

"The end is crown of every work well done":
Theatrical Self-Consciousness and the Impulse
Towards Aesthetic Pleasure in Thomas Kyd's
The Spanish Tragedy

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Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* is both the first early modern revenge tragedy and the first early modern work to offer its audience a play-within-a-play. Through his inclusion of an on-stage audience, comprised of the allegorical figure of Revenge and the ghost of Don Andrea, Kyd seems to have tapped into the Elizabethan fascination with theatrical self-consciousness in this period. Although countless critics have alleged that these two figures are extraneous to the plot of *The Spanish Tragedy*, and constitute a flaw in the play's narrative framework, I intend to argue that they are, in fact, crucial to Kyd's self-conscious investigation into the narrative impulse and the dynamics of human desire. In this complex and compelling play, Kyd articulates an intriguing perspective on human desire for aesthetic balance, and more specifically, on how the impulse for closure, which is implicit in a desire for balance, is the impetus for revenge. Kyd conflates the impulses for narrative, revenge, and aesthetic pleasure, ultimately suggesting that revenge points towards a central desire not only of the revenge drama, but also of all narrative. Revenge seeks to rectify an imbalance in justice, and so, at its most basic level, results in a sense of closure and aesthetic balance. As will be made evident in the course of my discussion, the recurring presence of theatrical self-consciousness in the genre of the revenge drama is far from coincidental, but rather is evidence of an inextricable continuity between the desires for revenge and aesthetic pleasure.

Fredson Bowers' *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy* invites modern readers to speculate about the response of an Elizabethan audience to the dramatic unfolding of Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*. His approach provides a historically-grounded assessment of the manner in which Kyd's audience would likely respond to the events of the play, and therefore, despite its many flaws, remains a useful aid to the modern reader. Bowers' interpretation is limited, however, from a literary perspective, in that the author's attention to the historical backdrop of the play distracts him from the very real possibility that Kyd's intent may have been to offer a perspective that departs in a number of interesting ways from Elizabethan conceptions of literature and theatre. According to Bowers, Elizabethan ethics would deem the figures of Andrea and Revenge superfluous to the play, and the only revenge which would have been of interest to the audience is that of Hieronimo on Lorenzo. He writes: "The leading motive of *The*

Spanish Tragedy is revenge, but the motive does not appear as determinant in the plot until the middle of the play, since the characters must first be set in conflict to provide the murder which is to be revenged” (63). He contends that the primary action of the play, which occurs in the latter half, “does not spring from the motive of revenge for [Andrea] nor is this revenge directed chiefly at his slayer. Consequently, the ghost has no real connection with the play” (Bowers 71). Bowers censures the structure and composition of Kyd’s tragedy on the grounds that it does not abide by the criteria he himself presents as suitable for this specific genre of literature. The aspects of the plays he judges unnecessary and irrelevant to the progression of the plot, however, bear a relevance to the play’s self-conscious ruminations on the medium of theatre and the playwright’s desire to evoke an impulse for revenge and aesthetic balance within the audience. Bowers’ assumptions that the play lacks coherence emanates from a personal agenda to assess the play’s merit based on the guidelines of his own theory of revenge. As a result, he neglects to recognize the presence of a unified discourse throughout the play, which does not fall within his own assumptions regarding the purpose and import of revenge tragedy.

From the outset of the play, the audiences’ expectations of what will occur on stage are dictated by the dialogues between Andrea and Revenge. Kyd persuades the audience to enter into the logic of a violent impulse for revenge by assuring the audience that the play will deliver revenge and consistently reiterating this guarantee in the exchanges between Andrea and Revenge. In the first scene of the play, the allegorical figure Revenge discloses a central element of the play’s conclusion when he promises Andrea, “thou shalt see the author of thy death... Depriv’d of life by Bel-imperia” (I.i.87, 89). He then requests Andrea to join him in retiring above stage to view the spectacle and “serve for the chorus in this tragedy” (I.i.91). Eleanor Tweedie correctly concludes that this line “stresses the interpretive role the two figures will fill throughout” (225). The play is framed in such a way that Andrea and Revenge constitute a second layer of perception within the theatre. As neither strictly spectators nor actors, these two figures comprise an additional level of awareness beyond the players on-stage and the audience off-stage. Their involvement in the play is limited to the introductory scene, their final comments at the close of each act, and the conclusion. Their fragmented dialogues scattered throughout the text, though scant, intensify the

escalating desire of Andrea and the audience for revenge by insisting upon the imminence of retribution. At the end of Act I, Revenge chides Andrea for his misgivings and impatience regarding the gradual realization of his revenge. In an attempt to soothe the bereaved ghost and incite his appetite for vengeance further, Revenge instructs Andrea to patiently await the conclusion of his journey, and implicitly urges the audience to await the conclusion of the play. His speech promises a delightfully cruel end for Andrea's adversaries.

Be still; Andrea; ere we go from hence,
I'll turn their friendship [that of Spain and Portugal] into fell despite
Their love to mortal hate, their day to night,
Their hope into despair, their peace to war,
Their joys to pain, their bliss to misery. (I.v.5-10)

In these lines, Revenge not only attempts to strengthen Andrea's resolve, but also sketches a generic outline of the forthcoming events of the play. He foreshadows the peace that will arise between the nations of Spain and Portugal as a result of the proposed union between Balthazar and Bel-imperia and references the dissolution of this "bliss" at the play's end. At the close of Act II, Revenge and Andrea once again rematerialize to reiterate a similar discourse. Here, Revenge speaks metaphorically of Andrea's hastiness for revenge, which he compares to a desire to "Harvest when the corn is green." Employing the same language from Act I, he beseeches Andrea to "be still" and take pleasure in viewing the aesthetic unraveling of justice.

Thou talkest of Harvest when the corn is green.
The end is crown of every work well done:
The sickle comes not till the corn is ripe.
Be still; and ere I lead thee from this place,
I'll show thee Balthazar in heavy case. (II.v.7-11)

Again, Revenge flouts his prescience by pre-naming the death of Balthazar. In addition, he seems to reference the massacre figured in Hieronimo's concluding play, dubbing it the "crown of every work well

done.” By celebrating the artistic appeal of this violent spectacle, Revenge compromises the *real* violence done by Hieronimo’s play to its participants. His metaphor reduces the individuals that comprise the doomed cast to an abstraction. Revenge’s poetic language revises these actors, including Andrea’s beloved Bel-imperia, by way of a seemingly innocuous metaphor, into a crop awaiting harvest by the iconic *sickle* of death. Through his manipulation of language, he transforms a scene of daunting violence into a linguistically pleasurable rendering of that same scene, which, robbed of all perceptible horror, delights its audience in a way that echoes the pleasure Hieronimo’s audience experiences in viewing what they perceive to be the fictitious unfoldings of a play, but is, in actuality, the slaughter of their acquaintances. In this regard, the impulse for revenge very accurately mirrors the impulse for aesthetic pleasure. The allegorical figure Revenge conceives of revenge as an aesthetic accomplishment that engenders symmetry or balance. Primarily through his eloquence, Revenge gradually persuades Andrea to embrace this vision of vengeance, and despite our own uneasiness, makes even us, the audience, complicit in wanting a world where one can achieve retribution through violence. Thus Bower’s claim that “the ghost has no real connection with the play” is false (71). Andrea’s postponed revenge is a necessary device of the playwright, which successfully incites the audience’s escalating desire for vengeance. At the close of Act III, we are offered a final reassurance by Revenge that Andrea’s justice is soon to arrive. Again, Andrea reiterates reservations regarding the course of his revenge, charging Revenge to awake and bring his promised ends into completion. Revenge mollifies the discontented ghost with a “dumb show” or masque and provides an explanatory speech to elucidate the allegorical display.

The two first, the nuptial torches bore,
As brightly burning as the midday’s sun;
But after them doth Hymen hie as fast,
Clothéd in sable, and a saffron robe,
And blows them out, and quenbeth them with blood,
As discontent that things continue so. (III.xv.29)

In this passage, Revenge assures Andrea that the nuptial torches carried in the wedding processions to signify desire will be followed by the mythical god of marriage, Hymen, usually figured as a young man carrying a torch and veil, yet described here as attired in a robe of sable and saffron. Revenge's explanation makes known that the masque or "mystery" which Andrea presses him to "reveal" is indeed performed by precisely the same ominous personage (Hymen). "Sable" or black signifies death and saffron, a deep shade of yellow, is symbolic of fertility in classical Roman wedding ceremonies (Maus 346). The masque, then, seems to foreshadow the death that will accompany the nuptials of Bel-imperia and Balthazar, and ironically inverts the classical symbolic import of the color saffron by associating its fecundity with Andrea's revenge, which is brought into a sort of fertile fruition by Hieronimo's murderous play-within-a-play. Revenge's resolution to employ a masque in order to expose the forthcoming consequences of Hieronimo's play is no coincidence. The choice situates the violence of both this masque and the *real* violence it promises within an artistic context. Like Revenge's deceptively attractive simile at the end of Act II, this masque beautifies its own message by offering the audience an aesthetically-pleasing and riveting visual display, which successfully masks the odious meaning it conveys. It foreshadows the deaths of not only the wicked characters who have betrayed Don Andrea, but also of those to whom he still professes a deep sentimental attachment, including Bel-imperia, as well as the guiltless Hieronimo and Castille. Andrea's response to the confounding spectacle, "reveal this *mystery*" (III.xv.29), may remind us of Revenge's opening address to the perturbed ghost in the first scene of the play: "Here sit we down to see the *mystery*" [emphasis mine] (I.i.89). In both moments, we are made to recall the role both figures occupy as an audience to Kyd's play, as well as our own corresponding function as onlookers. Andrea's request to be made aware of the meaning of Revenge's masque ("reveal this *mystery*") is also one that occupies our own thoughts throughout the play. Like Andrea, we request an answer to the perplexing question: "How should I respond to what I am seeing?" The play's self-reflexive engagement with art as a means to deliver these prophecies of horror provokes the reader to question whether art, in this context or even generally, is wholly amoral.

Throughout the play, Kyd's characters frequently employ artistic strategies to deceive their listeners both on-and-off-stage. Language, in particular, proves to be a universal tool of deception within the play. For example, Kyd's characters often engage their narrative skill as a means to seduce their audience into accepting certain premises. At the outset of the play, we are confronted with four different accounts of Andrea's death, each crafted such that it will presumably yield some particular desired effect. The Spanish General, for instance, attests to the valor of the Portuguese troops and the equally fierce competition offered by their skilled ranks. Don Andrea's death is mentioned impersonally by the general as merely one of many casualties. The general also reports that Balthazar behaved rudely and proudly as he hovered above Andrea's fallen body ("insulting over him [Andrea]/ Breath[ing] out proud vaunts and sounding to [their] reproach") (I.ii.73-4). The general's clever display is rewarded: Spain's victory over the accomplished Portuguese army is perceived as a tremendous moral conquest and subsequently, the general receives the gift of a chain from the King and the assurance of more rewards to come. Next, we receive two more accounts of the battle from both Horatio and Lorenzo. The two disputing soldiers each lay claim to having captured the Portuguese prince Balthazar. Lorenzo insists that he first took hold of Balthazar's horse by the reins and deprived the prince of his weapon, while Horatio maintains that his own menacing lance forced the prince to yield his weapon. Although these two stories do not necessarily stand in contradiction, they do reveal how readily each man establishes his own contribution to the prince's defeat as superior based solely on the grounds that he himself completed a particular action. Their squabble is informative also, because, as the critic Caroline McGinnis Kay suggests, "the General not only neglected to mention Lorenzo, but also may have lied about Balthazar's manner" (193). Indeed, the general's omission of Horatio's part in the capture of the Portuguese prince is inexplicable. He mentions Lorenzo's involvement in the detainment of Balthazar, and so surely he must know that Horatio also played an active role in this deed—a claim corroborated by Lorenzo, Horatio, and Balthazar himself. As Kay further questions: "And since Lorenzo is the King's nephew, why did the General pass up the opportunity to praise the King's kinsman?" (24). Furthermore, the polite, courteous Balthazar we encounter before the Spanish court is far from the rude, pompous prince the general describes. Therefore,

we must assume that this accusation was either a lie invented by the General to enhance his claim to *moral* victory or that Balthazar's behavior before the Spanish court is a deceitful performance meant to evoke a favorable response from his captors. The fourth account is presented by Villuppo, who claims a fellow Portuguese soldier, Alexandro has acted as a traitor and murdered Balthazar in battle. Like his fellow storytellers, Villuppo intends for his deceit to evoke a specific response in his listeners. After his treachery has been discovered, Villuppo confesses that he did not perjure Alexandro to cause the young man injury, but rather to gain "reward and [out of a] hope to be preferred" (III.i.94). The final and perhaps most compelling description of Andrea's death is offered by Horatio to Bel-imperia. His praise of Andrea's heroism and merit as a soldier seems overwrought, but it arouses precisely the response he desires in Andrea's despondent lover, Bel-imperia. According to Horatio, if it were not for the divine intervention of "wrathful Nemesis," who envied Andrea's "praise and worth," the brave soldier would not have died in combat (I.iv.16-17). Furthermore, when Bel-imperia questions what became of her lover's body, Horatio expounds at length upon his careful attention to the handling of his fallen comrade's remains. Like his fellow story-tellers, Hoaratio achieves the effect he most ardently desires from his self-aggrandizing tale: He successfully transfer's Bel-imperia's affections from the departed Andrea to himself, a transference made manifest in Horatio's acceptance of Don Andrea's scarf.

The most impersonal account of Don Andrea's death comes from Andrea himself. He relates that he was involved in a "conflict with Portingale" in which he was "slain" due to his "valour [which] drew [him] into danger's mouth / Till life to death made passage through [his] wounds" (I.i.15-18). Kay suggests that Andrea's description serves as a sort of "touchstone" against which we can evaluate the four subsequent accounts of his death. If we make use of Andrea's opening speech accordingly, we are made to perceive more acutely the disparate nature of these four ensuing narratives. Each skilled story-teller employs language as a means to abuse and deceive his audience. Kyd's emphasis on the falseness of language in each of these accounts is evocative of his larger concern regarding the frequently amoral nature of art. Indeed, he seems to liken the impulse for revenge with an impulse for narration. Both constitute a sort of instinctual urge which compels the characters of the play to behave deceitfully and

even violently. In addition, the playwright explicitly associates both compulsions with artistic pleasure in a way that compounds and complicates our understanding of art. The General, Lorenzo, Horatio, and Villuppo are all correctly labeled as deceivers, but it would seem reductive if we did not also register that each man is an extremely successful orator and skilled manipulator of language. Their narrative accounts of Don Andrea's death are, indeed, so compelling that their listeners actually enter into their fictive renderings of the event and respond precisely as each author ordains. Each man expresses an absolute confidence in his Tamburlanian capacity to accomplish his will through language, and consequently, the transparently self-aggrandizing nature of each account is nonetheless convincing. As in our encounters with Revenge throughout the play, we are made to appreciate, albeit with apprehension, the capacity of art to disguise even the most horrific aspects of our reality by rendering them beautiful or aesthetically pleasing.

Yet, Kyd also grounds his assumptions on a concomitant awareness that the efficacy of art is always contingent on the response of the viewer. The playwright alerts his readers to this truth by figuring Andrea and Revenge as mediators or intercessors between the actions of the play and the audience. Throughout the play, Andrea and Revenge seem to play an interpretive role by offering Kyd's readers one way of responding to the dramatic action. The framing of the play gives Andrea and Revenge the beginning and ending words to the drama. In addition, as I've noted earlier, their dialogues also constitute the concluding scene of each act. Much like Andrea, who is pervaded by an impulse for violent revenge in response to Revenge's persuasive and articulate speeches, we are made to feel a similar desire for Kyd's characters to achieve self-actualized retribution. By making us complicit in such a desire, Kyd draws us into the amoral world of the play. In a very compelling way, he manipulates our reactions to the play through the figures of Andrea and Revenge, whose interspersed dialogues function as interpretive cruxes to which our attention is invariably turned at the close of each act. Ironically, the assertion made by countless critics, including Bowers, that these two figures are "superfluous," in fact, attests to how profoundly skilled a playwright Kyd was. The subtlety with which he renders their involvement in the play may convince us that they are of little importance; however, in action, these two figures guide our

responses throughout the play, and most specifically, accentuate our increasing desire for revenge. Kyd seems to entertain the notion that art derives its efficacy from viewer response. He permits us to imagine that we are observing *The Spanish Tragedy* as unbiased spectators, but, like his deceased hero, Andrea, we become far more than casual onlookers of the play. The two figures are certainly not a conventional chorus by any means, for as critic Johnathan Bates notes: “they embody the ethic of revenge which the play problematizes” (269). The spectacle of Kyd’s play coerces both us and Andrea into occupying its amoral world—a realm in which individuals exact their own violent revenge without any ensuing ethical qualms. We see this transition occur most evidently in Don Andrea. For example, at the outset of the play, he is not particularly taken with idea of revenge. As Kay astutely observes: “Revenge’s cavalier assumptions that Don Andrea demands a blood revenge does not coincide with Don Andrea’s manner of speech” (22). In fact, Andrea describes his death with such astonishing impartiality that we are led to believe he harbors no resentment regarding the circumstances of his untimely passing. Furthermore, his acquaintance with Revenge, which seals the course of his future exploits within the play and the unfolding of the narrative itself, is not the consequence of divinely-ordained justice, but rather of a whim expressed by Pluto’s wife, Proserpine.

Andrea’s arrival in Hades provokes a bitter dispute amongst the ruling inhabitants of the underworld regarding whether he ought to reside with fellow lovers in the fields of love or with fellow martialists in the martial fields. After a brief quarrel, the contending parties agree to send the ghost of Andrea to their “infernal king,” who at the earnest pleadings of his wife, Proserpine, remits the spirit to her charge (I.i.52). She alone decides to invoke the presence of Revenge and propel the two figures back into Andrea’s former world with the incentive to enact violent retribution. Although Andrea initially appears apathetic to the prospect of revenge, he is easily persuaded to embrace the notion both by the eloquence of the allegorical figure Revenge and the theatrical performance of the play itself—a “mystery” he beholds above stage with his fellow audience member, Revenge. Indeed, Revenge explicitly welcomes such a reading of their role when he announces to Andrea: “Here sit we down to see the mystery, / And serve for Chorus in this tragedy” (I.i.89-90). Therefore, in the earliest moments of the

play, Kyd seems to draw an implicit parallel between our role as the audience and Andrea/Revenge's role as the chorus. Thus, it is not shocking, I think, that we shape our own responses to the play largely on the reactions of these two characters. Bate offers a similar reading in "The Performance of Revenge," noting, that "[a]s spectators, Revenge and the Ghost must in some sense function as representatives of the theatre audience" (269). Nor is it surprising, therefore, that we find ourselves, like Andrea, made willing subjects to the violence of the play and to an instinctual desire for aesthetic balance, which all acts of revenge implicitly entail. By this, I mean that revenge seeks to rectify some wrong done to a character which has created an imbalance or injustice evoking a yearning for a kind of restoration of symmetry. It is also of exceeding importance that Kyd values our response as the audience. Like Hieronimo, whose violent play-within-a-play derives its efficacy from its ability to deceive the audience, Kyd recognizes that his desire to blur the boundaries between the moral world which we occupy and the amoral world of the play into which we enter can only be successful if his audience responds with acceptance to his invitation. Therefore, the playwright attempts to manipulate our response to the play, such that we enter into the logic of a violent impulse for revenge.

Kyd is intensely fascinated by the capacity of art to deceive its audience and he contemplates this idea most evidently in Hieronimo's play-within-a-play. Similarly to the abstruse masque which Revenge presents to Andrea at the close of Act III, the meaning of Hieronimo's play is difficult to discern. Hieronimo's play entails a visual drama, in which the characters implicated in his son's death rehearse the actions of their villainy. Each actor portrays the same role he or she has acted throughout the course of the play, and each exercises his or her part in a unique language. Hieronimo argues for the necessity of these diverse languages, stating: "Each one of us must act his part / In unknown languages, / That it may breed the more variety" (IV.i.166-8). Of course, we may also perceive an additional purpose for Hieronimo's demand. The confusion that results both on-and-off-stage evokes a response similar to that felt by the audience. We have been made to feel a strong sense of ambivalence and distrust for language in response to play's emphasis on the deceptiveness of words. We may recall, for example, Pedringano's bating of the hangman at his own execution. Falsely assured by Lorenzo's messenger that a letter of

pardon is contained within a box the messenger holds, he goads on his executioner, arrogantly rejoicing in his supposed superiority to the law. The box, however, does not hold a letter of pardon or any promise of clemency for the murderous Pedringano. It is empty—a profoundly symbolic gesture towards the emptiness of Lorenzo’s promise and the deceiving nature of language throughout the play. Language, in Hieronimo’s play, is similarly vacant of meaning for both its actors and the observers of the play on-and-off-stage. Like the onstage audience, we are baffled by the sundry languages of the actors. Again, we are made to consider the central question evoked by Kyd’s drama: “How should I respond to what I am seeing?” As Bate observes, our own uncertainty leads us to deliberate that “perhaps the knowledge that it is only a play has become an *imperfect* knowledge” (270). Hieronimo’s play blurs the distinctions between art and life: in his role as a murderer, Hieronimo actually slaughters his fellow actors on stage. The dual disparity the audience witnesses is complex and unnerving—we must accept the play-within-a-play as a performance that encroaches upon life within the Kyd’s larger play, while simultaneously remaining aware that our reality is disparate from that of the audience on stage; that, indeed, the individuals robbed of life on-stage are merely characters and not truly living. Hieronimo further obscures the dialectics between life and art at the poignant moment when he draws a curtain to reveal the corpse of his murdered son, Horatio. The entire performance disturbs the boundary between the real and the fictive, such that we are no longer able to comprehend or even respect the distinction between real and figured acts of violence.

As I’ve suggested earlier, Kyd conflates the impulses for revenge, narrative closure, and aesthetic pleasure. In Hieronimo’s play, the continuity between these impulses becomes most apparent. Hieronimo’s narrative impulse both creates and drives his retelling of the tragedy *Soliman and Perseda*—a plot which engenders violence and death for the play’s participants, and aesthetic pleasure for the stage and theatre audiences. Hieronimo’s employment of a theatrical performance as a means to actualize his violent revenge reflects Kyd’s fascination with the interplay between artistic pleasure and violence, particularly the many ways in which art can act out both real and figured violence. The theatrical self-consciousness of Kyd’s play is compelling and extends far beyond Hieronimo’s haunting, final spectacle.

Indeed, *The Spanish Tragedy* is intensely preoccupied with theatre as a mode of representation. As I've already suggested, the four separate accounts of Don Andrea's death alert us to the playwright's interest in narration and performance. In addition to this, the play manifests a marked emphasis on props (the "pardon" box, napkins, pens, daggers, ropes, torches), recurrent imagery (Don Andrea's scarf, the bloody handkerchief, the perverse bower), and a radical revisualization of theatrical space (Revenge and Andrea are seated in a box above the stage adjacent to the off-stage audience). The whole spectacle was self-conscious in ways an Elizabethan audience, and indeed no audience, had ever experienced prior. *The Spanish Tragedy* began the association between the revenge drama and theatrical self-consciousness. We are most familiar with Shakespeare's use of a play-within-a-play in the revenge drama *Hamlet*. We might assume that the connection between the revenge tragedy and theatrical self-consciousness is a mere coincidence that arose in *The Spanish Tragedy* and was replicated in the later works of Kyd's contemporaries. Yet, Kyd's extraordinary interest in the continuities between violence, revenge, and art in *The Spanish Tragedy* seems to suggest that the frequent concurrence of revenge drama and theatrical self-consciousness is no coincidence. Bate poses just this question to his readership, writing: "Why is revenge so frequently presented as a *performance*, and what is more a performance which draws attention to its own status as performance?" (267)

In *Reading for the Plot*, Peter Brooks implicitly offers an answer to this query. Brooks links the human narrative impulse, to which Kyd seems to allude throughout the play, with an instinctual yearning to satisfy our unconscious desires. He writes:

Narratives portray the motors of desire that drive and consume their plots, and they also lay bare the nature of narration as a form of human desire: the need to tell as a primary human drive that seeks to seduce and subjugate the listener, to implicate him in the thrust of a desire that never can quite speak to its name—never can quite come to the point—but that insists on speaking over and over again its movement toward that name. For the analyst of narrative, these different yet convergent vectors of desire suggest the need to explore more fully the shaping function of desire, its modeling of the plot, and also the dynamics of exchange and transmission, the roles of tellers and listeners. (61)

Brooks associates the narrative impulse with a tendency that seeks to “seduce and subjugate the listener, to implicate him in the thrust of a desire.” Kyd displays just this sort of “drive” throughout *The Spanish Tragedy*. Like his characters, who use language as a tool to deceive their listeners, Kyd seduces and subjugates the audience to a central desire, the desire for revenge. Yet, as Brooks shrewdly notes, this desire can “never quite speak to its name...but insists on speaking over and over again its movement towards that name.” As the play unfolds, we may, and indeed should, come to recognize that although Kyd names revenge as the central desire of his narrative, it is in many ways peripheral to other concerns. Andrea’s initial apathy towards revenge alerts us to this possibility. The figure Revenge consistently reiterates or speaks “over and over again” the play’s movement towards his own name. He becomes the desire that drives the narrative forward and for this reason, he is an extraordinary successful allegorical representation of the central desire (revenge) for which he stands. However, if the point to which he leads us, if the desire for which we are made to yearn, is not truly revenge itself then what is it? As Brooks notes, “[d]esire is inherently unsatisfiable” (55). Desire cannot exist in the absence of want, because its primary ambition is to answer to its own desire to continue desiring. Therefore, all narratives are premised on creating an imbalance that yields a desire for closure which can never be fully achieved. Revenge drama, in specific, operates, at least in generic terms, by establishing a feeling of unrest or imbalance that the plot seeks to rectify with the introduction of symmetry. The plot typically unfolds as follows: a character is wronged in a way that upsets the balance of justice, and that character, then, enacts revenge in an attempt to achieve a sense of balance. In this regard, all narratives, in essence, are driven by the central impulse of the revenge drama—this is, of course, a desire to attain closure/balance. The impulse for revenge emanates from an instinctual desire for aesthetic balance or symmetry, and so, at its most basic level, the revenge drama expresses a yearning for aesthetic pleasure. The ghost of Dan Andrea articulates this knowledge at the close of the play. He describes his revenge in acutely artistic terms, noting:

Aye, now my hope have end in their effects,
When blood and sorrow finished my desire:
Horatio murdered in his father's bower;
Vile Serberine by Pedringano slain;
False Pedringano *hanged by quant device*;
Fair Isabella by herself misdome;
Prince Balthazar by Bel-imperia stabbed;
The Duke of Castille and his wicked sone
Both done to death by old Hieronimo;
My Bel-imperia fall'n as Dido fell,
Aye, these were spectacle to please my soul! [emphasis mine] (IV.v.1-12)

In these lines, Andrea rejoices in the aesthetic appeal of each character's death. In particular, he seems delighted by the irony of Horatio and Pedringano's deaths. He underscores the location of Horatio's death in his father's bower. Gardens are characteristically associated with fecundity, birth, and life, but this garden has been made perverse by the deaths of both Horatio and his mother, Isabella. Pedringano, he notes, has been "hanged by quaint device." As this observation reveals, Andrea appreciates the ironic notion that Pedringano is hanged, literally, due to his "quaint" or insidious behavior. In addition, Andrea revels in his own clever play-on-words, which apply an implicit dual meaning to "quant device," both the gallows that lay claim to Pedringano's life and the executed man's cunning. Even the death of Andrea's beloved Bel-imperia is reduced by his own metaphoric language to a fiction. He compares her death to the infamous suicide of Virgil's Dido, who, like Bel-imperia, stabs herself out of grief for the loss of her former lover. Furthermore, Andrea recalls with fondness the deaths of Castille and Hieronimo, whom, to our knowledge, have done Don Andrea no wrong. He dubs all this violence, even that which extends beyond Hieronimo's play, a "spectacle" that "please[s] [his] soul." All of this suggests that Andrea views himself as a spectator of a play. In these final lines, he expresses his sincere approval of this play to its contented author Revenge, who has brought his initial promise into fruition: "The end is crown of every work well done" (II.v.6). Yet, this final resolution provides no closure for the theatre audience. How are we to square the death of the seemingly innocent Castille with Andrea's supposition that balance and justice have been accomplished? And, how are we to respond to Andrea's expressions of delight in

response to the aesthetically-pleasing deaths of Bel-imperia and Horatio? Again, the recurrent question of the play arises: "How should I respond to what I am seeing?" *The Spanish Tragedy* provides no answers to these problematic questions. Hieronimo's curious and unnerving final action, the biting out of his tongue, is, perhaps, symbolic of the play's own refusal to speak to the many questions it raises.

As I've suggested earlier, one of the fundamental claims of Kyd's play seems to be that all narratives desire the sort of closure or aesthetic balance provided by revenge. Brookes suggests that the narrative creates a state of excitement, which makes us long for rest or closure. Yet, our desire for closure or "satisfaction" is often a satisfaction that in the end is not moral as much as it is formal. The danger of such a desire, Kyd implies, is that we can yearn for closure and aesthetic balance at any cost. Therefore, I would suggest that the recurrence of theatrical self-consciousness in the genre of the revenge drama is a consequence of this inextricable continuity between revenge and art. Evidently, Kyd was deeply fascinated by the dynamics of human desire and the varied ways in which we attempt to employ artistic strategies as a vehicle to actualize our desires. Kyd recognizes the extraordinary capacity of the human mind to envision and consequently yearn for perfection through art, yet also expresses an awareness of our baser qualities which relegate us to a state in which we can only envision and strive, but never achieve a state of true stability. For this reason, Kyd is the analyst to which Brooks refers, who longs to explore and discover "more fully the shaping function of desire, its modeling of the plot, and the dynamics of exchange and transmission, the roles of tellers and listeners." *The Spanish Tragedy* is a masterpiece both for its innovative reevaluation of theatre as an artistic medium and its compelling inquiry into the nature of *being* human.

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