Violence in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama

Linwood Clay Powers III

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarship.richmond.edu/masters-theses

Part of the English Language and Literature Commons

Recommended Citation

VIOLENCE IN ELIZABETHAN AND JACOBEAN DRAMA

BY

LINWOOD CLAY POWERS III

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND
IN CANDIDACY
FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

AUGUST 1969
Introduction

Elizabethan and Jacobean tragedy contains some of the most violent scenes in the history of English drama. Different playwrights treat their potentially violent themes in different manners; therefore, this paper will examine the types of violence employed by the different dramatists.

In dealing with a subject as broad in scope as this one, it is necessary to limit the study to a selection of key dramatists. The dramatists were selected because they reflect a certain type of drama which was prevalent during their careers. For example, Kyd was the earliest to deal with revenge tragedy, Marlowe used the super villain as the protagonist, Jonson and Chapman employed classical styles, Webster presented bloody horrors, Beaumont and Fletcher produced melodrama, Ford used pathos as a central theme, and Shirley engaged some tricky stage devices to add new twists to old themes. So many studies dealing with Shakespeare's contributions to English drama have been made that it would be superfluous to attempt to contribute any thoughts on the subject; therefore, there are few references to Shakespeare in this paper.

The terms Elizabethan and Jacobean are used to refer to the period between Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* (1587) and Shirley's *The Cardinal* (1611). Usually, Elizabethan refers to that period in drama governed by the reign of Queen Elizabeth (1558-1603), and Jacobean refers to the period governed by the reign of James I (1603-1625). Generally speaking, however, these two terms often overlap, and in this paper the term Elizabethan refers
roughly to the period concluding with the death of Shakespeare (1616), and Jacobean roughly to the period concluding with the closing of the theatres (1642). (Fredson Bowers uses Elizabethan to refer to the time period 1589-1642.)

This paper traces the progression of violence beginning with *The Spanish Tragedy* and ending with *The Cardinal*. Chapter I is concerned with the English code of morality, justice, and values as expressed in the selected plays. Chapter II treats the motivation of the violence depicted—whether the violence is necessary to plot development or whether the violence is there for its own sake. In Chapter III types of subtle violence are treated: implied (offstage, planned but thwarted), trickery (with or without violence), and mental cruelty. Chapter IV contains three sections: the influence of Machiavelli and Seneca and the development of revenge tragedy.
During the Elizabethan Age most writers expressed the spirit of their times; almost every poet was set directly in the center of life. These characteristic writings could be easily attainable in the cheap quarto or more ambitious folio form.\(^1\)

The plays of the time were concerned with men, women, and their ways upon earth, and the playwrights quite often used allusions showing the presence of a Christian background. Most of the dramatists, excepting those who had no serious reflections to make upon God, man, or society, were conservatives. (The most obvious exceptions were Marlowe, Chapman, and Ford.) There was also speculation upon the nature and destiny of man:

The dramatists were not much interested, as dramatists, in dogma or philosophical synthesis, but they were interested in the law of nature, in the problem of evil and suffering, in the life of action and the life of contemplation, in the pull of this world and how far it can be reconciled with man’s aspirations for the next, in mutability, and some of them were especially interested in man’s behaviour at what many felt to be the supreme moment of life—at death.\(^2\)

In tradition of belief there is really no break between Elizabethan and Jacobean drama. The dramatists, including Marlowe, assumed a Christian universe. The plays of both periods are worked out for the most part in terms of this world, but beliefs and moral values of Christian religion are not challenged. If a Jacobean tragedy should end without reference

---


to the joys of heaven or the terrors of hell, it is not because the dramatists disbelieved in an after-life for the virtuous and the wicked. It was a "church-going and sermon-reading age."\textsuperscript{3}

The main preoccupations of Elizabethans and Jacobians alike were with religion, theological controversy, and what may be called moral philosophy. If distinguishing characteristics between Elizabethans and Jacobians are wanted, it may be mentioned that Jacobians have made an exact, more searching inquiry into moral and political questions and had an interest in the analysis of the mysteries of the human mind. It would be too simple to contrast Elizabethan optimism with Jacobean pessimism although many references may be found. There are also references to the contrary.\textsuperscript{4}

Because of the Elizabethans' preoccupations and interests, it is not surprising that during the Elizabethan Age plays became more prominent. The London companies that acted between 1590-1642 developed in organization, wealth, and importance. The theatre became a fashionable and a profitable investment. The links between the Court and the theatres became stronger as those between the Court and Parliament grew weaker.\textsuperscript{5}

Dramatists found that plays were a highly suitable media for conveying their individual thoughts. One of the first of the popular dramatists to employ this method was Christopher Marlowe. Irving Ribner, editor of a definitive edition of Marlowe's plays, speaks of Marlowe's habit of reflecting his own thoughts in his plays:

Perhaps more surely than any of his contemporaries, Marlowe reflected in his plays his own changing and developing vision of

\textsuperscript{3}Ibid., pp. 7-11.

\textsuperscript{4}Ibid., pp. 17-25.

\textsuperscript{5}Ibid., pp. 84-85.
man's place in the universe, and at some point in his intellectual progression tragedy became possible.6

Since Christopher Marlowe was a rebel, we must think of The Jew of Malta (1592) as being a rebellion against contemporary Elizabethan ideals. The play is anti-Semitic in that Barabas is pictured as a despicable person who resorts to poisoning a group of nuns in order to poison his own daughter. But the play is also anti-Christian. It must be remembered that the character of Barabas for most of the first two acts is much different from his character in the final three. The reason for this change is the fact that Barabas has been wronged by a Christian who confiscates his money. In addition, Marlowe portrays the two friars as being much less than the accepted Christian ideal.

Marlowe seems to be striking out at all accepted beliefs. Jew, Christian, and Turk in this play all live by the same code, the success of one following upon the downfall of the other, as each is able to seize the advantage and practice his policy the more efficiently.7

Marlowe's earlier plays, Tamburlaine Parts I and II, indicate an even more adverse attitude toward the creeds of established religions. Tamburlaine, himself, is certainly anti-Christian and is given the role of a despicable subhuman when he orders the holy books burned and insults Mahomet. It is a disturbing fact as well as a black mark on Elizabethan morality when we note that Tamburlaine I and II were received with great zest by the Elizabethan audiences.

Marlowe treats religious ideals opposed to Tamburlaine scornfully. Any Christian sentiment in favor of peace is "presented in such a way

7 Ibid., p. xxxii.
as to incur its destruction in derision." Lines in favor of this orthodox view are spoken by the fool Mycetes, at whom the audience is probably laughing. The most just comment on the world is given to the most despicable character, Calyphas, a coward, and carries no weight at all. Yet even with this perverse view of the world Tamburlaine I and II were two of the most popular plays on the Elizabethan stage.

Elizabethan drama may have been given "a larger scope and higher purpose" if it had been taken under the wing of the Church. The censor's office was the only official contact between the Church and the stage. Until 1607 all plays intended for publication were licensed by ecclesiastical licensers; after 1607 almost all plays by the Revels Office. Francis Bacon regretted that in his time play-acting was esteemed but as a toy; discipline had been neglected. F. P. Wilson states:

Perhaps it is as well that Elizabethan dramatists had only to do with a censorship that permitted a reasonable amount of freedom to the human mind. It curbed political and religious speculation of an unorthodox kind, but exercised no such restrictive influence over morals as the unofficial censorship of public opinion over the Victorian novelists.\footnote{Wilson, p. 91.}

The prevailing types of drama in the early 1590's were the chronicle-history play, romantic comedy, and romantic tragedy. Ten years later romantic comedy and romantic tragedy persist with striking differences, and the English history play has almost disappeared. However, the history play did not drop out of fashion because of the accession of the Stuarts in 1603; two or three years before Elizabeth's death, it had become obvious that the vein of the history play was exhausted.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 92-93.}

\footnote{J. B. Steane, \textit{Marlowe—A Critical Study} (Cambridge, 1961), pp. 80-81.}
About the same time as the chronicle-history play began to disappear, a change in the tone of comedy began to come about. With the turn of the century more and more comedies appeared which were not romantic but were, in the words of Marston, "a spectacle of life and public manners." Ben Jonson was instrumental in this bent towards satire with his "comedy of humours." He felt that comedy should be allied to the times in theme, character, and language. The plays during this period are often based on the rascality and credulity of human nature.\(^\text{11}\)

Jonson and George Chapman, the two most learned of the Jacobean dramatists, wrote for the public theatre but made few concessions to the popular taste. Both were influenced by the Stoic morality of Epictetus and Seneca. Jonson's Cato and Chapman's Clermont D'Ambois are example of a departure from Christian morality, and the plays Cato and The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois illustrate a synthesis of Stoic and Christian morality.\(^\text{12}\)

But for a few years, years including the turn of the century and the reign of James I, dramatists found the words and phrasing with which to express a tragic vision of good and evil "with an insight not rivalled by English dramatists before or since. There remains in Jacobean as in Elizabethan drama a strong infusion of the morality play."\(^\text{13}\)

On the other hand, John Fletcher, one of the most popular of all Jacobean dramatists, was an entertainer. The constant principle underlying his work was the desire to amuse. He attempts tragic passion only

\(^{11}\)\text{Ibid., p. 93.}

\(^{12}\)\text{Ibid., pp. 103-104.}

\(^{13}\)\text{Ibid., pp. 99-102.}
to suit the taste and fashion of his audience; he reflects the court life of his time. In a way Fletcher is more typical of Jacobean drama than either Jonson or Chapman.

It would not be entirely true to say that the dramatists of the time reflected the vulgar minority of English life by the violence and crudeness they depicted. The dramatists were not merely catering to the groundlings in the audience; the violence which they portrayed appealed also to the majority of the people. They reflected the morality, justice, and values of the times.

Actually the audience at the Globe was not ignorant and stupid. It did not consist wholly of groundlings, "the gentlemen of understanding," or gulls, who sat upon the stage to see and be seen. These people acquired their notoriety because they annoyed the dramatists the most. They had their way at theatres like the Red Bull, but not so at the Globe, where there were courtiers, university men, Inns of Court men, gentlemen and their wives, captains and soldiers, and journeymen and apprentices. The audience was most representative of City, Country, and Court. With this type of audience a drama was possible which showed a wide range of interests.

The writers tried to interest the less educated of the audience with violence and crudeness, which also appealed to the more refined. Because the writer tried to interest these people as well as the more refined, the drama was saved from becoming academic, and "attentiveness to matter saved the drama from those over-refinements of style which are the curse

---

1Tbid., pp. 98-99.
15Tbid., p. 88.
of much Elizabethan and some Jacobean writing."

A good example of how Elizabethan and Jacobean drama reflected the morality and values of the times can be seen in the revenge tragedy. Fredson Bowers in his study of Elizabethan and Jacobean revenge tragedy has this to say:

Since an act of violence was not a crime but merely a personal injury, the revenge for it in kind was the first manifestation of a consciousness of justice, for private revenge was the mightiest, the only possible form in which a wrong could be righted.17

Criminal punishment, in fact, was a form of revenge. No wonder Marlowe's Barabas was scalded to death. It was common practice in England that "such as kill by poysen are cyther shalded to death in lead or seething water."18 Legal condemnation of private revenge came slowly in England.

The Elizabethan audience, however, did not entirely give its approval to the revenge tragedy. The point is that they would accept the revenger's cause as necessary and just and would hope that he achieve success, but only on condition that the revenger did not survive. Therefore death was considered as payment for the violent motives which had forced him to override the rules of God rather than await divine retribution. The grand sacrifice—death in victory—was the revenger's only possible lot.19

Revenge and violence in drama were so commonplace as to be expected by the playgoers.

16 Ibid., pp. 86-87.
19 Bowers, p. 184.
The Elizabethan who attended public executions as an amusement was used to the sight of blood and would scarcely flinch from it on the stage. Rather, he would demand it, for he was keenly interested in murders for any other motive than simple robbery. 20

A popular type of play with the Elizabethans and Jacobians was the aforementioned revenge tragedy. It was popular not only for its spectacular scenes of horror and murder but also for its rather unique portrayal of justice. Perhaps today the form of justice depicted in a revenge tragedy seems far too harsh and barbaric, but to the Elizabethans and Jacobians it fitted neatly into the scheme of their lives.

English revenge tragedy received its first great impetus with the production of Thomas Kyd's The Spanish Tragedy (1587-1589). The play uses blood-vengeance as the heart of its dramatic action. From this sensational theme—the sacred duty of the father to avenge the murder of his son—the Spanish Tragedy derived its popularity. The central motive was a universal one, which appealed to all classes of people and to all time. 21

Tucker Brooke says:

The Spanish Tragedy virtually created a great deal of Elizabethan stage business. Depending altogether upon spectacular effect, in entire indifference to moral purpose and truth of characterization, Kyd raised tragedy at a single bound to a position decidedly higher in vulgar favor than that occupied by the previously dominant comedy. 22

Owing to Kyd's delight in wholesale slaughter, it was unlikely even an innocent Hieronimo would have survived the play; the fact that he was

20 Ibid., p. 16.

21 Ibid., p. 65.

22 C. F. Tucker Brooke, The Tudor Drama (Boston, 1911), p. 211.
guilty of murder sealed his death. No slayer in Elizabethan drama escaped some penalty, and that penalty was usually death.23

The implications of a revenger's death in victory finally led to the transformation of the hero to the villain who still retained exactly the same revenge motives as a Kydian hero. There were three reasons for this change: the dramatist could easily vary the monotonous Kydian formula, the popularity of the villain was growing and the dramatists wanted to please the audience but didn't want to abandon a tried plot structure, and finally, the audience could never accept a murderer as a hero no matter how just his motive. In other words, a compromise could no longer be effected between stage and public morality.24

In 1611 George Chapman, in The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois, used a watered-down version of the Kydian formula. Kyd's character Hieronimo was pre-occupied by an overwhelming lust for blood and passion for revenge, and his ends were achieved by treachery and deceit. On the other hand Chapman had the idea of the dignity of the classical hero and the philosophical purpose of the dignified classical tragedy. In Clermont we have a revenger who could be an English gentleman. He does not want to take the law into his own hands. Clermont was unable to secure justice from a corrupted court, and he would not try to obtain revenge in a private duel because this would violate the code of the contemporary English gentlemen. Actually, upon closer examination of the plot, we find that Clermont would have no case in a court of law because Bussy D'Ambois was killed in an adulterate union. Chapman, however, ignores this fact.25

23Bowers, p. 80.
24Ibid., p. 185.
25Ibid., p. 146.
All this aside, Clermont reluctantly accepts the justice of his cause and attempts revenge like a gentleman. Montsury refuses to fight, but Clermont urges him on by turning him over to Montsury's own wife. This is all the man can take, and he finally accepts Clermont's challenge. Clermont then engages him courteously, and on his death pronounces a benediction. The final link between Clermont and the England of the Stuarts is his refusal to attempt a revenge on the king for the murder of the Guise, a close friend. This is the divine right of kings theory which was fostered by James I.26

Chapman sought to elevate the tone of the revenge play by using Stoic doctrines on the proper conduct of life in its various phases.

He disapproved of the conventional bloody revenge acted on the stage and, as an ethical Englishman, wrote a tragedy which portrayed a revenge successfully carried through to its conclusion by a revenger acting according to the highest and most generous ideals of an English gentleman.27

While revenge plays of this nature make up a minority of Jacobean drama, it is interesting to note that this type of drama did exist and, in fact, did enjoy a degree of success on the English stage. Actually Jacobean drama turned toward sensationalism.

The older Elizabethan drama of revenge was highly moral in that it raised certain problems concerning man's life. The hero had a tragedy in his life which changed his character, drove him to insanity, and eventually dealt him ruin in his triumph of revenge. The type was narrow and a change toward artificiality and sensationalism in the Jacobean Age led audiences to ask for less seriousness and more variety in the plays.

26Ibid., pp. 146-147.
27Ibid., p. 149.
The people preferred the rhetoric and bombast of a villain to the moral analysis of a tortured hero revenger. The author had a lack of sympathy toward his character, and this feeling was transmitted to the audience. The emotions of the audience were not touched. An Englishman’s fancy could be caught by the melodrama but his emotions could not.  

William Archer felt that this sensationalism was carried to an extreme: 

"There was no limit to the horrors which they could introduce into their plays, not only with impunity, but with applause... Webster and Dekker, with their dances of madmen and parades of prostitutes, seem to have ministered to a well-recognized taste."

Audiences sought merely amusement and entertainment in the plays. There was little or no mention of the serious aspects of life. Naturally as good taste diminished, violence and sensationalism increased. Between September 1630 and February 1631 there were twenty plays acted at Court by the King’s players. Only one was Shakespeare’s (A Midsummer Night’s Dream); ten were Beaumont and Fletcher’s.

The decadence of the early seventeenth century drama may not be attributed solely to the influence of the Court, but it did contribute. The decadence is more noticeable during Charles I’s reign, but there is certainly evidence during James’s reign also, especially after Shakespeare’s death.

Even during the early part of James’s reign Jacobean loved to bring into view all unsavory incidents of life which modern sanitation tries to hold aloof. They liked obscenity. Mental afflictions were considered

---

28 Ibid., pp. 154-155.
29 William Archer, The Old Drama and the New (Boston, 1923), p. 46.
30 Wilson, pp. 85-86.
fair game. The cruel barbarism of the age may be sufficiently estimated from the single fact that Bedlam (Bethlehem Asylum) was a popular place of amusement for smart society.\(^\text{31}\)

Bethlehem Asylum was originally known as St. Mary of Bethlehem. It was established as a priory in 1247 by Simon Fitz Mary, sheriff of London. The first reference to Bethlehem as a hospital, not an asylum, was in 1339 in the royal grant by Edward III, which extended the right to collect alms. The City Council of London took over Bethlehem in 1346, and Bedlam became an asylum.\(^\text{32}\)

The attitude of the public toward Bedlam was one of curiosity, amusement, and, in some cases, maliciousness. The public enjoyed watching the spectacular whippings which were given the inmates both as treatment and punishment. There were so many visitors that Bedlam received £400 by collecting a penny from each visitor. An average day of attendance was about 300 visitors. The visitors probably walked through the corridors peeping into the cells.\(^\text{33}\)

It is small wonder that the portrayal of madmen on the Elizabethan and Jacobean stages met with highly favorable audience appeal. Bedlamites were often used as instruments of satire, and beginning with Hamlet, or about 1601, the deliberate and frequent use of insanity upon the English stage becomes increasingly apparent. Madmen were often used to produce a purely theatrical spectacle.\(^\text{34}\)

---

\(^{31}\) Archer, pp. 79-80.


\(^{33}\) Ibid., pp. 25-26.

\(^{34}\) Ibid., pp. 42, 44.
The Jacobean madman, as might be expected, was exploited, for spectacle by various dramatists, such as Massinger and Fletcher. However, a later Jacobean dramatist, John Ford, treated madmen differently. His interest was almost completely scientific. He was interested in character study. Ford had an optimistic faith in the madman's destiny. For example, Bassanis, in The Broken Heart, was restored to a happier and more worthwhile life than previously experienced.\(^\text{35}\)

Reed marks a difference between Elizabethan and Jacobean madmen. He says those portrayed before 1601 were "stereotyped renderings whose disordered minds were capable of imagining superhuman achievements... little more than a mouthpiece for Elizabethan fustian."\(^\text{36}\)

The Jacobean madman was a much more objective study. He expressed the frustrations rather than the potentialities of mankind. He rarely, if ever, went mad without first showing some type of humor, usually melancholy. Once mad, he seldom recovered his wits. On the other hand, the Jacobean playwright was more conscious of the theatrical appeal of madness than the Elizabethan playwright, but he was also more sympathetic. In fact, theatricality was the primary motive of Jacobean playwrights portraying madmen.\(^\text{37}\)

Evidence of the contemporary popularity of Bethlehem Hospital as a place of amusement is found in Jacobean drama. In The Duchess of Malfi and The Changeling, inmates of an insane asylum go through a harebrained routine, climaxed by the customary morris dance. Alibius' madhouse in The Changeling may be a caricature of Bethlehem itself.\(^\text{38}\)

\(^{35}\)Ibid., pp. 158-159.

\(^{36}\)Ibid., p. 4.

\(^{37}\)Ibid., pp. 1-5.

\(^{38}\)Ibid., p. 23.
Reed summarizes his views of the Jacobean practice of portraying Bedlamites on the stage for pure theatricality:

Such professionally minded playwrights as Dekker and Fletcher were, consequently, probably not prompted to employ scenes of Bedlamites by any necessity of winning back customers from the hospital, but rather by the fact that antics of mad folk, if embellished, were particularly suitable to the stage. In a drama peculiarly marked by showmanship and stage devices, nothing could have been better in tune with the excessive theatrical temperament than the uninhibited and carefully embellished symptoms of a few well-chosen Bedlamites. This, then, I take simply enough to have been the chief reason for the repeated reproduction of the hospital and its inmates on the stage; the lunatics offered, in brief, better and more spectacular entertainment on the stage, where selection and exaggeration were possible, than they did at Bethlehem Hospital.39

The Jacobians were noted for their stoicism. They could accept evil as good. Travis Bogard speaks of Jacobean stoicism in John Webster’s

The Duchess of Malfi:

Here again Jacobean stoicism, the contempt for suffering, the willingness to take evil as a good, is matched with Jacobean Machiavellism, the delight in evil, frequently with the sense that the only ‘good’ is evil. Once more the conflict is used as a basis for setting forth a definite ethical scheme, which apparently was intended in some measure as a solution to contemporary problems.40

In addition to a Stoic philosophy, Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists reflected the feelings of the times by using a type of tragedy taken from Boccaccio’s Latin work De Cacibus Virorum Illustrum. This so-called tragedy was a prose or poetical narrative of the declines of great men from prosperity to misery. As it was developed in Renaissance England, it dealt chiefly with the fall of princes and kings, usually wicked ones, with the intent to warn rulers and men in general to avoid the crimes

40Travis Bogard, The Tragic Satire of John Webster (Los Angeles, 1955), p. 36.
and vices that had brought those in the plays to destruction and misery.
An early example of De Casibus tragedy may be found in Kyd's The Spanish Tragedy when the Viceroy of Portugal and Horatio fall from high places.
In Marlowe's Tamburlaine the fall of all the kings and rulers conquered by Tamburlaine is a dramatic catalogue of De Casibus tragedies.\[1\]

During the Jacobean Age a strong feeling toward the divine right of kings existed. In The Middle Tragedy Beaumont and Fletcher have extended De Casibus tragedy to the Jacobean era. They dealt with a ticklish situation when they portrayed the personal revenge of a subject on a king. Beaumont and Fletcher with their love for artificial situations played up this new idea for delay in vengeance. They use the character of Melantius as a tool to produce fully effective theatrical scenes. The conflict in the mind of Melantius is, theoretically, "put on the high plane of struggle between every natural impulse of earthly man and the strict code of human and divine law, intensified by the special circumstances of the doctrine of Divine Right."\[2\]

In conclusion, it is apparent that there are major differences between Elizabethan and Jacobean drama. But these differences occurred over a period of years rather than immediately after the accession of James I. There were certain key figures who seem to have expressed the spirit of their times and who were instrumental in bringing about the changes which took place in the drama before 1642. Because the morality, philosophy, and ideals of the people changed between the years 1585-1642, the drama naturally reflected these changes.

---

\[1\] Cole, pp. 42, 58-89.
\[2\] Bowers, p. 173.
On the other hand, since most of the people of the time would have abhorred any blasphemy of the Christian religion, dramatists, excepting Marlowe, do not challenge Christian beliefs and moral values. Some of these dramatists do, however, depict wholesale slaughter, and an entire indifference to moral purpose.

This spectacular type of drama is best exemplified by the revenge tragedy which became more refined after the turn of the century, but later reverted to much of its earlier sensationalism. Violence increased as the Jacobean audiences clamored for less seriousness and more variety in the plays. These audiences enjoyed watching madmen at Bethlehem Asylum as well as an exploitation of madmen on the Jacobean stage.

In addition to reflecting the savagery of the times, the plays also reflect the stoicism as well as a strong feeling for the divine right of kings which prevailed after Elizabeth's death.

All in all, the Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights seem to reflect the changing times in England during the latter part of Elizabeth's reign, through the reign of James I and up to the beginning of the English Civil War in 1642.
The violence in the drama of the Elizabethan and Jacobean Ages certainly reflects the times; however, is the violence necessary for plot development or is it merely present as a sop to the vulgar tastes of the audience?

William Archer questions whether the Elizabethan and Jacobean Ages, Shakespeare aside, contain plays which could be considered great.

It dealt in violent passions and rough humours, suitable for audiences who were quick of apprehension and responsive in imagination; but in the main rude, incult, unpolished. The platform stage, imperfectly localised and with no pictorial background, lent itself to what may be called go-as-you-please drama, full of copious rhetoric and unchastened humour, with scarcely any art of construction or arrangement. Under such conditions, the writing of a passable play demands little of what we should now call specifically dramatic talent. A certain fluency in dialogue was all that was required.¹

Perhaps Archer overstates his case, but his point is interesting and worth some consideration in this chapter dealing with the necessity of violence in the drama.

One of the most popular types of drama during this time was the revenge play. Often criticized for its excessive violence, the revenge play is a good indication of the tone of the age. Percy Simpson is somewhat critical of the authors¹ techniques in their plays:

If we content ourselves with asking the plain question, 'What is the importance of the Revenge Play? What did it contribute to English drama?' there is one decisive and satisfying answer: It contributed Hamlet.²

¹Archer, p. 30.
This conclusion may be somewhat overstated. The revenge theme is also the central motive in *The Spanish Tragedy*, a bloody, yet relatively polished, revenge tragedy. Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* contains much violence since it is one of the first real revenge tragedies. It set the mode for many imitators, most of whose plays were inferior to it in excellence. However, Kyd's masterpiece has received its share of adverse criticism including Fredson Bowers' belief that the situation which Kyd created was almost dramatically impossible. Bowers obviously refers to the exhibition of Horatio's body; the wearing of black; reading in a book before a philosophical soliloquy; a letter written in blood and kept as a memento to revenge; the melancholy of the revenger, who struggles with the problems of revenge, fortune, justice, and death; and the sentimental but desperately revengeful woman.

The play itself has revenge as its theme. Balthazar calls it revenge when he says he must kill Horatio, who has what is rightfully Balthazar's, meaning Bel-Imperia. Balthazar and Lorenzo plot for Horatio's death. Lorenzo, Balthazar, Serberine, and Pedringano (disguised) fall upon Horatio and Bel-Imperia. Bel-Imperia is taken aside by Balthazar as the others hang Horatio in the arbor. They then stab him as Bel-Imperia yells for help. The actual violence depicted in the scene is necessary to plot development as Hieronimo now has a motive for his madness and revenge.

Hieronimo and Isabella enter and behold their son. As Hieronimo cuts Horatio's body down and raves, he now sets the stage for the violence

---

3Bowers, p. 73.
to follow: "To know the author were some ease of grief;/ For in revenge
my heart would find relief."¹

Hieronimo later learns that Lorenzo and Balthazar murdered Horatio
when "a letter falleth" from Bel-Imperia. Now, like Hamlet, he decides
to act cautiously:

What means this unexpected miracle?
Hy son slain by Lorenzo and the prince!
What cause had they Horatio to malign?
Or what might move thee, Bel-Imperia,
To accuse thy brother, had he been the mean?
Hieronimo, beware!—thou art betray'd,
And to entrap thy life this train is laid.
Advise thee therefore, be not credulous:
This is devised to endanger thee,
That thou, by this, Lorenzo shouldst accuse;
And he, for thy dishonour done, should draw
Thy life in question and thy name in hate.
Dear was the life of my beloved son,
And of his death behoves me be reveng'd;
Then hazard not thine own, Hieronimo,
But live t'effect thy resolution.
I therefore will by circumstances try,
What I can gather to confirm this writ;
And, heark'ning near the Duke of Castile's house,
Close, if I can, with Bel-Imperia,
To listen more, but nothing to betray."²

Meanwhile, Kyd further villifies Lorenzo by having him persuade
Pedringano to kill Serberine and then have the Watch apprehend Pedringano,
for "Slaves are ordained to no other end."³

Pedringano murders the unsuspecting Serberine and is caught and taken
to Hieronimo's. Balthazar is told of Serberine's death and wants revenge
on Pedringano, so that when he receives a letter from Pedringano asking

¹Thomas Kyd, The Spanish Tragedy, II, iv, 102-103. (Unless otherwise
stated, the following edition will be used when referring to the plays in
this thesis.) William Allan Neilson, ed., The Chief Elizabethan Dramatists
(Boston and New York, 1911.)

²Ibid., III, ii, 32-52.

³Ibid., III, ii, 129.
for aid, he sends by his page an empty box saying a pardon is in it. The resulting sickly humorous scenes provide Kyd with two valid dramatic points. One, the scenes are good comic relief, albeit rather morbid; and two, the scenes allow the audience to see one of the murderers being put to death. It is humorous as well as dramatically valid to have Pedringano go to the gallows fully expecting he has been betrayed by Lorenzo.

After the death of Pedringano, Hieronimo realizes that Bell-Imperia's letter was true. There is no longer any need for caution; his way is clear: "But wherefore waste I mine unfruitful words, / When naught but blood will satisfy my woes?" 7 The audience is still sympathetic to Hieronimo.

When Hieronimo's wife, Isabella, goes mad, Hieronimo knows he should have taken action. He is mad by this time. He even tears some papers brought to him by citizens asking for a judgment. Although Hieronimo knows what he must do, he needs a catalyst. Isabella supplies this in a spectacular scene. She cuts down the arbor where Horatio was hanged and rebukes her husband for not taking action; she then stabs herself: "And with this weapon will I wound the breast, / The hapless breast, that gave Horatio suck." 8

There can now be no turning back for Hieronimo:

Behoves thee then, Hieronimo, to be reveng'd!
The plot is laid of dire revenge; For nothing wants but acting of revenge. 9

The final bloody scene is one of the bloodiest and most violent in all Elizabethan drama, but it is a dramatic necessity. Hieronimo in the

7Ibid., III, vii, 69-70.
8Ibid., IV, ii, 37-38.
9Ibid., IV, iii, 26-29.
play-within-a-play stabs Lorenzo, and Bel-Imperia stabs Balthazar. She
then stabs herself. Hieronimo runs to hang himself but is caught. Before
he can be tortured, Hieronimo bites out his tongue. He then takes a knife,
meant for mending his pen, and stabs the Duke of Castile, Lorenzo's
father, and then stabs himself. The scene ends with the King of Spain
mourning over his brother's body, and the King of Portugal bearing the
body of his son while the trumpets sound a death march.

According to Fredson Bowers, Hieronimo has now become a villain, and
this is the reason for much of the violence in the play. Hieronimo used
devious means to ensnare and kill Lorenzo and Balthazar. If these were
not sufficient to label him a villain, the debacle which ends the play
(after promises of a pardon if his cause has been just, Hieronimo refuses
all questions and wilfully stabs Lorenzo's father) certainly qualifies
him as a villain. The Elizabethans understood collective revenge but
hated it. Hieronimo has strayed so far from the English sense of justice
as to withdraw any possibility of sympathy. Hieronimo's act is, therefore,
either a culmination of his villainy (mad or sane), or else Kyd was swept
away by a passion for violence, and he wrote the scene with no motive in
mind but the wish to portray more bloody deeds. Hieronimo, mad or sane,
was a villain to the English audience at the end and was forced to commit
suicide to satisfy the stern doctrine that murder, no matter what the
motive, was never permissible.¹⁰

Douglas Cole disagrees with Bowers as to the role of three of the
major characters. He says that Kyd's tragedy, although dealing out death
to all the guilty characters, focuses primarily on the suffering of innocents:
Hieronimo, Bel-Imperia, and Isabella. They are judged as innocent in the

¹⁰Bowers, p. 82.
play itself; the final chorus looks forward to the heavenly reward of each of them, as well as of Horatio, just as it portends classical infernal punishments for the guilty.\textsuperscript{11}

If we are to accept Cole's explanation, then Kyd's violence has very little reason; but this is not the case. The violence quite vividly portrays villains and heroes and then villains, as the main characters' machinations are depicted by Kyd. Obviously Kyd was influenced by the violence of the Elizabethan Age. The \textit{Spanish Tragedy} merely reflected its times.

It is almost an understatement to say that in \textit{The Spanish Tragedy} suffering, whether physical or mental, dominates the stage. Death and revenge for death are the focal themes of the play, and Kyd's genius embodies them in theatrically sensational situations which were to provide a favorite pattern for future Elizabethan tragedy. The "Chorus" itself operates as a concrete symbol of the focal themes, made up as it is of the ghost of Andrea and the allegorical figure of Revenge. They take no part in the action of the play, yet they represent in visual terms what all the action is about. And it is certainly above all in visual terms that Kyd chooses to represent the suffering and death of his characters. Compared with earlier English plays \textit{The Spanish Tragedy} is remarkable for the quality and variety of its staged physical violence.\textsuperscript{12}

In addition to the violence described in \textit{The Spanish Tragedy} the following three plays of Christopher Marlowe reveal much violence, both similar and dissimilar to that described in \textit{The Spanish Tragedy}. However, the motivation for this violence is somewhat different than that which has just been described.

\textsuperscript{11}Cole, p. 70.
\textsuperscript{12}Ibid., p. 63.
Both parts of Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* were written in the summer and autumn of 1587. They were acted upon the stage by the Lord Admiral's men and were so popular that they have often been regarded as ushering in a whole new era in English drama. Part II was probably an afterthought because Part I was so popular. Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* was written around 1590 and performed by Lord Strange's Men.13

In *Tamburlaine* (both parts) we find two types of violence: that which is necessary to plot development and that which is unnecessary or there merely for its own sake. However, in Part II more violence of the latter nature may be observed. It is almost as if because of the popularity of Part I, Marlowe tried to outdo himself in Part II.

Nowhere in Part I does the audience see Tamburlaine kill or physically injure anyone, not even at second hand through an underling. He refuses to punish the coward-king Mycetes; Cosroe and Arabia die of wounds inflicted by no specified person; Agydas, Bajazeth, and Zabina all kill themselves. Marlowe thus avoids the possibility of Tamburlaine's figure being tarnished by direct, observed engagement in personal slaughter. He is always at least one remove from his victims; Death, his servant, does the work for him. Tamburlaine is depicted as being "above" suffering and death.14

In *Tamburlaine II* the hero is coarser. The first time we see Tamburlaine kill anyone is when he stabs Calyphas, his own son, for refusing to enter battle. The horror of this scene is made more obvious because it is the first time. According to Cole the more barbaric character of Tamburlaine is a further development of Part I's theme of "honor" defined and achieved

---

13 Hibner, p. xxi.

14 Cole, p. 102.
by bloody destruction. As elsewhere, Tamburlaine persists in cloaking the
cruelst of deeds in the most glowing accounts of his superhuman aspiration.
He has his chariot pulled by captive kings, and he has the Governor of
Babylon hung on the city walls and shot to death. Some justifies these
deeds by stating that Marlowe uses this sensationalism because Tamburlaine
is a sensational character. This idea will be examined later in this
chapter.

Almost immediately Marlowe shows Tamburlaine as a sensational charac-
ter with sensational designs. In Act II of Part I Tamburlaine has turned
on his ally Cosroe and has defeated him. Tamburlaine now asserts his desire:

Nature that form'd us of four elements,

Warring within our breasts for regiment,

Both teach us all to have aspiring minds.

Our souls, whose faculties can comprehend

The wondrous architecture of the world,

And measure every wandering planet's cause,

Still climbing after knowledge infinite,

And always moving as the restless spheres,

Wills us to wear ourselves, and never rest,

Until we reach the ripest fruit of all,

That perfect bliss and sole felicity,

The sweet fruition of an earthly crown.

There is much in this play that weighs against Tamburlaine as a hero,
and this duplicity in dealing with Cosroe is one thing. There is an
ambiguity in the success and character that has been admired up to this
point. The previous lines point out a question to be debated throughout
the play. Aspiration is a natural and admirable thing, and survival of
the fittest is also natural law; however, much of Tamburlaine's cruelty
is unnecessary, even though many of the characters that scorn Tamburlaine
are somewhat decadent themselves.

---

15 Ibid., p. 108.
17 Steane, pp. 63-64.
Agydas is certainly not decadent, yet Tamburlaine overhears him warning Zenocrate of Tamburlaine. Tamburlaine enters and looks menacingly at Agydas, who now feels that he will soon kill him, perhaps even torture him. Agydas decides to "Go, wander, free from fear of tyrant's rage," and he stabs himself. Since Techelles and Usumcasane decide to bury him honorably, there can be no question as to his character, and as to Tamburlaine's (and Marlowe's) unnecessary cruelty.

As the play unfolds and Tamburlaine becomes more and more powerful, Marlowe depicts more and more violence—some necessary to the development of the play and some unnecessary. Marlowe is often restrained. For example there is a lack of violence in the battle scene in Act III. There is no fighting, only sounds of battle; then Tamburlaine enters after overcoming Bajazeth. The three kings have been slain, but offstage. Marlowe had the opportunity for a bloody scene but refrained.

As the play continues, however, Marlowe portrays the torture scene of Bajazeth and Zabina, Bajazeth's wife. He can almost be forgiven for this, but not for the scene with the four virgins in Act V. The four virgins have come to Tamburlaine to beg him to spare their city. This is his answer:

Tamb. Virgins, in vain ye labor to prevent That which mine honour swears shall be perform'd; Behold my sword! what see you at the point? 1 Virg. Nothing but fear and fatal steel, my lord. Tamb. Your fearful minds are thick and misty then; For there sits Death, there sits imperious Death Keeping his circuit by the slicing edge. But I am pleas'd you shall not see him there; He now is seated on my horsemen's spears, And on their points his fleshless body feeds. Techelles, straight go charge a few of them To charge these dames, and show my servant, Death, Sitting in scarlet on their armed spears.

Virgins, 0 pity us!

Tamb. Away with them, I say, and show them Death.

I will not spare these proud Egyptians. 19

Not only does Tamburlaine have the virgins killed, but Techelles has "hoisted up their slaughtered carcasses" on Damascus' walls. This scene certainly does not exhibit restraint on Marlowe's part; it is simply an over-abundance of cruelty and an example of unnecessary violence, created merely for the benefit of the audience.

Another violent scene illustrating Marlowe's love for the spectacular has Bajazeth beating his brains out against his cage where he has been kept prisoner like an animal. His wife seeing him dead beats her brains out also, but not before uttering some oaths against Tamburlaine.

J. B. Steane says,

Elizabethan drama is full of violence and cruelty, but these are examples of an individual and particularly nasty kind. It is clear that, whether in pleasure or repulsion, Marlowe was attracted to cruelty; and here in Tamburlaine, although the mind is divided, the division is unequal and the larger part seems to rate violence and cruelty as among the enviable excitements of life. 20

Tamburlaine regards himself as a superman destined to become ruler of the universe, and his deeds as depicted by Marlowe merely enhance that image. As Eugene M. Waith points out, "His contempt for earthly potentates and the assertion of his will combine in his conception of himself as the scourge of God, a conception which he shares with Hercules." 21

This conception certainly gives Marlowe an allowable margin of freedom in describing Tamburlaine's deeds, but not as much freedom as he has used.

19Tbid., V, ii, 43-58.

20Steane, p. 85.

There is certainly nothing tragic about Tamburlaine's character; there is no defeat or destruction that he must undergo, no physical or mental anguish that he displays. The major burden of the play is the sensational revelation of Tamburlaine's superhuman character and ability. Marlowe works hard to this end; the action consists of a series of Tamburlaenian victories, each greater than the last; the imagery intensifies the idea of greatness and awe-inspiring achievement, surrounding the conqueror and his deeds with enhancing figures of speech drawn from the gods of classical mythology, from jewels, treasure, precious stones and metals, stars, planets and other heavenly bodies. The spectacle of violence underlines the power of Tamburlaine.  

Part II of Tamburlaine is even more violent than Part I, but in some scenes Marlowe is curiously restrained. The King of Hungary is wounded offstage, and when he enters he calls his wound "well-deserved." "And let this death, wherein to sin I die,/ Conceive a second life in endless mercy."  

Zenocrate's death is a peaceful scene. Music sounds with Tamburlaine by her side speaking of her beauty. Her death marks an end to any opposition to Tamburlaine. She had shown pity for Bajazeth and Zabina and had pleaded to Tamburlaine to show mercy to her people. She dies humbly and in a religious calm—all this appeals to a nature and a view of life unlike Tamburlaine's. However, the emphasis is upon her womanliness. A conscience and a tender heart are suitable in women but a dishonor to manliness.  

---

22Cole, p. 87.  
24Steane, pp. 82-83.
Marlowe now digs deeper into pathos by showing the death of the valiant Captain of Balsora, who has been mortally wounded in battle against Tamburlaine's forces. The violent imagery used in this scene is a good example of the thematic elements in the play.

**Captain.** A deadly bullet gliding through my side Lies heavy on my heart; I cannot live. I feel my liver pierced, and all my veins, That there begin and nourish every part, Mangled and torn, and all my entrails bathed In blood that straineth from their orifex. Farewell, sweet wife! Sweet son, farewell! I die. [He dies]

**Olympia.** Death, whether art thou gone, that both we live? Come back again, sweet Death, and strike us both! One minute ends our days, and one sepulcher Contain our bodies! Death, why com'st thou not? Well, this must be the messenger for thee. [She draws a dagger]

Olympia now stabs her son after he requests to die. He cannot live without his father. She now burns the bodies of her husband and son and attempts to kill herself. Theridamus and Techelles enter and stop her, for they admire her bravery and decide to take her to Tamburlaine.

The obvious plot contrivance and device Marlowe uses to portray Olympia's death weaken the play. She tricks Theridamus into killing her by telling him she has a potion which when applied to the body makes the body invincible. She anoints her neck and Theridamus stabs her there. It is as though Marlowe realized the death of one man, Tamburlaine, was not sufficient matter for a play, so he must fill in with these necessarily violent vignettes.

The death of Calyphas, Tamburlaine's son, is in marked contrast to the death of Olympia's son. It is almost a ritual killing, as Tamburlaine gets rid of an unworthy part of himself. Because of preceding violent

---

25 *Tamburlaine*, Part II, iii, iv, 4-5.
scenes, the audience probably felt little revulsion when a father kills his own son. Cruelty is accepted along with valor, pride, and ambition as a part of the spirit which makes Tamburlaine great. This scene is totally in keeping with the theme of the play. To be the terror of the world is his exclusive concern. The fact that the violent nature of Tamburlaine was accepted so readily by Elizabethan audiences is a sad comment on the times.

Marlowe's insatiable passion for violence may be seen in Act V, scene 1, of Part II. The governor of Babylon refuses to yield. When Babylon is captured, Tamburlaine orders the governor to be hung in chains on the walls. The Kings of Natolia and Jerusalem hurl insults at Tamburlaine, and he has them harnessed to his chariot. He now orders the governor to be shot. The once-proud governor has been reduced to a begging, pleading coward. He is shot but only wounded by Theridamas; then, finally, Tamburlaine orders all to shoot the helpless governor. Tamburlaine enjoys the spectacle:

Tamburlaine: So, now he hangs like Bagdut's governor,
Having as many bullets in his flesh
As there be breeches in her battered wall.

Tamburlaine stands outside all morality. He is typically Machiavellian. He is finally cut off at the peak of his glory, not as punishment for sin but rather as the necessary culmination of his greatness. Tamburlaine dies because all who live must die. His conquests are undiminished, his one weak son has been destroyed, and his two remaining sons are there to carry on.

---

27 Tamburlaine, Part II, V, i, 157-159.
28 Ribner, pp. xxvii-xxviii.
Truly, Tamburlaine is the hero, not the villain of this play. This fact is especially true for an Elizabethan audience. The only part in both plays where his role as hero may be doubted is when he burns the religious books and dares Mahomet out of his heaven29. This whole scene illustrates the utter futility of Tamburlaine's dreams.

Simply because Marlowe indulges so readily in violence does not take away from his brilliance with blank verse. His "mighty line" is never more evident than in the death scene of Tamburlaine:

> Not last, Techelles? No, for I shall die.  
> See where my slave, the ugly monster Death,  
> Shaking and quivering, pale and wan for fear,  
> Stands aiming at me with his murdering dart,  
> Who flies away at every glance I give;  
> And when I look away, comes stealing on,  
> Villain, away, and his thee to the field!  
> I and my army come to load thy bark  
> With souls of thousands mangled carcasses.  
> Look where he goes! But see he comes again  
> Because I stay. Techelles, let us March  
> And weary Death with bearing souls to hell.

> farewell, my boys! My dearest friends farewell!  
> My body feels, my soul doth weep to see  
> Your sweet desires deprived my company,  
> For Tamburlaine, the scourge of God, must die.  
> [He dies]30

Throughout both parts of Tamburlaine, Marlowe draws attention to the cost in simple human terms of the superman's march toward the fulfillment of his great destiny. These elements convey a sense of futility and death which support a return to reality in the fact that Tamburlaine must die. Nevertheless, the events of the play suggest a preoccupation on the part of the author with violence, unnecessary violence. While it is true that much of the spectacular action occurring in the plays aids

---

29 Stocane, pp. 62-63.  
30 Tamburlaine, Part II, V, iii, 66–77, 2h5–2h8.
the purpose of character development, it is also true that taken all at once this spectacle is a little too much to swallow. When taken separately each act has a valid, although somewhat shaky, dramatic purpose, but when we view all the violence as a whole, the only logical conclusion is that Marlowe's passion for violence, as well as the Elizabethan taste for violence, combined to make Tamburlaine something less than a brilliant play.

One final footnote on Tamburlaine is appropriate at this point. An accident occurred during a performance of the scene where the Governor of Babylon is hung up in chains on the walls for Tamburlaine's soldiers to shoot at. In a letter written on November 10, 1587, we learn that a child in the audience was killed accidentally, by a shot fired by one of the Lord Admiral's players in this scene.31

In The Jew of Malta Marlowe deals with a similar conception of villainy as in Tamburlaine. The first two acts of The Jew of Malta show much promise for tragedy; however, by Act III, scene ii, Barabas has accomplished his revenge and the last part of the play is concerned with his lust for power and attempts to vindicate himself from punishment. The last three acts of The Jew of Malta, even in their present debased state, must confirm the weakness of the earlier play. Barabas's Machiavellism consists purely in deeds of wholesale slaughter, absurd in their conception, and in the usual deceits practiced to rid the doer of witnesses to his crime.32

Speaking of the suffering in The Jew of Malta Douglas Cole says,

Barabas is human, too, to the extent that he can feel suffering; but it is the suffering that he inflicts on others that provides the focal interest. The Jew of Malta is a spectacle of personified evil at work, rather than a spectacle of tragic suffering.33

32Bowers, p. 106.
33Cole, p. 123.
According to Cole, "...Marlowe's treatment of suffering in this play contributes to the greater picture." While this statement is true up to a point, it is not entirely accurate. Much of the suffering and violence in The Jew of Malta is present merely for the sake of spectacle and, as we have already seen, for the sake of Marlowe's obsession with violence.

In a way Marlowe prepares the audience for the horrors he is about to unleash. In Act I Barabas is wronged by the Christians, and he vows revenge. In Act II he purchases a slave named Ithamore and proceeds to tell him "that [which] shall stick by thee."

First be thou void of these affections,
Compassion, love, vain hope, and heartless fear;
Be mov'd at nothing, see thou pity none,
But to thyself smile when the Christians moan.

As for myself, I walk abroad o' nights
And kill sick people groaning under walls;
Sometimes I go about and poison wells,
And now and then, to cherish Christian thieves,
I am content to lose some of my crowns,
That I may, walking in my galley,
See 'am go pinion'd along by my door.
Being young I studied physics, and began
To practise first upon the Italian;
And always kept the sextons' arms in ure
With digging graves and ringing dead men's knells.
And after that I was an engineer,
And in the war 'twixt France and Germany,
Under pretence of helping Charles the Fifth,
Slew friends and enemies with my stratagem.
Then after that was I an usurer
And with extorting, cozening, forfeiting,
And tricks belonging into brokery,
I filled the jails with bankrupts in a year,
And with young orphans planted hospitals,
And every man made some or other mad,
And now and then one hang himself for grief,
Firming upon his breast a long great scroll
How I with interest tormented him.
But mark how I am blessed for plaguing them;
I have as much coin as will buy the town.
But tell me now, how hast thou spent thy time?

31 Ibid.
Ith. Faith, master,
In setting Christians villages on fire,
Chaining of eunuchs, binding galley-slaves,
Onetime I was an ostler in an inn,
And in the night-time secretly would I steal
To travellers' chambers, and there cut their throats.
Once at Jerusalem, where the pilgrims kneeled,
I strewed powder on the marble stones,
And there withal their knees would rankle so,
That I have laughed a-good to see the cripples
Go limping home to Christendom on stilts.
Bar. Why this is something. Make accounts of me
As of thy fellow, we are villains both. 35

For villains such as Barabas and Ithamore it is not unusual to indulge in as much violence as Marlowe depicts. As J. B. Steane points out,

"With wealth their end and opportunism their means, the people of the play cannot be other than hard and ruthless." 36

Because of this point we can accept the fact that Barabas feigns a challenge to Mathias from Lodowick, hoping that they will both be killed.
We can even believe Barabas enjoys watching them die, simply because he wants revenge on Fernez; however, it taxes the imagination somewhat to conceive of anyone so cruel as to use his daughter as a tool for revenge the way Barabas does.

Barabas obviously thinks very highly of his daughter, for early in the play he ranks her on the same level with himself and his wealth:

"Nay, let 'em combat, conquer, and kill all! So they spare me, my daughter, and my wealth." 37 Therefore, we must condemn Marlowe as being overly violent when he has Barabas poison all the nuns in the convent just to murder his only daughter.

35 The Jew of Malta, II, iii, 175-178, 180-220.
36 Steane, p. 169.
37 The Jew of Malta, I, i, 151-152.
In addition to this dramatically imperfect plot twist, Marlowe employs coldly calculated murder and sickly humorous, as well as unbelievable, comedy in the same scene. Barabas and Ithamore plot for the lives of the two friars because they know too much. The scene is a room in the house of Barabas where Friar Barnardine is asleep:

Itham. You loiter, master; wherfore stay we thus? 0 how I long to see him shake his heels.
Bar. Come one, sirrah.
Off with your girdle, make a handsome noose.
[They put the noose around the friar's neck.]
Frier, awake!

Frier Barn. What, do you mean to strangle me?
Itham. Yes, 'cause you use to confess.

Friar. Blame not us but the proverb, 'Confess and be hanged.'
Full hard!
Frier Barn. What, will you have my life?
Bar. Full hard I say.—You would have had my gods.
Itham. Ay, and our lives too, therefore pull again.

[They strangle him.]
'Tis neatly done, sir, here's no print at all.
Bar. Then it is as it should be; take him up.
Itham. Nay, master, be rul'd by me a little.

[Stands the body upright against the wall and puts a staff in its hand.]
So let him lean upon his staff.
Excellent! he stands as if he were begging of bacon. 38

The next scene where Friar Barnardine falls to the ground when struck by Friar Jacomo's staff is equally ghastly. Marlowe probably realized that Elizabethan audiences would enjoy these scenes, but today we must severely criticize him for being too patronizing. The rest of the play is contrived and somewhat unbelievable.

This play shows Marlowe's limitations as a dramatist. The theory of dramatic construction centering on a unifying hero could not overcome the fatal split between the grandeur of the character's conception and the pettiness of the illustrative action. 39

38Tbid., IV, ii, 11-29.
39Bowers, p. 106.
J. B. Steane says,

Greed, hypocrisy and littleness provide a setting against which we follow the fortunes of the devil-as-hero. In the first scenes we have predominantly realistic drama and the ambition, fears and sufferings of a human being. Gradually the man becomes monster and, with the established monstrosity of the man and the society around him, the strokes of portraiture thicken to caricature. Amongst the desolation of a murderous, hollow and little world, the dignity involved in tragedy gives way before the absurdity involved in force. This is the 'savage comic humor' of which Eliot wrote, and if it is not 'terribly serious' in the urgency or concentration of its tone, it is at least a kind of writing not lightly arrived at by a man whose work began with such a very different vision of the world and the men it was made for. 40

Not unlike Marlowe's The Jew of Malta is George Chapman's Bussy D'Ambois (1598); however, the latter, although minus Marlowe's "mighty line," contains a more believable plot. In addition, the typical Elizabethan violence which Chapman employs, although unnecessary to some extent, is more acceptable than Marlowe's use of violence in Tamburlaine and The Jew of Malta.

Early in the play Chapman sets the stage for what is to follow. Maflfe gives D'Ambois some crowns sent by Monsieur but first tests him. D'Ambois finally strikes him and Maflfe says, "These crowns are set in blood; blood be their fruit."41

Early in Act II when Chapman has an opportunity to portray a gory scene in typical Elizabethan style, he refrains and uses a nuntius, or messenger. The character with the tag name Nuntius describes the fight between D'Ambois and Barrisor, Pyrrhot and Helynell, Brisac and L'Anou. In this confusing account Nuntius mentions D'Ambois revenging the death of Brisac by killing L'Anou. Pyrrhot and Helynell kill each other. Five men die by the sword. With Kyd or Marlowe corpses would have been strewn over the stage.

40 Steane, p. 203.
41 Bussy D'Ambois, I, i, 222.
Later in the play D'Ambois is pardoned and now goes in "service to the Duchess."

And now through blood and vengeance, deeds of height,
And hard to be achiev'd 't is fit I make attempt of her perfection.

The stage is now set for the violence yet to come. In Act IV, scene ii, Montsoury, after being told of his wife's infidelity, stabs her servant, Pero, without warning when she enters with a letter. Pero, however, does not die, and is tended by Monsieur's surgeon.

Chapman, as has previously been pointed out, used less onstage violence and spectacle than Kyd and Marlowe; however, in Act IV, scene i, Chapman reverts to the pure spectacle of violence which appealed so much to Elizabethan audiences. Montsoury pulls his wife, Tamyra, by her hair, then stabs her twice, telling her to write who was the go-between or "pander" in her affair. He puts her on the rack for torture, but still she refuses to comply with his demands. Friar Comolet enters and seeing Tamyra on the rack dies with sword in hand. Tamyra now begins to write with her own blood to her love, Bussy. Montsoury puts the Friar into a vault and disguises himself, as Tamyra wraps herself in the arras.

William Archer alludes to this scene in the following excerpt from his book, The Old Drama and the New:

Now there is nothing easier—nothing that demands less art, less invention, less expenditure of intellect—than to thrill people's nerves with blood and torments, if you can only find people who like to have their nerves so thrilled. But the modern dramatist enjoys no such facility. He is sadly restricted by the queasy stomach of the modern public. The elder Dumas, in his first play, Henri III et sa cour, introduced the same incident which Chapman had employed in Bussy D'Ambois, of making a husband force his wife to write a letter betraying her lover into an ambush; but Dumas's Duc de Guise, instead of stabbing the

\[1\] Ibid., II, i, 214-216.
Duchess and putting her on the rack, merely clutched her arm with his mailed fist; and even that was held to verge upon inadmissible brutality.⁴³

Bussy’s death scene, however, is well handled. The Umbra of the Friar appears to Bussy to warn him of "...bloody deeds past and to come." Although warned by Behemoth that the Friar is dead and he should not go to Tamyra, Bussy ignores the warning when he is confronted by the disguised Montsurry. Bussy frightens the murderers but they return with Montsurry. Bussy has Montsurry in his power but lets him go, and then he is shot by the murderers. Bussy’s death speech is done with typical classical restraint, full of classical allusions and vivid imagery.

"...O, my heart is broken.  
Fate, nor these murderers, Monsieur, nor the Guise,  
Have any glory in my death, but this,  
This Killing Spectacle, this prodigy.  
My sun is turn’d to blood, in whose red beams  
Minas and Osen, hid in drifts of snow  
Laid on my heart and liver, from their veins  
Melt like two hungry torrents, eating rocks  
Into the ocean of all human life,  
And make it better, only with my blood.  
O frail condition of strength, valor, virtue,  
In me (like warning fire upon the top  
Of some steep beacon on a steeper hill)  
Made to express it like a falling star  
Silently glanc’d, that like a thunderbolt  
Look’d to have struck and shook the firmament."⁴⁴

Robert J. Lordi comments on Chapman’s attitude toward Bussy:

Considerable critical difficulty too has arisen concerning Chapman’s attitude toward his hero and the meaning of the play. Bussy is, on the one hand, a kind of ideal hero whom Chapman holds up for our admiration; he is, like Tamburlaine, the epitome of Renaissance man with his lofty ambition and noble aspirations to surpass the stars; he is like Hercules or Achilles, a man of tremendous strength, courage, valor, virtue and passion; and he is like Prometheus, an exemplum of individualism, unrelenting in his will to freedom and his defiance of the gods and their laws.

---

⁴³Archer, pp. 146-147.

⁴⁴Bussy D’Ambois, v, iv, 130-146.
Bussy, on the other hand, has been viewed as the antithesis of all his Christian-humanist creator believed in and valued: he is the embodiment of the counter-Renaissance ideal. Montaigne's natural man, a man endowed with his "naute noblesse" and who is a law into himself; he is a subservant of the moral order, a man of hypocrisy, arrogance, self-will, libertinism, and he is a man of blood and passion, or a man directly opposed to the Christian-humanist ideal that reason should dominate the instinctive life.\textsuperscript{45}

Bussy's death scene is well handled, and anyone who may see the love affair with Tanyra as irrelevant to the action wrongly accuses Chapman of structural incoherence and weakness in plot construction. As Lordi says, Tanyra's refusal of Monsieur (symbolized by her refusal of his pearl necklace), despite his wealth and outward greatness, which like a colossal statue is all hollow within, brilliantly counterpoints her acceptance of Bussy (symbolized by her gift to Bussy of a pearl necklace), despite his want of outward greatness and because of his inner worth of manliness ('man,' she tells us, 'is a name of honor for a king!') And so, ironically, Bussy's virtue indirectly provides Monsieur with a motive for destroying him.\textsuperscript{46}

Bussy's death scene and final speech are, therefore, credible; so the only fault one may find in Chapman's handling of a potentially violent play is the scene where Montserry tortures Tanyra. By modern drama's standards perhaps this scene would seem a bit overdone, but the scene would have appealed to Elizabethan audiences, and therefore, we cannot fault Chapman greatly for this relatively small indulgence.

Chapman's sequel to Bussy D'Ambois, The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois (1610), is very similar to its predecessor in its relative lack of violence. Opportunity for violence is present in this later play, but in most scenes Chapman shuns this opportunity. For example, in Act IV, scene i Clermont D'Ambois battles valiantly and escapes from two soldiers sent by Maillard


\textsuperscript{46}Ibid, p. xxvi.
to capture Clermont, but the entire scene is related by Aumale. We can only imagine how Kyd would have handled this situation.

In any revenge play, especially the Elizabethan revenge play, violence is a necessary requirement. The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois is no exception; however, the violence portrayed by Chapman is not violence for its own sake but a well-constructed necessary plot development. There is the ever-present revenge tragedy ghost, in this case Bussy D'Ambois, himself, who foresees tragedy. He says Clermont shall not die, but in the end, his revenge complete, Clermont takes his own life, but not before killing Montsury. The fight is a long one and Montsury dies valiantly, witnessed by his wife and daughter. Unlike Kyd or Marlowe, Chapman ends his play on a note of forgiveness and nobility, a typical classical play. Before he dies, Montsury forgives Clermont and Tamrya:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Clermont.} & \quad \text{Noble and Christian.} \\
\text{Tamrya.} & \quad \text{Oh, it breaks my heart.} \\
\text{Clermont.} & \quad \text{And should; for all faults found in him before,} \\
& \quad \text{These words, this end, make full amends and more.} \\
& \quad \text{Rest, worthy soul, and with it the dear spirit} \\
& \quad \text{Of my loved brother, rest in endless peace;} \\
& \quad \text{Soft lie thy bones, Heaven be your soul's abode,} \\
& \quad \text{And to your ashes be the earth no load.}^{47}
\end{align*}
\]

Another example of Chapman's restraint occurs in the scene at the beginning of Act V when the Guise is murdered. The king fears treachery by Clermont and the Guise, and he sends for the Guise. The Guise does not think the king will dare harm him. He takes up the arras, and the guard enters and strikes him down. The Guise asks for the king to justify this deed. The king enters and says, "... this blood I shed is to save the blood/ Of many thousands."\(^{48}\)

---


\(^{48}\)Ibid., V, i, 644-445.
Another classicist, Ben Jonson, uses violence in *Sejanus* (1603), but not the Kydian type. The same restraint found in Chapman is also somewhat in evidence in Jonson though not to as great a degree. Action is sometimes implied rather than witnessed. In Act II Sejanus speaks, giving his view on revenge and how he will obtain power. This is immediately following his plot with Drusus' wife to poison her husband. The scene brings to mind a similar scene in *The Jew of Malta* where Barabas enumerates his villainy for the benefit of Ithamore, his slave.

If this be not revenge, when I have done
And made it perfect, let Egyptian slaves,
Parthians, and barefoot Hebrews brand my face,
And print my body full of injuries,
Thou lost thyself, child Drusus, when thou thought' st
Thou couldst overslip my vengeance or withstand
The power I had to crush thee into air,
Thy follies now shall taste what kind of man
They have provok'd, and this thy father's house
Crack in the flame of my incensed rage,
Whose fury shall admit no shame or mean. —
Adultery! it is the lightest ill
I will commit. A race of wicked acts
Shall o'er approve, nor yet keep silent: things,
That for their cunning, close, and cruel mark
Thy father would wish his, and shall, perhaps,
Carry the empty name, but we the prize.
On, then, my soul, and start not in thy course;
Though heav'n drop sulphur, and hell belch out fire,
Laugh at the idle terrors; tell proud love,
Between his power and thine there is no odds;
'Twas only fear first in the world made gods. 49

Another example of violence by implication occurs in Act V. Sejanus has fallen out of favor because of Macro's treachery. He is taken prisoner, and Terentius tells of his fate. The opportunity for a spectacular scene was present, but Jonson did not take the opportunity. He even employs a Huntius to describe the fate of Sejanus' family. Even the violence described by the Huntius is superfluous. Sejanus' fate may be seen by

49 *Sejanus, His Fall*, II, ii, 1-24.
the audience to be the necessary end for all villains, but the crude fate of his family as described by the messenger is superfluous.

On the other hand, Jonson's violence and action are certainly not confined to second-hand observations. Silius stabs himself onstage after unsuccessfully trying to defend himself against Varro's accusations. However, much of Sejanus' horrors are by implication, and Jonson muddles much of the plot by this overdone cataloguing of violence.

Sejanus is not content with simple raw murder; he must manipulate his victims by his ingenuity into destroying each other. The ambitious intrigues of this villain occupy the weight of the plot. Only one intrigue is motivated by revenge—Sejanus bears a grudge against Drusus and tricks Tiberius into poisoning Drusus. The downfall of Sejanus is hastily dramatized and poorly done. The hurried ending, with its set horrors when each character takes his turn at dying, indicates all too clearly the loose hold on characterization when the insistence is on strong action. There is a muddled subplot—the blood-revenge of Caligula for the death of his father, Germanicus. This division of dramatic interest between the two major villains and a revenger of blood who was a minor character, was beyond the author's grasp.50

Not all violence was limited to tragedy. John Marston, a contemporary of Jonson and Chapman, uses violence in his plays, but his violence is a different type. There are no murders in his "comedy" The Malcontent, yet the violence is still present, Archer says,

That Marston had a horribly coarse mind is generally admitted; but he is at the same time credited with imagination and passionate earnestness. If it be a sign of earnestness to have no gleam of humour, the quality may be allowed him. When he tried to write comedy, as in The Malcontent, what he actually produced was a

50Bowers, pp. 159-160.
melodram without murders, but full of lust and violence, and worked out by means of the most preposterous disguises. Nor is the over-estimation of Marston as a dramatist to be explained by the usual confusion of dramatic with poetic merit; for his poetic gift is of the slightest. He is crabbed, pedantic, violent, often grotesque. The lyric gift which, in many of his fellows, suborns the verdict to criticism is mainly lacking in him.51

The golden age in English drama had begun to wane by the time John Webster's The Duchess of Malfi appeared in 1614. It seems that there is very little excuse for much of Webster's violence, except that it is there merely for its own sake and for spectacular effect. Whereas Kyd and Marlowe may be excused for their somewhat excessive use of violence (they were working with a relatively unrefined type of drama in England at the time—tragedy), no such excuse may be found for Webster. Tragedy had developed through Chapman and Jonson, and Shakespeare had certainly refined tragedy to its highest point. Shakespeare had also shown that it was possible to use violence and at the same time create a fine play. Webster reverts to English tragedy in its earliest stages.

In The Duchess of Malfi there is a premium on violence. There are ten deaths in the play, a dance of madmen, torture, and various horrors.

Much of the violence contained in The Duchess of Malfi is unnecessary. The tortures that Ferdinand uses (which will be examined in a later chapter) are horrible, and his motives for torturing his sister are obscure. He gives them only after she is dead. He had a hope that "Had she continued widow, to have gained/ An infinite mass of treasure by her death."52 The reason cannot be because the Duchess has a surviving son by her first marriage. Webster did not take time to conceive of better reasons. As

51 Archer, p. 95.

52 The Duchess of Malfi, V, ii, 299-300.
Archer says, "So long as people behaved in a sufficiently violent and sanguinary way, Elizabethan audiences did not insist on their having any particular motive for so doing."  

Webster keeps death, disease, and insanity before the minds of the audience. The death of the Duchess is more than a murder. "It is an almost clinical investigation of the breaking point of the human spirit."  

The torture goes beyond the realm of normal human understanding. Webster gives no satisfactory human motivation for what Ferdinand does; therefore, Webster's skill as a dramatist must be questioned.  

Travis Bogard viewed Webster as a great dramatist, and he reasons,  

As Webster darkens the world of his tragedy, life appears to become an increasing agony. What had been aberration to the earlier satirists becomes in Webster the norm. Each evil is a symbol of death, each abuse a step toward it. In the end, what his satire revealed of the true nature of life is fused with the outcome of his tragic story. The ultimate tragedy of Webster's world is not the death of any individual but the presence of evil and decay which drags all mankind to death. The function of the satire is to reveal man's common mortality and his involvement in evil; the tragic story is the story of a few who find courage to defy such revelation. In their defiance there is a glory for mankind, and in their struggle and assertion lies the brilliance of Websterian tragedy.  

Yet it is important to realize that Websterian tragedy is great because of its fusion of satire and tragedy. Had this fusion been incomplete, the effect would have been destroyed. A lack of reality or of proper heightening, a failure to integrate the satire content—and the accusation could justly be made that these spectacles were merely sensational shows to please the vulgar. As it is, taking the drama in their own time, in the light of the carefully developed techniques which produced them, the accusation seems in all significant instances to lack justification.  

---

53 Archer, p. 53.  
54 Bogard, p. 52.  
55 Ibid., p. 147.
On the other hand Archer disagrees and cites the scene where Ferdinand draws a curtain and shows the Duchess wax figures of Antonio and their son, apparently lying dead. She takes them for reality and makes no move to approach them. This is improbable, says Archer. It would have been easier, safer, and more dramatic to have lied to her in words. Archer continues, "This waxen lie is the device of a dramatist in search of crude physical horrors."56

Somewhere in between these two extremes lies the valid judgment of Webster as a playwright. The deaths of the Duchess, Cariola, Antonio, and the Duchess' children are full of horror and are sad occasions evoking the audience's pity; however the horrors are handled as well as possible, and if satire were intended, the scenes are even commendable. Bogard says,

Contrasting action is a structural axiom of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama. . . Nowhere else, however, is it used so consistently for satiric purposes as in Webserian tragedy. Webster uses it to stress, as satire should, the wide distance and, at the same time, the frightening interplay between good and evil, the pitiable and the horrible in society. Vicious action is scaled against gentle; in the starkness of the contrast, both are stripped of appearances, and the essential quality of each is intensified.57

Archer takes offense at Charles Lamb's defense of Webster. Lamb commends Webster for the Duchess' death scene. He goes on to condemn the remarkable circumstances surrounding the Cardinal's death. The Cardinal tells his attendant noblemen to take no notice of him if they should hear him "in violent fit." When Bosola comes to kill the Cardinal, his Eminence screams for help; but the gentlemen, assembled on the Upper Stage, resolutely ignore his appeal. This is a "childish invention" and is "coldly mechanical." It is the work of a man deliberately setting out, in the coldest of cold

56 Archer, p. 58.
57 Bogard, p. 111.
blood, to make the reader's flesh creep. Webster should compress and concentrate. His crude and arbitrary horrors would be hoisted or laughed off the stage if a melodramatist today dared to offer them to his public.58

Webster even adds a new twist to the horror of murder. In Act V, scene ii, the Cardinal tells Julia, his mistress, his secret that he ordered the killing of the Duchess and her two children. He then orders her to kiss a book to seal her secrecy. The book contains poison and she dies. This ingenious use of poison seems to begin a trend in tragedy toward even more ingenious stage devices and is topped only by Shirley's devices in The Cardinal (1641).

The final act of The Duchess of Malfi resembles its counterpart in The Spanish Tragedy. Bosola goes to kill the Cardinal. He bars the door and kills a servant who tries to unbar it. Now he stabs the Cardinal. Ferdinand enters and, because of his madness, he stabs the Cardinal and gives Bosola his death wound. Before Bosola dies, he kills Ferdinand.

The violence in The Duchess of Malfi is unnecessary in many scenes. The play is a return to pre-Shakespearean tragedy and is not an advance in the progression of tragedy but rather a recession.

Jacobean drama regresses even more with the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher. These two dramatists are entertainers. The constant principle underlying their work is the desire to amuse. They attempt tragic passion only to suit the taste and fashion of the audience. Their plays reflect the court life of their time. In fact, the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries preferred contemporaries because of their plays: prominent story line, more clearly marked characters, and clearer style. Beaumont and Fletcher are superficial; the violence and passion in their

---

58Archer pp. 60-61.
plays are mere ornaments and are totally unnecessary except for sensational effect. The imagery which is characteristic of the best Jacobean drama, Webster's plays, for instance, is not present in the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher.\(^{59}\)

In *The Maid's Tragedy* (1619) Beaumont and Fletcher create an improbable situation and spice it with unnecessary and brutal violence. Evadne, the maid, marries Amintor but then becomes the mistress of the king. The entire basis for the play is ridiculous.

The starting point of the action—the cruel foolish of Amintor, who marries Evadne only to be told with bitter contempt that his function is to serve as a cloak for her amour with the king—this basis of the whole play is utterly incredible. What woman in her senses, however cynical, however abandoned, would select a passionate lover to play such a trick upon? It is simply to invite disaster; and it is a sound principle of drama that disaster too recklessly invited ceases to be interesting. History shows us how easy it is to find complacent scapegoats for royal sins; and there is nothing to suggest that there would have been any difficulty in this case. Then the psychology of Evadne is obscure. She seems to despise herself from the first, and to act in desperation, but why, then, has she ever fallen to the king? She apparently feels no passion for him; and as for ambition, what glory is there in being a king's secret mistress? She does not appear to exercise any power through her influence over her paramour. Perhaps the radical fault with the story is that the king is a lay figure, a mere rhetorical puppet. The relation between him and Evadne might have been made interesting but it is not. Finally, Evadne's conversion through the bullying of Melantius is psychology simplified to its uttermost. I say nothing of the brutal grossness of the play; but I do say that if a modern dramatist produced a play so full of psychological improbabilities and enigmas, he would certainly not find the critics assigning him a place only a little lower than Shakespeare.\(^{60}\)

An example of Beaumont and Fletcher's overuse of violence occurs in Act V. Evadne repents and promises Melantius she will kill the king. She enters his bedroom and finds him asleep.

\(^{59}\) Wilson, pp. 98-99.

\(^{60}\) Archer, pp. 65-66.
Evadne. Yet I must not
Thus tamely do it as he sleeps—that were
To rock him to another world: my vengeance
Shall take him waking, and lay before him
The number of his wrongs and punishments.
I'll shape his sins like furies, till I waken
His evil angel, his sick conscience,
And then I'll strike him dead.

Evadne now ties him down and enumerates his guilt. She stabs him,
and the king asks for mercy.

King. Hold, Evadne!
I do command thee hold.

Evad. I do not mean sin,
To part so fairly with you; we must change
More of these love-tricks yet.

King. What bloody villain
Provok'st thee to this murder?

Evad. Thou, Thou monster!

King. Oh!

Evad. Thou kept'st me brave at court and whor'd me
King; then married me to a young noble gentleman,
And whor'd me still.

King. Evadne, pity me!

Evad. Hell take me then! This for my lord Amintor,
This for my noble brother! And this stroke
For the most wronged of women! [Kills him]

King. Oh! I die.

Evad. Die all our faults together! I forgive thee. [Exit]

The above scene illustrates well how Beaumont and Fletcher play up
to the emotions of the audience. The cheap stage devices they use in
this play are not confined to the previous scene, however. The senti-
mentality employed in scene iii of Act V is even more obvious than that
used in scene i. The deaths which are depicted are necessary to the cul-
mination of the plot, but the manner in which they are presented points
out Beaumont and Fletcher's superficial and unnecessary plot twists.

Aspatia in scene iii enters disguised as Aspatia's brother. She
coaxes Amintor to draw on her hoping to die by his sword. He takes as

much as he can and finally draws and wounds Aspatia. Evadne now enters and informs Amintor she has killed the king, hoping he will now love her. However, Amintor is appalled at so base a deed and chastises her for it. Evadne then stabs herself and soon after, she dies. This is a poor scene. After hating her for what she did, Amintor, after she stabs herself, has "a little human nature yet" and holds her hand while she dies.

Now Aspatia revives and after overhearing that Amintor still loves her, she tells him who she is and now there is hope that she will recover.

Asp. I shall sure live, Amintor; I am well;
A kind of healthful joy wanders within me,

Amin. The world wants lives to excuse thy loss;
Come, let me take thee to some place of help.

Asp. Amintor, thou must stay; I must rest here;
My strength begins to destroy my will.
How dost thou, my best soul? I would fain live
Now, if I could. Wouldn't thou have loved me, then?

Amin. Alas,
All that I am's not worth a hair from thee!

Asp. Give me thy hand; mine hands grope up and down,
And cannot find thee; I am wondrous sick.
Have I thine, Amintor?

Amin. Thou greatest blessing of the world thou hast.

Asp. I do believe thee better than my sense
Oh, I must go! farewell! [Dies]

Amin. She swoons.—Aspatia!—Help! for God's sake, water,
Such as may chain life over to this frame!—
Aspatia, speak!—What, no help yet? I fool!
I'll chase her temples, Yet there nothing stirs,
Some hidden power tell her, Amintor calls,
And let her answer me!—Aspatia, speak!
I have heard, if there be any life, but bow
The body thus, and it will show itself.
Oh, she is gone! I will not leave her yet,
Since out of justice we must challenge nothing,
I'll call it mercy, if you'll pity me,
You heavenly powers, and lend for some few years
The blessed soul with's fair seat again!
No comfort come; the gods deny me too.
I'll bow the body and again.—Aspatia!—
The soul is fled forever; and I wrong
Myself, so long to lose her company,
Must I talk now? Here's to be with thee, Love! [Dies himself] 62
Beaumont and Fletcher use the violence described above for no dramatic purpose, except to evoke the audience's pity; therefore the violence may be termed unnecessary. It is pathos pushed beyond the bounds of effectiveness.

After Beaumont and Fletcher it is hard to imagine many new plot twists for the sake of spectacular action. Unnecessary violence has become synonymous with the plays of these two Jacobean dramatists. However, Thomas Middleton must be mentioned for one of his horrors employed in *The Changeling* (1623).

Much of *The Changeling* is good drama and even the fifth act which portrays the deaths of the main characters is well handled and not overdone. Characterization is good and where opportunity for violence affords itself in many scenes, Middleton often ignores it where a lesser dramatist may have become carried away. In fact, Archer has this comment on Middleton and *The Changeling*:

Here then, we have a drama which is full of good material, spoilt partly by sheer lack of thought, partly by a willful and quite unnecessary dragging to the front of the physical incidents of depravity, with the obvious design of tickling the sensual imagination of the audience. To the Elizabethan public, an ounce of sexual suggestion was worth a pound of psychological analysis or moral casuistry. *The Changeling* is, in fact, a good play gone wrong; it rattles at the joints, and falls to pieces at a touch for lack of thoughtful and rational adjustment. And in this respect it is absolutely typical. The plays of the period which will stand even the least exacting tests of external plausibility or internal consistency are few indeed. What distinguishes *The Changeling* from the general ruck of Elizabethan melodramas is that it more narrowly misses being a good play. We feel that Middleton was a real dramatist, who, in another environment, would have been capable of working up to higher standards,63

The main condemning scene occurs in Act III. De Flores, hoping to please Beatrice, plots to kill her suitor, Alonzo de Piracquo. With the

63 Archer, p. 100.
pretense of showing him the fortifications of the castle, De Flores per-
suades him to remove his sword as De Flores removes his own. Then with
the suggestion that Alonzo "Take special notice of that sconce," he stabs
him three times with a rapier which he had hidden behind a door. Not con-
tent with the slaying of Alonzo, he notices a diamond on the finger of the
dead nobleman:

... 't was well found;
This will approve the work. What, so fast on?
Not part in death? I'll take a speedy course then.
Finger and all shall off. Cuts off the finger. So, now I'll clear
The passages from all suspect or fear.
[Exit with body.]

Actually, since this is the only scene we can call unnecessarily
violent, Middleton should be commended. Considering the direction Jacobean
drama had taken with the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher and Webster, it
is rather remarkable that we are able to find any tragedy during this period
so relatively void of unnecessary violence.

In The Broken Heart (1631) John Ford uses a different type of Jacobean
violence, and in the process he is able to describe deep grief compas-
sionately. He is like John Webster in many ways. The device of the mechani-
cal chair in The Broken Heart is typically Websterian, but where Webster
is unnaturally violent, Ford is unnaturally quiet. Where Webster deals
with physical horrors, Ford portrays sexual abnormalities.

To say that the violence in Ford's plays is unnecessary would be a
mistake. The murdering and dying are there as a necessity for portraying
the depths to which Ford's characters sink. None of his characters are
actually villains; they are their own worst enemies. They suffer unendur-
ably until they finally collapse. This is not violence for its own sake.

---

64 The Changeling, III, ii, 22-26.
However, superfluous violence is present in *The Broken Heart* in the form of suffering. (This will be dealt with in Chapter III.) Where Webster appeals directly to the audience with his tragedies of blood, Ford appeals more subtly with his tragedies of perversity and suffering. His plays illustrate the decadence of Jacobean drama as well as do the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher with all of their superficiality and over-indulgence in violence.

On the other hand, *The Cardinal* (1641), by James Shirley, is a tragedy in the true Websterian tradition. In fact, *The Cardinal* contains many "remembrances of Webster's Duchess of Malfi." The play is a revenge tragedy of blood, and blood and violence abound. Much of this violence makes very little sense except that it is there for a shock effect to appeal directly to the audience.

In Act III, scene ii, Alvarez and the Duchess are to be married, Colombo returns and disguises himself as a masquer.

[Re-enter Colombo. Four Masquers bring in Alvarez dead, in one of their habits, and having laid him down, exeunt.]  
Duch. What mystery is this?  
Cnr. We want the bridegroom still;  
King. Where is Alvarez?  
(Colombo points to the body; they unmars and find Alvarez bleeding.)  
Duch. Oh, 'tis my lord. He's murder'd!  
King. Who durst commit this horrid act?  
Colom. I, sir; [throws off his disguise]  
King. Colombo? Ha!  
Colom. Yes; Colombo, that dares stay  
To justify that act,  
Her. Most barbarous!  
Duch. Oh, my dearest lord!  
King. Our guard seize on them all!  
This sight doth shake all that is man within me.  
Poor Alvarez, is this thy wedding day?  

---


This scene sets the stage for the revenge motive which the rest of the play is based on, but the horror of the scene could have been played down somewhat.

Revenge and death occur throughout the play. Hernando kills Columbo in a duel, and while this scene is well handled, Shirley could not resist a rather macabre touch. The seconds of both men are killed also.

The third scene of Act V contains many plot twists and unexpected melodramatic turns. The Cardinal tries to seduce the Duchess, but she resists, and Hernando comes to her rescue. He stabs the Cardinal and then himself. Hernando dies. The Cardinal asks to be forgiven and says he has already poisoned the Duchess, who has now regained her senses after the revenge, but he has an antidote handy. The Duchess informs us that she only feigned madness and used Hernando for her revenge purposes to direct the guilt away from her. The Cardinal (and then the Duchess) take the antidote. The Cardinal then says that the antidote was the real poison. He confesses his intentions of that night, to seduce the Duchess then poison her. The Cardinal learns that his wounds were not serious and that he has killed himself by taking the poison. He dies.

These devices seem to be those of a weak dramatist playing on the emotions of the audience. Shirley could have accomplished his dramatic goals just as easily with less theatricality and violence, but he took the easy way. Still Shirley must be regarded as above the norm when we consider the drama of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

W. A. Neilson notes:

A peculiar change takes place in the fifth act, in which the Cardinal, hitherto somewhat in the background and scheming on behalf of a favorite nephew, comes forward as a villain of the deepest dye, seeking in rape and murder the satisfaction of his own lust and revenge. Another unexpected turn is given at the close by the discovery that the dying confession of the Cardinal,
which the convention of the tragedy of blood leads us to accept
as genuine, is a mere trick contrived to poison the duchess with
a pretended antidote. But the excess of ingenuity, and the double
catastrophe, do not prevent us from understanding the claim that
we have a tragedy greater than any produced in England between
its own date and the nineteenth century. 67

According to what has preceded the catastrophe in Act V, we expect
to find a clearly expressed or implied moral; or at the least a suggestion
that Rosaura, the Duchess, while grievously wronged, had in her turn mis-
taken justice and committed wrong. However, the characters now turn from
gray into black and white. The Cardinal now appears with the absurd scheme
of rape and poison. Now, the Cardinal, who up to this point deserves some
sympathy, tricks Rosaura to her death. The Duchess, by virtue of the
Cardinal's turnabout, now changes into a guiltless heroine whose cruel
fate is universally mourned. This change represents a weakening of con-
ception on Shirley's part. The collapse of the Cardinal is peculiarly
similar to the metamorphosis of Barabas. The play does not fulfill its
promise. Fletcherian theatricality has destroyed the potential of the
last great tragedy of blood. 68

Some overall observations concerning the Jacobean dramatists mentioned
in this paper are necessary before concluding this chapter. Although
all of the dramatists discussed in this paper possessed skills making
them worthy to be considered among the best of England's dramatists, they
all used violence in different degrees, many times unnecessarily horrible
violence for no other reason than to satiate the passions of an audience.

Of course, the Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists were affected by
their times. Any dramatist during any age is so affected, but the Elizabethan

67Parks and Beatty, pp. 1364-1365.
68Bowers, p. 234.
and Jacobean dramatists were overly affected. They reflect the decadence of their times, and while it is true that had these dramatists written during a less decadent time, their plays would have been more highly respected today, these writers should also strive to affect their times. A dramatist must appeal to his audience, but he also must keep his dramatic integrity and not continuously slip in scenes depicting horrors merely for spectacular effect or audience appeal.

In tracing the development of violence in the English drama from 1585 to 1642 we find that the works of Kyd and Marlowe are early examples of staged violence at its bloodiest and cruellest. However, directly following Kyd and Marlowe, we find a surprising trend toward classical restraint in the plays of Chapman and Jonson. Soon, however, the decadence of the times begins to take its toll on the plays of the times. Webster carries his horrors to new levels, Beaumont and Fletcher add melodrama, Ford presents suffering and perversion and, finally, Shirley resorts to a shock effect and ingenious little plot twists to appeal directly to the audience.
III

Violence in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama is concerned not only with murder and physical horrors but also with suffering and mental cruelty. This chapter will not attempt to cover completely the mental cruelty theme, however. Robert Reed’s *Bedlam on the Jacobean Stage* goes into the dramatists’ use of mental cruelty as well as madness or the feigning of madness. Since the importance of *Bedlam* to the Elizabethans has already been pointed out, there is no need to go into that aspect here. It is sufficient to say merely that the Elizabethans and Jacobean enjoyed plays with some aspect of madness; therefore, the dramatists gave them what they wanted. This chapter will simply point out the uses of madness or mental cruelty or suffering in the selected plays. Some dramatists used the madness or mental cruelty theme merely for spectacular effect, while others tried to examine the psychological implications of a person’s actions so as to give the audience a better insight into his character. This chapter will concern itself with all of the above aspects. Beginning with Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy*, we find evidence of mental as well as physical suffering.

It is almost an understatement to say that in *The Spanish Tragedy* suffering, whether physical or mental, is in the center of the stage. Death and revenge for death are the focal themes of the play, and Kyd’s genius embodies them in theatrically sensational situations which were to provide a favorite pattern for future Elizabethan tragedy. The “Chorus” operates as a concrete symbol of the focal themes. The Chorus is made up
of the ghost of Andrea and the allegorical figure of Revenge. They take no part in the action of the play; yet they represent in visual terms what all the action is about. It is certainly above all in visual terms that Kyd chooses to represent the suffering and death of his characters.¹

In Act III, scene i, Alexandro is cleared of the death of Balthazar when it is learned that Balthazar is still alive at the Spanish court. Villuppo admits guilt for trying to frame Alexandro for personal gain, and he is taken away to die by

```
not so mean a torment as we have
Devis'd for him who, thou said'st, slew our son,
But with the bitt'rest tortments and extremes
That may be yet invented for thine end,²
```

Suffering and torture is implied in this scene, but no mental cruelty is visible as yet on stage.

Soon, however, Isabella, Hieronimo's wife, goes mad, and her husband follows suit later in the play. Isabella, by the final act, is completely out of her head. She cuts down the arbor where Horatio was hanged, argues against Hieronimo for not taking action and, seeming to become a friend of the murderers, stabs herself.

Hieronimo's madness, however, is the main sub-theme of the play as indicated by the subtitle, "Hieronimo Is Mad Again." In Act III he receives two Portingales and acts very strangely toward them.

```
2 Portingale. Pray you, which is the next way
to my lord, the duke's?
Hieronimo. The next way from me.
1 Portingale. To his house, we mean.
Hieronimo. 0, hard by: 'tis your house that you see.
2 Portingale. You could not tell us if his son were thereof
```

¹Cole, p. 63.
²The Spanish Tragedy, III, i, 98-101.
Hieronimo. Who, my Lord Lorenzo?

Portingale. Ay sir. 

[He goeth in at one door and comes out at another.] 

Hieronimo. O, forbear!

For other talk for us far fitter were. 

But if you be importunate to know 

The way to him, and where to find him out, 

Then list to me, and I'll resolve your doubt. 

There is a path upon your left-hand side 

That leadeth from a guilty conscience 

Unto a forest of distrust and fear— 

A darksome place, and dangerous to pass: 

There shall you meet with melancholy thoughts, 

Whose baleful humours if you but uphold, 

It will conduct you to despair and death— 

Whose rocky cliffs when you have once beheld, 

Within a hazy vale of lasting night, 

That, kindled with the world's iniquities, 

Doth cast up filthy and detested fumes— 

Not far from thence, where murderers have built 

A habitation for their cursed souls, 

There, in a brazen cauldron, fix'd by Jove, 

In his fell wrath, upon a sulphur flame, 

Yourselves shall find Lorenzo bathing him 

In boiling lead and blood of innocents. 

Portingale. Ha, ha, ha! 

Hieronimo. Ha, ha, ha! Why, ha, ha, ha! Farewell, good ha, ha, ha! 

Exit. 

Portingale. Doubtless this man is passing lunatic, 

Or imperfection of his age doth make him dote. 

Come, let's away to seek my lord the duke. 

In the very next scene, Hieronimo ponders suicide but decides against it when he realizes that no one will be left to avenge his son's death. 

He asks the king for justice and digs with his dagger at the earth to redeem his son from "the bowels of the earth," After the king expresses astonishment at his behavior and he exits, Lorenzo tells the king that Hieronimo is "in a manner lunatic." 

At any thought of his dead son, Horatio, Hieronimo lapses into madness.

3Ibid., III, xi, 51-61. 

4Ibid., III, xii, 70. 

5Ibid., III, xii, 88.
He sees in Basuto, a painter, whose son has also been murdered, his own plight. Hieronimo even keeps on his person a bloody handkerchief that belonged to Horatio. When he tries to discharge his duties as judge by meting out justice, he ends up by giving away all his money on one hand and tearing up citizens' petitions on the other. Throughout Act III Hieronimo totters between sanity and madness.

However, in the final act, Hieronimo gathers up his wits once more to execute a dire plan that will satisfy his passion for revenge. He is no longer the madman of Act III, but a cool, calculating revenger. His wife's suicide is the catalytic element in the horrible series of events which culminate in the final scene of horrors. The play, therefore, deservedly earns the subtitle "Hieronimo Is Mad Again."

In this early period of English tragedy, Christopher Marlowe stands out as a master at depicting mental horrors and suffering. Often Marlowe would merely imply some torture and thereby hint at horrors to come. In Act III of Tamburlaine I, Agydas kills himself for fear of the tortures that Tamburlaine will put him through:

Then haste, Agydas, and prevent the plagues Which thy prolonged fates may draw on thee, Go, wander, free from fear of tyrant's rage, Removed from the torment and the hell With which he may excurciate thy soul, And let Agydas by Agydas die, And with this stab slumber eternally.  
[Stabs himself]  

In Part II of Tamburlaine the spectacular scene involving the Governor of Babylon contains mental cruelty and suffering in addition to the abundance of violence. The Kings of Matolia and Jerusalem hurl insults at Tamburlaine, and he has them harnessed to his chariot. He now orders

---

6 Tamburlaine, Part I, III, ii, 100-106.
the governor to be shot. The once-proud Governor has been reduced to a begging, pleading coward. The type of mental cruelty and suffering involved in this play and in Marlowe's plays in general is different from that portrayed by many of the later playwrights.

As Travis Bogard says, "Webster struck fire in every line." The tortures that Ferdinand devises for his sister in *The Duchess of Malfi* are mentally unbearable. He makes her suffer to the ultimate by making her believe she has kissed the hand of her "dead" lover, Antonio. Actually Ferdinand used wax figures of Antonio and his sons to fool the Duchess, so as to make her suffer even more. The Duchess is finally murdered but dies bravely. Ferdinand's motives for torturing her are obscure, but the scene is powerful theatre and helps to vilify Ferdinand and deify the Duchess. In very real ways Webster keeps death, disease, and insanity before the minds of the audience.

Webster examines closely the madness of Ferdinand. Because of his insanity he stabs the Cardinal and gives Bosola his death wound, but before Bosola dies, he kills Ferdinand. Ferdinand, himself, speaks about his madness before he dies:

> My sister, O my sister! there's the cause on't.  
> Whether we fall by ambition, blood, or lust,  
> Like diamonds, we are cut with our own dust.  
> [dies]

Throughout the play Webster, through the use of imagery, has stressed man's bestiality and degeneration. At the end of the play this animal imagery is translated into action in Ferdinand's madness. His mind has

---

7 Bogard, p. 13.
8 Ibid., pp. 52-53.
9 The Duchess of Malfi, V, v, 71-76.
been dwelling on wolves—he compares the Duchess' voice to the howling of a wolf, her children are "Cubs"; and when he sees their bodies, he says one should not pity the death of "young wolves." The beast in man has shown; Ferdinand is an animal.\(^\text{10}\) Webster has examined the depths of madness in The Duchess of Malfi.

Beaumont and Fletcher were more concerned with theatricality than with any "clinical investigation of the breaking point of the human spirit." They do, however superficially, investigate mental cruelty. In The Maid's Tragedy in the scene where Evadne murders the King, Beaumont and Fletcher touch the surface of mental cruelty. Evadne ties the King down and berates him for his cruelty before stabbing him. It is a pitiful scene, as the King begs for mercy and Evadne turns a deaf ear; and in typical Beaumont and Fletcher theatricality, she stabs him many times:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{King:} & \quad \text{Evadne, pity me!} \\
\text{Evadne:} & \quad \text{Hell take me, then! This for my lord Amintor,} \\
& \quad \text{This for my noble brother! And this stroke,} \\
& \quad \text{For the most wrong'd of women!} \\
& \quad \text{[kills him]}\text{\textsuperscript{11}}
\end{align*}
\]

Beaumont and Fletcher were not brilliant psychologists, but it is interesting to note that even these two writers touch upon the mental torture that seemed to appeal to the audiences of the time. They could easily have portrayed the scene as follows: Evadne enters the king's bedroom and, finding him asleep, stabs him to death. However, Beaumont and Fletcher would have missed an opportunity to touch, no matter how superficially, upon pent-up desires within Evadne. Since the king has "whor'd" her, this is all the excuse the authors need to go into the above-mentioned scene.

\(^{10}\text{Bogard, pp. } 136-137.\)

\(^{11}\text{The Maid's Tragedy, V, i, 136-109.}\)
On the other hand, John Ford was a master at psychological insight. Havelock Ellis points out that

He is a master of the brief mysterious words, so calm in seeing, which well up from the depths of despair. He concentrates the revelation of a soul's agony into a sob or a sigh. The surface seems calm; we scarcely suspect that there is anything beneath; one gasp bubbles up from the drowning heart below, and all is silence.12

An interesting twist to the idea of madness in a character is brought out by James Shirley in *The Cardinal*. The Duchess' lover, Alvarez, is murdered by Don Columbo, who later torments the poor Duchess:

I come
To show the man you have provok'd, and lost,
And tell you what remains of my revenge,—
Live, but never presume again to marry;
I'll kill the next at th' altar, and quench all
The smiling tapers with his blood: if after,
You dare provoke the priest and Heaven so much
To take another, in thy bed I'll cut him from
Thy warm embrace, and throw his heart to ravens.13

It is no wonder that the Duchess seeks revenge. She feigns madness to throw any guilt away from her, and she uses Hernando as her instrument for revenge. Shirley has taken the madness theme and used it to his own plot advantages although his handling of this theme is certainly nothing new.

In summary, the drama of this age contains much violence both mental and physical. Since the Elizabethans and Jacobean enjoyed plays with some aspect of madness involved, the playwrights often tried to incorporate madness or mental cruelty into their plays: Kyd portrays the madness of Hieronimo which leads to revenge in *The Spanish Tragedy*; Marlowe depicts mental cruelty in both parts of *Tamburlaene*; Webster examines the depths

---

12 Parks and Beatty, p. 1300.

of madness as well as man's breaking point in *The Duchess of Malfi*.
Beaumont and Fletcher superficially investigate mental cruelty in *The Maid's Tragedy*; Ford shows some psychological insight in *The Broken Heart*; and Shirley handles the madness theme in a way reminiscent of *Hamlet* in *The Cardinal*.

Since Elizabethan and Jacobean audiences were so drawn to violence, it is no wonder that we find so much mental cruelty and madness portrayed on the stage. Excepting the few notable exceptions mentioned in this chapter, most of the dramatists of the time were content to portray madness and mental cruelty merely to satisfy these audiences.
Elizabetian and Jacobean drama was influenced greatly by three major forces: Machiavelli, Seneca, and the revenge tragedy. While other forces were present, these three seem to set the tone of violence for which many of the dramas are known.

Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527) was an Italian statesman, patriot, and thinker of great genius. He is known today mainly as the author of The Prince (1512/1513) and The Discourses (1517) although he wrote poems and comedies and a history. His statements concerning the qualities a prince must possess have often been misinterpreted. Many of the Elizabethans and Jacobians believed that Machiavelli was saying that instead of being mild a prince ought to be cruel; instead of being loyal, treacherous; instead of aiming to be loved, he should aim to be feared. This distortion of his views has been regarded as Machiavellism. Therefore, the term "Machiavellism became synonymous with wickedness or evil. Actually Machiavelli was not concerned with good or evil, only with political efficiency. A ruler should do whatever is appropriate to the situation in which he finds himself and may lead most quickly to success. However, Machiavelli did believe that force was an integral element in politics, since expansion should be the goal of every political organization. The Elizabethan view of Machiavelli is enhanced also by his belief that a powerful military force was necessary for the preservation of political independence; thus, Christianity, by preaching meekness, might soften
men and weaken a political society, Machiavelli wrote very strongly against the "effeminacy" to which Christianity had led. 1

The important thing is that Elizabethan playwrights and audiences treated Machiavelli as evil, a man willing to do anything for the good of the state, a man who believed that the end justifies the means. This conception was widespread and often when an unusually wicked character was portrayed, Machiavelli or the term "Machiavellian" would appear in the text of the play, so influential were the doctrines of The Prince and The Discourses. 2

Lorenzo, in The Spanish Tragedy, is the first in a long line of Elizabethan villains who owe their sole inspiration to Machiavelli. Lorenzo is as necessary to the extension of the dramatic action as is Hieronimo. Every one of Lorenzo's actions is based on Machiavellian policy. The ambition to raise his house by a royal marriage for his sister is the motivation behind his murder of Horatio. He is ruthless to all who stand in his way, is indifferent to others' sufferings, uses secrecy, employs men to do his dirty work, uses any means to attain his ends, and he is fundamentally cold-blooded and unsentimental. 3 All of these Machiavellian characteristics help in the make-up of the character of Lorenzo.

A good example of Lorenzo's Machiavellian tendencies appears in Act III. He plots to have Pedrignano kill Serberin and then have the Watch apprehend Pedrignano, for "Slaves are obtained to no other end." 4

---

1Felix Gilbert "Niccolo Machiavelli," The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, V, 119-120.
2Ibid., 120.
3Bowers, pp. 76-77.
4The Spanish Tragedy, III, ii, 129.
Lorenzo’s "principles and slogans are not so much inversions of Christian doctrine as they are examples of Machiavellian policy." 5

Although Thomas Kyd employed the principles of Machiavellism, the first dramatist to introduce the character Machiavelli upon the stage and to give a Machiavellian the central and dominant role in a play was Christopher Marlowe in The Jew of Malta. 6

Although Machiavellian villainy is hinted at in Tamburline I and II, it is not until The Jew of Malta that a true Machiavellian villain appears.

In fact, the prologue to the play is spoken by Machiavel, who prepares us for things to come:

Albeit the world think Machiavel is dead,
Yet was his soul but flown beyond the Alps,
And, now the Guise is dead, is come from France
To view this land and frolic with his friends,
To some perhaps my name is odious,
But such as love me guard me from their tongues;
And let them know that I am Machiavel,
And weigh not men, and therefore not men’s words.
Admir’d I am of those that hate me most.
Though some speak openly against my books,
Yet will they read me, and thereby attain
To Peter’s chair; and when they cast me off,
Are poison’d by my climbing followers.
I count religion but a childish toy,
And hold there is no sin but ignorance.
‘Birds of the air will tell of murders past!’
I am ashamed to hear such fooleries.
Many will talk of title to a crown:
What right had Caesar to the empery?
Might first made kings, and laws were then most sure
When, like the Draco’s, they were writ in blood,
Hence comes it that a strong-built citadel
Commands much more than letters can import;
Which maxim had [but] Phalaris observ’d,
He had never bellowed, in a brazen bull,
Of great ones’ envy, O’ the poor petty wights
Let me be envi’d and not pitied!
But whither am I bound? I come not, I,

5Cole, p. 137.

6Ibid., p. 137.
To read a lecture here in Britain,
But to present the tragedy of a Jew,
Who smiles to see how full his bags are cram'd,
Which money was not got without my means.
I crave but this—grace him as he deserves,
And let him not be entertain'd the more
Because he favours me.  

Barabas is a complete example of a Machiavellian villain in everything he does. In fact, in Act II, he tells Ithamore:

First be thou void of these affections,
Compassion, love, vain hope, and heartless fear;
Be mov'd at nothing, see thou pity none.  

The very fact that Barabas believes the end justifies any means makes him a candidate for the blackest of any of the Elizabethan stage villains, Machiavellian or otherwise. Boyer states,

After the second act Barabas does nothing in keeping with his character, and the events are brought about without logical sequence. Consequently, in spite of our sympathy for the Jew in the beginning, when the play closes we experience no tragic emotion.

In George Chapman we see Machiavellism of a different type from that displayed by Marlowe. Although Jacobean Machiavellism bore little resemblance to its source, Chapman was more faithful than most of the Jacobean dramatists with his original source. The characters of these other dramatists possess no integrity. They work against the protagonist by attacking his greatest strength, the core of his individuality. In Bussy D’Ambois evil attacks directly. Bussy’s assertion of his virtue is attacked at every turn.

---

7 The Jew of Malta, I, Prologue, 1-35.
8 Ibid., II, iii, 175-177.
10 Bogard, p. 23.
In *The Revenge of Busay D'Ambois* the Machiavels attack the hero directly and thereby keep the drama on the move. The hero is forced into a passive, defensive role throughout most of the tragedy. This defensive passivity of the Jacobean tragic hero meant, however, that he could not control the action of the play but would be brought into the focal position only as a target for the machinations of the antagonists. He is unable to combat evil because he would then be taking the law into his own hands, leaving himself vulnerable to the contamination of evil, and causing him to risk loss of self-respect and his own integrity.\(^{11}\)

Chapman creates a passive hero, Clermont D'Ambois, who revels in his own virtue. Others speak about this virtue. Chapman, although dull, had the "solid virtue of knowing what he was up to. He had the courage of his own dullness."\(^{12}\)

In *Sejanus* Chapman’s fellow classicist Ben Jonson has created a true Machiavellian villain. Sejanus is a prince’s counsellor, yet he yearns for power obtained by any means:

```
Adultery! it is the lightest ill
I will commit. A race of wicked acts
Shall flow out of my anger and o'erspread
The world's wide face, which no posterity
Shall e'er approve, nor yet keep silent: things,
That for their cunning, close, and cruel mark
Thy father would wish his, and shall, perhaps,
Carry the empty name, but we the prise.
On, then, my soul, and start not in thy course;
Though heav'n drop sulphur, and hell balch out fire,
Laugh at the idle terrors: tell proud Jove,
Between his power and thine there is no odds:
'Twas only fear first in the world made Gods.\(^{13}\)
```
Sejanus' cohort, Macro, also expresses Machiavellian philosophy when he states:

The way to rise is to obey and please,
He that will thrive in state, he must neglect
The trodden paths that truth and right respect;
And prove men, wilder ways: for virtue there
Is not that narrow thing she is elsewhere.\(^1\)

Boyer sums up the Machiavellian of Sejanus:

In closing Sejanus as a Machiavellian villain of the ambitious type, one important distinction has to be noted. He is not himself a prince like Selimus, Alahan, and Richard III, but a prince's counsellor. Moreover, and perhaps because of his subordinate position, he does not take the field of war, but confines his activities to the chamber. He ministers to the desires and the power of his ruler, but—and this is the real motive for his conduct—he also seeks to supplant him. He is, indeed, actuated by revenge in the case of Crusus, and this motive conforms his character even more closely to the mould left by the villains who had gone before him; yet this motive is a minor one. As a matter of fact, in his divergence from the morbid revenger and the bombastic slayer, and in his close attention to political business, he is the nearest approach to the real Machiavellian that we have had since Richard.\(^15\)

In John Ford's The Broken Heart (1631) we find a later Jacobean version of the Machiavellian villain. We see in the following soliloquy of Ithocles something of the Machiavellian tradition:

... Morality, appli'd
Is timely practic'd, keeps the soul in tune,
At whose sweet music all our actions dance:
But this is form of books and school-tradition;
It physics not the sickness of a mind
Broken with griefs: strong fevers are not eas'd
With counsel, but with best receipts and means;
Means, speedy means and certain; that's the cure.\(^16\)

Lastly, in James Shirley's The Cardinal there is another Machiavellian revenger worthy of mention. The Cardinal, himself, is a somewhat obscure

---

\(^1\) Ibid., III, iii, 113-117.

\(^15\) Boyer, pp. 171-172.

\(^16\) The Broken Heart, II, ii, 8-15.
villain, yet by Jacobean standards, still of the Machiavellian mold. He is always in the background and is always plotting; he goes to any length to achieve his revenge in the best Machiavellian tradition. When he sees he cannot achieve perfect revenge on the Duchess, he decides to "riple first her darling chastity." When he fails to seduce the Duchess, he then poisons her. The King has this to say of the Cardinal:

When men
Of gifts and sacred function once decline
From virtue, their ill deeds transcend example.17

In addition to Machiavelli, Elizabethan and Jacobean drama was also influenced by one Lucius Annaeus Seneca (l B.C.-A.D. 65). Seneca helped to educate the young Nero, but intrigues of his enemies led to his dismissal and eventual suicide. He is noted mainly for his ten prose tragedies dealing with exaggerated slaughter and suffering.18

Lucius Annaeus Seneca was virtually unknown to Englishmen until the middle of the sixteenth century when the Renaissance ideals led to a renewal of interest in the classics. John Manly points out that knowledge of the literature and life of the Greeks and Romans enabled the men of the Renaissance to distinguish their life as men from that of beasts, to approach that ideal type toward which they strove, the perfect gentleman, complete master of his body, of his mind, of his passions. To these men drama was probably the most important form of literature.19

The ten tragedies were printed individually between 1559 and 1581. In 1561 the translation of the "Tenne Tragedies" appeared as a whole.

17 The Cardinal, V, iii, 291-293.
19 John Matthews Manly, "The Influence of the Tragedies of Seneca Upon Early English Drama," The Tragedies of Seneca (Chicago, 1907), p. 3.
This translation was readily accessible, and many English students of the dramas "contented themselves with Seneca." There is every evidence that the 1581 translation was highly esteemed and extensively used.20

Cunliffe says that the Elizabethan dramatists had no trouble obtaining Seneca:

The learned dramatists of the Inns of Court and the popular playwrights of a later date who borrowed from Seneca seem to have gone to the Latin text, and their version is often more accurate, as well as more elegant, than the rendering of the professed translators. Of course the dramatists who used Seneca's lines without acknowledgment would not be likely to reveal their indebtedness to the English version, if they could avoid it; and there can be little doubt that the translation would be extensively used in conjunction with the original by those who had but 'small Latin;' and were glad to take advantage of what help they could get to puzzle out Seneca's aphoristic obscurities and far-fetched allusions. The translation must also have had considerable effect in spreading a general knowledge of Seneca's form, style and manner, the character of his subjects, and the leading ideas of his philosophical teaching as contained in the tragedies.21

What were Seneca's beliefs, and how deep did his influence on Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights go? Seneca states that cruelty, a tendency to excess in punishment, is an evil constantly attendant the possession of power. It cuts the ties of humanity and degrades man to the level of beast and in extreme forms becomes madness.22 Chapter II of this paper dealing with the excessive cruelty employed by those in "possession of power" points out the deep Senecan influence felt by Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights alike. More specifically, the horrors depicted by Marlowe in Tamburlaine I and II and The Jew of Malta and the ghastly horrors staged by Webster in The Duchess of Malfi and, to a lesser degree, the

---

21 Ibid., p. 6.
superficial spectacle of Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Maid's Tragedy* point directly to a Senecan model. In any event, most of the Elizabethan and Jacobean tragedies were influenced by Seneca, either directly or indirectly.

Seneca's subjects are taken from Greek tragedy and are the most sensational he could find—the banquet of Thyestes, the murder of Agamemnon by his faithless wife and her paramour, the guilty love of Phaedra, the execution of Astyanax and Polyxena, the revenge of Medea, the slaughter of Megara and her children, the fatal jealousy of Deianira, the incest and parricide of Oedipus, and the unnatural strife of his sons. *Octavia* is the only tragedy whose subject is not taken from Greek mythology, but the theme is still of lust and blood.\(^23\)

Seneca flagrantly violated the maxim of stage decencies. Medea kills both her children on stage, and she flings the bodies down at their father's feet. Phaedra and Jocasta stab themselves. In *Thyestes* a messenger relates the sacrifice in sickening detail. The death of Hippolytus is similar.\(^24\) After *The Spanish Tragedy* the rule of the English stage was to follow the practice of Seneca as far as ignoring stage decencies was concerned. The chief significance of *The Spanish Tragedy* lies in its development of the bloody horrors detailed by the Ghost at the end of the action.\(^25\)

Seneca's influence on Christopher Marlowe is also obvious. Cunliffe points out that in Marlowe there are few of the sage reflections with which Seneca adorned his plays; but there are all of Seneca's horror of incident and exaggeration of expression. Cunliffe also finds comparisons in Jonson,

\(^23\)Cunliffe, p. 17.
\(^24\)Ibid., pp. 39-41.
\(^25\)Ibid., p. 58.
Chapman, Webster, Beaumont and Fletcher, Ford, and Shirley.  

The rhetorical style of Seneca was also a popular form for emulation, especially among the university wits. They cherished as an ideal the Senecan interest in situation, the Senecan love for broad description, for introspection and reflection, and for elaborate monologue and catchy sententiousness. Kyd, although not educated in either university, especially was influenced by this style.  

Seneca goes to no trouble to make his sensational themes dramatically effective by clever construction of plot and careful development of character. He contents himself with amplifying the horror of the tragic situations till they become disgusting, and exaggerating the expression of passion till it becomes ridiculous.

Certainly many of the Elizabethtans and Jacobean, including Kyd and Marlowe, can be accused of a similar sententiousness. All of the playwrights discussed in this paper are guilty of Senecan bombast to some extent, and Beaumont and Fletcher are open for more than merely casual criticism.

In defense of the Elizabethan use of descriptive passages, scanty use of scenery is largely the excuse. There are also passages of exposition of reflection, of pure declamation, equally long as well as equally beautiful. The Renaissance love of talk may explain this in part, but it is doubtless due in part to Seneca's influence.

In addition to the sententious line and use of highly descriptive passages Seneca took the most difficult of Greek themes and produced

---

26 Ibid., p. 59.
27 Manly, p. 6.
28 Cunliffe, pp. 18-19.
29 Manly, p. 9.
melodrama. Since previous chapters have noted the melodramatic nature of Elizabethan and Jacobean tragedy, it is sufficient here to say that this melodramatic nature is a natural inheritance from Seneca.30

Seneca’s leading doctrine is that of fatalism—the absolute fatalism of the Stoic school.31 In fact, The Duchess of Malfi is constructed around the conflict of the Senecan protagonist with the Machiavellian antagonist. At the death of the central character, the stoical resolution sounds clearly. The Duchess welcomes death as a gift, the best her brothers can give her. Bosola admits his death is pain, but sees that in it there is only good.32

From Seneca the European drama in general, and English tragedy in particular, received the five acts which have become standard. Seneca’s division into five acts separated by choruses is exact in the earliest English tragedies—Gorboduc, The Misfortunes of Arthur, Tancred and Gismund. The chorus, although retained for a while, soon lost its original form and purpose so that in The Spanish Tragedy Andrea and Revenge "sit down to see the mystery/ And serve for Chorus in this Tragedy,"

Seneca’s choruses could be cut out without injuring the plot and sometimes could be used interchangeably in tragedies without loss of appropriateness.33

Another heritage from Seneca was the belief that tragedy must end unhappily. The Greeks had no such theory. It was enough for Sophocles

30Ibid.
32Bogard, p. 35.
33Cunliffe, pp. 32-33.
and Aristotle that tragedy should be serious in theme and dignified in characters and in language.\textsuperscript{34}

Seneca also frequently employed a messenger to relate horrors.\textsuperscript{35} Although it is true that this figure became less important in English tragedy, many Elizabethans and Jacobean still employed the device when they felt somewhat disinclined to portray a particularly bloody deed on stage. For example, in \textit{Sejanus}, Ben Jonson, ever the classicist, used Munius to describe the bloody details of Sejanus' death.

Seneca bestowed upon English tragedy other stock characters besides the Messenger—the confidential Nurse, full of consolation and advice; the faithful Servant; the cruel Tyrant, with his ambitious schemes and maxims of rule. The most important was the Ghost. Supernatural agencies of all kinds played an important role in Seneca's tragedies. It seems that Seneca liked the world below rather than the gods from above.\textsuperscript{36}

All in all, the influence of Seneca was felt strongly in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama. His use of excessive cruelty, flagrant violation of the maxim of stage decencies, sensational subjects, stage horrors, sententiousness, melodramatic situations, sotticism, division of plays into five acts, use of chorus, use of a messenger or munius and other stock characters led to some of the most brilliant drama in the language. Many of the above devices will be seen as being directly influential on the English revenge tragedy.

The plays of Seneca were mainly concerned with themes of revenge or retribution; and their model was readily adapted to the English

\textsuperscript{34}Manly, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{35}Ibid., p. 43.
\textsuperscript{36}Ibid., p. 44.
theatrical taste for bloodshed, horror, and physical suffering. In a Senecan tragedy there were several murders, varied by an occasional suicide, and culminating in a general slaughter in the fifth act. Revenge played the most active part; it is almost always present in the motives of the characters, and in many plays it is the chief dramatic force.37

Kyd's The Spanish Tragedy was an immensely popular revenge tragedy based on the Senecan mold. The Senecan theme of revenge and the Senecan devices of introducing ghosts and a chorus into the play were employed by Kyd. Many of the themes and devices used in The Spanish Tragedy influenced other plays of the Elizabethan and Jacobean period including those of Shakespeare. Blank verse was used by the Elizabethan playwrights in order to reproduce the bombastic effect of the Senecan style.

Christopher Marlowe was influenced by this revenge theme which seems to run throughout Elizabethan tragedy. His The Jew of Malta is contrasted to its Kydian counterpart by Fredson Bowers, an authority on the Elizabethan revenge play:

In the Kydian tragedy a murder is committed secretly, the name of the murderer is given to the revenger by a medium which he distrusts; delay results until additional facts corroborate the ascription, but then the revenger is hampered by the counter designs of his enemy and all perish in the catastrophe. The Jew of Malta is conceived on an entirely different plan. First, even taking into account the villain Barabas as the central figure, the play actually revolves about the siege of Malta and its deliverance, treated largely in the manner of chronicle-history; hence, the audience's attention is demanded for other matters than the revenge of Barabas, especially at the catastrophe which is unmotivated by revenge. Secondly, in Kyd's plays the revenge, once conceived, runs through the whole and reaches its culmination in the catastrophe, whereas Barabas's revenge ends to all practical purposes in the second scene of the third act. The rest

of the play is given over to his attempts to save himself from the consequences of his revenge and to become master of Malta. In the last analysis we have a tragedy about the siege of Malta and the desperate intrigues of a revengeful Jew.38

After The Jew of Malta villainy began to grow. This growth of interest in the portrayal of villainy is the crux of the swing to action of horror, because if an author wanted to explain such villains, it was necessary to exhibit horrors incredibly fantastic. The blacker the villain, the more horrible were the horrors. This interest in villains had succeeded in turning Kydian tragedy "topsy-turvy."39

Another forerunner of this new revenge tragedy was Marston's The Malcontent written about 1604. Marston first taught the lesson of dramatic complication by using many different revenges working against each other.40

Bowers points out that the twenty years after Kyd (1587-1607) may be distinctly set apart as the first period in the development of the Elizabethan tragedy of revenge. Although The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois (1610) came later it followed the tradition of Kyd, but by this time the fashion for tragedy had changed.41 Superficially The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois conforms to the standard pattern. Murder is committed before the play opens; a ghost calls for vengeance, and a revenger vows requital; he is aided by a friend, finds obstacles in his path, hesitates, finally kills his enemy, and dies. However, incidents are twisted to form a new pattern:

1. The original murder was open and there is never any doubt as to the murderer.

38Bowers, pp. 104-105.
39Ibid., p. 156.
40Ibid., p. 131.
41Ibid., p. 109.
2. The audience misses the shock of the appearance of a revelatory
ghost since this episode and the revenger's vow are merely narrated.

3. Revenge is not the only thing in the revenger's existence.
Clémont's vow is more of a duty; he has many other concerns in his life,
and many more pressing interests. Revenge is merely a disagreeable episode.

4. Tammyra (compare to Bel-Imperia) has little to do in the plan of
revenge and at its climax is, with Charlotte, simply a bystander.

5. The hesitation of the revenger has no dramatic value.

6. There are no series of murders for the audience because of the
code of honor for the revenger.

7. Clémont commits suicide for reasons unconnected with his vengeance.\textsuperscript{42}

A new school of tragedy emerged. This school, which concerned itself
chiefly with the depiction of villainy and horrors, came to the fore
between 1607 and 1620.

The new trends which produced this change of type are
clearly discernible even in the work of Marston, Chettle, and
Tourneur. The course taste of the popular audience, already
satiated with the rough and straightforward bloodshed of The
Spanish Tragedy, demanded even more shocking scenes of blood and
violence. The dramatists, therefore, exerted themselves to
device new and fiendishly horrible situations, fresh tortures,
ingenuous methods of poisoning, gruesome scenes of depravity.

With this portrayal of horror, strong enough to give a name to
a new school of tragedy, went an increased emphasis on a compli-
cated intrigue. Lastly, since he is the heart and soul of the
intrigue, the opponent villain of Kyd is invariably raised to
the position of protagonist. Strong sensation is substituted
for strong emotion, and artificial points of horror for an
inherent moral code.\textsuperscript{43}

The best example of the drama of this second period of revenge is
John Webster's The Duchess of Malfi (1614). This play depicts a world

\textsuperscript{42}ibid., p. 148.

\textsuperscript{43}ibid., p. 151.
that is horrifying. But it is the world, rather than the individuals in it, which apparently interested Webster most vitally. He had a tragic vision of life and used natural evil as the central theme of his play.\textsuperscript{144}

Thorndike believes that in spite of all the tragedies of blood and tales of terror written during the past three centuries, \textit{The White Devil} (1610) and \textit{The Duchess of Malfi}, both by Webster, remain unsurpassed in the literature of ghastly horror.\textsuperscript{145}

Webster, along with Fletcher, is the link between older Elizabethans and the decadent drama of Massinger and Ford.

The accomplice had always been the weak link in the Kydian villain's schemes. Webster followed the tradition of the weak link, but exalted the irony of the catastrophe and provided a more fitting doom for his villains by removing the element of accident from the accomplice's betrayal and founding such betrayal on a psychological change in character.\textsuperscript{146}

The third period of revenge includes 1620-1630. Although the second period put revenge in the hands of villains and implied disapproval, this period expresses its refusal of revenge openly and forthrightly. It expresses the absolute disapproval of revenge under any circumstances. Ford shows the cruelty of the duty to revenge in \textit{The Broken Heart}. Middleton's greatest expression of the working of revenge on character and after-circumstance occurs in \textit{The Changeling}. Plays in this period usually are replete with blood, horrors, and many of the conventions of the old revenge tragedy.\textsuperscript{147}

In \textit{The Changeling} (1623) there are various stock situations of revenge present. The main plot emphasizes a lustful intrigue which results in

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{144}Bogard, p. 80.
\item \textsuperscript{145}Thorndike, pp. 1-2.
\item \textsuperscript{146}Bowers, p. 179.
\item \textsuperscript{147}Ibid., p. 186.
\end{itemize}
murder. A revenger of blood appears and delays his revenge. A ghost appears. The villains slay their accomplice in true Kydian fashion. However, a new situation appears—revenge is thwarted by the suicide of the guilty persons themselves who have found that the results of their crimes were more than they had reckoned. Middleton shows that life carries its own vengeance for crime. Beatrice is punished by having to undergo prostitution to the hated De Flores. Her torture is revenge for her crime. This is an original treatment, a grimly ironic manner of treating the revenge theme.48

After 1630 revenge tragedy decayed. In fact, all tragedy decayed. The influence of Beaumont and Fletcher was tremendous. For example, an outline of The Cardinal (1611) fits perfectly into the outline of Kyd's play. However, action has taken the place of the Kydian emotion with its hesitating revenger, blood and thunder, and ghosts. Shirley has his characters do their thinking behind the scenes, and all the audience sees is the resulting action. This makes for a brisker but more shallow play. Shirley has rid the revenge tragedy of the pathos and hysteria, the rant and bombast that marked the Kydian form. His characters are very ordinary, and they set about righting their wrongs as best they can.49

The entire play is centered upon blood-revenge for murder. The Cardinal is the real villain and Columbo only a cruel man, who lacks the finer sensibilities which would have released Rosaura from her painful contract. Hernando is a revenger who is willing to suffer death for a good cause. Rosaura's misjudgment of Columbo's character really causes the tragedy.50

48Ibid., p. 205.
49Ibid., pp. 231-232.
50Ibid., pp. 232-233.
With the closing of the theatres in 1642 an era in English drama also came to a close. Bowers summarizes the effect on the development of English tragedy that the closing of the theatres had:

Decadence is too gentle a word for the insane image of character, plot, and motive in the minor dramatists; tragedy was actually disintegrating. The closing of the theaters was actually a blessing in disguise. In the breathing space afforded by the Commonwealth's inhibition, the tragic drama found a relief from its dependence on empty ingenuity and worn-out tragic conventions which had lost all touch with the problems of human life and ethics, and all interest in the human soul. 51

In conclusion, three major forces seem to be present in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama: the influence of the Italian statesman Machiavelli and the Roman dramatist Seneca, and the development of the English revenge play based largely on the Senecan mold.

Machiavelli's two major works The Prince (1512/1513) and The Discourses (1517) were most influential with the Elizabethans and Jacobians. The playwrights and audiences of the time treated Machiavelli as evil, not completely understanding the subtleties of his political philosophy. The treatments of Machiavellism by the dramatists range from that of Marlowe's blackest of Elizabethan stage villains, to interpretations more faithful to their source, by Chapman and Jonson, to the obscure version created by Shirley.

Seneca's influence is even more real than Machiavelli's in that his stage plays and rhetorical style found some degree of influence in most of the plays of the time. The popularity of the Senecan device of displaying various stage horrors is obvious from an examination of the plays of the major dramatists of the time.

51 Ibid., pp. 283-284.
Seneca also was influential in the development of the Elizabethan revenge tragedy. The four periods of the revenge tragedy between 1587 and 1642 show a development from villainy and horrors to a disapproval of revenge and, finally, to the decayed form which was prevalent just before the closing of the theatres.

By 1642 English drama had reached such a decayed state that the earlier promise hinted at by the plays of Marlowe, Jonson, Chapman and even Webster had become nothing but a memory. The closing of the theatres was, indeed, a blessing.
Conclusion

The development of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama may be traced simply by examining the beliefs and preoccupations of the times. The main preoccupations were with religion, theological controversy, and moral philosophy. The Jacobean may be distinguished from the Elizabethan by the Jacobean's more exact, more searching inquiry into moral and political questions and his interest in the analysis of the mysteries of the human mind.¹

Parallels between literature and other arts are dangerous and misleading. To the new, questioning, skeptical age (Jacobean), a new style was necessary. Elizabethan rhetoric was unsuitable. The new style began with Chapman and Jonson. The rhythm was looser and the diction closer to common life. Elaborate word schemes were rejected. This new style made possible the tragic vision of Webster and Middleton.²

Jacobean plays are pleasing to audiences today who stress the importance of plot and narrative. The plays of Beaumont and Fletcher were very popular in their time. These as well as the plays of Ford and Shirley were good at surprising the audience, a far cry from the Elizabethan plays that, according to Coleridge, used "not surprise, but expectation."³

¹Wilson, p. 20.
³Ibid., p. 98.
Both Elizabethans and Jacobean alike seem to set a premium on violence; however, the violence is not the same in both periods. There is unnecessary violence in the plays of both periods, but we find in many Jacobean plays an ingenuous as well as superfluous type of horror. It is as if the dramatists seem to be trying to outdo themselves in creating new and even more unusual twists to violence. The decadence of Jacobean drama is obvious in the plays of Webster, Beaumont and Fletcher, Ford, and Shirley.

There are reasons for this overabundance of violence: the decadence of the times and the dramatists' desire to appeal to the audiences. There are also the three influences discussed in the preceding chapter: Machiavelli, Seneca, and the revenge play.

Fredson Bowers summarizes the decadence of the Jacobean drama in relation to its Elizabethan counterpart:

For the subject matter of the new drama, themes were chosen in which the interest lay in violent far-fetched, and surprising situations. Since these situations are what count, the typical play of this period is likely to be little more than a compilation of proved incidents without much heed paid to the methods of transition from one to another. The earlier tragedy had had its share of horrible incident but had used it as background material, as a testing ground for the human spirit. The violence of these new plays is portrayed for its own sake. The sound and fury is chiefly on the surface and characterization weakens and grows conventional, since it was sufficient for the dramatist merely to portray types which would be recognizable.4

---

4Bowers, p. 155.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Vita

Limwood Clay Powers III was born on March 14, 1943, in Richmond, Virginia. He attended Highland Springs High School in nearby Henrico County where he was graduated in 1961.

After receiving his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1965 from the University of Richmond, Mr. Powers married the former Miss Geraldine Dyke, also of Richmond. He has been teaching English in the Chesterfield County school system for the past three years.