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Mediating the Sensational in *The Spanish Tragedy*

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An abstract of
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Abstract

Mediating the Sensational in *The Spanish Tragedy*

By James H. Reilly

This is a study of Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* and related scholarship, focusing closely on violence, subjectivity, and what critics have called its sensationalism. While I do not seek to refute the claims of sensationalism, I do consider what it means for a work of Elizabethan drama to be described as such, as well as the types of interpretive work involved in reading a sensational scene, line, stage direction, or even an entire play. Reading into the ways in which madness, eloquence, and voyeurism function in the play, I aim to examine how Kyd represents subjectivity and the sensual within a narrative of predetermined violence that undermines such subjectivity.

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Critics have long recognized Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* for its dramatic innovation and immense popularity when it was performed, agreeing that the play, along with Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, helped usher in a new era for Elizabethan tragedy.[1] Despite the historical significance attached to Kyd's play, it remains a notoriously difficult text that resists strict methodological approaches. Part of the difficulty of grappling with the play resides in what critics have variously referred to as its "sensational theatrical features,"[2] or its tendency towards sheer violence that borders on the absurd. This is not an unreasonable claim to make; characters are hanged, stabbed, or both; bodies are mutilated, lovers spied on and violently disrupted, and the protagonist bites out his own tongue after killing members of Spanish and Portuguese royalty. The excessive and often abrupt violence, as well as the fact that much of this violence occurs within a domestic and courtly sphere, supports such a reading, although dismissing or trivializing certain scenes because of elements that might be perceived as merely sensational would be to overlook some of the most meaningful moments of the play. In the pages that follow, I explore such moments in Kyd's play that might be characterized as sensational with a purpose of rethinking what it means for a scene, line, or stage direction to be sensational as such. I argue that the most sensational aspects of Kyd's play are also the most contradictory—that the very moments when madness and sanity, articulation and incoherence, passive voyeurism and active participation all occur

[1] Fredson Bowers refers to the play as the "first great impetus" of Elizabethan tragedy (65). Since then, few critics have diverged from this view. Lukas Erne, writing in 2001, similarly states: "it set the trend for the genre of revenge tragedy, thereby standing at the head of a considerable number of important plays that are all more or less indebted to it" (95).

[2] Murray 14

concomitantly are moments when the sensational, in the fullest sense of the word, is truly realized.

Fredson Bowers, writing in 1940, uses the term *sensational* to describe the "central motive" of the Spanish Tragedy, the "sacred duty of the father to avenge the murder of his son—and from that sensational theme derived its popularity" (65). More recently, Lukas Erne has identified moments in the play that he describes as "farcical" or "slapstick," words that imply a similar idea of physical violence in order to solicit or incite a response.[3] Although the word *sensational* is itself anachronistic for applying to an early modern text (it dates back to 1847), I find it useful in thinking through the ways in which Kyd's play encourages and even urges participatory responses from the viewer. The word *sensational* is defined as "of or pertaining to or dependent upon sensation or the senses," and, specifically regarding works of literature, "aiming at violently exciting effects. Also of incidents in fiction or in real life: Calculated to produce a startling impression."[4] This dual emphasis on both the perceptual faculties and on how a fictional representation makes an impression on an observer is particularly helpful in understanding how Kyd's play explores the relationship between observing and observed parties and troubles the distinction between fictional representation and "real life."

Looking at the ways in which madness, eloquence, and voyeurism function in the play, I aim to examine how Kyd represents subjectivity and the sensual within a narrative

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[3] Erne 86, 87. Erne uses these terms to describe the scene in which Pedringano is hanged at the scaffold after exchanging threats with the hangman. For Erne, this moment is comparable to a scene in *The Taming of the Shrew* when Petruccio and Grumio exchange in a "slapstick-knockabout," punning on the word 'knock.' However, a key difference between the two scenes that Erne does not acknowledge is the fact that neither Petruccio nor Grumio loses his life after the exchange; violence is merely alluded to through puns, not performed to the extent that it is in Kyd's play. Nevertheless, the very comparison between *The Spanish Tragedy* and a Shakespearean comedy indicates what type of humor might be at work in Kyd's play.

[4] "Sensational," (*OED).*

of predetermined violence that undermines such subjectivity. Madness in Kyd's play has been a topic of dispute, with critics reading (often implicitly) Hieronimo's madness as either real or feigned. The possibility of these divergent readings suggests that there are moments when both real and feigned madnesses are possible, often simultaneously, and that the task of discerning between the two is part of the interpretive work that the audience must undertake if they are to sympathize with the violent protagonist. Similarly, reading into Hieronimo's inarticulate utterances in the play, moments that suggest madness through the mixing of the verbal with the nonverbal, allows for divergent readings of Hieronimo's subjectivity; what does it mean that Hieronimo seems to lose control of his tongue after his son dies? What does it mean that he declares this loss of linguistic control during eloquent and long soliloquies? Through these moments of linguistic ambivalence, as with the moments of real and feigned madness, Kyd expresses, through the troubling of subjectivity that seems to occur under the term *revenge*, a level of ambivalence toward selfhood that characterized the early modern subject.[5]

Finally, in looking at how sexualized ways of seeing work in early modern drama, I am interested in exploring the link in Kyd's play between voyeurism and sensational, often sexual, violence. The relationship between the (usually male) voyeur and the object(s) of his gaze is one that is sexually charged and often characterized by violent desires. By emphasizing the subjectivity of the voyeur within these relationships, Kyd places the voyeur's role into an economy of the sensational in which the modes of experiencing violence and pleasure are reciprocated between the observer and the

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[5] See Cynthia Marshall's *The Shattering of the Self: Violence, Subjectivity, and Early Modern Texts* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2002) for a comprehensive work regarding such ambivalence toward subjectivity in early modern society and culture. See also notes 19 and 44 below.

observed, resulting in an exchange of violence for pleasure. Working in conversation with such critics as Cynthia Marshall, Carla Mazzio, Linda Woodbridge, and others, I explore the ways madness, inarticulateness, and voyeurism function in the play within such an economy of the sensational, ultimately addressing how subjectivity and the sensational are related even as the play works toward a violent negation of subjectivity in the end.

I. Discerning Madness and Mimesis

Critics of revenge tragedies have recognized madness as one trope of many that seem to be almost ubiquitous in revenge plots.[6] Revengers often go mad in their desire for revenge, but the reason for this madness and what it is that madness represents are rarely accounted for. In *The Spanish Tragedy*, Hieronimo's madness is similarly enigmatic. Does Hieronimo actually go mad? Does he feign madness? How does one distinguish between representations of real and feigned madness? Examining the relationship between madness and revenge, as well as the ways in which madness is mediated during the play, requires a closer look at how critics have generally considered madness in the play and how madness was possibly perceived at the time of the play's performance.

Critics and editors appear to be divided on the actual status of Hieronimo's madness. Although later (1602) printed editions of the play added a subtitle "Hiernonimo's Mad Again," there appears to be some ambiguity in the play as to whether or not his madness is feigned. Linda Woodbridge supports this reading, noting that the motif of revengers going mad has been "overemphasized because the few who do (Orestes, Hieronimo, Hamlet) are famous." Despite adding Hieronimo to this list of mad

[6] Woodbridge 43.

avengers, she sees him as a literary figure whose madness was exaggerated, even in his own time:

> In the latter two cases it is famously difficult to distinguish actual from feigned madness. And in the earliest surviving quarto of *The Spanish Tragedy* (1592), Hieronimo is not very mad: extended mad scenes were all "additions" to the 1602 quarto, probably by Jonson. Hieronimo talks crazily in 3.11 (possibly feigned madness), but all references to him being "distract" are efforts by Lorenzo, his son's murderer, to discredit his accusations.... (43n)

Woodbridge rightly observes that the 1602 additions portray an unambiguously "mad" Hieronimo, but she confuses her point by suggesting that he is "not very mad" in the original scenes, as if he were suffering from a less extreme form of madness. Overall, it seems Woodbridge favors reading Hieronimo's madness as indeterminate and ambiguous, "possibly" but not necessarily feigned. The fact that the 1602 additions (usually attributed to Ben Jonson[7]) depart from this ambiguity and exaggerate Hieronimo's madness suggests that even to the Elizabethan audience the question of madness in the play is uncertain.

This indeterminacy regarding Hieronimo's madness reflects the divided critical attitudes toward the famous avenger. In his classic 1940 study, *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy*, Fredson Bowers identifies what he deems to be "the basic Kydian formula for the tragedy of revenge," of which madness is a major component: "Madness is an important dramatic device. Hieronimo is afflicted with passing fits of genuine madness brought on by his

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[7] Erne, Lukas. *Beyond* The Spanish Tragedy*: A Study of the Works of Thomas Kyd*. New York: Manchester UP, 2001. See esp. 119-121 for a discussion of Ben Jonson's apparent authorship of the 1602 additions, including evidence to the contrary.

overwhelming grief and the overwhelming sense of his obligation and his helplessness to revenge which saps his will. It is not probable that in Kyd's original version Hieronimo ever pretended madness" (72). Bowers differentiates between pretended and genuine madness, the latter being the only type he considers to occur in Kyd's play.

Responding to similar claims that Hieronimo is afflicted with "genuine" madness, William Empson, in 1956, writes: "Some critics have said that in a crude play like *The Spanish Tragedy* the revenger is simply mad, whereas the whole subtlety and profundity of Shakespeare consisted in introducing doubt as to whether the hero was mad or not… I want now to advance on a rather lengthy attempt to prove that Hieronimo is just like Hamlet in being both mad and not mad, both wise and not wise, and so forth."[8] Drawing a comparison to Hamlet, Empson reads Kyd's protagonist as residing in an in-between state of consciousness where madness is affirmed and negated, as if he were oscillating back and forth between modes of awareness and levels of intelligence. Empson later revises this statement twice, however, first saying that Hieronimo is "only gradually pushed into madness, just as he is only gradually pushed into revenge; he disapproves of both, but cannot keep them from him; a long period of grizzling over his wrong and puzzling over his duty has to be gone through, and all this time he is getting madder" (71). Here, we encounter a view of Hieronimo's madness consistent with most recent criticism, a view that Hieronimo, like Hamlet, slips into madness gradually and through a long process of brooding and self-questioning. A few pages later, Empson revisits madness, viewing it as a way for Hieronimo to gain favor from the king:

> [Hieronimo] does win the sympathy of the King, who proposes to look into the case later (1.99). As the chief object of Hieronymo is to speak to the king away

[8] Empson 70.

> from the brother and nephew, this means that his choice of mad behaviour nearly succeeded. (Of course, in one way he can't help being peculiar, but in another way he is trying to make use of it.)[9]

Empson suggests that Hieronimo is to some extent feigning the madness that the other characters on stage, as well as many readers, have mistaken as entirely sincere. This reading, however, does not negate the view that Hieronimo actually is mad, but rather that he resides in some in between state, suffering from madness but not unable to "make use" of the condition to gain sympathy from the king. Empson's varied explanations of madness might seem contradictory, but the paradox really lies in Hieronimo's being simultaneously "mad and not mad, wise and not wise," and, I would add, in the difficult task of the audience to differentiate between seemingly contradictory representations of madness.

For many critics, the theory of the gradual descent into madness describes Hieronimo's condition and the changes he undergoes during the play. Lukas Erne, tracing a trajectory of sanity in the play, describes this development in stages:

> Two basic stages can thus be distinguished in Hieronimo's trajectory, the first, leading up to III.vii, in which he is shown to be essentially sane and intent on public justice, and the second, starting III.xi, with the protagonist seeking extralegal revenge and coming across as 'passing lunatic' (III.xi.32), madly digging the earth with his dagger, tearing the petitioner's papers, and mistaking Bazulto for Horatio.[10]

Erne sees a distinct shift in Hieronimo's behavior between a sane but grieving father and a mad, scheming, irrational avenger. These behavioral states do not coincide, but are

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[9] *Ibid.* 76.
[10] Erne 110.

sequential—one leads into the other. For Erne, the madness is unambiguous and distinctly locatable in the narrative. Unlike Empson's reading, this view leaves very little for the audience to decide; Hieronimo's actions and words become easily explained in terms of a singular notion of madness that resists further examination. While Erne's reading of Hieronimo's madness as a two-stage development is useful in tracing Hieronimo's descent into madness—clearly he does not start out mad, so there must be some kind of development of derangement over time—he does not consider the ways in which Hieronimo might inhabit both rational and irrational states simultaneously and liminally or perhaps in an oscillatory way, allowing the audience to have divergent responses to and readings of the performances of madness in *The Spanish Tragedy*.

In addition to these divergent critical readings of madness, it's worth considering how Kyd's play fits into a larger discourse of madness at the time. Although he never explicitly discusses Kyd's play in his *History of Madness*, Michel Foucault offers a compelling way of reading madness in early modern texts, particularly the ways in which madness was represented in literature and drama. For Foucault, madness as a concept is explainable as a medical and cultural idea that emerges in the early modern collective psyche after leprosy disappears. Tracing the development of madness in European medieval and early modern society, Foucault posits that the notion of madness replaces leprosy as a major perceived threat to the collective health of societies. The structures of confinement, the images, the stigmas, and the social attitudes that developed during the Middle Ages to isolate lepers remained even after leprosy disappeared, and a new disorder, a "phenomenon that medicine would take far longer to appropriate," emerges

in the fifteenth century in the form of madness.[11] Foucault recognizes a void in the collective medieval consciousness that leprosy left, and for him madness appears to fill this void as it comes to be defined and diagnosed in early modern medical terms. To reconstruct the early concept of madness, Foucault turns to cultural texts portraying mad characters on a fictitious level. Referring to King Lear and Don Quixote, Foucault identifies two major representations of madness in early modern Europe, emphasizing, "in Cervantes and Shakespeare, madness occupies an extreme position in that it is invariably without issue."[12] For Foucault, madness in literature does not simply designate a mysterious instability of consciousness in a character, but it also subverts the patriarchal transfer of power by disrupting lineages.

With Hieronimo, we find a character that predates these famous early modern madmen and who is similarly "without issue." The murder of his son is the hinge of the play, the moment when Hieronimo turns from a law-abiding and law-enforcing patriarch (he is the Knight Marshall of the Spanish Court[13]) into a desperate avenger. In his case a reformulation of Foucault's words is necessary: madness in Kyd's play occupies an extreme position that is brought about invariably through the loss of issue. In this sense, the madness that Hieronimo appears to suffer from is consistent with the major early modern figures representing madness as Foucault defines it. Given the way that Foucault places Don Quixote and King Lear into a broader narrative of madness, one could feasibly consider Hieronimo as a part of that same narrative. Through the loss of his son, Hieronimo fits into this pattern of disrupted and disempowered patriarchal lineages.

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[11] *History of Madness* 8.
[12] *Ibid* 38.
[13] See Chrisopher Crosbie, "*Oeconomia* and the Vegetative Soul: Rethinking Revenge in *The Spanish Tragedy*" *in English Literary Renaissance* 38:1 (2008), for a detailed discussion of Hieronimo's socio-economic status in the play and a reading of class antagonism between Hieronimo and the Spanish Court.

Although reading madness in Kyd's play as a part of the broader narrative in Foucault's *History of Madness* provides an interesting view of how Hieronimo compares to other perceptions of madness at the time, for the purposes of this essay, reading how madness and patriarchy are connected and represented in the play yields ways of understanding the economy of sensationalism that seems to operate in the play. While in many ways it is easy to explain everything excessive and sensational in the play in terms of a broad, singular notion of madness, keeping in mind the link between madness and patriarchy, as well as the possibility of different types or degrees of madness, offers more nuanced ways of reading Hieronimo's most belligerent and confused moments. In other words, the questions of whether or not Hieronimo, as a disempowered patriarch, is indeed mad and how other characters (and readers) interpret and respond to his words and actions are important for reading the moments in the play most often deemed sensational.

There is another patriarchal figure in *The Spanish Tragedy* who escapes the amount of critical attention usually given to Hieronimo, but who exists in a similar condition of liminal, transient instability. Don Andrea, who introduces the play as a ghost in the afterlife after being killed by Balthazar, seems to experience fluctuating modes of perception as he is led through the underworld: "Through dreadful shades of ever-glooming night,/ I saw more sights than thousand tongues can tell,/ or pens can write, or mortal hearts can think" (1.1.56-8). While it is unclear if Don Andrea is emphasizing the incomprehensible multitude of otherworldly spectacles or the limits of the senses, there is a distinct failure of human faculties of perception that undergoes repetition in the line. The failure of the tongue in this passage is also a simultaneous failure of writing and thinking, suggesting a severed connection between the three distinct actions ("tell,"

"write," and "think") and the spectacles, or "sights," encountered. The collective failure of a "thousand" tongues indicates a multiplicity of incoherence that afflicts specifically "mortal hearts," drawing ontological boundaries between capabilities of speaking, writing, and knowing. Mortality therefore appears to be something that imposes limits on human subjectivity, and Don Andrea's opening soliloquy serves to mediate the otherwise incomprehensible spectacles of the underworld for the "mortal" audience.

Interestingly, within a play often regarded as sensationalist, this opening scene is curiously concerned with negating the senses. It seems that the fascination with sense and how words, sights, and sounds are (or equally importantly, are not) perceived informs how Kyd represents subjectivity throughout the play. In this opening scene, as with the scene of Horatio's murder (discussed later) and several of Hieronimo's soliloquies, the audience receives verbal descriptions of personal and sensual experiences. However, this scene is particularly unique in that this mediated subjectivity would have been expressed through a human actor playing a non-human spirit. Faced with this ontological contradiction, the audience would need to reevaluate how non-corporeal subjectivity is represented on-stage, and how such a subject would differ phenomenologically from the human subject. In other words, by encountering dead and allegorical figures coexisting and interacting at the start of the play, we are simultaneously presented with the idea that these beings perceive differently than human subjects and that, as Don Andrea implies in his opening soliloquy, they witness spectacles in the underworld that do not translate into human ways of understanding. Nevertheless, Don Andrea narrates his passage through the underworld, including those sights and sounds he encounters that are, presumably, capable of being mediated.

At the close of his soliloquy, Don Andrea addresses Revenge directly, and the two serve as spectators to the revenge plot that unfolds. Here, Don Andrea meets the personification of his desire for revenge, the very figure capable of fulfilling his desire. The verbal exchange that subsequently occurs between Don Andrea and Revenge is brief yet revealing:

[Andrea:]

Forthwith, Revenge, she rounded thee in th' ear,
And bade thee lead me through the gates of horn,
Where dreams have passage in the silent night.
No sooner had she spoke but we were here,
I wot not how, in twinkling of an eye.

Revenge:

Then know, Andrea, that thou art arrived
Where thou shalt see the author of thy death,
Don Balthazar, the prince of Portingale,
Deprived of life by Bel-Imperia.
Here sit we down to see this mystery,
And serve the Chorus in this tragedy.

1.1.81-91

Andrea's experience in the afterlife is one characterized by liminality, as indicated by the number of passageways, paths, and passengers, as well as the necessity of obtaining a "passport" in order to wander there (1.1.35). He approaches his destination after a final passageway, the "gates of horn," where "dreams have passage" instead of spirits. At the close of his soliloquy, Andrea has undergone several rites of passage, and his consciousness appears to falter as he abruptly reaches his destination. Although Andrea is

never referred to as mad in this scene or elsewhere in the play, the parallels between him and Hieronimo are many, considering how both characters reside within a similar narrative pattern as fallen, "issueless" patriarchs who seem to slip in and out of levels of awareness. And, like Hieronimo, Andrea exists in a state of liminality that allows him to pass through different realms of indeterminacy and unknowing. Andrea's state of consciousness is again brought into question when Revenge responds, "Then know, Andrea, that thou art arrived," indicating a realization or state of knowing that corresponds with encountering revenge. Juxtaposed in this the brief dialogue is the indeterminacy of Andrea's afterlife—his transient existence in which he lacks the capability to articulate what he perceives—with the authoritative, deified agency of Revenge.

In the quote above, Revenge instructs Andrea to simultaneously *see* and *serve* in the tragedy that they are about to witness, implying little or no barrier between the spectator and the spectacle, the real and the represented. This dual role that Andrea and Revenge play as both actors in and audience to the tragedy that unfolds is just one example in the play when the act of seeing is linked in a vague causal relationship to violence. Since both Andrea and Revenge have a desire to see violence occur, and since Revenge appears to have some authority to determine the outcome of the violence that they witness, the passivity of their voyeuristic position is thrown into question. Lukas Erne makes a similar observation regarding the pair of observers: "Their view of the unfolding of events is one of determinism; the characters in the play within are no autonomous beings, but puppets who can only play out a pre-scribed plot whose conclusion is known to Revenge before

the action starts."[14] Erne is careful to indicate that the *view* of the two observers is deterministic, subtly indicating a relationship between the passivity of seeing and the act of shaping future events. Sheer sensationalism is a major part of the determined outcome; the violent events that are predetermined to occur will occur precisely to be watched and enjoyed by Don Andrea. Here, violence occurs (or will occur) in order to satisfy the spectator's desire for the sensational—in this case to visually witness excessive violence.

II. Inarticulate Patriarchs

Returning to Hieronimo, we find a character who similarly desires sensational and excessive violence, but who serves, in Erne's words, as a "puppet" rather than spectator in the already determined, "pre-scribed plot" (97). Despite his strong desire for justice, Hieronimo's agency, his ability to take matters into his own hands, is continuously thrown into question, and his apparent madness contributes to this doubt. Hieronimo seems capable of articulating only his own lack of agency, a lack that seems to afflict even his ability to express himself verbally. For instance, the death of his son diminishes his capabilities of expression: "My grief no heart, my thoughts no tongue can tell" (3.2.67). Here, the failure of speech to express his grief renders his tongue useless for articulating his thoughts, yet still (ironically) functional. Like Don Andrea in the underworld, Hieronimo grapples with the difficulty of putting to words something that defies articulation. And, like Don Andrea, Hieronimo continues to express, however limited his ability to do so, precisely what he has previously deemed inexpressible.

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[14] Erne 97

In light of the ambivalence with which human perception and language are treated in the play, understanding Hieronimo's soliloquies requires more than just reading closely what he articulates, but also making sense of why he cannot fully express himself. Carla Mazzio's work on disjointed and troubled discourse in Elizabethan culture, specifically her analysis of Hieronimo, offers an exhaustive and meticulous reading of Hieronimo's nonverbal utterances and his role as a disarticulated subject. Examining the etymology of the word "articulate," she observes that the root comes from the Latin *artus*, or "joint," evoking an "anatomy of grammar."[15] The inarticulate, disjointed, incoherent, and indistinct utterances therefore all convey a similar connotation of disconnect and interruption that, within the context of Elizabethan drama, characterizes moments of passionate and affective intensity. Such moments of discursive disruption in Elizabethan oral and textual culture are rich with meaning and indicative of new possibilities: "Departures from rhetorical competence, in both sacred and secular contexts, could be seen as enabling new forms of thinking, feeling, and acting" (2). Mazzio places such moments in historical context, specifically within the fierce debates among Protestant reformers concerning the English tongue and the barbaric, incoherent discourse practiced by Catholic clergy. Examining the writings of reformers such as John Jewel, Mazzio emphasizes an association between a certain practice of incoherence, mumbling, with Catholic clergy. These accusations of both incoherence and heresy challenged the Catholic Church by criticizing its rhetorical traditions: "the Reformation idealization of vernacular plainness as a vehicle of scriptural and liturgical translation found its diabolical antitype in ecclesiastical Latin mumbling" (22). Reformation polemicists emphasized the distinction between articulate and inarticulate modes of speech in order to establish

[15] *The Inarticulate Renaissance* 6

"distance between Protestant English and Catholic Latin" (25). While in Reformation texts the speech-act of mumbling is derided and politicized, in theatre it is slightly different:

> On stage, when such "effects" are situated within specific networks of exchange, located within religious and socioeconomic circumstances, space is often opened up for reflection about cause-effect relations that complicates, even as it draws upon, polemical "vehemence" with regard to the indistinct utterance.[16]

Mazzio examines the function of the incoherent in theatre, specifically in *The Spanish Tragedy,* the complex discursive role that Hieronimo plays and the alignment of his part with "plain-speaking England" (106). However, as Mazzio makes clear, Kyd appears to express a level of ambivalence toward plain speech: "Kyd makes plain the susceptibility of plainness to both moral corruption and foreign influence" (107). Through the character of Hieronimo, who embodies this ambivalence to plainness, Kyd appears to part from the strict Protestant views toward language and instead examines the complexities (often contradictions) of plainness.

Mazzio's impressive reading of *The Spanish Tragedy* in light of disarticulated communities and the religious and political debates over the English tongue still leaves open several questions regarding the function of the inarticulate utterance within Kyd's play. Namely, what is the relationship between Hieronimo's incoherence and what others perceive as his madness? Apart from its associations with the Catholic Church, is incoherence associated with mental disorder, and how might madness or grief be construed as such a disorder? While Hieronimo's moments of incoherence, as well as his eloquent meditations on incoherence, function to an extent as commentary on

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[16] *Ibid.* 54

contemporary debates on language (specifically Protestant polemics), in what ways does this historicizing fail to explain Hieronimo's disorderly speech and actions? Reading the interplay between articulate/verbal and inarticulate/nonverbal forms of communication in Hieronimo's lines and actions, one finds an indeterminacy that, like Empson's notion of the simultaneity of madness and non-madness, suggests a nuanced and seemingly contradictory representation of the patriarchal subject grappling with loss.

The relationship between language and grief in Kyd's play is interesting not just because of the inability of language to encapsulate grief, but the paradoxical liberation of the tongue that seems to occur because of grief. Hieronimo's longest speeches in the play occur after Horatio is killed, and other characters interpret his sudden enabling of the tongue as a form of madness. If we accept Empson's view that Hieronimo occupies a mental state of madness and non-madness, then he seems to slip into similarly fraught moments of eloquence and disarticulation, speaking within a liminal discourse in which the non-verbal and the verbal function in similar ways.

For example, when Hieronimo, in the grips of grief, encounters the anonymous Portingales in act three and offers a long visual description of an other-worldly place for murderers, a "habitation for their cursed souls," where Lorenzo resides, the first Portangale responds with laughter: "Ha, ha, ha!" (3.11.25, 29). This nonverbal response to Hieronimo's apparent madness briefly reverses the function of the inarticulate utterance by expressing humor instead of grief. Hieronimo greets this laughter with laughter, rendering the monosyllabic utterance an expression of confusion and madness: "Ha, ha, ha!/ Why, ha, ha, ha! Farewell, good, ha, ha, ha!" (3.11.30-1). Here the trope

of the madman's laughter[17] is thrown into question; is laughter here a result of madness, or is it a ploy on Hieronimo's part to maintain a façade of madness? Looking at how Hieronimo mixes the verbal and the nonverbal, we find that between the bursts of laughter Hieronimo adds the words *why*, *farewell*, and *good,* as if suggesting that the words themselves, stripped of any meaning, are simply inarticulate expressions. Like the nonverbal utterance represented by "ha," Hieronimo's words at this point seem to lose their meanings, signifying only the senseless. Here the blurring of the distinction between inarticulate and articulate draws attention to while simultaneously concealing Hieronimo's mental state and the various reactions to his lack of coherence. One could feasibly read this moment as an example of Hieronimo's tendency to exaggerate his madness; through the mirroring and the repetition of laughter, Hieronimo performs incoherence in order to hide his desire for revenge. Furthermore, interspersed in what seems like non-verbal utterances, he says, "farewell," and immediately exits the scene, subtly indicating that he does indeed have control over his tongue. Although in the grips of grief, Hieronimo seems to retain an ability to deceive others and conceal his intentions through performance. To return to Empson's notion of Hieronimo being both mad and not mad, we see a similarly contradictory tendency in Hieronimo to engage in both articulate and inarticulate forms of communication, slipping in and out of syntactical constructions and nonsensical utterances. Again, the audience must decide how to read such a performance, including the verbal and the nonverbal, in order to discern representations of real and mimetic madness.

A few scenes after his encounter with the Portingales, Hieronimo meets Bazulto, an old man also grieving over the loss of his son, in one of the more uncanny scenes in the

[17] See Woodbridge p. 42 for a discussion on laughter and revenge.

play. As in his conversation with the Portingales, Hieronimo grapples with a failure of speech, although this time the failure is not his own but rather that of someone who resembles him and shares with him a "muttering" language of grief:

> Thou art the lively image of my grief:
> Within thy face my sorrows I may see.
> Thy eyes are gummed with tears, thy cheeks are wan,
> Thy forehead troubled, and thy muttering lips
> Murmer sad words abruptly broken off
> By force of windy sighs thy spirit breathes;
> And all this sorrow riseth for thy son:
> And selfsame sorrow feel I for my son.
>
> (3.13.162-69)

Hieronimo sees in Bazulto a resemblance of himself, a "lively image" that he breaks into parts (face, eyes, cheeks, lips, forehead), emphasizing that he sees his own grief in the other's features. Through these blazons, Hieronimo does not simply observe visual similarities between the two, but rather he establishes sameness between them to an extent that suggests the old man is perhaps an illusion, a figment of Hieronimo's grief-stricken mind. Despite Bazulto's claims to the contrary ("I am a grieved man, and not a ghost"), his appearance in this scene, in which he interacts only with Hieronimo, leaves open the question of his being (3.13.159). Reading Bazulto in this way, as a hallucination that Hieronimo mistakes for real, carries the implication that at this point the audience is also seeing an image conjured by Hieronimo's mind, but one that is presented as yet another character who desires justice from the Knight Marshall. Again, the interpretive

work is left to audience to discern the extent to which Bazulto is a mere "lively image" rather than a companion who suffers a loss very similar to that of Hieronimo.

Regardless of his ontological status, Bazulto provides Hieronimo with the opportunity to articulate his grief, even if what he expresses is a lamentation about articulation itself. Aside from the questions that arise in this scene concerning Hieronimo's madness and his possible hallucinatory tendencies, the verbal and the nonverbal function as expressions of grief and constitute a type of discourse that relies on the inarticulate and the paralinguistic to engage in a conversation or some type of mirroring of grief. The site of speech is displaced from the tongue to the lips, which utter incoherent, broken phrases and breath nonverbal sighs. Seemingly tongueless, both figures are stuck in a moment of stasis, only capable of visually mirroring the sorrow of the other. This sorrow that the two figures share is not just similar but "selfsame," again suggesting the notion of sameness between them and the possibility that they indeed are the same grieving, mad, hallucinating man.

This scene of affective mirroring provides a contrasting function of reciprocating emotions in others (or perhaps imagining it entirely) when considered alongside the earlier scene with the Portingales and the repetition of laughter that occurs then. The first Portingale considers Hieronimo's grief-stricken state of mind as a form of madness, and Hieronimo does not object to the diagnosis. While his inarticulate and monosyllabic utterances in that scene serve to appropriate laughter as an expression of madness, the "muttering" that occurs in his dialogue with Bazulto is a shared language of grief. In theses two scenes, Hieronimo's incoherence functions differently, providing distinct ways of communication while defying articulation. However, in both scenes incoherence is also

a spectacle, something that is observed and witnessed. Whether or not Hieronimo's incoherence is a performance, it remains a spectacle of the tongue's failure.

The notion of the tongue's agency is something that Judith Brown takes up in her reading of Shakespeare's *Richard II*: "at times eager, daring, double, and moving, the tongue is an active agent, although it can also be care-tuned, unwilling, and finally silent." [18] Hieronimo's tongue, eager and daring at this point in the play, seems to assume a level of autonomy and functional detachment while remaining physically attached to Hieronimo's body. Although Brown is specifically referring to King Richard's lyricism and the many temperaments that affect the tongue in that play, she also traces out a similar transformation that occurs to Hieronimo's tongue from eager and daring to subversive and ultimately silent.

Given the effects within the play that loss and grief seem to have on the human faculties of speech, writing, and thought, one can explain, to an extent, Hieronimo's descent into incoherence, possibly madness, when Horatio is killed. Although grief in the play seems to function to negate the tongue and reduce its agency, a later soliloquy suggests that Hieronimo is in control of his tongue, at least momentarily: "No, no, Hieronimo, thou must enjoin/ Thine eyes to observation, and thy tongue/ to milder speeches than thy spirit affords" (3.13.39-41). Urging himself to instruct, or "enjoin," his eyes and tongue, he develops a new relationship with his autonomous tongue by acknowledging its agency while reasserting the modes of communication between thought and tongue. For at least a moment, Hieronimo bridges the disconnect that earlier rendered his tongue inarticulate, if only to subdue it until the realization of revenge: "Till

[18] Brown 287.

to revenge thou know, when, where and how" (line 44). The anticipation of revenge is also an anticipation of an epistemic event at which point a full enabling of the senses and parts (including the organ of eloquence) occurs. As stated above, Hieronimo's revenge is not simply an act of retaliation, but a delayed moment of epiphanic awakening that involves all of the faculties of perception, thought, and expression.

III. Seeing Sensationally

In light of Hieronimo's blurring of the verbal and the nonverbal and the divergent interpretations that are possible (including among spectators within the play) because of such blurring, we find a more subtle performance of the sensational, one that lacks, or at least defers, violence. In the sense that the *sensational* seeks to incite a response from or make an impression on a spectator, the sensationalism of Hieronimo's performance of madness (whether or not it is feigned in this particular instance) depends on the gazes of several groups of spectators, each residing on a different plane of observation. On stage observers include the Portingales, who respond immediately with laughter at Hieronimo's antics, and Don Andrea and Revenge, who wait until moments in between scenes to comment on the action that occurs. Meanwhile the audience is made keenly aware of the multiplicity of gazes and the violent consequences that often result because of such gazes. In Kyd's play seeing is itself represented as an act of sensationalism; the observer is often a spectacle as well, and this layering of seeing draws the audience's attention to moments when on-stage observers respond to on-stage spectacles. Furthermore, since violence always occurs under the gaze of multiple observers, seeing is sensational through its association with sensational violence.

Given this layering of gazes and the strange connection between visual perception and sensational violence, it is helpful to look at the ways in which the relationship between the viewers and the viewed in Kyd's play could be described as pornographic. Turning to Cynthia Marshall, we find a way of thinking about violence and eroticism in *Titus Andronicus* in ways that might inform our understanding of the sensational aspects of *The Spanish Tragedy*. Marshall[19] has described aspects of *Titus Andronicus* as pornographic, using the term broadly to "describe material that uses sexuality to activate a voyeuristic response" (110). Specifically, she considers how Lavinia's mutilated body is observed and described by Marcus, Titus, and Aaron. Other characters are often instructed to look at Lavinia and "read her body"(111). Recalling how early modern images of martyrs often "conjoined mutilation with eroticism," Marshall reads Lavinia as a character inscribed within a pornographic discourse, allowing Shakespeare to "explicitly sexualiz[e] Lavinia's martyrdom through the rape narrative" (110). Lavinia's body, as silent, mutilated, and sexualized, incites varied responses/urges from her viewers both within the play and in the audience. In this case, pornographic discourse might be characterized by "the power to shape bodily existence in the real world… troubling the phenomenological border between the real and the representational" (112). While Marshall's reading of the pornographic in *Titus Andronicus* helps to explain the difficult themes of sexuality and violence that critics often avoid when discussing the play, her rethinking the terms of pornographic representation in early modern texts is particularly useful in addressing similar moments in Kyd's play when sexual and violent meanings coexist.

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[19] Marshall, Cynthia. *The Shattering of the Self: Violence, Subjectivity, and Early Modern Texts.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2002. For more on pornographic discourses in early modern texts, as well as ways of defining "pornography" that address the problems of using the term anachronistically, see Ian Moulton, *Before Pornography: Erotic Writing in Early Modern England*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000.

Keeping in mind Marshall's notion of how the pornographic can work in a major early modern play-text by establishing and drawing attention to voyeuristic modes of seeing and responding to a (mutilated) body, how might we consider moments in Kyd's play as residing within a similar pornographic discourse, one in which the observer's gaze is sexually and epistemologically charged? As critics have noted, *The Spanish Tragedy* is full of voyeuristic moments; Don Andrea and Revenge, Balthazar and Lorenzo, the Spanish Court, and the Elizabethan audience all represent a unique voyeuristic position at particular moments, whether for a single scene or for the entire play. While not all of these voyeurisms necessarily perform pornographic ways of seeing, there are key moments in the play when the gaze of the voyeur functions as a form of sexualized seeing; ultimately, as in *Titus*, the sexual and violent meanings, inextricable as these meanings are in Kyd's play, determine the relationships between the viewer and the viewed and place these relationships firmly within a pornographic economy.[20]

The clearest example of a pornographic relationship between viewing subjects and viewed objects is the scene in which Bel-Imperia and Horatio, unknowingly observed by Lorenzo and Balthazar, make arrangements to meet in Hieronimo's garden to engage in "peaceful war" (2.2.38). Pleasure and pain are continuously linked in this scene, as rhetoric of war and sex, or rather sex figured as war, characterizes the exchange. Furthermore, that the entire scene takes place under the gaze of Lorenzo and Balthazar introduces an element of voyeurism, of looking as an epistemological act, and re-inscribes the two lovers into a pornographic scene in which they are the objects of both sexual and violent desires. Bel-Imperia is the first to express desire:

> My heart, sweet friend, is like a ship at sea:

[20] *Ibid.* 137.

> She wisheth port, where riding all at ease,
> She may repair what stormy times have worn,
> And leaning on the shore, may sing with joy
> That pleasure follows pain, and bliss annoy.
>
> (2.2.7-11)

Bel-Imperia's simile suggests that she is still grieving for Don Andrea, whose death, as well as the "stormy times" that she has spent grieving, is taking a toll on her; like her former lover, she is undergoing a transient, even turbulent experience. It is out of this state of grief and suffering that she wishes to repair something ("what stormy times have worn"), and this process of reparation occurs concomitantly with a recognition of a relationship between pleasure and pain. What follows is a reiteration of sexual fulfillment as a process of reparation, figured in terms of a ship at sea:

> Possession of thy love is th'only port,
> Wherein my heart, with fears and hopes long tossed,
> Each hour doth wish and long to make resort;
> There to repair the joys that it hath lost,
> And sitting safe, to sing in Cupid's choir
> That sweetest bliss, is crown of love's desire.
>
> (2.2.12-17)

For Bel-Imperia, sex is figured as a reparative process that occurs necessarily after pain and loss. Sex also occurs in "resort" or while "sitting safe," implying a degree of seclusion or privacy that Bel-Imperia and Horatio, despite what they might assume, cannot attain due to their position under a multiplicity of gazes.

The dialogue that takes place under the multi-layered and self-consciously voyeuristic gaze is filled with sexual and violent tensions, inciting responses from all parties involved. Both Lorenzo and Balthazar are energized by the sexual (verbal) exchange that they are witnessing, but they respond in very different ways. Balthazar wishes that his senses would fail him: "O sleep mine eyes, see not my love profaned/ Be deaf, my ears, hear not my discontent;/ Die, heart, another joys what thou deservest." However, contrary to his words, Balthazar continues to watch and listen (indicated by his next lines), fascinated and pained by what he sees. Conversely, Lorenzo instructs his senses to remain alert: "Watch still mine eyes, to see this love disjoined;/ hear still mine ears, to hear them both lament/ Live, heart, to joy at fond Horatio's fall" (2.2.18-23). Lorenzo seems to be having a much more pleasurable experience than Balthazar by anticipating the violence that he hopes to inflict on the observed couple. These divergent responses, characterized by disgust, pleasure, and sustained gazing, as well as the eroticism of the discourse that they overhear, suggest that the relationship between the male voyeurs and the scene that unfolds before them is distinctly pornographic.

Over the next several lines, Balthazar and Lorenzo respond to the lovers' dialogue with threats, revealing the conflicting intentions that exist between the excited observers and the unaware couple:

Bel-Imperia

Why stands Horatio speechless all this while?

Horatio

The less I speak, the more I meditate.

Bel-Imperia

But whereon dost thou chiefly meditate?

Horatio

On dangers past, and pleasures to ensue.

Balthazar

On pleasures past, and dangers to ensue.

Bel-Imperia

What dangers and what parties dost thou mean?

Horatio

Dangers of war and pleasures of our love.

Lorenzo

Dangers of death, but pleasures none at all.

(2.2.24-31)

Again, the voyeurs respond to what they are witnessing, this time in the form of feigned participation (presumably, nothing that either Lorenzo or Balthazar says at this point reaches the ears of the lovers). Their utterances, by mirroring and reversing the words of Horatio, reestablish the distance between the voyeurs and the lovers while also throwing it into question. They are observers, albeit not passive ones because they seek to take part in the narrative of pleasure and violence that unfolds verbally and visually before them.

When Bel-Imperia and Horatio at last meet in Hieronimo's garden at the predetermined time to consummate their love ("pass a pleasant hour"), their violent rhetoric is suggestive of sexual deeds (2.4.5). Here, the violent and martial rhetoric fits into a sexual discourse between the two lovers in the form of a back-and-forth exchange of sexual threats:

Bel-Imperia

If I be Venus, thou must needs be Mars,

And where Mars reigneth, there must needs be wars.

Horatio

Then thus begin our wars: put forth thy hand,

That it may combat with my ruder hand.

Bel-Imperia

Set forth thy foot to try the push of mine.

Horatio

But first my looks shall combat against thee.

(2.4.34-39)

Violence here is metaphorical, reciprocal, and escalating, with the purpose of inciting an imitative response from the other. Through such playful, sexualized violence, the couple enacts a fantasy that places them in a similar dialectic of pleasure/fulfillment and pain/violence as that of Hieronimo, who later on stages and enacts a fantasy of violence in front of the Spanish court. Like that later scene of fantastical violence, this playful enactment of war quickly turns bloody; Lorenzo and Balthazar, parting from their previous voyeuristic roles, enter the scene with a disguised Pedringano and kill Horatio by hanging and stabbing him.

David Willbern, writing on Oedipal violence in *The Spanish Tragedy*,[21] turns to this scene as one example of the ways in which sexual pleasure in the play is habitually replaced with pain and violence:

> Yet the love-war in which [Bel-Imperia and Horatio] engage is curiously unresolved. That is, its consummation is at least ambiguous, for at the exact moment of potential fulfillment, when all those puns on 'dying' seem about to be realized, the murderers (Lorenzo and Balthazar) rush in and replace the pun with real death, by killing Horatio. It is finally impossible to tell

[21] Willbern, David. "Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*: Inverted Vengeance." American Imago, 28 (1971), 247-167. For Willbern, this scene, as well as the one that follows in which Hieronimo discovers his son's body, figures into a broader Oedipal drama where the roles of son and father are reversed, and Hieronimo, who has earlier expressed ambivalence towards his son, suddenly assumes the role of the child whose patricidal wishes are fulfilled.

> if the sexual act is consummated, since it is interrupted at the crucial instant (250).

As Willbern notes, sexual fulfillment in the scene is interrupted, and literal ("real") violence replaces figurative "love-war." Reading this scene as demonstrating how the play to prevent marriage and "parental sexual activity," Willbern, however much he tends to overemphasize the possible Oedipal readings of the play, provides a compelling way to read how violence and sexuality operate within this scene (where violent urges are fulfilled instead of sexual ones) and in the play as a whole (266). At this moment, Lorenzo and Balthazar fulfill their own desires for Horatio's "fall" by hanging him from the bower and stabbing him to death. Horatio's body here and for the remainder of the play bears the marks of sexualized violence, serving as a grotesque spectacle for the multiple gazes that fall on him. Like Lavinia, he is reduced to a mutilated and silent object onto which other characters project their own grief and disgust, or through which they speak as if ventriloquizing the horror that they can only gaze upon from a distance.

In these two short scenes, Kyd depicts the blurring of violence and sexuality, as well as the voyeuristic modes of viewing such blurring, which successfully captivated the Elizabethan audience. To describe the fraught relationship between the distanced observers and the observed lovers as pornographic is admittedly anachronistic,[22] but the significant role of the concealed and fascinated observer within the play is undeniably a crucial part of the play's narrative of revenge. Voyeurism and male violence are linked through a build-up of sexual and violent tensions under the male gaze, the knowledge that is gained from that gaze, and the murder that takes place because of that knowledge. Furthermore, this violent voyeurism reflects modes of observation that occur on several

[22] Moulton 8.

different narrative/ ontological levels: Lorenzo and Balthazar secretly observe Horatio and Bel-Imperia, Don Andrea and Revenge sit as spectators to the "mystery," and the theatrical audience sit at the most privileged voyeuristic position. Given this layering of pornographic gazes and the troubling relationship between such acts of gazing and scenes of violence, Kyd draws attention to the type of seeing, as well as the simultaneous interpretation that results from seeing, that his play, through all of its meta-theatricality, necessitates.

For Molly Smith, the ambivalent relationship between spectator and spectacle inherent in Elizabethan revenge drama can be explained not in terms of private, sexualized, and voyeuristic viewing, but in its strange parallels to the power relationships and punitive practices at work in public executions. Pointing to the functional and structural similarities between scaffolds and theaters, Molly Smith observes, "The famous Triple Tree, the first permanent structure for hangings in London, was erected at Tyburn in 1571, during the same decade which saw the construction of the first public theater" (218). As Smith notes, the historical emergence of these physical structures, as spaces where crowds could gather and collectively bear witness to a staged event, reveals much about Elizabethan attitudes toward such spectacles. She makes clear several more resemblances between the two structures and the purposes they served in Elizabethan society:

> In short, hangings functioned as spectacles not unlike tragedies staged in the public theaters. The organization of spectators around hangings and executions and in the theaters, and the simultaneous localization of these entertainments

> through the construction of permanent structures, suggest the close alliance between these communal worlds in early modern England.[23]

Significantly, the spectacle of death is most effective through the participation of everyone, including spectators:

> The public execution's social relevance depended so fully on its proper enactment through the collusion of all participants, including the hangman as an instrument of the law, the criminal as a defier of divine and sovereign authority, and spectators as witnesses to the efficacy of royal power and justice, and the slightest deviation could lead to redefinitions and reinterpretations of power relations between subjects and the sovereign.[24]

As exercises and performances of power relations, public executions emphasized the presence and participation of spectators and their subjection to sovereignty. For these audiences, a play and a hanging seem to offer similarly fascinating public experiences, whether gruesome, funny, sexually provocative, or otherwise. Turning to the pivotal moment when Hieronimo addresses the court after staging *Soliman and Perseda*, Smith notes:

> The court's reaction as the truth unfolds changes from applause to anger and condemnation. Implicitly, Kyd invites the audience to reevaluate its response to the tragedy of evil so cunningly staged, for Hieronimo's theatrical production necessarily draws attention to the nebulous nature of the boundary that separates spectators from the spectacle. [25]

Smith focuses on one particular theatrical frame, the staging of *Soliman and Perseda*, and the boundaries that are crossed with enactment of the onstage murders of Balthazar and

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[23] Smith 218.
[24] *Ibid.* 226.
[25] *Ibid.* 228.

Lorenzo and the suicide of Bel-Imperia. The courtly audience must "reevaluate its response" upon learning that the spectacle that they have just witnessed is indeed real, and the theatrical framing of death dissolves as the onstage portrayal of revenge thwarts these very frames. Through the simultaneous representation of real and feigned murder, the playlet seems to operate in both a theatrical and punitive space, where the theatrical representation of death is also a public killing; the simultaneity of these public displays of violence is jarring and confusing for the observers of the playlet, who only gradually realize and acknowledge the extent to which Hieronimo and Bel-Imperia have shattered the frames of representation.

Given the troubling similarities between the two structures and the performances they offer, one can see why Kyd is interested in portraying both types of performance (the theatrical and the punitive) within his play, drawing the viewer's attention to stages and scaffolds as similar places where Elizabethan audiences could witness, and indeed be a part of, displays of power and violence. It seems that both structures provided some kind of satisfaction for the audience that was gained by public viewing. That these experiences take place in public is significant especially in light of the ways in which public and private modes of viewing both take place in Kyd's play, and how these two modes differ in the relationship established between viewer and viewed.

IV. Pleasurable Rites

In light of the varied ways that private and public gazes work in *The Spanish Tragedy* and how these gazes are usually directed toward violent scenes and mutilated bodies, the role of the corpse, as a spectacle and an unsettling presence on stage, deserves more critical attention. Dead bodies seem to play a particularly prominent role in the

play, and for mysterious reasons, several characters express an odd interest or curiosity in the corpses of loved ones. The Viceroy of Portugal, when misled to believe that Balthazar was killed in battle, asks, "but now, Villuppo, say,/ Where then became the carcase of my son?" (1.3.73-4). Similarly, in the very next scene, Bel-Imperia asks Horatio about her former lover's corpse: "But then was Don Andrea's carcase lost?" Both the Viceroy and Bel-Imperia, within 100 lines of one another, express similar concerns for the dead bodies of their loved ones; to lose the body, it seems, would be yet another loss, compounded further on top of the loss of life. Horatio's response to Bel-Imperia speaks to this concern:

> No, that was it for which I chiefly strove,
> Nor stepte I backe till I recovered him:
> I tooke him up and wound him in my armes.
> And welding him unto my private tent,
> There layd him downe and dewd him with my teares,
> And sighed and sorrowed as became a friend.
>
> (1.4.32-37)

Horatio ensures that Don Andrea's body be buried and the funeral rites performed, but prior to these rites he seems to display signs of affection to the corpse, a display of affection that appears to be a part of the burial process that Don Andrea mentions in his first soliloquoy:

> When I was slain, my soul descended straight
> To pass the flowing stream of Acheron:
> But churlish Charon, only boatman there,
> Said that my rites of burial not performed,
> I might not sit amongst the passengers.
> Ere Sol had slept three nights in Thetis' lap

> And slaked his smoking chariot in her flood,
>
> By Don Horatio, our Knight Marshal's son,
>
> My funerals and obsequies were done.
>
> (1.1.19-26)

In order to "sit amongst the passengers" in Charon's boat (which bears more than a little resemblance to Foucault's descriptions of the "boat of madmen"[26]), Don Andrea must wait for his funeral rites, or "obsequies," to be performed, a performance that involves not the "eternal substance" of his soul, but his corpse, the "wanton flesh" that remains on the battle field (1.1.1-2). Differing connotations within the word *obsequy* explain the strange event of affective, desirous mourning that seems to constitute the rites of burial; the term *obsequy* means "a funeral rite or ceremony," although an alternate definition states, "ready compliance with the will or pleasure of another, esp. a superior; deferential service; obsequiousness."[27] The word suggests a juxtaposition of somber funeral rites with deferential and pleasurable treatment of superiors. This dual connotation helps explain the ambiguous and seemingly contradictory displays of affection that occur when Horatio performs the rites of burial for Don Andrea. The coupling of death with pleasure, of the funeral rites with affective displays of mourning, informs how we might read the corpse within Kyd's play as an object of both mourning and pleasure.

The significance of obsequies in the play is further indicated by the fact that the story of Horatio performing the funeral rites for Don Andrea is told twice, in the instances quoted above, by two different speakers. The obsequy performs a dual function by not

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[26] *History of Madness* 11.
[27] "Obsequy," *(OED)*.

only to ensuring that Don Andrea's soul passes through the Virgilian underworld[28] unencumbered, but also as a mediated event that seems to provide some comfort or pleasure to mourners. Obsequies therefore perform two very different functions: one through their very enactment, and again as the rites are told and retold. The latter, the mediated obsequy, is the only one that the audience witnesses in *The Spanish Tragedy*—we hear from both Don Andrea and Horatio that the rites have been performed, yet we do not directly witness the actual performing of the rites. The retelling of the obsequy is therefore very much a part of the ritual itself, and, in the case of Don Horatio, it seems to take the place of the actual event.

Returning to the moment when Lorenzo and Balthazar rush into the garden to interrupt the sexual encounter between Horatio and Bel-Imperia, we find an instance in which the corpse serves a very different function than the private, ritualistic one it has served so far. Because Horatio is killed by hanging and stabbing, his body subsequently performs multiple roles as a silent, mutilated, penetrated object that hangs from something like a scaffold (the arbor). For Molly Smith, this scene exemplifies how Kyd treats death as a spectacle; since we can "assume that Balthazar and Bel-Imperia witness the stabbing," their "function as spectators parallels our own and underscores Kyd's exploitation of the event as public spectacle" (224). Smith observes (correctly) that Horatio's murder is presented as spectacle to characters and audience alike, although her emphasis on this murder as a *public* spectacle omits the fact that this murder takes place both at night and in Hieronimo's private garden. Remember that Bel-Imperia and Horatio have chosen to meet at the garden after nightfall in order to obtain privacy, or

[28] Lukas Erne recognizes Kyd's depiction of the afterlife as heavily influenced by Virgil: "the Ghost of Andrea describes his journey through the underworld in an account which is clearly modeled upon Book VI of Virgil's *Aeneid*" (51).

"safety" (2.4.5). Unbeknownst to them, their privacy is compromised entirely by Lorenzo and Balthazar, who invade the privacy first with their gazes in 4.2, and next by actually entering the garden in 4.4 to kill Horatio. Horatio's death is therefore not entirely public, but instead occurs through a blurring of private and public modes of viewing. In other words, the murder takes place simultaneously in a private garden and on a public stage, where the violation of privacy is just as much a spectacle as death itself.

Returning to the function of the corpse, we find an object through which death lingers on stage as a visual reminder of unexplained violence. Horatio's mutilated body begins to perform a role not unlike that of Lavinia in *Titus Andronicus*, who, although she survives brutal sexual violence, lingers on stage and attracts the gaze, disgust, and sympathy of Marcus, Titus, and Lucius, not to mention that of the audience.[29] Similarly, from this moment on, Horatio's body is a silent spectacle on which Hieronimo and, later, the Spanish Court gaze in failed attempt to comprehend the silent object of mutilation and sexualized violence.

Perhaps it is this obsession with the bodies of the dead, the ability for revenge to linger in the absence of life through the presence of dead bodies, which explains the proliferation and reappearance of lifeless bodies on stage. Revenge, it seems, is terrifying not just because it reciprocates violence, the mere placing of a mirror up to one's violent deeds so that they reflect back and inflict destruction. Revenge is the proliferation of loss, the intent of fracturing families and tearing apart affective bonds. Revenge is limitless; one vengeful deed breeds another, a mirror image of itself, almost the same, different only

[29] See Jonathan Bate's introduction to the Arden edition of *Titus Andronicus,* esp. pages 11-12 for a discussion of Titus' laughter when he learns about Lavinia's rape. This uncomfortable moment of laughter may be compared to Hieronimo's mad laughter in 3.11, when it is unclear what exactly laughter, as a paralinguistic utterance, expresses at that particular moment.

because multiplied. Kyd's portrayal of revenge is so terrifying because it is unrestrained and limitless.

V. Mediating the Sensational

Considering how Kyd's play is interested in representing moments of voyeurism and drawing attention to the self-consciousness of the private or public viewer, and how such moments often coincide or lead sequentially into moments of sensational violence, we turn to the scene in the play most often regarded as sensational.[30] When Hieronimo and Bel-Imperia exact revenge through the dramatic playlet *Soliman and Perseda* that Hieronimo has written, directed, and played in, the ways in which violence is mediated and presented as a dramatic event, as a spectacle that seems merely to mimic real violence, and the new meaning that corpses take on after such doubly feigned violence, suggest that the mediation of revenge is a crucial part of its very enactment as a performance of the sensational. For Hieronimo, revenge does not constitute a simple retaliation of violence; rather, it occurs through a conflation of theatrical and the punitive structures, simultaneously dramatizing and realizing death as a public spectacle. The ramification of this spectacle is one that shatters the community of onlookers, who only gradually come to discern the real from the feigned. When Hieronimo finally addresses the court to explain what has happened, he makes a curious statement regarding the reciprocity of revenge:

> With soonest speed I hasted to my sonne,

[30] See Arthur Freeman's *Thomas Kyd: Facts and Problems* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 80 for a comparison between the "gusto and sensationalism" of the climactic last two scenes of the play with the "patient and graceful" manner of the rest of the play. See also Empson, p. 70, as well as notes 2 and 3 above.

> Through girt with wounds and slaughtered as you see.
> And greeved I (thinke you) at this spectacle?
> Speake Portagues, whose loss resembles mine,
> If thou canst weepe upon thy *Balthazar*?
> Tis like I waild for my *Horatio*.
>
> (4.4.114-20)

Hieronimo makes several troubling comparisons in this speech that reveal the extent of his intentions for fulfilling revenge. Not only does he seek justice by killing those who killed his son, but he also succeeds in fracturing the families of the perpetrators. By inflicting a loss upon these families, a loss that "resembles" the loss of his son, Hieronimo continues this habitual destruction of the nuclear family that functions in the play under the term *revenge*. Kyd's representations of murder and revenge are therefore not merely moments of sensational violence that capture the gazes and incite the divergent responses of many observers, but public expositions of the consequences of loss, a portrayal of the rapidly expanding ripples of grief that shake the families of murdered loved ones. Revenge in Kyd's play is not an isolated incident, but a series of disruptions, a repetition of loss, and a process of undoing entire communities.

Mazzio's emphasis on the disarticulated subject's role in various communities offers a compelling way to read the community destruction that occurs in *The Spanish Tragedy*. Drawing attention to the formation of communities in early modern dramatic texts, Mazzio observes how the disarticulated subject might undermine such communities:

> In Renaissance drama, verbal incapacity or incoherence subtends whole constellations of affect within diverse socioeconomic communities: we find suitors rendered lexically confused in the face of the beloved, courtiers or avengers acting out failures of expressive capacity and verbal negotiation, and scholars alienated by the inability of their language to be used or comprehended by others, or sometimes even by themselves. [31]

Mazzio here compellingly observes a multiplicity of "communities" within Renaissance drama that are engaged on some level with inarticulate subjects, including avengers. For Mazzio, these communities emerge out of "historically specific fault lines of discourse," or "rifts" in contemporary debates that reveal the ambivalences and anxieties surrounding language, religion, and politics. Her grouping of these communities is interesting because of how each individual community seems to occupy a very different and peculiar locus in the "constellation of affect." Objects and agents of desire ("lovers"), an agent of violence ("avenger"), and an agent of knowledge ("scholar") are all points within an affective unity ("constellation"), all interconnected yet separate loci of affect/passion/desire. The avenger assumes a curious place in this constellation; as a character who is involved in a broad network of desire and knowledge, he or she stands alone as the embodiment of violence and thwarted desire. Mazzio, in her mapping out of a network of disarticulated communities, also provides a conceptual relationship between revenge, desire, and knowledge and the possible interplay between these communities on the Elizabethan stage. To take Mazzio's analysis further, one might say that Hieronimo and Don Andrea, as disempowered patriarchs who similarly occupy the position of the disarticulated, are there because they have been excluded from another community, that of the Spanish

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[31] *The Inarticulate Renaissance* 3

Court, not as a result of their own wrongdoing, but because of a fracturing of community and unity through a cycle of secrecy, deception, and murder.

Lukas Erne places a similar emphasis on community in *The Spanish Tragedy*, but one focused on family and "basic human relationships" rather than communal states of disarticulation:

> One of the insights scholars owe to the twentieth –century stage revivals of *The Spanish Tragedy* is the tremendous impact the play can have is not so much a matter of its spectacular features as of the personal drama of Horatio, Bel-Imperia, Isabella, and Hieronimo. Like *Hamlet*, *The Spanish Tragedy* is very much a family play, exploring powerful emotions in what are the most basic human relationships. [32]

If Erne is correct in asserting that the locus of emotional power in Kyd's play resides in its concern with basic familial relationships, then this centering of the family, and the violence that the action of the play inflicts upon the nuclear family, is possibly where the disruptive point of revenge lies. Revenge in *The Spanish Tragedy* corresponds to the destruction of the nuclear family and its implicit patriarchal structures,[33] as well as the disruption of relationships between lovers, parents, and children. By habitually disrupting such communities, as well as preventing sexual fulfillment[34], vengeance in the play disrupts such communities by replacing pleasure with violence; or, more specifically, it seeking pleasure through violence.

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[32] Erne, Lukas. "Thomas Kyd's Christian Tragedy" in *Renaissance Papers* 2001. Cambridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2002. Page 32.

[33] See Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare.* Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1983, for a discussion of Thomas More's *Utopia* and its "patriarchal familism"(42). Accepting Greenblatt's assertion of the "rise of the nuclear family in Early Modern England," one could read Kyd's play as working against this phenomenon and expressing ambivalence toward patriarchal structures generally.

[34] See Willbern for a discussion of the play's preoccupation with preventing sex.

The sensationalism of Hieronimo's performance of revenge is a result of more than just the presence of dead bodies on stage. It is also a creative event, a play-within-a-play written (and presumably performed) in "unknown languages," and the moment when revenge is finally enacted and realized in front of separate groups of observers (4.1.173). This moment of revenge also, significantly, draws attention to the discrepancies between the play-text and the possible ways in which it was performed. In response to critics over the question of the playlet's performance, Lukas Erne maintains, "There are no sound reasons to doubt that the play of 'Soliman and Perseda' was ever performed in 'sundry languages.'"[35] Assuming that the polyglot playlet was performed publicly as such, what is the function of this multiplicity of language, and why was it altered for the press? A subtle textual anomaly right before the playlet draws attention to yet another voyeuristic gaze: "*Gentlemen, this play of Hieronimo, in sundry languages, was thought good to be set down in English more largely, for the easier understanding to every public reader*" (4.4.10). Here, the presumed performance of a multiplicity of tongues is doubly translated to the page and reduced to one language.[36] The latter act of translation reveals both a concern for the presumed male "public reader" and for this reader's interpretation of the play. Like Lorenzo and Balthazar peeping into the garden to spy on Horatio and Bel-Imperia, the male gaze in this instance is similarly epistemologically charged (the text is concerned with his "understanding" the playlet), anticipating the violence that is about to ensue. At this moment the reader is no longer an implicit, passive voyeur, but rather a presence

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[35] Erne 65.

[36] In "Translating Contexts: The purpose of Hieronimo's *Soliman and Perseda* playlet in the *Spanish Tragedy*," Frank Ardolino has argued for an allegorical reading of this act of translation into English: "Through this series of analogous adaptations or translation—as epitomized by the translation of the sundry languages into English—Kyd delineates his subtextual politico-religious theme of the translation of power from Spain to England." While this argument is compelling, Ardolino has been criticized, most notably by Lukas Erne, for attempting to misalign Kyd's play with specific historical events to reveal "hidden meanings" (Erne 91).

within the text, a witness who is also a critical part in the sensationalism of the play's action.

Ian Moulton, in a passage that seems to describe precisely the mode of reading that is required at this point in the play, observes, "In thinking about debates over what pornography is or is not, I have often thought that it might make more sense to see pornography as a way of reading rather than as a mode of representation" (11). Considering the ways in which Hieronimo's playlet, Horatio's corpse, and the autoglossotomy that follows can be thought of as moments or sites of sexualized violence, Moulton's notion of the pornographic as a way of reading is particularly apt for describing the way all of the observers, including the Spanish Court, Andrea and Revenge, and the reader, witness, interpret, and participate in the final scenes of Kyd's play.

Returning to the textual announcement before the playlet we find a paratextual insertion that reveals a level of awareness and anxiety regarding the deliberate confusion that occurs onstage, and it represents an attempt to establish a level coherence in the text that was likely absent in performance. As Andrew Gurr's footnote explains, "This insertion is almost unique in early English drama in being addressed to the reader, not a character in the play" (116n). By directly addressing the reader, the insertion momentarily violates the frame of the play-text, establishing the reader as a character in the play precisely at the moment when the distance between spectator and spectacle is called into question in Hieronimo's playlet. Here Kyd's play, Hieronimo's playlet, and the anomalous textual insertion all throw into doubt the very framing of drama and revenge, drawing attention to the ways in which sensational violence necessarily operates

through, and in many ways against, mediation to incite responses from several audiences at once.

For Mazzio, the flattening out of linguistic heterogeneity for the sake of coherence and "understanding" appears to reflect the nationalist concern for the intrusion of foreign tongues into the English idiom.[37] With this in mind, Hieronimo's murderous playlet and his subsequent act of biting out his own tongue resonate with these notions of heterogeneous languages and the anxiety of protecting the mother tongue from contamination. For Mazzio, Hieronimo's act of self-mutilation is therefore an act of violence on language itself:

> Through Hieronimo's bloody theatre of revenge (the polyglot *Soliman and Perseda*), Kyd stages a discursive war zone which conflates murder, contamination, and corruption with the uneasy juxtaposition of alien forms. In many important ways, Hieronimo's ultimate revenge is a revenge on language, on representation, on what he returns to in the end, "our vulgar tongue."[38]

Vernacular speech for Hieronimo is "vulgar," and the violence he inflicts upon his tongue is yet another act of revenge in a scene where multiple plots of revenge are enacted. As Mazzio suggests, it appears that Kyd is attempting to inflict violence on language itself, as if finally expressing his ambivalence to the form of representation in which he has struggled all along to articulate himself. Furthermore, this ambivalence is not limited to language, but directed in a sense towards all modes of representation. Peter Sacks makes an observation about violence against mediation in revenge tragedies: "And it is worth

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[37] "Staging the Vernacular" 207-8. Mazzio observes here that "The influx of thousands of new words from Latin, Greek, French, Spanish, and Italian in the sixteenth century led to extensive debates about the presence of foreign and 'barbaric' elements within the national vocabulary." In short, Mazzio reads the presence of "sundry languages" in Hieronimo's playlet as a dramatization of this anxiety that speaks to the alignment of language and nationalism within a "mother tongue" (209).

[38] *Ibid*. 214

noticing the frequency with which acts of vengeance are performed in ways which apparently make use of a theatrical or verbal mediation only to disrupt it."[39] Similarly, Carla Mazzio observes how such a disruption of mediation describes how Hieronimo's playlet works: "The self-reflexivity of *Soliman and Perseda*, suggested by the sheer multiplicity of representational frames in which it is acted, calls attention to the way in which the highly theatrical and deliberative helps to facilitate the savage and uncivilized in the play (revenge itself)."[40] As Mazzio notes, the playlet is operating within multiple theatrical frames, observed simultaneously by the court, Don Andrea and Revenge, and the Elizabethan audience. That these frames are useful for the mediation of revenge even as they are violated when the act of revenge occurs supports the notion of how modes of representation are treated with a level of ambivalence and an acute awareness of their limits.

In light of Mazzio's reading of the function of polyglossia and the incoherent in this scene, one might add that the use of "sundry languages" in this scene serves a similar function as the presence of dead bodies in the same scene; the languages, stripped of their meaning, are rendered lifeless relics of their former selves, the objects of confusion, victims of violence, the loci of grief, and pieces of a revenge plot, the products of a self-canceling protagonist who slips in and out of madness and coherence at or against his will. However, for the printed play-text, this dramatization of incoherence and madness is negated, simultaneously translated and civilized, preventing Hieronimo from doing what he has in fact done for much of the play: performing incoherence. The bloody spectacle of the murderous playlet, with its coherence restored for the text, is followed by a bloody

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[39] Sacks, Peter. "Where Words Prevail Not: Grief, Revenge, and Language in Kyd and Shakespeare." *ELH*, 49:3 (1982), 580.
[40] "Staging the Vernacular" 215.

deed of revenge on language itself, an infliction of a permanent state of incoherence enacted through tongue-cutting. It seems that the perpetual fracturing of communities carried out by the avenger extends even to linguistic communities, and the respective unities of several languages are violated just as the tongue, the organ and agent of speech, is severed from the body, the part separated from the whole.

Right before Hieronimo bites out his tongue (perhaps the most memorable moment of the play), he reveals his son's corpse on stage for reasons that are not entirely clear. At the playlet's close, Hieronimo breaks character and launches into a lengthy speech in which he in effect summarizes everything that has happened to him so far in justification of revenge. As it turns out, his justification is already explained to an extent by the presence of his son's corpse: "I see your looks urge instance of these words;/ Behold the reason urging me to this:/ *Shows his dead son*" (4.4.87-89). Hieronimo, aware of the gazes of the Spanish and Portuguese royalty, reads these gazes as beckoning some kind of explanation, which he provides by revealing a corpse. Horatio's body here serves as the "reason" for Hieronimo's violent retaliation, "urging" him to take action; the corpse therefore accompanies the verbal justification of revenge, its very presence providing a visual and material reason for the sensational violence that has just occurred.

This moment also implies that Hieronimo, in the midst of pursuing revenge, has not performed the funeral rites for his son. In this case, Horatio's body is not concealed, as Don Andrea's was, but rather thrust quite literally onto the stage to offer some kind of physical justification for Hieronimo's revenge. Instead of the funeral rites, Hieronimo enacts a public spectacle of revenge as a murderous performance and uses his son's body as a part of this spectacle, revealing the corpse publicly as an object charged with violent

and subversive reasoning and meaning, as opposed to the meanings of pleasure and deference that the obsequy connotes.

After the sensational and, to many critics, baffling moment of autoglossotomy,[41] Hieronimo decides his own method of dying when "*he makes signs for a knife to mend his pen*" but chooses instead to stab himself and the Duke, marking the third and final suicide of the play. Both Isabella and Bel-Imperia have already met similar fates, raising the question of why such acts of self-cancelation seem to accompany the enactment or desire of revenge. Considering the concern of the play with representing troubled subjectivity, particularly the phenomenological aspects of Hieronimo's decline, his laments about the loss of his senses, as well as the fact that the violent conclusion, the undoing of the protagonist and the Spanish Court has been predetermined by Revenge all along, the negation of subjectivity that occurs when characters commit suicide reinforces the ambivalence of selfhood that has operated to an extent throughout the entire play, most notably through the words and actions of Hieronimo. In other words, the very status of the autonomous self as such is thrown into question when it is unclear to what extent the subject exercises agency, as is the case with Hieronimo carrying out a predetermined outcome. In the sense that subjectivity and agency are undermined due to such determinism, suicide might be read as consistent with such an undermining, that Hieronimo does not exercise agency but rather, as Erne says, exists as a "puppet,"[42] the vessel of greater forces that act through, and, in this instance, against his body. Alternatively, Hieronimo's suicide could be read as an act of resistance to such a dissolving of subjectivity, a final exercise of agency that ultimately fails by conflating

[41] See Murray 144 and Freeman 99 for discussions of the problems pertaining to Hieronimo's vow to silence and the perceived excessiveness of biting out his tongue.
[42] Erne 97

subject and object through violence. As Cynthia Marshall observes of the prolonged suicides that are staged in John Ford's *The Broken Heart*, "In suicide, the non-coincidence of self and body is illustrated phenomenologically; the suicide's body is simultaneously the object being destroyed and the subject enacting the destruction."[43] Regarding Hieronimo's subjectivity, we find a similar example of the "non-coincidence of self and body" where, as with the conflicting moments of madness and non-madness, contradictory impulses and agencies seem to be functioning at once, and, as with the multiple representations of madness that occur, the audience is left with the interpretive work of discerning whose will Hieronimo ultimately serves.

Hieronimo's sensational spectacles of revenge and suicide are ultimately a fulfillment of a sadomasochistic desire shared between several characters who, despite occupying the same space on the stage and the page, exist in different ontologies. Don Andrea, Bel-Imperia, and Hieronimo all desire the same violent end, yet only Don Andrea, the observer to the entire scene of violence, expresses the pleasure he derives from such violence:

> I now my hopes have ende in their effects,
> When blood and sorrow finish my desires,
> …I, these were spectacles to please my soul.
>
> (4.5.1-2)

This moment confirms the status of revenge as a form of desire and the enactment of revenge as a form of pleasure. "Blood and sorrow" (alternatively, sensational violence) are what "finish" Andreas desires, resulting in a satisfaction that is achieved by simply observing. Like the male reader addressed in the textual announcement, it appears as

[43] Marshall 155

though Andrea is engaged in an active form of seeing/ reading that sheer sensationalism demands.

The sadomasochistic desire for revenge that these characters share seems to operate in the play under a term that implies such desire through its very negation; indeed, several times in the play we hear both Andrea and Hieronimo decry that things remain "unrevenged" (3.14.140; 4.1.41). This delay of revenge is in a sense also a delayed fulfillment of desire, given how both Andrea and Hieronimo express revenge in terms of desire, pleasure, or relief. As much as Kyd's play is concerned with revenge, it seems that the play is filled with anxiety about something referred to as "unrevenge," which might be articulated as the failure to fulfill revenge, the state of preparation for revenge, and the obsessive plotting and solipsism that leads up to revenge. The fear of unrevenge seems to be Hieronimo's most powerful tool of self-motivation, and indeed it appears to be a contributing factor in Isabella's suicide ("Ah ha, thou doest delay their deaths") (4.2.32). Unrevenge (the deferral of satisfaction, the delay of desire, and the negation of the senses) is the state of "negligence" in which Hieronimo appears to spend most of the play, a liminal condition of both madness and not-madness, articulation and disarticulation that facilitates his creative and violent process of achieving the sensational negation of himself and the linguistic and political communities of which he was once a part.

With its heightened concern with both the sensual subject and the complicated role of the voyeur, *The Spanish Tragedy* certainly lives up to broad claims of sensationalism. However, reading the sensational requires, as I've argued, a more nuanced way of approaching scenes of madness, physical and linguistic violence, and voyeurism. As we know from the beginning of the play, violence is predetermined by Revenge; the rest of

the play works toward this end, in which subjectivity itself seems to be unraveling. There appears to be relationship between representations of sensational violence in Kyd's play and the contradictory ways in which subjectivity is both affirmed and negated, particularly with Hieronimo. As Cynthia Marshall observes, this ambivalence toward the autonomous subject is one that characterizes the notion of selfhood at the time:

> The degree to which early modern subjects were conflicted in their emergent selfhood, not just unstable structurally but dynamically and often simultaneously pulled toward opposite extremes of dissolution and coherence, has been downplayed by humanism's developmental emphasis. In fact, the contradiction between autonomy and instability defined the emerging subject. [44]

In *The Spanish Tragedy* we often encounter this contradiction regarding subjectivity, particularly each time that Hieronimo's madness is thrown into question, or the moments in which he seems to have trouble controlling his tongue. Hieronimo embodies this ambivalence of the self, but he is not the only figure to represent troubled subjectivity; Bel-Imperia, who has suffered the loss of two lovers, plays a role that mirrors that of Hieronimo. For both characters, it appears as though the sensational, as a way of experiencing subjectivity and exciting responses from observers, is also simultaneously embraced as a way for the avenger to negate the subject and fulfill his or her most sensual and sadomasochistic desires. Presented with this inherent contradiction toward the self and the senses, as well as the ambivalence with which modes of representation are treated, the reader is left to decide how to interpret such sensationalism, either as a form of mediated pleasure, as absurd or farcical violence, or as an expression of subjectivity that questions its very modes of perceiving and understanding the self and others.

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[44] Marshall 14.

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