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CARNIVAL'S DANCE OF DEATH:

FESTIVITIY IN THE REVENGE PLAYS OF KYD, SHAKESPEARE, AND MIDDLETON

by

BENJAMIN ROLLINS

Under the Direction of Paul Voss

ABSTRACT

Through four hundred years of accumulated disparaging comments from critics, revenge plays have lost much of the original luster they possessed in early modern England. Surprisingly, scholarship on revenge tragedy has invented an unfavorable lens for understanding this genre, and this lens has been relentlessly parroted for decades. The all-too-familiar generic approach that calls for revenge plays to exhibit a recurring set of concerns, including a revenge motive, a hesitation for the protagonist, and the revenger's feigned or actual madness, imply that these plays lack philosophical depth, as the appellation of revenge tends to evoke the trite commonalities which we have created for the genre. This dissertation aims to rectify the provincial views concerning revenge tragedies by providing a more complex, multivalent critical model that makes contemporary outmoded approaches to this genre. I argue that Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of carnival, and the ways in which it engages with new historical interpretations of early modern drama, functions as a discursive methodology to open up more creative interpretative possibilities for revenge tragedy. Carnival readings expose gaps in new

historicism's proposed systems of omnipresent power, which deny at every turn the chance for rebellion and individuality. Rather than relegating carnival to an occasional joke, quick aside, or subplot, revenge plays explore carnivalesque concerns, and revengers plot their vengeance with all the aspects of a carnival. In these plays, revengers define subjectivity in terms of the pleasure-seeking, self-serving urges of unofficial culture; negotiations for social change occur in which folk culture avoids a repressive, hierarchal order; and carnival play destabilizes courtly systems that track, classify, pigeonhole, and immobilize individuals.

INDEX WORDS: Revenge tragedy, Mikhail Bakhtin, Carnival in literature

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BENJAMIN ROLLINS

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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Georgia State University

2012

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2012

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May 2012

DEDICATION

To my wife Tiffany and my daughter Callaway, with love.

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I would like to thank all of my graduate professors at Georgia State University who had a direct or indirect impact on the completion of this dissertation, and more importantly, on honing my own work as a scholar and teacher. Paul Voss's remarkable enthusiasm and classroom dynamism inspired my thinking about early modern drama, and his encouragement in my early graduate school years launched this dissertation. Furthermore, this project would not have come to fruition without his guidance and consistent availability. I hope to make as much of an impact with my own students as Paul made with me. I have also benefitted from Wayne Erickson's careful editing and incisive comments. His sharp analysis contributed to the dissertation's final form, and I am grateful he puts so much effort into his work. I am also thankful for Paul Schmidt's comments that helped clarify my argument. I will remember Dr. Schmidt's blend of pedagogy and good humor, and following his example, I remind myself daily how a carnival spirit can energize not only a dissertation but also a classroom.

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1 INTRODUCTION

"There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism."
Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History"

"Vengeance is a vicious circle whose effect on primitive societies can only be surmised. For us the circle has been broken. We owe our good fortune to one of our social institutions above all: our judicial system, which serves to deflect the menace of vengeance. The system does not suppress vengeance; rather, it effectively limits itself to a single act of reprisal, enacted by a sovereign authority specializing in this particular function. The decisions of the judiciary are invariably presented as the final word on vengeance."
René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*

"It must be by some new-fangled weapon; for we wield the other weapons: that one wields us; it is not our hand that guides it: it guides our hand."
Montaigne, "On Anger"

"The death of the individual is only one moment in the triumphant life of the people and of mankind, a moment indispensable for their renewal and improvement."
Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*

Revenge tragedy and the spirit of carnival have coexisted since antiquity.[1] The revenge tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides accompanied the frenzied festivals of Dionysus, a classical form of carnival that celebrated a release of inhibition through drunken dancing and orgiastic rites.[2] During Roman times, the composition of

[1] Though the following discussion focuses on Greek and Roman carnival, one might also acknowledge the Egyptian festival of Osiris as an early form of carnival. It shares with Greek and Roman festivities the element of violence that frames this dissertation's concern with revenge. Set, Osiris's brother, murders and dismembers Osiris, who is revived by his sister Isis to become lord of the dead. Thus, the celebration of Osiris was not only one of birth but also death and rebirth. The festival to Osiris involved the creation of effigies, elaborate processions that involved animals, and ritual sacrifice that echoes the themes of death and rebirth.

[2] In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Friedrich Nietzsche famously calls for the rebirth of tragedy as a venue for cultural liberation through a celebration of Dionysian forces: "Not only does the bond between man and man come to be forged once more by the magic of the Dionysiac rite, but nature itself, long alienated or subjugated, rises again to celebrate the reconciliation with her prodigal son, man. The earth offers its gifts voluntarily … The chariot of Dionysus is bedecked with flowers and garlands; panthers and tigers stride beneath his yoke. Now the slave emerges as a freeman; all the rigid, hostile walls which either necessity or despotism has erected between men are shattered. Man now expresses himself through song and dance as the member of a higher community" (1). In contrast to Dionysian ecstasy, Apollo tempers unrestrained

Senecan drama, whose influence on early modern tragedy is well-documented, coincided with the unabated expression found in the Bacchanalia, an extension of the wild revelry found in the earlier Dionysiac festivals.[3] The imprudent and impetuous behaviors enacted under the auspices of Dionysus and Bacchus crossed currents in complex and dynamic ways with the origins of revenge tragedy. In *The Laws*, Plato reminds us of the possibility that carnival began as an act of revenge when he recounts "a secret stream of story" in which "the god Dionysus was robbed of his soul's judgment by his stepmother Hera, and that in vengeance therefor [*sic*] he brought in Bacchic rites and all the frenzied choristry, and with the same aim bestowed also the gift of wine" (672b). Plato, although he lauds carnival's restorative properties in earlier parts of *The Laws*, positions vengeance at the center of Dionysus's relationship with man, presenting, in effect, the

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indulgences to prevent the prospect of societal self-destruction, but the paradoxes of a Dionysian world articulated by Nietzsche resonate with Mikhail Bakhtin. In *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche adumbrates a vision that echoes carnival's propensity for indulgence: "This world … eternally changing, eternally flooding back … a becoming that knows no satiety, no disgust, no weariness: this is my Dionysian world of the eternally self-creating and eternally self-destroying" (1067). For Nietzsche, hypocrisy, mimicry, and play-acting constitute man's will to art, a method through which organic life seduces and reproduces. Man's fundamental nature lies in deception and intoxication that leads to artistic creation, which Nietzsche associates with sexual energy. Most importantly for Nietzsche, this process is ever becoming, a perpetual rebirth or eternal return, and Bakhtin's conception of carnival is similarly conceived. A folk culture, often promiscuous and always at play, interestingly recalls Nietzsche's Dionysian principle: both celebrate the collective creativity and sexual energy of a common folk class. Like Nietzsche's assertion that man has a will to art, carnival relies on man's performance or play-acting. Both thinkers champion what Nietzsche calls the "beautiful chaos of existence" (*The Gay Science* 277). Furthermore, Bakhtin's view of carnival as a celebration of the material bodily principle recalls an "organizing principle" of the chaotic Dionysian feasts; the body and its orifices are central to such pagan ceremonies. Dionysian rites establish key concerns in later carnival festivals and feasts-- the honoring of unofficial culture, the procreative body, and the communal experience as it is constituted through play-acting and laughter.

[3] See J. W. Cunliffe for the seminal study that explains Senecan philosophy and its shaping of revenge. Even by 1940, the influence and unchallenged precedence of Senecan influence on revenge became pervasive, as testified by Fredson Bower's comment: "The critical material about Seneca and his tragedies is so complete and accessible that an extended summary is unnecessary" (5). To Bowers, revenge tragedy emerged from Senecan drama, so critics often mistakenly assume that revenge must be Senecan. However, for early challenges to Seneca's influence, see Howard Baker and G. K. Hunter. For more recent readings, see Geoffrey Aggeler and Gordon Braden, who argue that Stoics cannot meet the ideal to which they strive. This failure to meet the ideal necessitates the violent behavior characteristic of Senecan drama. See also Peter Mercer's *Hamlet and the Acting of Revenge*, which explains revengers in Senecan terms, citing a motivation to revenge that "arises not from mere perversity of appetite but from a necessity beyond his conceiving" (92).

birth of anarchy and revenge with the rise of Dionysus's power and popularity. As a poisoned jest, Dionysus's gift of wine, so often seen as a symbol of carnival, finds its origins in revenge inspired by madness. The Roman Saturnalia, a commemoration of the halcyon days of Saturn's reign, celebrated social inversions with the election of a mock king who established rule based on misrule. With an elaborate retinue, the mock king issued burlesque laws, called for feasts, and even incited riots. The origins of carnival display its endorsement of, and affinity for, violent behaviors.[4] After having a temporary rule, the Rex Saturnalis was literally or symbolically destroyed at the end of the festivities.[5] Masking often accompanied the excess and transgression of Saturnalia whereby performers would don animal masks to assume the mythological significance of sacrificial beasts.

In *The Bacchae*, Euripides further explores the potential chaos of Dionysus that Plato intimates. Dionysus, inextricably linked with disruptive forces, provides a rallying self-exhortation:

> O Dionysus! now 'tis thine to act, for thou art not far away; let us take vengeance on him. First drive him mad by fixing in his soul a wayward

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[4] In *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy*, C.L. Barber writes at length on folk festivities. Though his discussion explores the intersection of rituals and comedy and he generally views folk rebellion in playful terms, Barber does briefly allude to carnival's violent potential: "village saturnalia of the Lord of Misrule's men was in its way a sort of rising; setting up a mock lord and demanding homage for him are playfully rebellious gestures, into which Dionysian feeling can flow" (29). This dissertation picks up the investigation of Dionysian feeling and carnival's violent concerns. A fuller discussion of Barber's work appears later in this chapter.

[5] In Europe during the Middle Ages, the mock king underwent a trial against a Lenten female figure, and the trial invariably failed, so the mock king was put to death. Peter Bruegel's portrait *The Battle of Carnival and Lent* immortalizes this struggle and often appears in carnival studies. For a complete discussion of Saturnalia and its lasting effects into the Renaissance, see Anthony Caputi's *Buffo. The Genius of Vulgar Comedy*. Caputi provides a comprehensive review of the carnivalesque from antiquity to the Renaissance. See also Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, especially pages 258-267. For the mimus of the antiquity, see Robert Weimann's *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition of the Theater*, particularly pages 1-14. For a literary application of Saturnalia and other early forms of carnival, see Barber's *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy* which argues that *Henry IV Part II* can be read as the trial of the play's mock king, Falstaff.

> frenzy; for never, whilst his senses are his own, will he consent to don a woman's dress; but when his mind is gone astray he will put it on. And fain would I make him a laughing-stock to Thebes as he is led in woman's dress through the city. (168)

Dionysus assumes responsibility for upholding the voices of the marginalized women by enacting their revenge through carnival. The inversion of dress and the power of mockery undermine Pentheus's rule and seek to uncrown him. The Dionysiac dissolves the customary boundaries and shackles of existence, asserting its reality as distinct from the regular order of the world. Francis Bacon's oxymoronic phrase for revenge as a "wild justice" readily applies to Dionysus's triumph over Pentheus at the end of the drama (5). Raging unbridled women, primed to excess through their rites, enact justice in the name of theater: Pentheus, turned into an acephalic image, loses his seat of reason through the irrational acts of the women. Dionysus, god of the theater, is also a god of carnival, and the ending of *The Bacchae* reinforces its carnivalesque movement. The play concludes with a subversion of the audience's expectations and highlights the seducing effects of a drama that invokes circularity: "what was most expected / has not been accomplished / So ends the play" (219). The fragmentation and indecisiveness of such an ending has incited a discussion of the metatheatrical qualities of the play. Martin Puchner refers to the play's self-reflexivity when he writes, "Without a doubt, *The Bacchae* is a play about the theatre, a play about the impossibility of escaping the theatre, and also a revenge of the theatre against its enemies" (13). The inability to mark an endpoint, to finalize and conclude, embodies the struggle of carnival and Lent, a timeless struggle that, according to Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, exists on a

continuum. Reading Dionysus as a patron of the arts, as a revenger, and as a founder of carnival in the Western World prompts consideration of the ways in which revenge tragedy and carnival have evolved into a representation no less potent than Dionysus's dithyramb.

A diverse range of twentieth century critics, including Northrop Frye, C.L. Barber, Mikhail Bakhtin, Rene Girard, Michael Bristol, and Naomi Liebler, interrogates the ritualistic origins of Renaissance drama.[6] For Bakhtin carnival exists as an umbrella term that encompasses diverse and often contradictory concepts, and his extensive work into the subject, captured in *Rabelais and His World*, serves as a starting point for discussion.[7] Bakhtin's discussion of carnival modifies and broadly applies the Dionysian rapture to medieval and early modern life. While some critics note how Bakhtin tempers the wildness of Dionysus, he preserves the core of early rituals in his theory of carnival, even if he favors a scatological vision.[8] In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin emphasizes feasting, festive laughter, crowning and uncrowning, inversion, the suspension of hierarchies, and the struggle between official and unofficial culture as essential elements of carnival, which offers "a completely different, nonofficial, extraecclesiastical and extrapolitical aspect of the world, of man, and of human relations" (*Rabelais* 6). Bakhtin reviews a host of medieval rituals that relied on carnival principles of excessive eating,

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[6] While I discuss in detail all of these critics' works later in this chapter, many explore similar concepts of laughter and folk culture by examining rituals other than ones discussed by Bakhtin, quite often through an anthropological perspective. Working independently of Bakhtin and using a different critical lens, Frye reaches conclusions about folk culture in *Anatomy of Criticism* that share many parallels with Bakhtin's conclusions in *Rabelais and His World*.

[7] Bakhtin's extensive discussion of carnival appears in two seminal studies, *Rabelais and His World* and *Problems in Dostoevsky's Poetics*. With only passing allusions to tragedy, Bakhtin delineates the comic narrative and its overlap with classical "festivities, rituals, and forms of the carnival type" (11). Both works, discussed throughout the dissertation, suggest the historical and cultural importance of carnival and its relation to literature.

[8] See Bakhtin's prevalent discussion of Rabelsian images of urine and excrement. Bakhtin praises Rabelais for celebrating, with infantile delight, the body's excrements. Pantagruel, he notes, drowns a village in urine.

drinking, and dancing, including The Feasts of the Three Kings, the Carnival period from Epiphany to Ash Wednesday, St. George's Day, May Day, Midsummernight's Day, and the Feast of Fools. For Bakhtin, carnival disestablishes and subverts unilateral authority, and laughter, through its universal, ambivalent, and collective properties, provides agency to the populace to critique seemingly unassailable institutions.[9] Parodying the sacred and the privileged through laughter, swearing, and other forms of uncrowning frees the folk culture from religious and ecclesiastical dogmatism. Bakhtin views laughter as a subversive and liberating power that energizes the individual against prohibitive religious systems:

> It was not only a victory over mystic terror of God, but also a victory over the awe inspired by the forces of nature, and most of all over the oppression and guilt related to all that was consecrated and forbidden ("manna" and "taboo"). It was the defeat of divine and human power, of authoritarian commandments and prohibitions, of death and punishment after death, hell and all that is more terrifying than earth itself. Through this victory laughter clarified man's consciousness and gave him a new outlook on life. (*Rabelais* 90-91)

In essence, carnival and its laughter are inimical to closed, controlling forms of discourse and power. Laughter carries salutary properties that empower folk culture while simultaneously subverting "authoritarian commandments and prohibitions" (91).

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[9] See Erasmus's *Praise of Folly* for a humanist work that interprets scripture in an ironic way. In addition to Rabelais's work, Erasmus's work further supports Bakhitn's claim that the Renaissance elite appropriated the laughter of folk culture in fashioning carnivalized literature. See also Keith Thomas's "The Place of Laughter in Tudor and Stuart England."

The war of Carnival and Lent, privileged and unprivileged, sacred and profane takes place in the public square, a boundless arena for humor, festivities, and nonofficial culture. In the marketplace, fools become creditable, kings and commoners unite, unmentionables are mentioned, and untouchables are touched. The anti-authoritarian nature of carnival brooks no hiding place; people unite in free and open contact in an undiscriminating marketplace that evades forms of censorship. Carnival removes linguistic and physical restraint and externalizes interior secrets and behaviors, placing them firmly in the public domain. Fools, for instance, take the interior knowledge of kings, thoughts kings wish to remain hidden, and place them on uninhibited display. King Lear's Fool, always irreverent and ready with degrading humor, never allows Lear to find a comfortable space to erect protective walls; his caustic wit keeps Lear's mistake of relinquishing the crown at the forefront of Lear’s consciousness. When Lear fails to understand why a snail has a house, the Fool quips, "Why, to put his head in; not to give it away to his daughters, and leave his horns without a case" (1.5.19-20). The Fool's mocking takes on the metaphor of poor household management to suggest that Lear appears unguarded and uncrowned. Without shelter, Lear must perform on the Fool's stage, with his head extended, snail-like, fully exposed and defenseless against a litany of carnival attacks.[10] Carnival erodes the boundary between Lear's most private inner thoughts and the open arena of the public square.

Early modern theater represents the epitome of carnival's externalizing function; everything moves into the open on the stage, and performances often represented a

[10] See Michael Bristol's discussion of fools and clowns in relation to carnival. Bristol explains how clowns function as a chorus, informing other characters and audience members of what they do not know. He notes the clown's proclivity for mimicking royal gestures, refusing to understand differences, and traversing boundaries.

carnival release from the structured, ossified world of everyday order. While it is certainly erroneous to claim that all theatergoers in early modern England experienced plays as a release from dreary, humdrum lives, at least some did. Michael Hattaway delineates the magnetic qualities of the theater for travelers to London and notes that, whether its attractive qualities lie in education or entertainment, theaters such as the Globe may have held performances with as many as 3,000 spectators from diverse classes in attendance. He further comments that "The Corporation of London considered that the crowds that frequented plays not only generated frays but also drew workers from their trades and diminished congregations at Evensong" (43). Brothels, bear-baiting arenas, and playhouses existed in the margins of London in an area sanctioned for such sport, and plays were performed at times of significant festive calendared events.[11] Not only did the theater represent some form of release, but more significantly, plays emerged out of carnival games. Plays were originally conceived as a type of sport or game in the early modern period and relied on the carnival illusion of masking, costuming, and playing. Plays emerged as an extension of traditional carnival games, as evidenced in the title page to *Robin Hood and the Friar*: "Here beginneth the play of Robin Hood, very proper to be played in May Games" (Hattaway 47). C.L. Barber also notes how traditional May games, which antedated the emergence of Renaissance theater, assumed dramatic form. For example, during Morris Dances, a fool would court "Maid Marian by dancing about her" (29). In his extensive analysis of folk rituals, Barber also explains how "Groups of performers frequently went on rounds of visits to the castles of neighboring lords and to

[11] Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, often performed as part of Christmas celebrations, stands as one prominent example.

the more important towns during their holidays" (18).[12] Acting itself, which invoked the ire of many Puritans, became an act of misrule associated with country people who celebrated with performances. As Michael Bristol argues, the actor speaks "with the full conviction and sound of authority;" therefore, his power lies in cogent dissembling. Actors prominently feature disguise, both physical, through the assumption of costumes, and linguistic, through the assumption of another's words.[13]

Within the context of the theater as a carnival performance, both as a release for the working class and as an on-stage masquerade where players play, revenge tragedy becomes a participant in carnival about carnival. In this vein, revenge expands theatrical appeal and influence. The perpetual self-reflexivity of the genre, one of its hallmark qualities, serves as an unremitting reminder that what is being asserted on stage as real is very unreal, yet the drama mesmerizes audiences all the more for its acknowledged unreality. Like Prospero's "insubstantial pageant," the revengers' use of carnival promotes the illusion of the theater (4.1.155).[14] Making use of carnival tropes, revenge, then, develops as a self-promoting and self-aggrandizing mechanism for theatrical performances.[15] Yet this self-promotion occurs with philosophical depth usually not attributed to the revenge tragedy genre.

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[12] Barber elaborates on the overlap between carnival games and theatrical development: "And the traditional popular pastimes themselves were often an element in the entertainment, either as a spectacle performed 'by the country people' and watched with complacency and amusement by the court circle, or as a holiday exercise in which the couturiers themselves participated" (31).

[13] For an extensive discussion of how carnival games helped develop Renaissance theater, see Stallybrass.

[14] All Shakespeare citations are from David Bevington's edition of *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, 4th ed.

[15] Though Jean Howard disagrees with my point that revenge becomes a self-promoting mechanism for the theater, she provides support for the ways in which the revenge genre questions the nature of theatrical representation and how it interrogates the epistemological questions surrounding life and the theater: Howard argues, "[T]he drama's incessant preoccupation with dramatic practices did not so much indicate theatrical narcissism as the widespread emergence of a 'dramatistic sense of life' resulting from both the secularization of Renaissance culture and from the social changes, including heightened social mobility,

The theater's notorious absence of artfully hidden architecture mirrors the metatheatrical function of the revenger's language; both make visible the reality of the unreality. As Hattaway explains, the stage of early modern England had no constructions to persuade an audience that they were being lured into The Forest of Arden, Denmark, or Cyprus. "Everything on stage," Hattaway writes, "proclaimed its status as a sign" (46). Revenge tragedy, through its grotesque forms of dismemberment, its variegated spectacle, and its self-referentiality, exemplifies a carnival show, a type of sign displaying its nakedness as a sign. Like carnival, revenge tragedy paradoxically degrades systems of signification but nonetheless remains keenly aware of the power of such signification. Through their carnival display of revenge, plays such as Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, and Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy* make elastic the boundaries between gender identities, invert and deride pious proclamations, uncrown authority, and depict revenge as an act of carnival feasting, in literal and metaphorical terms of consumption. [16]

I will demonstrate that carnival echoes crucial fundamental tenets of revenge tragedy and that this festive concept shaped the emergence of the genre, as early modern dramatists captured the unmitigated energy and chaos of the festivals. Revengers delight in carnival misrule by renouncing serious worldly duties and withdrawing from socially legitimate, often aristocratic, positions in favor of enacting hostile, seditious acts under

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attendant upon the prolonged and uneven transition from feudalism to capitalism. . . These changes unsettled identities and social positions, encouraging for better or worse, the sense that in some fundamental way men and women were actors in a self-scripted theater and must forge the identities once taken for granted" (16).

[16] The body frequently appears as a site of literal and metaphorical feasting. The lecherous Duke consumes Gloriana's body in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, and in retribution, Vindice removes the Duke's tongue to prevent further consumption. In a final kneeling gesture before her death, the Duchess of Malfi comments on her body as a site of feasting: "Go tell my brothers, when I am laid out, / They then may feed in quiet" (4.2.35).

the guise of festivity. Acting as Masters of the Revels, Hieronimo and Titus Andronicus promise a wealth of festivities using the elements of carnival—staging, mimicry, and feasting. As agents of carnival, they serve as Lords of Misrule to combat the overwhelming chaos of their worlds. Paradoxically, festivity becomes a propagator for a disorder that seeks to correct a disordered state. Hieronomio's playlet and Titus's final feast not only seek to add order to the world but do so by leveling hierarchical distinctions: playing, eating, and drinking—normally innocuous behaviors associated with festivities—interlock with insidious intentions. Behind the joyful pomp and ceremony of festivities lurks a more transgressive, self-indulgent carnival, a carnival of chaos that breaks laws and performs acts of excess. In terms of revenge, this self-indulgent carnival stems from revengers' forgetting the normal law and order of the world and focusing instead on an individual's freedom in relation to official ideology. This withdrawal from the normal order resonates with carnival's subversive abolishment of "laws, prohibitions, and restrictions that determine the structure and order of ordinary" (*Rabelais* 10). Delegitimizing official rule occurs before the devastation commonly found in revenge tragedies. Freedom from rule by degrading rule itself results in an uncrowning of authority that occurs before the revenger responds with physical violence. Before he stabs anyone in act five, Titus degrades the aristocracy by flaunting their bodily necessities. Tamora, though possessing the title of queen that putatively enforces her difference and superiority, must eat like commoners, so Titus exploits this communal need for food by forcing Tamora to turn into a cannibal, eating a pie baked with the flesh of her sons, Chiron and Demetrius. By exploiting her bodily needs, Titus dissolves Tamora's artificial constructs and sheds the difference Tamora tries to uphold.

Before Vindice kills the Duke, he mocks him with an artificial show of bones and makeup that eerily reenact the Duke's original transgression against Gloriana. This scene elicits the Duke's bodily lust, transforming him into an uncrowned and therefore assailable agent. As part of revenge in this period, the elite's bodily functions and desires take center stage. Revengers make the body a point of reference as a way to remove difference and authority. The logic of the revenger asserts that, if an aristocratic victim is subjected to bodily concerns—eating, drinking, sleeping, laughing—then the victim bears no privileged status. Carnival's erosion of difference between aristocrat and commoner allows the revenger to act more readily. Claudius begins *Hamlet* as the king, with the protection that such status affords, so before Hamlet can assail his victim, Claudius must become a satyr who sweats in "an enseamed bed, / Stew'd in corruption, honeying and making love / Over the nasty sty" (3.4.99-101).

If revengers degrade aristocratic bodies in order to assault their victims, revengers must also counter their own bodily degradation. Revengers must deal with anxiety and the faceless trepidation that the State's system of justice will leap into their seat and do their office of revenge. While physically violent punishments ensured the State's power in early modern England, individuals who appropriated that power became vigilantes who both threatened and reinforced the prescribed social order. Revengers threaten to usurp power through carnival appropriations, but because they target the State's aristocratic agents, they paradoxically reinforce the status of the high and noble. As the object of desire, aristocrats occupy a privileged position; otherwise, the revenger would have no need of targeting them. Of course, revenge, like carnival, upends social reality and uncrowns the high, with the ultimate goal of engendering an improved world that

champions illegitimate desires and the voices of the oppressed, impotent, disenfranchised, and neglected. Carnival renounces official occupations, sloughing off rigid hierarchical roles to experience communalism. Therefore, the task of the revenger requires operation and agency in a social realm in which the narration of a personal story takes on communal significance: Hieronimo proclaims his revenge before biting his tongue; Titus reveals the rape of Lavinia by Chiron and Demetrius before stabbing Tamora; and Vindice must reveal the pervasive incest in the Duke's house before proclaiming himself Gloriana's lover. By injecting their stories into the communal sphere, revengers struggle to create a lasting significance against the fear of nothingness, loss, and misery. By imbuing their revenge with communal significance, revengers reaffirm their personal stories as communal stories. They externalize their grief as an attempt to reassert themselves in the face of hollowness.

This struggle of self-assertion precludes the State from overtaking the revengers' story and completing the revenger's office. Similar to carnival festivals in which participants deny and mock authority, the revenger wrests control of his life by ignoring the State's officialdom and narrating a communal story that memorializes his transgression. The revenger's governing philosophy coincides with carnival's championing of individual identity, but it starkly contrasts the religious message of early modern England. The sermons of Richard Hooker tellingly suggest that the self is an empty shell, a void to be filled by God—not one to be filled by human deeds. According to Hooker, man's attempt to fill his own void results in frustration and incompleteness: "The being of all things dependenth" on God's grace, Hooker attests and adds that "complete union with him must be according unto every power and faculty of our minds

apt to receive so glorious an object" (*Lawes* I.2.3). Yet in an age in which God's prominence comes into question, revengers seek alternative ways to discover lasting fulfillment by controlling their own story.[17] In an age in which individualization becomes all the more real, and consequently, as Robert Watson has shown, death as annihilation becomes all the more terrifying, a shift back toward the communal ensures longevity through the narration of a story. Embracing the communal does not guarantee eternal salvation, but it rescues one from complete obscurity.

By resisting arbitrarily imposed forms and exposing the elite's rule as transitory and unstable, both revenge and carnival turn to ritualized violence.[18] Though not often conceived of in violent terms, carnival can move subtly from humor to horror. Michael Bristol, for example, has noted carnival's surprising potential for violence in his discussion of displaced abjection, in which grievance and resentment can be taken out on others "in a process where 'low' social groups turn their figurative and actual power, *not* against those in authority, but against those who are even 'lower'" (167). Early ritual practices could not only turn violent against those at the bottom of the social hierarchy but also those at the top. Stallybrass notes several examples in which festivities could evolve into political, incendiary acts. For example, during the Kett's rebellion of 1549, crowds gathered for the Wymondham Game tore down enclosures, and some "vagabond boyes" alighted on the city of Norwich, showing their hind parts to the town's defenses, "which soe diysmayd the archers that it tooke theyr hart from them" (Fletcher qtd. in Stallybrass "Drunk" 53). Furthermore, the Inns of Court tried to abolish Christmas

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[17] See Jonathan Dollimore's *Radical Tragedy*, especially pages 3-22, in which he challenges essentialism on the grounds that it is a historical construct, and therefore he questions humanist readings of early modern plays that rely on overtly religious messages.

[18] See Peter Burke's *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* for discussion of how carnival can turn violent against the elite. See especially pages 203-207.

revels, and like the Puritan attacks against the theater, there existed dissension concerning May Day, the license of Shrove Tuesday, and Christmas mumming, which permits transvestitism (Thomas 78). These tensions never diminished because of the violent and subversive potential of festivities, and the consistent efforts of the Inns of Court to abolish the revels speak to a real danger beyond carnival's temporary release of tightly concealed feelings.

According to Northrop Fyre, revenge futilely attempts to collect what has been lost, so it paradoxically keeps wounds exposed and fresh. To maintain the order of society and ensure continued functionality, though, the revenger sacrifices well-being for the community in order to punish deviants and, paradoxically, becomes a societal deviant in doing so. The well-known conflict between the desire for revenge and the State's arrogating vengeance from the individual hardly needs explication. As the State began making unprecedented claims of authority, revenge tragedy burgeoned in answer to the State's usurping power.[19] Within the framework of traditional discussions of this tension,

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[19] The State's burgeoning power can be glimpsed in the rhetoric of the Elizabethan Homilies. Widely preached and read throughout the Renaissance, the homilies often called for subjects to be passive and obedient in order to extend the State's control over the populace. The logic of many homilies often followed this pattern: if man's world mirrors the heavens and God wished his angels to be obedient and follow order, then God intends man to follow his prescriptions on earth. Revenge required an agency clearly forbidden in the homilies. Man's action against another interfered with God's rule, and the State, as emissary for God, was responsible for dispensing justice while man adhered to Christian patience. The following excerpt from Homily 21, An Homily Against Wilful Disobedience and Rebellion, illustrates the State's emerging role while minimizing the agency of the individual: "And as GOD would haue man to be his obedient subiect, so did he make all earthly creatures subiect vnto man, who kept their due obedience vnto man, so long as man remayned in his obedience vnto GOD: in the which obedience if man had continued still, there had beene no pouerty, no diseases, no sickenesse, no death, nor other miseries wherewith mankinde is now infinitely and most miserably afflicted and oppressed. So heere appeareth the originall kingdome of GOD ouer Angels and man, and vniuersally ouer all things, and of man ouer earthly creatures which GOD had made subiect vnto him, and with all the felicity and blessed state, which Angels, man, and all creatures had remayned in, had they continued in due obedience vnto GOD their King. For as long as in this first king-dome the subiects continued in due obedience to GOD their king, so long did GOD embrace all his subiects with his loue, fauour, and grace, which to enioy, is perfect felicity, whereby it is euident, that obe dience is the principall vertue of all vertues, and indeed the very root of all vertues, and the cause of all felicitie. But as all felicitie and blessednesse should haue continued with the continuance of obedience, so

revenge tragedy embodies the carnival spirit at work against authoritarian repression. The revenger's extralegal pursuit incompletely remedies injustice within the system precisely because the abhorrent nature of the State shields the offender from harm, most often because the offender acts as an agent and beneficiary of the State. The revenger, then, becomes a marginalized Other, a fighter against the law, one commended by carnival who takes arms against the eviscerating powers of the State. The revenger, countering the oppressive voices that would silence him, performs the carnival grotesque by breaking the boundaries of the individual, rupturing the smoothness associated with the neoclassical body, displaying comfort with dismemberment, and embracing the vulgar, the putrid. As an agent of carnival, the revenger enacts carnivalesque undermining through violent rituals that echo the brutal anarchy of the Dionysiac. If the revenger acts as an agent of subculture, as a societal outcast, then he also epitomizes the violent potential of subculture. Peter Stallybrass and Allon White argue that subculture is not mere play, with no serious import. Instead, they warn that the elite should not assume "critique can only exist in the language of 'reason,' 'pure knowledge,' and 'seriousness,'" weapons which the revenger often eschews (43). A fundamental paradox of revenge tragedy centralizes the revenger's pain even as it marginalizes the revenger's presence: revengers fall outside the law as if existing in an underground taboo culture, though their laments about their ostracized condition resonate throughout the plays. Though Heironimo's pain, for example, directs much of the action of *The Spanish Tragedy*, his

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with the breach of obedience, and breaking in of rebellion, al vices and miseries did withall breake in, and ouerwhelme the world. The first authour of which rebellion, the root of all vices, and mother of all mischiefes, was Lucifer, first GODS most excellent creature, and most bounden subiect, who by rebelling against the Maiestie of GOD, of the brightest and most glorious Angel, is become the blackest and most foulest fiend and deuill: and from the height of heauen, is fallen into the pit and bottome of hell" (550-51).

eventual ostracized status in the play classifies him as an agent of subculture, forced into the margins of society where he can no longer interpret the law or act as its advocate.

One of the most prominent studies of folk culture in early modern England captures nicely the ostracism of carnival characters. Though it makes no direct link to the study of revenge, C.L. Barber's *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy* frequently discusses how characters of subculture in drama emerged from the social practices of early modern England. As a landmark study, Barber's work emphasized how critical discourse should envision the theater as a social event and a communal experience. Dissolving unilateral boundaries, Barber suggests theater and culture became part of a complex fluid dynamic of shaping and reshaping. He endorses a historical and psychological view of man while eschewing the notion that either view represents a final, whole product.
Tensions and contradictions imbued in Elizabethan culture, he asserts, provided fodder for playwrights. His extension of drama's subversive elements allowed critics to envision how drama acted as a method of containment for seditious acts. After Barber, many critics focused on what is often called a safety value theory, by which plays host the oppressed feelings of the lower class, and these feelings found identification and release through performances. As a result, many studies after Barber understood plays as benign outlets for potentially hostile feelings.

Studies in this vein were particularly devoted to comedy and social life, and they proliferated greatly following Barber's work, with many studies adopting a Bakhtinian perspective. For example, Michael Bristol argues that an open-ended dialogue is created by the heterglossia of the mechanicals and the monologism invoked by the aristocracy in *Midsummer Night's Dream.* Rick Bowers reads shifting gender and class lines, coupled

with unremitting images of the body's procreative and execratory functions in Middleton's *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*. Of course, Falstaff has become a target critics could not miss. His bulging belly, uncrowning wit, and life in a tavern mark him a festive figure. Francois Laroque, Kristen Poole, Jonathan Hall, and Hugh Grady have rendered divergent carnival portraits of the merry man, focusing on his excessive consumption of meat and sack, his celebration of topsy-turvydom, and his inclusive laughter.[20] While the body of carnival discussion on the comedies protrudes as large as Falstaff's belly, the body of carnival discussion on the tragedies appears much more Lenten. Certainly, the plethora of carnival studies devoted to the pleasure-seeking, libido-driven characters of comedy has saturated critical discussion in this area. Therefore, this dissertation aims at redressing that imbalance.

In turning to tragedy in *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin suggestively intimates the carnivalesque nature of Shakespeare's tragedies:

> In world literature there are certain works in which the two aspects, seriousness and laughter, coexist and reflect each other, and are indeed whole aspects, not separate serious and comic images as in the usual modern drama. A striking example is Euripides' *Alcestis* in which tragedy is combined with the satyric drama (which apparently becomes the fourth

[20] Analyzing the battle of Carnival and Lent, Francois Laroque reads a "Bruegel-like atmosphere" in the Henry IV plays. Kristen Poole attacks traditional understandings of Falstaff's allusion to Oldcastle, and discusses the Marprelate satires which presented "puritans as grotesque individuals living in carnivalesque communities"(16). Jonathan Hall examines the Falstaff from *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and sees him as a figure in the "buried history of the modern subject" (180). Hugh Grady takes on Falstaff's construction of a modern subjectivity in light of the Renaissance's "model for life in a world newly open to the unfettered subjectivity created through shifting ideologies, religions, social stations, changing gender roles, and malleable sexuality" (242).

> drama). But the most important works in this category are, of course, Shakespeare's tragedies. (122)

Unfortunately, Bakhtin abandons his analysis of Shakespeare's tragedies after this paragraph and hardly broaches the topic again in his lengthy study of carnival. But this dissertation intends to pursue this gap left by Bakhtin. Despite the numerous studies on early modern comedy, Roger Pooley recalls critics' affinity for tragedy when he writes, "Bakhtin's call for a history of laughter has remained, if not unanswered, still drowned out by the continued interest in the history and theory of tragedy" (6-7). Surprisingly, then, carnival studies of tragedy are still in incipient stages and are disproportionately few when compared to carnival studies of comedy.[21] The great lacuna between carnival studies in comedy and carnival studies in tragedy was created in part by Bakhtin's brevity and in part by the success and popularity of C.L. Barber's focus on festivity. Most critics have also failed to connect any possibilities that carnival offers for revenge tragedy because they theorize that the two concepts are antithetical.[22]

In *Shakespeare's Festive Tragedy*, however, Naomi Liebler intends to rewrite and expand on C.L. Barber's work by exploring the festive nature of tragedy in a way "broader, deeper, and more complex than the one Barber intended for comedy" (2). She locates the festive nature of tragedy in the crisis of communities, asserting that the drama investigates means for a solution and a recompense in which the protagonist acts as "both

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[21] Nonetheless, many studies suggest that comic patterns appear in tragedy. For a seminal study on the intersection of comedy and tragedy, see Susan Snyder. Notably, Snyder's study *The Comic Matrix of Shakespeare's Tragedies* ignores carnival elements in comedy as she focuses on traditional qualities of romantic comedies and how *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello* divert "a well-developed comic movement. . . into tragedy by mischance" (1).

[22] In his discussion of class, carnival, and comedy, Robert Weimann feels free to ignore the dangers of carnival, or its Dioynisiac potential. In fact, Weimann argues that carnival imbues comedy with a "sense of freedom from the burden of the ruling ideologies and concepts of honor, love, ambition, and revenge" (159).

priest and pharmakos, victim and villain, actor and acted upon, in the reciprocal relations of a community and its individual members" (35). As a voice for the community, the tragic hero, Liebler avows, reciprocates a paradoxical relationship with the community he embodies. Specifically, the hero develops a nurturing and threatening relationship with his community. Also invoking the dual nature of carnival, Michael Bristol discusses laughter at Polonius's death and carnival's appropriation of festivity and violence in *Hamlet* to engender clarification through a reassertion of physical reality. Serious claims of a political, moral, and economic world are leveled and lampooned by jokes, death, and burial. The gravediggers' resentment of privilege mocks the self-assured elite categories of the living and degrades social standing. Richard Wilson sees a carnivalized discourse of the flesh being controlled and exerted from dominant positions in *Julius Caesar*. According to Wilson, Caesar masks as a Carnival King by engaging in sports, wildness, and theater, using these elements to govern his subjects' desires. However, of the studies that discuss carnival and tragedy, not one centers on the ways carnival mobilizes, subverts, and challenges the revenge tragedy genre.[23]

The critical methodology employed in this dissertation requires an awareness of new historicist and cultural materialist methodologies. While I strictly adhere to neither approach, both approaches have informed my use and definition of the term carnival. While the discussion of carnival thus far has maintained a decisively Bakhtinian view, poststructuralist criticism has questioned Bakhtin's use of binaries in his theory of carnival. For poststructuralists, stable and transcendent meanings do not exist, closure becomes an impossibility, and Derrida's conception of *differance* exposes the fallacy behind binary conceptions. This dissertation conceptually operates in a space between

[23] Even in Bristol's lengthy study of carnival and *Hamlet*, he elides the subject of revenge.

Bakhtin and poststructuralism. While it acknowledges the potentially arbitrary, unreliable nature of language and discusses how carnival leads to instability in revenge tragedies, it also acknowledges that there still exists an illusion of stable meaning and that binaries in Bakhtinian theory mirror binaries created by authors, performers, readers, and viewers of any particular play. That is, those involved in the creation and interpretation of a text habitually seal off that text from complexity and often create an illusion of closure based on binary logic. Authors, performers, readers, and viewers shape the aesthetic frame of a text through their perception, and even if poststructuralist theory denies the existence of stable meaning, the stability of a play exists, in part, based on the perception of its creators. Even revengers within a play conceive of their world in binaries: Under the rule of King Hamlet, Prince Hamlet lived in an untainted world ruled by Hyperion; under the rule of Claudius, Hamlet lives in a lascivious world ruled by a satyr. The critical position thus employed adopts two main principles: first, knowingly operating within the limitations of binary logic reveals useful critical readings of revenge plays, and second, shedding such binary limitations celebrates semantic open-endedness and also produces informative and imaginative critical readings.

The notion of carnival has undergone a striking metamorphosis in critical discourse since Bakhtin popularized the form, and carnival, now slippery and paradoxical in its use, needs further clarification. As an elusive term, carnival did not signify the same concepts in Greek culture as it did in medieval times; likewise, medieval carnival signifies something entirely different from the carnival of early modernity. As Arthur Lindley explains, "It has long been recognized, for example, that the simple dichotomy that Mikhail Bakhtin proposes in *Rabelais and His World*—in which carnival represents

life, joy, freedom, hope, in short the good; and the Christian official order represents oppression, suppression, depression, and repression, in short the bad—will not wash" ("Laughter" 105). Though Bakhtin did not propose a horrific potential of carnival, clearly its qualities of gaiety and transcendence arose out of the smoke of totalitarian oppression. The theoretical landscape over the last thirty years as well as several significant studies has shifted the definition of carnival and its application to drama. Instead of seeing carnival as a transgression, Terry Eagleton counterbalances the utility of carnival with its limitations. According to Eagleton, carnival represents a temporary, permissible rebellion that serves just as much to enforce the law as it does to subvert it. King James would have agreed with Eagleton's point and endorsed carnival as a politically savvy form of control. In a letter to Prince Henry regarding the rule of England, James sees value in carnival practices: "certaine dayes in the yeare would be appointed, for delighting the people with publicke spectacles of all honest games, & exercise or armes: as also for convening of neighbours, for entertaining friendship and hartlinesse, by honest feasting and merrinesse" (19). As a ruler who understands the needs for socially approved outlets that control disorder, King James views May Games, Christmas festivals, and the theater itself as elements of effective, rather than ineffective, government by providing a temporary release against the perceived capricious whims of the crown's authority.[24]

[24] Many ritual practices of carnival also received royal protection under Elizabeth. Approval from those in political power was not always so overwhelming, and the topic could be divisive. Carnival's power to undermine and twist authority garnered much attention from those close to the crown. See Howard's discussion of antitheatrical pamphleteers who viewed theater as a "powerful and potentially dangerous force" (42). Howard cogently argues, "these treaties pay homage to a static conception of the social order and an essentialist view of human identity as God-given rather than as forged through participation in social processes. . . In fact, what seems most troubling about the overt shapeshifting of actors and the elaborate and changing dress of women is that that both expose the hollowness of essentialist rhetoric" (43-44). For a discussion of politics and carnival, see also Stallybrass.

The perception of an idyllic folk culture struggling against authoritarian control that allows occasional episodes of free expression has not gone without scrutiny. Rocco Coronato takes aim at Bakhtin's utopian reading of his sources and selected emphases among them. He resists reading antithetical terms in Bakhtin's theory and doubts the "optimistic conception of a subversive tradition of popular comic culture" (35). Likewise, Mary Russo questions Bakhtin's view of Rabelais and carnival, calling it too "nostalgic for a socially diffuse oppositional context which has been lost" (61-62). While Coronato and Russo doubt the carnival fantasy world of unlimited meat and sack, neither exposes the Dionysiac origins of carnival, namely its violent and cruel potential. While very few studies address this topic, in his work *Bitter Carnival: Resentment and the Abject Hero*, Michael Bernstein discusses the carnivalesque in various writers including Horace, Shakespeare, and Dostoevsky, and like previous critics, he downplays Bakhtin's focus on "the Saturnalia's optimistic and celebratory assumptions" (18). Bernstein's thesis foregrounds the darker side of carnival and its malevolent potential: "when the tropes of Saturnalian reversal of all values spill over into daily life, they usually do so with a savagery that is the grim underside of their exuberant affirmations. It is precisely the festival's bitter side, the relationship between its celebratory and its rage-filled aspects, that I want to probe" (6). Instead of a fun-loving, carnivalesque hero such as Falstaff or Feste, Bernstein cites Charles Manson as an abject hero from the 1960s who adhered to carnival principles and turned the world topsy-turvy by accusing the society of fashioning him into a killer.

The violence associated with carnival in Bernstein's book echoes the conclusions of Rene Girard in his well-known text *Violence and the Sacred*. For Girard, all societal

rites perform a similar function by delaying the mimetic violence that finds expression in Saturnalian revelry. Girard's discussion of carnival's vindictive and destructive qualities recalls its Dionysiac origins, and for Girard, revelry represents the discharge of violence into society. If Bakhtin and C.L. Barber have been countered by theorists such as Girard and even attacked for their overly optimistic forms of festivity and carnival by Coronato, Russo, and Bernstein, then critics now have begun shifting away from reading carnival as an exemplification of the *joie de vivre*.

Jonathan Dollimore's *Radical Tragedy* dismantled previously fixed notions of our understanding of social and cosmic order in early modern England and consequently dissected notions of unity. Dollimore's cultural materialism marks the Renaissance concerns with subjectivity, specifically with reading conflicts between multiple identities, which forms one aspect of carnival play. For Dollimore, figures such as Martson's Malcontent represent the effects of a disjuncture between outmoded identities inherited from late medieval times and new ones available in emerging modernity. Arguing that the subversive qualities of drama disintegrate a providential viewpoint, Dollimore suggests that, in early modern England, drama diminishes the power of the afterlife to address wrongs and thereby uncrowns God. The collapse of an intellectual and social unity and the exposure of gaps in identity put forth by Dollimore ruptures the firm notion of Bakhtin's folk culture, and Dollimore's focus on subversion injected a more powerful, nearly insidious aspect, of folk culture's potential. Even though Bakhtin and Dollimore support the idea of difference, Bakhtin still relies heavily on sameness within a folk culture category. If an ideologically unconditioned discussion of early modern England does not exist, then neither does an ideologically unconditioned discussion of its folk

culture. Consequently, early carnival studies on drama fail to reflect difference and subversion; instead, they adopt Bakhtin's folk culture as one entire impenetrable unit.[25] For example, Robert Weimann suggests that folk rituals in early modern England took on an innocent, playful purpose. To Weimann, the self-indulgent qualities of folk culture render only a timid attempt at resistance to an authoritative class.

In one of the seminal documents of new historicism, Stephen Greenblatt's well-known "Invisible Bullets" argues that "Shakespeare's plays are centrally, repeatedly concerned with the production and containment of subversion and disorder" (40). Working from a Foucauldian model, Greenblatt imagines omnipresent systems of power at the nexus of dramatic functions, systems of power that deny at every turn the possibility for rebellion and even resistance. Theories of carnival, defined by Bakhtin and his theoretical predecessors, render ubiquitous systems of power incomplete by exposing the gaps in the exertion of power. Bakhtinian readings counter a reductive model by theorizing a subjectivity of resistance—a resistance to authority and a resistance to categorization. Nonetheless, the theories of new historicism rewrote carnival play. In revising C.L. Barber's iconic definition of carnival under the influence of Greenblatt, Arthur Lindley maintains that "carnival does not lead to release and clarification but to a chaotic dissolution, the only solution to which is a reimposition of order for the sake of

[25] See Alfred Harbage "Shakespeare and the Ritual Traditions." Harbage establishes a general parameter for understanding the division between public and private theater, reading popular theater as the antithesis of the "theater of a coterie" (16). While minimizing aristocratic entertainments, he privileges instead the "theater of a nation" (17). The underlying assumption of Harbage relies on the superiority of the popular theater.

order" (*Hobbyhorse* 34). The illusion of clarification has a tenuous hold on the endings of early modern drama, as Lindley sees acts of transgression recaptured by authority.[26]

Within the current critical landscape, the ambivalence of carnival cannot be overstated.[27] Terry Castle notes carnival's propensity for disrupting "firm conceptual boundaries" (182). When carnival upends authority, it questions fixed positions In carnival, any role or position occupied with categorical certainty becomes relative. Kings become clowns; rich become poor; males become females; and interior becomes exterior. When uncrowning the king, carnival exposes the superficiality of class distinctions; in inverting the normal order of dress, carnival interrogates the boundaries of gender; and by fusing rule and misrule, carnival borders on chaos. Thus, overthrowing the status quo questions hierarchy to the point of collapse. Boundaries between categories of rule and misrule, order and disorder have a tenuous distinction. When Hamlet takes his revenge, the defining characteristics between revenger and villain appear muted. Therefore, in the battle of the State's rigid authority and the revenger's urge for retribution, carnival revengers often resist the power of authority, jettison hierarchy, and enact rebellion only to reestablish the very structures they seek to uncrown. In many ways, revengers usurp power in order to reify it. This notion informs the discussion of the desire for revenge and the State's role by blurring the distinction between the two categories. Carnival asks, at

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[26] Lindley is but one example of a critic who uses carnival in light of new historicism's discussion of power. Many critics make similar arguments, with or without the facilitation of carnival. See Jean Howard's *The Stage and Social Struggle in Early Modern England*.

[27] Bakhtin explains: "Crowning and [un]crowning [in carnival is a two-in-one [...] ambivalent ritual expressing the inevitability, and simultaneously the creativity, of change and renewal, the jolly relativity of every system and order, every authority and every (hierarchical) position. The idea of immanent [un]crowning is contained already in the crowning: it is ambivalent from the very beginning." (*Rabelais* 102)

what point is the revenger ineradicably marked as a proponent of hierarchy and order, the very values he claims to subvert?

The opening of *Hamlet* reveals further considerations of these imagined boundaries and their relationship to power. Claudius usurps power to become a ruling figure of misrule, one who masks disorder as order. Hamlet, in turn, paradoxically enacts disorder to attempt to reify the order established under King Hamlet. While the hierarchy under King Hamlet becomes radically toppled by Claudius' first act of subversion, this hierarchy never firmly governs again. The diminished rule of Fortinbras takes hold at the end of the play. Carnival then eradicates fundamental differences between categories; it disestablishes exactly what Soviet Russia was known for, creating and maintaining firm distinctions. Carnival shows a dictator with his pants down sitting on a toilet. This uncrowning effect blurs the difference between dictator and commoner. In such a unifying expression of the lower bodily stratum, identity is often imbued with the seeds of its own subversion. Even in early carnival forms such as Saturnalia, the king and the sacrificial victim exist as two sides of the same coin, at one minute ruler, the very next minute sufferer.[28]

Carnival's costuming and masking qualities also serve the same function of troubling categories. In discussing the hybridity and costuming of carnival, Stallybrass and White note that carnival can "generate the possibility of shifting *the very terms of the system itself*, by erasing and interrogating the relationships which constitute it" (emphasis added, 53). In *The Revenger's Tragedy*, Vindice's masking as Piato allows for

[28] The theater, emerging out of carnival games, was also shedding binary categories. Public playhouses absorbed carnival's questioning of fixed and permanent boundaries. As Steve Mullaney observes, "the public playhouses were born at a time when traditional hierarchies were breaking down, and neither they nor the plays they fostered were thus contained by the customary antitheses of rule and misrule, order and disorder, holiday and everyday" ("The Place of the Stage" 51) .

the expression of homoerotic overtures toward Lussurioso, and this masking interrogates the lines between masculine identity and social practice through Vindice's play with gendered ideology. On the one hand, Vindice's heterosexual relationship with Gloriana shapes his desire for revenge, but on the other, in his acting of revenge, Vindice subverts this masculinity. Likewise, Bristol also notes carnival's power to disrupt boundaries and identity: "The grotesque inappropriateness of Carnival masquerade reveals the arbitrariness and impermanent in the relationship between the biological individual and his claims and pretensions to a fixed social status and identity" (*Carnival and the Institutions* 642). Revengers flout shifting identities, expose the impermanence of life, and speak in equivocal terms. They use costumes, masks, and performances to manipulate their relationship to power and authority.[29]

Through its play with systematic inversions, carnival pursues instability, but often and more specifically an instability that emerges naturally from the creative spirit of folk culture. Many revengers stage their own dramatic violence in carnival terms in juxtaposition with the more formal staged performance. Often the revengers' staged violence destabilizes the dramatic performance at hand by questioning its previously delineated boundary. In *The Spanish Tragedy*, what existed as the fixed frame of the play becomes less clearly defined when the played violence of Heironimo's playlet becomes real; as a result, real danger overlaps with what was previously an aesthetic experience. In this revenge tragedy and others that involve plays-within-plays, the revengers' staged performance destabilizes the meaning of violence. The collapse of the play's frame, at a

[29] Operating within the gaps of illusion and reality, the clown figure exemplifies the ambivalence of carnival play, and its potential to disrupt boundaries and authority. Invoking a dual perspective, the clown questions the rigid boundaries of actor and audience. The clown's frequent vacillation between the frame of the play and the audience's perspective makes it difficult to classify him.

moment where play and reality intersect, renders distinction between order and disorder problematic. Revenge tragedies dramatize the paradoxical nature of violence: it appears simultaneously necessary and futile.

Between 1580 and 1630, revenge tragedies captured the interest of an English audience, and contemporary references often note the popularity of these plays.[30] Despite the intrigue generated for fifty years over the reign of three monarchs, many revenge plays have until recently existed in the margins and periphery of critical pleasure. Excessive dramatic violence, coupled with melodramatic plots, tend to sour critics' judgment of these plays, and so revenge tragedy remains the Other, existing in a liminal space between acceptance and rejection. Even one of the most studied plays of all time, *Hamlet*, has comparatively few studies published about it primarily concerned with its revenge theme. In a play that knows no interpretative boundaries, preferred investigative topics include the nature of the ghost that visits Hamlet, the meaning of Hamlet's "To be or not to be," and the exact phrasing of Hamlet's first soliloquy ("sallied," "sullied," or "solid" flesh).[31] Investigations concerning *Hamlet's* mortality and epistemology abound; questions concerning its nature of revenge are surprisingly sparse. By comparison, one of the least studied Shakespearian plays, *Titus Andronicus*, has few serious studies outside the topics of authorship and feminism; critics generally eschew the topic of revenge with this play as well. While critics relegate *Titus* to a bloody spectacle, Hamlet carries critics' acclaim but does so for reasons other than its exploration into revenge.

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[30] *The Spanish Tragedy*, for example, was still performed on stage in 1642 when the theaters closed from years of attacks.

[31] See Robert Watson's discussion on the many banal studies of *Hamlet* in the *Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Drama*, pages 316-17.

In this context of revenge scholarship that denigrates the revenge theme, Stevie Simkin's argument strikes a cord: “When the Shakespearean era was identified in theatrical terms as the golden age of English drama [. . .] revenge tragedies were embarrassing blemishes best ignored” (3). Covered with a murky patina of critical disparagement, revenge plays have lost much of the original luster they possessed in early modern England. Part of the answer to this shift in perspective lies in a review of critics’ scholarship concerning revenge, and the terms and conventions we ascribe to this genre. Surprisingly, critics’ discourse has invented an unfavorable lens through which to view revenge tragedy, and to the detriment of this genre, this lens has been relentlessly parroted for decades. This dissertation aims to rectify critics’ discourse concerning revenge tragedies by providing a more complex, multivalent critical model to examine this genre.

Like Frankenstein, the revenge tragedy genre emerges as a monster we created only to spurn our creation. Ronald Broude reminds us of the extent to which modern critical discourse has invented the category of revenge:

> When we speak of ‘revenge tragedy,’ we are often unaware of the extent to which our approach to these important Renaissance plays has been conditioned by the name we have given them. Elizabethans themselves recognized no distinct dramatic type called revenge play. The term is a modern one, made current at the turn of the century by A. H. Thorndike, and first defined at length by Fredson Bowers more than thirty years ago. (“Revenge” 38)

In his groundbreaking 1902 article “The Relations of *Hamlet* to Contemporary Revenge Plays,” A.H. Thorndike, seeking to explore the concept of retribution, codified a list of revenge qualities, which placed Hamlet at the epoch’s center. Consideration of Thorndike's argument reveals early attempts to establish a boundary around the revenge tragedy genre and the distortion that can easily result from doing so. Thorndike remarkably constructed a subgenre of Renaissance plays that illuminates the theme of retribution, in his words, "a distinct species of the tragedy of blood. . . whose leading motive is revenge and whose main action deals with the progress of revenge" (125). Beginning with *The Spanish Tragedy* as the ultimate paradigm for revenge, Thorndike delineates three primary qualities of the genre: the "revenge of a father for a son is superintended by a ghost"; there exists "hesitation on the part of the revenger who requires much inciting and superabundant proof"; and madness constitutes "an essential motive throughout" (143-144). Thorndike then links various authors over various decades who were "working with similar dramatic motives, similar material, and to some extent under similar artistic impulses" and by doing so established revenge as a genre with its own recurring tropes (201).

Yet the most disconcerting element of Thorndike's creation of revenge genre lies in its treatment of *Hamlet*. Even though Thorndike seeks a balance between Shakespeare and his contemporaries, and putatively wishes to remain "fair in this effort," he nonetheless elevates *Hamlet* while degrading other revenge plays, especially the play he labels as the genesis of revenge, *The Spanish Tragedy* (220). Thorndike views Kyd’s work as a nascent attempt to construct generic conventions, and he concludes that many revenge plays, including *The Spanish Tragedy*, concern "the same themes to which

Shakespeare gave *final* expression" (220). Therefore, other playwrights were "struggling to express similar artistic moods and a similar range of thought and feeling" (220). Thorndike's inclination to read *Hamlet* as the most exemplary revenge tragedy, while a justifiable error, clearly shapes the construction of what he labels "the revenge type" (201). *Hamlet* becomes, for Thorndike, the telos of revenge tragedy, a paragon that other plays fail to match.

Creating a seemingly broader framework for analysis, Fredson Bowers's *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy*, published decades after Thorndike's research, sought to analyze "representatives of the larger pattern of revenge tragedy" (1). In doing so, Bowers solidified the notion that revenge tragedy existed as its own construct, with a recurring set of concerns, including a revenge motive, a cause for catastrophe linked to revenge, a hesitation for the protagonist, and the avenger's feigned or actual madness. Bowers, the first critic to publish a book-length analysis on revenge tragedy, concatenates diverse plays by arguing "revenge constitutes the main action of the play in the sense that the audience is chiefly interested in the events which lead to the necessary revenge for murder, and then in the revenge's action in accordance with his vow" (63). Despite the significance of Bowers's study, he repeats Thorndike's process of reading revenge through the lens of *Hamlet*. At the expense of other revenge tragedies, Bowers argues that "Shakespeare almost alone unshackled himself from the [revenge] form, although in *Titus Andronicus* he experimented with it and in the final *Hamlet* achieved the apotheosis of the revenge play" (101). Bowers accordingly defines key characteristics of revenge through *Hamlet*. The catastrophe of revenge tragedy, he suggests, stems from human or divine revenge for an unrighted wrong. While revenge does not have to dominate the

central focus, it cannot be introduced as an afterthought. The revenger, Bowers attests, may appear as a villain or hero, and his motivations for revenge may be multifold, including blood vengeance, resentment, jealousy, or self-preservation. The revenger carries out the revenge unless heavenly vengeance appears in the play.

While Aristotle's *Poetics* sets the precedent for establishing categories of literature around specific characteristics, this traditional genre criticism outlined by Aristotle and practiced by Bowers denies the possibility of exegesis until there exists an *a priori* commitment to categorize the work.[32] That is, a text's value lies in its conformity to a predetermined—or one might say post-determined—set of criteria that establishes the genre, and if the text fails to live up to the fixed set of criteria, critics often label it an inferior patchwork. Ironically, Bowers's definition denigrates one of the primary qualities that define revengers, nonconformity. Bakhtin remarks most highly on the "non-conformity" of the unassailable "nonofficial nature" of Rabelaisian images (*Rabelais* 2-3) Searching for criteria to create a genre leads to a reductive view of criticism that, in turn, yields limited interpretative possibilities and encourages instead the mindless matching up of data to create the illusion of aesthetic sophistication and completeness. While Bowers aimed at a broad enough definition to catalogue most elements of revenge, many of the plays he classifies as revenge tragedy counter his simplistic overarching definition.

Labeling plays according to one definition or to a series of conventions fails because of contradictions within the overarching definition or within the multiple

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[32] One might also consider the work of Peter Sacks, who generally follows generic expectations as well. He asserts that revenge tragedy came into popularity as the pastoral traditions waned. As political and religious unrest deepened, Sacks views the "solacing powers of pastoral" with decreasing effectiveness in an age where "the divinely guaranteed nature of justice" was skeptically regarded (578). For Sacks, the play's language cannot be separated from its violence. Both Bowers and Sacks avoid social and cultural anxieties associated with violence.

conventions. For example, Bowers wishes to include a sense of heavenly vengeance, removed from the reveneger's hands, but he specifically states that a criteria for revenge requires the agency of a human revenger.[33] Working from Thorndike's definition of revenge and seeking to broaden its application, Bowers wishes to include *The Atheist's Tragedy* within the revenge tragedy genre. However, this desire forces Bowers into a corner: Middleton creates a play with many of Bower's revenge elements but without a revenger. This resistance of some plays to fit the Bowers mold for revenge tragedy further supports the idea that Bowers creates revenge tragedy with *Hamlet* as its *sine qua non*.

Other problems arise in Bowers' work in his treatment of Hieronimo in *The Spanish Tragedy*. For Bowers, villain revengers, those who act as villains from the outset, serve as a hallmark of the revenge genre, and this character type becomes the basis for the revenge category. But, for Bowers, the act of revenge constitutes villainy. Bowers argues under the assumption that an early modern audience would have disapproved of private revenge. To his credit, he does distinguish between characters like Hieronimo who begin as heroes and end as villains, but his logic implies that all revengers must conclude the play as villains.[34]

The heavy influence of Seneca leads Bowers astray in his analysis of *Titus Andronicus*. Bowers describes Lucius, the survivor and governor of Rome, as "an unwitting accomplice to Titus's revenge" (116). Reading revenge through a morally instructive lens, Bowers notes that the villain revengers are always killed, but Bowers

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[33] Bowers works from Thorndike's definition of revenge. He argues that later critics applied this definition too strictly.

[34] In regards to Hieronimo, Bowers states that, “there is hardly a doubt that, mad or sane, Hieronimo was a villain to the English audience at the end and was forced to commit suicide to satisfy the strict doctrine that murder, no matter what the motive, was never successful" (82).

overlooks Lucius's status as a revenger. Instead, Bowers exculpates Lucius because he has no part in Titus's revenge. But Lucius invokes revenge when he stabs Saturninus: "Can the son's eye behold his father bleed? / There's meed for meed, death for a deadly deed!" (5.3.65-66). Lucius clearly understands that his act atones for his father and that personal revenge motivates his actions.[35]

In another section of Bowers' analysis, the categories he describes at the beginning of the study become slippery. By his own definition, Francisco in Webster's *The White Devil* satisfies the criteria for a villain revenger, but Bowers fails to explain how Francisco survives. Instead, he notes that Webster's characterization takes a multidimensional complexity that Kyd's characterization lacks, but he suggests, without much explanation in terms of how it affects his argument, that the revengers in *The White Devil* are not entirely virtuous or villainous.[36] This suggestion, which contradicts his assertion that revengers remain villains at the end of their plays, contains fruitful but unexplored implications. Carnival investigates the overlap of distinct categories, which appears as a conspicuous concern in revenge tragedies.

As foundational as Bowers' study is to the revenge tragedy genre, his attempts to exact conformity of divergent plays, of divergent motifs, to his strict definition preclude him from analyzing dominant concerns of self-reflexive play in *The Spanish Tragedy,* feasting and misrule in *Titus Andronicus*, and parody and costuming in *The Revenger's Tragedy.*[37] These carnival concerns address a salient weakness in revenge tragedy

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[35] Following the definition of Senecan revenge, Bowers reads the work of armies as a way to circumvent revenge. Lucius leads the Goths in rebellion against Tamora, but he does so at the head of an army, so Bowers dismisses any pursuit of revenge for Lucius.

[36] See Bowers discussion on 181-183.

[37] As intriguing as Hieronimo's playlet is, Bowers summarily dismisses it as an artificial scheme and denies that it bears any integral part of the revenge tragedy genre. As if embarrassed by superficial melodrama,

criticism—that Renaissance dramatists did not always repeat essential generic characteristics and thus the plays do not form an organic whole. Therefore, this dissertation provides three suggestive but independent carnival readings of three plays rather than a recursive or linear way to understand revenge tragedy. Where Bowers begins his analysis with the early revenge tragedies and finds similar repeated characteristics in later tragedies, this analysis acknowledges that carnival readings can yield divergent readings. A theoretical reading that encourages divergence in this genre seems wholly appropriate. The genre itself remained in flux over a period of fifty years, and a revision of revenge tragedy occurs at the end of the period from playwrights such as John Webster, not a hackneyed repetition of superficial motifs that suggest "the drama was becoming worn out" (Bowers 86).[38] While carnival frames revenge in many plays through the period, playwrights do not repeat the same carnivalesque concepts as an attempt to establish a genre. As such, each dissertation chapter maintains a different position with the carnival tradition.

Despite the weaknesses in Bowers' approach, such a construction of the genre proves deceptively attractive for critics who have perpetuated a limited understanding of revenge. Other revenge plays fail to live up to *Hamlet's* template and become degraded for their sensationalism and excessive violence. For example, F.S. Boas replicates the limited reading by Thorndike: "*The Spanish Tragedy* . . . with revenge and madness as its

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Bowers skirts his analysis around Hieronomio's theatrical plot and indeed any plot that invokes the carnivalesque. In his analysis of *The Spanish Tragedy*, Bowers briefly comments on the methods Hieronimo uses to secure revenge, relegating his plot to the base, terse description of "elaborate trickery" (72).

[38] Bowers sees many later revenge tragedies as superficial, incorporating standard motifs merely to develop the plot rather than explore character or ethical issues. Again, a carnival reading shatters this illusion, and in regards to a later play such as *The Duchess of Malfi*, we see how Webster takes up central concerns of subversion as an element to contain the subversive. Webster considers how patriarchal power constricts the fluid female, but also how the use of that subversive power limits the influence of the patriarchy.

main themes, anticipates in certain aspects Shakespeare's mighty work" (63). When pre-existing generic boundaries condition critical readings, critics force revenge plays other than *Hamlet* into the role of inferior precursor. Hallett and Hallett also take up a prescriptive, almost provincial, viewpoint of revenge tragedy. In addition to including traditional Senecan motifs, they attempt to broaden revenge tragedy by suggesting that dramatists must maintain the integrity of certain motifs—ghosts, hesitation, and the use of metatheater. However, they inadvertently narrow the list of plays that fit their definition since only *The Spanish Tragedy* fits the Kydian revenge tragedy they meticulously outline. For example, Hallet and Hallet call for four essential characteristics of a ghost motif: an injustice that invokes an unquenchable anger and creates a world in ruin; the release of a destructive force, "always portrayed as objective and otherworldly but originating from the order of nature," which attempts to piece together the shattered world; a revenger who takes on the challenge of ignoring civil and religious law to address the wrongs; and "the tendency of that force to initiate an action which cannot be controlled and which will inevitably lead to excess" (281). Despite Thorndike's and Bowers' positioning of *Hamlet* at the epicenter of revenge, not even King Hamlet satisfies all of the criteria since he fails the last criteria--serving as the impetus for the play's excess. Rather, the ghost domesticates Hamlet's fury, urging mercy in regard to Gertrude, both in his initial address to Hamlet and again in act three when Hamlet's rage takes over with Dionysiac passion. Rather than fueling revenge with incendiary fury, the ghost limits the scope of revenge.

Even more recent critics' responses to the genre cannot escape the pervasive groundwork by Thorndike and Bowers. Peter Mercer mimics previous studies by using

generic expectations to read revenge and by reading revenge plays through the ultimate lens of *Hamlet*. He asserts that *Hamlet* "is the astonishing consummation" of the revenge tragedy genre. "It is not," he adds, "just *another* revenge play. In fact, it forces the revenge structure to the point where it turns on its own forms and metaphors [. . .] Nevertheless, the structure it so radically transforms, the structure rediscovered by Elizabethan drama within the ancient myth of revenge, remains of the highest relevance to the play. *Hamlet* is born from that structure-- however strange the labour" [emphasis in the original] (7). Bente A. Videback's reading of revenge also emerges from the critical construction of this genre. He speaks of the "ingredients" of Renaissance revenge tragedy, noting the hackneyed convention of the presence of a ghost and revenge that occurs for murder or a "violation of a kinsman" (10). Videback echoes the many critics who use strictly Senecan terms to describe the genre but conclude only in contradiction. Videback admits that *The Maid's Tragedy* has no ghost, but still reads it as a revenge play concerning "the tainting of a kinswoman and a friend's honor rather than an actual murder" (9). To explain the popularity of the genre, Videback, like so many who dismiss lurid violence or passingly comment on it, offers no other insight except that violent plots were "in vogue" (42). Even the written transitions between paragraphs that Videback chooses illustrate how the category of revenge has transfixed our notions of the genre and colored our interpretations of it. He begins one paragraph with a transition that suggests years of conditioning and labeling revenge according to predetermined criteria, "As always in revenge tragedy..." (37). Not only does "as always" invoke a long standing critical tradition of labeling revenge, but it further suggests that readers should be intimately familiar with the conventions he perpetuates.

In her introduction to *Four Revenge Tragedies*, Katherine Maus passingly endeavors to reinvent how critics discuss revenge. She even tacitly acknowledges many carnival elements of revenge plays. She sees revenge plays operating against an unstable and dissolving hierarchal order, and the revenger taking on the role of "avatar and enemy of the social order" as he seeks to enforce hierarchy while upending hierarchy (xiii). In a world in which "authority and deference seemed to be deteriorating," punishment that reminded people of their place becomes customary (xii). Nonetheless, Maus still recognizes that conventions loosely define the genre, though there may be incongruent forms of revenge tragedy. For Maus, the ways in which revenge plays deviate from the normal conventions delineated by Thorndike and Bowers distinguish the defining characteristics of the genre.

Finding a link from antiquity to the Renaissance that encapsulates a model of revenge tragedy based on formal characteristics frustrates attempts to revive the revenge tragedy genre by forcing it to fit a limited framework. This generic approach implies that revenge tragedies are philosophically shallow and superficially simple, as the appellation of revenge tends to evoke the trite commonalities which we have assigned it.[39] If revenge tragedy incites the ire of critics, or at best a banal recapitulation of Bowers' work from the 1940s, then perhaps we reexamine what the revenge tragedy genre signifies. Additionally, such a classificatory approach not only fails to clarify the genre but also limits interpretative possibilities before critical discourse inevitably exhausts itself. In

[39] Steven Mullaney attempts to avoid such a restrictive approach to the genre when he focuses instead on the genre's misogyny: "Revenge tragedy has long been recognized. . . for the speed with which it becomes virtually synonymous with stage misogyny" (182). While Jean Howard concurs with Mullaney, and both critics see the genre excoriating women for their stereotypical traits and directing excessive violence toward them, I respond by claiming the genre does exactly the same for men. Men receive no less invective, no less violent treatment than women do in these plays. For every tongue missing from Lavinia, one can count a missing tongue from a male figure such as Hieronimo. Even approaches to revenge based on gender have their limitations, as it also narrows an understanding of the genre.

contrast to Thorndike, Bowers, Boas, Hallet and Hallet, Mercer, Videback and other critics who use a set of characteristics to classify the revenge tragedy genre, I argue that, since early modern criticism has "invented" a revenge tragedy genre predicated on the past's movement forward, these Senecan shadows have constricted the critical focus on revenge tragedy and precluded an exploration of more enriching ways of understanding revenge through carnival.

Without necessarily denying the historical influence of Seneca on revenge that so many critics have delineated, I pose that carnival functions as a discursive methodology to open up more creative interpretative possibilities for this genre. The topsy-turvy world of carnival can upend critical certainty by exposing previously disguised elements of revenge and by embracing more speculative readings. For example, revenge plays do not aspire to one pure, uncontaminated form as many critics have assumed; therefore, critics who currently label a play a revenge tragedy often gloss over the mingling of the serious and comic effects. The long established critical focus on revenger motivations and Senecan pursuits of divine justice elides such interplay. At no point in their discussion of revenge does Thorndike, Bowers, Boas, Hallet and Hallet, Videback, or Mercer elaborate on how revenge balances comic elements such as disguising, feasting, and laughing. Yet what revenge tragedy boasts as much laughter as *The Duchess of Malfi*, or what revenge tragedy balances seriousness and parody, often unsettling the audience, quite like *Titus Andronicus*? In the carnivalesque mode, revenge tragedies feature hybridity, and this amalgam of serious and comic elements avoids the reduction of this genre to a single category. Black comedy enshrouds even the moments most evocative of divine justice. A clear instance of carnival's degradation of divine vengeance occurs in *The Atheist's*

Tragedy. After committing a sordid list of crimes, the atheistic D'Amville raises an axe to execute the innocent Charlemont and Castabella. When his planned treachery misfires, he "strikes out his own brains" (5.2.241). Even at a moment of bloody murder, mocking and degrading humor accompany divine intervention.

In order to reevaluate revenge, I begin with the play that establishes the genre for many early critics. *The Spanish Tragedy* opens amid a world that celebrates order, piety, and reverence. This world of seriousness and hierarchy, however, yields to carnivalesque substitution and impermanence. Other studies on festivity and revenge, such as Liebler's *Shakespeare's Festive Tragedy*, focus on the hero's relationship to his community. In contrast, I use *The Spanish Tragedy* to suggest that Hieronimo unhinges himself from a fixed social structure and disregards his community. The hero embraces a less firm notion of subjectivity, one based on the fluid, pleasure-seeking, self-serving urges of unofficial culture, and through this transformation, undertakes revenge in carnival terms that eradicates class distinctions and collapses difference. His success, however, proves short-lived. Though Hieronimo kills his intended targets and some unintended ones, the primary tool that supports his carnivalesque revenge—his subversive, degrading language—proffers only a glimmer of hope before placing him firmly within the very constraints of officialdom he felt he had escaped. A Lenten spirit does not, however, completely eclipse carnival's liberating license. Instead, though Hieronimo feels the limits of his carnival antics, Kyd suggests that the theaters commercialize carnival and move a dying-out tradition of rituals into a newly forming commercialized, theatrical space.

For the chapter on *Titus Andronicus*, I review the excoriating assessment of the play's excessive violence and its general dismissal as a bloody play that satisfies a bloodthirsty audience. Rather than project vampirism onto the audience, I propose that, underlying the hewing of limbs, gang rape, mutilation, and cannibalism of the play, lies a carnivalesque structure that would naturally appeal to a largely plebian audience. Where some critics such as Michael Bristol write about carnival degradation in revenge tragedies but not how carnival energizes revenge itself, I propose that the movement of the play toward revenge's fulfillment can be explained as a reinterpretation of social power through the struggle of carnival's official and unofficial culture. The play's movement presents an exit from the everyday, ordered rule of Saturninus to a carnivalesque subversion of rigid hierarchy represented by Titus. As a carnival king, Titus derides and uncrowns the diseased body politic of Saturninus. Titus's rituals enforce a common bond of humanity with the audience, as he becomes a voice of the public fighting against ossified authority. Accordingly, part of the strong appeal of *Titus* lies in its depiction of a topsy-turvy world that locates power in the voice of the people through a carnival king, signaled even by his meat crown pie for a crown during the final feast. Rather than allowing carnival to be quietly subsumed by everyday social rules, Shakespeare reimagines boundaries of power through carnivalesque negotiations for social change in which plebian culture, much to its approbation, avoids a return to a repressive order. Embedded in the structure of the revenge, plebian culture's upheaval of power no doubt strikes the audience as much as the play's images of sacrifice and dismemberment.

In the third chapter, I recapture the essential carnivalesque nature of *The Revenger's Tragedy* by first examining thematic observations of carnival that already

linger in critical discourse. Rather than relegating carnival to an occasional joke, quick aside, or subplot, I argue that Middleton positions carnival festivity as the main action of the play. At every turn, politics take a back seat to salacious jokes, transgressive sexuality, grotesque bodies, and bodily degradation. Middleton even dramatizes the primary mover of the play, Vindice's revenge, in terms of bodily degradation: the Duke and Lussurioso go through the guts of the beggar Vindice. From the providential mocking suggested by the stage hand's thunderous noises in the final acts to Vindice's parodying himself as a rustic, I demonstrate how *The Revenger's Tragedy* self-reflexively comments on the purposes of play. Vindice's play releases moments of crisis and revelation in which he finds temporary liberty from oppressive courtly systems. In order to find such liberty, Vindice degrades aristocratic power through carnivalesque inversion: he turns an aristocratic privilege—the right to police physical and bodily spaces—topsy-turvy and diffuses aristocratic power by relocating it to a theatrical space. The malleable world of the theater enables Vindice to transform from a state of vulnerability to a temporary state of agency, and his aristocratic victims undergo a reversal of this process, moving from a state of agency—signaled by their control of space—to a state of vulnerability—signaled by their forfeiture of spatial control. The revenger's appropriation of carnival play thus destabilizes courtly systems that track, classify, pigeonhole, and immobilize individuals, and in turn projects those very systems as a method of revenge. But as Vindice gains control over a world he attempts to correct, he paradoxically finds no other systems of rule except for the abusive carnival misrule that governed and victimized him.

2 CARNIVAL'S LIBERATIING LICENSE AND THE LIMITS OF SUBJECTIVITY IN *THE SPANISH TRAGEDY*

> At all events, in Europe between 1500 and 1800 rituals of revolt did coexist with serious questioning of the social, political and religious order, and the one sometimes turned into the other. Protest was expressed in ritualized forms, but the ritual was not always sufficient to contain the protest. The wine barrel sometimes blew its top . . . Riots and rebellions frequently took place on the occasions of major festivals. In Basel they long remembered the massacre which took place on Shrove Tuesday 1376, which was known as *böse Fastnacht*, 'evil Carnival', just as Londoners remembered 'evil May Day' 1517, which turned into a riot against foreigners. At Bern in 1513 Carnival had turned into a peasant revolt . . . It is hardly surprising to find that members of the upper classes often suggested that particular festivals ought to be abolished, or that popular culture was in general need of reform. (Burke 203-204)

As Peter Burke's research suggests, carnival theorizes a subjectivity of resistance—a resistance to authority that renders ubiquitous systems of power incomplete by exposing the gaps in the exertion of that power. No form of rule pins subjects like insects against the wall all of the time. Carnival festivals, with a real potential for "evil," as Burke suggests, remind the aristocracy of their uneasy rule, and as carnival liberates popular culture from oppression, it destabilizes the relationship between high and low, aristocrat and commoner. Popular culture's revolt thus interrogates closely the line of power between upper and lower classes. Evil festival days manifest themselves as

puissant ruptures in an otherwise stable society that enforces class distinction by upholding firm "social, political, and religious order" (Burke 203). Furthermore, even though Burke notes "that members of the upper classes often suggested that particular festivals ought to be abolished," his account affirms that courtly life weaves carnival antics into its very fabric (203). This form of carnival as subversive resistance, fully integrated into courtly rituals, undergirds Hieronimo's revenge in *The Spanish Tragedy.* Hieronimo's act one masque anticipates the playlet and shows that the royal audience expects little seriousness to emerge from play. The King blithely dismisses the masque as a "pompous jest" (1.4.137). Therefore, Hieronimo's suggestion that the court perform *Soliman and Perseda*—a playlet that invokes the disguised brutality of evil carnivals—naturally evolves from existing systems of entertainment that commonly accept plays within the court. His playlet then effectively lures his victims with promises of court-sanctioned fantasy and revelry. As in carnival, however, the promise of festivity camouflages any riotous feelings waiting to break the surface. Thus, the theater's innocuous facade—that the audience and the participants can easily dismiss the events as mere play—further enhances Hieronimo's appropriation of play as weapon. Like *böse Fastnacht* or "evil May Day," though, Hieronimo disguises rebellion as festivity, and his subversive tactic "does not simply renounce court spectacle, but infiltrates it in order to turn it against itself" (Maus xviii).

Hieronimo's infiltration of courtly life reveals a world of appearances and ceremony. The ties between Spain and Portugal tenuously hold as political rulers thrust marriage on Bel-imperia to preserve appearance. At any moment, rumbling tensions

between warring nations could crack and expose a hostile core.[40] Hieronimo's function as Master of Revels further predicates courtly life on superficial appearance. In his endeavor to entertain through masques, Hieronimo mates courtly life to theatrical performance: both purport that everything exists as appearance, and a desire to get beyond appearance, without the possibility of doing so, animates the action of *The Spanish Tragedy*.[41]

In "Shakespeare and the Exorcists," Stephen Greenblatt endorses the elusive signification of the theater, which he dubs "a fraudulent institution that never pretends to be anything but fraudulent, an institution that calls forth what it is not, that signifies absence, that transforms the literal into the metaphorical, that evacuates everything it represents" (127). Hieronimo succeeds in his revenge by fostering precisely Greenblatt's notion that the theater remains fraudulent. Under a festive guise, he cloaks his revenge so well that his participatory audience mistakes real violence for stage violence and unknowingly abets a massacre. Performing a commercial enterprise for courtly entertainment and for courtly demise, Hieronimo constructs a playlet that works against the veracities of common sense: He reminds his actors of the illusion at hand even as they die. Hieronimo thus constructs his identity by manipulating theatrical signs—words, props, trinkets of illusion, even the actors' bodies—for the consumers' visual consumption. Even prior to the playlet, Hieronimo proves himself a master at linguistic manipulation: he woos the audience by deftly delivering laments and by altering and mixing linguistic signs to great effect. However, Hieronimo does not craft an identity

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[40] For further explication on such references, see Carla Mazzio, who reads the drama in terms of national integrity amid the anxieties of war.

[41] Kay Stockholder notes Hieronimo's conflicted duty as Knight Marshall and Master of Revels: "A dispenser of justice is by definition indifferent to the tastes of those who witness his performance of his role, while an entertainer by definition strives to please his audience" (99). Stockholder provides further context for the argument at hand. Even in the role of Knight Marshall, Stockholder suggests, Hieronimo acts as a performer.

based on theatrical and linguistic play in the beginning scenes, as the Spanish world opens amid serious political business that only moves forward based on the status and words of kings. The Spanish King asks the General four quick questions that pertain to the recent battle. In a dutiful response, the General proceeds to deliver a lengthy reply that recounts the battle's solemnity and concludes by enforcing the hegemony of Spain over Portugal: "His tribute shall be truly paid to Spain" (1.2.94).

In *The Spanish Tragedy*, this world of seriousness and hierarchy yields to carnivalesque substitution and impermanence. Hieronimo unhinges himself from a fixed social structure, embraces a less firm notion of subjectivity, one based on the fluid, pleasure-seeking, self-serving urges of unofficial culture, and through this transformation undertakes revenge in carnival terms that eradicate class distinctions and collapse difference. His success, however, proves short-lived. Though Hieronimo kills his intended targets and some unintended ones, the primary tool that supports his carnivalesque revenge—his subversive, degrading language—proffers only a glimmer of hope before placing him firmly within the very constraints of officialdom he felt he had escaped. A Lenten spirit does not, however, completely eclipse carnival's liberating license. Instead, though Hieronimo feels the limits of his carnival antics, Kyd suggests that the theaters commercialize carnival and move a dying-out tradition of rituals into a newly forming commercialized, theatrical space.

The movement of *The Spanish Tragedy* catalogues Hieronimo's alienation from the community. In act one, however, Hieronimo unquestioningly plays an official role of the court. In *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics*, Mikhail Bakhtin's discussion of official culture epitomizes Hieronimo's position:

> It could be said (with certain reservations, of course) that a person of the Middle Ages lived, as it were, *two lives*: one that was the *official* life, monolithically serious and gloomy, subjugated to a strict hierarchical order, full of terror, dogmatism, reverence and piety; the other was the *life of the carnival square*, free and unrestricted, full of ambivalent laughter, blasphemy, the profanation of everything sacred, full of debasing and obscenities, familiar contact with everyone and everything. Both these lives were legitimate, but separated by strict temporal boundaries. (emphasis in the original,129-30)

In the opening scene, Hieronimo epitomizes the stiff will-bending mentality required to prop up official medieval life. At this point, he does not laugh, curse, upbraid, defame, or violate hierarchal boundaries; instead, his subservient attitude receives reinforcement from the beneficiaries of orderly society. After favorable reports from the General that laud Horatio's performance, the King invites dutiful Hieronimo to "frolic with thy king," and he metes out rewards to the knight marshal: "Nor thou nor he shall die without reward" (1.2.96, 100). By virtue of raising a son who fills his hierarchal place, Hieronimo receives further accolades from the King "that in our victory thou have a share" (1.2.125).[42] Hieronimo exudes a sincere and mindful character that suggests subservience to a larger system he fails to control. His two scenes in the first act smack of ceremony, and Kyd inextricably ties Hieronimo's identity to Horatio's. Explicating Kyd's creation of a sanctified, legitimate social order, C.L. Barber emphasizes the first act's adherence to a caste system and remarks on Hieronimo's "clearly defined social

[42] In his study of gift-giving, Brian Sheerin notes how Queen Elizabeth gave gifts to enforce her status as royalty. According to Sheerin, gift-giving, as the Spanish king does here, defines a regal position.

position that makes him an appropriate figure for a middle-class London audience to identify with" (135).[43] Hieronimo stands silent until the King acknowledges Horatio's meritorious performance, and when the King first mentions Hieronimo in the play, he identifies him with his dutiful, ordered role of knight marshal.

Additionally, Hieronimo's first address in the play reinforces the status quo and his place in the hierarchy.[44] The remainder of Hieronimo's speeches reference Horatio, suggesting the bond of father-son and the fixed role of the familial within life at court. As Barber observes, Horatio's murder ruptures Hieronimo's sense of family and "prevents the transmission of heritage from generation to generation and is felt to destroy the basis of the hero's identity" (132). Hieronimo seems to have absorbed the ideology that the political order of the world reflects, with precision, a cosmic order. Like an automaton, Hieronimo feels bound by social, familial, and dutiful relations to God and the community. The serious worldview that dominates the first scene recalls the coherence and authority essential for a thriving official culture.[45]

The world of *The Spanish Tragedy* expresses a fragile view of stability that Hieronimo would rather ignore.[46] The play upends the firm notions of structure that many critics note in the opening scenes as we watch the walls around the Spanish Knight

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[43] Katherine Maus also notes Hieronimo's connection with hardworking Englishmen who "benefitted from nationalizing trends," but she also extends the analysis by citing similar qualities prevalent in Horatio: "Likewise Horatio prevails on the battlefield, an arena in which strength and courage matter more than pedigree" (xv).

[44] For a reading of this scene in the context of sovereign gift-giving in early modern England, see Sheerin, especially pages 263-265.

[45] Jordi Escola likewise argues that this scene establishes "restrictive aspects of law, order, and degree" (63). For this community founded in strict hierarchy, "to rebel against authority would be to rebel against reason itself" (63).

[46] For another analysis on instability, see Joel Altman, who argues that there exist three different accounts of Don Andrea's death and that these "different views of the same event. . . invite skepticism concerning the truth" (272). Altman further discusses the power of rhetoric to shape perception and question stable hierarchies.

Marshal crumble.[47] A few critics observe these crumbling walls, such as Scott McMillin, who asserts the instability of class relations manifested in the desires of Bel-Imperia and Horatio, which conflict with the "demands of patriarchy and hierarchy" (37). However, the Spanish King initially subverts the social order that appears initially to exist with the peace between Spain and Portugal long before Bel-Imperia and Horatio's relationship develops.[48] As a proponent of hierarchy and order, the King opens the play proper as a concerned ruler responsible for the outcome of the army: "Now say, Lord General, how fares our camp?" (1.2.1). In the bout of masculinity between Horatio and Lorenzo over the capture of Balthazar, the perplexed King, rather than judging events for himself, calls on the prisoner to act as authority. This inversion, by which the King's act empowers a prisoner while minimizing his own control, engenders a topsy-turvy world. Balthazar possesses knowledge beyond the King, and his answer, defying categorization, mystifies more than it clarifies: "To him in courtesy, to this perforce. / He spake me fair, this other gave me strokes; / He promised life, this other threatened death; / He wan my love, this other conquered me; / And truth to say I yield myself to both" (1.2.161-165). Balthazar's answer diminishes the authority of the King and changes truth and certainty into fragmentation and skepticism.[49] His answer further provides direction and instruction for the King, so the prisoner becomes a temporary ruler, as in Saturnalia, when the King proclaims, "You both deserve and both shall have reward" (1.3.179).

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[47] Ronald Broude, for example, emphasizes Hieronimo's trust in God early in the play. For Broude, Hieronimo's revenge demonstrates his loyalty to divine law, so Broude illogically concludes that the massacre in act five supports the heavens "reveng[ing] secret crimes (albeit not always in ways immediately comprehensible to mortals)" (135).

[48] See Peter Murray who, like Scott McMillin, emphasizes the uncertain atmosphere that characterizes the opening of the play. Murray highlights the scheming of Horatio who "deliberately colors his account to gain Bel-Imperia's favor" (45).

[49] See James Henke for an alternate reading of this scene. Reading the scene with an eye toward decision-making and justice, Henke notes the allusions of the Spanish King to Solomon and concludes that all involved parties "are satisfied that justice has been done" (358).

Balthazar's response, with its antithetical structure, separating the categories of words and deeds, life and death, and love and submission, also provides evidence for what Carla Mazzio reads as the play's "conventional structure of antitheses" (215). But Mazzio sees this firm structure of opposites as a prologue to "a series of rhetorical and thematic moves [which] calls into question the very logic of difference" (215). The King, for example, conflates boundaries of nationality and difference when he says, "Spain is Portugal, / And Portugal is Spain" (1.4.132-133). This line seems to invoke the unity of nations, but it also invokes the anxiety and terror associated with the dissolution of boundaries.[50] The King puts forth this suggestion significantly at a time of "feast" and great "cheer" (1.4.126-127). He further turns the world topsy-turvy by inverting the strict hierarchy that governs the feasting at official banquets. He directs Balthazar to take seat before his brother, the Duke of Castile, who, by all rules of decorum, would sit next to the King: "Sit down, young prince, you are our second guest, / Brother, sit down; and nephew, take your place" (1.4.128-129). Of course, by recognizing Horatio and giving him a majority of the reward for Balthazar's capture, the King elevates the social standing of the son of a Knight Marshall, who clearly has a subordinate status to Lorenzo. The King, however, intuits the inequity of his decision as he tries to negotiate a just resolution by suspending class hierarchies: "Will both abide the censure of my doom?" (1.2.174). This act threatens the normal boundaries of class as Horatio's new status suggests a social mobility that enrages Lorenzo.[51] These fluid class boundaries rupture the fabric of bonds and duty upheld by Hieronimo, who firmly roots himself in Spanish culture. In order to operate in a shifting world, in which prisoners act as kings and class

[50] For a discussion of the insistence of difference between the nations in the context of contemporary political events, see Eric Griffin, especially pages 342-343.
[51] For a discussion of class in this scene, see James Siemon and Christopher Crosbie.

difference dissolves, Hieronimo must assume a protean nature that also questions categorical boundaries.

Instead of recognizing a shift from official to unofficial culture, critics define structure and hierarchy as the key characteristics for sanity and normality. Fredson Bowers defines revengers as "normal persons caught up by demands often too strong for their powers and forced into a course of action which warps and twists their characters and may lead even to the disintegration of insanity" (88).[52] By classifying hierarchal structure as normal, critics then proceed to label any actions against hierarchy as madness and pursue moral tensions that often end vilifying the hero. Peter Mercer argues that Hieronimo's degradation takes the following path: "the hero is changed from his normal social self to a monster of revenging fury" (2). Ian McAdam explores the disintegration of Hieronimo's mind: "Hieronimo identifies with Horatio so intensely that madness ensues upon his son's murder" (50). Even A.C. Bradley's comments note only in Hieronimo a "waste of good" (40). The position of these critics privileges official culture and, in doing so, seeks to downplay the enormously complex shift in Hieronimo's subjectivity. Of course, critical discourse acknowledges Hieronimo's altered self but approaches Hieronimo as emblematic of moral decadence. Since Bowers originally denigrated Hieronimo's decline from hero to villain, recent criticism defines the animating tensions of this revenge play in narrow terms: the decline in the perceived efficacy of legal justice and the radical questioning of divine justice.[53] Even though his comments seem more *a propos* to *The Duchess of Malfi*, Northrop Frye points to the

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[52]Bowers further denigrates Kyd's use of madness, concluding that "whether Kyd realized the logical uselessness of the device is impossible to determine" (43).

[53] For earlier critics who refuted Bowers, see John Ratliff, Ejner Jensen, and Ronald Broude. For later critics who challenge the Bowers model, see Peter Sacks, Peter Mercer, Steve Simkin. See also Maus: "the dispensations of divine justice are hardly reassuring" (xxiii).

sullied nature of society bereft of human and divine justice: "we can expect nothing from . . . [the society] but a long series of treacherous murders. There is no order-figure: the head of state is as bad as everyone else, and the only action we feel much sympathy with is that of revenge—revenge on him, usually" (*Fools of Time* 44). While the failure of legal and divine justice receives much attention, treating the process of Hieronimo's turn to subaltern culture as a necessity and not as villainy reveals a new framework for understanding this shift in subjectivity.

The term subjectivity shadows forth a host of meanings and various senses that may apply to Hieronimo and therefore needs qualification. Louis Althusser, for example, discusses how interpellation fashions subjectivity within ideology. In his model, internalizing the concerns and discourses of society shape subjectivity's development. For Hieronimo and for most revengers, however, resistance to social discourses seems paramount. In fact, shunned from society and having his requests for vengeance ignored, Hieronimo rips apart the laws with his teeth. He certainly does not absorb social discourses as much as he opposes them. The introspective, solitary qualities of subjectivity espoused by Max Weber seem wholly appropriate to the revenger, however. Attacks on revengers' family members damage the construction of identity based on human relations. Shunning the solidarity of community, revengers then frequently retreat into themselves. As Jordi Escola observes, "this inward recoil betrays a psychic crisis. . . [that] shatters the civic ideal by which the victim has lived, and dislocates him from his place in the community" (64). But even critics like Escola, who tacitly support Weber's view of subjectivity and emphasize the revenger's isolation, do not recognize that revengers can also embody the dynamic aspects of unofficial culture.

These aspects of unofficial culture, predicated on community, unchecked appetite, and pleasure-driven desire, seemingly stand in contradiction to the inwardness of Weber's sense of subjectivity.[54] In *Radical Tragedy*, Jonathan Dollimore traces the developments of early modernity, and in theorizing an early modern subjectivity, he centralizes the malcontent figure who expressed angst over social mobility. Hieronimo mirrors the evolution of malcontents that Dollimore describes with some significant differences. Primarily, Hieronimo resists being pigeonholed into one category. Once he plays, Hieronimo resists one identity in favor of a multiplicity of identities. Through his well-known soliloquies, two selves emerge, a former self that operates within the strict confines of official culture and a self fractured in soliloquy that emphasizes the impotence of the former self. Like carnival, the second self celebrates change, evolution, and improvisation. Faced with an identity crisis ignited by Horatio's death, Hieronimo loses a fixed notion of self and picks up a protean subjectivity, "free and unrestricted, full of ambivalent laughter, blasphemy, the profanation of everything sacred" that epitomizes "the life of the carnival square" (Bakhtin 129-130).

Balthazar and Lorenzo's initial crime instigates Hieronimo's transformation by placing him in a vulnerable state. Pushed to the limits of despair and oblivion, Hieronimo

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[54] Some critics suggest an early modern subjectivity that exemplifies all the aspects of carnival. In *The Shattering of the Self: Violence, Subjectivity, and Early Modern Texts*, Cynthia Marshall examines scenes of violence laced with erotic overtones. She conjectures that scenes of pleasure and violence reveal an early modern propensity for "shattering or dissolution" (4). As the Renaissance embraced an emerging autonomous self encased within art, it simultaneously embraced a more fluid notion of subjectivity. An emerging sense of individualism carried with it undesirable constraints, and early modern subjectivity, Marshal contends, developed through temporary releases in the process of individuation. The violence against Lavinia in *Titus Andronicus*, for example, allowed audience members to experience a shattering of the self they found so constraining. Marshall musters psychoanalytic theory from Freud and Lacan to support this masochistic view of early modern subjectivity, but it also coincides with the values of unofficial culture. Specifically, the view that a plebian audience would take pleasure in a rebellion against an emerging construction of individuation echoes the purpose of carnival.

places his sword against his chest and contemplates suicide. The official life that seemed full of promise and kingly reward strikes Hieronimo as vacuous. Official life thrives on the expectation that order leads to predictability and stability. Hieronimo lives under the assumption that dutiful service always begets a prize. As he scorns official life, his affinity for a counter-culture—a culture of blasphemy, immorality, and irrationality—intensifies. Hieronimo laments his own impotence and alienation and questions his fixed subjectivity that previously defined him. His first expressed dissatisfaction with his deferential role as knight marshal occurs after the murder when he realizes the constraints of his official self and the indifference of the regime to his personal loss:

> Thus must we toil in other men's extremes,
>
> That know not how to remedy our own,
>
> And do them justice when unjustly we
>
> For all our wrongs can compass no redress. . .
>
> I to all men just must be,
>
> And neither gods nor men be just to me. (3.6.1-4, 9-10)

In developing a second self in the spirit of carnival, Hieronimo rebels against any official sense of justice. Despite being a magistrate, Hieronimo never once appeals to an official sense of law. After the murder, not only does Hieronimo fail to report his son's murder, but he also invokes a desire for revenge four times in the second act without acknowledging that official justice even exists.[55] Appealing to the law becomes superficial, even despicable to him. When he does mention justice in his speech in act

[55] Note Hieronimo's initial responses: "To know the author were some ease of grief / For in revenge my heart would find relief"; "Seest thou this handkercher besmear'd with blood? / It shall not from me till I take revenge"; "I'll not emtomb them till I have revenge"; and "I shall keep myself from a hasty death, in case then no revenge should follow your death" (2.5.40-41,51-52,54,77-78).

three, he regrets the rigidness of the office that made him passive, slavish: "Thus must we toil in other men's extremes" (3.6.1). As Hieronimo moves into the private sphere, he disdains official, public ceremony. During the oppressive ceremonies of official culture in act one, Hieronimo always appears in the presence of others; after the murder, Hieronimo appears on stage alone for the first time. Additionally, Hieronimo makes use of soliloquy and asides only after the murder, pursuing an inwardness that removes his politically encased and socially immobile self. Any categories designed to restrain Hieronimo and subject him to official dogmatism fail.[56]

Like Bakhtin's work itself, carnival discourages systemization, so it subverts authoritative discourse that tries to establish rigid social norms. To this end, Hieronimo resists social norms by separating himself from society.[57] With the revenger's separation, legal and moral remnants of society dissipate. Hieronimo renounces his serious worldly duties and withdraws from his socially legitimate position in favor of enacting hostile, seditious acts under the guise of festivity. Despite not invoking justice after his son's murder, Hieronimo does seek out the King in a putative appeal to royal justice. However, he approaches the King wielding a poniard and a halter, which belies any genuine attempt to elicit the King's assistance. In fact, his subversive intentions suspend the order of the King's business, as other affairs of the state preoccupy the King on Hieronimo's entrance: "Now show, ambassador, what our viceroy saith. / Hath he received the articles we sent?" (3.12.25-26). Hieronimo, however, has no intentions of pursuing official

[56] Frank Whigham comments on the revenger's controlling the environment as a means to alleviate victimization: "I suggest that the recurrent dramatic engagement with the issue of control rests on this correlative foundation of insecurity. The embrace of a relationality capable of funding one's ontology seems for many characters in Renaissance plays to have meant a voicing or revealing or acknowledgment of need, experienced as intolerable self-subjecting disabling vulnerability" (45).

[57] Maus notes the following: "Social trauma, by forcing or allowing members to venture from the group, makes available a kind of inwardness that, in turn, powerfully outrages the social order" (xv).

justice in an ordered manner but rather gives over to histrionic display and the relinquishment of his official self: "I'll make a pickaxe of my poniard, / And here surrender up my marshalship" (3.12.75-76). His theatrical antics distract the King's duty and mock the regal office. At the same time Hieronimo derides official life, he renounces his associations with that life, "surrender[ing] up" the rigid role that gives him no term, no language to express his revenge. That Lorenzo considers him "helplessly distract" further sabotages any reconciliation with his former office (3.12.96). In digging a grave, Hieronimo not only estranges himself from the community, but he symbolically buries his official life in open court. Hieronimo degrades public affairs, and his subversive act prepares the audience for the line "to be avenged on you all for this" (3.12.78). Defying class boundaries, he not only imagines vengeance against the elite as a real possibility, but in seeking revenge on every public figure present, he also removes all class barriers or distinctions in revenge. Hieronimo promises to take no pains to differentiate between classes or even between the guilty and innocent. This leveling of hierarchy that he promises anticipates the carnivalesque structure of his playlet by echoing the uncrowning properties of the *Danse Macabre*.

Often noted in studies of the carnivalesque, the *Danse Macabre* found multiple forms of expression in the early modern preoccupation with death, "whether in the form of wall-paintings in churches, graveyards, and palaces or in numerous popular woodcuts and engravings" (Neill 165). The earliest example of the *Danse Macabre* motif frescoed in the *Cimitiere des Innocents* in Paris (1424) illustrates how cultural productions of death emerged from the socio-economic effects of the Black Death and the ecclesiastical promotion of anxiety about death, which no doubt prompted the clergy's economic

aggrandizement. As emblematic of carnival, the *Danse Macabre* combines the desire for penitence in the face of sudden death (and the relinquishing of one's assets to the Church) and the desire for amusement taking the form of a last dance. The stark juxtaposition of life and death reminds viewers of the ephemeral nature of life. Death becomes a mock king as he dissolves hierarchies by uncrowning people from all social statuses, from the most pious and wealthiest of individuals to the lowest form of beggar. Michael Neill tracks the historical movement from religious representations of the *Danse Macabre* into secular space and notes how the depictions render flesh skull and bones, and this degradation cancels hierarchy (166).

Figure 1.1 depicts woodcut X from Hans Holbien's illustrated book *Dance of Death*. In the figure, death appears as a skeleton and intervenes in courtly affairs, leading the Empress aside to her open grave. The partial robing of the skeleton parodies the Empress's ornamented gown, as no clothes can shield her from the bones that exist underneath the garments. Indeed, Death's presence suggests that even flesh itself becomes nothing more than the garments worn by the Empress. The Empress's clearly distinct presence, marked by class and gender, becomes a temporary referent that Death permanently levels. Death disrobes the private interior covered by apparel, dissolves the distinct categories that signal her striking presence in this woodcut, and moves the victim into the communal grave, rendering her, like the skeleton, with no clear shape and no definition. This particular woodcut resonates with Hieronimo's grave digging scene since he, like Death, interrupts courtly business and digs a grave for the elite. He exposes earthly justice as a façade maintained by courtly ceremonies. Like the *Danse Macabre*,

Hieronimo does not simply aim his revenge at one particular individual but at everything official, at all hierarchal structures.

Figure 1.1 Hans Holbien, Woodcut X

If the *Danse Macabre* prepares us for the collapse of difference that occurs in Hieronimo's revenge in the playlet, this collapse concomitantly occurs with Hieronimo's development of subjectivity consistent with unofficial culture. First, the revenger sheds entirely the skin of his official life and invents himself anew, with a subjectivity predicated on eroding class boundaries. In a psychoanalytical reading of revenge tragedy, Harry Keyishian perceptively comments that attacks against revengers "confound and disrupt the victim's sense of possessing a stable and inviolable identity" (5). In essence, revengers feel "disempowered and, in effect, erased" (5). The strident, antithetical

rhetoric of Hieronimo's "O eyes, no eyes" monologue supports Keyishian's analysis, as the speech enforces the collapse of order and nearly destroys his identity: "O eyes, no eyes, but fountains fraught with tears; / O life, no life, but lively form of death; / O world, no world, but mass of public wrongs, / Confus'd and fill'd with murder and misdeeds" (3.2.1-4). Hieronimo's Dionysiac passion registers the profound loss of his world and furthers his accompanying mental decay. His speech eschews logical thought and follows a progression of emotional paroxysm that begins at the individual level, "eyes and life," and overflows into the entire "world." He confronts a new reality in which every category that previously defined him seems opposed to his existence. Driven only by revenge, he no longer feels the need to preserve his official role as a magistrate, his duty as husband, or his loyalty to God. As in the suicide scene, Hieronimo comes dangerously close to embracing the view of I as no I, a self-cancelation. This metonymic disruption of self galvanizes a search for a new *modus operandi*. With the eradication of his official role, Hieronimo remains vulnerable, but his own cunning emerges as a necessity for self-preservation. Through his alienation and estrangement from the community, Hieronimo then reinvents his character as more malleable. The improvisation of unofficial life empowers Hieronimo so that revenge, an action that cannot be expressed by official life, becomes a possibility.

In response to this vulnerability and loss of stable self, Hieronimo initially creates an imaginative self that pits the world against him.[58] At the very moment he mourns for his loss, he affirms his identity through a type of theatricality. As he narrates his story, Hieronimo deftly manipulates the perception of his role within the world. That is, he

[58] Other critics have noted Hieronimo's self-erosion. Peter Mercer notes the "psychological strain" that originates from Hieronimo's dissembling and thus masking of deep inner feelings "can threaten to destroy the stability of the inner self, the very identity that the device seeks to protect" (44).

takes linguistic signifiers, like pieces of a puzzle, and reshapes not only how the audience perceives him but how he perceives himself. In this invented fictional projection, Hieronimo envisions a victimized self who suffers beyond all others, an innocent who suffers an "inhuman and barbarous attempt," an "incomparable murder" (3.2.6, 3.2.7). Hieronimo sees himself as "most wretched," a "hopeless father" whose "hope hath end," whose "heart was slain," whose "treasure was lost" (2.4.94, 4.4.83, 4.4.89, 4.4.90, 4.4.91). His manipulation of linguistic signs proves a self-protective measure as it guards him against annihilation.[59] Envisioning the world as powerfully claustrophobic and isolating thus proves psychically therapeutic.

But more important, through numerous laments that reflect an insatiable anguish, Hieronimo self-mythologizes. The passion that drives his dirges and his grief overflow, transforming him into a larger than life, communal figure. His ritualistic desires for revenge, common to the injured psyche of victims, only further his communal status: As rationality gives way to wish-fulfillment, his singular, self-centered approach to life resonates with a vision of man fighting against a universal evil.[60] Where official culture contains and prohibits the expression of the individual, carnival valorizes this type of narcissism. Carnival rejects the rational processes that establish everyday order, and Hieronimo vilifies this very order and wishes to replace it with a world in which frustrated desires can be expressed without limitation.

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[59] Mazzio links the cultural connection between barbarism and early modern linguistics. She cites *The Art of English Poesie* (1589) as an example in which barbarism "was often invoked to describe discomfort with linguistic or dialectical otherness" (216). If the term barbarism invoked "savage, brutish [or] uncivilized violence," as well as linguistic disruption, as Mazzio argues, then the mimetic qualities in Hieronimo's revenge—by making the linguistic barbarism match the violence of the playlet—are readily apparent (217).
[60] Note, for example, Hieronimo's speech that invokes revenge three times in three lines: "The plot is laid of dire revenge. / On then Hieronimo, pursue revenge,/ For nothing wants but acting of revenge" (4.3.25-27). On the psychic state of the revenger, see Robert Watson.

A central paradox thus emerges through Hieronimo's isolation and unchecked desires: Hieronimo expresses communal experience in communal isolation. This paradox explains why revengers can move inwardly to develop Weber's view of subjectivity but still remain communal figures who speak to plebian culture's oppression by church and state. His rhetorical ploy to make himself into a good man and make the world "fill'd with murder and misdeeds" interestingly echoes the grand schemes and narcissistic expressions of the Prince of Carnival, Falstaff (3.2.4).

Perhaps no character embodies carnival principles as thoroughly as Falstaff. The cosmic appeal of his speeches, the self-serving and subversive quality of his dialogue, and his combination of the sacred and profane mark this carnival character. While largely innocuous bodily pleasures occupy Falstaff, as seen in his consumption of unlimited quantities of meat and sack, Hieronimo shares precisely these same qualities but in a darkly self-indulgent way. Where Falstaff attempts to engender a world of perpetual holiday, teeming with wenches and wine, Hieronimo seeks to create, with a more serious and urgent attitude, the same abandonment of the normal order. Both figures manipulate language to appear excessively victimized; both figures embrace a libido-driven view of the world; and both figures create their own worlds to satisfy an unquenchable appetite. Falstaff's manipulation of language to express urges for self-aggrandizement occurs in one of his opening speeches in *I Henry IV*:

> Marry then, sweet wag, when thou art king, let not us that are squires of the night's body be cal'd thieves of the day's beauty. Let us be 'Diana's foresters,' 'gentlemen of the shade,' 'minions of the moon,' and let men

> say we be men of good government, being govrnd, as the sea is, by our noble and chaste mistress the moon. (1.2.22-27)

Falstaff epitomizes the joyful pomp and ceremony of festivities, which requires the invention of terms—"Diana's foresters," "gentlemen of the shade," and "minions of the moon"—to elide the normal order of the world, a world which would very simply label him a thief. In seeking to justify his counter-cultural view, his appetite for thievery, Falstaff couples the purity of nature and the sanctity of the gods to excuse his extralegal pursuits. In his topsy-turvy vision, nature supports his stealing by day or night.

Hieronimo's insatiable desire for revenge results in passages that similarly configure his position:

> Where shall I run to breathe abroad my woes,
> My woes whose weight hath wearied the earth?
> Or mine exclaims, that have surcharged the air
> With ceaseless plaints for my deceased son?
> The blustering winds, conspiring with my words,
> At my lament have moved the leafless trees. (3.6.1)

Hieronimo mates his grief with nature, and like Falstaff's vision, nature supports the individual; for Hieronimo, it laments the revenger's plight. By framing his mourning within the natural world, Hieronimo suggests the broad appeal of his cries, which have made the trees "leafless" (3.6.1). But Hieronimo also subordinates nature to his cause, and this rhetorical maneuver collapses the difference between external and internal worlds. Hieronimo moves his grief from his inner world and locates it in the sanctity of nature, but at the same time, the profundity of the crime has sullied the external.

Hieronimo's association between object and event—that seemingly everything, including the trees, recalls for him Horatio's death—testifies to the semiotic process he invokes to create a subjectivity and his own mythology. Every sign takes on a potency that keeps the memory of Horatio fresh and immediate. His process to create a subjectivity therefore relies on a narcissistic wish-fulfillment—that all of nature takes up his concerns—and this method enforces his communal, self-mythologizing stature. [61]

Like the self-fictionalizing qualities of Falstaffian rhetoric, Hieronimo intensifies his suffering. In fact, Hieronimo even discovers the identity of the murderers, having received a letter as if in answer to a heavenly prayer, which he describes as "this unexpected miracle," but this discovery mitigates his suffering not one bit (3.2.32). Hieronimo swears, however, that "To know the author were some ease of grief" (2.5.40). "O sacred heavens," Hieronimo begins, but instead of delivering a religious encomium, he develops further his abject nature as he continues: "may it come to pass / That such a monstrous and detested deed, / So closely smothered and so long concealed, / Shall thus by this be venged or revealed?" (3.7.45-48). The sentence's syntax undercuts any pious notion as the lament shifts from "sacred heavens" to a lengthy description of the "detested deed" to end finally by questioning the justice of the revelation (3.7.45-48). What Jordi Escola calls Hieronimo's "damaged subjectivity" at this point, which he deems "pathological," also takes on elements of carnival (69). Hieronimo's intense suffering seeks to abandon the normal everyday order, and the more intensely he feels, the more he furthers his status as a good man in an increasingly evil world. In fact,

[61] Ian McAdam also emphasizes the importance of rhetoric in reading Hieronimo: "It could be argued that the play ultimately suggests. . . the potential power of rhetoric, art, and imagination to shape—threaten, subvert, even alter—the hierarchies of both gender and class" (41).

though the murder has occurred, Hieronimo makes the world more "monstrous and detested" the more he laments (3.7.46). This egotistical approach subverts the official structure of the world that requires individual will-bending and therefore carries a cosmic appeal. Thus, Hieronimo's emerging subjectivity based on self-serving urges, coupled with his affinities for the *Danse Macabre* and his rhetoric that conflates differences between inner and outer worlds, have prefigured a carnivalesque revenge that also eradicates difference.

Hieronimo takes his dumbshow from act one, strips it down, imagines an original function for it, essentially rebirthing it. This renewed attempt at creativity heralds *Soliman and Perseda's* carnival spirit. In the repressive world of Spain in which Hieronimo feels slighted at every turn, manipulation of multifarious discourses signals his carnivalesque revenge. Though his freedom in action seems diminished in the crumbling world, Hieronimo's developed subjectivity based on unofficial culture allows him to move from victim to victimizer. Hieronimo stages, unsurprisingly, the ultimate device of his revenge through carnival play as he masks violence with festivity, which mimics "evil Carnival." What was inward now becomes outward; what was peripheral now becomes central; what was word now becomes deed as the play moves Hieronimo's private grief into the realm of the public. Created not as an act of his dependence on the court, nor as an act of affirmation for the court, the origins of the playlet intimate carnival misrule. His revenge counters the nature of semantic and hierarchical stability that existed in the Spanish world before his turn to unofficial culture. The playlet then functions as a vehicle for carnival revenge on multiple levels: first, it counters the linguistic eloquence of the Renaissance by deriding official discourse; and secondly, it

levels hierarchy and insists on sameness between individuals separated by a socioeconomic divide.[62]

Rather than haphazardly creating an odd motley of languages, Hieronimo works like a Renaissance humanist, carefully preparing his playlet by translating Latin to English (4.4.23). The act of translation was meaningfully frustrating in the early modern period as it exposed the limited flexibility of the English language to capture to intricacies of Latin. Hieronimo's carefully plotted endeavor and painstaking work shows that he knows how to operate within the system to work against the system. That is, Hieronimo appropriates official notions of language to engender a politically subversive tool. In its conception, the playlet works against the very structures that created it; *Soliman and Perseda*, aimed at all forms of high speech, serves as a carnivalesque subversion of official discourse. However, Michael Hattaway's dissatisfaction with the playlet's variety occurs because Kyd tries to stage "a theater language that would, to the unlettered at least, communicate by mere sound" (110). Hattaway's opprobrious comments deny the intentional confusion of identities in the playlet, as the playlet self-reflexively draws attention to multiple disguises, disrupts semiotic boundaries, and muddies the referents for signifiers. That players often speak the lines in foreign languages with no clear referents signals the success of the carnivalesque revenge, but a background on linguistic eloquence in the Renaissance provides appropriate context for understanding the subversion in the playlet's semiotic disruption.

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[62] To read the playlet murders in light of a growing concern for medicine and the attraction of the dead body, see Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture*. See chapter four on execution, anatomy, and the theater, especially pages 54-80. For a sociopolitical concern, influenced by Foucault, see Francis Barker's *The Culture of Violence*, especially pages 209-234.

Roger Ascham, notable humanist educator and advocate for English eloquence, writes that imitation is "a facultie to expresse liuelie and perfitelie that example which ye go about to follow" (5). Like a carnival, the humanist education encourages the absorption and appropriation of other cultures and thus facilitates the creation of interconnected, flexible selves. Moving across barriers of language allowed for radical shifts in identity—not that the humanist education fostered identity that replicated "perfitelie" the classics but that the pre-existing classical model intertwined with the translator's own voice in such incalculable ways to (re)create a new product. The oscillation between translating Latin texts to English and then repeating the process in reverse "enforces complex relations between replication and originality" and further blurs the seemingly simplistic notion of imitation, as a newly produced translation tests the boundaries of artistic creation (Barkan 327). While the curriculum of imitation in the early modern period fosters a protean sense of identity required for carnival play, to express "perfitelie" not only implies a leap across cultural boundaries, but it also implies a one-to-one correspondence that can be achieved by treating language like a mathematical formula. Therefore, linguistic representations were considered thoughtfully and precisely. In *The Boke named the Governour*, Sir Thomas Elyot adumbrates how imitation and eloquence can and should be achieved by a governor:

> I could reherce diuers other poeis whiche for mater and eloquence be very necessary, but I feare me to be to longe form noble Homere: from whom as from a fountaine proceded all eloquence and lernyng. For in his bokes be contained, and moste perfectly expressed, nat only the doucumentes marciall and discipline of armes, but also incomparable wisedomes, and

> instructions for politike gouernaunace of people: with the worthy commendation and laude of noble princes. (27)

Significantly, Elyot binds imitation and clear articulation with wisdom and governance of the people. Within his established framework of strict morality in governing, rebellion against language and its "moste perfectly expressed" forms is tantamount to a rebellion against order. An attack on language's precision is a bestial uncrowning of the fabric of officialdom. Ascham even demonizes language ill-used and sees poor linguistic construction as an indelible stain on the user's character: "the childe commonlie learneth, first, an euill choice of wordes, (and right choice of wordes, saith Caesar, is the foundation of eloquence) than, a wrong placing of wordes: and lastlie, an ill framing of the sentence, with a peruerse iudgement, both of words and sentences. These faultes, taking once roote in yougthe, be neuer, or hardlie, pluckt away in age" (22). How, then, do we understand the playlet and its basis on linguistic anti-representation against the backdrop of humanist eloquence and imitation?

The playlet blatantly challenges such notions of precision and eloquence.[63] Having no clear systems of linguistic control, Hieronimo's polyglot play blasphemes official language, as it suggests language alienates, existing as an illusion of illusion.[64] On one level, then, the playlet champions the voices of the people by subverting the dominant paradigm of linguistic eloquence and replacing it with linguistic apocalypse. The conflation of Greek, Latin, French, and Italian into one melting pot fragments the

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[63] As a rebellion against linguistic eloquence, the playlet recounts, according to Mazzio, "not simply the fall of Catholicism into so much unintelligible bible-abble but also the perils of vernacular at a time when the English tongue was, and was not, its own" (99).

[64] Rhetoric presents a reality "whose truth is always irretrievable" (McAdam 43). Jonas Barish also reads the scene as "a progressive alienation of language" (143).

dramatic action into what Bakhtin would term extreme polyvocalism. Unmoored from logical and linguistic systems, the playlet involves actors who are English playing characters who are Spanish, Portuguese, or Turkish speaking in French, Latin, Italian, and/or Greek while a theater audience watches Hieronimo—actor, character, and director—oversee the playlet in which the actors believe they participate in a game.[65] The heterogeneity of the scene, both linguistic and visual, recalls the diversity of the carnival marketplace, which is "the people as a whole but organized in their own way, the way of the people. It is outside of and contrary to all existing forms of the coercive socioeconomic and political organization, which is suspended for the time of festivity" (Rabelais 255). This playlet of "mere confusion," as Balthazar describes it, significantly masks its insidious intent, as the "unknown languages" provide a festive shield for murder (4.1.167,174). As in evil Carnival, the aristocracy has no sense of the impending violence. The King easily dismisses the play as he perceives it just as he did the masque in act one. Speaking of Balthazar, he playfully remarks, "How well he acts his amorous passion!" (4.4.21). At the conclusion of the murders, the King's initial response pushes the playlet toward farce: "Well said!—Old Marshal this was bravely done" (4.4.67). Of course, the killing turns out to be real as Hieronimo stabs Lorenzo and Bel-Imperia kills Balthazar and then turns on herself—except in another sense the killing still exists as a game within the play proper, as Hieronimo reminds the audience that the actors can live to act another day: "And that we do as all tragedians do: / To die today, for fashioning our scene. . . An in a minute starting up again, / Revive to please tomorrow's audience"

[65] The playlet exemplifies John Kerrigan's definition of revenge: "A good revenge is a form of a practical joke" (155).

(4.4.78-79, 81-82). This metatheatricality draws attention to the permeable boundaries of play and seriousness that characterize Hieronimo's revenge.[66]

These permeable boundaries mask Hieronimo's revenge as a subversive act of class eradication; two royal houses fall.[67]In his excessive bloodbath, where Castile dies even though he appears innocent, Hieronimo literalizes the *Danse Macabre*.[68] He dismantles hierarchal order by attacking all orderly forms; Hieronimo eviscerates the lineage of Spain and Portugal. He therefore actualizes the leveling insinuated in an earlier comment from the Spanish King: "Spain is Portugal, and Portugal is Spain" (1.4.132-133). Whereas the chiasmic structure of the Kings' speech intimates the dissolution of differences, Hieronimo makes this dissolution a reality.[69] In seeking to transfer his grief to the court, he insists that his suffering, the suffering of a middle class individual, can be felt as palpably by those of the upper class.[70] In singling out his class superiors, Hieronimo clarifies that his revenge afflicted fathers with the same pain he experienced: "As dear to me was my Horatio / As yours, or yours, or yours, my lord to you" (4.4.170). His suggestion that emotions transcend class therefore destabilizes class categories. He breaks the line of succession for both the Spanish and Portuguese rulers, as he leaves the

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[66] Mazzio also notes the ways metatheatricality serves the purpose of revenge: "The self-reflexivity of *Soliman and Perseda,* suggested by the sheer multiplicity of representational frames within which it is acted, calls attention to the way in which the highly theatrical and deliberative helps to facilitate the savage and uncivilized in the play (revenge itself)" (215).

[67] Stockholder argues that Hieronimo emerges as "a person who unconsciously harbors fierce resentments toward and subversive ideas about the system he consciously serves and the persons who command his loyalty" (98).

[68] Deborah Willis argues "the violence of revenge swerves from its true target, requiring the sacrifice of innocents who function as props in the revenger's show, performed for an audience that includes the perpetrator along with the broader community" (22-23).

[69] For an elaborate discussion of the *Danse Macabre*, see Neill's *Issues of Death*, especially pages 30-52.

[70] Maus echoes a Bakhtinian reading in her discussion: "Ranging the corpse of his socially inferior son alongside the bodies of the heirs apparent, Hieronimo stages and voices a radically leveling sentiment: that one dead child is very like another, that paternal love feels essentially the same for noble and commoner, that his suffering is worth as much as the suffering of princes" (xvii).

rulers stunned by their heirs' deaths: "Speak, Portuguese whose loss resembles mine" (4.4.114).

By destabilizing the ruling class, Hieronimo's playlet embodies carnival's power to subvert conceptual boundaries between high and low, and this conflation of binaries consequently questions the coherence of his unofficial subjectivity. Hieronimo expresses, with unmitigated ardor, his desire to tell a story:

> And princes, how behold Hieronimo
> Author and actor in this tragedy
> Bearing his latest fortune in his fist:
> And will as resolute conclude his part
> As any of the actors gone before.
> And gentles, thus I end my play:
> Urge no more words, I have no more to say. (4.4.145-151)

In his longest speech, Hieronimo concludes his playlet acknowledging the limits of his subversion, what has constituted his identity and self-presentation to this point. The same subjectivity of unofficial life that leads him to dig in the dirt and mock the King now fails him. With Lorenzo and Balthazar dead, Hieronimo seems to have nothing left to subvert or negate, and he feels the limits of play. Significantly, Hieronimo binds his problem of limitation with his role as author. As an author, Hieronimo attempts to express autonomy from the dramatic action that dictates his thoughts and movements. Kyd's radical creation holds awareness of his role as a character in a play, as an "actor in this tragedy," and Hieronimo rebels against the very frame that contains him (4.4.146). His creative act of authorship wrests control from the dominating discourse that governs him, so

Hieronimo creates his own stately tragedy to explore artistic boundaries. In this creation, Hieronimo uses discourse that is half his and half Seneca's. By objectifying another's discourse in artistic representation, Hieronimo tries to locate his own authentic voice but encounters the limits of self-presentation when doing so. Bakhtin comments on the vacillating nature of an author regarding discourse: " [an author] utilizes now one language, now another, in order to avoid giving himself up wholly to either of them; he makes use of this verbal give-and-take, this dialogue of language at every point in his work, in order that he himself might remain as it were neutral with regard to language, a third party in a quarrel between two people" (*Problems* 314).[71] Certainly, linguistic neutrality does not aptly describe Hieronimo's laments through much of the play; however, the dialogical nature of the playlet—that, as an artistic representation, it engages social life outside the artist's study and engenders free and open discourse—enforces Hieronimo's desire as author to have the playlet assimilated by others. Simply put, Hieronimo intends the playlet to be consumed by its audience. An author's use of language, according to Bakhtin, connects people, various authors and audiences, and allows for a "verbal give-and-take."

Through the playlet, Hieronimo tries to create what Bakhtin defines as polyphony: "A plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses . . . which is part and parcel of the artist's design" (9). The polyphony of the playlet represents real living language, voices that oppose fixed meaning and shatter the illusion that a pure language

[71] Carnival theory can be attached to Bakhtin's theory of dialogue. For a scholarly precedent that does this effectively, see Jan Kott's *The Bottom Translation*. James Siemon's comments concerning how characters'' utterances shatter the frame of play are also relevant here: "Instead of providing a grounding, referential "reality" against which characters' utterances may be measured in a dialogue of easily indexed points of view, the play treats objects, words, and actions as similarly conflicted arenas of contending values and significances. Paradoxically, it raises questions not because it fails to provide. . . choric pronouncements to frame that "reality" with significance, but because it fosters conflict in both frame and content" (92).

exists. Hieronimo acknowledges his own participation in a cycle of reading, writing, and communicating through his use of humanist imitation, owning that his own shaping of the playlet is directed and determined by narratives, such as Seneca's, that he has internalized. In effect, Hieronimo's authorship is transindividual, and because the playlet parallels the action within the play proper, we see the degree to which tragedies are lived over and over.[72] Furthermore, Bakhtin's treatment of characters in Dostoevsky carries remarkable weight in a discussion of Hieronimo as he tries to establish autonomy through artistic representation:

> The character is treated as ideologically authoritative and independent; he is perceived as the author of a fully weighted ideological conception of his own, and not as the object of Dostoevsky's finalizing artistic vision . . . the direct and full weighted signifying power of the characters' words destroys the monologic plane of the novel and calls forth an unmediated response—as if the character were not an object of authorial discourse, but rather a fully valid, autonomous carrier of his own individual world . . . Dostoevsky, like Goethe's Prometheus, creates not voiceless slaves (as does Zeus), but *free* people, capable of standing *alongside* their creator, capable of not agreeing with him and even of rebelling against him. (*Problems* 5-6)

Hieronimo wants to be both socially free and free from the dramatic action of the playlet because the playlet, despite its multiple audiences, one in the confines of the play and one existing outside the play, does not communicate Hieronimo's grief. The audience, so

[72] Many critics have noted the parallels in Hieronimo's revenge, and Lorenzo and Balthazar's crime. See Mercer pages 37-60.

thoroughly duped by Hieronimo's own festive masking, does not recognize the significance of the events that transpire. The King ignorantly asks: "But now what follows for Hieronimo?" (4.4.71). Without the understanding of his audience, Hieronimo fails at creating a "fully weighted ideological conception of his own" and thus feels the mitigation of his revenge at the moment he takes it (5). Hieronimo's earlier beating of the painter prefigures this frustration directed at artistic representation. Hieronimo exposes the limits of representation when he asks the painter: "Canst paint a doleful cry?. . . Canst thou draw a murderer?. . . stretch thine art" (3.7.236,242,263). His desire to stretch the art form expresses his dissatisfaction with its mimetic ability. Of course, the painter cannot make a cry "doleful." According to Hieronimo, the painting cannot capture revenge because an end exists to every painting, but, as Hieronimo insists, there can be no end in revenge except "death and madness" (3.7.268). He displaces his frustration with the art onto the maker of the art by beating him and exclaiming, "*Vindicta mihi*" (3.7.274). If Hieronimo creates a self-serving subjectivity based on the unlimited expression of his desire, he becomes doubly frustrated when this victimized self encounters containment. These wish-fulfilling urges for self-aggrandizement find limited expression in the playlet.

Therefore, shortly after concluding the playlet and encountering such a benighted question from the King, Hieronimo knows he must unveil "the reason urging me to this," and he then reveals the corpse as a means to signal his grief (4.4.87). At this dilated moment of revelation, Hieronimo literalizes his alienation:

> See here my show, look on this spectacle
>
> Here lay my hope, and here my hope hath end;

> Here lay my heart, and here my heart was slain;
>
> Here lay my treasure, here my treasure lost;
>
> Here lay my bliss, and here my bliss bereft. (4.4.88)

The body is a reminder of the self as represented as presence—as everything that language lacks. Hieronimo's desperate attempt at signaling presence occurs through the repeated use of the word "here"—invoked nine times in five lines. His simple diction and the anaphoric repetition signals immediate and urgent suffering. He insists on the body as divorced from language to signify what his body represented in language cannot.[73] At this moment of utter misery and loss, Hieronimo comes to the savage realization that his object of fascination and hope, the body of his son, is reduced to a mere object, with no more potency or relevancy than a stage prop. Hieronimo thus feels the limits of his subversive actions. Even as he continues to create his unbridled subjectivity, he feels that no words, no deeds, or even bodily displays can represent fully the victimized self he created. He cannot be good enough; the world cannot be evil enough. Hieronimo's attempt to assert an autonomous self, free from restrictions and subjugation to hierarchy, expresses the carnival desire to elide official rules and satisfy extralegal, self-serving ambitions, but these ambitions find limited expression through theatrical play.

Restricted in the frame of playing, Hieronimo moves from his playlet to the play proper, but he fully realizes he still exists within a play. In fact, as a fully self-aware character, he expresses a dual desire to conclude the play he produced and the one he inhabits: "thus I end my play: / Urge no more words, I have no more to say" (4.4.150-

[73] Hieronimo's appropriation of the corpse by making it a stage spectacle transgresses laws in early modern England, and his rebellion in this regard also shows the extent to which he desperately wants to represent presence. As Karin Coddon notes in her thorough discussion of corpses in early modern England, "licit contact with the dead body was expressly limited to men of science" (73).

151). Such overlap between a character who tries to stop playing within a play suggests that the move from a fictional work to a real world, from art into life—the same movement that characterizes *Soloman and Perseda*—only troubles the categories of fiction and reality and imposes problems of representation. Erasato does not die, for example, but Lorenzo who plays him does. This movement preserves a frame of ambiguity, and even though Hieronimo dexterously manipulates signs, he never escapes this process. His tongue, the very apparatus that created a fictional self-projection for much of the play, becomes a loathsome thing that keeps him manipulating signs, but his skill fails to communicate the real message of his grief. As Greenblatt would suggest, his theatrical revenge "signifies absence. . . [and] evacuates everything it represents" (127). Through his subsequent autoglossotomy, Hieronimo even tries to extricate himself from the play proper, to escape linguistic signification and limitation, to the extent that such a thing can be attained.[74] Yet Hieronimo's problem of authorship provides the impetus for such a brutal action: what empowers him as a character to free himself from the constraints of the play, his own ability as author to stand alongside his creator, also limits his expression of autonomy.

The carnival process that uproots his need for official life and energizes him with a second life, a subjectivity of unchecked appetites, proffers only a glimmer of hope before placing him firmly within the very constraints he felt he had escaped. Reality gives way to pleasure, but reality reimposes itself with brutal force. Hieronimo finds that,

[74] A carnival act of defiance, his autoglosstomy rebels against the authority of the official King. Hieronimo preserves the secret, and his concealment casts doubt over political and social hierarchies. Except of course that it appears he harbors no secret. The question at hand concerns Hieronimo's complotters, and this question has been answered by the Viceroy without Hieronimo's complicity: "That was thy daughter Bel-Imperia; / For by her hand my Balthazar was slain:/ I saw her stab him" (4.4.144). His fictional counter-reality positions him as a centripetal force. He locates his grief outside the limits of the communicable. In contrast, Siemon writes, "autoglossotomy is a work of conceptual performance, which forms the matter of his subjection into an assertion of transcendent distinction" (528).

in the world of *The Spanish Tragedy*, dissimulation yields more dissimulation; appearances beget more appearances; signs heap upon signs.[75] Despite being a master of manipulation, a Master of Revels, Hieronimo cannot escape the text but only operate within its signifiers. Any salvation that Hieronimo experiences is paradoxically through the carnivalesque design that kills him. But this textual entrapment model suggests a movement for carnival into an aesthetic sphere.

Rather than reading textual entrapment pessimistically, as many studies using a Foucauldian model do, I argue that this entrapment catalogues a significant shift in Renaissance culture, an epoch in which carnival holidays and festivals recede into things of the past. The unchecked appetite that governs Hieronimo finds malevolent expression in his playlet, but this consuming, irrational desire, so characteristic of unofficial culture, coincides with an emerging early modern subjectivity of desire. Critics associate this ever-evolving subjectivity with shifting social, political, religious, and gendered hierarchies, which Dollimore's analysis of the malcontent contextualizes. Hieronimo's desire for revenge mirrors the shift from medieval identity, which required restraint and devotion to official life, to the more fluid improvisations of the Renaissance, testified in the numerous characters who mask and dodge fixed positions in favor of an unbridled subjectivity, from Jonson's Volpone to Shakespeare's female comic heroines Rosalind and Viola.[76]

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[75] In commenting on this aspect, Maus argues that the frame episodes "ironically imply that human beings are, like actors in a play, working through scripts they have not themselves written" (xxii).

[76] The frequent transmutations of identities in early modern England that disrupt hierarchy irked the likes of Puritans such as Philip Stubbes who in *The Anatomie of Abuses* rained down a veritable hell storm of criticism against carnival play.

C.L. Barber discusses ancient carnival rituals as a manifestation of plebian spirit, but this manifestation occurs amid the commercial expansion of the theater. His discussion therefore prompts an often overlooked consideration of the traditional carnival games such as May Day and Morris Dances and their relationship to emerging capitalism.[77] The system of theatrical patronage waned by the 1590s as playing companies became self-sufficient with support from growing audiences. Several scholars have noted the theaters' decreased reliance on patronage and increased reliance of community support. For example, Kathleen McLuskie characterizes this shift as a "vital cultural accommodation to a new economic and social system" (4). Brian Sheerin argues that "[t]he theater in this decade found itself uniquely poised between an (older) gift-oriented patronage system and the emerging capacities for more contractually-based capitalist enterprises" (248). Reliant on a wide-ranging group of individuals, the theater transformed into a carnival marketplace—public, competitive, and diverse. As capitalism replaces feudalism, Bakhtin notes, carnival merged with literary forms, and figures of social upheaval appeared in the novels of Rabelais. This process of modernization described by Bakhtin duly applies to theatrical characters created for communal structures which were becoming "contractually-based capitalist enterprises" (248).

Expanding into urban settings, the theater encases communal games in a dramatic form. As the theater evolves into a conspicuous economic enterprise, the ancient communal rituals of carnival, both the innocuous outlined by Barber and the insidious outlined by Burke, vanish into cultural memory. The medieval carnival described by

[77] See also Phebe Jensen's *Religion and Revelry in Shakespeare's Festive World.* Like Barber, Jensen discusses the traditional pastimes emphasized at this point in my analysis, but unlike Barber, Jensen places these traditions within a religious framework. In contrast to both Barber and Jensen, I emphasize what these festivities mean in an emerging capitalist London.

Bakhtin did not occur with the same frequency during the Renaissance. The gap that resulted from the gradual elimination of carnival games did not remain open, however, but found fulfillment in a new arena. As May Day festivities waned, theatrical festivities replaced them. With Hieronimo Kyd replaces a subjectivity of moral cosmology from medieval times with a subjectivity that centralizes dark pleasures and cunning in individual pursuits.[78]

Unchained from the medieval world of hierarchies, the Renaissance supports the self-centeredness and struggles for autonomy that locate the carnival tradition within the emerging capitalistic theater. This carnivalesque subjectivity moves into a theatrical space to create its own newly forming aesthetics. The subjectivity of unofficial culture designs its own sense of aesthetics amid the urban expansion of the theater. Hieronimo's machinations, which lead to his self-aggrandizement, precisely encapsulate the scheming and self-conception needed to enflame the embers of capitalism. A voice that resonates with plebian culture and demands satisfaction of its all-consuming, omnipresent desire drives the psychological engine that runs the very system that makes the theater successful. Much like carnival's merger with literary forms in the novels of Rabelais, the Renaissance imbeds carnival characters within the emerging capitalistic space of the theater. The commercial theater secularizes a figure from a ritualistic tradition who embodies transgression, appropriating this figure for its own self-preservation. The theater thus commodifies insatiable desire as it creates an aesthetic space.

[78] In contrast to this reading, S. F. Johnson reads Hieronimo's Machiavellian qualities in much less manipulative terms. Using the Elizabethan homilies as his guide, he reminds us that God imbues the elect with a profound understanding, and as part of the elect, Hieronimo, despite what may seem like cunning and dissembling, actually bides his time wisely and in accordance with divinity.

Long-standing interpretations of revenge tragedy ignore the theater's expansion and the genre's place within that expansion. Fredson Bowers and Ronald Broude espouse a vision of early modern England that defines revenge as an illicit usurpation of God's law and earthly justice. According to these critics, the movement in the early modern period toward the centralization of power, specifically the suppression of the feudal aristocracy in a newly formed, unitary modern state, robs the individual of powers to rectify private wrongs. The central government, spearheaded by Tudor monarchs, usurped enough power "to counteract the sort of baronial license which had led to the War of the Roses" (Broude 47). Numerous critics have embraced this reading so that it has now become commonplace. Bente A. Videback succinctly summarizes this tension in *The Spanish Tragedy* with the following account: "Incapable of finding justice for his murdered son through the courts, he [Hieronimo] is faced with a dilemma. He can either turn the other cheek, and like a good Christian let God mete out justice, or he can break the law he holds in such high esteem in the pursuit of private revenge" (37). In this version of revenge, critics must label the revenger's actions as appropriate or inappropriate depending on strict classifications that Bowers and Broude have codified. Revenge tragedy thus assumes a foreseeable flow that ends in moral turpitude or moral exculpation for the revenger. This approach conflates disparate concerns of revenge tragedies from the 1580s to the 1630s, as it relegates the subgenre to a tale of ethical considerations and makes critics intent on knowing whether the original audience would have sympathized with the revenger's plight or dismissed him as an outlaw. A carnival reading instead suggests how and why Hieronimo takes revenge, the limits that preclude a satisfactory revenge, and the ways this revenge drives theatrical growth.

3 THE POLITICS OF VIOLENCE:

CARNIVAL UPHEAVAL IN *TITUS ANDRONCIUS*

"Exaggeration, hyperbolism, excessiveness are generally considered fundamental to attributes of the grotesque style."
Mikhail Bakhtin[79]

If Nietzsche is correct when, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, he explains Hamlet's delay as "Knowledge kills action" because "action requires the veils of illusion," then in *Titus Andronicus*, the characters wear their veils proudly, and knowledge is nothing but an elusive myth, for action, and action of the most gruesome kind, dominates the play (59). Indeed, it is excessive action, inconsistencies in the action, and action perpetuated at the expense of character that leads most critics to diminish *Titus*. In 1686, Edward Ravenscroft denounced Shakespeare's play as "the most incorrect and indigested piece in all his Works; it seems rather a heap of Rubbish than a Structure" (1). T.S. Eliot, one of the first critics to suggest the play was a farce, vilifies it as "one of the stupidest and most uninspired plays ever written, a play in which it is incredible that Shakespeare had any hand at all" (54). John Dover Wilson highlights the play's lurid Senecan excess by comparing *Titus* to "some broken-down cart, laden with bleeding corpses from an Elizabethan scaffold, and driven by an executioner from Bedlam dressed in cap and bells" (2). Even Samuel Johnson, who gives unreserved admiration to most of Shakespeare's works, doubted that *Titus* could ever be staged again, citing objections to "the barbarity of the spectacles, and the general massacre which . . . can scarcely be conceived tolerable to any audience" (364). More recently, Harold Bloom, who lavishly praises Shakespeare for inventing the modern conception of the human, nonetheless

[79] See *Rabelais and His World* 303.

wishes that "Shakespeare had not perpetrated this poetic atrocity" (79).[80] Critics' visceral reaction to the play has led some to explore and even reject its authorship, with Stephan Keller's recent study suggesting the play is a collaboration between Shakespeare and George Peele.[81] Brain Vickers' book *Shakespeare, Co-Author* expands on Keller's suggestions, and examines rhetorical devices, alliteration use, and polysyllabic words. Its primary assertion—that Peele wrote act one and parts of acts two and four—remains unchallenged.[82] The facts still stand that, if it were not for these debates of authorship, coupled with a recent rise in feminist criticism, few serious studies of the play would exist, and the number would seem particularly minuscule placed in the context of other Shakespearean tragedies.[83] Most modern critics who are quick to point out the "purple patches" in the play do so on the basis of excessive action and faults in character, claiming that Titus, as a tragic figure, cannot arouse sympathy.[84] Jack Reese writes, "We are not terribly moved by what happens on stage, primarily because we do not believe in the humanity of the characters" (79). Even those who would defend the play from its excessive gore feel a need to account for the audience's sympathetic response to its putative tragic hero. For instance, Deborah Willis feels compelled to argue that Lavinia's troubles do not require a "deadening of response to the pain of Titus" (26). The litany of disparagement hurled at *Titus Andronicus* has dismissed it as a spectacle of

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[80] This study remains consistent with recent efforts to salvage *Titus* from moral judgments and critics' disparagement. Many recent studies discuss dismemberment in light of psychoanalysis or feminism. See Douglas Green, Gillian Kendall, Tina Mohler, and Sid Ray.

[81] For earlier studies and comments on authorship see Boyd, Maxwell, and Price.

[82] Jonathan Bate, even though his edition leaves out Peele as an author, has since changed his position on co-authorship. He writes in *The Times Literary Supplement* that "I am in the privileged -- or perhaps embarrassing -- position of being able to confirm the accuracy of Vickers's diagnosis" (23).

[83] For feminist readings on the play see Davies-Wynne, Detmer-Goebel, and Fawcett. For readings that discern the play's stance toward Catholicism, see Lukas Erne "'Popish Tricks' and 'a Ruinous Monastery': Titus Andronicus and the Question of Shakespeare's Catholicism."

[84] For instance, Harold Bloom remarks, "Shakespeare took care to estrange Titus from us early and late" (79).

dismemberment, hyperbole, and exaggeration, but these very same criticisms of the play find legitimacy in carnival expression.[85]

Despite modern critics' struggle with the play, the Elizabethans apparently reveled in it, and attendance was unusually high.[86] In the Induction to *Bartholomew Fair*, Ben Jonson ironically remarks, "He that will swear *Jeronimo* or *Andronicus* are the best plays yet, shall pass unexpected at, here, as a man whose judgment shows it is constant, and hath stood still, these five and twenty, or thirty years" (30). Whatever flaws the play has aesthetically and however it may be flawed as a tragedy, it was still an Elizabethan favorite. What, then, accounts for the disparity between critics' damaging perception of this play and the Elizabethan audience's revelry in it? Did the untutored Elizabethans, lacking keen critical judgment, not realize the play fails as a tragedy? Did the Elizabethans relish in the floridness of the Ovidian rhetoric that seems so out of place? Critics have sought an easy answer, equally ridiculous to those ideas proposed, and Coleridge's comment typifies the critics' solution to this deceptively simple conundrum: the play, he argues, was "obviously intended to excite vulgar audiences by its scenes of blood and horror" (31). Mark Van Doren, Dover Wilson, and Harold Bloom concur and see a bloody spectacle that satisfies bloodthirsty Elizabethans. Rather than project vampirism onto the audience, I would propose that underlying the hewing of limbs, gang rape, mutilation, and cannibalism of the play lies a carnivalesque structure that not only animates Titus's revenge but also naturally appeals to a largely plebian audience. Applying Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of carnival and the grotesque to explore the

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[85] For those who would justify the plays' violent excess, see Brucher, who views the violence as necessary for the humor, and Tricomi, especially pages 114-119.

[86] The title pages of Q2 (1600) and Q3 (1611) note that the play was performed "sundry times" by the Lord Chamberlain's Men, and by 1611, they had long received royal patronage.

inversion of social norms demonstrates the usefulness of the play's "exaggeration, hyperbolism, [and] excessiveness" and explains the existing lacuna between audience satisfaction and critics' opprobrium.

The ideas of Mikhail Bakhtin and his notion of carnival—feasting, festive laughter, crowning and uncrowning, inversion, the suspension of hierarchies, and the struggle between official and unofficial culture—are readily applied to Shakespearian comedy.[87] However, in *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin also suggestively intimates the carnivalesque nature of Shakespeare's tragedies:

> In world literature there are certain works in which the two aspects, seriousness and laughter, coexist and reflect each other, and are indeed whole aspects, not separate serious and comic images as in the usual modern drama. A striking example is Euripides' *Alcestis* in which tragedy is combined with the satyric drama (which apparently becomes the fourth drama). But the most important works in this category are, of course, Shakespeare's tragedies. (122)

Unfortunately, Bakhtin abandons his analysis of Shakespeare's tragedies after this paragraph and hardly broaches the topic again in his lengthy study of carnival, which opens up suggestions for the carnival implications of this play. Bakhtin's ideas, therefore, have broad implications for literary discussion of *Titus Andronicus* and other Shakespearean tragedies. To the detriment of the critical debate on *Titus*, some critics reflect on the seriousness and laughter within the play, but they do so as separate images and not as codependent elements, working together to produce one aesthetic vision. Indeed, the ambivalent images and oxymoronic combinations of *Titus* have not been fully

[87] See Wiles, and for an earlier more comprehensive study on comedy, see Barber.

fleshed out by critical debate, yet they are largely responsible for creating a play that, as Bakhtin says, leaves us "weeping for laughter and laughing for tears" (*Rabelais* 102). In the spirit of carnival, Shakespeare brings together a motley crew from various orders of humanity—Romans, Goths, a Moor and a clown. Tamora and Aaron enjoy "free and familiar contact" regardless of "social estate, rank, age, [and] property" (Bakhtin *Problems* 123). Additionally, the allusions in the play create an even more heterogeneous society, symbolically including Greek and Hebrew culture: Chiron and Demetrius' rape of Lavinia echoes the abduction and rape of Persephone, and Aaron's biblical name adds ironic richness to his character (Hamilton 204). Titus feigns madness and pretends to believe Tamora's carnival disguise as "Revenge," as well as Chiron and Demetrius's masking as "Rape" and "Murder." Chiron and Demetrius's rape of Lavinia is but one instance of what Bakhtin calls "*carnivalistic mesalliances*" that mingle "the sacred with the profane, the lofty with the low, the great with the insignificant, the wise with the stupid" (*Problems* 123).

Carnival, a cultural term in which a subjugated class defines itself in opposition to the ruling elite, praises subversion and liberation from official ideology. Kings, clergy, and government officials are always subject to the power of a working class folk culture. Bakhtin's folk or unofficial culture engage in activities that official culture prohibits: they eat, drink, and curse excessively; they resist dogma; they parody and mock the privileged; and they laugh openly, both at themselves and at officials. As such, the associations and images of carnival naturally appeal to an audience of plebeians who delight in the antics and festivity of carnival characters such as Feste, Sir Toby, and Falstaff. Surprisingly, even the most overt carnivalesque images of *Titus* have escaped

critical attention since critical discourse has overlooked carnival as it applies to revenge tragedy. Yet the word "Feast" is mentioned eight times in the play, and Act One ends with a feast while the last scene of the play begins with one. These festive gatherings animate the play in crucial ways that appeal to plebian audience members. The final feast of *Titus* represents the counterpart to nuptials in Shakespearean comedy, for it combines melancholy and mirth, death and life, and Roman and Goth in an upheaval in which the carnival king, signified by his meat pie for a crown, temporarily rebels against the official culture. Accordingly, part of the strong appeal of *Titus* lies in its depiction of a topsy-turvy world that locates power in the voice of the people through a carnival king who engenders social and political change. In this early play, Shakespeare's nascent interest in power, order, and the masses finds expression through the carnival struggle between official and unofficial culture. Specifically, a power shift occurs in which unofficial culture, resisting suppression for much of the play, mocks, uncrowns, and displaces official culture through an annihilating and renewing carnival feast.

The opening struggle between Saturninus and Bassianus introduces and mirrors the carnival struggle between official and unofficial culture. In the first scene, Shakespeare quickly establishes Saturninus as an authority, a representation of official culture, for Saturninus appeals to patricians, not for rule based on the people's voice, but based on birthright: "I am his firstborn son that was the last / That ware the imperial diadem of Rome" (1.1.5-6). Saturninus seeks to maintain the social order that existed before his father died, letting his "father's honors live" in him (1.1.7). Conversely, Bassianus, a carnival character, would resist and undermine that social order. Shakespeare emphasizes Bassianus's opposition to his brother by placing him on the

opposite side of the stage and making his stance seem subversive to his brother's potential rule. While his first speech structurally resembles his brother's, his opening address contains several nuances: "Romans, friends, followers, favorers of my right" (1.1.9).[88] Whereas Saturninus's tone commands, Bassianus's use of "friends" and "favorers" possesses a more humane touch, as opposed to Saturninus's "patricians" and "patrons" (1.1.1). As an appeal to pathos, Bassianus's choice in words gives the addressees a sense of voice and power since "favor" can be freely bestowed. He further solidifies his intentions when he urges the election and encourages the Romans to "fight for freedom in your choice" (1.1.17). According to Bakhtin, the voice of the people elects the carnival king, and this election represents an essential element of carnival. Bassianus would dismiss birthright, a part of the social order, to be crowned by the people.

However, on Marcus's entrance, the tribune of the people speaks for the people, and so he announces, in effect, the carnival king: "Know that the people of Rome, for whom we stand / A special party, have by common voice / Chosen Andronicus" (1.1.21-23). The voice of the people must elect a carnival king, who pressures the hierarchal boundary between the high and the low. As such, Titus's election mocks Saturninus's authority since Saturninus planned to be elected by birthright and was outshone by Titus, who holds the adulation of the people and fights for the people, a point to which Marcus draws attention. Saturninus's uncrowning in miniature prompts a bitter satirical response: "How fair the tribune speaks to calm my thoughts!" (1.1.46). By comparison, Bassianus's more gracious response shows a loving acceptance of Titus as a carnival king. As if to assert authority over Saturninus, Titus enters with a processional of drums,

[88] For an analysis of the structural similarity in the speeches, see Reese, especially pages 77-81.

trumpets, and the conquered Goths. Titus announces an ambiguously festive time, a time serving as a funeral and martial celebration. He embraces melancholy and joy, and he views life and death not as binary oppositions but in strictly carnival terms: "These that survive let Rome reward with love / These that I bring unto their latest home, / With burial amongst their ancestors" (1.1.81-83).[89] In carnival, death does not negate life but represents a part of it; death is required for life's "renewal and rejuvenation" (Bakhtin 50). Appropriately, then, Titus acknowledges the "virtue and nobility" inherent in the dead and lavishes praise both on the dead and living (1.1.93).

While ambiguous festivity begins the play, piety does not dominate the festivity. Critics have interpreted Titus's quick agreement to Lucius' proposed sacrifice of Alarbus as estranging and barbaric.[90] Truly, the deed epitomizes impiety, but this sense of rancorous offense coincides with Titus's role as carnival king. Carnival brings down established order and subverts traditional values and symbols, so carnival particularly targets religion. Hence, Titus explains to Tamora that the people, both dead and alive, demand a religious sacrifice: "for their breathen slain / Religiously they ask a sacrifice" (1.1.123-124). Significantly, Shakespeare also implicates Lucius in this carnival realism. His blatant and revolting statement, "hew his limbs til they be clean consumed," also ridicules religion and specifically lowers it to the material bodily level (1.1.129). Lucius degrades the spiritual with his obsession with flesh and the body. In his first three short speeches (none more than six lines), he mentions "limbs" three times and invokes an astounding number of other bodily images in the name of religion: "sacrifice his flesh,"

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[89] The same here could be said of Claudius's speech in 1.2 of *Hamlet*. See Bristol's 'Funeral bak'd meats' for an analysis of this speech.
[90] See Robert Miola's "*Titus Andronicus*" especially pages 42-50 in which he discusses the barbarism of Roman ritual.

"prison of their bones," and "entrails feed the sacrificing fire" (1.1.98-99,144). His chanting for the sacrificial ritual recalls Shylock's equally ritualistic scoffing of the law and ceremony in *The Merchant of Venice* when he demands a pound of flesh: "I crave the law, / The penalty and forfeit of my bond" (4.1.204-205). While the sacrifice of Alarbus may have been a Shakespearean late addition, Robert Miola notes that Roman religion did not require human sacrifice, so Shakespeare fabricated this ritual for the play (198). The effect connects father and son to unofficial culture through a debasing of the official Roman religion that the play establishes in act one.

While it may seem objectionable at this point to associate Titus with a carnival king because he is offered and refuses the crown, Titus actually rejects the crown in grand carnival fashion. A carnival king would not offer power to the people's voice by embracing authority; rather, a traditional image of the carnival king depicts him with a meatpie for a crown, thus subverting authority's control through derision. In a similar way, Titus mocks the office of king by urging the people to give him a staff for his old age and "not a scepter to control the world" (1.1.199). At the same time, he gloats in his power over Saturninus, seemingly trying to allay the Prince's anger with "Patience, Prince Saturninus" and later with "Content thee, Prince" (1.1.202, 210). His repeated reference to Saturninus as "Prince," of course, affirms Titus's power of appointment and reminds Saturninus of his own status as a manqué emperor. Later, of course, Titus derides the ruling class when he assumes control with his meat pie of Chiron and Demetrius representing his crown. In the early stages of the play, though, official culture must try to condemn and control the power of carnival.

If Titus entered the play amid flourishes and trumpets that proclaimed his victory, it will not be long before he is held in contempt. Interestingly, Bakhtin elaborates specifically on the Roman triumphal procession:

> For instance, in the early period of the Roman state the ceremonial of the triumphal procession included on almost equal terms the glorifiying and the deriding of the victor. The funeral ritual was also composed of lamenting (glorifying) and deriding the deceased. (*Rabelais* 6)

After Saturninus's crowning, Titus's elevated status slowly comes to an end until he can claim victor no longer. With the help of Titus's sons, Bassianus escapes with Lavinia, and as a result, Saturninus denounces all of the Andronici, but he directs his upbraiding to Titus: "No, Titus, no. The Emperor needs her not, / Nor her, nor thee, nor any of thy stock" (1.1.300-301). In a role reversal from just moments before, Saturninus now affirms his power and degrades Titus, and he even does so while noting Titus's mocking nature (though it seems misplaced in the drama at this point): "I'll trust by leisure him that mocks me once" (1.1.302). This squaring off between official and unofficial culture serves as the driving force of the play, and carnival struggles provide the impetus for Titus's revenge. At this turning point, Titus begins a carnivalesque movement downward, but his own movement in this direction, though not a smooth, straightforward descent, fittingly brings the entire play with him. That is, the cosmos of play moves downward toward the earth. As Bakhtin explains, "'Downward' is earth, 'upward' is heaven. Earth is an element that devours, swallows up (the grave, the womb) and at the same time an element of birth, of renascene (the maternal breasts)" (*Rableais* 21). Titus experiences the devouring element of the earth in the early part of the play as Saturninus

trumps him, but just as carnival revives itself, so Titus's new birth will lead to the uncrowning of Saturninus's authority. This dualistic notion of carnival also manifests itself in act one with the glorifying (lamenting) and deriding of Titus's sons. In accordance with carnival, Titus actually mocks the deceased before act one ends. After slaying Mutius with his own hand (ironically, he later loses a hand, almost as symbolic retribution), Titus repudiates the dead body of his son, referring to Mutius as "unworthy" and commanding Marcus to keep his son's body away from the tomb. Instructing Marcus on Mutius's burial, Titus issues the degrading directive: "bury him where you can" (1.1.347). Only after much protestation from Marcus and Martius does Titus hesitatingly consent to burial. This scene, strategically placed in the first act, starkly juxtaposes Titus's entrance and his adoration for his slain sons.

The struggle in act one between official culture, as represented by Saturninus, and unofficial culture lead by the carnival king Titus, ends in temporary harmony, feasting, and two wedding ceremonies. The feast, therefore, does not represent a carnivalesque social upheaval, one in which misrule suspends etiquette, and annihilation and rejuvenation occur simultaneously. Rather, it represents an official feast in Bakhtinian terms—"stable, unchanging, and perennial" (9). In much the same light as Shakespearean comedies, a point elaborated on by Douglas Parker, this official feast maintains the current social order and political life (489). At the end of romantic comedies, such as *As You Like It* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, feasting and marriage symbolize the unification of a renewed society and the dissolution of disorder, and it seems that on the surface this scene serves the same function—to reconcile the strife of act one. Parker emphasizes Saturninus' all-is-forgiven speech and notes how it

echoes kings and dukes in comedy who seek to re-establish social order (489). Of course, Saturninus acts as both the agent and beneficiary of a firm social order, so he would seek to ossify the authority that has thus far been established only tentatively because of carnival's undermining power.

Roman civilization does not neatly contrast with the barbarism of the Goths as many critics believe, for the barbarism of the Goths infiltrates the Roman courts.[91] Initially existing outside of Roman culture, Tamora, her sons, and Aaron complicate the struggles between official and unofficial culture. Their perspective allows them to see the benefits of seriousness and carnival. They, then, possess the unique ability to participate in and appropriate both elements of life in order to suit their own machinations, and they do so under the pretense of Roman approval. Saturninus' choice of Tamora as a bride is significant not only in that he scorns Titus by rejecting Lavinia but also in that he undermines his own authority by taking part in carnival: he enjoys "free and familiar contact" with a Goth (Bakhtin *Problems* 123). To emphasize his licentiousness, Shakespeare allows Saturninus only one speech, one that announces Tamora as his bridal choice, before the Emperor pronounces his eagerness to "consummate our spousal rites" (1.1.338). His marriage to Tamora mingles the "lofty with the low" and locates the idea of renewal in the most sexual, bodily terms, and his sexuality has caught the attention of critics (*Problems* 123). In an analysis of skin color, particularly of Tamora's ultra white "hue," Francesca Royster notes that "Saturninus's preference of Tamora's 'goodly hue' over Lavinia's is overtly sexual" (434). Saturninus's lust, resulting in his incorporation of Tamora into Rome, brings down the actions of the Emperor to an earthly level,

[91] See Royster who argues, "It is not surprising that *Titus Andronicus* invites its viewers to identify with the Romans—England traced its origins to the Trojan Brut and represents Goths as well as Moors as barbaric, uncivilized, and racially other" (436).

affirming sexual appetite. While Saturninus's authority is lowered, though not completely uncrowned, Tamora's control increases, and she strategically begins to appropriate official culture. She shows keen insight when, in an aside, she craftily warns the Emperor of Titus's role and power as carnival king, for unlike Saturninus, Tamora recognizes that the people's voice supports Titus: "My lord, be ruled by me, be won at last; / [...] Lest then the people, and patricians too, / Upon a just survey take Titus' part / And so supplant you for ingratitude" (1.1.443,446-448). Tamora's constant goading for power and eventually winning over of Saturninus signals her status as a different type of carnival ruler—a Lord of Misrule, a temporal king during the Roman Saturnalia.[92]

While Bakhtin refers to a champion of the people, one who has their voice, as a carnival king, he does not take care in distinguishing carnival rulers or different carnival festivals.[93] Instead, Bakhtin's terms for carnival and carnival king are all-inclusive. Some explanation of the Roman Saturnalia and its elected Lord of Misrule can broaden a Bakhtinian perspective and shed light on Tamora's crafty character. As explained by Sir James Frazer in *The Golden Bough*, the festival of the Roman Saturnalia commemorated the reign of Saturn, the god of sowing and husbandry, who lived on earth during a fabled Golden Age. The Saturnalia occurred during the Winter Solstice, and as part of the ceremony, a mock king or Lord of Misrule was elected, often from among the slaves (483). Saturninus's name does not appear as a Shakespearean accident; the allusions to Saturn and Saturnalia conspicuously invokes both the god (Saturn) and the festival (Saturnalia). Saturninus's rule, however, serves as an ironic inversion of Saturn's Golden

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[92] For background on the Lord of Misrule, see Barber's *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy*, especially chapter 3.

[93] For a critique of Bakhtin, see Wiles' introduction to the study of the carnivalesque in which he exposes a long history of carnival that antedates Bakhtin. Through his discussion of different carnivals, Wiles clarifies some of Bakhtin's shortcomings.

Age, so he stands, in a sense, as a failed Saturn, making his name as ironic as his inefficacious rule. The reason for his failure can be attributed to his elevation of a slave to the status of an Empress, in effect his erecting a Lord of Misrule. A.C. Hamilton also connects Saturninus with the god Saturn, but explains Tamora's role in a mythical context: "In Renaissance iconography Saturn was shown devouring his child. His wife was Rhea, the earth, and in the play Saturnine's wife eats her children 'like to the earth swallowing her own increase'" (203). As the Lord of Misrule was intended to be a mock-king of Saturn, so it becomes appropriate that Tamora, not Saturninus, devours Chiron and Demetrius.

Tamora's role as the Lord of Misrule wreaks havoc on the Roman state and constantly exerts pressure on authority while appropriating that authority.[94] As Tamora tells Titus, "I am incorporate in Rome, / A Roman now adopted happily" (1.1.463-464). Tamora infiltrates the Roman state and turns it upside down. Her character cannot be easily summarized or grasped, exemplified by Aaron's comment: "this queen, / This goddess, this Semiramis, this nymph, / This siren..." (2.1.21-23). As a result, she is often dismissed or ignored by critics.[95] Tamora, however, is not a representation of official or unofficial culture, but she "adopts" both, and the closeness of her carnivalesque qualities to Saturninus is inimical to his power, yet the Emperor fails to realize this. For instance, in the forest scene, where Bassianus is discovered murdered, Tamora cajoles the Emperor through her role as Empress when she authoritatively gives Saturninus a letter that implicates Titus' sons in Bassianus's death. Tamora delivers "The complot of this

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[94] Contrastingly, Miola proposes that Saturninus is the sole cause for the disorder state and that Lucius is the correction for this disorder. See "*Titus Andronicus* and the Mythos of Shakespeare's Rome."

[95] For exceptions, see Asp, who devotes her analysis to the ways in which Lavinia establishes an agency through "non-linguistic means" (21), and Kehler, who sees Lavinia empowered by the collapse of Roman and Goth.

timeless tragedy," and she emphasizes, with confidence and certainty, "How easily murder is discovered" (2.3.265,287). Tamora's assumption of authority leads Saturninus to the faulty conclusion that "the guilt is plain" (2.4.301). The rational order of law that authority clings to proves nothing more than folly and deception. Tamora's twisting, surreptitious ways exemplify the Lord of Misrule's conduct. As Michael Bristol explains in *Carnival and Theater*:

> The Lord of Misrule who presides over much regularly occurring festive revelry borrows the gestures and the functions of constituted authority in order to actualize both 'law' and its 'transgression.' The Lord of Misrule does not rule and govern from above: he is immersed in the folly he undertakes to regulate. Transgression becomes law [. . . .] The Lord of Misrule mimics the center of authority and reveals that folly and transgression are the covert reality of rational government. (67)

"Trangression becomes law" when Tamora commands the death of Bassianus and exhorts her sons to use Lavinia freely. Of course, her exhortation results, in part, from being discovered in the forest, so in response to her embarrassment, she would perpetuate the same "folly" in which she would engage. Yet in her role as a member of official culture, she promises to regulate court sexuality and reproduction, swearing to Saturninus to serve as "a handmaid [. . .] to his desires, / A loving nurse, a mother to his youth" (1.1.332-333). The ironic inversion of her "motherhood"—through her child bearing to Aaron—pressures the authority of the court.

In the lascivious court of Saturninus, inversion rules, and kings are made cuckolds. Not only does Tamora freely have sexual relations with the Moor, but she also

has the bravado to flout her marriage to Saturninus. The very day after her wedding and consummation with the Emperor, she would secretly make love to Aaron in the shade of the forest if he were willing. Tamora and Aaron's very relationship represents an inversion, for Tamora takes the role of sexual aggressor, and Aaron becomes more distancing and passive. The product of their relationship is an illegitimate child, a mocking symbol of Saturninus's feeble rule. As Francesca Royster brilliantly remarks, "Subverting the comic expectations of rebirth and rejuvenation that normally accompany Shakespearean births, the baby is a product of Tamora's and Aaron's transgression against Saturninus' authority" (449). When Tamora is alone with Aaron in the forest, her language gives further evidence to her carnivalesque appropriations. At first, she describes the forest in the most picturesque terms, but when Chiron and Demetrius enter, she transmogrifies the "sweet melodious birds" into the "fatal raven" (2.1.27,97). While talking to Aaron, she describes the ambience of the forest in terms of the "cheerful sun," the "cooling wind," and the "babbling echo" (2.1.13-14,17). Furthermore, her allusion to Aeneas and Dido's affair in the cave contextualizes the growth and rejuvenation of the atmosphere in sexual terms. Then, Tamora completes a carnivalesque description when she acknowledges the fallowness of the wasteland in which she was surprised. What was lush and ripe for a sexual encounter becomes sullied and ripe for murder. She tells her sons:

> A barren detested vale you see it is;
> The trees, though summer, yet forlorn and lean,
> Overcome with moss and baleful mistletoe;
> Here never shines the sun; here nothing breeds. (2.1.93-96)

Tamora's location of death and birth within the same setting carnivalizes the atmosphere and represents an image of the grotesque. Bakhtin defines grotesque imagery, itself ambivalent, as "copulation, pregnancy, birth, growth, old age, disintegration, dismemberment" (*Rabelais* 25). Within the grotesque realm of the forest, it is not surprising that the Emperor and his attendants hunt for food, necessary for growth; a pit becomes central to the action, itself an ambivalent image of the tomb/womb, the great devourer/destroyer and the earth mother; Bassianus is murdered; and Lavinia is raped and dismembered.[96]

Critics, such as Robert Miola, who would see Lavinia's rape as merely symptomatic of Saturninus's ineffectual rule and the accompanied disorder of the state, miss the significance of Tamora's role as Lord of Misrule. Lavinia has two rapes, one occurs before Tamora becomes incorporated into Rome and the second occurs afterward. Before Saturninus marries Tamora, Bassianus abducts Lavinia, and Saturninus charges his brother with "rape" (1.1.405). While rape in the sense of abduction would not escape an Elizabethan audience,[97] Lavinia's second rape, after the Lord of Misrule ascends and entreats the Emperor "be ruled by me," occurs and is certainly the more horrific. Additionally, critics have been puzzled over Lavinia's language in the forest scene, seeing her vitriolic attacks on Tamora as distancing the audience from her character and making her an unsympathetic rape victim.[98] However, her language enhances, draws attention to, and is appropriate for the carnival atmosphere in the forest. For Bakhtin,

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[96] For a discussion of the tomb/womb, see Wynne-Davies who discusses women's identity in light of men who seek to control language and interpretation over events. Wynne-Davies argues for Lavinia's feminine agency.

[97] See Detmer-Goebel for a perspective on rape as abduction. She argues that "statutory laws of rape and abduction reflect a legal tradition undergoing change with regards to a woman's non-consent and accusation of rape" (75).

[98] See Miola's "Titus Andronicus: Rome and the Family" for such a perspective. Miola argues that over-stylized language "threatens to turn the entire scene into melodrama" (197).

official culture excludes profanities and abusive speech from its discourse, so those who use it clearly break cultural norms. Lavinia, like her brother Lucius, connects to carnival festivities through her identification with Titus, so her language often represents carnivalesque subversion and appropriately degrades Tamora. Shakespeare develops Lavinia's carnival ties early so that her role in the carnival upheaval of the play proves instrumental in the final scene.

Since carnival does not represent a one-sided attack on authority, a continual propagation of its values, the carnival king, elected by the people, will be abused and neglected by the people as well. After the sentencing of Titus' sons, the judges, senators, and tribunes pass by Titus with Martius and Quintus bound. Significantly, those who revered Titus now ignore his pleas. As in Saturnalia, the mock king finds his rule temporary, and an inversion that ignores the power of the carnival king replaces the inversion of authority that initially started the festival. Soon after, Marcus appears on stage with the ravished Lavinia, which only increases Titus's anguish, and then Titus, in effect, trades his hand for his two sons' heads, which renews and intensifies the mocking of the tribunes' silence. As a result, Titus hyperbolically laments his situation, and as Bertrand Evans contends, Titus misdirects his rage, locating his grief in Saturninus and Rome. Evans argues that a young Shakespeare is at work on a piece of juvenilia since he views it as a fault that the "wails of the Andronici against Saturninus and Rome dominate the middle portion of the drama" even though it seems that Tamora and Aaron are the instigators of Titus's woe (11). However, a Bakhtinian reading suggests that Titus's role as carnival king justifies his verbal attacks and his revenge on Saturninus.

Official culture tries to suppress and control the voice of the people, thereby minimizing disruptions to its power. Hence, Chiron and Demetrius, part of the royal court even though they appropriate carnivalesque licentiousness like their mother, cut out Lavinia's tongue, and Saturninus executes Titus's sons, trying to marginalize carnival power. Official culture's intended dominance results in the famous scene in which Titus, with only one hand, bids Marcus take one head, while he takes the other, and then instructs Lavinia to "Bear thou my hand, sweet wench, between thy teeth" (3.1.82). The ambivalence of this scene flatly perplexes many critics, and recent feminist readings of this scene focus exclusively on Lavinia, yet Lavinia is but one part of this tableaux, which depicts an image of Bakhtin's "grotesque body" (*Rabelais* 26). The symbolic regime of carnival includes the "grotesque body," defined by Bakhtin in opposition to the neoclassical view that sees the body as complete, closed, and static; the "grotesque body" celebrates orifices, sexuality, and incompleteness and represents an unfinished transformation of "death and birth, growth and becoming" (*Rabelais* 24). Likewise, in contrast to the neoclassical view, it is not simply one body, as in one individual's body, but instead can represent several bodies. This scene represents what is dead, receding and dying—Titus' sons, Lavinia, and Titus himself—with what is being born, growing, and eventually flourishing—Lucius. The incomplete bodies of the persecuted here hardly need comment, but Lavinia's body is a more ambivalent carnival image.

Lavinia's rape both debases and exults the body. The very act of rape destroys her virginity, but it also draws attention to and celebrates the importance of her sexuality. Lavinia is both desirable and disgusting, her desirability being highlighted and degraded by her rape and mutilation. For instance, Marcus notes, as soon as he finds her ravished,

that her arms were "sweet ornaments / Whose circling shadows kings have sought to sleep in" (2.4.18-19). It is the absence of Lavinia's arms that calls Marcus' attention to their value; that is, he praises her body because she has been disfigured. Marcus's lamentations and adulations continue for forty-six lines after he sees Lavinia. The attention to Lavinia because of her sexuality signals her part in the grotesque body. Shakespeare makes her, and her family's response to her, an ambivalent carnivalesque stage presence. On the other hand, Lavinia's brother Lucius represents the birth that stands out among the mangled limbs. Lucius is the other half of the grotesque body in that he represents hope while Titus despairs his fortune. Lucius is the savior in the scene, an image of rebirth in that he says farewell but promises a symbolically laden return: "Farewell, proud Rome, till Lucius come again!" (3.1.290). Lucius plays a key role in the feast of act five by succeeding in raising an army of Goths, and in terms of carnival represents the uncrowning of authority.

The struggle between official and unofficial culture escalates before the final uncrowning. Titus mocks Chiron and Demetrius by sending them verses alluding to their crimes and assaults authority by shooting arrows, addressed to the gods and marked with his grievances, at Saturninus.[99] Titus's arrows clearly disrupt the Roman "law" that Saturninus refers to several times in the play.[100] Fittingly, of all the gods Titus names, he ensures that one arrow is addressed to Saturn and "not 'to Saturnine'" (4.3.56). Titus's address to Saturn is straightforward and not ironic, for he appeals to Saturn as if the god would bring back the Golden Age and redress his wrongs. Of course, the impossibility of this makes the arrow all the more poignant for Saturninus, who cannot govern over a

[99] Bertrand Evans calls this scene "a spectacle of madness exhibited for its own sake" (12).
[100] "Law" is mentioned four times in the play, and Saturninus is the only one who uses it.

fruitful world; Saturninus cannot act as a god like Saturn. He rules artificially and ineffectually, and the arrow, by distinguishing between the god (Saturn) who should rule and the man (Saturninus) who does, highlights Saturninus' arbitrary rule and treats it like a carnival joke. These arrows reduce the great divide between official and unofficial culture. Indeed, that critics interpret the scene as farcical nonsense is exactly the point; it is an outlandish assault on authority, being one of the ambiguous scenes that mixes the lofty with low and jars the audience's understanding of the genre of tragedy. Furthermore, Titus shoots the arrows amid his own festive laughter aimed at the exalted Saturninus: "Ha, ha!" (4.3.67). One of the few times a character laughs in the play, Titus's outburst is both triumphant and deriding, but his carnivalesque outclassing of authority continues when he sends a clown to the Emperor. Carnival motivates Titus's revenge at every turn in the play.

The clown, an overlooked figure by many critics writing on the play, serves as a one-man carnival, an element of misrule, and a representation of the people's afflicted voice.[101] The clown in *Titus*, though he has few lines, mentions that he is going to "take up a matter of brawl betwixt my uncle and one of the Emperal's men" (4.3.92-93). Through the clown's insulting malapropism "Emperal" for "Emperor," he reveals his alliance in the war between plebeians and official culture and asserts that the people's voice should have authority since the clown plans to appeal to the tribunal of the plebeians or "tribunal plebs" (4.3.92). In a similar way, then, the business of the clown mirrors that of Titus: both wage the same fight against official culture. Accordingly, Titus easily persuades the clown to deliver a message and the pigeons to Saturninus—the

[101] For a short discussion of the clown, see Moschovakis, who views the clown in light of theme of martyrdom.

message's bitter intent perceived by the clown. However, the clown's presence in the court undermines Saturninus' authority by adding a consciousness of the low, and his opening address parodies Tamora's status as Empress by calling her "mistress-ship" (4.4.40). Furthermore, the silliness of the pigeons in the court—a type of carnival gift-giving intended to lower the exalted—infuriates the Emperor. Not surprisingly, Saturninus quickly intervenes and attempts to silence the voice of the people by hanging the clown.

Official culture refuses to understand the permanent revolution of carnival and its resistance to suppression. While Titus has been nearly devoured by the events in the play, he ushers in a carnival upheaval that originates in act four. No longer a victim of misrule, he inverts his relationship with Tamora and assumes control. Titus feigns madness, and Tamora, Chiron, and Demetrius mask themselves allegorically as Revenge, Rape, and Murder. Whereas Tamora was able to prompt the death sentence on Titus's sons when she served the role of Empress, Titus inverts the power relationship when Tamora assumes her role as Lord of Misrule. Tamora's appropriation of carnival fails because, as a carnival king, Titus sees through her mask, and he mocks the false disguise: "How like the Empress and her sons you are!" (5.2.84). Titus converts Tamora's "determined jest" into his own "merry jest," and significantly, he revenges his two sons' deaths by killing Tamora's two sons. Under Titus's rule, all hierarchies go unheeded. As Chiron and Demetrius are being overpowered, they invoke their social status as a means of defense: "Villains, forbear! We are the Empress' sons" (5.2.162). Their pleas on the basis of authority are nullified because, as Publius responds, "And therefore do we what we are commanded" (5.2.163). Precisely because they are the Empress' sons, and

therefore have an exalted position in the hierarchy, they must die. Certainly, Chiron and Demetrius have abused their role as a part of official culture, but more importantly, their deaths represent Titus's first preparation for the feast and signal, on one level, Titus's impeding revenge, but on a more political level, the rise of carnival and the uncrowning of authority.

Titus's harrowing speech to Chiron and Demetrius while they are bound and gagged announces his intention in organizing a carnival feast. He mentions "feast" three times in the speech and "banquet" twice. His allusion to the Centaurs' feast evokes the wedding feast of Pirithous and Hippodamia in which the Centaurs—an image of Bakhtin's "material bodily lower stratum"—were invited to partake. Drunk with wine, the Centaurs tried to abduct the women at the feast and were slain for it. The Centaur's feast can be seen in terms of a carnival rebellion, one in which an ostracized class tries to overturn an official wedding feast. Classical allusions are not the only allusions that decorate Titus's speech. His ironic Christian allusion—"Receive the blood," which Jonathan Bate reads as "a dark parody of the language of the holy eucharist"—also can be read in carnival terms (145). Nicholas Moschovakis argues that the allusion represents an anachronism, not in any pejorative sense, but as an intentional artistic design. Moschovakis is correct in reading the Christian allusions in the scene as an invitation for the Elizabethan audience to question the "violent deaths of professed Christians" (471). Artistically, Shakespeare achieves this dramatic double entendre through his use of carnival. Here, carnival lowers the Christian religion by coupling its sacrosanct elements with the sacrilegious, which exemplifies Bakhtin's "*carnivalistic mésalliance*," a group of divergent individuals whose heterogeneity subverts serious religion (*Problems* 123). In

his speech, Titus mingles representations of the body, blood, religion, food and flesh. The effect degrades the Christian religion and results in the audience's questioning the condoning of violence in the name of religion.

While Chiron and Demetrius are no Christ-like figures, the image of Lavinia receiving their blood represents the closeness of life and death, for blood is simultaneously a representation of death and a necessity for life. In an insidious communal, Chiron and Demetrius must atone for their sins through the price of their blood, but Titus uses their blood to make food, a requisite for growth and rejuvenation. In terms of carnival, food represents growth at the world's expense. It symbolizes human's daily labor since the day ends with food. In essence, man's struggle against the world ends in triumph and victory as represented by the preparation and eating of food. Not only is Chiron and Demetrius's blood used in making the paste, but also their heads are used as meat for the pie. Traditionally, the carnival king presides over a feast with a meat pie in place of a crown. Lavinia's role in the making of the pie is justified revenge in this play, but her role also enforces her part in the grotesque body since, according to Bakhtin, images of food and drink are interwoven with the grotesque body.

Since the final feast of *Titus Andronicus* represents the counterpart to nuptials in Shakespearean comedy, this carnival feast combines melancholy and mirth, death and life, and Roman and Goth. Titus enters with his meat pie in place of a crown. Severing all connection with authority and the Roman army, Titus disregards his normal dress and enters like a cook, and Lavinia wears a veil. The changing of clothes also signifies a carnival feast, and in this case, Titus's casual attire mocks the Emperor. Indeed, Saturninus rather curiously seems preoccupied with Titus's dress, and he shows his

concern: "Why art thou thus attired, Andronicus?" (5.3.30). Titus's response is enigmatic to the Emperor since the answer avoids Saturninus's question but is suggestive to the audience: "Because I would be sure to have all well / To entertain Your Highness and your empress" (5.3.31-32). Additionally, Titus's presence as a cook immediately seeks to bring down Emperor to the bodily level of food. After a short but mocking welcome, Titus apologizes for the poor meal but assures his guests: "'Twill fill your stomachs" (5.3.29). Even though he addresses him as Emperor, Titus mocks the social signifiers and treats the Emperor as a casual acquaintance: "My lord the Emperor, resolve me this." (5.3.35). Titus then leads Saturninus to the conclusion that Virginius was correct in slaying his own daughter, but he mockingly pries Saturninus for a justification: "Your reason, mighty lord?" (5.3.40). After Saturninus's explanation that the "girl should not survive her shame," Titus continues his deriding of authority by yoking the adjective "mighty" to the regal title "lord" and placing it in a different context, one in which Titus uses the same "mighty" reason to kill his own daughter in front of the Emperor. Titus's speech lures the Emperor into the world of carnival, and through the Emperor's language and logic, Titus symbolically seeks to involve him in the murder of Lavinia. Thus, the Emperor's engagement with Titus briefly foreshadows the impending uncrowning of official culture represented by Saturninus's murder of Titus.

The feast exemplifies Bakhtin's notion of a carnival "feast of becoming, change, and renewal," which is "hostile to all that is immortalized and completed" (*Rabelais* 9). Consistent throughout the play, Saturninus still represents official culture since he intends to punish Chiron and Demetrius after Titus reveals their crimes. Titus the carnival king lashes out at Tamora since he has been a victim of misrule, and interestingly, Saturninus

responds by killing Titus. To his last moment, Saturninus would silence the voice of carnival, and whereas before he orders the death of carnival by hanging the clown, now he personally takes action that leads to his own uncrowning. What seems to be overlooked by critics is the subversion inherent in Saturninus's action. Tamora's role as Lord of Misrule exerts pressure on the Emperor throughout the play, but this exertion culminates in Saturninus's killing Titus, which, in effect, means the Emperor uncrowns himself. Saturninus proclaims his reason for killing Titus even as he delivers the final stroke: "Die, frantic wretch, for this accursed deed!" (5.3.64). To the detriment of Saturninus's authority, Saturninus revenges Tamora's death, but he only kills Titus because he does not know of Tamora's infidelity with Aaron, for if he knew that he was made a cuckold, Tamora's ending would more closely resemble Desdemona's. Even as Saturninus stabs Titus, he immerses himself in folly and undermines authority's control.

To capitalize on the uncrowning of authority and to eradicate any remaining authority, the lasting symbol of carnival, Lucius, kills Saturninus. Carnival's power—omnipresent and indestructible—inverts the social order and creates a *monde invers*, where those on the bottom of the hierarchy now rule from the top. Throughout the play, Shakespeare closely ties Lucius to the carnival elements of his father—the degrading of religion through the sacrifice of Alarbus and the incorporation of the grotesque body. After the abuse and death of the feast, Lucius represents the carnival king, for he, like his father, gains the voice of the people: "The common voice do cry it shall be so / Lucius, all hail, Rome's royal emperor!" (5.3.140-141). To emphasize the death of the old and the birth of the new, the plebeians repeat the line in slightly different terms, terms on which Lucius, a carnival king, can more readily accept: "Lucius, all hail, Rome's

gracious governor" (5.3.146). When the plebeians regard Lucius as Emperor, he does not respond to their praises, but when they refer to him as governor, Lucius acknowledges that role as more befitting: "May I govern so" (5.3.147). Just as his father had turned down the crown, so Lucius rejects the notion of Emperor and accepts only a more qualified role of governor. Therefore, Lucius's rule restores a demystified order, for Lucius governs by election, not by blood as an Emperor Saturninus did. The people's voice redistributes power.

Critics, though, have been dissatisfied with Lucius's rule at the end. Some critics recall Lucius's barbaric sacrifice of Alarbus and question the solidity of Rome's future. Moschovakis decries the Andronici family led by Lucius: "As much as Tamora may have seemed deficient in pity, the Andronici have proved equally pitiless" (479). Moschovakis points to Tamora's "desecration" and argues that Lucius overemphasizes Tamora's role in the machinations and punishes her too harshly. Yet Lucius's blame is not haphazard or over-generalized. Lucius blames the Lord of Misrule, and he, as well as his father, have been victims at her expense. The real issue at hand, however, is not Lucius's seeming antipathy for Tamora, but the appropriateness of her punishment in terms of carnival. The Lord of Misrule serves only a temporary role as king before being slain as a death sacrifice. The destruction of the Lord of Misrule occurs to the "feigned grief or genuine delight of the populace" (Frazer 698). As signaled by one Roman's speech near the end of the play, the people take pleasure in the justice done to Aaron or the "execrable wretch" as the Roman refers to him (5.3.177). With the full approbation of the people, Lucius then pronounces a sentence on Aaron and Tamora, but Tamora's sentence locates the idea of death and renewal in terms of the body. If we follow the First Quarto text,

then the play ends with a carnivalesque image of the cyclical nature of life and death. The two seemingly binary oppositions are melded: "And being dead, let birds on her take pity" (5.3.200). Though the body is absent of life, it can sustain the life of those still living, namely the birds, and the feeding is less an act of desecration as it is a celebration of the Roman state's renewal. Thus, just as we have seen throughout *Titus*, death and life are inextricably yoked, and the play honors replaceablity.

In a play that seems so shockingly despicable, we must not look individually to the characters to find what is good about this play or why the Elizabethans enjoyed it. Taking such an approach leads to myopia. We will not find motives or actions that are laudable in this play, and humanity is forgotten. If the theater of early modern England was educative—an idea put forth in Philip Sydney's *An Apology for Poetry*—then the play instructs the audience, not through character, but through what the characters represent. The play itself stands for an uncrowning of official culture in which social norms and structures are inverted. The notion of the people's voice impacting and overturning official culture would appeal to an audience of plebeians. While some debate the social stratification of the audience, most evidence suggests that a variety of social classes were represented, with lower working classes accounting for much of the audience (McDonald 119). Certainly, drama can seek to maintain control over the populace, but it can also attempt to subvert and demystify authority. The education the play provides the audience comes in the form of questions with problematic implications and no facile answers: Under what times and circumstances should unofficial culture rule? When should unofficial culture no longer try to subvert authority temporarily but viciously rebel against it? If the idea of the common people ruling appealed to the

original audience, the play also sends a message for the ruling class not to ignore the carnival elements in life because suppressing and silencing carnival is tantamount to ostracizing the people. Carnival must have socially acceptable forms of expression. For original audience, the theater provided such an outlet in which they could partake in collective life and vicariously observe the triumph of that life.

4 SPACE, BODIES, AND CARNIVAL DEGRADATION IN *THE REVENGER'S TRAGEDY*

Since Jonathan's Dollimore famous essay on *The Revenger's Tragedy* as a "subversive black camp" appeared, criticism has gestured toward Bakhtinian readings of the play, even though many of these gestures remain implicit (149). Charles Hallett, for example, observes Vindice's adhering to fundamental elements of carnival by "stripping away appearances and exposing grotesque realities" (234). Similarly, when Renato Rizzoli argues that Vindice "grotesquely disguise[s]" Gloriana's skull, he notes the masquerading qualities of carnivalesque (101). Peter Stallybrass more directly analyzes the inversions of Bakhtin's classical and grotesque bodies, asserting that the classical body loses its idealistic luster and becomes degraded as "a purely defensive posture. Not to be eaten, not to be entered: these are the tropes of negation which organize Vindice's resistance to the court" (214). While the Bakhtinian grotesque frequently draws critical attention, Karin Coddon tackles concerns with what Bakhtin would consider a carnivalesque degradation—the intersection of the body with the profane. Specifically, the combination of death and the erotic, according to Coddon, facilitates the play's development of parody and "interrogate[s] contemporary, increasingly scientistic notions of the body" (71). Using a new historical approach to science in the early modern period, Coddon argues that, since "Necrophilia yokes together science and seduction," Middleton travesties science's "'insistent displacement of an 'objective' knowledge of the body" through "spectacular, defiantly perverse desire" (71). These contrarious desires, more characteristic of carnival than official culture, uncrown and debase scientific claims to authority, so Coddon's research testifies to the centrality of carnival's defining

elements.[102] In discussing more festive aspects of parody, Katherine Maus notes the play's overlap with comedy and conceives Vindice's movements as more appropriate to Viola or Rosalind: "His opportunistic, manipulative intelligence is a trait more commonly associated with comic than with tragic characters" (xxi).[103] For Maus, the drama caricatures notions of revenge tragedy, even as it brings to the forefront self-reflective qualities. Like many comic figures discussed by Bakhtin who represent carnival spirit, Vindice's frequent asides mark him as a clown figure as much as a revenger: at every turn he informs the audience about events they do not yet know. He further uses his litany of disguises to infiltrate the court, mimic royal gestures, and engage in "free and familiar contact" with aristocracy (Bakhtin, *Problems* 123). As such, Vindice traverses courtly and country boundaries like clowns prolifically do in comedy, and such penetration of aristocratic borders and spaces by an outsider intimates his affinities for comic uncrowning. Indeed, that he kills the Duke so early in the drama suggests similarities with comic figures who violate taboos with impunity.[104] Vindice's radical actions, though, disturb the boundaries of the genre he inhabits: Maus argues that "such playfulness subverts the austere morality of the revenge-play genre" (xxi).

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[102] Coddon uncovers hidden notions of parody regarding scientific discourse in the early modern period. As such, her study exemplifies Bakhtin's discussion of the "presence of parody," which he says, "is in general very difficult to identify ... in literary prose ... without knowing the background of alien discourse against which it is projected, that is, without knowing its context. In world literature there are probably many works whose parodic nature has not even been suspected" (374). I would propose that Coddon' discussion of official scientific discourse matches precisely Bakhtin's "alien discourse" that parody mocks.

[103] In noting the comic, Leslie Sanders suggests the characters "spend much of their time in farcical clowning," and she concludes in true Bakhtinian fashion that "The play is both gruesome and hilarious" (35). Stephen Wigler likewise notes the play "mixes terrifying violence and outrageous farce so subtly that the violence is often uproariously funny and the comedy is frequently nauseating" (217).

[104] Michael Neill also comments on the play's affinities for comedy and cites the twists in the revenge plot as its defining element: "it is of course true that the comic extravagance of this play's intricate revenge plotting accounts for much of the pleasure of its action" (397).

Even those critics who consciously ignore carnival images in the play echo Bakhtinian terms in their analyses. Choosing instead to focus on the fetishism of executions as a cultural practice, Molly Smith nonetheless employs terms of carnival to describe the play's "grotesque representations of the body, instances of deliberate demystification" (227). Of course, Dollimore, in his original study that rescued Middleton's otherwise obscure play, relies on many ideas from Bakhtin and carnival. Dollimore bridges the critical disparity between "fundamentally orthodox" approaches to the play with "hopelessly decadent" views of it (139). In an extended treatment of latent, subversive themes, Dollimore shadows forth Vindice's facetious, hypocritical, and parodic qualities. The entire play, he notes, performs what Bakhtin would consider a carnivalesque undertaking; it demystifies claims of providential power.

Much of the critics' language that describes the play relies on evidence and terms from carnival, but criticism currently speaks in a circuitous route about the play's utilization of carnival. In this study I will recapture the essential carnivalesque nature of this revenge play by making more direct thematic observations that linger in the margins of critics' discourse. Rather than relegating carnival to an occasional joke, quick aside, or subplot, I argue that Middleton positions carnival festivity as the main action of the play.[105] At every turn, politics take a back seat to salacious jokes, transgressive sexuality, grotesque bodies, and bodily degradation. Middleton even dramatizes the primary mover

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[105] The debate on authorship for this play has raged since its anonymous entrance into the Stationer's Register in 1607. Like most current criticism, I follow the work of Macdonald Jackson and David Lake, two foundational studies in authorship that have helped shape Middleton as the definitive author for the text.

of the play, Vindice's revenge, in terms of bodily degradation: the Duke and Lussurioso go through the guts of the beggar Vindice. In a statement of resistance and bodily debasement, Vindice reminds us, "Great men were gods—if beggars couldn't kill 'em!" (II.ii.115). Second only to Hamlet in the revenge tragedy genre in the number of puns and jokes aimed at the lofty, Vindice's wordplay undermines everything official.[106] Even courtly life in the play establishes rule based on misrule. Under the Duke, the court celebrates licentiousness and illicit procreation. His court emphasizes what Bakhtin calls the "lower bodily stratum" as the court's display of uninhibited carnality, expressed through feasting, incest, and sexuality, coincides with carnival's release from purity and stringent rule (*Rabelais* 24). In a world of excessive transgressions, no one in the play, in or out of the court, pursues harmony in the natural and social order. Unsurprisingly, then, *The Revenger's Tragedy* often draws disparaging comments from critics such as Nicholas Brooke, who marvels at the play's "bad taste" (14).[107] Bad taste, however, defines carnival grotesque, so such attacks on the play's morality suggest that carnival functions with degrading regularity throughout the play. Not simply dramatizing lurid excess, though, Middleton frames concerns of adultery, incest, rape, prostitution within images of flesh, jesting, laughter, and excrement. As Vindice playfully remarks, "Tell but some woman a secret overnight, / Your doctor may find it in the urinal I'th'morning" (I.iii.93).

From the providential mocking suggested by the stage hand's thunderous noises in the final acts to Vindice's parodying himself as a rustic, *The Revenger's Tragedy* self-

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[106] See Lindley's "Abattoir and Costello," which discusses puns in *Hamlet* and *The Revenger's Tragedy*.
[107] Eleanor Prosser remarks on concepts that seem to her illogical but resonate with carnival's fragmentation and celebration for open-endedness: "In the tangle of perhaps thirteen different revenge actions launched ... several are immediately forgotten and at least five have no motivation whatsoever" (38). Such excessive action characterizes carnival experiences and points to the play's parodic qualities. Vindice buries the motive for revenge in the sport of pursuing it. Frank Howson's observation that the ducal family members excessively plot the deaths of other ducal family members also accords with carnival's tasteless grotesqueries.

reflexively comments on the purposes of playing. In the very serious act of revenge, Vindice abandons seriousness and becomes a circus leader for the carnivalesque. Indeed, playing suffuses Vindice's revenge: He ridicules, mocks, seduces, and satirizes. Vindice's play releases moments of crisis and revelation in which he finds temporary liberty from oppressive courtly systems. In order to find such liberty, Vindice degrades aristocratic power through carnivalesque inversion: he turns an aristocratic privilege—the right to police physical and bodily spaces—topsy-turvy and diffuses aristocratic power by relocating it to a theatrical space. The malleable world of the theater enables Vindice to transform from a state of vulnerability to a temporary state of agency, and his aristocratic victims undergo a reversal of this process, moving from a state of agency—signaled by their control of space—to a state of vulnerability—signaled by their forfeiture of spatial control. The revenger's appropriation of carnival play thus destabilizes courtly systems that track, classify, pigeonhole, and immobilize individuals, and in turn projects those very systems as a method of revenge. But as Vindice gains control over a world he attempts to correct, he paradoxically finds no other systems of rule except for the abusive carnival misrule that governed and victimized him.

Before Vindice speaks in the opening soliloquy, Middleton enforces his role as a carnival outsider, a social pariah.[108] Middleton positions Vindice spatially below a passing train of aristocrats; thus, Vindice exists outside of the court, operating in a socio-politically distinct arena. Vindice is low rather than high; even Spurio the bastard son

[108] While this discussion centers on how theatrical spacing enforces his outsider status, Vindice also punctuates his own ostracism when, late in the play, he removes the disguise he adopted for so long to reveal his true features, but rather than exposing his true identity, this revelation of "himself" serves as a further disguise. No one in the play who wields controlling power recognizes Vindice. As several critics have noted, the Duke does not even seem to recognize Vindice when he takes revenge. Not even the pronouncement of his name, "'Tis I, Vindice," seems to affect the Duke in any material way.

affords more privilege than he.[109] Middleton juxtaposes this highly ceremonial gesture with the material sphere of the main stage, occupied with the revenger and a representation of the *danse macabre*, Gloriana's skull. As Vindice begins to play, Middleton clarifies two important codependent concepts in terms of staging: the regulation of physical space exerts authority, and theatrical space serves as an appropriate battleground for authority and prominence. If the main theatrical space exists beneath the Duke, Vindice can exact revenge by degrading the Duke, that is by lowering his body to the level of theater. To catch the Duke in a play serves carnival's subversive properties. It not only places the Duke in a realm in which royalty can be feigned, but it also inverts the relationship between high and low, ruler and ruled. Vindice's playing calls for interchangeability and role reversals—the very qualities necessary for revenge against unassailable courtly villains who enforce difference as essential aspects of their rule. Furthermore, the festive nature of theater cloaks the counterfestive nature of Vindice's intentions. It subtly allows Vindice to appropriate control of space by luring his victims into a staging area presented as purely festive, without need for seriousness and therefore without need for contestation and domination.

In addition to Vindice's stage position suggesting his diminished status, Gloriana's skull betrays Vindice's vulnerable, victimized state while it centralizes the play's concern with carnivalesque transgression and desire.[110] Even after nearly a

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[109] Michael Neill provides further context for this argument when he emphasizes the diminished stature of Spurio: "For clearly the very definition of a bastard as "whore's son" implies that the anxieties surrounding bastardy had a great deal to do with its disruption of the proper line of paternity through the creation of a child that could only be defined as its mother's son" (397).

[110] The skull stands as a potent symbol in the play. As criticism has duly noted, Gloriana's name was an echo for Queen Elizabeth, known as the "glorious-one," and this description first appeared in Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*. As some critics assert, Gloriana not only recalls Elizabeth's person, but it also invokes nostalgia for an impeccable ruler who had died just a few years prior to the publication of *The Revenger's Tragedy*. In the divided stances on the symbolism of the skull, many critics read the skull as a

decade, Vindice broods on the skull with feelings of immediacy that punctuate his helplessness: “Thou sallow picture of my poisoned love, / My study’s ornament” (I.i.14-5). As victim, Gloriana’s skull signals a transgression inspired by lust; as a tool for Vindice’s revenge, designed to recoup the lost beauty of the lover, the skull signals perverse desire. As in carnival, the repression of the sexual impulse knows no boundaries. The Duke’s disregard for boundaries vexes Vindice who acknowledges failure in policing the boundary of her body against the Duke’s overwhelming “palsy lust,” an appetite that serves as the genesis of the tragedy (1.1.8). Because of his vulnerability, Vindice allows his past to consume his present. Vindice’s first words reveal what consumes and dictates his thoughts: the “Duke, royal lecher” (1.1.1). The Duke’s original transgression emphasizes the carnival nature of his court and renders Vindice mentally defenseless against such transgression. Vindice therefore exists as a product of the Duke’s unlicensed sexuality, as a creation of carnal transgression. Writing on the distinguishing features of the revenger, John Kerrigan defends the view that the villain in revenge plays creates revengers:

> A revenger’s position is different. His predicament is imposed upon him, and to know this is part of his plight. Injured by another, or urged towards

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representation of moral decadence and the corruption of the court. Much of the criticism purports that the morality of the play is akin to a moralizing sermon, and the skull serves as a prominent illustration for the morality it enforces. For this line of thinking, see L.G. Salingar, "The Revenger's Tragedy and the Morality Tradition," L.G. Salingar, "Tourneur and the Tragedy of Revenge," and Peter Murray, *A Study of Cyril Tourneur*. See also Brooke who argues the play “continually insists on moral implications” (14).
In contrast, Prosser suggests the delay of private revenge renders the play morally ambiguous. She sees immediate action, rather than excessive brooding, as a masculine action, so the skull adds ambiguity to the play as it feminizes the protagonist. Lawrence J. Ross argues that the skull "stands, of course, for all the betrayed women of the play" and infuses the play with an impending awareness of mortality (xxvii). In a different approach, William Stull provides an extensive generic history for skulls from a diverse set of plays in which he suggests the convention that revenger’s construct mementos of their beloved. Reading the skull from a carnival perspective reveals drastically different concerns. We can treat the skull as the gravediggers treat Yorick’s skull in *Hamlet*—not as an ornamental object but as a representation of bodily degradation, one that erodes differences between classes.

> vengeance by a raped mistress or murdered father, he is forced to adopt a role . . . . as long as he remains a revenger the proportions of the acts he engages in are determined by an injury he never gave or a request he did not make. (12)

The Duke's crime not only incites Vindice, but his rule denies Vindice any legitimate recourse for satisfaction. Since the Duke represents political and social control, a direct assault on the ruler not only threatens the corporeal body but metaphorically strikes at an elusive political system that magnifies the body's power. This system shields its rulers from harm, so in order to accomplish the difficult undertaking of revenge, Vindice must use bodily degradation to render his victim helpless. Gloriana's skull signals Vindice's grotesque: As a caregiver of the grotesque bodily processes—decomposition and decay—and as overseer of the dirty processes of the body, Vindice inextricably links himself to bodily degradation.

As an element of carnival, Vindice's hallmark, Gloriana's skull, represents a *contemptus mundi* worldview, suggesting the transitory nature of human life. In an act of carnivalesque inversion, Vindice uproots what should be dead and buried. What should be beneath the earth now moves on it, so in a violation of Renaissance burial rites, Vindice inverts the normal order: Downward becomes upward as Vindice comes into contact with the earth.[111] As Bakhtin explains, "'Downward' is earth, 'upward' is heaven. Earth is an element that devours, swallows up (the grave, the womb) and at the same time an element of birth, of renascence (the maternal breasts). Such is the meaning of 'upward' and 'downward' in their cosmic aspect, while in their purely bodily aspect, which is not clearly distinct from the cosmic, the upper part is the face or the head and

[111] For a discussion of proper burial rites, see Thomas Rist.

the lower part is the genital organs, the belly, and the buttocks" (*Rabelais* 21). Having closed off her genitals, the Duke effaces her reproductive organs and leaves her as a representative element of heaven.[112] Of course, the erasure of the face renders Gloriana an ambivalent image. The Duke degrades her heavenly features, so she simultaneously exists as a representation of the grave. This ambivalent image serves one clear purpose in terms of carnival: existing only as a head—and not arms, a torso, or feet—the skull mocks the insufficiency of the head of state. Her head lampoons the Duke's official office.

As a *memento mori*, Gloriana's skull not only evokes Vindice's feelings of loss, but it also ignites and governs the methods of his revenge.[113] Specifically, the skull levels claims of seriousness; political, moral, and economic assertions fall flat against her death. For Vindice, the skull exposes the "artificial shine" of courtly life; his musings on her death immediately bring to mind the contrasting "fat folks" of court (1.1.21, 45). Vindice's intense preoccupation with Gloriana's "ragged imperfections" rather than her once famous beauty provides a framework for how he enacts revenge (1.1.18).[114] In assaults against the aristocracy, guided by a symbol of life's fleeting nature, Vindice also levels hierarchy; he seeks to enforce sameness on his social and political superiors despite the governing conventions that insist on difference. In other words, he seeks to

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[112] On Gloriana's body, see Peter Stallybrass, "Reading the Body: *The Revenger's Tragedy* and the Jacobean Theater of Consumption." Stallybrass argues that Gloriana's death must necessarily occur to preserve her virginity. As a consummated woman, the openness and fluidity of the female body poses regulatory issues for patriarchal power.

111 True to the form of Bacchic rites, a female instigates revenge. In this case, Gloriana provides the governing principles for how Vindice should accomplish revenge. Vindice seeks to project Gloriana's bodily degradation onto the aristocratic body. See Irving Ribner and Robert Ornstein for a discussion of Gloriana's skull as an example of the *memento mori* tradition.

[114] Even in his attempts to praise Gloriana's beauty, he accomplishes nothing but shattering beauty's illusion: "When two heaven-pointed diamonds were set / In those unsightly rings" (1.1.19-20). Vindice's rhetoric tears her beauty to pieces. He does not paint a whole picture of Gloriana; he rhetorically fragments her instead.

replicate the process of Gloriana's bodily degradation through uncrowning, which serves as a prelude to inflicting mortal wounds.

In directing an attack of sameness, Vindice employs carnivalesque methods as he degrades the aristocratic body. When first referencing his method of revenge, Vindice employs a grotesque invocation to Gloriana's skull to "Be merry, be merry" ambiguously serves several purposes (1.1.44). First, the carnival dictate ironically refers to the continuance of courtly entertainments as if more merriment would only increase the amount of flesh "worn off" in the revenge (1.1.46). Secondly, the line serves as much as a self-governing direction for Vindice's revenge, indicating that Vindice should take a merry approach in violence, for, in the next three lines, Vindice castigates the court's use of carnival "banquets, ease, and laughter" (1.1.47). Vindice sees himself deploying merriment against the merry aspects of the court. Specifically, couching his murderous intrigue within a frame of merriment, Vindice plans to blend in with courtly entertainment. Vindice appropriates signs of festivity since the court defines itself through festivity. Through this approach, chameleon-like, Vindice penetrates courtly spaces that otherwise inhibit his movements. Therefore, imbued with multiple meanings, "be merry" also foregrounds Vindice's characteristic wordplay he employs to uncrown authority. Having a penchant for interchanging identities and jesting with wordplay, actions that recall characters in comedy, Vindice pursues a merry approach in his revenge.

In contrast to Vindice's agency through carnival subversion, Gloriana's skull, though an instigator of revenge, has little potency beyond provoking Vindice's action.[115]

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[115] As feminist scholars such as Kathyrn Finin have noted, "The female body in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, then, takes up her role in the signifying system as the "reassuring sign [. . .] a 'being for' a masculine

In fact, her skull highlights her conspicuous lack of agency. Where Vindice disguises himself three times, Gloriana, with her lack of features, merely suggests the falsity of disguise, and she has no power to perform. In contrast, women in early modern comedy regularly masquerade as men and do so with powerful effect. These women often access conversations, letters, rooms, and courtyards that they otherwise would not be privy to. Spaces and objects that are taboo for women in comedy yield to powerful feminine agency. Rosalind safely traverses the forest of Arden in masculine attire. Viola infiltrates a foreign court and becomes the confidante of Duke Orsino. Notably, she accesses a space not even the Duke, for all of his aristocratic privilege and standing, can enter: Olivia's chamber. As characteristic of many plays in the revenge tragedy genre, *The Revenger's Tragedy* has few women capable of cunning dissimulation.[116] Only the Duchess possesses subversive qualities in cuckolding the Duke. Bakhtin sees this lack of feminine agency as a disadvantage to men. Women, he notes, serve as a "foil to [man's] avarice, jealousy, stupidity, hypocrisy, false heroism, and abstract idealism" (*Rabelais* 223). If the Duke blocks Gloriana's potency, then Vindice assumes full control for masquerading and costuming in her stead.

While Vindice most clearly usurps the State's power to punish criminals and does so because the State and the criminal in this case reside in the same person, Vindice controls more than simply the State's right to kill. Other, more nuanced mechanisms of control speak to carnival's subversive power, and the crown notably regulates these mechanisms, though Vindice appropriates them for his own ends. The play's first scene

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subject who seeks to reconfirm his identity" (Butler 1990, 45): in this case the identity of the artistic revenger" (2).

[116] Writing about the tyrant, for example, Eileen Allman says: "Women are not allowed autonomy; they are passive matter he shapes, like a Baconian scientist, to his will. Adopting the most conservative and misogynistic of his culture's attitudes, he uses the female body as his text" (42).

introduces aristocratic control of space and brings to light issues of sovereign spatial control.[117] This theme dominates the Duke's first appearance when he oversees the accusations surrounding Junior Brother. When Junior Brother's crime "throw[s] ink upon the forehead of our state," the Duke stalls the decision of his sentence yet calls for him to be "kept close prisoner" (1.2.4, 85). He further controls the space of judgment while he "sit[s] by and sigh[s]" (1.2.20). As a grand display of spatial control, the Duke orders Lussurioso's imprisonment and release within the same scene. The release takes on an air of ceremony and spectacle as the stage directions call for an "authenticated document" to represent the sovereign word. In *The Revenger's Tragedy*, control of space constitutes the exertion of strong political power, but current scholarship virtually ignores this aspect.[118]

The issue of regal control of space has its historical precedence in the early modern period. In consolidating authority in the crown, Tudor and Stuart monarchs often deliberately asserted their right to govern space and bodies that move within that space without question. Imbued with divine right, the crown needed little justification for sovereign control. In *The Trew Law of Free Monarchies*, James makes direct and forceful the king's right to govern people moving in space: "As ye see it manifest that the king is overlord of the whole land, so is he master over every person that inhabiteth the same,

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[117] While not acknowledging the importance of space, Constance Jordan nonetheless contextualizes the importance of the Duke's office and his control, which will be developed throughout this discussion. He discusses political thought during Jacobean England and suggests that politics were "pervasive in ways that are quite alien to us," since social relations revolved around "the concepts of an office, its authority and power, its obligations and limitations" (3).

[118] There exist only occasional passing remarks in the critical literature on space, but they never seem to be fully developed. Arthur Lindley, for example, notes, "It is equally difficult to place things in any spatial relationship to each other" ("Abattoir and Costello" 48). At this point, one might also recall that the Duke feels helpless that the Duchess can move freely, within her own space, outside of the Duke's control. In fact, her sexual violation with Spurio poses such a rift to the Duke's power because he cannot regulate what he attempts to restrict—her movement, her body, even her own orifices.

having power over the life and death of every one of them" (187). Similarly, in *Basilikon Doron*, James provides characteristic advice on policing borders to his son Henry:

> But as for the Bordours, because I knowe, if yee enjoy not this whole Ile, according to Gods right and your lineall discent, yee will neuer get leaue to brooke this North and barrennest part thereof, no, not your owne head whereon the Crowne should stand: I neede not in that case trouble you with them: for then they will bee the middest of the Ile, and so as easily ruled as any part thereof. (187)

Of course, James links kingly authority as synonymous with the State, but significantly he posits the failure to "brooke this North" as a personal failure and as a failure in the crown itself, which enforces regal control over boundaries (187). Instead, the positioning in "middest of the Ile" renders the uncivilized and barbarous subjects pliable and easily governed (187). James's implication clearly intends that he justifiably controls a well-defined space and any person moving within that space falls under his discipline.

Other early modern texts and laws point to an aristocratic right to control space, both physical and bodily. The 1572 emendation to the Vagabond Act serves as another example of spatial control of bodies. The Act reveals the anxieties over "masterless men" who have limited traveling rites over the English countryside:

> All and everye persone and persones whatsoever that being whole and mightye in Body and able to labour, havinge not Land or Maister, nor using any lawfull Marchaundize Crafte or Mysterye whereby hee or shee might get his or her Lyvinge, and can gyve no reckning how he or shee dothe lawfully get his or her Lyvinge; & all Fencers Bearewardes Comon

> Players in Enterludes & Minstrels, not belonging to any Baron of this Realme or towards any other honorable Personage of greater Degree [who] shall wander abroade and have not Lycense of two Justices of the Peace at the leaste, whereof one to be of the Quorum, when and in what Shier they shall happen to wander … shalbee taken adjudged and deemed Roges Vacaboundes and Sturdy Beggers. (qtd. in Chambers 270)

The law restricts the spatial movement of individuals, but particularly those who fail to own land. Therefore, an individual's movement within space signifies social clout: one must possess land and concomitantly a certain social rank to move freely and exert authority over others. One could also point to a host of royal decrees that regulate bodily movement. Queen Elizabeth's patent to Leicester's Men licensed them to play without strict regulation in the court or in the provinces: "And the said Commedies, Tragedies, Enterludes, and stage playes, to gether with their musicke, to shewe, publishe, exercise, and occupie to their best commoditie during all the terme aforesaide, aswell within oure Citie of London and liberties of the same, as also within the liberties and fredomes of anye oure Cities, townes, Bouroughes &c whatsoeuer as without the same, thoroughte oure Realme of England" (qtd. in Chambers 87-88). Leicester's Men were free to roam England and play but only because royal decree permitted them do so. The court's governing bodily movement certainly even extends to playing.

Vindice's spatial dislocation in the opening scene doubly registers with early modern concerns of spatial control, both in his lack of bodily regulation and in his promise to play without license. Such dislocation places him no higher in the social hierarchy than a wandering vagabond. His further acts of shifting identities, costuming,

and even playing a rustic catalogue concerns of unlicensed provincial playing. As a locus for power, the control of space not only functions as an assertion of aristocratic right, but it also functions as a mode of carnival resistance since unlicensed play on a theatrical stage potentially embodies subversive elements. As we have seen, C.L. Barber clarifies how theatrical space overlaps with traditionally festive May games and Morris dances and how simple unregulated play threatens aristocratic control.[119] *In Shakespeare's Festive Comedy*, Barber narrates a story of class struggle between Talyboys Dymoke and the local governing official, the Earl of Lincoln. In the village of South Kyme, Dymoke dramatized a farcical play he called "The Death of the Lord of Kyme," with a fully developed plot and overt elements of treason: At one point, the fool relinquishes a wooden dagger to the Earl of Lincoln with suggestive implications. Performed under a festival license, Dymoke's subversive play hurled obscenities at the Earl of Lincoln and "did frame and make a stage play to be played in for sport and merriment at the setting up of a May Pole in South Kyme" (23). Playing, part of the festive May games, ended in a reimposition of bodily control: The court found that Dymoke did not have the right to perform the play under festival license and sent him to the pillory. Within the governed spaces of *The Revenger's Tragedy*, Vindice must undermine and appropriate the Duke's control of political space that fuels his sovereign power. However, in attempting to seize control over socio-politically sanctioned spaces, Vindice runs into an insidious mechanism of aristocratic defense.

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[119] Stephen Mullaney paints a picture of Renaissance theaters as having elements of carnival freak shows. His perspective also illuminates the nature of carnival games and their overlap with theater: "The journey across the Thames was a short but considerable one: a passage into a domain of cultural license, a field of ambivalent cultures and marginal pastimes lodged . . . on the margins of order and community" (35).

Especially after committing crimes, the Duke governs space as a self-protecting mechanism to deflect punishment and safeguard his aristocratic body from similar attacks, which thwarts direct efforts at assault without some form of dissimulation. For the Duke, controlling space provides license for unlimited carnal transgressions and the deflation of retribution aimed at such transgressions. The Duke misappropriates the State's power and attempts to seize Gloriana's body, but his sovereign position excuses attempted rape and justifies her murder. If anyone tries to attack him, he quickly invokes his right to regulate bodies, which explains why Lussurioso's direct assault fails.[120] In fact, his social rank allows the Duke to efface even the most egregious private transgressions. As Arthur Lindley observes, "the Duke has not only killed Gloriana simply for refusing him but, perhaps worse, he seems to have forgotten doing it, giving no clear sign of what he is being murdered for, let alone the identity of his murderers" ("Abattoir and Costello" 47). In an unregulated court in which transgression rules, the Duke acts with impunity for nine years, and if the Duke forgets killing a person, this shocking gap in memory suggests such a systemic corruption of countless other transgressions, untold within the confines of the play, which must flood the Duke's mind.[121] Furthermore, the Duke's unrecognized crime suggests his lack of culpability: The Duke forgives himself for the illicit deeds because he has internalized a topsy-turvy world as the norm.[122]

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[120] While Fredson Bowers suggests that "an open killing in hot blood" did not carry the same stigma as a murder based on scheming, in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, aristocratic privilege blocks such open killing (1). This necessitates a stealthy path to revenge, though in his analysis Bowers denigrates the excessive schemes of revengers.

[121] Without knowing the victims' names, the Duke alludes in passing to "many a beauty" he has poisoned (2.3.130).

[122] As several critics note, there is no indication that the Duke perverts a purer form of existing government. In *The Revenger's Tragedy*, a socio-political ideal mode of government exists only as a far off fantasy. See McMillin.

To establish a secure space in which the Duke may act freely and fortify his defenses, his spatial control extends to bodily control.[123] In discussing the sexual trespasses of revenge tragedy villains, Eileen Allman notes the conceptual overlap between control of physical space and bodily space. She argues, "As self-proclaimed head of state and family, the revenge tyrant marries mothers, seduces sisters, and rapes wives, in the process infantilizing sons, undermining brothers, and, most publicly shameful, cuckolding husbands," and thus, "Through the agency of a woman theoretically subject to him, he [the revenger] is made subject to another man" (42). In every scene in which he appears, the Duke regulates the movements of bodies in space. He mandates the appearance of guards at Junior Brother's sentencing and Lussurioso's invasion with great frequency—"Guard, bear him hence," "You upper guard defend us!," and "E'en with the nerves of wrath, and throw thy head / Amongst the lawyer's! Guard!" (1.2.86, 2.3.8, 2.3.16-17). The effectiveness of invoking such bodily control—at every command his movement of a guard moves yet another body he wishes relocated—testify to the ways the Duke regulates bodily space to reinforce his misrule. Even if the Duke does not specifically call for protection under a guard, he frequently requests the movement of bodies: "Bear him hence" and "To prison with the villain" (1.2.86, 2.3.50).[124]

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[123] Bodily boundaries and issues of bodily control dominate *The Revenger's Tragedy*. Gloriana's death calls attention to the lack of possession in the play and the constant threat of trespass: one does even own his or her body. Accordingly, men take on the responsibility for policing female bodies from usurpation, so women's bodily control is a site of masculine contest. The suggestion that Vindice could not govern the bodily boundary of his love preoccupies his thoughts. The Duke exploits his bodily control over Gloriana. Her orifices are his, or they will not exist. In such a rapacious world, masculine subjects must establish themselves through impenetrable bodily boundaries, as Vindice's wry jest makes clear: "That woman is all male whom none can enter" (2.1.112).

[124] The discussion of the Duke's political power so far counters other readings that seek alternate forms of power. For example, Gregory Wilson argues that power in the play does not stem from social position but rather from a character's sexuality: "it is the characters in the play who exert the greatest sexual power who

The new Duke, Lussurioso, absorbs the same sense of space and regulation of bodies that his father exhibits. He illicitly penetrates the Duke's secure interior space, his private bedroom, which mimics the Duke's disregard for private spaces. Most notably, however, Lussurioso's aristocratic standing, like the Duke's, affords him the privilege of accessing what he otherwise could not access. Lussurioso's abuse of aristocratic privilege to violate sacred spaces, in mimetically staging the Duke's abuse of such privilege and power, furthers the theme of the play's carnivalesque degradation. Assuming a higher social rank, Lussurioso's first command regulates a body by exiling the Duchess: "I'll begin dukedom with her banishment" (5.1.174). After the revengers attack Lussurioso, he, like his father, calls, "Treason, a guard" (5.3.53). Appropriately, then, Vindice assaults the guards first before assaulting Lussurioso. Recalling Gloriana's death and the manipulation of her body, Vindice understands that usurping bodily control disarms aristocratic privilege. When questioned by Piero, "But how for the duke's guard," Vindice's response bears the seal of a carnivalesque attack: "Let that alone; / By one and one their strengths shall be drunk down" (5.2.26, 5.2.27). Not only will wine undo the guards' rationality and place their bodies "down," but also this attack preludes the masked antics that uncrown Lussurioso.

As Vindice's opening soliloquy makes clear, the Duke's omnipresence pervades even his most interior and hidden spaces: his thoughts. The porous boundaries of the body extend into an easily assailable mental space. In a discussion of real spaces and the ideal spaces of the mind, Henri Lefebvre clarifies their relationship:

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also possess the greatest social and political influence; as sexual potency shifts, so too does the political and social status of the play's characters" (65). The Duke, however, clearly has control of space as the argument has thus shown, and he only loses this control moments before his death. Additionally, the Duke has no sexual prominence. He may have unabated lust, but he has produced no heirs. His sterility compromises any power he would have through sexuality as Wilson asserts.

> What term should be used to describe the division which keeps the various types of space away from each other, so that physical space, mental space and social space do not overlap? Distortion? Disjunction? Schism? Break? As a matter of fact the term used is far less important than the distance that separates 'ideal' space, which has to do with mental (logico-mathematical) categories, from 'real' space, which is the space of social practice. (14)

He justifies the intertwining of real social spaces and ideal spaces of the mind by concluding, "in actuality each of these two kinds of space involves, underpins and presupposes the other" (14). Lefebvre's position seems quite tenable: Trespasses into physical space and bodily space accompany thoughts about those trespasses. Physical and bodily regulation clearly exerted by the Duke necessitates some overlap with mental constructions, and Vindice announces this unwarranted mental breach in his opening lines. Specifically, the breach of the female body instigates Vindice's fixation with revenge and spurs his unmitigated passion. As in Lefebrve's discussion of real and ideal spaces, Vindice thus treats the Duke as a malignant disease whose poison doubly permeates both Gloriana's body and Vindice's mind. Current criticism on the play acknowledges Vindice's fragile mental state and, in some instances, considers it a dominate theme. Hallett and Hallett offer the following:

> In an extremely subtle study of the revenger's psyche, he [Middleton/Tourneur] makes the world of the play itself a projection of the maddened mind of Vindice. So successful has he been in presenting, through Vindice's eyes, a world bereft of all decency, all human feeling, a

> world full of a 'loathing and disgust of humanity' as it would have existed in the obsessed imagination of the revenger, that commentators have taken Vindice's vision for Tourneur's and deemed Tourneur mad. (80)

Rather than simply insisting on the revenger's madness, though, we can recognize the type of anxiety such a displacement represents.

Andrew Hiscock notes that mental spaces represent "a flexible and imaginative category which concentrates upon symbolic appropriations (e.g. racial, gendered, juridical, theological) of space in social existence" (5). Mental spaces therefore carry more weight that the simple dichotomy of sanity and insanity suggest. In fact, the assault on "symbolic appropriations" often gives rise to symptoms that may be labeled sane or insane. The Duke's attempt to leap into Vindice's seat and do his office infiltrates the private space of the family and erects a new ruler who governs with absolute authority. Such an assault disturbs Vindice on many fronts. First, by threatening to displace Vindice's body with his own through sexual breach, the Duke regulates Vindice's body physically. Second, by usurping control within the private sphere, the Duke exposes Vindice's vulnerability and powerlessness by disavowing Vindice's very right to act as head of a household. Consequently, the Duke's impending penetration of an intimate space undermines a mental construct on which Vindice validates his identity, his masculinity.[125]

The policing of physical and bodily borders largely determines Vindice's masculine conception. When misleading his sister, Vindice wishes in an aside that

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[125] Other critics have insufficient answers to explain the Duke's assault on Vindice, and his motive for revenge. R.A. Foakes, for instance, is most concerned with "the primal scene of violence, the deed that seems spontaneous and to have no meaning" (8). This approach explains Vindice's mental obsession that so many critics note. Larry S. Champion argues, "Through involvement of his brother, then, Vindice has accomplished the vengeance which had obsessed him at the beginning of the drama" (317).

"Troops of celestial soldiers guard her heart" (2.1.142). Notably, in this heartfelt instance, he imaginatively implores the aristocratic privilege of governing soldiers. Later, after meeting with Lussurioso, Vindice again cites the necessity of protecting bodily space: "It shall go hard yet, but I'll guard her honour" (2.2.106). In the most pointed example in the play, Lussurioso frames his desire of Castiza in terms of bodily transgression, wishing to "Enter upon the portion of her soul, / Her honor, which she calls her chastity, / And bring it into expense" (I.iii.113-5), but even though Lussurioso never touches her, Vindice seeks retribution for this intended violation. Perhaps Vindice fears the sister's fate will mirror what Gloriana suffered, but the mere suggestion of bodily transgression seems sufficient for Vindice to seek revenge. The assault on the female body damages the constructed masculine identity known for protecting that body. However, the tragedy heightens this tension by placing Vindice in the paradoxical position that, to protect the female body, he must relinquish control of that body.

Against the backdrop of aristocratic control, Vindice turns to a theatrical performance to enact revenge. While this recurring trope of performance occurs with frequency in revenge tragedies, criticism diverges on the reason why revengers as diverse as Hieronimo, Hamlet, Antonio, and Vindice rely on the same convention of performance.[126] Katharine Maus poses the question, "What is the connection between revenge and theatrical display?" but only partially answers this perceptive question by mentioning the function of disguise in theater (xviii). John Kerrigan argues that the motivation for revenge "cuts two ways at once, subordinating the agent to a situation but, at the same time, prompting him to shape events towards that action's end. This generates

[126] Howard Felperin notes Vindice's "self-abandonment" to theatricality (166). Scott McMillin concurs, suggesting "the play is virtually an exercise in theatrical self-abandonment" (108).

a theatricality which registers even in non-dramatic literature" (15-16). The implication seems to be that revengers must choose *de facto* a theatrical performance as their method of revenge. However, Jonathan Bate notes the oversimplication in thinking of theatrical performances as an ingrained aspect of the genre: "Theatrical self-consciousness is so fundamental to Elizabethan revenge drama that it is insufficient to account for it on merely formal grounds by pointing out that play-acting serves to give Hieronimo, Titus, and Hamlet the opportunity to kill or expose their enemies which they would not otherwise have" (267). Bate encourages us to look elsewhere to explain the use of theatrical devices, and the theater seems a particularly apt tool for Vindice's revenge on many levels.

Unlike some revenge plays, *The Revenger's Tragedy* establishes a dynamic that blocks direct revenge. Vindice never has a moment of opportunity to kill like Hamlet does when Claudius prays. As evinced by Lussurioso's failed attempt at killing the Duke, the aristocratic body shuts off its accessibility. Additionally, the court relies on the masquerading of theater; it exists as a façade or a show, so Vindice's appropriation of theatrical devices blends with the artifice of courtly life. Perhaps more importantly, though, the theater distorts time. Vindice resurrects Gloriana through the theater and ushers forth the past into the present moment. Payback then becomes immediate. Since the past shared with Gloriana consumes Vindice's present, he ironically instigates his revenge by restaging the events of nine years ago. Through the performance, Vindice erodes boundaries of time. Frank Whigham asserts that theatrical performances reveal how revengers seize control of their world through self-fashioning. Wounded and vulnerable by the Duke's assaults, Vindice, according to Whigham, takes up theater to

suggest his potency in the face of impotency, but carnival explains how the theater manages to make him potent. His disarming experience at the hands of the Duke provides motivation to search for ways to reverse his dispossession, victimization, and loss. In short, he needs a tool, like the theater, that champions inversion.

The inversions of theater allow Vindice to control and manipulate the previously sanctioned space regulated by the Duke. The theater lowers the body of the court to that of the stage. Following inversion, it further provides an agency for Vindice to transform from victim to victimizer, from actor in the Duke's play to director in his own. Through his dizzying circus of disguises, Vindice learns to manipulate signs with precision and skill. In fact, the drive of his revenge mocks the Duke's ability to read signs; moments before the Duke arrives, Vindice, after dressing the skull, comments on the ugliness of his design: "Methinks she makes almost as a fair a sign / As some old gentlewoman in a periwig" (3.5.111-112). Even if this were not a skull, Vindice suggests, a reasonable person would still question the attractiveness of the "old gentlewoman." He dupes audiences and dissimulates to create an alternate reality that, by affecting the audience's perceptions, controls in ways not afforded by his previous vulnerable state. To accomplish this degradation, Vindice overlaps the real space of the court with theatrical space and disguises his murderous objective under the guise of play and sexual indulgence. His set up enforces to the Duke that the "serious business" of the court remains separate from the ensuing theatrical play, and the Duke's actions immediately preceding the theater—his dismissal and further bodily regulation of courtly attendants—suggests the Duke's internalization of Vindice's ploy. The temporary distortion of the theater, the ruse that it remains separate from the court even as it remains within the

court, permits Vindice to seize control over courtly space. Vindice manipulates the Duke into believing himself a participant in a play that has no serious import and calls for no accountability of actions. The play seemingly frees the Duke of his official status and presents the illusion that he can act with impunity. The reversal of positions between victim and victimizer exposes the Duke's vulnerability and elevates Vindice's agency.

This reversal of positions, by which Vindice assumes the regulation of space the Duke once had, coincides with sites of carnival that resist control of physical space and bodily space, specifically Bakhtin's marketplace. In carnival's inversion of rules, by which vagabonds and masterless men become powerful lawmakers of misrule, the regulation of physical and bodily space from the privileged dissolves. The very foundation on which such control rests, that of divine right, becomes a comedic gesture flaunted by the carnival king. As part of this challenge to divine right, carnival space, according to Bakhtin, requires that "people who in life are separated by impenetrable hierarchical barriers enter into free and familiar contact on the carnival square" (*Problems* 123). The privilege of the marketplace allows open contact between all ranks of people. Carnival's suspension of hierarchy necessarily entails a suspension of rank. During official feasts, "everyone was expected to appear in the full regalia of his calling, rank, and merits and to take the place corresponding to his position. It was a consecration of inequality" (*Rabelais*10). The town square, however, unites people separated by divisions of property, class, and profession. Bakhtin describes such contact as the birth of human relationships, which occurs through the erosion of defined physical spaces and regulated bodily movements. The lack of discipline over the people's orifices, through

eating, drinking, and sexuality, signals the people's freedom from rule, as inner bodily processes become outer shows.

Like a carnival marketplace predicated on inversion, the dissolution of boundaries, and a lack of bodily control, Vindice's revenge occurs in a performative space that encourages the Duke to relinquish his control to a new Master of Revels.[127] Vindice uses disguise and his stage prop Gloriana to help create a performative space with the Duke as principal actor. Though not often conceived in theatrical terms, the scene of Vindice's revenge bears the theatrical power of Hieronimo's *Soliman and Perseda* or Titus's grand banquet. Significantly, the disguise that propels Vindice into courtly life now facilitates the shedding of his impotent status. The disguise paradoxically, then, functions as an empowering and disempowering device. On the one hand, the disguise recalls Vindice's symbolic separation from the court as an unrecognized vagabond, as the mask draws attention to his status as a courtly outsider. On the other hand, the disguise empowers and creates agency. Since Vindice has no control over courtly affairs, his disguise manipulates the Duke and lures him into a space Vindice controls. He sets the scene in a secluded lodge just outside the court. Vindice meticulously prepares for his show by decorating the skull and even providing a prologue for the Duke: "Faith, my lord, a country lady, a little bashful at first" (3.5.132). Skilled in manipulating the perceptions of his audience, Vindice fabricates an identity for the skull in his prologue.

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[127] Kerrigan speaks to the revenger taking action and agency as a dramatist. The creativity and play with which Vindice directs movements follows Kerrigan's comment: "In pursuit of retribution, the avenger must manipulate a fluid and contingent world with a dramatist's inventiveness and authority. He must be, in the play, an image of its author, transmuting creative ambition into narrative and stage action" (16).

As Master of Revels, Vindice controls the actions of the Duke and other characters as he would a dramatic production. Just prior to the commencement of his show, Vindice directs movement of props and bodies; he commands Hippolito: "Brother, fall you back / A little with the bony lady" (3.5.119-120). Then again in direction for the proper lighting, he instructs, "Back with the torch! / Brother, raise the perfumes" (3.5.139). Then, after revealing the treachery, Vindice continues directing for the maximum horrific effect: "Place the torch here, that his affrighted eyeballs / May start into those hollows" (3.5.146-147).[128] Hippolito even congratulates his brother in theatrical terms: "I do applaud thy constant vengeance" (3.5.107).

Vindice even directs the actions so that the Duke performs his lust. The Duke performatively replays his initial attempt at seduction, so this stage spectacle engenders the desired effect: the Duke falls prey to the stratagem and consequently has no more potency than a stage prop. Vindice now regulates space and movement and relegates the Duke to the lowly status of passive observer and estranged spectacle. In turn, the Duke becomes the spectator, a passive agent, frozen, bereft of his power to control space. In effect, Vindice forces the Duke into the position Gloriana once occupied.[129] His torturous treatment culminates in a scene several acts later when the Duke is discovered dead, and the court takes on the role of audience for Vindice's play: "Be witness of a strange spectacle . . . the Duke my father gealed in blood" (5.1.89-91).

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[128] While Stallybrass argues that death evacuates Gloriana from the space of courtly corruption and unchecked sexual desire, I would argue that Vindice's ruse places her firmly within such corruption and refigures her as an object of sexual desire. Though Vindice qualifies her limited appeal, he certainly intends to mimic her former glory, and the Duke fully sexualizes her once again.

[129] Kerrigan points to the problems of replicating revenge so closely, and Vindice runs into the very dilemma Kerrigan describes: "when B, injured by A, does to A what A did to him, he makes himself resemble the opponent he has blamed, while he transforms his enemy into the kind of victim he was once. Indeed, the more scrupulous he is in pursuit of retribution, the more exact in exacting vengeance, the more he effects this interchange" (6). As the last part of the paper elaborates, through his revenge Vindice replicates the very tools that victimized him.

Vindice's insidious device further replicates his vulnerability in the Duke. The Duke, forced to a passive role of spectator, recalls Vindice's helplessness during Gloriana's assault. Vindice not only controls the physical space of this lodge and the bodily movements of the Duke, but he also further projects his violation of mental space onto the Duke. Where the Duke threatened Vindice's masculinity by taking his place in bed, Vindice now forces the Duke to watch Spurio and the Duchess consummate, concretizing the Duke's image of horror and recasting Vindice's fear of displacement by exposing the Duke displaced. Rather than simply staging bodily violence, Middleton dramatizes how incestuous cuckoldry assaults the masculine identity on several fronts. This adultery reciprocates the rift in mental space that originally incited revenge. Furthermore, in governing the body of Gloriana and appropriating her for this spectacle, Vindice puts the Duke in his proper place as uncrowned ruler and reasserts his recovered masculinity by recouping control of what he deemed "useless property." The final dance over the Duke's body, which also occurs after Lussurioso's death but rarely receives critical attention, further exploits the aristocratic lack of control. The bodily movements of the dance mock the dead precisely because such movements flaunt the inability of the Duke to control them. They simultaneously reassert Vindice's freedom: he now controls his own body.[130]

The created theatrical space serves the antics of Vindice, and his wordplay constitutes part of his revenge and represents a festivity to this counterfestive act. Vindice

[130] In his important study, Alan Brissenden moves the discussion of dance beyond interpretations of extraneous scenes designed to delight audience members. Instead, Brissenden centralizes the dance as an element of order in a disordered world. He notes the ironic nature of dance in the Jacobean tragedies. See his article "Jacobean Tragedy and the Dance," and his expansion of this discussion in *Shakespeare and the Dance*.

relies on wordplay to enforce the scene as occurring in a performative space. [131] This use of wordplay or misunderstanding recalls the sport and game playing of carnival festivals, in which wordplay resists serious cultural poetics and circumvents aristocratic authority.[132] Bakhtin reminds us that the fool often expresses the infinitely complex layers of language and always acknowledges "there are no neutral and objective words" (*Problems* 160). Linguistic play recalls the familiarity of carnival in which abusive speech derides the privileged and enforces sameness. Accordingly, wordplay accompanies Vindice's revenge with unabated regularity. Vindice assures the Duke that his chosen lady may demure slightly, "but after the first kiss, my lord, the / worst is past" (3.5.134). Vindice not only slyly references the Duke's impending death as he couples sex and death, but he includes the interjection, "My lord," to clarify the degrading, uncrowning language he aims at the Duke's high standing. His revenge for the "very ragged bone" suggests Gloriana's skull as well as the low class in whose name he revenges (3.5.153). He continues using language of class amid wordplay to lower the Duke to the bodily, material level. He frequently and mockingly calls the Duke "Your Grace," but in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, "Grace" doubles as the name of a bawd and ironically recalls the scene in which Spurio invokes such "Grace" only moments before the Duchess seduces him. Placed within the context of adulterous and incestuous play, the term Grace carries disruptive meaning rather than serious import. Where Spurio uses

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[131] Most critics develop ideas of wordplay in *The Revenger's Tragedy* in passing remarks. Murray serves as prominent example. He notes only, "the notion of metamorphosis is everywhere in the play: it is apparent linguistically in the form of puns and metaphors concerning transformation and dramatically in the extended use of disguise" (156). Sanders focuses on the play's sexual language but not as an integral part of revenge: "the language of the play considerably darkens the comedy" (117). Patricia Parker's discussion of wordplay shows that those who use deceptive rhetoric are often women associated with "cosmetics, clothing, and decoration" (110).

[132] For a discussion of wordplay in tragedies, see Robert Weimann's *Authority and Representation in Early Modern Discourse*, particularly chapters one and two.

the term decisively against religion and aristocratic standing, Vindice further uses it to uncrown the Duke. Vindice's wordplay destabilizes the signification of lofty language. Jesting at Gloriana's ghastly appearance, Vindice's pun on grave—"sh' has somewhat a grave look with her"—in turn makes the Duke look foolish: "I love that best," he replies (3.5.135-136). Vindice's linguistic play on the Duke's lust, specifically Vindice's prescient anticipation of such a comment, suggests Vindice's control not only of the scene's bodily movement but also of the script he writes.

Like a fool, Vindice puns in order to uncrown, and his wordplay unsettles official notions of language. In the context of early modern England, an official aristocratic word often invoked socio-politically sanctioned actions. In noting how problematic aristocratic expression of authority could become, William C. Carroll emphasizes that "the general crisis of authority in this period was simultaneously also a crisis of the sign, and especially a crisis of those semiotic systems designed to enforce and regulate social and class distinctions" (212).[133] Numerous texts justified the rightful rule of the Tudors, such as Thomas More's *The Tragicall Historie of King Richard the Third* (1513), and many more celebrated the rule of Elizabeth, a ruler whose status was often questioned based on her bastard birth. Royal language thus needed a powerfully cogent effect to govern large political consequences, so many examples of effective rhetoric found in books such as Philip Melanchthon's *Institutiones* (1521) and Thomas Wilson's *The Arte of Rhetorique* (1533) attest to how speakers and writers could manipulate language to exert authority. For example, Wilson argues that speakers must "persuade, and move the affections of his hearers in such wise that they shall be forced to yield unto his saying" (48). With the

[133] Other scholars even highlight the instability of representational systems themselves. See Robert Weimann's examination of the theater in *Authority and Representation in Early Modern Discourse*.

Duke's written word, he not only disciplines bodies spatially, but his word functions as a "signet" (2.3.101). The Duke regularly treats his own word as authoritative, complete, and unequivocal. The Duke believes his signs always signify clearly. He silences the judge's sentencing of Junior Brother and orders bodily movements with precision. The import of his words can best be glimpsed in his rhetoric of love, where the Duke assumes that, on his word, a female must yield her body: "How sweet can a duke breathe! Age has no fault . . . I must be bold with you" (3.5.140,143). Vindice's manipulation of the sign points to his usurpation of aristocratic control and further contextualizes his revolt in terms of class. Amid the discourse of aristocratic authority, where language often governs bodies, Vindice's wordplay points to a linguistic revolt.

Whereas aristocratic discourse tries to pinpoint a worthy, specific intended meaning, Vindice's wordplay suggests that language elides signification. In response to the Duke's question, "What are you two?," Vindice elusively replies, "Villains all three" (3.5.152-153). Whereas the Duke tries to pigeonhole his two assailants, Vindice reminds him of Gloriana's presence, which forms a third member to the party. Significantly, because of Vindice's slippery wordplay, he could also intend to implicate the Duke as the third member. In either intention, the wordplay amid the revenge precludes fixed meaning and refuses the Duke's insistence on the specific reference to two. The wordplay simultaneously uncrowns the Duke by conflating him with the *memento mori* and therefore insinuating his own death.

Vindice exposes the incest in the Duke's house, and he frames this revelation significantly with wordplay. The Duke references a mise-en-scene which reveals his cuckolded image: "Oh, kill me not with that sight!" (3.5.192). Vindice retorts with a pun

on sight: "Thou shalt not lose that sight for all thy dukedom" (3.5.193). Through his equivocation, Vindice imposes the literal meaning of eyesight and toys with the idea that the Duke's eyesight must be necessarily preserved to uncrown with the sight of a sexual spectacle. This incongruity between two meanings of sight fundamentally constitutes part of the grotesque experience of Vindice's revenge. Vindice's verbal play speaks to a dominant carnival theme—that one language does not hold superior standing to another. By refusing to understand aristocratic discourse, Vindice levels linguistic systems of difference and instead enforces sameness between classes. Having experienced an unsettling degradation down the social hierarchy when his father died, Vindice knows of the impermanence of social existence and jests with the Duke as he loses his. Like unconstrained laughter, Vindice's wordplay disrespects authority, so that at every turn Vindice's antic play undermines logic and consistency. Furthermore, this wordplay, even as it dodges fixed meaning, expresses Vindice's desire to confront rather than elide the Duke. Vindice's linguistic leveling prefigures bodily leveling, namely the Duke's death. The verbal play that accompanies the deadly serious business of murder derides the Duke's body natural and body politic.

Nailing down the Duke's tongue counterpoints wordplay's expressed freedom. The theatrical performance accompanied by Vindice's usurpation of bodily and linguistic control culminates in an attack on the bodily organ responsible for governing. Vindice metonymically places the untouchable aristocratic power in the Duke's tongue, the apparatus that helps to produce that power.[134] As the Duke's replicates his controlling

[134] The relevance of the tongue has not gone without notice in the critical literature. J.L. Simmons notes how Middleton borrows from the Kydian revenge play and draws parallels to Lavinia's mutilated tongue in *Titus Andronicus*. However, Simmons limits his observations to the cancellation of justice societal bonds through the tongue's mutilation and its ability to flatter and distort with rhetoric. For Simmons, Middleton

discourse over Gloriana, Vindice erroneously concludes that removal of the Duke's tongue eliminates his authority. As Carla Mazzio suggests,

> The urge to locate the root of discursive instability in the tongue itself is a way of rendering vulnerable that which is threatening, of rendering concrete, singular, and detachable that which is elusive, abstract, and capable of endless manipulation. The localization of discourse in the organ of speech, in other words, enables the fantasy of location, excision, and—however paradoxically—the fantasy of control. (*The Inarticulate Renaissance* 99)

That Vindice plays fast and loose with language while preventing the Duke from speaking not only serves as a delightful irony, but it also realizes the insidious potential of play. Vindice laments his father, who "had his tongue, yet grief made him die speechless" (3.5.175), and appropriately takes revenge on the Duke's ability to speak: "Then we'll invent a silence…Now with thy dagger / Nail down his tongue" (3.5.196, 198-9). As in carnival, the voice of the people counters the monologic force of privileged rhetoric. Voice exerts authority, so Vindice continues his wordplay while the Duke sits in silence.

But in Vindice's case, as well his father's and Gloriana's, sovereign voice exposes vulnerability in plebian culture. Even with the Duke's tongue tied down, he still manages to gasp moments before his death, "I cannot brook" (3.5.221). His impending revelation of the assassination potentially disrupts Vindice's play. At any minute the aristocratic voice could break through the boundaries of play, recapture authority, and assign Vindice

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creates a world of "nimble and desperate tongues," whose propensity to lead man to destruction fuels Vindice's courtly assaults (58). I expand on this early attempt to discuss one of the grotesque elements of the play by viewing the tongue in the context of class struggle.

to the hangman. Fortunately for the revengers, music, a sign of festivity, stifles the Duke's voice, and his death remains hidden. However, a similar moment occurs during Lussurioso's murder, which leaves Vindice vulnerable to aristocratic control. Before his death, Lussurioso musters, "Those in the masque did murder us" (5.3.80). Vindice's control through bodily movement, bodily degradation, and wordplay finds itself once again subject to aristocratic articulation. Vindice only gloats on his victory once Lussurioso's speech fails: "My tongue is out of office" (5.3.91).

In *The Revenger's Tragedy*, silence becomes a sign of impotence. Tongues not only authorize violence and bodily control, but they also subjugate through an assertion of difference, so an attack on the tongue insists on a lack of privilege and an eradication of difference. The Duke's misrule stems from the weapon he uses to deploy aristocratic power, so to evade this power and make an assault on the office of the State tangible, Vindice attacks the Duke's vocal agent. However, this assault on the tongue highlights the failure of the performance to revenge satisfactorily.[135] Carnival play cannot preclude the internalization of the powers that animate the political system. Dismembering the tongue serves as a frail gesture to combat a larger, corrupt political system which can easily replace figureheads. The violent act attempts to concretize a voice that is not the individual ruler's own but an abstract representation of a system that authorizes violence to augment its hegemonic control. Vindice erroneously assumes that, since the tongue speaks political decrees, the tongue stands for political decrees. He therefore attempts to control the body in vengeance against the systems that authorized his victimization, but by doing so, he wields the same axe of bodily control and violence that the State

[135] The play is not simply a "tragedy of revenge itself," as Gregory Wilson argues, but a tragedy on the incompleteness of revenge and how this incompleteness reconfigures the dominant power structure (73).

authorized for the Duke.[136] Thus, the dismemberment of the tongue only reenacts the systems of violence employed by the State, and this reenactment greatly diminishes carnival's subversive properties. Since the sovereign voice controls mechanisms of institutionalized violence and authorizes violence, Vindice fails to establish any regime upheaval by replicating the type of violence authorized by the State.

Vindice mimics the systems of corruption, and he ends the play as vulnerable and isolated as he began.[137] Ironically, the sovereign word consigns him to his fate. Antonio, who previously rejected the use of violence, fears Vindice's replication of violent behavior against the State: "You that would murder him would murder me" (5.3.125). Now as acting agent for the State, Antonio emphasizes Vindice's futile attempts to strive for greater political change. The State continues to serve as arbiter and judge, administering violence in order to protect itself and reaffirm its own power to regulate bodies within space. Antonio defines "treason" as acts that question the regulation of such control.

Vindice's self-incrimination in the final moments of the play perplexes many critics.[138] Certainly, the revenger's position hardly seems credible when he gleefully

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[136] Maus rightly discusses revenge's carnival properties: "Blood vengeance, in other words, almost automatically subverts the power of the crown" (xvii). But she stops here without elaborating on how revengers often wield weapons of State control and how that actually centralizes the power of the crown. Her perspective champions carnival's power at least more than Middleton does in *The Revenger's Tragedy*.

[137] At this point Vindice has aligned his own existence with the existence of Italy; by uncrowning the Duke's position, he assumes the excessive qualities of the Duke. He partially replaces him and kills Lussurioso on a mere suggestion.

Maus comments on Vindice's cyclical nature and affirms he uncrowns himself, "His exposure and execution do not suggest the ineluctable workings of fate, the wrath of an unappeased deity, or the torment of agonized conscience" (xxii).

[138] Many critics have understood the play as meting out God's punishment and Vindice's revelation as an instrument of God's will. M.C. Bradbrook, for example, sees Vindice's death "primarily as the judgment of heaven" (165). Peter Lisca views it as a necessity in re-establishing the moral order. Other views contest such traditional interpretations but still fail to provide an explanation for Vindice's curious actions other than ascribing it to an accident or the pervasiveness of moral depravity. Robert Orenstein counters Bradbook's view and argues instead that Vindice dies unjustly as result of a defunct moral code. Kistner

exposes himself as the culprit for the Duke's murder: "'Twas somewhat witty carried, though we say it. / 'Twas we two murdered him" (5.3.117-8). Maus remarks on Vindice's "effervescent inability to keep his mouth shut" (xxii). Similarly, Lars Engle, who notes moments of festivity in the play, nonetheless comments that Vindice could "get away with everything just by keeping his mouth shut" (1302). But a carnival perspective enlightens these implications and degrading remarks on Vindice's character. Vindice, of course, has been at play. He acts and responds as if all of his actions were part of a game, some sport that has occupied his imagination for a few hours, and he now delights to tell.[139] The illusion of the theater proves a self-deluding mechanism for Vindice; the same illusion he fostered in revenge against the Duke now haunts him with full force. As he treats his own real actions as part of the play he created, Vindice ultimately fails to recognize the instability between the theatrical and the real. Vindice leaves the stage satisfied with his impending death; his ability to jest at death exemplifies plebian culture and the playful state of his imagination, even if no concrete triumphant renewal exists.

Bakhtin's optimistic version of carnival views death as a brief pause before a greater renewal: "The death of the individual is only one moment in the triumphant life of the people and of mankind, a moment indispensable for their renewal and improvement" (341). At best, Vindice's revenge questions authority's loss of power and causes us to examine the extent to which power has been reconfigured. By ironizing the potential of

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and Kistner also understand Vindice's death in terms of an ethical stance of the play and discuss its necessity in terms of societal moral depravity. Most famously, T.S. Eliot explained the revelation in psychological terms; Vindice's revelation, he argues, expresses a "death-motive" ("Cyril Tourneur" 925). In my analysis, I sought answers to why he would express this "death-motive."

[139] Scott McMillin is one of few critics who make a passing allusion to Vindice's joy at the revelation: "Vindice takes pleasure in disclosing his murder of the old Duke" ("Acting and Violence" 277).

renewal with Vindice's death at the word of Antonio, Middleton leaves us with a consideration of how much disturbance in the regime Vindice's antics cause, with no clear solution to this dilemma.[140] At his end, bereft of physical and bodily control, Vindice wields the only weapon he has left, his voice, and though he speaks more than the Duke or Lussurioso can, he will have a voice only momentarily. And when he does speak, his characteristic wordplay—his method to elide aristocratic control—is greatly diminished. Perhaps the only control he wrested from aristocratic power is the control of his own mental space. Since Antonio condemns this victory, the lasting effects of carnival's subversive power remain masked.

Middleton diverts questions of the protagonist's innocence or guilt and does not centralize the dynamic between Senecan and Christian doctrine as previous scholarship suggests.[141] The ethics of revenge, in effect, take a back seat to the process of revenge.[142] Middleton found it more interesting to dramatize not the tensions that inhibit an individual to revenge but a subject's place and agency within the context of a dominating political institution. Carnival allows a temporary moment of rebellion against a

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[140] While this reading of the ending is admittedly dampening, other critics reach a similar crossroads. Howard Pearce proposes that "If the play demonstrates not only decay but also vitality, not only chaos but also control, not only disorder but also order, then its *Weltanschauung* may be far too complex to yield simple paraphrases of the playwright's thesis" (19). Sanders poses the dilemma as follows: "Tragedy is the theatre of priests, grotesque is the theatre of clowns. Is Vindice a priest, for the task of the revenger is a priestly task: the calling of men to judgment? Or is he a clown, a Yippie, making "revolution for the hell of it"? Or does he begin as one and end as the other?" While Sanders expresses ambiguous feelings about the ending, she never embraces them and believes there is a clear message to discern. On the other hand, Pearce remains more skeptical. Certainly, Vindice's antics did not change a regime but neither were they unequivocally useless. The tension and ambiguity of this scene no doubt registers with the anxieties surrounding issues of succession. A change in regime naturally produces conflicted responses.

[141] See Albert Tricomi who argues that *The Revenger's Tragedy* adheres to "a righteous, native, anti-humanistic, Christian conservatism" ("Economic and Social" 103). In contrast, M.C. Bradbrook points out that "Justice is sold either for favors or money: this is insisted on again and again in the imagery and by direct statement" (161).

[142] See Larry Champion for a discussion on ethics and revenge: "Not only is Vindice totally oblivious to the ethical dimensions of his actions, he also clearly considers himself to be above the moral quagmire which engulfs all members of the royal family" (313).

hegemonic system bent on aggrandizing its power to victimize subjects, a system that employs violence to protect its right to violence. In a contest over spatial control, the Duke's misrule violates private spaces and boundaries, so Vindice appropriates elements of carnival inversion through theatrical antics to enact a revenge that degrades the Duke to the bodily level. Vindice places the Duke in a performative space in which the revengers act as Master of Revels. Out of his pursuit of lust and perceived lack of distinction between theatrical and real, the Duke relinquishes control of the space, and Vindice then, partially and temporarily, governs the Duke's body and language. However, through his theatrical performance, he unwittingly replicates the systems of violence inculcated from the State. He controls bodily transgression by enacting bodily transgressions. Antonio's final Lenten word of severity further solidifies the cyclical nature of violence as it dismisses Vindice's play and redirects physical and bodily control as an aristocratic privilege. With regulation and trespass against Vindice's body, the final question the play raises concerns the extent to which the State's bodily transgression against Vindice constitutes a mental breach for the audience that has identified with him through five acts.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The period of carnival that lasted from December 26 to Shrove Tuesday took on all the aspects of a play: the city became a theater—its inhabitants actors and its streets stages. The inverted world, rife with rituals of sex and violence, parodied daily order and challenged social hierarchies. By Lent, however, carnival reached a conclusion. Participants banished the Lord of Misrule, fled the streets, and abandoned all excess. Carnival's epilogue ended with a promise of renewal during the next season. As I have attempted to demonstrate, such a temporary rupture in the calendar provides an apt analogy for understanding the revenger's spirit. Through parody, dancing, laughing, and swearing, carnival disestablishes and subverts unilateral authority. Revengers employ these carnival weapons and treat life as a holiday by suspending the normal order of events. In the many discussions of traditional May Games, King James' statements on festivals, the Kett's rebellion of 1549, and the Talyboys Dymoke controversy, I have attempted to historicize the argument that carnival functions as a social discourse that helped inaugurate the revenge tragedy genre. Indeed, carnival games and festivities seem an *a propos* vehicle for the exploration of revenge. From Hieronimo's self-serving and subversive qualities to Titus's grand feast that uncrowns Saturninus, revengers perceive themselves as carnival heroes and assault authority with carnival tactics. Though not often conceived of in violent terms, carnival can move subtly from humor to horror, as the peasant revolt at Bern or evil May Day in London suggest. I have argued that early modern dramatists captured the unmitigated energy and chaos of the festivals and imbued allegorically their revengers with the full force of misrule that carnival represented. Grotesqueries, inversions, and mockeries associated with carnival appear as frequently in

revenge plays as they do in the comedies with which other critics typically align them. Moreover, viewing carnival as an animating force behind the revenge tragedy genre reveals larger concerns circulating in the existing literature.

Inspired by the work of Althusser and Foucault, much criticism about early modern drama in the last thirty years concerns the theories of the subject and the discourses of power. These theories of power often imply a unitary system that pervasively and thoroughly governs individuals, and studies beginning in the 1980s investigate ways in which dramatists explore how institutions exercise power.[143] Yet aside from work on *Hamlet*, very few revenge plays receive attention in this area, or if power and the subject receive attention, critics do not link them to the theme of revenge. Instead, critics employ a more conventional model that, based on Aristotelian techniques, scientifically tries to link common threads between plays and declare value based on the number of threads discovered. Within the context of current scholarship, carnival readings of these revenge plays serve two crucial functions. First, they update an out-moded and hackneyed approach to the genre by centralizing power, ideology, and the subject as the primary concerns of these plays. Carnival scrutinizes the line of power between aristocrats and commoners and therefore illuminates recent themes concerning how individuals define themselves in relation to systems of power. To borrow from Greenblatt, "the production . . . of . . . subversion" succinctly summarizes carnival's main purpose (40). Hieronomio, Titus, and Vindice slough off ideological claims that enforce hierarchy to rebel against a dominating system that fails to hear their complaints. The

[143] For examples of these arguments, see Jonathan Bate, "The Performance of Revenge"; Margaret de Grazia, Maureen Quilligan, Peter Stallybrass, "Introduction" in *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture*; Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*; Cynthia Marshall, *The Shattering of the Self;* and Stallybrass, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*.

imposition of a social, political, and religious order, and a revenger's ability to resist this order, emerge as carnival concerns that complement studies on the discourses of power in early modern England. Carnival moves a discussion of revenge tragedy away from the provincial readings of Thorndike and Bowers into the more contemporary concerns of late twentieth century critical discourse.

However, even more importantly, carnival updates our understanding of these revenge plays only to suggest a way of resisting the power and ideology found in Foucaldian studies of subjectivity and power in early modern drama. Carnival investigates a counter-discourse to unchecked authority and therefore poses the possibility of an autonomous subjectivity. By definition, revengers resist interpellation. Cultural and religious messages prevent revengers from taking action, yet revengers parody these messages, remain aware of the instability their actions create, and disregard the passivism requested in Romans 12:19: "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." Social discourses have a muted effect on revengers who choose to act in accordance with their individual will-to-power. Carnival exposes gaps in Althusser's and Foucault's systems of power, which deny at every turn a chance of rebellion and individuality. Carnival readings, then, supplement and help balance a host of literary studies based on Althusser or Foucault that proffer few areas of resistance for the early modern subject.[144] Carnival creates spaces of freedom, such as Vindice's rebellion against the Duke in a secluded lodge outside of court, but it requires the revenger's

[144] In searching for modes of resistance on the early modern stage, I follow Brian Vickers and Katherine Maus, who both argue against Foucauldian systems of omnipresent power. For Vickers, see *Appropriating Shakespeare: Contemporary Critical Quarrels.* For Maus, see *Inwardness and the Theater in the English Renaissance*.

withdrawal from a political, hierarchal world. Revengers therefore paradoxically draw on hierarchal traditions to mask an anti-traditional sentiment. Early modern dramatists predicate a revenger's self conception on a vast inner power shielded by an outward façade. This duplicity and masking, including Hieronimo's madness, Titus's role as chef, and Vindice's multiple disguises, suggest that institutions do not wholly exercise power over individuals and that temporary resistance occurs through festive guises.

Kyd, Shakespeare, and Middleton complicate struggles of carnival by collapsing them with revenge and presciently anticipate the recent debates concerning power, ideology, and subjectivity. Carnival readings suggest that power emerges at the nexus between a revenger's resistance—his play of multiple identities—and the exhaustion of this play, as it collides with a competing institution of power. The ends of revenge plays dramatize these colliding forces as carnival extinguishes itself. If Hieronimo creates a self-serving subjectivity to express unchecked desire, he becomes doubly frustrated when this victimized self encounters containment of its own expression. Carnival paradoxically empowers his revenge through the playlet but then limits his wish-fulfilling urges for self-aggrandizement. Rather than the presence of a potent rebellion, Hieronimo encounters the absence of representation. Reaffirming its role as a mouthpiece for ideology, the institution of the theater negates itself as an institution of resistance. Likewise, *Titus Andronicus* ends with embers of carnival barely burning: the death of the carnival king and the reinstitution of a diminished order with Lucius as governor. *The Revenger's Tragedy* concludes with an official sovereign voice pronouncing Vindice's ineffectual upheaval. Not only does Vindice replicate the violent systems of corruption he fought, but he dies to reinforce the State's continued policy of administering violence in

order to protect itself and reaffirm its own power to regulate rebellion. The carnival life that proves so energizing to the revenger bursts on the stage with a violent force but recedes as quickly as it came. At the end of revenge plays, carnival jokes itself to death.

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