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Faces of Death on the Renaissance Stage

By

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Abstract

Bodies litter the stage in Renaissance tragedy. But, more than lurid sensationalism--the textbook "tragedy of blood" appellation--deaths, on the Renaissance stage, enhance moral awareness, force philosophical questions about the nature of existence, and refine critical attitudes. The object of this thesis is to study the significance of death in selected plays by the best tragic dramatists of the Elizabethan/Jacobean age.

The only full-length study of the subject remains Theodore Spencer's Death and Elizabethan Tragedy: A Study of Convention and Opinion in the Elizabethan Drama (1936; rpt. New York: Pageant, 1960). As might be expected in 1936, Spencer's approach depended on realistic expectations about Renaissance drama and the standard assumptions of literary history. In the near half century since, such intellectual challenges as the Theatre of the Absurd and the New Criticism have changed the way critics think and write about drama. My approach, supported where necessary by literary and theatrical scholarship, is primarily analytical. My concern throughout is the texture of death in Renaissance tragedy, and the moral enigmas presented there.

The opening chapter of the dissertation sets out the medieval traditions of paraliturgical eschatology and early moral plays. Death itself provides the matrix for critical readings of some fifteen tragedies including Doctor Faustus, The Revenger's Tragedy, The Duchess of Malfi, and The Broken Heart. The language, atmosphere, and drama of death grow into the powerful monstrosity of Marlowe, the grotesque irony of Marston and Tourneur, the cryptic awareness of Webster, the sensual pathos of Ford. As well, there are many critical comparisons to be made along the way: domestic tragedy retains the homiletic aim of the earlier moralities; the soul, devalued in Middleton's dramaturgy, dies before our eyes in Macbeth. The tragic dramatists know that death touches at the very heart of man's definition, and use it as the deepest symbol of human inevitability.

Abbreviations

<u>ELH</u>	<u>English Literary History</u>
<u>ELN</u>	<u>English Language Notes</u>
<u>ELR</u>	<u>English Literary Renaissance</u>
<u>HLQ</u>	<u>Huntington Library Quarterly</u>
<u>JEGP</u>	<u>Journal of English and Germanic Philology</u>
<u>MLQ</u>	<u>Modern Language Quarterly</u>
<u>MLR</u>	<u>Modern Language Review</u>
<u>MP</u>	<u>Modern Philology</u>
<u>PMLA</u>	<u>Publications of the Modern Language Association</u>
<u>PQ</u>	<u>Philological Quarterly</u>
<u>SEL</u>	<u>Studies in English Literature: 1500-1900</u>
<u>SP</u>	<u>Studies in Philology</u>
<u>TSLL</u>	<u>Texas Studies in Literature and Language</u>

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Chapter I

"Goddys Masangere": Death and the Medieval Traditions of Drama

Man's encounter with death is an inherently dramatic event. We ritualize it, mythologize it, hold it up as penitential example and, yes, dramatize it with loving seriousness. Death is a universal provoker of truth--and has been, ever since man could form the existential question: given the inevitability of death, how am I to act? And how man acts in the face of death seemed to pose a real problem to the early religious drama, in which death made frequent allegorical appearances:

I am deth goddys masangere
All myghty god hath sent me here
yon lordeyn to Sle with-owtyn dwere
for his wykkyd werkynge.

("The Death of Herod,"
Coventry, ll. 177-80)

I am Dethe that no man dredeth--
For every man I reste--and no man spareth.

(Everyman, ll. 115-116)¹

Such first-person announcements would have been problematic for the secular Renaissance stage in England, and seem quaintly extraneous to modern man's heightened self-consciousness. It is difficult to fear the overt. But it is in death, and in the attendant feeling of doomed reality, that tragedy begins. In this opening chapter, I intend to set out some Christian perspectives on death through scripture, penitential

literature, and the evolving religious drama of the Middle Ages. The ritual known as the Dance of Death grows out of this extra-ecclesiastical context and, with its cryptic verses and patterned action, demonstrates effects that are well on the way toward fully realized tragic drama.

In the medieval world, death inspires the imagination with fear and remembrance. As a preaching tool, it can affect an audience in the deepest personal manner. Looking into the darkness of his mortality, man finds a hapless truth about himself that both ennobles and disgusts. Pope Innocent III used death for just this effect in his enormously influential treatise De Contemptu Mundi. The argument maintains St. Augustine's ascetic rejection of life in the flesh in favor of spiritual glorification. This mortified scholasticism was of extreme importance to the medieval mind which, in an age of faith, saw death as the last consequence of a life of defining sin. As a result, death was linked directly to judgment, where men and their doings would appear in their true light and earthly deception would be impossible.

Meditation on the four "last things"--death, judgment, heaven, hell--was the proper attitude of piety for the human mind. Contemplation of death helped elevate the spirit. By comparison, this transitory world of flesh was only fit for scorn, and the chastening symbol of death proved the uselessness of worldly impulse. Indeed, early English ecclesiastical tracts with expressive titles like Ayenbite of Inwit, The Pricke of Conscience, and The Craft of Deying passed into popular understanding as the Middle Ages registered its cry of "memento mori!" to posterity. The resultant possibilities were as extreme as medieval reality itself: the black terror of hell on the one hand, the golden apotheosis of heaven on the other, and the nebulous area of purgatory as academic

process between glory and damnation.²

The ritual surrounding death refines emotion and understanding in a truly striking manner: there is intense seriousness, truth, realization. Drama grows out of such ritual, as in the burial of William Marshal-- Regent of England in the time of Henry III and secret member of the Knights Templar--who gave express (and somewhat heretical) directions to be wrapped in his Templar's robes on his deathbed. Similarly John Donne, four hundred years later, would pose in his burial shroud for the preliminary sketches of a death effigy. Both men saw themselves as performing final truths, as settling accounts before making that final and ultimate change of role.³ And what could be more starkly truthful or unabashedly theatrical than the ubiquitous medieval iconography of death? Where the decay of death is not actually celebrated, the fame of life is prominently remembered. In the tomb of William Longespée (c. 1230-40) at Salisbury Cathedral, the conventional figure of the eternally resting knight is laid amidst martial finery, its head gently inclined to one side. At Dorchester in Oxfordshire, an unknown knight of the later thirteenth century is remembered by an effigy that depicts him forever in the act of drawing his sword. The most cursory view of medieval tomb effigies reveals a plethora of contemplative and allegorical postures: praying hands (in England usually lopped off because of later ethical aversion to drama in the period 1642-60), genuflections, and book-readings. Often there is a dramatic foreshortening, as in the two-tiered tomb of Alice, Duchess of Suffolk, at Ewelme. On the upper level this granddaughter of Chaucer is cast in loving detail, her features (almost surely a portrait) composed in an attitude of prayer. On the lower tier, however, a cadaver is carved, graphically depicting the dead

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one's state of decomposition.⁴ An emphasis on physical rot and decay is conventional for this period, but none is more dramatic than the effect struck by the tomb of René of Chalons: a partially decomposed skeleton stands, holding his heart aloft in an attitude of address appropriate to Hamlet or Vindice!⁵

A deep sense of mortality pervaded ethical thought in the Middle Ages and it, in turn, informed art and expression. The traditions expanded themselves out of Christian asceticism, where meditation on death was clearly the most widely used and intensely cultivated means to self-knowledge. Rigorous self-examination tended to glorify spirituality by personal mortification, and this extreme awareness led man to timeless verities that cut through the vanity and mutability of earthly existence. The essential truth for mankind lay in the memento mori of the ascetic orders, and their meditational method seems to have been popularly appropriated to raise a tireless chorus of the commonplaces of mortality: "In the midst of life we are in death," "As I am, so shall you be." Johan Huizinga is lucid on this point:

All that the meditations on death of the monks of yore had produced, was now condensed into a very primitive image. This vivid image, continually impressed upon all minds, had hardly assimilated more than a single element of the great complex of ideas relating to death, namely, the sense of the perishable nature of all things. It would seem, at times, as if the soul of the declining Middle Ages only succeeded in seeing death under this aspect.

While it is easy to exaggerate death as a preoccupation of the Middle Ages, the conception of man as mere "food for worms" was intense; and Theodore Spencer saw this feeling expressing itself, in part, in heightened realism in medieval objects of devotion.⁷ Instead of merely

espousing doctrine, religious art, in its new realism, demanded emotional response. The medieval mind responded by relishing the vivid detail of Christ's suffering and death in a vicarious manner. Indeed the Franciscan and Dominican orders, which began during this period, saw imitation of Christ's deprivation and suffering as their very impetus. This austerity, coupled with its emotional basis, imbued the period with a deeply felt self-consciousness, and the common mind with a submissive acceptance of worldly decay and mutability. Huizinga ascribed a great deal of the medieval attitude to a popular notion of the time which held that the bodies of some saints had never decayed. By comparison, sinful man held his mortal drossness in contempt, as, "a kind of spasmodic reaction against an excessive sensuality."⁸

The Old Testament has plenty of precedents for an attitude of corruption and decay, though, in the New Testament, the ancient Hebrew mortalism was eventually replaced by the Greek concept of immortality. The medieval mind seemed to cherish the religious extremes of each example. The Hebrew people accepted a death which they believed was conferred upon them by a God of ineffable power. As all things in nature died, so did they; yet the people as a whole survived, and there was no questioning the divine plan for the tribe. But the collective good and survival ethic of Jewish theology, where man is a part of nature's process, was modified by the personal salvation of Christian teaching which refined the dust-to-dust formula of Ecclesiastes. While ancient Hebrew philosophers were men of nature and tribal lore, the New Testament apostles were optimistic proponents of idealism and personal immortality. The Greek philosophers were more conceptual and academic--men of the city, in fact--and the New Testament epistles are written to

men in cities. The gentle cynicism of historical experience that prevails in the Old Testament yielded to a faith in the New Testament that was joyous in its discovery of salvation. But, while the feudal bias of the medieval mind most certainly accepted the New Testament message of faith, it looked back with nostalgia to the ancient purity of the Hebrew tribes in all their forbidding physicality. Faith was now a matter of isolated self-consciousness, and death an intensely private experience--as seen in the personal conversion of St. Paul, and in the lonely suffering of Jesus. One may be identified as a brother in Christ, but immortality is strictly one's own immortality. Such jealous desire for personal immortality, set against clear Old Testament statements of bodily corruption, combined for horrific effect in the religious self-consciousness, dogma, and apprehension of medieval Europe.

As a result, man's attitude to death undergoes a massive shift in focus that redefines his very being. Death is no longer accepted as a biological harmony with human life, but engaged as a mystery of the eternal--and a fearful one at that. For the Christian, death takes on broad metaphorical connotations; and Lloyd Bailey Sr. notes, "Mortality, within this larger sphere of 'death', is thus not ultimately an acceptable manifestation of the Creator's will and wisdom, but an intrusion into and perversion of his will," citing St. Paul in support of his view: "For he [Christ] must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. / The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death" (1 Corinthians 15:25-26).⁹ So death is given a character note, is made into the great antagonist. Man is expected to follow Christ's example, because mortality is a horror to be ultimately overcome. Here is dramatic conflict allowing tragic possibilities, where before there was only

instinctual acceptance of a teleology beyond man's comprehension. Little wonder that the Gospels and Epistles emphasize and explicate Christ's death to the extent they do. The knowledge of Christ's resurrection empowers the Christian to act, to characterize himself, to "walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4). In short, man himself is given a character note: a participatory identity in the drama of life.

Johan Huizinga argues that man's cultural existence is fundamentally dramatic¹⁰--and the action of death must clearly be of utmost importance to that existence. As a personified character, however, Death as simple enemy became Death as the messenger of God--the incontrovertible master of reality. The Hundred Years' War dragged on in sporadic but often savage combat, infant survival was low; and the ravages of plague swept medieval Europe with gruesome finality. The horrible familiarity with death, both on the battlefield or "safe" at home, made prayer for deliverance the only answer. The territorial conflicts of feudal lords and monarchs were little more comprehensible than the medical mysteries underlying the ravages of plague. Men felt themselves to be somehow morally reprehensible; that the pestilence was some form of mysterious punishment from above, even though a grotesquely coincidental poem of the period, the didactic Ratis Raving, endeavored to describe the seven stages of man's life with deathly lucidity. Robert Henryson's "Ane Prayer for the Pest" expressed conventional remorse in colorful language:

Haif rewth, lord, of thyn awin similitude,
Puniſ with pety and nocht with violens;
We knaw it is for our ingratitude
That we ar punist with thiſ pestillens.

(ll. 45-48) ¹¹

Death on such a massive scale made man an active--if unwilling--

participant, and the most vivid symbol of this deathly interaction is the curiously appealing Dance of Death. Known in Germany as "Totentanz," in France as "La Danse de Morts," this strange motif gained popularity as the "Danse Macabre" in England, translated by the fifteenth-century monk, John Lydgate. Originally, the French verses accompanied a graphic depiction of dancing skeletons and living partners on the cloister wall of the Church of the Holy Innocents in Paris.¹² But it is a dance of "Death," rather than of "the dead," as Death, variously represented, bids each character to dance away worldly pomp, ambition, and worry with singular assuredness. Every stratum of society is included, from the Pope down to the ignorant poor man, and each character accepts the invitation. The dramatic context is grimly clear: ubiquitous death comes dispassionately to all, regardless of situation, personal history, or social class.

The motif seems to be an expansion of the legend of the Three Living and the Three Dead, where three (often noble) huntsmen, in the farthest reaches of the forest, encounter their own future corpses and receive a lecture on the vanity of worldly hopes and ambitions. This is a stock feature of medieval sermons. The call to penitence is concomitant with the memento mori, and the Dance of Death enactment is a mere extrapolation. Indeed, historical accounts and reconstructions of "choreomania" aside,¹³ it seems certain that the para-ecclesiastical nature of the Dance of Death was peculiarly suited to the death-obsessed spirit of the age. Such a spirit caused Douglas Gray to wonder if "homilists and moralists were, or felt, forced to find novel, even melodramatic, ways of arousing penitence and emotion."¹⁴ Likewise, Ernst Moritz Manasse states "It is as though the increased interest in

the affairs of the 'world,' which is a characteristic of this period, made people sense more intensely what violence they must suffer from Death."¹⁵ Certainly one of the most lucid of The Canterbury Tales, the Pardoner's Tale, is a clever reworking of the legend of the Three Dead-- "For lewed people loven tales old" (l. 437)--and it very nearly succeeds in its fraudulent attempt to stir the penitential almsgiving of the pilgrims.¹⁶ But where death is used as a penitential weapon, there is little room for emotional complexity or compassionate understanding. The Host's unsophisticated and literalistic reaction to the Doctor's tale of Apius and Virginia--

I seye al day that men may see
That yiftes of Fortune and of Nature
Been cause of deeth to many a creature--
(ll. 294-96)

makes him an easy mark for the beguiling Pardoner. There are many variations on the sermonist's theme, but they all emphasize a basic tragic sense: pity for the death of others, fear for the death of oneself.

It seems paradoxical that this period, ever conscious of Christ's symbolic triumph over death, should wish to enact so vividly death's triumph over man. Yet the Dance of Death is in conformity with the macabre imagination that inspired the gruesome burial effigies so common to this period. There is an element of acquiescence and weird celebration in the Dance of Death: grinning skeletons, their comic angular poses, their ludicrous insistence on dancing. Knowledge of physiology had advanced to the point where the skeleton had become the concrete and universal symbol for death--a symbol grotesquely attached to man's own living experience instead of the insubstantial and

imaginative wraithlike figures of earlier times.¹⁷ As symbol, then, it, struck the mind of medieval man with a powerful urgency that bypassed social, economic, and political lines. The Pardon Churchyard of St. Paul's Cathedral had a Dance of Death similar to the one in Paris, and Lydgate, having visited there, took it upon himself to supply English verses: "To translatyn' al . Oute of the frensshe / machabres daunce" (ll. 23-24).¹⁸

In his "translator's" preface, Lydgate sets the didactic tone--"This worlde / is but a pilgrimage"; (l. 37)--before setting out the responsive dialogue of his poem. Each character speaks for his own social class, with the exception of "Maistir John Rikele / some tyme Tregetour . Of noble Harry / kynge of Engeland" (ll. 513-514): Biographical theories abound, but I think the curious inclusion of Henry V's jester cum troubadour acts as a timeless reminder of the premature haste every age takes in heaping immortality on its popular performers. Lydgate also deviates from the French original by adding a princess as well as a cryptic concluding character called "Machabre the doctour" who draws the moral:

Man is not ellis / platly for to thinke .
 But as a winde / wiche is transitorie .
 Passinge ay forthe / whither he wake or winke .
 Towarde this daunce / have this in memorie .
 Remembringe ay / ther is no bet victorie .
 In this life here / than fle synne at the leste .
 Than shul ye regne / in paradys with glorie .
 Happy is he / that maketh in hevene his feste .
 (ll. 641-48)

Lydgate misunderstood "Machabre" to be the name of the poem's original author, and the English word "macabre" (admitted by the O.E.D. to be of doubtful origin) has been connected with the Dance of Death ever since.¹⁹

Death in the Middle Ages was much more public than now, something more like a daily occurrence than a modern medical mistake. Death-carts for plague victims, and continual--often multiple--burials were a plain and public feature of life. The Dance of Death, as a result, seems due in part to death's universal unpredictability and to the equally arbitrary survival of life. Joy and terror, pity and relief entwined as harsh opposites with no specifically religious function other than to announce and enact death's defining characteristics in an inevitable, if somewhat gruesome, dance. This social reaction was legitimized by the belief that pestilence was God's punishment, and death the messenger that bruited it abroad. Indeed, the first stanza of Lydgate's preface to The Dance Macabre is as much a reminder of plague as a deathly call for repentance:

O yee folkes / harde hertid as a stone
 Wich to the worlde / have al your aduertence
 Liche as it shulde / last evere in oone
 Where is your witt / wher is your prudence
 To se afor / the sodeine violence
 Of cruel dethe / that be so wis and sage
 Whiche sleeth allas / by stroke of pestilence
 Bothe yong and olde / of lowe & hy parage
 (11.1-8)

The medieval preoccupation with death might equally be seen as a gruesome familiarity impossible to comprehend in a safer and less ascetic time. Because of this, E.P. Hammond's allegations of "dull sense perceptions" and "low creative power" in the age is an illegitimate reading of nineteenth-century mores into a completely different esthetic.²⁰ Such adverse conceptions stem from a prejudice that usually sees the Middle Ages as a period of ignorance and barbarism. Yet the intellectual generosity of a Christian humanist like Sir Thomas More could quite

easily grasp the sober efficacy of the Dance of Death:

What profit and commodity cometh unto man's soul by the meditation of death is not only marked of (i.e. observed in) the chosen people of God, but also of such as were the best sort among gentiles and paynims. For some of the old famous philosophers when they were demanded what faculty philosophy was, answered that it was the meditation or exercise of death. For like as death maketh a severance of the body and the soul, when they by course of nature must needs depart asunder, so (said they) doth the study of philosophy labour to sever the soul from the love and affections of the body while they be together. . . . We were never so greatly moved by the beholding of the Dance of Death pictured in Paul's, as we shall feel ourselves stirred and altered by the feeling of that imagination in our hearts. And no marvel. For these pictures express only the figure of dead, bony bodies, bitten away the flesh; which though it be ugly to behold, yet neither the light thereof nor the sight of all the dead heads in the charnel house, nor the apparition of a very ghost, is half so grisly as the deep conceived fantasy of death in his nature, by the lively imagination graven in thine own heart. 21

Protestant reform slowly eroded the grisly verities of the Catholic world, only to introduce conceptualized horrors of its own like predestined damnation and complete personal responsibility. This neo-asceticism only helped return man to his deepest impressions about death, however, and to the "last things" as the ultimate dramatic tension in an emerging world of material preferment. This is the grotesque tragic irony that comes in for such scrupulous treatment in the later drama of Webster, Marston, and Tourneur: an enduring milieu of macabre festivity couples with skeletal iconography in ghastly plots of murder that register tragic effect. The gravediggers, along with Yorick's inspirational skull, maintain this intense irony in Hamlet. Here, however, G.R. Owst notes an early sense of doom and genuine tragic feeling in the sermons of the celebrated Dominican preacher John Bromyard:

Bromyard . . . contrasts the state of him who once "was strong as a boxer, who was wont to fight, to smite, to leap, to raise the hand in dances and sing loudly ditties of inordinate love" with that of the same man, now scarcely able to move his feet at the call of nature, lift hands to feed himself, drive away the flies from his mouth, or even turn from side to side in his own bed of weakness.²²

The striking contrast needs no comment other than reiteration of the medieval concept of death as a release from a life of sinful dross, as a heroic desire for expiation. Such graphic sermonizing, with its attendant promise of reward, reinforced the early devotional drama and its major penitential truth--inexorable death.

The earliest church drama had a specifically religious function which grew out of the liturgy and into the Corpus Christi cycle of indigenous English drama. Death, within this early drama, enjoys a fully realized allegorical role--and an extremely theatrical one at that. As K.S. Block noted in her introduction to the Ludus Coventriae, "The most dramatic passage in the series is, perhaps, the unnoted entrance of Death in the midst of the revelry of Herod and his knights."²³ During Herod's celebration of the massacre of the innocents, "Mors" slinks in and raucously exclaims: "Ow I herde a page make preysyng of pride" ("Death of Herod;" l. 168). Confronted with death, Herod the king is merely a page; and Mors, having declared himself "goddys masangere" (l. 177), descants on the nature of his own conquering power:

I am sent fro god deth is my name
 All thyng that is on grownd I welde at my wylle
 both man and beste and byrdys wylde and tame
 Whan that I come them to . with deth I do them kylle.
 (ll. 181-84)

The language is conventionalized but powerful, reminiscent of Death's unperturbed assuredness in the Dance of Death. And Death himself concludes the "Death of Herod" play in terms that evoke the same grim pathos as medieval funerary sculpture:

Amonges wormys as I yow telle
 Undyr the erth shul ye dwelle
 and thei shul Etyen both flesch and felle
 As thei have don me.
 (ll. 281-84)

The archetypal "dead man" in Christian tradition is Lazarus, and the interpretations of his story in the mystery cycles present some new aspects of death. First, there is no allegorical characterization of death, though the mourning sisters and the many comforters often bewail its effect. Secondly, the death-to-life miracle of Lazarus prefigures Christ's own death and resurrection, as well as the resurrection and final judgment of all men. Kolve even uses the Lazarus story as an exemplar of the figural interpretation of the cycle as a whole: "A figure (Lazarus) is fulfilled (by the Resurrection of Christ) and this becomes itself a figure (for the general resurrection before Doomsday)."²⁴ It is significant too that the raising of Lazarus is the only miracle of Christ's ministry to be presented as a pageant on its own, and Rosemary Woolf's point is well-taken:

It surpasses in strangeness and power the healing of the blind and the lame, and touches the imagination more forcibly than the other miraculous restorations to life which took place more instantly after death. It could therefore be taken to stand for all Christ's miracles.²⁵

Again death's power as universal penitential tool is emphasized. The lack of an actual "figure" of death only adds mystery to the fascination

of the miracle--here is a man who entered into the finality of death; and yet he returned to live among men again!

The story, however, undergoes markedly different treatment in the Coventry and Towneley cycles. Lazarus, in the Ludus Coventriae, simply drops off, leaving Martha and Mary to face public rebuke for their uncontained grief. But Jesus, at his arrival, shows tears to be the appropriate response. He then dramatically calls forth Lazarus, and concludes the pageant in rather pedestrian fashion by overt explication of its prefigural content:

Now I have shewyd in opyn syght
of my godhed the gret glorie
to-ward my passyon I wyl me dyght
the tyme is nere that I must deye
For all mankynde his sowle to bye.
(ll. 449-53)

The Towneley "Lazarus" has more impact. In a play less than half the length of the Coventry pageant, Lazarus is dead at the outset. This clever foreshortening focuses attention immediately and solely upon death. Jesus again commands him to arise, and Lazarus does so to deliver a monologue that, while it assembles the typical tags of decay, far surpasses meditational convention in its effect:

And let me be youre boke,
 youre sampill take by me;
Fro dede you cleke in cloke,
 sich shall ye all be.

.....
Under the erthe ye shall / thus carefully then cowche;
The royfe of youre hall / youre nakyd nose shall towche;
Nawther great ne small / To you will knele ne crowche;
A shete shall be youre pall / sich todys shall be youre nowche;
Todys shall you dere,
Feyndys will you fere,
youre flesh that fare was here
Thus rufully shall rote;

In stede of fare colore
 sich bandy shall binde youre throte.
 (ll. 121-44)²⁶

Lazarus figuratively takes his hearers back inside the casket with him, in this excerpt from a sermon that makes up over half the Towneley play. The Dance of Death disregard³ for class or beauty is evident, as is the dire inevitability in Lazarus' deathly tone. Using himself as example, he points to his own empty eye orbits (l. 148)--convincing theatrical makeup is necessary--and, still wrapped in his winding sheet, strikes a pose similar to that of Death itself: a pose pictured on the south wall of the Lady Chapel, Salisbury Cathedral.²⁷ The shrouded figure pictured there addresses a young gallant and points meaningfully at some dead bodies, whose graves are represented by coffins or boxes. These stage properties were used in the mystery plays as well--much more effective dramatically than an imagined hole in the ground. Compare this powerful dramaturgy, along with the Towneley Lazarus' language of decay, to the Coventry Lazarus' simple acquiescence:

My wynde is stoppyd gon is my breth
 And deth is come to make myn ende
 to god in hevyn my sowle I qweh
 Farwell systeryn for hens I wende.
 (ll. 105-108)

By contrast, the sense of inexorable ruin in the Towneley play approaches the tragic in its concrete, personal, and unwavering expression, and in its powerful feeling of loss. While grief overcome is the main topic of the Coventry pageant, a striking note of tragic possibility comes near the conclusion of the Towneley play, and is spoken by Lazarus himself:

Amende the man, whils thou art here,
 Agane thou go an othere gate;
 When thou art dede and laide on bere,
 Wyt thou well thou bees to late;
 For if all the goode that ever thou gate
 Were delt for the after thi day,
 In heven it wolde not mende thi state,
 Forthi amende the Whils thou may.
 (11. 182-89)

It is the irrevocability of life that brings on the fearful note, the terrible "Whils" that makes man shudder in introspection. The Lazarus episode certainly presents a miracle of faith open to mortal man, but only at a wonderfully immortal remove. Johan Huizinga tells of the popular medieval belief that Lazarus, after his resurrection, lived in continual morbid fear of having to face death again; and Martha, in the gospel, expresses real concern about her brother's offensive state of decomposition: "Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days" (John 11:39). Woolf's analysis is again expressive and pointed: "That Lazarus, however, could know from personal experience of the horrors of decay of the tomb is of course a poetic fancy without theological basis, though in meditative literature the squalidness of the grave and the pains of hell seem to merge as though they were both part of one appalling torment."²⁸

Death's pervading character in the unstable state of life is well-stressed in the earliest extant morality play, The Pride of Life. While homiletic concerns are of prime importance in the allegorical moralities, this play is a powerful piece on death's certainty which, as editor Norman Davis puts it, "has obvious affinities with the Dance of Death."²⁹ And the play's dramatic power is also accentuated by the inadvertent "Mrs. Grundy" effect of its fragmentary state. While he is feared,

reviled, debated over, even challenged, the allegorical character Death does not appear. But he doesn't have to. Where death is involved the ending is easily inferred, and a lengthy prologue spells out the inevitable before the play even begins.

The overwhelming might of Death is pitted against the complacent pride of Life. Characterized as a king (Rex Vivus), Life expresses a deluded sense of personal invincibility with archetypal fervor. "I schal lyve evermo" (l. 175), he boasts, and insists on the power of his own self-conception: "I ne schal never dye / For I am King of Life" (ll. 211-212). Such ill-considered communiqués naturally worry Life's queen, who seems to embody the spirituality and reason that King Life lacks. Unfortunately, Life is too assured of his own prowess to heed any cautionary suggestions about his conduct. Having already rebuffed his Queen's warnings with arch mistrust--"woldistow that I were dede / That thou might have a new?" (ll. 195-96), and "This nis bot women tale" (l. 209)--he now gloats with the ignorant pride of a confirmed bully:

What prehistou of Dethis might
 And of his maistrye?
 He ne durst onis with me fight
 For his both eye.

(ll. 239-42)

Life appeals to his allegorical henchmen, Strength and Health, who assure him of his physical might, and promise to humiliate Death in battle. Thus Life's pride is corroborated and inflated through his own brazen egoism. The religious figure of the Bishop is required to intercede, and his touching sermon weaves social complaint into a strong memento mori theme. Finally, he addresses King Life personally:

Thynk, Schir Kyng, one othir trist--
 That tyng misst son.
 * That thou lev now as ye list,
 Deth wol cum rit son.

And give ye dethis wounde
 For thin outrage;
 Within a litil stounde
 Then artou but a page.
 (11. 435-42)

The King of Life is (as Herod learned in the mysteries) only a page of Death. Instead of heeding the Bishop's spiritual counsel, however, Life boldly dispatches his messenger Mirth--doubtless his last vestige of living indulgence--to challenge Death to open combat. Life's pride is maddeningly suicidal, and the gesture would be ridiculous if it were not so figuratively pathetic. The play breaks off at just this crucial point, but the outcome is inevitable, as the Prologue has already revealed.

Yet there is an inadvertent structural sophistication about The Pride of Life that is singular in this period's drama. The parallelism of Life and his messenger Mirth opposing God and his messenger Death is a true dramatic crisis with tragic potential. J.M.R. Margeson notes the play's similarity in arrangement to the Dance of Death, and sees a generic type in the play's action that he refers to as the "Pride of Life morality," separate from the more familiar "Temptation and Fall."³⁰ Man is seen as climactically rebellious rather than extensively flawed. Like the Dance of Death, the play focuses on death's utter inescapability along with its attendant feeling of personal doom. Faced with death, man realizes that reprieve is impossible and that other life-experiences are not worth considering. And the dramatic foreshortening that introduces Life at the height of his deluded powers--"King ic am, kinde of kingis ikorre" (1.121)--just before Death arrives

is a stronger crisis than the massively diverse and episodic struggle in the Temptation and Fall, morality, The Castle of Perseverance. Even here the confrontation with death is crucial, however, and it marks the turning point in Mankind's ('Humanum Genus') career. He has grown into an avaricious adult; and, frenzied over his riches, Mankind is oblivious as Mors arrives with the pointed observation:

Ageyns me is no defens.
In the grete pestelens
Thanne was I wel knowe.

But now almost I am forgete;
Men of Deth holde no tale..
In coveytyse here good they gete;
The grete fyschys ete the smale;
(ll. 2814-20)³¹

Death expressing a social conscience is unprecedented, but the sentiment echoes that of the Bishop in The Pride of Life: "Thai farit as fisis in a pol / The gret eteit the smal" (ll. 361-62). And the allusion to plague is conventional, if not usually so nostalgic. As well, it is surprising to hear Death betray even a hint of interest in the mutable mores of men. Yet even death is not the end in this somewhat over-structured and complex moral comedy. The plot still requires intercessionary submissions on Mankind's behalf by the four "daughters" of God, in conformity with the biblical promise: "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other" (Psalm 85:10). Mark Eccles is astute to point out that "The greater scope of the play and the long-windedness of its speeches keep The Castle of Perseverance from achieving the concentrated intensity of Everyman."³² Along with Everyman, I believe we could add the fragmentary Pride of Life. What The Castle of Perseverance does achieve, however, is substantial: a

sweeping view of challenges, choices, small gains, and real fear. It is an encyclopedic allegory on the nature of man's mind; and if the ethical conclusion is conventional, it is something King Life, in all his glory, was incapable of apprehending:

To save you fro synnyng
 Evyr at the begynnyng
 Thynk on youre last endyng!
 (ll. 3646-48)

Although death is only an episode in the overall design of The Castle of Perseverance, it is still embodied allegorically and is a crucial moment of real dramatic tension that is set aside from other encounters by virtue of its vicarious impact and sheer theatricality. Death on the stage attracts attention in a way that other actions (allegorical or otherwise) simply cannot. This is the ultimate encounter, the ultimate experience. In life, it is the only part of the script that cannot be cut. And the late morality play Everyman--arguably the apex of the tradition--presents death as the play's first principle; thus the Prologue:

Here begynneth a treatyse how the hye Fader of heven sendeth
 Dethe to somon every creature to come and gyve a-counte of
 theyr lyves in this worlde / and is in maner of a moral play.

The messenger (almost certainly doubling as Death) draws the conventional moral at the outset:

Man, in the begynnyng
 Loke well, and take good heed to the endyng,
 Be you never so gay!

(ll. 10-12)

As in The Pride of Life and in the Towneley Lazarus pageant, Death defines

the dramatic conflict from the very beginning.

To open with Death's deputization as God's "myghty messengere"(1.63) is a bold stroke directly opposite to the technique of The Castle of Perseverance, where the lifetime psychomachia begins with the naked infant Humanum Genus. Here, the strategic foreshortening of Everyman throws immediate doubt on the finding of Dennis Moran: "The time allowed Everyman projects the fullness of life's experience, defined and circumscribed, as Everyman is made to recognize, by the natural fact of death," and "Everyman's achievement is not cheaply or superficially won; it is the result of a progressive experience through life and disillusionment, culminating with a satisfying intellectual and psychological exactness in knowledge."³³ But Everyman's time is up; and, while his achievement might indeed be satisfying, his "fullness of life's experience" is seen only through reported hindsight. Everyman does not warrant the trust that Moran invests in him. As he is a desultory materialist from the outset, his life-experiences really amount to nothing in the face of Death, where his Goode Dedes are so weak and unexercised they cannot walk (ll. 485-98), and a constant reliance on Goodes only yields its telling confession: "My condycyon is mannes soul to kyll" (l. 442). Moreover, Everyman is faced with his own end. Death insists, "Come hens, and not tary!" (l. 130) and, in response to Everyman's plea, "Gentyll Deth, spare me tyll to-morowe"(1. 173), coldly objects,

Naye, therto I, wyll not consent,
Nor no man wyll I respyte;
But to the herte sodeynly I shall smyte
Without ony advysement.

(ll. 176-79)

But Everyman is imperviously venial, and there is a real chill to Death's dispassionate observation of the poor worldling: "Loo, yonder I se Fveryman walkynge" (l. 80). Everyman is marked for the cosmic grading process that begins with death; and the sheer unexpectedness of the event is striking. This is Death from the outside, exhorting Everyman to undertake an allegorical journey from which he will never return, but also death from the inside, as shown by the bewildered victim's disbelief and earnest request for delay: "O Deth, thou comest whan I had the leest in mynde!" (l. 119); "dyfferre this mater tyll an other daye" (l. 123). People confronted with death naturally react like this. But Death is the ultimate in impartiality, and Everyman's attempt at bribery only prefigures his pathetic reliance on Goodes later. Death has no interest whatsoever in worldly wealth or power, and describes himself as, quite simply, opposite to life:

I set not by golde, sylver, nor rychesse,
 Ne by pope / emperour / kynge / duke, ne prynces;
 For, and I wolde receyve gyftes grete,
 All the worlde I myght gete;
 But my custome is clene contrary.
 (ll. 125-29)

Death sings the ringing inevitabilities of the earlier Dance of Death. He is on an irreversible mission from God, and his democratizing disregard for social status is typical. To Death, Everyman is just another soul to be separated from a perishable body.

Everyman's journey becomes a lesson in self-reliance before the Almighty. One by one his friends, family, and investments drop off, leaving him utterly alone. Fellashyp, indignantly concerned at first, assures him, "I wyll not forsake the to my lyves ende" (l. 213); but

even he recoils in horror at Everyman's disclosure: "Deth was with me here" (l. 264). While the blandishments of earthly companionship are cherished necessities of life, Everyman is now claimed for dead and can rely only on his personal God-given assets: "Dyscrecyon," "Strengthe," "Fyve Wyttes," and "Beaute," as introduced through Knowledge and Goode Dedes. Yet his personal allegorical features are still outside elements to prop him up, rather than internalized features of a personality. Thomas Van Laan detects a rising action which he likens to the pattern of Fortune's wheel;³⁴ but Everyman would not be "every man" if he were at the height of Fortune's wheel when Death arrived. He is complacent and worldly, but clearly without power. Unlike King Life, Everyman never shows the defiance necessary to enact tragic struggle. His main feature is his sheer ordinariness. Indeed the moral of the play is to be found in vicarious feeling for the simple, single protagonist, not in the glorious grief (however inchoate in The Pride of Life) of a fall from high estate. If anything, Everyman degrades himself by righteously accepting his own scourging after confession. Goldhamer notes that "This painful act, of reconsideration of faults, brings release. He is able to see himself as a whole person and to accept his good deeds even while admitting his weaknesses."³⁵ As an adjunct to his dying body, Everyman literally and figuratively beats the sins of his flesh to death. Death for Everyman is a separation of body from soul in the first place, and the extreme symbolism of flagellation mortifies the flesh as it liberates the soul in its extrawordly search for salvation.

Everyman throws himself on God's mercy, and his salvation is assured. Unlike the many suppliant in The Castle of Perseverance, however, Goode Dedes takes up Everyman's part with the simple, selfless

plea:

Shorte our ende and mynysshe our payne;
 Let us go and never come agayne.
 (ll. 878-79)

Though everything of worldly note forsakes him, his good deeds act as
 Everyman's best recommendation in heaven. The Doctor's epilogue explains:

This morall men may have in mynde.
 Ye herers, take it of worth, olde and yonge,
 And forsake Pryde, for he deceyveth you in the ende;
 And remembre Beaute, V. Wyttes, Strength, & Dyscrecyon,
 They all at the last do Everyman forsake,
 Save his Good Dedes there dothe he take.
 (ll. 902-907)

This is the penitential moral of death for all the early Christian moral
 drama. As messenger of God, Death excites deep personal feelings of fear
 and inevitability, that are entangled with cosmic conceptions of
 retribution, doom, and salvation. In the face of such overwhelming
 mystery so ineffably beyond man's comprehension, the only strategy for
 man is humble charity and obedient faith, as noted in the epilogue above
 and stated in the epilogue of another wise doctor--Lydgate's Machabre:

Yit ther be folke / mo than six or sevene
 Reckles of lyf / in many maner wise.
 Like as ther were / helle none nor hevne
 Suche false errour / lete every man dispice
 For hooly seintis / and oolde clerkis wise
 Writen contrarie / her falsnes to deface
 To lyve wel / take this for best emprice
 Is moche worth / whan men shul hens pace.,
 (ll. 649-56)

Death, in the Christian context, is not the end of everyman. Death
 is a messenger: a means to an end. And it is significant that the play
Everyman concentrates continually on state of mind rather than physical

putrefaction. To reinforce this, Death is portrayed as a dignified, steely-nerved killer, as opposed to the earlier notions of worm-blown carrion and decay. Yet the unmistakable memento mori on the title page of the original Skot print of Everyman (c. 1528/9, Huntington Library Copy)³⁶ makes sure that the traditional associations are intact. The play fuses with the underlying eschatological fixations of the age. But Death, as allegorical symbol in Everyman, transcends the earlier iconographical horrors because here it is God's mercy that is stressed, rather than His justice. And while it is difficult to agree completely with Lawrence Ryan's opinion that "Doctrinal content is the reason for being of Everyman," it must be concurred that, "Like Oedipus, Everyman discovers that it is better for a man to face reality and to learn what he really is and has, no matter what suffering the discovery may cost him, than to spend his life in pursuing illusions."³⁷ Of course what man "really" was in the medieval world was defined by exclusive opposites. The face of death perceived in this drama is two-dimensional in the sense that it promises heaven or hell, leaving no room for the special pleading of tragic circumstance. The message of God, through Death, remained a simple and constant reminder: "memento mori."

The morality mode and its struggle for righteousness is a clear forerunner of later complications in secular tragedy. Everyman's worldly pride makes damnation a real possibility; and Death, as God's messenger, is totally impartial if not decidedly sinister. W.A. Davenport adroitly notes that the tragic possibilities of Everyman are lost in the service of didacticism;³⁸ and, for all the early moral plays, tragic damnation is averted through enduring faith, good works, or extrawordly intercession. I think it is correct to assume that the action of the drama is basically

a means to advance homiletic concerns. But, at the same time, I also agree with Michael Kelley, who refuses to accept the term "dramatized sermon," and argues, "The plays do give moral information--demonstrating the pitfalls of sin and man's need to repent--but this is commonplace, familiar material by the time the moralities appear, and they present it so grandly and with such flamboyant ornamentation that their elaborate forms often eclipse the instruction."³⁹ As well, J.M.R. Margeson's opinion is instructive:

The religious drama provided to the dramatic imagination certain characteristic situations of undeniable tragic force, and a religious vision of the meaning of such experiences. It saw the universe divided between forces of evil and forces of good, and man's nature divided also between rebellion and obedience--a view which seemed to make tragic experience inevitable, even if contained within a larger providential scheme that was not tragic. The predicament of innocence in a world that is defiantly and cruelly evil, and the predicament of the sinner who discovers the nature of his sin and the terror of rebellion against God, become the heritage of the later drama in a number of vivid dramatic images.⁴⁰

Of course the secular stage that produced such magnificent tragedies as Doctor Faustus, Macbeth, and The Duchess of Malfi relied on a moral vision that was basically Christian too, but the timeless strain of external destiny on human self-definition, along with the internal vicissitudes of psychological conflict that result, was a matter of direct inheritance from the earliest moral drama.

Thomas Preston's Cambises, licensed in 1569, takes death, drama, and homiletic concerns in general one tentative step forward. For the purposes of this study, the play makes an effective and interesting

transition. Indeed, David Bevington has referred to Cambises as "the best known of the hybrid moralities;"⁴¹ and the dramaturgy does indicate a movement from the generalized homiletic aim of the earlier moralities to clearer statements on political virtue or Protestant polemic. Tucker Brooke, much earlier, called Cambises a "transitional interlude," and perceived in it a certain aristocratic tone that elevated it above the "provincialism" of a contemporary play like Thersites.⁴² The play presents the breakdown and punishment of an unfit king, amid terrible deaths and direful consequences. Though Cambises is primitive in its exposition, faint glimmers of later plays like Edward II and Richard II are easily discerned. And true moral complications arise in the play's action concerning allegiance, obedience, responsibility. Though Cambises the king is a harsh dispenser of justice, it is still justice. But then he declines into sheer brutality and--in the absence of psychological or doctrinaire explanation--the audience is left to wonder what went wrong. Why did Cambises do what he did? This is a new question for the tragic concerns of morality, and explains, in part, the play's enigmatic title: "A Lamentable Tragedie, mixed full of pleasant mirth . . ."⁴³

The plot requires more of a story element than a homiletic frame, and "pleasant mirth," in Cambises, is provided by a conventional vice figure with the unconventional name, Ambidexter. He provides raucous comedy with the soldiers Huf, Ruf, and Snuf, and the country rustics Hob and Lob. But it is blatant violence and terrible deaths that hold the episodic plot together. Indeed the play might be seen as actually bracketed by death, where Cambises begins the play's action by announcing that "Mors" has vanquished his father, Cyrus (l. 6), and that he is now king himself. Association with the leveling character Mors of

the earlier mysteries and moralities is immediate. Linked to this powerful sense of death at the outset is Cambises' own portentous statement:

And I, by due inheritance, possesse that princely crowne,
Ruling by sword of mighty force in place of great renowne.
(ll. 7-8)

As a result, his tyrannical misbehavior must inevitably conclude with the condign visitation of Mors upon Cambises, as promised by the conclusion of the play's full title: "his odious death by God's Iustice appointed." Besides, the name Cambises was synonymous with tyranny in Tudor England, where the notion of a mysterious and savage Arabian monarch appealed to popular sensation. Willard Farnham was the first to trace Preston's actual source to the English historian Richard Taverner and his didactic Garden of Wysdom (1539).⁴⁴ The story was a popular tale about political virtue, and Taverner clearly set out his reasons for including Cambises' story in his collection of moral anecdotes: "I thynke it here good to report certayne his notoriose crymes and his ende, to thyntent all rulers, what so ever they be, may take exemple at hym, to feare God, to preserve the common weale, to execute iustice and iudgement, to use theyr subiects as men and not as beastes."⁴⁵

Cambises' career documents a brutal misuse of power. His first act as king is to embark on a punitive war against the Egyptians. The learned judge Sisamnes is appointed to rule in Cambises' absence, and he pledges loyalty to the office in terms reminiscent of Fellowship in Everyman:

Unworthy much, O prince, am I, and for this gift unfit;
 But, sith that it hath pleasd your Grace that I in it must sit,
 I do avouch, unto my death, according to my skil,
 With equity for to observe your Graces mind and wil.

(11. 101-104)

These terms are grimly ironic, too, when Sisamnes must eventually suffer death for his abuse of influence. Showing stern justice, Cambises has the corrupt politician decapitated and flayed before the eyes of his own son. Appointing the young man in Sisamnes' vacant position, Cambises warns:

Otian thou seest thy father dead, and thou art in his roome:
 If thou beest proud, as he hath beene, even thereto shalt thou come.

(11. 467-68)

Yet Cambises himself has come back from war in Eygpt portentously heralded by the black trumpet of Shame, as opposed to the golden horn of Fame; he now begins an episodic and inexplicable decline into gratuitous brutality. He uses the son of his closest advisor, Praxaspes, for target practice to silence sudden accusations of drunkenness. The child's heart is brought to him with the arrow still in it, and Cambises' ludicrous self-satisfaction is reminiscent of King Life's:

Beholde, Praxaspes, thy sonnes owne hart! O, how well the same was hit!
 After this wine to doo this deed I thought it very fit.
 Esteem thou maist right well therby no drunkard is the king
 That in the midst of all his cups could doo this valiant thing.

(11. 563-66)

He next dispatches Cruelty and Murder to eliminate his brother Smirdis for suspected ambitions, and then forces his "cosin-jarmin" into an incestuous marriage with him.

His tyranny, however, ends as arbitrarily as it began. Amid the

pomp of banquet festivities, Cambises tries to entertain his Queen with a diverting story of two "brother whelpes" that he witnessed team up and vanquish a lion. But she ruins the cheer by crying at the story's moral, and reminding Cambises of his own fratricide:

And was this favour shewd in dogs, to shame of royall king?
 Alack, I wish these eares of mine had not once heard this thing!
 Even so should you, O mighty king, to brother beene a stay,
 And not, without offence to you, in such wise him to slay.
 (ll. 1034-37)

She is duly executed for her impertinence by the allegorical thrill-killers Cruelty and Murder, and all advisors sympathetic to her opinion are threatened with death as well, until Cambises, in a final sensational stroke, staggers onto the stage. The direction reads: "Enter the KING, without a gowne, a sword thrust up into his side, bleeding" (l. 1158 s.d.).

The death of Cambises is clearly God's punishment, as the title promised and Cambises himself realizes. "A just reward for my misdeeds my death doth plaine declare" (l. 1172), declares the now-suffering king. Abstract virtues, embodied in the three Lords, hammer home the moral at the same time as they express wonder at the event:

SECOND LORD. As he in saddle would have lept, his sword from
 sheath did goe,
 Goring him up into the side,--his life was ended so.
 THIRD LORD. His blood so fast did issue out that nought could
 him prolong;
 Yet, before he yeelded up the ghost, his hart was very
 strong.
 FIRST LORD. A just reward for his misdeeds the God above hath
 wrought,
 For certainly the life he led was to be counted nought.
 (ll. 1189-94)

Cambises' demise is a divinely sanctioned process that promises punishment for sin, and yet a curious ambivalence is demonstrated. On

one level his death is purely accidental, an inexplicable naturalistic feature of the action. Doubtless, accidental death is still dictated by God in ways that man cannot understand; as Everyman found, "I may saye Deth gyveth no warnynge!" (l. 132). But here, while Cambises exclaims, "Death hath caught me with his dart" (l. 1170), the allegorical figure is never actually present, as he was in Everyman, and as other motivating figures of Cambises' decline are: "Shame" (who heralded his return "with a trump blacke" [l. 340 s.d.]), "Ambidexter" (who whispered hearsay about his brother's plot to supplant him [ll. 676-81]), and "Cupid" (who shot Cambises with love as he looked upon his "cosin-jarmin" [l. 880 s.d.]). The figures perform significant action too that conventional morality abstractions, debating ethically for the soul of the hero, do not. As a result, we are forced to look further at naturalistic evidence, however primitively realized, for Cambises' decline: his addiction to drink, an uncontrollable megalomania. Of Cambises' death, David Bevington shrewdly notes, "The retribution does not compensate sufficiently for the grossness of the crimes. Cambises would have died in any event; he happens to die at a particular time and in a particular manner," adding, "The material of Cambises concentrates on the fact rather than its consequences."⁴⁶

Burton J. Fishman appreciates the play's concentration on fact, through a further level of pure theatricality and violent realism that is unprecedented in Cambises.⁴⁷ He argues that Preston, as a true man of the theater, pursued a "visual aesthetic" rather than the primarily poetic one of the earlier moralities. And it is true that the rhythmic subtlety of the anonymous Wakefield Master does more for his dramaturgy than the quaint doggerel of Preston's incessant fourteeners does for

Cambises. On the visual level Fishman explains--referring back to Proverbs 16:18, "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall"--that the sword turned on the self is a conventional iconographic representation of ire, and that Cambises unhorsed is an unmistakable fall of pride. So while Preston delivered the moralistic lesson expected by the audience (and required by the licensers), he also endeavored to present fuller theatrical effects. The vivid detail of the play's many death scenes--the boy's heart with the arrow in it (l. 563), Sisamnes played "with a false skin" (l. 464 s.d.), and Smirdis' running blood: "A little bradder of vinegar prickt" (l. 726 s.d.)--presents sensational effects that enhance the action in a way that was not open to the verbalized psychomachia of the moralities. Yet the effects still serve to illustrate, if crudely, a conventional moral that is ironically spoken by Cambises himself:

The father he shal suffer death, the sonne his roome succeed;
And, if that he no better prove, so likewise shall he speed.
(ll. 415-416)

Cambises clearly misapplies his own doctrine and eventually suffers his own undoing. His death is fit retribution for his perverse behavior, as Cambises himself symbolizes man's selfish inability to curb his own desires, and his decline into monstrous sin is portrayed as a direct result. Of Cambises' barbarism, Taverner moralized:

Such maners coulde not long have successe. For God speaketh in the scripture. Blowdy men and wylde shall not fynyshe halfe theyre days upon the erthe. Wherefore not long after, wyth a grevous vengeance, God plagued him:⁴⁸

Cambises' death is a sensational example of divine punishment which

conforms to the didacticism of the morality play. Certainly Preston wanted to keep this moral intact in the manner of the earlier moralities but, in addition, he purposely selected a historical personage and grafted moral lessons onto that character's career. He may not be an Everyman, a Mankind, nor even a King Lear, but he is morally instructive through what he does, not simply representative by what he is. Cambises, as a result, is a clear example of misbehavior at once similar to and yet completely apart from the audience which vicariously experiences his demise. Preston has it both ways: through primitive moral enigmas in the play's action a degree of tragic tension is achieved, and yet the simpler "mirror" effect of the moralities is left intact as well. If Cambises is a king, it only makes the lesson more pertinent.

Perhaps Preston's achievement is as much inadvertent as it is developmental. Even as distinct a morality play as Mankind was beginning to use the clever theatrical effects of the comic arch-villain Titivillus, and the raucous audience-participation techniques of the vices Nowadays, New-Guise, and Nought.⁴⁹ Death, in Cambises, is still used as an urgent call to repentance, as a messenger of God to chasten and subdue. But the action is more important than the characterization. Also, within the naturalistic actions of men as opposed to purely ethical allegory, moral complications arise. A sermon may be an effective dramatization, but it can never be a portrayal--and this will be a recurring weakness of the later Domestic tragedies. For Preston's play, however, weakness proves to be strength. Dramatized moral structures are necessarily inadequate to the complexities of the human situations involved, but even a primitive "hybrid morality" like Cambises develops the effectiveness of a story's action linked to fuller characterization:

the figure Preparation is a mere epithet away from becoming 1st Servant, while Cruelty and Murder will enjoy an important structural place on the Renaissance stage as 1st and 2nd Murderer.

His contrivances of Death and other allegorical features are dramatically unsophisticated, but Preston must be seen as part of a broad vista of moral and religious dramatic structures--especially in the realm of death which figures so prominently in both the moral call for repentance and the tragic feeling of loss. Preston's own lay surname on the title-page of Cambises is evidence in itself of a movement away from the received doctrine of the anonymous morality plays. Willard Farnham grasps the crucial quality lacking:

But however the passion-play or the tragic ritual begins, consciously artistic tragedy upon the stage does not begin until man in all seriousness brings intellectual curiosity, critical ability, and, what is paradoxical and most important, even creative pleasure to the dramatic imagination of life's destructive forces.⁵⁰

And with "creative pleasure" and "destructive forces" in mind, we must turn to Christopher Marlowe.

Chapter II

Marlowe and the Ugly Monster Death

Death in effect comes down to earth on the Renaissance stage. While the humanists tended to glorify the noble creature man by stressing his potentiality for virtue, they also made him intensely aware of his mortal vulnerability. What this meant for secular tragedy was a subtle change from death as an ineffable spirit to death as an earth-dwelling monster ever ready to swallow man. It no longer made self-announcing entrances, and its looks could change at will. In the face of this, the drama could no longer declaim man's deepest fears allegorically because such was the strategy of an earlier religious ethic. Secular dramatic action demanded that he proceed only from what he knew for sure; and the first of the four "last things" remained constant as his only certainty.

Christopher Marlowe was the first English dramatist to capture the language and atmosphere of human anxiety, ambition, and death. I propose, in this chapter, to study death as embodied and illustrated in the two parts of Tamburlaine The Great and the later play, Doctor Faustus. In both cases, human ambition is forged in the white heat of naked earthly pride. Doubt and defiance, the first principles of Marlowe's dramaturgy, are the sources of a new tragic potential that could only be hinted at in the earlier moral drama. In Marlowe's plays, death gets its first real "showing" in a dramatic sense. Death becomes important not only for what it represents as symbol, but for what it is as experience. What this

reveals about character and tragic inevitability is a testament to Marlowe's originality.

Marlowe had something new to say in Tamburlaine The Great, first printed in 1590. He had a new style to go with it as well, sensed immediately in a prologue as exuberant as it is blunt:

From jiggling veins of rhyming mother-wits
And such conceits as clownage keeps in pay,
We'll lead you to the stately tent of War,
Where you shall hear the Scythian Tamburlaine
Threat'ning the world with high astounding terms
And scourging kingdoms with his conquering sword.
View but his picture in this tragic glass
And then applaud his fortunes as you please.¹

This would set the standard for serious tragedy. The idiom had been seen before but never so powerfully felt. As Tucker Brooke put it, "Blank verse had been a metre employed with increasing skill, but employed only when Englishmen were affecting to write like Romans."² There was no affectation here. Artificial forms of rhetorical balance, symmetry, and amplification were about to be pressed into the service of a heroic style that would force them to bend to the deepest human impulses of lust, ambition, and power. Indeed, Tamburlaine's massively acquisitive character is itself a clear metaphor for the fierce human desire to control destiny. Citing no less a precedent than Jove, Tamburlaine enunciates the manifesto of the liberated human will:

Nature, that framed us of four elements
Warring within our breasts for regiment,
Doth teach us all to have aspiring minds:
Our souls, whose faculties can comprehend
The wondrous architecture of the world
And measure every wandring planet's course,
Still climbing after knowledge infinite
And always moving as the restless spheres,

Wills us to wear ourselves and never rest
 Until we reach the ripest fruit of all,
 That perfect bliss and sole felicity,
 The sweet fruition of an earthly crown.

(II. vii. 18-29)

But the questing ambitions of life can be negated in a sword stroke.

Tamburlaine characterizes in himself a destructive force who crushes worldly pride and favor to rule in its stead. This monstrous responsibility had previously been limited to the allegorical figure Death, often iconographically depicted with a crown atop his grotesquely grinning skull.³ But Tamburlaine holds the same power, to judge by Menaphon's early description of him:

His lofty brows in folds do figure death,
 And in their smoothness amity and life.

(II. i. 21-22)

The hero makes a corresponding claim in his famous declaration of invincibility:

I hold the Fates bound fast in iron chains,
 And with my hand turn Fortune's wheel about,
 And sooner shall the sun fall from his sphere
 Than Tamburlaine be slain or overcome.

(I. ii. 173-76)

Yet Tamburlaine's ultimate fate is death--a monster of horrible proportions that can be harnessed, exercised, even cursed for a time, but has a perverse power of its own that inevitably strikes back.

Imagery of relentless elevation and unwavering authority yields the sense of Tamburlaine as larger than life and, indeed, as immense as death. He is an everyman in his birth, a rarity in his ambition, and a superman in his ability. The fact that he has raised himself from simple

shepherd to conquering hero adds to the sense of Tamburlaine as a ruthless leveller heedless of social status or responsibility, and this is seen especially in his bold love for Zenocrate combined with disregard both for her father, the Soldan of Egypt, and her betrothed, the King of Arabia. But there is no Machiavellian duplicity in his climb to power. Tamburlaine grandly identifies what he wants, publicly announces his intentions, and then proceeds to secure his desires by destroying all opposition. Nothing is covert. Never could we expect to hear from him the sneering, asides or hypocritical histrionics of a studied Machiavellian like Shakespeare's Richard III. Tamburlaine's words are spoken in grim truth because, once expressed, they can never be reconsidered. He speaks his words as fate, and then proceeds to carry out his promises without regard for any extraneous or mitigating circumstance. Michael Quinn sees a didactic quality here: "Marlowe's demonstration of how contemptible is the failure to equate one's actions with one's words represents a demand for absolute integrity in the individual: that one be true to oneself in a special sense."⁴ The "special sense" of this integrity for Tamburlaine leads to the absolute finitude of death. He triumphs as he destroys, kills to conquer, and holds his enemies powerless by his personal power over death. Indeed Eugene Waith parallels Tamburlaine with another great destroyer in mythology--Hercules--and relates both to a dynamic primitivism in man.⁵ As men, we are affected. It is impossible to condone the monstrous cruelty of Tamburlaine but, at the same time, it is equally impossible not to admire the honest power of a man who deals in the gravely serious black and white of life and death.

Tamburlaine's primitive extremes are symbolized by the colors of his

troop. His personal mood must be made clear to all, and such large furnishings as tents are easily seen from a distance. A messenger reports their significance to the 'Soldan' of Egypt:

Pleaseth your mightiness to understand,
 His resolution far exceedeth all:
 The first day when he pitcheth down his tents,
 White is their hue, and on his silver crest.
 A snowy feather spangled white he bears,
 To signify the mildness of his mind
 That, satiate with spoil, refuseth blood;
 But when Aurora mounts the second time,
 As red as scarlet is his furniture--
 Then must his kindled wrath be quenched with blood,
 Not sparing any that can manage arms;
 But if these threats move no submission,
 Black are his colours, black pavilion,
 His spear, his shield, his horse, his armour, plumes,
 And jettý feathers menace death and hell--
 Without respect of sex, degree, or age,
 He razeth all his foes with fire and sword.

(IV. i. 47-63)

The key to the entire description is Tamburlaine's "resolution," and in the speaker's beseeching request that his "mightiness," the Soldan, understand Tamburlaine's total lack of compromise. Harry Levin refers to the description as a "lurid colour scheme, in the shades of love, war, and death,"⁶ but it is more than this. It is a rigid heroic determinism with absolutely no grey area, absolutely no room for negotiation: comply or suffer; comply now or die. Levin pointedly notes the absence of natural yellows, greens, browns, and blues in Tamburlaine's scheme, without mentioning that such colors of innocent pastoralism, carefree aspiration, and effeminate timidity have no place in the dominance and repression symbolized by blood red and death black.

The white and black at each end of Tamburlaine's scheme are rigid and unmistakable: life and death. The messenger fearfully reports that

Tamburlaine kills "without respect of sex, degree, or age," reinforcing Menaphon's earlier notion of him as a veritable figure of Death itself. In his introduction to the play, Cunningham adroitly notes Tamburlaine's key emblematic significance as a God of Death, adding,

To relate Tamburlaine to theatrical emblems such as these is not to allegorise, it in simple terms: it is, rather, to gain a heightened awareness of the collisions within the play between old and new, between sacred and profane, between allegorical type and self-willed individual being.⁷

Tamburlaine's portentous show of colors is as inexorable as life and death: white of inexperience; red of adult struggle; black of aged death. As a distinct figure of death, convinced that he rules Fate, Tamburlaine merely speeds up the process at will.

The clearest example of Tamburlaine's unremittingly deathlike resolve, in Part I, is the execution of the virgins at Damascus. The city has not complied and the lesson of the color scheme means total destruction: Tamburlaine is dressed in black; pity is impossible. He has spoken, and every action he performs will be an unwavering extrapolation. Yet Warren Smith interprets the stage direction at this point-- "TAMBURLAINE all in black, and very melancholy"--as a "sudden change in mood"⁸ on the part of the warlord. Smith seems to apologize for the scene by attributing an internal tenderness to Tamburlaine, as one who is secretly discontented with the task he must perform. But Tamburlaine's motivation is never so complex. His tone is closer to what Clifford Leech discerned as "contemptuous pity":⁹

What, are the turtles frayed out of their nests?
Alas, poor fools, must you be first shall feel
The sworn destruction of Damascus?
(V. i. 64-66)

And he is never more cruelly eloquent than when he lectures the girls on death:

Tamburlaine. Virgins, in vain ye labour to prevent
 That which mine honour swears shall be performed.
 Behold my sword, what see you at the point?
 Virgins. Nothing but fear and fatal steel, my lord.
Tamburlaine. Your fearful minds are thick and misty, then,
 For there sits Death, there sits imperious Death,
 Keeping his circuit by the slicing edge.
 But I am pleased you shall not see him there:
 He is now seated on my horsemen's spears,
 And on their points his fleshless body feeds.
 Techelles, straight go charge a few of them
 To charge these dames, and show my servant Death,
 Sitting in scarlet on their armed spears.
 Omnes. O pity us!
Tamburlaine. Away with them I say and show them Death.
 (V. i. 106-120)

Tamburlaine controls an inscrutable servant dressed in "fear and fatal steel"--Death. He wields it at the end of his sword and at the very turn of his whim. Having mastered Death, he may introduce the fleshless feeding horror in any number of ways and transfer his "servant" wherever he wishes. He perceives himself as a righteous punisher of dissident pride through this atrocity. The horror lies not in the fact that the helpless virgins, still clutching their ineffectual laurel branches, meet death, but in Tamburlaine's vicious insistence that they must. Their impaled bodies hoisted up in full view, the dead girls grimly symbolize the conqueror's intrinsic, merciless, and deathlike power. Tamburlaine's dispassionate self-justification to the city of Damascus is chillingly predictable:

They have refused the offer of their lives,
 And know my customs are as peremptory
 As wrathful planets, death, or destiny.
 (V. i. 126-28)

Bradbrook saw the virgins as a simple "set of innocent white dummies," concluding, "Their acting was probably as formal as their speech."¹⁰ But surely there is a strong iconographical use of color here that follows directly from the white/red/black scheme noted earlier: Tamburlaine all in black stands over the supplicating virgins in their white linens; red blood is about to be spilt. Implacable Death confronts naive life, and there is no hope for unsoiled reprieve. Tamburlaine carries out what he considers a solemn promise, a military necessity! Indeed, Thomas Dekker saw an aptness of metaphor in Tamburlaine's militarism when he described the contemporary ravages of unrelenting plague. In his pamphlet The Wonderfull Yeare (1603), he wrote:

Imagine then that all this while, Death (like a Spanish Leagar, or rather like stalking Tamburlaine) hath pitcht his tents, . . . in the sinfully-polluted Suburbs: the Plague is Muster-maister and Marshall of the field. Burning Feavers, Boyles, Blaines, and Carbuncles, the Leaders, Lieutenants, Serjeants, and Corporalls: the maine Army consisting (like Dunkirke) of a mingle-mangle, viz. dumpish Mourners, merry Sextons, hungry Coffin-sellers, scrubbing Bearers, and nastie Grave-makers: but indeed they are the Pioners of the Campe, that are employed onely (like Moles) in casting up of earth and digging of trenches; Feare and Trembling (the two Catch-polles of Death) arrest every one: No parley will be graunted, no composition stood upon, But the Allarum is stricke up, the Toxin ringes out for life, and no voice heard but Tue, Tue, Kill, Kill.¹¹

Dekker clearly saw Death and Tamburlaine as quite synonymous, with their unquestioned authority over a host of obsessively murderous subordinates --an army both adamant and inescapable.

The tone shifts immediately after Tamburlaine's order to "put the rest to the sword" (l. 134), and centers on the lyrical passage in praise of ideal Beauty. J.W. Harper, in his explanatory introduction to the play, is cogent:

Just at the point where Tamburlaine's moral fortunes seem to have reached their nadir, Marlowe inserts the great soliloquy "What is beauty" (V. ii. 97-127), the play's most brilliant lyrical passage, which suddenly transposes the interest of the drama into a new key and forces us to realize that we have been witnessing not merely a chronicle play about a successful general but a drama of ideas in which the full meaning and implications of heroism, will, and inspiration are being explored.¹²

Concerns like heroism, will, and inspiration transcend simple moral judgments. Existence itself is at stake here, where Tamburlaine's unprecedented introspection links beauty and death in heightened contemplation along the lines of the traditional memento mori theme. Zenocrate's beauty and gentle sorrow bring words to Tamburlaine that have hitherto been unthinkable. Her tears provoke internal conflict in the conqueror:

A doubtful battle with my tempted thoughts
 For Egypt's freedom and the Soldan's life--
 His life that so consumes Zenocrate,
 Whose sorrows lay more siege unto my soul
 Than all my army to Damascus' walls;
 And neither Persia's sovereign nor the Turk
 Troubled my senses with conceit of foil
 So much by much as doth Zenocrate.

(V. i. 152-59)

The possibility of defeat--"conceit of foil"--is something that Tamburlaine has never before considered. He is an undefeated general; he has never reflected upon the idea of a countering mortality because of his overpowering military prerogative to command both life and death. But the beautiful, life-loving Zenocrate fears death, and her concern causes within Tamburlaine, her protector, a disquieting and bittersweet doubt. Beauty is what is left after the poet's resources have been exhausted, and it is the equally ultimate experience of death

that waits at the end of mortal aspiration. Tamburlaine is indeed in the process of "conceiving and subduing, both" (l. 183). His perplexed conjunction of ideals disturbs the hitherto omnipotent nature of his authority through intimations of a power beyond his domination. Yet Death, the treacherous lackey at Tamburlaine's boot, remains unsuspected while the voicing of this crucial speech, so near to the victory of Zenocrate's hand in marriage, prefigures the emergence of death in Part II as the ultimate challenger to the superman.¹³

Traditionally, death consoles the privations of life by negating all worldly affluence. This is the central theme of the Dance of Death, and it is illustrated in the highly formalized sacrifices of Bajazeth and Zabina. Tormented and demeaned, his former glory obliterated by the might of Tamburlaine, the Turkish emperor accepts death as his only consolation:

Now, Bajazeth, abridge thy baneful days
And beat thy brains out of thy conquered head.
(V. i. 286-87)

Thus, the erstwhile head of many states significantly "brains himself against the cage" (l. 304 s.d.) in deference to the overwhelming might of his conqueror. Upon finding the body, his consort destroys herself in telling suicidal frenzy:

What do mine eyes behold? My husband dead!
His skull all riven in twain, his brains dashed out!
O Bajazeth, my husband and my lord,
O Bajazeth, O Turk, O emperor--give him his liquor?
Not I. Bring milk and fire, and my blood I bring him again,
tear me in pieces, give me the sword with a ball of wild-fire
upon it. Down with him, down with him! Go to my child, away,
away, away. Ah, save that infant, save him, save him! I, even
I, speak to her. The sun was down. Streamers white, red,
black, here, here, here. Fling the meat in his face.

Tamburlaine, Tamburlaine! Let the soldiers be buried. Hell,
death, Tamburlaine, hell! Make ready my coach, my chair, my
jewels, I come, I come, I come!

She runs against the cage and brains herself.

(ll. 305-319 s.d.)

Death is both final punishment and reward. It reduces glory to, negligible rant. Tamburlaine is to blame, however, and Zabina's horrified passion sets up instinctual associations about her captor in the lurid colors white, red, and black, along with images of dead soldiers, expiration, and grandeur. Her exclamatory prose is meant to convey a sense of distracted incoherence in the face of lost title and dignity. But Tamburlaine, as much as death itself, remains inscrutably indifferent.

Zenocrate enters at this point, and the play returns to metric blank verse as she meditates upon Tamburlaine's ruthlessness. Her recollections provide what Clemen calls "a carefully designed cumulative effect,"¹⁴ and they are indeed preparatory to Zenocrate's own balancing of Tamburlaine's soliloquy on beauty and ambition. Her sensitive refrain "Behold the Turk and his great emperess!" is loaded with tragic realization, but what Zenocrate knows is lost on the conqueror in his blind preponderation:

Ah Tamburlaine my love, sweet Tamburlaine,
That fightest for sceptres and for slippery crowns,
Behold the Turk and his great emperess!
Thou that in conduct of thy happy stars
Sleepest every night with conquest on thy brows
And yet wouldst shun the wavering turns of war,
In fear and feeling of the like distress
Behold the Turk and his great emperess!
Ah mighty Jove and holy Mahomet,
Pardon my love, O pardon his contempt
Of earthly fortune and respect of pity,
And let not conquest ruthlessly pursued
Be equally against his life incensed
In this great Turk and hapless emperess!

(V. i. 356-69)

Her remorse is appropriate and grimly prescient. In her simple love for Tamburlaine she is able to see the outcome of his obsessive drive for power, and expresses a truly tragic fear. Tamburlaine, on the other hand, is too self-involved to realize the tragic possibilities of his monomania. His earlier ruminations on Beauty were as cryptic as Zenocrate's thoughts, here, on Fate are clear. But Tamburlaine sees himself as a separate development from life's human realities. As Leech puts it, "Tamburlaine has made a pact with himself, in disregard of other human beings (even, ultimately of Zenocrate) and of cosmic processes."¹⁵

Tamburlaine considers himself a cosmic process, as is made clear in his exalted self-opinion near the conclusion of Part I:

The god of war resigns his room to me,
 Meaning to make me general of the world:
 Jove, viewing me in arms, looks pale and wan,
 Fearing my power should pull him from his throne;
 Where'er I come the Fatal Sisters sweat,
 And grisly Death, by running to and fro
 To do their ceaseless homage to my sword.
 (V. i. 451-57)

Speaking more and more in a compulsive "first-person descriptive," Tamburlaine feels that he has not only mastered Death but has, in fact, replaced it. This is seen further in the inhuman way he sums up his earthly victories:

Emperors and kings lie breathless at my feet:
 The Turk and his great empress, as it seems,
 Left to themselves while we were at the fight,
 Have desperately despatched their slavish lives;
 With them Arabia too hath left his life--
 All sights of power to grace my victory;
 And such are objects fit for Tamburlaine,
 Wherein as in a mirror may be seen
 His honour, that consists in shedding blood
 When men presume to manage arms with him.
 (II. 470-79)

He takes pride in his dispassionate leveling of all opposition, and exults in announcing his marriage to Zenocrate while oblivious to the human carnage about him: the ruined bodies of Bajazeth and Zabina, the blameless King of Arabia, the hoisted remains of the virgins of Damascus, and the "bloody spectacle" of Damascus itself. Douglas Cole pointedly sums up the effect:

Marlowe's last scene thus accents the paradox of the inhuman effects of Tamburlaine's superhuman ambitions, a paradox which is more of a problem than a resolution. The victorious and Titanic figure of Tamburlaine cannot be separated from the dark shadow of human suffering that he himself casts; in Part I he alone represents the source of all the violence and destruction in the universe of the play. Not until Part II does the shadow of suffering begin to fall on Tamburlaine himself.¹⁶

Levin relates the two parts of Tamburlaine in a paradigm: "the first treats of love and war, the second of war and death."¹⁷ But Helen Gardner sees the second part as misjudged by any comparison with Part I, while Peter V. LePage argues that both parts are unified in an "urge to have godlike power over life and death."¹⁸ I feel that the second part plays out a certain tragic inevitability and find that the cosmic process of death thoroughly justifies Part II, as described by the subtitle in the printed edition of 1606:

With his impassionate furie, for the death of his Lady and Love faire Zenocrate: his forme of exhortation and discipline to his three Sonnes, and the manner of his owne death.

This is the ending that everyone wants to see, and Lawrence Danson is quite right when he points out that we never believe in an immortality for Tamburlaine in any case.¹⁹ The more monstrous and absolute his victories become, the more it becomes apparent that he will be destroyed

by an equally monstrous power. The power is death--that which destroys every man regardless of status: the whining King Mycetes, the despairing emperor Bajazeth, the innocent virgins of Damascus, and even the mighty Tamburlaine himself.

But death is an insidious monster that can evoke much pain before exercising its powers of obliteration. It centers tragedy in a crushing sense of loss, and the death of Zenocrate is at the center of the two "tragical discourses" of Tamburlaine The Great. The scene is splendidly balanced, focusing on Zenocrate's deathbed, with Tamburlaine at her side, and flanked by their three sons, her three physicians, and his three lieutenants. Yet no deployment of military might or medical knowledge can counter Zenocrate's mortality. This fact baffles the conqueror who has, up to now, ordered death as he saw fit. Tamburlaine's faithful servant Death has mutinied. Faced with such gross insubordination, Tamburlaine reacts with a confused mixture of anguish, rage, and military bluster:

What, is she dead? Techelles, draw thy sword,
And wound the earth, that it may cleave in twain,
And we descend into th' infernal vaults
To hale the Fatal Sisters by the hair
And throw them in the triple moat of hell
For taking hence my fair Zenocrate.
Casane and Theridamas, to arms!
Raise cavalieros higher than the clouds,
And with the cannon break the frame of heaven,
Batter the shining palace of the sun
And shiver all the starry firmament.

(Part II, II. iv. 96-106)

The conqueror has met his ultimate foe, and Danson aptly points to Tamburlaine's jealous retention of the corpse as "the most gruesome confirmation of his ordinary mortality."²⁰ Tamburlaine's violent

reaction to Zenocrate's death makes it clear that his grief is directed at the fact that he has met an enemy over which he cannot hold power--Death itself--and it marks the turning point in his career.²¹

A seemingly strange shift occurs at this point, and it is reminiscent of Tamburlaine's sudden paeon to Beauty after ordering the execution of the virgins of Damascus. Having just razed the town wherein she died, Tamburlaine has his sons deliver commemorations. Calyphas' lines are especially significant:

This pillar placed in memory of her,
Where in Arabian, Hebrew, Greek, is writ,
This town being burnt by Tamburlaine the Great
Forbids the world to build it up again.

(Part II, III. ii. 15-18)

Clearly, this is meant to symbolize Tamburlaine's deepest authoritarian grief, but he turns quickly from sorrow and complaint to deliver a speech on the "rudiments of war" (l. 54) to his boys. While some commentators view this as a completely unreasonable shift and others see it as Marlowe's poor integration of material gleaned from a sixteenth-century military manual,²² it seems most clearly to be a lecture on survival. Life is war to the conqueror Tamburlaine, and in Zenocrate's death he has just lost his first battle. His paternal reaction is to teach his sons how to get Death on their side, under their authority. But failure is already "built-into" his plan, as Calyphas questions Tamburlaine's very premises.

The case of Calyphas further exposes Tamburlaine's decline. While usually glossed over as a simple coward or an example of sloth, he incisively accuses his impetuous brothers of being "More childish valourous than manly wise" (Part II, IV. i. 17), and this is a comment

that might easily apply to Tamburlaine's own destructive behavior in reaction to Zenocrate's death. As Danson notes, "The real object of Tamburlaine's revolt is mortality itself,"²³ and Calyphas has both prior experience and personal feeling on the subject:

I know, sir, what it is to kill a man--
It works remorse of conscience in me.
(II. 27-28)

Yet Tamburlaine kills his noncombative offspring despite the intercessionary pleas of his lieutenants and his other sons. Whether Calyphas is a "cynical Epicurean"²⁴ or not is beside the point of this clear example of Tamburlaine's violence turned against itself. His summary execution of Calyphas is a mere expansion of his own self-laceration--used earlier (Part II, III. ii. 124 s.d.) as an example of correct military fortitude--and the captured King of Jerusalem comments in a tone of voice that counts as prophecy:

Thy victories are grown so violent
That shortly heaven, filled with the meteors
Of blood and fire thy tyrannies have made,
Will pour down blood and fire on thy head.
(Part II, IV. i: 140-43)

Tamburlaine's brutal slaying of his son is contrasted by Olympia's merciful murder of her child so as to spare it the wrath of Tamburlaine's soldiers. Olympia, parted from her dead husband and child, has her attempt at suicide thwarted by Theridamas, who wooed her in enticing terms similar to those Tamburlaine had used successfully with Zenocrate in Part I. But Olympia is resolute:

My lord and husband's death, with my sweet son's,
 With whom I buried all affections
 Save grief and sorrow which torment my heart,
 Forbids my mind to entertain a thought
 That tends to love, but meditate on death,
 A fitter subject for a pensive soul.

(Part II, IV. ii. 22-27).

Hers is a wearied sense of loss, and she tricks Theridamas into killing her. While this action might test the limits of credulity, surely it does not simply align itself with the deaths of Zenocrate and Calyphas as another in a series of "death sacrifices." In arguing thus, Susan Richards calls Olympia a "priestess or nun dedicated to death,"²⁵ but her words and actions are rather those of a pathetic victim. Like Lady Macduff and her child, Olympia suffers the sad circumstantial fate of the innocent.

Tamburlaine never meets Olympia, but the consequences of his wrath reach everywhere. The grandest symbol of his vanquishing power is his chariot, drawn by teams of monarchs. Tamburlaine has proclaimed himself "The scourge of God and terror of the world" (Part II, IV. i. 154) and here, with scourge in hand, he acts out that death-like role, shouting dispassionately at the harnessed kings:

If you can live with it, then live, and draw
 My chariot swifter than the racking clouds;
 If not, then die like beasts, and fit for nought
 But perches for the black and fatal ravens.

(Part II, IV. iii. 20-23)

This harsh symbol takes the place of Bajazeth's cage in Part I, but has a grotesquely retributive quality as well; it effectively answers the Turkish emperor's pre-battle threat not only to castrate Tamburlaine, but to demean his followers:

By the holy Alcaron I swear
 He shall be made a chaste and lustless eunuch
 And in my sarell tend my concubines;
 And all his captains that thus stoutly stand
 Shall draw the chariot of my emperess.
 (Part I, III. iii. 76-80)

Thus Tamburlaine--who neither forgets nor forgives--drives the enslaved figures of earthly power both as the ultimate thrill of domination, and as a clear symbol of his authority at the reins of Fate.²⁶

Tamburlaine administers the final defeat of the Turkish forces from his chariot. It is from here also that he oversees the gruesome execution of the Governor of Babylon, (the counterpart in Part II to the spectacle at Damascus), in a scene which is exceeded only by the mass-drowning of the city's population. Tamburlaine's burning of the Koran illustrates the height of atrocity, however, and it is at this significant point that the despot stammers, "stay, I feel myself distempered suddenly" (Part II, V. 1. 217). The factual statement seems naturalistic enough, and Cole correctly notes the absence of conventional moral explication²⁷-- something presented at a decidedly didactic pitch in the expiring words of the blasphemously treacherous Sigismond:

Discomfited is all the Christian host,
 And God hath thundered vengeance from on high
 For my accursed and hateful perjury.
 O just and dreadful punisher of sin;
 Let the dishonour of the pains I feel
 In this my mortal well-deserved wound
 End all my penance in my sudden death;
 And let this death wherein to sin I die
 Conceive a second life in endless mercy.
 (Part II, II. iii. 1-9)

But moral discovery is impossible for the self-deified Tamburlaine, who considers himself invincible and takes his exit with this momentous

declaration: "Sickness or death can never conquer me" (Part II. V. ii. 221).

Susan Richards traces an enforced "double value" in Marlowe's imagery that develops Tamburlaine's relationship to death. Of Marlowe, she says, "He uses a series of images until they become equated, almost identified, with their referent; then he reverses the equation, and the referent itself becomes the image."²⁸ She shrewdly cites the image of warrior-as-meteor at Zenocrate's funeral:

And kindle heaps of exhalations
That, being fiery meteors, may presage
Death and destruction to th' inhabitants.
(Part II, III. ii. 3-5)

She then contrasts the image of meteor-as-warrior, used later by Tamburlaine to answer the curses of his captives just after the execution of Calyphas:

I will persist a terror to the world,
Making the meteors that, like armed men,
Are seen to march upon the towers of heaven.
(Part II, IV. i. 201-203)

What this means, however, for the association of Tamburlaine and Death is much broader, and entails a fundamental challenge to the nature of Tamburlaine's authority and his existence.

The double value I am proposing reveals itself over both parts of the play, while Richards' analysis is restricted to only the second part. Throughout, Tamburlaine has been described in impossible superlatives by every major character, including himself. But there is never any doubt as to what his features portend. One wrathful look at Agydas in Part I (III. iii. 65 s.d.) was enough to make the Egyptian realize that suicide

was his only recourse. In Part II, to Usumcasane's observation of enemy fear--"Poor souls, they look as if their deaths were near" (III. v. 61)--Tamburlaine simply replies, "Why, so he is, Casane, I am here." To mitigate the irony, Tamburlaine faces his foes one last time, and they flee in terror at the sight of him. No longer do his looks merely presage death, they are death and symbolize the absolute height of Tamburlaine's monstrosity.

Realizing the severity of his final sickness, however, Tamburlaine describes his treacherous playmate:

See where my slave, the ugly monster Death,
Shaking and quivering, pale and wan for fear,
Stands aiming at me with his murdering dart
Who flies away at every glance I give,
And when I look away comes stealing on.
Villain, away, and hie thee to the field!
I and mine army come to load thy bark
With souls of thousand mangled carcasses--
Look where he goes! but see, he comes again
Because I stay!

(Part II, v. iii, 67-76)

He deludedly insists on his dominance over death but, because of his lost energy, there is no more fun to be had. Indeed the physician's prognosis is clinically straightforward:

I viewed your urine, and the hypostasis,
Thick and obscure, doth make your danger great;
Your veins are full of accidental heat
Whereby the moisture of your blood is dried:
The humidum and calor, which some hold
Is not a parcel of the elements
But of a substance more divine and pure,
Is almost clean extinguished and spent,
Which, being the cause of life, imports your death.

(II. 82-90)

Rigid physiological descriptions contribute to the sense of death as an

inevitable process--a process even Tamburlaine must undergo. Moreover, the terms have been consistent throughout: from Cosroe, to Bajazeth, to the now-dying Tamburlaine, the pain of death has been expressed in the language of the body. More than a divine mystery involving retribution, death has become an inexorably painful fact.²⁹

It is as a painful fact that death is finally addressed. The dying despot's last words conform to his grim realization: "Tamburlaine, the scourge of God, must die" (Part II, V. iii. 248). The word "must" is of most significance, and Gardner concludes that the moral of the play "is the simple medieval one of the inevitability of death."³⁰ But the play's cosmic ideological concerns with beauty, desire, ambition, and power are not so easily reducible. Tamburlaine dies, yes, but to an Armageddon-like vision by his son and heir: "Meet heaven and earth, and here let all things end" (I. 249). Tamburlaine's involvement with death has been a lifelong struggle: he claimed to control death, became a personification of death, and was fully identified as death, until finally overmastered by the power of death itself. Death's ultimate characterization as universal finality is exposed. Its painful fact--beyond simple inevitability--is its overawing infinity: the quality to which Tamburlaine aspired but, as a human being, inevitably failed to reach.

Death is a monstrous symbol, a truly horrible figure at once completely removed from and yet thoroughly infused in the experience of life. Easily seduced by the myth of the immortal self, man still remains powerless when he confronts his last enemy. This is the tragical realization of Tamburlaine--a draconian despot for whom control meant

everything. But man's mortal nature will grasp at whispers, and the intellectual career of Doctor John Faustus of Wittenberg is analagous, in terms appropriate to the inner man, to the global carnage of the megalomaniacal Tamburlaine. Both men seek fame and power through the unrestrained pride of deific aspiration. Indeed Faustus presents himself as an arrogant intellectual imperialist. He is determined to "level at the end of every art" (i. 4)³¹--Logic, Medicine, Law, Divinity; he conquers scholastic subjects as Tamburlaine does civilizations. But his insatiable intellectual ambition finds none of them suitably satisfying. In an egoistic void, he chooses "cursed necromancy" (Prologue, l. 25) and Marlowe traces out his spiritual suicide in The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus.

There is an aura of grim finality at the play's very outset, and it is sensed as early as the prologue. In direct opposition to the promised threats and conquerings of Tamburlaine, the Icarus-like aspiration of Faustus is already recounted in the past tense:

Till, swollen with cunning of a self-conceit,
His waxen wings did mount above his reach,
And, melting, heavens conspir'd his overthrow.
(ll. 20-22)

The prologue appeals to "patient judgments" (l. 9) while presenting a desperately impatient scene. Faustus, alone in his study, curses the frustrations of his own limited ability:

Yet art thou still but Faustus, and a man.
Couldst thou make men to live eternally
Or being dead raise them to life again,
Then this profession were to be esteem'd.
(i. 23-26)

Dissatisfied because he lacks the divine power of life and death, Faustus sees only death for himself, through specious application of biblical texts in syllogistic form: sin leads to death; all men sin; therefore all men must die. "Ay, we must die an everlasting death" (i. 45), concludes Faustus, and the death of his spirit begins.³²

Faustus' massive intellectual pride is combined with an aggressive acquisitiveness that forces him to grasp and contain the power of knowledge before he has mastered its simple provisional workings. The small ironies of misquotation and logical manipulation (errors unworthy of an academic so accomplished) show Faustus to be still an "expert" rather than an "authority," and his pedantic absolutism proves to be his undoing later. Mephostophilis vacillates about cosmic information to the point of refusing to answer Faustus' direct question, "Now tell me, who made the world?" (vi. 69). The answer is the name which tortures the devil every time it is spoken, and the one which Faustus no longer acknowledges. It is, of course, God; and Faustus' fundamental error lies in the fact that, through his dogmatic self-confidence, he refuses to see that true knowledge resides not in human understanding, nor in clever bits of demonic information, but in the faith of knowing God correctly.³³ In a Protestant context, Faustus' limitations are highlighted by the fact that theological expertise lies in a simple human faith, while authority resides solely with God.

Faustus' loss of faith is symbolized by his compulsive desire for the esoteric knowledge of magic.³⁴ In malicious delight, he rejects all conventional learning for the intoxicating charms and symbols of witchcraft:

These metaphysics of magicians
 And necromantic books are heavenly;
 Lines, circles, letters and characters:
 Ay, these are those that Faustus most desires.
 (i. 48-51)

But while he tries to distance himself from the petty parameters of human knowledge, he only further isolates himself through pride. This alienation from his fellow man (seen in the fact that Faustus is usually either alone, with demonic spirits, invisible, or conspicuous among rustics) is a metaphor for Faustus' alienation from God, and it places the health of his soul in peril. Magic further weakens his faith and symbolizes his separation from humanity at large in the telling question of the Scholar: "I wonder what's become of Faustus, that was wont to make our schools ring with sic probo" (ii. 1-2). As he loses faith in salvation, Faustus loses his sense of self as well, as is explained with grim irony in his own statement of resolve:

ere I sleep I'll try what I can do:
 This night I'll conjure though I die therefor.
 (i. 164-65)

Faustus considers himself intellectually prepared to challenge the black arts, and, alone in his study, he narrates his own actions with compulsive fervor:

Faustus, begin thine incantations,
 And try if devils will obey thy hest,
 Seeing thou hast pray'd and sacrific'd to them.
 Within this circle is Jehovah's name
 Forward and backward anagrammatiz'd,
 The breviated names of holy saints,
 Figures of every adjunct to the heavens,
 And characters of signs and erring stars,
 By which the spirits are enforc'd to rise.
 (iii. 5-13)

He invokes the infernal trinity of Lucifer, Beelzebub, and Demogorgon in resolute Latin, but the demon which appears is too horrible for Faustus to face. He is Mephostophilis, a lost spirit, dead to eternity but changed easily into the figure of a friar to ease the terror of his true countenance. This disguise is an interlude convention as well as a convenient and ironic way for the erstwhile cleric Faustus to converse with a messenger from hell. Yet Faustus' conjuring by itself has not made Mephostophilis appear. The demon explains (aping Faustus' own scholasticism) that his presence is but per accidens because of the blasphemy of Faustus' invocation, adding,

when we hear one rack the name of God,
 Abjure the scriptures and his saviour Christ,
 We fly, in hope to get his glorious soul;
 Nor will we come unless he use such means
 Whereby he is in danger to be damn'd.
 Therefore the shortest cut for conjuring
 Is stoutly to abjure the Trinity
 And pray devoutly to the prince of hell.
 (iii. 49-56)

Clearly, Faustus' soul is in danger. Mephostophilis even counsels him to give up magic, but the learned doctor considers himself to be one proposition ahead of the demon. He knows the devil to be a liar by nature, and counters with incredulous self-assurance:

What, is great Mephostophilis so passionate
 For being deprived of the joys of heaven?
 Learn thou of Faustus manly fortitude
 And scorn those joys thou never shalt possess.
 Go bear these tidings to great Lucifer:
 Seeing Faustus hath incurr'd eternal death
 By desperate thoughts against Jove's deity,
 Say he surrenders up to him his soul
 So he will spare him four-and-twenty years,
 Letting him live in all voluptuousness.
 (iii. 85-94)

Faustus has moved himself into diabolic association through the presumptuous and mortal error of dismissing the concept of soul. Having flippantly interjected earlier, "But, leaving these vain trifles of men's souls, / Tell me, what is that Lucifer thy lord?" (ll. 64-65), he now goes so far as to disparage the concept of "eternal death" (ll. 90): he denies "eternal death" even as he admits his own incurrence of it. To the sophisticated Faustus damnation is a joke, a medieval bogey, and he cavalierly fixes on the arbitrary term of twenty-four years of life in exchange for his immortal soul. His pride blinds him to spiritual realities. As Frank Manley astutely observes, Faustus is essentially isolated in the mystery of self.³⁵ He is lost in his own worldliness, condemned to his own limited terms which express desire with child-like compulsion. Everything Faustus sees, he sees in relation to his prideful self. And it is of key significance that pride led to the original damnation of Lucifer--Faustus' chosen role-model.

Robert West might argue the traditional insubstantiality of a contract signed with demons,³⁶ but there is an awesome finality about a deed of gift sealed with the power of Christ's own last words. Faustus conveys his life to the Devil, and then lives under sentence of death. While one might morbidly predict the decade of one's own death with some accuracy, Faustus' signed contract sets down the very day and hour. This unnatural localization of death emphasizes its important relation to every other occurrence in the play. Faustus' experience is inseparable from it. As precise as he is impetuous, the scholar ensures that his contract is drawn up properly in correct legal language and form

(Faustus has already mastered the "drudgery" of law); with all necessary conditions stated, all ambiguities resolved. "All this in spite of the

fact that Mephastophilis never asks for anything except Faustus's soul," alleges Edward A. Snow.³⁷ But the soul with which Faustus bargains so casually contains the transcendence of self he so earnestly and blindly desires. With his soul mortgaged, he will spend the remainder of life's term in a gradual amortization of faith, and a constant fear of foreclosure. Wilbur Sanders is lucid on the fatalistic effect:

If there were no more than this in Doctor Faustus, it would not exercise the kind of fascination it does. But there is also a desperate fatalism about Marlowe's vision, a sense that all the most desirable and ravishing things, man's fulfilment itself, are subject to a cosmic veto. A tragic rift yawns between the things man desires as man, and the things he must be content with, as sinner. And it is partly against this dark fatality that Faustus mobilises his doomed revolt.³⁸

Edward A. Snow's challenging study focuses on the phenomenological "ends" of Faustus' desires. Like other commentators, Snow identifies Faustus as an extended figure of gluttony,³⁹ but goes further to see Faustus' human will itself as subordinate to a constant desire for definition in terms of that which it can possess. The prologue points up this pattern early:

And gluttred now with learning's golden gifts,
He surfeits upon cursed necromancy.

(ll. 24-25)

At the prospect of obtaining magical power, Faustus himself exclaims, "How am I gluttred with conceit of this!" (l. 77). Having obtained a taste of magical satisfaction, he further declares, "The God thou serv'st is thine own appetite" (v. 11). Recurrent images of eating and consuming emphasize the starvation of Faustus' soul, which mortal gratification cannot satisfy and magical gratification can only destroy. Snow notes,

"The language of achieving ends, making an end, coming to an end, etc., is a continual refrain of the opening soliloquy, and it recurs throughout the course of the play."⁴⁰ Having made these observations, Snow argues for a position which plays down moral judgments in favor of treating the play as a "sceptical, nonjudgmental exploration of human consciousness."⁴¹ Yet the choice Faustus makes is of crucial moral significance. He has agreed to an end which is damnation--a state he pretends to understand and not to fear. Instead, Faustus revels in the self-satisfied power of magic which facilitates evil, and which he mistakenly considers a suitable end in itself. But while the divine power of good he has rejected is a means to an end as well as a gracious end in itself, magic is only an exploitative means: a set of occult circles and mystic conjurations that grow ever more self-involved until the soul, deprived of God's grace, is eventually damned to eternal selfhood. This is the ultimate end, and it is starkly revealed during Faustus' first conversation with Mephostophilis:

Fau. Where are you damn'd?
 Meph. In hell.
 Fau. How comes it then that thou art out of hell?
 Meph. Why, this is hell, nor am I out of it.
 Think'st thou that I, who saw the face of God
 And tasted the eternal joys of heaven,
 Am not tormented with ten thousand hells
 In being depriv'd of everlasting bliss?
 (iii. 76-82)

Faustus has deliberately chosen to cut himself off from God's grace by pursuing mystic self-glorification in the occult and esoteric. He emphasizes his self at the expense of his soul, and this erroneous imbalance tilts him in the direction of damnation. Consequently Faustus must reconcile his soul with God before death or he will suffer, as

Mephostophilis does, eternal exclusion from the grace of God: poena damni --the punishment of loss--adroitly observed by Douglas Cole.⁴² Yet, and this is damningly ironic, Faustus feels that his soul has been rejected by God in the first place, as noted by Arie Sachs: "Faustus' loss of trust in personal salvation is explained by his conviction, reiterated throughout, that God hates him."⁴³ In the face of a momentary pang of conscience, the Bad Angel offers up the dismal choric fact: "Ay, but Faustus never shall repent" (vi. 17), and Faustus' own introspection reveals only a further "hardening" of his heart. His self-conscious rejection of grace continues to ossify through the inflexibility of his own pride, and he despises his human limitations the way he rather paranoically imagines God must. To compensate, Faustus aspires to godhead himself and, in a flush of deluded self-confidence, shouts, "A sound magician is a demi-god; / Here tire, my brains, to get a deity!" (i. 61-62).

Yet it is a well-observed phenomenon that Faustus' actions, once charmed, fall miserably short of his stated aspirations. The text itself is often blamed, and Wolfgang Clemen's opinion is typical:

We may disregard the interpolated episodes, which were provided partly as comic relief and partly to pander to the audience's fondness for spectacle; Marlowe's authorship of these episodes is very questionable, and in any case they do not represent the core of the play.⁴⁴

Still, in any honest performance of the play, the irony of the middle scenes will emphasize a real core of futility in Faustus' existence. Where the mighty Tamburlaine threatened the world with "high astounding terms" and then proceeded brutally to fulfill the spirit of his metaphors, Faustus, alone in a cramped study, envisions impossible dreams:

Shall I make spirits fetch me what I please,
 Resolve me of all ambiguities,
 Perform what desperate enterprise I will?
 I'll have them fly to India for gold,
 Ransack the ocean for orient pearl,
 And search all corners of the new-found world
 For pleasant fruits and princely delicates;
 I'll have them read me strange philosophy
 And tell the secrets of all foreign kings;
 I'll have them wall all Germany with brass
 And make swift Rhine circle fair Wittenberg;
 I'll have them fill the public schools with silk
 Wherewith the students shall be bravely clad;
 I'll levy soldiers with the coin they bring
 And chase the Prince of Parma from our land
 And reign sole king of all our provinces.

(i. 78-93)

Once his pact with the devil is signed, however, he never shows any inclination toward political, military, or social virtue. His one significant plea for spiritual help--"O Christ, my saviour, my saviour, / Help to save distressed Faustus' soul" (vi. 85-86)--sounds more like backsliding than like faith.

Max Bluestone has shrewdly described Faustus' knee-jerk reaction to the psychomachia proportions of the Good and Bad Angels as "presumptuous despair."⁴⁵ Faustus actually thinks he has done atonement by calling on Christ at this point, but, at the same time, he shows a deeper lack of faith in Christian repentance. He remembers the Bad Angel's threat: "If thou repent, devils will tear thee in pieces" (vi. 83), and prematurely reacts: "O Faustus, they are come to fetch thy soul" (l. 92). Lucifer and "his companion prince in hell" do nothing of the kind, however, in conformity with the Good Angel's promise: "Repent, and they shall never raze thy skin" (l. 84). Christ truly cannot save Faustus' soul because of its present enfeebled condition, but then Lucifer cannot claim it either because death is not at hand. This could be a spiritual turning

point for Faustus but, instead, he turns it into a show of weakness. He allows himself to be bullied by the legbreakers from hell because of his real lack of faith; and Lucifer, infernally sensitive to this failing in Faustus, distracts any further introspection with the histrionic legerdemain of the seven deadly sins. They troupe by in a grotesque cavalcade and Faustus, easily appeased, exclaims, "O, how this sight doth delight my soul!" (l. 170). But his soul is actually being ignored. In a metaphorical sense, Faustus falls in behind this doomed parade.

Indeed, from this point on, Faustus forgets his own idealized ambitions to imitate the demonic impresario. His career takes on the farcical tone of a Tudor interlude, and the actual pointlessness of his position is emphasized by the jocose irony of the play's middle scenes. He turns invisible to wreak impolite havoc at the Vatican, acts as outrageous court magician to the German Emperor and patronized illusionist for the Vanholt Duchy, and becomes the titillating terror of the gossiping country populace. Instead of exerting demonic power and infernal influence, he proves himself to be an annoying trickster like the traditional vices of the interludes. In fact, his antics symbolize the essential ludicrousness of the man who declares himself superhuman. Rather than a portrayal of steady decline, Faustus' involvement with the Horse-courser, Robin, Dick, and the others only further emphasizes his limitations as a simple human, and he enters the subplot on their level. Through his prideful shortsightedness Faustus forgets (if he ever really knew) that "because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; . . . God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise" (I Corinthians 1:25-27). His pedestrian carryings-on, while imbued with demonic charm, are an ironic show of the horseplay of mortal life when

compared to the eternal value of the immortal life of the soul.⁴⁶

The thunder-and-lightning conventions of extra-worldly power which open scene xviii subtly herald doom, and the doom of Faustus' profligate soul in particular. Wagner pointedly moves the action forward:

I think my master means to die shortly:
 He has made his will and given me his wealth,
 His house, his goods, and store of golden plate,
 Besides two thousand ducats ready coin'd.
 I wonder what he means. If death were nigh,
 He would not banquet and carouse and swill
 Amongst the students, as even now he doth,
 Who are at supper with such belly-cheer
 As Wagner ne'er beheld in all his life.
 (xviii. 1-9)

But death is "nigh" and, while Faustus' behavior puzzles Wagner (who probably deserves something less than inheritance), a legacy for the unaccomplished scholar symbolizes Faustus' general disregard as the term of his contract expires. In fact, Faustus' "will" is synonymous with the pointless "belly-cheer" in which he so heartily indulges. In the face of infinite possibility, Faustus has opted for twenty-four years of irresponsibility misconstrued, in his mind, as power. He has deludedly fed the self while starving the soul. Soon he must reckon accounts, and his present rev lry at the banquet table only further emphasizes his actual insufficiency.

The Old Man of scene xviii is an exemplar of the course still open to Faustus. Something of a "Father Time" figure, he heightens a sense of finality in Faustus' experience at the same time as he provides the concrete human symbolism missing in the ineffectual Good Angel. He exhorts Faustus to leave off the "damned art" of magic, yet fully realizes the difficulties of abnegation through faith. Indeed, though he

chastizes Faustus' willfulness, he endeavors to lessen the severity of condemnation:

It may be this my exhortation
Seems harsh and all unpleasant; let it not,
For, gentle son, I speak it not in wrath
Or envy of thee, but in tender love
And pity of thy future misery;
And so have hope that this my kind rebuke,
Checking thy body, may amend thy soul.
(ll. 48-54)

The Old Man's enduring faith has helped him on the way to transcending the self, while Faustus' reliance on self-worth condemns him to moral paralysis at this crucial point. "O friend," he responds, "I feel / Thy words to comfort my distressed soul. / Leave me awhile to ponder on my sins" (ll. 65-67). But this is no time to intellectualize. The power of the soul must be accepted irrationally on faith; and it is significant that the Old Man is neither a "good angel" nor even a clerical figure, but simply an aged human who carries his mortality gracefully because of the strength of his faith.

As death draws near, Faustus is at once the Old Man's physical equal and pathetic spiritual opposite; and, instead of seizing an eleventh-hour reprieve (the availability of which, illustrated by the thief on the cross, is the standard argument against despair), Faustus wishes for death in a bluster of despair and self-recrimination:

Where art thou, Faustus? wretch, what hast thou done?
Damn'd art thou, Faustus, damn'd; despair and die!
(xviii. 55-56)

Mephostophilis cannily hands him a dagger. Yet this is not Faustus' first attempt at suicide, as implied by his earlier terrified recollection:

Scarce can I name salvation, faith, or heaven,
 But fearful echoes thunders in mine ears,
 'Faustus, thou art damn'd!' Then guns and knives,
 Swords, poison, halters, and envenom'd steel
 Are laid before me to dispatch myself;
 And long ere this I should have done the deed
 Had not sweet pleasure conquer'd deep despair.
 (vi. 19-25)

Faustus is doubly damned: both by his despairing lack of faith and by the mortal sins of "sweet pleasure" that illegitimately help to mitigate it.

Susan Snyder's general observation is appropriate in Faustus' case:

"Pride and despair are linked in the refusal to acknowledge insufficiency of self and ask for God's help."⁴⁸ Yet the Old Man intercedes at this point the way Una, in Spenser's Faerie Queene, had had to come between the Redcross Knight and the "man of hell," Despair, in a similar situation:

Then gan the villein him to overcraw,
 And brought unto him swords, ropes, poison, fire,
 And all that might him to perdition draw;
 And bad him choose, what death he would desire:
 For death was due to him, that had provokt God's ire.
 (I. ix. 1)

Faustus' error, like that of the Redcross Knight, lies in his mortal fear of God's judgment and punishment, instead of faith in God's mercy and love.⁵⁰ The confinement of his study is likewise analogous to the terrible isolation of the "cave of Despaire" in The Faerie Queene. But the leering allegorical figure of Despair is internalized in Faustus' own grief and conscience:

I do repent, and yet I do despair;
 Hell strives with grace for conquest in my breast.
 What shall I do to shun the snares of death?
 (xviii. 71-73)

Mephostophilis suggests that he dispatch himself immediately, knowing that to claim Faustus' soul now would mean successful damnation. In fact, the eagerness of Mephostophilis is itself an argument for Faustus' reprieve, if he will only turn to God with a truly contrite heart, as the Old Man exhorts him to. Unfortunately, Faustus' warped fixation on punishment forces him to transfer his own misbehavior to the Old Man, and he bids Mephostophilis "Torment, sweet friend, that base and aged man / That durst dissuade me from thy Lucifer" (ll. 84-85), only to be answered with a statement of evil's impotence in the face of true faith:

His faith is great; I cannot touch his soul;
But what I may afflict his body with
I will attempt, which is but little worth.
(ll. 87-89)

In desperation Faustus changes the subject to focus on yet another desire. As his contract expires he seeks to experience further earthly satisfaction, and he asks Mephostophilis to provide Helen of Troy not only to gratify his fleshly appetite but, in a perversely practical way, to take his mind off of the grace he need only ask for. Faustus imagines that the embrace of Helen will, in his words, "extinguish clear / Those thoughts that do dissuade me from my vow, / And keep mine oath I made to Lucifer" (xviii. 94-96). Yet the lyric that follows, beginning with the famous "Was this the face than launch'd a thousand ships," does more than merely distract Faustus' attention from thoughts of repentance. It is a complex pagan, to demonic beauty, equal and opposite to the moist moonful imagery of the like set-piece on Zenocrate in Tamburlaine. Here, however, the imagery bursts forth in violence and vertigo--"Her lips suck forth my soul: see where it flies!" (l. 102)--to hover in an air of flame where

"all is dross that is not Helena" (l. 105). Ironically, Faustus' obsessive praise echoes an earlier statement on purity put forward by Mephostophilis: "All places shall be hell that is not heaven" (v. 127). Both characters seek to define absolute desirability by excluding everything else. But Mephostophilis sees the eternal view of priorities at the last trump, while Faustus remains pathetically localized within his own immediate appetite. His infatuated "heaven is in these lips" (l. 104) falls woefully short of the more pertinent state of his eternal soul. Excluded from heaven, it must be in hell, and Faustus is drawing ever closer to this terrible realization.

Yet hellfire is imagistically linked to sublimation in the present context. The flames, concrete medieval symbol for punishment, have been subdued to this point in order to "heat up" the finale, but have also prefigured Helen in subtle and significant ways. Mephostophilis used a "chafer of fire" (v. 69 s.d.) to liquefy Faustus' congealed blood-ink and cause him to melt into demonic association. Also, Helen's "hot whore" understudy (v. 150) had been ludicrously presented as "a Devil dressed like a woman, with fireworks" (l. 148 s.d.). But the metaphorical flames that lick about Helen are neither emblematic nor grotesque. Their effect is sensual catalysis, and Faustus rhapsodically centers her in the furious heat of the sun:

O, thou art fairer than the evening's air
 Clad in the beauty of a thousand stars,
 Brighter art thou than flaming Jupiter
 When he appear'd to hapless Semele,
 More lovely than the monarch of the sky
 In wanton Arethusa's azur'd arms,
 And none but thou shalt be my paramour.
 (xviii. 112-118)

She is a destructively enervating succubus, and Sachs aptly notes that her kiss is the kiss of death. But it is misleading to see her (as Sachs also does) symbolizing some sort of decadent death-wish quiescence.⁵¹ Faustus is clearly on a pattern to self-destruction, and he mistakes this "paramour" for the eternal love of heavenly bliss, but his praise of Helen is meant to symbolize his actively burning lust. She metaphorically sucks life out of him, and he likewise indulges in the joyfully unbearable heat of the moment oblivious to the fact that in her face he sees his own --the face of damnation.

The concluding scenes are powerfully intense, and the approach of Faustus' death heightens the extremes of polarization between everlasting torment and everlasting bliss. Lucifer returns, satisfied in his own contempt, and intent on delivering "lasting damnation" (xix. 5) to his ironic protégé. Beelzebub is sneeringly direct: "Here we'll stay / To mark him how he doth demean himself" (ll. 9-10), and Mephostophilis takes sadistic pleasure in describing Faustus' eleventh-hour desperation:

Fond worlding, now his heart-blood dries with grief,
His conscience kills it, and his labouring brain
Begets a world of idle fantasies
To overreach the devil; but all in vain:
His store of pleasures must be sauc'd with pain.

(ll. 12-16)

His indulgent globetrotting has indeed come full-circle, but it is a cruel homecoming as the devils take their places to observe the final throes. Death, here, is not in any way equated with sanctuary in Faustus' mind, as Snow would seem to have it,⁵² but with mortal illness, relentless torment, and everlasting perdition. The scholars are concerned and wish to summon physicians, but Faustus is only too aware of

the lack of remedy for his situation. He descants how he must "remain in hell for ever. Hell, ah hell for ever! Sweet friends, what shall become of Faustus, being in hell for ever?" (ll. 51-53). His mind is disengaged in fixation on the repeated certitude of "hell for ever . . . hell for ever." Indeed, overseen by a telling trinity of demons (and this is a remarkable theatrical effect), he pathetically intones the syllables in doomed understanding. At this point Faustus is, as Ariele Sachs puts it, "a man utterly seduced by the prospect of his own damnation, hypnotized by it, made incapable of salvation by the fascination of his own doom."⁵³

Faustus' twenty-four years of "life" have, in fact, been a sentence of death. He arrives at this realization himself--much to his own horror --but continues to stand outside his own existence watching himself perform. Moreover, death, for Faustus, has an overwhelmingly tangible quality, an inescapable "thingness" that gapes open to devour him. His life has not been lived--it has merely dwindled away in ephemeral self-satisfaction and petty pleasure. His preparation for death has been a twenty-four year term; but it seems as if he had served a twenty-four hour term, as alone again in his study, he mutters,

Now hast thou but one bare hour to live,
And then thou must be damn'd perpetually.
(ll. 134-35)

Time is illustrated in Faustus' very words, as the self-conscious enunciation of each painful syllable slowly draws the statement to a rapid volley of phonemes in "perpetually." He is miserably aware of death and damnation, and the absence of any "regret," as Spencer termed it,⁵⁴ following twenty-four years of enjoyment is inconsequential. A

deeper sense of futility mollifies regret as it has defined, for twenty-four years, Faustus' dubious enjoyment.

In fact, Faustus considers himself beyond any hope that regret might imply, even to the point of his hysterical "See, see where Christ's blood streams in the firmament!" (l. 146). His hallucination is similar to the portentous "Homo fuge!" inscribed on his own arm in scene v and yet, even then, he thought himself incapable of gaining grace:

Homo fuge! Whither should I fly?
If unto God, he'll throw me down to hell.--
My senses are deceiv'd, here's nothing writ.--
O yes, I see it plain; even here is writ,
Homo fuge! Yet shall not Faustus fly.
(v. 77-81)

Here, however, Faustus' exclamation is analogous to Tamburlaine's delirious imperative "set black streamers in the firmament" (Part II, V. iii. 49), a comparison drawn first by T.S. Eliot.⁵⁵ The complementary red of blood and black of death string across both plays as violent and paramount symbolism. In both cases death symbolizes an ultimate--the first of the four "last things"--and the course of the action is a journey to death for the hero, after which the dramatist simply defers his responsibility.

Faustus is intent upon saving himself but, instead of looking to God, he continues to seek external and elusive bits of information. While his last speech is like the proverbial "flashing" of one's life before one's eyes, Faustus damns himself through his own missapplied terms:

Ah, my Christ!--
Rend not my heart for naming of my Christ;
Yet will I call on him. O, spare me, Lucifer!
(xix. 147-49)

He first calls on Christ in pain, not out of contrition. In fact, he uses the name in vain. Two lines later, when the meter of the verse and the fate of his soul stand balanced on the crucial name "Christ," Faustus can only provide the blurted multisyllable "Lucifer!". In fear, he calls up traditional Old Testament mountains to obliterate his existence, and curses his birth through images of his own gross humanity:

Now draw up Faustus like a foggy mist
 Into the entrails of yon labouring cloud,
 That, when you vomit forth into the air,
 My limbs may issue from your smoky mouths,
 So that my soul may but ascend to heaven.

(ll. 159-63)

He desperately desires escape; he would rather not have a soul than have it damped. His desire for total non-being makes him curse his parents, as well as himself, before wishing the ultimate disintegration:

O soul, be chang'd into little water drops,
 And fall into the ocean, n'er be found.

(ll. 185-86)

But death and hell occur contemporaneously for Faustus. His terrified exclamations describe ugly ferocity and searing pain as he slides down to eternal torment echoing another multisyllabic name from which he will never be separated.

"The screamed 'Ah, Mephostophilis!'" (l. 190) concludes Faustus' life at the same time as it voices what J.V. Cunningham calls "the shocked limit of feeling . . . the extreme of fear."⁵⁶ Plenty of interlude sinners with names like Moros and Nichol Newfangle had ridden to hell before on the devil's back, but they were ludicrous figures who elicited raucous laughter to accompany their roaring joyrides. Faustus, on the

other hand, expresses painful internal suffering and even pathetically bargains--"I'll burn my books!" (l. 190)--in a last act of desperate evasion. We experience a vicarious wonder at the extreme of his feeling, and fear in a truly tragic context. The man of exceptional possibilities has brought damnation upon himself, like any unredeemed "hot whore" or burgher Duke. His primary error has been a deluded reliance on the self, as noted astutely by Max Bluestone:

The form of Faustus' fortunes follows a clearly tragic curve from ambiguous decision to ambiguous death, from mystery to mystery. The nodes of the curve are familiar enough; heroic self-sufficiency and tragic self-confidence, decision as dilemma, choice, consequences, suffering, tardy transvaluation, and death felt as loss, all these deeply cross-purposed by good and evil as defined by Faustus', conflicting beliefs and doubts.⁵⁷

By contrast, Tamburlaine, the all-powerful chainer of Fate, is wiped out like any of his victims when Fate decides it is time. Faustus' overriding irony lies in the fact that he chose the time himself. Both protagonists reach their heroic and pathetic limits in death, and we, the living, behold them with awe.

Faustus pictures the medieval punishments of hell in his death throes, and the hellmouth stage property of the earlier drama is even brought out (l. 115 s.d.) to ensure that there is no mistaking his fate. Indeed his scattered limbs, discovered afterward, imply an explosive force that sends the soul out of the body to another locality. Faustus' death has been a wondrous spectacle of pain and irretrievable loss. His intellectual and moral possibilities--"Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight" (Epilogue 1)--have been lost in sin and eternal death of the soul. Faustus' main transgression is a failure to heed one

of Christ's first lessons to his apostles: "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell". (Matthew 10:28). Faustus has never shown fear in proper proportion--unequivocally set down in Psalm 111:10: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom"--and is now utterly damned without recourse.

While Faustus acts out the death of the soul, Tamburlaine's struggles are basically physical. The worldly conqueror exerts international military dominance because he feels that he can exploit death to his advantage. Faustus disregards death because of his misguided sense of power--a solipsistic intellectuality. While death is a monstrous circle about Tamburlaine's experience where he exerts authority for a time, to Faustus it belongs among the occult categories wherein he pigeonholes such pathetic worldly aspirations as lust, frivolity, and selfish desire in general. The double-barreled futility exhibited in these contrasting careers shows that Tamburlaine, for all his worldly power, is eventually reduced to nothing while Faustus' imperialism of the mind only leads him to a horrible understanding of damnation. Indeed Tamburlaine, as part of a process to which he could never be reconciled, ironically leaves sons to further his earthly rule, while Faustus, childless and self-involved, is obliterated.

Yet both take on the appearance of death to become ugly symbols of the moral choices they have made: Tamburlaine, the "scourge of God," is a terrifying killer who eventually routs his enemies through his very presence; Faustus, a spiritual suicide, denies God in himself, is totally unable to die to the world, and inspires concern in his fellows where his features symbolize debilitating, rather than violent death. Both

protagonists are linked to an overwhelming inevitability in death, which is impossible to circumvent through simple human means. Like a monstrous beast at the end of life's path, death waits to devour them in all their deluded grandeur. Their self-satisfaction is the colossal error of human will, and Marlowe presents them as symbols of external and internal human aspiration. Faced with death at every point, neither Tamburlaine nor Faustus recognizes it for what it is--an ugly monster of gigantic proportions that reduces man to impotence or imbecility.

Chapter III

The Skeletal Grin in Marston and Tourneur

The diary of an Elizabethan law student, John Manningham, contains the following anecdotal entry for November 21, 1601:

Jo. Marstone the last Christmas when he daunct with Alderman Meres wifes daughter, a spaniard borne, fell into a strang commendacion of her witt and beauty. When he had done, shee thought to pay him home, and told him she though[t] he was a poet. "Tis true," said he, "for poetes fayne, and lye, and soe dyd I when I commended your beauty, for you are exceeding foule."

Marston has been seen as a sleazy, pathological insult artist ever since.

He is never to be trusted because his satirical venom will come spitting out even in the most innocuous situations. It is no doubt this impression, sustained by Ben Jonson's oft-recounted contempt, that informed Samuel Schoenbaum's naive identification of Marston with the character of Malevole as a maladjusted neurotic with a penchant for violence.²

Likewise, T.S. Eliot's pronouncement on The Revenger's Tragedy in 1930 was as critically illegitimate as it was impressionistically profound:

The cynicism, the loathing and disgust of humanity, expressed consummately in The Revenger's Tragedy, are immature in the respect that they exceed the object. Their objective equivalents are characters practising the grossest vices; characters which seem merely to be spectres projected from the poet's inner world of nightmare, some horror beyond words. So the play is a document on humanity chiefly because it is a document on one human being, Tourneur; its motive is truly the death motive, for it is the loathing and horror of life itself.³

The grotesque preoccupation with death of both dramatists is so bewitchingly repulsive/attractive that critics often require a specific place to lay blame/congratulations. The author, real or supposed (and in Tourneur's case this uncertainty adds to the cryptic effect), becomes associated directly with the moral vision of his work, and this leads to biographical astigmatism that distorts a truly critical approach. This chapter is entitled "The Skeletal grin in (not of) Marston and Tourneur" because the fleshless grinning that lurks in and around their satiric approach to the dirty joke of death is a matter of irony and exposition, not a personal moral stance.

I plan to explore the purposeful grotesque of Antonio's Revenge, The Revenger's Tragedy, and The Atheist's Tragedy, with reference, where needed, to The Malcontent.⁴ No one dies in The Malcontent, which is technically a tragicomedy, but the overall tone is definitely funereal and the play develops a character type of extreme importance.⁵ My emphasis throughout will be on tragic satire, where humanity is mocked by reductive portrayals of tortured life and violent death. There is an "unremitting" quality to these plays--a sarcasm and overstatement--that presents moral matters as morality by default. Consider the overstated openings of these plays:

Enter PIERO unbraced, his arms bare, smeared in blood, a poinard in one hand, bloody, and a torch in the other, STROTZO following him with a cord.

(AR, I. i. s.d.)

The vilest out-of-tune music being heard, enter BILIOSO and PREPASSO.

(Malc., I. i. s.d.)

Enter VINDICE [holding a skull; he watches as] the Duke, Duchess, LUSSURIOSO his son, SPURIO the bastard, with a train, pass over the stage with torch-light.

(RT, I. i. s.d.)

A sensational conjunction of blood, violence, and darkness sets the tone: low, lewd, and murderous. Indeed the explicit cacophony of The Malcontent's opening is a metaphor for the disjointed and nightmarish world of all the plays to be discussed in this chapter.

Antonio's Revenge begins at an exclamatory homicidal pitch, as Piero maniacally crows,

Ho, Gaspar Strotzo, bind Feliche's trunk
Unto the panting side of Mellida. [Exit STROTZO.]
'Tis now dead night; yet all the earth is clutched.
In the dull leaden hand of snoring sleep;
No breath disturbs the quiet of the air,
No spirit moves upon the breast of earth,
Save howling dogs, nightcrows, and screeching owls,
Save meager ghosts, Piero, and black thoughts.

[Clock strikes.]

(I. i. 1-8 s.d.)

Horrific and deathly symbols of cryptic insubstantiality are shouted to the fore: night, darkness, howling dogs, owls, ghosts. They contrast with the sweaty physicality of "Feliche's trunk," "the panting side of Mellida," and "the dull leaden hand of snoring sleep" to reinforce nervy, secretive criminality. Piero clearly sees himself as an elusive spirit of revenge as well; and the action is swift and ghastly as one murderer exits, the other gloats, and a clock ominously strikes the small hours.

Ironical evil is doubled from the outset for grotesque effect. Piero, a justified revenger in his own mind, revels in triumph over his victims while his goon accomplice vainly tries to convey important (and cherished) information. Finally, insulted for his lack of eloquence, Strotzo breaks in:

I would have told you, if the incubus
That rides your bosom would have patience,
It is reported that in private state
Maria, Genoa's Duchess, makes to court,
Longing to see him whom she ne'er shall see,
Her lord, Andrugio.

(I. i. 90-95)

Note the corrupt comical image of "incubus" and "bosom," along with the snickering, trivialized effect of "Longing to see him whom she ne'er shall see." Restricted to little more than frustrated monosyllables to this point, Strotzo maliciously comments on how Maria will find the current reconciliation between Piero and the murdered Andrugio, "reconciliation with a death!" (I. 97). Throughout Piero's savage monologue, Strotzo (himself strangled with inelegance) has been farcically unable to articulate himself. And, having finally explained the favorable circumstance of Maria's presence, he is again silenced by the ludicrous extent of Piero's passion:

O, let me swoon for joy. By heaven, I think
I ha' said my prayers, within this month at least,
I am so boundless happy. Doth she come?
By this warm reeking gore, I'll marry her.
Look I not now like an inamorato?
Poison the father, butcher the son, and marry the mother--ha!

(I. i. 99-104)

Clearly Antonio's life is in danger, but the son "butchered" at this point is that of Pandulpho Feliche. The stage is set for the sensational discovery of the killing, where Antonio, his mother Maria, and the aged Pandulpho are all present at the window of Antonio's beloved Mellida. The effect, stage-managed by the evil Piero, is as ominous as it is grotesque. Antonio croons, "See, look, the curtain stirs; shine nature's pride, / Love's vital spirit; dear Antonio's bride!" (I. iii. 128-29).

as the curtains part to reveal "the body of FELICHE, stabbed thick with wounds [and] hung up" (l. 130 s.d.). Piero freely admits to the killing, but claims he did it in rage at discovering Feliche in flagrante delicto with his daughter, Antonio's love, Mellida. Strotzo immediately takes his cue and enters with news of Andrugio's death, reportedly due to overjoyousness. Death and dishonor dangle before every character, in accordance with Piero's own suggestive image: "Feliche hangs / But as a bait upon the line of death" (I. i. 15-16). They are all in the terrible danger of being reeled in on Piero's crazed trawl line.

The sensational opening scenes effectively polarize another set of ironic doubles in the aggrieved pair, Antonio and Pandulpho. The youthful Antonio is outraged and impassioned as he cries out in confusion and disbelief,

My father dead, my love attaint of lust,
 (That's a large lie, as vast as spacious hell!),
 Poor guiltless lady--O accursèd lie!
 What, whom, wither, which shall I first lament?
 A dead father, a dishonoured wife?
 (I.. v., 27-31)

He spurns all consolation, declaring patience a "slave to fools" (l. 36), and comfort "a parasite" (l. 49), as he exits in wretched bluster.

Pandulpho, on the other hand, laughs off the horror of his slain son in sickly rationalization:

How provident our quick Venetians are
 Lest hooves of jades should trample on my boy;
 Look how they lift him up to eminence,
 Heave him 'bove reach of flesh. Ha, ha, ha.
 (ll. 71-74)

Unlike Antonio--in his impetuous fervor--Pandulpho comforts himself with

the cowardly stoicism that follows unspeakable terror. He masks his passion in the guise of social expediency:

Wouldst have me cry, run raving up and down
For my son's loss? Wouldst have me turn rank mad,
Or wring my face with mimic action,
Stamp, curse, weep, rage, and then my bosom strike?
Away, 'tis apish action, player-like.
If he is guiltless, why should tears be spent?
Thrice blessed soul that dieth innocent.
If he is lepered with so foul a guilt,
Why should a sigh be lent, a tear be spilt?
(ll. 76-84)

Neither character can reconcile himself in the face of inscrutable death, but while Antonio wrestles with the agony of emotionalized woe, Pandulpho, his partner in grief, suffers a paralyzed wonder.

The opposing reactions of Antonio and Pandulpho are suggestive of the central critical problem with Marston: where is the line of demarcation between tragedy and satire? This problem is addressed directly by R.A. Foakes' reading of Antonio's Revenge.⁶ Others had apologized for the play's extreme self-consciousness, though Caputi noted something of the irony in a chapter entitled "Lovers-in-Distress Burlesques and Antonio's Revenge," and W. Reavley Gair concluded his introduction to the play by endorsing its worth as a parody of Hamlet.⁷ But Foakes' view of the irony took into account not only the play's text, but its calculated ridiculousness as well when performed by the boy actors of Paul's:

The peculiar tone of the Antonio plays is largely generated through the exploitation of the clash between the "infant weakness" of the boys and their "passion"; they speak more than gods, and, at the same time, Marston does not let his audience forget that they are less than men.⁸

Roakes noted the conscious detachment in characters like Pandulpho and Alberto, who call for music (which dutifully begins) and then proceed to comment on the action (I. v. 62-67). Balurdo, in turn, draws attention to the play's hyperbole by inditing "good words" throughout. Indeed the second act is but barely underway when Balurdo bursts ludicrously upon the stage "with a beard half off, half on" (II. i. 21 s.d.); and Roakes draws further attention to the grotesquely childish strutting involved in impassioned figures like Piero and Antonio. The players themselves are their own satiric comment.

The boy actors had been a comic staple for decades, ranting in such oversize parts as that of John Heywood's Thersites, and their youth, attached incongruously to the viciousness of the roles in Antonio's Revenge, smacks of satire in the grimmest sense. Yet T.F. Wharton argued against ironic readings by claiming a thoughtlessness for Marston that disregarded conscious parody in favor of his whim, as author.⁹ But what Wharton saw as "randomly repetitive" in Piero and Antonio is visually repetitive as well. Each is a revenger, self-justified in his own violence, and Antonio "his arms bloody, [bearing] a torch and a poinard" (III. v. 14 s.d.) recalls Piero at the play's very opening: "his arms bare, smeared in blood, a poinard in one hand, bloody, and a torch in the other." Another set of ironic contrasts resides in Piero's contemptuous gloating:

Rot there, thou cerecloth that enfolds the flesh
Of my loathed foe; moulder to crumbling dust;
Oblivion choke the passage of thy fame!
(II. i. 1-3)

and in the first words spoken by Andrugio's ghost:

Thy pangs of anguish rip my cerecloth up;
 And lo, the ghost of old Andrugio
 Forsakes his coffin! Antonio, revenge!
 (III. i. 32-34)

Surely there is nothing "random" about the parallelism here; moreover, I feel that the Senecan wail of revenge can be legitimately played for laughs as well. Why not? Marston himself was willing to describe The Malcontent as a "harsh comedy" in his Latin dedication to Ben Jonson, and anyone capable of penning Malevole's "I had rather follow a drunkard, and live by licking up his vomit, than by serve ~~the~~ flattery" (Malc., IV. v. 66-68) derives a certain enjoyment from stirring ironic sensations. Besides Balurdo's ridiculous antics throughout Antonio's Revenge, Pandulpho is given the strange line "Antonio, kiss my foot" (IV. v. 1) to begin the scene that ends in a collective resolve for vengeance!

The problem of tone in Marston has been sharply focused by a "Critical Forum" exchange in Essays in Criticism. Richard Levin capped off a controversy with R.A. Foakes on ironic readings by issuing the following statement of principle:

I believe we should approach the plays of this period with the assumption that they mean what generations of spectators and readers have taken them to mean (when we have such a consensus), unless there is very good evidence to the contrary.¹⁰

Levin's caution should be applauded--especially in the realm of Shakespearean criticism that renders the Bard incapable of anything short of perfection. But Marston's dramaturgy had become the main bone of contention in the conflict and this, in itself, says something about Marston's power of irony. However, I doubt that a "consensus" on the nature of Marston's (or anyone else's) plays has ever existed--at least

not much beyond a vague conformity found in a current of grotesque latent in the English psyche, and generalized aptly by Nicholas Brooke:

Before Marlowe and Kyd, English tragedy (apart from one isolated academic experiment, Gorboduc) was largely violent moral farce. It emerged from late medieval morality plays where sardonic humourists mocked and derided the solemn morals with strikingly ambivalent results.¹¹

Each age interprets differently; and drama, with its potential for adaptation, is most susceptible to flux. For me (and doubtless for Professors Levin and Foakes as well) this is where the enduring freshness of the genre lies. The evocative power of dramatic artifice should not be exclusively harnessed by "straight," "ironic," or (what might be even more reprehensible by Levin's or Foakes' standards) "close" readings. Part of the reason Levin objected to ironic readings was because he detected a tendency to rescue "bad" plays (or portions thereof) by pleading parody--with the same irresponsibility that allows any statement to be made by pleading irony. What is really offensive here is not the technique, but its underlying reality--a reality that does not particularly flatter the present age, and one which S. Gorley Putt has accurately described:

Not all the reasons for supposing the present time to be peculiarly favourable for an appreciation of Elizabethan/Jacobean drama are complimentary to us. There is much in this theatrical treasury which requires a strong stomach in the reader, let alone the watcher and listener. We have that strong stomach. We have earned it the hard way. Nineteenth-century commentators were accustomed to make ritual gestures of distaste when they were confronted by the crude brutalities of some of these plays, whose authors picked unimproving themes and dragged up imagery from the unwelcome subconsciousness of their difficult age. We, who have lived through or inherited horrors glossed over in the eighteenth-century and undreamed of in the nineteenth, have no cause to flinch.¹²

Parody is a fact of dramatic performance, and the twentieth century's Theater of Cruelty has infinitely more in common with the power of Jacobean intrigue than with the drama of social realism earlier in this century. Its artifice goes a good deal further toward presenting an existential context of experience as well. Tom Stoppard's Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead could not have been conceived through the neoclassical bias of the eighteenth century, the Victorian sensibility of the nineteenth, or the Romantic buffer zone that produced the partial information of Byron's Manfred. Even the lighter moments of Waiting For Godot's "dreadful privation" are more in touch with the high camp of Peter Quince's production of Pyramus and Thisbe, or "Bottom's Dream" ("because it hath no bottom") in A Midsummer Night's Dream. Reality--so often a parody of itself--is thus confirmed through parody that is not necessarily cavalier. It chastens us with a paradigmatic sense of our own shortcomings. It is all we know.

Parody can only survive through repetition. The more savage the incongruity, the more striking the effect. Wharton insists, however, that "Antonio's Revenge does not parody revenge ethics, but endorses vengeance in its most sadistic form."¹³ Doubtless, he has the shocking horror of Julio's death in mind; and Fredson Bowers, earlier, had codified the scene as "a purely gratuitous piece of business brought in merely to make the audience shudder."¹⁴ But the scene is set up around clearly defined homicidal contrasts. Agitators "From above and beneath" (III. ii. 75 s.d.) cry "Murder" and the incensed Antonio pledges, "I'll suck red vengeance / Out of Piero's wounds" (ll. 77-78). Yet Piero "in his nightgown and nightcap" (l. 79 s.d.) is a touchingly ironic picture of concerned parenthood:

Jul. Ho, father, father!

Pie. How now, Julio, my pretty little son?

[Te FOROBOSCO] Why suffer you the child to walk so late?

-(11: 83-85)

Antonio delays killing Piero at this point, vowing "I'll force him feed on life / Till he shall loathe it" (11. 89-90); and murdering Julio seems the perfect way to begin. Yet it is difficult to place the onus of revenge on Andrugio's ghost (Geckle claims that "Antonio is being forced to commit atrocities by a spiritual force against which he is helpless"¹⁵) or to see Julio as some sort of "surrogate target."¹⁶ Instead, the associations around the words "brother" and "father" sung from the mouth of this innocent only further enrage Antonio:

Jul. Brother Antonio, are you here i' faith?

Why do you frown? Indeed my sister said

That I should call you brother, that she did,

When you were married to her. Buss me, good;

'Truth, I love you better than my father, 'deed.

Ant. Thy father? Gracious, O bounteous heaven!

I do adore thy justice.

(III. iii. 1-7)

The two would have been brothers--albeit brothers-in-law--in the marriage of Antonio to Mellida. They will be step-brothers yet, if Piero marries Maria. Indeed this child, in the mind of Antonio, represents the son Piero would have by Maria; and the thought of it is maddening.

The Halletts are accurate on Antonio's state of mind at this point:

Under the pressures of the passion for revenge, he begins to see the world in terms of the self, that is, he creates a personal view of the world which clouds his vision and prevents him from comprehending the outside world as it really is.¹⁷

A son himself, Antonio narrates his stabbing of Julio through operative artifice that borders on the sacrificial. He then explicitly states-- at his own father's graveside--the conjunction of meaning and murder. that he has perpetrated:

He is all Piero, father; all; this blood,
This breast, this heart, Piero all,
Whom thus I mangle. Sprite of Julio,
Forget this was thy trunk. I live thy friend.
Mayst thou be twined with the soft'st embrace
Of clear eternity; but thy father's blood
I thus make incense of: [ANTONIO allows JULIO'S blood to fall
upon the hearse] to Vengeance!
(III. iii. 56-63)

Sadistic this is, but it is more than that. Stage directions ensure the proper visual effect, and the paradigmatic sense of revenge desired is noted aptly by Richard W. Hillman: "The prospect of murdering Julio, the unspeakable Piero's innocent young son, leads to a remarkably direct, if self-contained, presentation of revenge as a matter of meaning and mortality."¹⁸

In Antonio's Revenge the webbing of intrigue is not plotted out. Instead, the primitive operative device of high passion and gruesome symbolism is used in a fashion similar to that in the earlier scene of Julio's murder. Antonio puts off the fool's disguise that hides him from Piero throughout Act IV, and prostrates himself in despair:

Death, like to a stifling incubus,
Lie on my bosom. Lo, sir; I am sped:
My breast is Golgotha, grave for the dead.
(IV. iv. 21-23)

Meanwhile, Pandulpho actually lays the corpse of Feliche "thwart ANTONIO'S breast." Mute symbol of injustice, Feliche's body, in its winding sheet, focuses attention as did the blood-dripping body of Julio.

They are not so much memento mori as gruesome reminders of irrational violence. Against the conjunction of dead Feliche and despairing Antonio, a medieval débat on the virtue of revenge is argued. Pandulpho, the erstwhile stoic of administrative proportions, performs a surprising about-face and stirs Antonio with inflammatory rhetoric:

Man will break out, despite philosophy.
 Why, all this while I ha' but played a part,
 Like to some boy that acts a tragedy,
 Speaks burly words and raves out passion;
 But when he thinks upon his infant weakness,
 He droops his eye. I spake more than a god,
 Yet am less than man.
 I am the miserablest soul that breathes.
 (IV. v. 46-53)

Woeful misery and wondrous resolution coalesce at this point. Attention is again focused on deathly action, as the motivating character bristles with indignation and resolve:

Why should this voice keep tune,
 When there's no music in the breast of man?
 I'll say an honest antique rhyme I have:
 Help me, good sorrow-mates, to give him grave.
They all help to carry FELICHE to his grave.
 Death, exile, complaints and woe,
 Are but man's lackeys, not his foe.
 No mortal 'stapes from fortune's war
 Without a wound, at least a scar.
 Many have led these to the grave,
 But all shall follow, none shall save.
 (IV. v. 70-79)

The poetry is not lost on Antonio, who registers the grim decision, "Let's think a plot; then pell-mell vengeance!" (l. 95). An indiscriminate and "pell-mell" vengeance is to be pursued because the play's horrors have mounted to the point where Piero, the villain, has become prime symbol for the entire range of discord "in the breast of

man."¹⁹ The "time has come for vengeance because Antonio's very time of life has become intolerable. Revenge, amoral and symbolic, will instill new meaning.

The symbolic dumb show at the outset of Act V sets the violent tone: various personages "make semblance of loathing PIERO and knit their fists at him." Of course the villain is oblivious, and his surprise amidst the gruesome revelry will heighten the horror. During the masque, the revengers continue in conspiratorial whispers until Piero is bound to a chair and tortured with insults, "dismemberment, and Antonio's arch comment as a Thyestean dish of roasted child is served: "Here's flesh and blood which I am sure thou lovest" (V. v. 49). The tongueless Piero pathetically "seems to condole his son," as the masquers continue their vilification:

Ant. Scum of the mud of hell!

Alb.

Slime of all filth!

Mar. Thou most detested toad.

(ll. 65-66)

They conclude with Bafurdo's absurd "Thou most retort and obtuse rascal!" Swords drawn, the revengers "offer to run all at PIERO and on a sudden stop" (l. 73 s.d.) in stooge-like zeal. The sweetness of the moment must be drawn out, and Piero is stabbed one-by-one in retributive sententiousness before, finally, "They all run at PIERO with their rapiers" (l. 79 s.d.). The villain is excised and a concluding scene sets normative social values.

Convention dictates that the revenger must be punished, however, because his atrocious vengeance oversteps morality and justice, and because it is simply not mortal man's prerogative to exact vengeance.

"Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord" (Romans 12:19), and this is understood to be an exclusive right. But in Antonio's Revenge the revenger survives, despite his horrifying choreography of slaughter and defilement. The revenge group instead devolves, as a whole, into a monastic negation of life (where the only alternative is suicide) because no one in the play wishes to condemn any of them. Parolphe and Antonio are even offered a reward from the state for eliminating Piero, and are blessed by the official Senate body: "May your honours live / Religiously held sacred, even for ever and ever" (V. vii. 10-11). But this is not a calculated blow to the myth of the heroic revenger, nor a conclusion of "palpable nonsense," as yet another critic would have it.²⁰ Rather, the conclusion emphasizes an amoral reality through repeating the very promise of absolution that the treacherous Piero had offered Strotzo (II. v. 27-35), before garroting him at the ironic moment of untruth (IV. iii. 64 s.d.). This blatant abuse of confession combines with a literalistic religious viewpoint at the play's conclusion to satirize the vanity of moral rectitude. Morality is possible, but it is not man's prerogative. If vengeance truly is the Lord's, then any mortal judgment of revenge is deluded, and man's ability to dictate terms of life and death is made grimly ridiculous once again.

Vindice of The Revenger's Tragedy is a more venomously internalized, a more inwardly warped protagonist from the outset:

Duke; royal lecher; go, grey-hair'd adultery;
 And thou his son, as impious steep'd as he;
 And thou his bastard, true-begot in evil;
 And thou his duchess, that will do with devil.
 Four excellent characters.

(I. i. 1-5)

Positioned midway between audience and procession, Vindice acts as disgusted interlocutor for the showing of freakish and debased creatures before us. What was witnessed in the character and action of Piero in Antonio's Revenge is here described by Vindice. This is the "ruling class"--not a glittering spectacle of poise and pomp but, instead, a shadowy, shuffling group characterized strictly in terms of perverse sexuality. The collective description "Four excellent characters" is almost demented in its withering sarcasm. The hatred expressed here is restrained by the furious control of a psychotic--a buckle that, when snapped, will unleash uncontrollable spasms of destruction.

Vindice focuses on the Duke, the main object of his contempt:

O, that marrowless age
 Would stuff the hollow bones with damn'd desires,
 And 'stead of heat, kindle infernal fires
 Within the spendthrift veins of a dry duke,
 A parch'd and juiceless luxur. O God!--one
 That has scarce blood enough to live upon,
 And he to riot it like a son and heir?
 O, the thought of that
 Turns my abused heart-strings into fret.
 (I. i. 5-13)

The state's central symbol of authority is described as a husk of licentiousness and incontinence. His deathly lust is more of a senile habit than a passionate pleasure, and it is this sexual inappropriateness in his behavior that gnaws primarily at the fevered rectitude of Vindice. Himself a ruined "son and heir," Vindice hates the disordered figure that revels in blandishments to which he has been denied. But it is not simple jealousy. The general atmosphere is poisonous with soured hopes and rotten realities where Vindice's "abused heart-strings" no longer strike proper chords but, like the "out-of-tune" music of The Malcontent,

are fretful and unpredictable in pitch. Vindice is all homicidal
vengeance looking for a place to assert itself. Peter Lasca calls

The Revenger's Tragedy "A Study in Irony," pointing out that the play

"does not attempt to trace out the war of good with evil, nor the self-

division of good, but rather the intestinal division of evil itself, a

division which while, seeming to lead to multiplication ironically ends .

in cross-cancellation." 21. A revenger wrapped in a tragedy, Vindice and

the despised Duke are two sinister wrongs that will eventually obliterate each other in a wake of general destruction.

Vindice's lover has been murdered nine years before. Yet, he fondles her skull in the play's opening scene. More than a mere stage property, the skull is introduced as a character in the play, and its very "presence" will aid Vindice's gruesome revenge. He recounts his lover's demise at the hands of the "royal lecher" described earlier, and the terms are as disturbing as they are disturbed:

Thou sawllo picture of my poison'd love,
My study's ornament, thou shell of death,
Once the bright face of my betrothed lady,
When life and beauty naturally fill'd out
These ragged imperfections,
When two heaven-pointed diamonds were set
In those unsightly rings--then 'twas a face
So far beyond the artificial shine
Of any woman's bought complexion,
That the uprightest man (if such there be
That sin but seven times a day) broke custom,
And made up eight with looking after her.
 . . . But O, accursed palace!
Thee when thou wert apparel'd in thy flesh
The old duke poison'd,
Because thy purer part would not consent
Unto his palsy-lust; for old men lustful
Do show like young men, angry, eager, violent,
Outbid like their limited performances.

(I. i. 14-36)

His "study's ornament" is a "shell of death" that was once "apparel'd" (fashionably, we may suppose) in "flesh"--it is a bizarre conjunction of a living past with a dead present. Not only was Vindice's beloved poisoned, but "poison'd love" is symptomatic of a larger problem in the revenger. He dwells on the inert "thingness" of the skull as if it were human. But diamonds in the empty eye orbits suggest a shocking image of multifaceted, crystalline hardness, rather than any blissful association with heaven. Her face, compared to the shining "bought complexion" of other women, does not radiate virtue by comparison if Vindice can only theorize on its ability to induce lustful fantasy. His hatred renders him incapable of recognizing his own mechanized "verbal distortion."²² His complaint is so deep that anything Vindice sees as "good"--even the innocent beauty of his murdered lover--is unreasonably reinforced to the point of enervating delectability. Likewise, in the opposite direction, his appeal to popular patristic theology--a moral handicap of eight sins daily--is a deadening overcompensation for the veniality that does exist in daily life. But Vindice is a grotesque extremist. His hatred of the Duke's "palsy-lust" (nine years in brewing, it must not be forgotten) betrays him as a young man incapable of balanced introspection; and he is totally unaware that he effectively describes himself in the defiling terms "angry, eager, violent."

L.G. Salingar put it succinctly: "Death has triumphed, and the only course left open to Vindice is to convert a horrified recoil into a grim acceptance, turning the forces of death against themselves."²³ This he proceeds to do, as he shouts at the skull in hysterical imperative:

Advance thee, O thou terror to fat folks,
To have their costly three-pil'd flesh worn off
As bare as this.

(I. i. 45-47)

"Fat folks" and "three-pil'd flesh" are disparaging terms of indulgent corruption, at once indiscriminate and gruesomely physical. Clearly an agent of death, Vindice holds the skull aloft as a horrific and unmistakable memento mori, only to be interrupted by his brother's grotesque understatement: "Still sighing o'er death's vizard?" (l. 19). Nicholas Brooke describes the effect: "The grotesque at this intensity is a very strange experience: it becomes a mode of perceiving, and reveals a good deal of our response to death, and indeed to life as well, that normally remains decently obscure."³⁴ A grim acceptance is indeed perceived, but it is linked to a curious irony that renders death laughable as well. An unreasonable demand is made on the consciousness through death or its symbol (in this case a skull) and synonymous reactions occur: tears at the horror, a function of woe seen earlier in Antonio; laughter at the incongruity, a function of wonder as witnessed in Pandulpho. The Revenger's Tragedy is not nearly so explicit as Antonio's Revenge, however, and Vindice's internal miasma of obsessive, deathly vengeance requires further decoding.

An obscurity of the play, usually overlooked or patronized, concerns the reason behind Vindice's nine-year delay in gaining revenge. Is it simply a constructional "given"? Is it a problem lying outside the parameters of the play? I think the nine-year span is crucial and establishes an important set of associations in character. Clearly Vindice's brother Hippolito is a younger brother, and Vindice has had to

wait while the youngster "grew" into a position at court. Hippolito, Vindice's "fifth column," thus replaces their father--a civil servant who passed away in unjustified disgrace. He shows real loyalty and enthusiasm for revenge, but none of his older brother's cynicism and craft. Indeed Hippolito is Vindice's puppet, as much as his associate, and a near contemporary of the treacherous brothers of the court.²⁵ If Hippolito and Lussurioso are about the same age and the other evil siblings--Spurio, Ambizioso, Supervacuo, and Junior--are younger still, then the disenfranchized Vindice is further alienated by his lost prime. Consider the insult: nine years ago when his beloved was murdered, these post-pubescent perverts were still in short clothes. And the very murderer is their father. Wedged therefore between the "palsy-lust" of the old Duke and the youthful "heat" of Lussurioso and his brothers, Vindice cuts a grotesquely pathetic figure as a "man o' th' time."

Vindice continues the Morality tradition of the Vice but with a grimness that attests to his modernity. The late fifteenth-century play Mankind identified its demons consistently as modern: "New-Guise," "Nowadays," and "Nought." Unlike the usual ruse, however, Vindice is the good man disguised as evil. Calling himself Piato, his assignment as pander for Lussurioso gains him a ready and cryptic place in the orbit of court. The character association is clear: Vindice, his lover dead and himself still suffering her loss, must cloak his identity to aid the gratification of insensitive, glandular lust in Lussurioso. This he does to gain access to the object of his violent hatred--the Duke. Yet he is stunned to discover that it is his own sister he must procure for the ducal heir. This begins a series of ironic reversals

in the play (Bradbrook claimed to have counted twenty-two of them), but the important point here is the centering of Lussurioso's character. Disguised, Vindice elicits the telling question of Lussurioso: "Then thou know'st / I' th' world strange lust?" (I. iii. 55-56); and the "strange lust" that obsesses Lussurioso is not an obsession with virginity, as Brooke alleges,²⁶ but instead a fixation on the orgasmic good of the self, where any partner is a mere sex gadget. This monstrous sense of self-gratification is reducible unto death itself, as implied in the play's first scene where Vindice, the skull of his dead mistress in hand, mused on Lussurioso's desires:

"I wonder how ill-featur'd, vile-proportion'd
 / That one should be, if she were made for woman,
 Whom at the insurrection of his lust
 He would refuse for once; heart, I think none."
 (I. i. 85-88)

Lussurioso can even counter a rude homosexual advance with unperturbed ease: "Friend, I can, / Forget myself in private, but elsewhere / I pray do you remember me" (I. iii. 38-40). On his way to assassinate the lecherous, murderous Duke, Vindice discovers that the heir to power is as detestable as the present ruler.

Vindice arrives at court to exact revenge for the degradation and death of his beloved. He finds, however, that more than just the Duke is to blame. Larry S. Champion argues a broad societal case for the tragic perspective in The Revenger's Tragedy, noting necessary judgment "both on the flawed protagonist and on the corrupt society, the surrounding characters who through deceit and passion for self-gratification share the responsibility for provoking such a flaw."²⁷

Disinherited, obsessively true to a love long since dead, Vindice has internalized his fixation on revenge ever since and now, loose in society again, he finds corruption everywhere: the Duke himself is a cuckold, Vindice's own mother has a price, Lussurioso's life is in danger because of jealous half-brothers, the youngest of the royal brood is an unrepentant rapist about to be exonerated. Each character (and this includes Vindice) is dominated by a singular form of lust--murder, wealth, orgasm, power, revenge--that has, as its common denominator, the grinning, empty knowledge of the play's dominating symbol--the skull of Vindice's beloved. Such two-dimensional characterization stylizes both the corruption and the grace of the play, where Morality abstractions set up the cartoon-like obsessiveness of the central horrific irony--death-dealing revenge.

In his introduction to The Revenger's Tragedy, R.A. Foakes saw the play's ironies contributing to an overall quality at once "grotesque, perverted, even mad";²⁸ and these adjectives intersect during Vindice's magnificent exposition of the silkworm. The stage direction reads:

"Enter VINDICE, with the skull of his love dressed up in tires [and masked]" (III. v. 42 s.d.). Attention is focused upon the gorgeously attired skeleton that Vindice has prepared for the Duke; and this universal symbol for death is more effectively dramatic than the pathetic bleeding body of Julio in Antonio's Revenge. Instead of woe, the skull evokes wonder:

Does the silk-worm expend her yellow labours
For thee? for thee does she undo herself?
Are lordships sold to maintain ladyships
For the poor benefit of a bewitching minute?
Why does yon fellow falsify high-ways,
And put his life between the judge's lips,

To refine such a thing? Keeps horse and men
To beat their valours for her?

Surely we are all mad people, and they
Whom we think are, are not; we mistake those:
'Tis we are mad in sense, they but in clothes.

(III. v. 72-82)

All the while that Vindice's beloved lived and "shone so bright" (l. 67), this macabre skeletal form was the true reality. At least now, in death, she is impeccable. His fixed gaze on the skull unwavering, Vindice further acknowledges the futility of his own actions through a combination of nostalgic self-reproach and cryptic avowal. He is nauseated by an image of deathly sexuality, conveyed through the hauntingly enervating verbs "expend" and "undo." His aversion is reinforced by the equally provocative verb "maintain," where its ambivalent object is at once "ladyships" and whoredoms. Concretely linked to mortality through what Vindice perceives as sexual incontinence, the pathetic "benefit of a bewitching minute" refers at once to the short-lived pleasure of orgasm and the futility of human existence. "Yon fellow" is simply any fellow, and to "falsify high-ways" is an odd generalization that, as Foakes notes, "suggests overtones which go beyond the image of robbery, implying perhaps the violation of proper courses of behaviour."²⁹ Human existence, then, lived inevitably at the expense of spiritual gain, puts one's life "between the judge's lips" where it is constantly liable. Horses and men (Vindice included) are pathetically drone-like in this fatalistic regard, and their ambitious "valours" are in fact "yellow labours," vain as those of the mindless silkworm.

Vindice's monstrous disgust articulates the indescribable hatred he feels at the wrong done to him. Such abhorrence strengthens his

resolve. In a voided world of paralyzing madness on one hand and futile sanity on the other, at least he has a positive task to perform--revenge.

Hillman characterizes the motivation adroitly: "The revenger perceives the injury he has suffered as rendering his existence meaningless; he then embraces the destruction of his enemies as a new source of meaning."³⁰ The skull becomes his accomplice as well as his totem. Yet, injured and degraded beyond words, Vindice acknowledges a sense of his own futility that parallels his nihilistic self-justification of revenge. As B.J. Layman observed, "The skull is the agent in a realm where no effective counteragent exists; and while Vindice addresses his Beloved volubly, the very soul and secret of her responding eloquence is, inevitably, her grinning silence."³¹

The death-masque revenge is a convention bequeathed by Marston. It simultaneously ties together the plot and obliterates the revenger in a purgative, final slaughter. The Revenger's Tragedy presents the sine qua non of ironic action at this point. A banquet is prepared, similar to that terrible "revelling night / When torchlight made an artificial noon" (I. iv. 26-27) and Lord Antonio's wife was raped by the Duchess' youngest son. Lussurioso sits in state as the new Duke while Vindice, Hippolito, "and two LORDS more" (V. iii. 40 s.d.) dance in to kill him and his retainers. The action is ingeniously replayed as Ambitioso, Supervacuo, and a balancing "Fourth Man" perform the same action only to find their target (Lussurioso) already dead. The masquers then turn on each other in a stylized power struggle, and each is killed in turn. Lord Antonio is declared Duke and--in response to his innocuous wonder-- Vindice gleefully confesses to instigating the entire purge. He and his brother are summarily rewarded:

Ant. Lay hands upon those villains.
 . . . Bear 'em to speedy execution.
 . . . You that would murder him would murder me.
 (11. 101-105)

Vindice accepts his fate with remarkable élan, despite Hippolito's whining rebuke, "'Sfoot, brother, you begun" (1. 106). But the world of the play does not return to a former age of morality at Lord Antonio's succession.³² Nor can The Revenger's Tragedy be codified as a "correction" of Marston's misuse of the death-of-the-avenger motif."³³ Vindice has ironically shown himself to have too much in common with the villains he takes revenge upon; and his sentencing at the play's conclusion is a stylized condemnation that symbolizes the inevitability of punishment along with life's all-too-human pattern of violence and retribution.

Tragic satire generally reduces itself to anarchy--an anarchy produced by de-emphasizing any normative purpose in man. Such chaos is usually projected for the sake of naturalism. But The Atheist's Tragedy, unlike its predecessors, cannot be measured with such human verisimilitude in mind. It is an artificial construct from the beginning, where the satirical edge is ground down to an incisive, formal clarity. The hysterical pitch is gone; gone, too, is the instinctual poetic feeling, the passion, the demented retribution. The playwright produces a scheme: if the only tragedy is damnation, then atheism is tragic and the true Christian will gain revenge through a paradoxical refusal to effect blood revenge. This is what is meant by "turning the other cheek."

Only God claims vengeance anyway, and man must be content with the instructions set forth in Colossians 3:2-3:

Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.
For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.

The Atheist's Tragedy presents its satiric argument from just this starting point.

Indeed, Inga-Stina Ekeblad comments of the play,

The speeches have a strictly logical structure. Hypotheses become theses, and these form the bases for new theses. Throughout the play we find that not only D'Amville's speeches but also those of other characters are built as if they were part of a formal discourse.³⁴

The atmosphere of an evil time is not conveyed through blood, criminality, or lust. Instead, the audience is quietly introduced to both the villain of the piece and to the play's central problem in D'Amville's logical demonstration:

If death casts up
Our total sum of joy and happiness,
Let me have all my senses feasted in
Th' abundant fulness of delight at once,
And with a sweet insensible increase
Of pleasing surfeit melt into my dust.

(I. i. 16-21)

D'Amville is an atheist, a villain by definition--a haughty spirit proud of his own reason and his command of it. He reasons that man, like the beasts, is a mere fact of biology, and, therefore, rejects any notion of a deific first principle with an eye for the main chance. His arrogance resides in his own inflated ego, where he is much more a "man o' th' time" than was the disguised Vindice. Definitely lacking the massive drive and

profound curiosity of an atheist like Faustus, D'Amville is a simple non-believer, drawn along the lines suggested in contemporary prose rebuttals of atheism and "free-thinking," and described accurately by Robert Ornstein as "a farcical example of the Naturalist, a villain who turns his philosophy into an absurd anti-religion, and who self-consciously exclaims, 'Nature forbid'."³⁵ In this respect he is a subtler and better-grounded character than the impassioned Picro of Antonio's Revenge, whose shrieks of triumph sounded like non sequiturs:

Excellent! Excellent! I'll conquer Rome,
Pop out the light of bright religion;
And then helter-skelter, all cocksure!
(IV. iii. 142-44)

D'Amville, by contrast, discourses quietly, and his disregard for religion is not revealed as the crowning horror of his personality--it is his personality. His atheism marks him as the archetypal villain of humanity.

The Atheist's Tragedy, however, is just as much The Honest Man's Revenge; and the counterbalancing "honest man" of the subtitle is the totally virtuous Charlemont. His firm Christian belief defines him as hero, in direct opposition to his evil uncle, D'Amville. Desiring honor more than fearing death, Charlemont dutifully seeks to be the good Christian soldier in a foreign war. While his father, Montferrers, fears for the young man's safety, D'Amville cleverly equivocates:

I am of a confident belief
That e'en the time, place, manner of our deaths
Do follow fate with that necessity
That makes us sure to die.

(I. ii. 46-49)

Sir Thomas Browne's contemporary orthodox Christian moralism is more considered and, in its own way, more to the point:

In expectation of a better, I can with patience embrace this life, yet in my best meditations do often defie death; I honour any man that contemns it, nor can I highly love any that is afraid of it: this makes me naturally love a Souldier, and honour those tattered and contemptible Regiments that will die at the command of a Sergeant. For a Pagan there may be some motives to be in love with life; but for a Christian to be amazed at death, I see not how he can escape this Dilemma, that he is too sensible of this life, or hopeless of the life to come.³⁶

Charlemont is the type of "Souldier" that Browne would love, while D'Amville is a deluded, life-loving "Pagan." He endorses Charlemont's campaign abroad, secretly hoping that his nephew will die, because Charlemont's elimination will further D'Amville's hollow dynastic plans -- plans based firmly on an atheistic fear of death:

Here are my sons . . .
There's my eternity. My life in them
And their succession shall for ever live,
And in my reason dwells the providence
To add to life as much of happiness.
(I. ii. 123-27)

Like Tamburlaine, D'Amville hopes to live on through his offspring. Yet he lacks any semblance of pagan grandeur. Instead of a grand conqueror, blinded in his pride, D'Amville is a pathetically ironic creature whose situation is described accurately by Peter B. Murray: "Tourneur grasps the contradiction inherent in the atheist's search for immortality among the dying creatures of this world, and he shapes his drama so that the actions of the atheist always reveal in their fullest the implications of denying the fatherhood of God."³⁷

Ornstein argues that if Tourneur had been able "to free himself from the satiric obsessions of The Revenger's Tragedy, he might have created a more successful hero in his second tragedy."³⁸ While attention is focused on D'Amville's machinations, however, he is definitely not the play's hero. That distinction is solely Charlemont's, because of his unwavering faith and Christian patience. His virtues are overtly inactive, and his heroism is contradictory in that it is so stylized as to be academic rather than dramatic. But it is heroism nonetheless.

Charlemont will gain vengeance through a lack of vengeance, because his Christian resolution will be drawn out to heroic proportions as an unwavering moral stance. According to Schuman, "This unconventional use of the revenge motif moves Tourneur's play far beyond the 'atheism is bad' level. It broadens the definition of 'atheism' so as to make its condemnation not a truism but a profound act of faith."³⁹ In Charlemont's absence, then, the industrious villain has Montferrers murdered, the hero's death reported, and himself declared sole beneficiary of the Montferrers estate. At the same time, D'Amville's own son Rousard is wed to Charlemont's beloved Castabella. All this occurs while Charlemont's heroic character receives no dramatic development.

D'Amville strikes a grand ceremonial pose at the outset of Act III, as he reads the epitaphs of his brother, Montferrers, and nephew, Charlemont. The funerals are a central visual symbol of D'Amville at the height of his selfish glory, and cap off what the villain considers a job well done. D'Amville's eulogy is consistent with his bogus poetic exclamation at news of his brother's death:

Drop out,
 Mine eye-balls, and let envious Fortune play
 At tennis with 'em. Have I lived to this?
 (II. iv. 25-27)

But, alone with his henchman again, he cannot restrain his glee:

Here's a sweet comedy. 'T begins with O
Dolentis and concludes with ha, ha, he.
 (II. 84-85)

With a shrug, D'Amville brushes off the divine protestation of thunder and lightning. This is merely a forerunner of the providential catastrophe to ensue, a clear symbol of divine displeasure that is echoed at the gravesides as the volleys of cannonfire punctuate D'Amville's histrionic oration.

The pat wisdom of the epitaphs reiterates the simplistic reasoning of Belforest, who comforts D'Amville, "Whether our deaths be good / Or bad, it is not death but life that tries. / He liv'd well, therefore questionless well dies" (II. iv. 44-46). Belforest's daughter Castabella, however, is the only true mourner at the tombs. She is the only character who, like Charlemont, professes a "divine contempt o' th' world" (I. iv. 110). Unfortunately, in her altruism, she applies this proper reasoning to her father's phony chaplain, Langebeau Snuffe, as well. He is a precisionist Puritan, with no formal theological training, who relies on raw "spirit" to cover his inadequacy. While D'Amville is to be abhorred, Snuffe provokes contempt. Indeed his hypocrisy is as much an impetus to atheism as Nature, as D'Amville himself observes:

Compare's profession with his life;
 They so directly contradict themselves
 As if the end of his instructions were
 But to divert the world from sin that he

More easily might engross it to himself.

By that I am confirm'd an atheist.

(I: ii. 210-15)

Though Snuffe had solemnized the betrothal of Charlemont and Castabella with Belforest's blessing, he is easily shaped for D'Amville's ends by reversing himself and endorsing the marriage of Castabella and Rousard. This is effortless for him because of his theological inconsistency: he denigrates premarital kissing--"Fie, fie, fie, these carnal kisses do stir up the concupiscences of the flesh" (I.ii. 121-22)--yet had saluted the couple with "the spirit of copulation" (I. 103); he attempts to mollify Castabella's grief at Charlemont's departure with "the spirit of consolation" (I. iv. 38) by declaring Charlemont an unsuitable husband. Indeed, with his ludicrous malapropisms and inappropriate behavior, Snuffe is similar to Balurdo of Antonio's Revenge, who sought gentle status through spurious genealogy, and even attempted a lover's serenade with the dirge-like tones of a bass violin. Their characters are malleable and ridiculous.

Castabella and Charlemont shine as symbols of rectitude through the play's rotting action. They are consistent in their passive Christian heroism, and it is figuratively perfect that the sickly Rousard should be physically incapable of consummating his hastily arranged marriage to Castabella. Indeed the soul-saving irony of the situation is underlined by Rousard's brother, Sebastian, who shouts rape at the betrothal ceremony, explaining,

Why what is't but a rape to force a wench
To marry, since it forces her to lie
With him she would not?

(I. iv. 129-31)

Snuffe ludicrously protests, "Verily, his tongue / Is an unsanctified member"; and Sebastian responds in kind: "Verily, / Your gravity becomes your perish'd soul / As hoary mouldiness does rotten fruit." Alone, Sebastian further emphasizes the opportunistic fraud of the proceedings: "The nearer the church, the further from God" (ll. 139-40).

But Castabella (and Charlemont too, upon reappearance) is the sole exception to Sebastian's generalization. Since the earthly church is corrupt, Castabella appeals to an ineffable all-knowing divinity:

O thou that know'st me justly Charlemont's,
Though in the forc'd possession of another,
Since from thine own free spirit we receive it
That our affections cannot be compell'd
Though our actions may, be not displeas'd if on
The altar of this tomb I sacrifice
My tears.

(III. i. 53-59)

Yet she is not the archetypal "weeping woman" figure at the empty tomb of Christ.⁴⁰ Castabella symbolizes virtuous chastity that is simply at home at "the altar of this tomb." Charlemont's body is not physically here but this is his tomb, and it symbolizes the fact that both Charlemont and Castabella are dead in life while alive to the glory of Christ, in whom they live. The iconographic point here is orthodoxy, not apotheosis. To work out the scene with Charlemont as an allegorical Christ figure, unbalances the satire intended. D'Amville thinks he handles fate through a confident manipulation of Nature but, in fact, he falls woefully short of such ambition. Only Charlemont is capable of success because of his unquestioning faith.

Charlemont returns to find his beloved married off and himself dispossessed. True, it is as if he has arisen from the dead, but the

audience has never had any doubts about the fact of his survival. Rather, his reappearance is patterned so as to highlight Castabella's virtue.

At the tomb, she professes enduring love while Charlemont chastizes her for her married state:

Marry'd! Had not my mother been a woman,
I should protest against the chastity
Of all thy sex.

(III. i. 97-99)

His moralizing is tentative, conditional, disappointed--Castabella is his forsaken love after all--but the audience knows Castabella's private virtue as well as her ironic situation with Rousard. They are both trapped by D'Amville, and this crucial scene is meant to counter the active evil of the villain who, without being present, effectively separates the lovers to his advantage. As Barish observes, "Traits like chastity, modesty, and obedience tend to be less flamboyant than their corresponding vices, a matter of quiet perseverance rather than spectacular gestures, and hence more resistant to theatrical treatment."⁴¹ The stiffness of the scene, and of Charlemont's "injur'd patience," must therefore be accepted because it is as dramatically unrealizable as Charlemont's own innate goodness, as he laments,

Of all men's griefs must mine be singular?
Without example? Here I met my grave,
And all men's woes are bury'd i' their graves
But mine. In mine my miseries are born.

(III. i. 130-33)

He has been cheated of the sanctuary that death might provide as well as of the love that Castabella promised. Within the active world, however, Charlemont's further meditation clarifies his grief and points him in

the direction where the blame lies--D'Amville.

D'Amville shows a diabolical presence of mind in pretending to take the returned Charlemont for a ghost. The plucky Sebastian is willing to try Charlemont's substantiality, however, and they fight. Charlemont strikes him down and has him at his mercy, but is restrained by the real ghost of his murdered father, Montferrers:

Hold Charlemont!
Let him revenge my murder and thy wrongs
To whom the justice of revenge belongs.
(III. ii. 31-33)

Earlier, the ghost had visited Charlemont on the battlefield, and his advice then was just as religiously orthodox:

Return to France, for thy old father's dead
And thou by murder disinherited.
Attend with patience the success of things
But leave revenge unto the King of kings.
(II. vi. 20-23)

His plea to abstain from vengeance runs counter to accepted revenge practice, as seen in the Senecan fury of Andrugio's ghost in Antonio's Revenge:

Antonio, revenge!
I was empoisoned by Piero's hand;
Revenge my blood!--take spirit, gentle boy--
Revenge my blood! Thy Mellida is chaste;
Only to frustrate thy pursuit in love
Is blazed unchaste.
(III. i. 34-39)

The ghost continues to screech revenge even as Antonio reaches for the innocent Julio with dagger drawn. The deliberate anti-Christian shock of the earlier play is absent in The Atheist's Tragedy, however, because

the ghost of Montferrers is so consistently theological. The virtuous man in life would surely inspire a virtuous ghost after death, and his counsel persuades Charlemont to maintain Christian stability and reserve earthly judgment.

Yet the ghost of Montferrers exercises a real hold on the play's action as it reaches the crisis of the graveyard scene. A macabre webbing of three plots occurs at this point: Charlemont goes to the grave of his father, shadowed by the murderous Borachio; Langebeau Snuffe takes the nubile Souquette out back of Saint Winifred's Church for "honest recreation"; D'Amville and Castabella arrive at the graveyard with the villain intent on raping his daughter-in-law. But Charlemont overcomes his midnight sermonizing to disarm and kill his attacker. He then frightens off the enclasped Snuffe and Souquette, collecting Snuffe's bizarre "sheet, hair and beard" as he does. Donning this disguise--which Snuffe thought approximated the ghost of Montferrers--Charlemont rescues Castabella from the clutches of D'Amville and his grotesque entreaty:

Kiss me. I warrant thee my breath is swcet.
 These dead men's bones lie here of purpose to
 Invite us to supply the number of
 The living. Come, we'll get young bones and do't.
 I will enjoy thee.

(IV. iii. 154-58)

Without escaping from these grotesque surroundings, Charlemont is reconciled with his beloved.

Charlemont explains how he has killed Borachio in self-defense and, like a conventional revenger, wishes himself dead. As well, he explicates his uncle's evil machinations:

My life he seeks: I would he had it, since
 He has depriv'd me of those blessings that
 Should make me love it. Come, I'll give it him.
 (IV. iii. 191-93)

But Charlemont is resolved in his own mind about death because of his faith. His revenge will be effected through Christian patience and charity, and this effect makes revenge an unmistakable matter of meaning and mortality for him. Indeed this eschatological point must surely have been the inspiration for his symbolic hiding-place in the charnel house--as well as his significant entry therein. Attention is directed to the action:

To get into the charnel house he takes hold of a death's head;
it slips and staggers him.
 Death's head, deceiv'st my hold?
 Such is the trust to all mortality.
Hides himself in the charnel house.
 (IV. iii. 78-79 s.d.)

He maintains himself as dead to sinful life, even though running from a murder he was forced to commit, and the inertness of the skulls about him combines with the inspiration of his dead father's advice to make Charlemont a truly orthodox death-dealing revenger. This approach contrasts with Vindice's nihilistic resolve in the silkworm speech of The Revenger's Tragedy, as well as with Pandulpho's final stoic resolution at the conclusion of Antonio's Revenge: "We know the world, and did we know no more / We would not live to know" (V. vi. 30-31).

At this point, in The Atheist's Tragedy the play's iconographic and symbolic zenith is reached as Charlemont and Castabella respond to a sudden and surprising bout of drowsiness:

They lie down with either of them a death's head for a pillow.
 (IV. iii. 204 s.d.)

No doubt the ghost of Montferrers is pleased, but there is more to this-- indeed, a good deal more than simple skeletal substitution for supernatural authority.⁴² Where the skull of Gloriana in The Revenger's Tragedy seemed to endorse Vindice's vengeance, the anonymous remains, here, act as conventional memento mori, and symbolically reconcile guiltless life to a peaceful eternal slumber. Yet the fearless innocence conveyed through the lovers' supine tableau is contrasted sharply to D'Amville's guilty nervousness among the tombs, and his surprised discovery:

Stay. Asleep? So soundly? And so sweetly
upon death's heads? And in a place so full of
fear and horror? Sure, there is some other
happiness within the freedom of the conscience
than my knowledge e'er attained to.

(IV. iii. 284-88)

Purity of conscience allows Charlemont and Castabella to sleep "sweetly upon death's heads." Their resigned death-in-life symbolizes a contentment and satisfaction that D'Amville--for all his mortal schemes and transient pleasures--is incapable of understanding.

Langebeau Snuffe's further necrophilous misadventures add to the macabre flavor of the satire at this point, as he mistakes the dead body of Borachio for the willing body of Souquette. His cries of murder tie together the scene and echo in the next, where Belforest and Sebastian kill each other over Levidulcia. She is the animal lust counterpart of D'Amville's Natural logic, and it is fitting that the atheist's son should involve himself in the complications of her dubious honor. Indeed Sebastian is a singularly irrational character in The Atheist's Tragedy, and the only one with any personal complexity in a psychological sense.

As Schuman notes, "Sebastian's nature and motives seem ambiguous, cloudy, ever shifting. He is perhaps the only really human character in the play."⁴³

Sebastian is only a minor character, however, and his personality is subordinate to the coincidental symbolism of dying at the same time as his brother. He ruins D'Amville's dynastic plans thereby. The ghost of Montferrers now appears to his evil brother and unequivocally sets out the choric fact:

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

(V. i. 27-31)

The desperate D'Amville's ensuing attempt to buy back his sons' lives is ridiculous; and his medical opinion deserves the derisive laughter it gets from the Doctor as D'Amville vainly rationalizes,

You ha' not yet examin'd the true state
And constitution of their bodies. Sure,
You ha' not. I'll reserve their waters till
The morning. Questionless, their urines will
Inform you better.

(II. 91-95)

He simply cannot believe that Nature has let him down. He is doubly deluded.

In despair, D'Amville resolves to seek redress. He threatens to take Nature to a higher court, but his very terms of reference are pointedly ironic:

'Nature, thou art a traitor to my soul.
 Thou hast abus'd my trust. I will complain
 To a superior court to right my wrong.
 I'll prove thee a forger of false assurances.
 In yond' Star Chamber thou shalt answer it.
 Withdraw the bodies. O the sense of death
 Begins to trouble my distracted soul:

(V. i. 116-22)

The "Star Chamber" is at once judicial and symbolically heaven-like; and D'Amville is the only "forger of false assurances" in the place. He is "distracted" by the deathly circumstances of fate, but is convinced that he has a case to be heard in the same court that exposes the truth of Langebeau Snuffe. D'Amville is surprisingly indiscreet as he interrupts the courtroom "distractedly, with the hearses of his two sons borne after him" (V. ii. 67 s.d.). His true nature begins to reveal itself in confused accusatory bluster. The very court in which he stands symbolizes the passive omniscience of heaven in sharp contrast to the atheist's wretchedly moronic procedures.

D'Amville cries "Judgment!" at Charlemont's trial, interrupting the course of justice and heaping unfounded accusations upon his nephew. As the accused stands steadfastly by his plea of self-defense, D'Amville hurls further paranoid invective but only succeeds in indicting himself by refusing to put "A cheerful eye upon the face of death" (l. 111), as the Judge suggests he do. Ironically, D'Amville is the one who is grief-stricken and miserable as Charlemont leaps to the scaffold in righteous preparation for the headsman. Castabella, equally assured of reward beyond death, follows him, and D'Amville's grand accusations are shown up for what they are--atheistic petty claims. He is demeaned by his own impotence; his "natural" reaction is to beg Charlemont's body for dissection after sentence is carried out:

I would find out by his anatomy
 What thing there is in Nature more exact
 Than in the constitution of myself.
 Methinks my parts and my dimensions are
 As many, as large, as well compos'd, as his,
 And yet in me the resolution wants
 To die with that assurance as he does.
 (ll. 145-51)

"To seek out courage with a scalpel," comments John Peter, "it is Tourneur's comment on the scepticism that the atheist everywhere displays, and on the futility of his beliefs."⁴⁴ D'Amville's atheistic veneer finally cracks at this point, and his pathetic realization, "The price of things is best known in their want" (l. 194), expresses his own serious "want," as he recoils at the sight of a symbolic glass of wine--life-giving communion. But D'Amville is debarred by his own reprehensible nature. The only judgment passed in this court is on D'Amville, and he condemns himself to die in atheistic isolation,

Death comes quickly. The resolute Charlemont and Castabella join hands in defiant concord, "their necks as bare as their faith is intact but, as D'Amville raises the axe, "[he] strikes out his own brains, [and then] staggers off the scaffold" (V. ii. 241 s.d.) The action continues the non-naturalistic vein of polemic symbolism, but there is no need to read a symbol of death (axe) cleaving a symbol of human reason (man's head).⁴⁵ A miracle has occurred before us, where God has simply pulled the puppet-strings. George Whetstone, in The English Myrror (1586), describes the traditional symbolism and precedents involved, in a chapter headed "Of the disposition and destruction of Atheists, macivillians and Timepleasers":

You monsters of humanitie, that as drunken with the strength of your owne wittes, and are bewitched with the hopefull successe of your pollicies, esteeme it for sound counsaile that I give you to understande, that the eternal, whom you neither feare, love, no[r] do acknowledge, seeth all your wicked pollicies in his vengeance, and frustrateth them with his mercie, he searcheth the reines and heartes, and will give to everie man according to his works. If you dig a pit to burie the innocent, looke to fall into it your selves: if you rayse a gallowes to hang them, be you sure, that you shall suffer thereupon: if you edge your sword to pearce their hearts: trust to it your own intrailles will be the sheath thereof. What you doe, or would doe unto them shalbe done unto you. Hamon set up a payre of gallowes to hang Mardocheus the Jew, and he and his tenne sonnes, did die thereon. . . . If you Atheists regard not these examples in scriptures because you studie not the sacred Bible, looke into the examples of prophane Cronacles and histories of time, from whence you fetch your pollicies and cunning experiments: and you shall see in all ages, howe God returned the mischiefes of the wicked, into their own bowels.⁴⁶

Indeed, God's braining of the atheist D'Amville might be considered a point of "pure" revenge--something Vindice strove for in re-enacting the seduction scene by having the old Duke suicidally kiss the lips he had formerly poisoned--something Antonio hoped to effect, as he reminded the dying Piero:

Remember hell;
And let the howling murmurs of black spirits,
The horrid torments of the damned ghosts,
Affright thy soul as it descendeth down
Into the entrails of the ugly deep.

(AR, V. v: 68-72)

Each of the earlier plays strained to produce horrific naturalism that would also comment on man's limited and ironic condition. The distraught revenger was a metaphor for frustrated humanity in a world of irrational evil, and the plot sustained itself with twists and surprises until it ended in a blood-bath of hysterical retribution. Moreover, the

"malcontent" disguise allowed the hero to distance himself from evil while he reacted and proceeded to rectify it. Unfortunately, this disguise led nowhere for tragedy, and only confused the plot of satire. While Charlemont is barefaced in faith throughout The Atheist's Tragedy, Vindice, of The Revenger's Tragedy, disguised himself as "Piato" even though no one at the court knew him anyway. Antonio, "in a fool's habit, with a little toy of a walnut shell and soap to make bubbles" (AR, IV. i. s.d.), witnessed surprising twists in his own stratagem that elicited deathly confusion, as he declared:

Antonio's dead!
The fool will follow too. He, he, he!
Now works the scene; quick observation scud
To cote the plot, or else the plot is lost.
(AR; IV. iii. 101-104)

The scene is analogous to Vindice's ironic declaration, "I'm hir'd to kill myself" (RT, IV. ii. 203), and likewise to the confused "cross-capers" of The Malcontent:

Pietro. I am amazed; struck in a swoon with wonder. I am
commanded to murder thee.
Mal. I am commanded to poison thee--at supper.
Pietro. At supper!
Mal. In the citadel.
Pietro. In the citadel!

(IV. iv. 7-12)

The Atheist's Tragedy solves the "identity" problem of satire the way The Revenger's Tragedy solved the "tragic" problem of satire: by stylization. J.W. Lever describes the context best:

The heroes may have their faults of deficiency or excess; but the fundamental flaw is not in them but in the world they inhabit: in the political state, the social order it upholds,

and likewise, by projection, in the cosmic state of shifting arbitrary [sic] phenomena called "Fortune." For the most part, indeed, we are not greatly concerned with the characters as individuals. Generally their emotional relationships and psychological make-up are sketched in broad outlines which hardly call for a close-range scrutiny. What really matters is the quality of their response to intolerable situations. This is a drama of adversity and stance, not of character and destiny.⁴⁷

Indeed, the violent life-to-death tragedy put forth by Antonio's Revenge ensured the play's inherent ironies by stretching naturalistic credulity to the breaking point. The Malcontent is a clearer dramatic success, but Marston lost the tragic sense for the sake of satire. In The Revenger's Tragedy, naturalism is not a concern, and tragedy meshes with satire because the characters are all mechanized vices, as in the earlier Moralities. Unfortunately, their similarity against a background of depravity makes them difficult to differentiate. Yet the polarity of situation and character in The Atheist's Tragedy clarifies through overt lack of verisimilitude. Its patent artificiality and literal religious context puts it in direct touch with the "cosmic state" of "Fortune" noted by Lever. This is tragic satire at its barest. As Ornstein observes, "The protagonist of Tourneur's play is God, who is from the outset D'Amville's opponent."⁴⁸

Quite simply, "The moral of tragedy is that life should be rejected," as Donatus declared.⁴⁹ In the tragic satire of Marston and Tourneur, this certainly is true. But, instead of life rejected in favor of wondrous resignation and steely defiance, this drama rejects ~~life~~ as corruptive and soul-destroying in the first place. Men sin, and men suffer. An atrocity is committed, and the emotional response elicited maintains the tragic experience at an overtly human level of explanation.

This leads to difficulty in reconciling the ironies that arise. But human viciousness is a fact of existence, and its horrific irony is in its fundamental irrationality. The villain's random cruelty and perversity (usually from a position of authority or trust) destroys confidence in human nature, and leads to a recognition of tragic uncertainty. The drama, then, pressured from one side as grotesque lampoon, and from the other as tragedy without form, is truly the tragic satire of an inescapably evil time when inscrutable criminality is an effect, not a cause, and life is not laughably human but grinningly absurd. Charlemont and Castabella recognize the corruption inherent in life by "turning the other cheek" to death itself, while Antonio and Vindice--unbalanced in their pessimistic disgust--only exacerbate life by choosing to deal in death, thereby victimizing themselves.

By ridiculing life's apparent crudities, by facing humanity with its own shortcomings, the satirist moves his readers toward an improved state. The tragic satire considered in this chapter has formed itself consistently around a figure that doubles as aggrieved protagonist and uncompromising revenger. Alvin Kernan explains the contiguity of these qualities:

Both are unable to hold their tongues but discover in themselves an agonized compulsion to reveal the truth by speaking out, and to unmask the world's pretenses to virtue by clever arrangements of events and scene. Both find it necessary . . . to probe to the very source of infection in the state and cut it out of the body politic. The traditional metaphorical tools employed for this work by the satirist, the surgical probe and caustic medicine, blend readily with the actual tools of the revenger, the sword and the cup of poison.⁵⁰

But the savage ironies of tragic conflict in a satirical mode may be too

grim to face: good against evil; God against man; life against death.

In this regard, The Atheist's Tragedy turns back upon The Revenger's

Tragedy and Antonio's Revenge by making the moral religiously explicit

and by satirizing man at his weakest spiritual point--doubt. D'Amville

is made to look a proper fool through atheistic cowardice in the face of

death while, in the other plays, death is a bloody constant of overt and

horrific theatricalism. Retribution is the focus, but it is only as

successful as its ingenuity is ironic. Indeed Pandulpho's passion sings

the anthem of such vicious irony:

Sa, sa; no, let him die and die, and still be dying.

. . . And yet not die, till he hath died and died

Ten thousand deaths in agony of heart.

(AR, V. v. 73-75)

Bodies litter the stage in Antonio's Revenge as a Senecan ghost

maliciously cries for revenge. The Revenger's Tragedy likewise produces

a villainous overkill where a human skull acts as prime motivator. In

The Atheist's Tragedy, however, an orthodox ghost takes the role of

Christian chorus while polemic symbols of piety and evil clash by

virtue of their very natures. The comment is morally paradigmatic: God

is life; man is death. Man must acknowledge the distinction through

virtuous behavior and moral discipline. Should he lapse, there is a

grinning skull beneath his skin that will constantly remind him.

Chapter IV

Death's Heads and Flowerpots: Mortality

in John Webster

Most critics of Webster set out by giving thanks for deliverance-- deliverance from past criticism that tended to recoil from the intense and problematic amorality of The White Devil and The Duchess of Malfi.¹ Such critical aversion elicited Rupert Brooke's famous impression about the characters of Webster's drama resembling "writhing grubs in an immense night."² Likewise, T.S. Eliot declared Webster "a very great literary and dramatic genius directed toward chaos."³ I think Webster appealed more to the imagination of these critics than to their critical judiciousness. Brooke's early study stands pretty much on its own youthful enthusiasm; and Eliot, while he never did respond with a full essay on Webster, was too much of a poet to deny impressionistic insight into the playwright's concerns:

Webster was much possessed by death
And saw the skull beneath the skin;
And breastless creatures under ground
Leaned backward with a lipless grin.

Daffodil bulbs instead of balls
Stared from the sockets of the eyes!
He knew that thought clings round dead limbs
Tightening its lusts and luxuries.⁴

Una Ellis-Fermor, too, considered Webster a dramatist "intimately preoccupied with death," and consisely described his technique: "He

brings his characters to the verge of death and holds them there, suspended, subject to his questioning."⁵ If his questions lack conceptual method, this is due to the vitality of his concern with human existence. Webster's characters stand in lonely fear before a death of simple and utter cancellation. Their lives are inquisitive contortions of opinion, abstraction, assertion, and nullification where pat answers are as inadequate as logical story line. The overwhelming question for Webster's tragedies, then, is not a formal "what will happen?" but an ethical "what is happening?"

Webster's characters are intensely aware of the mists of obliteration in which they dangle, and this metaphor is one appropriated by the twentieth century to explain modern man's existential recognition of his own absurdity. More than crass sensationalism in a moral void of poisonings, sword fights, and poetic set-pieces, Webster's tragedy presents genuine human panic under the threat of death. Webster's stage universe is a Godless place, and his apparent confusion of form is a purposeful attempt to reconcile form with content where--faced with an inescapable nothingness--conventional behavior is pointless, patterned formality ridiculous and tawdry. It is absurd in fact; and defiant integrity in the individual character is all that can be hoped for from a confused and humiliated humanity. Naturally Webster did not know the terms "absurdist" or "existentialist," but they have come to stand for patterns of thought that he would have recognized in the terms of his day as "melancholy" or "speculative philosophy." Norman Rabkin's point is astute:

Recognition of the kinship between The Duchess of Malfi and some of the absurdist drama of the past few years may help readers avoid traps into which some critics have repeatedly fallen, and may provide a concept of the play which makes academic attempts to moralize and tame the play into Christian orthodoxy appear as superfluous as it does earlier tendencies to reject Webster's conventions as unselfconsciously barbarous. 6

It is impossible to "tame" the following absurd image from The White Devil:

Enter BRACCIANO's Ghost, in his leather cassock and breeches, boots, [and] a cowl, [in his hand] a pot of lily-flowers with a skull in't.

(V. iv. 123s.d.)

Scornfully, Flamineo asks the ghost, "Is it in your knowledge / To answer me how long I have to live? / That's the most necessary question"

(ll. 130-32). It is the "most necessary question" indeed, and he is duly answered:

The Ghost throws earth upon him and shows him the skull.

(l. 135 s.d.)

Likewise, in The Duchess of Malfi, the salacious Julia is enjoined by the Cardinal to keep his murderous machinations secret by kissing the Book. But his Bible is poisoned, and she expires amidst general recriminations:

'Tis weakness,
Too much to think what should have been done--I go,
I know not whither.

(V. ii. 287-89)

Questions on the nature of existence, and observations on its uncertainty in any case, present sparks of absurd insight in an otherwise bleak moral environment. Man senses an eternal quality to existence and yet is demeaned by the finite nature of his own experience. Robert F. Whitman

says that Webster's moral vision is really a "double vision, in which two quite different systems of values might possess equal degrees of authority and validity."⁷ Even if his "Apollonian" and "Dionysian" distinctions seem arbitrary, I agree with Whitman that "Webster would seem to be presenting us with a series of ambiguities: the ambiguity of appearance, the ambiguity of 'good' and 'evil,' the ambiguity of life itself."⁸ But I find it more appropriate to drop the Nietzschean critical terms and think of the most essentially "human" differences toward experience--among them, differences of masculinity and femininity in general. For Webster plays off humanity against itself in terms of gender. Maleness has to do with an essentialist code of ethics--you perform certain duties because of what you are; femaleness is more self-defined--you choose to perform certain duties and those choices determine what you are.⁹ A death's head scattering compost from a flowerpot or a whore kissing a poisoned Bible are absurd images of indomitable mortality where death, stylized and ever-present, forces the play's action into a paradoxical design of disunified artistic unity.

Ambivalence is normative for Webster; every action is qualified. I hope to make a case for design based on the perverse predilections of gender as applied to the broader ethical concerns of the plays. I do not intend to attach Jungian postulates to the characters, but there is a consistent bellicose sexuality about them. Note Vittoria's disdain at her own death:

'Twas a manly blow--
The next thou giv'st, murder some sucking infant,
And then thou wilt be famous.

(WD, V. vi. 232-34)

Bosola's final thoughts have a similar tendency:

O, this gloomy world!
In what a shadow, or deep pit of darkness,
Doth womanish and fearful mankind live!
(DM, V. v. 100-102)

Irving Ribner saw Vittoria and the Duchess as symbols of life while Flamineo and the Duchess' brothers are clearly a countering "death force." Convinced that Webster did indeed seek to discover a "moral order," Ribner contended, "To fully perceive Webster's achievement we must see his later play as the exploration of a value postulated in the earlier one and as the final resolution of the problem with which both plays are concerned."¹⁰ I think the "problem" for Webster's plays is a problem with existence; the "resolution," however, is as partial as human nature itself.

"I know death hath ten thousand several doors / For men to take their exits," claims the Duchess of Malfi, "and 'tis found / They go on such strange geometrical hinges, / You may open them both ways" (IV. ii. 219-22). This is the central fact of human experience: innumerable possibilities doubled, at once, because the obverse may be equally true. Webster never allows this confused tension to slacken so that, linked to their opposites by virtue of their very being, the fullest sensations of mortality are emphasized: fecundity and impotence, truth and deception, humaneness and bestiality, satisfaction and despair. These are the "hateful contraries" of Webster's vision, and they are subsumed in the dramatic action under the discordant qualities of the male and female characters. Their fundamental irrationality is set forth in a modern context by Albert Camus:

A world that can be explained even with bad reasons is a familiar world. But, on the other hand, in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity.¹¹

This "feeling of absurdity"--the inescapable darkness and imprisonment, the gratuitous homicides, the irrational treachery--ensures the ambivalent situation of the characters in Webster's plays.

This world of Webster's is a dense artifice, and death is an inscrutable pigment that colors every corner of it. A significant metaphor of painting is relied upon to convey impressions of character. But, instead of baroque flashes of feeling or cleverly superimposed perspectives,¹² I detect a curiously abstract portraiture in characterization--a series of artistic densities linked throughout by an expendable story line. Webster assembles disparate attitudes through this technique--an approach that is more naturalistic than the moral philosophy shaped around single characters like Bussy D'Ambouis or Doctor Faustus. Human irrationality in all its hues is of concern to Webster, and Ornstein appropriately notes, "His attitude towards philosophical questions suggests derision rather than neutrality."¹³ This infuses a real sense of fatalism in the plays. Indeed, there is a certain longing for the assuredness of the void in Webster's skepticism, where disputation, meaning, and being all end. The action of the plays, therefore, does not "represent" values so much as it "suggests" contours of behavior impossible to convey within a rational scheme of plot and characterization.

Webster's character of "An Excellent Actor" is often quoted as evidence of the actor's being "much affected to painting," but a further

trait strikes me as more significant: Webster says that "All men have beene of his occupation: and indeed, what hee doth fainedly that doe others essentially."¹⁴ All the world's a stage? More than that: man as "actor" lacks both script and direction. The characters of The White Devil, along with their spasmodic actions, are leashed arbitrarily into the conventions of revenge tragedy; their counterparts in The Duchess of Malfi are free to register statements in word and action about man's prurience, jealousy, hypocrisy, and lust--in short, about his damning penchant for negation over affirmation, misery over comfort, death over regeneration. A perversely tragic temperament is reiterated throughout in the ontological implications of the annulling word "never." Webster paints a magnificent void in The White Devil and The Duchess of Malfi, a void in which life is impossibly ambivalent, finality is the effect of motivation, and death is at once everything and nothing.

The first scene of The White Devil is really little more than scaffolding for Vittoria's deathly "yew-tree" dream, with its obvious punning pronoun and homicidal application. Vittoria--the "white devil" of the play's title--wants her ridiculous husband, along with Bracciano's clinging wife, done away with. But once the dream has been explicated by Bracciano and murder fixed in his mind, Cornelia comes forward to block their illicit partnership. The mother figure typically endorses fruitful union, but the elegant union of Vittoria and Bracciano is founded on opportunism, deceit, and death. In fact, Cornelia's imagery of blighted growth appropriately reinforces the funereal associations of the "yew-tree" dream just overheard, and she continues the metaphor with a mother's typical concern:

What makes you here my lord this dead of night?
 Never dropt mildew on a flower here,
 Till now.

. . . . O that this fair garden
 Had with all poisoned herbs of Thessaly
 At first been planted, made a nursery
 For witchcraft; rather than a burial plot,
 For both your honours.

(I. ii. 271-78)

Benjamin states some of her prime attributes: "Cornelia is strongly individualized as a stern matron of the old style; she is also all woman in a world of masculine appetite and aggression, as she attempts to cleanse, order, pacify."¹⁵ But her qualities as an individual are subordinate to her choric realization of the malevolence inherent in this "dead of night"; and, although she is sensitive to the insidious poison of the young pair's self-will, her attempts to cleanse and order are little more than moral warnings. Besides, in a world of "masculine appetite and aggression" her influence is ignored; though she remains true to motherly principles, violence and death escalate throughout the action.

The fearful negation that Cornelia speaks of is thrown back in her face by another of her progeny. Flamíneo, embarrassed by her righteous retorts to the Duke Bracciano, reacts with exactly the venomous self-will Cornelia has warned against. He has an opportunist's grasp on the duke and sees his sister's involvement with Bracciano as his own springboard to advancement. In response to Cornelia's virtuous rhetoric--"What? because we are poor, / Shall we be vicious?" (I. ii. 314-15)--Flamíneo hammers home his opinion that to be poor is to be vicious. He demeans his mother further by twisting the normal course of propagation and inheritance:

My father prov'd himself a gentleman,
 Sold all's land, and like a fortunate fellow
 Died ere the money was spent.

(11. 317-19)

I would the common'st courtesan in Rome
 Had been my mother rather than thyself.
 Nature is very pitiful to whores
 To give them but few children, yet those children
 Plurality of fathers,--they are sure
 They shall not want.

(11. 334-39)

His father had a gentleman's prerogative, as does Bracciano as duke, but Flameneo denies any such conceptualized primogeniture for himself. Even a whore's offspring has "connections," if not legitimacy; but Flameneo has neither, as he chooses to effectively "make" himself by virtue of his own questionable actions. His ironic echoing of the gentle resignation in the twenty-third Psalm reveals the extent of Flameneo's selfish desperation--he indeed "wants" (in both senses of "need" and "desire"), and wants badly.

Having stressed Flameneo's character in extended monologue, The White Devil now yields the stage to the marital disharmony of Flameneo's employer, Bracciano. He is confronted and lectured to by his outraged brothers-in-law, who accuse him of faithlessness to Isabella. Their concern for Bracciano's involvement with Vittoria rings with pettiness--"You shift your shirt there / When you retire from tennis"

(II. i. 52-53)--but it touches the root of Bracciano's dismissive attitude. His legitimate union with Isabella is jeopardized by the influence of Vittoria; and, intoxicated by her influence, Bracciano goes so far as to curse not only his marriage, but his own offspring as well. Left alone to reconcile himself with his fawning wife, he formally kisses

her hand and vows,

This is the latest ceremony of my love,
Henceforth I'll never lie with thee, by this,
This wedding-ring: I'll never more lie with thee.
(II. i. 193-95)

His personal rejection of Isabella strikes her directly, and she responds in mortified horror to the destructive spirit of his denial:

O my winding-sheet,
Now shall I need thee shortly! dear my lord,
Let me hear once more, what I would not hear,--
Never?
(II. 205-208)

Bracciano's repeated "Never" seals the doom of their union, and the iciness of the response accentuates its deathly finality. A life-giving association--however banal it may be by comparison with the excitement of Vittoria--is hereby severed. Bracciano cleverly allows his wife to take responsibility for the breakup, and Isabella--yoked to a conventional femininity--does so out of enduring commitment to their union.

Rejection of Isabella is only a prelude to her elimination, however, and, by means of a thoroughly artificial dumb show in the dead of night, Bracciano witnesses his wife's extinction. She dies by kissing a poisoned portrait of her husband; then, in a final act of selflessness, she keeps her son and others from drawing near to the fatal fumes. "Excellent, then she's dead" (II. ii. 24), brusquely declares Bracciano, unmoved. His treacherous venom is made apparent, and it relates back in grim irony to the accusatory oath of his brother-in-law earlier:

Would I had given
 Both her white hands to death, bound and lock'd fast
 In her last winding-sheet, when I gave thee
 But one.

(II. i. 64-67)

As he watches Flamineo's dexterous twisting of Camillo's neck, Bracciano, is again totally dispassionate. When Vittoria's husband is eliminated at the same time as his own wife, Bracciano's comment is glib: "It was quaintly done" (II. ii. 38). Through these crafty homicides, Bracciano is revealed in all his vicious deceit; poison and delegated violence represent his very being. He is a decidedly lethal and shadowy figure, and the "back postern" (I. 52) of his escape is appropriate to his insidiousness. His swift exit also allows Webster's seamless reintegration of dramatic action in the incriminating space he leaves under Vittoria's roof. At the same time, Vittoria's murderous yew-tree dream has come true.

Vittoria finds herself rapidly indicted for the murders on circumstantial evidence, but maintains an admirable composure. During her formal "arraignment," she declares,

Sum up my faults I pray, and you shall find
 That beauty and gay clothes, a merry heart,
 And a good stomach to a feast, are all,
 All the poor crimes that you can charge me with.

(III. ii. 207-210)

She is right. Her consummate histrionics are consistently positive and life-affirming. Webster, early in the play, directs audience response through the comments of the impartial ambassadors:

<u>Fr. Amb.</u>	She hath lived ill.
<u>Eng. Amb.</u>	True, but the cardinal's too bitter..
	(II. 106-107)

Vittoria is mercilessly accused of venomous sexuality which, in her case, seems to be an important adjunct to the crime of murder itself. The imagery of decay and death, however, rests only with her accusers and, in any case, these are qualities of definition imposed on her from the outside by men set up as figures of authority. She has always chosen to define herself by her own actions and, bullied by Monticelso's righteous delineation of a whore, easily counters, "This character escapes me" (l. 101). Indeed, once her sole defender, Bracciano, has departed the court in blustering dudgeon over a perceived insult to his character, Vittoria shrewdly notes of her accuser/judge, "The wolf may prey the better" (l. 180). She is banished to a euphemistic "house of convertites" through the slim evidence of character testimony; and, though she injects a typical whore's joke--"Do the noblemen in Rome / Erect it for their wives, that I am sent / To lodge there?" (ll. 267-69)--she departs with an impressive display of feminine pride and defiance:

O woman's poor revenge
Which dwells but in the tongue,--I will not weep,
No I do scorn to call up one poor tear
To fawn on your injustice,--bear me hence,
Unto this house of--what's your mitigating title?
Mont. Of convertites.
Vit. It shall not be a house of convertites--
My mind shall make it honester to me
Than the Pope's palace, and more peaceable
Than thy soul, though thou art a cardinal,--
Know this, and let it somewhat raise your spite,
Through darkness diamonds spread their richest light.
(ll. 283-94)

She is superb with the naturalistic shift in her flow of thoughts--
"What's your mitigating title?"--and her complete refusal to mitigate.

She vows to redefine the house of "convertites" through her own actions, and refuses to rely on the received symbols of peace and honesty vested in pope and cardinal. Her rejection of them is an existential affirmation of herself, but there is an undeniable substratum of guilt in her. More evidence is needed to effectively blacken Vittoria's character, and darkness encroaches immediately upon her departure.

When Bracciano's son arrives, in mourning for his dead mother, the black garb of this innocent directly counters the vivacious light and superheated shine of Vittoria and Bracciano. Of the boy, Una Ellis-Fermor notes, "Giovanni is perhaps one of the best child studies in a drama not noticeably successful in its children,"¹⁶ and Benjamin declares that Giovanni's presence should serve, for Bracciano, "as a reminder of the path he ought to be following."¹⁷ But the homicidal Bracciano is as far beyond mourning as Giovanni is free from guilt. He retains an empty-hearted silence as Giovanni, in a question that will reverberate through to the play's conclusion, wonders aloud,

What do the dead do, uncle? do they eat,
Hear music, go a-hunting, and be merry,
As we that live?

(III. ii. 323-25)

It is impossible to answer him adequately.

Vittoria endures the "arraignment" alone, without the support or testimony of her lover and accomplice Bracciano or her brother/murderer Flamineo. The burden of guilt in the case clearly lies with them. She merely fails to accede to the label "whore" and, as a result, is condemned by the court to live up to its opinion. Even though Vittoria is hurried off to a house for penitent whores, she finds no peace in

which to be penitent. Through Francisco's devious letter-writing, she finds herself once again assaulted and interrogated by accusatory men. Bracciano, as self-pitying as he is invidious, confronts her with Francisco's false love letter, crying,

O my sweetest duchess
How lovely art thou now! [to Vittoria] Thy loose thoughts
Scatter like quicksilver, I was bewitch'd;
For all the world speaks ill of thee.
(IV. ii. 99-102)

This represents the height of his mean-spirited duplicity. His own safety and desires threatened, he is willing to accept the condemnation of Vittoria by forgetting his own guilt in the affair--a strategy she never thinks of, as she demands the right to define herself despite the opinion of "the world":

No matter.
I'll live so now I'll make that world recant
And change her speeches.
(II. 102-104)

Throughout, she has taken responsibility for her own actions, while Bracciano has parasitically relied on her poor reputation to fortify his own. With this in mind, Vittoria turns on her lover and, for the first time, draws attention to the misery of her own condition:

What have I gain'd by thee but infamy?
Thou hast stain'd the spotless honour of my house,
And frighted thence noble society:
Like those, which sick o' th' palsy, and retain
Ill-scenting foxes 'bout them, are still shunn'd
By those of choicer nostrils.
What do you call this house?
Is this your palace? did not the judge style it
A house of penitent whores? who sent me to it?
Who hath the honour to advance Vittoria

To this incontinent college? is't not you?
 Is't not your high preferment? Go, go brag
 How many ladies you have undone, like me.
 Fare you well sir; let me hear no more of you.
 I had a limb corrupted to an ulcer,
 But I have cut it off: and now I'll go
 Weeping to heaven on crutches.

(ll. 107-123)

Her performance completed, she throws herself upon a bed in a state of anguish and petulance. Her argument has been both emotional and incontrovertible, and it turns Bracciano around. Note, however, her lack of recrimination, her womanly desire to endure. She demands "let me hear no more of you," but answers the very next question Bracciano asks. She also remains silently indignant as her two-faced brother coaches the penitent Bracciano in sexist asides of intercession:

Women are caught as you take tortoises,
 She must be turn'd on her back.

(IV. ii. 151-52)

The terms are consistently animalistic and barely guarded in their exploitative brutality. Their grossness confirms Flamineo's prejudice against human nature in general but also, as Mc Elroy points out, "emotionally distances him from an otherwise demeaning situation."¹⁸ In the face of insecurity one feeds the ego, and Flamineo tries to justify Bracciano's jealousy as the mark of a "great" man. Vittoria's response to such ravening insistence is pointed: "Your dog or hawk should be rewarded better / Than I have been" (ll. 190-91); and she is more correct than she knows. In desperation she exclaims, "O ye dissembling men!" (l. 182), and yet must endure the prototypical male rejoinder: "We suck'd that, sister, / From women's breasts." In a male-dominated

society, undesirable qualities are feminine a priori; and Flamineo's fable of symbiotic gratitude is cleverly twisted to place Vittoria in a passive position of thankfulness and acceptance. Even as she is "sprung" for Padua, Vittoria remains a prisoner of masculine intransigence and imposition.

Vittoria's escape sparks the final revenge action, which begins as Monticelso, her accuser, becomes Pope in a processional scene reminiscent of the formal "arraignment" earlier. He is now recognized as the sole focus of power, and this public "stamp" of authority seems to be a necessary part of The White Devil in general. Lodovico uses subtlety and craft to gain papal blessing for his revenge at this point, and this official requirement seems a convenient way to reintroduce him into the plot. He was the disappointed figure who started the play off with the evocative shout "Banish'd?", and who promised to make Italian "cut-works" (I. i. 52) in the guts of his accusers upon his return. Curiously, however, he was present when Isabella was poisoned, and took sinister pleasure in a pact of mutual nihilism with Flamineo (III. iii. 75-110). All was duplicity for this ambivalent figure, though, and Lodovico's only motivation is a barely developed love for the now-dead Isabella. In fact, he is only one of a group of revengers who meet, embrace, and verbally discuss plans for the assassination of Bracciano. The public figure Francisco--the new Pope's brother, and co-accuser of Vittoria--is the leader of this revenge group and, disguised as the moor Mulinassar, conforms to the convention of the disguised Duke able to oversee justice and test loyalty.

Act V of The White Devil begins a series of reversals and murders that carries the revenge plot through to its conclusion. Vittoria,

however, loses prominence in the early plotting of the final act--the poisonings, the barriers, the internecine homicide--to allow for a generalized pathos that requires some fast-paced contortions. Flamineo, having argued with his brother, simply enters and "runs MARCELLO through" (V. 11. 14 s.d.). The murder, horrifying in its gratuitousness, occurs right before the mother's eyes. Yet Cornelia tries to "cover up" the incident, and actually lies in order to save her murderous son from execution. At one point, she draws a knife to kill Flamineo herself but, faltering at the blade's zenith, she melodramatically cannot bring herself to do it. Her justification is that "One arrow's graz'd already; it were vain / T' lose this: for that will ne'er be found again" (ll. 68-69). It is a sad testament to humanity's ability to withstand present grief--even for bad reasons--rather than face the eternal grief expressed in the idea of "never."

Yet, even as Bracciano passes a probationary sentence on Flamineo, insidious murder is enacted:

LODOVICO sprinkles BRACCIANO's beaver with a poison.
(V. 11. 76 s.d.)

Poison and its deceitful infection is a persistent metaphor in The White Devil for moral corruption and silent death. Price accurately identifies poison as both a feature of the play's construction and an imagistic reinforcement of the same.¹⁹ The danger of poison is its killing stealth, as noted by Flamineo, following Bracciano's earlier displeasure: "I do look now for a Spanish fig, or an Italian sallet daily" (IV. 11. 61). But the all-pervading poison of the play seeps through Bracciano's beaver at the mock-combat "barriers" of Act V.

"O my loved lord,--poisoned?" (V. iii. 7), exclaims Vittoria in horror; and Bracciano must now keep her away from his toxins as the poisoned Isabella had been seen to do earlier in her dumb-show killing. In response to his lover's real concern, however, Bracciano can only declaim, "How miserable a thing it is to die / 'Mongst women howling!" (ll. 36-37), before launching into howling delirium himself. But poison is a traceless killer, and, though the revengers-in-disguise reveal themselves to Bracciano during spurious last rites to sweeten the revenge, Bracciano's murders must be explained to Francisco and the others by Zanche. This information indicts Flameneo, and the main burden of revenge follows.

Faced with Giovanni's gathering opprobrium, Cornelia's mad grief for the dead Marcello, and Bracciano's dirt-flinging ghost, Flameneo experiences a momentary qualm of compassion which he cannot quite reconcile with his usual opportunism. The sensational ghost of Bracciano clears his thoughts, however, and he resolves to gain his master's belated reward from Vittoria now that she is Bracciano's beneficiary. Benjamin pointedly identifies the ensuing duel of wits between Vittoria, Flameneo, and Zanche in this final scene as "one of the great bits of savage farce in English drama,"²⁰ but through its bizarre reversals and rationalizations the play's fatalistic grace notes are stuck. Flameneo suggests group suicide to escape Francisco's wrath but, having faced his cohorts' fire and intensified their expressed hatred through feigned misery, he rises to accuse Vittoria and Zanche of heartless duplicity--a duplicity he attributes to all women. His venom is to no avail, however, as Lodovico and Gasparo rush in to

perform the final revenge cut-works.

Revenge deaths usually provide remembrance and realization for the victim, justice and satisfaction for the revenger. But any external sense of justice seems beside the point here. While a dying scene might seem the obvious place for a monologue on the wayward course of one's life, The White Devil provides powerful meditations on the meaning of existence itself. Even the revengers get into the spirit of ontological inquiry, as Lodovico straightforwardly asks the dying Flamineo, "What dost think on?" (V. vi. 201). Flamineo is direct:

Nothing; of nothing: leave thy idle questions,--
I am 'i' th' way to study a long silence,
To prate were idle,--I remember nothing.
There's nothing of so infinite vexation
As man's own thoughts.

(11. 202-206)

Simple explication in the grip of death is meaningless, and Flamineo's reiterated "nothing" voices a key understanding both of what he was and of what he is to become.

Vittoria, on the other hand, maintains an elegant pride in her insistence that she suffer death first, so that Zanche might wait on her even in her expiration. But her material self-determination is no longer valid, and Flamineo punches through her final absurd preoccupations with an existential call for individual integrity:

I do not look
Who went before, nor who shall follow me;
No, at myself I will begin and end.

(V. vi. 256-58)

Flamineo faces his death with a defiant mixture of resignation and

disgust, while Vittoria, in the same experience, is thoroughly perplexed, and capable only of the worldly villain's conventional dying call:

O happy they that never saw the court,
Nor ever knew great man but by report.
(ll. 261-62)

She dies in defiance, as does Flamineo with his debunking "lost voice" and "everlasting cold" (l. 271). The typical revenge double-cross ensues immediately, but the revengers have been cheated of even a glimpse of remorse.

It might be argued that Webster cheated himself by using a revenge tragedy to pose questions on the meaning of existence. Doubtless, his concern in setting out was not so philosophical. But the play's opening exclamation--"Banish'd?"--imposes a provocative condition that is lost both on the character who speaks it and on the play's development in general. The metaphor of banishment has nothing to do with Lodovico's reintegration into the plot, but takes on real power in the intellectual concerns of those about to lose their lives--as when Vittoria cries, "My soul, like to a ship in a black storm, / Is driven I know not whither" (V. vi. 248-49). The vengeance wrought by Monticelso, Francisco, Lodovico, and others even less memorable becomes totally subordinate to the existential concerns of Vittoria and Flamineo--characters condemned to suffer inexorable death before our eyes. Revenge killings, however, no matter how obsessively motivated or well executed, are never killings enough. Any "form" of death is subordinate to the overwhelming certainty of death in itself. The only certainty besides

death, in Webster's view, is universal ambivalence--an absurd notion lost within the framework of a revenge tragedy, but better grasped in the inextricable situation of The Duchess of Malfi.

Webster structures both tragedies around a central heroine. This is significant, and Roger Stalling notes that Webster is "appreciatively fascinated [with women], almost to the point of being a feminist."²¹ Yet Webster's strategy here seems to be more a matter of ethical distinction than "fascinated" chauvinism--however appreciative. He attaches a freedom of choice to his heroines, a freedom denied his male characters because of their adherence to rigid codes of honor. But while Vittoria is the ambivalent "white devil"--lover, whore, prisoner, and life-force in a web of death--the Duchess of Malfi is imbued with a consistent integrity throughout. She is tormented by her brothers from the outset, and all punishments aim squarely at her feminine prerogative for choice. Yet she never acts out of duplicity, as Vittoria does, never breaks down in remorse for what she has done. In The White Devil, male antagonists are grouped around three central women, Vittoria, Cornelia, and Isabella, and are related thereby through a revenge plot of plaintiff and respondent. In The Duchess of Malfi, however, plot is secondary, and the male parts are conditioned by their relation to the single heroine--the Duchess: the Cardinal and Ferdinand are her brothers, Antonio is her husband, Bosola (properly brotherless) is at once her titled "Provisor," suspicionless confessor, and knife in her back.

It is this conciseness of relations in the play that allows

The Duchess of Malfi to open with Antonio's explication of the French King's godly "masterpiece" of court, the machinations of Ferdinand and the Cardinal, Bosola's sinister qualities, and the Duchess' shining desire for life and propagation. But the masterpiece of the French court is an impossible figure in the danger and deceit of Malfi. The forces of love, life, and choice coalesce in Antonio and the Duchess, but are modified immediately by the opposing forces of denial, death, and conformity that stand poised in her brothers and their "creature," Bosola. On the pretext of purity and respect the Duchess is counseled never to remarry, but she exercises her own freedom of choice and does so anyway. The connubial good of love and marriage must act itself out in stealth and secrecy, wrapped around a constant opposing image of death and disunity. Once her intentions are known, the Duchess is firm:

Make not your heart so dead a piece of flesh
To fear, more than to love me: sir, be confident--
What is't distracts you? This is flesh, and blood, sir;
'Tis not the figure cut in alabaster
Kneels at my husband's tomb.

(I. i. 451-55)

Yet funereal associations invade her very terms of love: the Duchess is a widow; the prospective groom is deathly afraid; indeed Antonio's "Quietus" (l. 464) truly is more a kiss of death than of union. The Duchess declares their bond a "sacred Gordian, which let violence / Never untwine" (ll. 480-81), but it is of double significance that Alexander the Great violently hacked the first "Gordian" knot open at will, and that the Duchess' pretext for getting Antonio alone was to make a "will" herself. There is a curious finality to the betrothal of Antonio and the Duchess and, though Stilling praises what he perceives

as "two people genuinely, sexually in love,"²² the Duchess' mildly jesting sword-in-the-bed image--"Like the old tale, in 'Alexander and Lodowick', / Lay a naked sword between us, keep us chaste" (ll. 500-501) --confers an ominous cutting edge on their union.

The Duchess of Malfi realizes how murderously furious her brothers will be if she remarries, but refuses to let the forces of repression and denial have their way. Indeed, following the hypocritical moral lecturing of her brothers, she comments wryly, "I think this speech between you both was studied, / It came so roundly off" (I. 1. 329-30). Ferdinand and the Cardinal adhere rigidly to the artificial dictates of noble "birth" while the Duchess sees things in terms of existential behavior and choice. She is willing to accept personal responsibility for her actions; and, alone, she justifies herself against a masculine code of authority and abnegation with refreshing feminine élan:

If all my royal kindred
Lay in my way unto this marriage,
I'd make them my low footsteps: and even now,
Even in this hate, as men in some great battles,
By apprehending danger, have achiev'd
Almost impossible actions--I have heard soldiers say so--
So I, through frights, and threat'nings, will assay
This dangerous venture: let old wives report
I wink'd and chose a husband.

(ll. 341-49)

Note her emphasis on the enduring reputation of her "choice." The Duchess "chose a husband"; she was not maneuvered into a prearranged situation of acceptance. But her best intentions dismiss, rather naively, the strict world of hatred and violence outside her loving embrace of Antonio. Her reliance on "war story" acts of courage--"I have heard soldiers say so"--is practically echoed as she explains her

wedding strategy to Antonio:

I have heard lawyers say, a contract in a chamber
Per verba de presenti is absolute marriage.
 (II. 478-79)

This dubious, if not childlike, basis for optimism is precarious and shortsighted, as she offhandedly asserts, "All discord, without this circumference, / Is only to be pitied, and not fear'd" (II. 469-70). Bosola with his sinister duplicity is, in fact, already within the metaphorical "circumference" that encircles the Duchess and Antonio, and the first act ends with ominous conjunctions of renewal, destruction, deceit, and fear.

Bosola's railing is subdued until the beginning of Act II, where he proves himself a master of misogynous rhetoric, and applies it to humanity as a whole. He confronts the barren fornicators Castruchio and the Old Lady with insulting evidence of their aged corruption, building up to a contrived and poetic coup de grâce:

I do wonder you do not loathe yourselves--observe my
 meditation now:
 What thing is in this outward form of man
 To be belov'd? we account it ominous
 If nature do produce a colt, or lamb,
 A fawn, or goat, in any limb resembling
 A man; and fly from't as a prodigy.
 Man stands amaz'd to see his deformity
 In any other creature but himself.
 (II. i. 43-51)

In a world of dense animalistic fatalism, human attributes are deformities of embarrassment and inconvenience. Indeed the human body itself is corrupt and bestial, dressed sumptuously to hide its renovating mortality, as Bosola affirms:

Though continually we bear about us
 A rotten and dead body, we delight
 To hide it in rich tissue: all our fear--
 Nay, all our terror--is lest our physician
 Should put us in the ground, to be made sweet.
 (II. 56-60)

The human body is a decaying piece of flesh, in Bosola's mortified terms, where "hide" is a punning verb that conveys the dual sense of simple concealment and animalistic covering. The naturally brutish human state requires death and burial before it can be made truly good. Bosola's disgust is aimed at the bogus splendor of earthly existence; and the grim ambiguity of being "made sweet" is analogous to the realization of Flamineo, when confronted with the symbolic contrast of the death's head and the flowerpot in The White Devil.

Bosola's concerns are much broader than Flamineo's; however, and his capacity as hired spy seems subordinate to his shadowy flair for morbid intrigue. He characteristically embodies stealth and surveillance as he addresses his employers, saying to the Cardinal, "I do haunt you still. . . " (I. i. 29) and to Ferdinand, "I was lur'd to you" (I. i. 231). While Flamineo is active and unsubtle in his single-minded pursuit of reward, Bosola, by contrast, uses his privation to ruminate on the sickness of man in general, not solely on his avariciousness; and he turns quickly to the Duchess' life-giving "sickness" of pregnancy:

I observe our duchess
 Is 'sick o' days, she pukes, her stomach seethes,
 The fins of her eyelids look most teeming blue,
 She wanes i' the cheek, and waxes fat i' th' flank;
 And (contrary to our Italian fashion)
 Wears a loose-body'd gown--there's somewhat in't!
 (II. i. 63-68)

He sees the miracle of childbirth strictly in terms of extended malaise, describes the Duchess in grossly physical terms as if she were mere horseflesh. Indeed he takes a perverse pleasure in the fact that the green apricots of his "pretty trick" to ascertain her pregnancy were ripened in horse dung; and this snide observation is just one of many, loaded onto the pullcart of Bosola's depraved but intuitive imagination. It links back to his resolve when first hired by Ferdinand, as he ironically inquired,

What's my place?
The provisorship o' th' horse? say then, my corruption
Grew out of horse-dung: I am your creature.
(I. i. 285-87)

Moreover, it reinforces his animalistic view of the Duchess herself, as well as her suspected condition:

So, so: there's no question but her tetchiness and
most vulturous eating of the apricocks are apparent
signs of breeding.
(II. ii. 1-3)

Similarly, later in the night, Bosola likens the shriek of birth to the "melancholy bird" (II. iii. 7): the owl--"Best friend of silence and of solitariness" (l. 8). But the owl is also a cryptic figure of fate and death. Bosola confronts the fearful Antonio in half-light during the small hours, and their conversation is at dangerous cross-purposes when the fact of fatherhood must be hidden as though it were an act of sin. "You look wildly" (l. 20), observes Bosola with cynical detachment, and Antonio's fundamental honesty blazons forth his fear. In his nervousness, he inadvertently drops the new child's horoscope. Bosola, retrieving it, finds that he possesses concrete evidence of the Duchess' misbehavior.

The very act of childbirth takes on paradoxically death-like associations in The Duchess of Malfi. At news of the Duchess' giving birth, her outraged brothers can only respond in terms of infection and disease:

Card. Shall our blood,
The royal blood of Arragon and Castile,
Be thus attainted?

Ferd. Apply desperate physic:
We must not now use balsamum, but fire,
The smarting cupping-glass, for that's the mean
To purge infected blood, such blood as hers.

(II. v. 21-26)

Duke Ferdinand is especially incensed as he totally ignores any sense of life-giving potential in his sister. Instead, he viciously fantasizes, "Methinks I see her laughing" (1, 38), as he fixes on sordid images of violent sexuality. In reply to the Cardinal's arch inquiry, "With whom?", he relishes his own seamy imagination:

Happily with some strong thigh'd bargeman;
Or one o'th' wood-yard, that can quoit the sledge,
Or toss the bar, or else some lovely squire
That carries coals up to her privy lodgings.

(11. 42-45)

He is also stirred to 'gruesome depths of sadistic retribution:

I would have their bodies
Burnt in a coal-pit, with the ventage stopp'd,
That their curs'd smoke might not ascend to heaven:
Or dip the sheets they lie in in pitch or sulphur,
Wrap them in't, and then light them like a match;
Or else to boil their bastard to a cullis,
And give't his lecherous father, to renew
The sin of his back.

(11. 66-73) ,

Ferdinand is obsessed by torturous degradation to the point of consuming the child in his own frenzied imagination. New life is tinder to his flaming sense of injury, and merely a means to effect punishment. His prerogative is quite simply cancellation and death, where the father must be a lecher and the giving of birth reduced to a sexual by-product. His sister's part in the process is sensed through a maniacal mating of death, sex, and nurture, as Ferdinand growls, "'Tis not your whore's milk that shall quench my wild-fire, / But your whore's blood" (ll. 47-48). Ferdinand's deathly resolve is contained in a complete mood-shift that is chilling in its finality:

Till I know who leaps my sister, I'll not stir:
That known, I'll find scorpions to string my whips,
And fix her in a general eclipse.
(ll. 77-79)

Clifford Leech comments that "Ferdinand is not the man to smother his rage during two long years."²³ Yet a two-year gap exists between Acts II and III, during which time two more children are born to Antonio and the Duchess. On one level this represents one of the glaring inconsistencies of the play, but it can be seen as a mirror of the irrationality involved. Through two years of deceptive quietude, the Duchess and her lover become complacent about their safety. Yet at the same time as Webster stresses their careless life-indulgence, he reinforces the gathering fury of Ferdinand--a fury restrained (not smothered) by a psychotic's fixated sense of control. Ornstein rightly describes Webster's technique here as a "bold willingness to be 'inconsistent' in order to obtain the precise moral discriminations which are lacking in The White Devil."²⁴ There is no overt gap in the action

but, at the same time, there is a sense that all has changed for the worse in an oblique two-year interim. There is no mistaking the wearied precariousness of Antonio as he converses with Delio on the swift passage of time:

Delio. Methinks 'twas yesterday: let me but wink,
And not behold your face, which to mine eye
Is somewhat leaner, verily I should dream
It were within this half-hour.
Ant. You have not been in law, friend Delio,
Nor in prison, nor a suitor at the court,
Nor begg'd the reversion of some great man's place,
Nor troubled with an old wife, which doth make
Your time so insensibly hasten.
(III. i. 8-16)

Time, in any sense, is always an expression of mortality; and it is time, rather than death itself, that so "composes" a man's thoughts, as Dr. Johnson aptly noted. By realizing that he "belongs" to time, man realizes he must live it out to its end. It is just this mortalistic realization of time that inspires Antonio's defense of matrimony in terms of natural renewal and spiritual transcendence:

O fie upon this single life! forgo it!
We read how Daphne, for her peevish flight,
Became a fruitless bay-tree; Syrinx turn'd
To the pale empty reed; Anaxarete
Was frozen into marble: whereas those
Which marry'd, or prov'd kind unto their friends,
Were, by a gracious influence, transshap'd
Into the olive, pomegranate, mulberry;
Became flow'rs, precious stones, or eminent stars.
(III. ii. 24-32)

While Antonio, the Duchess, and Cariola banter playfully, danger stealthily approaches.

At this brightest point of human interchange and domestic naturalism,

the terse barbarity of delayed punishment asserts itself. Unaware, the Duchess exchanges feminine jests on the relative good looks of women through subtle shifts in imagery--from portrait, to mirror, to personal mutability:

Did you ever in your life know an ill painter
Desire to have his dwelling next door to the shop
Of an excellent picture-maker? 'twould disgrace
His face-making, and undo him:--I prithee,
When were we so merry?--my hair tangles.

Doth not the colour of my hair 'gin to change?
When I wax gray, I shall have all the court
Powder their hair with arras, to be like me.

(III. ii. 49-60)

The irregular fancy of the verse is summarily dissipated as Ferdinand steals in upon her. Simple humanity and genuine warmth are sharply counterpointed by austere disgust and perversely discipline--a response intensified, it must not be forgotten, over a gap of two years. T.B. Tomlinson misses the distinct comparative value of this confrontation, declaring the Duchess' personal language and gesture as "clumsily introduced," or at least "very stilted."²⁵ The point here, however, concerns the "precise moral discriminations" to which Ornstein referred. Once aware of her brother's terrible presence (and this is a gripping dramatic point in itself), the Duchess immediately shifts to her official voice:

'Tis welcome:
For know, whether I am doom'd to live or die,
I can do both like a prince.

(II. 69-71)

Her tone is suddenly terse, direct, ordered. In response, Ferdinand simply hands her a dagger--the one he had threateningly brandished during

his moral lecture in Act I (ll. 330-32)--and hisses, "Die then, quickly."

The Duchess' clever but futile wish-fulfillment on the benign nature of her husband's identity--"Sure, you came hither / By his confederacy (ll. 87-88)--is anathema to Ferdinand, who reacts violently at the very thought of such a liaison. He roars out insults and threats to the palace in general, hoping the Duchess' lover will overhear them, before narrowing his deathly metaphors down to whispering accusations. He fairly pouts with personal injury as he addresses his sister on virtuous widowhood:

Thou art undone:
And thou hast ta'en that massy sheet of lead
That hid thy husband's bones, and folded it
About my heart.

(III. ii. 111-114)

His mood shifts yet again to cold detachment, and the ensuing fable on Reputation, Love, and Death comes straight from Ferdinand's own impenetrable heart. To him only reputation matters, and the Duchess' self-justification is touchingly pathetic:

Why should only I,
Of all the other princes of the world,
Be cas'd up, like a holy relic? I have youth,
And a little beauty.

(ll. 137-40)

But her humanity is unavailing. Ferdinand reiterates "I will never see 'you/thee' more" (ll. 136/141), and "never," in his code, is absolute. At the same time as he cuts himself off from all life-giving relation to the Duchess' humanity, he effectively passes her uncommutable death sentence as well.

Because of their insistence on choosing rather than acquiring, both heroines--Vittoria in The White Devil, and the Duchess of Malfi here-- must be locked up. But it is the Duchess who lives out the prison metaphor while Vittoria is a victim of revenge. The sense of inevitability in The Duchess of Malfi is intense. Instead of undergoing a showy trial with foreign ambassadors and formal sentencing to a named prison, as in The White Devil, the Duchess of Malfi is captured and condemned through arcane misdirection and stealth. This is suggestive of human life, where the Duchess is condemned to the existential freedom of making her own choice: Antonio. Her brothers, as a result, punish her for what they feel to be an essential affront to the family's honor. Yet she is a duchess, and her torment, therefore, must be politic. Bosola sets out the appropriate metaphor in character and action:

A politician is the devil's quilted anvil--
 He fashions all sins on him, and the blows
 Are never heard: he may work in a lady's chamber,
 As here for proof. What rests, but I reveal
 All to my lord?

(III. ii. 323-27)

A hard, evil center cloaked in a deceptively soft exterior--the image is enacted brilliantly when Bosola next appears. Ferdinand, the Cardinal, and others at court are discussing military strategy. Bosola arrives with his damning intelligence about the relation between Antonio and the Duchess. Nothing is overt. Two courtiers, downstage, narrate the unheard conversation between Ferdinand and Bosola:

Pes. The Lord Ferdinand laughs.

Delio. Like a deadly cannon,
 That lightens ere it smokes.

Pes. These are your true pangs of death,

The pangs of life that struggle with great statesmen--
Delio. In such a deformed silence, witches whisper
 Their charms.

(III. iii. 54-59)

Ferdinand's laughter is indeed a "deformed silence," a politician's mark of death--a treachery Antonio has known well from the outset: "The duke there? a most perverse, and turbulent nature: / What appears in him mirth, is merely outside" (I. i. 169-70). The Duke Ferdinand has Antonio's name now; the Duchess' punishment begins.

Of the early acts of The Duchess of Malfi, T.B. Tomlinson avers, "They represent a brilliant but brittle fragmentation of experience, and the danger obviously is that the fragmentation will be too complete for the concentration of Act IV to piece together."²⁶ While it is true that the play centers on Act IV, particularly on the prison image, I do not accept the notion that its function is so subservient as to "piece together" the play. I doubt that Webster suddenly realized how disjointed his play was and decided to write something of brilliance to compensate. Act IV is of a piece with the rest of the play, where time is out of joint and ambivalence is the only certainty. If The Duchess of Malfi is, as Clifford Leech points out, "a collection of brilliant scenes, whose statements do not ultimately cohere,"²⁷ the reason is because incoherence is the very basis of this confused and transitory life. Humanity suffers incurable dread at the same time as it tries to exert its own existence; and this is central to the play's concrete sense of nervous, naturalistic inconsistency.

Imprisoned, the Duchess is fortified with "a strange disdain" (IV. i. 12), a realization of her own pointlessness in a world suddenly become unnatural to her: "I account this world a tedious theatre, /

For I do play a part in't 'gainst my will" (ll. 84-85). Her choices are severely limited by her physical incarceration, yet she chooses altruistic integrity for herself. As she holds and kisses the severed hand that Ferdinand proffers in the dark, her grotesquely unknowing concern is for her brother's health: "You are very cold. / I fear you are not well after your travel" (ll. 51-52). Her reward, however, is a numbing spectacle:

Here is discovered, behind a traverse, the artificial figures
of Antonio and his children, appearing as if they were dead.
(IV. i. 55 s.d.)

David M. Bergeron, arguing against earlier contentions that the wax figures are gratuitous grotesqueries, says that we must penetrate the "Tussard barrier" and see the figures as "a terrifying part of a pattern."²⁸ But while Bergeron's assessment is valid, the terrifying pattern is a broader and more artificial one than he suggests. The wax figures are weirdly evocative, relating all the way back to Vittoria's yew-tree dream in The White Devil, and immediately ahead to the perverse litany enacted between the Duchess and Bosola. In her agony, the Duchess curses the stars overhead and calls for the reduction of the world itself to "its first chaos" (IV. i. 99). But Bosola's dispassionate antiphon is truly the final word: "Look you, the stars shine still." As Leech says of the line, "It is the completest assertion in Jacobean drama of man's impotence, of the remoteness, the impersonality of the cosmic powers."²⁹

Wax figures in a nightmare existence--this is the Duchess' realization as well as her sentence; and her tormented condemnation cuts

deeper than the buried metaphor of banishment in The White Devil. Yet a sense of complete estrangement persists in Ferdinand's vow never to see the Duchess again. It is now Bosola's turn to take the pledge of finality:

Bos.	Must I see her again?	
Ferd.		Yes.
Bos.		Never.
Ferd.		You must.
Bos.	Never in mine own shape.	

(IV. i. 133-34)

The terse sticomythia implies abrupt certainty and necessity--the Duchess must be punished. But she is not punished so much for what she has done, as for failing to live up to the expectations of her essential position as Duchess. Antonio would never suffer the same fate because he was never considered to be of the same essential importance. His crime was much less because he was much less; and Ferdinand's gruesome accusation is directed wholly at the Duchess: "You were too much i'th' light:--but no more" (I. 42). The quibble is a common one, but its ramifications are enormous: the Duchess has been too loose, too bright, too life-involved. The dark dungeon she now inhabits is the black, essentialist world of Ferdinand, where life is not a matter of moral choice, but of an automated and stultifying obedience.

The Duchess is only too aware of her state: "The robin-redbreast, and the nightingale, / Never live long in cages" (IV. ii. 13-14); and, in response to her ensuing existential question, "Who am I?" (I. 123), Bosola elaborates in grim and textured terms, continuing the prison metaphor:

Thou art a box of worm-seed, at best, but a salvatory of green mummy:--what's this flesh? a little crudded milk, fantastical puff-paste; our bodies are weaker than those paper prisons boys use to keep flies in; more contemptible, since ours is to preserve earth-worms. Didst thou ever see a lark in a cage? such is the soul in the body: this world is like her little turf of grass, and the heaven o'er our heads, like her looking-glass, only gives us a miserable knowledge of the small compass of our prison.³⁰

(ll. 124-33)

His response contains the existential contradiction of the traditional contemptus mundi conclusion: our bodies are indeed corrupt captives under sentence of death, but "the heaven o'er our heads" does not afford the same comfort it did in the medieval "age of faith." Rather it only reflects our urgent and claustrophobic mortal questionings, as Flamineo found in his own death throes: "While we look up to heaven we confound / Knowledge with knowledge" (WD, V. vi. 259-60). While the Duchess is severely affected by Bosola's bleak oration, she maintains her integrity by echoing his earlier rejoinder about the permanence of the stars: "I am Duchess of Malfi still" (l. 142), she declares in splendid defiance. But, again, she is summarily deflated by the detached observation of her tormentor: "That makes thy sleeps so broken." There is no rationalization this time about unsurpassable distances or difficult understanding; the Duchess merely acknowledges, "Thou art very plain" (l. 46). She is about to learn, as Ornstein puts it, "the meaning of existence in the supreme moments of agony and duress that lay bare the soul."³¹

The horrors of Act IV--the severed hand, the wax figures, the dance of madmen--reflect a terrible external reality. Ferdinand explicitly states their purpose: "To bring her to despair" (IV. i. 116); Bosola understands his mission as a duty to bring the Duchess "By degrees to mortification" (IV. ii. 177). Stilling feels that, from the Duchess,

Ferdinand wants a "spiritual capitulation, the abandonment of romanticism."³² But what he has demanded all along is more earthy: complete and utter submission--not only to a rigid code of family honor, but to him as well. The Duchess--significantly Ferdinand's twin--has not only offended family honor in her indiscreet marriage, she has also (he feels) rejected him personally. Ferdinand's response is a strangely informative bluster:

Damn her! that body of hers,
While that my blood ran pure in't, was more worth
Than that which thou wouldst comfort, call'd a soul.
(IV. i. 121-23)

Her purest state--purer even than soul--is only possible through his endorsement, investiture, love. The Duchess has rebelled by exercising her own choice of Antonio as husband, and spurning her brother's authority thereby. Ferdinand, then, finds that he must "repossess" his sister, through degradation, torture, and death at his behest. In this way, he reconfirms her definition on his terms alone. Yet the notion of a specific offense never forms itself in Ferdinand's mind, although there does seem to be something gratifying to him in her agony, something he earnestly desires. His impulses are a mystery even to himself, but his behavior wells up from a deep miasmic complex of incest and fratricide that he interprets as insult. Her death after a purifying ritual of mortifying torment is, in Ferdinand's sadistic and confused mind, a reunification in the womb: a return to a state of union which is at once exalted and incestuous.³³

The Duchess subverts Ferdinand's pleasure by choosing death herself, rather than accepting it on his terms in anguish and terror. She endures

all the chaos her brother can provide, with a splendid integrity that refuses to be broken down until she decides to capitulate. Through lurid wax horrors and wailing madmen, the Duchess maintains composure and listens with detachment and disdain. The pathetic troupe with their "dismal kind of music" (IV. ii. 60 s.d.) is a calculated piece of artifice that sounds the bestial anxiety of life against the dignified repose of death. Their crazed dialogue is at absurd cross-purposes--a mad bit of vaudeville--that is followed by Bosola's entrance, disguised "like an old man" (l. 114 s.d.). The Duchess' query is brilliantly germane: "Is he mad too?" Bosola is the star performer in this weirdly contrived dance of death, and the answer--though the Duchess might not think so immediately--is self-evident: to live is to be mad. This is the message of Bosola's solo performance:

Hark, now everything is still,
The screech-owl, and the whistler shrill
Call upon our dame, aloud,
And bid her quickly don her shroud.
Much you had of land and rent,
Your length in clay's now competent.
A long war disturb'd your mind
Here your perfect peace is, sign'd.
Of what is't fools make such vain keeping?
Sin their conception, their birth weeping;
Their life a general mist of error,
Their death a hideous storm of terror.
Strew your hair with powders sweet,
Don clean linen, bathe your feet,
And (the foul fiend more to check)
A crucifix let bless your neck.
'Tis now full tide, 'tween night and day:
End your groan, and come away.
 (IV. ii. 178-95) ³⁴

Resigned dignity is lauded as the only sane approach to life under condemnation, and when the Duchess begs Bosola to remove her from his deathly presence in "any way, for heaven-sake, / So I were out of your

whispering" (II. 222-23), she is ready for release.

The Duchess' last words to her waiting-woman are pathetic and humane, as she touchingly orders,

I pray thee, look thou giv'st my little boy
Some syrup for his cold, and let the girl
Say her prayers, ere she sleep.

(IV. ii. 203-205)

What matter that she has just seen her children represented as dead by the wax figures? The inconsistency focuses her unselfish concern. The Duchess is an archetype of generosity and resignation, as Bosola (now in the guise of a comforting bellman) presses her with obsessed persistence.

"Doth not death fright you?" (I. 210), he searchingly asks, with more metaphysical verisimilitude than the inquiring revenger Lodovico of The White Devil (V. vi. 201, 221-22). A revenger who is existentially inquisitive in the very act of blood stretches the bounds of credulity; but here the Duchess is stalwart as Bosola deviously continues:

Yet, methinks,
The manner of your death should much afflict you,
This cord should terrify you?

(IV. ii. 213-215)

The difference is in the seductive worth, the renovating, albeit ineffable, peace beyond the living torment. Bosola himself has schooled the Duchess on the art of dying, and she is resolutely indifferent:

What would it pleasure me to have my throat cut
With diamonds? or to be smothered
With cassia? or to be shot to death with pearls?

(II. 216-218)

The Duchess has learned that the means to death--namely life itself, in

all its bogus material worth--is of no real consequence.

Charles Forker captures the feeling accurately at this point: "She impresses us by her superb stoicism, but she also reveals that latent desire for extinction that is part of her complex humanity and a donné of Webster's dramatized psychology."³⁵ The Duchess' final command is superb in its selflessness:

Pull, and pull strongly, for your able strength
Must pull down heaven upon me:--
Yet stay; heaven-gates are not so highly arch'd
As princes' palaces, they that enter there
Must go upon their knees.--[Kneels.] Come violent death,
Serve for mandragora to make me sleep!
Go tell my brothers, when I am laid out,
They then may feed in quiet. They strangle her.
(IV. ii. 230-37 s.d.)

Note also the image of animalism that informs her final thought about her brothers. It relates back to the Duchess' sad bequest to her waiting-woman:

Farewell Cariola;
In my last will I have not much to give;
A many hungry guests have fed upon me,
Thine will be a poor reversion.
(II. 199-202)

She has consistently provided sustenance to the point of her own undoing; and her brothers, linked directly to the image of cannibalism, may be said to represent, in Roger Stilling's words, "the principle of masculine dominance run mad."³⁶ The Duchess, by contrast, represents the coolest sanity, as she chooses the integrity of death over their imposed definition of her life. Her death, in fact, is her reprieve from a life of utter condemnation, as well as the moral center of the play as a

whole.

The conclusion of The Duchess of Malfi is splendidly ironic. That of The White Devil is formulaic by contrast, for the chief revenger is sent off to prison and Giovanni, sporting "his uncle's villainous look already" (V. iv. 30), is left to rule. Here, however, the surviving offspring looked to for reconciliation and rule has already had his violent path cast in the horoscope that Bosola discovered to start the murderous thrust of the action. John Selzer feels that the concluding speech of The Duchess of Malfi confirms that "Webster's play chooses merit over degree,"³⁷ but no such political stability can be assured in light of the violent death predicted, and with the mysterious older son of the Duchess' first marriage lurking as a threat in the background. The ending is as ambiguous as every other feature of the play, in which life's pleasures are but "the good hours / Of an age" (V. iv. 67-68), and continued existence only extended torture. As the Duchess found,

Persuade a wretch that's broke upon the wheel
To have all his bones new set; entreat him live
To be executed again.

(IV. i. 81-83).

Flameneo too had declared, "This miserable courtesy shows, as if a tormenter should give hot cordial drinks to one three-quarters dead o'th' rack, only to fetch the miserable soul again to endure more dog-days"

(WD, V. i. 139-42). Life in the world of Webster's vision is a "miserable courtesy" indeed, and certainty is reserved only for the underlying reprieve of death.

The ambivalent mortality of Webster's tragedies is built upon a foundation of calculated artifice; key figures relate beast fables and

moral maxims; there are mad funeral songs from Cornelia and Bosola, and even a crazed dance of death in the Duchess' prison; a carefully related dream of a deathly yew-tree leads to multiple homicide in The White Devil, and a gallery of wax figures in the second play so mortifies the Duchess that her satisfied tormentor (Ferdinand) observes, "Excellent: as I would wish; she's plagu'd in art" (DM, IV. i. 111). The art metaphor here is used to restate and qualify Bracciano's simple statement: "Excellent, then she's dead" (WD, II. ii. 24), and is better integrated into the play's action than Lodovico's Pyrrhic (if not superfluous) triumph: "I limb'd this night-piece and it was my best" (WD, V. vi. 297). Yet it is clear that, in both plays, art has gone the way of modern esthetic value, where "art" is no longer in the object but in the perpetrator/artist. This is the direction of the abstract and in these plays, the action leads to the supremely abstract artifice of life itself, where dangerous reality is as fragile as perspective, and certainty dictated by he who holds the trowel.

The main characters themselves are "pictured" as much as plotted in these plays, and their careers can be traced through their appearances. Vittoria undergoes interrogation and torment because she "appears" to be a whore. The Duchess, imprisoned, specifically asks, "Who do I look like now?" (IV. ii. 30), and Cariola is direct:

Like to your picture in the gallery,
A deal of life in show, but none in practice;
Or rather like some reverend monument
Whose ruins are even pitied.

(ll. 31-34)

In this, the Duchess is linked to the "ancient ruins," where her surviving husband is caught by the echo of her grave in the general realization:

"Churches and cities, which have disease like to men, / Must have like death that we have" (V. iii. 18-19). Antonio's words carry the fatalistic understanding of an entire civilization but, for him, register grief for a lost wife whose face, "folded in sorrow" (l. 45), he thinks he sees. Unfortunately, all is lost.

Another glimpse of the Duchess is only a momentary "fancy", as her spirit now resides, if anywhere, in the appearance of Bosola. Having metaphorically wiped off his "painted honour" (IV. ii. 336) at the Duchess' dying gasp, he is now appropriately described by the fearful Cardinal:

Thou look'st ghastly:
There sits in thy face some great determination,
Mix'd with some fear.

(V. v. 8-10)

His is clearly a face of death, and the Duchess' features shine in him as stylized revenger. This "role" for Bosola is just one of many for him, however, as he has consistently masked himself, changed his identity, and suited his appearance as circumstances required. His specific role defined him at every point too, where, in conformity with his college reputation as a "speculative man" (I. i. iii. 47), he has appeared as honest servant, treacherous intelligencer, deputed authority, jailer, confessor, preceptor, and killer. Throughout, he has defined himself by his own disparate actions, and his inconsistencies are legitimate qualities of the absurd, as noted by Martin Esslin: "Human nature is not constant . . . it is possible to transform one character into another in the course of a play."³⁸

This understanding forms part of Ewbank's conclusion: "As a sister,

the Duchess is defeated by a confused and demonic world; but as a wife and mother she gains a kind of victory. The peculiar effect of her death is, at least partly, achieved by the superimposition upon each other of these two images of her."³⁹ But the images are blurred and intertwined between the Duchess and Bosola, to present mortality as a final form--an abstract. I think of the Duchess as all her forms at once, not one-at-a-time, as Ewbank's perspective analogy suggests. Indeed, this grasp of her mortality is recognized finally by Ferdinand himself, who gasps, "Cover her face: mine eyes dazzle: she died young" (IV. ii. 264). He is unable to face death; but death is a mirror. Ferdinand's disoriented inability to use conjunctives suggests Eaton's astute evaluation of this crucial point in the play as "a confrontation with eternity and a waste of human values."⁴⁰

Nothing is unqualified in The Duchess of Malfi, and the final scenes are a mist of futility that hovers momentarily over Antonio's pointless search for reconciliation, and what Bosola considers "Revenge, for the Duchess of Malfi" (V. v. 81). But what is to be reconciled or revenged? A deranged duke in the grip of lycanthropy? An arch-machiavellian Cardinal suffering gruesome delusions? Revenge does not present itself as an ethical problem to Webster's characters, as it does to Vindice or Hamlet, because it is an afterthought, an ersatz desperation. The effect of death alone is of interest, manifesting itself to the Cardinal's conscience as an unsubstantial "thing, arm'd with a rake" (V. v. 6), or heard in the shadowy mutterings of Ferdinand's dementia: "Strangling is a very quiet death" (V. iv. 34). Antonio had set the ontological tone earlier, as he took final leave of the Duchess: "Heaven fashion'd us of

nothing; and we strive / To bring ourselves to nothing" (III. v. 82-83); and it is this sense of a reduction unto zero that informed the Duchess' earlier notion on the arithmetical geometry of death, as well as a cryptic epigram common to both plays:

Glories, like glow-worms, afar off shine bright,
But look'd to near, have neither heat nor light.

(WD, V. i. 41-42, DM, IV. ii. 144-45)

Motivated revenge, rationality, the fact of human existence itself--all appear ludicrous if not genuinely grotesque in the face of such abstract inevitability--a view of death set forth, again, by Camus and understood completely by Webster:

The horror comes in reality from the mathematical aspect of the event. If time frightens us, this is because it works out the problem and the solution comes afterward. All the pretty speeches about the soul will have their contrary convincingly proved, at least for a time. From this inert body on which a slap makes no mark the soul has disappeared. This elementary and definitive aspect of the adventure constitutes the absurd feeling. Under the fatal lighting of that destiny, its uselessness becomes evident. No code of ethics and no effort are justifiable a priori in the face of the cruel mathematics that command our condition.⁴¹

Joan M. Lord is right in saying that "Webster's dramatic achievement is to have created a dynamic center of consciousness, the Duchess, within the death-oriented world of the play."⁴² But the Duchess' dynamism is proved only as virtuous as its ability to accept death. It is her only reprieve from an imprisoned life, where she learns the lonely cost of human existence. Flamineo's nausea in The White Devil is sordid by comparison, but prefigures some of the animalistic breakdown of Ferdinand in the later play. Ferdinand's lycanthropy does more than merely mirror his inner nature, however; it is a metaphor for man in all

his ravenous, cowardly cunning. People are persistently compared to wolves in Webster's drama, and Flamineo is not averse to declaring his own existence, "like a wolf in a woman's breast" (WD, V. iii. 56). This horrid oxymoron is similar to the very death's head and lily-flowers that inform him of his final ruin, and it is grasped in all its self-contradictory absurdity in Bosola's dying call for integrity:

In what a shadow, or deep pit of darkness,
Doth womanish and fearful mankind live!
Let worthy minds ne'er stagger in distrust
To suffer death, or shame for what is just--
Mine is another voyage.

(DM, V. v. 101-105)

It is significant that he recognizes his own failing in the glancing litotes of his final gasp. But no one can be trusted. Bosola's refusal to hope carries a profound nobility of indifference with it that is similar to the Duchess' defiance when she embraced death as reprieve. In Webster's tragic vision, death is a reprieve from the hell of other people in general, where nothing--no dogma, morality, or faith--offers a more equitable deliverance.

Chapter V

Beauty Hates Death: Middleton and

Domestic Tragedy

In each of the plays to be considered in this chapter, it is again a woman who stands at the center of the tragedy. Unlike Vittoria or the Duchess of Malfi, however, these women cannot be heroic because of their social position: This is domestic tragedy, and a statement such as "beauty hates death"¹ is really synonymous with a broader social precept like "extravagance hates reality" or "flamboyance breeds contempt." In each case, the maxim is simplistic if not platitudinous. Instead of a cathartic exposition of noble superiors and their high passions, domestic tragedy is out to chasten and teach through the sordid misadventures of common people in common situations. Men's manners are to be amended by reflecting the behavior, righteous or otherwise, of a rapidly growing body of middle-class stature: shopkeepers, landowners, tradesmen. In what is still considered the authoritative study, Henry Hitch Adams declared domestic tragedy to be inseparable from its didactic intent.² And in matters moral, it is axiomatic that men make the rules and women serve as examples.

The rise of Protestant theology paralleled an emerging ascendance of money and education by which pageantry and sacrament lost influence in favor of personal introspection and social participation. Divine Providence replaced blind Fortune with a teleological framework,

and a bourgeois moral drama ensued. The Puritan emphasis on rules of conduct, sermonizing, and conscience dictated an entertainment that, without challenging basic assumptions, could present titillating immorality before hammering home a popular religious corrective. The middle-class family, as social and economic unity, provided the perfect setting. As vulnerable to disloyalty and breakdown as the state itself, the Puritan family was a state in itself with the myth of revolt in Paradise as its primal totem. Indeed, two chapters of an important historical study plot the fundamental change: from "The Secularization of the Parish" to "The Spiritualization of the Household."³ The former mystery of marriage was now a civil contract for the honorable association of men and women under God's social plan for human reality. The husband was a king who reigned with his queen/wife over a domain of business and family. Popular morality, family stability, and social utility were the new precepts. For an educated middle class of profit and loss, life was no longer contemptible, but an exercise of faith; death no longer an inseparable memento mori, but the ironic "wages of sin."

The Puritan bourgeois finds marital instability tragedy in itself with the contiguous crimes of murder and adultery ever-ready to subvert the natural order of wedlock. It is a truism of social studies that murderers usually murder someone they know, and death dealt between common and related people makes a deeper vicarious impression than the alienated monstrosities of former villains who slaughtered en masse in warped emulation of godhead. Public testimony of family violence, with its concomitant shame and social reform, has more open and overt impact

than private confession to a mystical clergy. Indeed, the murderous spouse detected and punished is the more terrifying because he or she not only threatens God's kingdom of marriage, but, treacherously, sleeps in the same bed as the victim.

Death in the domestic tragedies to be considered here is always of a sordid, plotting, and psychologically vicious nature. The tragedy is neither defiant nor grand but, instead, misguided and petty. Rather than cathartic wonder, these tragedies present didactic woe. I intend to study two Domestic Tragedies--A Warning For Fair Women and Arden of Faversham--in their own didactic milieu, before moving on to the subtler and more fully realized tragedies of Thomas Middleton. I consider Women Beware Women and The Changeling to be domestic tragedies too, but they are more mature studies of psychological veracity and dramatic ambivalence. Where the anonymous tragedies are clearly matters of journalistic sensation with crude, evangelical overtones, Middleton's plays present problematic satire with dispassionate skill. There is never an appeal to Divine Providence in Middleton, where people become identified with the moral choices they have made. While death is an external mystery expressed in religious metaphors by the anonymous writers, for Middleton it is a factual human happening, expressed in metaphors of disease and treatment. While the earlier plays (I am linking plays from different centuries) are fundamentally religious with social offshoots of moral idealism, Middleton's plays are more a matter of social reality with religion, if anywhere, in the eye of the beholder. A wife's treasonous and heretical actions in a play such as Arden of Faversham become, for Middleton, logically explicable in terms of money and prestige. Death is still the dominant fact of the tragedy, but it

has different aspects in the two types of domestic tragedy I intend to investigate.

An obvious omission is the oft-anthologized A Woman Killed With Kindness by Thomas Heywood but, as I have argued elsewhere,⁴ this play is exempt because Heywood's sense of simple virtue, thrift, and fair play bears little relation to the homiletic morality of the anonymous tragedies or to Middleton's dark ironies of character and psychology. The anonymity of the first two plays to be discussed is a feature of their sermonizing intent. Since the golden age of attribution studies is now over, their anonymity is argument in itself for their bourgeois concerns. Local place names and customs are used in these plays to establish a verifiably social rather than historic context, so I will indulge in no tangential source-hunting but will rely on the texts of A Warning For Fair Women and Arden of Faversham⁵ as seminal documents of edification in themselves.

The very title, A Warning For Fair Women, does not describe the play, so much as it applies an external moral application in the manner of a sermon. Indeed, by way of induction, the external allegorical entities History, Comedy, and Tragedy argue for the right to perform. Comedy's satirical set-piece is often quoted as detailed evidence in the history of stage effect, but it also lampoons the exaggerated passions and ideals of conventional revenge tragedy:

How some damned tyrant, to obtaine a crowne,
Stabs, hangs, impoysons, smothers, cutteth throats,
And then a Chorus too comes howling in,
And tels us of the wofrying of a cat,
Then of a filthie whining ghost,
Lapt in some fowle sheete, or a leather pelch,

Comes skreaming like a pigge halfe stickt,
 And cries Vindicta, revenge, revenge:
 With that a little Rosen flasheth forth,
 Like smoke out of a Tabacco pipe, or a boyes squib:
 Then comes in two or three like to drovers,
 With taylers bodkins, stabbing one another,
 Is not this trim? is not here goodly things?

(ll. 50-63)

The deprecating tone appeals to a middle-class suspicion of emotional indulgence and theatrical artifice. As in a sermon, the "matter" is far more important than the "manner" and, as Tragedy whips the others off the stage, History points out,

'Looke Comedie, I markt it not till now,
 The stage is hung with blacke; and I perceive
 The Auditors prepare for Tragedie.

(ll. 81-83)

The drapes are a simple and effective way to compose idea and setting. No smoke or flash powder here--the stage is hung in deathly black; tragedy must be done. But while the taciturn figure Tragedy explains this to be a true story, the play's primitive efficacy is similar to that of the ancient bards of oral tradition: the story itself is subordinate to the effective telling of it, and the moral conclusions to be drawn paramount above all. Indeed, Tragedy is direct and unequivocal on the nature both of herself and of the story to ensue:

My Sceane is London, native and your owne,
 I sigh to thinke, my subject too well knowne,
 I am not faind: many now in this round,
 Once to behold me in sad teares were drownd.

(ll. 95-98)

Note the sermonizing effect of induced introspection: what is about to be portrayed has indeed been performed, and anybody in this "round" is

liable. Death, and the vicarious woe of implication, is promised from the first.

Significantly, the first evidence of misdoing in the play appears in the falsely inflated language of the antagonist, Browne. Having met Anne Sanders, his desire is inflamed:

Straight or crooked, I must needes speake with her,
For by this light my heart is not my owne,
But taken prisoner at this frolicke feast,
Intangled in a net of golden wiar,
Which love had slily laid in her faire lookes.
(ll. 156-60)

To literal-minded middle-class notions of popular morality and social obedience, Browne's passion is misguided and unbalanced. He covets Sanders' wife in direct opposition to the tenth Commandment. Browne's sin is mortal; his terms of love are deluded and hyperbolic. The Petrarchan notions of capture, entrapment, and sacrifice are decidedly suspicious in their appeal to emotion over reason. The weight of his desire, however, easily impresses the simple Roger and his scheming mistress, Drury. Exhorting them to intercede on his behalf, Browne insists, "I am dead, / Unlesse I may prevaile to get her love" (ll. 533-34). But Browne's death is now assured as punishment for such immoderate desire.

Anne Sanders shows a conventionally womanish weakness for vanity and appearance too, allowing a simple middle-class wedge to be driven between her and her husband: money. The investor has capital tied up when Anne wishes to buy new clothes. "I doe like the fashion" (l. 595), Anne observes, and the word "fashion" is loaded in the present Puritan context. It is a predestined weakness of woman that will lead to her

Downfall. Through pride, Anne is embarrassed before the clothiers because of her lack of ready cash and her husband's unfortunate inability to supply it at the moment of her purchase. Credit is offered, but it only exacerbates Anne's shame. Besides, it was pride in the first place that would attract her to fashionable adornment, and Anne's penchant for mere appearance is indicated in her explanation to Drury:

I am a woman, and in that respect,
Am well content my husband shall controule me,
But that my man should over-awe me too,
And in the sight of strangers, mistress Drurie,
I tell you true, do's grieve me to the heart.
(ll. 655-59)

Her calamitous feelings are sheer emotionalism, and Drury uses the gambit to introduce Browne into Anne's aggrieved "heart."

Anne draws attention to the tell-tale spots of yellow on her elegant chatelaine fingers, declaring them to be typically portentous of anger. Drury immediately begins to plead Browne's case, explicating Anne's woe in terms of palmistry. She notes the "line of life" (l. 680) and the "Ladder of Promotion" (l. 699) to predict Anne's rise in prestige upon the imminent death of her husband. Anne's disavowal is genuine and reflex-like:

I do not wish to be promoted so,
My George is gentle, and beloved beside,
And I have even as good a husband of him,
As any wench in London hath beside.
(ll. 700-703)

Drury enhances the necromantic tone of her predictions through simple appeal to inarguable Divine Providence:

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True, he is good, but not too good for God,
Hee's kind, but can his love dispence with death,
Hee's wealthie, and an handsome man beside,
But wil his grave be satisfied with that?

(ll. 704-707)

Having planted the idea of predestined widowhood, Drury need only appeal to the nature of Anne's injured pride. She emphasizes an equivalence between second marriage and material promotion--especially in terms of fine clothes and social position. She then inserts the name "Browne" along with overtly inexplicable knowledge of his earlier conversation with Anne, and the mildly intrigued housewife is willing to accept the predictions at face value. Her noncommittal tone is evidence of partial compliance, as she declares of Drury's presentiment,

If it be so, I must submit myselfe,
To that which God and destenie sets downe.

(ll. 755-56)

The allegorical figure Tragedy re-enters at this point, carrying a significant "bowle of bloud" (l. 771), and explaining,

This deadly banquet is preparte at hand,
Where Ebon tapers are brought up from hel,
To leade blacke murther to this damned deed;
The ugly Screechowe, and the night Raven,
With flaggy wings and hideous croking noise,
Do beate the casements of this fatal house,
Whilst I do bring my dreadful Furies forth.

(ll. 780-86)

Bradbrook identifies this conventionalized bloody banquet with the classical Thyestean feast,⁶ but the allegorical level of morbid exposition seems aimed at the unseen horror of motivation. The reason for murder must be made concrete in traditional symbolism: black candles,

screech owls, ravens, and Furies. "Strange solemne musike like Belles"

(l. 799) enhances a sense of the macabre in the ensuing dumb-show which, while it is clearly a throwback to the allegorized moral drama, aims at complexity in its dramatic effect:

The Furies goe to the doore and meete them: first the Furies enter before leading them, dauncing a soft daunce to the solemne musike: next comes Lust before Browne, leading mistris Sanders covered with a blacke vail: Chastitie all in white, pulling her backe softly by the arme: then Drewry, thrusting away Chastitie, Roger following: they march about; and then sit to the table: the Furies fill wine, Lust drinckes to Browne, he to Mistris Sanders, she pledgeth him: Lust embraceth her, she thrusteth Chastity from her, Chastity wringes her hands, and departs: Drury and Roger embrace one an other: the Furies leape and embrace one another.

(ll. 803-15)

The allegorical figures interweave with the dramatic characters in an orgiastic breakdown of decency and order. Tragedy, in turn, narrates the external application:

Now bloud and Lust, doth conquer and subdue,
And Chastitie is quite abandoned:
Here enters Murther into al their hearts,
And doth possesse them with the hellish thirst,
Of guiltlesse blood.

(ll. 838-42)

There is no sense of internal motivation or moral choice. The figures of sin must be seen to work their evil will. Such primitive popular psychology is directly analogous to the modern fiction of the criminal mastermind when, in fact, it is ignorance that exacerbates criminality. Here, the villains are transformed into monsters controlled by external demons when, actually, they are humans acting irrationally. Even Browne explicates his predestined villainy in telling shades of black and white

cast upon his reprobate soul:

Oh sable night, sit on the eie of heaven,
That it discerne not this blacke deede of darknesse,
My guiltie soule, burnt with lusts hateful fire,
Must wade through bloud, t'obtaine my vile desiré,
Be then my coverture, thicke ugly night,
The light hates me, and I doe hate the light.

(11. 910-15)

Browne's murderous attempts frustrated, Tragedy returns to explain how Providence, in the form of circumstance, has interceded for Sanders' sake. The action of the play forms the basic support for Tragedy's expository didacticism:

Twice (as you see) this sad distressed man,
The onely marke whereat foule Murther shot:
Just in the loose of envious eager death,
By accidents strange and miraculous,
Escap't the arrow aymed at his hart.
Suppose him on the water now for Woolwich,
For secrete businesse with his bosome friend,
From thence, as fatal destinie conducts him,
To Mary-Cray by some occasion cald:
Which by false Druries meanes made knowne to Browne,
Lust, Gaine, and Murther spurd this villaine on,
Still to pursue this unsuspecting soule.

(11. 1244-55)

Sanders remains as beatifically unsuspecting as Browne is demonically possessed. The catastrophe occurs in a swift and early stroke, as Sanders and his simple companion John Beane are both cut down by Browne in a flush of murderous rage.

It is a matter of tragic circumstance that the affable John Beane should accompany Sanders on the fateful trip to Woolwich. His demise is as predetermined as Browne's murderous lust. As Adams observes, "The author, in an effort to account for operations of chance in a universe

ostensibly ruled by Divine Providence, made destiny the reason for the end of life."⁷ If John Beane dies it is because his time has come. Old Joan's portentous dream of the boy's bleeding nose (ll. 1023-34) is comparable to Anne Sanders' telling spots of yellow: inexplicable signs of a Divine Providence, bestowed on an ignorant humanity. Yet the drama reaches effective realism at this point, in the simple stage direction: "Beane left wounded, and for dead, stirres and creepes" (l. 1419).

He is found along with the dead Sanders and comforted by the old couple who had received worried intimations of his injury.

Browne's bloody handkerchief (also foreseen in Old Joan's dream) symbolizes Anne's grief and complicity as she eulogizes Sanders' death in a declamatory conjunction of death, desire, and beauty:

A womans sinne, a wives inconstancie,
Oh God that I was borne to be so vile,
So monstrous and prodigious for my lust.
Fie on this pride of mine, this pamperd flesh,
I will revenge me on these tising eies,
And teare them out for being amorous.
Oh Sanders my deare husband, give me leave,
Why doe you hold me? are not my deeds'uglie?
Let then my faults be written in my face.
(ll. 1556-64)

Drury bids her pity the living Browne rather than the dead Sanders, but the impossibility of Anne's moral existence is conveyed through the oxymora of her rebuke:

Ah, bid me feed on poyson and be fat,
Or looke upon the Basiliske and live,
Or surfet daily and be stil in health,
Or leape into the sea and not be drownde.
(ll. 1640-43)

In the primitive world of this play, deception is impossible because God

"sees all," and moral guilt righteously nullifies existence.

Browne, too, feels real guilt as he overhears Young Sanders and his playmate. The presumptive innocence of this youngest of the Sanders' children indicts Browne in pathetic irony:

Har. Go to, where shall we play?
 Yong. San. Here at our doore.
 Har. What and if your father find us?
 Yong. San. No hees at Woolwich, and will not come home tonight.
 (ll. 1591-1595)

Significantly, this is the child who sat with his mother at the same doorstep earlier awaiting Sanders' return from the exchange (ll. 324-39). The scene depicted Browne's first illicit meeting with Anne, and the child acted as moral focus in setting up the familial and domestic concerns of the plot. Here, he continues to call for moral adjustment by his very presence, and Browne even declares,

Me thinkes in him I see his fathers wounds
 Fresh bleeding in my sight, nay he doth stand
 Like to an Angel with a firie sworde,
 To barre mine entrance at that fatall doore.
 (ll. 1617-20)

It is through the bleeding wounds of John Beane; however, that Browne is finally indicted. Popular notion had it that the victim bled afresh in the presence of the murderer and, lest the audience miss the overt significance, Browne himself ruminates in a rare aside:

I gave him fifteene wounds,
 Which now be fifteene mouthes that doe accuse me,
 In ev'ry wound there is a bloudy tongue,
 Which will all speake, although he hold his peace.
 (ll. 1995-98)

But John Beane does rally strength in his dying moment to accuse Browne

verbally, accentuating the miraculous and opening the way for additional commentary on the traditional belief of how murder "will out."⁸ All that remains is for the Lords of the Court to render an explicit choral commentary:

1 Lo. T'is a wondrous thing,
But that the power of heaven sustained him,
A man with nine or ten such mortal wounds,
Not taking foode should live so many daies,
And then at sight of Browne recover strength,
And speake so clearly as they say he did.
4 Lo. I, and soone after he avouch'd the fact
Unto Browne's face then to give up the ghost.
2 Lo. T'was Gods good wil it should be so my Lorc
(ll. 2064-72)

Yet Browne clearly suffers some degree of remorse, as seen in his grief for the Sanders' child and in his public attempt to absolve Anne from guilt. The investigating Lords hold him in some social esteem, as the descriptive evidence shows:

The man that did the deede,
Was faire and fat, his doublet of white silke,
His hose of blew, I am sorie for George Browne.
(ll. 1714-16)

Even John Beane's master, Barnes, declares,

Is this that Browne that is suspected to
have done
The murther? a goodly man beleeve me:
Too fair a creature for so fowle an act.
(ll. 1970-73)

Browne is not the "swaggering, swearing, drunken desperate Dicke" (ll. 1473-74) supposed to have perpetrated the carnage. Yet the allegory clearly showed him drunk on "Lust" and "Murther." In addition, the

evidence of a brother in jail at Newgate for a similar crime establishes Browne's "bad blood," and his Irish heritage further indicts him in terms of popular cultural prejudice.

Browne is a slave of "Murther," and internal irony is impossible to maintain against external reality. His intercession on Anne's behalf is further evidence of his misguided morality--she is an accessory to murder, after all--and his final request that his body not be hanged in chains is not based on self-respect, but on errant pride. The Lord Justice, enrobed and detached, pronounces standard homiletic wisdom before passing final sentence:

Al men must die, although by divers meanes,
The maner how is of least moment, but
The matter why, condemns or justifies:
But be of comfort; though the world condemne,
Yea, though thy conscience sting thee for thy fact,
Yet God is greater then thy conscience,
And he can save whom al the world condemnes,
If true repentance turne thee to his grace.
Thy time is short, therefore spend this thy time
In praier and contemplation of thy end,
Labour to die better then thou hast liv'd.

(ll. 2242-52)

But Browne, now an unrelieved symbol of passionate incontinence, rejects repentance in a death speech that openly reveals his fundamental ignorance and suicidal despair:

I never spake of God, unlesse when I
Have blasphemed his name with monstrous oathes:
I never read the scriptures in my life,
But did esteeme them worse then vanitie:
I never came in Church where God was taught,
Tooke benefite of Sacrament or Baptisme:
The Sabbath dayes I spent in common stewes,
Unthrifitie gaming, and vile perjuries:
I held no man once worthie to be spoke of
That went not in some strange disguise attire,

Or had not fetcht some vile monstrous fashion,
 To bring in odious detestable pride:
 I hated any man that did not doe
 Some damned or some hated filthie deede,
 That had been death for vertuous men to heare,
 Of all the worst that live, I was the worst,
 Of all the cursed, I the most accursed,
 All carelesse men be warned by my end,
 And by my fall your wicked lives amend.

He leapes off.
 (11. 2461-79)

In the courtroom, Anne Sanders wears a white rose in her bosom to betoken innocence and pure conscience, but her feeble alibi of pregnancy is unavailing. Roger, Drury, and Anne bicker among themselves in a hellish confusion of cross-recrimination, but the Lord Justice silences them with his sentence:

Your precious soule as well as here your bodies,
 Are left in hazard of eternal death,
 Be sorrie therefore, tis no pettie sinne,
 But murder most unnatural of al,
 Wherewith your hands are tainted, and in which,
 Before and after the accursed fact,
 You stand as accessarie: to be briefe,
 You shal be carried backe unto the place,
 From whence you came, and so from thence at last,
 Unto the place of execution, where
 You shal al three be hang'd til you be dead,
 And so the Lord have mercie on your soules.

(11. 2360-71)

Anne continues to plead innocence, but the observation of the second Lord is telling: "It should not seeme so by the rose you weare, / His colour now is of another hue" (11. 2374-75). The flower, it may be suspected, has turned a damningly reprehensible shade of brown.

Anne desperately seeks sophistic reprieve through bargaining with Drury, but the old woman, fully repentant, delivers a further sermonizing monologue:

Should I, to purchase safety for another,
 Or lengthen out anothers temporall life,
 Hazard mine owne soule everlastingly,
 And loose the endlesse joyes of heaven,
 Prepare for such as wil confesse their sinnes?
 No mistris Sanders, yet there's time of grace,
 And yet we may obtaine forgivenes,
 If we wil seeke it at our Saviours hands.
 But if we wilfully shut up our hearts
 Against the holy spirit that knockes for entrance
 It is not this worlds punishment shal serve,
 Nor death of body, but our soules shal live
 In endlesse torments of unquenched fire.
 (ll. 2589-2601)

At this, Anne reverses herself, declares herself "strangely changed"
 (l. 2606), and confesses her guilt to the omniscient puppeteer of
 Puritan belief:

God•I thanke that hath found out my sin,
 And brought me to affliction in this world,
 Thereby to save me in the world to come.
 (ll. 2683-85)

The action has become strangely provisional, a mere backdrop for
 the moral harangue of authority and reform. Lengthy monologues at this
 point explicitly state the play's religious precept--a necessary fact of
 composition and popular taste, as noted by Adams: "The excitement of the
 murder story probably enticed the people into the theatre, and they
 accepted the lecture which came with the play as a necessary part of the
 dramatization of a thrilling tale of homicide."⁹ Anne's children are
 even collected about her in this final scene. It is a clear short cut
 to bourgeois sympathy and pathos, as the soon-to-be-orphaned innocents
 emphasize the terrible extent of this "home-borne Tragedie" (l. 2729).
 They are directly analogous to the victimized John Beane. But death
 and deprivation in A Warning For Fair Women is a simple matter of

predestination for the good, and retributive wages of sin for the evil.

No other types of people exist in God's kingdom, and there is, consequently, no purgatorial grey area between reward and punishment.

Anne's final bequest to each child of a volume of meditations by the contemporary theologian John Bradford lays bare the play's final didactic concerns. On the one hand, it is a shortcoming of parochial moralism but, in the context of emerging domestic tragedy, it teaches a woeful lesson by example to an appreciative audience that required moral leadership. Yet, despite its occasional subtleties of character and effect, a domestic tragedy such as A Warning For Fair Women is really only a reformed version of the Catholic moralities. While it recognizes woman as an emerging social factor and focuses on the middle-class family, its aim is almost wholly religious. With holdover figures like Lust, Chastity, and Murder waiting in the wings for their cue, it comes almost as a surprise that Death is not included as part of the allegory. Of course, the individual man is now responsible for the health of his soul and the actions of his life. Arden of Faversham, while still a domestic tragedy, is worked out on a subtler and more fully realized dramatic scale.

Instead of offering a preachy warning, the title Arden of Faversham evoked memories, in 1592, of a recent atrocity that served as a bad example for all marriages. The title of the quarto continues: When is shewed the great malice and discimulation of a wicked woman, the unsatiable desire of filthy lust and the shamefull end of all murderers.¹⁰

Clearly didactic, the play makes its appeal to the same bourgeois audience aimed at in A Warning For Fair Women. Yet the action is less

externalized and, while the language is not heavily figurative, constant metaphors of amputation and blood reinforce the sordid context of death in the tragedy. Where the earlier play cast Lust in an awkward Dumb Show (see WFTW, ll. 1266-73), Arden of Faversham virtually opens with imagery of painful excision put, more effectively, in the mouth of the wronged husband:

That injurious ribald that attempts
To violate my dear wife's chastity
(For dear I hold her love, as dear as heaven)
Shall on the bed which he thinks to defile
See his dissevered joints and sinews torn
Whilst on the planchers pants his weary body,
Smeared in the channels of his lustful blood.
(i. 37-43)

Significantly, the violence described will be vented upon Arden himself.

Thus the tone is set for fuller characterization in Arden of Faversham, with allegorical figures dropped completely and the appeal to Divine Providence less explicit. In an attempt to clear the way for her illicit attachment to Mosby, Alice Arden plots the death of her husband. The drama then becomes a series of attempts on Arden's life, colored by domestic detail, spare and direct language, and a degree of tragic irony. Indeed, at the play's opening, we learn that the villain of the piece has even decided to forego his fleshly rendezvous with Mrs. Arden. But Alice waits at her doorstep for him--in direct opposition to Anne Sanders, who waited obediently at her door for her husband. Alice even wishes her husband gone forever:

Ere noon he means to take horse and away!
Sweet news is this. O, that some airy spirit
Would in the shape and likeness of a horse
Gallop with Arden 'cross the ocean

And throw him from his back into the waves!

(l. 93-97)

Arden is not the guiltless family figurehead that Sanders was in A Warning For Fair Women. He appears self-satisfied and ambitious, with his opening lines betraying more disgust at the baseness of Mosby than outrage at Alice's alleged infidelity. "He should not make me to be pointed at" (l. 35), complains the offended husband, as he discusses his land-holdings with all the legal intransigence of a rack-rent landlord. Though he considers himself "by birth a gentleman of blood" (l. 36), Arden shows his true quality when he later challenges his "base-born" rival:

ARDEN draws forth Mosby's sword.

Arden.

So, sirrah, you may not wear a sword!
The statute makes against artificers.
I warrant that I do. Now use your bodkin,
Your Spanish needle, and your pressing iron,
For this shall go with me. And mark my words--
You Goodman botcher, 'tis to you I speak--
The next time that I take thee near my house,
Instead of legs I'll make thee crawl on stumps.
(ll. 309 s.d.-317)

This is clearly the vehemence of a nouveau riche, insecure both in his position and his fury. He gains self-assurance by demeaning his opponent and by appealing to the received social standard. Arden is as much a social climber as Mosby, but his possession of real property, coupled with the security of his marriage, puts him clearly in the ascendant middle class of money and political influence. Alice is the advantageous prize for which both men contend, and Arden has something of the look of a successful Mosby, to judge by the testimony of the honest husbandman Greene:

18)

Why, Mistress Arden, can the crabbed Churl
Use you unkindly? Respects he not your birth,
Your honourable friends, nor what you brought?
Why, all Kent knows your parentage and what you are.
(1. 488-91)

Alice further elaborates on her supposed mistreatment, and Greene is unequivocal in his opinion of the two-faced Arden--the Arden who has heartlessly deprived Greene of his land:

It grieveth me
So fair a creature should be so abused.
Why, who would have thought the civil sir so sullen?
He looks so smoothly. Now, fie upon him, churl!
And if he lives a day he lives too long.
(11. 506-510)

The "fair" Alice, however, is secretly as smooth as her husband. Legal sophistry has deprived Greene of his property, and Alice only further incites his rage as he details Arden's unfair acquisitiveness and vows revenge:

Your husband doth me wrong
To wring me from the little land I have.
.....
But, seeing he hath taken my lands, I'll value life
As careless as he is careful for to get;
And, tell him this from me, I'll be revenged
And so as he shall wish the Abbey lands
Had rested still within their former state.
(1. 470-82)

Greene insists "I had rather die than lose my land" (1. 518), and Alice objectifies his severe feelings, not only by suggesting he hire "some cutter for to cut him [Arden] short" (1. 521), but by offering Greene money to effect the murder.

Alice is, in fact, the "queen bee" of a wide-reaching death pact

that seeks to eliminate Arden; and Greene has just gained membership. Mosby counsels discretion when he hears of Greene's involvement, but he has himself acquired the services of one Clarke, a painter; to fashion a poisoned crucifix that will kill Arden on contact. Clarke, if successful, will claim Mosby's sister Susan as payment. But the scheme is complicated at this point by Arden's man, Michael, who also dotes on Susan as his reward. Alice has engaged him as a "fifth column" to facilitate Arden's death. Michael has already vowed to her, "I will kill my master / Or anything that you will have me do" (ll. 162-63); and he makes a desperate bid for independent wealth that parallels the ambitions of Mosby and Arden. Knowing he is in competition with Clarke for Susan's favor, Michael vows,

Tell her whether I live or die
I'll make her more worth than twenty painters can;
For I will rid mine elder brother away,
And then the farm of Bolton is mine own.
Who would not venture upon house and land
When he may have it for a 'right-down blow?
(ll. 170-75)

Michael's fratricidal bravado is admittedly naive, but it is of a piece with the materialistic opportunism prevalent in the play. Death can be effected for a price; murder is a realistic way to gain power. Michael is as eager to kill for property as Greene is to preserve it. Through the death of Arden, all the others will realize their desires as well. Sub-contracting the killing to a pair of brutes like Black Will and Shakebag only further distances the main complainants from their basic plan of evil. Alice has incited them all, through a domineering effect of passion and desire. The otherwise unobtrusive Clarke even sees his

own passion mirrored in Mrs. Arden's desire for Mosby:

I know you love him well
 And fain would have your husband made away,
 Wherein, trust me; you show a noble mind,
 That rather than you'll live with him you hate
 You'll venture life and die with him you love.
 The like will I do for my Susan's sake:
 (ll. 267-72)

Such ennobling passion is as bogus as Browne's Petrarchan hyperbole in A Warning For Fair Women. The implication is that Alice is risking her own life, when she is in fact threatening Arden's. As a convicted murderess later, however, she will indeed die with Mosby. The pun on the word "die" at this point accentuates the orgasmic scurrility of the entire sordid affair.

In a sensitive and informed article, Ian and Heather Ousby argue that constant hyperbole suggests psychological breakdown and distortion of morality on the part of Alice. "Once an extravagant oath has been made, its fulfillment becomes a matter of pride."¹¹ Alice's lack of puritan modesty has led her to an intractable position. Her inflated ego would find it impossible to call off Arden's killing, now that she considers herself a woman set apart from petty domesticity by ennobling passion. Pride is the basis of her revolt and, while another critic characterizes her as amoral and anarchical,¹² Alice shows her impetuosity through a willful pride in her own self-conception. Clarke presents her with the poisoned crucifix (itself a symbol of perverse papistry); and Alice descants upon love in the presence of Mosby:

Then this, I hope, if all the rest do fail,
 Will catch Master Arden
 And make him wise in death that lived a fool.

Why should he thrust his sickle in our corn,
 Or what hath he to do with thee, my love,
 Or govern me that am to rule myself?

(x. 80-85)

Alice's romanticized hyperbole, besides being basically selfish, voices the erroneous aristocratic position that a humble middle-class Englishman would identify with the lust and intrigue of reprobate papal states. Her passion seems to unbalance her reason, as she declares,

Love is a god, and marriage is but words;
 And therefore Mosby's title is the best.
 Tush! Whether it be or no, he shall be mine
 In spite of him, of Hymen, and of rites.

(i. 101-104)

She intends to satisfy her will regardless of right or wrong, when every aspect of her middle-class milieu dictates that she be more modest, more obedient to social form. Love is not a god, but a shared experience between monogamous men and women. Marriage regulates love in a meaningful social contract to do God's will on earth. Marriage as form, and love as somehow outside marriage, is a Petrarchan conceit that went out with the old regime's concept of marriage as sacramental mystery. Amor vincit omnia may have been a fine motto for Chaucer's Prioress, but it has only a fanciful quality in the bourgeois utilitarianism of Puritan England. Alice's rejection of Puritan religious order, therefore, is not heroism, but moral miscalculation; and Catherine Belsey's reading of the play as a rejection of "permanent monogamy in favor of a free sexuality"¹³ is a twentieth-century misinterpretation guided by irresponsible romanticism. For Alice, heroism would be achieved by gentle subjection as helpmate in a marriage of middle-class citizens. Her desire for a mythical and

illicit Love is the passion that makes her a murderess, cuts her away from social virtue, and effectively causes the death of her moral being.

Arden's suspicions and fears are pointed up early in his private conversation with Franklin:

Her faults, methinks, are painted in my face
For every searching eye to overread;
And Mosby's name, a scandal unto mine,
Is deeply trenched in my blushing brow.
Ah, Franklin, Franklin, when I think on this,
My heart's grief rends my other powers
Worse than the conflict at the hour of death.
(iv. 14-20)

He links his feelings of offense directly to Alice and Mosby, and compares the effect with death. His existence has become an extended shudder of mistrust, as he relates his ominous deer-hunting dream and quotes the threatening accusation: "'Thou art the game we seek'" (vi. 19).

Instead of the conventional clairvoyant dream-piece being relegated to the subplot, as in A Warning For Fair Women (11. 1023-1035), it functions here on the naturalistic level of conversation. It still operates as a primitive forerunner of the murderous action to ensue, however, and Arden, though a severely class-conscious and hardhearted land grabber, is humanized as an unknowing citizen in fear for his personal safety. His partnership with Franklin takes him away from the main action to outside business deals and meetings, and allows the plot of blood to coagulate around his name through his very absence.

Greene hires the two city ruffians; Black Will and Shakebag, to kill Arden. Desperate, masterless men--the scourge of sixteenth-century society--they are returned soldiers with little hope of employment or advancement. Black Will warms immediately to the task--"Ah, that I might

be set awork thus through the year and that murder would grow to an "occupation" (ii, 105-107)--coloring in a nasty naturalistic underworld through his foul language and street savvy. No one tells him how to kill--"Plat me no platforms! Give me the money, and I'll stab him as he stands pissing against a wall, but I'll kill him" (ll. 97-98)--and the deal is easily transacted, as Black Will declares,

How? Twenty angels? Give my fellow George
Shakebag and me twenty angels; and, if thou'lt
have thy own father slain that thou may'st inherit
his land, we'll kill him.

(ll. 87-90)

His murderous words relate back to Michael's own fratricidal fantasies earlier, and ahead to the boy's enervating fear of the killers' violence.

There is a farcical edge to Black Will and Shakebag in their constant murderous one-upmanship. They never cease boasting their evil, in the same degree as they never succeed in acting with any rationality. Their personalities, thereby, highlight the ignorant and unnatural qualities that combine in their murderous attempts. Indeed, at their first sight of Arden, a nameless apprentice opens a window, inadvertently breaking Black Will's head and averting danger from Arden. Thwarted and bloodied, Black Will asseverates in pained bluster,

I tell thee, Greene, the forlorn traveller
Whose lips are glued with summer's parching heat
Ne'er longed so much to see a running brook
As I to finish Arden's tragedy.
Seest thou this gore that cleaveth to my face?
From hence ne'er will I wash this bloody stain
Till Arden's heart be panting in my hand.

(iii. 100-106)

Though Shakebag claims "I cannot paint my valour out with words" (l. 108),

he immediately offers comparable similes for his violence that attain

a curious metaphorical sublimity at the beginning of scene v:

Black night hath hid the pleasures of the day,
And sheeting darkness overhangs the earth
And with the black fold of her cloudy robe
Obscures us from the eyesight of the world,
In which sweet silence such as we triumph.

(11. 1-5)

The incessant boasting of Black Will and Shakebag parallels Alice's own deluded hyperbole and distances their personalities from the evil they do. Though "Black Will" is, here, the appropriate nickname for a characterized London cutthroat, it is also the evil that Alice Arden suffers. It could have stood as an allegorical figure in an earlier play like A Warning For Fair Women.

Black Will's blood-caked face becomes a symbol for the corruption to ensue. Indeed Michael, engaged to leave the door open to the murderers' intrusion, imagines Black Will's "foul, death-threatening face" (iv. 81) as he ponders the imminent danger to both his master and himself:

That grim-faced fellow, pitiless Black Will,
And Shakebag, stern in bloody stratagem--
Two rougher ruffians never lived in Kent--
Have sworn my death if I infringe my vow,
A dreadful thing to be considered of.
Methinks I see them with their bolstered hair,
Staring and grinning in thy gentle face,
And in their ruthless hands their daggers drawn,
Insulting o'er thee with a peck of oaths
Whilst thou, submissive; pleading for relief,
Art mangled by their ireful instruments.

(iv. 67-77)

Haunted by his own horrified imaginings, Michael shouts in fear and

alerts Arden and Franklin, who reprove his passionate outburst and make secure the doors.

Black Will and his cohort are again subverted on Rainham Down, as the traveling Arden and Franklin are met by Lord Cheyne. The presence of the titled peer coincidentally intervenes in the homicide, and Lord Cheyne's detached exchange with Black Will stands out in direct contrast to Arden's earlier venomous quarrel with Mosby. There is no challenge to be considered here, no threat of physical violence. Instead, the gentleman, with due understanding of degree, recognizes the human reality of the situation:

[Seeing Black Will] What, Black Will! For whose purse
 wait you?
 Thou wilt be hanged in Kent when all is done.
 (ix. 117-18)

Lord Cheyne sternly warns the villains to leave off mischief--even donates a crown in the interests of their rehabilitation--before departing in elegant hospitableness with Arden and Franklin.

Foiled again, Black Will rages in suicidal frenzy, much in the same manner as the frustrated Browne had done in similar circumstances:

Bro. Except by miracle, thou art delivered as was never man,
My sword unsheathed, and with the piercing steele,
Ready to broch his bosome, and my purpose
Thwarted by some malignant envious starre.
Night I could stabbe thee, I could stabbe my selfe,
I am so mad that he scaped my hands.

(WFFW, 11. 948-53)

Arden of Faversham, however, is less obviously providential. Browne was maddened by the allegorical figures of Lust and Murder, but Black Will and Shakebag are merely acting as a pair of underworld rogues might be.

expected to act. Their irrational buffoonery reaches its apex when Arden eludes them in the fog at the Isle of Sheppy crossing. The two thugs fall into a ditch in rather slapstick fashion, and the local ferryman answers their call for help. The ironic life-saver bears allusion to Charon, the ferryman of Hades, and Black Will has already declared himself as, in his words, "in hell's mouth, where I cannot see my way for smoke" (xii. 2-3). Their humorous hi-jinks concretely betray their fundamental ignorance by illustrating the famous example in the New Testament: "If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch" (Matthew 15:14). In addition, the situation here is used to show the final murkiness of their incompetent designs before Arden's actual killing occurs.

H.H. Adams is perhaps a little too formulaic on the method of the plot in general. It is unlikely that the author of Arden of Faversham had an open theological text on his desk to sort out orthodox theory on divine justice as he developed his plot. Nevertheless, Adams' observation on the dramatic use of Reede's late introduction is astute:

Reede, who serves no other dramatic purpose, must be considered as the one who seals the fate of Arden. His interview with Arden, far from being extraneous to the plot, precipitates the catastrophe, for at that point divine protection is withdrawn from Arden.¹⁴

Reede, an honest man, curses Arden for the same land-grabbing that motivated Greene's homicidal plans. Greene, however, had taken vengeance into his own hands by hiring the ridiculous torpedos Black Will and Shakebag, while Reede significantly makes his appeal directly to God, in cursing Arden:

God, I beseech thee, show some miracle
 On thee or thine in plaguing thee for this.
 That plot of ground which thou detaimest from me--
 I speak it in an agony of spirit--
 Be ruinous and fatal unto thee!
 Either there be butchered by thy dearest friends,
 Or else be brought for men to wonder at,
 Or thou or thine may carry in that place,
 Or there run mad and end thy cursed days.
 (xiii. 30-38)

Arden does, in a sense, "run mad" in the next instance, as he sees Alice and Mosby arm-in-arm exchanging kisses. He immediately draws and injures Mosby in the ensuing scuffle. Alice reviles him for this jealousy, pleading irony and sport, and condemning Arden for "a frantic man" (l. 105). But Franklin deflates her rhetoric--"Marry, God defend me from such a jest!" (l. 98)--and Mosby's subtle "I may thank you, Mistress Arden, for this wound" (l. 87) is even more telling. The Ousbys explain this by saying, "In Mosby's voice we hear bitterness, a bitterness that raises doubts about the worth of the gifts women bestow on their lovers, and perhaps on the worth of the women themselves."¹⁵ But there is understanding too in the wound's ominous symbolism. Mosby's gash is the gift Alice would have bestowed on Arden, but violence is all that can be expected from desperation. Mosby is becoming ever more aware of Alice's viciousness, and the slash that now bleeds in her presence subtly prefigures the killing strokes that will indict her later.

Indeed, at further mention of the wound, Alice becomes as incensed by bloodlust as full of condolence:

When I saw thee hurt,
 I could have took the weapon thou lett'st fall
 And run at Arden, for I have sworn

That these mine eyes, offended with his sight,
 Shall never close till Arden's be shut up.
 This night I rose and walked about the chamber,
 And twice or thrice I thought to have murdered him.
 (xiv. 81-87)

There is a strong note of horror in the linkage of death-plotting and sleeping partner; Alice is truly the treacherous "dearest friend" of Reede's curse, and Arden is too complacently uxorious to be aware of it. Franklin is aware:

Poor gentleman, how soon he is bewitched!
 And yet, because his wife is the instrument,
 His friends must not be lavish in their speech.
 (xiii. 153-55)

Arden's shamefaced repentance in the presence of his wife is as credulous as it is fatally ironic:

In thy discontent I find a death,
 A death tormenting more than death itself.
 (xiii. 120-21)

Death finally comes to Arden as he plays a reconciling game of backgammon with Mosby. It is the perfect domestic setting, and conforms to the archetypal "bloody banquet" dumb show in A Warning For Fair Women (ll. 771-815). The table is supposed to support sustenance and recreation, but is used here as a prop for murder. His back to the assailants, Arden is wrestled to the floor and stabbed in turn by Mosby, Shakebag, and Alice herself, whose fury elicits Michael's horrified "O, Mistress!" (xiv. 239) as Arden dies. The ensuing confusion of concealment and alibi barely covers the treachery of the conspirators' asides. Michael plans to silence Alice with ratsbane (l. 294), and his nervous

stratagem hearkens back to Mosby's own secret plan of generalized treachery:

Such bees as Greene must never live to sting.
 Then is there Michael, and the painter too,
 Chief actors to Arden's overthrow,
 Who, when they shall see me sit in Arden's seat,
 They will insult upon me for my meed
 Or fright me by detecting of his end.
 I'll none of that, for I can cast a bone
 To make these curs pluck out each other's throat;
 And then am I sole ruler of mine own.
 Yet Mistress Arden lives; but she's myself,
 And holy church rites makes us two but one.
 But what for that I may not trust you, Alice?
 You have supplanted Arden for my sake
 And will extirpen me to plant another.
 'Tis fearful sleeping in a serpent's bed,
 And I will cleanly rid my hands of her.

(viii. 28-43)

Mosby sings the murderous anthem that all the conspirators honor, as they bicker amongst themselves and follow their own goals. Black Will and Shakebag are only the most overt examples of such perverse ambition. The primary motive to rid themselves of Arden for the sake of personal advancement has the conspirators interwoven into a virtual net of murder that eventually ensnares them all. The primitive episodic nature of the play has something in common with the "chain of vice" notion of popular theology explained by Adams:

A person who committed a small sin, . . . lost grace and weakened his conscience in proportion to the gravity of the offense. Thus, each succeeding moral lapse became easier. As a man fell from God, God withdrew from him. From petty misdemeanors, the road to cardinal sins was easy--indeed, almost inevitable.¹⁶

The conspirators have become increasingly vicious; and the original "best intentions" of Greene and Michael are now lost in senseless bloodlust;

they have become no different from Black Will or Shakebag. It has also become clear that the net of murder in the Arden household must double back upon itself. Every plotter receives the harsh retribution of a divine providence: Bradshaw, implicated through his predestined error of carrying messages between Greene and Alice; Susan, guilty of passive compliance; all the others, clear homicides who have strayed further and further from the grace of God. The clearest example of Providence is evidenced in Arden's bleeding wounds. The precedent that had indicted Browne in A Warning For Fair Women condemns the unrighteous here, as Alice leans over her murdered spouse in misery and grief:

The more I sound his name, the more he bleeds.
This blood condemns me and in gushing forth
Speaks as it falls and asks me why I did it.
(xvi. 4-6)

No mortal explanation, save fundamental evil, is availing, and Alice correctly seeks salvation through orthodox repentance:

Leave now to trouble me with worldly things,
And let me meditate upon my Saviour Christ,
Whose blood must save me for the blood I shed.
(xviii. 9-11)

She shows her better nature through an eleventh-hour confession, while Mosby goes out with a petulant "Fie upon women!" (l. 34). He is no longer recognizable as the ambitious lover who, in a moment of touching introspection, realized,

My golden time was when I had no gold;
Though then I wanted, yet I slept secure;
My daily toil begat me night's repose;
My night's repose made daylight fresh to me.
(viii. 11-14)

The long night of damnation has swept him away, as sentence is passed and justice obliterates corruption with primitive finality.

Yet the play has shown some subtle ironies. A medieval belief in "murder will out" is illustrated in Arden's accusatory wounds, as well as in the dead grass of his grave. The victimized Arden, it is clear, had victimized others, and his body's removal to the counting house, as well as, finally, to the very property he had cheated for, is an ironic visual symbol of his lucre. The moral didacticism of this play is in a real struggle with bourgeois realism and topical allusion; sermonizing speeches of repentance are restricted to Alice's taciturn confession, and justice is effectively seen to be done. As Sarah Youngblood puts it, "Arden of Feversham combines, in the nature of its tragic action, the simple external concept of tragedy inherited from the medieval drama, and the subtler, inwardly probing concept of tragedy which marks later Elizabethan and Jacobean drama."¹⁷

Indeed, Arden of Feversham has shifted some degree of emphasis to the effect of sin, rather than allegorically declaiming its causes. The web of argument and reconciliation, credulous trust, and irrational violence that makes up the dramatic action has a measure of melodramatic verity impossible to achieve in earlier moral plays, where the central character merely embodied the working of evil in figures such as Lust, Pride, and Murder. Even A Warning For Fair Women has an allegorical dimension not evident in Arden of Feversham. As Max Bluestone rightly contends, "If melodrama simplifies the problematical nature of things, Arden of Feversham transcends mere melodrama and approaches something we may call tragic melodrama."¹⁸ The sordid complications that motivate death for Arden, as well as for his houseful of killers, enhance a sense of tragic

waste. But the moral mandate of the play is still a commitment to teaching by precept. While it is a fine example of domestic tragedy, Arden of Faversham is still part of a process, in my view--a process that realizes a fuller sense of its tragic value in the drama of Thomas Middleton.

There are some basic differences in ethical attitude and stylistic approach that set Middleton's dramaturgy apart. First, the main tenet of domestic tragedy is that the sinner cannot hide from God. Anne Sanders had spelled it out in symbolism drawn from both classical myth and Old Testament retribution:

Mountains will not suffice to cover it,
Cymerian darknesse cannot shadow it,
Nor any pollicie wit hath in store,
Cloake it so cunningly, but at the last
If nothing else, yet will the very stones
That lie within the streets cry out vengeance,
And point at us to be the murderers.

(WFFW, ll. 1664-70)

Likewise, the conclusion of Arden of Faversham draws on monologues of repentant moralizing in which tragic realization and confession of sin seem external to the play's action. The characters are seldom more than mere puppets because, deep down, they know all along that God is controlling them through His inscrutable Providence. But in Middleton, God is not so readily apparent; concealment is the easiest part of sin. In The Changeling and Women Beware Women, concealment is actually a virtue and more accurately reflects the interactions of people thereby. Thus Ornstein

In this world respectability and vice walk arm in arm; there is no place for the fantastic depravities that haunt Tourneur's imagination. Like Jonson's, Middleton's sinners are confidence men rather than cutthroats. They are honorable lechers who sin discreetly and who calculate their enormities with a due regard for propriety. If they rob a woman's virtue, they will murder her husband to make her an honest woman again. If they commit incest they nevertheless abhor the vulgarity of "daylight" lechery. They are moved by sermons, and they are fond of their brothers, sisters, and nieces; forever prudent, they keep a watchful eye on the futures of those they love.¹⁹

Middleton, therefore, has an eye for character that rivals that of any comic writer of the age. His attention to tragic plot is equally painstaking and likely warrants a good deal of what T.B. Tomlinson considers a simple statement of fact: "Before Ibsen and Chekhov, nobody but Middleton wrote domestic tragedy worth serious and sustained attention."²⁰ Middleton's best feature is his attention to moral irony through both character and plot. He focuses on a moral problem but never moralizes, because his technique is that of the rationalist, the realist. In Middleton's tragedies, pleading bewitchment (as Mosby and Alice Arden do) is illegitimate. Any reliance on societal position is either debunked by reality or subtly undercut in ways that accentuate the characters' moral ignorance. Where Lord Cheyne is a latecomer in Arden of Faversham, used merely to thwart another episode in a primitive plot, the Duke of Florence in Women Beware Women and Tomazo de Piracquo in The Changeling are noble figures that function naturalistically throughout. Likewise, Black Will and Shakebag, though brilliantly characterized, are more valuable as contrasts to Arden and righteousness, while the Ward's grotesque idiocy has a distinct meaning for the nature of a society conditioned to show him respect because of his social

position. The result is a constant ambivalence by which the reader is forced to decide on the merits of an obstinate aristocracy and an intransigent middle class. The satire succeeds through direct contrasts of subplot, character, and subtle class distinctions, and makes Middleton, in my opinion, the finest author of domestic tragedy in the age.²¹

Middleton, then, is clearly a dramatist of the middle class. He lampoons the acquisitive tradesman along with the affected landholder at the same time as he involves them with their "gentle" counterparts and their contiguous misdoings. His moral message, however, is not overtly religious but rather a note of caution for society as a whole. Where the anonymous writers portrayed allegorical figures in individual human forms, Middleton details a subtle communal cancer whose actions cause ambiguous effects throughout society. As Ornstein noted, the Middleton world does not involve the shining court depravity of Webster or Tourneur but is, instead, much more like the reader's world--the world of the drawing room, or of the closed door with the inevitable keyhole. Such domestic naturalism makes one cautious of characterizing Middleton's people as "moral idiots" or of seeing the body politic as a "viciously corrupt society."²² Corruption certainly exists, but it is not society's first principle. Bourgeois values are not inherently evil; they are merely narrow and ignorant, and allow evil to fester. As a result, to deprecate Middleton's characters as unworthy of tragic consideration is to miss entirely the sense of subtle satire and contemporary didacticism necessary in domestic tragedy. Any comparisons with Shakespeare, Chapman, or Marlowe are odious,²³ but noxiously so when it is realized

that domestic tragedy bears difference beyond mere degree. Tragic matter for Middleton is no longer restricted to wars, imprisonment, or power politics, but focuses on human emotion, desires, and responsibility.²⁴ By the same token, if Middleton had been striving for tragic effect, his plays would appear as primitive as A Warning For Fair Women or Arden of Faversham. The real horror of a situation like Beatrice-Joanna's is that she never realizes the tragic extent of what she has done while, earlier, Alice Arden and Anne Sanders both did--to an extravagantly pious degree. The evildoers of anonymous domestic tragedy realize their tragic sinfulness and repent in homiletic soliloquies. Nothing so cardboard is about to occur in Middleton's tragedies.

Death is still the vital organ of the tragedy, in its sense of loss, of mystery, of complete finality. But its overwhelming effect in plays such as A Warning For Fair Women and Arden of Faversham make it a supernatural horror that can only be spoken of in religious metaphors. Tragic appeal is made directly to the heavens to forgive a sin that manifests itself in death. Middleton is more down-to-earth. His characters do not look up when faced with death; they look around. Consequently, their metaphors of death involve disease, decay, fear. Death in Middleton is a social rather than spiritual evil, for no shaman-like figures (chief justices, priests, Lords) have power to assuage the moral condition of the world. Any figures of moral authority are shown to be corrupt, ineffective, or ignorantly involved in society's suicidal compulsion to effect its own undoing. Middleton views his people under high resolution, and the effect is domestic drama with vicarious implications for any secular society of hopes, ambitions, life.

Yet the very title Women Beware Women has the same preachy tone as the earlier Warning For Fair Women. The full title of the source for the Beatrice Joanna-De Flores plot, first noted by Gerard Langbaine, is definitely didactic: John Reynolds' The Triumphs of God's Revenge against The Crying and Execrable Sinne of Wilfull and Premeditated Murther.²⁵

Beauty and death are at moral odds once again in Middleton's tragedy, but, while beauty is still vested in the central heroine, death is objectified in a male antagonist who wields psychological rather than spiritual power. It is true that De Flores bears the facial features of evil like the marred Black Will, but he is not simply characterized as a cutthroat. He shatters moral illusions, but discreetly so; and, unlike the other bourgeois characters, he indulges in no "charades of honor."²⁶ Yet he is clearly a psychopathological type in his obsessed desire for Beatrice-Joanna, and Middleton's study of his deathly characteristics is penetrating. As Schoenbaum puts it, "The Changeling is, indeed, a striking illustration of how the genius of a great dramatist can transform the most unpromising melodrama into the subject matter of a memorable and harrowing psychological tragedy."²⁷

The domestic setting is arranged and reinforced around the fortified manor house belonging to Vermandero, the proud father of the soon-to-be-wed Beatrice-Joanna. Yet the capricious girl has fallen for Alsemero, a visitor in Alicant, whose chummy familiarity with her father only strengthens his reciprocal feelings for her. The conversation is practically formulaic in the realm of domestic drama as Vermandero delivers the proud host's lecture on his unique abode, only to discover his guest to be the unthreatening son of a former acquaintance:

Ver. . . . Of what name, I beseech you?
 Als. Alsemero, sir.
 Ver. Alsemero; not the son
 Of John de Alsemero?
 Als. The same, sir.
 Ver. My best love bids you welcome.
 Oh, sir, I knew your father;
 We two were in acquaintance long ago.
 (I. i. 168-74)

Vermandero is as pleased at the coincidence as he is with his own
 bourgeois satisfaction on the topic of his future son-in-law, Alonzo de
 Piracquo:

I tell you, sir, the gentleman's complete,
 A courtier and a gallant, enrich'd
 With many fair and noble ornaments;
 I would not change him for a son-in-law
 For any he in Spain, the proudest he,
 And we have great ones, that you know.
 (II. 212-17)

Ironically, his son-in-law's place in this respected house will be
 changed for the very man who stands before him. His secure castle with
 its "secrets" within is a clear Petrarchan symbol of his other pride and
 joy: Beatrice-Joanna.
 28

Clearly a Petrarchan "love exchange" has occurred between Beatrice-
 Joanna and Alsemero, but the betrothed Alonzo blocks their union. A man
 of honor, Alsemero offers to challenge his rival, but Beatrice dissuades
 him from violence with the shallow contention, "Blood-guiltiness becomes
 a fouler visage" (II. ii. 40). She knows De Flores is enamored of her and
 will do her bidding. In fact, he begs for service on his knee as she
 flatters him in the most blatant manner:

What ha' you done
 To your face a-late? Y'have met with some good physician;

Y'have prun'd yourself, methinks, you were not wont
To look so amorously.

(II. ii. 72-75)

De Flores is already "mad with joy" (l. 70) that she actually called him by name, and he expresses insights that are both sensitive and obsessed:

Her fingers touch'd me!
She smells all amber.

(II. 81-82)

They border on a fetishist's passion as Beatrice-Joanna offers to cleanse his affected face, and De Flores responds, "With your own hands, lady?" (l. 84). She insists, and De Flores' aside is impassioned,

'Tis half an act of pleasure
To hear her talk thus to me.

(II. 86-87)

The perverse hiring continues as Beatrice-Joanna spells out De Flores' murderous assignment by parts, little realizing the extent of his desire:

<u>Bea.</u>	Take him to thy fury.
<u>DeF.</u>	I thirst for him.
<u>Bea.</u>	Alonzo de Piracquo.
<u>DeF.</u>	His end's upon him; He shall be seen no more.

(II. 133-35)

It is a labor of love for De Flores, and his passionate homicidal desires are merely the obverse of Alsemero's pristine Petrarchanism. J. Chesley Taylor is shrewd on the nature of the two men's similarity: "In the desire to challenge Alonzo he [Alsemero] thus becomes little different from De Flores. Both men wish to kill Alonzo, performing a 'service' for Beatrice that each hopes will permit him to possess her."²⁹

De Flores, however, is a sinister figure, endowed with a deathly sexuality that Beatrice-Joanna cannot fully comprehend. She has already discussed him with Alsemero in terms of poison and loathing, and declares him to be a veritable "basilisk" (I. i. 115)--the mythical creature that kills with a glance. Beatrice-Joanna's private feelings on De Flores are pointed:

I never see this fellow, but I think
Of some harm towards me, danger's in my mind still;
I scarce leave trembling of an hour after.
(II. i. 89-91)

Her fears are shockingly embodied in Alonzo's amputated ring finger, the "token" (III. iv. 26) De Flores returns with, after murderously performing Beatrice-Joanna's wishes. "Bless me!" she exclaims, "What hast thou done?" (I. 29), completely unable to reconcile the totality of death with a whim of her own that merely wishes away that which she no longer needs or desires. In her pathetic, bourgeois shortsightedness, she never thought "disposing" of Alonzo would actually involve blood and violence, and is as insulted as surprised when the dripping evidence is laid at her feet.

Beatrice becomes even more pathetic in her further attempts to "buy off" De Flores. She continues to increase his reward, when what De Flores really wants is something beyond mere money:

I could ha' hir'd
A journeyman in murder at this rate,
And mine own conscience might have slept at ease.
(III. iv. 68-70)

Exasperated, she tries to wish him away, still thinking he has a price that she can meet:

I prithee make away with all speed possible.
 And if thou be'st so modest not to name
 The sum that will content thee, paper blushes not;
 Send thy demand in writing, it shall follow thee,
 But prithee take thy flight.

(ll. 77-81)

Put it in writing--what a paltry bourgeois notion. De Flores tells her that her maidenhead is his pride, and Beatrice's response represents the height of sheltered idealism:

Why, 'tis impossible thou canst be so wicked,
 Or shelter such a cunning cruelty,
 To make his death the murderer of my honour!
 Thy language is so bold and vicious,
 I cannot see which way I can forgive it
 With any modesty.

(ll. 120-125)

Her sense of injury is overridden immediately as De Flores declares her as much a murderer as himself. She has been the murderer of her own honor, and De Flores' response to her final pleas of preferential status is as chilling as it is correct: she pleads, "Think but upon the distance that creation / Set 'twixt thy blood and mine, and keep thee there" (ll. 130-131), but De Flores cuts her social equivocation to the ground:

Look but into your conscience, read me there,
 'Tis a true book, you'll find me there your equal:
 Push, fly not to your birth, but settle you
 In what the act has made you, y'are no more now;
 You must forget your parentage to me:
 Y'are the deed's creature; by that name
 You lost your first condition, and I challenge you,
 As peace and innocence has turn'd you out,
 And made you one with me.

(ll. 132-140)

Beatrice and De Flores are united in Alonzo's death.

In Women Beware Women the murder of an interceding character is effected as well, but this time the victim appears to be the central protagonist and is already married to the beauty who will ensure his undoing. The action requires Bianca's corruption early, and her husband Leantio must surely bear some responsibility. He is a self-satisfied middle-class businessman who has wooed Bianca from Venice and can think of her only in acquisitive moral terms:

As often as I look upon that treasure,
 And know it to be mine--there lies the blessing--
 It joys me that I ever was ordained
 To have a being, and to live 'mongst men;
 Which is a fearful living, and a poor one,
 Let a man truly think on't.
 To have the toil and griefs of fourscore years
 Put up in a white sheet, tied with two knots--
 Methinks it should strike earthquakes in adulterers,
 When e'en the very sheets they commit sin in
 May prove; for ought they know, all their last garments:
 Oh what a mark were there for women then!
 (I. i. 14-25)

Her value is in her price, and Leantio figures that he has made a steal. In fact, his bourgeois satisfaction is enhanced by the constant metaphor of thievery he invokes. To him, Bianca is "the best piece of theft / That ever was committed" (ll. 43-44). But Leantio is more a figure of pettiness than moral imbalance, a characteristic noticed in his trite memento mori above and constantly reinforced by his clichéd sense of accomplishment. Leantio, like the complacent Vermandero of The Changeling, is unaware of his own irony as he lauds the juncture of beauty and death that will undo his house.

Middleton moves the action swiftly to Bianca's seduction. Naturally, Leantio tries to keep his investment in her hidden, but the beautiful

young wife is noticed from a distance by the Florentine Duke. A rendezvous is quickly set up in Livia's house, as the salacious lady sits the Mother down to a game of chess while Bianca is shown through the house. The quibbling chess moves between Livia and the Mother cover the seduction on the upper stage, and need no comment besides their loaded metaphors of chivalry and capture. Aware of her predicament, Bianca exclaims "Oh treachery to honour!" (II. ii. 320), but the Duke cuts through her appeal with the systematic persuasion of a studied lecher. He gains Bianca by taking her to his side in somewhat the same way as De Flores had made himself a partner with Beatrice-Joanna. Instead of deflating honor, however, the Duke makes it clear that, in Florence, honor is dictated by him:

Sure, I think
 Thou know'st the way to please me. I affect
 A passionate pleading 'bove an easy yielding,
 But never pitied any--they deserve none--
 That will not pity me. I can command,
 Think upon that. Yet if thou truly knewest
 The infinite pleasure my affection takes
 In gentle, fair entreatings, when love's businesses
 Are carried courteously 'twixt heart and heart,
 You'd make more haste to please me.
 (II. 358-67)

The Duke's unctuous refrain--"think on that. . . think upon that" (II. 335, 363)--is a confusing appeal to Bianca's moral judgment that, as yet, only sees things in clear black and white. She sees the imminent death of her honor in appropriate metaphors of tempestuous destruction and disease:

Make me not bold with death and deeds of ruin
 Because they fear not you; me they must fright.
 Then am I best, in health--should thunder speak

And none regard it, it had lost the name
 And were as good be still. I'm not like those
 That take their soundest sleeps in greatest tempests;
 Then wake I most, the weather fearfullest,
 And call for strength to virtue.

(ll. 351-58)

But the Duke can provide for such moral turbulence through sheer capital,
 and he makes his successful bid as he takes Bianca's arm:

Come play the wise wench, and provide for ever;
 Let storms come when they list, they find thee sheltered.
 Should any doubt arise, let nothing trouble thee;
 Put trust in our love for the managing
 Of all to thy heart's peace. We'll walk together,
 And show a thankful joy for both our fortunes.

(ll. 382-87)

Acting as the Duke's pimp, Guardiano has overheard the entire
 seduction and accurately voices the metaphorical coupling of sex and
 decay to ensue:

Never were finer snares for women's honesties
 Than are devised in these days; no spider's web
 Made of a daintier thread, than are now practised
 To catch love's flesh-fly by the silver wing.

(ll. 397-400)

The image of deathly sexuality is perfect in its connotations of fly-
 blown carrion, and Bianca reinforces the feeling further as she returns
 from her intimate flesh session with the Duke:

Now bless me from a blasting; I saw that now
 Fearful for any woman's eye to look on.
 Infectious mists and mildews hang at 's eyes,
 The weather of a doomsday dwells upon him.
 Yet since mine honour's leprous, why should I
 Preserve that fair that caused the leprosy?
 Come poison all at once.

(ll. 420-26)

This is clearly not the "bewitchment" of an Alice Arden or an Anne Sanders. Bianca has met and coupled with the Duke in the earthliest skirt-hiked fashion, and her appeal is similarly down-to-earth. The Duke is not a Devil but a man; and Bianca, while corrupted, is not destroyed. The color silver accurately reveals her bought condition, between the white of innocence and the black death of her honor. She begins to excel in the duplicity that seduced her. Bianca can now put on a smiling face while she privately spurns Livia. "Y^e are a damned bawd" (l. 465), she declares; but Livia adroitly adjusts the focus when left alone:

. Is't so: damned bawd?
Are you so bitter? 'Tis but want of use--
Her tender modesty is sea-sick a little,
Being not accustomed to the breaking billow
Of woman's wavering faith, blown with temptations.
'Tis but a qualm of honour, 'twill away,
A little bitter for the time, but lasts not.
Sin tastes at the first draught like wormwood water,
But drunk again, 'tis nectar ever after.
(ll. 469-77)

Her cynical observations are pointed, and a far cry from the somewhat histrionic exhortations witnessed in the similar situations of earlier domestic tragedies, as noted by Charles A. Hallett:

Bianca was free to cry out against the injustices of a world in which a woman's beauty is her destruction and the authority set over her her destroyer. But that is the way people act in plays. Livia knows that in life the instinct for self-preservation is greater than the desire for justice.³⁰

Bianca is paralleled in the subplot by Isabella, who also comes under Livia's tutelage. The girl has been effectively "sold off" to the wealthy but entirely foolish Ward, by a father who cares nothing for her

feelings. As long as the prospective son-in-law is "hid under bushels" (I. ii. 85), what matter that he is a fool? In fact, he is a "fool entailed" (II. i. 81), a congenital idiot--the decadent aristocratic counterpart of the upwardly acquisitive bourgeois. Isabella seeks solace from an uncle who dotes upon her sexually, and Livia clears the way for all by giving misinformation to the girl. Convinced that she is not related by blood to any of her father's relatives, Isabella grasps union with Hippolito as mere adultery and decides to go through with marriage to the Ward as an honorable front.

An emerging incest motif thus moves domestic tragedy into a subtle realm of horror. It was a mere hint earlier in A Warning For Fair Women, where Browne had a brother likewise convicted of murder. They were clearly an example of "bad blood." This notion of perverted bloodline is blatant in Women Beware Women, where a union of niece and uncle--with all the outward elegance of wedded bliss--is undercut by a rotten foundation of deceit and incestuous lust. Isabella and Hippolito dance flawlessly before the Duke (III. iii. 200 s.d.), while the Ward's steps are antiq and ridiculous. The Ward is stupidly inseparable from his man Sordido, and his aristocratic parentage is significantly ignored. This seems to directly contrast with the affair of Isabella and her uncle. A victim of defective genetics, the Ward has inherited his idiocy as well as his money, and his comic function is more than simple grotesqueness. As Larry S. Champion puts it, "It is a humor which intensifies rather than lessens the pervading sense of human bestiality and impending doom."³¹

The humor in the subplot of The Changeling has a similar effect. Here a woman, also named Isabella, parallels the central heroine Beatrice-

Joanna. Isabella, married to the madhouse keeper, finds herself pursued by a pair of spurious madmen, and the satiric set-piece on "Tony" is analogous to the case of the Ward in Women Beware Women. The drooling impersonator is introduced as a gentleman, and the madhouse enforcer Lollio responds, "There's nobody doubted that; at first sight I knew him for a gentleman, he looks no other yet" (The Changeling I. ii. 114-15). But the ludicrous stratagem of pretending madness to gain access to the beautiful Isabella is a bored courtier's lark, while Beatrice-Joanna suffers under the influence of a real madman in De Flores, who is willing to invest his own self in her.

Likewise Alibius, Isabella's husband, shows himself to be a foolish bourgeois by locking his wife up in the madhouse so as to hide her beauty from "the daily visitants" (I. ii. 52). In this, he is as ridiculous as Alsemero of the main-plot, with his chemical test for virginity. The virginity-test episode is outrageous, but it functions on a moral and symbolic level where the gaping, sneezing, and laughing are grotesque mechanical exaggerations of natural actions. It truly points up Alsemero's petty concerns but does more than merely "dramatize the limitations of the empirical approach in a world where appearance has little relationship to reality."³² The effect is reductive, as it is replayed by Diaphanta later for pure laughs through simple repetition. Similarly, in Women Beware Women, Sordido fakes an exaggerated yawn that Isabella immediately duplicates, so the Ward can inspect her teeth (III. iv. 98 s.d.). The actions are automatic and grotesque in a world of natural indignities where every commodity has a price, and social sensibilities are coarse at best. Indeed, Margot Heinemann accurately sees the virginity episodes as "black comedy."³³

Leantio is a mere extrapolation from the characters of Alibius and Alsemero, as he resolves to actually incarcerate Bianca. She is "a gem no stranger's eye must see" (III. ii. 94), but is already receiving invitations from court. Leantio feels that his actions are practical, but he is blinded to the actual ghouliness of what he proposes:

At the end of the dark parlour there's a place
 So artificially contrived for a conveyance,
 No search could ever find . . . When my father
 Kept in for manslaughter, it was his sanctuary.
 There will I lock my life's best treasure up,
 Bianca.

(III. ii. 162-67)

She has committed no crime worthy of the "dark parlour" as yet, but Leantio's reaction only conforms to his simplistic morality:

When I behold a glorious dangerous strumpet,
 Sparkling in beauty and destruction too,
 Both at a twinkling, I do liken straight
 Her beautified body to a goodly temple
 That's built on vaults where carcasses lie rotting.

(III. ii. 14-18)

Beauty and destruction are closer than he thinks, but do not wear the gross stamp of "glorious dangerous strumpet." It is merely his wife, and her wishes for a better social position, that set the machinery of destruction in gear.

Bianca makes it clear that she is no longer satisfied in Leantio's house. The finery that befits her station is lacking and she feels insulted. "Here's a house / For a young gentlewoman to be got with child in" (III. i. 29-30), she cries in petulant disgust, and the Mother replies with wholesome middle-class satisfaction:

Yes, simple though you make it, there has been three
 Got in a year in 't, since you move me to 't;
 And all as sweet-faced children, and as lovely;
 As you'll be mother of.

(II. 31-34)

This confrontation is a dramatic advance over the symbolic action of Beatrice-Joanna and her virgin understudy Diaphanta, where the maid passed the ridiculous virginity test and was bed-tricked with Alsemero to cover Beatrice's shortcoming. Diaphanta performed beyond the call of duty, and Beatrice, thrown into consternation by her social inferior and sexual equal, required more murder to be secure. She made the same presumptuous error she had with De Flores. Middleton puts the gnomic terms of redress for this social problem in the mouth of the Mother in Women Beware Women:

The miller's daughter brings forth as white boys,
 As she that bathes herself with milk and bean-flour.

(III. i. 37-38)

Yet "white boys" do not stay white long, and Leantio shows his social discoloration as he foolishly tries to keep both wife and mother from attendance at court. He is an example of his own pathetically bourgeois limitations, not a perverted symbol of greed, as earlier moral drama or some modern critics might have him. He is as blind to social reality in his way as Beatrice-Joanna was in hers. As Tomlinson effectively puts it, "The bourgeois gains in wealth and security are real gains, until one puts them--as their own tendency to transfer the terms of bargaining in goods to the business of love and marriage itself puts them--into a context of personal living."³⁴ In a personal context, Leantio looks like every household tyrant, but his tyranny is the result

of overcompensatory insurance on his goods. The Duke, on the other hand, gets off rather lightly (Verna Ann Foster characterizes him as a benign sugar daddy and genuine lover, to enhance Bianca's suffering in Leantio's household³⁵) because he need not see anything in a material context. To him women are not capital--they do not even account for that much:

"Come, Bianca,
Of purpose sent into the world to show
Perfection once in woman; I'll believe
Henceforward they have ev'ry one a soul too.
(III. iii. 22-25)

The Duke's real feelings are practically inhuman. To have even, once considered women soulless is to have denied them real existence; and Leantio, for all his misguided materialism and petty moralizing, was never so nihilistic. Yet the Duke enjoys a formal elegance that distances him from the "grudging man" (l. 29), as Bianca calls him, and allows the Duke to buy off Leantio by dubbing him Captain of the outpost at Rouans. Despite this public show of generosity, the rewarded cuckold is in fact demoted because he makes more as a simple factor than he ever could as a military man. Leantio groans,

I'm rewarded
With captainship o' th' fort, a place of credit
I must confess, but poor; my factorship
Shall not exchange means with 't.
(II. 342-45)

But his deepest sense of loss is expressed in his touching feelings of finality on the "commodity" of Bianca in the "exchange" of court:

Is she my wife till death, yet no more mine?
That's a hard measure; then what's marriage good for?
Methinks by right, I should not now be living,

And then 'twere all well. What a happiness
 Had I been made of, had I never seen her;
 For nothing makes man's loss grievous to him,
 But knowledge of the worth of what he loses;
 For what he never had he never misses.
 She's gone for ever, utterly; there is
 As much redemption of a soul from hell
 As a fair woman's body from his palace.

(II. 320-30)

Leantio's passion inflames Livia, who steps in to claim him as her own. The ruined husband, disappointed in love and kept as a cuckold, consents to becoming the older woman's gigolo both for financial gain, and to maintain a position where he may continue to protest his treatment. Indeed, his new feelings about Bianca are well-grounded psychologically:

My safest course,
 For health of mind and body, is to turn
 My heart, and hate her, most extremely hate her;
 I have no other way.

(III. iii. 337-40)

And he returns, tricked out in finery, to torment Bianca. No sadder domestic scene exists in the drama than occurs here. The Duke's kept woman is confronted by her estranged husband, now the gigolo of the lady who corrupted her in the first place. The repartee is wittily ribald until Leantio breaks down and calls her "whore" (IV. i. 61). But they are both whores in fact and, while Bianca is superb at maintaining her emotional distance, Leantio becomes nearly inarticulate with grief on the nature of their living death:

Why, here's sin made, and ne'er a conscience put to it!
 A monster with all forehead, and no eyes.
 Why do I talk to thee of sense or virtue,
 That art as dark as death? And as much madness
 To set light before thee, as to lead blind folks
 To see the monuments, which they may smell as soon
 As they behold.

(IV. i. 92-98)

Leantio has overstepped the bounds of aristocratic decorum in his bourgeois notions of married exclusivity. He has indiscreetly "rocked the boat" at court, and Bianca's subtle appeal to the Duke after Leantio's departure--"I love peace, sir" (l. 125)--is an effective death sentence. The Duke craftily informs Hippolito of his sister Livia's liaison with Leantio, knowing that the rigid code of honor will prevail and dispose of the "impudent boaster: / One that does raise his glory from her shame, / And tells the midday sun what's done in darkness" (IV. i. 150-52). Leantio's fault lies not in his commission of sin, but in his poor concealment of it. He is too honest, in fact, and Hippolito even says as much:

Dare he do thus much, and know me alive!
 Put case one must be vicious, as I know myself
 Monstrously guilty, there's a blind time made for 't;
 He might use only that, 'twere conscionable--
 Art, silence, closeness, subtlety, and darkness
 Are fit for such a business; but there's no pity
 To be bestowed on an apparent sinner,
 An impudent daylight lecher.

(IV. ii. 3-10)

Thus the incestuous uncle. In his indignation, it is a simple task to goad the pathetic Leantio, clearly no swordsman, into a confrontation and summarily run him through.

Tomazo de Piracquo, every bit the offended aristocrat, stalks the halls of Vermandero's castle in The Changeling. He is similar to Hippolito in this respect. But while he represents danger in Alicant, he is more effective as the locus of De Flores' guilt. A conventional dumb show at the outset of Act IV showed De Flores' divided mind at the stylized nuptials of Alsemero and Beatrice-Joanna:

DE FLORES after all, smiling at the accident; ALONZO's ghost appears to DE FLORES in the midst of his smile, startles him, showing him the hand whose finger he had cut off.

(IV. i. s.d.)

De Flores himself admits of Tomazo, "I smell his brother's blood when I come near him" (IV. ii. 41). As De Flores and Beatrice seek to cover their tracks by eliminating Diaphanta, Alonzo's ghost again appears (V. i. 57 s.d.) but is quickly dismissed as mere conscience. Yet, meeting De Flores again, a nervy suspicion on Tomazo's part has him draw and strike. His instincts are correct and De Flores, although drawn, cannot return the blow because of his guilty conscience:

I cannot strike; I see his brother's wounds
Fresh bleeding in his eye, as in a crystal.
(V. ii. 32-33)

Yet Beatrice-Joanna and De Flores are finally exposed through Alicant's grapevine as Jasperino warns his master of Beatrice's duplicity. In an effort to defend herself, she implicates herself in Alonzo's murder, expecting Alsemero to acknowledge the extent of her love. She pathetically intones, "Remember I am true unto your bed" (V. iii. 82). But her protestations are unavailing as De Flores, cornered, confesses all--including his sexual control of Beatrice. Alsemero washes his hands of the affair, and De Flores commits his final atrocity by killing both Beatrice-Joanna and himself. She realizes her damning error as she pleads with her father:

Oh come not near me, sir, I shall defile you:
I am that of your blood was taken from you
For your better health.

(V. iii. 149-51)

And she acknowledges her tragic fate in association with De Flores:

Beneath the stars, upon yon meteor
 Ever hung my fate, 'mongst things corruptible;
 I ne'er could pluck it from him: my loathing
 Was prophet to the rest, but ne'er believ'd;
 Mine honour fell with him, and now my life.
 (II. 154-58)

Her repentance is conventional moral fare, but the appeal to fate requires further note. Beatrice's fault throughout has been her inability to trace out any consistent form of action beyond her own desires. Having succumbed to De Flores, she merely observed, "Murder I see is followed by more sins" (III. iv. 164), and worked out the rest of her cover-up with one eye on her reputation and another on the deathly attraction of De Flores himself. Her statement at that point summed up the play "at an elementary and moralistic level,"³⁶ as noted by Christopher Ricks. But all domestic tragedy airs the moral note. As Beatrice links De Flores to her fate, she acknowledges an insidious psychological power that twisted her malleable immaturity. Though Beatrice dies with repentance on her lips, De Flores goes out with an obsessive defiance:

Her honour's prize
 Was my reward; I thank life for nothing
 But that pleasure: it was so sweet to me
 That I have drunk up all, left none behind
 For any man to pledge me.
 (V. iii. 167-71)

Moralism in response to such single-minded devotion is impossible, and Alsemero's attempt is thereby deflated. The only dramatic course left to the survivors is ironic introspection.

If Middleton is out to deflate the moral tone of domestic tragedy in the Changeling, he shows it as completely untenable through the stylized horror that concludes Women Beware Women. The Cardinal's late arrival, along with his monologues of righteousness, seem alien to the tone of this play, and he is variously circumvented or ignored. He may be intended as moral spokesman, but certainly not spokesman for the middle class. He is impotent in the face of power, and completely inappropriate for the quick dodges of retribution about to ensue. To legitimize his claim on the now-widowed Bianca, the Duke simply marries her after having her husband murdered, and the cross-capers of the marriage masque follow in irony and horror.

To most critics, this conventional use of mis-drunk poison and violent retribution is a dramatic blunder--if not simply in poor taste--but Middleton has invested this death-masque with more than mere convention. He has taken the petty viciousness of his characters as far as he can, and the pressure of their latent hate is certain to explode: Guardiano means to kill Hippolito for the embarrassment done to the Ward and himself; Livia wants to avenge Leantio with Hippolito's death; Isabella, confronted with her incest, intends to kill Livia; and Bianca, herself, is out to eliminate the Cardinal. All the aristocratic characters are thus gathered into one room, and the drama is transposed into a higher key as they expire in the most exquisitely genteel ways: "Livia chokes on poisoned perfume," Isabella is scalded with molten gold; Hippolito is shot to death by poison-tipped Cupid's arrows; and Guardiano, with help from his idiotic Ward, falls through his own trap door onto the spikes below. Naturalism is thus abandoned for a bizarre

dramatic symbol that silences the characters even as they realize the nature of their costumed evils. As Irving Ribner puts it, "If it catered to a Jacobean taste for the spectacular, it is also the necessary culmination to the moral argument of the play."³⁷ Bianca inadvertently poisons the Duke, and drinks a draught herself, but this is anticlimatic. The occult display of aristocratic depravity has consumed her too, and the spirit of Leantio is all but forgotten.

Thus Middleton wipes the stage clear. The domestic tragedy that began with allegorical figures of Comedy, History, and Tragedy debating their worths in a black-curtained hall has moved through direct homiletic appeal to the final dramatic symbolism of mass suicide. Every character at the conclusion of Women Beware Women is effectively hoist with his own petard, and the tragic appeal is not to emotional catharsis--the characters do not deserve that much--but to intellectual detachment. The mercenary utilitarianism of an emerging middle class has been effectively lampooned through contrast with a perverse aristocracy. Middleton's premium on satiric irony has made his sense of domestic tragedy a tight argument of naturalistic behavior and severe dramatic symbol, where no one steps to a pulpit but the moral is gleaned nonetheless. Death will forever be a punishment, but beauty, freed from its Platonic associations with perfection, takes its proper satiric place on a scale of vanities. Placing beauty and death together in subtle psychological drama makes Middleton's contribution to domestic tragedy a balanced statement of society's shoddy morality and its ever-embarrassed righteousness.

Chapter VI

Death, Disorder, and Hallucination in Macbeth

It no longer seems necessary to open a discussion of Shakespearean drama by scourging A.C. Bradley and former critics of the "character analysis" school. Their approach was informed by the critical fashion of their day, and it enjoys most relevance now in its proper historical place. By the same token, little need be said about the twentieth century's "breakthrough" in imaginative criticism, with such scholars as G. Wilson Knight, L.C. Knights, and Derek Traversi in the vanguard of Shakespeare's reclamation as a poet. To declare a play like Macbeth a well-integrated dramatic poem with superb thematic structure is now a truism. If Webster seemed to "think" in images, clearly Shakespeare organized patterns of imagery to reinforce a dramatic wholeness of poetic understanding and feeling. And the feeling I get from Macbeth is one of exquisite chaotic intensity, where death as symbol is not only an end, but a contributing factor to a sense of living terror.

I have selected this single play from the Shakespeare canon because of its active and unrelenting concern with death. Hamlet's "To be, or not to be" (III. i. 56) is certainly Shakespeare's clearest formulation of the problem of existence, but the plot of Hamlet deals mainly with death in terms of revenge. Even the death of an entire way of life in King Lear is subordinate to death as moral awareness: "we that are young shall never see so much, nor live so long" (V. iii. 324-25). In Macbeth

the problem is murder: the simple and sudden cutting off of life. Yet the circumstances and consequences are as variable as the iconographic range is spectacular: the witches are evil heralds; Lady Macbeth illustrates power through imagined infanticide; bloody babes are ambivalent symbols; the dead Duncan's skin is silver, his blood golden; the brief candle of life is snuffed out; and, finally, Macbeth's own severed head closes the play's action. The Porter scene, so often played for comic "relief," comes off as another gruesome joke in my reading, because death, here, is in the hands of irrational men. The terror of these "horrible imaginings" (I. iii. 138) is that they become real; and the play--at the risk of sounding crazily paradoxical--is virtually "alive" with death, as sensational fear leads to deeper philosophical wonder. To me, the sense of utter destruction in Macbeth helps to define death as a crucial struggle: a fearsome power outside of man, but one that is sickeningly ever-present because it is wielded by men.¹

One of the first points Wilson Knight made about the play in his seminal study is important for my approach: "The logic of imaginative correspondence is more significant and more exact than the language of plot."² For action so variously dangerous, so full of nervous fear as that of Macbeth, this statement seems perfectly true to me. In fact, the nature of what is happening on the level of plot does not really begin to cohere until the third scene, when Rosse relates King Duncan's commendation to Macbeth:

He finds thee in the stout Norweyan ranks,
Nothing afeard of what thyself didst make,
Strange images of death.

.....

3

He bade me, from him, call thee Thane of Cawdor:
 In which addition, hail, most worthy Thane.
 (I. iii. 95-106)

The hero is rewarded for his brutal valor, his almost inhuman capacity to endure death and killing. At the same time, Macbeth's military prowess confirms the sinister clairvoyance of the apparitions of the opening scene, who have ominously predicted his success.

His victories are related by a wounded survivor who describes Macbeth as a superb killing machine. Amid the deadly confusion of hand-to-hand combat, Macbeth systematically "carv'd out his passage" (I. ii. 19) to face the rebel commander, Macdonwald, and butchered his foe on the spot. In the Captain's words, Macbeth

ne'er shook hands, nor bade farewell, to him,
 Till he unseam'd him from the nave to th' chops,
 And fix'd his head upon our battlements.
 (II. 21-23)

"Storms and direful thunders" (I. 26) add to the bloody disorder as a second assault is described. Macbeth and his adjutant, Banquo, are seen to thrive on such chaos. Undismayed by the counterattack, they are likened to deadly hunters of the animal kingdom, and retaliate as if "they meant to bathe in reeking wounds, / Or memorize another Golgotha" (II. 40-41). Their violence on such terms is both shocking and horribly thorough. Another reporter even refers to Macbeth as "Bellona's bridegroom" (I. 55), which adds an element of wedded love to his already clear predilection for slaughter on a massive scale. Macbeth's "personal venture in the rebels' fight" (I. iii. 91) makes King Duncan uncertain whether the day's victory is in fact his or Macbeth's own. To

reward the hero, Duncan strips the disloyal Thane of Cawdor of his title and confers it on his general:

No more that Thane of Cawdor shall deceive
Our bosom interest.--Go pronounce his present death,
And with his former title greet Macbeth.
(I. ii. 65-67)

But the title "Thane of Cawdor" is now tainted with treachery. And Duncan's accidental rhyme is significant: death and Macbeth are inseparable from this point on.

Duncan sees retributive justice in his reward, declaring, "What he hath lost, noble Macbeth hath won" (I. ii. 69). His terms echo the strange utterances of the play's opening scene. The witches determined to meet Macbeth "When the hurlyburly's done, / When the battle's lost and won" (I. i. 3-4). Duncan passes judgment, and the three witches immediately reconvene. Clearly there is something paradoxical, something profoundly ambivalent, in Macbeth's triumph. True, every battle is won by someone and lost by someone; indeed, every life is both lived in one sense and died in another. Almost every critic points to Macbeth's first words--"So foul and fair a day I have not seen" (I. iii. 38)--as a significant verbal parallel with the three witches in unison:

Fair is foul, and foul is fair:
Hover through the fog and filthy air.
(I. i. 11-12)

But even more important to me is their ability to thrive, like Macbeth, on disorder. Their antithetical devilishness is problematic in a way that is both evocative of moral struggle and decidedly lethal in its implications. Unlike the traditionally comic vice figures, the witches

of Macbeth are deadly serious. Instead of living embodiments of human veniality, they are disturbing figures of supernatural evil who revel in the bizarre freedom of nonsensical, necromantic language. Their telling position at the play's opening is a portentous feature of the peril and calamity to ensue.

The first question demanded of these strange apparitions, "so wither'd and so wild in their attire" (I. iii. 40), is significant: "Live you?" (I. 41). Banquo and Macbeth are justifiably startled by the ghoulish appearance of these figures, but the audience is more fully informed of their penchant for killing swine (as Macbeth and Banquo have been symbolically doing in battle), roughing up illiterates (as the witches consider themselves now to be doing), whipping up storms to confuse the natural order of things, and even taking the forms of vermin in suggestive terms of vicious sexuality: "Like a rat without a tail; / I'll do, I'll do, and I'll do" (I. iii. 10). Yet, though their gender is uncertain--"you should be women, / And yet your beards forbid me to interpret / That you are so" (ll. 45-47)--they possess a prescient sense of Macbeth's own sinister mitosis, as they divide and multiply his honors before the fact:

1 <u>Witch.</u>	All hail, Macbeth! hail to thee, Thane of Glamis!
2 <u>Witch.</u>	All hail, Macbeth! hail to thee, Thane of Cawdor!
3 <u>Witch.</u>	All hail, Macbeth! that shalt be King hereafter.

(ll. 48-50)

Macbeth is rendered speechless by their pointed prognostications, but Banquo speaks up in his own regard as only a man with a clear conscience could. The response is weirdly stylized and crucially ambivalent:

- 1 Witch. Lesser than Macbeth, and greater.
 2 Witch. Not so happy, yet much happier.
 3 Witch. Thou shalt get kings, though thou be none;
 So all hail, Macbeth and Banquo!
 1 Witch. Banquo and Macbeth, all hail!
 (ll. 65-69)

The antithetical conjunctions "fair/foul" and "won/lost" are strangely sublimated in the formal interchanging of the main protagonists' names. No reference can be fully signified. Things seem to be simultaneously themselves and their opposites. Honor, moral value, political virtue, and military might seem to contain within themselves the very seeds of their own undoing; and these "imperfect speakers" (l. 70) seem perfectly knowledgeable of the dismaying consequences for both Macbeth and Banquo, and for the political fortunes of eleventh-century Scotland in general.

Audience and reader both know that the prophecies are already in the supernatural mill. On the level of plot, however, Macbeth is both stimulated and confused by the witches' "strange intelligence" (l. iii. 76). Even though, as far as Macbeth knows, "the Thane of Cawdor lives, / A prosperous gentleman" (ll. 72-73), his series of asides confirms his covetous desire, after Cawdor's fifth-column collaboration has been exposed. The information is astonishing--Cawdor a traitor?--and weirdly dreamlike too, as the witches' prophecy is duly fulfilled. Macbeth has been in conflict with his own ally without even knowing it. He did not actually face Cawdor as he did Macdonwald, however; and the mention of "Sinel's death" (l. 71) implies that the title Glamis has just been acquired through battle as well. The honor is hereditary, but the witches disappear without clarification and leave their words crystallized like the illusory patterns that ensue, having "eaten on

the insane root, / That takes the reason prisoner" (I. 84-85). Cawdor's treason, real or reported, seems to throw reality in doubt. Yet Macbeth is greeted with the title "Thane of Cawdor" almost in the next instance; and his surprise and suspicions run parallel to Duncan's own disappointment and bitterness concerning Cawdor's betrayal of his "bosom interest" (I. ii. 66). Facts seem to be at odds with circumstances. Dugald Murdoch pointedly concludes, "By keeping us in the dark about the precise nature of Cawdor's crime, Shakespeare creates an atmosphere of doubt, uncertainty, and lurking danger, which pervades the play as a whole."³

An awareness of present danger and frightening disorder is the inspiration for Macbeth's first deep soliloquy:

This supernatural soliciting
 Cannot be ill; cannot be good:--
 If ill, why hath it given me earnest of success,
 Commencing in a truth? I am Thane of Cawdor.
 If good, why do I yield to that suggestion
 Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair,
 And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,
 Against the use of nature? Present fears
 Are less than horrible imaginings.
 My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,
 Shakes so my single state of man,
 That function is smother'd in surmise,
 And nothing is, but what is not.

(I. iii. 130-42)

He is taken in by the alluring appeal of the witches' prophecy. So far they have been accurate, but Macbeth's reliance on their words leads him into a "chaotic world," a "realm of impossibility, beyond the powers of ordinary conception, beyond the proper sphere of words."⁴ If the greatest amount of "ill" is also the least amount of "good," then Macbeth is seen sliding along the scale to rest in the neutral position

of "cannot be ill; cannot be good." How much "ill" is contained in the desire accomplished--the title Thane of Cawdor? At the same time, how much "good" resides in the agonizing prospect of supplanting the King--himself King hereafter? The "horrid image" of killing the rightful King paralyzes this military paragon in the "fantastical" sense witnessed earlier by Banquo: "Good Sir, why do you start, and seem to fear / Things that do sound so fair?" (ll. 51-52). But while he has proven himself capable of enduring and perpetrating "strange images of death," the death of Duncan, urged in his fingertips and tingling in his scalp, is an image Macbeth cannot so easily endure. As R.A. Foakes puts it, "The speech records Macbeth's horror at, and fascination with, a new vision of death--not the brutal and casual slaughter of the battlefield, but the calculated murder of a king."⁵

Although Macbeth's conscience is smitten by the idea of assassination, his thought is not so clearly calculated as Foakes might suggest: "The King is dead, long live the King"--the very idea of kingship suggests an overpowering sense of immortality that is concomitant with the impossible antithesis "cannot be ill; cannot be good", and symptomizes the self-cancelling attraction and repulsion of Macbeth's own thought. The very subject of the soliloquy's first sentence--"soliciting"--along with its phonemically similar modifier--"supernatural"--suggests associations beyond Macbeth's control, both of his language and of his conscience. His thought does not travel to a sum-total conclusion, but settles on a starting point which is no point at all: nothing--the eternal solution of every balanced equation. On the battlefield no self-analysis was necessary: he killed as ordered and considered himself

a success. Here, however, he finds that "function is smother'd in surmise / And nothing is, but what is not." What Macbeth is not is King. But kingship--that, curiously immortal state--is becoming his only conscious desire. Knight adroitly calls this last line of Macbeth's first soliloquy "the text of the play,"⁶ and Richard Horwich develops this idea with a view to the play's almost palpable sense of disorder:

All the play's "multitudinous antitheses" cancel each other out, emphasizing what is paralyzing and self-defeating in human experience and suggesting an ultimate state of entropy toward which everything tends, a state reflected in the very syntax of many of the play's most famous speeches.⁷

Faced with the play's overall sense of dissolution, critics often turn to the harmonious imagery of the established king, Duncan, and the morally scrupulous Banquo. But harmony can reside quite deceptively in the ear of the apprehender. Banquo's "temple-haunting martlet" speech (I. vi. 3-10) is a beautifully-put word picture, but I disagree that it, along with Duncan's generous imagery of husbandry in scene iv, is among "the main axes of reference by which we take our emotional bearings in the play."⁸ If anything, Banquo's honest vitality is dangerously overmatched by the rotten atmosphere of necromantic jabbering and continuous civil strife; and his unabashed virtue only makes the sinister internal scheming of Macbeth even more twisted. The religiously sanctioned comfort and fullness of "pendent bed, and procreant cradle" (I. vi. 8) do indeed convey "the sense of weight, of life concentrating itself naturally in the process of birth."⁹ But it is a false sense of security. Bloodied new-borns will prove to be problematic imagery throughout the play and, in any case, the less-than-matronly hostess of the castle has just provided an unambiguous warning:

The raven himself is hoarse,
That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan
Under my battlements.

(I. v. 38-40)

King Duncan himself is a clear symbol of rectitude and morality, but the natural order "shortly to be violated", in Knights' view,¹⁰ has suffered already in the rebellion of Macdonwald and Cawdor. If Duncan places "absolute trust" (I. iv. 14) in such treacherous kinsmen as the Thane of Cawdor, and then repeats the same mistake with Macbeth, is not his position as essential arbiter of propriety and degree put in some doubt? If Duncan's language of husbandry suggests balanced growth and loving nurture, does his inability to distinguish the tare from the wheat suggest a serious flaw in his governing ability? Naiveté at this level of politics is not a defense. Even Duncan's eldest son, Malcolm, the newly-invested "Prince of Cumberland" (I. 39), shows no ability to lead when faced with the crucial circumstances of his father's death. If editors and commentators are at pains to point out Macbeth's lie-- "my dull brain was wrought / With things forgotten" (I. iii. 150-51)¹¹-- as he ponders the death of Duncan and takes mental notes toward an emerging nepotism of his own, they might also pay heed to the parallel occurrence in the next scene, as Duncan ponders the insult of Cawdor's treachery, only to put on a bright face at Macbeth's entrance and claim he was ruminating on the insufficiency of his recompense (I. iv. 14-16). Emotional bearings, even before the end of the first act, have shifted so diversely that rational mechanisms of judgment and order have proven nightmarishly ineffective.

The horror has only just begun. Lady Macbeth is seized by a rush for power as she reads her husband's factual but rather tentative

letter (I. v. 1-16). Her attitude is all evil certainty as she dismisses the ineffectuality of Macbeth's "milk of human kindness" (l. 17). She wants her own nurturing mother's milk metaphorically turned to "gall" (l. 48), as she bids the deathly spirits of her own mortal thoughts: "unsex me here, / And fill me, from the crown to the toe, top-full / Of direst cruelty!" (ll. 41-43). Her exclamation cries out for the same purposeful brutality that was reported of her husband's "unseaming" of Macdonwald. Here, however, she is perversely "filled" from the top to the bottom in a satanic declaration of resolve analogous to that of the witches. She pointedly intends to pour her own "spirits" (l. 26) in Macbeth's ear. Lady Macbeth even greets her husband as if she were one of the hags:

Great Glamis! Worthy Cawdor!
 Greater than both, by the all-hail hereafter!
 Thy letters have transported me beyond
 This ignorant present, and I feel now
 The future in the instant.

(I. v. 54-58)

Note the parallelism in the titular form of address, the significant "all-hail" and "hereafter." She is possessed by a supernatural feeling of "the future in the instant," and counsels Macbeth on active duplicity. But she is too eager, too incautious, too impetuous to understand her husband's hesitation when faced with the overwhelming immortality of promised kingship.

Macbeth, self-ostracized from the banquet table, is under the control of his own murderous anxiety. His thoughts are nervous and muddled in tongue-twisting indistinctness:

If it were done, when 'tis done, then 'twere well
 It were done quickly: if th' assassination
 Could trammel up the consequence, and catch
 With his surcease success; that but this blow
 Might be the be-all and the end-all--here,
 But here, upon his bank and shoal of time,
 We'd jump the life to come.

(I. vii. 1-7)

More cautious than his wife, he nonetheless seems to have transported himself, like her, "beyond / This ignorant present" (I. v. 56-57) and looks at the unmentionable deed as something to be "done" when "done" and "done" quickly, in a weirdly time-altered echo of the witch's earlier "I'll do, I'll do, and I'll do" (I. iii. 10). He is obsessed. He recognizes that he is pondering "assassination," but slurs Duncan's "surcease" with his own sense of "success" as if he were in the grip of an equally inexact "supernatural soliciting" (I. iii. 130). He is chastened by thoughts of domestic and military responsibility, retributive punishment, and by a sense of his own place in time. But all this is subordinate to the tantalizing aura of immutable power to be obtained, following the admittedly "deep damnation" of Duncan's euphemistic "taking-off" (I. vii. 20). A reward of ineffable proportions hangs in the future, if Macbeth will take action to determine that future. Yet the enormity of the deed overwhelms him with clusters of mythological and apocalyptic visions that reduce themselves to Macbeth alone as a horseman--significantly, however, not riding in triumph, but thrown dangerously from his own mount as a result of a "vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself" (l. 27).¹² Macbeth's earlier vindictive envy of Malcolm--"The Prince of Cumberland!--That is a step / On which I must fall down, or else o'erleap, / For it in my way lies" (I. iv. 48-50)--seems to inform his galloping thoughts here as much as

the competing imagery of "heaven's Cherubins, hors'd / Upon the sightless couriers of the air" (I. vii. 22-23). He is torn by a perception of his own destructive ambition while, at the same time, seduced by the audaciousness necessary to leap beyond his own limits and secure the future for himself.

Macbeth's murderous course is set out by the active encouragement of his wife. Their relationship is of an especially secretive and tyrannical nature that manifests itself in paradoxes of love and hate. Macbeth is firm--"We will proceed no further in this business" (I. vii. 31)--but is immediately ridiculed by his wife for his lack of daring. His insistent reply is defensive, darkly peccant, problematic: "I dare do all that may become a man; / Who dares do more, is none" (II. 46-47). The pause after "more" is a telling one. It hearkens back to the former Thane of Cawdor's last unredeeming act of manliness: "Nothing in his life / Became him like the leaving it" (I. iv. 7-8); and the present Thane bears the title at least in part because of the former's overdaring and unbecoming action. At the same time, the idea of going beyond the boundaries of manliness is a challenge that arouses Macbeth personally and imaginatively. Sensing this, Lady Macbeth holds up her own resolve in the example of merciless child-killing to snuff out Macbeth's earlier vacillation: "Pity, like a naked new-born babe, / Striding the blast" (I. vii. 21-22). She argues that it took a real man to even imagine supplanting Duncan, that only a real man is capable of doing it. She would sooner murder her own child than go back on a "manly" oath; or, more pointedly, Macbeth's oath, like a precious infant, is being dashed to death by feminine compliance. Power resides not in the meek,

pitying, or contemplative, but in the man of action and his resolve. Macbeth has proved it over and over again on the battlefield, and Lady Macbeth persuades him he need merely regularize his "valour" with his "desire" (ll. 40, 41) to succeed to power and be a "man" in her eyes.

Anyone else accusing Macbeth of not being a man would either be laughed at or "unseam'd" on the spot, but Macbeth wilts in the presence of his wife's cutting accusations. Foakes adroitly points out that Lady Macbeth is only capable of envisioning the deed as a "triumph of the will," but that for Macbeth the consequences are much broader.¹³ Within him the dutiful soldier is found to be in conflict with a mutinous regicide, and he is consequently horrified by the enormous symbolism of his own revolt. At the same time, he is sickened by Lady Macbeth's surgical probing into his own self-conception as a "man." She effectively sticks a scalpel between her condemnation of Macbeth as unmanly and his continuing allegiance to Duncan: one is cowardice, the other inferiority. Macbeth hates his wife's opprobrium more than he resents Duncan's benign dominance; but both can be abolished by one killing stroke. As Robert Ornstein observes, "Macbeth kills because his wife makes him admit that he wishes to kill."¹⁴ But she sees only the exterior surfaces of a military coup. To her, Duncan is only a man to be replaced while, to Macbeth, he represents a set of transcendental principles. The death of Duncan will be, for Macbeth, the death of doubt, the birth of an inner peace conceived as primogeniture through self-assertion.

The first two scenes of Act II might easily be called the primal killing scenes. They present a lull of false security, significant

silences, and scattered areas of tension throughout that are disconcertingly nightmarish. The "thick Night" (I. v. 50) that Lady Macbeth wished for is now settled upon the castle. It is an evil setting. Banquo lovingly banters with his son about "husbandry in heaven" (II. i. 4), and his terms align him with the virtuous hierarchy of Duncan's rule. But his reflexes snap in the direction of his sword when momentarily interrupted by his host. The small-hour confidentiality between the two men is conversational, naturalistic; but it significantly focuses on Duncan too, as Banquo describes the King's situation and condition within the castle. In doing so, he inadvertently gives Macbeth a preliminary intelligence report. Goldman comments on the effect: "We experience evil in Macbeth not as a malign external presence, nor as a rottenness undermining all things, but as a sudden thickening of a natural atmosphere."¹⁵ The two significantly agree to meet sine die, and Macbeth even promises a certain nebulous "honour" (l. 26) if all goes as he wishes. But the information is tentative, testy, and the tension is dagger-sharp, as Banquo and his son leave the thickening evil of the moment and Macbeth speaks in code to his servant: "Go, bid thy mistress, when my drink is ready, / She strike upon the bell (ll. 31-32).

Left alone, Macbeth agonizes over inner lacerations of fear, desire, and revulsion. He imagines the perpetration of atrocity, projects himself into the hallucinated image, and then finds himself actually performing the deed. The "dagger of the mind" (II. i. 38) becomes, Macbeth discovers, "as palpable / As this which now I draw" (ll. 40-41). It is a crucial moment. The proven killer does not draw without a

reason. Macbeth finds, "Thou marshall'st me the way that I was going; / And such an instrument I was to use" (ll. 42-43). His surprise is subordinate only to his terror, and he speaks to the blade as if it were a fully conscious collaborator. The dagger itself seems to respond by showing blood. Macbeth is able to shake off the gory vision, but finds himself overpowered by the ghoulisn immediacy of darkness and night, where "Nature seems dead" (l. 50). Abetted by glimpses of "Witchcraft" (l. 51), and stirred on by "wicked dreams" (l. 50), Macbeth becomes one with "wither'd Murther" (l. 52). He fully understands the consequences of his actions--that is the horrible appeal--but presses on as if he were somehow outside the action, as if he were a third-party observer. He finds a comparison to be drawn between himself and murder's "stealthy pace" (l. 54). He discovers that he strides toward his own design "like a ghost" (l. 56). He hears his own footsteps, and this physical perception of sound awakens him momentarily from his dread reverie. But Macbeth requires the horror to accomplish the horrible deed, to meet the overwhelming challenge. "Whiles I threat, he lives" (l. 60) is a bitter realization of his own subjective histrionics, and the ringing bell--itself a clear symbol of death--releases Macbeth from his own consciousness. All that is required now is to "go" (l. 62), to simply "do," to perform the fury, to achieve. After the rigors of tortured introspection, action--however terrible--is at least positive, concrete, tied to reality. Macbeth answers the bell's chilling signal with a measure of relief.

The killing of Duncan has never been fully accepted in Macbeth's mind because he knows only too well, "If Chance will have me King, why,

Chance may crown me, / Without my stir" (I. iii. 144-45). He had not lifted a finger to become Thane of Glamis or Thane of Cawdor, and this deeply contemplated murder seems to be almost an interference, an "overleaping," to use Macbeth's own simile, in the natural course of things. But he is now dictating reality through his own extreme actions, and Lady Macbeth's observation, "He is about it" (II. ii. 4), is a simple statement that looms large in its dire consequences. What "it" is, for Macbeth, is considerably more than just the death of Duncan-- "it" is Macbeth's own realization, accomplishment, fulfillment. Earlier tragedy would have called it his fate. The nervous off-stage exclamations and panicky stichomythia maintain the action at a distinctly human level, however, as Lady Macbeth reproaches the killer for his own painful disquiet. "Consider it not so deeply" (I. 29), she counsels. But the maddening "it" of her reprimand cuts Macbeth deeply with a sense of his own guilt. He has lived the horror of performing murder, not just imagined "it"; and his proximity to his victims is a terror he cannot reconcile with his inner sense of clan loyalty.

Macbeth's fevered conscience is assaulted by a strange voice that cries "Sleep no more!" (I. 34), with the same diabolical certainty of the witch's earlier vow:

Sleep shall neither night nor day
 Hang upon his penthouse lid;
 He shall live a man forbid.
 (I. iii. 19-21)

He has bungled in returning with the murder weapons which must lie beside the scapegoat, and his "brainsickly" (II. ii. 45) fixation on forbidden sleep is a figure of his total revulsion. The soothing "death

of each day's life" (I. 37) becomes, in its absence, a terrible living death. The consequences of Macbeth's murderous action manifest themselves almost at once in terms of self-directed violence. Looking at his bloodied killer's hands, he tellingly exclaims, "Ha! they pluck out mine eyes" (I. 58). This admission of his internal frenzy is also a clear analogue to the harsh measure in St. Mark's gospel: "And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye than, having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire" (9:47). Here, however; both eyes are metaphorically plucked out in complete debilitation, accentuated by Macbeth's earlier chill realization: "Mine eyes are made the fools o' th' other senses, / Or else worth all the rest" (II. i. 44-45). Fearsome visionary power is something Macbeth decried earlier, when first smitten with a desire to "overleap" the newly named Prince of Cumberland:

Stars, hide your fires!
 Let not light see my black and deep desires;
 The eye wink at the hand; yet let that be,
 Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see.
 (I. iv. 50-53)

The carnage is as close as his own bloodied hands. Heavy thumpings at the castle gate jerk the murderer back to a local realization of the horror he has perpetrated. The insistent knocking, in fact, brings Macbeth back to reality with part of his consciousness excised. Sleep represents comfort, and it will be denied from now on. Yet Lady Macbeth compares her own bloody hands with those of her husband, and states bluntly, "A little water clears us of this deed" (II. ii. 66). She simply has not experienced the enormous horror of the event on a

supernatural level the way Macbeth has; and he now faces reality with a newly acknowledged definition: he is a murderer.

There is a numbing simultaneity to the monotonous knocking at the gate that seamlessly integrates Macbeth's recognition of his deed and the Porter's antic monologue. The overriding correspondence of symbolism cannot be overlooked, but what the fearsome sound means to each character, and to the play overall, is quite disparate. Concomitant with the pounding at the gates of Inverness Castle is the "harrowing" knock at Hell Gate, as well as the dreaded contemporary death-knock of the all-too-familiar plague carters.¹⁶ The scene is played for laughs, but a detritus of disgust and revulsion is stirred up constantly, in tandem with the grimly evocative humor. The hollow thumping that joins the action effectively chases away the final wisps of "the dunnest smoke of Hell" (I. v. 51) that Lady Macbeth called for, to expose the place of the damned in all its embittered raucousness.

The Porter fits in perfectly. Significantly comparing himself to the "Porter of Hell Gate" (II. iii. 2), he is one of the "watchers" (II. ii. 70) that Lady Macbeth feared to be taken for. The knocking has disturbed his undutiful slumber, and he growls in surly recognition of the need to rouse himself and perform his obligations as watchman. He holds the keys to Macbeth's castle and, as a result, reflects badly on Macbeth's own earlier analysis of his relationship to Duncan as one "who should against his murderer shut the door, / Not bear the knife myself" (I. vii. 15-16). But the crime has gone off nonetheless, despite the Porter's supposedly all-night vigil. His curious existence seems to be one of never-ending tedium and no-exit futility that consoles

itself in drink and self-serving wit. His jokes are worn stories of equivocating irony, suicide, and cultural stereotypes; and yet they make a grotesque commentary on the action thus far: "Here's a farmer, that hang'd himself on th' expectation of plenty" (II. iii. 4-5) fuses immediately with Duncan's terms of husbandry and harvest, and his rather suicidal endorsement of Macbeth. As well, the equivocator "who committed treason enough for God's sake, yet could not equivocate to heaven" (II. 10-12) suggests the internal strife just witnessed in Macbeth. The Porter's connections, like Macbeth's own, are indistinct, internal matters of self-violence and acute dissatisfaction. He has no greater chance of finding quiet in the brutalizing chill of his waking reality than Macbeth has of finding sleep in his. The Porter's black humor even takes him so far as to suggest the macabre impartiality of the traditional Dance of Death at this point, as he avers, "I had thought to have let in some of all professions, that go the primrose way to th' everlasting bonfire" (II. 19-21). The comment reflects tellingly on the damning process that the castle's Lord is presently undergoing.

Yet the drunken disorder of this scene is not meant as "relief" nor, as it often becomes in performance, a farcical setting somehow at odds with the overall tonality of the play. The Porter effectively echoes the disorder in the play as a whole, and this in turn leads to the fevered riot of murder as well. Drink, in fact,--"a great provoker" (II. iii. 26), according to the Porter--has been a significant stimulant throughout the grisly plotting of Duncan's assassination. "Was the hope drunk, / Wherein you dress'd yourself?" (I. vii. 35-36), demanded Lady

Macbeth, at her husband's first sign of equivocation. Here, the Porter blusters on about drink's vacillating effect on lechery, and the terms link up neatly with Lady Macbeth's "unsexed" resolve: "That which hath made them drunk hath made me bold" (II. ii. 1). Significantly, she had plied Duncan's grooms with "wine and wassail" (I. vii. 65), and their "drenched natures" lying "as in a death" (l. 69) is similar to the Porter's own boozy slumber. "I believe, drink gave thee the lie last night" (II. iii. 38), observes Macduff of the thickheaded gate-keeper; and he is terribly right--especially in light of Macbeth's own code word: "bid thy mistress, when my drink is ready, / She strike upon the bell" (II. i. 31-32, my emphasis). Duncan has been murdered during the Porter's disordered and incompetent watch. True, Duncan's grooms were the last line of defense, but the Porter's drunken irresponsibility casts aspersions on the security of Macbeth's castle as a whole, and its poor defense against the night's evil tumult as described by Lennox:

The night has been unruly: where we lay,
Our chimneys were blown down; and, as they say,
Lamentings heard i' th' air; strange screams of death,
And, prophesying with accents terrible
Of dire combustion, and confus'd events,
New hatch'd to th' woeful time, the obscure bird
Clamour'd the livelong night: some say, the earth
Was feverous, and did shake.

(II. iii. 55-62)

The Porter has been criminally negligent, and the "confus'd events" of his "unruly" night's watch confirm him as a drunken, irrational, and ironic death icon.

The night's deathly associations line up with the witches' earlier handling of winds (I. iii. 11-15), and their sinister "tempest-tost" (l. 25)

predictions. Yet Macbeth--the brunt of their sinister clairvoyance--is laconic and matter-of-fact, as he affirms "'Twas a rough night" (II. iii. 62). How grimly true: Macbeth is the only one who knows how really "rough" the night has been. But--and this adds to the suspense--he is capable of uttering only monosyllables in detached clauses, until the horrified cry goes up. Desperate to avert suspicion, Macbeth now produces what he hopes is the perfect alibi: the grooms killed Duncan, and Macbeth killed the grooms. No loose ends are left dangling. Yet only Duncan was to die in Lady Macbeth's plan, and the shock of multiple homicide is doubtless a contributing factor to her anguished fainting spell. At any rate, Macbeth is now on his own. Still, his terms are uncontrolled self-revelations:

Had I but died an hour before this chance,
I had liv'd a blessed time; for, from this instant,
There's nothing serious in mortality;
All is but toys: renown, and grace, is dead;
The wine of life is drawn, and the mere lees
Is left this vault to brag of.

(II. iii. 91-96)

They express an inchoate nihilism. Macbeth has lost his moorings within castle, clan, and country. Speaking from the bottom of his heart, he acquits himself of the murder by actually telling the truth, as his imagination goes back to the scene of the atrocity, and his terms effectively re-enact the killing:¹⁷

Here lay Duncan,
His silver skin lac'd with his golden blood;
And his gash'd stabs look'd like a breach in nature
For ruin's wasteful entrance.

(II. iii. 111-114)

At the death of Duncan, fair has indeed become foul. A choric scene between Rosse and the Old Man emphasizes nature's confusion at the death of the rightful King. Although it is daytime, the darkness of night overshadows the earth. Uncanny reversals follow the dread event that can only be mentioned in euphemisms, as the Old Man judiciously observes,

'Tis unnatural,
Even like the deed that's done. On Tuesday last,
A falcon, towering in her pride of place,
Was by a mousing owl hawk'd at, and killed.

(III. iv. 10-13)

The imagery relates back swiftly to the lack of dismay exhibited by Macbeth and Banquo--"As sparrows eagles, or the hare the lion" (I. ii. 35)--as reported by the Captain. The tenor is all futility and displaced degree in unmerciful situations of life and death. Things are strangely inverted. Duncan's horses even "eat each other" (II. iv. 18) in symbolic internecine struggle. All is whisper and rumor. The treachery of the moment is almost tangible as Rosse and his cousin, Macduff, discourse in carefully chosen words about Macbeth's forthcoming investiture:

<u>Rosse.</u>	Will you to Scone?
<u>Macd.</u>	No cousin; I'll to Fife.
<u>Rosse.</u>	Well, I will thither.
<u>Macd.</u>	Well, may you see things well done there:--adieu!-- Lest our old robes sit easier than our new!

(II. iv. 35-38)

Note the nervous ambiguity of "well," and the uncertain fit of the new situation in general. These usually gregarious noblemen are hesitant, unsure, self-conscious. The "strange screams of death" (II. iii. 57)

that Lennox reported of the natural atmosphere have their silent counterpart here in a perverse political environment, where reality and tyranny begin to intersect in violence, fear, and mistrust.

"To be thus 'is nothing, but to be safely thus" (III. i. 47) expresses an intuition of security that Macbeth deludedly believes he can attain on earth. He wants to live eternally in the lineal primogeniture of his kingship, but aches with the realization suggested by the very existence of Banquo's son, Fleance. "Thou shalt get kings, though thou be none" (I. iii. 67) was the witches' prediction for Banquo; and Macbeth agonizes over his own "fruitless crown" and "barren sceptre" (III. i. 60,61), in terms that recall the witch's promise: "I'll drain him dry as hay" (I. iii. 18). Banquo and Fleance confront Macbeth with a sense of his own internal desiccation. Both of them must be eliminated for Macbeth to consolidate power, establish his rule, and germinate his line. As a result, Macbeth transfers his own massive sense of guilt onto Banquo's issue through twisted terms of the cui bono defense:

No son of mine succeeding. If't be so,
For Banquo's issue have I fil'd my mind;
For them the gracious Duncan have I murder'd;
Put rancours in the vessel of my peace,
Only for them; and mine eternal jewel
Given to the common Enemy of man,
To make them kings, the seed of Banquo kings!
(III. i. 63-69)

Banquo and his "issue" are the real villains in Macbeth's mind. He will see to it that they pay.

Absolute authority through eradication is becoming Macbeth's only method of coping with reality. He desires a simultaneous consolidation of power in the realm and peace in his soul through the simple elimination

of Banquo and Fleance. But the security he requires is painfully out of reach within an illusive realm of paranoia. As a result, his increasingly acute insomnia and self-loathing leads to a miserable envy of his own victims, as he rebuffs his wife's concerned advances to complain,

Better be with the dead,
Whom we, to gain our peace, have sent to peace,
Than on the torture of the mind to lie
In restless ecstasy.

(III. ii. 19-22)

Macbeth's internal "scorpions" (l. 36) do not admit of any comforting balm but, instead, inspire spoken images of sinister machination and deadly consequence:

Ere the bat hath flown
His cloister'd flight; ere to black Hecate's summons
The shard-born beetle, with his drowsy hums,
Hath rung Night's yawning peal, there shall be done
A deed of dreadful note.

(ll. 40-44)

He is fixated on deathly imagery of attraction and repulsion. Death, and Macbeth's consequent control of it, forms itself as an obsessive necessity in his mind. The psychological motivation is deftly noted by Robert Ornstein:

A more conventional dramatist would have suggested that Macbeth piles murder on murder because his first act of blood brutalizes his nature. Shakespeare gives us a more terrible Macbeth who is driven to kill again and again because he cannot live with the memory of his first crime.¹⁸

Macbeth thinks that he can achieve "peace" by killing off all apprehended threats. But, while his murderous schemes are aimed at obtaining

undisputed power through politic elimination, they signify themselves through Macbeth's own expression as, at once, beyond his control and yet within his terrible grasp:

Light thickens; and the crow
Makes wings to th' rooky wood;
Good things of Day begin to droop and drowse,
Whiles Night's black agents to their preys do rouse.
(III. ii. 50-53)

The horrid paradox of Macbeth's contemplations at this point is that "Night's black agents" will rouse themselves against him at the banquet later in the evening. The parallelism between this crucial get-together and the one that preceded Duncan's assassination is no coincidence. Macbeth must repeat the crime, must "do it right" to gain inner peace and political security. He maintains a public gregariousness as King, clan leader, and host, but he is wrenched from within by a ghastly pettiness that tries to earn respect through hatred. Macbeth is all false confidence as he enjoys his own sarcastic praise for his henchmen. Banquo's throat has been cut, and his murderer is dubbed "the best o' th' cut-throats" (III. iv. 16). "No further "issue" can threaten Macbeth's emerging dynasty. He is still one life away from security, however; and while the title "nonpareil" is reserved for the killer of Fleance, no one can claim the dubious honor. The "issue" is at large that threatens his security. "The worm, that's fled" (I. 28) is the dangerous offspring of the "grown serpent" (I. 28), but is also suggestive of Macbeth's internal torment--especially with respect to his eye/hand strife seen earlier (II. i. 58), its biblical analogue (Mark 9:47), and the curiously iterated observation that locates

Macbeth's misery "Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:44, 46, 48).

The clearest symbol of Macbeth's hellish inner fire is seen in the ghost of Banquo. The vision is restricted to Macbeth alone, and he challenges it in fear with no regard for his incriminating lack of control. He is stirred to the heights of irrational hyperbole in his threatening challenge:

Approach thou like the rugged Russian bear,
The arm'd rhinoceros, or th' Hyrcan tiger;
Take any shape but that, and my firm nerves
Shall never tremble.

(III. iv. 99-102)

But Macbeth's inner fear and loathing will not sustain his bravado, and his mood shifts rapidly to the drooping pathos of direct statement to his wife:

You make me strange
Even to the disposition that I owe,
When now I think you can behold such sights,
And keep the natural ruby of your cheeks,
When mine is blanch'd with fear.

(II. 111-115)

Oblivious to the abashed banqueters who exit en masse, Macbeth babbles what he knows about "Night's black agents" with confused fervor:

It will have blood, they say: blood will have blood:
Stones have been known to move, and trees to speak;
Augures, and understood relations, have
By magot-pies, and choughs, and rooks, brought forth
The secret'st man of blood.--What is the night?

(II. 121-25)

Significantly, Macbeth snaps back to reality at the mention of the

word "blood." It is the same word--"There's blood upon thy face" (III. iv. 13)--that began the scene's hallucinatory disorder; and the worrisome identification of the "secret'st man of blood" is none other than himself. Intensely aware of time, murder, and his own precarious security, Macbeth shifts his mood again with cutting discernment: "How say'st thou, that Macduff denies his person, / At our great bidding?" (II. 127-28). Muir notes, "Banquo being dead, Macbeth is driven towards the next murder";¹⁹ but this neglects Macbeth's severe mistrust of anything he cannot control. The ghost terrified him with a sense of his own guilt; Fleance, though escaped, is still the unthreatening "baby of a girl" (I. 105) that Macbeth refused to be taken for. It is Macduff--significantly absent at Scone (II. iv. 36) during Macbeth's investiture, and avoiding his monarch's banquet even now--who poses the most immediate threat to Macbeth's increasingly pathological need for security. The distraught King's paranoic boast, "There's not a one of them, but in his house / I keep a servant fee'd" (II. 130-31), is evocative of the covert and underhanded rule that Scotland now suffers. This perverse suspicion emphasizes as well the earlier necessity for "the perfect spy o'th' time" to spy even on Macbeth's own operatives, as the second Murderer complained--"He needs not our mistrust" (III. iii. 2). But Macbeth no longer trusts anyone or anything beyond the parameters of the witches' prophecy for him.

Macbeth is resolved to question the witches again, "to know, / By the worst means, the worst" (II. 133-34), as he puts it. The witches are not surprised in the least by his reappearance--as one observes, "By the pricking of my thumbs, / Something wicked this way comes" (IV. i. 44-45).

The rhyme has a trivializing effect: Macbeth is just another "wicked" ingredient to be added to the pot. The crude bits of offal and carrion, and the stylized presence of Hecate,²⁰ have their nauseous parallel in Macbeth's own earlier ruminations on "black Hecate," "the shard-born beetle," or "Night's black agents" (III. ii. 41, 42, 53). The hideous, life-threatening quality of the witches' actions relates back to Macbeth's own perverse banqueting of his victims. G. Wilson Knight calls this early part of the scene a "holocaust of filth",²¹ and it does conform to a sense of utter defilement in the witches' suggestive performance of "a deed without a name" (IV. i. 49). Their brew, like the Porter's drink, is a mercilessly "great provoker" (II. iii. 26) of self-consuming lechery. As well, the poisonous atmosphere of the witches' cave wafts back to Macbeth's own debasement in the unspeakable villainy of regicide. The entire scene at this point is an external chaos that reflects Macbeth's inner turmoil: a sickening whirl of gruesome fantasy and hallucination.

Macbeth is willing to endure the vertigo of his tortured reality "Even till destruction sicken" (IV. i. 60), so long as the witches might hold out the hope of even one clairvoyant certainty on which to pin his hopes and policy. It is a desperate gamble, but the witches have not failed him yet. Though Macbeth assumes authority in the cave, the witches' infernal "masters" (l. 63) know his desires even before he can articulate them, and present three quick and significant apparitions. The "armed head," the "bloody child," and the "child crowned with a tree in his hand" (ll. 68, 76, 86, s.d.) are telling charms that hint at the future through indirection and symbol.²² Macbeth rashly grasps what is

positive to him in the ensuing paradoxes of birth and death, succession and forfeit. He scoffs at the "rebellious dead" (l. 97) already punished for their impingement upon his rule, and foresees his own worried life as a desirable fulfillment of "the lease of Nature" (l. 99). But his inquiry into Banquo's line is answered by a mortifying procession of regality:

A show of eight Kings, the last with a glass in his hand;
BANQUO following.

(l. 111 s.d.)

G. Wilson Knight overstates the case by seeing the show of eight kings as a suggestion of "the creative process itself," and Macbeth a countering "symbol of time itself from its death aspect."²³ Yet the vision does sicken Macbeth with evidence of his own dynastic impotence, and he fulminates with all the horrified recoil of a demented eugenicist.

Macbeth's anguish and self-recrimination has its public counterpart in the preceeding choric scene (III. vi) between Lennox and an anonymous Lord. Their conversation on the woeful state of Scotland is analogous to the earlier choric dismay of Rosse and the Old Man (II. iv). The topic is not the contemplative one of "Nature" now, however, but the more pressing one of political survival and intrigue. Lennox sees Macbeth almost totally in oblique terms of condemnation, as concerns the deaths of Duncan and Banquo. Lennox learns of Macduff's escape to England in this scene, and he is virtually unguarded in his hope that the fugitive Thane will gather strength to deliver the country, now "under a hand accurs'd" (III. vi. 49). In fact, his whispered opprobrium about "the tyrant's feast" (l. 22) is the first mention of

open dissatisfaction with Macbeth's rule; and the Lord responds with nostalgic complaint for earlier wholesome values:

Thither Macduff
Is gone to pray the holy King, upon his aid
To wake Northumberland, and warlike Siward;
That, by the help of these (with Him above
To ratify the work), we may again
Give to our tables meat, sleep to our nights,
Free from our feasts and banquets bloody knives,
Do faithful homage, and receive free honours,
All which we pine for now.

(III. vi. 29-37)

Significantly, Lennox divulges the information of Macduff's flight in Act IV, scene i, and is the next to follow.

Macduff's flight is far from clear-cut policy. He seemingly abandons his wife and family; and the scene at Fife Castle shows Rosse trying to console a confused and frightened Lady Macduff. Is her husband a coward? a traitor? She questions Macduff's loyalty and judgment; and Rosse, so relied upon to read the political barometer, takes his unsure leave as well." The touching domestic exchange between Lady Macduff and her son only draws out the pathos of the situation and intensifies the atrocity of the horror to ensue. Warned of her imminent danger, Lady Macduff reconciles herself in the very self-cancelling "fair/foul, foul/fair" terms that inform the play throughout:

I have done no harm. But I remember now
I am in this earthly world, where, to do harm
Is often laudable; to do good, sometime
Accounted dangerous folly.

(IV. ii. 73-76)

Macbeth's wrath ensues. It is his tyrant's attempt to assert meaning, to dictate reality on his terms alone. It is also a cowardly slaughter

that symbolizes the ruin of such clannish virtues as family honor and domestic loyalty in the Scotland that Macbeth now controls. His is a fascistic prerogative--the prerogative of terror that abolishes perceived opposition through extermination. He puts all threats to death. And the death of Macduff's family is only a preliminary, a challenge of bloody outrage that dares Macduff to return.

The confusion of political allegiances, fear, mistrust, and intrigue comes to a head in England, as Malcolm, self-exiled, is met by Macduff. Malcolm is rightfully cautious; though Macduff claims to be loyal, his last public pronouncement on Malcolm was not favorable:

Malcolm, and Donalbain, the King's two sons,
Are stol'n away and fled; which puts upon them
Suspicion of the deed.

(II. iv. 25-27)

Doubtless, Macduff's rebellious "broad words" (III. vi. 21) against Macbeth have not reached England any more quickly than news of the late carnage at Fife, as Malcolm, unaware of his own grim irony, notes,

What you have spoke, it may be so, perchance.
This tyrant, whose sole name blisters our tongues,
Was once thought honest: you have lov'd him well;
He hath not touch'd you yet:

(IV. iii. 11-14)

But Macduff is aggrieved for Scotland under Macbeth, and Malcolm tries the Thane's fealty by painting a corrupt picture of himself to compare with Macbeth's tyranny. Foul proves itself fair in a positive sense, however, because, as critics point out, Malcolm's bruited excesses are actually a catalogue of Macbeth's own crimes against the state. They are built up only to be torn down by Macduff's anguish, as he returns

attention to Duncan's murder with the moral weight of Pauline eschatology and the divine right of Kings:

Thy royal father
Was a most sainted King: the Queen, that bore thee,
Oft'ner upon her knees than on her feet,
Died every day she liv'd. Fare thee well!
These evils thou repeat'st upon thyself
Hath banish'd me from Scotland.

(11. 108-113)

This, of course, is what Malcolm wants to hear, and he immediately explains his indirect testing of the worthy Macduff. The confused Thane finds the elaborate ruse "hard to reconcile" (l. 139), but Malcolm dissociates himself from the vices he has described with appropriate religious sanction, and rallies military support with his first grasp on realistic moral leadership.

Scotland's army of liberation is auspicious. Menteith and Angus discuss pre-battle strategy near Dunsinane, and the advantage is clearly on Malcolm's side:

The English power is near, led on by Malcolm,
His uncle Siward, and the good Macduff.
Revenge burn in them; for their dear causes
Would, to the bleeding and the grim alarm,
Excite the mortified man.

(V. ii. 1-5)

Malcolm carries the weight of moral right, and the mention of rousing the dead immediately suggests a spiritual allegiance with Macbeth's victims, King Duncan, Banquo, and the slaughtered household at Fife.

By contrast, Macbeth is "the tyrant" (V. ii. 11). Though he is popularly considered mad, others "that lesser hate him" (l. 13) are willing to concede some measure of "valiant fury" (l. 14) to him in his

stubborn resolve to defend Dunsinane. Yet the only certainty about his forces is a predilection for mutiny: "None serve with him but constrained things, / Whose hearts are absent too" (V. iv. 13-14). Menteith finds the desertions to be a mirror of Macbeth's own inner disturbance--

Who then shall blame
His pester'd senses to recoil and start,
When all that is within him does condemn
Itself, for being there?

(V. ii. 22-25)

--and this is made clear in Macbeth's own deluded sense of invincibility:

Bring me no more reports; let them fly all:
Till Birnam wood remove to Dunsinane,
I cannot taint with fear. What's the boy Malcolm?
Was he not born of woman? The spirits that know
All mortal consequence have pronounc'd me thus:
"Fear not, Macbeth; no man that's born of woman
Shall e'er have power upon thee."--Then fly, false Thanes,
And mingle with the English epicures.

(V. iii. 1-8)

His fearlessness is really solipsistic disregard as his army slips away. He no longer credits any intelligence other than his own deluded sense of power. He sets himself up more as an icon protected against the rot of fear than as a legitimate military leader. His increasingly foul-minded confidence declines toward insult as well, in the pederastic imagery of "the boy Malcolm," the "false Thanes," and their desire to "mingle with the English epicures." A servant brings news of the English force, but Macbeth prefers sarcastic ignorance at the expense of this "cream-fac'd loon" (1. 11), rather than hear any further reports that might interfere with his introverted apprehensions. In fact, Macbeth seems already self-destructive here, as if "all mortal

consequence" were directed solely at him; and his wearied realization is directly at odds with the youthful force that swells in numbers against him:

I have liv'd long enough: my way of life
Is fall'n into the sere, the yellow leaf;
And that which should accompany old age,
As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,
I must not look to have; but in their stead,
Curses, not loud, but deep, mouth-honour, breath,
Which the poor heart would fain deny, and dare not.

(V. iii. 22-28)

He recognizes the empty necessity of "mouth-honour," but is incapable of apprehending his own real loss of power. His subjective "yellow leaf" is particularly at odds with the green boughs of Birnam wood which will obscure his foes further, and his sense of enfeebling "old age" stands out starkly against his stoic earlier vow:

My strange and self-abuse
Is the initiate fear, that wants hard use:
We are yet but young in deed.

(III. iv. 141-43)

Macbeth's "hard use" is truthfully synonymous with his "deeds" of youth, and he is now left with nothing but himself and the enervated "sere" (V. iii. 23).

Macbeth's self-destructive inconsistency is pointed up as he orders "Hang those that talk of fear" (V. iii. 36), and yet implores the Doctor to treat his land, to "purge it to a sound and pristine health" (I. 52). If a healthy Scotland could be restored by the physician, Macbeth vows, "I would applaud thee to the very echo, / That should applaud again" (II. 53-54). This jaded commendation suggests only empty repetitive

tedium, a fatalistic resignation that masks a deeper disregard. "Throw physic to the dogs; I'll none of it" (I. 47) is Macbeth's response to treatment in general, as well as his mechanized lack of caring for Lady Macbeth's equally mechanized somnambulism. Her overt and uncontrolled dementia symbolizes the anguish Macbeth has consistently repressed. "Fie, my Lord, fie! a soldier, and afeard?" (V. i. 35-36), she scolds, from within her unreachable self, but she has never understood the enormity of what Macbeth has perpetrated. He went beyond soldiery to effect the overthrow of order, to make his own bid for immortality, and then to live sleeplessly with an appalling realization of his actual insecurity. (Macbeth never told his wife about the "Banquo" part of the prophecy.) But Lady Macbeth is now pathologically sleepless as well. She was able to wash the real blood off her husband's hands, but is now eternally unable to eradicate the offensive "smell of the blood" (I. 48) from her own "infected mind."

Macbeth, by contrast, is beyond the humanizing effect that fear would imply. He shouts orders as he arms for battle, and yet pauses to reflect on his own empty annoyance with the shriek of women. Here, he is reminded of the scalp-tingling terror in his "fell of hair" (V. v. 11) that attended contemplation of Duncan's murder (I. iii. 134-35). In significant relation to the treacherous banquets he set for both Duncan and Banquo, Macbeth finds he has "supp'd full with horrors" (V. v. 13) himself. His surfeit renders him devoid of concern, and his nihilism is expressed in terms of eternal dissatisfaction that justifiably makes up the play's most memorable passage. Macbeth gruffly demands, "Wherefore was that cry?" (I. 15); and, in response to the report of his

wife's death, expatiates:

She should have died hereafter:
 There would have been a time for such a word.--
 To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
 Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
 To the last syllable of recorded time;
 And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
 The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
 Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player,
 That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
 And then is heard no more: it is a tale
 Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
 Signifying nothing.

(V. v. 17-28)

The word "hereafter" is loaded with the witches' promise of kingship, and Lady Macbeth's own first greeting. Whether Macbeth is caustically dismissive (she would have died anyway) or vaguely annoyed (she should have died at a more appropriate time) is irreconcilably ambivalent, but his response is in character with his earlier demand: "Bring me no more reports" (V. iii. 1). Macbeth is as tired of information as he is of life. "I have liv'd long enough" (V. iii. 22), he declares, bespeaking the extent of his increasingly pathological avoidance and dissociation. Yet he continues, despite the realization of his own pointlessness--like the addict who knows his self-destruction is defined by his search for the climactic high, the intermeshing of self and the ultimate experience: death. Yet death on such terms is as meaningless as life, and as elusive as comfort. "To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow" evokes an intuition at once nostalgic and beyond hope: Duncan would have departed in peace "to-morrow" (I. v. 60); Banquo's counsel was cleverly postponed until "to-morrow" (III. i. 22); "to-morrow" (III. iv. 30) Macbeth would determine how to deal with the escaped Fleance. Like the schoolboy

philosopher who discovers that tomorrow never comes, Macbeth begins to realize that nothing in his experience is now availing. Throughout, he has been one day behind in his search for fulfillment, and this "petty pace" to eternity indicates the extent of his precarious power, as well as the futility of all his yesterdays. "The future in the instant" (I. v. 58) that so excited Lady Macbeth, and Macbeth's own thoughtful apprehension of "this bank and shoal of time" (I. vii. 6), have eroded through concomitant waves of evil and paranoia. Macbeth--childless widower, forsaken King, and unrepentant murderer--is left with nothing but himself and an eternal vista of nothingness that renders humanity a mere cast of self-conscious players, and the script of life an idiotic improvisation. The passage is an awesome disclosure of the infinite. The nature of the disclosure--its attendant wretchedness, waste, and ennui--is Macbeth's punishment. As Ornstein notes,

No other passage in Jacobean tragedy touches the nihilism of Macbeth's final soliloquy. Only Webster could conceive of a similar horror at the lunacy of existence and a similar weariness and hopelessness of spirit If the anguish of the damned sounds musically on the ears of the saved, then there is comfort here for some.²⁴

Like Faustus, Macbeth finds hell to be a state of mind. But he does not play off against a trickster demon like Mephistophilis for effect. Instead, the witches provide evil hypnotic suggestion, and Macbeth's hallucinatory self-analysis takes over. As a result, his actions do not take the form of all-too-human vice and folly but become increasingly monstrous atrocities, perversely aimed at quelling his internal torment. But there is a limit to even the most unconscionable iniquity; and, while Faustus is dragged out kicking and screaming, Macbeth no longer

cares. Confronted with the intelligence of Birnam wood's seeming march on 'Dunsinane,' he replies,

If thou speak'st false,
Upon the next tree shalt thou hang alive,
Till famine cling thee: If thy speech be sooth,
I care not if thou dost for me as much.
(V. v. 38-41)

The prophecy is working itself out with damning insistence, and Macbeth strikes up the battle cry one last time. It is his only way to assert control of the situation. He even proposes to die in soldier's armor instead of the kingly robes that have never quite fit. But all of his outward appurtenances are mere luggage in the face of annihilation:

Macbeth strides to his last battle armed with the prophecy that "none of woman born" can ever harm him. With this distinction in mind, Young Siward's summary death blow is structurally subordinate to Macbeth's deluded invincibility. His foe vanquished, Macbeth scoffs, "Thou wast born of woman" (V. vii. 11), but the repetition of his inhuman charm belies an inevitability linked to the first words spoken at the graveside in the Order for the Burial of the Dead, from the Book of Common Prayer: "Man that is born of a woman hath but a short time to live, and is full of misery." Macbeth has epitomized this axiom; and his bizarre linking of suicide and random murder indicates the repudiation of human life as the height of his misery:

Why should I play the Roman fool, and die
On mine own sword? whiles I see lives, the gashes
Do better upon them.
(V. viii. 1-3)

Macduff, then,--clearly an avenging angel--arrives as somewhat of a

deliverance. It is the confrontation everyone has been waiting for-- even Macbeth, as he rationalizes his former worry, "Of all men else I have avoided thee" (I. 4). When first exhorted to "Beware the Thane of Fife" (IV. i. 72), Macbeth answered, "Thou hast harp'd my fear aright" (I. 74). But his suspicious "fear" of Macduff, even though he needed only "make assurance double sure" (I. 83) by killing him, is given its full meaning here as Macbeth hears the fateful words:

Despair thy charm;
And let the Angel, whom thou still hast serv'd,
Tell thee, Macduff was from his mother's womb
Untimely ripp'd.

(V. viii. 13-16)*

The powerful retribution contained in the disparate bloody child imagery coagulates at this point, and Macbeth faces his inevitable, violent overthrow.

In terms of actual numbers, the losses are small. "So great a day as 'this is cheaply bought" (V. ix. 3), observes Siward. Yet the audience and reader feel as though a monumental power struggle has taken place: drums have prefixed nearly every scene of the final act, and the scenes themselves shift rapidly to convey a sense of multiform military action. The liberating army's cover of leaves from Birnam wood is problematic here as well. The witches' prophecy must be worked out, but why obscure the numbers of a force that clearly has the advantage of troop strength in the first place, and is gaining recruits at every turn? True, they wear the green boughs as something of a badge, but the camouflage acts as unnatural disguise in conformity with Malcolm's calculated deceit earlier in conversation with Macduff (IV. iii). It is as if the

liberators must uproot and take nature with them to rid the land of Macbeth's perverse administration. In doing ~~this~~, they focus attention on Macbeth's internal struggle--where the largest part of the action takes place. On the level of outward warfare, Macbeth has suffered the near-total desertion of his army. The only battle to be fought here is within Macbeth himself. His tragic singularity as he declares himself invincible (ironically damned in his "trust" of the witches [IV. i. 139]) generates the confusion of conflict in his distorted sense of reality as well as the inevitable reality of his own eradication.

But the conflict is not over. Young Siward's posthumous promotion to "God's soldier" (V. ix. 13) symbolizes the moral rightness of the victory²⁵ at the same time as Macbeth's head is offered up as trophy to the new order. Is this not something of a reenactment of the fate of the rebel Macdonwald, and of Macbeth's own glory at the time? Macduff declares "the time is free" (I. 21), and Malcolm restores order in terms of religious tranquility--but didn't the ill-fated Duncan do the same? And what about the witches' prophecy? They haven't been wrong yet, and Fleance is still at large. Lest we dismiss him as a mere stripling, it might be remembered that he was present at the testy interchange between Banquo and Macbeth (II. i. 10-30)²⁶ and, in any case, even the innocent Young Macduff possessed shrewd and precocious insight into power: "The liars and swearers are fools; for there are liars and swearers enow to beat the honest men, and hang them up" (IV. ii. 55-57). In Scotland's civil-war environment, they mature quickly. Donalbain is also significantly absent, and vaguely threatening because of it. At Duncan's murder, the elder Malcolm actually looked to his little brother for

advice; and Donalbain seemed pretty politic--

What should be spoken
Here, where our fate, hid in an auger-hole,
May rush, and seize us? Let's away:
Our tears are not yet brew'd.

(II. iii. 122-25)

--as well as subtly ominous, as he took his leave: "There's daggers in men's smiles: the near in blood, / The nearer bloody" (II. 140-41). I do not propose to rewrite the conclusion with extraneous circumstances parading as events, but these questions are tantalizingly implicit. Any impartial political observer would be justified in experiencing "a vague, free-floating sense that the old cycle is starting over again."²⁷ With this in mind, we can at least be thankful that the crowning grotesquerie --Macduff's promotion to Thane of Cawdor--does not occur.

In Macbeth, nothing can be taken as conclusive, for the play's only constant is the supernatural inaccessibility of the three witches' perplexing "deathness." Life is a contrasting chaos of criminality and sorrow, where death confers definition through punishment or peace. The horror is that men manipulate the instruments of death to their own irrational satisfaction. Macbeth grasps at death in desperation as a paradoxical means to fulfillment, and then must return to it again and again to reinforce and consolidate that fulfillment. His career as killer, however, becomes a struggle with his own tendencies toward self-destruction, his grasp on political power an agonizing fight to exert self-control. At the same time, Scotland has been in a state of civil war since the play's outset. The conflict has shifted variously from outward acts of assassination and terrorism to inward dread in an

extended image of eternal night and appalling insomnia. Murder and deceit come to the fore where loyalty might otherwise be expected, and security is a grotesquely elusive concept that only promises madness as the search for it intensifies. No judgment of any circumstance is certain because the iterated terms "fair" and "foul" are relative qualities that acquire meaning only in relation to the action at hand-- action that justifies itself through its perpetrator's delusion. Life on such terms makes death at once a welcome respite and an incomprehensible horror. Like hallucination or nightmare, it comes from nowhere, resides in the mind, and wakes into terror. Within the savage disorder of Macbeth, it is a final firestorm of tortuous unrest--a glimpse into the tormented substructure of a paranoic hell on earth.

Chapter VII

John Ford and the Sleep of Death

The plays of John Ford no longer require apology or justification. Historically, they do not mark the end of a dramatic period, nor the final flourish of an unwholesome aristocratic coterie. Anyone seeking such a result will find grist for the mill in the prolific output of Massinger, Fletcher, and Shirley, or in the later offerings of gentlemen dramatists like Suckling and Davenant. Instead, Ford offers a tantalizing ambivalence that is felt nowhere so strongly as in his sense of death--a sense that is closer to serene acceptance than mortified horror. And it is here--in his dramatic presentation of death--that I feel Ford effectively "makes the quietus" of this period's drama.¹

Clifford Leech says that "Ford, with his urge towards a cessation of movement, is necessarily the poet of death."² This statement must be immediately qualified by R.J. Kaufmann's incisive observation: "Ford struggles purposively with humanity's genius for self-deprivation, with its puzzling aspiration to be the architect of its own unhappiness."³

I think Ford presents struggles of frustration and irrationality in impossible situations of love where death offers peace, freedom, dignity. He fastens on the extruding absolutes of human experience, love and death--contiguous paradoxes that end where they begin. The end of something is its definition. The ritualized vow (unbreakable even in death) or the public spectacle of a funeral are necessary.

conclusions that confer definition through celebrating an end. And Ford is great on endings. The deaths of his characters are consecrated to the turmoil and misfortune of their irrational lives.

Ford's first critic, Gerard Langbaine, asserted that the author was "more addicted to Tragedy, than Comedy."⁴ But the tragic vision of John Ford "arrived" at death's narcotic quiescence--it didn't start there. In this chapter I plan to discuss 'Tis Pity She's A Whore, Love's Sacrifice, and The Broken Heart--three tragedies of single authorship, and all printed in the year 1633. Ford referred to 'Tis Pity as "these first fruits of my leisure,"⁵ in dedicating the work to the Earl of Peterborough, but the actual order of composition of these plays is not of concern here. Instead I hope to show how death, in Love's Sacrifice and The Broken Heart, completes a pattern beginning with intense and aggressive emotionalism and ending in the silent dignity of eternal slumber.

Incest is a sensational point of departure, and 'Tis Pity She's A Whore centers on the forbidden love of Annabella and Giovanni, set up in a ritualized exchange of vows:

<u>Ann.</u>	On my knees, Brother, even by our mother's dust, I charge you, Do not betray me to your mirth or hate: Love me, or kill me, brother.	<u>She kneels.</u>
<u>Gio.</u>	On my knees, Sister, even by my mother's dust I charge you, Do not betray me to your mirth or hate: Love me, or kill me, sister.	<u>He kneels.</u>

(I. ii. 253-59)

The scene is touching, childlike in its sincerity and in its maternal dependence. It is also based on childish extremes: compromise or understanding is ineffectual, unwanted, unthinkable. The oath-taking

verbalizes Giovanni's own extreme action earlier, when he offered his dagger and pledged his love:

Here's my breast, strike home!
Rip up my bosom, there thou shalt behold
A heart in which is writ the truth I speak.
(II. 209-11)

"Love me, or kill me"--it is the motto of the mutual love they bear; and it is significant that Giovanni should err in the repetition of the stylized nuptials. Annabella swears "by our mother's dust" (I. 254 [my emphasis]), while Giovanni is more personally self-gratifying. Also, during their exchange of vows, there is no reason for the ominously symbolic knife to be sheathed.

The incestuous exchange is not a development. The play's very opening presents Giovanni's ethical argument for incestuous sexuality. There is no hypothetical distancing in his approach either. As Kenneth Requa notes, "Giovanni is not dispassionately facing an intellectual problem, for his already heated passion is in search of a rationale."⁶ Yet more than mere rationale is involved. Consider the incredible extremity of Giovanni's self-gratification:

Shall a peevish sound,
A customary form, from man to man,
Of brother and of sister, be a bar
'Twixt my perpetual happiness and me?
(I. i. 24-27)

The distance between Giovanni and his "perpetual happiness" is to be bridged by the shocking sameness of his own sister. Instead of mutual reinforcement, such a love is doomed to cancellation as the Friar moans,
"O Giovanni! Hast thou left the schools / Of knowledge, to converse with

lust and death?" (ll. 57-58). The Friar is correct, as Giovanni realizes, admitting that the counsel is "a voice of life" (l. 68). The Friar preaches purity through mortification, but Giovanni's response provides its own moral loophole, as he promises,

All this I'll do, to free me from the rod
Of vengeance; else I'll swear my fate's my God.
(ll. 83-84)

In the grip of irrational desire for his sister, Giovanni avows, "Tis not, I know, / My lust, but 'tis my fate that leads me on" (I. ii. 158-59). Cyrus Hoy legitimately asks, "Where, in fact, lies the distinction between Giovanni's lust and Giovanni's fate?"⁷ The fact is that Giovanni's lust is his fate: a fate he is unable to overcome. But Giovanni's indulgence blinds him to the transitive logic of his situation anyway: if his lust is his fate, and his fate is death, then his lust is his death. The Friar warned him of it in the first place: "Death waits on thy lust" (I. i. 59); Giovanni is now in a deadly game where "they lose that win" (l. 63). The deluded scholar realizes it himself at this point, even though he calls it by the acceptable name of love:

Lost, I am lost; my fates have doomed my death;
The more I strive, I love, the more I love,
The less I hope; I see my ruin, certain.
(I. ii. 144-46)

This is the point where Annabella first sees him. Either he is unrecognizable in his grief--"some shadow of a man" (I. ii, 137), as Annabella says--or he is just back from a lengthy stay at the university of Bononia where, as the Friar recalls, Giovanni was declared a "wonder"

and praised for his "behaviour, learning, speech, / Sweetness, and all that could make up a man" (I. i. 51-52). The time is not specified. Neither is it specified how long Giovanni, on the Friar's orders, wept and prayed for guidance. A week? One or two cramped genuflections? The fact is that none of it makes any difference. Giovanni is on a distinctly tragic course, and incest as such is a forcefully effective vehicle for tragic destruction. A horrifying taboo, it is something recoiled from irrationally. And yet, it is just as irrationally sought after by Giovanni for the sake of egoistical gratification.

Incest is not, like love, something given or shared. Rather it is a withdrawal into selfhood. Annabella must be either very naive or intensely credulous as her philosophical prodigy of a brother purposely blurs distinctions:

I have asked counsel of the holy Church,
Who tells me I may love you, and 'tis just
That since I may, I should; and will, yes will:
Must I now live, or die?

(I. ii. 241-44)

If by "holy Church" Giovanni means the Friar, he is simply lying. If he means heaven, he dementedly mistakes silence for condonement of his opinion that his sister and he are "to be ever one, / One soul, one flesh, one love, one heart, one all" (I. i. 33-34). A.P. Hogan writes lucidly on this point: "A romantic Giovanni is undercut at every turn by the self-absorbed perversity of his love--a love even more incestuous than it may at first appear, since its origin and object are essentially the self."⁸

Indeed Giovanni's manic egoism begins to take shape after the

siblings emerge from their first physical act of incest:

Come Annabella, no more sister now
But love, a name more gracious; do not blush,
Beauty's sweet wonder, but be proud; to know
That yielding thou hast conquered, and inflamed
A heart whose tribute is thy brother's life.

(II. i. 1-5)

She is a "wonder" only through Giovanni's embrace, not out of any Platonic value he may have posited earlier. Annabella's otherness is denied through their incest that also, paradoxically, subordinates her "conquest" to Giovanni's self-deification:

Thus hung Jove on Leda's neck,
And sucked divine ambrosia from her lips.
I envy not the mightiest man alive,
But hold myself in being king of thee
More great, than were I king of all the world.

(II. 16-20)

Again, her "divinity" is on Giovanni's terms. Annabella's available suitors are to her (as to the audience) uniformly "hateful" (I. 30), and Giovanni is their moral and intellectual superior; but, as Richard Levin succinctly puts it, "The focus of the main plot . . . is not on Annabella's search for the right mate but on Giovanni's dominant role in initiating and continuing their incest."⁹

Giovanni returns to the Friar's intent on justifying incest on the Friar's own terms. He argues that, in loving Annabella, he is only following the Friar's moral teachings. "In like causes are effects alike" (II. v. 26), he declares, again accentuating his sister's sameness in relation to him. Rebuked, Giovanni shifts to a strategy bordering on personal insult: "Your age o'errules you: had you youth

like mine, / You'd make her love your Heaven, and her divine" (ll. 35-36), before launching into a weirdly inverted Petrarchan encomium.

Standard Petrarchan similes indicate resemblance between desirable features of the lady and ideal examples of the source of their desirability (her lips are like cherries), but Giovanni contravenes the conventions to produce a strangely mechanized view that ends in an ironic and chill stasis:

View well her face, and in that little round
You may observe a world of variety:
For colour, lips, for sweet perfumes, her breath;
For jewels, eyes; for threads of purest gold,
Hair; for delicious choice of flowers, cheeks;
Wonder in every portion of that throne.
(ll. 49-54)

He literalizes the tenor of his similes to make Annabella not a "wonder" of variety, but an incestuous fixation. Giovanni enthrones himself in her, and her marvellous attributes are reflections of how he sees the world. The Friar's condemnation--"O ignorance in knowledge!" (l. 27)--is a misunderstanding of what is in fact happening. Giovanni's intelligence is intact, but his perception of reality is perverted because of a monstrous pride. To accuse the Friar of "a pride parallel to Giovanni's,"¹⁰ as Regua does, is to miss the point of the passage entirely. True, the Friar left Bononia to follow Giovanni, but this is a comment on the young man's former virtuosity and near-genius, not on the Friar as a blundering opportunistic scholar. Friar Bonaventura's fear for a "second death" (l. 61)--damnation for Giovanni--is becoming only too evident in Giovanni's decline.

The terrible irony of Giovanni's situation is pointed up

immediately in the next scene. Florio, inquiring after his son's whereabouts, is answered, "gone to the friar, / His reverend tutor" (II. vi. 2-3). "That's a blessed man," returns Florio innocently, "I hope / He'll teach him how to gain another world" (II. 3, 4-5). But the other "world" forming around Giovanni looks more like madness to the audience and damnation to the Friar--a "second death" indeed. Florio is a stable citizen who only wants what is best for his children, and who sees his own unsuspecting sense of fair play in everything. He suggests Annabella send his late wife's bequeathed ring--an engagement ring, no less--to one of her suitors, only to find that Giovanni is wearing it! Annabella rebuffs her suitors' advances, and Florio as appropriately sympathetic. Still, he worries about his son's increasingly alienated behavior:

Son, where have you been? what, alone, alone, still, still?
I would not have it so, you must forsake
This over-bookish humour.

(II. 122-24)

His son's melancholy¹¹ stimulates his parental concern but, at this point, Florio is just as concerned about missing his supper. Alone with his sister again, Giovanni becomes pettily jealous over Annabella's new trinket, and welcomes the fast-approaching lusciousness of night.

Incest and spiritual destruction are paired with the same irrational loathing that excoriates fratricide, cannibalism, necrophilia. The offense is not a matter of degree but of kind, and a judicial approach is less appropriate than horrified recoil and simple eradication. Deviance at this level of intensity is well beyond the usual tragic symbols of regicide or atheism. Yet Ford purposely

pitches the offense at just such an intolerable level and, more than that, maintains impartiality. The morality is as problematic as the horror is intense and, like Giovanni and Annabella, the audience is on its own. The logical step separating incest from inevitable destruction is pregnancy; and the child in Annabella's womb is consistently associated with death and decline rather than life and renewal. Her main suitor, Soranzo, attempts to plight his troth while Annabella coyly flits about his declarations of heartsickness with ironic calls for aqua-vitae, before falling physically faint herself. The disturbed eavesdropper, Giovanni, hurries to her side, and soon receives the terrible verdict, in secret, from Annabella's nurse:

Put.	O that ever I was born to see this day!
Gib.	She is not dead, ha, is she?
Put.	Dead! no, she is quick; 'tis worse, she is with child.
	(III. iii. 4-6)

Her pregnancy is worse than death. Annabella's "sickness" is pointedly significant, because it symbolizes the latent disorder in her union with Giovanni in the first place. Florio only intensifies the problem through ignorant altruism, as he decides to exercise his parental authority, and put a stop to all dalliance by marrying his daughter off to Soranzo without delay. Friar Bonaventura is quickly pressed into service--ironically, by Giovanni--to solemnize the avowals and perform the ceremony. In doing this, he is neither a "muddled moralist," as Ornstein conceives him to be, nor reprehensibly "responsible," as Requa claims, for Annabella's disastrous marriage.¹² There is little doubt from the outset that she will wed Soranzo as the lesser of three evils; and the Friar is, at best, incidental with his

naive religiosity that regards marriage as a curative sacrament.

Indeed, his shriving of Annabella takes the form of coercion by terror that significantly had failed when he tried it on Giovanni in Act I. Bonaventura describes the punishments of hell in elaborate detail and recognizes Annabella's sin as a "death" (III. vi. 40) she must leave; but Annabella's pregnancy and hasty marriage is where her death actually begins.

The wedding banquet is a traditional celebration of life and fruition, and the unknowing bridegroom ironically declares the propriety of it all: "a shield for me against my death" (IV. i. 8). Soranzo's connubial pleasure is soon cut short, however, by Giovanni's refusal to join in his toast to the proceedings. Annabella smoothes over the awkwardness of her brother's recalcitrant behavior, and the wedding masque propitiously begins at the same time, but there is no mistaking the extent of Giovanni's belligerence. He mutters to himself,

O, torture! were the marriage yet undone,
Ere I'd endure this sight, to see my love
Clipped by another, I would dare confusion,
And stand the horror of ten thousand deaths.

(IV. i. 15-18)

The first dance is but barely concluded when Soranzo's former mistress unmask herself to propose a treacherously deadly toast to the nuptials. Soranzo's man, Vasques, being privy to her plot, rearranges the wine cups so that Hippolita chokes on her own venom. The wedding party collectively sees the thwarted revenge as "wonderful justice" (l. 28), and Hippolita expires with telling curses that point directly at Annabella's secret pregnancy:

May'st thou live
 To father bastards, may her womb bring forth
 Monsters, and die together in your sins
 Hated, scorned and unpitied!

(ll. 97-100)

The condition of the newlyweds, when next we see them, is barely a surprise:

Enter SORANZO unbraced, and ANNABELLA dragged in.

(IV. iii. s.d.)

The secret is out. Enraged, humiliated, and confused, Soranzo roars,

Harlot, rare, notable harlot,
 That with thy brazen face maintain'st thy sin,
 Was there no man in Parma to be bawd
 To your loose cunning whoredom else but I?
 Must your hot itch and plurisy of lust,
 The heyday of your luxury, be fed
 Up to a surfeit, and could none but I
 Be picked out to be cloak to your close tricks,
 Your belly-sports? Now I must be the dad
 To all that gallimaufry that's stuffed
 In thy corrupted bastard-bearing womb?
 Why must I?

(IV. iii. 4-15)

Doubtless, Soranzo articulates the inner "itch," "lust," and "luxury" to which he himself has been a prey, but this is no time to be punishing him for his former illicit affair with Hippolita. Indeed, Annabella's response is icier than even Soranzo, who faced her condescending ripostes in III. ii, could imagine, "Beastly man, why, 'tis thy fate" (IV. iii. 15). She refuses to reveal the identity of her lover, beyond attributing spiritual worth to him that only makes Soranzo appear more "beastly" by contrast. Soranzo's expletives, coupled with physical abuse, are answered by Annabella's alternating shrieks and song, but she is the only character who at this point indulges in the "fantasies

of power and possession"¹³ which A.P. Hogan would attribute to her husband. Hogan goes on to see Soranzo as analogous to Giovanni, but I disagree. Soranzo certainly rants like the beast Annabella accuses him of being, but I doubt that he "visualizes himself as omnipotent Death."¹⁴ He reacts with violence and bluster because he is a conventional raging cuckold. Giovanni is subtler, his range of experience more complex and truly fearsome. Annabella, physically carrying the evidence of incestuous destruction, is likewise a figure disturbing in her self-assuredness. "Wilt thou confess, and I will spare thy life?" (l. 74), demands Soranzo at last. But Annabella is resolute. "My life!" she exclaims, "I will not buy my life so dear."

Annabella does regain some hold on her life through personal repentance. She admits that she "trod the path to death" (V. i. 27), pleads for the sake of Giovanni's soul, and vows "Repentance, and a leaving of that life / I long have died in" (ll. 36-37). The Friar is conveniently on hand to hear her confession and is delighted to convey her message of remorse and warning to Giovanni. Unfortunately, Giovanni is no longer reachable. The Friar duly delivers Annabella's letter to him, but Giovanni's reaction is directly opposite to her pleadings:

She writes I know not what--death? I'll not fear
An armed thunderbolt aimed at my heart.
She writes we are discovered--pox on dreams
Of low faint-hearted cowardice! Discovered?
The devil we are! Which way is't possible?
Are we grown traitors to our own delights?
Confusion take such dotage, 'tis but forged!
This is your peevish chattering, weak old man.
(V. iii. 33-40)

Giovanni disregards the Friar further, as he brazenly accepts Soranzo's

treacherous invitation to his birthday feast. This is the very contingency Annabella's letter warned him of, but Giovanni no longer listens to anyone but himself. He rants on about facing "Death" (l. 58) without fear, and resolves to "strike as deep in slaughter" (l. 62) himself. His inflated monomania symptomizes his gathering decline in its total lack of compromise. Indeed, it is directly opposite to his sister's humble repentance, as Giovanni deludedly descants,

Be all a man, my soul; let not the curse
Of old prescription rend from me the gall
Of courage, which enrolls a glorious death.
If I must totter like a well-grown oak,
Some under-shrubs shall in my weighty fall
Be crushed to splits; with me they all shall perish.
(ll. 74-79)

Demeaned and exasperated, the Friar finally departs and leaves Giovanni to his own deserts. Bonaventura has been religiously literalistic and inflexible throughout, but at least he has been consistent. Without him, the moral moorings are lost. A society like Ford's Parma will quickly drift to its own advantage. Such treachery is seen in Vasques' and Soranzo's final briefing of the hired Banditti. Desperate and bloodthirsty, they had put out Putana's eyes on command once Annabella's secret had been wheedled out of her, and are now prepared to slaughter Giovanni when they hear the word. As a result, Soranzo takes particular pleasure in greeting his rival and in making sure that all of Parmesan society is present. There is even a perverse glee in the way he suggests Giovanni "walk to her chamber," (V. iv. 41) and in the insistence of "Good brother, get her forth" (l. 43). Tension is strained to the breaking point as Soranzo greets the murderously

corrupt Cardinal; and Giovanni, forsaken of all guidance, makes his way to Annabella one last time.

The final scene of Giovanni and Annabella together presents all the best and worst of their relationship. Their innocent comparing of notes on matters eternal is touching;

Gio. The schoolmen teach, that all this globe of earth
Shall be consumed to ashes in a minute.
Ann. So I have read too.
Gio. But 'twere somewhat strange
To see the waters burn: could I believe
This might be true, I could believe as well
There might be Hell or Heaven.
Ann. That's most certain.
Gio. A dream, a dream: else in this other world
We should know one another.
Ann. So we shall.
Gio. Have you heard so?
Ann. For certain.
Gio. But d'ee think
That I shall see you there, you look on me;
May we kiss one another, prate or laugh,
Or do as we do here?
(V. v. 30-41)

The exchange is uncomplicated and loving, beautiful in its childlike sense of wonder: "you look on me?"--the focus is delicate. But Giovanni has shown his "Soranzo" side too, as he cynically inquired of his sister,

What, changed so soon? Hath your new sprightly lord
Found out a trick in night-games more than we
Could know in our simplicity?
(ll. 1-3)

In response to Annabella's fearful caution, he directs her attention to his face. In it Annabella detects "Distraction and a troubled countenance" (l. 46), but Giovanni is more exact: "Death, and a swift repining wrath." His tears are a confused mixture of emotion as he begs

his sister's forgiveness and joins her one last time--with a knife-- the knife on which they pledged their love in the first place.

Death is their final act of union. It brings them together, and the finality of the bond is unbreakable. Hence the ecstasy of the act which, as Giovanni claims, "I most glory in" (V. v. 91). He explains to Annabella that he kills "to save thy fame" (l. 84) but, once the blade is in her, declares "Revenge is mine" (l. 86). Indeed, when he returns to the banquet, "with a heart upon his dagger" (V. vi. 9 s.d.), he spares no one in describing his incestuous affair with Annabella, along with his final mutilation of her. The shock is too much for old Florio, who dies on the spot. Giovanni completes his insane mission by killing Soranzo in self-deified delusion:

For in my fists I bear the twists of life.
 Soranzo, see this heart which was thy wife's:
 Thus I exchange it royally for thine, [Stabs him.]
 And thus, and thus; now brave revenge is mine.
 (V. vi. 71-74)

He has gained revenge by destroying all encumbrances to his love; inevitably, he has destroyed the encumbrance of Annabella too. All that remains is Giovanni.

The scene is variously recoiled from or embraced. R.J. Kaufmann applauds Ford's daring literalization of "the metaphor that the truth of love is written in the heart of the beloved."¹⁵ Kenneth Muir declares the heart on the dagger to be "an indication that Giovanni has crossed the borders of madness."¹⁶ Both statements, I think, are accurate, and go a long way toward describing the horrific nature of Giovanni's tragedy. Giovanni measures everything in relation to himself,

and destroys everything he sees. Even the love he pledged is murder, when seen from any angle other than Giovanni's. He kills and dismembers his sister out of a love that is really misapplied revenge on Soranzo, and on what Giovanni perceives as Annabella's unfaithfulness. Her passive and reconciled acceptance of death gains tragic pity, but, at the last, she is a mere extension of Giovanni's ego. He grants her the same peace he earnestly seeks for himself, when he thanks his killer-- "Thou has done for me / But what I would have else done on myself" (V. vi. 97-98)--and expires with Annabella's name on his lips.

Of Ford's achievement, Robert Ornstein declares, "In 'Tis Pity his reach exceeded his grasp; his techniques were not refined enough for the moral and aesthetic complexity of his subject";¹⁷ and I think that, in the broadest sense of tragedy, this is entirely true. Derek Roper observes in his introduction to the Revels edition that "Giovanni is reckless and absolute, a true descendent of Tamburlaine and Faustus."¹⁸ While such a conception enhances Giovanni's monumental tragic pride, the black-and-white, heaven-or-hell worlds of Tamburlaine and Faustus are somehow inappropriate by comparison. Ford's sense of tragedy is too ambivalent, too paradoxical. To the very end, the moral absolutes of 'Tis Pity are purposely blurred to effect the impossibility of the moral choices that are made within the play. The larger problem that Ford aims at with this technique is one adroitly isolated by Irving Ribner: "man's inability to find his place in the universe."¹⁹ Ford guesses that the answer may lie on the other side of death, but a revenge-tragedy frame does not quite enclose the ontological landscape that is projected by Ford's complex vision. "Death, thou art a guest long

looked-for" (V. vi. 104), declares Giovanni finally, but the savagery of the action is enough to turn almost any "guest" away. Death is an intensely powerful and personally organized resolution for Ford, and it deserves deference as a consummation both desirable and necessary.

The very title Love's Sacrifice suggests the quality of immolation that death offers to Ford's characters. The sacramental tone is of first notice in a play with so mysteriously religious a title, and the central exchange between Fernando and Bianca has a curiously sacrificial quality to it:

If, when I am dead, you rip
This coffin of my heart, there shall you read
With constant eyes, what now my tongue defines,
Bianca's name carv'd out in bloody lines.
For ever, lady, now good-night!
(II. iii. p.49) 20

The deathly pledge is answered by Bianca in the next scene:

Remember this, and think I speak thy words;
"When I am dead, rip up my heart, and read
With constant eyes, what now my tongue defines,
Fernando's name carv'd out in bloody lines."
Once more, good rest, sweet!
(p. 54)...

The ceremoniousness is accentuated by two well-placed caesurae that lead into the line that expresses the lover's name "carv'd out in bloody lines." The parallelism is as significant as the pace is slow and dignified, and each pledge is concluded with a gentle but deeply felt leave-taking. It is a parting unto death that has been spelled

out by Bianca, and agreed upon by both lovers. Bianca--"her haire
about her eares, in her night mantle" (l. 1268 [II. iv.])--comes to
 Fernando's bedside and finally offers herself to him, with the
 understanding that if he indulges his physical desires she will kill
 herself before daylight arrives.

Peter Ure reads the play in light of the contemporary "cult" of
 platonic love that flitted about Queen Henrietta Maria and the court of
 King Charles I,²¹ but Fernando thinks that Bianca has come to make him
 "master" of his "best desires" (II. v. p. 51); and his struggle to
 "master passion" (p. 53) must be kept in the play's forefront to
 maintain dramatic tension. Besides, the lushness of the bedroom scenes
 is too alluring. It is an argument in itself against Mark Stavig's
 generalized satirical conception:

As the play reveals, neither the eloquent Duke nor the
 attractive Fernando nor the beautiful Bianca is able to keep
 love on a rational level. Ford's intention seems to be to
 provide both a psychological study of the influence of love
 on human behavior and a satirical exposure of the absurdities
 of the arguments used to justify love.²²

I think Ford sees love's irrationality as both desirable and dangerous
 --as its best feature, in fact. Love and death are clearly the
 compelling absolutes of Ford's world. They are mysteries of ecstasy
 and irrationality that are to be venerated, not lampooned; they are
 earthly problems that cannot be solved in earthly terms, but must be
 transmuted through a faith that surpasses understanding.

Because of their extreme passions and difficulties, Ford's lovers
 become saint-like in their devotions and martyrs in their deaths. In
Love's Sacrifice, sacramental imagery gives the play a stylized and

rather illusory quality. In Ure's reading, they are simply uninitiated to the recondite aspects of platonic love, but they have overriding earthly concerns as well. Fiormonda, who is Duke Caraffa's sister, resents Bianca's hold on her brother at the same time as she comes to realize Bianca's enigmatic emotional attachment to Fernando. In terms of strict family honor, Caraffa has married well below his station in taking Bianca; and Fernando, aristocratic and well-travelled, is the object of Fiormonda's lustful sallies. Despite the courtier's polite objections, Fiormonda, an experienced widow, goes for the main course of direct physical contact:

.. * Look here,
My blood is not yet freez'd; for better instance,
Be judge yourself; experience is no danger--
Cold are my sighs; but, feel, my lips are warm.
(I. ii. p. 24)

Fernando restrains her by pleading a prior vow to bachelorhood. But Fiormonda notes his lovestruck attitude when around her rival, Bianca, and makes a significant vow herself with respect to Fernando:

To stir-up tragedies as black as brave,
And send the lecher panting to his grave.
(II. iii. p. 50)

Of course Fernando is far from being a lecher, but he has panted about his grave a good deal already. His first thoughts on Bianca were attended by chastening thoughts of death: "The duchess, O, the duchess! in her smiles / Are all my joys abstracted.--Death to my thoughts" (I. ii. p. 21). Such feelings are later indulged, as he ponders the object of his love:

Thus bodies walk unsoul'd! mine eyes but follow
 My heart entomb'd in yonder goodly shrine:
 Life without her is but death's subtle snares,
 And I am but a coffin to my cares.

(I. ii. p. 28)

Love, like death, is an altered state that the lover enjoys. His constant praise and devotion are his only means of recognition, because both love and death are beyond his understanding. Earthly comprehension is most often associated with condemnation, so the lover feels a persecuted guilt that is paradoxically enlivening in its fixation on death. Punishment for what society considers "aberrant" love usually takes the form of death--as witnessed in the play's much-maligned subplot, and its treatment of the ridiculously impervious lovers, Ferentes and Maurycio. Fernando, then, is in a very dangerous position, but it is a position he earnestly desires because his love overrules his reason.

The powerful attraction of love leads to Bianca's somewhat reckless advances, once their pact is sealed. In full view of the court, she makes to wipe Fernando's lip with her handkerchief, and whispers to him, "Speak, shall I steal a kiss? believe me, my lord, I long" (II. ii.

p. 62). If this is "platonic," it is flying dangerously close to the ground, and Fernando discreetly recoils. But a game of "maw" is started up by Bianca at just this point, and it symbolizes a heightening of the irrational where losers actually win and, as Fiormonda scoffs, "Your knave will heave the queen out or your king" (p. 63). The same symbolic underpinning was used earlier when Bianca and Fernando met in a game of chess. At that point, however, the Queen (Bianca) being captured by a Pawn (Fernando) led to at least a show of distress:

Bian.

My clergy help me!
My queen! and nothing for it but a pawn?
Why, then, the game's lost too: but play.
(II. iii. p. 46)

The chess match was rational, unlike man--significantly similar to love itself: "'tis all on fortune" (II. ii. p. 63)--but, even then, the surly D'Avolos misconstrued matters, as he does now when he calls Caraffa a cuckold to his face: "Fernando is your rival, has stolen your duchess' heart, murdered friendship, horns your head, and laughs at your horns" (III. iii. p. 68). The intelligencer's Iago-like asides, calculated to be overheard, are a bit tedious, but D'Avolos finally brings Caraffa face-to-face with damning external evidence of Bianca's misbehavior.

The cutting irony of the scene lies in the fact that Fernando and Bianca are actually quite innocent of indulgent concupiscence. Yet the stage direction emphasizes sensuousness and intimacy to the point of blurring distinctions between what is friendly admissibility and what is illicit love:

A Curtaine drawne, below are discovered Biancha in her night attire, leaning on a Cushion at a Table, holding Fernando by the hand.

(l. 2350-52[V. i.])

The evidence is incriminating, if partial, and Caraffa reacts with roaring anguish and acrimony. He has Fernando impounded but is staggered by the sincere and implacable Bianca, who answers his rhetorical question--"wretched whore, / What'canst thou hope for?"--with stinging defiance:

Death; I wish no less.
 You told me you had dreamt; and, gentle duke,
 Unless you be mistook, you're now awak'd.
 (V. i. p. 91)

Her reply is reminiscent of Annabella's, as she calmly parries Caraffa's curses and accusations. Indeed, she seems to urge his vengeance on, as she openly declares, "The self-same appetite which led you on / To marry me led me to love your friend" (p. 93). She is mercilessly frank. Caraffa is injured and betrayed, and vilifies Bianca with relish; but this "whore" is not guilty.

In fact, Bianca welcomes Caraffa's threats and unwaveringly urges him to kill her as proof of her innocence. "Prepare to die!" growls the Duke; and Bianca poses as a passive martyr to love, as she responds,

I do; and to the point
 Of thy sharp sword, with open breast I'll run
 Half way thus naked; do not shrink, Caraffa;
 This daunts not me: but in the latter act
 Of thy revenge, 'tis all the suit I ask
 At my last gasp, to spare thy noble friend;
 For life to me without him were a death.
 (V. i. p. 95)

Notice the traditional wedding vow--"I do"--with which she faces her end. Death is a truly sacramental bond with the irrational. Bianca completely refuses to justify herself to Caraffa, because both her love and her death are full justification in themselves. She therefore desires death as deliverance. The Duke is momentarily assuaged but, goaded by the bloodthirsty Fiormonda, he draws his dagger and kills Bianca, who dies with Fernando's name on her lips.

The next scene shows Duke Caraffa ready to dispatch his wife's

lover as well. Fernando wishes to sacrifice himself to love in the same manner as Bianca, and he too offers his open breast as a sheath for Caraffa's weapon. The Duke relents, however, as Fernando insists on Bianca's chastity and venerates her loving spirit:

Glorious Bianca,
Reign in the triumph of thy martyrdom;
Earth was unworthy of thee!

(V. ii. p. 99)

She loved, but chastely; and her martyred status is a testament to her purity. Caraffa, in his wretchedness, attempts to kill himself, but is stayed by Fernando. Together, the men do homage to the spirit of their dead saint--at once wife and lover.

The play's final scene is calculated to impart an image of beatific devotion, but it clearly strains for effect. The action is processional and takes place at Bianca's tomb in liturgical dignity:

A sad sound of soft musicke. The Tombe is discovered. Enter foure with Torches, after them two Fryars, after the Duke in mourning manner, after him the Abbot, Fiormonda, Colona, Iulia, Roseilli, Petruccio, Nibrassa, and a guard. D'avolos following behinde. Comming neere the Tombe they all kneele, making shew of Ceremony. The Duke goes to the Tombe, layes his hand on it. Musicke cease.

(ll. 2733-41 [V. iii])

The entire cast is present and kneeling, as Caraffa speaks an extended eulogy that is heightened throughout with evocative words such as "blessed," "sacred," and "shrine." Bianca has attained sainthood and Caraffa, in mourning, is now come to formally "bury griefs with her" (p. 103). The crypt is now opened to reveal Fernando "in his winding sheet" (l. 2764) emerging with the challenge:

Com'st thou, Caraffa,
To practise yet a rage upon the dead?
(p. 104).

The imagery of defilement and necrophilia is patently grotesque, especially when seen in connection with the religious formality of the event. Fernando, significantly dressed like a corpse, declares himself one of the dead. He defies Caraffa at a level of love/death that the Duke can only aspire to, but soon the rivals are merely arguing over preferential mourning rights. Caraffa threatens fearful punishment by death, but is scoffed at for his shortsightedness--"Of death!--poor duke! / Why, that's the aim I shoot at" (p. 104)--as Fernando eludes capture by drinking off a vial of deadly poison.

Robert Ornstein calls this "the silliest final scene in Jacobean tragedy,"²³ but the melodramatic action can be seen as subordinate to poetic effect. Fernando revels in his death throes because he is in the process of gaining full union with Bianca--a union denied him in life--and he indulges in the release of his immolating death:

It works, it works already, bravely! bravely!--
Now, now I feel it tear each several joint.
O royal poison! trusty friend! split, split
Both heart and gall asunder, excellent bane!--
. . . Well search'd out,
Swift, nimble venom! torture every vein!--
I come, Bianca--cruel torment, feast,
Feast on, do!

(V. iii. p. 105)

He is consumed by a paradoxical pleasure in death that is little short of orgasmic in its heightened sense of power and gathering urgency. His lingering death emphasizes a sweetly catabolic transformation from corrupt flesh to pure soul.²⁴

Caraffa realizes the powerful oneness of his wife and his friend, and is determined to be part of the sacrificial bond. His guilt seems to enforce his suicide, which follows Fernando's death immediately. Indeed, Caraffa significantly considers himself "on her altar sacrific'd" (p. 106) as he stabs himself and narrates his own end:

Sprightful flood,
Run out in rivers! O, that these thick streams
Could gather head, and make a standing pool,
That jealous husbands here might bathe in blood!
So! I grow sweetly empty; all the pipes
Of life unvessel life.--Now, heavens, wipe out
The writing of my sin! Bianca, thus
I creep to thee--to thee, Bi--an--ca.

(V. iii. p. 106)

Like Fernando, Caraffa experiences a rapturous union with Bianca in his final moments. The terms are again elevated and ecstatic, and the striking image of the "standing pool" where jealous husbands "might bathe in blood" ensures the sacrificial blessedness of the event.

The overall impression is one of the beatific, and sanctified--love that completes itself elsewhere in death: a "sweet emptiness" to the pedestrian understanding of life. The religious parallel is easily evidenced in the faith with which the dying characters face the mystery of death. Death, like love, becomes a glorious embrace of the irrational. Yet the religious symbolism throughout Love's Sacrifice lacks variety. Speeches ring out in a key of exaltation that subordinates the development of the plot. What Ford required was a way to wrap a ponderous concept around quick dramatic action for the sake of emotional control. Such a combination would satisfy his "addiction" to tragedy much better; and such a combination is realized, I feel, in The Broken Heart.

Here is how Ford's contemporary, Richard Crashaw, saw Ford's achievement:

Thou cheat'st us Ford, mak'st one seeme two by Art,
What is Love's Sacrifice, but the broken Heart?²⁵

He is correct in a clever sort of way, although I hesitate to see Crashaw's epigram as in any way condemnatory. Rather, a poet with celebrated sensibilities for the emotionalized vigor of the baroque identifies a unity of vision in Ford's two plays. S. Gorley Putt's chapter on Ford is tellingly entitled "Baroque Drama Under Control",²⁶ and it might be added that the baroque is a kindred sensibility between Crashaw and Ford, where the deepest feelings of man are projected as emotional extremes. Anything less would be untrustworthy. So while Ford may "cheat," to use Crashaw's term, he also repays by continuing to study individual psychology and human deprivation. He drops the Christian iconology of Love's Sacrifice, just as he had the Italianate revenge motif of 'Tis Pity She's A Whore, to emphasize a balanced virtue between emotional sensitivity and stoic toughness.

The setting of The Broken Heart is ancient Sparta, where values were regimented, society understood to be terse and masculine. Silences are loaded with meaning, laconic speech a testament to emotional control. For this reason, it is difficult to countenance Roger Burbidge's opinion: "In the world of The Broken Heart, the emotions are strong but inexpressible, and it is important to ask why, for the refusal to express emotion is itself a denial of humanity."²⁷ This statement is

typical of what might be called the "communicative fallacy" of the twentieth century. For in the "world" of The Broken Heart death is ultimately ineffable, and all the tortured poetics of Love's Sacrifice are subdued, here, into strategic silences of dignity and devotion that are equally, if not more, expressive of man's essential humanity.

Unlike Ford's other tragedies, the impetus for this plot is not a reciprocal pledge-taking but a further emotional sundering. The Broken Heart--the play's very title is a standard symbol for sundered hopes and frustrated affections. Moreover, it centers the action, as Orgilus, an unrequited lover, throws off his scholar's disguise and approaches his now-married love, Penthea (II. iii).²⁸ She rebuffs his entreaty, however, at the same time as she declares herself unfit for the emotions of love in general. The two were to be married, but the engagement--significantly blessed by Penthea's late father--was broken off by her brother Ithocles, who matched her to the aged and impotent Bassanes. Penthea considers herself condemned to her enforced marriage, and refuses to manifest overt desire for Orgilus, who exits vowing unspecified reprisal:

I'll tear my veil of politic French off,
And stand up like a man resolved to do.
Actions, not words, shall show me. O Penthea!
(II. iii. 124-26)

The expository first scene of the play sets up the impossible situation of Orgilus' love for Penthea, and the nature of her wretched marriage to Bassanes, as Orgilus takes leave for Athens. His motive, as he explains to Crotolon, his father, is to "lose the memory of something / Her presence makes to live in me afresh" (I. i. 81-82). Before leaving,

however, Orgilus makes his sister Euphrania vow never to wed without his consent--ironically exercising the same prerogative Ithocles had asserted in depriving him. He takes his exit in disappointment and grief:

Souls sunk in sorrows never are without 'em;
They change fresh airs, but bear their griefs about 'em.

(II. 117-118)

By contrast, the next scene presents the return of Sparta's conquering hero, Ithocles. The "youthful general" has quelled the Messenians, and returns in pomp to receive the accolades of the state. Significantly, the "provincial garland" that crowns his temples was woven personally by Calantha, the Spartan princess. But Ithocles does not present himself as the glory-hunting opportunist of Orgilus' description. Instead, he is a paragon of military frankness, control, and morality in his self-deprecating announcement:

Whom heaven
Is pleased to style victorious, there, to such
Applause runs madding, like the drunken priests
In Bacchus' sacrifices, without reason
Voicing the leader-on a demi-god;
Whenas, indeed, each common soldier's blood
Drops down as current coin in that hard purchase
As his whose much more delicate condition
Hath sucked the milk of ease. Judgement commands,
But resolution executes.

(I. ii. 79-88)

He is noble in his sense of service, virtuous in his thoughtful utilitarian approach to military sacrifice. Ithocles recognizes and values the "current coin" and "hard purchase" of his social inferiors, as a true leader must. Philus points out, by way of introduction:

"He hath served his country, / And thinks 'twas but his duty" (ll. 46-47).

Curiously, it is the aggrieved Orgilus who bears the burden of duplicity at this point. He hates Ithocles, and Prophilus too by extension, and is still in Sparta incognito, contrary to his stated intention to go to Athens. Disguised as the scholar Aplotes, he moves about the oratory of Tecnicus, the Spartan artist-philosopher. It is here that Orgilus coincidentally overhears Prophilus' wooing of Euphrania, and his anguished asides are reminiscent of Giovanni's in 'Tis Pity, when Soranzo wooed Annabella. But Euphrania is torn by her vow to her brother and her real affection for Prophilus. Orgilus is barely able to contain his impassioned eavesdropping and, discovered, slips into the zany role of Aplotes, the self-involved scholar. Michael J. Kelly calls this calculated confusion a "psychic debate in which Orgilus, like many revengers, persuades himself that action is necessary and revenge justified."²⁹ Yet, as Fredson Bowers observes, Orgilus is not the typical revenge-nurturing hero: "Although the possibility of his revenge is always present, it is not until the middle of the fourth act with the madness of Penthea and his own partial distraction that he resolves to revenge her."³⁰ Orgilus is practising a very un-Spartanlike deception--a portrayal of "scholar's melancholy," I suppose--to remain close to the action of his sister's involvement with Prophilus, and his beloved Penthea's misfortune. At this point he is an observer, not a revenger. What he sees only further reinforces his misery, and Orgilus can hardly believe his luck as Prophilus hires him as unsuspected go-between:

Mortality.

Creeps on the dung of earth, and cannot reach
The riddles which are purposed by the gods.

(I. iii. 179-81)

Pentheia is the play's prime example of wearied mortality, and she is introduced in contrast with her miserably jealous husband. Bassanes is, at this point, a rather traditional older spouse who raves about incipient immorality and wishes to have the very windows of his house blocked off to assuage his jealousy. But his fears are ridiculously inappropriate, especially when applied to the emptiness and joylessness of Pentheia's life. In a manic shift of mood, Bassanes offers her all manner of material comfort but, as Jeanne Addison Roberts puts it, "Pentheia is a walking death wish from the beginning of [the] play."³¹ Hers is all passive complicity as Bassanes waxes generous:

We'll remove
Nearer the court. Or what thinks my Pentheia
Of the delightful island we command?
Rule me as thou canst wish.

(II. i. 104-107)

Nothing has any real attraction for her, however, and she responds with apathetic coolness:

I am no mistress.
Whither you please, I must attend. All ways
Are alike pleasant to me.

(II. 107-109)

When confronted by her former lover, Orgilus, Pentheia remains detached, and constructs a fantasy based on his future while denying the possibility of any life for herself:

Though I cannot
 Add to thy comfort, yet I shall more often
 Remember from what fortune I am fallen,
 And pity mine own ruin. Live, live happy,
 Happy in thy next choice, that thou mayst people
 This barren age with virtues in thy issue!
 And O, when thou art married, think on me.
 With mercy, not contempt. I hope thy wife,
 Hearing my story, will not scorn my fall.

(II. iii. 86-94)

Note the dulled imagistic string--"fortune," "pity," "ruin," "barren," "mercy" --with which she expresses her depressed state, while associating opposite qualities with Orgilus: "comfort," "choice," "virtues," "issue." She effectively withdraws from his nostalgic desire to redeem their love because she no longer has life enough to contribute. Orgilus takes his exit in wretched bluster; and, alone again with the enervating reality of her jealous husband, Penthea moans,

In vain we labour in this course of life
 To piece our journey out at length, or crave
 Respite of breath. Our home is in the grave.

(II. 146-48)

"Perfect philosophy" is Bassanes' prim reply, barely masking the tortured extent of his own wishful thinking. But while his "agonies" are "infinite" (II. i. 158), they are of his own making. Orgilus and Penthea are twinned in a grief that is imposed upon them.

The actual twins in the play are the siblings, Penthea and Ithocles. Ford curiously withholds this bit of information until Act III, scene 11, but it is effective when revealed because it brings the two together in sympathy. Ithocles wishes to disburden himself of his guilt over Penthea's lovelorn condition, as well as request her good word on his behalf to Calantha, the princess of Sparta. He agonizes over his

motives for Calantha's hand, and beatifies his sister in her grief before expressing his own woe:

Death waits to waft me to the Stygian banks
And free me from this chaos of my bondage;
And till thou wilt forgive, I must endure.

(III. ii. 90-92)

His deathly terms strike an understanding chord in Penthea, as she inquires directly, "Who is the saint you serve?" Ithocles, the tough military man, prevaricates for a moment before speaking Calantha's name, and Penthea gives him one last verbal stabbing:

Suppose you were contracted to her, would it not
Split even your very soul to see her father
Snatch her out of your arms against her will,
And force her on the prince of Argos?

(II. 106-109)

Ithocles can no longer respond to the reiterated reproach of her "own story," and the two are reconciled at the very moment that Bassanes furiously breaks in with rash accusations of incest. He reaches his degenerative nadir at this point but, more importantly, elevates Ithocles' nobility by contrast. The Spartan general is as fit a mate for Calantha as the prince of Argos, and Penthea recommends her brother to Calantha as a final wearied act of generosity.

Penthea details the miserable extent of her buried life to Calantha, emphasizing the finality of their present meeting:

My glass of life, sweet princess, hath few minutes
Remaining to run down. The sands are spent.
For by an inward messenger I feel
The summons of departure short and certain.

(III. v. 9-12)

Calantha half-mockingly calls her "melancholy" (l. 13), and suggests cosmetic remedy. But Penthea is firm as death, as she details her required treatment:

a winding sheet, a fold of lead,
And some untrod-on corner in the earth.
(ll. 32-33)

She means to make a stylized verbal declaration of her last will and testament, and significantly names Calantha as executrix. Her youth (an oxymoron itself in Penthea's present state) she bequeaths to "virgin wives" and "married maids"--figures suggesting Penthea's own frustrations of love and wedlock. Secondly, she gives her fame to "Memory" and "Truth" in the hope that her good name will not be misconstrued in death. Finally, her third "jewel," Ithocles, is bequeathed directly to Calantha. Penthea dares presumption in this manner because of death's power to bind. Calantha can scarcely be expected to deny Penthea's last suit, but the princess gracefully refrains from premature commitment. Still, her final office is done, and Penthea resigns completely:

My reckonings are made even: Death or fate
Can now nor strike too soon nor force too late.
(ll. 111-112)

Ithocles throughout the play has risen in the estimation of everyone concerned, and is now under official consideration for the hand of Calantha. His guilt over Penthea's misfortunes, coupled with his sincere desire to make peace with Orgilus, reinforce the fact that his former impetuosity and self-serving ideals are facts of his past.

He does not deny the reality of his past misdoings but, at the same time, it is clear that they were performed by someone other than the Ithocles who eats humble pie as dessert to the dish of accusations served up by Orgilus' father, Crotolon, earlier. Ithocles acknowledges,

'A presses home the injury. It smarts.
 No reprehensions, uncle, I deserve 'em.
 Yet, gentle sir, consider what the heat
 Of an unsteady youth, a giddy brain,
 Green indiscretion, flattery of greatness,
 Rawness of judgement, wilfulness in folly,
 Thoughts vagrant as the wind and as uncertain,
 Might lead a boy in years to. 'Twas a fault,
 A capital fault. For then I could not dive
 Into the secrets of commanding love;
 * Since when, experience, by the extremities--in others--
 Hath forced me to collect.

(II. ii. 42-53)

Ithocles is now a lover too, and his better nature seeks open-handed commiseration with Orgilus, whom he recommends publicly to the allied prince of Argos (III. iii. 52-55).

Orgilus, by contrast, harbors deep and unforgiving resentment for Ithocles, in spite of his apparent courtesy and acquiescence.

Befriended on the surface, Ithocles appeals on behalf of Prophilus' troth to Euphrania, "Your consent / Can only make them one" (III. iv. 59-60), and Orgilus' blessing is curiously conditional. Also, Orgilus sings a bitterweet nuptial song--"Comforts lasting, loves increasing, / Like soft hours never ceasing. . . ." (II. 70-81)--as much to emphasize what he has missed as to reluctantly celebrate his sister's betrothal. He seems to be reconciled with Ithocles, but Crotolon is aware that his son has not been to Athens after all, and counters Orgilus' excuse that a "general infection" made him return early, with the pointed observation:

I fear

Thou hast brought back a worse infection with thee,
Infection of thy mind; which, as thou sayest,
Threatens the desolation of our family.

(III. iv. 42-45)

Orgilus' aside to Crotolon, upon blessing the nuptials, is loaded with duplicity as he venomously echoes Ithocles' conquering modesty by calling his endorsement "my duty" (l. 96).

The learned Technician has been justly suspicious of Orgilus' "borrowed shape so late put on" (III. i. 4), and even comes to the point of direct accusation:

I have observed a growth in thy aspect
Of dangerous extent, sudden, and--look to 't!
I might add certain--

(ll. 25-27)

Orgilus interrupts with earnest protestations of innocence and receives a lengthy disquisition on honor. But the adjective Technician balked on at the end of line 26 is declared openly when he arrives at court with his sealed interpretation of the Delphic oracle:

The hurts are yet but mortal
Which shortly will prove deadly.

(IV. i. 120-21 [my emphasis])

The prince of Argos' suit to Calantha has necessitated Technician's counsel, and he is clearly unnerved by what he knows. A gentle clerical figure, Technician--like Friar Bonaventura in 'Tis Pity--finds it expedient to depart before the explosion of violence occurs but, true to his cryptic character, he drops two sententious bombs of his own before he leaves:

--Ithocles,

When youth is ripe, and age from time doth part,
The lifeless trunk shall wed the broken heart.

and:

List, Orgilus, . . .

Let craft with courtesy a while confer,
Revenge proves its own executioner.

° (IV. l. 132-34, 135-39)

Ithocles is not reflective enough to grasp the meaning of his riddle-- "What's this, if understood?" (l. 135), he growls--and is too incensed to wonder anyway because of his recent confrontation with the prince of Argos for Calantha's favor. Orgilus, on the other hand, carefully repeats his teacher's puzzling couplet and, although he cursorily rejects the saying as the "dotage of a withered brain" (l. 154), the epigram will return to him again later, in its full significance.

Pentheia's intensified melancholy finally motivates Orgilus. Yet he achieves an understanding of his revenge mission without taking a glorious vow of vengeance. He has been a threatening influence throughout, but his arcane schemes have not been the typical revenge delays necessary to determine the real villain or the secret devisings of exquisite retribution. Rather, he has conformed to Spartan values of correct external behavior in publicly blessing his sister's marriage and befriending his former enemy, Ithocles. Besides, there is some question as to whom Orgilus despises most--Ithocles or Bassanes--and both men have accepted full responsibility for their irrational misdoings. Still, Orgilus takes grim pleasure in demeaning Bassanes further, before directing his full attention to the wretched Pentheia

with "her hair about her ears" (IV. ii. 57 s.d.). She communicates her lost fecundity through mad ramblings fixated on death--"There's not a hair / Sticks on my head but, like a leaden plummet, / It sinks me to the grave" (II. 75-77)--before pointing an accusatory finger at Ithocles:

Too much happiness
Will make folk proud they say.--But that is he--
Points at Ithocles.
And yet he paid for 't home. Alas, his heart
Is crept into the cabinet of the princess.
We shall have points and bride-laces. Remember
When we last gathered roses in the garden
I found my wits, but truly you lost yours.
That's he, and still 'tis he.
(II. 115-22)

The cryptic rose garden she refers to might be the "palace grove" (II. ii. 109) where Ithocles "lost" his wits by declaring love for Calantha, and Penthea "found" hers by pledging her love to death. At the same time, she may be referring obliquely to Orgilus' menacing resolution "to do" some unspecified "action" (II. iii. 125, 126) when he departed from her in Tecnicus' garden. Certainly Orgilus takes her musings personally, as he states in an eager aside: "She has tutored me. / Some powerful inspiration checks my laziness" (IV. ii. 124-25).

It is significant that Tecnicus' pessimistic exposition of the Delphic oracle should be revealed at the same time that the ailing King Amyclas blesses the union of Calantha and Ithocles. Orgilus is grievously envious of Ithocles' good fortune, and can barely contain his scorn. Yet Ithocles is consistently open-hearted and frank (if not a little thickheaded) throughout this scene, as Orgilus builds his innuendo through hyperbolic address:

My most good lord, my most great lord,
My gracious princely lord--I might add, royal.
(IV. iii. 103-104)

Ithocles fixes on the last word, "Royal! a subject royal?", and Orgilus, ever dwelling on his lost monarchy as thwarted husband (a position Bassanes bemoans, IV. ii. 29-33), throws the honor back in his face:

"I was myself a piece of suitor once, / And forward in preferment too"
(IV. iii. 114-115). Ithocles continues to think nothing but the best of Orgilus, confiding "The princess is contracted mine" (l. 123), and Orgilus is barely guarded in his sarcasm:

Why not?
I now applaud her wisdom. When your kingdom
Stands seated in your will, secure and settled,
I dare pronounce you will be a just monarch.
Greece must admire, and tremble.
(ll. 123-27)

Ithocles declares his dubious friend a partner "in all respects else but the bed" (l. 135) and, like the word "royal" earlier, "bed" is the only word the listener seems to hear. What Ithocles associates with wedded satisfaction, however, is to Orgilus a satisfying mark of death:

The bed!
Forfend it Jove's own jealousy, till lastly
We slip down in the common earth together;
And there our beds are equal, save some monument
To show this was the king and this the subject.
(ll. 135-39)

Thelma Greenfield notes, "Reiteration of the word bed operates importantly here as pivotal between marriage and the grave and as a reminder of the chain of causation that stretches in this play from one to the other,"³² but I detect also a telling parallel at this point.

Orgilus waves his stoic resolution like a flag, but his tough-minded statement on the democracy of death is felt equally by Ithocles. It should be remembered that death's impartiality was the theme of Ithocles' first speech in the play. Setting up the two protagonists in this way emphasizes the general application of the sad lullaby that follows:

Love is dead. Let lovers' eyes,
Locked in endless dreams,
Th' extremes of all extremes,
Ope no more; for now Love dies,
Now Love dies, implying
Love's martyrs must be ever, ever dying.
 (IV. iii. 148-53)

The "horrid stillness" (l. 154) that ensues reinforces Orgilus' own deathly observation, "There is mystery in mourning" (l. 156). Love and death are joined at this point by their equivalent sense of ineffability and refinement. Martyrdom, sanctification, and spiritual purity are celebrated by both states, and are intensified by their presence together--as experienced by Penthea. Her languid death is reported by the veiled maids Chrystalla and Philema, who are immediately dismissed by Orgilus. Alone now with his dead love and live enemy, Orgilus wreaks a revenge that is swift and stylized. Ithocles finds himself "catcht in the engine" (IV. iv. 21 s.d.)--effectively throned in death--while Orgilus sits on the other side of Penthea's corpse. She betokens his measure of meaning and happiness in the world. Ithocles is direct: "Thou meanest to kill me basely?" (l. 27); and Orgilus luxuriates in his own spite as he apes Ithocles' amorous mannerisms, and demeans him in his own glory:

You dream'd of kingdoms, did 'ee? How to bosom
 The delicacies of a youngling princess;
 How with this nod to grace that subtle courtier;
 How with that frown to make this noble tremble;
 And so forth; whiles Penthea's groans and tortures,
 Her agonies, her miseries, afflictions,
 Ne'er touched upon your thought. As for my injuries,
 Alas, they were beneath your royal pity.
 But yet they lived, thou proud man, to confound thee.
 Behold thy fate, this steel.

(ll. 30-39)

But Ithocles will not yield the satisfaction of emotional response until his dying release. Resolute to the end, he is stabbed twice by a now-admiring Orgilus, and finally welcomes death as a concluding religious exercise:

Thoughts of ambition, or delicious banquet,
 With beauty, youth, and love, together perish
 In my last breath, which on the sacred altar
 Of a long-looked-for peace--now--moves--to--heaven.

(ll. 67-70)

The execution of Ithocles becomes something of a mutual action, as Orgilus pledges to follow soon after and continue their struggle in the next world. There is real admiration for Ithocles' steely resolution too, as Orgilus hastens to kill him with minimum suffering. The trick chair, in this regard, is not a contrived device calculated merely to make the audience squirm. It acts as superb stage balance: Ithocles pinned in a chair; Penthea dead in a chair; Orgilus condemned, where he sits, by his own action. Nor is this crucial effect of plot symptomatic of Orgilus' own deeper confusion, as Coburn Freer would claim. Orgilus moves swiftly, narrating his own action--"I'll lock the bodies safe, till what must follow / Shall be approved" (IV. iv. 73-74)--and Freer observes, "There is no way of knowing whether he is

referring to the acclaim with which he thinks the murder of the ambitious Ithocles will be greeted or to his own criminal prosecution for having committed the murder."³³ Orgilus may be thinking "higgledy-piddledy of both," as Freer puts it, ~~but~~ I am not convinced. Ithocles is a Spartan military hero who has the King's blessing as prospective son-in-law. Therefore criminal prosecution is the least Orgilus can expect. Quondam philosophy students who double as assassins cannot hope for much acclaim in Sparta's environment of social conformity and military virtue. In addition, the scene's concluding couplet--"In vain they build their hopes, whose life is shame. / No monument lasts but a happy name" (ll. 75-76)--is not as simply ironic as Freer sees it.

Whether the referent is Ithocles or Orgilus is a moot point in context. The sentiment is one of stock pagan morality, and it portends the stoic virtue Orgilus will maintain in his own imminent and promised death.

Orgilus' death is concomitant with the wedding banquet for his sister and Prophilus. In fact, the play is effectively tied together at this point when death interrupts and refines the celebration of life. The authority of Calantha is superb. The deaths of Amyclas, Penthea, and Ithocles are reported to her in succession, but she does not flinch. Her only acknowledgement is to change partners in her dance. The wedding party is amazed, but her public control--while formalized--reveals the extent of her Spartan virtue. Her father's death confirmed, Calantha switches immediately to the royal "we," as she wisely anatomizes Penthea's death: "She hath finished / A long and painful progress" (V. ii. 38-39). Orgilus freely admits killing her betrothed, Ithocles, and Calantha's official voice cuts through the

general dismay with a leader's certitude: "You have done it" (l. 49).
As well, her pronouncement of justice is equally terse and dispassionate:

Make thy choice
Of what death likes thee best. There's all our bounty.
(ll. 80-81)

Then she adds,

Those that are dead
Are dead. Had they not now died, of necessity
They must have paid the debt they owed to nature,
One time or other.
(ll. 89-92)

Orgilus accepts his sentence just as impersonally, and chooses to bleed to death by his own hand. His resolution is noble, dignified, truly Spartan, as the onlookers comment: "Desperate courage" and "Honourable infamy" (l. 123). Orgilus' suicidal death with its unflinching sense of defiance is, significantly, the very same end chosen by Seneca himself (as reported in the Annals of Tacitus, Book XV, no. 62), and Bassanes gains belated honor as well by aiding him in his grim task. Bassanes even treats Orgilus with the same stoic respect Orgilus had given to Ithocles in his death throes. As the blood drains, Bassanes extols the proceedings:

This pastime
Appears majestic. Some high-tuned poem
Hereafter shall deliver to posterity
The writer's glory and his subject's triumph.
(V. ii. 131-34)

Orgilus, in dying, is assured the "happy name" that he ruminated upon earlier (IV. iv. 76). His indifference to death is a Spartan attribute

to be admired, not a "heightening of the horror" on Ford's part, as Burbridge would have it. He thus misreads Bassanes' collaboration in Orgilus' death as a "danse macabre" when, in simple point of fact, it is a job that needs to be done.³⁴ Freer has the nature of the moment in better perspective when he refers to Bassanes' "paternal" care in facilitating the execution.³⁵ Yet it is paternal with a healthy measure of new-found peer respect, as Bassanes has risen in estimation from ridiculously jealous husband to--for whatever it's worth at this point--responsible public citizen.

Orgilus' death is quite similar to Caraffa's in Love's Sacrifice but, instead of eulogizing, the dying revenger remembers the prophecy of Tecnicus: "Revenge proves its own executioner" (V. ii. 147). He bends back toward the earth with a stoic's splendid realization of his own tragedy:

So falls the standards
Of my prerogative in being a creature.
A mist hangs o'er mine eyes. The sun's bright splendour
Is clouded in an everlasting shadow.
Welcome thou ice that sittest about my heart;
No heat can ever thaw thee.
(V. ii. 150-55)

He finds--as Caraffa did--the sheer propriety of bleeding to death, where "all the pipes / Of life unvessel life" (LS, V. iii. p. 106). Orgilus' suicidal action as a lover is an extrapolation of the pain he has suffered. Yet Freer notes of the passage, "Orgilus has always kept understanding at a distance, and it is appropriate that he should end by seeing his own death as something imposed upon him from the outside, like a mist before him or ice around him."³⁶ Freer compares this with

what he feels are Flamineo's analogous but more pertinent explications in The White Devil. But Flamineo has been at the center of action in his play, at once a parasitical motivator as well as a dangerous force in his own right. Orgilus, by contrast, has never been in control of anything but his own death. Ithocles dictated his predicament of unrequited love, benignly forced the marriage of Prophilus and Euphrania, and unsuspectingly advanced Orgilus at court. To take revenge on Ithocles, Orgilus must take his own life as well.

In the final scene Ford characteristically pushes ritual to the fore, but note the curious inversion in the use of funeral whites: the altar is "covered with white" (V. iii. s.d.); two white candles burn; Calantha is robed in white, as are Euphrania, Philema, and Chrystalla. More than a mourning of death, this is a wedding to it: a celebration of purity. The moment is heightened perfectly by the circumstances, as the stately Calantha disseminates power among Nearchus (who always held it in balance anyway and, as prince of Argos, actually "out-Spartaned" the Spartans), Bassanes (who has reformed and matured into an eternal social worker), and Prophilus (who, through marriage to Euphrania, has reconciled the play's original dispute). All that remains is for Calantha to reveal the extent of her personal bereavement in relation to Ithocles:

O my lords,
I but deceived your eyes with antic gesture,
When one news straight came huddling on another,
Of death, and death, and death. Still I danced forward;
But it struck home, and here, and in an instant.
(V. iii. 67-71)

Calantha's admission applies the title of the play to its final ambiguity as she points to her own breast: Penthea was broken-hearted from the first--but so was her asinine husband, Bassanes; Orgilus suffered a broken heart--but so did Ithocles, the object of his contempt. Calantha, too, Sparta's new ruler, dies of a broken heart. Her dignified expiration reinforces the power of this conventional biblical image for contrition and reconciliation, as stated in the penitential Psalm 51:

A broken and a contrite heart,
O God, thou wilt not despise.

Death is the ultimate reconciliation. In Ford's vision, it rescues us from the vain emotions of life. Sacramental fixation on death as a refining process is in conformity with Calantha's noble observation: "They are the silent griefs which cut the heart-strings" (V. iii. 75). Her death is in no way anticlimatic by comparison with Penthea's but, rather, a stylized illustration of H.J. Oliver's findings: that Ford's achievement lies in the "exploration, rather than the exploitation, of human passion."³⁷ Indeed, her swan song concludes with a meaningful chorus that is antiphonal to Penthea's earlier theme on "Love's Martyrs":

Sorrows mingled with contents prepare
Rest for care.
Love only reigns in death; though art
Can find no comfort for a broken heart.

(ll. 91-94)

Michael Neill is cogent on the effect:

The concluding enigma is a double one: only in death can love reign, but love alone reigns in death. It can do so because death puts an end to both change and the divisions which are consequent on change and so, in a last paradox, resolves all paradox.³⁸

Ford's characters, then, are in love with death's certainty as much as its reprieve. In every case their lives are impossible self-contradictions of love, and they live out the traditional pun on Amor and Mors with superb endurance and grace. Even the ranting Giovanni--the most blatant example--saw death as a "guest long looked-for" at the end. Ford never cheats in psychologizing the nature of his people, and the "shrug" of silence anticipated in the epilogue to The Broken Heart is perhaps all that can be reasonably expected. Truly the moral worth of these plays is best felt as a resignation--a respectful and all-consuming acceptance in the face of eternity--to silence. The ability to face death with hospitable dignity and undying love is the finest attribute of Ford's characters, for whom teleology on earth is subordinate to an ineffable mode of purity lying somewhere in the sleep of death.

Conclusion: The Many Faces of Death

The faces of death that I have held up for inspection do not cohere into any single pattern of behavior. Men die. Theologically, it makes good sense to explain it through metaphorical illustration: St. Paul avers, "Behold, I shew you a mystery: we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed" (1 Corinthians 15:51). The tragic dramatists are less certain, however. In tragedy, things do not work out for men as they would wish: accomplishments are negated, love is often thwarted, friendships prove to be misalliances, pleasure hides fear. The drama captures man in his mortal state of endless qualification, his self-consciousness, his relativism; and the cage of life in which he exerts himself hangs tenuously on inevitable death. Theodore Spencer makes the point forcefully: "Our conceptions of comedy and tragedy, our ideals of bravery, of beauty, of wisdom, our view of others and of ourselves, all depend on the fact of death, and were death suddenly abolished, not one of them would remain the same."¹

Death is associated with living obedience and moral control almost from the very first. Early in his development, man recognizes that moral arbitration lies outside his limited experience. Death, of course, does too. The tragic dramatists use the awesome inevitability of death to tap the most primitive senses of punishment and loss. So, moving beyond the medieval sense of a discernible moral vision, the tragedy of the Renaissance presents a series of moral conundrums where death presides

rather as universal index during life than as ultimate punishment after it.

J.V. Cunningham puts it plainly: "The tragic fact is death. Even the most natural death has in it a radical violence, for it is a transition from this life to something by definition quite otherwise."² The statement combines deep feeling with a wise suspension of doctrinaire certainty. Death can be thought of as a "transition," but, from the standpoint of life, it can only be referred to as to something "otherwise." Definitions are inadmissible, if not superfluous. Questions alone are permitted. The skeptic's truism provides a possible approach; as Montaigne suggested: "To Philosophi[z]e Is to Learne how to Die."³ In the face of death, every man is a philosopher. But, while theology and philosophy have a vested interest in death as problem and proof, tragic drama--with its focus on death--must be more flexible. It moves philosophy into a context for every man because it asks deeply personal questions publicly. As a result, it can be more intellectually honest as well, because tragedy is a matter of feeling and understanding, of human intuition rather than righteous generalization. In tragic drama, all contradictions must be accommodated, and self-contradiction is inevitable. Over and over again, death forces writers of tragedy to pose Montaigne's famous query: "Que sçay-je?"--"What can I know?"⁴

The medieval question of death provided an either/or answer: heaven or hell. But questions answered become tougher questions. A two-dimensional battle between death and pride gives way to a larger conflict of death and a whole theater of human experiences, attitudes, and possibilities. Death takes on a three-dimensional solidity, focus,

and unpredictability. The medieval study of where man belongs becomes the Renaissance study of what man does. His willfulness is captured in the insatiable figures of Tamburlaine and Faustus, figures that are cut down at the height of their presumptuous power. Death is no longer an allegorical character to be met, but an enigmatic monstrosity that destroys. These deluded figures--superb in their human short-sightedness--suffer the final realization of the Old Testament irony: "If I justify myself, mine own mouth will condemn me; if I say I am perfect it will also prove me perverse" (Job 9:20).

Death, in the dramaturgy of Marston and Tourneur, is closely integrated with a world of irrationality and self-contradiction: the world of revenge. In this vision, the golden world of responsibility and benign order is an offensive myth; or, if it ever did exist, it is irretrievable in a present age of utter vice and depravity. Power is equated with crime, and subjection is a sign that betokens either morality or stupidity. Besides the gruesome action, gross physicality is emphasized throughout to accentuate man's beastliness, and the "thingness" of dead bodies and unburied skeletons is a constant reminder of the essentially dead state of man in the first place. Such a stance inherits a good deal from the memento mori of an earlier religious ethic; but, here, the strategy of the drama seems to be one that implies the orthodox by emphasizing the perverse. What could be more ironic? But, then, in the face of this crude mortal world, how can it be otherwise? Marston and Tourneur present satiric tragedy that chastens even as it parodies. Man's serious ambitions--Tamburlaine's imperial mastery, Faustus' intellectual fulfillment, even Macbeth's instinct for immortality--are

all reduced to grotesque, murderous zeal. The death that made Faustus a fearful atheistic example makes D'Amville, in The Atheist's Tragedy, look pathetic and ridiculous. Likewise, Vindice's iterated disgust in The Revenger's Tragedy and Piero's incredible capacity for evil in Antonio's Revenge are absurd in their exaggeration. But the revenge vision is one that exaggerates of necessity: a vision of a world completely unjust, and gone completely mad as a result of it. Such a world deserves to die. Fear and suffering are exhausted in the grim irony of self-contradiction, where the revenger, careless of his own life, dedicates his energies to the destruction of those whom he considers destructive. Instead of a paternalistic medieval world of ignorance transcended, this is a modern world of ignorance lived. The characters of the earlier religious drama were mere counters in a conflict of good and evil, and the revenge drama of Marston and Tourneur presents similar caricatures in a world at once violent and farcical; but--and this is paradoxical in itself, in view of the Calvinist bias easily discerned here--the revenge vision of these satiric tragedies does not so much glorify God's power of judgment and retribution, as it excoriates mortal limitations in a disgusting world that is made so by men.

Macbeth presents a harrowing psychological study of a man, a homicide. He gleams the extent of his own fatal perversity, and transfers it onto the external world in general. Unlike Tamburlaine or Faustus, who do have the evidence of outward conquest or intellectual achievement to rely on, Macbeth's belief in his own invincibility is pure delusion. Yet the "Macbeth" world of hallucination, inner terror, and unspeakable atrocity is just as susceptible to disorder

and eventual breakdown. We go inside the frightening certainty of the villain's mind, instead of wandering in the confusion of the revenger's. Macbeth would be immortal by fathering immortal kings. Here, death promises worldly advancement and consolidation of political power, but becomes only a desperate and maddening cover-up for the original crime of assassination. Even as he attempts to exert control through tyranny, Macbeth moves to the bizarre and necromantic rhythms of the three Weird Sisters. Achievement yields to pointlessness. Nothing works--that is the message. Just as death negates the perceived fullness of life, so the external world becomes a contradiction of itself. Death, welcomed or feared, provides the only basis for a reality that seems to promise coherence, and yet only frustrates itself through discontinuity and disintegration.

The word for all this is one with a peculiarly modern valence: absurdity. Reason can have no effect on that which is essentially absurd; and death as negation is the ultimate absurdity. It is a metaphysical slap in the face that leaves life stinging with an absurd self-consciousness from the very beginning. Webster provides the experiential context: inert wax figures imprisoned in a nightmare existence, where evil is inscrutable even unto itself, and nothing--no moral good, no religious faith, no social ethic--is unqualified. Every action in Webster's vision is conditional, except death and the conditional paralysis of ambivalence itself. Man is his own witless negation. Undercut by his own detachment from a world that is fundamentally foreign to him, he "stands amaz'd to see his deformity / In any other creature but himself" (DM, II. i. 50-51), and never ceases

to "confound knowledge with knowledge" (WD, V. vi. 259-60). Where earlier ironists like Marston and Tourneur grappled with the problem of moral behavior in an immoral world, Webster's problem concerns existence alone in a world that is totally uncaring, if not decidedly hostile. Meaning, however, is not forthcoming in Webster's drama, and death, in all its gratuitousness, is the only possible and impartial deliverance from the incarcerating absurdity of life.

Webster's void is pinlit with superb grace in The Duchess of Malfi, but eschatological terror continues to blacken the surface in the animalism of the Duchess' brothers, and in the enigmatic motives of Bosola. Middleton is more down-to-earth. He psychologizes with a perceptive eye, and it is instructive to consider the subtly drawn characters of Middleton's domestic tragedies, when compared with the primitive features of conventional domestic tragedy. The villains are "writ large" and repaid with the wages of sin while Middleton's clever offenders persevere. The journalistic sensationalism of domestic tragedy looks back to the amazing truths portrayed in the Saints' lives and the Moralities, while Middleton probes the more intimate truths of the hypocritical handshake, the secrecy of the drawing room, or the danger in the stemware so elegantly at hand. The family unit, rocked by disobedience and homicide, is more shrewdly anatomized in Middleton's dramaturgy too, where coherence of relationships is nothing but a treacherous sham, and every character has a price. Death, here, is a social--not a spiritual--concern; and the problem is where to hide the body, not the fate of the soul. Neither the eschatological chill of Webster nor the simple piety of anonymous domestic tragedy can survive

in Middleton's de-mythologized action.

Death supervenes; it explains nothing. The soul, devalued in Middleton's plays, dies before our very eyes in Macbeth. The dramatic illusion of tragedy invites imagined participation, and a vicarious terror grips us as we lose ourselves therein. We are sensitive to a vulnerable "otherness" in our own private being--an uncertain place within us where our own death waits. We are powerless over it. Tragic heroes on the stage fill this mysterious area with the assertive symbol of conquest, desire, revenge. Their actions are often villainous, but at least they do act. In the face of their own mortality, they vigorously assert themselves, as opposed to the common tendency toward acquiescence and atrophy. But their own ignorant mortality deludes them. Ever-present death promises their negation. Sir Thomas Browne wrote, "It is the heaviest stone that melancholy can throw at a man, to tell him he is at the end of his nature; or that there is no further state to come, unto which this seemes progressionall, and otherwise made in vaine."⁵ But Browne, medical man and somewhat indulgent theorist of the "O altitudo," intuits something curious in his meditations on death: a "superiour ingredient," as he calls it, an "obscured part of our selves, whereto all present felicities afford no resting contentment"--this, he concludes, "will be able at last to tell us we are more than our present selves."⁶ Whatever this "ingredient" is, it is nothing to be certain about. Yet Browne--not known as a dramatic critic, but certainly an observant contemporary of the Renaissance dramatists--hereby presents the intuited germ of a moral vision: the "unknowing" basis from which the tragic dramatists had been proceeding for years.

Death subsumes all the action of tragedy within a larger category that goes beyond religious faith, philosophical inquiry, or measurable experience. For the dramatists, death is an action; and actions are open to interpretation. In Ford's case, the final dramatic action partakes of the nature of sleep--the meditative metaphor of the earlier ascetics. For Ford, however, eternal slumber is a moral suspension rather than a moral requisite. It is a withdrawal of assertion into a region of complete unknowing: a transcendence of religious, epistemological, and existential opinion. As a result, Ford takes his place with the other tragic playwrights where death is seen to enhance rather than resolve ambiguity, enrich rather than resolve doubt. Its mystery leaves it forever open to speculation as the arch-paradox of lived experience. The only thing we can be sure of, death is--at the same time--the only thing we can never know.

In tragic drama, death strips man bare to reveal his perverse and defiant curiosity, his relativism, his theatrical predilection in the very throes of doom. This is as far as we might venture to generalize about the moral implications of death on the Renaissance stage. But the many faces of death exhibited there go a long way toward enriching the experience of anguish, fear, and loss that tragedy plays to in the human psyche. We cherish our ends, demand conclusiveness, but fear it just the same. It is the way we are. Comedy is never having to doubt--the ending is known, or at least benign. For tragedy, however, death presents both the living fear of the unknown, and an ultimately unknown ending at the last.

Notes to Chapter I

"Goddys Masangere": Death and the Medieval

Traditions of Drama

¹The quotations are from Ludus Coventriae, or The Play Called Corpus Christi, ed. K.S. Block, Early English Text Society, e.s. 120 (London: Oxford University Press, 1922), p. 174, and from Everyman, ed. A.C. Cawley (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1961), p. 4 respectively, with silent emendation of most archaic forms for ease of reading. This I do for all quoted passages from medieval texts, regularizing especially the letters "u/v," "s," and rendering the eth or thorn as "th."

²Theodore Spencer, in Death and Elizabethan Tragedy (1936; rpt. New York: Pageant, 1960), quotes the opening of The Pricke of Conscience--"Ded is the mast dred thing that es in all this world" (p. 10)--as typical of the popular ars moriendi literature of the period. See also Dan Michel's Ayenbite of Inwit, ed. Richard Morris, Early English Text Society, o.s. 23 (London: N. Trübner, 1866), and The Craft of Deying, in Ratis Raving, and Other Moral and Religious Pieces, ed. J. Rawson Lumby, Early English Text Society, 43 (London: N. Trübner, 1870), pp. 1-8. For religious, ethical, and social background concerning medieval attitudes to death, see T.S.R. Boase, Death in the Middle Ages: Mortality, Judgment and Remembrance (London: Thames and Hudson, 1972); G.R. Owst, Preaching in Medieval England (1926; rpt. New York: Russell and Russell, 1965); Herschel Baker, The Image of Man (1947; rpt. Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1975); and Johan Huizinga, The Waning of the Middle Ages (London: Edward Arnold, 1924). For a useful bibliographical update on key topics in Huizinga's monumental study, see Margaret Aston, "Huizinga's Harvest: England and The Waning of the Middle Ages," Medievalia Et Humanistica, n.s. 9 (1979), 1-24.

³See Sidney Painter, William Marshal: Knight-Errant, Baron, and Regent of England (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1933), pp. 280-85. Donne's famous effigy stands in St. Paul's Cathedral today, and R.C. Bald follows Walton's account closely in John Donne: A Life (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970), concluding,

Walton's account of Donne's last days, then, may seem extravagant, even macabre, to the twentieth century, but it was in the tradition of his own age and evoked much admiration. Donne's lifelong talent for the dramatic gesture and the still

vital force of his own personality enabled him to make of his own death a kind of new ritual expressing the doctrines of his religion. He had contemplated death for many years and had passed beyond its horrors so that he could welcome it as the gateway to eternal life (p. 528).

See also Izaak Walton's biography of Donne in Lives, ed. George Saintsbury (London: Oxford University Press, 1927), pp. 74-83.

⁴For photographic reproductions of these effigies (and others in the same mode) see Boase, pp. 76, 79, and 97 respectively.

⁵See David E. Stannard, The Puritan Way of Death: A Study in Religion, Culture, and Social Change (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 24-25.

⁶Huizinga, p. 124. See also Louis Martz, The Poetry of Meditation (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), pp. 25-152.

⁷Spencer, pp. 14-20.

⁸Huizinga, p. 126. Sandro Sticca's "Drama and Spirituality in the Middle Ages," Medievalia Et Humanistica, n.s. 4 (1973), 69-87, investigates this Christian "tragic intuition" as part of the relatively new Christocentric mysticism of St. Anselm and St. Bernard. Earlier, J.W. Robinson, "The Late Medieval Cult of Jesus and the Mystery Plays," PMLA, 80 (1965), 508-514, had considered the parallels between Christ's monologues and the medieval image of pity. For a broader perspective on the parallels between medieval iconography and dramatic response, see M.D. Anderson's Drama and Imagery in English Medieval Churches (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963). The great progenitor of this line of investigation is Emile Mâle's L'Art Religieux de la fin du Moyen Age en France (1908; rpt. Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1925).

⁹See Lloyd R. Bailey, Sr., Biblical Perspectives on Death (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), p. 89. See also John Donne's dramatically evocative "Sermon No. 1: 'The Last Enemy That Shall Be Destroyed Is Death,'" in The Sermons of John Donne, ed. George R. Potter and Evelyn M. Simpson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), IV, pp. 45-62. Scriptural quotations throughout are from the King James version.

¹⁰See Johan Huizinga, Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture (Boston: Beacon, 1950).

¹¹Robert Henryson, "Ane Prayer for the Pest," in The Poems of Robert Henryson, ed. Denton Fox (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981), pp. 167-69.

See also J. Rawson Lumby, ed., Ratis Raving, pp. 67-103. For historical background to the plague, see George Deaux, The Black Death, 1347 (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1969). J.F.D. Shrewsbury focuses strictly on Britain and brings his expertise in Bacteriology to bear on the plague in his extensive study, A History of the Bubonic Plague in the British Isles (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970). As well, see Rossell Hope Robbins, "Signs of Death in Middle English," Medieval Studies, 32 (1970), 282-98.

¹² Huizinga describes the macabre atmosphere of the dance, and of the churchyard of the Holy Innocents in Waning, pp. 129-35.

¹³ See Beatrice White's introduction to The Dance of Death, ed. Florence Warren, Early English Text Society, o.s. 181 (London: Oxford University Press, 1931), pp. xiii-xv.

¹⁴ Douglas Gray, Themes and Images in the Medieval Religious Lyric (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), p. 181.

¹⁵ Ernst Moritz Manasse, "The Dance Motive of the Latin Dance of Death," Medievalia Et Humanistica, 4 (1946), 93. For an impressionistic and somewhat adverse appraisal of the tradition, see Francis Douce, Holbein's Dance of Death (London: George Bell, 1890), pp. 1-47. Probably the most accessible twentieth-century commentary is James M. Clark's The Dance of Death in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance (Glasgow: Jackson, 1950). The book is divided by country for a sensitive but basically evaluative study of the actual condition and originality of the art pieces, but concludes with an excellent critical chapter.

¹⁶ Chaucer quotations are from Fragment VI of The Canterbury Tales, in The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, ed. F.N. Robinson, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957).

¹⁷ See Spencer, pp. 28-29.

¹⁸ John Lydgate, The Dance Macabre, in English Verse Between Chaucer and Surrey, ed. E.P. Hammond (1927; rpt. New York: Octagon, 1965), p. 131. Seventeenth-century historian Sir William Dugdale, in his Monasticon Anglicanum (London: Sam Keble, 1693), could not restrain himself from describing the "Dance at Paul's" in detail:

The Dance of Death (formerly painted about the Cloyster of St. Paul's) was writ in French by one Machabree, and translated into old English Verse by Dan John of Lydgate, Monk of Bury. In this Dance Death leads all sorts of People, . . . ["all sorts" are described, eg. King, Churchman, Commoner] to all which Death makes a short address and they

as short an answer, with the "Author's Moral Reflection" (pp. 302-303).

¹⁹ "Macabré" was a surname in medieval France, but the earliest known use of the word "macabre" is in Jean Lefèvre's fourteenth-century poem "Le Respit de Mort":

Je fis de Macabre la danse,
Qui tout gent maine a sa trace
E a la fosse les adresse.

The meaning is cryptic to modern investigators, but it seems to be spoken in first-person allegory, and undoubtedly links death with a universal dance.

²⁰ Hammond, ed., pp. 128-29. See also Nancy Lee Beaty's The Craft of Dying, Yale Studies in English, 175 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970). This study contains genuine insights into the tradition of the ars moriendi in England, but only to emphasize the "artistic climax" of Jeremy Taylor's later Holy Dying (1651).

²¹ This passage from More's The Four Last Things is cited by Clark, p. 13. It should be remembered that More was somewhat of a secret ascetic himself; but this in no way detracts from the humanistic dignity of his thought and its appropriate expression. For a sensitive study of later Protestant use of the ars moriendi tradition, see David W. Atkinson, "The English ars moriendi: Its Protestant Transformation," Renaissance and Reformation, 18 (1982), 1-10.

²² G.R. Owst, Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1961), p. 527. The fourteenth-century Summa Praedicatorum of John Bromyard was a popular encyclopedia of source material for preachers. It was set out alphabetically under subject headings, and Owst notes further that the section entitled "Mors" is one of the largest (p. 51, n. 1).

²³ K.S. Block, ed., p. lvi. It should be noted that the Ludus Coventriae is often referred to as the "N-town" cycle as well. It has no actual connection with Coventry, and line 527 of the introductory "Banns" announces that the cycle is to be played in an unspecified "N-town."

²⁴ V.A. Kolve, The Play Called Corpus Christi (London: Edward Arnold, 1966), pp. 80-81. For a helpful diagram detailing the interrelation of all the pageants, see Kolve, p. 85.

²⁵ Rosemary Woolf, The English Mystery Plays (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), p. 231.

²⁶ The Towneley Plays, ed. George England and Alfred W. Pollard, Early English Text Society, e.s. 71 (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1897), pp. 390-91. Also known as the Wakefield Cycle, "Towneley" was the name of an eighteenth-century owner of the manuscript of the plays performed at Wakefield.

²⁷ See Clark, pp. 10-11.

²⁸ Woolf, p. 230. For Huizinga on Lazarus, see Waning, pp. 131-32.

²⁹ See the introduction to Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments, ed. Norman Davis, Early English Text Society, supp. 1 (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. xxxix. Passages quoted from The Pride of Life (pp. 90-105) are from this edition, with silently emended archaic usage, as noted before.

³⁰ J.M.R. Margeson, The Origins of English Tragedy (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967), p. 33.

³¹ The Castle of Perseverance, in The Macro Plays, ed. Mark Eccles, Early English Text Society, 262 (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 86.

³² Eccles, p. xxvi. For a detailed and sensitive study of the structure of The Castle of Perseverance, see Michael R. Kelley, "Circles Within Circles," in Flamboyant Drama (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1979), pp. 29-63.

³³ Dennis V. Moran, "The Life of Everyman," Neophilologus, 56 (1972), 325.

³⁴ Thomas F. Van Laan, "Everyman: A Structural Analysis," PMLA, 78 (1963), 465-75.

³⁵ Allen D. Goldhamer, "Everyman: A Dramatization of Death," Classica Et Mediaevalia, 30 (1973), 611. It should be noted that the earlier mysteries included extensive scenes of torture in the "Buffeting," "Scourging," and "Cruxifiction" plays. Though it is difficult going for the modern reader, a legitimate medieval sense of imago Christi is communicated through Everyman's extreme action at this point.

³⁶ Reproduced as frontispiece to Cawley's edition.

³⁷ Lawrence V. Ryan, "Doctrine and Dramatic Structure in Everyman," Speculum, 32 (1957), 723, 735. This substantial essay investigates the play's theology but, mistakenly in my view, devalues the dramatic action in favor of pure doctrine.

³⁸ See W.A. Davenport, Fifteenth-Century English Drama: The Early Moral Plays and Their Literary Relations (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1982), pp. 33-34.

³⁹ Kelley, p. 25.

⁴⁰ Margeson, p. 71.

⁴¹ David Bevington, From Mankind to Marlowe (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), p. 183.

⁴² Tucker Brooke, The Tudor Drama (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1911), pp. 207, 139. Brooke's distinctions are curiously impressionistic, but there is a clear difference. Preston diversifies allegorical representations and allows primitive psychological characterization to develop tragic conflict. Whether or not (his play is "aristocratic," it is more complex and ambitious than a string of "lesser" interludes, notably Thersites, Respublica, Hickescorner, and Jacob and Essau. The most accessible way into this neglected body of literature is still the Anonymous Plays, and Lost Tudor Plays in the Early English Dramatists Series, ed. John S. Farmer (1905-7; rpt. London: Guildford, Traylen, 1966).

⁴³ See J.M. Manly's critical text of Cambises, in Specimens of the Pre-Shakespearean Drama, Athenaeum Press Series (Boston: Ginn, 1899), II, 159-210. P. Happé's extensive essay, "Tragic Themes in Three Tudor Moralities," SEL, 5 (1965), 207-227, explores the nature of tragic complications and development in Cambises, Horestes, and Apus and Virginia.

⁴⁴ See Willard Farnham, The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1936), pp. 263-65. See also W.A. Armstrong, "The Background and Sources of Preston's Cambises," English Studies, 31 (1950), 129-35.

⁴⁵ Cited by Armstrong, 135.

⁴⁶ Bevington, p. 214.

⁴⁷ Burton J. Fishman, "Pride and Ire: Theatrical Iconography in Preston's Cambises," SEL, 16 (1976), 201-211.

⁴⁸ Cited by Happé, 209.

⁴⁹ See Mankind, in The Macro Plays, ed. Mark Eccles, pp. 153-84.

⁵⁰ Farnham, p. 2.

Notes to Chapter II

Marlowe and the Ugly Monster Death

¹Christopher Marlowe, Tamburlaine The Great, ed. J.S. Cunningham, The Revels Plays (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981). This edition is used for both parts of Tamburlaine.

²Tucker Brooke, "Marlowe's Versification and Style," SP, 19 (1922), 188. This essay is an incisive prosodic study of the Marlowe canon. A later essay by Donald Peet, "The Rhetoric of Tamburlaine," ELH, 26 (1959), 137-57, concentrates on Marlowe's bold application of formal rhetoric to effectively describe power. Other key studies that look at Marlowe's style include Howard Baker, Induction to Tragedy (1934; rpt. New York: Russell & Russell, 1965), pp. 91-98; Wolfgang Clemen, English Tragedy Before Shakespeare: The Development of Dramatic Speech, trans. T.S. Dorsch (London: Methuen, 1961), pp. 113-20; Moody E. Prior, The Language of Tragedy (1947; rpt. Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1964), pp. 33-46.

³The figure is conventional in the Dance of Death sequence, especially in the "Death to the King" segment. See, as well, the two remarkable illuminations that serve as frontispiece to Volume I of Glynn Wickham's Early English Stages (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1959).

⁴Michael Quinn, "The Freedom of Tamburlaine," MLQ, 21 (1960), 318.

⁵See Eugene Waith, The Herculean Hero (London: Chatto & Windus, 1962), pp. 64-70. It should be noted that Clarence Boyer, for all his analysis of Senecan, Machiavellian, and Ambitious villain-hero types, conspicuously omitted Tamburlaine from his large study, The Villain as Hero in Elizabethan Tragedy (London: Routledge, 1914). In his preface, however, he acknowledges the fact and refers to Tamburlaine as a special "conquering Hero" type (p. vii)--clearly the type allegorically represented by Death in the earlier moral drama.

⁶Harry Levin, Christopher Marlowe: The Overreacher (1955; rpt. London: Faber, 1961), p. 68.

⁷Cunningham, ed., Tamburlaine, pp. 27-28.

⁸Warren D. Smith, "The Substance of Meaning in Tamburlaine Part I," SP, 67 (1970), 165. Smith sees Tamburlaine's "melancholy" as a mollifying step in the development of his character from brute to lover, where his ensuing speech on beauty is the turning point of an internalized Venus/Mars conflict.

⁹Clifford Leech, "The Structure of Tamburlaine," Tulane Drama Review, 8 (Summer 1964), 37. It should be noted that this helpful issue is devoted entirely to articles on Marlowe.

¹⁰M.C. Bradbrook, Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935), pp. 139-40.

¹¹Thomas Dekker, The Wonderfull Yeare, in The Plague Pamphlets of Thomas Dekker, ed. F.P. Wilson (Oxford: Clarendon, 1925), pp. 31-32. See also F.P. Wilson, The Plague in Shakespeare's London (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1927), wherein is cited the dubious syllogism from a sermon preached at Paul's Cross in 1577: "The cause of plagues is sinne, if you looke to it well: and the cause of sinne are playes: therefore the cause of plagues are playes" (p. 52). I have silently regularized u/v and long ~ when quoting from Renaissance texts.

¹²J.W. Harper, ed., Tamburlaine, New Mermaids (London: Ernest Benn, 1971), p. xlii.

¹³Clearly Part II is a sequel written, as the prologue admits, to continue and capitalize upon the success of Part I:

The general welcomes Tamburlaine received
When he arriv'd last upon our stage
Hath made our poet pen his second part,
Where death cuts off the progress of his pomp
And murderous Fates throws all his triumphs down.
(ll. 1-5)

Yet an evaluative examination of Marlowe's motives or processes is not at issue in this chapter. I treat the two parts as a unity, bearing in mind Clifford Leech's comment: "Although we have every reason to believe Marlowe's statement that Part II was not in his original plan, we can see it as bringing to full expression much that was unobtrusively present in the thought of Part I." See "The Two-Part Play: Marlowe and the Early Shakespeare," Shakespeare Jahrbuch, 94 (1958), 92.

¹⁴Clemen, p. 128.

¹⁵Leech, TDR, 8 (1964), 41.

¹⁶ Douglas Cole, Suffering and Evil in the Plays of Christopher Marlowe (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), p. 103.

¹⁷ Levin, p. 54.

¹⁸ Peter V. LePage, "The Search for Godhead in Marlowe's Tamburlaine," College English, 26 (1965), 606. See also Helen Gardner, "The Second Part of Tamburlaine The Great," MLR, 37 (1942), 18-24.

¹⁹ Lawrence Danson, "Christopher Marlowe: The Questioner," ELR, 12 (1982), 12.

²⁰ Danson, 16.

²¹ Charles G. Masinton sees the grief of Tamburlaine as essentially selfish, noting, "He has failed from the beginning to appreciate Zenocrate as a human being"; see Christopher Marlowe's Tragic Vision: A Study in Damnation (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1972), p. 48. In an exploratory psychological essay, "The Death of Zenocrate: 'Conceiving and subduing both' in Marlowe's Tamburlaine," Literature and Psychology, 16 (1966), 15-24, C.L. Barber investigates Marlowe's "oral" nature through the Oedipal pattern of Tamburlaine: "Everything in Marlowe's play is consistent with his presenting in the relation of Tamburlaine to Zenocrate a romance that seeks to extend or recover the essentials of a relationship with a mother" (18).

²² Namely Paul Ive's Practise of Fortification (1589). See Paul H. Kocher, "Marlowe's Art of War," SP, 39 (1942), 207-25. T.M. Pearce, "Tamburlaine's 'Discipline to his Threë Sonnes': An Interpretation of Tamburlaine Part II," MLO, 15 (1954), 18-27, goes even further to characterize Tamburlaine as an educator in the line of Ascham, Elyot, and Sir Humphrey Gilbert, and to read the play itself as a counterblast to Stephen Gosson's criticism of the theater as prime example of the period's general effeminacy and moral degeneration.

²³ Danson, 16.

²⁴ Levin, p. 69. Huston Diehl, "Inversion and Irony: the Visual Rhetoric of Renaissance English Tragedy," SEL, 22 (1982), 197-209, points to late complications of medieval and Tudor iconography on the Renaissance stage. She uses the scene of Calyphas' slaying as one of her first examples, arguing the playing cards as personified Idleness, and seeing in the execution of his son an internal killing of sloth in Tamburlaine himself. Kocher detected an undercurrent of sympathy for Calyphas' "sardonic pacifism," but concluded "Calyphas deserved death under every code of contemporary military law" (223).

²⁵ Susan Richards, "Marlowe's Tamburlaine II: A Drama of Death," MLQ, 26 (1965), 378.

²⁶ See Robert Cockcroft's widely informed essay, "Emblematic Irony: Some Possible Significances of Tamburlaine's Chariot," Renaissance and Modern Studies, 12 (1968), 33-55. Eugene M. Waith, "Marlowe and the Jades of Asia," SEL, 5 (1965), 229-45, describes Tamburlaine's chariot as a "theatrical image of unforgettable brilliance" (231), and uses it as an illuminating approach to the topic of Marlowe's artistic control.

²⁷ Cole, pp. 112-113.

²⁸ Richards, 379.

²⁹ See Cole, pp. 89-93, on Marlowe's originality in dramatizing physical suffering; see also Johnstone Parr, "Tamburlaine's Malady," PMLA, 59 (1944), 696-714, for a medical, psycho-physiological, and astrological explanation of Tamburlaine's demise. Incorporating contemporary medical texts for support, this interesting article is reprinted in Tamburlaine's Malady and Other Essays on Astrology in Elizabethan Drama (University, Ala.: University of Alabama Press, 1953), pp. 3-23.

³⁰ Gardner, 24.

³¹ Christopher Marlowe, Doctor Faustus, ed. John D. Jump, The Revels Plays (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962). Since the problems of textual authority are especially intricate in the case of this play, I have chosen to rely throughout on Jump's text rather than opening complicated bibliographical arguments once again.

³² Nearly every critic points to Faustus' misapplication of the relevant biblical texts: Romans 6:23 and I John 1:8-9. This "devil's syllogism" was treated by the sixteenth-century Protestant divine Thomas Becon in The Dialogue Between the Christian Knight and Satan, and detailed by Susan Snyder in "The Left Hand of God: Despair in Medieval and Renaissance Tradition," Studies in the Renaissance, 12 (1965), 18-59. See also Max Bluestone's important essay "Libido Speculandi: Doctrine and Dramaturgy in Contemporary Interpretations of Marlowe's Doctor Faustus," in Reinterpretations of Elizabethan Drama, ed. Norman Rabkin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), pp. 33-88--a broad and insightful survey of speculative criticism with an extensive bibliographical appendix.

³³ Scholarly opinion on Faustus' misjudgment ranges from informed treatments of subtle ironies to direct accusations of incompetence. See A.L. French's antagonistic "The Philosophy of Dr. Faustus," Essays

in Criticism, 20 (1970), 123-42 (S. Nagarajan's rebuttal is included in the same volume, 485-87). James A. Reynolds, "Faustus' Flawed Learning," English Studies, 57 (1976), 329-36 is more sympathetic, as is Joseph T. McCullen's earlier study, "Dr. Faustus and Renaissance Learning," MLR, 51 (1956), 6-16. See also H.W. Matalene, "Marlowe's Faustus and the comforts of Academicism," ELH, 39 (1972), 495-519. Phoebe S. Spinrad, "The Dilettante's Lie in Doctor Faustus," TSL, 24 (1982), 243-54, presents an adverse characterization of the protagonist.

³⁴ Robert H. West, "The Impatient Magic of Dr. Faustus," ELR, 4 (1974), 218-40, studies the play through a thoughtful reading of its demonological ironies. William Blackburn, "'Heavenly Words': Marlowe's Faustus as a Renaissance Magician," English Studies in Canada, 4 (1978), 1-14, takes a curiously hostile stand, seeing Faustus as essentially incompetent and a failure in magic because he fails to use language correctly. For a broader study, see Anthony Harris, Night's Black Agents: Witchcraft and Magic in Seventeenth-Century Drama (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980).

³⁵ See Frank Manley, "The Nature of Faustus," MP, 66 (1969), 218-31.

³⁶ West, 226-27.

³⁷ Edward A. Snow, "Marlowe's Doctor Faustus and the Ends of Desire," in Two Renaissance Mythmakers: Christopher Marlowe and Ben Jonson, ed. Alvin Kernan (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), p. 94.

³⁸ Wilbur Sanders, The Dramatist and the Received Idea: Studies in the Plays of Marlowe and Shakespeare (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 226.

³⁹ Notably Levin, p. 141; Masinton, pp. 123-25.

⁴⁰ Snow, p. 73.

⁴¹ Snow, p. 75.

⁴² Cole, pp. 192-93.

⁴³ Arieh Sachs, "The Religious Despair of Doctor Faustus," JEGP, 63 (1964), 626. Pauline Honderich's informative "John Calvin and Doctor Faustus," MLR, 68 (1973), 1-13, accepts this "psychology" of personal destruction and considers the play against a theological background that balances extreme Calvinist with moderate Anglican positions on spiritual destiny. As well, Robert Ornstein concludes,

in "Marlowe and God: The Tragic Theology of Dr. Faustus," PMLA, 83 (1968), 1385, that "the ethic of heaven--of the cosmos--in Marlowe's view, is inhumane, futilely grasped at by an arrogant Faustus and exemplified on earth by Tamburlaine's dedications to power and the law of his own pitiless will." See also, Sanders' interesting quasi-biographical chapter, "Marlowe and the Calvinist Doctrine of Reprobation," in The Dramatist and the Received Idea, pp. 243-52.

⁴⁴ Clemen, p. 138.

⁴⁵ Bluestone, p. 68.

⁴⁶ Richard Levin, on the other hand, sees a parodic decline in Faustus' fortunes in The Multiple Plot in English Renaissance Drama (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), pp. 119-23. Warren D. Smith's earlier essay, "The Nature of Evil in Doctor Faustus," MLR, 60 (1965), 171-75, is more dismissive, declaring the middle portion of the play "an interesting argument against sin by establishing evil, though terrible in consequence, as actually petty in nature" (171). For a discussion of the psychomachia-like mixture of seriousness and comedy, see David Bevington, From Mankind to Marlowe (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), pp. 252-55. Robert Ornstein's earlier conclusion on the nature of the subplot clowning remains instructive: "Simultaneously nonsensical and profound, it clarifies our perception of moral values." See "The Comic Synthesis in Doctor Faustus," ELH, 22 (1955), 167.

⁴⁷ For historical background to Faustus' "case of conscience," and to his suspenseful chance for reprieve, see Lily B. Campbell, "Doctor Faustus: A Case of Conscience," PMLA, 67 (1952), 219-39.

⁴⁸ Snyder, 32.

⁴⁹ Edmund Spenser, The Faerie Queene, in The Works of Edmund Spenser, ed. Edwin Greenlaw et al. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1932), I, 122.

⁵⁰ The same "devil's syllogism," noted earlier (n. 32), that started Faustus' headlong dive into despair is used impeccably by Despair himself in The Faerie Queene:

Is not his law, Let every sinner die:
 Die shall all flesh? what then must needs be donne,
 Is it not better to doe willinglie,
 Then linger, till the glasse be all out ronne?
 Death is the end of woes: die soone, O faeries sonne.
 (I. ix. xlvii)

⁵¹Sachs, 641-42. It is even further astray, I think, to describe her embrace as in any way incestuous or maternal; see Snow, p. 89. W.W. Greg tried to make a case for demoniality--sexual intercourse with a demon--in "The Damnation of Faustus," MLR, 41 (1946), 97-107, an argument expanded upon and rejected by Nicholas Kiessling's "Doctor Faustus and the Sin of Demoniality," SEL, 15 (1975), 205-11.

⁵²Snow, pp. 103-104.

⁵³Sachs, 647,

⁵⁴Theodore Spencer, Death and Elizabethan Tragedy (1936; rpt. New York: Pageant, 1960), p. 230.

⁵⁵Eliot cites the two lines as examples of Marlowe's successful ability in poetic remodeling. See "Christopher Marlowe," in Selected Essays, 3rd ed. (London: Faber, 1951), pp. 121-22.

⁵⁶J.V. Cunningham, Woe or Wonder (Chicago: Swallow, 1951), p. 21.

⁵⁷Bluestone, p. 42.

Notes to Chapter III

The Skeletal Grin in Marston and Tourneur

¹The Diary of John Manningham of the Middle Temple, 1602-1603, ed. Robert Parker Sorlien (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1976), p. 133.

²See Samuel Schoenbaum, "The Precarious Balance of John Marston," PMLA, 67 (1952), 1069-78. An opposite but equally hypothetical (if not romanticized) notion had been surmised earlier by Theodore Spencer, "John Marston," Criterion, 13 (July 1934), 581-99.

The secret of Marston's temperament is that he was an idealist, and like so many of his contemporaries, he was an idealist whose idealism was based on insufficient facts. When the facts hit him in the face the blow was severe, and in order to conceal how much he was hurt, he pretended that he had known about them all along, that he enjoyed them (597).

The fullest critical study is Anthony Caputi's John Marston, Satirist (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1961). Philip J. Finkelpearl's study has a broader social angle that relates Marston to the cultural and intellectual milieu of his time; see John Marston of the Middle Temple (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969). A recent essay also deserves note: Scott Colley, "Marston, Calvinism, and Satire," Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England, 1 (1984), 85-96. Colley appropriately suggests, "What appears to be an unbalanced Marston may be a Marston who is convinced that he is witness to an unbalanced world" (89).

³See Selected Essays, 3rd ed. (London: Faber, 1951), pp. 189-90. Harold Jenkins' "Cyril Tourneur," Review of English Studies, 17 (1941), 21-36, typifies the critical stance that identifies Tourneur with the thoughts expressed by his characters. Two full-length critical studies exist: Peter B. Murray, A Study of Cyril Tourneur (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1964); and, more recently, Samuel Schuman, Cyril Tourneur, Twayne's English Authors Series (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1977).

⁴These four titles are the primary sources in this chapter. Quotations are taken from the Revels Plays edition in each case: Antonio's Revenge, ed. W. Reavley Gair (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1978); The Malcontent, ed. George K. Hunter (London:

Methuen, 1964); The Revenger's Tragedy, ed. R.A. Foakes (London: Methuen, 1966); The Atheist's Tragedy, ed. Irving Ribner (London: Methuen, 1964).

⁵ See Elmer Edgar Stoll, "Shakespeare, Marston, and the Malcontent Type," MP, 3 (1906), 281-303. Primarily tracing Marston's influence on Jacques and Hamlet, Stoll, in this early essay, makes some pointed observations on the "Malcontent bias": a "railing at the follies and abuses of society, at classes like courtiers and ladies, and at the 'world' in general, . . . of the vanity and transitoriness of human pretensions, distinctions, and existence itself" (282).

⁶ See R. A. Foakes, "John Marston's Fantastical Plays: Antonio and Mellida and Antonio's Revenge," PQ, 41 (1962), 229-39.

⁷ See Gair, ed., p. 40, and Caputi, pp. 117-56.

⁸ Foakes, PQ, 41, 235. Ejner J. Jensen, "The Style of the Boy Actors," Comparative Drama, 2 (1968), 100-114, invokes modern standards to argue against Foakes and Caputi:

The rigorous application of the assumption of a burlesque style minimizes the dramatic effectiveness of the plays and turns them into a unique and inferior kind of entertainment (111).

Michael Shapiro sympathizes with the burlesque notion, however, in "Children's Troupes: Dramatic Illusion and Acting Style," Comparative Drama, 3 (1969), 42-53. For a broader study, see Alfred Harbage, Shakespeare and the Rival Traditions (New York: Macmillan, 1952), and W. Reavley Gair's recent The Children of Paul's: The Story of a Theatre Company, 1553-1608 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

⁹ See T.F. Wharton, "Old Marston or New Marston: The Antonio Plays," Essays in Criticism, 25 (1975), 357-69.

¹⁰ Richard Levin, "The Proof of the Parody," Essays in Criticism, 24 (1974), 315-16. The skirmish can be traced back from here to its opening volley: Levin's "The New New Inn and the Proliferation of Good Bad Drama," Essays in Criticism, 22 (1972), 41-47. Levin has recently drawn his conclusions together into a helpful and broader context with New Readings vs. Old Plays: Recent Trends in the Reinterpretation of English Renaissance Drama (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).

¹¹ Nicholas Brooke, Horrid Laughter in Jacobean Tragedy (London: Open Books, 1979), p. 7. An important essay on this conjunction of horror, burlesque, and irony is R.A. Foakes' "On Marston, The Malcontent, and The Revenger's Tragedy," in The Elizabethan Theatre, 6 (Toronto: Macmillan, 1975), pp. 59-75.

¹² S. Gorley Putt, The Golden Age of English Drama: Enjoyment of Elizabethan and Jacobean Plays (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1981), pp. 4-5. Certainly a good deal of Putt's legitimate "enjoyment" is derived through the irony, as evinced in his chapter on Marston, "John Marston: Mannerism and Black Farce," pp. 69-83.

¹³ Wharton, 363.

¹⁴ Fredson Bowers, Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy: 1587-1642 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940), p. 123.

¹⁵ George L. Geckle, John Marston's Drama (Toronto: Associated University Press, 1980), p. 86.

¹⁶ Charles A. and Elaine S. Hallett, "Antonio's Revenge and the Integrity of the Revenge Tragedy Motifs," SP, 76 (1979), 377.

¹⁷ Hallett and Hallett, 371.

¹⁸ Richard W. Hillman, "Meaning and Mortality in Some Renaissance Revenge Plays," University of Toronto Quarterly, 49 (1979-80), 6.

¹⁹ Reading the play as a parodic exposure of the revenger's amorality, Philip J. Ayres regards the importance of "pell-mell" as an indication of "its user's lack of any directing moral consciousness"; see "Marston's Antonio's Revenge: The Morality of the Revenging Hero," SEL, 12 (1972), 369. Barbara J. Baines, in a recent article, has taken the final "giant-step" in ironic readings of the play; see "Antonio's Revenge: Marston's Play on Revenge Plays," SEL, 23 (1983), 277-94.

²⁰ See John Peter, Complaint and Satire in Early English Literature (Oxford: Clarendon, 1956), p. 239; also Ayres, SEL, 12, 362. Geoffrey D. Aggeler, "Stoicism and Revenge in Marston," English Studies, 51 (1970), 507-17, argues classical points of dramatization, noting, of the revengers' declined bounty, "Such rewards mean little to men who have abandoned everything they have valued for the sake of revenge" (512).

²¹ Peter Lisca, "The Revenger's Tragedy: A Study in Irony," PQ, 38 (1959), 245.

²² See Ronald Huebert, "The Revenger's Tragedy and the Fallacy of the Excluded Middle," University of Toronto Quarterly, 48 (1978-79), 13.

²³ L.G. Salingar, "The Revenger's Tragedy and the Morality Tradition," Scrutiny, 6 (March 1938), 405. See also Samuel Schoenbaum,

"The Revenger's Tragedy: Jacobean Dance of Death," MLQ, 15 (1954), 201-207, and John Mark Heumann's reformulated neo-Freudian approach in "Death Culture and the World of The Revenger's Tragedy," Gradiva, 1 (1976), 48-64.

²⁴ Brooke, p. 24.

²⁵ For a sensitive appraisal of the brothers in this connection, see Jonas A. Barish, "The True and False Families of The Revenger's Tragedy," in English Renaissance Drama: Essays in Honor of Madeleine Doran & Mark Eccles, ed. Standish Henning et al. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1976), pp. 142-54. See also Stephen Wigler, "If Looks Could Kill: Fathers and Sons in The Revenger's Tragedy," Comparative Drama, 9 (1975), 206-25, an interesting psychoanalytical study that explores the relationship of eyes to genitals, eyesight to castration and killing.

²⁶ Brooke, p. 15.

²⁷ Larry S. Champion, "Tourneur's The Revenger's Tragedy and the Jacobean Tragic Perspective," SP, 72 (1975), 301.

²⁸ Foakes, ed., p. xli.

²⁹ Foakes, ed., p. 71, n. 76.

³⁰ Hillman, 1.

³¹ B.J. Layman, "Tourneur's Artificial Noon: The Design of The Revenger's Tragedy," MLQ, 34 (1973), 31. I analyze the "silkworm speech" in greater detail in "Tourneur's The Revenger's Tragedy, III. v. 69-82," The Explicator, 42 (Spring 1984), 10-11.

³² See Arthur L. and M.K. Kistner, "Morality and Inevitability in The Revenger's Tragedy," JEGP, 71 (1972), 36-46.

³³ See Charles A. and Elaine S. Hallett, The Revenger's Madness: A Study of Revenge Tragedy Motifs (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980), p. 242.

³⁴ Inga-Stina Ekeblad, "An Approach to Tourneur's Imagery," MLR, 54 (1959), 490.

³⁵ Robert Ornstein, "The Atheist's Tragedy and Renaissance Naturalism," SP, 51 (1954), 197.

³⁶ Sir Thomas Browne, Religio Medici, ed. W.A. Greenhill, Golden Treasury Series (1881; rpt. London: Macmillan, 1946), pp. 62-63.

³⁷ Murray, p. 140.

³⁸ Robert Ornstein, The Moral Vision of Jacobean Tragedy (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1960), p. 119.

³⁹ Schuman, p. 118.

⁴⁰ See Huston Diehl, "'Reduce Thy Understanding to Thine Eye': Seeing and Interpreting in The Atheist's Tragedy," SP, 78 (1981), 51-52.

⁴¹ Barish, p. 146.

⁴² See Hallett and Hallett, The Revenger's Madness, pp. 228-30. The sense of nihilistic motivation in Vindice and The Revenger's Tragedy is not addressed by the Halletts' informative note either, which describes the skull of Gloriana as a strictly subjective authority. See also Frank Howson, "Horror and the Macabre in Four Elizabethan Tragedies," Cahiers Elisabethains, 10 (1976), 1-12.

⁴³ Schuman, p. 115.

⁴⁴ Peter, p. 279.

⁴⁵ See Diehl, 55.

⁴⁶ Cited by J.M.R. Margeson, The Origins of English Tragedy (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967), p. 137.

⁴⁷ J.W. Lever, The Tragedy of State (London: Methuen, 1971), p. 10. See also G.K. Hunter, "English Folly and Italian Vice," in Jacobean Theatre, ed. John Russell Brown and Bernard Harris (London: Edward Arnold, 1960), pp. 85-111, and Robert C. Jones, "Italian Settings and the 'World' of Elizabethan Tragedy," SEL, 10 (1970), 251-68.

⁴⁸ Ornstein, SP, 51 (1954), 202.

⁴⁹ Cited by J.V. Cunningham, Woe or Wonder (Chicago: Swallow, 1951), p. 36.

⁵⁰ Alvin Kernan, The Cankered Muse: Satire of the English Renaissance (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), p. 220.

Notes to Chapter IV

Death's Heads and Flowerpots: Mortality

in John Webster

¹These are the primary sources. Quotations are from the Revels Plays edition in each case: The White Devil, ed. John Russell Brown (London: Methuen, 1966); The Duchess of Malfi, ed. John Russell Brown (London: Methuen, 1964).

²Rupert Brooke, John Webster and the Elizabethan Drama (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1916), p. 158. See also William Archer, The Old Drama and the New (1923; rpt. New York: Dodd, 1929), and Ian Jack, "The Case of John Webster," Scrutiny, 16 (1949), 38-43. Don D. Moore traces the history of Webster criticism in John Webster and his Critics, 1617-1964 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966). A survey of more recent criticism forms the first part of Robert F. Whitman's Beyond Melancholy: John Webster and the Tragedy of Darkness (Salzburg: Jacobean Drama Studies 4, 1973), pp. 1-63.

³T.S. Eliot, "Four Elizabethan Dramatists," in Selected Essays, 3rd. ed. (London: Faber, 1951), p. 117.

⁴See T.S. Eliot's "Whispers of Immortality," in The Complete Poems and Plays: 1909-1950 (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1971), p. 32. Madeleine Doran uses a more critical approach to detect a mortalistic unity in Webster's contribution to the Jacobean "tragedy of evil":

Webster, though he is in this line of tragedy, is more complicated than the others. His dark world is lit by a splendor that evokes something more than morbid fascination and disgust. Even creatures like Brachiano, Lodovico, and Flamineo shine in darkness. However wicked they may be, there is defiance and a kind of glory in the courage with which they meet death. . . . Simple vitality asserts itself in a world that is doomed.

See Endeavors of Art: A Study of Form in Elizabethan Drama (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1954), p. 139. The term "tragedy of evil" itself was coined by Henry W. Wells, whose broad study--though dated--is still helpful; see Elizabethan and Jacobean Playwrights (1939; rpt. Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat, 1964).

⁵ Una Ellis-Fermor, The Jacobean Drama, 4th ed: (London: Methuen, 1958), pp. 170, 171.

⁶ Norman Rabkin; ed., Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Duchess of Malfi (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1968), p. 8. It is disappointing that none of the essays included in Rabkin's volume follows his introductory advice. Two recent exceptions, however, deserve note: J.F. Mc Elroy, "The White Devil, Women Beware Women, and the Limitations of Rationalist Criticism," SEL, 19 (1979), 285-312; and Margaret Holubetz, "A Mocking of Theatrical Conventions: The Fake Death Scenes in The White Devil and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead," English Studies, 63 (1982), 426-29. In his definitive study, Martin Esslin made specific mention of John Webster's tragedies in a chapter headed "The Tradition of the Absurd"; see The Theatre of the Absurd (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1961), p. 252.

⁷ Robert F. Whitman, "The Moral Paradox of Webster's Tragedy," PMLA, 90 (1975), 896.

⁸ Whitman, PMLA, 90, 902.

⁹ I must here acknowledge my indebtedness to Linda Bamber's recent and helpful study, Comic Women, Tragic Men: A Study of Gender and Genre in Shakespeare (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1982).

¹⁰ Irving Ribner, Jacobean Tragedy: The Quest for Moral Order (London: Methuen, 1962), p. 98.

¹¹ Albert Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus, in The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays, trans. Justin O'Brien (New York: Knopf, 1955), p. 6

¹² See respectively Ralph Berry, The Art of John Webster (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), and Inga-Stina Ewbank, "Webster's Realism, or, 'A Cunning Piece Wrought Perspective,'" in John Webster, ed. Brian Morris, Mermaid Critical Commentaries (London: Ernest Benn, 1970), pp. 159-78. Both studies tend to shape the painting metaphor to their own ends, but they augment my argument for the irrational and the abstract. See also Wylie Sypher's helpful study, Four Stages of Renaissance Style: Transformations in Art and Literature 1400-1700 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1955).

¹³ Robert Ornstein, The Moral Vision of Jacobean Tragedy (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1960), p. 134.

¹⁴ F.L. Lucas, ed., The Complete Works of John Webster (London: Chatto & Windus, 1928), IV, 43.

- ¹⁵ Edwin B. Benjamin, "Patterns of Morality in The White Devil," English Studies, 46 (1965), 9.
- ¹⁶ Ellis-Fermor, p. 188, n. 1.
- ¹⁷ Benjamin, 10.
- ¹⁸ Mc Elroy, 308.
- ¹⁹ See Hereward T. Price, "The Function of Imagery in Webster," PMLA, 70 (1955), 718.
- ²⁰ Benjamin, 6.
- ²¹ Roger Stilling, Love and Death in Renaissance Tragedy (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976), p. 225. Marianne Nordfors, "Science and Realism in John Webster's The Duchess of Malfi," Studia Neophilologica, 49 (1977), 233-42, likewise finds Webster to be a dramatist "disturbingly ahead of his time" (240) not only in his use of scientific knowledge, but in his perceived capacity as a champion of women's rights.
- ²² Stilling, p. 238.
- ²³ Clifford Leech, John Webster: A Critical Study, Hogarth Lectures on Literature (London: Hogarth Press, 1951), p. 67.
- ²⁴ Ornstein, p. 130.
- ²⁵ T.B. Tomlinson, A Study of Elizabethan and Jacobean Tragedy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), p. 139.
- ²⁶ Tomlinson, p. 136.
- ²⁷ Leech, p. 65.
- ²⁸ David M. Bergeron, "The Wax Figures in The Duchess of Malfi," SEL, 18 (1978), 339. On the related matter of funerary sculpture, see John Buxton, Elizabethan Taste (London: Macmillan, 1963), especially Chapter IV, pp. 133-67. Ralph Berry observes an interesting pattern of subversion in "Masques and Dumb Shows in Webster's Plays," The Elizabethan Theatre, 7 (1980), pp. 124-46, and concludes, "Webster's imagination, as I conceive it, grasps for means of challenging the propositions of order, hierarchy, and ceremony" (p. 146).

²⁹Leech, p. 83.

³⁰This is a dense amalgam of conventional memento mori wisdom, of Job 10:10 ("Hast thou not poured me out as milk, and curdled me like cheese?"), and of Augustinian eschatology. As well, it is impossible to ignore Berry's note in The Art of John Webster: "Nowhere more clearly than in this exchange is the existentialism of The Duchess of Malfi to be discerned" (p. 137). I detect also a certain fatalism latent in the British psyche that Webster may have drawn on at this point: Bede relates how the pagan seventh-century monarch King Edwin equivocated over a personal letter of doctrine from Pope Boniface, but warmed to the metaphor of a tiny bird as applied to the teachings of Christ. One of Edwin's chief advisors argued,

This is how the present life of man on earth, King, appears to me in comparison with that time which is unknown to us. You are sitting feasting with your ealdormen and thegns in winter time; the fire is burning on the hearth in the middle of the hall and all inside is warm, while outside the wintry storms of rain and snow are raging; and a sparrow flies swiftly through the hall. It enters in at one door and quickly flies out through the other. For the few moments it is inside, the storm and wintry tempest cannot touch it, but after the briefest moment of calm, it flits from your sight, out of the wintry storm and into it again. So this life of man appears but for a moment; what follows or indeed what went before, we know not at all. If this new doctrine brings us more certain information, it seems right that we should accept it.

See Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People, ed. Bertram Colgrave, and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), ii. 13, pp. 183-85.

³¹Ornstein, p. 133.

³²Stilling, p. 243.

³³On the complex webbing of sadism, incest, and death in the play, see Giles Mitchell's and Eugene Wright's pointed psychological study, "Duke Ferdinand's Lycanthropy as Disguise Motive in The Duchess of Malfi," Literature and Psychology, 25 (1975), 117-23.

³⁴Charles R. Forker, "Love, Death, and Fame: The Grotesque Tragedy of John Webster," Anglia, 91 (1973), 194-218, includes a shrewd note on the danse macabre which I think applies itself, by extension, to Bosola's disguises, and to the specific occupations of the madmen: "Many of the figures in The Duchess of Malfi have explicit counterparts in Holbein's famous series of woodcuts, the Duchess, the Cardinal, the Duke, the Old Woman, the Bride, the Bridegroom, and the Child"

(198, n. 1). See also Bettie Anne Doeblér, "Continuity in the Art of Dying: The Duchess of Malfi," Comparative Drama, 14 (1980), 203-215.

³⁵Forker, 207.

³⁶Stilling, p. 239.

³⁷John L. Selzer, "Merit and Degree in Webster's The Duchess of Malfi," ELR, 11 (1981), 79.

³⁸Esslin, p. 274.

³⁹Ewbank, p. 174.

⁴⁰Winifred Kittredge Eaton, Contrasts in the Representations of Death by Sophocles, Webster and Strindberg (Salzburg: Jacobean Drama Studies 17, 1975), p. 156.

⁴¹Camus, pp. 15-16.

⁴²Joan M. Lord, "The Duchess of Malfi: 'the Spirit of Greatness' and 'of Woman'," SEL, 16 (1976), 316.

Notes to Chapter V

Beauty Hates Death: Middleton and
Domestic Tragedy

¹The idea for this chapter's title comes from analogous statements in Middleton's tragedies: Women Beware Women (II. i. 84) and The Changeling (II. ii. 67). Unless otherwise specified, quotations from Middleton are from the Revels Plays edition in each case: Women Beware Women, ed. J.R. Mulryne (London: Methuen, 1975); and The Changeling, ed. N.W. Bawcutt (London: Methuen, 1958). I do not mean to denigrate Rowley's influence, but will usually name Middleton alone when referring to the authorship of The Changeling.

²See Henry Hitch Adams, English Domestic Or, Homiletic Tragedy, 1575 to 1642 (1943; rpt. New York: Benjamin Blom, 1965).

³See Christopher Hill, Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England (London: Secker & Warburg, 1964), especially chapters 1, 12, and 13. For further study of social, economic, and religious background, see Louis B. Wright, Middle-Class Culture in Elizabethan England (1935; rpt. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1958), and Lawrence Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800 (New York: Harper & Row, 1977). An interesting early essay is William and Malleville Haller's "The Puritan Art of Love," HLO, 5 (1942), 235-72.

⁴See "A Woman Killed With Kindness: Plausibility on a Smaller Scale," SEL, 24 (1984), 293-306.

⁵Quotations are derived from A Warning For Fair Women, ed. Charles Dale Cannon (The Hague: Mouton, 1975), and The Tragedy of Master Arden of Faversham, ed. M.L. Wine, The Revels Plays (London: Methuen, 1973).

⁶See M.C. Bradbrook, Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935), pp. 18-19. See also B.R. Pearn, "Dumb-show in Elizabethan Drama," Review of English Studies, 11 (1935), 385-405.

⁷Adams, p. 125.

⁸It is interesting that Thomas Heywood recounts two of the three tales found here as evidence for the moral efficacy of players and playgoing. See Apology For Actors (1612; rpt. London: Shakespeare Society 15, 1853), pp. 57-60.

⁹Adams, p. 123.

¹⁰Reproduced in Wine, ed., p. 2.

¹¹Ian and Heather Dubrow Ousby, "Art and Language in Arden of Faversham," Durham University Journal, 37 (1975), 52.

¹²See Sarah Youngblood, "Theme and Imagery in Arden of Feversham," SEL, 3 (1963), 207-218.

¹³Catherine Belsey, "Alice Arden's Crime," Renaissance Drama, 13 (1982), 88.

¹⁴Adams, p. 106.

¹⁵Ousby and Ousby, 48.

¹⁶Adams, pp. 118-19.

¹⁷Youngblood, 208. The point is also made in an interesting short essay by Raymond Chapman, "Arden of Faversham: Its Interest Today," English, 11 (1956), 15-17.

¹⁸Max Bluestone, "The Imagery of Tragic Melodrama in Arden of Feversham," Drama Survey, 5 (1966), 172.

¹⁹Robert Ornstein, The Moral Vision of Jacobean Tragedy (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1960), p. 192.

²⁰T.B. Tomlinson, A Study of Elizabethan and Jacobean Tragedy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), p. 158.

²¹For Middleton as satirist, see David M. Holmes, The Art of Thomas Middleton: A Critical Study (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970). See also Richard Levin's helpful chapter on The Changeling in The Multiple Plot in English Renaissance Drama (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), pp. 34-54.

²²See respectively Samuel Schoenbaum, Middleton's Tragedies: A Critical Study (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), p. 124,

and Larry S. Champion, Tragic Patterns in Jacobean and Caroline Drama (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1977), p. 152. It must be noted that Champion's vision is 20/20 later, when he refers to Middleton's sense of tragedy as a "general tragedy of human abuse" (p. 173).

²³ G.R. Hibbard invests the earlier dramatists with an almost professorial sense of tragic dignity; and Middleton, relegated to a limbo somewhere outside the parameters of a tradition discerned between the Mirror For Magistrates and domestic tragedy, suffers thereby. See "The Tragedies of Thomas Middleton and the Decadence of the Drama," Renaissance and Modern Studies, 1 (1957), 35-64.

²⁴ Ornstein comments on the connections between the shift to domestic concerns in later tragedy, the rise of the heroine, and the tragicomic influence of Beaumont and Fletcher (pp. 170-72). Arthur C. Kirsch expands (and at times over-extends) these assumptions in Jacobean Dramatic Perspectives (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1972).

²⁵ See Gerard Langbaine, An Account of the English Dramatick Poets (1691; rpt. Los Angeles: University of California Augustan Reprint Society, 1971), p. 371.

²⁶ Ornstein, p. 188.

²⁷ Schoenbaum, pp. 137-38. In an interesting argument, Robert Jordan, "Myth and Psychology in The Changeling," Renaissance Drama, 3 (1970), 157-65, de-emphasizes psychology to contend that the power of the relationship between Beatrice-Joanna and De Flores lies in the "beauty and the beast" myth.

²⁸ Ornstein astutely notes the play's Petrarchan inversions and parallels (p. 183, and *passim*), and Tomlinson focuses on the castle in some detail as symbol (pp. 192-96). See also Thomas L. Berger, "The Petrarchan Fortress of The Changeling," Renaissance Papers (1969), 37-46.

²⁹ J. Chesley Taylor, "Metaphors of the Moral World: Structure in The Changeling," Tulane Studies in English, 20 (1972), 52.

³⁰ Charles A. Hallett, "The Psychological Drama of Women Beware Women," SEL, 12 (1972), 381.

³¹ Champion, p. 159.

³² Barbara J. Baines, The Lust Motif in the Plays of Thomas Middleton (Salzburg: Jacobean Drama Studies 29, 1973), p. 113. See also Penelope

B.R. Doob, "A Reading of The Changeling," ELR, 3 (1973), 199-201.

³³ Margot Heinemann, Puritanism and Theatre: Thomas Middleton and Opposition Drama under the Early Stuarts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 178.

³⁴ Tomlinson, p. 171; see also Edward Engleberg, "Tragic Blindness in The Changeling and Women Beware Women," MLQ, 23 (1962), 37-46.

³⁵ See Verna Ann Foster, "The Deed's Creature: The Tragedy of Bianca in Women Beware Women," JEGP, 78 (1979), 508-521.

³⁶ Christopher Ricks, "The Moral and Poetic Structure of The Changeling," Essays in Criticism, 10 (1960), 290.

³⁷ Irving Ribner, Jacobean Tragedy: The Quest for Moral Order (London: Methuen, 1962), pp. 137-38.

Notes to Chapter VI

Death, Disorder, and Hallucination in Macbeth

¹Shakespeare quotations throughout are from the Arden editions, namely Macbeth, ed. Kenneth Muir (London: Methuen, 1962); Hamlet, ed. Harold Jenkins (London: Methuen, 1982); and King Lear, ed. Kenneth Muir (London: Methuen 1952).

²G. Wilson Knight, The Wheel of Fire (London: Oxford University Press, 1930), p. 155.

³Dugald Murdoch, "The Thane of Cawdor and Macbeth," Studia Neophilologica, 43 (1971), 226.

⁴Lawrence Danson, Tragic Alphabet: Shakespeare's Drama of Language (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), p. 126. See also John Baxter's stylistic analysis in Shakespeare's Poetic Styles: Verse Into Drama (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), as well as Michael Goldman's thoughtful essay, "Language and Action in Macbeth," in Focus on Macbeth, ed. John Russell Brown (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), pp. 140-52.

⁵R.A. Foakes, "Images of Death: Ambition in Macbeth," in Focus on Macbeth, ed. John Russell Brown (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), p. 13. My interpretation is also indebted to Maynard Mack Jr.'s Killing The King: Three Studies in Shakespeare's Tragic Structure, Yale Studies in English, 180 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973); see especially Mack's analysis of the King's "two bodies"--i.e. body natural (James Stuart) and immortal body politic (Jacobus Rex).

⁶Knight, p. 168.

⁷Richard Horwich, "Integrity in Macbeth: The Search for the 'Single State of Man,'" Shakespeare Quarterly, 29 (1978), 367. See also G.I. Duthie, "Antithesis in Macbeth," Shakespeare Survey, 19 (1966), 25-33.

⁸L.C. Knights, "How Many Children had Lady Macbeth?", in Explorations (London: Chatto & Windus, 1946), p. 22. This fine essay set something of a standard for twentieth-century criticism. But the point established here can be extended to G.R. Elliot's almost total misreading, Dramatic

Providence in Macbeth. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960). I think the possibility of Macbeth's repentance and salvation is a moot point of wish fulfillment on the part of any critic who would support such a reading.

⁹D.A. Traversi, An Approach to Shakespeare, 3rd ed. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1956), p. 426.

¹⁰Knights, p. 21.

¹¹See Muir's note.

¹²This much-discussed passage seems to support two interpretations: one sees the ambitious horseman overleaping himself in an attempt to vault into the saddle, while the other sees the rider falling from his horse after overleaping an obstacle. I support the latter view, in agreement with Catherine Belsey's informative note, "Shakespeare's 'Vaulting Ambition,'" ELN, 10 (1973-74), 198-201. The opening clause suggests that the spurless rider is already mounted. Besides, the image of an over-eager horseman missing the saddle seems somewhat slapstick to me. It lacks the life-or-death danger that this play is all about.

¹³Foakes, p. 14f.

¹⁴Robert Ornstein, The Moral Vision of Jacobean Tragedy (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1960), p. 231.

¹⁵Goldman, p. 145.

¹⁶For a sensitive account of the scene's imagery, see Paul A. Jorgensen, Our Naked Frailties: Sensational Art and Meaning in Macbeth (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), pp. 165-67. See also Glynne Wickham, "Hell-Castle and its Door-Keeper," Shakespeare Survey, 19 (1966), 68-74.

¹⁷See W.A. Murray, "Why was Duncan's blood golden?", Shakespeare Survey, 19 (1966), 34-44. Murray's reading of the scene is shrewd, but I do not think that Macbeth is in any danger of "spilling the beans," so to speak, and thereby necessitating the diversion of Lady Macbeth's spurious fainting spell.

¹⁸Ornstein, p. 232. Ornstein's comparison of Macbeth and Raskolnikov (p. 231) is both appropriate and revealing. There is a real correspondence of psychological effect in Macbeth and some of the dark Russian novels of the nineteenth century--a correspondence that just barely eluded G. Wilson Knight's chapter entitled "Shakespeare and

Tolstoy" in The Wheel of Fire, pp. 263-72.

¹⁹Muir, III. iv. 127, n.

²⁰The interpolation controversy has no real bearing on my interpretation; it is outlined in Muir's Introduction, pp. xxxiii-xxxvi.

²¹Knight, p. 160.

²²"Indirection" should be emphasized more than symbol. I agree with Sharon L. Jansen Jaech, "Political Prophecy and Macbeth's 'Sweet Bodements,'" Shakespeare Quarterly, 34 (1983), 290-97, who concludes that these symbols, as symbols, are subordinate to their effect as general warnings which the impetuous Macbeth misinterprets to his own eventual dismay.

²³See G. Wilson Knight, The Imperial Theme (London: Oxford University Press, 1931), pp. 151, 150.

²⁴Ornstein, p. 232. Every critic has his own critical intuition about the passage, but Fitzroy Pyle's "The Way to Dusty Death," Notes and Queries, 19 (1972), 129-31, is ingenious almost in spite of itself. The argument imagines Macbeth in the act of imagining some eternal burial vault as he speaks.

²⁵Karl F. Zender, "The Death of Young Siward: Providential Order, and Tragic Loss in Macbeth," TSL, 17 (1975), 415-25 uses Young Siward's death as starting point for an interesting discussion of the play's ambiguities.

²⁶Although historical matters lie outside the scope of this study, it should be mentioned that King James was popularly considered to have descended from Banquo and Fleance. See W.G. Boswell-Stone, ed., Shakespeare's Holinshed (1896; rpt. New York: Benjamin Blom, 1966), pp. 19, 35.

²⁷Stephen Booth, "King Lear," "Macbeth," Indefinition, and Tragedy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983); p. 92.

Notes to Chapter VII

John Ford and the Sleep of Death

¹General studies of the period traditionally end with Ford before issuing a Shakespearean corrective. See Una Ellis-Fermor, The Jacobean Drama, 4th ed. (London: Methuen, 1958), and Robert Ornstein, The Moral Vision of Jacobean Tragedy (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1960). But this tendency toward comparison is not as reprehensible as its moralistic parallel. M.C. Bradbrook, Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935), crowded Ford into an appended chapter entitled "The Decadence," while T.B. Tomlinson--as late as 1964--noted a "frank enjoyment of sin," and declared, "Ford, then, is the real villain of the piece in Jacobean tragedy"; see A Study of Elizabethan and Jacobean Tragedy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), pp. 265, 268.

²Clifford Leech, John Ford and the Drama of his Time (London: Chatto & Windus, 1957), p. 75.

³R.J. Kaufmann, "Ford's Tragic Perspective," TSLI, 1 (1959-60), 522. See also Alan Brissenden, "Impediments to Love: A Theme in John Ford," Renaissance Drama, 7 (1964), 95-102; and Juliet McMaster, "John Ford, Dramatist of Frustration," English Studies in Canada, 1 (1975), 266-79.

⁴Gerard Langbaine, An Account of the English Dramatick Poets (1691; rpt. Los Angeles: Augustan Reprint Society, 1971), p. 219.

⁵John Ford, 'Tis Pity She's a Whore, ed. Derek Roper, The Revels Plays (London: Methuen, 1975), pp. 3-4. Subsequent references are from this edition.

⁶Kenneth A. Requa, "Music in the Ear: Giovanni as Tragic Hero in Ford's 'Tis Pity She's a Whore," Papers on Language and Literature, 7 (1971), 17.

⁷Cyrus Hoy, "'Ignorance in Knowledge': Marlowe's Faustus and Ford's Giovanni," MP, 57 (1959-60), 149.

⁸A.P. Hogan, "'Tis Pity She's a Whore: The Overall Design," SEL, 17 (1977), 310.

⁹Richard Levin, The Multiple Plot in English Renaissance Drama (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 85.

¹⁰Requa, 23.

¹¹According to the definitive contemporary study, Giovanni shows clear symptoms of vainglory, overmuch study, and Love-Melancholy. See Robert Burton, The Anatomy of Melancholy, ed. Holbrook Jackson (New York: Vantage, 1977), especially Partition I, pp. 292-330, and Partition III. For further "clinical" criticism of Ford in particular, see S. Blaine Ewing, Burtonian Melancholy in the Plays of John Ford (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940), and G.F. Sensabaugh, The Tragic Muse of John Ford (1944; rpt. New York: Benjamin Blom, 1965).

¹²See Ornstein, p. 208; see also Requa, 24.

¹³Hogan, 313. For an interesting reading of this scene with a view to Artaud's theories of "cruelty" in the modern theater, see Carol C. Rosen, "The Language of Cruelty in Ford's 'Tis Pity She's a Whore," Comparative Drama, 8 (1974-75), 356-68.

¹⁴Hogan, 312.

¹⁵Kaufmann, 536.

¹⁶Kenneth Muir, "The Case of John Ford," Sewanee Review, 84 (1976), 617.

¹⁷Ornstein, p. 203.

¹⁸Roper, ed., p. lvi.

¹⁹Irving Ribner, Jacobean Tragedy: The Quest for Moral Order (London: Methuen, 1962), p. 157.

²⁰John Ford, Love's Sacrifice, in The Works of John Ford, ed. William Gifford and Alexander Dyce (1895; rpt. New York: Russell & Russell, 1965) II, 1-108. Because this edition lacks line references, I will refer throughout to act, scene, and page number. As well, because of Gifford's notorious Victorian emendations, I rely on the quarto for all stage directions, as found in John Fordes dramatische Werke, ed. W. Bang, Materialien zur Kunde des älteren Englischen Dramas, 23 (1908; rpt. Vaduz: Kraus Reprint, 1963), pp. 88-174.

²¹See Peter Ure, "Cult and Initiates in Ford's Love's Sacrifice," MLQ, 11 (1950), 298-306.

²² Mark Stavig, John Ford and the Traditional Moral Order (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968), p. 125.

²³ Ornstein, p. 219.

²⁴ Ronald Huebert anatomizes Fernando at this point:

Fernando seems to stretch the moment of death to its maximum length. He does not merely describe the sensation of pain: He uses the imperative mood to invite and demand the mingled agony and ecstasy of dying.

See John Ford: Baroque English Dramatist (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1977), p. 50.

²⁵ Richard Crashaw, Poems, ed. L.C. Martin, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1957), p. 181.

²⁶ See S. Gorley Putt, The Golden Age of English Drama: Enjoyment of Elizabethan and Jacobean Plays (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1981), pp. 155-85.

²⁷ Roger T. Burbridge, "The Moral Vision of Ford's The Broken Heart," SEL, 10 (1970), 399.

²⁸ The text used here is The Broken Heart, ed. T.J.B. Spencer, The Revels Plays (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980). Subsequent references are to this edition.

²⁹ Michael J. Kelly, "The Values of Action and Chronicle in The Broken Heart," Papers on Language and Literature, 7 (1971), 152. Kelly reads the play as a document in some inchoate philosophy of action, while Eugene M. Waith takes a diametrically opposite point of view in "Struggle for Calm: The Dramatic Structure of The Broken Heart," an essay that interestingly compares musical meaning and dramatic experience; see English Renaissance Drama: Essays in Honor of Madeleine Doran & Mark Eccles, ed. Standish Henning, et al. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1976), pp. 155-66.

³⁰ Fredson Bowers, Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy: 1587-1642, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940), p. 212.

³¹ Jeanne Addison Roberts, "John Ford's Passionate Abstractions," Southern Humanities Review, 7 (1973), 323. In quoting Roberts' nicely put statement, I must dissociate myself from her overall argument, which reads Ford's characters as allegorical abstractions in a "society vs. the individual" study.

³²Thelma N. Greenfield, "The Language of Process in Ford's The Broken Heart," PMLA, 87 (1972), 403.

³³Coburn Freer, The Poetics of Jacobean Drama (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), p. 178.

³⁴See Burbridge, 402, 403.

³⁵See Freer, p. 198. Freer's study of Bassanes' development is excellent, and it should be emphasized that the character is a challenging one--the role Sir Laurence Olivier took for himself when he staged the play at the Festival Theatre, Chichester, in 1962.

³⁶Freer, p. 180.

³⁷H.J. Oliver, The Problem of John Ford (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1955), p. 124.

³⁸Michael Neill, "Ford's Unbroken Art: The Moral Design of The Broken Heart," MLR, 75 (1980), 267.

Notes to Conclusion

The Many Faces of Death

¹ Theodore Spencer, Death and Elizabethan Tragedy (1936; rpt. New York: Pageant, 1960), p. vii.

J.V. Cunningham, Woe or Wonder: The Emotional Effect of Shakespearean Tragedy (Chicago: Swallow, 1951), p. 57.

³ See Montaigne's essay, "That to Philosophi[z]e, Is to Learne how to Die," in The Essayes of Michel Lord of Montaigne, trans. John Florio, Everyman's Library (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1910), I, 73-91.

⁴ Florio translates the overwhelming question thus: "What can I tell?" (234). See Montaigne's influential essay, "An Apologie Of Raymond Sebond," in The Essayes of Michel Lord of Montaigne, II, 125-326.

⁵ Sir Thomas Browne, Hydriotaphia, "Urne-Buriall," in Religio Medici and Other Works, ed. L.C. Martin (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964), p. 117.

⁶ Browne, p. 118.

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