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CYRIL TOURNEUR'S

THE REVENGER'S TRAGEDY: THE MORAL CONTEXT

by

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For

my father and mother
FOREWORD

No scholar need be told that genuine understanding of a literary work is based on the understanding of all the pertinent matter that surrounded it and its producer. To attempt the explication of literature as if it has been written in a moral, social, and political vacuum is to fail before the task is begun. Good criticism is invariably the wedding of sound scholarship and mature imagination. And such criticism must operate with total awareness that a work separated from us by the distance of some three hundred years has an integrity of its own; it will not yield itself and its essence up to the critic who finds it convenient to recast the poem or the play in twentieth century terms, and to approach it as if its context were the same as that which produced a recent novel.

The following study is an attempt to follow the statements made above. It is an attempt to unite a body of information derived by scholarly procedures with an imaginative reading of a late Elizabethan play. The purpose is, as the title of the study suggests, to ascertain what body of moral opinion circumscribed the writers of Elizabethan drama.

The method used may seem discontinuous, but I think it
can be defended pragmatically. While the first two chapters serve as introductory material, the conclusions as to purpose and attitude in *The Revenger's Tragedy* that I draw in the final chapter are based on a good deal of readings in the moral criticism written preceding and during the time in which Cyril Tourneur wrote.

These introductory chapters are an attempt to recreate, within obvious limits, the moral "climate" of the time insofar as we may gauge it from critical writings. It is necessarily incomplete. It would require a study of vast proportions to even touch upon the myriad cross-currents of social, political, theological and economic opinions that, taken together, produced the total context of Tourneur's world. Further, one suspects, such a study might tell us little more than we can know by following the method chosen here.

In this study, then, we have the criticism—both pro and con—and we have the play. Their interrelationships are suggested—but not labored—in the final chapter. I hope that both the summary of Elizabethan moral criticism and the analysis of *The Revenger's Tragedy* in terms of it provide some special insight into the complexus of ethical opinion that was instrumental in producing an age of dramatic poetry unsurpassed in the history of literature.
I would like to take this opportunity to thank Dr. Carroll Camden not only for his suggestions and assistance in the preparation of this study, but even more for his friendship—a friendship that has transformed a scholarly task into a valuable human experience.
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INTRODUCTION

When the bad bleedes, then is the Tragedie good. [ILL.]

If, as Douglas Bush suggests, every age is "an age of transition," it remains a truism inherent in English literary history that the last decades of Elizabeth's reign and the first decades of the seventeenth century produced many of the seed ideas and attitudes that have influenced the politics, social structure, and literature of the English-speaking world ever since. In almost every field of human activity one finds sharp contrasts and well-defined poles of opinion, the medieval and the modern rubbing elbows, and as the printed book came within the economic reach of almost every Englishman at the juncture of the centuries, those contrasts and poles of opinion found for the first time a medium through which they might appeal their cases directly to the people.

The same period in which the English drama rose to its greatest poetic and creative height found the printed book a powerful agent for the public discussion of the myriad real grievances—and the countless tempests-in-teapots that inevitably arose in the small intellectual circles of a city that was still to a great extent provincial and only beginning to grow toward the complex metropolis that is modern London.
Among the many blasts and counterblasts that made their way through the busy presses and thence into the bookshops huddled around St. Paul's, one issue stood out particularly. It was, in fact, but an expanded and intensified version of a centuries-old battle that had found first voice in ancient Greece, and had been waged time and again through antiquity, the middle ages, and the Italian Renaissance. The issue described—and one that concerned an inordinate number of Englishmen, considering its special nature—was the attacks against and the defense of imaginative literature in general and the stage in particular.

The growing strength of London's middle class, and the rise of the Puritan ethic in proportion made the concentrated attack inevitable, and, so far as the cultured aristocracy and the writers and players themselves were concerned, the defense essential. Yet neither the precarious position of the theatre in 17th century England, nor the fulminations of the Puritans against it represented a new struggle or even a novel concept. If the Puritan sallies against the theatre and their rather general suspicion of imaginative literature, and the various defenses of both were in any way new, the novelty was a question of intensity and of the vast publicity given the whole
affair. Certainly few movements concerning literature are more fully documented with available sources presenting both sides of the controversy.\textsuperscript{5}

The English defenses or apologias for poetry and drama were, for the most part, either influenced by, or at least quite similar to many earlier Italian treatises in which the Humanists had defended imaginative literature and drama against "shallow churchmen" who strangely had made a kind of unconscious common cause with the Puritans in their distrust of fiction and theatre.\textsuperscript{6}

The point of the Puritan attack, however, was double-pronged: it dealt first with the basic "falsity" of poetry, particularly dramatic poetry, along the lines of the old Platonic attack. Poetry, according to this train of reasoning was false; dramatic poetry was false in gesture and in act as well as in word. Connected with this first prong of the Puritan attack was the concept that poetry was more than just false: it was the product of degraded pagan worship, which made it anathema and "most filthie" from its genesis.\textsuperscript{7} And if this primary argument failed to sway the hearer or reader of the sermon or tract, the Puritans had the other prong of their attack ready at hand.
This second line of the Puritan offensive represents a much stronger case than the old Platonic saw which had as its opponents not only Aristotle, Horace, and Virgil, all of considerable influence at this time, but, more important, the very basic appetites of human nature itself. For the second line of the Puritan attack dealt with the immorality and lewdness of the company that gathered at the theatres, and used them as its meeting place. Stephen Gosson, quoting almost verbatim from John Northbrook's earlier *Treatise Against Dicing, Dancing, Plays, and Interludes*, complains of the sort of people who gathered at theatres:

In our assemblies at plays in London, you shall see such heaving and shoving, such itching and shouldering to sit by women; such care for their garments that they may not be trod on; such eyes to their laps that no chips light in them; such pillows to their backs that they take no hurt; such masking in their ears, I know not what; such giving them pippins to pass the time; such playing at foot saunt without cards; such ticking, such toying, such smiling, such winking, and such manning them home when the sports are ended, that it is a right comedic to mark their behavior, to watch their conceits, as the cat for the mouse, and as good as a course at the game itself, to dog them a little, or follow aloof by the print of their feet, and so discover by stealth where the dear taketh soyle. 8

Except incidentally, we will not deal with the question of
rowdy playgoers. Its relevance to literature is non-existant, and one may as well condemn books because their readers are vicious as damn plays on account of the excesses of the auditory. The only point in our problem that bears on the question of playgoers' morals is the problem of whether it is likely that the "lewdness" of Elizabethan audiences can be linked with the matter or treatment of the dramas themselves.

II

So much for the matter of charge and counter-charge as it provides an insight into the moral background of the age in which Tourneur's plays appeared. The remainder of the paper will attempt to analyze Tourneur's unique play, The Revenger's Tragedy in terms of the moral attitudes expressed in the charges and countercharges described above. It seems important to establish once and for all whether or not the Jacobean or later Elizabethan drama was created in terms of a moral sense, or whether it was immoral—as many critics maintain the Restoration comedy was—or amoral, lacking any coherent pattern of moral concepts altogether.

I believe that it can be demonstrated that, in Tourneur's play at least, a play considered by many critics to be among the most vicious products of the later Elizabethan stage, a
distinct and conscious concept of morality is at work--not only as an artistic device, but didactically, in the commonly accepted sermon-sense of the term. If the epigraph of this paper--"When the bad bleedes, then is the Tragedie good"--may be used as a kind of verbal jumping-off place, I believe that we may find an exposition of Renaissance justification of fiction and drama in the story of Vindice, Hippolito, and their corrosive war against vice--almost the "old vice o' the morality"--in the person of the lecherous Duke, his adulterous duchess, and their collection of depraved sons. If one coldly discounts the fine poetry and clever plotting of the play, it becomes obvious that we are dealing with a moral parable rather than an indifferent distillation of experience in dramatic form. And the parable extends its range even farther than we have a right to expect. For even the quite generally accepted Renaissance theory of righteous revenge is punished in the denouement as Antonio, one of the two characters who are blameless in the play, condemns the murder of the Duke by Vendice and Hippolito, although the Duke's son had raped and caused the death of his wife. Thus Antonio becomes a sort of Christian knight who suffers long, acts honestly, and punishes the murder of his lord even though for public and personal reasons
he might pragmatically be expected to be the first to condone the murder.

The only other survivors among the play's main characters are Castiza, the virtuous sister of Vendice and Hippolito, and Gratiana, the mother of the three who repented her attempt to prostitute Castanza to the Duke's son, Lussurioso. Thus the most puritanical of the play's auditors would have been forced to admit the moral nature of the drama even though they might not have been pleased with the matters shown and discussed. Morality is not a question of escaping problems but of solving—or resolving—they in a manner fitting man's nature. The author of *The Revenger's Tragedy* does that.
CHAPTER I.

The opening remarks of J. E. Spingarn's *History of Literary Criticism in the Renaissance* suggest the principal concern of this first phase of our study:

The first problem of Renaissance criticism was the justification of imaginative literature.... The Renaissance was...confronted with the necessity of justifying its appreciation of the vast body of literature which the revival of learning had recovered for the modern world; and the function of Renaissance criticism was to reestablish the aesthetic foundations of literature, to reaffirm the eternal lesson of Hellenic culture, and to restore once and for all the element of beauty to its rightful place in human life and in the world of art.

The large number of Renaissance apologies for poetry and the drama which confront the modern scholar and critic attest to the interest of the Elizabethans in the problems of imaginative literature, especially of the drama, and the justification of them. The methods used in the process of rehabilitation differed even as the tempers of the defenders differed, but several patterns of argument appeared frequently. Guarino, an Italian critic and educator of the sixteenth century, suggests one of the main approaches to a defense of literature:

We need, then, to be careful in reading the fictions of the poets to fix our thought rather on the underlying truths which are therein concealed than upon the imaginations in which they are expressed.
This concept of profound allegorical truth inherent in all literature, even the pagan, was a widely-accepted defensive point against the stern aesthetes who denied any virtue at all to poetry. The "falsehood of the fable" was of no concern: it was the underlying truth that counted. Sir John Harington points out the deep significances of poetry:

The ancient poets have indeed wrapped, as it were, in their writings divers and sundry meanings, which they call the senses or mysteries thereof.

That this concern with the moral allegory traces its ancestry to the anciently-accepted manner of scriptural interpretation is quite obvious. Whenever the Fathers had been pressed to explain the obviously irrational statements of certain scriptural passages, they handled the matter by simply stepping beyond the realm of literal fact and understanding the passage as "moral" or "mystical." A prime example of this technique is to be found in the Christian interpretation of the Song of Songs. Its embarrassing inclusion in the canonical scriptures is neatly turned aside by understanding the poem as an allegory of Christ the bridegroom coming to the Church, his bride. As late as the twentieth century such an interpretation was footnoted in the Douai-Rheims and King James versions of the Bible.
And, thought the enlightened scholars and critics of the Italian Renaissance, what may be applied to Holy Writ may be turned to a defense of the ancients as well. If their work is not inspired in the usual sense, it may certainly contain the germs of another kind of moral revelation. "Nor can we deny," said Bruni d'Arezzo,

a certain kind of inspiration to a poet who, on the very eve of the Redeemer's birth, could speak of 'the Virgin's return,' and the 'Divine offspring sent down from on high.' So thought Lactantius, who held that the Sibyl here alludes directly to the Savior. Such power of reading the future is implied in the name 'vates,' so often given to the true poet...  

And this inspiration, this "possession as by a power other and stronger than himself,"13 is clothed always in the "deep conceits" of allegory. The concept of "possession," derives, of course, from Plato, who, if he exiled poets from the Republic, acknowledged their other-worldly powers in Ion:

All good poets, epic as well as lyric, compose their beautiful poems not by art, but because they are inspired and possessed. And as the Corybanthian revellers when they dance are not in their right minds, so the lyric poets are not in their right mind when they are composing their beautiful strains... 14

This point gibes well with the concept that in the poetry of the ancients, allegory clothes prophecy of the coming Redeemer. "Not in their right mind" amounts to a freeing of the poet
from the world of cause and effect, and a releasing of himself to the poetry-shaping powers that are beyond intellect.

"I reason not that all Poets are holy, but I affirm that Poetry is a heavenly gift, a perfect gift, than which I know not greater pleasure," 15 says Thomas Lodge in his *Defense of Poetry, Music, and Stage-Plaies*. If the concept of poetic inspiration has become more sophisticated by the time it appears in the English Renaissance, it is still present. And that mystical inspiration is not to be looked for in the mere literal level of the work in question: it lurks beneath the surface of event in the allegory of the piece. J. W. H. Atkins states the position of poetry at the end of the middle ages and on into the Renaissance:

...it was an esoteric art based on allegory, laden with hidden meanings and adorned with verse and fine diction.16

There is certainly no lack of contemporary comment on this concept of poetry. It is the most pervasive of all the various defenses of poetry, and d'Arezzo states the limits of the concept quite clearly:

...who can fail to understand that such fictions are not to be read literally...and that it is unjust criticism to ignore the beauties of any work of art and to call attention only to its blemishes? 17
Thus one sees that it is the basic moral content that is of consequence to those who hold to the Renaissance concept of allegory as justification in poetry. If the surface of the work is unattractive, if it deals with bad men or intolerable situations, this is no matter. The true value does not demand any particular narrative scheme, nor need that narrative eschew the treatment of any subject that may decently be presented on the stage.

If, then, we have fixed the concept of allegory as a portion of the poetic defense offered by the enlightened humanists of England and the continent during the sixteenth century, it remains in this regard to illustrate in what direction this allegorical understanding of the ancients, and of contemporary poets for that matter, was supposed to lead.

Minturno suggests the office of the poet in these words:

It will be the business of the poet so to speak in his verses that he may teach, that he may delight, that he may move. 18

The didactic purpose of poetry persists throughout the Renaissance without a dissenting voice. Though the sense in which the Renaissance critics and scholars conceived didacticism was not so narrow as our present understanding of the term, it was conceded that the excuse for poetry were those "fundamental truths hidden under the literal expression of the fable." 19
The concept of teaching was more nearly a matter of communication in the period we are discussing than a matter of indoctrination. When the whole context of western ideas was more or less unified, the problem at hand was one of communication of those ideas and ideals than one of teaching in any scholastic sense.

In any case, the various apologists for poetry insisted upon the moral values to be found in poetry, and in its value as a kind of guide to conduct and understanding. Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini thus framed the Renaissance ideal of poetry's purpose:

> Literature is our guide to the true meaning of the past, to a right estimate of the present, to a sound forecast of the future. Where letters cease, darkness covers the land. 20

And Guarino, discussing poetry as a portion of liberal education, says:

> ...where the poet treats...of things in themselves noble, then we may accept his guidance without reserves. 21

D'Arezzo states without qualification that, as we may gain insight and lasting wisdom from scripture, so may we also reap it from a study of literature. The basis of any education must include a knowledge of the classics.
...familiarity with the great poets of antiquity is essential to any claim to true education. For in their writings we find deep speculations upon Nature, and upon the causes and origins of things, which must carry weight with us both from their antiquity and their authorship. Besides those, many important truths upon matters of daily life are suggested or illustrated. All this is expressed with such grace and dignity as demands our admiration. 22

And Sir John Harington, discussing the ends of poetry in England, differs only in his approach and manner of statement. The object of poetry is still a moral (and perhaps a social) one:

...this I say of poetry, and I think I say truly, that there are many good lessons to be learned out of it, many good examples to be found in it, many good uses to be had of it, and that therefore it is not, nor ought to be despised by the wiser sort, but so to be studied and employed, as was intended by the first writers and devisers thereof, which is to soften and polish the hard and rough dispositions of men, and make them capable of virtue and good discipline. 23

Although Castelvetro claims that the end of poetry is pure delight, 24 his concept fell on deaf ears, and one supposes that even those who could admit the double purpose of poetry as teaching made delightful, would have claimed that the very act of learning is the highest form of delight for every rational creature.
In this regard, Sir Philip Sidney had quite a bit to say on poetry. As to its purpose:

The final end of poetry is to lead and draw us to as high a perfection as our degenerate souls, made worse by their clayey lodgings, can be capable of...so that, the ending end of all earthly learning being virtuous action, those skills, that most serve to bring forth that, have a most just title to be princes over the rest. 25

Again the moral purpose of poetry is emphasized. It is the queen of the other disciplines, and its inculcation of ideals and ideas of conduct is far superior to that of the other studies:

I say the philosopher teacheth, but he teacheth obscurely, so as the learned only can understand him; that is to say, he teacheth them that are already taught. But the poet is the food for the tenderest stomachs, the poet is indeed the right popular philosopher, whereof Aesop's tales give good proof; whose pretty allegories, stealing under the formal tales of beasts, make many, more beastly than beasts, begin to hear the sound of virtue from these dumb speakers. 26

And in expressing the superiority of poetry, one cannot help noticing Sidney's use of the word "allegory." The inescapable linkage of poetry's moral purpose and its allegorical method in the minds of foremost Renaissance thinkers. In the quotations following immediately, I shall attempt to demonstrate that poetry's ablest defenders always suggested this duality as the prime reason-for-being behind poetry. This line of
defense was intended to render criticism of the literal fables, the horror and the immorality, the murders and the bawdy humor, pointless. It was, in the minds of these Renaissance men, of no consequence that evil was shown in verse or on stage; the moral undercurrent and the outcome of the works was what counted. That fools might be traduced was not denied by them. But fools could be ill-guided by scripture or by a most pithy sermon. The poetry and plays at hand were to be judged with regard to their effect on men of prudence and maturity. And men who possessed these virtues possessed also the kind of sophistication that demanded more than straw men to represent vice. Virtue would triumph, they believed, but the struggle must appear a genuine one. "Now, as in Geometry," Sir Philip Sidney said,

\[ \text{the oblique must be known as well as the right, and in Arithmetic the odd as well as the even, so in the actions of our life who seeth not the filthiness of evil wanteth a great foil to perceive the beauty of virtue.} \]

George Gascoigne understood and stated the principle in much the same way. The wise man will reap wisdom from everything presented to his attention; the fool from nothing:

\[ \text{...the well-minded man may reap some commoditie out of the most frivolous works that are written. And as the venomous spider will sucke poison out of the most holesome herbe, and the industrious} \]
Bee can gather honey out of the most stinking weede, even so the discrete reader may take a happy example by the most lascivious histories, although the capitious and harebrained heads can neither be encouraged by the good, nor forewarned by the bad. 28

But to return to the statements of the moral-allegorical dichotomy in poetry, one finds three rather lengthy statements that seem to express, in essence, a similar turn of thought:

Menander dare not offend the Senate openly, yet wants he not a parasite to touch them privily. Terence will not report the abuse of harlots under their proper style, but he can finely gird them under the person of Thaïs. He dare not tell the rich of their covetness and severity towards their children, but he can control them under the person of Durus Demeas. He must not show the abuse of noble young gentlemen under their own title, but he will warn them in the person of Pamphilus. Will you learn to know a parasite? Loom upon his Dauus. Will you seek the abuse of courtly flatterers? Behold Gnato. And if we had some satirical poets nowadays to pen our comedies, that might be admitted of zeal, to decipher the abuses of the world in the person of notorious offenders, I know we should wisely rid our assemblies of many of your brotherhood. 29

Lodge's last remark is a rather pointed sneer at Stephen Gosson, author of The School of Abuse, a contemporary condemnation of the drama that we shall find occasion to discuss at greater length later.

But Lodge's defense of poetry as allegory, as a way of attacking vice prudently and indirectly is not alone.
Thomas Heywood repeated his concept in his own defense written some thirty years later:

If we present a tragedy, we include the fatall and abortive ends of such as commit notorious murders, which is aggravated and acted with all the art that may be to terrifie men from the like abhored practices. If wee present a forreigne history, the subject is so intended, that in the lives of Romans, Grecians, or others, either the vertues of our own countrymen are extoiled, or their vices reproved; as thus, by the example of Caesar to stir souldiers to valor and magnanimitie; by the fall of Pompey that no man trust in his own strength: we present Alexander killing his friend to reprove rashnesse; Mydas, choked with his gold, to taxe covetousnesse; Nero against tyranny; Sardanapalus against luxury; Minus against ambition; with infinite others, by sundry instances either animating men to noble attempts or attacking the consciences of the spectators, finding themselves toucht in presenting the vices of others. If a morall, it is to persuade men to humanity and good life, to instruct them in civility and good manners, shewing them the fruits of honesty and the end of villany. 30

And if such be the purpose of tragedy, Heywood comments on comedy as well. Its purpose is

to shew others their slovenly and unhandsome behavior, that they may reform that simplicity in themselves which others make their sport, lest they happen to become the like subject of generall scorne to an auditory; else it entreats of love, deriding foolish inamorates, who spend their ages, their spirits, nay themselves, in the servile and ridiculous imp loyments of their mistresses: and these are mingled with sportful accidents, to recreate such as of themselves are wholly devoted to
melancholy, which corrupts the blood, or to refresh such weary spirits as are tired with labor or study, to moderate the cares and heaviness of the mind, that they may return to their trades and faculties with more zeal and earnestness, after some small, soft, and pleasant retirement. 31

Here Heywood, in the manner most generally adopted by the defenders of poetry and drama, illustrates, to this own satisfaction at least, the moral purpose behind each kind of play. And in the same vein, Sir Philip Sidney discusses poetry:

Poetry ever setteth virtue so out in her best colors, making Fortune her well-waiting handmaid, that one must needs be enamoured of her. Well may you see Ulysses in a storm, and in other hard plights; but they are but exercises of patience and magnanimity, to make them shine the more in the near-following prosperity. And of the contrary part, if evil men come to the stage, they ever go out (as the tragedy writer answered to one that misliked the show of such persons) so manacled as they little animate folks to follow them. 32

The evidence presented so far is only a portion of that available. But there is little point in laboring further the united concept of poetry's moral purpose through the use of allegory. Still, at least two more comments are worth recording; the first because it provides such a neat double for Sidney's comments noted above. I quote from Thomas Lodge again:

You remember not that under the person of Virgil the practice of a diligent captain is described; under the shadow of birds, beasts,
and trees, the follies of the world were deciphered: you know not, that the creation is signified in the image of Prometheus; the fall of pride in the person of Narcissus; these are toyes because they savor of wisdom which you want....What so they wrote, it was to this purpose, in the guise of pleasure to draw men to wisdom; for seeing the world in those days was unperfect, it was necessary that they, like good physicians, should so frame their potions, that they might be applicable to the quiesie stomachs of their werish patients. 33

In the person of Aeneas or Ulysses is figured forth the same sort of virtue that one finds personified in such characters as the Red Cross Knight or young Prince Arthur. And finally, we see the same sort of concern stated by George Puttenham in The Arte of English Poetrie:

> Now it is tyme to speake of the matter or subject of poesie, which to myne intent is, what soever wittie and delicate conceit of man meet or worthy to be put in written verse, for any necessary use of the present time, or good instruction of posteritie. But the chief and principall is:...the praise of vertue and reproof of vice, the instruction of morall doctrines...finally the common solace of mankind in all his travails and cares of this transitorie life. 34

The idea of poetry as entertainment, delight alone, is difficult to discover among Renaissance critics. Outside the solitary example of Castelvetro,35 it is almost non-existant. But at the same time, the general concept of poetry quite pointedly states that while moral instruction through allegory
is poetry's prime reason for being, it should instruct in a delightful manner. This matter of delight is discussed by poetry's defenders and by its opponents--both to its praise and to its condemnation. Sir John Harington, probably influenced by Sidney, either in manuscript (since Sidney's Apology must have been written in the early 1580's, though it was not published until 1595) or through the osmosis of ideas that passed back and forth through the learned circles of the relatively small upper class, states the 'pleasure-principle' almost exactly as Sidney does [see 26 supra]:

Young men doe like best that Philosophy, that is not Philosophie, or that is not delivered as Philosophy, and such are the pleasant writings of learned poets, that are the popular Philosophers and the popular divines. 37

Here again we find a unanimity among Renaissance critics.

Essentially the same attitude is expressed by William Webbe:

All poets desire either by their works to profitt or delight men or else to join both profitable and pleasant lessons together for the instruction of life. 38

Pleasure and profit conjoined, then, is the real end of poetry in the mind of English Renaissance critics and writers. That the moral purpose was foremost should be obvious from the material we have quoted above, but the concept of delight, though subordinate at this time, became more and more prominent
as endless religious conflict and discord lessened English respect for the religious establishment, and broke finally into civil war which sharply divided the Puritan distrust and hatred of poetry, and the cavalier espousal of it as primarily a dilettante pastime well befitting the tender sentiments of noble birth. Still, in the period with which we are concerned at present, the moral end of poetry, and by extension, drama as well, is central. And the enjoyment derived therefrom is first an incentive to read good instruction, and second a pleasurable but not essential by-product.

Perhaps the next phase of our inquiry might best be an examination of opinions as to how the poet manages to instruct and delight at the same time. The opinions touching on this matter are more diverse than those which have gone before. While all our apologists agree to the principle of 'delightful instruction,' they differ somewhat in their understanding of the manner in which this is accomplished. D'Arezzo's explanation is among the most interesting:

We know, however, that in certain quarters—where all knowledge and appreciation of letters is wanting—this whole branch of literature, marked as it is by something of the divine, and fit, therefore, for the highest place, is decried as unworthy of study. But when we remember the value of the best poetry, its charm of form and the variety and interest of
its subject-matter, when we consider the ease
with which from our childhood up it can be com-
mitt ed to memory, when we recall the peculiar
affinity of rhythm and metre to our emotions
and our intelligence, we must conclude that
Nature herself is against such headlong critics. 39

It is the "peculiar affinity of rhythm and meter" that allows
poetry to do its work, d'Arezzo believes. He epitomizes his
theory in a later passage:

Have we not often felt the sudden uplifting of
the soul when in the solemn office of the Mass
such a passage as the 'primo Dierum omnium'
bursts upon us? It is not hard for us, then,
to understand what the ancients meant when they
said that the soul is ordered, is special rela-
tion to the principles of harmony and rhythm,
and is, therefore, by no other influence so
fitly and surely moved. Hence I hold my con-
viction to be securely based; namely that
poetry has, by our very constitution, a stronger
attraction for us than any other form of expres-
sion, and that anyone ignorant of and indif-
ferent to, so valuable an aid to knowledge
and so ennobling a source of pleasure can by
no means be entitled to be called 'educated.' 40

This spiritual—or psychological—interpretation of how poetry
does its work is quite different from the less esoteric pro-
cess that Philip Sidney describes:

He [the poet] doth not only show the way,
but giveth so sweet a prospect into the way,
as will entice any man to enter into it.
Nay, he doth, as if your journey should lie
through a fair vineyard, at the first give
you a cluster of grapes, that, full of that
taste, you may long to pass further. He
beginneth not with obscure definitions, which
must blur the margent with interpretations, and load the memory with doubtfulness; but he cometh to you with words set in delightful proportion, either accompanied with, or prepared for, the well-enchanting skill of music ... And pretending no more, doth intend the winning of the mind from wickedness to virtue. 41

Though the analogy between music and man’s innate love of measure, harmony, and proportion may seem outside the range of our study, it is this natural grasp of poetry’s elements on man’s nature that serves as a portion of the defense. If a well-turned and memorable metaphor be wedded with pleasing sound and suitable proportion, it will provide the vehicle through which the moral import will be transported. The appeal is to man’s sense of beauty—and through that aesthetic sense, man’s moral nature is touched. Ben Jonson states a similar proposition:

The reading of Homer and Virgil is counselled by Quintilian, as the best way of informing youth, and confirming man. For besides, that the mind is raised with the height and sublimity of such a verse, it takes spirit from the greatness of the matter, and is tinted with the best of things. Tragic, and Lyric poetry is good, too: and comic with the best, if the manners of the reader be once in safety. 42

As the mind is "raised" and pleased by the verse itself, by the cadences of the "passions" on stage, so the moral content operates on the soul, and, according to Guarino, it is this
inspirational quality, the beauty of the verse united to its congruency with experience that keeps the necessary horrors of drama or poetry from disturbing us. "What in real life repels us," he says, "may in fiction gain our admiration by its skillful representation." Another hint as to the manner in which poetry achieves its purpose is given in Sidney, drawing from the Poetics: "Poetry deal eth with Katholou, that is to say, with the universal consideration, and the history with Kathe Kaston, the particular:" it is the very archetypal significance of poetry that "raises" the mind. One is not caught up so much in the personal history of Ulysses, or the personal horror of Oedipus' downfall and discovery, as in the general suggestion of man's plight as figured forth in the Odyssey and in Oedipus Tyrannus. A specific in history, by the very weight of fact and context is anchored within its own frame of reference—but poetry, even "histories," is released and made bigger, more embracing. If Alexander is but a personage in the pages of history, if he is but a certain element in a chain of action that begins before his birth and continues relentlessly after his death, he can yet become, under the hand of a talented poet, an organized figure whose life has a beginning, a middle, and an end—and a figure who can serve to
illustrate certain strengths and weaknesses characteristic of all mankind. Poets have the power of imposing an order on the formless and indistinguishable chaos of history; they can draw from the beauty and ugliness of life those special strands that suit their purposes, and they may set them forth in such a way as to embody in their poems or dramas a particular aspect of human experience. Because we can judge a poem or drama in this way, Guarino suggests,

We are not disturbed by the impieties, cruelties, horrors which we find there; we judge these things simply by their congruity to the characters and situations described. 45

The "elevation" or emotional force gained from poetry or drama depends at once upon the congruity to reality and the transcending power of the poet to raise the situation he handles to a level above the mere specific. Hamlet is finally great not merely because it represents the artistic and skillful handling of a story about the tragic forces playing about one man's life, but because the poet's power forces his audience to feel the elusive but very real tie between the Prince of Denmark and themselves. This is Renaissance critical theory. Implicit in it may be the reason for the popularity of histories and tragedies dealing with persons of high station. Still living and working within a society ultimately conscious of
hierarchy and degree, the common Englishman was most deeply affected by that poetry and drama which dealt with the upper strata of his hierarchy; one wonders if the "tragedy" of an Elizabethan Willie Loman would not have been the grossest of comedy to the audience of Shakespeare's day.

In order to operate successfully, poetry must comprehend the collected assumptions of its audience: it may not establish a new world view all its own. And, in the case of ancient poetry, for example, what did not fit the world-view of the Elizabethans in Virgil, was blithely warped, lopped, and twisted into shape as was the Song of Songs. If one is seeking allegory assiduously, it is not difficult to find it in almost any work of literature. So, in fact, the very use of "allegory" may be considered as both a method of poetical style, and as a method through which poetry drew and sustained its audience. The preparation for this sort of thing had, of course, been established much earlier. The medieval dependence upon allegory to communicate the mysteries of the Christian faith to an unlettered laity is outside our area of concern, but consciousness of this matter is essential to a full grasp of the material immediately at hand, and to the essay on The Revenger's Tragedy which comprises the second half of this study.
Before we can begin an examination of the opposition to drama and poetry, it is necessary that we at least note other attendant points of defense which, while not bearing so immediately upon our subject, still form part of the total picture that stood before the defenders of poetry as they wrote.

Certainly one of the most telling, one should think, from the Elizabethan point of view, is the matter of poetry's connection with religion. Sir John Harington, though not stating baldly that the scriptures are sometimes poetical, suggests that reading of the prophane authors is good preparation for the intelligent reading of scripture:

...for that the Holy Scriptures are a deep and profound study, and not subject to every weak capacitie...we do first read some other authors, making them, as it were a looking-glass to the eyes of our minde; and than after we have gathered more strength, we enter into the profound studies of higher mysteries...\textsuperscript{49}

Sir Philip Sidney does not skirt the issue. He points out the verse content of the Bible:

Since the Holy Scripture (wherein there is no uncleanness) hath whole parts in it poetical, and that even our Savior Christ vouchsafed to use the flowers of it; since all his kinds are not only in their united forms but in their severed dissections fully commendable; I think (and think I think rightly) the laurel crown appointed for triumphing captains doth worthily (of all other learnings) honor the poet's triumph.\textsuperscript{50}
Henry Peacham seconds him some twenty-five years later, discussing the high position of poetry:

Neither hath humane knowledge beene the onely subject of this Divine Art, but euen the highest Mysteries of Divinitie. What are the Psalms of David...but a Divine Poeme, going sometime in one measure, sometime in another? What lively similitudes and comparisons, as the righteous man to a baie tree, the Scule to a thristie Hart, unity to ointment and the dew of Hermon! What excellent Allegories, as the vine planted in Aegypt...and what soever else be required to the texture of so rich and glorious a peace? 51

And Peacham obligingly provides documentation for an earlier remark made in this study. He comments on the Renaissance interpretation of The Song of Songs:

And the Song of Salomon, which is onely left vs of a thousand, is it not a continued Allegory of the Mysticall love betwixt Christ and his Church? Moreover, the Apostles themselves have not disdained to alledge the authoritie of the heathen poets, Aratus, Menander, and Epimenides. 52

If the Holy Scriptures themselves contained the "flowers" of poetry, the Elizabethan defenders felt, then the attackers would be sorely pressed to condemn poetry in general. "Shall we condemn a generallity for any one particular misconstruction...the use of any generall thing is not for any one abuse to be condemned,"53 Thomas Heywood claims. If the Puritans wish to damn the abuses of poetry, then the defenders will
support them. But that the whole tradition of poetry should
be damned for the lewdness or irresponsibility of a few is non-
sense, Thomas Lodge suggests:

...Poetry is dispraised not for the folly
that is in it, but for the abuse which many
ill writers couller by it... 54

And connected with the religious side of the defense, Lodge
takes opportunity to slash at some of poetry's old enemies:

If you say that Poets did labor about nothing,
tell me (I besech you) what wonders wrought
those your dunce Doctors in their reasons
de ente, et non ente? 55

The sum total of such an offensive was to catch the Puritan
attackers between the poles of scripture and Scholasticism.
If they denigrated poetry as a whole, the Psalms and the Song
of Songs could hardly escape their heavyhanded censure. On
the other side, whatever they might think of poetry, it is
certain that they had no desire to link themselves with the
Scholastic philosophers who were much more immediate and real
enemies to the "true gospel" than were the heathen poets. Of
course Lodge and his cohorts were creating a false option;
though the medieval Fathers generally disliked poetry, ignored
it, or understood it as a rather faulty "handmaid of theology,"
they had little in common with the Puritans past this common
dislike or indifference. 56
Finally in this regard, Heywood manages to present what may well be the worst attempt at defense that one may find in the welter of books and pamphlets relating to the subject:

...since they [Christ and his apostles] in their divine wisdoms knew all the sinnes abounding in the world before that time, taxt and reproved all the abuses reigning in that time and ...were content to pass [drama and poetry] over, as things tolerated and indifferent, why should any nice and overscrupulous heads, since they cannot ground their curiousnesse either upon the Old or New Testament, take upon them to correct, controule, or carp at that, against which they cannot finde any text in the sacred scriptures? 57

It may be palpably unfair to scorn Heywood for a kind of argument that was common to his age; certainly one does not have to go far to point out another example. Sir John Harington, in refuting Tertullian and Plato and their argument that poetry is but feigning and lying, uses the same approach:

Suffiseth it me only to prove that by the authority of sacred scriptures, bothe parts of Poesie, invention or imitation, and verse are allowable, and consequently that great objectio of lying is quite take away and refuted.58

The last major phase of poetry's defense, one found repeated in work after work deals with the idea of poetry's contribution to the patriotic sense in general—and that of Englishmen in particular.
Sir Philip Sidney affirms that poetry can raise men to brave deeds, and stir them in emulation of the great deeds of past heroes:

I never heard the old song of Percy and Douglas that I found not my heart moved more than with a trumpet; and yet is it sung but by some blind crowder, with no rougher voice than rude style; which, being so evil apparelled in the cobwebs and dust of that uncivil age, what would it work, trimmed in the gorgeous eloquence of Pindar? In Hungary I have seen it the manner of all feasts, and other such meetings, to have songs of their ancestor's valor; which that right soldierlike nation think the chiefest kindlers of brave courage. The incomparable Lacedemonians did not only carry that kind of music ever with them to the field, but even at home, as such songs were made, so were they all content to be the singers of them, when the lusty men were to tell what they did, the old men what they had done, and the young men what they would do. 59

Henry Peacham applies the general principle to the war songs of England herself:

What other thing gave and edge to the valour of our ancient Britons but their Bardes... recording in verse the brave exploits of their nation, and singing the same unto their Harpes at their publick feasts and meetings, amongst whom Taliessin, a learned Bard and Master to Merlin, sung the life and acts of King Arthur? 60

And Thomas Heywood applies the same principle to the drama:

To turne to our domesticke histories: what English blood, see the person of any bold Englishman presented, and doth not hugge his fame, and hunnye at his valor, pursuing
him in his enterprise with his best wishes, and as being wrapt in contemplation, offers to him in his hart all prosperous performance, as if the personator were the man personated? 61

Poetry, then, stirs men to valor and instills in them courage and national pride. Through that poetry or drama in which great national figures appear, men are drawn to splendid deeds, and to a sense of national identity.

To summarize the principle points cited in defense of poetry, then, we may begin with its moral consideration. The overwhelming majority of Renaissance commentators on the subject conceived poetry's purpose to be a moral one. If the matter of a poem or drama is unpleasant or terrible, one sees in that very ugliness and its tragic outcome the reason for moral conduct; 62 if the matter of the work is of honest and heroic action, the reader or viewer is moved to emulate, to seize that which is good.

The visage is no better cut in brasse, Nor can the carver so expresse the face, As does the poet's penne, whose arts surpasse To give men's lives and vertues their due grace. 53

Poetry preserves the good and the bad, and the wise reader can draw much instruction from both—and the instruction, unlike that of philosophy, is pleasurable. 64 Rather than setting up a barrier between good matter and the reader, poetry brings
the indifferent reader to it—as does drama.

Poetry, under the figures of various persons and situations, provides a pattern for the wise man who would prosper, and that some men take poetry to their own detriment is no argument against it; the "oblique" must be known, too.

It is poetry, of all the arts, that finds out the innermost recesses of man's spirit—his very constitution draws him to the measure and harmony of verse. And as the harmony and measure of poetry invite him to partake of it, man is drawn to the noble and improving matter contained in it.

Through the "pleasant prospect" of poetry, God's Holy Scriptures present man with his directly revealed truth. It is the "flowers of poesy" that Christ used to illustrate his moral teachings, and whole books of the Old Testament are poetical. Since the Bible was inspired by the Holy Ghost, those who condemn poetry in general are, by implication, blaspheming God himself.

Finally, poetry has been, through the ages, a source of inspiration to the states that possessed and cherished it. It spurs the soldier to feats of valor, contributes to the zeal of the citizen, and is an addition to any commonwealth.

This, then, was the argument in favor of poetry that was advanced during the Renaissance. Much of the matter we have
discussed will be recalled in the specific study of Tourneur's *Revenger's Tragedy*; the balance of it serves the purpose of filling out the shape of the literary argument in its widest sense.
CHAPTER II.

"The best play you can pick out, is but a mixture of good and evil, how can it be then the school mistress of life?"
--Stephen Gosson: *Plaies Confuted in Five Actions*

"I must confess," said Stephen Gosson, "that poets are the whetstones of wit, not withstanding, that wit is dearly bought:" and from the epigraph one notes that whatever Gosson's virtues may have been, wit was not one of them. One cannot avoid the conclusion, after reading extensively in the anti-stage literature of the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, that the kind of vision that allowed Gosson to so expose himself as in the quotation that heads this section of my essay is a fairly good epitome of critics of both poetry and drama and their minds in general.

The contemporary mind would agree with both of Gosson's statements. The best plays that we know are but mixtures of good and bad--as is life itself. His question seems pointless to us: that plays should be the school mistresses of life has never occurred to most of us. This concept of Elizabethan literary criticism, so strong a current during the Renaissance, has ceased to be an issue with us. We neither affirm that drama provides--or may provide--moral instruction, nor do we deny it. Gosson's second remark does not fail to contain its
own special irony for the modern reader, too. Certainly the wit of the great poets and dramatists of the past is dearly bought through the endless efforts of scholarship and criticism. In order to appreciate the important poetry and drama of the past, countless generations of scholars and critics have worked at the tedious and thankless task of fixing text, deciding what poems and plays properly belong within the canon of a given poet's works. And even when these matters are settled, there remains the unceasing task of evaluating, comparing and contrasting the poetry and drama that has been salvaged from the past, the endless process of criticism and explication that each generation must undertake again for itself. In truth, the wit of poets is dearly bought.

Whatever the faults of the defenders of poetry, however badly they bungled the job at hand, their failings were inherent in the attitudes of their age. They could not defend poetry as we do. The moral value of poetry had been called into question; there was no question as to whether its moral purpose was its central justification—if, indeed, it had any such justification at all. To say that poetry and drama had value simply as recreations, honest representations of human experience, would have been outside the range of the opinion
that Elizabethan Englishmen could have accepted. In many ways, our Elizabethan ancestors were more pragmatic than we—and those habits or pastimes that could not justify themselves with a fairly immediate profit to the individual or community were frowned upon, most especially by the Puritans. The body of Calvinist theology had stripped human life of its purposeless pleasures. Those remarks are in no way a condemnation of Calvinism; it more nearly amounts to an equation of Elizabethan Calvinism with the practices and opinions of the primitive Church. Certainly Tertullian (who died a heretic, but of a popular bent) would have shared more in common with Calvin than with Alexander VI or Pius II, Popes of the high Renaissance.

But if the justification of poetry was weak by the very nature of the arguments that had to be used, the Puritan offensive was yet weaker. Excepting the quite valid (one assumes) complaint that the theatres were the gathering places for "lewd loves" and the very stewpits of bawdry, the attackers of poetry had much the worst of the argument. Sidney had noted that all civilized nations had first formulated their culture from the works of poets, and that philosophy and history had made their first appearances through the medium of
poetry. The best the Puritan (the use of this term, made common through the use of the phrase "the Puritan attack on the stage," is used here more as a matter of descriptive convenience than as an accurate label for a group of critics many of whom were of no Puritan sentiments at all) attackers could bring to bear against the historical argument was the hoary words of a limited number of ancient and medieval churchmen—whose whole system and metaphysic they had rejected. Possibly the unfavorable impression one derives from reading these attacks on poetry and the stage stems from this kind of philosophical opportunism rather than from the dubious charges of hypocrisy constantly leveled at the attackers. As to their sincerity, one can only conjecture—and that with little enough in the way of proof on either side. The charge that they used the arguments and words of the popish foes they had so recently displaced and repudiated is less easily turned aside—unless one chooses to accept the point of view that their reformation had been more political than religious.

Outside the issue already mentioned in the introduction, that of the irregularity of theatre audiences and in some cases the lewdness of the actors themselves, the basis of the Puritan attack was firmly planted in concepts almost identical
with those held by poetry's defenders. Both sides believed in the power of poetry and drama to instruct and edify. As the defenders claimed that these mediums provided moral guidance and precepts through the praise of virtue and the condemnation of vice, the Puritans claimed that poetry in general and the drama in particular were detrimental to the morals of the people, that drama indeed instructed the unlettered populace—in "murther, insurrection, and whoredom."

...Pul off the visard that poets maske in, you shall disclose their reproach, bewray their vanitie, loth their wantonesse, lament their folly, and perceive their sharp sayings to be placed as pearles in dunghils, fresh pictures on rotten walles, chaste matrons apparel on common curtesans....No marvel that Plato shut them out of his schoole, and banished them quite from his commonwealth, as effeminate writers, unprofitable members, and utter enimies to vertue. 4

The very term Gosson chooses, "unprofitable members," suggests the Puritan attitude toward life—and more to our purpose, suggests what was expected of poetry and drama by both defenders and attackers. That poetry might not properly be called "profitable" and still retain its right to a place in society and culture occurred to neither side. Gosson continues in his attack, still taking for granted the premise that instruction is poetry's defense:
...if people will bee instructed (God be thanked) wee have divines enough to discharge that, and moe by a great many then are well-harkened to: yet sith these abuses are grown to head, and sinne so ripe, the number is lesse then I would it were.

According to Gosson, instruction is available without recourse to the stage. But further, Gosson says, even if you go to the theatre with the express purpose of being taught,

Sometime you shall see nothing but the adventures of a amorous knight, passing from country to country for the love of his ladie, encountering many a terrible monster made of brown paper, and at his return is so wonderfully changed, that he cannot be known but by some posy in his tablet, or by a broken ring, or a handkerchief, or a piece of a cockleshell, what learn you by that? When ye soul of your plays is either mere trifles, of Italian bawdry, or wooing of gentlewomen, what are we taught?

And, of course, the sort of play he cites here is like those of Beaumont and Fletcher—romantic drama. This is the more innocuous sort of play. What are we instructed by tragedy—especially the kind written by Webster, Marston, and Tourneur?

...in their plays you shall learn all things that appertain to craft, mischief, deceits, and filthiness. If you will learn how to be false and deceive your husbands, or husbands their wives, how to play the harlots, to obtain one's love, how to ravish, how to be-guile, how to betray, to flatter, lie, swear, foreswear, how to allure to whoredom, how to murder, how to poison, how to disobey and
rebell against princes, how to consume treasures prodigally, to move to lusts, to ransack and spoil cities and townes, to be idle, to blaspheme, to sing filthy songs of love, to speak filthily, to be proud, how to mock, scoff and deride any nation, like unto Genisius Aralatensis. 7

Thus preached John Northbrook in his Treatise Against Dicing, Dancing, Plays, and Interludes. The moral content of all drama was totally objectionable. What might be learned from them was a catalogue of the deadly sins, a rollcall of the vices. Philip Stubbes seconds him in his Anatomie of Abuses:

...and whereas you say there are good Examples to be learned in them, truly so there are: if you will learn falsehood; if you will learn cosenage; if you will learn to deceive; if you will learn to play the Hypocrite, to cogge, lie, and falsify; if you will learn to jest, laugh, and leer, to grin, to nod, and mose; if you will learn to play the vice, to swear, tear and blaspheme both Heaven and Earth; if you will learn to become a Bawd, unclean, and to devirginate Maids, to deflower honest Wives: if you will learn to murder, slay, kill, pick, steal, rob, and rove: if you will learn to rebel against Princes, to commit Treasons, to consume Treasures, to practice idleness, to sing and talk of bawdy love and venery: if you will learn to deride, scoff, mock, and flout, to flatter and smooth: if you will learn to play the whoremaster, the glutton, Drunkard, or incestuous person: if you will learn to become proud, haughty, and arrogant; and finally if you will learn to condemn God and all his laws, to care neither for heaven nor hell, and to commit all kind of sin and mischief, you need to go to no other school, for all
these good examples may you see painted before your eyes in interludes and plays. 8

The Puritan mentality, then, if we are to take the attackers at their word, conceived all the untoward actions in Elizabethan drama as conducive to imitation by the auditory. It is difficult to believe that the Puritans really conceived this to be true, especially in light of remarks like those of Sidney to the effect that no villain who came on stage prosperous was allowed to leave that way.

But belief aside, the constant charge of bad example was leveled at the stage by those interested in destroying it. Stubbes, unusually volitile, continues his tirade, repeating the earlier charges and adding new ones:

...Do they [plays] not maintain bawdry, infinite foolery, and renew the remembrance of heathen idolatry? Do they not induce whoredom and uncleanness? Nay, are they not rather plain devourers of maidenly virginity and chastity? For proof whereof, but mark the flocking and running to Theatres and Curtains, daily and hourly, night and day, time and tide, to see plays and Interludes; where such wanton gestures, such bawdy speeches, such laughing and leering, such killing and buffing, such clipping and culling, such winking and glancing of wanton eyes, and the like, is used, as is wonderful to behold. Than, these goodly pageants being done...every one brings another homewards of their way very friendly, and in their secret conclaves (covertly) they play the Sodomites or worse. 9
While conceiving that some disorder and lasciviousness must have attended the Elizabethan theatrical productions, one wonders if Stubbes is not overstating the suggestivity of the players themselves, especially since the simulated murders and even laughter are condemned. One cannot help wondering too what in Stubbes' mind might be worse than the charge of sodomy. Stubbes' criticism, while among the most vocal, is far from the only one that scores the supposed lewdness of the performances:

Those filthy and unhonest gestures and movings of enterlude players, what other thing do they teach than wanton pleasure and stirring of fleshly lusts, unlawful appetites and desires, with their bawdie and filthy sayings and counterfeit doings? 10

Northbrook echoes Stubbes, and in turn is echoed by the unknown author of *A Shorte Treatise Against Stage-Playe*:

Whereas Stage-Playes ordinarily goe under the name either of Tragedies or els of Comedies we are to understand that the argument or matter acted in tragedies, is murther, treason, rebellion and such like, and in comedies is bawdrie, cosenage and meere knaverie. 11

Whatever charge may be brought against the Puritan attackers, unity of purpose was their forte. If one reads the numerous attacks through several times, there is a temptation to suspect, except for the wide range of time the various pamphlets covered,
a general agreement and conspiracy to undercut the stage. The range of defense is much wider and more varied than is that of the Puritan attackers. The charges related so far are repeated with monotonous regularity from Northbrook's pamphlet in 1577 up to the time of the Puritan revolt.

By virtue of being among the earliest attackers of the stage, Northbrook was able to claim the dubious distinction of being the first to inject the negative theological element into the controversy:

...the devil found out stage-plays first, and were invented by his craft and policy; for that they contain the wicked acts and whoredoms of the gods, whereby the consciences of goodly men are grievously wounded, and wicked lusts are many ways stirred up...

But if Northbrook injected the theological first, his followers were legion, and few of the later controversialists missed their opportunity to elaborate on the same theme:

Not onely the word of God doth overthrow them, adjudging them and the maintainers of them to Hell, but also all holie counsels, and synods, both general, national, and provincial, together with all Writers, both divine and prophane, ever since the beginning, have disallowed them, and writ (almost) whole volumes against them.

The learned Tertullian, in his book, De Speculo, sayeth that playes were consecrated to that false idol Bacchus, for that he is said to have found out and invented strong drinke.
Augustinus, de civitate Dei, sayeth that plaies were ordained by the Devil, and consecrate to heathen Gods, to draw us from Christianity to idolatry, and gentilisme. And in another place, Pecunias Histrionibus dare vitium est innane, non virtus: to give money to players is a grievous sin.

Chrisostome calleth those plays Festa Sathani, feasts of the Devil. Lactantius, and ancient learned Father, sayeth, Histrionum impudissimi gestus, nihil aliud nisi libidinem movent: the shameless gestures of the players serve to nothing so much as to move the flesh to lust and uncleanness. And therefore in the 30. counsell of Carthage and Synode of Laodicea, it was decreed that no Christian man or woman should resort to plays or interludes, where is nothing by blasphemie, scurrility and whoredom maintained.

Such is the erudition added to the controversy by Stubbes, who, one supposes, did not realize that the same council of Carthage whose proclamation concerning plays he cites as an authority had fixed the canon of scripture that he and the Puritans rejected. At best one is forced to note that the Puritan attackers are adept at selecting that material from authors specifically suited to their purpose. They quote Tertullian freely, although he died a heresiarch, and they pointedly avoid quoting Cyprian or Eusibeus, no friends of the stage themselves, who had upheld the supremacy of the Roman Pontiff.

Of course, as one might suspect, the attackers did not overlook the old Platonic argument, or any possible variations
Perhaps the most striking example of Puritan sophistry and semantic shuffling is the following neat argument excerpted from Gosson's *Plaies Confuted in Five Actions*:

...we will...see whether by ye philosophers themselves it may be suffered. I trust they will grant me that every lie is sin, for the devil is the father of all lies, as oft as ever he lyeth, he speaketh of his own. Aristotle in the thickest fog of his ignorance concerning God, pronounceth a lie to be naught of itself and to be fled.

The proof is evident, the consequence is necessary, that in stage plays for a boy to put on the attire, the gesture, the passions of a woman; for a mean person to take upon him the title of a prince with counterfeit port, and train, is by outward signs to show themselves otherwise than they are, and so with in the compass of a lie, which by Aristotle's definition is naught of itself and to be fled. 14

Gosson's terrible logic is unassailable; it is impossible to dispute abstract values with a literal minded antagonist.

This same pattern of argument is repeated by Gosson in relation to the theological argument:

...whatsoever was consecrated to the honor of the heathen gods was consecrated to idolatry, stage plays by his [Lodge's] own confession were consecrated to the honor of heathen gods, therefore consecrated to idolatry. Being consecrated to idolatry, they are not of God, if they proceed not from God, they are the doctrine and inventions of the devil. 15

The impeccable syllogistic quality of Gosson's arguments must
have caused Sidney to throw up his hands in despair and wonder just how clearcut a victory humanism had won over decayed scholasticism.

At this point, and considering the same question of drama's "dedication" to heathen gods (thus to idolatry by necessity), it is possible to lessen the burden borne by the Puritans at least to the extent of pointing out that Bishop Salvianus of Massilia might have been the very prototype paraphrased by Gosson:

In shows there is a certain Apostasy from the faith, and a deadly declining from our belief, and the heavenly sacraments. For what is the first profession of Christians at their baptism? They protest they will renounce the Devil, and all his works, his pomps, and vanities. Therefore by our own confession, shows and pomps are the works of the devil. 16

That the attackers of the stage were capable of inserting words to their own advantage as the word "shows" is inserted above, or of drawing absolute black-and-white contrasts where none existed, as Gosson does when he states that all things not proceeding from God must be Satan's, is evidenced throughout the controversy we are investigating. False logic, semantic misrepresentation, and what charity might require us to call hyperbole is to be seen on every page of the pamphlets. An example of this excessive hyperbole appears in a passage already
quoted in another regard: "...all Writers, both divine and prophane, ever since the beginning have disallowed them, and writ (almost) whole volumes against them."\(^{17}\) Stubbes' 'almost' does not lessen the ludicrous effect of his statement.

One quality outstanding in Gosson, if not in the Puritans in general, was a disconcerting brashness. After listing the multiple horrors one might be exposed to by watching tragedy, romance, or comedy, and after asking what was to be gained from a play about an "amourous knight," Gosson has the truly astounding cheek to defend his own plays (noted to have been failures\(^{18}\)) as models of prudent instruction:

\begin{quote}
[his own play] intended to show the rewards of traytors in Catiline, and the necessary government of learned men in the person of Cicero, which foresees very danger that is likely to happen, and forstalles it continually ere it take effect. \(^{19}\)
\end{quote}

And at this juncture one must let honesty outweigh charity in order to show Gosson's apparent duplicity. After telling us that his tragedies show "the reward of traytors," we glance forward one year and quote from his \textit{Plaies Confuted}:

\begin{quote}
The argument of tragedies is wrath, crueltye, injury, murder either violent by sword, or voluntary by poison. \(^{20}\)
\end{quote}

And again:
The beholding of troubles and miserable slaughters that are in tragedies, drive us to immoderate sorrow, heaviness, womanish weeping and mourning, whereby we become lovers of dumps, and lamentō, both enemies to fortitude.  

One can hardly imagine that Gosson's play about Catiline lacked slaughter, or that "the rewarde of traytors" he discusses was a garland of roses. Further, if what we know of Elizabethan audiences is representative, weeping at slaughter was not one of their weaknesses. Even as late as 1660 and shortly after, Samuel Pepys considered a good execution first-rate entertainment.  

To return for a moment to Bishop Salvianus, one notes that if his arguments are as singleminded and as unrealistic as Gosson's, Northbrook's or Stubbes', they at least offer a bit of variety to the old fare. The learned bishop discusses how extensive the nature of the evil connected with drama is:  

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All other evils pollute the doers only, not the beholders, or the hearers...only the filthiness of plays, and spectacles is such, as maketh both the actors and beholders guilty alike...in the representation of whoredom all the people in mind play the whores. And such as happily came chaste unto shows, return adulterers from plays.  
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All connected with the production or the presentation of plays are sinners, thinks the bishop. And the extensive range of drama's perverting influence has further ramifications:
...at theatres...both the mind there with lust, and the eyes with shows, and the ears with hearing be polluted; all which are so bad, that no man can well report or declare them with honesty. For who, without passing the bounds of shamelessness, can utter those imitations of unhonest things; that filthy speech; that vile motion, the beastly gestures used there? 24

In this passage one feels that the bishop has exceeded Stubbes in virulence; has out-Gossoned Gosson. At least we may believe, however, that the bishop had written no plays. There is, further, another point to consider. We are quoting from what purports to be a translation of the bishop's treatise by "Anglo-Phile Eutheo." The bishop himself is an Italian, and it was conceded, by Elizabethan Englishmen, at least, that the lechery and lasciviousness of the Italian drama made the bawdiness of English drama pale by comparison. 25 If this is true, the honesty of transferring a criticism of Italian drama (by a Papist) without comment or modification into a controversy concerned with English drama as if the author had so intended it, is another example of shady argumentative practice.

The bishop is timely enough in one aspect of his critique of the drama. He deprecates the use of God's name on stage:

How often is the sacred and reverend name of God blasphemed on the stages without regard of his judgements! Is he not held the gallantest
rustler, that can rap out the most disguised
oaths to tempt the Lord withal! As who should
say, it were allowable to sweare, so it were
done covertly. As if it were none offense to
resemble the wicked and that to dissemble were
commendable. 26

Some twenty-four years after the English publication of this
"third blast" at the stage, at least this point was won by
the Puritan attackers (although one does not find any other
specific mention of the use of the name of God as an "abuse"
in the other tracts against the stage). King James I put into
effect the following statute in 1605-6:

For the p^ venting and avoyding of the greate
Abuse of the Holy Name of God in Stage playes
Interludes Maygames Shews and such like; be
it enacted by our Soveraigne Lorde the Kingg
Majesty, and by the Lordes Spirituall and
Temporall, and comons in this p^ sent Parlia¬
ment assembled, and by the authoritie of the
same, That if at any tyme or tymes, after the
end of this p^ sent Session of Parliament,
any psen or psons doe or shall in any Stage
play interlude Shewe or Maygame or Pageant
jestingly or ppohaneley speake or use the Holy
Name of God or of Christ Jesus, or of the
Holy Ghost or of the Trinitie, which are not
to be spoken but with feare and reverence,
shall forfeite for everie such Offence by
hym or them committed Tenne Pounds...27

But if the use of God's name on stage ceased, there were
plenty of other abuses that Gosson and his Puritan contemporar-
ies could "strip and whip." One T. G [ainsford] published a
treatise entitled The Rich Cabinet Furnished with Varietie of
Descriptions, London, 1616. The pamphlet contrasted the ancient standing of the poet and player with their present reputation. It is noteworthy that players are not condemned "from the beginning" by T.G. as in most of the Puritan broadsides:

PLAYER was ever the life of dead poesie, and in those times, that Philosophy taught us morall precepts, these acted the same in publique showes: so that vice was made odious, vertue set on a throne of imitation, punishment warranted to the wicked, reward afforded to well-deservers, and all sorts severally instructed in their severall callings.

Player is now a name of contempt, for times corrupt men with vice, and vice is growne to a height of government: so that whereas before man were affraid to offend, they now think it a disgrace to bee honest: whence the eye must be satisfied with vanitie, the eare with bawdery, the hand with obsceneitie, the heart with lust, the feete with wanderings, and the whole body and soule with pollutions: in all which Players are principall actors.

As Bishop Salvianus accused the plays of his time of corrupting all the senses and faculties of man, so does Gainsford. Echoing Ben Jonson, too, he conceives the main fault to lie with the times themselves. And the players contribute to the decay of the age by reflecting the dishonesty and vileness of the times. The extent to which the players aided the disjointed times may be suggested in a sermon preached by John Stockwood in 1578, if we can believe his claims:
players] shame not in the tyme of Divine service to come and dance about the churche, and without to have naked men dauncing in nettes, which is most filthie; for the heathen, that had never further knowledge than the light of natur, have counted it shamefull for a player to come on the stage without a slop. 30

Northbrook echoes the bishop, too--so closely, in fact, that one is tempted to suggest that he had read the earlier treatise:

...to exercise this art is not only a dishonest and wicked occupation, but also to behold it, and therein to delight is a shameful thing, because that the delight of a wanton mind is an offense. 31

Note how closely this follows the bishop's statement that plays "maketh both the actors and beholders guilty alike." And as the bishop states that "in the representation of whoredom all the people in mind play the whore," Northbrook says the "delight of a wanton mind is an offense." Quoting Northbrook further:

Those filthy and unhonest gestures and movings of enterlude players, what other thing do they teach than wanton pleasure and stirring of fleshly lusters, unlawful appetites and desires, with their bawdige and filthy sayings and counterfeit doings? 32

Certainly the similarity between Northbrook's censure of the player's "unhonest gestures" and the bishop's "imitations of unhonest things" and "beastly gestures" is striking; the possibility of the Puritans having gone privily to their Popish
foes for ammunition raises its head again.

Though the critical strain running through the commentary given above might lead the reader to think that I am leaving the central issue to condemn the Puritans and to denigrate their integrity, this is not so. When we begin the task of applying the observations we have made to *The Revenger's Tragedy*, we will have to assess the arguments for and against certain matter in the play. It is presently necessary, then, that we establish to the best of our ability the relative honesty and validity of the Puritan criticism. It must be borne in mind that we do not plan to explicate Tourneur's play through modern critical techniques, and that biographical criticism and its methods are closed to us, as we shall see. The entire point at issue in this study is to determine whether we can justify the moral content of *The Revenger's Tragedy* in the terms provided us by Elizabethan criticism. It is patent that we would not approach the play as Gosson did--nor would we attempt to justify it in the manner that Sidney would have done. A modern explication and criticism of the play may well be projected for future scholarship, but the present study is concerned with the problem of approximating as closely as possible what intelligent and unbiased Elizabethan criticism
would have had to say regarding the moral context of the drama. I say so much to defend my own occasionally sharp comments on that Puritan criticism that seems less than disinterested--or at least honest and consistent.

Returning to the attacks against the stage, one finds a number of censures that must be considered somewhat apart from those properly called "Puritan." George Puttenham can by no means be called an enemy of the theatre or of poetry, but he took exception with some of the matter appearing on the contemporary stage and in the poetry of his day:

...Poesie ought not to be abased and employed upon any unworthy matter and subject, nor used to vaine purposes, which nevertheless is dayly seene, and that is to utter conceits infamous and vicious or ridiculous and foolish, or of no good example and doctrine...33

This is certainly a gently-phrased and reasonable criticism, and serves to demonstrate that, while invective was a favorite instrument--and pastime--of Elizabethan controversialists, it was not used by those who had a level-headed and measured censure to deliver. This point may be reinforced by further quotation. The following passage is from Robert Southwell, St. Peter's Complaint, London, 1595:

Poets, by abusing their talent, and making the follies and faynings of love the customary subject of their base endeavours, have
so discredited this facultie, that a Poet, a lover, and a lyar are by many reckoned but three words of one signification.  

Southwell goes on to say that "the vanitie of men cannot counterpoyse the authority of God," and he defends poetry, as did Sidney and Harington, by claiming its divine origin, and its use in scripture. His unusually well-balanced criticism ends with a series of remarks that suggest the "decayed age" theory advanced by Jonson and Gainsford:

But the devil, as he affecteth Dietie and seeketh to have all the complements of Divine honour applied to his service, so hath hee among the rest possessed also most Poets with his idle fansies. For in lieu of solemn and devout matter, to which in dutie they owe their abilities, they now busie themselves in expressing such passions as onely serve for testimonies to how unworfchte affections they have wedded their wils.

If we cannot agree with Southwell's opinions as to what constitutes "objectionable material," we certainly must appreciate his judicious approach to a question which, by 1595, was entangled in an emotional network erected by both Puritan vituperation and replies like that of Thomas Nashe which was hardly calculated to lay the spectre of Puritan abuse-collecting:

I...hasten to other mens furie, who make the Presse the dunghill, whither they carry all the muck of their mellancholick imaginactions, pretending, forsooth, to anatomize abuses, and stubbe up sin by the rootes, when as
there waste paper, being well viewed, seems fraught with naught else saue dogge daies effects; who, wresting places of scripture against pride, whoredome, couetousness, gluttonie, and drunkennesse, extend their invectives so farre against the abuse that almost the things remaines not whereof they admitte anye lawfull use: speaking of pride, as though they were afraid some body should cut too large peniworthes out of their cloth; of couetousnes, as though in them that Proverbe had been verified, Nullus ad amissas ibit amicus opes; of gluttonie, as though their living did lye upon another mans trencher; of drunkennesse, as though they had beene brought vppe all the dayes of their life with bread and water: and finally, or whoredome, as though they had beene Eunuckes from their cradle, or blind from the house of their conception. But as the stage player is nearer the happier because hee represents oft times the persons of mighty men, as of Kings and Emperours, so I account such men neuer the holier because they place praise in painting foorth other mens imperfections. 36

Such scorn was not calculated to sooth the tempers of men like Gosson or Munday (if, indeed, Anthony Munday was involved in the controversy as author of the Second and Third Blast of Retreat from Stage Plays) who, by the nature of their past actions, were most open to charges of duplicity or opportunism. Nashe's criticism, I think, may represent the modern view of the Puritan invective.

Returning to those few examples of "gentlemanly" censure of the stage and of poetry, T. Gainsford deserves mention in this regard. On the whole, his strictures are reasonably set
forth, and all the more believable for their lack of corrosive force:

Players haue by communitie mared their owne markets: for as vertue is the better by enlargement and communication, so is vice the worse by dissumulation and common infusion of it's [sic] contagious poysen. 37

If we were willing to accept the premise that stagecraft is a notorious spreader and diffuser of vice, the comment would be unexceptionable. Gainsford's comment on the social status of the player is another example of tempered criticism:

Player is affraid of the statute, for if he have no better supportation then his profession, he is neither admitted in publicke, nor if he bee a roamer dares justifie himself in private, beeing a flat roague by the statute. 38

Gainsford is accurate in theory and in practice—and his choice of the word "roague" suggests he had some knowledge of the statutes to which he refers. The most important royal strictures that touched upon players were included in a statute of 14 Queen Elizabeth enacted in 1571-2, and in a restatement of much the same kind enacted 39 Elizabeth, in 1597-8. In both, the players were lumped together with "vagabonds, rogues, and sturdy beggers." Quoting from the latter statute, we find

...all psons that be or utter themselves to be Proctors, Pcurors, Patent Gatherers, or Collectors for Gaoles Prisons or HospitalC; all Fencers, Beareward, comon Players of EnterludC and MinstrelC wandring abroade (other than Players of EnterludC)
belonging to any Baron of this Realme, or any other Psoneage of greater Degree, to be auccutoryzed to play, under the Hand and Seale of Armes of such Baron or Psoneage) all Juglers, &c. shall be taken adjudged and deemed Rogues, Vagabonds, and Sturdy Beggers, and shall susteyne such Payne and Punyshment as by this Acte is in that behalfe appointed.

Gainsford's comments, taken with the ordinances quoted above, give us a more balanced picture of the general attitude toward players in England during the reign of Elizabeth (the situation did not change appreciably during the ensuing reign of James I), and suggest by implication the whole plight of that literature that did not spring from the court or its hangers-on. We know that the corporation of the City of London had an undisguised hatred of players and the men who supplied them with the matter they performed. Gosson, whose rare bursts of humor occasionally exceeded his sense, addressed a plea to "the Gentlewomen, Citizens of London," in which he asked them to "schole" themselves, and "abhorre" plays of their own accord. He has discarded the pseudo-philosophical arguments he had set forth earlier and applies his wit to the ladies' sense of propriety and to their concern for their reputation. "They which show themselves openly desyre to be seene," he says. "Thought is free: you can forbydd no man that vieweth you to note you, and that noateth you to judge you for entering
places of suspicion...."42 "Being pensive at home," Gosson quips:

if you go to Theatres to drive away fancies, it is as good phisicke as for the ache of your head to knocke out your brains...43

Possibly the Puritan attack reached some sort of new level of literal criticism with their cavelings concerning the matter of male players taking the parts of women, or playing the part of a fool or villain. Gainsford, usually reasonable, has this to say:

Plaiers practices can hardly be warranted in Religion: for a man to put on woman's apparell, and a woman a mans, is plaine prohibition;44

Philip Stubbes condemns those who take the part of fools or devils in dramatic productions:

...who will call him a wiseman, that playeth the part of a fool and a vice? who can call him a Christian, who playeth the part of a Devil, the sworne enemy of Christ? who can call him a just man, that playeth the part of a dissembling hypocrite? And, to be brief, who can call him a straight dealing man, who plays a cozeners trick? And so of all the rest. Away therefore with this so infamous an art! For go they never so brave, yet are they counted and taken for beggars.45

Gosson provides a second for Stubbes' observations; not only are the players to be abused for the various parts they play, but the claims they make for their dramas as morally instructive are plainly false, for
If any goodness were to be learned at plays it is likely that the players themselves which commit every syllable to memory should profit most, because that as every man learneth so he liveth: and as his study is, such are his manners; but the daily experience of their behavior, showeth that they reap no profit by the discipline themselves...

While this is perhaps an extreme example of false logic, one cannot help feeling that the entire fiber of the Puritan attack is finally based on such argument. Gosson undoubtedly did not realize the irony of his remarks dealing with the nature of the "discipline" that he conceived his readers to gain at plays:

In my opinion, the discipline we get by plays is like to the justice that a certain schoolmaster taught in Persia, which taught his scholars to lie, and not to lie; to deceive and not to deceive, with a distinction how they might do it to their friends, for exercise, to their foes in earnest. Wherein many of his scholars became so skillful by practice, by custom so bold, that their dearest friends paid more for their learning than their enemies.

To summarize the substance of the Puritan attack against the stage is not difficult. Outside the possibly justified complaints of disorderly assemblies at the theatres—which could have been handled, one would think, by any sort of a trained constabulary—the arguments were thin and had been used since the days of Tertullian at least. The Puritans
scored the "Falsity" of poetry and drama; they considered poetry and drama debased on the ground that they had been originated by heathens and were "consecrate" to pagan gods. They considered the horrors of murder, rebellion, incest, or rape to provide the worst of examples to both the unlearned and the learned. The lusty Elizabethan comedy with its emphasis on the animal vigor of man seemed still worse to them. There was little that could mollify their distaste of the stage, or of poetry in general. To stage a biblical play was blasphemy; to recreate the history of Thaïs was "whoredome;" to set forth the history of Richard II was to approve rebellion.

Both player and audience partook of the viciousness of "Stage-Plaies." The player was a common rogue who became still worse in the practice of his profession, and the poet was to be classed with him in ignominy. What passed for good example among the defenders of poetry and drama was in reality the "vizard" of the devil who had wrested poetry and interludes to his purposes, if indeed he had not "found them out."

"There is almost no man," Ben Jonson said, "but he sees clearer, and sharper, the vices in a speaker, then the
And when the men in question happened to be of that strange new strain of Calvinists and their more moderate supporters who were beginning to extend their influence—in God's name—throughout all England, one can be sure that few attempts to state a balanced and unprejudiced case might be forthcoming. To the Puritan mind, the moral problem presented by plays, and its solution, was quite simple; as Gosson put it,

Let us but shut uppe our eares to poets, pipers, and players; pull our feete backe frome resorts to theatres, and turne away our eyes from beholding of vanitie, the greatest storne of abuse will bee overblowne, and a faire path trodden to amendment of life; were not we so foolish to taste every drugge and buy every trifle, players woulde shut in their shops, and carry their trash to some other country.

And if all England would but follow Gosson's prescription, evil would be "stubb'd out;" the millenium would arrive.

Perhaps the worst charge we can bring against the Puritan attackers of the stage is that of possessing a kind of na"ivete that produced—and continues to produce, whenever its modern counterpart crops up—a series of crude oversimplifications in regard to any problem it touches. In the following chapter, we will see how an Elizabethan who more nearly saw into the nature of reality would answer Gosson and his contemporaries.
CHAPTER III.

"This our age swims within him."
---Reynenger's Tragedy: [I.iii]

"My Lord after long search," Hippolito says to Lussurioso, the sensual and depraved son of the reigning Duke, "wary inquiries and politick siftings, I made choice of yon fellow.... This our age swims within him."  Revenger's Tragedy: [I.iii]

If the passage just cited serves to introduce the disguised Vindice to one of his future victims, it serves equally well to suggest the shadowy yet intensely vital personality of Cyril Tourneur to the reader.

For of all Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights, we know both more and less about Cyril Tourneur. We know that the world of his drama is a midnight blend of morgue and madhouse, that the corrosive cynicism that informs his plays expresses itself continually in some of the most beautiful poetry that the age can boast. We can feel the dense pressures and counterpressures charged with catastrophe that shape the terrible destiny of his characters. "We are walking Ghostes," Cornwallis said of his seventeenth century contemporaries in his essay on 'Fame.' 1 And it is in this current of thought that Tourneur's people move and have their being.

Yet of Tourneur himself we know nothing. The biographical
data complied by Allardyce Nicholl in his excellent edition of the works is pure speculation, and even the canon of Tourneur's works is far from being unquestioned. This confusion is compounded by the vitriolic fervor of Tourneur's style, for it is impossible to read The Revenger's Tragedy or The Atheist's Tragedy without feeling that much of the author's personality is revealed within them. The uncanny vitality and power of the plays and their characters tempts the critic to posit Tourneur the artist in absentia, to create a life and an attitude for him out of the dark shapes of his characters. But such practice is poor criticism, and it is not scholarship at all. We must be content, for the time at least, with the plays themselves. And in The Revenger's Tragedy, there is much to occupy us.

Critics have charged that Tourneur's creations are not people at all; they are, "articulated skeletons," or cleverly conceived puppets. Tourneur, they allege, is not concerned with the characters he has created. He fails to be "aware of tragic issues," and fails to enter into his characters as Webster does. He places upon the stage "distortions, grotesques, almost childish caricatures of humanity," and he possesses a "very narrow, if deep, sensibility." Yet at the
same time, these critics refer to him as having written poetry that is, "if not the greatest, is among the most concentrated writing of the time; in the power of a single word or single image he is surpassed only by Shakespeare." Or again, "after Marlowe, Shakespeare and Webster, Tourneur is the most remarkable technical innovator—an innovator who found no imitators."

Such strange divergence of opinion—critics divided against themselves—is not difficult to understand after one has read The Revenger's Tragedy. The play boasts a "half-hysterical, half-apocalyptic" power that quite frankly leaves the reader (as it would doubtless leave the spectator) breathless and unable to reconcile the whirling twists and convolutions of the complicated plot. Among his peers, Tourneur is first in the art of building a plot that moves without pause from the first line to the last. The play's action is not interrupted by so much as a single hiatus; and its humor—bold and vicious conmingling of the bawdy and the macabre—is infused into the main and subplots directly. No scene breaks the headlong rush of Tourneur's characters to their appointed destinies. And there is none of the confusion or uncertainty of purpose that mars Webster's tragedies.

Whatever else one notes about The Revenger's Tragedy, the
calculating facility of Vendice assures one that Vendice has weighed every possibility, traced every thread of circumstance before committing himself to action. There is none of the loose plotting and *deus ex machina* resolution that one finds in the tragedies of Webster or of Chapman. What Vendice sets out to do, he does. He turns every disadvantage to his use. His disguises, his lies, his successful attempt to corrupt his mother, all are examples of the coldblooded perfectionist at work; the entire play moves in terms of Vendice's web of vengeance. "Duke: royal letcher; goe, gray hayrde adultery," he rasps, and the inexorable train of his revenge is under way. His control of the play's action is obvious until those last trembling seconds when he exposes his guilt to Antonio, and is doomed in his turn. But even at this point, there is no amazement and little consternation on Vendice's part. He says,

And now my Lord, since we are in for euuer:
This worke was ours which else might have beene slipt,
And if we list, we could haue Nobles clipt,
And go for lesse then beggers, but we hate
To bleed so cowardly; we haue ynough.
Yfaith, we're well, our Mother turnd, our Sister true,
We die after a nest of Dukes, adue.  
[V.i11]

His purpose has been clear, and he regrets nothing; the
revenge he had set out to exact has been accomplished. Unlike Bosola in *The Duchess of Malfi*, Vendice has 'clipt' no 'Nobles,' (obviously a neat pun turning on the sense of 'Noble' as rank and as a monetary unit. Vendice might have embraced a man of rank, prostituted his sister, and prospered; or he might have shaved gold coins in order to gain wealth). He carries his adamantine integrity to the grave with him--along with the added assurance of his mother's spiritual reversal, and the honesty of his sister. "We're well," he tells his colorless brother, Hippolito, and the play ends with a special feeling of completeness that resembles nothing quite so much as the French ideal of the "well-made play."  

Émile Legouis has called *The Revenger's Tragedy* "a gloomy morality play in an Italian dress," and one cannot quarrel with the substance of that remark. That the play is "gloomy" is to say that it is tragic. It is no more gloomy than the endless agony and self-imposed attrition of Lear, and is not half so gloomy as the brooding and vicious situation we encounter in *The Changeling*. That the play is, in fact, an extremely sophisticated and subtle morality play is, in a sense, the thesis behind this study. The morality play elements, and their congruence with the best avowed intentions of poetry's
Renaissance defenders, are yet to be examined. In the process of this examination it will appear, I think, quite clear that the charges of the Puritan attackers can be turned aside, if we extract the sense from their arguments, and refuse to dignify the chaff by confuting it.

While it would be possible to analyze those elements of The Revenger's Tragedy that reinforce the instructional precepts of the Renaissance critics separately, I have felt that a scene-by-scene examination of the play is preferable. The reasons are several; the chief one being that, familiarity with the play cannot be assumed of all readers of this study, and this fact would necessitate a précis of the play in order to make the elemental approach coherent. Since the plot of The Revenger's Tragedy is extremely complicated, such an approach has seemed impractical and wasteful of both space and time. Another reason for the scene-by-scene explication is that the force of the play's instructional aspect is best set forth by retaining the same fluidity that the drama naturally possesses. No Elizabethan critic would have maintained that a given speech ripped from context could still retain its maximum didactic effect. Even that kind of intellect which demands a "lesson" from literature understands that, if literature does teach, it teaches in its own way,—through certain
hidden processes that (we please to) call "esthetic." And these critics, I feel, would defend the position that a drama like The Revenger's Tragedy has its effect (instructional and otherwise) in its totality, not in selected excerpts.

For these reasons I plan to sketch the plot and action of the play as I emphasize those portions of dialogue and stage business that demonstrate the soundness of the play's moral construction insofar as Elizabethan critics and audiences were concerned.

Before beginning detailed commentary on the play itself, there remain several matters to discuss. The morality elements of the play are not confined to the text alone. One cannot escape noticing the abstract qualities implicit in the names of all the central characters: Vendice is "the revenger," Lussurioso is "luxurious" in the Elizabethan sense of sensual or lascivious; Spurio is, of course, the "false" or bastard son; Ambitioso is "ambitious," Castiza is "chastity," Supercuauo is "over-idle," or "over-foolish." Gratiana, ironically, is "grace." Thus there is implicitly an abstract battle between Vendice, the revenger, and the personified vices he would be revenged upon. There is the duel between Castiza and Lussurioso, chastity and luxury, the failure of Gratiana, "grace," and its reestablishment through repentence. And finally, \( \)
there is the ironic denouement in which the revenger and his
accomplice-brother are destroyed by Antonio, the "just man"
who has been vilely wronged by the Duke and by the Duchess'
youngest son, but who has endured the rape and subsequent
suicide of his wife patiently.

What we must understand is that there are two distinct
lines of morality running throughout the play. There is first
that moral attitude expressed by Vendice: injury must be re-
paid in kind; revenge is a moral debt, and as the Duke poi-
soned his affianced wife, so he plans to destroy the "royall
letcher" in return. Further, the Duke's refusal to honor
Vendice's father is offered as a secondary motive for his plot.
After one has read the first act of the play, little reason
is needed to justify a general slaughter of the Duke and his
circle out of hand. This view of the situation through Ven-
dice's eyes is the first line of the play's moral structure.

The second line is betrayed not only in the conclusion
of the play by Vendice's destruction, but in isolated scenes
throughout the drama. The constancy of Castiza is somehow
outside the sordid horrors of the court in which even Vendice,
by his methods, is involved. Gratiana, though temporarily
implicated in the court's debauchery, frees herself and, we
assume, remains constant. Antonio, except as victim, is also outside the fatal sphere of the Duke's household, and survives the final spate of destruction at the revels following the investiture of Lussurioso as the new Duke. And it is through the presence of these characters that we see the dramatist's total view of morality. The charge of "narrowness" is unsupportable. It may be that Renaissance history of Italy is most distasteful; its factual nature remains. It may be, further, that the scholars whose criticism we have noted--two of whom are women--find the unmasked violence and viciousness of action and motive in the play appalling and unbelievable. It is easy to sympathize with them in this; it is, however, impossible to accept their condemnation of Tourneur as "narrow" or a maker of "articulated skeletons" because he reaches outside the range of experience that they are able to accept intellectually and emotionally. That there are unlikely happenings, coincidences in the play, one need not bother to deny; these exist in the very greatest of Elizabethan drama (e.g. Hamlet's discovery of the letter carried by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and his clever rephrasing of its contents). The point is that Tourneur's moral attitude has consistently been equated with that of Vendice. Nothing could be further from the truth. The characters we have mentioned above are outside the malignant
circle of Vendice's immediate concern, and there remains another figure to consider in this matter of the second line of morality: Antonio's ravished wife.

Our only sight of her is when she is "discovered" to Hippolito and other lords in I.iv., but the speeches concerning her serve to characterize her—as well as her husband; and most important, they add to the range of moral insight with which we must credit Tourneur.

"Her honor first drunke poyson," Antonio says, referring to her rape by the Duchess' youngest son, "and her life, Being fellowes in one house did pledge her honour" [I.iv]. We see that "relligious Lady" dead twice, first in honor, and her soul quickly fled to recover that which had been forced from her. Her cheek is pillowed on a prayer-book turned to expose these words: "Curae leues loquuntur, Maiores stuptent." And Antonio says, "...she her honor forest, Deemed it a nobler dowry for her name, To die with poyson then to live with shame." One finds it difficult to understand how intelligent criticism can fail to recognize the fact that Tourneur's range is certainly much wider than that of Vendice alone.

The two lines of morality and a clear view of both currents is essential to our study. For if Vendice is conceived
as an avatar, a kind of tragic hero destroyed by an unfeeling Antonio who fails to reward the very man who has worked out their mutual revenge, then we have a play that would have seemed pointless and obscure to the Elizabethan audience. But Tourneur avoids such paradox by setting up a second line of moral concern outside that of Vendice, and makes Vendice himself admit the relevance of this second or 'eternal' order by his obsession with the preservation of his sister's honor, and by his concern for the fall of his mother. Vendice himself is capable of mercy; when Gratiana kneels and begs his forgiveness for offering to act as panderess for her daughter, Vendice says,

Nay, and you draw teares once, go you to bed, Wet will make yron blush and change to red: Brother it raines, twill spoile your dagger, house it. [IV. iv]

The "quality of mercy is not strained," and like that gentle rain, Gratiana's tears fall. Vendice acknowledges the validity of a moral order beyond his own in forgiving her. Here the true range of Tourneur's genius manifests itself. Gratiana is restored to "grace" by repentence, and Vendice, the "grotesque" who delights in his own plans of destruction and vengeance says,
ioye's a subtill elfe,
I thinke man's happiest, when he forgets himselfe:
Farewell once dryed, now holy-watred Meade,
Our hearts weare Feathers, that before wore Lead.

Despite this scene, and Vendice's endless moral commentary (which we will examine shortly), some critics have pleased to call him "neither good nor great, but vindictive and energetic enough to avenge by underhand means a specific injury" and to say of Tourneur's people in general that they are "distortions... all distorted to scale."

Tourneur's drama, if, as some critics claim, it is not a tragedy, may be called, perhaps, a revenge-morality, with the added element of the revenger punished. It is from this point of view that we shall begin an examination of the text.

To my knowledge no Elizabethan play begins so vigorously and impels the reader so quickly into the stream of dramatic action. There is no preparation, no padding, not even the usual attempt to shape a context for the main action through the use of minor characters or conversation. The first scene strikes with the fury of an angry serpent: "Duke: royall letcher;" Vendice snarls from a dimly lighted corner of the stage as the Duke passes with his train,

...Goe, gray hayrde adultery,
And thou his sonne, as impious steept as hee:
And thou his bastard true-begot in euill:
And thou his Dutchess that will doe with Diuill,
Foure exlent Characters--0 that marrow-lesse age,
Would stuffe the hollow Bones with dambd desires,
And stead of heate kindle infernall fires,
Within the spend-thrift veynes of a drye Duke,
A parcht and juicellesse luxur. [I.i]

It seems worth noting that, unlike Iago, Vendicce is primarily concerned with the immorality of the Duke and his court. Certainly his estimate of the "Foure exlent Characters" is more than justified in light of the later action. One senses the morality influence on the play in the very phrase, "Foure exlent Characters." Vendicce's interesting impersonality in this first speech is echoed repeatedly throughout the play. He fulminates against Lussurioso--because he is the image of his father; he predicts the unnatural union of the Duchess, and names the very flaws that the Duke himself confesses in II.ii, when he is threatened by Lussurioso, who, at Vendicce's prompting, mistakes him for Spurio:

Oh take mee not in sleepe, I haue great sins,
I must haue daies,
Nay months deere sonne, with penitential heaues,
To lift 'em out, and not to die uncleere,
O thou wilt kill me both in heaven and here. [II.ii]

Another point emphasized is that even the Duke is conscious of that moral sphere that operates independent of the
monstrous and corrupt society that is his court—the sphere that Castiza and Antonio occupy throughout the play, and that Gratiana falls from, and in which she is reinstated through her repentence.

Continuing his tirade against the Duke, Vendice makes clear his personal reasons for hating the court and its ruler:

O God! One
That has scarce blood enough to live upon,
And hee to riot it like a sonne and heyre?
O the thought of that
Turnes my abused heart-strings into fret.
Thou sallow picture of my poysioned love,
My studies ornament, thou shell of Death,
Once the bright face of my betrothed Lady,
When life and beauty naturally fild out
These ragged imperfections;...
But oh accursed Pallace!
Thee when thou wert appareld in thy flesh,
The old Duke poysoned,
Because thy purer part would not consent
Vnto his palsey-lust...

The Duke had attempted to seduce Gloriana; she had refused him, and in anger the Duke had poisoned her. Vendice now holds her skull, his "studies ornament," the later instrument of his revenge, and recollects the injustice that he has vowed to avenge. But Tourneur's genius accomplishes much more in this first scene. The Duke "riots it like a sonne and heyre," an ironic reference to Lussurioso, who indeed attempts to corrupt Castiza even as his father had attempted to seduce Gloriana.
The skull, of course, suggests the medieval *memento mori*, the emblem of death, the consciousness of which seldom left the medieval man. Vendice is cut in this pattern; he is, in fact, a moralist of the old order. He is personally guilty of none of those crimes for which he blames the Duke and his court. His only "crime" is the lengthy premeditation of the Duke's murder, and the subsequent planning of Lussurioso's death for the attempt on his sister's honor—neither of which seemed criminal to an Elizabethan audience.

Vendice's stringent morality and preoccupation with death serve to underscore the second line of morality we have discussed. "The vprightest man, (if such there be, that sinne but seuen times a day)," he says, would have been tempted by Gloriana's beauty. As Allardyce Nicoll suggests, Tourneur is anti-Roman in matters of religion, and there is almost a hint of the Calvinist about some of his language and attitudes, not only in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, but in *The Transformed Metamorphosis* as well.17 Certainly the moral attitudes expressed by Vendice, his revulsion at the viciousness of the Duke and his court, his loving memory of his fiancee's chastity, and such observations as "O ware an old man hot, and vicious" Age as in gold, in lust is couetous."--all must have jumped
well enough with the supermorality of the Puritans. But Ven-
dice continues:

Vengence thou murders Quit-rent, and whereby
Thou shouldst thy selfe Tennant to Tragedy,
Oh keep thy day, hour, minute, I beseech
For those thou hast determin'd: hum: who ere knew
Murder unpaid? faith give revenge her due
Sha's kept touch hitherto—be merry, merry,
Advance thee, 0 thou terror to fat folkes
To have their costly three-pilde flesh worn of
As bare as this—for banquets, ease and laughter,
Can make great men, as greatness goes by clay
But wise men little are more great then they.

It is at this point that Vendice moves into the peculiar orbit
of his own morality. His apostrophe to vengeance is in strange
contrast to the speech of the ghost of Montferrers in The Athe-
ist's Tragedy addressing his son who plans revenge upon D'Am-
ville: "Hold Charlemont! Let him revenge my murder, and thy
wrongs, To whom the Justice of Revenge belongs" The Atheist's
Tragedy: [III.ii]. If one may assume that Antonio and Castiza
in The Revenger's Tragedy and Charlemont in The Atheist's Tragedy
represent the kind of public morality that Tourneur wishes to
contrast with the Duke's corrupt court and D'Amville's atheism,
then it seems, considering the surprising end that comes to
Vendice, that there is an implicit condemnation of revenge in
the play. Such condemnation would certainly be more easily
established if the canon of Tourneur's plays were certain, and
if the relative dates of composition of *The Revenger's Tragedy* and *The Atheist's Tragedy* were known. Still, it is less than visionary criticism to suggest that Tourneur, whose style and poetic ability is far from crude, is in *The Revenger's Tragedy* erecting a play with a central problem that would have especially appealed to an Elizabethan audience. Is revenge justified? It cannot be truly reconciled with Christianity, Tourneur suggests. And by supplying Vendice with adequate motive, by making him bold and clever and totally dedicated to a personal moral code much more exalted than that of his enemies, by making him disinterested in position or wealth, Tourneur has created a character instead of a straw man. If I am correct in surmising that Tourneur is subtly undermining the validity of the revenge tradition, he is at the same time fulfilling Sidney's desire that both good and evil be presented in poetry and drama. The 'Oblique as well as the right' is present in Vendice; certainly he is justified insofar as his own judgment is concerned. He is not troubled about his own salvation. But this has little to do with the central problem—whether his revenge is justified in terms of the public or 'eternal' ethic.

In any case, Vendice's first speech has set up the
attitude we may expect to come to fruition as the play progresses: his ends are certain, and he does not falter. There is no inner struggle, no doubt, and he does not delay. The "thre-pilde flesh" refers, of course, to the rich velvet worn by the privileged classes, and the discussion of revenge as a terror to "fat folkes," in addition to suggesting the omnipresent threat of death as in the Morality tradition, calls to mind the general conception of the "superfluous man" spoken of by Gloucester in *King Lear*. Most important, Vendice voices both the public and private lines of morality in his speech. He first condemns the Duke for crimes against the public morality, and then adds his own peculiar charges.

As Vendice's soliloquy ends, his brother Hippolito enters, and they discuss Hippolito's position at court. He is attached to the Duke's chamber, and has maintained that position through the influence of the Duchess. He tells Vendice that Lussurioso has asked him to find a "strange digested fellow" of "ill-contented nature," one "for euill onely good...some base coynd Pander." Vendice immediately agrees to "put on that knave" and serve the Duke's son. "The smallest advantage fattens wronged men," he says, and thinks that by being close to the court, his opportunity for vengeance may the easier arise.
At this point Gratiana and Castiza enter. Vendice says, "I dare stake my soule for these two creatures;" though women fall easily, he tells his brother, Hippolito, their mother and sister are above such reproach. The juxtaposition of Gratiana and Castiza to the court serves to emphasize the ugliness of the commission that Lussurioso wishes Hippolito to carry out for him. Illicit sexuality is opposed to purity in such a way as to shame the one and exhaust the other.

We learn more about the nature of the court and its occupants quickly. "Tis whisperd there the Duchess yongest sonne Has played a Rape on Lord Antonio's wife," Hippolito tells his mother and sister. "Monster he deserues to die," Castiza replies. One of the play's two consistantly virtuous figures thus pronounces judgment upon the young son, and by implication, upon the whole court, each member of which is involved in some situation as unsavory as the rape. After a short discussion of the court, which touches on the death of the father of Vendice's family who "dyed of discontent: the Noblemans consumption," Vendice and Hippolito take their leave, Hippolito returning to court, Vendice to prepare his disguise.

The next scene opens in court with the youngest son being brought before the Duke and two judges to be tried for the rape of Antonio's wife. Tourneur manages to characterize the Duke with terrible economy. Rather than condemning the son's
action for the intrinsic viciousness and immorality of it, he is concerned with its effect on his reputation:

His violent Act has e'en drawn blood of honor
And stained our honors,
Throw me inck upon the for-head of our state
Which envious spirits will dip their pens into
After our death; and blot us in our Toombes.
For that which would seem treason in our liues
Is laughter when we're dead; who dares now whisper
That dares not then speake out, and e'en proclaime,
With loud words and broad pens our closest shame?

Such obsession with posthumous reputation reminds us of Dante's Guido da Montefeltro, or perhaps Browning's bishop at St. Praxed's. Such concern with earthly reputation is inimical to proper concern with one's spiritual state, and as such is one more charge against the Duke.

The Duchess pleads for her son, the Duke's "sonne-in-law," but in consideration of his reputation, the Duke refuses to interfere with the judge's decision. The second judge asks the young son what his reason for committing the rape. His reply is characteristic of the Duke's circle:

2. Iud. ...confesse my Lord!
What mou'd you toot?

Iuni. Why flesh and blood my Lord.
What should moue men vnto a woman else?

If the young son's answer suggests the callous immorality of
the court, it further indicates something of the dramatist's attitude toward morality. What indeed should move a man to a woman? Naturally there should be more than mere lust; there should be a "wedding of minds" as well. If the young son has illustrated his viciousness, he has given us a hint as to the attitude underlying his conduct, the attitude that makes his conduct especially vicious. If the morality of the court were to be accepted as the play's criterion, the entire drama would be senseless. One must be constantly aware of the active tensions between the moral sphere of Antonio and Castiza and that of the Duke and his circle. Vendice serves as the intermediary: he partakes of the morality of both spheres. His ends are, at least in his own mind, those of the Antonio-Castiza sphere; his methods are palpably those of the Duke's.

But the tensions between the two "moral worlds" are more subtle than we have yet indicated. If Vendice serves as the physical bond between the "good" and the "evil" worlds of the play, the language of the play serves as the abstract bond between them. Castiza says that the young son should die—instead of holding forth the principle of forgiveness, as would be expected of a one-dimensional "Christian" character in the old morality; and as we have noted, as Tourneur
himself places this principle in the mouth of Montferrer's ghost in *The Atheist's Tragedy*. Through such a speech, Castiza gives a kind of partial assent to the methods employed by her brother—if the end is to punish the wicked. On the other hand, as we have seen, the Duke acknowledges the existence and validity of the "good" moral realm by pleading with his son for time to compose himself and repent before he is killed.

In short speeches such as that of the young son, we see Tourneur using a masterful dramatic device: What else—besides lust—should move a man to a woman? The answer is implicit in the play, and the dramatist leaves the question to be answered by the whole play, and by the innate moral consciousness of his audience. This technique of question and implied answer could be construed as moral instruction at its most sophisticated level, and it is not surprising that the Puritan literalists overlooked such subtly presented instruction.

Lussurioso warns his foster-brother not to jest, not to trust an axe too far. The young son replies:

> I thanke you troth, good admonitions faith,  
> If Ide the grace now to make vs of them.  

*[I.ii]*

Specifically the young son means that he is in no position to
make use of good advice in his present predicament. Beneath
this primary sense is the dramatist's concept of "grace" as
it is manifested in Gratiana. Unlike Gratiana, who loses
"grace," but through sorrow regains it, the young son is unre-
pentent. "My fault being sport," he says, "let me but die in
jest." And to make clear the fact that he feels neither shame
nor disgust at his evil act, he says:

Well then tis done, and it would please me well
Were it to doe agen: sure shees a Godsse,
For ide no power to see her, and to liue.
It falls out true in this for I must die,
Her beauty was ordayne to be my scaffold...

The judges prepare to sentence the young son over his
mother's objections, but the Duke defers judgment until the
next sitting, and Ambitioso tells his brother that he and Super-
vacuo will work for his release.

As the younger brother is removed by a guard, the Duke
and judges exit; the Duchess, angered at the Duke's refusal
to free her "yongest deerest sonne" unconditionally, vows to
be revenged on him.

I le kill him in his fore-head, hate there feede,
That wound is deepest tho it neuer bleed:
And here comes hee whom my heart points vnto,
His bastard sonne, but my loues true-begot.

[I.ii]
Spurio approaches and greets the Duchess. As he kisses her hand, she says, "I think youd feare to kisse my hand too if my lip stood there." He kisses her boldly in reply, and the Duchess mixes talk of love with arguments intended to stir up Spurio against the father who had got him out of wedlock.

"Who would not be revenged of such a father," the Duchess says,

E'en in the worst way? I would thanke that sinne,
That could most injury him, and bee in league with it.
Oh what a griefe 'tis, that a man should live
But once in this world, and then to live a Bastard,
The curse a' the wombe, the theefe of Nature,
Begot against the sequent commandement,
Halfe damd in the conception, by the iustice
Of that unribred euerlasting law.

The Duchess' speech cleverly mixes and confuses the two moral orders existing in the play. She talks of the seventh commandment, and of bastardy as the "theefe of Nature," in that the legitimate spouse is robbed of her right by the illicit act of the father. She seems influenced by Calvinistic concepts, too. That a bastard should be damned out of hand is in line with the extreme Calvinist position that evil is punished, as the Old Testament has it, even to "the seventh generation."

What she has to say of the "wrong" in the Duke's having fathered Spurio out of wedlock is reasonable enough. But her conclusion is both faulty and self-interested. She wishes to gain Spurio
for a lover both because she wants to punish the Duke by cuckolding him, and because she desires Spurio physically. Her seeming concern for the injustices he has suffered is obviously a subterfuge designed to make him more agreeable to her suggestion. But her mixing the terms of the two orders, an apparent concern with the moral wrong done Spurio on the one hand, and the concept of revenge on the other, is in line with the method that Tourneur has chosen for the purpose of reinforcing both currents of morality as they course through the play, and in order to give depth and dimension to his people. The 'oblique' and the 'right' should certainly be put forth in any play that pretends to a profound and significant insight into human experience--and if the play is to 'hold a mirror up to nature' it is further necessary that it complicate each character somewhat by fusing the terms of both the 'oblique' and the 'right' into the dialogue. In this way, Tourneur keeps both ethical concepts before his audience. The very fact that a strong argument for revenge is made by the Duchess subtly weakens the grounds of the case for revenge itself. For a lecher to praise a virgin is to bring her reputation into question, and much the same principle applies here.

Let it be clear that this line of reasoning should not
be misunderstood. I am by no means attempting to demonstrate that the play is a broadside against the revenge convention either in drama or in life. It seems doubtful to me that Tourneur could have so intended it. Rather the play shows the whole concept of revenge and that 'special' individual morality attached to it being called into question. The answer provided by The Revenger's Tragedy does not seem to me to be unequivocal. It is rather a statement of the ethical problem and the two kinds of "morality" inevitably connected with it: that of the public or "eternal" order constantly invoked by Vendice, and recognized by the Duke and Duchess in their speeches, and to which Antonio and Gratiana and Castiza all belong; and the secondary order, a synthetic one, I think, which Vendice and Hippolito have created for the purpose of avenging themselves against the Duke. One could, I suppose, posit the Duke's court as a third level, a kind of "anti-moral" sphere. But the court, being consistently evil, presents no problem. The Puritans would have been perfectly justified in condemning almost every speech and attitude attributed to those connected with the court.

The real ethical problem consists in this: how far can the realm of public "eternal" morality condone the individual
moral sphere occupied by Vendice and Hippolito? The ironic paradox of the play rests in the fact that if Vendice is to be placed with the "good" figures, we must somehow reconcile his use of the very methods and techniques of the "bad" faction. This sort of problem is, I think (as does F. T. Bowers whom we shall discuss in a moment), unique in Elizabethan drama. Tourneur has refused to simplify his characters in the interest of easy identification of "good" and "bad" by the audience. An Elizabethan audience would immediately recognize the members of the Duke's court as the very personifications of vice—and would see in Antonio a longsuffering man of great moral integrity, in Castiza a chaste maiden, in Gratiana a woman pressed beyond her ability to resist temptation, yet one who reforms satisfactorily. But what shall they think of Vendice and Hippolito? "Every previous thoroughgoing villain had known he was a villain," Bowers says, "and he was excessively anxious to make that fact clear to the audience..." But Vendice is of a "scholler's" disposition; he does not want to become involved in the court. He is forced to do so by the double motive of his desire for revenge and his hatred of the moral evil abounding in the court. He is justified personally—but is he justified in that "eternall eye" that receives so much attention
in his speeches and those of the other characters? He thinks he is, but it seems to me that Tourneur is suggesting another answer.

An interesting and, I think, incisive discussion of the play as revenge tragedy—with a difference—has been forwarded by Bowers: "That Tourneur has actually formed Vindici as a villain and so at last exposes him, as a triumph in objective character-portrayal—a very rare occurrence on the Elizabethan stage." I cannot agree that Tourneur has given us a clear-cut portrayal of villainy in Vendice, but the objective portrayal, unless it is carefully examined in its whole moral context, would appear in that light. "Vindici's wrongs," Bowers says, "are as real as any hero revenger's." More important than this, he feels, especially insofar as the audience's sympathy is concerned, "Vindici is seen in the light of a moral purger of a corrupt court." 21

Here, then, is presented to the audience a revenger with entirely adequate motives of blood-revenge, one who is a purifier of the state and, unlike the traditional villain, firmly believes in his own salvation. 22

Bowers' estimate of Vendice's position is excellent. But he fails to draw from his analysis the conclusion that seems to me to be obvious: if Vendice is subjectively justified, and if the audience is compelled to side with him at least partially,
then we have but two alternative conclusions at hand: first, that the play, contrary to the weight of criticism, is truly a tragedy in the same sense that Lear or Hamlet are tragedies. This conclusion forces us to place Antonio in the camp of the Duke, or to at least consider him as another kind of "evil" character. The substance of the play, however, will not support this interpretation.

The second alternative is that, agreed, Vendice is subjectively justified in his action, but that there is a public morality, an eternal order beyond his own, and that Antonio is the instrument of that order, its representative (along with Castiza and Gratiana who serve as representatives of the order in a more passive sense), and its spokesman in the final scene of the drama. But what we must recognize is that this finale, though surprising, is no tour de force. As we are attempting to demonstrate, it has been prepared for carefully by Tourneur's constantly placing either direct or implicit references to the truly moral order in the mouths of his characters, or by inverting that order ironically as in the speech of the youngest son that we have discussed. The feeling of an eternal and unchanging moral order beyond the closed and poisonous circuit of the court is constant, and by this consistency, Tourneur
prepares for the "instruction" of Vendice's condemnation through the entire play. This point is well stated by Bowers, still I would point out again that he conceives Vendice as a villain--though I cannot say on what grounds--instead of recognizing that the play is a veiled and limited questioning of the moral validity of revenge:

Not until the startling anti-climax does the cold reason of a normal person with whom the audience can identify itself enter the play. The moment Antonio speaks, the spectators are oriented and the true horror of the smirking admissions of Vindici and his brother is realized. 23

Bowers seems to be confused in his next remarks, for he says, "This absence of a normal character to act as a touchstone accounts...for the...acceptance of the lurid deeds of the revenger, particularly when the playwright's own views are so completely hidden." 24 If Antonio's condemnation of Vendice and his brother are those of a coldly reasoning person, how are we to conclude that no normal person is present in the play? The two statements are contradictory. We have Antonio throughout the play. Our sense of his wronged presence is constant; the youngest son is imprisoned for the rape of his wife, Gratiana and Castiza discuss the occurrence, and finally, as Bowers notes, the slaughter at the masque in which Lussuriosó, Spurio, Ambitioso, and their followers are killed, takes
place through the combined efforts of Vendice, Hippolito, and several of Antonio's friends. Bowers has very nearly solved the problem the play presents, but, in this case, a near miss is as inaccurate as criticism that sees no more than a lurid melodrama when it is confronted with Tourneur's drama. Bowers supplied us with a number of valuable insights, however, and has provided the best criticism of the play to date. We see, after considering his remarks, that the play is not simple; that it is more than a revenge tragedy, and that, as Bowers puts it, "the playwright's views are...completely hidden." But there is still more to see. While the dramatist's views are hidden, they are hidden within the play, and can be traced as we are doing presently, through the separation and understanding of the two currents of moral intention that move within the play, their various intertwinnings, and their mutual opposition to the immorality of the Duke's court.

In returning to the text, we note Spurio's reply to the Duchess' proposal that he become her incestuous lover to avenge himself upon the Duke. "I, there's the vengeance that my birth was wrapt in, Ile be reuenged for all; now hate begin, Ile call foule Incest but a Veniall sinne," he says. And in his statement we again note recognition of that moral order outside the court. Incest is "foule," though Spurio plans to make use
of it. He hesitates after thus proclaiming himself, and says, "Oh one incestuous kiss picks open hell," reinforcing my argument as to his consciousness of the order to which Antonio, Castiza, and Gratiana belong. "Ile arme thy brow with womans Herauldrie," the Duchess says, referring to the Duke, as she exits. Spurio remains on stage and delivers a soliloquy resembling, superficially at least, that of Edmund in *King Lear*:

Duke, thou didst do me wrong, and by they Act  
Adultery is my nature;  
Faith if the truth were knowne, I was begot  
After some gluttonous dinner, some stirring dish  
Was my first father; when deepe healths went round,  
And Ladies cheekes were painted red with Wine,  
Their tongues as short and nimble as their heeles  
Vittering words sweet and thick; and when they rise,  
Were merrily disposed to fall agen,  
In such a whispring and with-drawing houre,  
When base-male-Bawds kept Centinell at stair-head,  
Was I stolne softly; oh--damnation mett  
The sinne of feasts, drunken adultery.  
I feele it swell me; my reuenge is iust...  
Duke on thy browe Ile draw by Bastardie.  

He says further that he hates the Duchess and her sons, as well as the Duke and his legitimate brother, Lussurioso: "--hate all I," Spurio intones. Too, we find the play complicated yet further. Boyer has characterized Vendice as a "malcontent," a man bent on evil with no sufficient motive, but this interpretation, as we have seen, will not hold water. Whatever Vendice's faults, his motivation is more than sufficient. It
is rather in the person of Spurio that we find a figure approaching the Elizabethan figure of the malcontent. While it was judged bad fortune to be a bastard son, it was hardly to be equated with having one's fiancé poisoned and the virtue on one's sister tried. Spurio enjoys the privileges of the court, and seems to have no deeper motive for his implacable hatred than had Edmund. While this motivation is not necessarily faulty, it fails to justify Spurio as fully as Vendice's wrongs do. Further, Vendice's plot is limited to forthright and direct (insofar as he is able) action: he plans to kill the Duke by whatever means offer themselves. Spurio plans no such action. On the contrary, he plans to commit the serious crime of incest, and in this way to exact at most a subjective revenge for the wrong done him.

By this time it should be clear that The Revenger's Tragedy is an apt name for the play with which we are dealing. Though it has been referred to as The Loyal Brother, according to J. A. Symonds,\textsuperscript{26} we are well satisfied with the present name. The patterns of revenge are practically numberless: Vendice and Hippolito meditate revenge for the death of the former's mistress, and later for the attempt by Lussurioso to compromise their sister. The Duchess is determined to avenge herself on the Duke who has allowed her youngest son to be
imprisoned for such a negligible offense as rape; Spurio will be revenged upon the Duke for his bastardy. The complex interweavings of these strands of the revenge motif provide the substance for the fast pace of the play. At no time are we more than a scene away from one of the central threads of conflict that are knitted into the play's pulsing action.

"What brother? am I farre inough from my selfe?" Vendice asks in the next scene. He is disguised in order to gain service with Lussurioso. As they await Lussurioso, Vendice apostrophizes the guiding spirit of the court:

Let blushes dwell i'th Country. Impudence!
Thou Goddesse of the pallace, Mistris of Mistresses
To whom the costly-perfum'd people pray,
Strike thou my fore-head into dauntlesse Marble;
Mine eyes to steady Saphires: turne my visage,
And if I must needs glow, let me blush inward
That this immodest season may not spy
That scholler in my cheekes, foole-bashfullnes,
That Maide in the old time, whose flush of Grace
Would neuer suffer her to get good cloaths;
Our maides are viser; and are lesse ashamd,
Save Grace the bawde I seldome heare Grace nam'd!

Vendice's character is shown forth more fully. He is of a scholarly and retiring disposition—shall we suggest a comparison with Hamlet?—and he finds it an effort to put on the face that his determined course requires. There is further the ironic reference to "Grace"—and the irony is honed to razor sharpness in Vendice's remark about 'Grace the bawd,' for it
adumbrates the future action of Gratiana, 'Grace,' who indeed succumbs to Vendice's own arguments and offers to play the bawd for her daughter.

When Lussurioso arrives, Hippolito prefers his disguised brother as one "rare for many deepe imployments;" Lussurioso dismisses Hippolito and says to Vendice, "be bould with vs, thy hand." Vendice's reply is indeed bold enough:

With all my heart yfaith. How doest sweete Musk-cat? When shall we lie together? [I.iii]

When the Duke's son asks him his occupation, he replies that he has been a "bone'setter." Lussurioso is amazed, and Vendice clarifies his remark: "A bawde my Lord, one that setts bones toghther." In the sumptuous atmosphere of a Renaissance court, Vendice's slicing through the comfortable padding of time and pleasure operates in much the same manner, one supposes, as did the morality plays—oz, more properly, as they were intended to. Swinburne's phrase for such verbal thrusts of power was "incrimination by photography"—and the photography is of the x-ray variety. The purpose of such dialogue, insofar as the audience was concerned, was to rouse within the spectator that special sensation best suggested by William Dunbar: "timor mortis conturbat me."
Lussurioso's reaction is what one might expect of a noble bred by the Duke's court: "Fit," he says, "fit for me, e'en traynd vp to my hand." He asks what strange lusts Vendice has known, and the disguised revenger obliges with a list calculated to stir whatever loathing or repulsion an audience might possess. He ends his catalogue of abominations with these lines:

...and in the morning
When they are vp and drest, and their masks on,
Who can perceiue this? Saue that eternall eye
That see's through flesh and all...

[1.iii]

Here we see Vendice stating a view that corresponds with the universal moral order posited by Tourneur. The courtly characters are "masked;" their deceit and secret vice is obscured by "Impudence" and falsity, and only the eternal eye of God, which Vendice says can see "through flesh and all," is able to see past the masks worn by the courtly wantons. And it is worth noting that, while Vendice claims this kind of cosmic x-ray power belongs only to the Deity, he himself practices it: he has called himself a "bone-setter," seeing past the sexual embrace, and characterizing it as the coming-together of potential skeletons. In his first speech, he has verbally worn the flesh off "fat folkes," and is engaged throughout the play in a constant anatomizing of the moral natures of his
victims and their society. "Who can perceive this?" Vendice asks, and in his actions we have his own answer: he can. He takes upon himself a function that he expressly admits is the prerogative of God alone. He makes himself judge and executioner, and by doing so violates the "eternall" law, the morality represented by the Antonio-Castiza-Gratiana triangle of characters. If we need more evidence to buttress our view, it is given in Antonio's refusal to revenge himself against the Duke and the court for his wrong, and in his quick sentence when he discovers that Vendice is guilty of the Duke's murder. As we have mentioned, this is the "eternal" or the public morality in action, and such a public ethic must needs punish those who feel free to interpolate their own brand of justice into the received order.

Lussurioso explains his purpose to Vendice, he tells him that there is a virgin living nearby that his "desires tend unto." "It is the only daughter, to Madame Gratiana the late widow." "Oh, my sister, my sister?--" Vendice says aside. Then he composes himself and agrees to pander for Lussurioso, who laughs and tells him that Hippolito is the young woman's brother, and that he has been the unconscious dupe who supplied in Vendice the very means of his sister's downfall. He tells Vendice, too, that if the girl should refuse his advances, he
should approach the mother. Though Vendice does not believe that either his sister or mother will be tempted by the offer of gold from Lussurioso, he decides to make a real effort to break their moral determination. Instead of merely leaving and returning later to say that his efforts were in vain, he purposes actually to carry out his assignment, and tempt daughter and mother with Lussurioso's gold. But even as he resolves to do so, he has already fixed Lussurioso's fate in his mind:

swear me to foul my sister.
Sword I durst make a promise of him to thee,
Thou shall disheire him, it shall be thine honor,
And yet now angry groath is done in me,
It would not prove the meanest policy.
In this disguise to try the faith of both;
Another might have had the selfe same office,
Some slave, that would have wrought effectually,
I and perhaps ore-wrought em, therefore I,
Being thought movayld, will apply my selfe,
Unto the selfe same forme, forget my nature,
As if no part about me were kin to 'em,
So touch 'em,--tho I durst almost for good,
Venture my lands in heaven upon their good.

[I.iii]

Vendice feels somehow compelled to test that same virtue which he is attempting to defend at home and to reinstate in the court. He is quite certain of his own virtue. He speaks of his "lands in heaven" as if his possession of them were already assured. And he is almost as certain of his mother's and sister's virtue. It seems reasonable, in view of the vicious
situation surrounding him, and considering his own hypersensitive moral nature, that Vendice should wish to prove his woman. That such a trial is, in a way, immoral itself, does not occur to Vendice because he has lived too long with the single ambition of destroying the vice that has injured him. One senses a kind of monomaniac fixation with morality in him that would be quite likely to express itself in such a perverse 'test.' What he does not realize is that in his contemplation of revenge, he has retained the outer appearances of the "eternal" morality, but has somehow lost the animating spirit that differentiates the "eternal" morality from Vendice's own perverted interpretation of it.

Scene four of the first act is concerned with Antonio's description of the rape, and his wife's suicide as a consequence of it. We have already discussed the way in which the attitudes expressed by Antonio serve to fix him within the sphere of the public, or "eternal" morality as opposed to the immorality of the court, and, as it turns out, equally opposed to the perverted individual ethic of Vendice and Hippolito. It is significant that Hippolito is present with the other lords as Antonio describes what has happened. When Antonio has finished, Hippolito says, "Twere pity The ruins of so faire a Monument, Should not be dipt in the defacer's blood."
Antonio does not reply to this, and Hippolito turns to the others saying,

I bind you all in steele to bind you surely, 
Heer let your oths meet, to be kept and payd, 
Which else will sticke like rust, and shame the blade; 
Strengthen my vow, that if at the next sitting, 
Judgment speake all in gold, and spare the bloud 
Of such a serpent, e'en before their seats, 
To let his soule out, which long since was found 
Guilty in heauen. 

[I.iv]

The rest agree, and vow, and Antonio makes a significant remark: "Kind Gentlemen, I thanke you in mine Ire." He thanks those who pledge to execute a revenge-judgment. But he does so "in his ire," not coolly and reasonably. What is more important to our study is the manner in which Tourneur allows Hippolito to insert the individual or "revenge" ethic into the situation. Hippolito, like Vendice, is certain of his righteousness. He says that the youngest son "long since was found Guilty in heauen." Like his brother, Hippolito is judge and jury, and is prepared to be executioner if the judges fail to return the verdict that his own ethic demands. Although the point is obscured by the obvious weight in favor of what Hippolito wishes to be the judgement on the youngest son, it is clear upon consideration that Hippolito and Vendice, by virtue of their methods, are at war with the basic premises of civilization and law. The kind of lynch-law they wish to deal
out, while aimed at real and vicious offenders, is against the very substance of any social order. Although Antonio thanks those who have sworn to take the law into their hands if they are not satisfied with the decision of the judges, he takes no active part in it, and does not urge it. As an emotional creature, he thanks them for their anger on behalf of his wrongs; as an intelligent and moral being he waits for that "eternall eye" to see and rectify the evil rampant in the court.

Through his skill in expressing both sides of Antonio's nature, Tourneur has created another multidimensional figure and has triumphed over the simple-formula-morality common to his age. But, again, it is easy to see that the Puritan attackers of the stage, who had, as we have seen, little interest in indicting the stage honestly and objectively, would have found it difficult to follow the torturous convolutions of the moral situation that Tourneur has set up. In his attempt to create figures that possess all the contradictions and subtle shadings of real men and women, Tourneur succeeded primarily in convincing his later critics that his range as a dramatist was "narrow." This being the case, could we expect a more sensitive judgment from the attackers?

The second act opens with the temptation of Castiza by
her disguised brother. As soon as he reveals that he comes from the Duke's son, he receives a box in the ear from Castiza. She states her loathing of Lussurioso and of him who comes as "his sinnes Attourney," and exits. "It is the sweetest Boxe, That ere my nose came nye," Vendice says, "most constant sister, In this thou hast right honorable shwone;" as his mother approaches, he prepares to try her as he has tried his sister. "I will lay Hard seige vnto my Mother, tho I know, A Syrens tongue could not bewitch her so," he says, and salutes her.

He gives her the greeting of "the Next of Italy," Lussurioso, and tells her that he will soon be ruler, and that she is in a position to please him, and thus gain preferment at court when he comes into the dukedom. He says that, were she to convince her daughter that she should submit to Lussurioso's pleasure, wealth and position would be hers. "O fie, fie, the riches of the world cannot hire a mother to such a most unnat- urall taske," she replies. "No," Vendice agrees, "but a thousand Angells can:

Men haue no power, Angells must worke you too't, The world descends into such base-borne euills That forty Angells can make fourscore diuills,... You tooke great paines for her, once when it was, Let her requite it now, tho it be but some; You brought her forth, she may well bring you home. [II.1]

"O heauens," Gratiana cries, "this ouer-comes me." "Not I
hope, already?" Vendice says aside. But she agrees to his proposition,

"It is too strong for me, men know that know vs, We are so weak their words can overthrow vs. He touched me nearly, made my virtues bate When his tongue struck upon my poor estate.

It is not difficult to see a parallel between Gratiana's concern with her position, her estate, and the Duke's concern with his posthumous reputation, and through this interest in the material, in the temporal as opposed to the "eternal" Gratiana falls. After Vendice has given her the money, she hands some small part of it back to him saying, "Let this thank ye your pains." Vendice's acrid humor is equal to the occasion, and he replies, "O you're a kind Madame," punning bitterly upon the two meanings of "madame." Castiza appears, and her mother begins at once to beseech her virtue. Castiza tells her of the message she had received, "sent from the Duke's son To tempt me to dishonorable Act." "Dishonorable Act?" Gratiana exclaims,

    good honorable fool, That wouldst be honest cause thou wouldst be so, Producing no one reason but thy will. And t'as a good report, pretely commended, But pray by whom? mean people; ignorant people, The better sort I'm sure cannot abide it. And by what rule should we square out our lives, But by our betters actions? oh if thou knew'st What t'were to loose it, thou would never keepe it: But there's a cold curse layd upon all Maydes,
Whilst others clip the Sunne they clasp the shades!  
Virginity is paradice lockt vp.  

"I cry you mercy. Lady I mistooke you, Pray did you see my  
Mother?" Castiza replies. Vendice adds his own argument to  
the controversy. "What's honestie?" he asks, "Tis but heavens  
beggar." But Castiza stands firm. As she exits, Vendice makes  
use of ironic statement again to praise her steadfastness:  

O Angels clap your wings upon the skyes,  
And give this Virgin Christall plaudities.  

Indeed those coins called "angels" can but clap their wings  
against the sky; they can find no entry into Castiza's chastity--and Vendice acknowledges the eternal order by claiming  
supernatural praises for his sister's constancy.  

The next scene is an interview between Lussurioso and  
Vendice, with the latter reporting his progress. He says he  
has not yet been able to break Castiza's will,  

Many a Maide has turn'd to Mahomet,  
With easier working; I durst undertake  
Upon the pawn and forfeit of my life  
With halfe those words to flat a Puritanes wife,  
But she is closse and good;--  

Perhaps any attempt to reconcile Tourneur with his antagonists  
fails right here. Such references, not infrequent on the Eliza-  
bethan stage, were the only weapons that the playwrights had  
at hand to use against their overzealous foes. And in any
case, since the "Puritanes wife" is used as an example of indestructable virtue, the attackers would have little to complain of.

Vendice smooths Lussurioso's disappointment by telling him that Castiza's mother is working on his behalf, and Lussurioso departs better pleased, feeling that, having won the mother, the daughter must soon follow. As he exits, Hippolito enters with the intelligence that Spurio is cuckolding his father. "Oh sin foule and deepe," Vendice replies as Spurio and his servants enter on their way to the Duchess' room. "Hell is in his eare." Vendice speaks of the bawdry of the court, and his speech shows the consummate dramatic mastery of Tourneur:

Marke, there, there, that step, now to the Duches, This their second meeting writes the Duke Cuckold With new addition, his horns newly reuiu'd:

"You flow well brother," Hippolito says. "Fuh I'me shallow yet, Too sparing and too modest; shall I tell thee? If every trick were told that's dealt by night There are few here that would not blush out right.

The last couplet is obviously directed to the audience itself, and illustrates the playwright's consciousness of that audience. Whatever his moral concern may be, one cannot escape
the opinion that he is attempting to communicate that concern to his auditory. At the same time, it is doubtful that any audience would be able to make the precise distinctions that are necessary in order to separate the morality of the play from that of its most vital and energetic figure. To some degree, at least, Tourneur's subtility must have been lost on an Elizabethan audience.

Lussurioso enters, Hippolito falls back, behind an arras perhaps, and Lussurioso tells Vendice that he has chosen this hour to "tast of that yong Lady." "Heart, and hell," Vendice replies aside, and is about to kill Lussurioso when an alternative occurs to him. He tells Lussurioso that Spurio is with the Duchess. "I am mad," Lussurioso cries, and lets Vendice lead him into the Duchess' chamber. As he prepares to slay them both, he is amazed to discover that the Duke is with his wife. At the Duke's call nobles, Ambitious, and Supervacu rush in. Lussurioso is completely confused by the unexpected turn of events, and pleads that he had no intention of slaying his father. Vendice, who is as surprised as Lussurioso, says, "Tis now good policie to be from sight; His vicious purpose to our sisters honour is crost beyond our thought."

As he and Hippolito exit, Spurio comes in. Lussurioso attempts to tell his father his real purpose, but the Duke will not
hear him, and sends him to prison saying, "Death shall not long lag after him." Lussurioso pleads with his half-brothers to speak on his behalf, and they agree to do so. As soon as he is taken out, Spurio following to discover what his offense has been, Supervacuo and Ambitioso discuss the best manner to assure his early execution. Ambitioso says

Now brother, let our hate and louse be woven
So subtly together, that in speaking one word for his life,
We may make three for his death,
The craftiest pleader gets most gold for breath.

Ambitioso speaks as a very epitome of the court and its moral attitude. Like his brother and the bastard, like both the Duke and Duchess, perfidy and duplicity is his nature. The two sons of the Duchess proceed to 'plead' for Lussurioso—and to their discomfit, almost succeed in gaining his freedom. They change their argument when his release seems imminent, and the Duke pretends to agree to Lussurioso's execution. As they exit with his signet ring to see Lussurioso executed, the Duke shows his true intention:

sure it was
But some mistaken furie in our sonne,
Which these aspiring boyes would climbe vpon:
He shall bee releasde suddenly.

At this point several nobles enter and plead for Lussurioso's
pardon and freedom. The Duke grants it at once, and as the
nobles go to free his son, the Duke reveals his consciousness
of the eternal moral order once more:

It well becomes that Judge to nod at crimes,
That dos commit greater himself and liues:
I may forgive a disobedient error,
That expect pardon for adultery
And in my old daies am a youth in lust:
Many a beauty have I turnd to poysen
In the denial, covetous of all,
Age hot, is like a Monster to be seene:
My haires are white, and yet my sinnes are Greene. [II.1]

The Duke not only acknowledges the existence of an order ex-
terior and superior to his own, he further describes himself
in terms much like those applied to him by Vendice at the
beginning of the play. Most striking of all, he admits the
charge of having poisoned young women who denied his attentions
—not just Gloriana, apparently, but others besides. Tourneur
uses this opportunity to formulate the exact condition of the
court's immorality so that its opposition to both moral cur-
rents in the play will be clear during the turmoil to follow.

Act three opens with an animated discussion between Super-
vacuo and Ambitioso. They decide to bypass the judges and
take the Duke's ring directly to the officers in hopes that
Lussurioso will be dispatched more quickly. But even as they
exit, Lussurioso passes, freed by the nobles who had gained
his pardon. In scene three of Act three, Ambitioso and Super-
ervacuo give the Duke's signet to an officer with the order to
execute "the Dukes sonne." They exit, and the officers bring
forth the only "Dukes sonne" still available for execution: the
youngest son.

The youngest son thinks at first he is to be released.
When he is told that his brothers have brought the warrant for
his execution, he cannot believe it:

here came a letter now,
New-bleeding from their Pens, scarce stinted yet,
Would Ie beene tore in peeces when I tore it,
Looke you officious whoresons words of comfort,
Not long a prisoner.

"It sayes true in that sir, for you must suffer presently,"
the first officer replies. "Knauish exposition," the youngest
son retorts: "Well get thee out by a trick, says hee." The
officer tells the youngest son that a trick is four cards—
which referred, in this case, to the four officers who will
bring the youngest son to the scaffold. "Worse and worse deal-
ing," the boy replies. As he goes to his death, he says

    My fault was sweet sport, which the world approues,
    I dye for that which every woman loues.

The "world" that loves such depraved sport is the world of the
court—and one feels the laughing presence of the dramatist
behind the tantalizing promise of freedom that presents itself to the youngest son and then turns suddenly to quite another of "freedom." Both the youngest son and his older brothers—whose letter was quite sincere—are trapped in the web of their vice, and are mutually punished by the ironic and unaided hand of the eternal morality—as D'Auville knocks his own brains out in The Atheist's Tragedy. As Bowers points out, it appears that Vendice is not really needed to precipitate the destruction of the court and its occupants. Given a little more time and the entire collection of villains will be "at each other's throats." The economy of the eternal order, it seems, would use villains to destroy villains, and the honest man—Vendice in this case, as well as his brother—who becomes involved, who comes between eternal vengeance and its object will be crushed. And if he is not destroyed out of hand, he will be warped and metamorphosed by the tension of his position to the point of being unable to differentiate between the morality of the eternal order and that which is peculiarly his own. As the youngest son is disposed of, the dramatist suggests, so would the rest of the court have been purged if Vendice had not usurped the vengeance that by right belongs to the eternal.

Scene five of Act three finds Vendice in a transport of
happiness. He has agreed with the Duke to supply a woman for his use; they are to meet at a lodge withdrawn from the court; and Vendice sees the end of his long wait for revenge at hand. Hippolito enters, and Vendice explains the situation to him. "I, but where's that Lady now?" Hippolito asks. "Be ready, stand with your hat off," Vendice replies as he exits. Hippolito waits musing on what lady of the court or countryside has agreed to an assignation with the Duke. Then Vendice re-enters with the 'lady.' It is the skull of his mistress carefully dressed, as the stage directions have it, "in Tires," that is, a head-dress, and trappings. "Art thou beguild now?" he asks Hippolito,

Tut, a Lady can
At such all hid, beguile a wiser man.
Haue I not fitted the old surfetter
With a quaint piece of beauty? age and bare bone
Are ere allied in action; here's an eye,
Able to tempt a greatman--to serve God,
A pretty hanging lip, that has forgot now to dissemble;
A dunckard claspe his teeth, and not undo e'm.
Heres a cheewe keeps her colour; let the wind go whistle,
Spout Raine, we feare thee not, be hot or cold
Alls one with vs; and is not he absurd,
Whose fortunes are vpon their faces set,
That feare no other God but winde and wet?

[III.v]

Vendice seems to echo Hieronono's 'Why then Ile fit you,' and his monologue seems to steer quite close to hysteria. What
has been previously a matter of preoccupation with Vendice seems now to be what Bowers calls a "buckling of the revenger's moral nature under the burden of an unbearable wrong which he had been too long helpless to right." Even Hippolito says "Why brother, brother." Vendice has more to say, however:

And now me thinkes I cold e'en chide my selfe,
For doating on her beauty, tho her death
Shall be reuengd after no common action;
Do's the Silke-worme expend her yellow labours
For thee? for thee dos she vndoe herselxe?
Are Lord-ships sold to maintaine Lady-ships
For the poore benefit of a bewitching minute?
Why dos yon fellow falsify hie-waies
And put his life betweene the Judges lippes,
To refine such a thing, keepes horse and men
To beate their valours for her?
Surely wee're all mad people, and they
Whome we thinke are, are not; we mistake those,
Tis we are mad in scence, they but in clothes.

I have waited until we reached this particular section of
the play to point out the manner in which Tourneur fulfills
another portion of his duties as those duties were conceived
by the Renaissance critics. If his moral lesson, a hard one,
indeed, is being underlined strongly at this point, Tourneur
is also writing some of the best poetry that his age produced.
It is the paradox of Tourneur's work that he rises to the
very heights of his poetic power when he is either dealing
with death and human folly directly, or when he is handling
the same problems with his own peculiar brand of corrosive
irony. Here he couples pure poetry with irony, and maintains his dramatic effect at the same time: "Why do you fellow falsify his wiles..." he asks—and brings the robber who steals for his love into the dark hunting-lodge with a word. He keeps in perfect focus both skull and silk, and we cannot escape the dreadful logic and frightening truth of his homily. Through the power and beauty of his verse, even the modern reader is caught up in the fascination of his "studies ornament." Is this the end of pride? Does man indeed but weave nets to catch the wind, as John Webster has it? Tourneur does not allow his audience to escape him. The power of plot, the terrible energy of his people—and perhaps most of all, the dark lightning of his poetry grasps the reader or the spectator and, like the wedding-guest, they must stay and listen. "Does every proud and selfe-affecting Dame Camphire her face for this?" Vendice continues, the pressure of his own reflections finally bursting its bonds and flowing freely:

Who now bids twenty pound a night, prepares
Musick, perfumes, and sweete-meates?
Thou maist lie chast now: It were fine me thinkes,
To haue thee seene at Reuells, forgetfull feasts,
And uncleane Brothells; sure twould fright the sinner
And make him a good coward, put a Reueller
Out off his Antick amble
And cloye an Epicure with empty dishes.

I should be noted that Vendice has practically forgotten his
mistress. The skull has become the abstract symbol of the futility of life that is lived in the terms familiar to the Duke's court. The Elizabethan audience would certainly have recognized that the censure applied to the lechery of that court, and to such fleshly corruption in general applied to "luxurs" of all ages and stations. Tourneur has, I think, most successfully brought together the poetic power of the secular drama and the eternally affecting issues of the old Moralities. What secular drama may be said to have failed in, according to those who wish a "lesson" to be taught, is made triumphant in *The Revenger's Tragedy*. What the moralities failed to achieve through lack of subtlety, realism, and art is brilliantly effected through this macabre wedding of both secular and religious dramatic technique and idea. Vendice's catalogue of horrors is well-calculated to make "good cowards" of those Elizabethans who were still close enough to the old medieval tradition to be affected by such emotional appeal. Finally, it seems difficult to believe that Tourneur did not have some such intention in mind. Certainly the long monologue we are presently examining is in no way essential to the play. Vendice's character is not enlarged by it; nothing of the play's action or theme depends on this lengthy speech. Yet Tourneur expends fifty-three lines on it, despite the
fact that economy and terse statement *annuls* a trademark with him. Vendice is serving as a sort of homilist, a preacher, and he uses the same general terms that the divines of the age characteristically employed.

But even here Tourneur does not forget that his is the task of writing a play first. Vendice concludes his speech with an eye to the business at hand:

> I haue not fashiond this onely—for show.  
> And vselesse property; no, it shall beare a part  
> E'en in it owne Revenge. This very skull,  
> Whose mistris the Duke poysoned, with this drug  
> The mortall curse of the earth, shall be reuenged  
> In the like straine, and kisse his lippes to death.  
> As much as the dumbe thing can, he shall feele:  
> What fayles in poyson, weele supply in steele.  

[III.v]

As I noted above, the skull has lost its personal connection with Vendice's mistress. He refers to it as having been owned by her, rather than as a part of her. The skull is now but a dumb thing. Death, he suggests, robs the fleshly remains of any value or significance, and as much as the skull can feel, so will the Duke—after he has kissed the skull. The symbol of death thus becomes the instrument of death as well. The Duke, who has reduced the once beautiful countenance of Vendice's mistress to an impersonal grinning death's head, will soon join it, passing into the land "from which no traveller returns."
As they talk, the Duke approaches and dismisses his attendants. As he enters, Hippolito falls back, and Vendice greets him. In the darkness, at Vendice's urging, he kisses the poisoned skull, and cries out in pain and surprise. Hippolito comes into view, and the Duke appeals to him to call for aid: "Oh, Hippolito? call treason." "Yes my good Lorde," Hippolito answers, stamping on him as he falls, "treason, treason, treason."

While the Duke moans in agony, Vendice exposes himself, and tells the Duke his reasons for poisoning him. Holding the skull before him, he says, "Looke monster, what a Lady hast thou made me, My once bethrothed wife." "Is it thou villain?" the Duke cries out, "Then I'me betrayde." "And let this comfort thee:" Vendice adds, "our Lord and Father Fell sick vpon the infection of they frownes, and dyed in sadnesse; be that thy hope of life."

The Duke's agonies continue, and Vendice administers the final turn of the screw: "(marke me duke) Thou'rt a renowned, high, and mighty Cuckold." As the Duke squirms under the relentless attack, Vendice tells him that his bastard "rides a hunting in thy browe." "Millions of deathes," the Duke moans. Vendice then adds the final touch: "Here in this lodge they meete for dammed clips, Those eyes shall see the incest of
their lips." "Is there a hell besides this, villaines?" The Duke rasps, strangely vocal for one in intense pain. "Villain?" Vendice retorts. "May heaven is just,...I nere knew yet Adulterer without hornes."

This last reply of Vendice's illustrates his own subjective certainty that his is a righteous cause. He is able to discourse freely of villainy and of justice and of heaven, for, he feels, he is no offender.

Spurio and the Duchess enter, and Vendice whispers to his brother.

If he but wink, not brooking the foule obiect,
Let our two other hands teare vp his lido,
And make his eyes like Comets shine through bloud;
When the bad bleeds, then is the tragedy good.

Tourneur's poetry again rises through horror to a macabre beauty, and, of more relevance to our subject, the last line of Vendice's speech suggests that he considers himself an actor in a play. "When the bad bleedes, then is the Tragedie good," he says, feeling that he is involved in a "tragedy" rather than a human action. Hippolito also seems to consider himself and his brother almost as figures in a Morality. "You vowed once To give me share to every tragick thought".

If Tourneur's dramatic control ever fails during the course of The Revenger's Tragedy, it is at this point. His
obvious attempt to delineate the morality caste that tinges the play causes its otherwise realistic—if any Elizabethan drama can or should be so called—dialogue to take on the stiff and conventional atrophy of the late medieval set-speeches. It is well that Vendice serves as a purger of the court's villainy; it is intolerable and ruinous to the play's integrity for him to conceive of himself as a sort of armed abstraction, a fleshless instrument through which that vengeance strikes.

For the vengeance he wreaks is his and his alone. He is not the agent of providence. The death of the Duke and the chain of destruction he is forging has been conceived and developed by him and by Hippolito. He has spoken of his Gloriana, and of his "schollers cheeke," thus establishing his humanity. If we are confronted with a Vendice who denies this slender thread of personal identity, the play will become nothing more than a cluttered morality lacking the clearcut issues and treatments of that genre and adding little to the morality's profound oversimplification of human problems. Fortunately Tourneur avoids setting up a continuing pattern of such speeches, and the action moves forward, allowing us to be "delighted" as we are "instructed."

Spurio and the Duchess kiss and embrace as the mortally
injured Duke is forced to look on. When Spurio hesitates, and seems about to withdraw from the illicit relationship, saying that the "best side to vs, is the worst side to heauen," the Duchess replies that it is thoughts of the Duke that move him to repudiate her. "But I protest by yonder waxen fire, Forget him, or ile poyson him," she says, unaware of the terrible irony of her speech.

Perhaps we could find no better wedding of language and situation to illustrate Cyril Tourneur at his best. As the poisoned Duke lies under the pos'ded knives of Vendice and Hippolito, forced to watch the fumblings and embraces of his own illegitimate son and his wife, she swears by the sullen waxen fire in the lodge grate that she will poison her husband if his bastard does not forget the Duke and make love to her. The countless overtones elicited by this careful and artistic juxtaposition of plot and dialogue must have produced an indescribable effect on an Elizabethan audience bred to believe in hell, and to dread incest and marital irregularity--and above all to loath the Italianate Machiavellian figures that slaughtered and gloated on the stage. If this were an isolated example, we might attribute it to luck. But Tourneur is able to reproduce his effects time and again. The scene above resembles in tone and effect the powerful opening scene wherein
Vendice describes the Duke and his court and, in his description, predicts the very train of vice that later comes into being. This ironic intensity is brought to fever pitch again when, casting away his disguise in Act four, Vendice is retained by Lussurioso to kill "Pianto," that character he himself had assumed in his disguise. It occurs still again, as we shall see, when a noble, upon the discovery of the Duke's body, says that murderers invariably expose themselves. "He were an Asse then yfaith," Vendice says aside, and Tourneur varies his technique here by letting the remark lie dormant in the consciousness of his audience until those last fatal seconds wherein Vendice does expose himself and his brother, and is condemned for it. "Now I remember too," Vendice says as he is about to be led to his death, "here was Pianto Brought forth a knauish sentence once—no doubt (said he) but time Will make the murderer bring forth himselfe. Tis well he died," Vendice concludes, "he was a witch." [V.iii] Such examples of Tourneur's ironic genius are many, and each is used to reinforce the eternal morality that pervades the substance of the play.

As the Duke watches his wife and bastard son play him false, he attempts to speak. "I cannot brooke—" he cries, and instantly Vendice and Hippolito knife him. "The Brooke is turnd to bloud," Vendice viciously puns. As the Duchess
and Spurio leave, unaware of the murder that has taken place within a few feet of them, Supervacuo and Ambitioso enter. They laugh gleefully and congratulate themselves on the clever plot through which, they think, they have had Lussurioso executed. Ambitioso tells his brother he has a trick to get the youngest son, executed in Lussurioso's place, released. Before the trick is revealed, an officer comes in with the "yet bleeding head" that they suppose to be Lussurioso's. As the officer describes the manner in which the youngest son met his death, Lussurioso enters. The two brothers are speechless with surprise. He thanks them for the assistance he thinks they have rendered him and leaves. The officer then explains whose head it is he bears, and the brothers are horrified. "Villaine," Supervacuo says with terrible though unconscious humor, "Ile brain thee with it." "Did we dissemble?" Ambitioso asks. "Bring warrant for thy death?" Supervacuo questions. "there's none of these wiles," Ambitioso moralizes, 

That euer come to good: I see now, there is nothing sure in mortalitie, but mortalitie; [III.vi]

Again it is the eternal morality that receives statement in the mouth of an unlikely advocate. Whatever the Puritan and other attackers might say to the contrary, it is obvious that Tourneur misses no opportunity to express those principles
that motivate his "good" characters and finally undo his "bad" ones.

Act four opens with an encounter between Lussurioso and Hippolito. Lussurioso at first blames Hippolito for having preferred the villainous Plato who had led him to attack his father. Hippolito mollifies him, and Lussurioso turns his wrath on Vendice, who is still disguised, as he enters. Vendice exits quickly, and Hippolito offers to bring his brother Vendice to the court for whatever "employment" the Duke's son may have for him. As Hippolito exits, Lussurioso plans to have Vendice "kill" the villainous Plato. Some nobles enter, tell Lussurioso that the Duke is away from court, and the group exits as Hippolito and Vendice, undisguised now, re-enter.

The two brothers discuss what Lussurioso may wish Vendice to do; then the Duke's son enters and after meeting and talking generally with Vendice, he tells the brothers that Plato, the disguised Vendice, has tempted him (Lussurioso) to corrupt their sister with jewels and money. "He shall surely die that did it," Vendice says, the Tourneuresque irony rising again. Lussurioso then commissions Vendice to kill Plato, and says, "Thy name, I haue forgot it?" "Vendice, my lord," is the answer.
Luss. Tis a good name that.

Vend. I, a revenger.

Luss. It do betoken courage, thou shouldst be valiant, And kill thyne enemies.

Vend. Thats my hope my Lord.

Luss. This slave is one.

Vend. Ile doome him.

As Ellis-Fermor suggests, each of Vendice's speeches underlines itself. The fierce irony builds toward the play's inexorable conclusion, and the effect of such lines upon an audience can easily be imagined. Vendice agrees to execute the villainous Plato, and Lussurioso exits leaving Hippolito confused and apprehensive. "Brother we loose our selues," he says. How will Vendice accomplish this commission? Neither Vendice nor Tourneur are yet bereft of "practice," however, and Vendice soon explains his policy to Hippolito. They will get the Duke's body, dress it in Vendice's disguise, prop it up somewhere and pretend to kill 'Plato.' When it is discovered to be the Duke's body, the discoverers will assume that Plato killed the Duke and dressed him in his own cast-off clothes. Thus Vendice and Hippolito will be beyond suspicion, and the mysterious Plato will be disposed of. Further, such a plan will keep the court from prying too deeply into the Duke's
death. They will be certain to accept the obvious: the Duke has been killed by the vanished Piatto.

Before carrying out this portion of their plan, Vendice determines to "conjure that base diuill out of our Mother." They appear in scene four of act four dragging her out of the house with daggers in their hands. This scene has been discussed at some length earlier as we attempted to trace the evidence for Tourneur's full characterization of Vendice, and to refute that criticism that conceived Tourneur's people to be no more than "grotesques" or "articulated skeletons."

There remains little to say about the scene and its reference to the play's entirety. It simply serves to illustrate Gratiana's return to the sphere of "eternal" morality through her repentence of having temporarily fallen into the sphere of courtly immorality by accepting Lussurioso's money and offering to prostitute her daughter.

The final act begins with Hippolito and Vendice propping the Duke's body up, and waiting for Lussurioso. Vendice asks if he comes alone. If he does, Vendice says, this is the time and the place to kill him. "Hee brings flesh-flies after him," Hippolito says, and Vendice steels himself to await a better chance: "oh I'me mad to loose such a sweete oppor-
tunity," he says.
Lussurioso enters, sees the propped body of his father leaning against a support, and takes it for Piato. "Shall we kill him now hees drunke?" Vendice asks. "Let him reele to hell," Lussurioso replies. Vendice stabs the body; and as it falls, Lussurioso discovers it to be his father's. As Vendice and Hippolito have planned, he imagines that Piato is guilty of the murder. "My royall father, too basely let bloud," Lussurioso says, "By a maleuolent slaue." "Harke," Hippolito says to Vendice, "he calls thee slaue agen." Vendice sneers and replies, "Ha!s lost, he may."

As soon as the shock of his father's death passes, Lussurioso begins to understand that he is now the Duke. His first act is to banish the Duchess, and declare revels—as soon as the Duke's funeral can be hastily completed. The new Duke exits leaving the other brothers who had gathered around the body to speake their plans. Each of the three, Spurio, Ambitioso, and Supervacuo is determined to kill Lussurioso and the others and gain the dukedom for himself.

In scene two, Vendice and Hippolito meet with Piero, a friend of Antonio's and other lords and plan to cleanse the monstrousous court while the festivities are in progress:

---Reuels are toward,
And those few Nobles that have long suppressed you,
Are busied to the furnishing of a Maske:
And do affect to make a pleasant taile ont,...
Within a straine or two we shall finde leasure,
To steale our swords out handsomly,
And when they thinke their pleasure sweete and good,
In midst of all their ioyes, they shall sigh bloud.  

[V.ii]

The others agree to the plan, and Vendice has succeeded even as Hippolito had done earlier. He has managed to insert his own method—drawn from a careful and lengthy study of the court--into those who have been outside both the court's immorality and outside the peculiar personal ethic he has shaped for himself. Antonio's friends are influenced by Vendice and Hippolito even as Gratiana had been influenced by Lussurioso's gold. Their own morality and vision is subtly steered off course by Vendice's words.

The third scene opens apparently just after Lussurioso has been invested with the ducal office. As his nobles give him their good wishes, he plans the extinction of his brothers:

That foule-Incontinent Duchesse we have banisht;
The Bastard shall not liue: after these Reuells
Ile begin strange ones; hee and the stepsonnes,
Shall pay their liues for the first subsidies.
We must not frowns so soone, else t'ad beene now.  

[V.iii]

Even as he plans to destroy his opposition, he sees a blazing star flash across the sky—an evil omen to the Elizabethans. "It showes great anger," says one of the lords when Lussurioso asks him the meaning of the omen.
Perhaps we might say that Tourneur shows himself in the "bushing-flaring star." The cosmic anger that has brooded above and behind the vicious course of the play's action is about to establish its own incontrovertible justice. The anger is Tourneur's; it is not simply directed at the Duke and his circle. Tourneur, who is the "God of creation" insofar as the play's universe is concerned, is about to loose his own swift doom on the tangled clutter of evil and deceit that breeds in and around the court. And in line with the eternal morality that he chooses to be spokesman for, he purges all that is not commensurate with the eternal order and its justice. Vendice's subjective righteousness will not preserve him, and, if Bowers' ideas on the attitude of middle-class audiences at this time are correct, the spectators will at least realize why Vendice is made to fall. "...the audience sentimentally sympathized with the Kydian hero revenger and hoped for his success, but only on condition that he did not survive."\(^ {31} \) In this ambivalent manner the Elizabethan mind reconciled the revenge code with the Christian conscience. By the time that *The Atheist's Tragedy* was published in 1611, however, Bowers claims that the revenge hero had lost all advocates. "...the bourgeois drama--most representative of the people--shows unmistakably
an aversion to the ideals and spirit of the revenge play." Bowers manages to divide this reaction to the revenge hero into periods: the first is one of acceptance—provided, as he said, that the hero did not survive; "Who but an incurable sentimentalist could conceive of Hamlet's receiving the crown after the death of Claudius, marrying, and living happily ever after?" Such figures as Hamlet, Bowers goes on to say, "were unbalanced by the force of the shock and the burden of their difficult duty... they were so twisted and warped by their overwhelming experiences that they could never return again to a normal life on earth." This was the period during which The Spanish Tragedy was one of the most popular plays on the stage. The second period, according to Bowers' division, is the one that chiefly concerns us. In the second period, the revenge villain reigns supreme. "The plays of the second period [about 1607-1623] showed a disapproval of revenge by their putting it in the hands of villains, but this disapproval was more implied than expressed." It is precisely this implied disapproval that we have found in Tourneur's play. Not only is it "implied," but the disapproval is so inserted into the play as to remain
almost undetected until the final scene. Still, if the audience is surprised by Vendice's condemnation, it would, in the final scene, see the "eternal" justice, the "angry star" that destroys Vendice as a usurper of its rights. The eternal order must adjust society as it sees fit. Vendice has confounded himself by coming between the wrath of that order and the court that it would have ultimately cleansed. As D'Amville knocks out his own brains in *The Atheist's Tragedy*, so Vendice gives himself over to the executioner. Eternal justice, which brooks no interference or usurpation from mortals, has turned him against himself in the economy of its realignment of a corrupt society.

If the condemnation of the revenge concept begins in the first decade of the seventeenth century, it may well be that *The Revenger's Tragedy* provides a perfect transition between *The Spanish Tragedy*, *Hamlet*, and such plays as *A Fair Quarrel* and *The Fatal Dowery* wherein revenge and the *code duello* are openly condemned.

As Lussurioso turns from the fatal star that flares over his doomed court, and begins to enjoy the masque, he is unaware that the disguised maskers are Vendice, Hippolito, and their confederates. The dance ends, and the maskers draw their swords and kill Lussurioso and the three nobles seated at table with him. Thunder sounds, and Vendice restates the
"morality play" theme that we have observed twice before in his speeches:

No power is angry when the lust-ful die;
When thunder claps, heauen likes the tragedy.  
[V.iii]

Again Tourneur's irony implies the defect that carries Vendice to his doom. The star has been called "angry"—but it is not merely angry at Lussurioso and his party. Its vindictive influence is directed at the whole sequence of evil that is taking place beneath it. The thunder is complementary to the star, and Vendice misinterprets its meaning. Heaven is angry, and the thunderclap sounding as Vendice and the others execute their vengeance is a warning to them as the star was to Lussurioso. The new Duke has ignored his warning—and has been destroyed as a consequence. Vendice misinterprets his—and will shortly be similarly destroyed. Lussurioso does not think of the eternal order, and has as a result little chance of understanding the meaning of the star. Vendice's crime is more terrible: he has twisted the eternal moral order to his own purposes. He has set himself up as the instrument and the interpreter of that order. What he conceives to be just, is just—for him at least. And heaven's vengeance is no slower to destroy a perverted "instrument" than it is to immolate a corrupt court. Unwilling to await the decree of the eter-
nal order, determined to force justice of his own devising, he has become liable even as the Duke and his court is liable, for crimes against the unchanging morality of heaven. Even that evil done in the name of justice and decency is no less evil.

Spurio and his followers enter at this point, discover the new Duke and his retainers murdered, and fall upon Ambitioso and his people who have entered at the same time. In the ensuing combat Spurio and Ambitioso are both killed, and Vendice, ever ready to take advantage of a situation, shouts, "Pistolls, treason, murder, helpe, guard my Lord the Duke."

Antonio enters to take charge of the situation at this juncture, and Vendice blames the murder of Lussurioso on one of Ambitioso's attendants. The man is sent to execution as Vendice turns to Antonio, who is now Duke, and says, "The rape of your good Lady has beene quited, with death on death."

This statement is the morality of Vendice as revenger in compendium. And Antonio's reply serves as the perfect contrast for it. "Just is the Lawe above," he replies, thinking that the eternal law has wreaked this vengeance. And so, indeed, it has. But Vendice has not been the passive instrument of that law. He has taken an unlawful initiative, and in doing so, has called down that same justice upon himself.
The eternal law has used him for its purposes, but he is still responsible for the willful actions he himself has committed against that law.

"Of all things it puts me most to wonder," Antonio says, "How the old Duke came murdred." Vendice, finally too clever, too politic for his own preservation, attempts to gain the Duke-apparent's good will. "We may be bould to speake it now, Twas somewhat witty carried tho we say it. Twas we two murdred him." "Lay hands upon those villains," Antonio says. "Ist come about?" Vendice cries out in surprise. But he recovers quickly, and faces his doom as stoically as he had waited for his revenge. "We haue enough," he tells Hippolito, "Yfaith, we're well, our Mother turnd, our Sister true, We die after a nest of Dukes, adue." Thus Vendice and Hippolito go to the scaffold still convinced that their course of action was righteous. But Antonio, standing amid the human rubble of the destroyed and empty court, delivers the last word—a word for the morality that survives both the transitory viciousness of the court that is no more, and the individual ethic that has dared pretend to stand beside the eternal: "Pray heauen," Antonio pleads, "their bloud may wash away all treason." And the treason is ended: the multiple betrayals that the play has borne witness to are hushed in death, and the various betrayers of the eternal moral order are no more. The universe of the play belongs now to those who have held
to a morality above corruption and beyond individual ethics.

Because of the detailed nature of my commentary on the text of the play, I feel that a minimum of final explanation will suffice to show the connection between the several parts of this study.

It was our observation that poetry's defense was primarily based on the value of poetry as morally instructive, and, beyond mere philosophy, delightful as well. The principal method of this moral communication, we noted, was allegory.

Certainly the Revenger's Tragedy fulfills every demand of poetry's apologists. Its acrid irony cuts through pretense and duplicity and shows "the skull beneath the skin." It attempts to establish the eternal morality that will not be denied. Its medieval attitude is, I should say, superrealistic; for that man's temporal end is the grave is undeniable. And what terrors may await the immoralist or the perverter or morality beyond that grave is a question beyond human power to answer. Tourneur's answer is an ancient one: "Remember man, that thou art dust--and to dust thou shalt return." This is the text that the Revenger's Tragedy provides an extended gloss upon. The relentless homily, the uninterrupted ironic spotlight on every dislocation in the play's moral situation, the constant mention of heaven and the consciousness of an order outside the court and its environs to which all the persons of the play are responsible: these are the elements that justify Legouis'
calling the drama a "morality." And these are the techniques
Tournier has used to inculcate his terrible lesson.

But no matter how terrible we may find the play's plot,
no matter how distasteful its characters, we cannot ignore the
dark latent beauty of its poetry. Its imagery and metaphor
is powerfully conceived and perfectly executed. As two critics
have pointed out, Tournier's technique and his poetic power
are of the first order. He must be compared with Shakespeare
and Webster as poet and dramatist. It may be that The Revenger's
Tragedy is too slight a peg to hang the reputation of genius
upon; but if we judge Tournier by quality instead of quantity,
he needs no apologist as a poet of unusual ability.

We have pointed out the allegorical nature of the play.
That allegory runs parallel with the plot itself. Lussurioso
is first a personage; on the second level he is the personi-
fication of lust. It is this very fact that critics, as we
have noted, attack in the play. They seem to see allegory
alone in The Revenger's Tragedy.

We have examined the allegorical nature of the play. Lus-
surioso is first a personage; on a secondary level, he is the
personification of lust—as Vendice is the personification of
vengeance, Spurio the personification of the wronged bastard
son. The play is not simple allegory, but the allegorical
movement of it, the constant morality-play implications that throned about each scene and thread their way through each lengthy speech,—these elements and their effect are inescapable.

Whatever else one may say about The Revenger's Tragedy, it seems to me that it fulfills every condition that the defenders of poetry set forth in their various discussions. It is moral—with a vengeance; it operates through a cleverly-handled and highly sophisticated allegorical machinery that utilizes all the dramatic strengths of the form without rendering the play's characters lifeless and devoid of personality. The just survive, the evil are punished, and those who, in the words of scripture, "are neither hot nor cold," those who attempt some individual reconciliation of the attitudes of the eternal morality with the methods of the immoral court, are punished too. The moral attitude that Tourneur betrays is an Elizabethan one; there are blacks and there are whites. But this logic of clearcut oppositions does not keep him from creating a poetic play that investigated the motives and the dramatic possibilities inherent in situations and characters who are not so conscious of this irreconcilable dichotomy as in Tourneur and his audience. If the moral attitude displayed by Tourneur is restrictive from our point of view, it is well to remember that this attitude was shared by his audience. It
is well, too, to remember that, like all art which we please to call "classical," the real greatness of the play resides in the fact that it transcends and reaches beyond the voluntarily restricted viewpoint that produced it.
Introduction and Chapter I


2. A classic example of the "detailed tempest" is to be found in Deborah Jones' essay, "John Lyly at St. Bartholomew's, or Much Ado About Washing," in Thomas Lodge and Other Elizabethans, edited by Charles J. Sissons (Cambridge, 1933).


4. J. W. H. Atkins; English Literary Criticism in the Renaissance (London, 1949), p. 7. Further evidence of the point in question is the number of books and pamphlets published relating to poetry and the stage at this time. The bibliography of this study cannot pretend to be exhaustive or complete, but some idea may be had by a glance at it.

5. G. Gregory Smith lists 10 anti-stage essays and 2 "defenses of the stage" between 1577-87 in his Elizabethan Critical Essays (Oxford, 1904), p. 61ff. He fails to list the various "Artes of Poetry" by Cox, Webbe, etc., as "defenses" at least by implication.

6. The attitude of the Church toward poetry and drama is no more regular than its attitude toward other social manifestations. If the French Auto-de-fe condemned "witches," the Spanish Inquisition considered such "trials" as superstitious nonsense (see H. C. Lea, History of the Inquisition in Spain, New York, 1906. IV, 212-25), and the same irregularity appears in its attitude toward poetry and drama. Tertullian voiced what was probably a majority opinion when he said "the Author of truth hates the false; he regards as adultery all that is unreal...he never will approve pretended loves, and wraths and groans, and tears." (De Spectacula, XXIII) Yet Aeneas Silvius maintained that such "narrow Churchmen" were to be ignored (De Liberorum Educacione).


22. Piccolomini, p. 129.

23. Harington, p. 123. Henry Peacham, in his *The Compleat Gentleman* (London, 1622), says much the same: "What were the songs of Linus, Orpheus, Amphion, Olympus, and that dittie Iopas sang to his harpe at Dido’s banquet, but Naturall and Morall Philosophie, sweetened with the pleasaunce of Number, that Rudenesse of Barbarisme might the better taste and digest the lessons of ciualitie?"

"The aim of poetry is to give, by imitation, delight to its listeners, leaving the discovery of truth of natural philosophy to the philosopher and the scientist, with their own method of delighting far removed from that of the poet."

It should be added that while critics and apologists of Renaissance poetry and drama repudiated the "simple delight" concept of justifying poetry's existence, a number of the dramatists—including Shakespeare, seem to have accepted it:

John Marston: The Dutch Courtezan (1604) Prologue:

"And if our pen in this seem over slight,
We strive not to instruct, but to delight."

Jonson, Fletcher, and Middleton: The Widow (c. 1620) Prologue:

...to make you merry
Is all th' ambition 't has, and fullest aim
Bent at your smiles, to win itself a name.


27. Sidney, p. 94.


31. Heywood, p. 54.

32. Sidney, p. 91.

33. Lodge, p. 4f.

35. See note 24. In direct opposition to Castelvertoz, Sir William Alexander, Earl of Sterling, in his Anacrisis, or a Censure of Some Poets Ancient and Modern (London, 1634), states: "Language is but the apparel of poesy, which may give Beauty, but not Strength: And when I censure any Poet, I first dissolve the general contexture of his work in several pieces, to see what Sinews it hath, and to mark what will remain behind, when that external Gorgeousness, consisting in the Choice or Placing or Words, as if it would bribe the Ear to corrupt the Judgement, is first removed, or at least only marshalled in its own Degree." It is the substance, the moral significance that Sterling is concerned with. And, in a similar way William Webbe, in his A Discourse of English Poetrie (London, 1586), reprinted in Haslewood, says, "I scorne and spue out the rakehelly rout of our ragged rymers which without learning boaste, without judgement jangle, without reason rage and fume..." (Haslewood, p. 38).


37. Harington, p. 125. In this same regard Phillip Massinger seconds Sidney with a word in favor of drama particularly:

Actors may put in for as large a share
As all the sects of the philosophers:
They with cold precepts (perhaps seldom read)
Deliver, what an honorable thing
The active virtue is: but does that fire
The blood, or will the blood with emulation,
To be both good and great, equal to that
Which is represented on our theatres?

(The Roman Actor, I.iii)

As the philosopher "teacheth obscurely" according to Sidney, the poets are the "popular Philosophers and popular divines." And what the philosophers and preachers deliver in the way of "cold precepts," are brought to the stage in such a way that they "fire the blood" to emulation.


With delight join profit and endeavour
To build their minds up fair, and on the stage
Decipher to the life what honours wait
On good and glorious actions, and the shame
That treads upon the heels of vice.

(The Roman Actor, I.ii)
And John Marston, who seems to be a bit inconsistent in this regard (see note 24), writes as follows in his preface To The Reader in the Malcontent (1604):

Surely I desire to satisfy every firm spirit, who, in all his actions, proposeth to himselfe no more ends then God and vertue doe, whose intentions are always simple.

39. D'Arezzo, p. 130.
41. Sidney, p. 92.
43. Guarino, p. 176.
44. Sidney, p. 90. [The phrase in Aristotle:] "poetry is a more philosophical and higher thing than history: for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular." (in W. J. Bate, p. 15).
45. Guarino, p. 175.
46. E. M. W. Tillyard notes this fact in his The Elizabethan World Picture, (New York, 1944). "Everything had to be included and everything had to be made to fit and to connect. For instance, it would not do to enjoy the Aeneid as the epic of Augustan Rome: the poem had to be fitted into the current theological scheme and was interpreted as an allegory of the human soul from birth to death," (p.3). J. W. H. Atkins states in his English Literary Criticism: The Renaissance (London, 1947), that "it was the 15th century Italian humanists who first broke away from medieval traditions..." He does not bother either to select the "traditions" that the humanists broke away from, or to document his contention. If the humanists abhored the "barbarism" of the medieval latinists, they assuredly retained the basic premises of the order itself. As Tillyard points out, the only ground upon which poetry or drama was acceptable to the medieval society was as a teaching mechanism. And even on this ground, consent to the morality or propriety of poetry and drama was far from unanimous. There was, on the part of the humanists, no "breaking away" from the basic assumptions.
of the middle ages. Rather they justified poetry on moral
grounds whereas most of the influential churchmen who had
preceded them--Tertullian and Boethius, for example--had
condemned it. That neither condemnation or defense of
poetry was universal during either the middle ages or the
Renaissance is plain: Aeneas Sylvius, later Pius II, had
this to say as early as 1450 writing to Ladislas, King of
Hungary and Bohemia:

"Now I meet an objection. You will be confronted by
the opposition of the shallow churchmen. 'Why waste
precious time in studying such sources of corruption
as the pagan poets?' They will quote Cicero and Plato,
Jerome and Boethius, and will cry out for the banish¬
ment of the very names of the ancient poets from the
soil of your country...happily, however, there are... not a few to whom the ancient poets are a precious
possession. You will have no difficulty in quoting
classical precedent for honoring them as they deserve.
Nay, the Fathers themselves, Jerome, Augustine, Cyprian,
did not hesitate to draw illustrations from Heathen
poetry, and so sanctioned its study."

That the purpose of instruction is firmly fixed in Sylvius'
mind is illustrated in a later extract from the same work:
"The crucial question is: how do you use your authors?
Basil has left us a clear guidance on the matter: we
leave on one side their beliefs and superstitions,
their false ideas of happiness, their defective stan¬
dard of morals; we welcome all that they can render
in praise of integrity and in condemnation of vice."

De Liberorum Educatione. [Quoted in Woodward, p. 149]

We see Sylvius, then, lashing out at the "shallow churchman"
who could disallow poetry completely. But, inline with the
defenses we have examined already, Sylvius champions poetry
explicitly on the ground of its value as an agent of moral
instruction--the same basis upon which miracle and morality
plays enjoyed their acceptance. To seek for some theory
of "poetry for poetry's sake" in either the middle ages or
the Renaissance is a thankless task: aesthetics were simply
not a matter of concern at this point in the development of
English literature, and any attempt to establish such a
basis for the sufferance of poetry would invariably bring
a retort similar to that of Sir William Alexander, Earl
of Sterling (see note 35).

47. But some of the more cautious Elizabethans felt that a "key"
to their own allegorical poems would clear the path for even the rudest reader. Thomas Watson, for example, in the prologue to the reader in his *Meliboeus* (London, 1590), takes no chance that the reader's understanding should go awry: "...my pastoral discourse to the unlearned may seeme obscure: which to prevent, I have thought good here to advertise you, that I figure Englande in Arcadia; Her Majesty in Diana; Sir Francis Walsingham in *Melibaeus* [sic], and his Ladie in Dryas; Sir Phillippe Sidney in *Astrophill*, and his Ladie in Hyale, Master Thomas Walsingham in *Tytorus*, and my selfe in *Gorydon.*"

48. J. E. Spingarn discusses allegory as a legacy from the middle ages in his *Literary Criticism in the Renaissance* (New York, 1912): "The ancient poets, according to Sir Thomas Wilson *Rhetoric*, [1553], did not spend their time inventing meaningless fables, but used the story merely as a framework for contents of ethical, philosophic, scientific, or historical import; the trials of Ulysses, for example, were intended to furnish a lively picture of man's misery in this life." At this point one should note that the interpretation of this particular work is not regular; Wilson's concept of it does not jibe with that of Sidney (see note 32 in text). To continue quoting Spingarn: "The poets are, in fact, wise men, spiritual legislators, reformers, who have at heart the redressing of wrongs; and in accomplishing this end, --either because they fear to rebuke these wrongs openly [see note 29], or because they doubt the efficacy of such frankness with ignorant people, --they hide their true meaning under the veil of pleasant fables. This theory of poetic art, one of the commonplaces of the age, may be described as the great legacy of the Middle Ages to Renaissance criticism."

Perhaps no more concise statement of this whole attitude can be offered than that of Sir John Harington: "The ancient poets have indeed wrapped, as it were, in their writings divers and sundry meanings, which they call the sences or mysteries thereof. First of all for the literall sense (as it were the utmost barke or ryne) they set down in manner of an historie, the acts and notable exploits of some persons worthy memorie; then in the same fiction, as a second rine, and somewhat more fine, as it were nearer to the pith and marrow, they place the morall sence, profitable for the active life of man, approving vertuous and condeming the contrarie. Many times also under the selfsame words they comprehend
some true understanding of naturall Philosophie, or sometimes of politick gouernment, and now and then of divinitie: and these same senses that can comprehend so excellent knowledge we call the Allegorie, which Plutarch defineth to be when one thing is told, and by that another is understood."

49. Harington, p. 124.

50. Sidney, p. 95. Sidney specifically mentions those passages he considers "poetical" on p. 86: "The chief, both in antiquity and excellency, were they that did imitate the inconceivable excellencies of God. Such were David in his Psalms; Solomon in his Song of Songs, in his Ecclesiastes, and Proverbs; Moses and Deborah in their Hymns; and the writer of Job, which, beside other, the learned Emanuel Tremellius and Franciscus Junius do entitle the poetical part of the Scripture. Against these none will speak that hath the Holy Ghost in due holy reverence.

51. Peacham, p. 117.

52. Peacham, p. 117.


54. Lodge, p. 15.

55. Lodge, p. 6.

56. Atkins, p. 103: "...poetry, according to [medieval] teaching, was but the handmaid of theology or philosophy, it was a branch of logic, it was 'versified rhetoric,' it was no real art but merely vain trifling, a 'spice,' a plaything..."


58. Harington, p. 132.

59. Sidney, p. 94f.

60. Peacham, p. 119.


62. Heywood, p. 57. He says: "What can sooner print modesty in the soules of the wanton, then by discovering unto them the monsterousnesse of their sin?"
George Whetstone, in his Preface to *Promos and Cassandra*, (London, 1578), says: "...by the reward of the good, the good are encouraged in well doing; and with the scourge of the lewde, the lewde are feared from evil attempts..."

63. Heywood, p. 20.

64. Sidney, p. 92. "...glad they will be to hear the tales of Hercules, Achilles, Lyrus, and Aeneas: and, hearing them, must needs hear the right description of wisdom, valour, and justice; which, if they had been barely, that is to say philosophically, set out, they would swear they be brought to school again."

65. Jonson, p. 595: "There be some men are born only to suck out the poison of books: *Habent venenum pro victu: intio, prodeliciis.* And such are they that only relish the obscene, and foul things in poets: which makes the profession taxed. But by whom? men, that watch for it, and (had they not had this hint) are so unjust valuerers of Letters; as they think no learning good, but what brings in gain. It shews, they themselves would never have been of the professions they are, but for the profits and fees."

Chapter II


2. Sidney, p. 95: "Since then poetry is of all human learning the most ancient and of most fatherly antiquity, as from whence other learnings have taken their beginnings; since it is so universal that no learned nation doth despise it, nor no barbarious nation is without it; since both Roman and Greek gave divine names unto it, the one of "Prophesying," the other of "making," and that indeed that name of "making" is fit for him...Since therein (namely in moral doctrine the chief of all knowledges) he doth not only far pass the historian, but, for instructing, is well nigh comparable to the philosopher, and for moving, leaves him behind him...I think...the laurel...doth worthily honor the poet's triumph."

Cf. George Whetstone, *Promos and Cassandra* (London, 1578): "The auncient Romanes heald these shows of suche prise that they not onely allowde the publicke exercise of them, but the grave Senators themselves countenaunced the Actors with
their presence..."
See also George Puttenham, p. 3: "The profession and use of Poesie is most ancient from the beginning, and not as manie erroneously suppose, after, but before any civil society was among men. For it is written, that poesie was th' originall cause and occasion of their first assem¬blies, when before the people remained in the woods and mountains, vagrant and dispersed like the wild beasts, lawless and naked, or verie ill clad, and of all good and necessarie provision for harbour or sustenance utterly unfurnished."

3. C. S. Lewis, in his English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, (Oxford, 1954), notes that Gosson was not himself a Puritan. "... he came from Corpus, Oxford, the fountain¬head of pure Canterbury doctrine...he quotes Aquinas and Cajetan." (p. 395) Discussing Philip Stubbes, he says, "He was no extreme Puritan..." (p. 398) Of Stockwood or Northbrook he makes no mention, most probably because they were both ministers, and the material brought to bear on this study is extracted from sermons.


5. Gosson, School, p. 21.


17. Stubbes, p. 142.

18. Lewis, p. 395: "His plays [Captain Mario, Catiline His Conspiracy. Dates unknown] appear to have been failures and have not survived."


25. See George Whetstone; dedication to *Promes and Cassandra*, (London, 1578): "...for at this daye the Italian is so lacuiuos in his commedies that honest hearers are greeved at his actions:"

Bearing also on this point are the remarks of Roger Ascham in *The Scholemaster*, (London, 1570). He discusses the moral weakness of the Italianate Englishman: *These be the enchantementes of Circes, brought out of Italie, to marre mens maners in England; much by example of ill life, but more by precepts of fonde books, of late translated out of Italian into English, sold in every shop in London, commended by honest titles the sonar to corrupt honest maners...* Gosson touches upon the "wantonness" of Italy briefly in his *School of Abuse*: "...our wrestling at armes is turned to wallowing in ladies lappes; our courage to cowardice; our cunning to riot, our bowes in yo bolles, and our darts to dishes. We have robbed...Italy of wantonnes...Compare London to Rome and England to Italy, you shall find the theatres of the one, the abuses of the other, to bee rife among us." (p. 24).


29. Jonson, p. 572; "now, letters onely serve to make men vile... it is the disease of the age: and no wonder if the world, growing old, begin to be inform: old age itself is a disease. It is long since the sick world began to doate, and talk idly: would she had but doated still; but her doat-age is now broke forth into a mandesse, and become a mere phrency."


35. Southwell, p. 113.


38. Gainsford, p. 229.

39. The statute of 1571-2 appears in Record Comm. vol. iv, part 1, p. 590-2. The act of 1597-8 appears in Statutes of the Realme, iv, art. 2. Both are quoted in Hazlitt, p. 21f, and p. 37f respectively.

40. Statutes, p. 38.
41. See Hazlitt, p. 27: Order of the Common Council of London in restraint of Dramatic Exhibition, Dec. 6, 1574. Also p. 23: Letter from the Lord Mayor and Corporation of London to the Lord Chamberlain, March 2, 1573-4, declining to license a place for Theatrical Performances within the limits of the City.

42. Gosson, School, p. 49.

43. Gosson, School, p. 50.

44. Gainsford, p. 230.

45. Stubbes, p.146.

46. Gosson, Plaies Confuted, p. 182.

47. Gosson, Plaies Confuted, p. 181.


50. Gosson, School, p. 34.

Chapter III


5. Ellis-Fermor, p. 154f.


10. Ellis-Fermor, p. 159.

11. When Bosola is tempted to betray the duchess and to become an informer in the pay of Ferdinand, her brother and Duke of Calabria, Bosola at first replies,

    Take your devils,
    Which hell calls angels; these cursed gifts would make
    You a corrupter, me an impudent traitor;
    And should I take these, they'd take me to hell.

But under continued pressure, Bosola gives in:

    For the good deed you have done me, I must do
    All the ill man can invent!

The Duchess of Malfi, I.I

This is the sort of betrayal that Vendice suggests he has avoided, and in this knowledge is part of his satisfaction.

12. The idea of 'embrace' is the generally accepted Elizabethan sense of 'clip' according to C. T. Onions' *A Shakespeare Glossary* (Oxford, 1911), p. 38. A second sense is 'to cut.'


19. This reference to velvet is Nicholl's gloss (p. 315). Apparently the phrase was fairly common. It occurs in Beaumont and Fletcher's *Philaster* (V.iv-16), and is glossed as "superlative" in Brooke and Paradise's *Elizabethan Drama 1580-1642* (Boston, 1933), p. 754.

25. Boyer, p. 149.
30. Ellis-Fermor, p. 158.
36. Bradbrook and Elio, see notes 7 and 9 in text.
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