and villain of earlier revenge tragedies.

D'Ambille is the tricky, deceitful, dissimulating, and lustful villain who lets his greed for gold and his ambition for power drive him to commit his villainy. His boastful exultation in the performance of his crimes shows the hardness of his nature. His hypocrisy is of the most accomplished order, the best example of which is evidenced by his behavior at the funeral of Montferrers, for there he not only feigns intense grief, but even reads epitaphs eulogizing the worthiness and virtue of his brother and nephew. Playing the dominant role in the tragedy, D'Ambille is made unique by his confidence in his own intellectual self-sufficiency and by his outspoken disavowal of the presence or

¹Hoffman, III, p. 30.

²Thorndike, PMLA, p. 192.

power of God; furthermore, his philosophy is entirely atheistic, and his observations contain a good deal of fatalism.¹

Charlemont, the hero, is reduced to a minor position in that he does not seek to carry out the revenge himself but, obeying the command of the ghost, leaves it to the workings of Providence. His distraction at his father's death and at Castabella's marriage is glimpsed only in a brief instant before he completely submits to the will of God. Only once in his attack on Sebastian does he show rage, and as the Ghost interferes, he exclaims,

You torture me between the passion of
My blood and the religion of my soul.²

In the events which follow, his action reveals that he considers himself an instrument of fate and only a cog in the workings of Providence. His marked tendency to meditate and philosophize and his eagerness to die and escape from life's burdens make him similar to other revenge heroes.³ By his confident faith in the power of God and his own total goodness, his portrayal is intended to represent the goal of Christian morality.

Dramatic Scenes and Details

There are many scenes, situations, and scenic details in the stage presentation of a revenge play which materially

¹Ibid., p. 199.

²The Atheist's Tragedy, III, ii, p. 295.

³Thorndike, PMLA, p. 199.

enhance its dramatic effectiveness. Some are important for they pertain definitely to the dramatic quality of the whole play; others are minor and only tend to increase the horror and grimness of a particular scene. They should be noticed, however, because by their constant repetition in subsequent revenge plays, they become conventional embellishments.

In The Spanish Tragedy the revenge is superintended by the ghost of Andrea and a ghostly personage called Revenge whose conversation acts as a prologue and epilogue and as a Chorus at the end of each act.¹ In the prologue after the recounting of his death and his journey into the underworld, the ghost of Andrea and Revenge occupy a position from which they intend to oversee the entire play. Serving in the capacity of a Chorus, they act as spectators of the action, comment on preceding events, and prophesy on those to come. Their presence seems to represent the tragic sense of fate which governs the action of the characters and dictates its outcome.² When Andrea's ghost becomes impatient at the slowness of Revenge, this Fury tells him that in time

I'll turn their friendship into fell despite,
 Their love to mortal hate, their day to night,
 Their hope to despair, their peace to war,
 Their joys to pain, their bliss to misery.³

¹There is no Chorus after the third act.

²Thorndike, PMLA, p. 148.

³The Spanish Tragedy, I, iii, ll. 185-188.

In the epilogue the ghost, deliriously happy that Revenge has brought about so many deaths, plans a place of eternal joy and peace for his friends and everlasting tortures of agony for his enemies.

The reception of the ambassadors and the marriage alliance between Bel-Imperia and Balthazar take on a political aspect, as does the dumb show in which Hieronomo pantomimes three kings deprived of their crowns.

Among the scenes and situations are a play within a play through which the revenge is finally accomplished, the dumb show mentioned above, the capture of Pedringano by the watch, and the scene in which Isabella runs lunatic. In these scenes are such details as the wearing of black, the swearing on the cross of the sword, the reading in a book before a soliloquy, and the death march of the final scene.

Those details which illustrate the crude manner of performance are the exhibition of Horatio's dead body, the bloody handkerchief as a symbol of Horatio's murder, Hieronomo's carrying out Horatio's body while singing a dirge, his play with the rope and dagger, his act of tearing at the earth with his dagger while crying, "I'll rip the bowels of the earth,"¹ and later biting out his tongue, and Isabella's tearing down the arbor. These acts represent the primitive manner of showing rage, despair, grief, and madness.

¹Ibid., IV, v, l. 70.

In Antonio's Revenge there are numerous situations and scenic details which add tremendously to the stage effectiveness, and which repeat some of those found in The Spanish Tragedy.

Marston transferred the Ghost from the prologue and chorus to the dialogue of the play. Making his first appearance at Andrugio's tomb at the stroke of midnight, the Ghost relates the circumstances of his murder, and cries, "Antonio, revenge!"¹ During the conversation between Maria and Antonio a few minutes later, the ghosts of Feliche, Andrugio, and Pandulpho call "murder, murder, murder."²

In a later scene, while the child Julio is prattling, a cry of "revenge" is sounded from underneath and just as Antonio stabs Julio, a groan is heard also apparently from underground.

The Ghost makes his second appearance seated on Maria's bed at which time he upbraids her for infidelity and commands her to join Antonio in revenge. At the same time he bids Antonio to assume a disguise and to remain at court until he finds his opportunity to kill Piero. The Ghost ends his visit in a long tirade:

And now ye sooty coursers of the night,
Hurry your chariot into hell's black womb.
Darkness, make flight; graves, eat your dead again:
Let's repossess our shrouds. Why lags delay?
Mount sparkling brightness, give the world his day!³

¹Antonio's Revenge, III, ii, l. 34.

²Ibid., III, i, ll. 125-127. (No reason is known for including Pandulpho among ghosts since he was not dead.)

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During the dumb show before the final act the Ghost enters and predicts that now at last he will see vengeance done, for Venice is full of hate against Piero and the people almost break into revolt.

Now looks down Providence
T'attend the last act of my son's revenge.

.

O, now triumphs my ghost,
Exclaiming, Heaven's just, for I shall see
The scourge of murder and impiety.¹

As the action reaches its crest just before the revengers seize Piero, the Ghost enters and "is placed betwixt the music-house."² From his seat he acts as spectator to the action, and as Piero is attacked, he cries out,

Bless'd be thy hand! I taste the joys of heaven
Viewing my son triumph in his black blood.³

The Ghost becomes a personage in Antonio's Revenge who acts not merely as a witness or commentator but is actively engaged in inciting Antonio to his revenge and even helping to plan it. His frequent mention of providence, heaven, and justice suggests that he is also representing a guiding Fate.

Marston makes use of the supernatural to foretell disaster. In a dream before he knows of his father's death, Antonio sees two ghosts. They represent violence, for one is smeared with blood and the other, in his father's shape,

¹Ibid., dumb show of V, 1, ll. 10-25.

²Ibid., stage direction to V, 11, p. 185.

³Ibid., V, 11, ll. 67-68.

calls for revenge. At the same time natural phenomena are acting as another omen. In a spectacular display fires ring the horizon and light the sky overhead, while a blazing comet streaks the heavens with its flaming path.

Other characteristic features which follow the old models in the structure of the play include a prologue and epilogue, a masque as a means of carrying out revenge, the trick by which Strotzo is dispatched, the appearance of Maria in a state of dishevelment, the marriage celebration and the reception for the nobleman from Milan, and use of the dumb shows. There are three pantomimes in Antonio's Revenge coming before Acts II, III, and V, and each depicts a certain phase of the play which by being dramatized increases the theatrical effectiveness. For example, the first dumb show represents Andrugio's funeral procession with its customary torch-bearers and mourners; the second illustrates Piero's passion and his designs to win the hand of Maria; and the third shows the mounting hatred of the people toward Piero.

In the scenes are such details as the wearing of black, reading a book before a soliloquy, falling to the ground in the midst of a soliloquy, using a tear-stained handkerchief as a symbol of grief, swearing an oath by wreathed arms, and the playing of a funeral dirge for Melilda at the end of the play. The many night scenes, the use

of funerals, hearses, coffins, tombs, and dungeon increase the atmosphere of grimness.

The details which illustrate the crude manner of presentation and which add to the general effect of horror are the entrance of Piero, and later of Antonio, splashed with blood and carrying blood-smeared daggers, the exhibition of both Feliche's dead body and the dismembered body of Julio, the striking of the stage with daggers at the burial of Feliche, and finally the vivid enactment of tortures upon Piero. Marston never missed a chance to add some spectacular detail of physical horror to his scenes.

Chettle in writing Hoffman took many of the theatrical motives and situations common to other revenge plays, and by much changing and altering, constructed a good acting play.¹

There is a notable lack of supernatural visitants. No ghost, either directly or indirectly, superintends the action of the play.

The customary use of foreboding, however, is employed to anticipate the approach of some sinister event. Otho, although assured of his welcome, senses the oncoming of some "sad fate,"² taking the storm, the shipwreck, and the appearance of strange apparitions to be evil omens. Lucibella voices her feeling of impending misfortune while waiting at the chapel for Mathias. While walking with Martha

¹Thorndike, PMLA, p. 193.

²Hoffman, I, p. 4.

toward the cave, Hoffman has an uneasy presentiment that all is not well.

The comic element is provided by the booby Jerome and his stooge, Stilt. They not only say and do foolish things, but are used as foils by Hoffman. The serious characters are portrayed only in their role of crime and intrigue.

The atmosphere of grimness and horror is enhanced by such situations as the presence of the family feud, a shipwreck, the usual tricky murder of the accomplice, which recalls the similar fate of Pedringano and Strotzo, the funeral procession bearing off the Duke's body, the mourning scene at the tomb, the detailed account of the burial of Otho, and the mad scenes of Lucibella. Much use is made of disguise, deceit, plots, intrigues, torture, and murder. These stratagems are characterized audacity, abundance, and childishness.¹

Among the theatrical details are the exhibition of dead bodies, the use of poisoned drinks, the wearing of sable garments, the playing of a death march, the reading of a book before a soliloquy, the swearing of an oath by Hoffman's foes, which in this play is done by forming a ring around Lorrique, placing their right hand on his head, and swearing vengeance; the usual allusions are made to Seneca, Nemesis, and Elysium.

¹Thorndike, PMLA, p. 188.

Although torture, bloodshed, violent murder, and other manifestations of physical horror characterize the play of Hoffman, there is no primitive display of exaggerated emotion such as has been found in the plays already discussed. The characters state the fact that they are grieved, but the expressions lack vitality; in their progress toward revenge, they are coldly calculating rather than emotional, and enact their crimes in utter cold-bloodedness.

In The Atheist's Tragedy there is included a new dramatic note. Atheism adds additional terror to a revenge play already loaded with abundant violence, for the Elizabethans upheld the poetic belief that the Supreme Deity would send vengeance upon an offending criminal.¹

The ghost of this play appears three times to direct the course of events, but this supernatural visitant is a Christian ghost, not the fierce, vengeful ghost of earlier revenge plays. Choosing his setting on a dark night just as the clock is striking one, the Ghost of Montferrers appears to Charlemont while he is on watch and commands him to return to France for his father has been murdered; his last words, however, are, "But leave revenge to the King of kings."² Charlemont persuades himself that he had only had a dream; but as the ghost re-enters, the soldier

¹Schelling, op. cit., I, p. 564.

²The Atheist's Tragedy, II, vi, p. 286.

shoots at him without effect, and Charlemont is convinced of the ghost's genuineness.

Later when Charlemont looses his wrath upon Sebastian, the ghost again appears and exclaims,

Hold, Charlemont,
Let him revenge my murder and thy wrongs
To whom the justice of revenge belongs.¹

Once more, when D'Ambille has fallen asleep over his gold, the ghost enters, contradicts the atheist's boasting, and predicts the beginning of his downfall:

D'Ambille! With all thy wisdom th'art a fool.
Not like the fools which we term innocents,
But a most wretched miserable fool
Which instantly, to the confusion of
Thy projects, with despair thou shalt behold.²

Tourneur's ghost was intended to be a messenger of Providence, but apart from his ideas, he remained, no doubt, a conventional stage ghost.³

Much use is made of portents. As Charlemont is leaving for war, Castabella predicts, "Some sad event will follow my sad tears."⁴ At the same time Charlemont adds, "Something within me would persuade me stay."⁵ After the announcement of Charlemont's death, Montferrers says that he fears he will be next, and in the last part of the play D'Ambille,

¹Ibid., III, 11, p. 294.

²Ibid., V, 1, p. 324.

³Thorndike, PMLA, p. 199.

⁴The Atheist's Tragedy, I, 11, p. 253.

⁵Ibid.

too, is troubled by a premonition of death. Reference is made to screech owls and howling dogs as evil omens.

Tourneur separates his comic element from his serious scenes. The comedy is most often grim and concerns some form of vice which the author attempts to make humorous.

The scene depicting the murder of Montferrers is particularly violent and horrible; it is climaxed with D'Ambille's exultant declaration that he will build his manor house on the very spot.

Among the dramatic situations are found three sword fights, a watch scene, a wedding banquet, a suicide, the death of the accomplice, and a mourning scene in which Castabella goes to the tomb of Charlemont.

There are such dramatic trimmings as scaffolds, death-heads used for cushions, thunder and lightning accompanying the ghost, and the exhibition of the dead body of Sebastian.

Elements Which Differentiate One Play from Another

The Spanish Tragedy, crude and often comically primitive in expression, appealed to the audience of the public theater because of its sensational deeds of blood and intrigue carried out by an insensitive villain and a ranting madman. Kyd's emphasis is all on physical horror, and there are no spiritual, moral, or instructive interpretations to relieve its impact.

Nash called it a "whole handful of tragical speeches" and "a blanke verse hodged up with ifs and ands."¹ In spite of its crudeness and lack of dignity, the play is not entirely without the element of real tragedy and represents a poet's effort toward imaginative expression.²

In motives, plot, characterization, and even in individual scenes and situations Marston followed the old models, but he altered the appearance of a few of these elements.

In his treatment of the supernatural, the Ghost was shifted from the prologue or chorus to an acting role in the play and haunts the scenes with his frequent appearances.³

A new emphasis is placed upon the dramatic love story as a motive; the passion of Piero leads him to commit his crimes, and the accusation against Mellida helps to drive Antonio to madness.

The comic elements are confined to the by-play of Balurdo and an occasional bit of talk by Nutriche, Maria's maid; therefore, the chief characters are portrayed distinctly in relation to horror and crime.⁴

¹Thorndike, PMLA, quoted from Nash's "Epistle to Green's Menaphon."

²Ibid., p. 148.

³Schelling, op. cit., I, p. 555.

⁴Thorndike, PMLA, p. 166.

Revenge is accomplished by a masque instead of a play within the play; the hero does not meet death; and there is a greater accumulation of horrors and melodramatic stage effects.¹

In addition to a new tragic diction and a more thoughtful philosophy, Marston's style, although still a pretentious rant, shows an imaginative quality which is his most original contribution.²

In dramatic structure, Hoffman differs widely from the other revenge plays. The chief alterations which Chettle made are in the omission of the ghost to direct the revenge; in the character of the central figure, who is really more villain than hero; and in a different method of handling the revenge, a necessity which resulted from the lack of hesitation on the part of the hero. Hoffman does not limit his revenge to a single person but includes many in his designs, an ambition which must involve a number of individual and different intrigues in place of one major plot.

Lucibella's madness, instead of being used only for its dramatic effectiveness, contributes to the main action by leading to the discovery of Hoffman's plots. This difference is important and was Chettle's own invention.³

¹Schelling, op. cit., I, p. 148.

²Thorndike, PMLA, pp. 167-168.

³Thorndike, Tragedy, p. 152.

Chettle made little effort to give the story either imaginative intensity or philosophical significance, nor did he make the ambitious effort of Jonson or Marston to express the workings of human psychology in a crisis. By combining common theatrical motives and details, he constructed a good play of action which successfully met stage demands.¹

The new elements found in The Atheist's Tragedy consist primarily of the transfer of the role of protagonist from avenger to murderer, a more elaborate plan of intrigue carried on wholly by the villain, the addition of atheism as a new terror,² and the morality or Christian character of the ghost.

In addition to his new personality development of the villain and the hero, Tourneur in his characterization of Languebeau Snuffe as a hypocritical chaplain savagely attacks the Puritans of his day.³

Also for the first time the soliloquies present a unity of argument for and against the power of God. Tourneur does not employ the reflective element solely for the purpose of a character's introspection into his individual situation; rather it shows a deliberate attempt to embody a

¹Ibid., p. 153; see also Thorndike, PMLA, pp. 192-193.

²Schelling, op. cit., I, p. 564.

³Thorndike, PMLA, p. 199.

definite philosophical conception in a tragedy of blood.¹

Moral Implications

Both The Spanish Tragedy and Hoffman contain no moral instruction whatsoever. Although the plays abound in long rhetorical soliloquies, these ranting speeches pertain purely to the characters' own particular situation. All emphasis is placed on the physical aspects of horror and violent bloodshed.

Marston stated in his prologue to Antonio's Revenge his serious and ambitious intention to give poetical expression to life's mysteries, to the presence of wrong and evil in the world, and to thoughts and emotions which arise from a dreadful situation. Although he did not succeed to the degree which he intended, it is significant that he saw the possibility in the revenge motive to interpret a kind of universal philosophy.²

Among the speeches and bits of conversation which will serve to illustrate Marston's attempt at moral instruction are, first Maria's comments on virtue, modesty, and the qualities appropriate to a good wife,

No, Lucio, my dear lord is wise, and knows
That tinsel glitter, or rich purpled robes,
Curl'd hairs, hung full of sparkling carcanets,
Are not the true adornments of a wife.

¹Ibid., p. 196.

²Ibid., pp. 167-168.

So long as wives are faithful, modest, chaste,
 Wise lords affect them. Virtue doth not waste
 With each slight flame of crackling vanity.
 A modest eye forceth affection,
 Whilst outward gayness' light looks but entice;
 Fairer than nature's fair is foulest vice.
 She that loves art, to get her cheek more lovers.
 Much outward gauds, slight inward grace discovers.
 I care not to seem fair but to my lord:
 Those that strive most to please most strangers' sight,
 Folly may judge most fair, wisdom most light.¹

Next, Pandulpho expresses his philosophy about young love
 when he says to Antonio,

Hast lost a good wife?
 Thrice-blessed man that lost her whilst she was good,
 Fair, young, unblemish'd, constant, loving, chaste.
 I tell thee, youth, age knows, young loves seem graced,
 Which with gray cares, rude jars, are oft defaced.²

 Thou has lost a good wife, thou lost a true friend, ha!
 Two of the rarest lendings of heaven,³

Antonio's speech about the part of a fool is Mars-
 ton's best expression of philosophy:

He is not wise who strives not to seem fool.

 Even in that note a fool's beatitude:
 He is not capable of passion;
 Wanting the power of distinction,
 He bears an unturned sail with every wind;
 Blow east, blow west, he stirs his course alike.
 I never saw a fool lean: the chub-faced fop
 Shines sleek with full-cramm'd fat of happiness,
 Whilst studious contemplation sucks the juice
 From wisards' cheeks: who making curious search
 For nature's secrets, the first innating cause
 Laughs them to scorn, as man doth busy apes

¹Antonio's Revenge, I, 11, ll. 47-61.

²Ibid., IV, 11, ll. 38-42.

³Ibid., 11. 48-49.

When they will zany men. Had Heaven been kind,
 Creating me an honest senseless dolt,
 A good, poor fool, I should want sense to feel
 The stings of anguish shoot through every vein;
 I should not know what 'twere to lost a father;
 I should be dead of sense to view defame
 Blur my bright love; I could not thus run mad,
 As one confounded in a maze of mischief,
 Stagger'd, stark, fell'd with bruising stroke of chance;
 I should not shoot mine eyes into the earth,
 Poring for mischief that might counterpoise
 Mischief, murder and --- ¹

While only brief glimpses of philosophical moralizing are spasmodically sprinkled throughout Marston's play, The Atheist's Tragedy embodies a definite moral implication in the theme itself. Sometimes called the "thesis" play, it has as its alternate title "The Honest Man's Revenge."

D'Ambille is the representative of vice and atheism, relying upon his own power of intellect and his possession of gold to sustain him. Through his fear of the supernatural, his ultimate despair, and his final doom, Tourneur shows that sin will be punished.

The minor characters -- Levidulcia, Soquette, Cataplasma, Fresco, Borachio, and Languebeau Snuffe -- represent the sins of lust and greed, and in the final outcome are severely punished.

On the other hand Charlemont is the symbol of Christian morality; honorable, courageous, and noble, he is the instrument of God's providence. Castabella signifies the virtues of purity and chastity. Their worthiness is rewarded,

¹Ibid., 11. 25, 37-59.

and the play ends in the triumph of the good.

For specific examples of some moralizing speeches, reference should be made again to a few of the soliloquies.

Charlemont in prison reflects upon his own situation as typical of others:

Our own constructions are the authors of
Our misery. We never measure our
Conditions but with men above us in
Estate. So while our spirits labour to
Be higher than our fortunes, they are more base.
Superior to us, are man's subjects and
Were made to serve him. The repining man
Is of a servile spirit to deject
The value of himself below their estimation.¹

Again at the graveyard Charlemont thinks of the worldly ambition of men:

O

That man with so much labour should aspire
To worldly height, when in the humble earth
The world's condition's at the best, or scorn
Inferior men, since to be lower than
A worm is higher than a king.²

Levidulcia moralizes upon her own sin in this fashion:

Must my life

Be made the world's example? Since it must,
Then thus in detestation of my deed,
To make the example move more forceably
To virtue, thus I seal it with a death
As full of horror as my life of sin.³

In the trial scene which concludes the play both D'Ambille and Charlemont in their speeches offer a climax to the play's moral preaching. D'Ambille utters his final

¹The Atheist's Tragedy, III, iii, p. 297.

²Ibid., IV, iii, p. 308.

³Ibid., IV, v, p. 322.

words in refutation of his atheism:

There was the strength of natural understanding.
But Nature is a fool. There is a power
Above her that hath overthrown the pride
Of all my projects and posterity.

.
But yon power
That struck me knew the judgment I deserved,
And gave it¹

Charlemont answers briefly,

Only to Heaven I attribute the work,
Whose gracious motives made me still forbear
To be mine own revenger. Now I see
That patience is the honest man's revenge.²

Tourneur made the definite attempt to apply moral significance to the conventional revenge tragedy. Ashley H. Thorndike in his criticism of the play states that

In occasional finely imaginative passages, in the realization of certain mental aspects, his conceptions become vital and suggestive, and one feels for a moment that The Atheist's Tragedy is, after all, not so far from Hamlet.³

¹Ibid., V, ii, p. 336.

²Ibid.

³PMLA, p. 200.

CHAPTER III

THE REVENGE PLAYS FOLLOWING HAMLET

The important revenge tragedies which followed Hamlet are The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois, which Chapman wrote as a sequel to his earlier Bussy D'Ambois; Tourneur's second revenge play, The Revenger's Tragedy; and two revenge plays for which Webster is chiefly famous, The White Devil and The Duchess of Malfi.

In this group of plays, there is a gradual departure from the Kydian blood-for-blood requital, and lust and sheer malice become increasingly important motives. The sensationalism of the revenge tragedy is enhanced by a greater accumulation of horrors, slaughter, and bloodshed. While characters in general receive a more vitalizing delineation, more emphasis tends to be placed upon the villain than upon the hero.

The plays included in this chapter will be analyzed and discussed in the same manner as were those of the preceding chapter.

Plot Motives

The fundamental motive of The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois is, as the title, implies, the revenge of Clermont

for the murder of his brother, Bussy. This murder has been committed, however, not entirely through sheer malice and not without sufficient cause, for Bussy has been slain by Montsurry as a result of his adulterous relations with Montsurry's wife, Tamyra. As the play opens, the Ghost of Bussy has already appeared to demand vengeance, and Clermont has vowed requital.

While the revenge motive is the core of the play, it does not occupy the entire action. The political plot of Guise against the throne of France, with the ensuing intrigue, involves most of the dramatic action in the play and is totally unrelated to the revenge motive. Clermont's alliance with Guise is of more moment than his task of seeking revenge on Montsurry.

Between the vow of revenge in Act I and its final culmination in the last scene of Act V, the political intrigue fills the time and action, and the revenge motive is kept before the audience only in the importunities of Charlotte, the sister of Bussy and of Clermont.

Since vengeance is not taken until Act V, the hesitation motive is present but has no emotional dramatic value. Although Clermont has vowed revenge, he is troubled throughout the play by the question of taking the law into his own hands.¹ He is not eager to revenge, and at one

¹Fredson Thayer Bowers, Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940), p. 148.

point, tired of his sister's insistence, answers,

We must wreak our wrongs
So as we take not more.¹

Later he goes further as he says,

I repent that ever
(By any instigation in th'appearance
My brother's spirit made, as I imagin'd),
That e'er I yielded to revenge his murder.
All worthy men should ever bring their blood
To bear all ill, not to be wreak'd with good.²

The ethic of revenge is finally resolved by the ghost of Bussy in the last act, and thus satisfied, Clermont fights Montsurry in fair combat and kills him. Instead of exulting in his revenge, Clermont pronounces a benediction:

. . . . for all faults found in him before,
These words, this end, makes full amends and more.
Rest, worthy soul, and with it the dear spirit
Of my lov'd brother, rest in endless peace!
Soft lie thy bones, heaven be your soul's abode,
And to your ashes be the earth no load!³

In addition to Clermont's reluctance to revenge, delay is further caused by the difficulty in piercing the guard which Montsurry has set around his house and by his refusal to accept Clermont's challenge when it is finally delivered. Meanwhile, the plot of Guise comes to the fore, and Clermont's part in it occupies his time and interest.

¹George Chapman, The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois, III, 11, 11. 103-104, Early Seventeenth-century Plays, 1600-1642, eds. Harold Reinohl Wally and John Harold Wilson (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, n. d.).

²Ibid., 11. 109-114.

³Ibid., V, v, 11. 114-119.

External obstacles are thereby placed in his path, not by the counter-intrigue of his victim, but by the stratagems of those persons who are attempting to halt the progress of Guise and who are entirely unconnected with his revenge.

When Clermont finally resolves to act, he is not killed as a result of his revenge but commits suicide because he has no desire to live after the death of Guise, a reason totally unrelated to his vengeance.¹

Madness, either real or feigned, is not employed as a dramatic motive in this play. Only in the terror and frantic fear of Montsurry is there any exhibition of abnormal and distracted emotion. When Clermont's challenge is delivered to him in Act I, he is in such a state of panic that he keeps crying, "murder, murder,"² even while being assured that no one is present who will hurt him. In Act V his terror is even more evident when he sees Clermont enter the room. Clermont quietly tells Tamyra to give Montsurry his sword, but Montsurry screams, "Treason! murder, murder!"³ His cowardice and fear of death are revealed in his continued refusal to fight, and he is aroused to action only when Tamyra is about to torture him as he had done her.

¹Bowers, op. cit., pp. 145-148.

²The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois, I, i, l. 136.

³Ibid., V, v, l. 7.

What little intrigue there is in the play is concerned with the plot of Guise and its ultimate doom and is not related to the revenge motive. Guise is an ambitious aspirant to the throne of France and the champion of the Catholic cause. As a firm friend and staunch ally, Clermont belongs to the party of Guise. Acting as a spy for the king, Baligny helps to trap Clermont in the first instance and later to ambush Guise.

In order to devise a scheme in which Clermont can be discredited and apprehended, the king must use much guile, for Clermont is greatly admired by the people as well as the court. Baligny takes Clermont to Cambrai on a pretext of engaging in practice battle skirmishes and of visiting Charlotte, Clermont's sister and Baligny's wife. After their arrival, Baligny makes an excuse to leave, and during a feigned martial celebration to welcome and honor Clermont, the captains have been ordered to seize him as he reviews the troops.

An anonymous letter is handed to Clermont revealing the true intent of the exhibition, but against his better judgment he ignores it. He does, however, accost Maillard with the intention of searching him for letters, but upon Maillard's repeated oaths that he has none, Clermont refrains. As he rides out between the battle arrays, two soldiers seize him from behind. As had been previously

predicted, he escapes them, and Clermont's fighting skill is shown in that the combined efforts of the captains and both armies are required to run him down. Although they never succeed in laying hands on him, Clermont finally falls exhausted and is taken prisoner. Later the intercession of Guise effects his release from the Bastille.

Since this plot has not worked out as intended, King Henry, together with Baligny and the guards, plan the ambush slaying of Guise whose political power is growing more threatening. As he answers a summon to appear before the king, Guise is attacked and stabbed to death. Henry enters as Guise is dying and attempts to justify the deed with the words,

And the blood I shed is to save the blood
Of many thousands.¹

to which Guise replies in a prophetic fashion:

That's your white pretext,
But you will find one drop of blood shed lawless
Will be the fountain to a purple sea.
The present lust and shift made for kings' lives
Against the pure form and just power of law
Will thrive like shifters' purchases; there hangs
A black star in the skies, to which the sun
Gives yet no light, will rain a poison'd shower
Into your entrails, that will make you feel
How little safety lies in treacherous steel.²

It is significant to note that Clermont does not attempt revenge on the king, for the murder of Guise, for in so doing, he would violate the belief in the divine right

¹Ibid., V, iv, ll. 50-51.

²Ibid., ll. 52-61.

of kings.

There is no intrigue connected with the accomplishment of revenge. Clermont enters Montsurry's house in a direct manner and endeavors to secure his revenge according to the code of honor. Montsurry's refusal to fight almost robs Clermont of his revenge. When Montsurry first lies on the floor, Clermont urges him to combat. Upon his continued refusal, Clermont hands the sword to Tamyra, who would not hesitate to employ it in effective torture. Montsurry is then forced to action, and Clermont engages him coolly and courteously even allowing him to stop for a rest. When Montsurry is finally slain, Clermont pronounces a benediction, thus upholding the Christian morality of the play.

There is no definite contrasting sub-plot in the play. Clermont's nobleness and his reluctance to revenge are emphasized by Charlotte's repeated importunities to revenge her brother's death and by Tamyra's equally vehement craving for vengeance. Clermont's concern for his brother seems insignificant in comparison to his love and grief at the death of Guise. He considers his vow to revenge his brother a repugnant duty, but so grieved is he at the loss of his lord that he commits suicide.

Only three of the characters meet death in the course of the action. Bussy D'Ambois has already been killed before the play begins, and it is not until the last

act that other deaths take place. Guise is slain by the king's guards in a treacherous attack; Clermont kills Montsurry in a sword fight, and thereafter commits suicide. These persons are not murdered in sheer malice, but each is killed for a definite reason not entirely unjustifiable.

No romantic love situation is present in the play although Bussy's affair with Montsurry's wife, Tamyra, serves as the motive for his murder which takes place before the play begins. Tamyra's true devotion to Bussy is expressed in her soliloquy at his grave,¹ and as the play ends with the slaying of her husband and the suicide of Clermont, she vows, along with Charlotte and the Countess, to spend the rest of her life in religious penance.

The Revenger's Tragedy is one of the last great tragedies to be composed under the Kydian formula. As the title suggests, it is not only a tragedy accomplished by the revenger, but also one which causes the downfall of the revenger in the corruption of his own nature.²

The prime motive is the revenge of Vendice for the death of his betrothed, who had been poisoned by the Duke after she repulsed his lustful advances. In addition the traditional revenge for a father's death is added as a subordinate motive, for Vendice's father had died presumably

¹Ibid., I, ii, p. 471.

²Bowers, op. cit., p. 132; see also Parrott and Ball, op. cit., p. 218.

from discontent after his disgrace by the Duke. Vendice first vows his revenge against the old Duke, but most of his intrigues are directed against Lussurioso, who plans to seduce Vendice's sister, Castiza.

Hesitation on the part of the revenger is evident in that Vendice has already inexplicably waited nine years for a chance at his revenge. After becoming pander to Lussurioso, Vendice succeeds in wreaking his vengeance on the Duke but passes up an ideal opportunity to kill Lussurioso because, he tells himself, he wants to meet him face to face in combat. His plan to kill Lussurioso over the dead body of the Duke is thwarted by the presence of witnesses. Finally in the last scene of Act V, after many episodes and intrigues, Vendice accomplishes his revenge during the performance of a masque.

While there is no madness, either feigned or real, on the part of any character, Tourneur substitutes the ironic cynicism of the revenger.¹

Vendice proceeds toward his revenge through two disguises and a complicated series of episodes and intrigues. Since his revenge is directed against both the Duke and his son, Vendice cannot concentrate on one single act but must proceed cautiously and secretly in forming his various stratagems, for were his intentions known, every hand at

¹Parrott and Ball, op. cit., p. 216.

court would be set against him.

All the counter-intrigue which interferes concerns the ambitious or lustful schemes of other court factions and is entirely separate and apart from the revenge motive. This confusion of non-essential episodes affects the main plot only vaguely but adds tremendously to the atmosphere of moral corruption and depravity. For example, the Duchess' youngest son is tried and imprisoned for rape. His brothers, Ambitioso and Supercuo, work for his release at the same time that their ambitions lead them to conspire the death of the Duke's legitimate son, Lussurioso. The old Duke is hunting for a new mistress, and the Duchess is carrying on a lewd affair with the bastard, Spurio. The subsidiary intrigues result finally in the death of all except the Duchess.

Vendice's schemes become almost submerged among the other conflicting forces, yet they provide the main story and the unifying element of the play. Accompanying his brother, Hippolito, Vendice goes to the court in the disguise of Plato to act as an accomplice for Lussurioso. In this capacity he attempts for his master the seduction of his sister, Castiza. Arguing that riches are worth more than honor, he discovers the firm chastity of his sister and the weakness of his own mother.

After bungling the trap he and Lussurioso have laid for the Duchess and Spurio, during which Lussurioso attacks

his father by mistake and is promptly hustled off to prison, Vendice is forced to go into temporary hiding. During this interim, however, he is given an opportunity to take revenge on the Duke. Leading him to a supposedly clandestine rendezvous, Vendice puts in the place of the expected damsel the skull of his betrothed fully clothed and painted with poison. In the darkened lodge, the lustful old Duke kisses the skull, and as he is dying, Vendice gloatingly reveals himself as the revenger.

Lussurioso, now released from prison, decides that he must hire a new accomplice to do away with the first one. Hippolito, for the second time, brings his brother to the young duke. This time Vendice is himself but feigns discontent and melancholy. Having been given the difficult job of killing Piato, Vendice devises the scheme to clothe the body of the Duke, yet undiscovered, in the attire of Piato so as to give the appearance that Piato has been the murderer and has escaped in the Duke's own robes. The plan works as intended.

Lussurioso is installed as the new Duke at a banquet given the same evening. During the carousing, Vendice, Hippolito, and two lords enter the hall in the costumes of masquers. While entertaining the new duke with a dance, they draw their swords and stab Lussurioso and the other three lords sitting at the table. As a peal of thunder sounds, Vendice cries,

No power is angry when the lustful die
When thunder claps, heaven likes the tragedy.¹

Another masque of murderers enter, this one composed of Ambitioso, Supercavuo, Spurio, and a lord. To their astonishment they find Lussurioso already killed, and immediately arguing over who will succeed him, they kill each other in an ensuing brawl.

Antonio, amazed at these affairs, is proclaimed the new ruler. As a surprise anticlimax, Vendice, over-confident in the exultation of his revenge, confesses to the deed. Expecting commendation, he is greatly surprised to find himself and his brother seized and led off to be executed. As he recalls his own words spoken earlier that only time will expose a murderer, he exclaims,

This murder might have slept in tongueless brass
But for ourselves, and the world died an ass.²

A contrasting situation is offered by the grief of Antonio for his wife who, after being raped by the Duchess' youngest son, poisons herself. As Vendice holds the skull of his betrothed and calls for vengeance, so does Antonio, over the body of his wife, lament her cruel fate and vow revenge. Antonio does not take part in any plots, however, for the Duchess' youngest son is conveniently beheaded for him. While Vendice is the bloodthirsty revenger, Antonio plays

¹Cyril Tourneur, The Revenger's Tragedy, V, iii, p. 429, Webster and Tourneur, ed. John Addington Symonds (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, n. d.). Hereafter this text, whose lines are not numbered, will be referred to as The Revenger's Tragedy.

²Ibid., p. 432.

the part of the grief-stricken martyr.

With much flow of blood violent slaughter takes the lives of all the principal characters and leaves only Antonio to restore order. Vendice's bride-to-be and his father have died before the play begins. The old Duke is poisoned by kissing the skull of his former victim; the Duchess' youngest son is beheaded by prison guards who misunderstand the orders of his brothers; Lussurioso along with three unidentified lords is stabbed during the masque at his coronation banquet; Spurio, Ambitioso, and Supervacuo kill each other in a brawl; and finally Vendice and Hippolito are led away to execution after they foolishly expose their own deeds.

The love element in this tragedy is represented by sheer lust which, constantly in the foreground, is the source of all the evil. Vendice's betrothed was poisoned because of her resistance to the advances of the Duke; Castiza is subjected to seduction; and Antonio's wife commits suicide after being raped. The Duke, because of his own sinful desires, walks into his death-trap. During the entire play, the Duchess and Spurio are having an illicit affair.

The main motive of The White Devil is the revenge of Francisco, Duke of Florence, for the murder of his sister, Isabella, slain by her husband, Brachiano. The unfolding of the plot story is dependent upon this motive although

it is not developed until Act IV when Francisco fully decides upon his plan of revenge. The motivating force of the first three acts of the tragedy is the lustful desire of Brachiano for Vittoria, wife of Camillo, and it is this adulterous relationship which causes Brachiano to murder Isabella and Camillo. Both the revenge motive and the love motive play an equally dominant role in the final action of the play. The conflict of the two leads to the deaths of not only Brachiano and Vittoria, but of Francisco and his accomplices.

There is little hesitation on the part of either Brachiano in carrying out his murder plots or Francisco in taking his revenge as soon as the opportunity presents itself. Since Webster does not bring the revenge element into play until Act IV, Francisco needs only one act in which to succeed in both plotting and accomplishing his revenge.

Madness is evidenced in three of the principal characters. Flamineo, the accomplice of Brachiano, assumes an ironic madness to divert suspicion from himself and to provide a cover for the shifting of his own selfish schemes.

Madness is very real in the case of Brachiano, for when the poison begins to eat into his brain and he realizes that death is inevitable, he begins to lose his mind. Iodovico's description shows that the sinful life which Brachiano had led is preying upon his mind:

He's fall'n into a strange distraction:
 He talks of battles and monopolies;
 Levying of taxes, and from that descends
 On twenty several objects which confound
 Deep sense of folly.¹

Later when Brachiano is portrayed in his full madness, his speeches represent "several kinds of distractions."² He accuses Vittoria and Flamineo of having led him into his crimes and describes them in a distorted fashion. In hallucination, he thinks he sees the devil wearing a rose to hide his cloven hoof; again, he cries out that six gray rats without tails are crawling on his pillow. The effect of crime upon a man's soul is evident in the insanity of Brachiano and in the horror of his death scene.

The insanity of Cornelia assumes a childlike quality. After having witnessed the murder of her son, Marcello, by his own brother, Flamineo, she becomes pathetically distracted. "'Tween doleful songs, tears, and sad elegies,"³ Cornelia adorns Marcello's body with flowers as she wraps him in a winding sheet. Thinking Flamineo is a gravedigger, she begins to rave, and her speech takes on a grimmer tone:

When screech owls croak upon the chimney tops,
 And the strange cricket i' th'oven sings and hops,
 Then yellow spots do on your hands appear,
 Be certain then you of a corpse shall hear.

¹John Webster, The White Devil, V, iii, ll. 68-72, Early Seventeenth-century Plays, 1600-1642, eds. Walley and Wilson. Hereafter this will be referred to as The White Devil.

²Ibid., stage direction to V, iii, p. 600.

³Ibid., V, iv, l. 52.

Out upon't, how 'tis speckled! H'as handled a toad,
 sure.
 Cowslip-water is good for the memory.
 Pray, buy me three ounces of't.¹

Then she continues her crazed babblings, interspersing her phrases with snatches of a song about unburied men, graves, and funeral wreaths.

An elaborate web of intrigue and counter-intrigue forms the plot story of this play. Flamineo, Brachiano, and Vittoria on the one hand are pitted against Cardinal Monticelso, Francisco, and Lodovico. No one of these characters is a really worthy person, and although the former trio represents the villainous set, the latter is far from being heroic.

The illicit love affair of Vittoria and Brachiano has been going on for some time as the play opens, and when Vittoria suggests, by her recount of a dream, the possibility of ridding themselves of her husband, Camillo, and of Brachiano's wife, Isabella, the villain needs no second hint. Before a plan can be completely evolved, Isabella returns to Rome unexpectedly, accompanied by Monticelso and Francisco. Brachiano's openly acknowledged love for Vittoria and his vindictive scorn toward Isabella immediately cause the Cardinal and the Florentine duke to plot his downfall. By sending Isabella to Padua and then commissioning Camillo to hunt down the pirate, Lodovico, they hope to

¹Ibid., ll. 78-84.

give Brachiano and Vittoria a free leeway for their affair, the exposure of which would result in scandal and their inevitable ruin.

In the meantime, however, Brachiano has hired a doctor to kill Isabella. Following her to Padua, he paints the lips of her husband's picture with poison. According to her customary ritual before retiring, Isabella kisses the picture three times and falls dead.

At the same time Brachiano's accomplice, Flamineo, is equally successful in accomplishing the murder of Camillo. In a state of drunken joviality, Camillo is maneuvered into a vaulting contest. As Camillo is about to exhibit his skill, Flamineo pitches him on his neck and twists it until broken.

Upon the discovery of the murder of Camillo Vittoria is brought to trial. Monticelso, acting as judge, brutally accuses her of both murder and adultery, but since no proof can be found for these charges to warrant a death sentence or imprisonment, he condemns her to confinement in a "house of converities."

At this point Francisco begins his intrigue. He secures from Monticelso, now Pope, a pardon for Lodovico, and since Lodovico has been Isabella's lover, he enlists his aid in seeking revenge. Next, he acquires the list of uncaptured murderers within the city in order to hire more accomplices when they are needed. Finally, he writes a letter to

Vittoria declaring his love for her and sends it by messenger with the stipulation that it be delivered in the presence of some friend of Brachiano. The letter has its desired effect, for Brachiano, aroused to jealousy, plans Vittoria's escape and flight.

In the disguise of Moorish soldiers, Francisco and Lodovico with their assistants arrive during the wedding celebration of the two lovers and are accepted into Brachiano's employment. At his first opportunity Lodovico sprinkles poison in Brachiano's beaver helmet, and it is this poison which brings about the madness and final death of Brachiano. When he is at the point of death, Francisco and Lodovico enter in the disguise of priests to administer the last rites. Left alone with him, they cease their pretended prayers and begin to curse him and damn him to everlasting hell. Brachiano revives enough to cry out, whereupon Lodovico strangles him to death.

Francisco, content with his revenge upon Brachiano, leaves the city, but Lodovico remains behind to deal with Vittoria.

Flammineo, during the course of action, although a sworn accomplice of Brachiano, has become more self-seeking and more daring in his own ambitious schemes. Petty jealousy has caused him to stab his brother, Marcello, in an openly treacherous attack. In addition, the insanity of his mother of which he has been the cause, the knowledge of his

many and varied crimes, and more particularly the thwarting of his ambition when Prince Giovanni, Brachiano's son, banishes him from his court, all tend to torment his already depraved mind in such a way that he decides to blackmail Vittoria. Should he be spurned by her, too, he says that he will "drown this weapon in her blood."¹ By means of a clever and feigned suicide pact, he tricks Vittoria into turning on him first, and upon the discovery of her true hatred for him, he attempts to stab both Vittoria and her Moorish maid, Zanche. At this instant Lodovico and Gasparo, still in Moorish disguise, rush into the room, and shouting the name of Isabella, they stab Flamineo, Vittoria, and Zanche. Amid much confusion the Prince and his party break into the room and in turn kill the two revengers. Giovanni, a noble character, remains at the close of the play to carry off the five dead bodies and to restore the order of his father's dukedom.

There are no minor contrasting situations to emphasize the main story. The various elements of intrigue and murder are equal in their intensity and in their importance to the plot. In character portrayal contrast is offered most clearly by the difference between Marcello's goodness and Flamineo's evil. The morality of Marcello tends to paint more darkly the extreme iniquity of his brother.

¹Ibid., V, v, l. 143.

Slaughter and bloodshed run rampant in this drama. Nine of the principal characters meet death by violent means. Near the beginning of the play Camillo has his neck broken by Flamineo in a vaulting exhibition; Isabella is poisoned by kissing her husband's picture. Later Flamineo runs his sword through Marcello; Lodovico poisons Brachiano's helmet and then strangles him to hasten his death; Flamineo, Vittoria, and Zanche are stabbed simultaneously by Lodovico and Gasparo, who in turn are killed by the forces of Prince Giovanni.

The love element is of the utmost importance in the plot story, but throughout the play it is represented by moral depravity. The valiant, though illicit love of Brachiano for Vittoria is the source of all the crimes, both directly and indirectly, yet the affair is lifted somewhat from the level of low intrigue by the genuineness of Brachiano's passion. In spite of his wicked means of achieving possession of his desired Vittoria, Brachiano's pride and insolence in the face of opposition and his loyalty to Vittoria even on his deathbed win for him a certain admiration.¹

Lust is constantly evident throughout the play. Lodovico had been Isabella's lover, and this fact allies him to Francisco in revenging her death. Flamineo has had an affair with Zanche, the Moorish serving woman, who for her

¹Bowers, op. cit., p. 181.

own part wants to elope with Francisco who she thinks is a Moor because of his disguise.

Monticelso's accusations against Vittoria are expressed quite vividly, and conversation throughout the play tells of all sorts of debauchery.

The motive which reigns over the action of The Duchess of Malfi is the revenge of two brothers against their sister, the cause of which is indefinite and unmotivated. Although Duke Ferdinand and the Cardinal give as their reasons the fact that the Duchess has married beneath her rank and also that, by doing so, she has deprived them of an "infinite mass of treasure,"¹ they are actually motivated primarily by sheer malice. There is no moral ground for revenge. The Duchess, guilty of a disregard for convention rather than of any crime, is an innocent victim of her brothers' cruelty.² Retribution is the keynote of the play, but the villains bring it directly upon themselves. Ferdinand goes mad; the Cardinal is haunted by a fear of hell; and Bosola himself is killed in a mortal scuffle with the brothers.³

There is no element of hesitation in this play, for Antonio, the potential hero, was stabbed before he ever

¹John Webster, The Duchess of Malfi, IV, ii, p. 213, Webster and Tourneur, ed. Symonds. Lines of this text are not numbered. Hereafter this will be referred to as The Duchess of Malfi.

²Parrott and Ball, op. cit., pp. 230-232.

³Bowers, op. cit., p. 179.

learned of his wife's murder. Tragedy might have been averted, however, when Ferdinand left the poniard in the Duchess' chamber if Antonio had had the strength of character to attack Ferdinand instead of only blustering that he should have done so.

Madness forms an essential element throughout the play and adds materially to the atmosphere of horror. The inhuman rage which Ferdinand exhibits when he hears of his sister's defiance borders on real insanity. Later, in order to drive the Duchess out of her mind, he not only lodges madmen near her but employs them to "entertain" her. Entering with Bosola, they engage in fantastic conversation while singing and dancing to "unanswerable music."¹ During this wild cavorting Bosola further attempts to terrify the Duchess by his gloomy impersonation of the tomb-maker and the bellman. An executioner is present with a coffin, cords, and a bell; Bosola sings a dismal ditty about preparation for death; and Cariola is carried out shrieking. The Duchess remains calm and unaffected in the midst of this terrorizing display and faces death in perfect readiness.

As a result of this crime Ferdinand becomes insane, and the horrible aspect of his madness is described by the doctor:

¹The Duchess of Malfi, IV, 11, p. 206.

In those that are possessed with't there o'erflows
 Such melancholy humour they imagine
 Themselves to be transformed into wolves;
 Steal forth to churchyards in the dead of night,
 And dig dead bodies up: as two nights since
 One met the duke 'bout midnight in a lane
 Behind Saint Mark's church, with the leg of a man
 Upon his shoulder; and he howled fearfully;
 Said he was a wolf, only the difference
 Was, a wolf's skin was hairy on the outside,
 His on the inside; bade them take their swords,
 Rip up his flesh, and try:¹

The Cardinal shows signs of distraction as he broods upon the flames of Hell. In the melancholy which has descended upon him he sees a vision armed with a rake striking at him from fish-ponds in his garden.

The intrigue and counter-intrigue which shape the plot of the drama are developed rather clearly and directly through the first four acts, but the last act is cluttered with such a mass of conflicting episodes that its very confusion produces an acute sensation of terror.

As their first step the villainous brothers place Bosola in the household of the Duchess to spy upon her behavior and to notice particularly what suitors solicit marriage. In defiance of her brothers' threats against a marriage, the Duchess woos and wins Antonio, afterwards contracting the marriage in secret. Even then she realizes her peril:

¹Ibid., V, ii, p. 219.

For I am going into a wilderness
 Where I shall find nor path nor friendly clue
 To be my guide.¹

The snooping Bosola discovers the Duchess' pregnancy by a trick with half-green apricots, and later the same night he learns of the child's birth from a nativity chart accidentally dropped by Antonio. He at once sends a message to Ferdinand who, with the Cardinal, not only exhibits wild rage but vows vengeance upon his sister and her lover. The assumption that the Duchess has been indulging in an illicit love affair makes matters worse.

Ferdinand stealthily enters his sister's room and confronts her with accusations of debauchery. The account of her marriage makes no difference, for he leaves his poniard admonishing her to kill herself and vows never more to see her.

Between the birth of her first child and the arrival of the Duke, the Duchess has managed somehow to give birth to two more children, and sensing deeply an attack by her brothers, she feigns a robbery for which she accuses Antonio, thereby insuring his escape with their eldest child. At the same time Bosola, in a cunning approach, praises Antonio so highly that the Duchess takes him into her confidence and in doing so makes her fatal mistake. She not only tells him that Antonio has fled to Ancona but follows Bosola's

¹Ibid., I, i, p. 146.

instruction to escape herself with her other children to the shrine of Our Lady of Loretta. Her second brother, the Cardinal, is waiting for her at this destination and in a solemn church scene banishes her, her husband, and their children.

Again the Duchess tries to escape the oncoming vengeance of her brothers. Antonio with the eldest boy immediately flees to Milan. Just as they part for the last time, Bosola seizes the Duchess and her two youngest children. Held prisoner in the palace of the Duke, the Duchess is subjected to mental tortures which include a dead man's hand wearing Antonio's ring, wax figures of Antonio and the children carved to suggest dead bodies, and the terrifying infliction of screaming madmen.

Beginning Act V, Antonio, finally, has decided to attempt a reconciliation with the Cardinal. Ferdinand by this time is a raving madman, and the Cardinal has employed Bosola to seek out Antonio and kill him. Since this accomplice is now feeling the stings of conscience, he decides that he will save Antonio's life and kill the brothers, but through a chance mistake he stabs Antonio instead as he is entering the Cardinal's home. In an ensuing sword fight, Bosola stabs the Cardinal, the Duke stabs Bosola, and Bosola in turn, before he dies, deals Ferdinand a fatal wound.

As the play ends, the stage is strewn with dead bodies. Delio enters to make a final speech proclaiming the

Duchess' eldest son succeeding heir who, he hopes, can "make noble use of this great ruin."¹

Contrast to the main situation is provided by the lustful affair of the Cardinal and his mistress, Julia, who in the end is poisoned by her lover.

Contrast is further noted in the characterization of the Duchess and her two brothers. The Cardinal has been compared to a fox; Ferdinand, a wolf;² and the Duchess, the embodiment of all noble virtues.

The slaughter element is evident in the nine murders which take place. The Duchess, her two children, and Cariola are strangled by an executioner hired by Ferdinand and the Cardinal; Julia is slain by kissing a poisoned holy book; Bosola stabs Antonio by mistake and in the fight which follows stabs the Cardinal, the Duke, and a servant before he himself is killed.

The tragic love story of Antonio and the Duchess is the prevailing force of the whole drama. Steadfast and sincere in their love throughout, both die in calm acceptance of their fate, neither wishing to live if the other is dead. Webster makes their romance more poignant by such scenes as the wooing of Antonio by the Duchess, their merry jesting on the eve of their ruin, and their sad parting,

¹Ibid., V, v, p. 240.

²Parrott and Ball, op. cit., p. 230.

both realizing that they will probably never see each other again.

As a contrast to the Duchess, Julia is the wife of old Castruccio and at the same time the lewd mistress of the Cardinal. As an accepted prostitute, she is approached by Delio and in one scene passionately solicits the attentions of Bosola.

Soliloquies

The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois abounds in long, philosophical and moralizing soliloquies. The Senecan-type tragedy gave Chapman an opportunity to show "his majesty of pen in tragical speeches."¹

Clermont has three soliloquies which express, in the main, his stoic philosophy of man's place in the universe. While he awaits his summons to review the battle maneuvers, he voices a premonition that misfortune will befall him because he feels that he is stepping above his proper status in assuming the honored position in this celebration.²

His second soliloquy is spoken after he has thrown aside all caution and is on his way to the combat field. Clearly revealed is his Stoic view of life as he says,

¹Thorndike, Tragedy, p. 144.

²The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois, III, iv, p. 494.

Chance what can chance me, well or ill is equal
 In my acceptance, since I joy in neither,
 But go with sway of all the world together.
 In all successes, fortune and the day
 To me alike are; I am fix'd, be she
 Never so fickle, and will there repose,
 Far past the reach of any die she throws.¹

After Clermont has slain Montsurry and after he has been told of Guise's death, he soliloquizes for forty-two lines in contemplation of suicide.²

Shall I live, and he
 Dead that alone gave means of life to me?

 But friendship is the cement of two minds,
 As of one man the soul and body is,
 Of which one cannot sever, but the other
 Suffers a needful separation.³

He goes on to reflect that as when a captain calls his men to return to their ship lest they be left on a foreign and hostile shore, so has his Master called all, and only he is left "negligent, to all the horrors of the vicious times."⁴ As he stabs himself, he cries, "I come, my lord! Clermont thy creature comes!"⁵

Tamyra, standing on the spot where Bussy was killed, soliloquizes once in an emotional expression of love and grief.

¹Ibid., ll. 159-165.

²Ibid., V, v, pp. 525-526.

³Ibid., ll. 149-160.

⁴Ibid., ll. 185-186.

⁵Ibid., l. 193.

O my dear Bussy, I will lie and kiss
 Spirit into thy blood, or breathe out mine
 In sighs and kisses and sad tunes to thine.¹

Clermont's release of Maillard on his oath that he knew of no plot of the king provides an opportunity for the messenger to philosophize upon "how vain are men's foreknowledge of things."²

Aumale, a captain in the king's service, relates in soliloquy the account of the attack on Clermont, which in itself gives a good insight into the character of the hero. Regarding his escape from the clutches of the soldiers and the failure of both armies to capture Clermont until he falls exhausted, Aumale wonderingly muses

What spirit breathes thus in this more than man,
 Turns flesh to air possess'd, and in a storm
 Tears men about the field like autumn leaves?³

Continuing his reflection, Aumale says that even after Clermont had fallen to the ground, he raised himself up, and his eyes "cast such a blaze of disdain"⁴ that all stood and stared until some "rude hand" dared to touch him.

Guise, in his one soliloquy, reveals his realization that he may die for his cause, but he expresses Stoic unconcern in the face of death.

¹Ibid., I, ii, ll. 22-24.

²Ibid., III, ii, l. 243.

³Ibid., IV, i, ll. 11-13.

⁴Ibid., l. 37.

Would any spirit,
 Free, manly, princely, wish to live to be
 Commanded by this mass of slavery,
 Since reason, judgment, resolution,
 And scorn of what we fear will lead to fear?¹

He chides himself for his vague feeling of doubt and resolves firmly not to stir "one foot out of the way for death and hell!"²

Not all the philosophical utterances are confined to the soliloquies, for throughout the play an abundance of moralizing speeches pervades the action. Dryden aptly called the play "dwarfish thought dressed up in gigantic words."³

Tourneur employs the reflective element to a great advantage in The Revenger's Tragedy. Almost every character soliloquizes, and in their speeches they not only expose their true natures and their thoughts, but explain much of what is to happen. In fact, without the soliloquies the audience would find considerable difficulty in understanding the action.

The tone of the whole play is set in the opening scene in which Vendice holds in his hand the skull of his murdered lady and invokes Vengeance. His long ranting soliloquy explains the manner of her death and that of his

¹Ibid., V, iv, ll. 11-15.

²Ibid., l. 24.

³Quoted from Thorndike, Tragedy, p. 146.

father, and after an extravagant expression of grief, cries,

Vengeance, thou murder's quit-rest, and whereby
Thou show'st thyself tenant to tragedy;
O keep thy day, hour, minute, I beseech,
For those thou hast determined.¹

Vendice speaks three soliloquies concerning his sister, all of which are emotional outbursts. The first expresses angered indignation that he must be pander to his mother and sister, but he thoughtfully adds that he will do his utmost to test their honor.²

In a second speech he praises his "most constant sister"³ who has just given him a box on the nose in vehement rejection of Lussurioso's proposal. Vendice adds, however, that he must with equal determination try his mother. After he has witnessed the weakness of his mother who is willing to give Castiza to Lussurioso in return for promised riches and luxury, Vendice curses the sin of the world and asks why Heaven does not strike down such base creatures.

Were't not for gold and women, there would be no
damnation.
Hell would look like a lord's great kitchen without
fire in't.⁴

Vendice soliloquizes again just after he neglects the opportunity to kill Lussurioso:

¹The Revenger's Tragedy, I, 1, pp. 343-344.

²Ibid., I, 1v, pp. 360-361.

³Ibid., II, 1, p. 365.

⁴Ibid., p. 372.

O, shall I kill him o' th' wrong side now? no!
 Sword, thou wast never a back-biter yet.
 I'll pierce him to his face; he shall die looking
 upon me.¹

After denouncing his mother again, he swears to guard his sister's honor.

The Duchess reveals her perverted character in Act I when she violently expresses hatred for her husband, the Duke. Because he did not try to prevent the imprisonment of her youngest son, she intends to "kill him in the forehead"² by spitefully indulging in an incestuous affair with her bastard step-son, Spurio.

In the same scene Spurio speaks a long soliloquy which uncovers his debased character. He says that since he was begot in adultery, then adultery is his nature, and he takes pleasure in being able to revenge himself on his father by submitting to the lustful desires of his step-mother.³

Castiza in one short soliloquy deplores her state of poverty in which her "only fortunes are her constant thoughts." She further philosophizes that

Maids and their honours are like poor beginners;
 Were not sin rich, there would be few sinners;

¹Ibid., II, ii, p. 376.

²Ibid., p. 351.

³Ibid., p. 354.

Why had not virtue a revenue? Well,
I know the cause, 'twould have impoverished hell.¹

The old Duke speaks twice in brief reflections. First he informs the audience that he intends to release Lussurioso from prison immediately because he sees dangerous envy and ambition in the insistent urgings of Ambitioso and Supervacuio for his son's death. In a second musing, he admits the immorality of his own past life: "My hairs are white, and yet my sins are green."²

In one explanatory soliloquy Lussurioso tells of his plan to hire the brother of Hippolito as an accomplice to kill the old one who knows too much: "Slaves are but nails to drive out one another."³

The soliloquies contain a good deal of ranting emotionalism, and they are at the same time a medium through which Tourneur expresses much of his bitter cynicism.

The soliloquies and asides which make up the reflective element of The White Devil have a quality of cynicism. The Kydian soliloquies on fate have become, in the hands of Webster, bitter and satirical reflections, the themes of which concern crime, hypocrisy and greed of the courts,⁴ and driving ambition which pushes aside all thoughts of honor.

¹Ibid., II, i, p. 364.

²Ibid.; both soliloquies are in II, iv, p. 383.

³Ibid., IV, i, p. 403.

⁴Thorndike, Tragedy, p. 201.

The three soliloquies of Flamineo are clear expressions of his own innate evil nature. Early in the play the audience is made acquainted with the course of action that Flamineo is going to pursue. He muses that if one aspires to a mountain-top, he must realize that the way "ascends not straight" but is "winding and indirect."¹

Flamineo's cold and calculating mind is further revealed as he contemplates his plan of action just after the Cardinal has pronounced his verdict against Vittoria:

Because now I cannot
counterfeit a whining passion for the death of my
lady, I will feign a mad humor for the disgrace
of my sister, and that will keep off idle ques-
tions. Treason's tongue hath a villainous palsy
in't; I will talk to any man, hear no man, and for
a time appear a politic madman.²

Later, in a brief aside, Flamineo expresses satisfaction with the way in which his feigned madness is serving his purpose.³

His long soliloquy near the end of the play is particularly important in revealing the character of this villain now almost at the end of his chain of crimes, the effect that his life of iniquity has had upon his soul, and the sudden uncertainty and disquieting fear shown by the thought of approaching death. Reflecting realistically

¹The White Devil, I, ii, ll. 335, 337.

²Ibid., III, ii, ll. 301-305.

³Ibid., IV, iv, ll. 167-171.

upon his own state of affairs, he says,

This night I'll know the utmost of my fate;
I'll be resolv'd what my rich sister means
T'assign me for my service. I have liv'd
Riotously ill, like some that live in court;
And sometimes, when my face was full of smiles,
Have felt the maze of conscience in my breast.
Oft gay and honor'd robes those tortures try;
We think cag'd birds sing, when indeed they cry. -- 1

As he thus muses, the Ghost of Brachiano appears carrying lilies and a skull. The spectre never speaks, but when Flamineo asks how long he will live, the ghost throws dirt on him from the pot of flowers and extends the skull, an action which Flamineo considers a fatal portent. Although Flamineo frantically entreats the ghost to speak, it vanishes, and Flamineo speaks his own thoughts again:

This is beyond melancholy. I do dare my fate
To do its worst. Now to my sister's lodging,
And sum up all these horrors: the disgrace
The prince threw on me; next, the piteous sight
Of my dead brother, and my mother's dotage;
And last this terrible vision. All these
Shall with Vittoria's bounty turn to good,
Or I will drown this weapon in her blood.²

The first short aside which Francisco speaks shows his intention to plot his revenge resolutely and craftily:

Monticelso,
I will not trust thee, but in all my plots
I'll rest as jealous as a town besieg'd.
Thou canst not reach what I intend to act.

¹Ibid., V, iv, ll. 110-117.

²Ibid., ll. 135-142.

Your flax soon kindles, soon is out again;
But gold slow heats, and long will hot remain.¹

Later in the same scene, Francisco speaks probably the most thoroughly revealing soliloquy in the entire play.² At first he reflects upon the wickedness of society in which a man can rise to great heights by bribery and evil methods. From the list of the city's criminals which he has acquired from Monticelso, he intends to hire several murderers to aid in his revenge. He then voices a brief expression of grief for the loss of his sister and a resolute determination to revenge her death. At this point Isabella's ghost appears but does not speak, and Francisco tells himself that it is only an illusion caused by his own melancholy. He chides himself:

Out of my brain with't! What have I to do
With tombs or death-beds, funerals or tears,
That have to meditate upon revenge?³

Forgetting the ghost, he calls in his servant to whom he gives a letter containing a pretended confession of love and proposal of elopement which is to be given to Vittoria in the presence of one of Brachiano's followers. Having taking the first step in his revenge intrigue, Francisco evolves his plan further:

¹Ibid., IV, 1, ll. 37-42.

²Ibid., ll. 74-136.

³Ibid., ll. 110-112.

He that deals all by strength, his wit is shallow;
 When a man's head goes through, each limb will follow.
 The engine for my business, bold Count Lodowick.
 'Tis gold must such an instrument procure;
 With empty fist no man doth falcons lure.
 Brachiano, I am not fit for thy encounter;
 Like the wild Irish, I'll ne'er think thee dead
 Till I can play at football with thy head.¹

Later in the same act, Francisco speaks in a short aside his satisfaction that Brachiano has reacted to the letter precisely as he had intended.

The conjurer whom Brachiano hired to call up visions for him picturing the progress of Isabella's and Camillo's deaths, states quite a pertinent prophecy:

Both flowers and weeds spring when the sun is warm,
 And great men do great good or else great harm.²

The only other character who soliloquizes is Lodovico, and in his one brief aside he reveals clearly his own iniquity. Having just received a thousand ducats supposedly from the Pope, but actually from Francisco, he comments,

He sounds my depth thus with a golden plummet.
 I am doubly arm'd now. Now to th'act of blood.
 There's but three Furies found in spacious hell,
 But in a great man's breast three thousand dwell.³

All the soliloquies, with the exception of the two short asides of the conjurer and Lodovico, are spoken by the chief villain and by the leading revenger. These two characters explain their thoughts and plans rather objectively

¹Ibid., IV, iv, ll. 52-59.

²Ibid., II, iii, ll. 55-56.

³Ibid., IV, iv, ll. 149-152.

without any expression of undue emotion. They serve admirably, however, to show the workings of their minds, to clarify their personalities, and to acquaint the audience with their plans of forthcoming events.

For the most part the soliloquies in The Duchess of Malfi do not form the essential element that they have in earlier revenge plays. The few which are spoken are short and, with the exception of two by Bosola, acquaint the audience with some specific detail necessary to the understanding of the plot.

The first soliloquy is a brief reflection by Cariola and tends to set a tone of inevitable tragedy to the marriage of her mistress:

Whether the spirit of greatness or of woman
Reign most in her, I know not; but it shows
A fearful madness: I owe her much of pity.¹

Delio, in his one short statement, expresses fear that the letter from Malfi which has just thrown the Duke into a fit of rage contains the betrayal of Antonio.²

Bosola, the accomplice, speaks six soliloquies which concern principally his work of spying. First, he reveals that he has noticed the illness of the Duchess, and suspecting the truth, he intends to try a trick with fresh apricots in order to satisfy his curiosity.³ Later that night,

¹The Duchess of Malfi, I, 1, p. 15.

²Ibid., IV, 11, p. 167.

³Ibid., II, 1, p. 154.

snooping beneath her window, he wonders at the meaning of a woman's shriek which he has just heard issuing from her lodging and also at the stratagem which has confined all the courtiers to their wards.¹ The entrance of Antonio interrupts his musings, and after his exit, Bosola picks up an astrology reading of the Duchess' newly born child. Elated at his discovery, he says further that he will send word to the brothers in Rome immediately.²

After he has persuaded the Duchess to proceed to the designated shrine, Bosola regretfully speaks of himself as a politician, the "devil's quilted anvil."³ Even while deploring the baseness of an informer, he still prefers worldly gain to honor and, therefore, intends to aid the vicious brothers.

When the executioner has killed the Duchess, Bosola finally voices his full repentance that he was ever a party to the crime:

What would I do, were this to do again?
I would not change my peace of conscience
For all the wealth of Europe.⁴

In an outburst of emotional despair Bosola vows to do what he can to right this great wrong.

Revealing that he is to put into practice what he has

¹Ibid., II, 111, p. 161.

²Ibid., pp. 163-164.

³Ibid., III, 11, p. 186.

⁴Ibid., IV, 11, p. 214.

vowed earlier, Bosola expresses his intention to help save Antonio's life and adds,

I'll join thee in a most just revenge:
The weakest arm is strong enough that strikes
With the sword of justice.

.

O Penitence, let me truly taste thy cup,
That throws men down only to raise them up!¹

The group of Bosola's soliloquies, taken apart from the rest of the play, first shows his willingness to be the evil brothers' accomplice, then his growing consciousness of his own dishonorable and wicked conduct, and finally his repentance and his resolve to save Antonio. His chance error ends in his own slaying of Antonio, but he turns on the Cardinal and the Duke in full vengeance, and it is by his hand that they are killed.

The Cardinal speaks two short soliloquies, the first of which is a mere explanation that he has confined the courtiers to their quarters in order to remove the body of Julia. The second, however, shows the state of melancholy into which he has sunk. Reading from a holy book, he puzzles about the suffering in hell and his own guilty conscience that has produced the vision of a "thing armed with a rake," which strikes at him from the fish-ponds in his garden.

¹Ibid., V, 11, p. 230.

Character Types

In The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois there is no real villain. Montsurry appears in only a few scenes at the beginning and at the end of the play. Although he is the object of revenge, he remains shut up in his closely guarded house and does not engage in any counter-intrigue against Clermont. Outside of his fear, his character is given little or no delineation. Baligny, while playing a role of deception in pretending friendship with Guise at the same time in which he is acting as a spy for the king, is never developed fully as a villain.

All of the actors are subordinate to the hero, Clermont, and serve only to fill their places in the plot story and to emphasize the character and personality of Clermont.

Chapman's hero is founded on the Stoic doctrine of virtue which governs his actions. Clermont corresponds to the theoretically ideal English gentleman who believed in allowing legal justice to punish his wrongs. By his own words he says that a wrong cannot be righted by a murder outside the law,¹ and he repents that he ever yielded to the demand of the Ghost. After somewhat reluctantly accepting the justice of the cause when the Ghost has explained the ethics of revenge, Clermont endeavors to fight Montsurry in a fair duel, and as his enemy dies, he voices a

¹The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois, III, ii, ll. 103-104.

benediction which purges his soul of hatred.¹

This ideal hero is a "Senecal man" of supreme moral courage; calm and resolute in the midst of life's vicissitudes, he is the embodiment of Stoic righteousness, which is best expressed in the description of his own philosophy:

To love nothing outward,
Or not within our own powers to command;
And so being sure of everything we love,
Who cares to lose the rest? If any man
Would neither live nor die in his free choice,
But as he sees necessity will have it
(Which if he would resist, he strives in vain),
What can come near him that he doth not will;
And if in worst events his will be done,
How can the best be better? All is one.²

His morality and virtue, as well as his skill in combat, are acknowledged by both his friends and adversaries. In a brief statement of his worth Guise remarks,

France never bred a nobler gentleman
For all parts.³

Later in a long speech Guise praises Clermont for his "most gentle and unwearied mind," his "firm inexorable spirit," his "contempt of riches and greatness," his liberal speaking of the truth, the "learning of his soul," the "flexibility of his most anger," his "sweet disposure," and his "just contempt of jesters, parasites, servile observers, and polluted tongues."⁴

¹Bowers, op. cit., pp. 146-147.

²The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois, IV, v, ll. 4-13.

³Ibid., II, i, ll. 81-82.

⁴Ibid., IV, iv, ll. 14-46.

Finally in the closing lines of the play the king's words are a tribute to Clermont's character:

We come indeed too late, which much I rue,
And would have kept this Clermont as my crown.¹

Clermont never misses an opportunity to philosophize at great length. Every statement, every situation, every deed, and every sentiment call forth long moralizing analogies. A. H. Thorndike makes the comment that "the thought is not equal to its dress."²

In The Revenger's Tragedy Tourneur has so many villains vying with each other that Vendice, the central character, is often submerged in the tangle of personalities.

Tourneur portrays his revenger with a new objectivity, for the audience is forced to decide for themselves as to the real character of Vendice. At the beginning of the play he has an adequate basis for seeking revenge. His wrongs include the murder of his fiancée, the death of his father, and finally the rape of Antonio's wife. While the latter has no direct connection with Vendice, the crime has issued from the wickedness within the court, and although he himself has no ambitions to rule the dukedom, he considers himself justified in being its moral purger.³ As he decides

¹Ibid., V, v, ll. 216-217.

²Tragedy, p. 145.

³Bowers, op. cit., pp. 132-134.

to test the honor of his sister and mother, his words show that he thinks of himself as a righteous revenger:

Though I durst almost for good
Venture my lands in Heaven upon their blood.¹

Obsessed with his vision of a rotten and depraved world, Vendice becomes exultantly convinced, with each successive crime, of his own right to cleanse the state of its evildoers. So sure is Vendice of the justification of his acts that he rather proudly admits the murders, and Antonio's shout to seize and execute the "villains," including Vendice, comes as a bewildering shock. In his closing speech Vendice is still satisfied with his accomplishments, but adds, "'Tis time to die, when we're ourselves our foes."²

In The White Devil the characters are individuals, not mere puppets. In their portrayal Webster was far more interested in his evil than in his virtuous characters. There are only three really "good" characters in the entire play, and they occupy minor roles. Marcello is the simple and honest soldier; Cornelia, the noble mother; and Prince Giovanni, the ideal young nobleman.

Webster humanizes his characters by making none of them all black or all white, but gray. All the principal characters, including the two revengers, are villains in varied degrees. Brachiano and Vittoria are fascinating

¹The Revenger's Tragedy, I, iii, p. 361.

²Ibid., V, iii, p. 431.

characters who in all their evil win the admiration, and to some extent, the unwilling sympathy of the audience. At the same time, in order to maintain the balance of sympathy, Webster slightly taints the purity of the revengers' motives and consequently the justice of their revenge.¹

Vittoria is a unique figure in Elizabethan drama² and is one of the first feminine characters to play a major role in a tragedy of blood. As "the white devil" she is the direct cause of the first two crimes and the underlying force which motivates the evil which follows. A devil disguised in loveliness is the picture expressed by Brachiano in his cry of disillusionment:

Your beauty! Oh, ten thousand curses on't!
How long have I beheld the devil in crystal!
Thou hast led me, like an heathen sacrifice,
With music and with fatal yokes of flowers
To my eternal ruin.³

Vittoria has a charm which evokes both admiration and aversion alike, for even in all her wickedness her beauty, her courage, and her wit give her character a quality of magnificence. Whether facing her hostile judges, her jealous lover, or her assassins, her courage never falters, and she meets death in proud resolution.⁴

¹Bowers, op. cit., pp. 180-181; see also Parrott and Ball, op. cit., p. 226.

²Parrott and Ball, op. cit., p. 226.

³The White Devil, IV, iii, ll. 16-20.

⁴Bowers, op. cit., p. 181; see also Parrott and Ball, op. cit., p. 226.

Brachiano, the chief villain, is a fitting partner for Vittoria. Self-centered, insolent, and ruthless, he is driven to his crimes by his genuine and overriding passion for Vittoria. The scorn and self-confidence with which he meets both the threats of the Medici and the curses of the Church win for him a reluctant admiration. On his death-bed the force of his passion leads him to reject his son and call instead for Vittoria, "this good woman."¹ His last outcry before he is strangled is a call for "Vittoria, Vittoria."²

Two accomplices aid materially in the intrigue and counter-intrigue of the drama. Flamineo is more nearly the conventional malcontent. Hardened and cynical, he is pander, murderer, and blackmailer, showing no trace of loyalty to either Brachiano or to his own family.³ Cold and selfish, he has moments of passionate outbursts, and as he dies, he admits his own wickedness:

'Tis well yet there's some goodness in my death;
My life was a black charnel. I have caught
An everlasting cold; I have lost my voice
Most irrecoverably. Farewell, glorious villains!
This busy trade of life appears most vain,
Since rest breeds rest, where all seek pain by pain.
Let no harsh flattering bells resound my knell;
Strike, thunder, and strike loud, to my farewell!⁴

¹The White Devil, V, iii, l. 17.

²Ibid., l. 164.

³Bower, op. cit., p. 181; see also Parrott and Ball, op. cit., p. 226.

⁴The White Devil, V, vi, ll. 265-272.

Iodovico, accomplice to Francisco, is one of the revengers and a desperate, bloody man from the start. Banished from the kingdom earlier, his pardon was effected by Francisco, who made him a sworn partner in revenge. Although an evil man, he was uncertain about the justice of sworn vengeance and proceeded to take part finally only after Francisco had tricked him into believing the Pope had countenanced the deed.

Francisco, the chief revenger, is far from being the noble hero seeking justice in the name of righteousness. Already having quarreled with Brachiano, he was seeking the downfall of both Brachiano and Vittoria before his sister was murdered. He cunningly plans his revenge, concealing his plans from Monticelso, a fact which shows that his conscience was not entirely free from doubts as to the moral justification of his vengeance. Once he has formulated his stratagem, he accomplishes his revenge ruthlessly and without hesitation.

The three characters who really matter are Brachiano, Vittoria, and Flamineo. The others fill the roles that the plot requires, but it is the vivid and realistic portrayal of these three, peculiarly admirable even in their iniquity, which gives this tragedy of blood its chief significance.

With the exception of the portrayal of Bosola, the accomplice, Webster does not humanize the characters of The

Duchess of Malfi as he does those of The White Devil. Drawing a sharp line between his evil and his good characters, he makes them more melodramatic than realistic.

Webster's sympathy throughout is for the Duchess, portrayed as the innocent victim of her brothers' sadistic cruelty. Glimpsed in a few early scenes as light-hearted and merry, she is from start to finish the representative of unswerving and resolute Stoic virtue, and in her very goodness, she lacks reality. All the physical and mental tortures practiced against her fail to bring her to despair; she is instantly ready to ask her brothers' pardon and to kiss the hand that has dealt her such suffering; her last words before death are for the welfare of her children and for the forgiveness of her executioner; and it is with calm resignation that she meets her end.¹

Antonio is too weak a character to fight for his family's survival and happiness. Other characters praise his dauntless courage and honor, but in his active role, he does nothing but run. When he finally decides to face the Cardinal, he blunders onto Bosola and is killed before he has a chance to do a single worthy act.

The Aragon brothers represent two types of villains. The Cardinal is the fox, crafty, cowardly, cold-blooded, and treacherous. His brother, Duke Ferdinand, is the wolf, a

¹Parrott and Ball, op. cit., p. 230.

"most perverse and turbulent nature,"¹ who exhibits a sadistic hunger for revenge. After the death of the Duchess the Cardinal is haunted by his own guilty conscience, and the Duke is driven to madness by his own unbridled passion.²

The accomplice, Bosola, is the most complex of the characters, and at the same time his continual presence serves to give unity to the play. Having served a sentence in the galleys for a previous murder, he has no other recourse but to accept the degrading position as the Cardinal's retainer. A misfit and a cynic, he is tossed between the knowledge of good and the practice of evil. As a paid employee, he does his dirty work as a spy-informer well, but he is affected by the sheer maliciousness of the Duke's crimes. Having relieved his mind by malcontent railing against the injustice in the world, he now begins his gradual conversion from evil to good. Killing Antonio by mistake, the very man whose life he had sworn to save, he then in despair turns his sword on his masters.

In his portrayal of Bosola Webster changed the Kydian accomplice into a strange and tragic figure.³ Bosola really lived and died "in a mist: I know not how."⁴

¹The Duchess of Malfi, I, i, p. 138.

²Parrott and Ball, op. cit., pp. 230-231.

³Ibid.

⁴The Duchess of Malfi, V, v, p. 240.

Dramatic Scenes and Details

Chapman, in endeavoring to write a revenge tragedy for the purpose of teaching virtue, discarded most of the conventional revenge play sensationalism.

Although the play is notably lacking in the usual accumulation of horrors, tortures, and unleashed violence, it does retain the spectacular figure of a ghost to urge revenge. Even the Ghost, however, is a philosopher rather than the hatred-inciting spectre from Hades. This Ghost of Bussy has appeared to Clermont sometime before the play begins and has secured his vow to carry out justice, but the audience does not see him until the opening scene of the last act when he suddenly appears and amidst an insistent demand for revenge shouts a moral warning, "Reform, ye ignorant men, your manless lives,"¹ for the good will not die unrewarded nor will the guilty escape penalty.

Shortly afterward he appears to Clermont and again urges vengeance in the name of justice and duty to heaven:

To live to Him is to do all things fitting
 His image, in which like Himself we live;
 To be His image is to do those things
 That make us deathless, which by death is only
 Doing those deeds that fit eternity;
 And those deeds are the perfecting that justice
 That makes the world last, which proportion is
 Of punishment and wreak for every wrong,
 As well as for right a reward as strong.
 Away, then! Use the means thou has to right
 The wrong I suffer'd. What corrupted law

¹The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois, V, 1, l. 15.

Leaves unperform'd in kings, do thou supply,
And be above them all in dignity.¹

For the third time in Act V he appears to Tamyra, Charlotte, the Countess, and Renel and orders them to cease their disputing, to lock the door after Montsurry enters, and to act immediately. Assuring them further that Clermont will not die, he makes his exit with the gloating words:

The black soft-footed hour is now on wing,
Which, for my just wreak, ghosts shall celebrate
With dances dire and of infernal state.²

Finally, after the death of Montsurry, the Ghosts of Bussy, Guise, Monsieur, Cardinal Guise, and Chatillon enter and, to the accompaniment of music, dance a grotesque jig around his dead body.³

The political intrigue of Guise and the counter-intrigue by the king provide a dramatic sub-plot. The battle maneuver scene in which Clermont is seized, with its confusion, shouting, and general uproar becomes probably the most dramatically exciting scene in the play.

The torture of Tamyra is mentioned, but it is not acted out on the stage; occasional use is made of portents; Charlotte falls at the feet of Aumale in a passionate expression of emotion over the imprisonment of her brother and later comes to the house of Montsurry disguised as a male

¹Ibid., V, i, ll. 87-99.

²Ibid., V, iv, ll. 55-57.

³Ibid., V, v, p. 525.

servant; there is the sword fight in which Montsurry is slain and the customary bearing off of dead bodies at the close of the play. The super-abundance of classical allusions throughout the play refers to many real and mythical warriors, politicians, and philosophers in the ancient Greek and Roman world.

The setting of The Revenger's Tragedy is laid in the Italian Court where ambition, lust, and revenge reign supreme. Every scene adds to the atmosphere of evil and licentiousness, and the tone of the whole play is one of complete moral depravity.¹

In the effective opening scene the corrupt court passes across the stage by torchlight while Vendice stands on the balcony overhead holding the skull of his betrothed and passionately invoking Vengeance.

The scene in which Vendice and his brother drag out their mother at the point of daggers and brutally rebuke her for her dishonorable inclinations is remarkable in its intensity and knife-like sharpness.

Ingenious is the retaliatory murder of the Duke killed by the poisoned skull of his victim. Vendice prolongs the agony of his death, cursing and stamping on him in an outburst of violent hatred.

No scene contains more startling stage effects nor

¹Parrott and Ball, op. cit., pp. 216-217.

creates more uproar and suspense than does the closing scene. At a carousing banquet the installation of Lussurioso in the ducal seat is shown by means of a dumb show. A blazing star and claps of thunder herald disaster. As the first group of masquers enter and begin to dance, they suddenly draw their swords and in the tumult of the revelries stab the new duke and the three lords sitting with him. Immediately another set of masquers bent on assassination appear, discover their victims already murdered, and their shouts increase the clamor. A brawl follows in which Ambitioso, Supervacuo, and Spurio are killed, and as Antonio assumes authority, a surprising reversal takes place, for Vendice calmly confesses to the murder and is hauled off to execution. As the play ends, the stage is strewn with countless dead bodies.

Among the typical dramatic embellishments which add to the play's general horror are the exhibition of dead bodies, a court trial for rape, the stabbing of a body already dead, the tramping on a body to express intense hatred, ranting utterances of grief, a poisoned skull, a bleeding head, disguises and portents, the swearing of oaths on the cross of the sword, the Duke's signet used to plot a death, and finally the cursing and swearing of a dying person as an indication of his soul's damnation.

The setting of The White Devil is laid in Renaissance

Italy, famous for its evil and corruptness, and Webster takes advantage of this fact to overload his play with spectacular sensationalism and violent bloodshed.

Supernatural visitants appear as stage effects but do not take part in the dialogue nor in the action of the play. The Ghost of Isabella appears for a brief moment to Francisco. Later the Ghost of Brachiano, appearing to Flamineo, enters "in leather cassock and breeches, boots and cowl; in his hand a pot of lily-flowers, with a skull in it."¹ The ghost does not speak but throws dirt on Flamineo and extends the skull, a gesture which warns of his forthcoming death.

In addition to riotous slaughter, bloodshed, and madness, the play is full of many dramatic episodes and complicated situations which tend to emphasize its over-all exciting and lurid atmosphere. Two dumb shows represent visions summoned by a conjurer to show Brachiano the way in which the murders of Isabella and of Camillo are being committed.

The trial scene of Vittoria is colored by vigorous accusations of murder and debauchery, much loud ranting and cursing. The scene in which Flamineo attempts to blackmail Vittoria and then feigns a suicide pact, with all its ensuing uproar, unleashed passion, and confusion and with its final climax in the violent deaths of five characters, is one of the most spectacular scenes in the entire play.

Dramatic details include the disguises of Francisco and Lodovico as Moors and later as priests, the presence of ambassadors, the election of the Pope, a wedding celebration, the swearing of oaths by sacrament, a planned sword fight, the wearing of the black, the use of portents and prophetic curses, the entrance of Vittoria with a book to read her prayers, the exhibition of emotion by Vittoria's throwing herself on the bed, and finally the bearing off of dead bodies at the close of the play.

Terror reaches its high point in The Duchess of Malfi. Every means is employed to make the horrors of death and decay theatrically effective. In addition to a riot of corruption, madness, torture, and wanton slaughter,¹ the play has a quality of decadence and sadism the extent of which has not been seen in previous plays.

There is an increase in the number and ingenuity of melodramatic situations. Although no supernatural apparitions appear on the stage, the echo scene is far more ghostly than any spirit in the play could possibly have been. By its hollow, dismal repetition of Antonio's phrases, "a thing of sorrow" and "that suits it best,"² it seems to lament the death of the Duchess. As Delio pleads with Antonio not to visit the Cardinal that night, the echo throws the words back in a resonant forewarning:

¹Thorndike, Tragedy, pp. 200-201.

²The Duchess of Malfi, V, iii, p. 231.

"Do not."
 "Be mindful of thy safety."
 "O, fly thy fate."
 "Thou art a dead thing."¹

And finally in answer to Antonio's plea for his Duchess, the echo prophetically returns his last words: "Never see her more."²

The most horrible scene is that in which Bosola brings the madmen to perform fantastic antics before the Duchess. In the midst of their insane babbling, grotesque dancing, and wild singing, the executioner enters with rope, bell, and coffin. While Cariola is carried out shrieking, he proceeds to strangle the Duchess in a ruthless, methodical fashion. Just as he finishes with the Duchess, he kills the children quickly and turns to Cariola, who is strangled with frantic pleas still in her throat.

For sheer gruesomeness no scene can surpass the one in which Ferdinand, in the dark, gives the Duchess the dismembered hand of a dead man and then points out from behind a curtain the pale wax figures of her husband and children molded as they would appear in death.

An uproariously exciting final scene depicts the mortal sword fight between the Cardinal, Ferdinand, and Bosola, ending with the deaths of all three villains.

¹Ibid., p. 232.

²Ibid.

Much use is made of omens; many of the scenes are laid at night; conversation centers around lust, crime, depravity, and torture. A dumb show, to the accompaniment of solemn music, depicts the Cardinal's banishing of Antonio, the Duchess, and their children. Other details typical of revenge plays include reading a book before a soliloquy, the presence of warring political factions as part of the background, a dagger to suggest suicide, Ferdinand's throwing himself down on his shadow in an expression of intense fear, a sword fight, the exhibition of dead bodies, and the final bearing off of the dead at the close of the play.

Elements Which Differentiate One Play from Another

The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois differs markedly from the conventional revenge tragedy. George Chapman was a dramatist, but at the same time he was a scholar, a classicist, and something of a philosopher. The Kydian type of bloody revenge play was disagreeable to him, and while The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois agrees superficially with the old models in purpose and structure, Chapman altered some of the most favored conventions.¹

Instead of portraying a revenger who seeks revenge at any cost and is driven to madness by grief and an overburdened sense of duty, Chapman creates a hero noble to the

¹Introduction to The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois, op. cit., p. 460.

degree of perfection, steeped in the Stoic doctrine of righteousness. Rather than showing the workings of a man's inner soul, Chapman tries to teach virtue. For the first time the stage-revenger is one who could be an English gentleman.¹

This play involves several notable changes. The original murder is acknowledged, and no doubt ever exists about the identity of the murderer. The initial appearance of the Ghost and the vow of Clermont to revenge are merely narrated. This ghost, who insists on retribution for justice as a dutiful act in the sight of the Almighty, does not appear on the stage until the last act. The hero has so many other interests in life that the revenge is more of a disagreeable episode than an all-engrossing task. The revenge itself is finally carried out according to the code of honor and in its almost mechanical enactment is more tiring than exciting. Furthermore, the hero is not killed in the denouement of revenge but commits suicide for a reason unrelated to his vengeance.

The delay on the part of the hero and the obstacles in his path are not caused by the counter-intrigue of his intended victim but by persons totally unconnected with his revenge. Montsurry is not the usual Machiavellian villain but is instead an almost stationary character without any particular delineation of personality. In fact, no real

¹Bowers, op. cit., p. 145.

villain exists at all in the play. While Baligny momentarily plays between the king and forces of Guise, he has no part in the revenge plot.

There are also no exhibitions of wild and unrestrained passion except possibly that seen to a degree in the vindictive spirit of Charlotte. The play presents no horror scenes, no torture scenes, and the only murder committed on the stage is that of Guise, which from the viewpoint of the throne of France had a legitimate motive.

In The Revenger's Tragedy probably the most notable new development is the complete objectivity with which Tourneur portrays the character of Vendice. No words of other characters give any hint as to his real nature, and the spectators, tracing step by step his self-deluded downfall, are forced to judge Vendice for themselves.¹

Tourneur does not name any of his courtly family. The Duke and the Duchess, as well as the Duchess' youngest son, are only designated by their rank. A few of the characters are labelled somewhat like the figures of the old Morals and may be intended to represent the vices of the court. Spurio is the bastard; Lussurioso, the licentious; Ambizioso, the ambitious; and Supervacuo, the idle.²

Further changes are noted in that no use is made of the supernatural; the characters themselves create enough

¹Ibid., pp. 133-134.

²Parrott and Ball, op. cit., p. 217.

terror without the appearance of a ghost. Neither is there madness, feigned or real; only the ironic cynicism of Vendice supplants this element. The strong emphasis placed upon sexual vice shows the entrance of a new motivating force in the tragedy of blood, one which increases in importance in the plays of Webster.

Felix E. Schelling evaluates the play in the following summarizing statement:

In ingenuity of its horror, its straining of all the legitimate devices of tragedy, its pruriency in an attitude of assumed righteousness, and its bitter cynical outlook on life, it reaches the ne plus ultra of its kind.¹

Webster has set the scene of The White Devil in Renaissance Italy and has chosen for his theme a tragedy of real life which took place in the last quarter of the sixteenth century. Sometimes he is accurate in minor details, and sometimes he strays materially from the historical account. The play presents Webster's own interpretation of Renaissance Italy rather than a true dramatization of history.²

Webster excels in his characterization. He humanizes his characters with a vital, realistic treatment, making them individuals rather than types. The great change which Webster introduces to this revenge tragedy lies in his successful effort to make his villains, even in their wickedness,

¹Op. cit., I, p. 566.

²Parrott and Ball, op. cit., p. 225.

appeal to the sympathy of the audience. Moreover, he achieves his characterization by means of dramatic dialogue instead of by words placed in the mouth of another.¹

In addition to his vivid character portrayal, Webster has marked his play with a more extensive accumulation of horrors, slaughter, and violence and has placed a greater stress upon lust and moral depravity.

Ghosts appear but are stage effects rather than spirits returning from the underworld to direct revenge; hesitation on the part of the avenger disappears; and a strong emphasis is placed upon the villain more than upon the revenging hero.

The direct source of The Duchess of Malfi is the twenty-third tale in Painter's Palace of Pleasure, 1566-1567,² the setting of which is Renaissance Italy. Webster again strays from his source material enough to compose a dramatically effective play.

In this tragedy of blood there is no moral ground for revenge. The situation of Antonio and the Duchess is pathetic rather than tragic, for Antonio never attains the stature of hero, and the Duchess is only an innocent victim of pursuit, torture, and murder. Their intrigue is designed only to escape her brothers, never to fight against them.

¹Ibid., pp. 226-227; see also Bowers, op. cit., pp. 180-181.

²Parrott and Ball, op. cit., p. 228.

In character portrayal, Webster has made the accomplice, usually a mere stock figure, the most interesting and the most complex character in his play.

The element of hesitation is not present, but madness is used with tremendous effect in creating terror. A high degree of decadence and a sadistic love of evil pervade this revenge play.

Although a ghost does not appear, the echo is used in its stead to produce an eerie, supernatural note of foreboding. Melancholy shrouds the entire play.

The abundance of horrors, tortures, wanton murder, bloodshed, and moral depravity reaches a pitch of violent sensationalism which marks a definite departure from the blood-for-blood requital of Kyd and sets a new model for future revenge tragedies.¹

Moral Implications

Chapman wrote a Senecan type play embodying Stoic philosophy and endeavoring to teach virtue. His moral definition of tragedy prefixed the drama: "Material instruction, elegant and sententious excitation to virtue, and deflection from the contrary, being the soul, limbs, and limits of an authentical tragedy."²

¹Thorndike, Tragedy, p. 199.

²Bowers, op. cit., p. 145.

The play abounds from beginning to end in long philosophical speeches and moralizing similes. The tone of the entire play is one of profound morality. For example, concerning the evils of pride and ambition Baligny comments,

. . . . But to note the cause
Of all these foul digressions and revolts
From our first natures, this 'tis in a word:
Since good arts fail, crafts and deceits are us'd;
Men ignorant are idle; idle men
Most practise what they most may do with ease,
Fashion, and favor, all their studies aiming
At getting money, which no wise man ever
Fed his desires with.¹

On the same subject, Renel says briefly,

Power and wealth move to tyranny, not bounty;
The merchant for his wealth is swoll'n in mind,
When yet the chief lord of it is the wind.²

Clermont talks of men in high positions degraded by pomp and ease, and of the disquiet of their station:

So children mounted on their hobby-horse
Think they are riding, when with wanton toil
They bear what should bear them. A man may well
Compare them to those foolish great-spleen'd camels,
That to their high heads begg'd of Jove horns higher;
Whose most uncomely and ridiculous pride,
When he had satisfied, they could not use,
But where they went upright before, they stoop'd,
And bore their heads much lower for their horns,
As these high men do, low in all true grace,
Their height being privilege to all things base.
And as the foolish poet that still writ
All his most self-lov'd verse in paper royal,
Or parchment rul'd with lead, smooth'd with the pumice,
Bound richly up, and strung with crimson strings,
Never so blest as when he writ and read
The ape-lov'd issue of his brain, and never
But joying in himself, admiring ever

¹The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois, I, i, ll. 61-69.

²Ibid., IV, ii, ll. 26-28.

(Yet in his works behold him, and he show'd
Like to a ditcher); so these painted men,
All set on outside, look upon within,
And not a peasant's entrails you shall find
More foul and measled, nor more starv'd of mind.¹

If you would consul be, says one, of Rome,
You must be watching, starting out of sleeps,
Every day whisking, glorifying plebeians,
Kissing patricians' hands, rot at their doors,
Speak and do basely, every day bestow
Gifts and observance upon one or other.
And what's th'event of all? Twelve rods before thee;
Three or four times sit for the whole tribunal;
Exhibit Circene games; make public feasts,
And for these idle outward things (says he)
Wouldst thou lay on such cost, toil, spend thy spirits?
And to be void of perturbation
For constancy, sleep when thou wouldst have sleep,
Wake when thou wouldst wake, fear nought, vex for nought,
No pains wilt thou bestow, no cost, no thought?²

Tamyra, in talking to Montsurry, voices a warning to
husbands:

Those with fair warnings might have been reform'd,
Not these unmanly rages. You have heard
The fiction of the north-wind and the sun,
Both working on a traveller and contending
Which had most power to take his cloak from him;
Which when the wind attempted, he roar'd out
Outrageous blasts at him to force it off,
That wrapt it closer on. When the calm sun
(The wind once leaving) charg'd him with still beams,
Quiet and fervent, and therein was constant,
Which made him cast off both his cloak and coat;
Like whom should men do. If ye wish your wives
Should leave dislik'd things, seek it not with rage,
For that enrages -- what ye give, ye have --
But use calm warnings and kind manly means,
And that in wives most prostitute will win
Not only sure amends, but make us wives
Better than those that ne'er led faulty lives.³

¹Ibid., II, i, ll. 173-195.

²Ibid., III, iv, ll. 127-141.

³Ibid., I, ii, ll. 78-95.

The most thorough and the clearest expression of Stoic philosophy is found in these words of Clermont's:

Good sir, believe that no particular torture
Can force me from my glad obedience
To any thing the high and general Cause,
To match with His whole fabric, hath ordain'd.
And know ye all (though far from all your aims,
Yet worth them all, and all men's endless studies)
That in this one thing all the discipline
Of manners and of manhood is contain'd.
A man to join himself with th'Universe
In his main sway, and make in all things fit
One with that All, and go on round as it,
Not plucking from the whole his wretched part,
And into straits, or into nought revert,
Wishing the complete Universe might be
Subject to such a rag of it as he;
But to consider great Necessity,
All things as well refract as voluntary
Reduceth to the prime celestial Cause,
Which he that yields to with a man's applause,
And cheek by cheek goes, crossing it no breath,
But, like God's image, follows to the death --
That man is truly wise, and everything
(Each cause, and every part distinguishing)
In nature with enough art understands,
And that full glory merits at all hands,
That doth the whole world at all parts adorn
And appertains to one celestial born.¹

The doctrine of the divine right of kings receives much attention in the play. Chapman in several instances reveals his ideas on government and kingship. Baligny compares a king's authority over his country to God's rule over the universe.² Later, Maillard emphatically tells Clermont that he did not perjure himself by an oath that he had no knowledge of a plot, for in doing so he was being loyal to

¹Ibid., IV, 1, ll. 131-157.

²Ibid., II, 1, p. 476.

his king.¹ The most noteworthy lecture on the duties of an ideal king is spoken by the Countess:

Kings' precedents in licence lack no danger.
 Kings are compar'd to gods, and should be like them,
 Full in all right, in nought superfluous,
 Nor nothing straining past right for their right;
 Reign justly, and reign safely. Policy
 Is but a guard corrupted, and a way
 Ventur'd in deserts without guide or path.
 Kings punish subjects' errors with their own.
 Kings are like archers, and their subjects, shafts:
 For as, when archers let their arrows fly,
 They call to them and bid them fly or fall,
 As if 'twere in the free power of the shaft
 To fly or fall, when only 'tis the strength,
 Straight shooting, compass, given it by the archer,
 That makes it hit or miss; and doing either,
 He's to be prais'd or blam'd, and not the shaft --
 So kings to subjects crying, "Do, do not, this,"
 Must to them by their own examples' strength,
 The straightness of their acts, and equal compass,
 Give subjects power t'obey them in the like;
 Not shoot them forth with faulty aim and strength,
 And lay the fault in them for flying amiss.²

Finally is added a warning note:

Woe be to the state
 Where treachery guards, and ruin makes men great.³

Fredson T. Bowers evaluates the philosophical and ethical content of this revenge tragedy:

It is entirely owing to this high ideal that Chapman wrote The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois as it is. The inference follows that he did not approve of the ethics of manner of previous tragedies of revenge and

¹Ibid., IV, i, p. 499.

²Ibid., IV, iii, ll. 45-66.

³Ibid., IV, iii, ll. 45-66. The writer has intentionally quoted the many long speeches from this play because they are significant as the play's moral implications and are difficult to paraphrase.

that he was deliberately setting himself to raise the type by the infusion of a high dignity and a proper philosophy. The play is, in a sense, propaganda, and as such a dramatic failure. What is important, however, is not so much that Chapman the philosopher sought to elevate the tone of a revenge play by packing it with Stoic doctrines on the proper conduct of life in its various phases, as that he disapproved of the conventional bloody revenge acted on the stage and, as an ethical Englishman, wrote a tragedy which portrayed a revenge successfully carried through to its conclusion by a revenger acting according to the highest and most generous ideals of an English gentleman.¹

In contrast to Chapman's attempt at profound philosophy, The Revenger's Tragedy is unrelieved by any moral standard. From Tourneur's picture of a corrupt and decayed Italian court, one may draw only the proverbial moral that the wage of sin is death.

In The White Devil Webster makes no overt effort at moral instruction. The play with its underlying presentation of corrupt government and immoral court life suggests to the reader the old truth that all is vanity and that a large part of the world's evil is a result of man's quest for wealth and power, a consequence of his ruthless building upon another's downfall to reach the tops of ambition's ladder.

The Cardinal pleads with Brachiano early in the play to set a virtuous example for his son:

See, my lords,
What hopes you store in him: this is a casket
For both your crowns, and should be held like dear.
Now is he apt for knowledge; therefore know

¹Op. cit., p. 149.

It is a more direct and even way
 To train to virtue those of princely blood
 By examples than by precepts. If by examples,
 Whom should he rather strive to imitate
 Than his own father? Be his pattern, then;
 Leave him a stock of virtue that may last,
 Should fortune rend his sails and split his mast.¹

Francisco adds his maxim to the words of the Cardinal:

See, a good habit makes a child a man,
 Whereas a bad one makes a man a beast.²

In the last act, Flamineo comments upon the dying Brachiano:

To see what solitariness is about dying princes!
 As heretofore they have unpeopled towns, divorc'd
 friends, and made great houses unhospitable, so
 now -- O justice! -- where are their flatterers
 now? Flatterers are but the shadows of princes'
 bodies; the least thick cloud makes them invisible.³

Finally, the play closes with a warning note from Giovanni:

Let guilty men remember, their black deeds
 Do lean on crutches made of slender reeds.⁴

With the exception of these few philosophical attempts, there is no obvious moral implication in the play, and for the most part the reader must draw his own inference.

The moral implications of The Duchess of Malfi are

¹The White Devil, II, i, ll. 98-108.

²Ibid., ll. 137-138.

³Ibid., V, iii, ll. 41-45.

⁴Ibid., V, vi, ll. 296-297.

even more indefinite than those of The White Devil. Conversation is interspersed here and there with sardonic bits of philosophy on the injustices in the world and the consequences of evil and virtue.

As Bosola reaches the climax in his career of crime with the unmotivated slaughter of the Duchess, he deplores his own iniquity with these words of lament:

What would I do, were this to do again?
I would not change my peace of conscience
For all the wealth of Europe.¹

The play concludes with a moralizing speech by Delio:

Let us make noble use
Of this great ruin; and join all our force
To establish this young hopeful gentleman
In's mother's right. These wretched eminent things
Leave no more fame behind'em, than should one
Fall in a frost, and leave his print in snow;
As soon as the sun shines, it ever melts,
Both form and matter. I have ever thought
Nature doth nothing so great for great men
As when she's pleased to make them lords of truth:
Integrity of life is fame's best friend,
Which nobly, beyond death, shall crown the end.²

¹The Duchess of Malfi, IV, ii, p. 214.

²Ibid., V, v, p. 240.

CHAPTER IV

HAMLET

The revenge plays which have been discussed in the preceding chapters are of one fairly definite type, and they embody many of the same characteristics.

It is practically certain that Shakespeare was indebted to the old Ur-Hamlet play and that he used dramatic material and stage techniques which his predecessors had developed. However much he kept from the old play, however much he added or changed, and however gradual the revision may have been, the final Hamlet is undoubtedly Shakespeare's.¹

Hamlet will be examined, as have been the other plays, in terms of plot motives, soliloquies, characters, dramatic scenes and details, and moral implications, for the purpose of showing the manner in which Shakespeare used materials already familiar as well as the extent and nature of his transformation.

Plot Motives

The central and controlling motive of Hamlet is the revenge of a son for the death of his father with the ghost of the murdered victim appearing to reveal the circumstances

¹Thorndike, PMLA, p. 201.

of the crime and to incite vengeance.

While this revenge motive is the dominant theme of the play, it is softened by the poetical character of the ghost and by the realistic and humanizing portrayal of the hero.¹ A sub-revenge plot centers around Laertes who is also seeking revenge for the murder of his father, and the two plots are interwoven in such a way as to have a reciprocal effect upon each other. Pitted against one another in the final action of the play, the two avengers succeed in completing their revenge yet meet their death in its accomplishment.

Intrigue and counter-intrigue form the basis for the action, and while the many deeds of trickery and deception are as sensational as those of other revenge plays, this element is subdued by the presence of other motives and by the over-all philosophical tone of the play. Interested foremost in characterization, the vivid impression of the personality in a striking situation,² Shakespeare retained most of the intrigue in the old Hamlet and did not depart drastically from the original plot.³

Beginning his intrigue after his first encounter with the ghost, Hamlet feigns madness as a cover for his movements. The foolish old Polonius, convinced that Hamlet

¹Ibid., p. 204.

²E. E. Stoll, Shakespeare Studies (New York: Macmillan Company, n. d.), p. 115.

³Thorndike, PMLA, p. 205.

is distracted because Ophelia has repulsed his advances, plants his daughter as a snare to prove his theory. Meanwhile, the king, having grown more worried at Hamlet's behavior, sends for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to spy upon Hamlet and to learn the truth. Sensing the meaning of these stratagems, Hamlet cleverly thwarts both attempts and plots to test the guilt of the king by having a company of strolling players enact a murder scene containing elements similar to those of the actual killing of his father. So disturbed is Claudius during the play that he rushes from the hall, and Hamlet, stumbling upon him alone at prayer, neglects an opportunity to kill him. Claudius, now certain of Hamlet's intentions, determines to send Hamlet to England in the company of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who carry letters demanding his execution upon arrival in England.

Hamlet goes to his mother and so upbraids her that in fear she cries out. Old Polonius, hiding behind the arras, echoes her call for help, and Hamlet, thrusting his sword at the eavesdropper who he thinks is the king, mortally wounds Polonius. After persuading his mother not to oppose him, Hamlet disposes of the body of Polonius but is not quick enough to escape arrest by the king. Placed under guard, he is forced to embark for England immediately. While on shipboard he finds the orders which his companions carry, and rewriting them and sealing them with his father's signet, he insures their subsequent death. Later Hamlet escapes

aboard a pirate vessel and sends letters to the king and Horatio announcing his return to Denmark.

In the meantime Ophelia, insane with grief at the loss of her father, has committed suicide, and her brother, Laertes, hotheadedly storms into the castle to avenge his father's death. Claudius cunningly turns Laertes' wrath against Hamlet, and together they plan a fencing match in which a poisoned foil is to be used to kill the Prince.

Against the advice of Horatio and his own intuition, Hamlet agrees to participate in what he thinks is a friendly match. Claudius prepares a poisoned drink for his nephew in the event Laertes fails. Hamlet, however, is wounded with the envenomed foil, the queen unwittingly drinks the poisoned wine, and in a confused scuffle during which the swords are exchanged, Hamlet not only wounds Laertes but turns upon the king and kills him in a final thrust. Horatio lives to tell of Claudius' villainy and to clear Hamlet's name.

In the final scene as Hamlet dies, the English ambassadors enter to tell of the execution of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and Fortinbras, victorious in his march on Poland, arrives to restore order in the kingdom.

The hesitation motive is one of the most important features in Hamlet, and although present in all revenge plays, it has been the principal factor in creating the Hamlet

"problem." Delay has been one of the most consistent characteristics of the revenging hero in a tragedy of blood. Oppressed by doubt and irresolution, the hero after an initial vow of vengeance seeks new proof, questions fate, delays in a daze of bewilderment, neglects an opportunity to slay his victim, and wastes his energy in a useless murder. Without the addition of a single new dramatic detail¹ Hamlet in much the same way struggles through these weaknesses and indecisions toward the final accomplishments of his revenge. Shakespeare, however, endows the delay of Hamlet with such subtlety and vitality in the light of human nature and such reasonableness in view of the superstitions and religious beliefs of his day, that this element is changed from a conventional device to a matter of psychological behavior.

Hamlet at the outset of the play has been thrown into the depths of despondency by the sudden death of his father whom he loved and by the immediate marriage of his mother to his uncle, whom he has always hated. Already suspecting some kind of foul play, he becomes so aroused by the message of the ghost that he excitedly and impulsively swears instant revenge. Since Hamlet is already in a confused state of mind, the command of the ghost adds a dreadful new burden to his melancholy. After he has had time to compose himself, however, he begins to ponder upon the general

¹Ibid., p. 203.

significance of the spectre. Hamlet, a philosophic person and one ruled by reason, doubts the ghost honestly and legitimately because according to the opinion of his day, it could be the devil who habitually tried to prey upon an individual in a moment of weakness.¹ He, therefore, plans the play in order to test the true nature of the ghost as well as the guilt of the king.

After he is thoroughly convinced that Claudius murdered his father, Hamlet has only one opportunity to carry out his revenge and that is at the moment when the king is at prayer. Here Hamlet restrains himself because the popular religion of the Elizabethans taught that the soul of a person who dies while praying would go to heaven,² and Claudius must be killed with his sins unpardoned so that he would suffer the eternal torments of hell.

Hamlet then goes to his mother and, after the murder of Polonius, is placed under heavy guard until he has been safely embarked to England. Upon his return, he consents to the fencing match with Laertes. Only when he has been stabbed with the poisoned sword and realizes that the match is another villainous plot of the king, does Hamlet finally complete his revenge by not only stabbing Claudius but also

¹Stoll, op. cit., p. 136; see also J. E. Hankins, The Character of Hamlet and Other Essays (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1941), p. 117.

²Hankins, op. cit., p. 217.

forcing him to drink from the poisoned cup.

Together with the element of hesitation, madness is developed as an important plot feature. A popular theme with the audiences of the period,¹ Shakespeare could not afford to dispense with this effective stage business. Whether Hamlet is ever actually mad or is only feigning insanity has been the subject of considerable discussion, but the most authoritative sources² agree that Hamlet's madness is entirely a role of conscious intrigue, and although he is at times ranting and emotional and at other times deep in melancholy, he is never in reality a madman. Shakespeare develops the madness of Hamlet with tremendous power and vitality, incorporating into this stock dramatic artifice a "lasting human suggestiveness."³

Hamlet decides to feign an "antic disposition"⁴ just after the ghost has demanded revenge. Soon afterwards he appears before Ophelia

. . . . with his doublet all unbrac'd;
No hat upon his head; his stocking foul'd,
Ungarter'd, and down-gyved to his ankle;
Pale as his shirt; his knees knocking each other;

¹Thorndike, PMLA, p. 205.

²Stoll, op. cit.; Thorndike, PMLA; A. C. Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan and Company, Ltd., 1920).

³Thorndike, PMLA, p. 205.

⁴William Shakespeare, Hamlet, I, v, l. 172, Shakespeare's Principal Plays, eds. Tucker Brooke, John William Cunliffe, and Henry Noble MacCracken, 3rd ed. (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, Inc., n. d.). Hereafter this will be referred to as Hamlet.

And with a look so piteous in purport
 As if he had been loosed out of hell
 To speak of horrors,¹

His extreme despair is described further by Ophelia:

He took me by the wrist and held me hard;
 Then goes he to the length of all his arm;
 And, with his other hand thus o'er his brow,
 He falls to such perusal of my face
 As he would draw it. Long stay'd he so;
 As last, a little shaking of mine arm
 And thrice his head thus waving up and down,
 He raised a sigh so piteous and profound
 That it did seem to shatter all his bulk
 And end his being: that done, he lets me go:
 And, with his head over his shoulder turn'd,
 He seem'd to find his way without his eyes;
 For out o' doors he went without their help,
 And, to the last, bended their light on me.²

Hamlet must have been carrying on his role effectively for some time, for the suspicious of the king have been aroused, and when he first talks to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, whom he has commissioned to pry the truth from Hamlet, he speaks of "Hamlet's transformation," and the queen talks of "my too much changed son."³

In the presence of Polonius, whom he calls a "tedious old fool,"⁴ Hamlet plays the lunatic, but his inane snatches of speech carry a double meaning, and he cleverly makes a complete dunce of Polonius. With Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, however, his double-talk assumes a cynical and ironic

¹Ibid., II, i, ll. 78-84.

²Ibid., ll. 87-100.

³Ibid., II, ii, ll. 5, 36.

⁴Ibid., I, 223.

tone. Calling Denmark a prison and even the world "a goodly one; in which there are many confines, wards, and dungeons, Denmark being one o' the worst,"¹ Hamlet turns his own situation into a satire on man:

I have of late -- but wherefore I know not --
lost all my mirth, forgone all custom of
exercise; and indeed it goes so heavily
with my disposition that this goodly frame,
the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory,
this most excellent canopy, the air, look
you, this brave o'erhanging firmament, this
majestical roof fretted with golden fire,
why, it appears no other thing to me than
a foul and pestilent congregation of
vapours. What a piece of work is a man!
how noble in reason! how infinite in
faculty! in form and moving how express
and admirable! in action how like an angel!
in apprehension how like a god! the beauty
of the world! the paragon of animals! And
yet, to me, what is this quintessence of
dust? man delights not me: no, nor woman
neither²

He easily traps the two spies into confessing their real intentions, and as the players enter, he greets them with these bitter words:

You are welcome: but my uncle-father and my
aunt-mother are deceived.

.

I am but mad north-north-west: when the wind
is southerly I know a hawk from a hand-saw.³

Again in the passionate scene with his mother Hamlet declares,

¹Ibid., ll. 251-253.

²Ibid., ll. 306-323.

³Ibid., ll. 393-397.

. . . . I essentially am not in madness,
But mad in craft.¹

Hamlet puts on the act of a wild madman during the feverish search for Polonius' body, but after an absurd utterance to the bewildered Rosencrantz, who does not understand, he replies that "a knavish speech sleeps in a foolish ear."²

Hamlet's madness throughout the play is characterized by a display of sardonic wit, sarcastic jibes, and bitter irony. "A sharp contrast of merry madness with sad sanity,"³ Hamlet's feigned role is one of the most dramatically effective elements in the entire play.

The madness of Ophelia is pitiful, and through its presentation Shakespeare adds new pathos to an already tragic situation but does not connect it directly to the plot.⁴ Driven insane with grief and an acute sense of loss by the death of her father, Ophelia is portrayed as having fallen into childish foolishness. Singing bits of meaningless ditties, she tosses flowers here and there. Her suicide is described by Gertrude in a poetic expression of particular beauty:

¹Ibid., III, iv, ll. 187-188.

²Ibid., IV, ii, l. 25.

³Stoll, op. cit., p. 124.

⁴Thorndike, PMLA, p. 204.

There is a willow grows aslant a brook,
 That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream;
 There with fantastic garlands did she come
 Of crow-flowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples
 That liberal shepherds give a grosser name,
 But our cold maids do dead men's fingers call them:
 There, on the pendant boughs her coronet weeds
 Clambering to hang, an envious sliver broke;
 When down her weedy trophies and herself
 Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread
 wide;
 And, mermaid-like, awhile they bore her up:
 Which time she chanted snatches of old tunes;
 As one incapable of her own distress,
 Or like a creature native and indued
 Unto that element: but long it could not be
 Till that her garments, heavy with their drink
 Pull'd the poor wretch from her melodious lay
 To muddy death.¹

The play of Hamlet presents a strong minor revenge situation which serves as a foil to the main situation. Laertes, like Hamlet, has lost his father by murder and seeks revenge, but unlike Hamlet, he is hot-headed and impetuous; his actions are governed entirely by his emotions, and he is so inflamed at the violence done his father that he does not wait to learn the circumstances but invades the palace in a rage, almost kills Claudius, and quickly turns his wrath on Hamlet at the first suggestion of the king. He jumps into Ophelia's grave in an extravagant show of grief and treacherously proceeds toward his revenge against Hamlet without a moment's hesitation. Even after Hamlet's apology Laertes still does not seek a true account of his father's death but considers that he must defend his honor

¹Hamlet, IV, vii, ll. 167-184.

at all cost. Only when he is dying does he admit his fault:

Exchange forgiveness with me, noble Hamlet:
Mine and my father's death come not upon thee,
Nor thine on me!¹

Laertes' character, identified entirely by emotion and never by reason, emphasizes the philosophic and thoughtful nature of Hamlet, and Hamlet is made more admirable by contrast to a defective person.

The slaughter element reappears in as spectacular a form as in any revenge play, yet it is so covered over by the philosophical and moral qualities of the play that its prominence is lessened. Before the play begins Hamlet's father has already been slain by poison dropped into his ear, and during the play eight of the principal characters die by violent means. Polonius, eavesdropping from behind a curtain, is stabbed by Hamlet, who later sends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to their execution by forged letters; Ophelia drowns herself; and in the fencing match in the last act Gertrude accidentally drinks poisoned wine; Hamlet and Laertes mortally wound each other with the poisoned foils; and as Hamlet is dying, he stabs Claudius. Only Horatio remains to tell the story, and Fortinbras, to claim the kingdom.

The love element is supplied by both the king's passion for the queen and by Hamlet's love for Ophelia. The former gains reality through characterization but is not

¹Ibid., V, 11, 11. 340-342.

given extensive representation.¹ The latter remains vague throughout the play. It is certain that Hamlet had been in love with Ophelia and that in his turmoil he goes to her in the hope of being able to confide in her or to receive her help. Ophelia, however, proves an added impediment, for Hamlet perceives her weakness, and seeing in her the instability of his own mother, he turns from her in despair. The only definite statement concerning Hamlet and Ophelia is Hamlet's outburst as he confronts Laertes in Ophelia's grave:

I lov'd Ophelia: forty thousand brothers
Could not, with all their quantity of love,
Make up my sum.²

In building upon an old story and in revising an old play, Shakespeare employed the same dramatic motives which other playwrights had used and which were popular on the Elizabethan stage,³ and while he did not change them fundamentally, he developed them with a power of expression and with a psychological unfolding which the other writers had tried in vain to attain.

Soliloquies

Hamlet abounds in soliloquies as do all revenge plays, and Hamlet is imbued with the same problems of philosophy, meditations on life and death, fate and evil, that

¹Thorndike, PMLA, p. 205.

²Hamlet, V, i, ll. 292-294.

³Thorndike, PMLA, p. 205; see also T. S. Eliot, Selected Essays 1917-1932 (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, n. d.), p. 122.

confront most revenge heroes; yet Shakespeare in his mastery of expression endows the reflective passages of Hamlet with a certain intangible imaginative quality and with a profound intellectual suggestiveness.¹

The importance of the soliloquies lies in their revelation of Hamlet's character. Before others, he suppresses his feelings or hides them in subtleties, and only when he is alone does he unleash his emotions and display his thoughts. The change in Hamlet's character, its growing complexity, can be seen by an examination of his soliloquies. First in the depths of melancholy and despondency, Hamlet denounces the world and its iniquity; then after engaging in a violent self-depreciation for his lack of activity, he plans his action. Later he begins to emerge from his own individual crisis and to generalize on a higher and more universal level. Then in comparing himself to Fortinbras, he combines his personal and general reflections. In the final act Hamlet, more reconciled and calmer, has ceased to be a mere individual trying to control his own fate but has become an instrument in the hands of providence.² The immediate is replaced by the universal as he says,

There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will.³

Hamlet's first soliloquy is a passionate outburst,

¹J. D. Wilson, What Happens in Hamlet (Cambridge: University Press, 1937), p. 76.

²Theodore Spencer, Shakespeare and the Nature of Man (New York: Macmillan Company, 1942), pp. 106-108.

³Hamlet, V, ii, ll. 10-11.

clearly revealing his state of mind at the opening of the play. The audience has already learned the situation at court, that Hamlet has been recalled from Wittenberg because of the sudden death of his father, and that he has returned to find the throne to which he was heir in the hands of his uncle and his mother already married. From the conversation of Claudius, Gertrude, and Hamlet, the audience is also made aware of Hamlet's melancholy, presumably caused by grief for the loss of his father. Only when Hamlet begins his soliloquy does the audience learn the real basis of his despondency. The evil of the world seems to have closed around him, and he exclaims an ardent wish for death:

O, that this too too solid flesh would melt,
 Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew!
 Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd
 His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God! O God!
 How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable,
 Seem to me all the uses of this world!
 Fie on't! O fie! 'tis an unweeded garden,
 That grows to seed; things rank and gross in
 nature
 Possess it merely.¹

Then he discloses his main concern, the horror and repugnancy evoked by his mother's marriage:

. . . . Frailty, thy name is woman! --
 A little month, or ere those shoes were old
 With which she follow'd my poor father's body,
 Like Niobe, all tears: -- why she, even she --
 O God, a beast, that wants discourse of reason,
 Would have mourn'd longer -- married with my uncle,
 My father's brother, but no more like my father
 Than I to Hercules: within a month:
 Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears

¹Ibid., I, 1, ll. 129-137.

Had left the flushing in her galled eyes,
She married.¹

His utter despair is held in his last words: "But break,
my heart; for I must hold my tongue."²

In the same act just after the ghost has told Hamlet of his uncle's villainy and has commanded him to revenge, Hamlet in high emotional tension engages in a furious and exaggerated avowal of vengeance:

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,
Unmix'd with baser matter: yes, yes, by heaven!³

Turning again on his mother and the king, he cries out,

O most pernicious woman!
O villain, villain, smiling, damned villain!⁴

Following his encounter with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Hamlet realizes that the king has become suspicious of his madness and is now consciously set in opposition against him. He has talked with the players who have come to entertain and has listened to one of them recite a tragic speech. As he is left alone, he begins to condemn himself for his inactivity. Hamlet compares himself to the actor

¹Ibid., ll. 146-156.

²Ibid., l. 159.

³Ibid., I, v, ll. 97-104.

⁴Ibid., ll. 105-106.

who can arouse his feelings over an imaginary situation while he who has every reason to be incensed is "a dull and muddy-mettled rascal."¹ He brutally reproaches himself:

O, vengeance!
 Why, what an ass am I! This is most brave,
 That I, the son of a dear father murder'd,
 Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,
 Must, like a whore, unpack my heart with words,
 And fall a-cursing, like a very drab,
 A scullion!²

Then his emotion begins to yield to reason, and Hamlet conceives the idea of having the players act a dramatic representation of the crime. He realizes that the king's guilt is not yet sufficiently proved, for the ghost may have been the devil who "hath power t'assume a pleasing shape."³ Looking forward to observing the king during the play, Hamlet declares,

I'll have grounds
 More relative than this: the play's the thing,
 Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king.⁴

Before the hour for the play arrives, old Polonius is setting the stage for his act with Ophelia as the decoy, and Hamlet once more lapses into thoughtful meditation about present and future life. Again he ponders the question of suicide as he did in his first soliloquy, but here the tone of lofty contemplation is different from the melancholy

¹Ibid., II, ii, ll. 594.

²Ibid., ll. 610-616.

³Ibid., ll. 628-629.

⁴Ibid., ll. 632-634.

despair of the earlier speech.¹ This soliloquy has been termed the crux of the whole drama, for it is the point where Hamlet reveals the secret of his complex soul.² The meaning of the first few lines is simply whether one should live oppressed by "outrageous fortune"³ or escape by choosing death. The rest of the speech takes on a different application. Not only does this philosophic discourse apply to Hamlet's own crisis but it expresses the universal thoughts and doubts which were shared by the people of the Elizabethan period as well as by those of our own day.⁴ Is death a sleep, a "consummation devoutly to be wish'd,"⁵ an end to the "heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to,"⁶ or are there such dreams in death which are worse than present troubles? This question of life after death, the dread of the unknown, "must give us pause"⁷ and must force man "to grunt and sweat under a weary life,"⁸ to think before he imperils his immortal soul by entering

¹Hankins, op. cit., p. 46.

²Irving T. Richards, "The Meaning of Hamlet's Soliloquy," PMLA, XLVIII (1933), 745.

³Hamlet, III, 1, l. 58.

⁴Spencer, op. cit., p. 105.

⁵Hamlet, III, 1, ll. 63-64.

⁶Ibid., ll. 62-63.

⁷Ibid., l. 68.

⁸Ibid., l. 77.

"the undiscover'd country from whose bourn no traveler returns."¹ This concern for his immortal soul, not physical cowardice, is the core of Hamlet's contemplation. He generalizes upon his plight:

Thus conscience does make cowards of us all,
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprises of great pith and moment
With this regard their currents turn awry,
And lose the name of action.²

Hamlet receives ample confirmation from the king's conduct at the play that the ghost had spoken the truth. In expressing the emotions consuming him, he gives vent to his mounting rage which makes him capable of bloody deeds:

'Tis now the very witching time of night,
When churchyards yawn and hell itself breathes
out
Contagion to this world: now could I drink hot
blood,
And do such bitter business as the day
Would quake to look on.³

Since his mother has sent for him, Hamlet tries to steel himself against harming her. "O heart, lose not thy nature,"⁴ Hamlet cautions himself, for the ghost had warned him "to leave her to heaven."⁵ Summoning his will power, Hamlet says,

¹Ibid., ll. 79-80.

²Ibid., ll. 83-88.

³Ibid., III, ii, ll. 403-407.

⁴Ibid., I. 411.

⁵Ibid., I, v, l. 86.

Let me be cruel, not unnatural;
 I will speak daggers to her, but use none,
 My tongue and soul in this be hypocrites.¹

On his way to his mother's room he encounters Claudius alone at prayer and is presented with an opportunity to slay him. Hamlet hesitates, sword drawn, and ponders the consequence of the deed. He must punish the king's soul as well as his body, for the ghost of Hamlet's father was suffering the torments of purgatory because his life had been

Cut off even in the blossoms of my sin,

 No reckoning made, but sent to my account
 With all my imperfections on my head.²

Hamlet recalls the manner of his father's murder and realizes that if he is to get complete revenge, he must be certain of sending the villain's soul to hell. If he kills the king now in the act of praying, Claudius' soul would ascend to heaven. Thus weighing the matter, Hamlet refrains,

Up, sword; and know thou a more horrid hent:
 When he is drunk asleep, or in his rage,
 Or in the incestuous pleasure of his bed;
 At gaming, swearing, or about some act
 That has no relish of salvation in 't;
 Then trip him, that his heels may kick at heaven,
 And that his soul may be as damn'd and black
 As hell, whereto it goes.³

During the scene with his mother, Hamlet has released some of his pent-up emotion in the stabbing of Polonius, and while he is waiting to board the ship to England,

¹Ibid., III, ii, ll. 413-415.

²Ibid., I, v, ll. 76-79.

³Ibid., III, iii, ll. 88-95.

he meets Fortinbras leading his army into Poland. He compares his own situation to that of Fortinbras, and his soliloquy reveals genuine perplexity at his own delay. Speaking of his "dull revenge,"¹ Hamlet wonders why he has not acted.

Now, whether it be
Bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple
Of thinking too precisely on the event,
A thought which, quarter'd, hath but one part
wisdom
And ever three parts coward, I do not know
Why yet I live to say "This thing's to do;"
Sith I have cause and will and strength and means
To do't.²

Has his inactivity been caused by stupidity or by over-cautiousness, a lack of concern with his main task or too much thought and reasoning as to the outcome? Hamlet is ready to believe himself a coward. Claudius should be dead if he had not failed in his duty, and he asks himself why this task must still be before him when he has had the motive, the intention, the ability, and the opportunity to have accomplished it.

The campaign for Poland is for an "eggshell,"³ a worthless piece of land, and "the imminent death of twenty thousand men"⁴ is the price for a conquest which is a matter

¹Ibid., IV, 111, l. 33.

²Ibid., 11. 39-46.

³Ibid., l. 53.

⁴Ibid., l. 59.

of only prestige and honor. Hamlet suffers by contrast:

How stand I then,
That have a father kill'd, a mother stain'd,
Excitements of my reason and my blood,
And let all sleep?¹

Struck with acute shame, he declares,

O, from this time forth,
My thoughts will be bloody, or be nothing worth!²

The one soliloquy of Claudius tells almost everything about his character. Claudius is fully aware of his sin:

O, my offence is rank, it smells to heaven;
It hath the primal eldest curse upon't,
A brother's murder.³

He wants to repent and to pray to God for forgiveness, but he cannot because he still possesses the "effects" of his murder -- his crown, his ambition, and his queen -- and he does not want to give them up. He cannot receive mercy and "retain the offense."⁴ In the corruption of the world he can evade justice, but in heaven his deeds are reckoned. Claudius cannot repent; his soul is like a bird caught in lime, for the more it struggles, the tighter it is held.⁵ Although his words look upward, his thoughts of wife and crown remain below, and "words without thoughts never to heaven go."⁶ Claudius' effort toward penitence and his

¹Ibid., ll. 56-59.

²Ibid., ll. 65-66.

³Ibid., III, iii, ll. 36-38.

⁴Ibid., l. 56.

⁵Hankins, op. cit., p. 216.

⁶Hamlet, III, iii, l. 98.

refusal to accept its penalties make his fate even more terrible. He feels himself to be the most wretched of men and consciously realizes his own damnation.

The soliloquies are probably the most significant part of Hamlet, for in their lines "blood-revenge ceases to be the theme that rests in the mind, and one seems to feel all of life's mystery and tragedy."¹

Characters

In Hamlet Shakespeare uses the same character types that are found in all revenge plays. Claudius is the villain and the protagonist; Laertes, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern, the accomplices; and Hamlet, the revenging hero. These characters, however, instead of being mere stage puppets, who act out their parts in keeping with the necessities of the plot, become studies in human nature. Portraying them as neither all good nor all bad, Shakespeare endeavors to depict his characters realistically, to point out their merits as well as their imperfections, to present them in their strength and in their weakness. He has woven into them his own experiences and observations of life and his intuitive understanding of human psychology.

Claudius, while being the representative of the villain class and the source of evil, is not a complete devil. His ambition for the throne and his passion for the queen

¹Thorndike, PMLA, p. 207.

lead him to his crimes, but after he has attained his goal, he tries to govern his state well.

At the beginning of the play, Claudius is holding his first full court after the death of the elder Hamlet. He first expresses sorrow at the loss of the former king and his gratitude to the court for having kept the period of mourning. Then he speaks of international affairs, the demands of young Fortinbras, and dispatches ambassadors to Norway to sue for peace. Next he turns to Laertes and gives him permission to go to France. Finally, he addresses Hamlet, calling him "my cousin" and "my son,"¹ and in a conciliatory speech entreats him to cast aside his mourning and to remain in Denmark:

We pray you, throw to earth
This unprevailing woe, and think of us
As of a father: for let the world take note,
You are the most immediate to our throne;
And with no less nobility of love
Than that which dearest father bears his son,
Do I impart towards you.

.
And we beseech you, bend you to remain
Here, in the cheer and comfort of our eye,
Our chiefest courtier, cousin, and our son.²

Once he has grown suspicious of Hamlet's madness, however, Claudius becomes wary and commissions Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to spy on Hamlet. When this method had failed, he asks Gertrude to ferret out the meaning of her

¹Hamlet, I, ii, l. 64.

²Ibid., ll. 106-117.

son's behavior. Even though Hamlet's peculiar conduct occupies his foremost thoughts, he never loses sight of the external threat to his country and rejoices at the peace treaty which his ambassadors have obtained.

After the presentation of the play, when he is certain that Hamlet knows of his crime, Claudius, more carefully on guard, deliberately plots to get Hamlet out of the way. Not only does he plan to send him to England but secretly writes letters ordering his execution. Cunning and deceptive, when this plan goes awry and Hamlet unexpectedly returns to Denmark, he tricks Laertes into becoming Hamlet's murderer.

Whatever is worth-while in Claudius' character lies in his sincere love for the queen, his concern for the welfare of his state, and his remorse and awareness of his own wickedness, even though his ambition for power makes it impossible for him to repent.

Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, and Laertes do the work of Claudius' accomplices, but they are not the diabolical agents typical of other revenge plays. Their roles are toned down and altered.¹ It is never certain that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern know that they are part of an evil design, either in prying into Hamlet's affairs or in being the bearers of orders for his death. Killed because Hamlet

¹Thorndike, PMLA, p. 210.

reversed the contents of the letters, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern die in a trick maneuver, the customary manner of death for revenge play accomplices.

Laertes, instantly ready to revenge his father's murder, easily plays into Claudius' clever hands. Only when he is dying does Laertes realize that he has been a tool for the king's treachery.

The strongest of the minor characters is Horatio, the faithful friend of Hamlet. Sincere and loyal, level-headed and practical, Horatio most nearly attains the stature of the ideal. Through the words of Hamlet Shakespeare pays tribute to this kind of individual:

Since my dear soul was mistress of my choice
And could of men distinguish, her election
Hath seal'd thee for herself; for thou hast been
As one, in suffering all, that suffers nothing,
A man that fortune's buffets and rewards
Hath ta'en with equal thanks: and blest are those
Whose blood and judgement are so well commingled,
That they are not a pipe for fortune's finger
To sound what stop she pleases. Give me that man
That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him
In my heart's core, ay, in my heart of heart,
As I do thee.¹

Hamlet, as the hero of a revenge play, retains many of the characteristics of the conventional avenger. A "sweet prince,"² "the expectancy and rose of the fair state, the glass of fashion and the mould of form,"³ he is a scholar

¹Hamlet, III, ii, ll. 68-79.

²Ibid., V, ii, l. 370.

³Ibid., III, i, ll. 160-161.

and an idealist, interested in drama and art and in philosophy. Given to meditation and melancholy, Hamlet is tormented by the pressure of events beyond his control, "the whips and scorns of time."¹ Like other revenge heroes, he is overwhelmed by the sense of evil around him and the duty to revenge commanded by a visitant from another world. He questions fate, hesitates in bewilderment, and in a gesture of unleashed emotion kills an innocent person. At times wild and ranting and at other times crafty and dissimulating, Hamlet is for the most part cynical and ironical.²

Shakespeare has taken the conventional hero of a tragedy of blood with his customary supply of character traits and succeeds in developing a true tragic hero. A noble and righteous man brought into conflict with chance and evil, Hamlet meets disaster through his own inherent inability and weakness. Endeavoring to present the soul of a man in a crisis, Shakespeare portrays Hamlet in his inner struggle against a hostile environment, in the conflicts of his temperament, and in the concerns of his philosophical mind, and develops him so psychologically that in the complexity of his personality he becomes a living human being, "all that Shakespeare found of the greatest beauty and worth

¹Ibid., l. 70.

²Thorndike, Tragedy, p. 155; PMLA, pp. 211-212.

in the human spirit."¹ Critics emphasize sometimes one, again another element in his character as the most important. Ever revealing himself in new aspects, Hamlet becomes a figure who can be interpreted according to one's own view of life and according to one's own thoughts and feelings.

As a soul frees itself from the body, Hamlet has left the old stage type and risen into that ideal sphere where imagination and reflection dwell alone. Shakespeare made the revenging hero an incarnate expression of life's mystery and tragedy.²

Dramatic Scenes and Details

The dramatic scenes and details in Hamlet are old materials used by other playwrights in writing their revenge plays. Shakespeare makes use of the same accumulation of murders, poisoned drinks, a sword fight, the stabbing of an innocent intruder, and a suicide; melancholy distraction, feigned insanity, and the senseless ravings of a mad girl; a ghost appearing to soldiers on watch, midnight scenes with a clock striking, a churchyard scene with death-heads, and a funeral; the reception of ambassadors, banquets, and an international situation; the swearing on the sword hilt; the descriptive announcement of the death of the heroine, the reading of a book before a soliloquy, the wearing of the black, a dumb show, a play within a play, the voice of a

¹A. J. A. Waldock, Hamlet, A Study in Critical Method (Cambridge: University Press, 1931), p. 99.

²Thorndike, PMLA, p. 217.

ghost from the cellar, and the bearing off of dead bodies at the end of the play.

While this conventional store of theatrical material was used over and over again in revenge plays, Shakespeare developed these elements with such a realistic treatment and with such a definite purpose to serve in the play that they became an integral part of Hamlet. Rather than spectacular devices providing only an atmosphere of sensationalism, each has been woven into the play with some psychological significance or has been used as a point for some philosophical reflection.

The stock Senecan ghost was a kind of "Jack-in-the-box," a ranting abstraction, but under the hand of Shakespeare the ghost of the elder Hamlet becomes a dramatically convincing figure.¹ Inciting vengeance as it does in all revenge plays, Shakespeare's ghost possesses a human quality and a touch of pathos. Appearing first to Marcello and Bernado, the two guards, the ghost has stalked the battlements of the castle for two consecutive nights; then the practical Horatio, the scholar and skeptic, is called to be a witness. Dressed in the armor which the king wore during the war with Norway, the ghost enters as the clock is striking one o'clock. The effect upon Horatio is notable, for pale and trembling he says that "it harrows me with fear

¹Wilson, op. cit., p. 59.

and wonder,"¹ and he voices the accepted belief of that period that "this forebodes some strange eruption to our state."² Horatio speaks to the ghost, but as the cock crows heralding the coming of day, the martial figure disappears. When Horatio reports the occurrence to Hamlet, he describes the ghost's pale countenance, "more in sorrow than in anger."³

Hamlet accepts the authenticity of the ghost without hesitation and determines to speak to it "though hell itself should gape and bid me hold my peace."⁴ The night is cold and dark; just at midnight the ghost, still in the armor of the king, enters again. Hamlet, filled with awe, exclaims,

Angels and ministers of grace defend us!
Be thou a spirit of health or goblin damn'd,
Bring with thee airs from heaven or blasts from
 hell,
Be thy intents wicked or charitable,
Thou com'st in such a questionable shape
That I will speak to thee:⁵

Addressing the ghost as "Hamlet, king, father, royal Dane,"⁶ Hamlet begins to question the figure, and the ghost beckons him to follow. Horatio attempts to restrain Hamlet, telling

¹Hamlet, I, i, l. 44.

²Ibid., l. 69.

³Ibid., I, ii, l. 232.

⁴Ibid., ll. 244-245.

⁵Ibid., I, iv, ll. 39-44.

⁶Ibid., ll. 44-45.

him that it may be an evil spirit who will tempt him to the "dreadful summit of the cliff,"¹ but Hamlet defiantly breaks away and follows.

Alone with Hamlet, the ghost begins his tale:

I am thy father's spirit,
Doom'd for a certain time to walk the night,
And for the day confin'd to fast in fires,
Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature
Are burnt and purged away.²

Further speaking of the unimaginable tortures of purgatory, the ghost suddenly cries, "Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder."³

Having aroused Hamlet to vow immediate revenge, the ghost gives an elaborate and vivid description of the murder, made more horrible because of the lack of preparation for death. As the ghost makes ready to depart, it admonishes Hamlet with this final command:

If thou hast nature in thee, bear it not;
Let not the royal bed of Denmark be
A couch for luxury and damned incest.
But, howsoever thou pursuest this act,
Taint not thy mind, not 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. Fare thee well at once!
The glow-worm shows the matin to be near,
And 'gins to pale his uneffectual fire:
Adieu, adieu! Hamlet, remember me.⁴

Making only one other appearance, the ghost comes

¹Ibid., 1. 70.

²Ibid., I, v, ll. 9-13.

³Ibid., 1. 25.

⁴Ibid., ll. 81-91.

between Hamlet and his mother as a reminder to Hamlet that he must not do violence to the queen.

The ghost is a tremendously effective figure and upon it hinges most of the play's action. In its portrayal Shakespeare appealed to all parts of his audience; the groundlings saw only the spectacular apparition while the more enlightened and intelligent perceived the philosophical arguments of Hamlet and Horatio. To each according to his viewpoint, the ghost had a profound and exciting appeal.¹

The dumb show is present in nearly all revenge plays as a tableau to foreshadow approaching events or a means to save the writer trouble of composing dialogue by representing action in pantomime.² In Hamlet, however, the dumb show is used for a definite dramatic purpose. As a part of the play which the players enact at the request of Hamlet, the dumb show depicts the details of the elder Hamlet's murder. Witnessed by Claudius, the queen, and other members of the court, the dumb show together with the play within the play is the device which proves without question the guilt of the king.

The discussion of international affairs, which concerns the threat of war with Norway and the noble qualities of young Fortinbras, has a direct significance, for by breaking into the action at frequent intervals, it serves chiefly

¹Wilson, op. cit., p. 85.

²Ibid., p. 147.

to prepare the way for Fortinbras' succession to the throne of Denmark at the close of the play.

Hamlet's play with the death-heads is turned into a moralizing discourse on life and death. Even the swearing on the cross of the sword seems to have its reason, for its three-fold demand is a protection for Hamlet in his future conduct.

The most dramatic situation and the emotional peak of the play is Hamlet's scene with his mother. His cruel and brutal upbraiding shows not only that the marriage of his mother has been his foremost concern but that he wants above all to make her aware of her guilt and to win her to his side.

Certainly there is no more exciting scene nor one that creates more suspense than the fencing duel between Laertes and Hamlet which is the tragic climax of the play. For a moment it seems as though Laertes may relent and forego his treacherous attack, again that Hamlet may be able to hold off Laertes' thrusts; then in an instant everything becomes confusion -- the queen drinks the poison, Laertes and Hamlet in a scuffle for the poisoned rapier wound each other, the cry of "treason, treason"¹ is resounded, and Hamlet in a last gesture stabs Claudius.

¹Hamlet, V, ii, l. 334.

Moral Implications

The usual revenge play is made up primarily of action, deeds of intrigue and violence, and melodramatic emotions, all of which have been treated objectively with the sole purpose of providing an atmosphere of horror and sensationalism. A few writers made attempts at moral implications, but these philosophical bits were interspersed spasmodically and seem to have no real bearing on the plan of the plays themselves.

Although Shakespeare used the same spectacular elements, the way in which he directed attention away from the physical aspects of terror and imbued his entire play with profound moral and philosophical overtones has made Hamlet not only the finest of revenge plays but one of the world's literary masterpieces.

So much moral philosophy pervades Hamlet that it would be impossible to cite the many pertinent passages. The few examples selected, however, will serve to illustrate the moral thought which Shakespeare wove into his play. While some philosophy is introduced in the speeches of minor characters, the most notable moral instruction is contained in the speeches of Hamlet, made more meaningful because of the significant position of his character in relation to Elizabethan ideas.

Shakespeare's counsel on human conduct is shown in

Polonius' noted speech to Laertes. Although ever the meddling busybody, old Polonius gives advice which is not without a good deal of common sense:

And these few precepts in thy memory
 See thou character. Give thy thoughts no tongue,
 Nor any unproportion'd thought his act.
 Be thou familiar, but by no means vulgar.
 The friends thou hast, and their adoption tried,
 Grapple them to thy soul with hoops of steel;
 But do not dull thy palm with entertainment
 Of each new-hatch'd, unfledg'd comrade. Beware
 Of entrance to a quarrel, but being in,
 Bear't that the opposed may beware of thee.
 Give every man thy ear, but few thy voice;
 Take each man's censure, but reserve thy judgement.
 Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy,
 But not express'd in fancy; rich, not gaudy;
 For the apparel oft proclaims the man,
 And they in France of the best rank and station
 Are of a most select and generous chief in that.
 Neither a borrower nor a lender be;
 For loan oft loses both itself and friend,
 And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry.
 This above all: to thine own self be true,
 And it must follow, as the night the day,
 Thou canst not then be false to any man.¹

Shakespeare uses the traditional view of kingship which stressed the importance of the king as the center of the state. Rosencrantz describes the ideal accepted by the Elizabethans as he says,

The single and peculiar life is bound,
 With all the strength and armour of the mind,
 To keep itself from noyance; but much more
 That spirit upon whose weal depends and rests
 The lives of many. The cease of majesty
 Dies not alone; but, like a gulf, doth draw
 What's near it with it: it is a massy wheel,
 Fix'd on the summit of the highest mount,
 To whose spokes ten thousand lesser things

¹Ibid., I, iii, ll. 58-80.

Are mortis'd and adjoin'd; which, when it falls,
Each small annexment, petty consequence,
Attends the boisterous ruin. Never alone
Did the king sigh, but with a general groan.¹

In advising Ophelia about her love for Hamlet,
Laertes places Hamlet in the same position as Rosencrantz
does Claudius:

His greatness weigh'd, his will is not his own;
For he himself is subject to his birth:
He may not, as unvalued persons do,
Carve for himself; for on his choice depends
The sanctity and health of the whole state;
And therefore must his choice be circumscrib'd
Unto the voice and yielding of that body
Whereof he is the head.²

By means of many speeches of secondary characters,
like those of Rosencrantz and Laertes just quoted, Shake-
speare emphasized the political side of the action, and by
placing his hero against a political background, he increased
the scope of his play. Not only does the feeling about king-
ship apply to the situation at hand but it increases the
enormity of Claudius' murder of his brother.³

Hamlet's speeches are particularly significant in
reflecting the vexing philosophical thoughts and speculations
current in Shakespeare's day. Moreover, Hamlet's generaliz-
ing type of mind is shown by his characteristic trait of
turning his own individual situation into one of universal
application, broadened to encompass all humanity. The

¹Ibid., III, iii, ll. 11-23.

²Ibid., I, iii, ll. 17-28.

³T. Spencer, op. cit., pp. 102-104.

carousing of Claudius lends itself to a comment on the frailty of man. As Hamlet hears the noise of revelry sounding from the castle, he remarks,

So, oft it chances in particular men,
That for some vicious mole of nature in them,
As, in their birth -- wherein they are not guilty,
Since nature cannot choose his origin --
By the o'ergrowth of some complexion,
Oft breaking down the pales and forts of reason,
Or by some habit that too much o'er-leavens
The form of plausible manners, that these men,
Carrying, I say, the stamp of one defect,
Being nature's livery, or fortune's star, --
Their virtue else -- be they as pure as grace,
As infinite as man may undergo --
Shall in the general censure take corruption
From that particular fault: the dram of eale
Doth all the noble substance of a doubt
To his own scandal.¹

Voicing the traditional view of the virtue of a human being,² Hamlet observes,

What is man,
If his chief good and market of his time
Be but to sleep and feed? a beast, no more.
Sure, he that made us with such large discourse,
Looking before and after, gave us not
That capability and god-like reason
To rust in us unus'd.³

Hamlet's ironic speech on mankind is especially noteworthy, for it reflects the doubts of the period regarding man's position in the universe. Such men as Copernicus and Montaigne were exploding the long-established glorification of man as the center of the universe. Sensitive

¹Hamlet, I, iv, ll. 23-37.

²T. Spencer, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

³Hamlet, IV, iv, ll. 33-39.

to the temper of his times, Shakespeare was expressing one of the major conflicts of his age. As Hamlet describes his melancholy, a state of mind which was at once plausible to the Elizabethans, he first views the vast aspects of the external world:

I have of late -- but wherefore I know not --
lost all my mirth, forgone all custom of exercise;
and indeed it goes so heavily with my disposition
that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a
sterile promontory, this most excellent canopy,
the air, look you, this brave o'erhanging firmament,
this majestical roof fretted with golden fire, why,
it appears no other thing to me than a foul and
pestilent congregation of vapours.¹

Turning almost automatically from this consideration of the macrocosm to that of the microcosm, Hamlet exclaims,

What a piece of work is a man! how noble in reason!
how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how
express and admirable! in action how like an angel!
in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the
world! the paragon of animals! And yet, to me,
what is this quintessence of dust? man delights
not me.²

According to the peculiar doctrine of the Elizabethans, man was a creature midway between an angel and a beast, differing from them chiefly by his ability to choose, his free will. Angels were above choice because through their intellect they understood universal truth; beasts were below choice because through their limited sense they were not able to understand. Man, however, by means of his free

¹Ibid., II, ii, ll. 306-316.

²Ibid., ll. 316-323.

will, could decide his own level. "The earlier Renaissance had emphasized the revelation of those potentialities by comparing man with the angels; the later Renaissance emphasized their destruction by comparing man with the animals."¹ The confusion of thought and the natural pessimism which arose from the new dwarfed conception of man are revealed in these words of Hamlet.²

Viewing the players as representatives of life itself, Hamlet sees them as the "abstracts and brief chronicles of time"³ whose aim in their dramas is "to hold, as 'twere the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure."⁴ Again as he handles the death-heads in the churchyard, Hamlet perceives in them the finality of death and the inevitable reduction of all to one common kind. In the over-all atmosphere of corruption emanating from the royal court and in the position of his hero brought face to face with this evil and moral perversity, Shakespeare has emphasized throughout the play the pessimistic picture of death and decay.

In writing Hamlet, Shakespeare portrayed a good and upright man, thrown suddenly into conflict with evil and

¹T.Spencer, op. cit., p. 49.

²Ibid., pp. 21-50; 99-101.

³Hamlet, II, ii, l. 547.

⁴Ibid., III, ii, ll. 26-28.

circumstance, to whom a visitant from another world assigns the overwhelming duty of revenging his father's murder. Into this situation of his hero's inner struggle against his environment Shakespeare poured his knowledge of human nature and of life and presented political as well as religious and ethical questions which occupied the minds of men of the Elizabethan period, questions of which some are of universal interest to men of all ages.¹

Shakespeare used many of the sixteenth-century traditional beliefs concerning man's nature as a means of portraying character and of defining values by which characters and action could be understood.² As he broadened the scope of these conventional views and dramatized them with his understanding of human psychology, the characters and events in Hamlet take on a symbolic and universal significance. The increasing complexity of Hamlet's character, his deep concern for his moral integrity and for the right conduct of life in terms of present and future worlds have made Hamlet the "Mona Lisa of literature."²

In reflecting the general moral and ethical thought of his day, Shakespeare used throughout Hamlet the conflict between the two views of man's nature which the people of his age felt so deeply. On one side is the optimistic man in a bright and orderly world as it should be, while on the other is the pessimistic and melancholy man viewing the

¹T. Spencer, op. cit., p. 93.

²Eliot, op. cit., p. 124.

chaotic world as it is. Shakespeare put the awareness of this conflict into the essential character of Hamlet. The discovery of the difference between appearance and reality, between what theory taught and what experience in life proved, is the cause of the intense turmoil within Hamlet's mind. This dramatic element, used as an integral part of the whole play and presented, moreover, in relation to the thought and feeling of the time, is one of the main reasons for Hamlet's greatness.¹

Hamlet, before the second marriage of his mother, had been the ideal young nobleman. Having a "noble mind," "the courtier's, soldier's, scholar's eye, tongue, sword,"² he represented the traditional optimistic view of man's nature. Upon the discovery of his mother's lust and the usurpation of the throne by his uncle whom he considered unworthy, Hamlet begins to see his surroundings -- the world, the state, and the individual -- in the corruption of actuality. In the Elizabethan period these three spheres were closely integrated, and the destruction of one meant the destruction of the others as well. The seventeenth-century had opened new psychological vistas, new sets of problems which people of earlier centuries had not perceived so fully. Hamlet's disillusionment is caused primarily by his own individual situation, but Hamlet becomes

¹T. Spencer, op. cit., p. 94.

²Hamlet, III, 1, ll. 57-58.

an expression for the emotions which were shared by people of Shakespeare's own time and which have been shared by people ever since. Shakespeare placed Hamlet and his individual action against the background of universal truth. This sense of the reality of evil, the difference between outward appearance and inner truth in the cosmos, in the state, and in man, the dramatic use of one of the important conflicts of the period, whereby the dramatic dimension is enlarged by significant generalization, is what gives to Hamlet so profound a meaning.¹

About this immortal work of art, Felix E. Schelling said,

Shakespeare lavished the golden plenty of his inexhaustible art; his subtle gnomie wisdom, his caustic play of wit, the potent magic of his poetry, the cadenced music of his verse, all were there, with the sure stroke of his masterly characterization, whereby his personages live and change under his hand as men live and change in this world.²

In writing Hamlet, Shakespeare followed the stage fashion already set by other men; he strove to express the same range of mood and thought that others were attempting to express, and wherein other playwrights had failed, Shakespeare magnificently succeeded.

¹T. Spencer, op. cit., pp. 94-106.

²Op. cit., I, p. 560.

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