At the Limit:
Ethics, Sovereignty, and Subjectivity in
English Revenge Tragedy

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Abstract

At the Limit: Ethics, Sovereignty, and Subjectivity in English Revenge Tragedy

At the Limit offers a new way of conceptualizing the so-called revenge tragedy genre by examining a group of 16th- and 17th-century English “traditional” revenge plays, chronicle plays, dark comedies, epic poems, and elegiac verse. The current understanding of early modern revenge tragedy is indebted to Fredson Bowers who most recently identified the dramatic texts that comprise this genre in 1940. Subsequently, the term “revenge tragedy” has denoted Elizabethan and Jacobean plays that include either a vengeance-driven narrative or spectacular acts of violence. In contrast, my dissertation challenges the boundaries of revenge tragedy as I investigate how the structure of revenge animates early modern literature. By expanding the generic limits, one can better assess how revenge influences early modern culture. I argue that revenge – in its characteristic excess, its disruptive qualities, and its possibility of perverse enjoyment – destabilizes. But it is not simply that revenge engages in subversion; rather, revenge simultaneously undermines and constitutes concepts of early modern culture.

In particular, I examine how the structure of revenge informs and exceeds conceptions of reading (chapter one), ethics (chapter two), sovereignty (chapter three), and subjectivity (chapter four). Casting my reading across generic boundaries, I construct a theory of reading the traumatic spectacle instantiated by revenge in Marlowe’s Edward II and
Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy*, make use of the early modern vagabond to show how Marston’s *Antonio’s Revenge* and Middleton’s *The Revenger’s Tragedy* repudiate ethics and choose a “vagabond aesthetics” that privileges unproductivity, exile, and perpetual motion; bring Beaumont and Fletcher’s *The Maid’s Tragedy* and Tourneur’s *The Atheist’s Tragedy* into conversation with the execution of Charles I to argue that regicidal revenge, perversely enough, preserves and reifies the structure of sovereignty; and examine revenge’s role in shaping the republican subject in Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and his assorted political tracts.
This dissertation is dedicated to Connie and Ed John

and to the memory of Joanne C. King.
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Introduction

In Poor Taste: The Curious Case of Revenge

In the past few years, the genre of revenge tragedy has reemerged from its decades long hiatus from literary criticism. Recent examples of scholarship include Linda Woodbridge’s *English Revenge Drama: Money, Resistance, Equality* and Thomas Rist’s *Revenge Tragedy and the Drama of Commemoration in Reforming England*. Much of this resurgence is indebted to recent interest in political theology and sovereignty – a trend in which part of my own project participates. That said, an aura of ill-defined unseemliness persists nevertheless. Revenge tragedy, despite its current popularity, is appreciated not for its spectacular vengeance but rather in spite of it. Stevie Simkin quips:

> They [revenge plays] are (with some reluctance) permitted to join the established canon of classical works, occasionally dragged out like exotic creatures for a season to be observed by curious audiences and often patronizing theatre critics, and then locked securely away for another ten years. (4)

Of this reaction, Susan Zimmerman observes that “plays of blood and/or revenge foreground an explicit, even outrageous, sensationalism that would seem to preclude serious symbolic import” (13). For those who subscribe to
this notion, aesthetic value and revenge tragedy emerge as mutually exclusive categories.

In rationalizing their distaste, some critics aim to move beyond revenge. For them, the ideal revenge tragedy is one in which there is no revenge. Analyzing The Tempest in Shapes of Revenge, Harry Keyishian valorizes Prospero and his “revengeless revenge,” citing this character as an example of “Shakespeare’s most effective revenger.” One most succeeds at revenge, according to Keyishian, when one does not engage in it. This is not to say, of course, that Keyishian actually moves beyond revenge; he advocates for revenge – “revengeless” or otherwise.

Taking Keyishian’s sentiments one step further, Michael Neill lauds Prospero as a “reformed revenger...whose very name suggests hope for the future (Pro-spero) rather than obsession with the past” (348-49).¹ Neill’s disavowal of revenge stems from a belief that it is both anti-life and anti-future. Unequivocally condemning the behavior of theatrical revengers, Neill writes: “This was what Bacon had in mind when he wrote of ‘vindictive persons liv[ing] the life of witches’ – being possessed, as it were, by the evil spirits of the past, which must in the end undo them” (345). One of the major problems with the structure of revenge, at least according to Neill, is that the avenger is necessarily “undo[ne].”

On this last point, I find myself surprisingly in agreement with Neill. Revenge does undo. But in contrast to the argument put forth by Neill, my dissertation aims to stay with, rather than disavow, that undoing. My project
endeavors, in other words, to show how revenge simultaneously supports and undermines. I contend that revenge functions not unlike a mercenary, operating without loyalties in its radically deconstructive mission. Revenge, as I will argue in this dissertation, is neither inherently “evil” nor “good.” Rather, revenge drives us beyond the structures of binary logic.

But even if one were seduced by the potential of “revengeless revenge” – the hope that revenge, in other words, could be recuperated and “reformed” – problems would continue to plague us. To begin, I question Neill’s claim that Prospero is a “reformed revenger” as his behavior extends to Caliban. While Prospero frees Ariel and forgives his estranged brother as well as the other men who collude in his attempted murder, Caliban’s “pardon” is less than magnanimous. If this pardon is to arrive at all, it occurs only after Caliban redecorates Prospero’s chamber—after, to put it bluntly, Caliban has completed another chore for his master.\(^2\) Indeed, this final glimpse of Caliban is not of a mutinous slave (i.e., the image with which the play begins) but rather of one who has been effectively domesticated and silenced. Responding slavishly to Prospero’s orders, Caliban states: “Ay, that I will; and I’ll be wise hereafter, / And seek for grace. What a thrice-double ass / Was I to take this drunkard for a god, / And worship this dull fool!” (5.1.298-301). Such a tidy turn-of-events ought to give one pause. If Caliban is pardoned at all, Prospero’s “forgiveness” has served only to create a more dedicated servant. Admittedly, Prospero does not harm or murder Caliban – acts demanded by traditional revenge tragedy. Yet this brief example
suggests that revenge might encompass acts that are less dramatic than injury or death.

Even if one insists upon Prospero’s forgiveness, there are still problems in this utopia. Neill writes:

This play [The Tempest] imagines a process by which human beings, through a full remembrance of their past errors, can free themselves from the cycle of revenge – allowing them to move through a series of unburdenings (both literal and metaphorical) toward the blessed oblivion envisaged by a forgiving Prospero: ‘Let us not burden our remembrance with / A heaviness that’s gone’ (5.1.199-200).’ (348)

Recall that, for Neill, this “cycle of revenge” necessarily culminates in the avenger’s undoing. By distancing oneself from the “evil spirits of the past,” one circumvents the self-destructive logic of revenge. But at least one problem remains: to distance oneself from the past (and thereby free oneself from the cycle of revenge), one must move “through a full remembrance of [one’s] past errors,” a remembrance that moves towards a “blessed oblivion.”

According to Neill, one only remembers in order to forget completely.

And what are the consequences of this “blessed oblivion,” these fictive “unburdenings”? Consider the “heaviness” of Caliban, who figures as the abject remainder of this story. Not for nothing, Caliban is the only one who recalls and repeats the history of this island. As Neill sanitizes revenges, he overlooks the problems posed by Caliban in order to turn The Tempest into a
tale of redemption. *If* redemption occurs at all, it only occurs via the evacuation of differing and dissenting voices. Peace is achieved only by colonizing Calibans and silencing their histories altogether.

From the perspective of this project, revenge inheres in the voices of those who resist dominant narratives or even meaning altogether. I locate such examples in the first lines of Caliban when he resists Prospero's threats: “This island’s mine, by Sycorax my mother, / Which thou tak’st from me” (1.2.334-35); in Aaron’s words at the conclusion of *Titus Andronicus* as he rages unrepentant: “Ten thousand worse [evils] than ever yet I did / Would I perform if I might have my will. / If one good deed in all my life I did / I do repent it from my very soul” (5.3.186-89); and, *in particular*, in Iago's “motiveless malignancy” and eerie silence: “Demand me nothing. What you know, you know. / From this time forth I never will speak word” (5.2.309-10). Revenge emerges from that which does not make sense, that which defies logic, that which is purposeless.

**The Culture of Early Modern Revenge**

While some critics and audiences might cringe at the spectacular violence of English revenge tragedy, Elizabethan audiences were no strangers to ritualized violence, as many witnessed highly theatrical executions. An Englishman found guilty of treason in 1589, for instance, was subjected to the following punishment:

> From thence to the place of Execution, and there to be hanged until he were half dead, his Members to be cut off, his Bowels
to be cast into the Fire, his Head to be cut off, his Quarters to be divided into four several parts, and to be bestowed in four several Places.  

The details of such executions are no less grisly than the violence demanded by, for instance, the stage directions of *Titus Andronicus*. Moreover, the violence of the historical and theatrical worlds were not divided but mutually reinforced each other. Examining the uncomfortable proximity of the real-life executions at Tyburn to graphic theatrical deaths, Molly Easo Smith argues that “the relationship between theater and the scaffold worked both ways: if dramatic deaths could suggest public maiming and executions, the latter could as easily and as vividly evoke its theatrical counterparts” (219).

Indeed, if we continue to examine *Titus Andronicus* as a case study, the contemporary response to this play suggests the pleasure with which audiences took in these spectacles of vengeance. According to Jonathan Bate, *Titus Andronicus* “was hugely successful in its own time,” and he conjectures that “it perhaps did more than any other play to establish its author’s reputation as a dramatist.” Unfortunately, individual reactions to this revenge tragedy are limited, but one does remain from Jacques Petit, a Gascon servant and tutor in the household of Sir John Harington, who watched the January 1, 1596 production most likely performed by the Shakespeare’s Chamberlain’s Men. Petit writes of how “‘le monstre’ (the spectacle) [was] the best part of Shakespeare’s play.” The popularity of *Titus*
Andronicus, moreover, was not anomalous, for revenge tragedies preoccupied Elizabethan and Jacobean spectators. Other popular early modern revenge tragedies include The Spanish Tragedy, Hamlet, and The Malcontent. In particular, The Spanish Tragedy enjoyed great longevity on the early modern stage; its extensive revisions and performance history ensured that this play remained in the public eye through the seventeenth century.¹⁰

Though vengeance was sanctioned neither by church nor state, it was not uniformly condemned in early modern culture, and this ambivalence will be discussed at length in my second chapter. But there were other reasons – beyond moral squeamishness – for which revenge was discouraged. As Eleanor Prosser observes in Hamlet and Revenge, “psychological treatises by Bright, Grimestone, and Burton present the typical Renaissance view that physical health is dependent on the moderation of passion” (9). In The Anatomy of Melancholy (1621), for example, Robert Burton details the health consequences of anger. Excessive emotion, according to Burton, disrupts the body’s equilibrium and potentially destroys the subject altogether. Insanity, then, emerges as one of the effects of revenge: “[Ajax] was easily moved to anger. [He] had no other beginning of his madness; and Charles the sixth, that Lunatick French King, fell into this misery, out of the extremity of his passion, desire of revenge and malice, ‘incensed against the Duke of Britain, he could neither eat, drink, nor sleep for some days together” (153).

Still others advocate an occasional dose of vengeance. George Puttenham takes this stance in the highly influential Arte of Poesie (1589).
Here, he advises the cautious employment of revenge against equals rather than subordinates:

Also, not to be passionate for small detriments or offenses, nor to be a revenger of them but in cases of great injurie, and specially of dishonors: and therein to be very sterne and vindictive, for that fauours of Princely magnanimitie: not to seeke revenge vpon base and obscure persons, ouer whom the conquest is not glorious, nor the victorie honourable. (3.24.50)

Illustrating this maxim of "glorious" and "honourable" vengeance, Puttenham makes use of an anecdote from the coronation of Queen Elizabeth I. One knight, who had offended her as Lady Elizabeth, sought pardon to avoid imprisonment in the Tower. As Puttenham retells the event, Queen Elizabeth assured the knight that he need not fear further consequences for his past actions: “Do you not know that we are descended of the Lion, whose nature is not to harme or pray vpon the mouse, or any other such small vermin?” (3.24.50). Even as Puttenham makes use of this example as a disavowal of revenge, it exists as a rhetorical mode of revenge, one that skillfully and publically emasculates the knight for his bad behavior. And by posing this insult as a rhetorical question, Queen Elizabeth extracts a verbal assent from the knight, an assent that admits his inferiority before Her Majesty.

Of course there are clear distinctions to be made between cutting someone publically and cutting off someone’s head. There is no doubt that Queen Elizabeth chose to exercise leniency here. But I also want to attend to
those legible moments of aggression and animosity, moments that substitute for death or, in this example, imprisonment. I wish to expand, in other words, the definition of revenge such that it includes both the deliciously malicious and the tyrannically good.

Despite these early modern anecdotes, which gesture towards a cultural interest in revenge, the term “revenge tragedy” is a twentieth-century construction. In “The Relations of Hamlet to Contemporary Revenge Plays,” A.H. Thorndike links seemingly disparate plays such as Shakespeare’s Hamlet, Kyd’s The Spanish Tragedy, and Marston’s Antonio’s Revenge through the creation of the “revenge tragedy” genre in 1902. In Philosophies of Retribution, Christopher Crosbie points out the primacy of Hamlet in Thorndike’s construction of the revenge tragedy genre. He explains:

Rather than simply situating Hamlet within the context of similar drama, that is, Thorndike, projects Shakespeare’s most famous play onto other texts, creating in one motion a coherent genre but one imperfectly suited to other plays. If Hamlet sits comfortably within the generic type, it does so because Shakespeare’s play provides the very conventions for the genre itself. Hamlet, in short, is the type. (Crosbie 4)

If Hamlet is the quintessential revenge tragedy, the question then becomes the following: how does one read the “procrustean position” of other revenge plays (Crosbie 4)?
Nearly forty years later, Fredson Bowers expanded upon Thorndike’s article, embarking on the first book length study of this genre, and explored these “other” revenge plays. Scientifically approaching the matter of classification, Bowers defines the genre in his seminal work *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy*:

Revenge constitutes the main action of the play in the sense that the audience is chiefly interested in the events which lead to the necessary revenge for murder, and then in the revenger’s actions in accordance with his vow. The revenge must be the cause of the catastrophe, and its start must not be delayed beyond the crisis. ‘Revenge tragedy’ customarily (but by no means necessarily) portrays the ghosts of the murdered urging revenge, a hesitation on the part of the avenger, a delay in proceeding to this vengeance, and his feigned and actual madness. (64-5)

The parenthetical aside, which erupts just as Bowers attempts to define this genre, symptomatizes an undercurrent of unease with this definition. Indeed, even his use of “customarily” qualifies this definition, adding further weight to the ambiguity revealed by that parenthetical aside.

While Bowers has dominated the field of revenge tragedy for decades, his discomfort with the genre has been similarly influential. More recently, Stevie Simkin has observed that
the term ‘revenge tragedy’ has become something of a catch-all term for a large proportion of the tragic drama of the Jacobean period; a homogenizing tendency has traditionally classed any play that either includes a vengeance-themed narrative thread or indulges in spectacular and multiple acts of violence as a revenge tragedy. (4 Early)

Though Simkin makes an excellent point regarding the vagueness of this term, his assessment does little to define further, much less challenge, Bowers’ canon. His analysis, like all other criticism, makes use of the same plays set forth as “revenge plays” by Thorndike and Bowers.11

Some critics sidestep this monumental influence by applying various methodologies to the canon. Feminist criticism has proven especially influential. Alison Findlay, for instance, calls Renaissance revenge tragedy a particularly “‘feminine genre’ because, among other reasons, it violates the Law of the Father, resists the practices of patriarchy, and ‘promotes insubordination’ even when the avenger is male” (Liebler 362). More recently, Liberty Stanavage generates an alternative narrative by attending to female revengers and the accompanying gendering of revenge in her dissertation, “Domesticating Vengeance: The Female Revenger in Early Modern Drama 1566-1700.” In addition to applying diverse methodologies, other critics explore the origin of the genre itself. Anne Pippin Burnett’s Revenge in Attic and Later Tragedy and John Kerrigan’s Revenge Tragedy: Aeschylus to Armageddon best epitomize this trend. In their respective
projects, they view the English revenge tragedy genre as a simple product of its Latin and Greek predecessors without considering fully the genre’s specific features as determined by its cultural and historical moment. But, more to the point, neither Burnett nor Kerrigan weighs in on questions of canon. Indeed, even when critics sidestep these questions, they nevertheless choose the canon set forth by Thorndike and Bowers. In other words, even in approaching the plays as individual works, applying diverse methodologies, or attending to historical concerns, prior critical projects accept and make use of a canon that is, at best, quite limited.

Unlike these scholars, Christopher Crosbie confronts the critical influence of Bowers and Thorndike. Shifting his focus to philosophy, Crosbie demonstrates the compatibility of reading vengeance and philosophy together. Though Crosbie produces exciting readings of early modern philosophy, his selection of plays remains conservative. In other words, even as Crosbie rightly points to the problems of this genre, his work – through the selection of texts – recuperates those same issues. Could, for instance, the revenge tragedy genre encompass texts other than drama? What knowledge might be produced by attending to the structure of revenge rather than a set of predetermined plays?

To explore these questions, my dissertation challenges the boundaries of revenge tragedy as I investigate how the structure of revenge animates early modern literature. Moving beyond the drama canonized by Bowers, my dissertation offers a new way of conceptualizing the so-called revenge
tragedy genre by examining a group of 16th- and 17th-century English “traditional” revenge plays, chronicle plays, dark comedies, epic poetry, and elegiac verse. The texts span 1592-1674. By expanding the generic limits, one can better assess how revenge influences early modern culture. I will argue that revenge – in its characteristic excess, its disruptive qualities, and its possibility of perverse enjoyment – destabilizes and contradicts. In particular, I examine how the structure of revenge informs and exceeds conceptions of reading (chapter one), ethics (chapter two), sovereignty (chapter three), and subjectivity (chapter four). But it is not simply that revenge subverts these concepts; rather, revenge simultaneously undermines and constitutes them. Revenge, in other words, functions as a deconstructive agent.

Because much of this dissertation intervenes in ongoing theoretical discussions, I aim to demonstrate the compatibility of theory with historicist approaches to early modern drama. For instance, utilizing primary texts such as James I’s proclamations to Parliament, I show how Giorgio Agamben’s notion of the sovereign – insofar as the sovereign both instantiates the law and remains outside it as the sole exception, an exception that becomes the rule – is always already present in the historical materials. Despite naysayers, theory is anything but an anachronism in this field; instead, theory emerges as a lingua franca of sorts. Though I incorporate a variety of theoretical tools – from feminist to post-structuralist, I work predominantly from a Lacanian psychoanalytic framework. I do so because this theoretical
lineage affords not only the greatest freedom in considering such concepts as “desire” and “ethics,” but also because some of the most rigorous conversations concerning a specifically queer ethical project have been generated by this approach. Finally, I utilize psychoanalysis not to psychoanalyze literary characters or authors, but to explore the text’s unconscious – the portions, in other words, that resist meaning-making. Given the interpretative lessons of psychoanalysis, I employ the skills of close reading in my dissertation; from theoretical essays to historical documents, the text itself remains my primary focus.

My first chapter, “Shock and Awe,” takes up these concerns and opens with questions of reading. Quite simply, how does one read the spectacle of revenge – a spectacle that is nothing if not shocking? As Stevie Simkin writes, “revenge tragedies...still have the capacity to shock and their power inheres in something greater than mere spectacles of death and cruelty” (19). Yet one must wonder: what is the source of this shock? And how might this affect textual interpretation? In Inwardness and Theatre, Katharine Eisaman Maus explains that “spectacle depends upon, sometimes, betrays, but never fully manifests a truth that remains shrouded, indiscernible, or ambiguous” (210). For Maus, the shock of the spectacle remains singularly indebted to its veil. But what occurs when the spectacle is ostensibly unveiled? Reading Thomas Kyd’s The Spanish Tragedy (1592) alongside Christopher Marlowe’s Edward II (1594), I explore how one might read the “shocking” revenge tragedy spectacle. When encountering these dramatic corpses, one must consider
how these spectacles facilitate salient textual disruptions. What is *shocking* about the revenge spectacle, I argue, is that vengeance reveals the fissures in signification. In contrast to critics and characters who attempt to diminish this gap – to fill it up, in other words, with more language – I posit that this linguistic chasm *is* the terrifying spectacle, a chasm that ought not be filled with more content.

My second chapter, “Vagabond Aesthetics,” continues to explore the deconstructive aspects of revenge as it relates to ethics. Rather than categorizing an act of revenge as “ethical” or “unethical,” my argument investigates how early modern revenge – in its characteristic excess and penchant for circulation – radicalizes ethics. And for two of the major early modern ethical frameworks, Protestant Christianity and Aristotelian ethos, revenge poses a significant problem. Theatrical revenge was poised to make use of this ambivalence. While early modern revenge tragedy categorically demands the disposal of the revengers, Thomas Middleton’s *The Revenger’s Tragedy* (1609) and John Marston’s *Antonio’s Revenge* (1599-1600), two dark comedies, stand in stark contrast to the canon as they parody and invert this convention. *Antonio’s Revenge*, for example, offers a radical revision insofar as the revengers are celebrated rather than executed. Moreover, these dark comedies refuse to align themselves with an ethical framework; they refuse, in other words, to condemn the excessive acts of revenge around which the plots circle.
I posit that ethical subversion emerges as a product of the plays’ participation in comedy, a genre that exacerbates the slippage between signifier and signified. Making use of Alenka Zupančič’s The Odd One In, I show how the peripatetic movement of comedy coalesces in the figure of the early modern vagabond. Arguing that the vagabond is critically aligned with the revengers, I show how these plays repudiate ethics in favor of “vagabond aesthetics” – a form of aesthetics that privileges unproductivity, exile, and perpetual motion.

My penultimate chapter, “Le Roi Ne Meurt Jamais,” extends my reading of revenge’s destabilizing and deconstructive force as it turns to the issue of sovereignty. From Gorboduc to Hamlet, and from The Spanish Tragedy to The Revenger’s Tragedy, the sovereign himself is explicitly under attack in English revenge tragedies. Interestingly, this phenomenon has not attracted sustained critical attention. In this chapter, then, I analyze the ritualized violence against the sovereign’s body in the decades preceding the criminalization and execution of Charles I in Cyril Tourneur’s The Atheist’s Tragedy (1611) and Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher’s The Maid’s Tragedy (1619). In contrast to the critical consensus that revenge threatens the crown, I argue that vengeance – which arrives in the forms of atheism and regicide – only seemingly undermines the monarchical structure.

To understand these failed attempts, I examine the psychoanalytic characterization of perversion. Perversion adheres to and enforces the very letter of the law. I contend that regicidal revenge is not a preparation for but
an antidote against this real-life possibility, demonstrating how a desire to
purify the position of the King motivates the assassination plots in these
texts. What’s at stake in such an argument is one of revenge tragedy’s best-
kept secrets: the latent conservatism of the seemingly radical attacks on the
crown.

Turning from literary regicide to the aftermath of the Civil Wars and
execution of Charles I, I examine the literature of the Commonwealth in my
final chapter, “The Republic and the Revenge Machine.” Here, I explore the
manner in which revenge drives post-execution literature and subjects. To
begin, I delve into the literary cult of Charles I, a collection of commemorative
and elegiac poetry on his martyrdom. These selections include John Quarles’
Regale Lectum Miseriae, A Coffin for King Charles, Henry King’s A Deepe Groan,
and Monumentum Regale. Vengeance infuses this literary cult, but it is a
phenomenon that has gone unstudied. In this first set of texts, then, I
consider the relation of revenge to issues of temporality. These texts, I argue,
illustrate how the revenge act is indebted or, perhaps more accurately,
doomed to a repetition compulsion of sorts. Not only does repetition betray a
sense of failure or incompletion (e.g., in a psychoanalytic sense), it also
creates a past that is always already present. Or, to put it differently, the
repetitious revenge project freezes time; progress comes to a grinding halt.
Charles I is always and forever more dying.

Yet a paradox emerges in the elegiac verse: insofar as revenge
demands a repeated action that maintains a painful present, it also
constructs a telos such that the revenge act may be approached in the future. Even divine or filial retribution – heavily relied upon in the royalist literary circles – operates in such a way that the revenge act is anticipatory. The construction of the future emerges as a means by which royalists guarantee victory over their oppressors. Tomorrow, in other words, promises success.

But what of a failed future? Failure enters the equation through Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and Satan’s impossible project of revenge. How, then, do we understand Satan’s refusal to stop playing the game even though he realizes it is a game that he will ultimately lose? What, in other words, is the purpose of Satan’s repetitious revenge? To address those questions, I show how Satan’s narcissistic reproductions of himself are critical to his revenge project. Moreover, this narcissism, I argue, extends beyond *Paradise Lost* and characterizes republican subjectivity itself.

To make this argument, I analyze the political writings of Milton. My aim here is not to pathologize this developing subject, but to understand the manner in which revenge – through narcissism – informs republican subjectivity. Linking narcissism to the death drive, I argue that the structure of revenge illuminates that drive. Making use of Freudian and Lacanian definitions, I suggest that the death drive accomplishes two contradictory objectives. On the one hand, the drive unleashes chaos. And, on the other, this same drive moves the subject towards stasis and stillness. With this framework in mind, I examine the presence of narcissism and this contradictory drive in Milton’s three major republican texts: *The Tenure of*
Kings and Magistrates, The Second Defence of the English People, and The Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth. If narcissism becomes the model by which the republican subject establishes himself, might we understand Satan's repetitious revenge project – a project that is invested in futility and destruction – as a manifestation of that drive?

If so, the triangulation of narcissism, the death drive, and revenge informs not only early modern republicanism but also its democratic derivatives in our current world. As a point of departure, I would offer that revenge is a prominent presence in much of our current political upheaval. Consider, for example, the ongoing Arab Uprisings, the international Occupy Wall Street movement, and even the August 2011 UK riots. Prompted by iniquity, these events seem not unmotivated by revenge as they aim to destabilize systems of oppression as well as punish those who have benefited from and enforced them. This is not to simplify, of course, the complex motives behind these movements or to neatly divide the issue between “oppressor” and “oppressed.” Rather, throughout this dissertation, I will argue that revenge complicates and contradicts. But by exploring the manifestations of revenge in this project – rather than limiting my inquiry to a handful of canonical plays – one will be better able to locate the ways in which revenge structures our existence. And this possibility, perhaps, leads to the final question: is there an outside or alternative to revenge?
Chapter One

Shock and Awe: Reading the Spectacle of the Real

Introduction

Whether unbelievably grotesque, curiously campy, or tragic to the limits of patience, the revenge tragedy spectacle is rife with shock value. As Stevie Simkin observes, “Revenge tragedies, now so infrequently staged, still have the capacity to shock and their power inheres in something greater than mere spectacles of death and cruelty” (19). Yet what does it mean “to shock”? Though “shock” is a term frequently bandied around in discussions of the genre, scholarship has not seen fit to examine it much further. Moreover, what is the source of this shock, a shock that surpasses “mere spectacles of death and cruelty”? In Inwardness and Theatre in the English Renaissance, Katharine Eisaman Maus hypothesizes that “spectacle depends upon, sometimes betrays, but never fully manifests a truth that remains shrouded, indiscernible, or ambiguous” (210). For Maus, the shock of the spectacle remains in a liminal space, for the paradox is that the shock simultaneously reveals and conceals. To examine this phenomenon further, I shall investigate the ways in which one reads the “shocking” spectacle. After I establish this theoretical framework, I will then focus on instances in which the spectacle is ostensibly revealed to its audience in two revenge tragedies: Kyd’s The Spanish Tragedy (1592) and Marlowe’s Edward II (1594).
For Walter Benjamin, shock emerges as a malaise of modernity, and his formulation seems particularly fitting, especially as many locate the origins of modernity in the early modern period. In “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Benjamin explains the shock of film: “No sooner has his [the movie spectator’s] eye grasped a scene than it is already changed. It cannot be arrested....The spectator’s process of association in view of these images is indeed interrupted by their constant, sudden change. This constitutes the shock effect of the film” (1183). Though a portion of the cinematic “shock effect” is indebted to the rapidly transitioning visual field, the disruptive nature of these transitions – the fact that these images cannot be understood in “association” – constitutes the majority of the “shock effects.” As soon as the meaning of one image is “grasped,” the following image dislocates this tenuous grip of comprehension. This theorization of shock, grounded in a resistance to signification, will serve as a useful foundation as we encounter the spectacle of revenge tragedies. To shock is to do more than elicit gasps of surprise from the audience. To shock is to render meaning-making impossible.

But why is an analysis of the corpse a useful means by which to examine the shocking spectacle of revenge tragedies? In After Theory, Terry Eagleton explains: “Dead bodies are indecent. They proclaim with embarrassing candour the secret of all matter, that it has no obvious relation to meaning. The moment of death is the moment when meaning haemorrhages from us” (164). Similarly addressing the corpse’s “meaning” as
lack of meaning, Karin Coddon argues that "the corpse is at once a thing, materially present yet marked by the absolute absence of subjectivity—nothing, a signifier severed from its referent" (125). When encountering these dramatic corpses, one must consider how these spectacles facilitate a salient textual disruption.\(^\text{13}\) If these macabre spectacles signify textual disruptions insofar as they are unconnected to meaning, how could we read them? Is this an impossible project? More to the point, with what do we grapple when we encounter the spectacle of the corpse? As I investigate recent theories of reading to understand the shock of the Renaissance revenge tragedy spectacle, I simultaneously consider how one reads absence, illegibility, disruption, and non-meaning—all of which are produced by the presence of the onstage corpse. Though some readers might object to my seemingly "anachronistic" methodology, I would remind them that the interpretative challenges demonstrated by revenge tragedy spectacles are not limited to the early modern period. Rather, questions about how one should (or can) read textual gaps are of utmost importance for all literary critics in any period.

**Current Critical Reading Practices**

If we understand the corpse as a locus of meaninglessness, we are left with some difficult questions. How does one approach a no-thing? How does one read non-meaning? Part of this desire to encounter the threatening site of non-meaning symptomatizes what Alain Badiou terms the “passion for the Real” (la passion du réel). Writing of the penchant for *real* Reality in *The Century*, Badiou identifies it as a key feature of the twentieth century (32).
Characterized by a “harshness of violence” that becomes the very “sign of [its] authenticity,” the Real is “the price to be paid for peeling off the deceptive layers of reality” (Žižek 6). Given the preponderance of corpses littering the Renaissance stage and the painstaking attention to their violent death scenes, one must wonder if such stunts manifest this “passion for the Real,” a passion that seems arbitrarily limited to the twentieth century in Badiou’s construction. Furthermore, the critical desire to read the spectacle of the corpse emerges as part and parcel of this passion as well. To read for the corpse is to read for the Real.

To confront the interpretive obstacle of the unveiled corpse, one option is to acknowledge the significant meaninglessness and to let the illegible remain so. One cannot make sense, in other words, of the spectacle of the unveiled corpse nor does one attempt to do so. Such an approach is akin to Paul De Man’s theorization of irony. In “The Rhetoric of Temporality,” De Man explains that

[irony] can only restate and repeat it [irony’s inauthenticity] on an increasingly conscious level, but it remains endlessly caught in the impossibility of making this knowledge applicable to the empirical world...the temporal void that [irony] reveals is the same void we encountered when we found allegory always implying an unreachable anteriority.

(218)
Through this void in which we are “endlessly caught,” we encounter irony. From a Lacanian psychoanalytic perspective, this void is analogous to the Real. The shocking spectacle – in the form of the unveiled corpse – remains illegible precisely because it is the Thing, the kernel of the Real. But there are limitations to this interpretative practice precisely because it refuses to yield an interpretation. Mystification – the inevitable recourse to the Real – becomes a frustrating tautology of sorts; we can only “restate and repeat” the impossibility of meaning-making. Yet this restatement and repetition paradoxically affords legibility to the spectacle insofar as one names it “illegibile.” Thus, even mystification cannot stay properly mystified.

To examine the second critical reading practice, let us turn briefly to Shakespeare’s “The Rape of Lucrece,” a poem that locates the origins of the Roman Republic in an act of revenge on behalf of an assaulted woman. Addressing the spectacle of Lucrece’s corpse, critics and characters alike impose their own desired readings onto it. Most immediately, Lucrece becomes the battle cry of the Republic: “They did conclude to bear dead Lucrece thence, / To show her bleeding body thorough Rome, / And so to publish Tarquin’s foul offense” (1850-52). But Collatine and Lucretius see little more than a property dispute: “‘My daughter’ and ‘my wife’ with clamours filled / The dispersed air, who, holding Lucrece’ life, / Answered their cries, ‘my daughter’ and ‘my wife” (1804-06). Feminist critics such as Nancy Vickers and Jane O. Newman read Lucrece’s corpse as a consequence
of patriarchal norms whereas other feminist critics point to her corpse as a moment of resistance against the patriarchy.

The macabre remnants of Gloriana in Thomas Middleton’s *The Revenger's Tragedy* function similarly insofar as the fetishized exposure of her bones perpetuates Vindice’s drive for revenge. Her gaping maw, for instance, becomes the very vehicle by which the old Duke is poisoned. While Lars Engle explains that this gruesome treatment of the corpse “uses over-the-top violence to prompt awareness of the omnipresence of power and oppression,” still others assert the figurative relation between Gloriana and Queen Elizabeth (1299). Nevertheless, one can see how these corpsely spectacles – Lucrece or Gloriana – evolve into the inexhaustible banner under which any manner of causes or critical practices may rally.

In the critical approaches to these texts, the tireless attempt to make meaning of the corpse – a spectacle that defies meaning – demonstrates the limits of allegory. By allegory, I refer to De Man’s definition of it as “a sign that refers to one specific meaning and thus exhausts its suggestive potentialities once it has been deciphered” (200). Allegory, in other words, “has run its full course” (Gadamer 70; de Man 200). Whereas irony refuses to close the gap opened up by the Real, allegory sews up the hole by making it mean. Thus, allegory tames the threat of meaninglessness embodied by the corpse.

Related to allegory, paranoid reading practices similarly make a “nothing” into “something.” Coined by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “paranoid
reading” is indebted to a “hermeneutics of suspicion,”14 but despite paranoia’s connotations, it does not signify a “pathologizing diagnosis” (Touching 126). Rather, paranoid reading is characterized by the “knowing, anxious, paranoid determination that no horror, however apparently unthinkable, shall ever come to the reader as new” (Touching 146). In short, paranoia is all about preparation for the expected-unexpected, and no detail is insignificant.15

Sedgwick leads the ranks as she articulates her problems with this normative reading practice in “You’re So Paranoid You Probably Think This Essay is About You.” Interpreting paranoia from a Kleinian position, she explains:

The paranoid position – understandably marked by hatred, envy, and anxiety – is a position of terrible alertness to the dangers posed by the hateful and envious part-objects that one defensively projects into, carves out of, and ingests from the world around one. (Touching 128)

This antagonistic posture functions as a defense against surprise. Though paranoid readers are nothing if not nervous, they attempt to diminish this anxiety by staving off surprise. Paranoid reading normalizes the text by constraining its threatening illegibility and by reducing it to something more legible, more manageable.

Though admirably careful in their attention to detail, paranoid readers force an overarching interpretation to confirm and to conform to
their "delusions." And at such moments, one recognizes the critical
limitations of the paranoid reading position for the literary critic: if
everything can be assimilated into the paranoiac’s totalizing argument, one
does not produce arguments; one merely confirms delusions. Articulating the
“leftover question following the paranoid reading,” Sedgwick asks: “What
would we know then that we don’t already know?” (Touching 126). Not
much, it seems.

As an alternative to paranoia, Sedgwick introduces her second
practice of reading – reparative reading. Theorizing this practice from a
Kleinian perspective, Sedgwick aligns reparative reading with the depressive
position, “the position from which it is possible in turn to use one’s own
resources to assimilate or ‘repair’ the murderous part-objects into something
like a whole” (Touching 128). Whereas paranoid reading enacts a certain
kind of violence on the text, reparative reading attempts to recuperate it. And
whereas paranoia has been associated with homophobia within the Freudian
framework, reparation has been understood as a distinctly queer modality.
As Lauren Berlant explains, “the aim of reparative criticism is to sustain the
unfinished and unthought thoughts about desire that are otherwise defeated
by the roar of conventionality or heteroculture” (73). Reparative criticism
heals the textual violence perpetuated by the “paranoid optic” that forces
queer experience into “invisibility or illegibility” (Touching 147). Finally, the
reparative reader is unfazed by surprise: “To read from a reparative position
is to surrender the knowing, anxious paranoid determination that no horror,
however apparently unthinkable, shall ever come to the reader as new; to a reparatively positioned reader, it can seem realistic and necessary to experience surprise” (Touching 146).

Like paranoid reading, the alternative of reparative reading that Sedgwick offers seems vexed. Though I wholeheartedly support the intention behind this alternative reading practice, in addition to its queer politics, much of reparative reading merely recapitulates the paranoid reading structure against which it so forcefully argues. Consider Paul Kelleher’s elaboration of reparative reading in which he writes that

the queer theoretical appropriation of paranoia as a way to apprehend the secret subject of modern sexuality overlooks constituents, such as emotion, affect, and drive, that are not exclusively, or even largely, cognitively based: what gets occluded, then, is the affective subject of sensibility. (149)

Ultimately, Kelleher argues for an exposure of the “affective subject of sensibility.” Despite his critique of paranoia’s apprehension of the “secret subject of modern sexuality,” Kelleher’s argument overlooks the way in which reparative reading utilizes the paranoid practice of exposure insofar as it seeks out “what gets occluded.” The only difference in Kelleher’s formulation is that paranoid reading exposes secrets while reparative reading exposes affect. It is in this way that reparative reading bears an uncanny resemblance to paranoid reading. The two positions are, thus, not that dissimilar, despite what advocates of reparative reading see as the
utopian possibility of queer reparation. Indeed, Kelleher’s argument demonstrates the gravitational pull of the paranoid practice of reading. To reach escape velocity, we need to attempt an alternative that does not merely aim to expose what has been occluded.18

By turning our attention to what is in excess rather than what is absent, we might meet with more success. Outlining the characteristics of reparative reading, Sedgwick points to the ways in which it has been considered too “aestheticizing,” as if the reparative motive, from the perspective of the paranoid reader, is far too invested in the stylistic aspects of the text (Touching 150). To put it differently, “surplus beauty” and “surplus stylistic investment” characterize reparative criticism (150). Yet it is difficult to extricate style from pleasure, for style is pleasure. As Roland Barthes articulates in The Pleasure of the Text, what it searches for (in a perspective of bliss) are the pulsional incidents, the language lined with flesh, a text where we can hear the grain of the throat, the patina of consonants, the voluptuousness of vowels, a whole carnal stereophony: the articulation of the tongue, not that of the meaning of language.

(66-7)

For the reparative reader, attentive to the admonishment that “reparative motives...are about pleasure,” Sedgwick’s pleasure is not pleasure enough. Though Sedgwick’s theorization of reparative reading gestures toward pleasure in an abstract manner, her argument stops short of theorizing an
excessive pleasure that is inextricable from the text. She fails, in other words, to make good on her promise of pleasure. By placing Barthes’ work alongside Sedgwick’s, I will prolong the pleasures of reparative reading. Barthes introduces the shift from the austere pleasures of the obsessive meaning-making of the paranoid reader to the other, fuller pleasures of the embodied text, a flickering tongue that penetrates “into my ear: it granulates, it crackles, it caresses, it grates, it cuts, it comes: that is bliss” (67). This bliss to which Barthes refers is beyond pleasure, akin to jouissance. Might we expand Sedgwick’s pleasure into something more to theorize more rigorously this reparative practice?

Fleshing out reparative reading, Sedgwick writes that the “desire of a reparative impulse, on the other hand, is additive and accretive” (“Paranoid” 27-28). For our purposes, I wish to focus on the qualities of addition and accretion; there is, in other words, something more to reparative reading. Yet what is this more if not jouissance? In On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge: Book XX, Lacan explicates the position of woman: “It’s not because she is not-wholly in the phallic function that she is not there at all. She is not not at all there. She is there in full. But there is something more” (74). This more is feminine jouissance as the feminine position imparts a surplus jouissance. Barthes’ theorization of bliss in The Pleasure of the Text is not unlike Lacan’s concept of jouissance: “The other edge is the other delight: more, more, still more! one more word, one more celebration...[the text] is the pledge of continuous jubilation. The moment when by its very
excess verbal pleasure chokes and reels into bliss” (8). Even Sedgwick grants a degree of surplus in her theorization of the pleasures of reparative reading: “The glue of surplus beauty, surplus stylistic investment, unexplained upwellings of threat, contempt, and longing cements together and animates the amalgam of powerful part-objects” (Touching 150). Comparing the reparative reader to Proust, Sedgwick writes that “the reparative reader ‘helps himself again and again’” (Touching 150). There is always more in reparative practices.

But in certain ways, Sedgwick’s theorization of this pleasure is conflicted as she attempts to confine and constrain its unwieldiness: “There is the additional opportunity of experimenting with a vocabulary that will do justice to a wide affective range...it can also be reifying and, indeed, coercive to have only one, totalizing model of positive affect always in the same featured position” (Touching 145). While she admirably attempts to expand the vocabulary with which reparative readers may articulate this wide range of positive affect with a proliferation of alternatives, she simultaneously bars the possibility of these items in a surprising moment of heteronormative Puritanism against a host of extremes: "ecstasy, sublimity, self-shattering, jouissance, suspicion, abjection, knowingness, horror, grim satisfaction, or righteous indignation” (146). For my purposes, I am most troubled by her blacklisting of jouissance (emphasized by her italicization of the word), for jouissance is neither totalizing nor non-totalizing.21 It is outside the totalizing system of the Symbolic. Nor is jouissance an affect, for affect presupposes a
subject that can feel whereas jouissance destroys subjectivity altogether. Jouissance is pleasure in excess to the point of pain; to think of it as affect is to bind a boundless bliss.

Though Sedgwick's theoretical work rightly urges us away from the academy-wide practice of paranoid meaning-making, she fails to usher in a useful alternative. By excising the encounter with the Real, reparative reading repairs the textual dissonance we will see embodied by the unveiled corpse. And if reading for the corpse is reading for the Real, one must embark upon a method of reading that accommodates, rather than assimilates, textual disruption. In contrast to Sedgwick's conclusions, I wish to reincorporate the Real – in the form of jouissance – into my reading of revenge. Jouissance, as a radical self-shattering, emerges as the antithesis of reparation, and given that I aim to address the disruption heralded by the spectacle, it seems all the more fitting to examine a potential reading practice which is itself indebted to the grisly intrusion of the Real. Having laid out my theoretical project in this section, I will return to the reading practice of jouissance in the concluding pages of this chapter. In the meantime, I turn from a theoretical discussion of reading practices to one of theatrical encounters with the unveiled corpse.

**Zizek and Artaud: Pushing the Limits of Theater**

The extremes from which Sedgwick problematically shies are taken up by Antoin Artaud in *The Theatre and its Double* when he envisions theatre as a “redeeming epidemic.” Like the scourge of the Bubonic Plague, the highest
form of theater reveals truth and authenticity even as Artaud problematically presupposes the presence of both: “And finally from a human view point we can see that theatre action is as beneficial as the plague, impelling us to see ourselves as we are, making the masks fall and divulging our world's lies, aimlessness, meanness, and even two-facedness” (22). Yet theater no longer aspires to this extreme, for it has lost its necessary shock value. Amusingly enough, Artaud credits Renaissance theatre with this dramatic degeneration: “Shakespeare himself is responsible for this aberration and decline, this isolationist concept of theatre, holding that a stage performance ought not to affect the public, or that a projected image should not cause a shock to the anatomy, leaving an indelible impression on it” (57). Because performances no longer administer shocks to their spectators, this state of subdued theatre, from early modern England onwards, remains complicit in systems of oppression: “Moreover, rarely does the debate rise to a social level or do we question our social or ethical system. Our theatre never goes so far as to ask itself whether by choice this social or ethical system is iniquitous or not” (30).

Proposing an alternative in which spectators are forced not only to reconsider societal structures but to rework them entirely, Artaud coins the phrase “theatre of cruelty,” a theatre in which “violent physical images pulverize, mesmerize the audience’s sensibilities, caught in the drama as if in a vortex of higher forces,” a form of theater that aspires to his vision of the “redeeming epidemic” (63). From an Artaudian perspective, the spectacle of
the corpse, insofar as this spectacle is traumatic, is part and parcel of this theatre of cruelty, for the corpse offers the necessary “shock” to transform its spectators for the better.22 And it is in this manner that he recuperates the contemporary arguments in favor of Elizabethan theatre against the mainly Puritan concerns about its deleterious effects on audiences’ morality.23

Concluding his treatise, Artaud articulates a final goal of the theatre of cruelty: “to make theatre a believable reality by inflicting this kind of tangible laceration” (65). He envisions a theater performance so shocking as to be utterly believable, a performance that would cross over from fiction into reality. Reality continues to be at issue here when, in his final sentence, he wonders “whether real blood is needed right now to reveal this cruelty” (67). Ostensibly, Artaud speculates whether society will need actual blood, as opposed to “fake,” theatrical blood, to commence a revolution. But given that he aims to make life and art continuous – without a boundary between the two – there could be no “real” or “fake” blood. Only blood.

Thomas Kyd’s The Spanish Tragedy takes up precisely this question of reality, offering a model by which we may better explore the relation of “the passion for the Real” to the spectacle of the corpse, one that does not merely recuperate the aforementioned allegorical treatment. The central trauma of this play is the brutal murder and hanging of Hieronimo’s son, Horatio, a trauma to which the play spectacularly returns when Hieronimo displays his son’s remains to the court. What remains fascinatingly grotesque about this drama is the manner in which the spectacle of the
corpse is forcibly made public. Horatio, for instance, is stabbed and hanged in the middle of his father’s arbor; this murder is not a private act but one that invites, even demands, spectators.\textsuperscript{24} The culmination of Hieronimo’s revenge plot reveals not only his son’s remains to the unwitting court but the vestiges of the princes of Spain and Portugal as well.\textsuperscript{25} One cannot avoid, in other words, the highly intrusive nature of this public spectacle. Therefore in the following section, I want to suggest that Kyd’s highly visible corpses force a violent confrontation with the Real that radically reframes the relationship between spectator and actor. In doing so, my reading of this drama demands that critics question the binary construction of reality and theatricality and ultimately revisit the practice of historicism.

It is this so-called distinction between the “real world” qua reality and the theatrical one that has consumed literary critics, as evidenced by their obsessive attempts to uncover historical analogues to the events in \textit{The Spanish Tragedy}. Though Philip Edwards asserts that Kyd “keep[s] his play at a distance from contemporary events” (xxv), Frank Ardolino meticulously constructs a direct correspondence from Kyd’s text to the Paris massacre of 1572, arguing that Hieronimo alludes to it “as the historical precedent for his use of a wedding celebration as the means of eliminating his unsuspecting enemies” (401).\textsuperscript{26} Similarly reading from a historicist bent, Eugene Hill posits that Hieronimo’s deadly masque “represents the passage of power from Babylon-Spain to Elizabethan England in the last decades of the sixteenth century” (160-1).
Such critical discussions not only symptomatize the problems with allegory insofar as they too neatly dispose of ambiguity, they also reify the boundaries between the Elizabethan world and stage. We are delivered, once again, into the jaws of another binarism — that of the authentic (the world) and the imitative (the theater). From the perspective of such historicist readings, contemporary events of the Elizabethan world supply the glimmer of authenticity in these theatrical texts. One does not read literary texts; rather, one works as an archaeologist, unearthing the historical events embedded in them. As such, the text only derives value from its proximity to history — the authentic par excellence.

But it is the very notion of “real world” authenticity that Slavoj Žižek troubles in *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*. He writes: “Virtual reality provides reality itself deprived of its substance, of the hard resistant kernel of the Real — just as decaffeinated coffee smells and tastes like real coffee without being real coffee, Virtual Reality is experienced as reality without being so” (11). It is this Virtual Reality — devoid of substance, authenticity, and the Real — in which Žižek locates our reality. Our “passion for the Real” stems from this attenuated existence in Virtual Reality. But given that the “real world” may only be “Virtual Reality,” to locate the source of the text’s authenticity in its historical analogue seems, at best, seriously misguided.

Yet in certain ways, Žižek’s theorization of Virtual Reality reproduces the binary structure of historicism. Lacanian psychoanalysis, Žižek’s theoretical framework, offers an escape from this binarism. Though
the Symbolic and Virtual Reality may be synonymous, they are not
diametrically opposed to the Real. In the Lacanian universe, the Symbolic
produces the Real – the receptacle of what escapes signification.
Paradoxically enough, the Real is that which is both external and internal to
the Symbolic.27 Creating a neologism, Lacan writes that the relationship
between the Real and the Symbolic is one of extimité – intimate yet
estranged.28

Rather than upholding the constructed distance between the
authenticity of the world and imitative qualities of the play (or between
Virtual Reality and the Real), we would do better to examine the
imbrications of the theatrical world with the Elizabethan world. More
recently, Molly Smith has examined the uncomfortable proximity of the
real-life executions at Tyburn to the graphic deaths of Kyd’s tragedy,
arguing that “the relationship between theater and the scaffold worked
both ways: if dramatic deaths could suggest public maiming and executions,
the latter could as easily and as vividly evoke its theatrical counterparts”
(219). Her historicist argument speaks most eloquently to the
interrelatedness of the theatrical spectacle and the real world, thereby
gesturing toward the dissolution of such boundaries. Rather than
constructing a spectrum of difference between history and theater, she
views them as opposite sides of the same coin.

If we combine the arguments of Smith, Žižek, and Lacan, we
recognize that the realm of the theater is not the sole instance of Virtual
Reality; the “real” theater of “public maiming and executions” becomes the domain of Virtual Reality as well. What, then, does it mean if both the theater and the “real” world are rendered equivalent in Virtual Reality? To read for the passion for the Real – to read the shocking spectacle – we need to rend the fabricated façade of Virtual Reality. The unveiled corpse urges us toward something both beyond and within it.

We begin our approach, then, with Hieronimo’s ominous introduction to his masque in which he first troubles the distinction between the court and the theater. Bitterly addressing the spectators at the macabre conclusion of the masque, he taunts them:

Haply you think – but bootless are your thoughts –
That this is fabulously counterfeit,
And that we do as all tragedians do:
To die today, for fashioning our scene –
The death of Ajax, or some Roman peer –
And in a minute, starting up again,
Revive to please tomorrow’s audience. (4.4.76-81)

As Hieronimo reveals the “reality” of these theatrical deaths, he instantiates a new kind of tragedy in which his performance is anything but “fabulously counterfeit.” He does away with the distinctions between “real time” and “theatrical time,” for the actors here do not simply “die today” but die to revive no more. In dissolving the temporary, theatrical time, the expectedly
“counterfeit” nature of the performance collides violently with the real life of the court.

Not surprisingly, this violent collision between fiction and reality elicits little more than confusion from the spectators, and it is precisely this confusion that prompts Hieronimo to unveil his son, to make the spectators see, in other words, the diminished boundaries between the two: “I see your looks urge instance of these words. / Behold the reason urging me to this” (4.4.87-8). The visual “instance” – Hieronimo’s spectacle – supersedes both “words” and “reason,” even as this “instance” cannot be verbally intimated. Indeed, Hieronimo’s “this” exists without a verbal referent as if the visual spectacle cannot be constrained by the limits of language; the spectacle of the corpse is to what his “this” refers. From Hieronimo’s vantage point, the spectacle of his son’s corpse demonstrates the manner in which the spheres of court and theater are inextricably linked or, more precisely, that they are always already connected. Hieronimo reverts to the language of the stage immediately after he unveils his son: “See here my show. Look on this spectacle!” (4.4.89). Yet to depict the “real” deeds, Hieronimo utilizes theatrical language of “show” and “spectacle,” thereby underscorng the inseparability of these spheres. As he continues his soliloquy, Hieronimo asks ironically of Portugal’s viceroy: “How can you brook our play’s catastrophe?” (4.4.121). Even when Hieronimo showcases the bodies of Prince Balthazar and Don Lorenzo, his terminology remains consistently theatrical. Here, the figure of the corpse functions to collapse
the boundaries between the two, and through this spectacle, Hieronimo also unveils the fabricated nature of the distance between theatrical and real-life violence.

As Hieronimo diminishes the distance between the two, the courtly spectators unwittingly transform themselves into the tragic actors in their very own masque. The murderers of Horatio become the actors of Hieronimo’s play, breaking far more than legs in their performances. And in orchestrating his revenge, Hieronimo moves violence from an outside site of execution to the inner sanctum of the court itself. Because the deadly masque turns abruptly from approved theatrical violence into the gruesome discovery of “real” death, the spectacle of violence becomes downright disorienting. One would do well to ask where are we?

Yet we cannot forget that this, too, is a performance or, more precisely, a play within a play within a play. Such a reminder might prompt a sigh of relief insofar as the emphasis on performance distances the fiction from us and our conception of reality (i.e., it’s just a story). But that is little more than cold comfort when we recall the overarching domain of Virtual Reality. Given Žižek’s postulation, we, too, exist in another performance of sorts, though a far more sophisticated and convincing one. We continue our residence in Virtual Reality, and it is in this way that Kyd’s concluding mise en abyme plays out to such extremes.

In an attempt to extricate ourselves from this mise en abyme by following through on the “passion for the Real,” let us attend to the ways in
which Hieronimo’s necrophilic exhibition weakens the presence of reality – Virtual Reality – and moves us towards the Real. Hieronimo forces nothing less than the unbearable coincidence of courtly life and theatrical performance onto his audience-turned-acting troupe, an unbearable coincidence that resembles the relation between the ever-encroaching corpse and the subject. In “Approaching Abjection,” Julia Kristeva calls the corpse the “utmost of abjection” because “refuse and corpses show me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live...[the corpse] is a border that has encroached upon everything” (3). No doubt an encounter with a corpse is traumatic, especially given its relation to meaninglessness. Yet the primary trauma of the corpse stems from its paradoxical challenge to the subject, even though the corpse – the abject object par excellence – secures the very existence of the subject: “I” exist because “I” am not a corpse. But that existence is an uneasy one, for the threatening corpse continuously encroaches upon the border of subjectivity with its distended abdomen, the exudation of its bodily fluids, and its stink of putrefaction. What the corpse reveals to Hieronimo’s audience is the presence of death always already infecting life.

In Hieronimo’s “passion for the real,” his display demonstrates the extimacy between the theater and the court, between actors and spectators, between the corpse of his son and the tragic survivors, between life and death – and in this paradoxical relation, he rends the fabricated façade of Virtual Reality and its artificial binarisms. He uncovers, in other words, the
theatrical reality precisely as he unveils the decaying body of his son. He shows how reality is always already theatrical and how life is always already infected with death in the spectacle of the corpse. Via his display, Hieronimo reveals the very spectacle of Virtual Reality in an effort to see something else, and that unreal spectacle is nothing if not shocking.

**Abyss of the Real: Finding the Human Subject in Sodom**

Whereas the discussion of *The Spanish Tragedy* gestures towards the Real – insofar as Hieronimo shows his spectators the façade of Virtual Reality – in what follows, I attempt an impossible project: that of delving headfirst into the abyss of the Real. Yet there is a salient difference between Marlowe’s *Edward II* and Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy*. Whereas the corporal spectacles of *The Spanish Tragedy* are inescapably public, the spectacle of the corpse in *Edward II* appears peculiar insofar as it is not seen. Indeed, it remains intractably, intimately private. But how could a spectacle – which, by definition, demands witnesses, spectators – go unseen? How does one read a private, even invisible, spectacle? Courting this impossibility, this beyond of signification, I read *Edward II*, arguing that sodomy metaphorizes the Real, the traumatic residue of the revenge tragedy “shock.” To show this connection, I engage with Elizabethan discussions of sodomy to illustrate how theoretical notions of the Real and historical definitions of the sodomite inform an early modern understanding of the human.

But *Edward II* seems a peculiar, even problematic, selection for an examination of the revenge tragedy genre. Though certain aspects of this
play remain consistent with traditional conceptions of revenge tragedy – Edward III’s execution of Mortimer, for example – I am not arguing that 

*Edward II* is a revenge tragedy tout court. Rather than upholding this genre, much of my project is invested in expanding it. If, for instance, *Edward II* is included in the revenge tragedy genre, then the distance between revenge tragedy and chronicle (or history) plays is diminished.

Or, to phrase it differently, we might see how chronicle plays are indebted to the structural presence of revenge. As in other chronicle plays, *Edward II* features elements of traditional revenge plays, especially with regard to the manner of Edward’s assassination. Lars Engle describes the manner of Edward’s death as a “Dantesque contrapasso,” and insofar as the execution avenges Edward’s “crime” of sodomy, the damage done to his body merits further examination within a larger discussion of revenge tragedy.

Moreover, Michael Drayton’s rendering of the tragic events in his poem “Peirs Gaveston Earle of Cornwall, His life, death, and fortune” (1594) affords an unlikely legibility to the revenge structure in this story. Written two years following the 1592 London performance of *Edward II*, Drayton’s work gives voice to the much-maligned Gaveston, exonerating him of sodomitical accusations.32 While the final ten stanzas of the poem explicate Edward II’s revenge project, the concluding lines speak most explicitly to his vow:

Eyes, neuer sleep, vntill you see reuenge,

Head, neuer rest, vntill thou plot reuenge,
Hart, neuer think, but tending to reuenge,
Hands, neuer act, but acting deep reuenge.
Jus-dooming heauens, reuenge me from above,
That men vnborne may wonder at my loue.

In contrast to Marlowe’s characterization of Edward II as an ineffectual monarch, Drayton’s poem offers an element of revenge absent in Marlowe’s text. Indeed, revenge becomes the modus operandi by which Edward proves the “wonder” of his love for Gaveston to future generations. As he anatomizes his act of revenge, Edward’s “hart” – a heart that thinks rather than feels – turns him into something of a revenge-machine. And as Edward invokes revenge from the “iust-dooming heauens,” he audaciously presumes power over them. Gone is a king subject to his people and his God, much less to his unorthodox passions. From the organs of his body to encounters with providence, Edward reigns supreme in this poem. I am not suggesting that Drayton’s text is a more reliable portrait nor am I suggesting that Marlowe’s text must be read alongside Drayton’s poem. But the structural presence of revenge may be more at home in Marlowe’s tragedy of kingship and love than has been understood.

**The Hole that Means Nothing**

Unknowability – part and parcel of the shocking revenge tragedy spectacle – emerges as the salient feature of Edward’s tragedy, not simply in the purported homosexuality of the king, but in the very allegation of sodomy itself in early modern England. Jonathan Goldberg explains that the term was
not necessarily related to a specific sexual act as there were “no discrete terms for homosexual behavior in the period, sodomy always was embedded in other discourses, those delineating anti-social behavior – sedition, demonism, atheism.” (75). Sodomy signified much more than a homosexual act. Gregory Bredbeck explains that “the recourse to homoeroticism is part of a larger strategy of social exclusion. Through the pejorative display of social deviance, satires such as these attempt to isolate and expel elements that threaten the integrity of orthodox social structures” (35). One is not accused of sodomy simply for engaging in a particular kind of sex; one is a sodomite based on his larger role in the disruption of social structures. Sodomy, in other words, is less about fucking and more about telling the social order to “fuck off.”

As to Edward II’s affinity for the squirming, social climber Gavenston, most critical and historical interpretations do not hesitate to assert his homosexuality. Bredbeck, however, rightly encourages restraint when considering Edward II’s sexual proclivities: “In short, Edward was not a perfect pattern of kingship, and the reasons for his downfall, though impossible to recover fully, were certainly more expansive than a homoerotic union” (53). Moreover, from a historical understanding of relationships between men, this relationship was not as obvious as it might appear to a contemporary audience. Along these lines, Alan Bray issues an important corrective about the complexity of male-male Elizabethan friendship:
But the many who have written of the apparently openly ‘homosexual’ nature of the play have not grasped its irony of that the intense emotion, the passionate language, and the embraces we see between these two men have ready parallels in Elizabethan England in the daily conventions of friendship without being signs of a sodomitical relationship. (Bray 49)

The “daily conventions of friendship” encompassed activities such as bed sharing, embracing, and kissing. But the conventional trappings of this friendship could be easily mistaken for the unnatural, sodomitical one due to class differences between men and, relatedly, by attempts to curry favor – to bribe, rather than to gift. While class transgressions mark the sodomitical relationship, the outward manifestations of male friendship remain the same, thereby obscuring interpretations of these relationships.

Unknowable, too, is the manner in which Edward II is executed. Though Raphael Holinshed offers the historical clarification in stomach-churning detail, Marlowe’s text remains frustratingly ambiguous about the deed. Of this, Lars Engle writes: “Marlowe leaves crucial details of the murder of Edward up to the imaginations of readers and stage directors” (356). Yet even as Engle admits the ambiguity of Marlowe’s stage directions, he asserts that the text “gestures clearly enough at the murder clinically described in Holinshed” (356). Though that may be so, such an understanding is predicated on a familiarity with this other text; Marlowe’s text alone would not enable the reader to recognize that Edward “has a red-
hot poker thrust into his intestines through a horn inserted in his anus” (356). Moreover, by privileging the extra-textual referent of Holinshed’s history over the primary text, Engle performs the very definition of de Man’s allegory, “exhausting [the] suggestive potentialities” of this troubling scene of execution (200).

Within the constraints of the primary text itself, Lightborn, the genius behind this gruesome murder, refuses to reveal the details of the execution to Mortimer Jr: “Nay, you shall pardon me; none shall know my tricks” (5.4.37). In refusing to include Mortimer and, relatedly, the audience, Lightborn allows an impenetrable curtain to fall over the scene of execution. Though mastermind of the execution, Mortimer relinquishes his knowledge of the crime, for he “care[s] not how it is, so it be not spied” (5.4.40). The use of “spied” gestures not only to the powers of the naked eye but also to the ubiquity of court surveillance. For Mortimer’s plan to succeed, no one may witness the murder nor may the details of the act be discerned from Edward’s corpse.

But it is not simply the manner of execution but the persons involved who recede into the background, into anonymity, into invisibility – making the murder exist as a mere nightmare in this unreal London in which nothing remains, save for the troublesome corpse of the king. Following Edward’s execution, Lightborn – the one person who has spied – is, not surprisingly, stabbed to death and cast into the moat. Subsequently, Gurney flees the court while Matrevis bemoans the gruesome deed to a largely unsympathetic
Mortimer: “Ay, my good lord. I would it were undone” (5.6.2). Matrevis’ fear of betrayal is, no doubt, well founded, and he pleads permission to flee from the court as well. By the final scene, all the key players in Edward’s execution, those who had a hand in the gore, have been evacuated in one way or another from the text. And this evacuation, at the level of narrative, preserves the unknowable aspects of Edward’s execution.

If we consider, then, the opacity of Edward’s II’s homosexuality, the ambiguity of the execution, and even the uneasy status of sodomy in early modern England, the wounded anus ostensibly resolves the uncertainty. Sodomy, an ambiguous though deadly allegation, emerges as identifiable offense via the wounded anus. The wound contains the threat of such a transgression while simultaneously punishing it. As Judith Haber explains, “the invisible, indeterminate act of sodomy, punished and pinned down, becomes the visible guarantee of the existence of a point” (180). In its obscene reply to the question of Edward’s homosexuality, the wound forcibly affixes the signified to the signifier, thereby resolving the central trauma of the text: its radical unknowability. With the wounded anus, the act of sodomy is writ large upon the body of the king, even as the execution itself, at least in Marlowe’s text, remains frustratingly vague. And in contrast to Engle, who posits that male-male sex is evoked only implicitly in its horrible parody in the murder of Edward, I want to suggest that this “horrible parody” of male-male sex makes explicit both Edward’s homosexuality and the “indeterminate act of sodomy” (Engle 356). As such, the wound raises the stage curtain to
shock its audience with the revenge tragedy spectacle, for the wounded anus of Edward II renders the unknowable knowable with horrifying certainty.

**Signifying Sodomy**

Even if we understand the wound as the mark of sodomitical practices, a question remains: where is the wounded anus in this drama? How can one spot this sign of sodomy onstage? Where is the *proof*? Indeed, such a mark appears most peculiar insofar as it fails to appear at all. Like allegorical readings, the wounded anus momentarily diminishes the threat of meaninglessness, even as it gestures towards a signifier elsewhere. Or, to put it succinctly, one can never get to the Thing itself. Given that, one would do well to ask from what this meaning-making keeps us so determinedly away? And why do we persistently return to the register of non-meaning? To approach this radical nothingness – the real energy behind the spectacle – let us return to contemporary definitions of sodomy.

Historically speaking, the term itself existed in a linguistic liminal space. In *Englands Mourning Garment* (1603), Henry Cheetle praises Queen Elizabeth’s reign while taking an opportunity to express his outrage at sodomitical practices: “Her owne iustice was such, as neuer any could truly complaine of her; neither did she pardon faultes vnpardonable, as murder, rape, *Sodomie*, that sin almost not to be named.” Though Cheetle ostensibly articulates his horror at this “faulte vnpardonable” by “almost” refusing to name it, its presence is doubly reasserted by the threat of its absence. And to add more insult to linguistic injury, Cheetle’s manuscript capitalizes and
italicizes the term, thereby emphasizing sodomy – an act that surpasses murder and rape – even further.

Yet it is not simply God-fearing English who had a difficult time with the term. At this time, sodomy had an unwieldy definition: “[Sodomy] signified precisely ‘nothing,’ non-meaning, chaos, and indeterminancy” (Haber 173). In Queering the Renaissance, Jonathan Goldberg close reads Phillip Stubbes’ The Anatomie of Abuses (1583): “Sodomy, for Stubbes, is a debauched playing that knows no limit – that has violated the properties of male/female married sex – or whose limit can only be gestured towards in a supplementary addition, ‘Sodomits or worse’” (121). It is Goldberg’s emphasis on the limitless affront to the social order that is encapsulated in the term itself. In other words, sodomy forces the social order and its language to a limit.

Despite sodomy’s linguistic status, early modern writers did not hesitate to assert its pernicious presence within certain social groups in England. In his history of the Papist corruptions of England, Thomas Beard asserts in “A Retractive from the Romish Religion” (1616) that since the 12th century, “Sodomie raigned over all England, and from the Clergie crept also into the Laity.” Beard, of course, is not alone in his associations of Catholicism with sodomitical practices; even John Donne enjoyed penning an occasional diatribe to that effect. Nevertheless these charges of sodomy function by further delegitimizing the social standing of marginalized populations.
At the same time, moralists assert the widespread practice of sodomy as evidence of England’s deterioration. In “The Belman of London,” Thomas Dekker bemoans the moral decline of England, outing the most sinful communities by name, stating that “no sinne but is here committed without shame, Adulterie is common amongst them, Incest but laughed at, Sodomy made a jest.” Dekkers’ ordering of these sins – adultery, incest, and sodomy – reaffirms sodomy’s privileged status as the gravest offense. These texts also suggest the pervasiveness of this “vnnaturall sinne of Sodomie” in English early modern culture. Whether in historical reality or within the prurient cultural imagination, sodomy might be considered “vnnaturall,” yet it is anything but “not named.”

Given the taint of original sin, the perceived pervasiveness of sodomy hardly seems a wonder. As Samuel Clarke reminds his readers in The Saints Nosegay (1642), “Adams fall hath made mans capacity very small” (248). In The Sincere Convent (1641), New England minister Thomas Shepard rails against the innate depravity of humans, writing that “every naturall man and woman is borne full of all sin as full as a Toade is full of poison, as full as ever his skin can hold; Minde, Will, Eyes, Mouth, every limbe of his body, and every piece of his soul is full of sin; their hearts are bundles of sin” (51). Yet for Shepard and others, this original sin translates into actual abominations:

All those sinnes are in thine heart...thy heart is a stinking sinkhole of all Atheisme, Sodomy, Blasphemy, Murther,
Whoredome, Adultery, Witchcraft, Buggery; so that if thou hast
any good thing in thee, it is but as a drop of Rosewater in a
bowle of poison, where fallen, it is all corrupted.

“Vnnaturall acts” are so worrisome to Shepard as to be listed in two different
forms – sodomy and buggery. Sodomy, in addition to the pantheon of vices
listed by Shepard, could materialize at any moment. Any and all were capable
of such a monstrous act. John Rainolds anticipates this fear in *The Overthrow
of Stage Plays* (1599) in which he asserts that the sin of sodomy is one to
which “men’s natural corruption and viciousness is prone” (Bray 41). Not
only society but also the individual must remain watchful against such
poison – the unknown abyss of wickedness, mildewing within the human
heart.

**Finding the Subject in Sodom**

But if we have located the heart, what of the subject itself? Everyone from
Popish Protestants, average Protestants, and even Puritans could agree:
sodomites figured as the limit-concept of society. One could descend no
further. As the societal pariah and bogeyman, the sodomite served a useful
purpose insofar as he masked another kind of trauma, one inherent to
subjectivity. From a psychoanalytic perspective, trauma constitutes the
subject’s emergence into the Symbolic. As Slavoj Žižek reminds us in *Tarrying
with the Negative*, “the Symbolic itself opens up the wound it professes to
heal” (180). The entrance into language grants subjectivity as it
simultaneously traumatizes the subject. Like our biological births, we are born(e) out of and by this very trauma.

Trauma, then, emerges as a nightmarish Joan Crawford, Dearest (m)Other of us all. And if that Thing is our mother, what does that make us? Our status as subjects is indebted to an encounter with the Real, and it is this abyss that becomes the condition of the human subject, estranging ourselves from ourselves and prohibiting the coincidence of the two. Žižek writes that “what we call ‘subjectivization’ (recognizing oneself in interpellation assuming an imposed symbolic mandate) is a kind of defense mechanism against an abyss, a gap, which ’is’ the subject” (171). In other words, we are all the spawn of Mommie Dearest – wire hangers and all – insofar as the subject “is” a gap, or kernel of the Real. Paradoxically, however, the Symbolic creates that abyss through its exclusionary methods. The process of subjectivization evolves precisely to keep the subject in the Symbolic order, to circumvent the coincidence of the subject and the Real.

But on some level, we knew this all along, for the early modern discussion of sodomy points to a similar abyss innate in all humans. Recall the aforementioned jeremiad of Thomas Shepard and the warnings of John Rainolds, warnings that indicted the (w)hole of humanity. As sodomy is the place to which “men’s natural corruption and viciousness is prone,” this most unnatural act suddenly becomes most natural, given the original sin and fallibility inherent to humanity. And in this moment of realization, the most unlikely of bedfellows – Lacanian psychoanalysis and Puritanical preaching –
can agree on the threatening nature of the human, if nothing else. In giving shape to this abyss, the wounded anus attempts to mark and to quarantine this corruption, this Otherness, this radical nothingness. But we know better: we are all carriers, wandering around Sodom.

Despite this knowledge, however, it is far easier to indulge fantasy. We pretend, in other words, to be humans rather than contaminants or, more precisely, we pretend that this contamination is unrelated to our humanity. As Kenneth Reinhard explains, “the judgment ‘he is inhuman’ means something thoroughly different, namely, that this person is neither simply human nor simply inhuman, but marked by a terrifying excess which, although it negates what we understand as humanity, is inherent to being human” (9). To perpetuate this fantasy, we prop up others as our Other (the neighbor, the foreigner, the Jew, the woman, the sodomite, and so forth), thereby displacing our contamination. In The Neighbor, Žižek explains the displaced horror attributed to this neighbor:

There is the Other qua Real, the impossible Thing, the ‘inhuman partner’...The neighbor (Nebenmensch) as the Thing means that, beneath the neighbor as my semblant, my mirror image, there always lurks the unfathomable abyss of radical Otherness, of a monstrous Thing that cannot be ‘gentrified.’

(143)

Given that no amount of “gentrification” will resolve the Otherness of the Other, we keep It at a distance.
Yet it is not enough to simply cast others into the void of the Real. We must also relentlessly engage in a very personal process of abjection to guard the borders of our human identity: “The abject has only one quality of the object – that of being opposed to I” (Kristeva 1). The decaying corpse of Hieronimo’s son guarantees the animation of its spectators. The shit excreted from Edward’s anus similarly secures his identity; he exists precisely because he is not shit. But like the figures of the woman or the sodomite, these abjected objects are also infused with the terrifying quality of the Lacanian Real. Refuse, decay, and human waste operate, then, as vestiges of the Real, vestiges that secure our position as human within the Symbolic order, even as they radically challenge that position.48

The abyss we approach via sodomy is a place devoid of signifying coordinates. As opposed to the Symbolic, the realm of language ruled by the signifier, the Real escapes meaning-making altogether. As Dylan Evans explains, “the real is ‘the impossible’ (S11, 167) because it is impossible to imagine, impossible to integrate into the symbolic order, and impossible to attain in any way. It is this character of impossibility and of resistance to symbolization which lends the real its essentially traumatic quality” (160).49 This, then, marks the difficulty of discussing the Real and of theorizing an encounter with the shock of the revenge tragedy spectacle.

Radical Acts
The investment in distancing ourselves as subjects from the Real speaks volumes about its threat, and this distance translates into our reading
practices insofar as critics compulsively allegorize to stave off that threat.

What heightens the difficulty in viewing the revenge tragedy spectacle is that the encounter with the Real constitutes a deadly trauma, deadly to the subject qua subject. Should we encounter the Real without the protection of meaning or mystification, we – as subjects – would not exist. It is this annihilation of subjectivity that constitutes a radical act.

Yet what are the qualities of a radical act? What does it mean to assert that Hieronimo performs a radical act? Or, perhaps more unbelievably, that Edward II does as well? Heavily influenced by the Lacanian interpretation of Antigone’s act, Žižek defines the radical act as “a step into the open, with no guarantee about the final outcome – why? Because an Act retroactively changes the very co-ordinates into which it intervenes” (152). We might understand the Act as that which radically alters our status as subjects of the Symbolic. Characterized by an uncompromising stance and lack of guarantees, the radical Act “undermines[s] the ‘servicing of goods,’ the reign of the pleasure-reality principle” (142). The radical act exceeds the limit of the Symbolic, and we encounter this limit in Edward II.

If there is any character in deep shit, it’s Edward. Imprisoned in a dungeon teeming with sewage, he begs his captors for water: “Oh, water, gentle friends, to cool my thirst / And clear my body from foul excrements!” (5.3.25-6). In response to this pitiful request, Matrevis brings him more “foul excrement” in the form of sewer water. As Matrevis and Gurney escalate
their acts of torture, they marvel at Edward’s endurance, an endurance that seems not altogether human:

I wonder the king dies not
Being in a vault up to the knees in water
To which the channels of the castle run,
From whence a damp continually ariseth
That were enough to poison any man –
Much more a king brought up so tenderly...
He hath a body able to endure
More than we can inflict. (5.5.1-11)

Edward’s strange body is a “marvel” insofar as it resists the seemingly limitless tortures of Matrevis and Gurney. Moreover, given Marlowe’s less than flattering characterization of Edward, his fortitude appears all the more remarkable in this moment. As Edward withstands the abjected materials of the castle, Edward exceeds his capacity not only as a “tenderly” brought up king, but also as a human. Yet he goes even further. In the liminal space of the dungeon, Edward becomes inseparable from the shit to which he is literally subjected, and in this manner, he exists beyond the category of the human.

Edward’s transformation is his radical act, and insofar as he exists outside the category of the human, he invokes the presence of another tragic figure: Antigone. In The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, Lacan writes of this enigmatic figure and her unshakable desire to bury her deceased brother against the law of her uncle. Emphasizing her metamorphic qualities when
she encounters the corpse. Lacan aligns her with Atè – that which “designates the limit that human life can only briefly cross” (262). Atè represents the beyond of the Symbolic Order; Atè is the terrifying excess that pushes Virtual Reality to its limit. For Lacan, Antigone “perpetuates, eternalizes, immortalizes that Atè” (283). She, like Edward II, metamorphoses into something else (Lacan 283). To go beyond Atè – to commit a radical Act – suggests a radically altered subjectivity that is anything but human.

Edward’s radical act of exceeding the limits of the human is echoed in the execution of Mortimer. Taking responsibility for the court following Edward II’s execution at the hands of Lightborn, Edward III orders the savage execution of Mortimer Jr, an execution befitting a traitor. Per Edward III’s instructions, Mortimer’s severed head is placed on the former king's coffin and subsequently paraded throughout the kingdom: “My father’s murdered through thy treachery, / And thou shalt die, and on his mournful hearse / Thy hateful and accursed head shall lie, / To witness to the world that by thy means / His kingly body was too soon interred” (5.6.28-32). All of this, however, is announced directly to Mortimer himself. Effecting a radical temporal shift, Edward III’s decree anticipates the future dismemberment even as Mortimer stands whole before him. As Mortimer straddles the line between life and death and between the human and the corpse, he encounters a moment of ex-stasis, a moment in which he is radically estranged from himself. Mortimer’s soon-to-be corpse – mutilated and
grotesque – emerges as both a remainder of what was once human and a reminder of what will become of him.\textsuperscript{52}

But here is the rub: the corpse is not simply a remainder of the human – it is the most explicit reminder of what is human. Or, to put it differently, this scene demonstrates what was always already there – the kernel of the Real that resides in the human – insofar as Mortimer embodies both corpse and human. Yet this moment illuminates not only the gap within the human, but the gap within meaning-making as well. Through Mortimer’s punishment, his severed head becomes the mute, intractable “witness” to the assassination of Edward II, a witness who reveals absolutely nothing. Similarly, the king’s anus reveals nothing of either his alleged sodomitical relations or his untimely death. Finally, sodomy, constitutive of a radical nothingness, exacerbates this “no-thing” anus. The text refuses our attempts to know this event with any certainty and therein lies its challenge to our epistemological methods: we cannot overcome the gap. Because both reader and text remain split and radically estranged from their parts, it seems this gap cannot be mended. Or, to put it differently, the gap is constitutive of both the text and the critic, and so this distance cannot be overcome.

\textit{The Spanish Tragedy} exacerbates the gap in meaning revealed in \textit{Edward II}. While Edward’s radical act illuminates the gap, Hieronimo’s act ensures that we are made to mind it. He gestures most explicitly toward the gaps in Virtual Reality, the places at which it fails to stave off the threat of \textit{something else} in its moments of unbearable coincidence. As Alain Badiou
reminds his readers, these gaps are the encounters with the Real; they are, in other words, that which punctures our Virtual Reality. But this is the point at which Badiou and I must part ways, for he cannot brook the persistent, incorrigible gap. Instead, he urges one “to invent content...where there is almost nothing” (57). Such a theoretical move is analogous to the response of the king and viceroy to Hieronimo’s spectacle: “Speak, traitor! Damned, bloody murderer, speak! / For, now I have thee, I will make thee speak. / Why has thou done this undeserving deed?” (4.4.163-65). Despite Hieronimo’s lengthy explanation following the masque, the heads of Spain and Portugal urge even more speech, demanding “invented content” to fill in the gap, to tame the trauma of the unveiled corpse, to reinstate Virtual Reality.

Conversely (or perversely), Hieronimo’s radical Act exacerbates the gap, a gap the royal families are so desperate to fill in with words. Preferring “harmless silence,” Hieronimo refuses speech immediately following his lengthy explanation: “But never shalt thou force me to reveal / The thing which I have vowed inviolate; / And therefore, in despite of all thy threats, / Pleased with their deaths and eased with their revenge, / First take my tongue and afterwards my heart” (4.4.189-93). Ostensibly, he has revealed everything.53 By stating, however, that there is something else, he widens the gap insofar as there is something for which the text cannot account. And he jumps headfirst into this gap by biting out his own tongue, by carrying out this radical act of self-destruction. In creating a space of
silence – a place from which both literary critics and figureheads of power are barred – Hieronimo remains committed to his radical Act of exposing and widening the gaps in Virtual Reality. He refuses, in other words, to speak the very words that would superficially suture those holes; instead, he keeps the textual wound open.  

What, then, does Hieronimo’s radical Act offer us with regard to the act of reading the spectacle of the revenge tragedy? How might we connect this radical Act to our earlier discussion of alternative reading practices? By unveiling the corpse of his son to the court, Hieronimo reveals the ever-encroaching Real to his audience. As I have argued, this unbearable spectacle demonstrates a life always already infused with death, an authenticity predicated on the imitative, and for us as literary critics, a meaning-making that is always already unraveling. Hieronimo embodies the negativity of the Real as he exposes the limits of Virtual Reality. He refuses to cede ground on his desire for destruction, even as it consumes him. But whatever appeal this stance has for certain desperado types, it does little for literary critics. To read destructively – to read for this kind of radical negativity until it destroys even oneself – is an impossible task.

Rather, the radical Act of reading admits the limitations of Virtual Reality and extends the gaps in the text. Recall, for instance, the very details of Hieronimo’s self-destruction; he takes the instruments of communication – his tongue and a knife on the pretext of mending his pen – and utilizes them to exacerbate an anything but “harmless silence.” Thus, for every positivized,
content-laden space, there is an equally incorrigible hole, an absence that evacuates meaning. This absence is the ugly underbelly of positivism, an absence for which we must account in our meaning-making – not, however, to balance out our ledgers but to acknowledge the inevitable imbalance of signification. Rather than functioning as the figureheads of power in their incessant demands to make the silence speak, literary critics must acknowledge the textual portions that refuse assimilation while simultaneously refraining from stopping up the hole.

For it is this hole that is constitutive of the human, informed by the (w)hole of the sodomite. It is this hole that is part and parcel of language, the distance between meaning and sign. Rather than perform totalizing readings, readings that coerce these remnants into a phantasmatic whole, might we address the textual gaps created by the spectacle of the unveiled corpse? Might we, in contrast to the reading practices advocated by Sedgwick, perform a method of reading that courts this hole, a reading that is inspired by jouissance – an animating spark of the Real that wholly overwhelms both human subject and language? Because reading for jouissance widens the gap created by the slippage between the signifier and the signified, it is a form of interpretation indebted to waste, traces, and remainders – a critical practice uninterested in productive readings.

**Conclusion: Reading for Jouissance and the Shocking Effects of Revenge**

To demonstrate this reading for jouissance, I look once more to *The Spanish Tragedy*. In my prior discussion of its disorienting mise en abyme – its play
within a play within a play – my argument failed to go far enough. Indeed, I neglected a minor, but salient, detail: *The Spanish Tragedy* is a work of dramatic fiction. As such, Hieronimo’s masque cannot be a dizzying, endless hall of mirrors insofar as its status as fiction limits this funhouse effect. In that moment of confrontation, the argument that I put forth, namely that theatrical life and “real” life compress into Virtual Reality, dissolves on these pages, for there is no “real” life of which to speak. This text has no outside against which I could contrast its theatrical components; one cannot locate a touchstone in which to anchor one’s argument.

This example of the inevitable failure of my argument symptomatizes an ironic dialectic that is essential to reading for jouissance. By “ironic dialectic,” I refer to a system that, like Paul De Man’s definition of irony, refers endlessly without a referent in sight. Unlike a Hegelian dialectic, these competing arguments always fail to arrive at a truth, or, more precisely, the truth is undone by subsequent arguments in an ironic dialectic. Truth, in other words, is perpetually deferred. Or obscured. We stand on shaky ground with regard to language, and such a mode of criticism pulls out the proverbial rug from under our feet and showcases the rotting floorboards beneath.

Because reading for jouissance demands the acknowledgement that our critical arguments are always already unraveling, an engagement with this ironic dialectic embraces, rather than eschews, the gaps instantiated by the revenge tragedy spectacle. As in the “shock effects” of Benjamin’s movie theaters, the *significance* behind the spectacles of revenge tragedies slips from
our fumbling fingers. This, here, constitutes the shock of revenge tragedies – the manner in which meaning cannot be fastened down – yet continues moving nevertheless.

While the most impressive revenge tragedy spectacles exacerbate the gap between the signifier and the signified, this gap, in and of itself, is not particular to the structure of revenge. Rather, this gap is a feature of language itself; these questions of meaning-making confront all literary critics and their texts. Yet there is something about revenge's structure – its quintessential “shock value” – that puts this gap in signification on prominent display.

Moreover, these revenge texts demonstrate the unraveling in language while offering nothing as an alternative. Throughout this dissertation, I will argue that revenge functions as a deconstructive agent. In the following chapter, I explore how revenge operates in relation to the binarism of good and evil. Does revenge offer its own peculiar brand of ethics? Might it subvert this binarism altogether? Or will revenge thwart that desire for ethical certainty altogether?
Chapter Two

“Relish not substance, but applaud the show”: Vengeance and Vagabond Aesthetics in Antonio’s Revenge and The Revenger’s Tragedy

Introduction

In early modern England, the matter of revenge was anything but decided. The English tried to reconcile their inheritance of private justice (i.e., revenge is a right) with their fears that private revenge would “unleash a general disrespect for law” (Bower 11). And the church made use of its authority to quell those vestigial impulses for revenge. In The Sinners Guyde (1564), Luis de Granada condemns the act of revenge on the grounds that “it is a thing...altogether to be detested, that thou shouldest revenge another mans maliciousness with thine owne maliciousness; and appointing thy self Judge in thine own cause, shouldest chastice another mans injustice with thine owne.” For de Granada and other ecclesiastical authorities of this time, revenge is not the prerogative of humans, and the avenger is hardly to be praised. Shortly after James I’s accession to the throne, William Perkins weighed in on the revenge debate: “In this case [of private revenge], God puts the sword into the private mans hands.” Perkins negotiates the conflict by envisioning the avenger as an agent of God and, in that manner, sacralizes revenge. In contrast, Francis Bacon, jurist of distinction and James I’s Attorney General and Lord Chancellor, is cited frequently as an advocate against revenge. Yet Bacon sounds not unlike Perkins when he
acknowledges, albeit reluctantly, its use when “there is no law to remedy [the wrong]” (348). Whereas ecclesiastical and juridical figures write against revenge, others, like Perkins and Bacon, navigate the tension between honor and the religio-ethical sentiments of the day. I offer these notable examples to complicate the early modern English prohibitions against revenge. Though English law was quite explicit on the matter, public opinions (and even legal ones) were, at best, unsettled. At worst, early modern culture admitted, rather begrudgingly, the value of vengeance in late Elizabethan and early Jacobean society.

Early modern attitudes, however, were not as ambivalent towards theatrical revengers. In her introduction to *Four Revenge Tragedies*, Katharine Eisaman Maus explains: “Caught in a double bind, the revenger seems simultaneously an avatar and enemy of the social order” (xiii). Rather than serving as the agents of righteousness, the figures of revenge – who circumvent the law to achieve their ends – encumber the very system that is designed to mete out justice. As Eleanor Prosser remarks of early modern audiences in *Hamlet and Revenge*, “No figure in folklore or literature is more fascinating than the rebel. We identify with Faustus and even with Satan, but we know that they must be hurled into Hell” (33). Prosser’s “must” seems most significant here: why *must* these figures of rebellion be expelled from the text?

Though early modern sources evinced a complex and frequently contradictory relationship toward revenge, Renaissance drama offered a
seemingly straightforward approach by categorically demanding the disposal of its avengers. Titus Andronicus, Hamlet, and The Spanish Tragedy are just a few examples that fit this generic convention, and it is this evacuation of problematic characters (both revengers and those associated with the act of vengeance) that protects the ethical integrity of such texts. Indeed, the onstage deaths of the revengers confirm what the upright knew all along: revenge, insofar as it is a misdeed, will ultimately be punished. Fredson Bowers, for instance, remarks on this convention: “That the majority of stage-revengers...met their deaths may be attributed...to the fact that they turned from sympathetic, wronged heroes to bloody maniacs whose revenge might better have been left to God” (40). Moreover, these textual expulsions, which usually occur in the form of execution, also emerge as antidotes to the anxiety provoked by these figures. Insofar as the avenger generates sympathy, he places the audience in a troubling ethical position regarding this already controversial act of revenge: how can audience members root for the revenger-turned-villain and preserve their ethical positions? The convention of executing the avenger, then, becomes a manner in which those disparate objectives might be reconciled.

John Marston’s Antonio’s Revenge and Thomas Middleton’s The Revenger’s Tragedy stand in stark contrast to the canon as they parody and invert the conventional execution. Using the figure of the early modern vagabond, I will show how these plays repudiate ethics and instead manifest a “vagabond aesthetics.” In the first half of this chapter, I will argue that these
texts subvert the traditional moralism of revenge tragedy. They reveal the self-justifying and self-deconstructing nature of moralism, and ultimately refuse to weigh in on whether or not revenge is “right” or “wrong.” In the latter half of my argument, I will posit that this subversion emerges as a product of the plays’ participation in comedy, a genre that exacerbates the slippage between signifier and signified. The peripatetic movement of comedy coalesces in the figure of the early modern vagabond. Demonstrating how both revengers are critically aligned with vagrancy, I will ultimately contend that these plays put forth a concept of vagabond aesthetics – a type of aesthetics that privileges unproductivity, exile, and perpetual motion.

Mucking up Moralism

By the performance of *The Revenger’s Tragedy* in 1606, the convention of onstage deaths becomes ripe for parody. Charting the vengeance-strewn path of Vindice and his brother, Hippolito, *The Revenger’s Tragedy* focuses on their attacks on the Duke and his family. By the play’s conclusion, Vindice has successfully destroyed the royal family and brags of his achievements to the new Duke, Antonio. Shocked by Vindice’s disclosure, the new Duke calls for the immediate execution of Vindice and Hippolito. At this point, it would seem as if *The Revenger’s Tragedy* adheres to the conventions of the genre insofar as the avengers will be executed.

But the conclusion to *The Revenger’s Tragedy* features salient differences from the generic conclusion, differences that undercut the gravity of these executions. In contrast to traditional revenge tragedy, this play fails
to stage the execution of the revengers. Though the audience recognizes the inevitability of execution as Hippolito and Vindice are led offstage, the play concludes before this event takes place. And because this execution occurs outside the boundaries of the performance (or text), the deferred execution preserves not moral resolution but irresolution.

Vindice’s final speech complicates further this moral irresolution. Following his decreed execution, Vindice wryly observes to Hippolito: “Thou has no conscience. Are we not revenged? / Is there one enemy left alive amongst those? / ‘Tis time to die when we are ourselves our foes” (5.3.128-130). As Vindice articulates the imperative of the generic conclusion (i.e., to die immediately following the completion of one’s revenge), he parodies it. One cannot forget, of course, that Vindice’s boasting to Antonio immediately precedes this current speech. Indeed, that is the moment at which they become their own “foes” – when they disclose the assassination details. Therefore, the immediacy with which Vindice accepts his fate (and himself as a newfound “enemy”) – when, a moment before, he evinces pride in his deadly deeds – turns these lines into comic fodder.

Vindice’s moral posturing is equally transparent and consequently unsettling. Appropriating the voice of authority, Vindice chides Hippolito (i.e., “Thou has no conscience”) for his lack of a moral compass. Yet such a fraternal criticism presupposes that Vindice believes himself to be in possession of this coveted conscience. Given that Vindice has just orchestrated the torture and murder of every single enemy, his moral
conscience, if it exists at all, is ironized heavily in this exchange. While this play evokes the traditional revenge tragedy conclusion, it calls that convention into question in a mocking scene of sacrifice.

While *The Revenger’s Tragedy* makes use of parody to undermine theatrical conventions, *Antonio’s Revenge* inverts this convention altogether as it features revengers who do not die but thrive. As Raymond Rice observes, “critics have long been stymied – perhaps traumatized might be a better word – by the play’s apocalyptic conclusion” (311). In *Antonio’s Revenge*, the sequel to *Antonio and Mellida*, Marston constructs a pseudo-history based on actual events in fifteenth-century Italy (Gair 18).

Presumably written between 1598-99, this play opens with the diabolical machinations of Duke Piero, who murders Antonio’s father. Antonio’s revenge is complicated by the fact that Piero is the father of his betrothed, and Antonio uses his relationship with the family to further his revenge. In perhaps the most ethically troubling moment of the play, Antonio murders Julio, the son of Piero and younger brother to Mellida (his betrothed), and defiles a church altar with his innocent blood. Despite the fact that Antonio considers Julio a beloved “almost brother,” revenge – on behalf of blood relations – takes precedence.

And it is Antonio’s monomaniacal pursuit of revenge that is met with approval by the other characters. Following the gory climax in which Antonio serves Piero the remnants of his son at a banquet, the senators immediately corroborate the scope of Piero’s villainy and fixate on Antonio’s
victimization: “Antonio, belief is fortified / With most invincible
approvements of much wrong / By this Piero to thee. We have found /
Beadrolls of mischief, plots of villainy” (5.2.131-34). By assuring Antonio that
they have located “approvements,” or proof, the senators validate his
perspective and tacitly condone his actions as revenger. Moreover, Antonio
emerges as the sole victim insofar as the senator focuses on the “wrong”
done to “thee.” In case one misses the initial senatorial concentration on
Antonio as victim, another senator exclaims: “Alas, poor orphant!” (5.2.136).
This outburst of sympathy, bizarre in and of itself, is elaborated further
through the characterization of Antonio as an “orphant”: bereft, neglected,
 orphaned. The result, then, is an empathetic excess that becomes downright
 infantilizing.

In addition to expressing concern over Antonio’s plight, the senators
praise him and his macabre crew: “Blest be you all, and may your honours
live / Religiously held sacred, even for ever and ever. Thou art another
Hercules to us, / In ridding huge pollution from our state” (5.2.127-30).
Combining references to Greek mythology with distinctly biblical language,
the senators laud the avengers for purifying the state and elevate them to
demi-god status through their worship.58 Mere praise, however, is
insufficient for this new “Hercules” – “triumph, a cash reward, and a role in
Venetian government” are offered as additional tokens of appreciation
(Spinard 170). Not surprisingly, Antonio is “amaz’d” at this “benignity”
(5.2.189), and audience members who anticipate a conventional ending are
as well. By offering this radical revision – a revision that celebrates the revengers rather than punishes them – Marston’s text refuses to take the normative ethical position found in revenge tragedy.

Yet the senatorial response is not simply benign but positively sycophantic as the leaders extol the revengers’ ethical clarity: “You are well-season’d props, / And will not warp, or lean to either part” (5.2.189). In Radical Comedy in Early Modern England, Rick Bowers attends to the significance of these “props”:

The first Senator even gestures towards the revengers’ performance in Brechtian estrangement [through the use of that phrase]...This usage for the word ‘property’ is not recorded in the OED before 1685. And yet Marston’s play never lets us forget that the revengers operate figuratively as structural underpinnings but also practically as the very self-referential material of the revenge drama itself. (81)

But in Bowers’ etymological leap from “props” to “property,” he overlooks the ethical purport of this passage. In contrast, my reading reveals the senate’s desire for an ethical direction when confronted with revenge. The victorious avengers, in other words, metamorphose into a Venetian moral compass. Given that “props” refers to beams or sticks that “serve to support something or keep it in place,” might we consider that these avengers fix the ethical borders of Venice? The senators place their trust in them precisely because they are neither corrupted (“warp[ed]”) nor partial (“lean to either
part”). In this moment, the senators evince a desire to fix ethical truth, to determine and isolate the Good.

This desire to locate ethical criteria is later borne out in the play’s criticism. Split between valorization and condemnation of Antonio’s actions, scholars pursue questions of the Good. Most recently, Phoebe Spinard claims that *Antonio’s Revenge* combines both Christian and pagan allusions, consequently “sacralizing” this revenge in a decidedly Judeo-Christian context; the text, in other words, condones his actions. In contrast to Spinard and critics who locate the good in revenge, some scholars assert that Marston is testing his readers – that, in other words, he urges his audience to remain critical of Antonio’s behavior and to resist the external validation from the Venetian government. Still others determine the good of revenge from society’s perspective. Applauding Antonio’s decision to remove himself from Venetian society, Karen Robertson argues that it is “an acknowledgement that after participation in godlike rage, a return to ordinary society is not possible” (103). And G.K. Hunter differentiates between society’s ostensible approval of Antonio’s actions and the revengers themselves, who “do not share this view” (xvi).

In contrast to these critical voices who double as ethical judges, I pursue a more playful approach via the historical-cultural context of *Antonio’s Revenge*. Investigating John Marston’s proximity to the 1599 Bishops’ Ban, Lynda Boose explains that he “turned up not only in the middle of the 1599 ban but at the center of almost every literary controversy of the
era” (192). Much of this controversy, according to Boose, stemmed from Marston’s deployment of irony and comedy. If one considers, then, Marston’s propensity for controversy, one would do well to sidestep singularly conservative readings of this drama.

Though members of the Venetian senate and even critics themselves evince a desire for an ethical touchstone, the text itself, I argue, reveals such a quest to be little more than a phantasm. By offering this radical revision – a revision that celebrates the revengers rather than expels them – Marston’s text seems to applaud the act of revenge. But such a position ignores the possibility that the Senate’s reaction is ironic, that Marston, in other words, is playing with the audience. Consider the manner in which, just as the Senate admires the revengers as ethical “props,” Pandulpho declines the Senate’s offers and explains that they are removing themselves to a monastery. This self-exile prevents the Senate (or audience) from making use of them as ethical yardsticks. *Antonio’s Revenge* prominently features that desire for an ethical touchstone only to refuse to make good on the deal by expelling these acclaimed revengers from the city. And in this manner, Marston’s text refuses to take a stance on the ethics of revenge.

**Early Modern Ethical Frameworks**

But might not revenge itself trouble the notion of an ethical touchstone? In what follows, I establish two of the major early modern ethical frameworks – Protestant Christianity and Aristotelian ethos – arguing that revenge posed a significant problem for both. The yearning for an ethical standard becomes
readily understandable when one considers early modern conceptions of evil—evil that was ubiquitous and difficult to differentiate from the good.

Protestant ethics emphasized the good in the form of the Decalogue against a potential wilderness of wickedness. William Est’s *Sathans Sowing Season* (1611) warns against this ubiquity of evil: “Bee sober, and watch, for your adversary the Diuell as a roaring Lyon walketh about, seeking whom he may deuoure” (1). To prey upon unsuspecting victims, this “Diuell” turns all manner of tricks to lead individuals astray:

And this he [Satan] effected not onely by inward suggestions, but also by outward enticements of wicked men, and that not only by their filthy and corrupt communication onely, but also by the pestilent seed of euill examples he laboureth to infect the minds of men, and to catch them in his net. (26)

Using both “inward” and “outward” temptations, Satan infects multitudes with his “pestilent seed.” As such, evil’s strength lies in its wild rates of transmission.

Christian watchfulness is a poor match against this infection when one considers the way in which “the good and the euill, the wicked and the godly, are mixed together, and suffered vntill the end of the world, when they shall for ever be separated by the Lord” (9). For early modern audiences, then, the problem of evil becomes one of distinguishability. Because evil cannot be easily identified, the resulting emphasis on the Decalogue becomes the mode by which individuals cleave to some kind of ethical certainty.60 Within a
Western European Christian framework, evil is that which defies categorization, and its unwieldy nature (as all that does not meet the narrow standards of the Good) becomes mapped onto notions of excess. One's strict adherence to the commandments symptomizes one's fear of evil's ubiquity – the fear that there is no way to tell which is lamb or lion.

This problem of differentiation remains even when Protestant Christianity addresses revenge. In the 1604 “Lectures on the XV Psalme read in the cathedral church of S. Paule, in London,” Minister George Downname argues that one who commits an act of revenge is “inspired with a satanickall spirit, who breath out reuenge” (117). This devilish incitement is countered, according to Downname, by Christ’s message in the New Testament: “For Christ would haue vs to be so farre from desire of reuenge, that he would haue vs readie rather to receiue a second injurie, than to reuenge the former” (115). For Downname, Christianity demands masochism from the faithful; one’s willingness to endure subsequent injury becomes the mark of piety.

Though explicitly aligning vengeance with Satan and mercy with the true followers of Christ, Downname muddles the matter when he praises “the Lord” as “the God of reuenge.” But how could revenge, which was brought on by a “satannical spirit,” be associated with God? To avoid sacrilege, then, it seems that the problem is not with revenge per se but with those who audaciously commit it. Whereas the “children of God” must “abstaine from reuenging wrongs,” God himself, according to Downname’s reading of scripture, “hath promised to reuenge it” (115). And, in fact, scripture
corroborates this reading: “Dearely beloued, auenge not your selues, but rather geue place vnto wrath. For it is written: Uengeaunce is myne, I wyll repay sayth the Lorde. Therfore, yf thyne enemie hunger, feede hym: yf he thirst, geue him drinke. For in so doing, thou shalt heape coales of fyre on his head” (Romans 12:19-20)61 What is most fascinating about this oft-cited passage are the mixed messages contained therein. Whereas God lays claim to vengeance, the faithful also enact a “benevolent” vengeance by practicing the teachings of Jesus (e.g., feed the hungry, care for the sick). Turning the other cheek, then, offers the added benefit of “heap[ing] coales of fyre” on the head of one’s enemy. But even in conservative interpretations of such passages, revenge itself is not inherently evil because either God or his earthly “magistrats” may take revenge, and in doing so, neither is damned by their association with vengeance. Issues arise, of course, with those who arrogate divine prerogative to themselves. Though an act of private revenge may constitute blasphemy, revenge, in and of itself, is not actually the problem here. And, perhaps, a lesser vengeance might even be available to believers.

In contrast to the theological acrobatics of Christianity, Aristotelian ethics attempted to create space for ethical indeterminacy. In the final quarter of the sixteenth century, England experienced the revival of the Aristotelian tradition, which spurred numerous translations and publications of Aristotle’s texts (Schmitt 68). In fact, Charles B. Schmitt claims in John Case and Aristotelianism in Renaissance England that Copernicus, Galileo, Newton,
Bacon, and Descartes “were all heirs in one way or another of the Aristotelian revival in England” (28). Without England’s intellectual revival, in other words, there would have been no Scientific Revolution. This tradition, however, did not simply influence scientific thought; it also shaped the ethical realm as Aristotle was considered “the main authority in moral philosophy far into the sixteenth century, his ethics informing university systems and published materials throughout Europe” (Crosbie 148-49; Lines 79).

In contrast to the Protestant framework, Aristotelian ethics is a flexible system that negotiates between two poles. As Christopher Crosbie observes, Aristotelian ethics is “absolute yet also culturally intuited, the ethical mean admits a theoretical range of action as ‘moderate,’ depending upon the circumstance” (148). And despite Aristotle’s emphasis on “moderation” in Nicomachean Ethics, he recognizes that even that characteristic ought to be applied in moderation. Or, to put it differently, one ought to “save extreme reactions for extreme situations” (Crosbie 151; Broadie 99).

Yet the question of revenge poses a problem to this tradition as well. On the one hand, Aristotle seems to repudiate vengeful impulses, instead advocating a restoration of “the status quo” insofar as “the offender should be made to give up his ill-gotten gain, which should then be restored to the victim, so that the result is ‘equality’ once more” (Bostock 61). This solution – which focuses on restitution rather than rehabilitation (or even personal
animus) – emerges as little more than a passionless arithmetical exchange. But, on the other hand, Aristotle grapples visibly with the manner in which revenge resists such a neat equation:

Men, then, as well as beasts, suffer pain when they are angry, and are pleased when the exact their revenge; those who fight for these reasons, however, are pugnacious, but not brave; for they do not act for the sake of the noble nor as reason directs, but from strength of feeling; they have, however, something akin to courage. (53)

Though an avenger fights from “strength of feeling” – a fury that is clearly less privileged than “reason” or “nob[ility]” – this lesser energy source does not bar him from virtue. In the equivocating prose of Aristotle and his translators, even avengers who are too much in touch with their “feeling[s]” may arrive at some simulacrum of courage. I stress this moment to suggest how revenge does not necessarily possess a negative valence in Aristotelian ethics; indeed “revenge,” in contrast to good temper, is considered even “more human” in later passages of *Nicomachean Ethics* (74).

But it is in the following lines that Aristotle reaches the apex of his ambivalence towards vengeance as he concludes his essay on the virtue of anger:

The man who strays a little from the path, either towards the more or towards the less, is not blamed; since sometimes we
praise those who exhibit the deficiency, and call them good-
tempered, and sometimes we call angry people manly, as
capable of ruling. How far, therefore, and how a man must
stray before he becomes blameworthy, it is not easy to state in
words; for the decision depends on the particular facts and on
perception. But so much at least is plain, that the middle state
is praiseworthy – that in virtue of which we are angry with the
right people, at the right things, in the right way, and so on,
while the excesses and defects are blameworthy – slightly so if
they are present in a low degree, more if in a higher degree,
and very much if in a high degree. Evidently, then, we must
cling to the middle state. (74)

While Aristotle hedges much like a politician onstage, he admits the
formidable problem posed by revenge. When Aristotle states that “[the
degree of straying before one becomes blameworthy] is not easy to state in
words,” he defers judgment through an almost endless array of determining
factors: Who might serve as the judge? Whose “perception,” in other words,
determines the blame? And whose version of the “particular facts”? By
refusing to put forth a definitive answer, much less address the questions
that logically arise from his explanation, Aristotle accommodates the
complexity of revenge to the point of vagueness. For example, he aligns
virtuous anger with those who are angry in the “right way” and associates
varying degrees of blameworthiness with levels of “excesses and defects.” At
no point are these ethical poles defined concretely. And immediately after this equivocation, an equivocation that performs the unreadability of his subject matter, Aristotle issues a prescription to “cling to the middle state.” One is not simply to follow, but cling to, this undefined state, and this verb choice underscores an inflexibility that seems at odds with Aristotle’s original message. In this manner, then, Aristotle abruptly sutures the gap opened up by not knowing, a gap that symptomatizes the ethical difficulties posed by revenge.

**Moral Tricksters**

While revenge itself may complicate ethical frameworks, *The Revenger’s Tragedy* brings ethical uncertainty to the fore through the character of Vindice. Though Albert Tricomi posits that Vindice embodies “righteous, native, anti-humanistic Christian conservatism,” his work misses the point: Vindice may embody this conservatism, but he also actively works to undo any confident assessment of his behavior. Brian Yost, for instance, states that Vindice, “as a moralistic figure,” is “disturbingly adept at deception” (“Visual”). Going even further, Karin Coddon observes: “To put on the role of Vindice again is to put on a new disguise” (130). Recall, for instance, Vindice’s transition from Piato (a character created to access the court and overthrow the Duke) back to himself. Lussurioso contracts Vindice to assassinate Piato, a demand that requires Vindice to “assassinate” himself. Such moves epitomize Vindice’s tricksterism, and it seems challenging, to say
the least, to take his actions at face value. He seems to resist definitive
categorization altogether.

Vindice’s tricksterism, however, is not limited to the court but rather
extends to his family as well. Disguised as Piato, Vindice pays a visit to his
childhood home to secure his sister for Lussurioso. But this is simply a
pretext for Vindice’s intention to test his sister’s chastity. When he attempts
to ply Castiza with riches and honor, she boxes him in the ear for his
audacious proposal: “I swore I’d put anger in my hand, / And pass the virgin
limits of myself / To him that next appeared in that base office” (2.1.32-34).
Because Vindice remains invested in patriarchal notions of feminine purity,
he is, of course, delighted by Castiza’s dramatic response: “It is the sweet’st
box that e’er my nose came nigh, / The finest drawnwork cuff that e’er was
worn!” (2.1.41-42). Punning on “box” and “cuff,” Vindice marvels at his
sister’s moral and physical strength. But his punning continues, as Judith
Haber observes, insofar as “box” and “cuff” are also euphemisms for female
genitalia. In this way, as Haber explains, Vindice celebrates Castiza’s purity
by entering (or almost entering) her “box” with his “nose.” In his mode of
tricksterism, then, Vindice’s patriarchal mores are tinged with an incestuous
lasciviousness.

This tricksterism, however, is in the to service of exacerbating further
the ethical uncertainty provoked by revenge. In the final conversation
between Antonio (the newly appointed Duke) and Vindice, The Revenger’s
Tragedy makes explicit the self-justifying and self-deconstructing aspects of moralism:

Vindice: The rape of your good lady has been quited
With death on death.
Antonio: Just is the law above! (5.3.107-109)

Despite evidence to the contrary, Antonio’s response associates this assassination of Junior Brother, heir to the Duke and rapist of Antonio’s wife, with a most righteous form of heavenly justice. Yet when Vindice falls into temptation, bragging of his schemes and successes, Antonio is repulsed by the news and orders his immediate execution: “Away with ‘em! Such an old man as he; / You that would murder him would murder me” (5.3.123-125).

Here, I wish to ponder Antonio’s abrupt change towards the assassins. When anonymous hands mete out Godly justice, Antonio marvels at the results and reaps the rewards. But when anonymity metamorphoses into corporeal subjects, he withdraws his support in horror. In this exchange, Vindice uncovers the Duke’s hypocrisy and puts it on display for the audience.

To be fair, of course, Antonio also perceives a personal threat encapsulated in this act of vengeance. From Antonio’s perspective, there is little difference or distance between a Good Duke and a Bad Duke. Consequently, Antonio notes his proximity to the recently deceased Duke by referring to their shared age (i.e., “old man”) and by slipping between “him” and “me.” When Vindice assures the Duke that the Junior Brother’s execution was “all for Your Grace’s good,” that justification fails to persuade the Duke.
Instead, Antonio recoils and promptly sentences Vindice to a “speedy execution”:

Vindice: Heart, was’t not for your good, my lord?

Antonio: My good? (5.3.123-24; emphasis mine)

Through the thrice-repeated good of the excerpt, the text suggests the interchangeability of good and evil. While Vindice first presumes knowledge of “Your Grace’s good,” he soon undermines that initial position by asking the Duke for confirmation of his good. And given Antonio’s own capricious judgment, it is small wonder that Dollimore deems his behavior nothing more than “moral posturing” in which “‘honour’ and ‘chastity’ are turned inside out and held up for inspection” (141). Antonio’s hypocritical response reveals moralism to be little more than self-serving. But it is Vindice who turns these virtues inside out before the audience. It is through Vindice’s own movement – from bragart to supplicant to martyr – that Antonio’s hypocrisy becomes clear.

The Last Laugh

This tricksterism – what might be called “movement” – emerges as a product of comedy. Positing the relation between comedy and movement in The Odd One In, Alenka Zupančič explains:

This process [of comedy] is in constant motion. Indeed, this irresistible motion is one of the key features of comedy, which is why it seems so difficult to pin it down with concepts and definitions....and is quite capable of its own definitions as
materials to be submitted to further comic treatment, turned upside down, or inside out [...]. (3)

Comedy is not something that simply provokes laughter; rather, comedy plays out the slippage between the signifier and the signified. It diminishes the fixity of language. Zupančič’s own writing gestures towards this continued movement as she concludes her paragraph with a set of ellipses.

Both The Revenger’s Tragedy and Antonio’s Revenge inhabit the realm of comedy. Though the “savage” comedy of The Revenger’s Tragedy is already well established, I will illustrate a few moments from the text as it relates to Zupančič’s framework. While comedy is predicated on movement, this movement is not necessarily linear. Zupančič writes:

Comedy or, more precisely, comic sequence is always inaugurated by some unexpected surplus-realization. This surplus-realization may well be produced by failure, by a mistake, an error, through misunderstanding (and it usually is), but the moment it occurs, it changes the very structure of the field. The field of comedy is essentially the field in which the answer precedes the question, satisfaction precedes the demand. (132)

The moment at which the audience first meets Vindice’s mother and sister illustrates the manner in which comedy plays with the temporal sequence by offering an “answer [that] precedes the question.” As Castiza (the sister) and her mother walk towards Vindice and Hippolito, Vindice hurries to conclude
the conversation: “I have a habit that will fit it quaintly. / Here comes our mother. / And sister” (1.1.102-04). Ostensibly, the brothers aim to keep their court affairs from these women, and “quaintly” refers to the cunning way in which they shall maintain their secrecy. Yet “quaint” also circulates as a reference to female genitals in early modern England. Insofar as Vindice moves from uttering “quaintly” to observing his approaching mother and sister, quaint’s multivalence is displaced onto these two women via his abrupt transition. Indeed, it is only punctuation that keeps this “quaint” comment from Castiza and her mother, and this punctual stop is less evident, of course, when performed. From such slippage, comedy originates.

In addition to this out-of-order movement, comedy provides a surplus: “Not only do we (or the comic characters) not get what we haven’t asked for, on top of it (and not instead of it) we get something we haven’t even asked for at all....It is this discrepancy of something en plus that leads the way and drives the comedy” (Zupančič 132). An instance of this comic surplus emerges after Antonio’s wife is raped by Junior Brother and kills herself. The suicide of a ravished noblewoman hearkens back to Lucrece as an event laden with pathos. Comedy enters the scene, however, through the excess of Antonio’s reaction to this loss. While he is heartbroken by her death, he comforts himself with the “miracle” that “being an old man, I’d a wife so chaste,” and the scene concludes on these lines (1318). Though Antonio evinces anxiety about his age (and, subsequently, his potency) throughout the play, here, his anxiety – an anxiety that seems altogether out
of place – undercuts the gravity of the situation. Through the lens of Antonio’s self-absorption, his wife’s act of a suicide, which traditionally “proves” her innocence, is also rewritten as the sign of Antonio’s masculinity. The manner in which this “extra” worry juxtaposes against Antonio’s desire for vengeance instantiates comic friction. More precisely, this moment is indicative of the ways in which The Revenger’s Tragedy is in the service of revealing the male characters’ investment in managing “their” women. Comedy erupts, then, from this unexpected exposure.

While Antonio’s Revenge similarly displays frequent moments of comedy, it does not deploy comedy with the rhetorical sophistication and complexity of The Revenger’s Tragedy. Several characters, such as Nutriche and Balurdo, are designated as stock characters of comic relief in Antonio’s Revenge. For instance, on the morning of Antonio’s wedding day – the same morning on which the court discovers the murdered father of Antonio and his bride-to-be in bed with another man (who is also deceased) – Nutriche complains of being woken up by the shouting. The melee, it seems, has disturbed the “pleasure of [her] finest [sex] dream” (1.2.31). As she recounts this dream to her female companions, Nutriche gestures towards the interrupted orgasm through her exclamations: “O God! I was even coming to it, law. O Jesu! ’twas coming of the sweetest” (1.2.32). Even at this time, “to come” suggests sexual ecstasy; therefore, Nutriche bemoans her proximity to this orgasm, a “coming” that is now behind her. While Nutriche plays with images of feminine bawdiness, Balurdo enacts more physical, even slapstick,
comedy onstage. When the virtuous Maria, beloved mother of Antonio, learns of her husband’s death, she falls into a swoon. What would be a moment of tragedy is disrupted by the well intentioned but clumsy Balurdo, who first runs to her rescue: “Courage, courage, sweet lady, ’tis Sir Jeffrey Balurdo bids you courage. Truly I am as nimble as an elephant about a lady” (1.2.256-57). Indeed, it takes Balurdo – and three additional men – to bear Maria to her room offstage. As this nobleman (who emphasizes his title of nobility as he comes to her rescue) stumbles and bumbles around Maria, his physical presence underscores his elephantine grace. Comedy emerges not simply from the disruption of an otherwise tragic scene but also from the deflation of chivalric imperative.

But even Antonio is not exempt from infusing the text with comic moments, particularly if one looks to his use of hyperbolic reproduction. Of this technique’s connection to comedy, Zupančič explains: “This repetition/reproduction has the effect of introducing or ‘revealing’ a gap in the original itself – a gap that we failed to notice before” (121). Describing his fitful night of sleep – a common trope that symbolizes a malignant plot unfolding in the court – Antonio makes liberal use of hyperbole. Though only one ghost tipped off Marcellus to the fact that “something’s rotten in the state of Denmark,” Antonio endures bad dreams, two ghosts, a comet, and a bloody nose (113). In the excessive quality of this list of bad omens, the text forestalls an interpretation of allusion but becomes, rather, one of comic parody. The target of the elicited laughter is not just Antonio’s experience but
also *Hamlet* and other traditional revenge tragedies that make use of such tired tropes. And beyond those plays, this laughter targets those audience members who expect or desire these clichés.

**The Little Tramp**

Before moving forward, I want to reiterate two major claims regarding comedy. Firstly, comedy is movement; it occurs at the moment at which language runs away with itself. But this formulation of comedy does not necessarily describe the *genre* of comedy. This claim leads me to my second point: the comedy that we are discussing here is something peripheral, a linguistic phenomenon that exceeds or remains outside the genre. In any event, comedy is that which does not belong. If we consider an early modern equivalent, the vagabond emerges as an apt figure. Due to its itinerancy and its perpetual “not belonging,” the early modern vagabond embodies these salient characteristics of comedy.

In “A Rejoinder,” A. J. Beier’s relates the variety of external factors that influenced vagrancy, which was considered a state of criminality in English society: “For most of Elizabeth’s reign, until 1597, regardless of whether people wanted to work, they were liable to prosecution as vagrants simply for being out of work, for begging, and for not having lands, a master or a craft from which to get a living” (130). These material issues – in addition to widespread underemployment, a rising population, increasing food prices, and decreasing wages – spurred the vagrant onward. In *Poverty and Policy*, Paul Slack explains:
[English] vagrants were not in any other respect proven
criminals at the time of their punishment. If they had been,
they would have been indicted and convicted for the more
serious offense [....] People who were convicted and punished
for vagrancy alone, and not for any other crime, [...] were the
people for whom the offense was invented: suspicious persons
in the middle ground between the deserving poor and the
criminal fraternity. (92-93; Woodbridge 4)

In the eyes of the Law, such individuals were guilty – somehow of something –
and the wholly invented category of vagrancy enabled law enforcers to
identify them. As Linda Woodbridge wryly observes, “why should there be
laws against vagrancy? Because vagrants are criminals. How do we know
they are criminals? Because vagrancy is a crime” (4).

Despite this legalistic tautology, fear of vagrants produced material
consequences for accused individuals. In the early years of Elizabeth’s reign,
a 1547 statute required vagabonds to be branded with a “V” on their
breasts.73 Later, ear-boring emerged as another consequence, as is
mentioned in a 1572 statute. From 1531-1597, according to Beier, the laws
against vagrancy remain the same with respect to their “harshness.”
Elizabeth I’s Vagrancy Act of 1597, however, marks a turning point in early
modern English law, heralding even stiffer penalties for the wandering poor.
This act called for the banishment of such “dangerous rogues” overseas
while, six years later, the Privy Council Order of 1603 specified the possible
destinations of removal, destinations that included the East and West Indies, Newfoundland, France, Germany, and Spain. Even in this brief summary of the legal history, one notices how England shifts from attempts to identify and to differentiate these “criminals” from the rest of society to expelling them altogether from England’s boundaries. Such a transition symptomatizes an eventual inability to coexist with vagrants.

William Perkins gestures towards this separation in *A godly and learned exposition of Christs Sermon in the Mount* (1608) when he writes: “The master must banish idlenesse out of his family; and the magistrate out of the commonwealth: vagrant persons ought not to be tolerated; for such eate not their own bread” (288). While Perkins analogizes the situations facing both the master and the magistrate, he refers almost euphemistically (i.e., the vice of “idlenesse”) to the problem of the vagrant. While Perkins refrains from explicitly advocating banishment as a political policy, his message is clear enough. Insofar as the vagrant is *the* metonymic figure of “idlenesse;” insofar as the master should banish idlenesse (i.e., vagrants) from his family; so, too, should the magistrate banish vagrants from the commonwealth. This inability (or unwillingness) to coexist stems largely from beliefs that vagrants fail to produce and contribute to English society.

While advertising employment opportunities in the burgeoning colony, the 1611 “Counsell for Virginia” dissuaded undesirables in no uncertain terms: “It is not intended any more to burden the action [building the English
Plantation] with vagrant and vnecessary persons: this is to giue notice to so many honest and industrious men.”

Given their perceived idleness – that, in the words of William Perkins, “they eate not their own bread” – vagabonds are susceptible to representation as parasites. Insofar as these unassimilated individuals are viewed as non-productive and antisocial, vagabonds resemble what, in No Future, Lee Edelman calls the “queer.” Subscribing to the logic of opposition, the queer functions as an antagonist to the future, to (re)production, and to meaning itself. Society (which is to say heteronormative society) maintains the coherence of its identity by disavowing its own characteristics of narcissism and futility, for instance, and the queer serves as the space onto which these qualities may be abjected.

But there are limitations to this term’s application, for as Theodora Jankowski quips, there is no early modern queer. I am not suggesting, of course, the invisibility of same-sex desire or an impossibility of queering early modern literature. Given the extensive and excellent work of Alan Bray, Valerie Traub, Jonathan Goldberg, Carla Freccero, and Richard Rambuss, to name but a few, homoerotic desire is most certainly legible, and sophisticated queer readings abound. But even if one dismissed these period or historicist concerns, “the queer” and “the vagabond” are not synonymous terms. While both vagabonds and queers share qualities of parasitism, non-productivity, and social exclusion, they also diverge insofar as vagrancy is predicated on itinerancy.
Indeed, movement is the underlying threat that vagrancy poses to English Renaissance society. In *Popish pietie, or The first part of the historie of that horrible and barbarous conspiracie, commonly called the powder treason* (1610), Francis Herring, like John Rhodes and others, details the relationship between the Catholic Church and English vagrants: “He [a member of the “Catholicke Sect and crew”] straight assembles th’ English vagrants there, / Who wish for change, and harme to this land here” (10). Though these terrorist plots do not necessarily originate within vagrant populations, such groups offer eager armies to facilitate these actions – precisely due to their supposed “wish for change and harme.” This assumed “harm” pegs such populations as subversive kernels of antisociality roaming the bucolic English countryside, and Herring’s reference to “change,” demonizes further their itinerant lifestyles by associating vagrants with intended “harme.”

Though Herring refrains from detailing how “change” and “harme” are linked in his unspecified yet causal relation, change is precisely the problem for the vagrant. According to the OED, “vagrant” refers to “one of a class of persons who having no settled home or regular work wander from place to place, and maintain themselves by begging or in some other disreputable or dishonest way; an itinerant beggar, idle loafer, or tramp.” This term is closely related to “vagabond” as both words share the Latin “vagart” (“to wander”) in their etymological histories. What is most significant is the emphasis on movement but a movement that is purposeless and unproductive. Vagrant
movement implies not a telos-oriented progression but unceasing wandering. It is movement for movement’s sake.

Yet how might one align the seemingly disparate figures of the revenger and vagabond? At what point do they intersect? In *Antonio’s Revenge*, vagrancy emerges in relation to Pandulpho (one of the revengers whose son was murdered by Piero) when he is exiled from the court and his assets seized by Piero. Despite this unfortunate turn of events – loss of son, home, and property – Pandulpho maintains that he will never be truly homeless: “The earth’s my body’s, and the heaven’s my soul’s / Most native place of birth, which they will keep / Despite the menace of mortality” (2.1.161-63). By expanding the definition of home beyond the court, Pandulpho challenges the Duke’s edict and refuses homelessness. Indeed, within this model, homelessness itself is an impossible feat even as Pandulpho’s situation, quite clearly, fits the criteria for vagrancy.

At its conclusion, *Antonio’s Revenge* continues to make use of this trope but suggests that one can only choose exile (not, for example, that exile can be forced upon one) insofar as the revengers remove themselves to a monastery. The Catholic associations with this location render it especially foreign and distance it from ordinary society. Of this decision to separate themselves from others, Pandulpho explains their world-weariness:

> We know the world, and did we know no more,
> We would not live to know; but since constraint
> Of holy bands forceth us to keep this lodge
Of dirt’s corruption, till dread power calls
Our soul’s appearance, we will live enclosed
In holy verge of some religious order
Most constant votaries. (5.2.147-52)

Here, the human body is demoted to the “lodge of dirt’s corruption,” and though the revengers would prefer to escape – particularly via suicide – they are constrained by the “holy bands,” the vows that keep them anchored to the body and prohibit self-murder. They must wait until God meets them in death (i.e., the moment of the “soul’s appearance”). Indeed, it is not just the “world” but also the human condition itself from which the revengers qua vagabonds find themselves estranged.

Though the realities of vagrancy are less explicit in *The Revenger’s Tragedy*, the threat of exile frames the play from the very start. Both Vindice and Hippolito, it seems, exist outside society. At the beginning of *The Revenger’s Tragedy*, for instance, Vindice has retreated from court life following the poisoning of his beloved Gloriana and only returns to it in elaborate disguise as the panderer Piato. These disguises compound further the manner in which Vindice resembles the vagrant insofar as he is “socially alien to the court” yet intimately tied to its events (Yost). But even at his home, Vindice embodies the alienated vagabond insofar as he disguises himself before his own mother and sister. And given Hippolito’s subversive presence in the court, Vindice marvels that he has “not [been] turned out yet” in the play’s opening speech (1.1.62).
Once at the court, Vindice aligns the figure of the malcontent with the vagabond. Contracted by Lussurioso to kill Piato (i.e., one of his disguises), Vindice frames his melancholic humor around his penury existence: “Money? Ho, ho! / ‘T has been my want so long, ‘tis now my scoff. / I’ve e’en forgot what color silver’s of” (4.2.109-111). Though this “new” Vindice is poor, he is not necessarily part of the wandering poor. His following lines, however, gesture towards the overlap between parasitic courtiers and vagabonds: “I get good clothes / Of those that dread my humor, and, for table room, / I feed on those that cannot be rid of me” (4.2.112-14). Insofar as both courtiers (or, more specifically, malcontents) and vagabonds “feed on” others and “eate not of their owne bread,” Vindice provides the link between the tenuous existence of a courtier and its curious structural similarities to the cultural framing of vagrancy. Vindice, in other words, invites the vagabond into the court.

**Ethics versus Aesthetics**

Given the manner in which these plays parody concerns of good and evil, I would argue that they eschew ethics in favor of aesthetics. Focusing on the main criticisms leveled at the vagabond – namely, unproductivity and instability – I want to consider how revenge informs an aesthetics predicated on itinerancy. For this, I coin the term “vagabond aesthetics.” From a Lacanian psychoanalytic perspective, the aesthetic is associated with the Symbolic order; it is the veil that permits the unveiling. In what follows, I
sketch out the significance of vagabond aesthetics by investigating the specific acts of vengeance in *The Revenger's Tragedy* and *Antonio's Revenge*.

What, then, does revenge reveal about this mode of aesthetic itinerancy? Etymologically speaking, revenge is synonymous with repayment, predicated as it is on the principle of even, measured exchange. Yet when the Venetian senate offers a repayment of sorts for the avengers’ “Herculean efforts” in the guise of “outward pomp” and “chiefest fortunes,” Antonio demurs: “Other vows constrain another course” (5.2.145). This repudiation seems altogether peculiar. While these gifts represent the Senate’s approval of the revenge, might these “gifts” also represent recompense for services rendered? To read these gifts as recompense, however, requires an understanding of why Antonio and his men resist this more than generous payment.

Yet “generosity” might be much of the problem here. In *The Subject of Tragedy*, Catherine Belsey observes: “Revenge is always in excess of justice....The discourse of revenge reproduces the violence and the excess of its practice” (113). In keeping with Belsey’s observation, then, those responsible for justice aim to match the excess of revenge. In other words, the excessive quality of Antonio’s revenge is reciprocated in the too-generous offers from the Senate. Whatever the avengers desire, they are allowed to “claim freely.”

Moreover, this lack of specificity contradicts the terms that would be demanded in a proto-capitalist exchange or even in an Elizabethan duel.
agreement. Antonio’s refusal to accept those saccharine gifts resists the 
domestication of revenge precisely because his act refuses commodification. 
He rejects an exchange value for his “work” on behalf of the government, and 
as a result, revenge resides in another register altogether, one that is 
separate from an emerging market economy.77 Furthermore, as an added 
benefit to his refusal, Antonio retains the power at the conclusion of this 
revenge tragedy insofar as the government remains perpetually indebted to 
him. Antonio’s “other vows” take precedence over the wishes of his 
government.

Yet the Venetian government remains indebted not only as a result of 
Antonio’s refusal but also because of the very nature of revenge itself. After 
Antonio sets his revenge-machine in motion, he muses: “No, let him [Piero] 
die, and die, and still be dying. / And yet not die till he hath died and died /
Ten thousand deaths in agony of heart” (5.2.106-7)).78 Here, Antonio 
prolongs his painful revenge in a paradoxical fashion as the present, past, and 
perpetual future tenses conflict and collide. These lines demonstrate the 
tension between Antonio’s desire to complete his act of revenge (i.e., “let him 
die”) and to keep it in motion. Note, for instance, the repetition of “die” – in 
both the present and past tenses that is complicated further by the fantasy of 
“ten thousand deaths” – a number, which though finite, still gestures towards 
the infinitude of revenge in its excess. The manner in which revenge is 
doomed to incompletion suggests that revenge could never be satisfied. If
there is an equal exchange, it is only one in which my unquantifiable suffering equals your punishment.

With regard to the specific acts of revenge, the vagabond aesthetic manifests itself as pointless, but perpetual, movement, and the repetition of “pell mell” throughout Antonio’s Revenge gestures towards this aesthetic. According to the OED, “pell mell” refers to both an indiscriminate amalgam and to a disordered haste. Moreover, the fact that this phrase circulates throughout the text itself, emerging as an unconscious refrain uttered by major characters, speaks to the perpetual motion of vagabond aesthetics. When this refrain is used in Antonio’s Revenge, characters are in the midst of determining an appropriate course of action. But unlike the intellectual vacillation and endless pontifications of Hamlet, these characters weigh their options only briefly before they throw themselves into the fray. As Piero embarks upon his nefarious plans, he crows to an empty stage: “Pell mell – confusion and black murder guides / The organs of my spirit: shrink not, heart! / Capienda rebus in malis praecepts via est” (2.2.222-24). To refer to “confusion” as a guide – along with “murder” whose “black[ness] obscures sight – is to posit an anti-guide of sorts. Piero has no guides, in other words, save the ones that cloud his vision but spur his “spirit.” To conclude his speech, Piero quotes from Seneca’s Agamemnon, a quotation that translates into the following: “In combating some evils, a bold determined course of action must be adopted.” This “bold determined course of action,” however, is complicated by the lines that precede it. Indeed, if the lines are taken
together, Piero’s action is similarly unguided. His is a bold and determined course, to be sure, but one that is wholly “pell mell”: impulsive, reactive, and hurried.

Antonio’s use of “pell mell” immediately precedes his multiple acts of vengeance (i.e., killing Julio, planning the deadly masque, and taking the first stab at Piero). Before his first act of vengeance, Antonio stands over Julio with a knife and soliloquizes: “Have at adventure, pell mell, no reverse. –” (3.1.165). Though Antonio debates whether or not killing the innocent Julio goes too far, he pushes these worries aside with his embrace of “adventure.” What remains most interesting about this line is not simply that Antonio repeats Piero’s nonsensical phrase, but also the line’s concluding punctuation. In the manuscript, this unlikely combination of a period and a dash – insofar as the period denotes the concluding line while the dash interrupts that concluding mark – represents the punctual equivalent of “pell mell.” By including two contradictory marks side by side, the text renders their message pointless – pointless, perhaps, as the “pell mell” movement of vengeance itself.

While “pell mell” does not appear in The Revenger’s Tragedy, the play’s dramatic structure gestures towards this refrain’s frantic movement. In contrast to traditional revenge tragedy in which vengeance culminates in the final act, the plot of The Revenger’s Tragedy extends well beyond the act of revenge. Though the torture and death of the Duke has been Vindice’s consistent aim through the play, this central act – that which could be
analogized as a period – occurs in the middle of the play at Act 3 Scene 5. And still the plot *keeps going* (perhaps even running away with itself) – much like that unruly dash in *Antonio’s Revenge*.

Vindice’s disguises are similarly dashing and signify a purposeless itinerancy, as his disguises, once discarded, continue moving to other bodies. Consider, for instance, the manner in which Vindice removes one of his costumes (i.e., Piato’s clothing) and dresses the Duke’s corpse in it. It is not that the Duke becomes Piato through this exchange of clothing. Because Vindice arranges the Duke’s body such that he resembles a drunken servant, this disguise takes on another meaning on another body. And even when Vindice is ostensibly himself, that personality is always already fractured. There is, of course, Vindice the malcontent, the hired assassin, the panderer, the guarantor of feminine virtue, and even the “witch.” Consequently, one might interpret these disguises as obscuring Vindice’s genuine identity, that there is, in other words, a “real” man beneath the costumes and many postures of Vindice.

But vagabond aesthetics lead us in another direction. Indeed, if vagabond aesthetics have any investment at all, they are invested in illusions, superficiality, that which is capricious and without use, that which dashes off and trips over its own feet. If one were to organize this concept under a banner, Piero’s parting words to his audience might serve as an apt motto: “Relish not the substance, but applaud the show.” For both *Antonio’s Revenge* and *The Revenger’s Tragedy*, there is nothing *but* the show.
Leaving this show in search of another, we proceed chronologically and focus exclusively on Jacobean drama in the following chapter. As if in anticipation of the tumultuous events to come – the outbreak of the Civil Wars, the trial and execution of Charles I, and the temporary formation of the English Commonwealth – these works are preoccupied by challenges to the sovereign. By dramatizing vengeful attacks and assassinations, these texts urge us to reconsider how revenge impacts the sovereign and, more specifically, his corporeal body. If revenge undermines both signification and ethical systems, how might it affect sovereign authority, an authority that depends on the fixity of language and ethics? Does it, as some contend, undermine sovereign rule? Or might revenge effect something more surprising and ultimately less radical?
Chapter Three

Le Roi Ne Meurt Jamais: Regicide, Revenge, and Revolution in Jacobean Revenge Tragedy

“Perfection, of a kind, was what he was after.”

--W.H. Auden from Epitaph on a Tyrant

Introduction

Philip Henry, a witness to the spectacle of Charles I’s execution, recalls: “The blow I saw given, and can truly say, with a sad heart, at the instant whereof I remember well, there was such a grone by the thousands then present as I never heard before and desire I may never hear again” (Lee 12; Preston 1). That “grone” of regret escaping the masses soon escalated, according to Paula Preston and other critics, into “extraordinary revulsion” towards the execution. Subsequently, Charles I “came to be regarded as a martyr and a saint; his alleged crimes were completely forgotten; and from the Restoration onward, the anniversary of his death was observed as a day of fasting and humiliation” (Preston 2). How, then, does one understand this conceptual shift from tyrant to martyr? And given the early modern public’s stomach for and delight in grislier onstage assassinations, how might we theorize the dramatic treatment of the sovereign and his body in the years approaching this pivotal event in English history?
Though early modern audiences adored revenge tragedies, various mandates, legal and ecclesiastical, prohibited the offstage re-enactment of these theatrical spectacles. Not surprisingly, the state had a particular investment in condemning its subjects' acts of revenge, for vengeance exposes a glitch in the governing machine. In The Subject of Tragedy, Catherine Belsey explains: “It is the sovereign's failure to administer justice, which inaugurates the subject’s quest for vengeance” (111). To resort to vengeance presumes the inability of the justice system to right wrongs. Taking further this notion in “English Revenge Tragedy,” Michael Neill argues: “More often than not the revenger finds himself pitched against the very authority that should be responsible for the implementation of justice” (329). Here, the structure of revenge not only presupposes the impotence of the justice system, but also facilitates a showdown of sorts with its most authoritative representative. Francis Bacon, jurist of distinction and James I’s Attorney General and Lord Chancellor, concurs that revenge damages these systems of authority: “As for the first wrong, it doth but offend the law; but the revenge of that wrong, putteth the law out of office” (Bacon “On Revenge”). Presumably, it is this antagonistic, even deadly, dynamic that prompts Katharine Eisaman Maus to observe that “blood vengeance almost automatically subverts the power of the crown” (Introduction xiv). Revenge, as it has been conventionally understood, defies both the sovereign and his law.
But according to many, revenge does more than wreak havoc with earthly powers; it undermines God’s authority as well.\(^{84}\) In *Radical Tragedy*, Dollimore states: “Revenge action is not a working out of divine vengeance, but a strategy of survival resorted to by the alienated and dispossessed. Moreover, in that action is a rejection of the providential scheme which divine vengeance conventionally presupposed” (29). God’s action, if it is to arrive at all, becomes little more than a tiresome game of waiting for Godot. Even if the avengers fancy themselves on the same team, Dollimore challenges their self-characterization as agents of godly justice: “As revengers, far from being the instruments of divine providence, they subversively arrogate its retributive function” (38).\(^{85}\) As I discussed in the previous chapter, these revengers take, in other words, what was considered to be the province of divinity and make it the province of man. It is in this way, then, that critics conceptualize revenge as a challenge to both earthly and heavenly sovereigns.

But revenge itself is not the only attack on the sovereign, for revenge tragedy obsessively rehearses regicide onstage. In his examination of this phenomenon in Shakespearean drama, Maynard Mack observes the centrality of regicide in dramatic history: “Western drama opened with defiance of the king. When Prometheus challenged Zeus and when Clytemnestra struck down Agamemnon, they set a pattern that continued through much of the history of drama” (12). And the genre of early modern revenge tragedy, particularly in Jacobean drama, retains this focus on the
king in its plot. From *Hamlet* to *The Revenge of Bussy d’Ambois*, and from *Antonio’s Revenge* to *The Revenger’s Tragedy*, the sovereign himself is explicitly under attack. It is not simply that revenge tragedy fetishizes an attack on the king; king-killing is its predominant sport, a sport that has attracted few spectators in the critical arena.

Even Mack reaches a critical impasse in his final chapter of *Killing the King* when he writes: “Everything is pruned, shaped, and focused to dramatize king killing in all its moral, political, metaphysical, and *symbolic* horror” (149). But why is the execution of the sovereign a moment of horror? Mack redoubles this question when he gestures toward this traumatic rupture inherent in deposing the crown: “Something great and horrible has happened and something profoundly disturbing in a political sense has been removed” (184). Though rightly asserting the profundity of regicide, Mack fails to articulate what that “something” – the disruptive element of regicide (or of sovereignty itself) – might be.

In this chapter, then, I analyze the ritualized violence against the sovereign’s body in the decades preceding the criminalization and execution of Charles I. To do so, I limit my examination to a small selection of revenge tragedies from the early years of James I’s rule because those years produced not only some of the most graphic revenge plays, but also the foundational politics that contributed to the civil wars decades later. Two revenge tragedies – Cyril Tourneur’s *The Atheist’s Tragedy* (1611) and Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher’s *The Maid’s Tragedy* (1619) – emerge as
exemplary texts of this early modern dynamic insofar as they present attacks on heavenly and earthly sovereigns. In contrast to Maus’ assertion that revenge “almost automatically subverts the crown,” I will argue that vengeance – which arrives in the forms of atheism and regicide – only seemingly undermines the monarchical structure. I instead offer that regicidal revenge is not a preparation for but an antidote against this real-life possibility in these plays. I want to suggest that literary revenge, in other words, emerges out of an inherently conservative impulse to preserve and to reify the structure of sovereignty.

**Sovereign Power**

But why would the drama-loving James I be a target – symbolic, real, or otherwise – of this onstage challenge? What is the relationship, if any, between this current sovereign and the plays that were preoccupied with ridding “him” from the stage? Examining the politics associated with James VI’s accession to the throne, Lori Anne Ferrell explains that many took issue with James’ distinctly “Scottish baggage,” which included his entourage of “Scottish advisers, Scottish cronies, and Scottish clergy” (27). Moreover, his plan to unite the two kingdoms into one nation angered more than a few allies. Indeed, Ferrell contends that the 1605 Gunpowder Plot “provides evidence of the confidence with which Catholic traitors felt they could exploit anti-union and anti-Scottish sentiment in England” (51). Nor can we forget the high-profile assassination of Henri IV of France in 1610, which preceded both of the revenge tragedies analyzed in this chapter. According to
historians Kenneth Fincham and Peter Lake, this event “panicked” James into “aggressive moves against English Catholics,” aggression that materialized in his selection of George Abbot as the new Archbishop of Canterbury (36).^89

Though I attend to the historical-cultural context from which these revenge tragedies arise, I am not suggesting that this context accounts fully for the animus behind these literary assassinations. Might we consider, instead, what this particular coincidence of the political and dramatic worlds signifies for the relationship between regicide and revenge?

But to whom (or what) does sovereignty refer? What are the responsibilities of and liberties afforded by this position? As Maynard Mack, E.M.W. Tillyard, and C.S. Lewis, among others, have noted, sovereignty was “simply another dimension of the general hierarchical order that prevailed in the [English early modern] world-picture” (Mack 21). The sovereign, composed of two bodies – the transient human one and the eternal body politic – served as God’s proxy on earth. The employment of the royal “we” symbolized the sovereign’s divine right to rule. A 1610 address of James I to Parliament speaks to this insistence on divine right:

The State of MONARCHIE is the supremest thing vpon earth:
For Kings are not onely GODS Lieutenants vpon earth, and sit vpon GODS throne, but euen by GOD himselfe they are called Gods.

Though James I acknowledges a celestial limit to sovereign power insofar as kings are “GODS Lieutenants,” and the possessive quality of this phrase
reflects God’s upper hand, his assertion that even God “himselfe” refers to earthly sovereigns as “Gods” obscures the hierarchical distinction between God and King.

Giorgio Agamben’s reading of sovereign power in *Homo Sacer* articulates the theoretical contradiction that underpins James I’s conception of it: “The paradox of sovereignty consists in the fact that the sovereign is, at the same time, outside and inside the juridical order” insofar as the sovereign is “truly the one to whom the juridical order grants the power of proclaiming a state of exception and, therefore, of suspending the order’s own validity” (15). The sovereign both instantiates and resides within a “permanent state of exception” (Benjamin 7). His liminal relation to violence and law further confuses his identity, for “the sovereign is the point of indistinction between violence and law, the threshold on which violence passes over into law and law passes over into violence” (Agamben 32). It is the sovereign’s decision that differentiates between violence (which ought to be punished by law) and the law (which sanctions penal violence). I would argue that the mere presence of this decision – insofar as there is one who *must* decide, insofar as there is a decision to be made at all – betrays the arbitrary construction of sovereign power.

Disavowing a society shaped solely by sovereign whim, the sovereign-instated Church of England legitimized royal power by educating the populace about the evils of rebellion. For instance, the *Homilie against
disobedience and willful rebellion (1570) reminds the congregation that the King acts as God’s designated proxy:

It is most evident [based on scriptural authority] that Kings, Queenes, and other Princes (for hee speaketh of authoritie and power, be it men or women) are ordained of GOD, are to bee obeyed and honoured of their subjects: that such subjects, as are disobedient or rebellious against their Princes, disobey GOD, and procure their owne damnation. (Book II, Homily 21) 

Moreover, this homily explicitly condemns disobedience against even “vndiscreet and euill gouernours” by aligning rebellious subjects with agents of the devil: “For who else be they that are most inclined to rebellion, but such haughtie spirits? From whom springeth such foule ruine of Realmes? Is not rebellion the greatest of all mischiefes? And who are most ready to the greatest mischiefes, but the worst of men?” (5). The rhetorical effect of these questions, questions to which every good Christian ought to know the answers, remains centuries later: a rebellion against even the most tyrannous monarch repeats Satan’s disobedience against God and courts a subsequent eternity in Hell.

Building upon these historical and theoretical frameworks, I utilize “sovereign” throughout the chapter to denote the central figure of authority present in revenge tragedy – be it Baron, Duke, King, or God. In this regard, the sovereign represents the Lacanian Other as the one whom the subject
presumes to have knowledge, the one who articulates the distinction between the Law and violence.

**God is Dead: The Relationship between Atheism and the King**

It is precisely this issue of God – as both fellow sovereign and backer of earthly administrations – that I wish to address in my first example. Given its categorization as an “anti-revenge tragedy,” Tourneur’s *The Atheist’s Tragedy; Or, The Honest Man’s Revenge* seems bereft of subversive potential. Whereas bloody-thirsty phantoms typically spur the revenge act, the ghost of the murdered baron returns to hold back the vengeful hand of his son, Charlemont: “Return to France, for they old father’s dead / And thou by murder disinherited. / Attend with patience the success of things / But leave revenge unto the King of kings” (2.6.20-23). By abstaining from revenge altogether or, more precisely, by relinquishing vengeful impulses to the “King of kings,” the text trusts in the providence of God and its eventual “success.” When Charlemont’s “patience” predictably runs out after D’Amville, the author of his wrongs, marries off Charlemont’s beloved to another in addition to murdering his father and disinheriting him – the phantom returns once more to halt potential violence. Revenge, characteristically left to the son and heir, now becomes the sole province of God.

Reinforcing its conservative message, the text didactically affirms that God comes through. As the wronged Charlemont and Castabella, his beloved, kneel at their execution, D’Amville cruelly taunts them. Yet as D’Amville raises the axe, he strikes a blow to his own head, staggers off the scaffold, and
admits that “there is a power above that hath overthrown the pride of all my projects” before he expires (5.2.256-58). As Providence itself intervenes to preserve the good, this deus ex machina is visible even from the cheapest of seats. Though the king may be murdered, the high King – the heavenly sovereign – remains intact and indisputably powerful. On this point, one could almost agree with Maus when she writes that this drama “salvages the absolute power” of a “beneficent deity” (xxix).

But this type of normative gloss disregards the complexities present in this play. Of the play's full title, for instance, Anja Müller-Wood observes:

This ‘manichean’ polarity is put in perspective by the conjunction ‘or’ that links its two components. Who is the tragic hero in this play: the atheist or the honest man? On the grammatical hinge that seems to differentiate the two characters, the apparent antagonists twist and turn to the rhythm of a capricious language. (90)92

Müller-Wood’s attention to the play’s language troubles the too-facile interpretations that have dominated its criticism and valorized Charlemont. Likewise, D'Amville’s atheism offers another mode by which we may confront the play’s undisputed conservatism and, more importantly, examine the mechanisms behind its challenge. In what follows, I shall consider whether the presence of atheism, which poses a substantial threat even in a conservative revenge tragedy, effectively “subverts the crown” of the heavenly sovereign.
Through sheer disbelief, atheism undermines not only God, but the King precisely because his powers derive from God. In *James I and the Politics of Literature*, Jonathan Goldberg comments upon this interrelatedness: “In Jacobean England, religion is politics, and *arcana imperii* have religious implications as well” (80). Despite the religiosity of its politics (and of its secrets), the Elizabethan-Jacobean period witnessed “the skeptical disintegration of providential belief,” as Jonathan Dollimore, William R. Elton, and other critics have observed (Dollimore 38; Elton 335). Of this epoch, Lori Anne Ferrell quips: “When we analyze the rhetoric of religion in the early seventeenth century, then we find that James I ruled over a powderkeg” (70). Social shifts, such as Galileo’s invention of the telescope, which proved Copernican theories, and Francis Bacon’s empiricism, enabled a new world view – one in which God was not at the center, if even in the picture at all.

Yet for the atheist (for whom God is certainly out of the picture), it is his assumed depravity that most troubles early modern society. Given that Protestant moral conduct is predicated on an ever-watchful God, that careful eye keeps an otherwise dissolute populace in check. But, as the logic goes, if an atheist refuses to believe, *anything* will go: “If yee goe to the Schoole of Sathan, the first ABC of Atheisme taught there is this, *All the kingdomes of the world will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship mee*” (Cowper 220-21). The words of Satan to Jesus in the desert are echoed here as a tempting mirage for those who confine their attentions to the “reality” of the material world – anything may be obtained via this singular focus. The “carnall
Atheist” is, according to William Cowper, “free to commit sinne” (160). This freedom is compounded further by the fact that neither are the wicked punished in this life nor is there any proof of the punishment to come: “The same condition befalleth to the Godly, which is threatened to the wicked” (Cowper 131). This, then, is the real problem with atheism: it sanctions any and all forms of wickedness, placing the burden of proof on Christian believers.

In *The Atheist's Tragedy*, D'Amville's irredeemable atheism is symptomatized by his meticulous deconstruction of the so-called “obvious” indicators of God's displeasure, for he replaces the superstitious fear of signs with scientific explanations. At the first roll of thunder and flash of lightning, D'Amville mocks his partner in crime:

What!
Dost start at thunder! Credit my belief;
'Tis a mere effect of Nature,
An exhalation hot and dry, involved
Within a wat'ry vapour i' the middle
Region of the air, whose coldness
Congealing that thick moisture to a cloud,
The angry exhalation shut within
A prison of contrary quality
Strives to be free; and with the violent
Eruption through the grossness of that cloud
Makes this noise we hear. (2.4.143-52)

D’Amville’s discourse remains indebted to classical “naturalist-philosophers” such as Aristotle and Lucretius (Maus 411), and this explanation clings to “science” rather than superstition. More problematic, though, is the manner in which D’Amville diminishes a sign of damnation to a “mere effect of Nature.” Though lightening might be great, its power does not derive from God, as even Bacon admits when he writes of this natural phenomenon.93

Induction and empiricism become the new tools with which to make sense of the natural world. And given that The Atheist’s Tragedy associates scientific discourse with this diabolical figure, it lobs a weighty criticism at those who leave God in favor of Science, those who refuse to read the signs of the Sovereign but instead aim to explain them.94

D’Amville, however, is not the only character who makes use of scientific (or, more precisely, naturalist) methodologies. In contrast to Michael Higgins, who argues that Charlemont and Castabella typify “calvinistic piety” and thereby “prove the ‘reality’ of spirit as opposed to the ‘phantasy’ of materialism,” I would posit that even the so-called “good” characters deploy the empirical tools of the villains (262).95 Thomas Rist observes how, when Castabella believes Charlemont to be a ghost, “[he] urges an epistemology based exclusively on visual perception: ‘Reduce thy understanding to thine eye’” (117). In this moment, Charlemont asks Castabella to use her powers of observation to recognize that he is indeed alive. She responds in kind: “I feel a substance warm and soft and moist, /
Subject to the capacity of sense” (3.1.84-85). This is not the language of one who recognizes her beloved; rather, Castabella’s unemotional observations are downright clinical. Precisely because the hero and heroine, alongside the villain, employ the tools (and language) of the scientific revolution, it is difficult to make the case that this drama demonizes empiricism insofar as it is a code for atheism.

Yet there is an early modern link between science and atheism. Even the writings of Bacon, a committed Protestant, betray his discomfort due to competing loyalties between scientific rigor and religious faith:

It is true, that a little philosophy inclineth man’s mind to atheism; but depth in philosophy bringeth men’s minds about to religion. For while the mind of man looketh upon second causes scattered, it may sometimes rest in them, and go no further; but when it beholdeth the chain of them, confederate and linked together, it must needs fly to Providence and Deity.

(371)
The structure of Bacon’s final sentence underlines his inadvertent concession; “must” and “needs” – two verbs conjugated in the present tense – divulge the urgency of his admonishment. And within the same essay, Bacon makes use of the tools of science to disprove atheism, suggesting that empirical observations are sufficient “proof” of God’s existence: “And therefore God never wrought miracle to convince atheism, because his ordinary works convince it” (371). If one is a clever enough scientist, as the
logic goes, one will see God in science. Nevertheless, the seams in Bacon’s construction are beginning to show.

To view those seams in a better light, I turn to *Three heavenly treatises upon the eighth chapter to the Romans* (1609), in which William Cowper offers this on the relationship between atheism and empiricism:

“*Atheisme…look[s] curiously to the decking of the body, which falleth vnder the eye of man, but regard[s] not the hid man of the heart, which falleth vnder the eye of God*” (308). By limiting oneself, in other words, to observable phenomena, a dutiful scientist strays into the lands of atheism, for science cannot account for that which “falleth vnder the eye of God.” Unlike Bacon, Cowper points to an epistemological limit: people cannot rely on discernable phenomena of the natural world precisely because so much lies outside that field. In this manner, then, science remains subordinate to the “truth” of religious beliefs.

Still it is not simply atheism’s proximity to science that poses a threat; *The Atheist’s Tragedy* itself fails to refute the logic of atheism. In response to D’Amville’s unrelenting arguments, the text only displays the theatrical moment of divine vengeance at the play’s conclusion. When, for instance, D’Amville pressures Castabella into “incestual” liaisons, he persuades, albeit unsuccessfully, with popular naturalist arguments. To this, Castabella replies: “I could confute / You, but the horror of the argument / Confounds my understanding” (4.3.140-42). But the problem, of course, is that she does not “confute” him. Atheism grows in stature as a bogeyman when its “horrors”
paralyze Christian intellect. And according to orthodox Protestantism, such a
stance would be considered heretical. Thomas Cooper, for instance, argues in
*The Churches Deliverance* (1609) that “[the workes of God] keepe vs from
security in sinne and presumption of Gods mercies. *They* confound Atheists
and scorners of religion” (92). Because the “workes of God” and those who
proclaim them refute atheism, the fact that Castabella refuses to formulate an
argument impugns God. For a text that underscores the usefulness of
empiricism, this lack of proof is, at best, problematic.

But despite atheism’s strong presence in this revenge tragedy, *The
Atheist’s Tragedy* ultimately cedes ground to the sovereign as a result of the
*strength* of D'Amville’s atheistic beliefs. Even if we remain skeptical of
D'Amville’s late-onset fear of vengeful ghosts,96 his reverence of Nature –
a reverence that remains consistent throughout the play – stands as a simple
substitution for a more orthodox belief in God. Indeed, it is D'Amville’s
preoccupation with nature that moves Robert Ornstein to categorize him not
so much as an atheist but as a “Renaissance ‘Naturalist’” (195).97 Because the
always-capitalized “Nature” replaces “God” in D'Amville’s rhetoric, the terms
are rendered, if not synonymous, then at least curiously aligned.98 For
D'Amville’s speeches. And when D’Amville’s sons are dying, this atheist even
prays aloud: “Dear Nature, in whose honour I have raised / A work of glory to
posterity, / O bury not the pride of that great action / Under the fall and ruin
of itself” (5.1.80-83). As the addressee of his futile prayer, Nature serves as
the placeholder of God. D’Amville still believes that *Something* will intercede on his behalf, that there is, in other words, an Other who controls destiny.99

Finally, if we return to the lightning episode, we see that D’Amville simply reverses thunder’s meaning in the symbolic register: “‘Tis a brave noise, and methinks graces our / Accomplished project as a peal of ordnance / Does a triumph; it speaks encouragement. / Now Nature shows thee how it favoured our / Performance” (2.4.154-58). Rather than viewing natural phenomena as signs of God’s displeasure, D’Amville insists on them as indicators of Nature’s *satisfaction*. Yet the logic of the two claims is indistinguishable. He does not, in fact, limit his interpretations to verifiable scientific observations about nature; he uses “Nature” as the mirror in which he sees himself. It becomes, in other words, that which secures his position as a subject in the “natural” world. Insofar as D’Amville demonstrates his belief in an agent of power (and *reveres* that power in the form of Nature), the *structure* of his atheism remains identical to that of the sanctioned Protestant perspective.100 Atheism can never, in fact, be atheistic enough. As such, the structure of the Sovereign – as God – remains resilient against the so-called assaults of atheism.

**Killing the King As Man**

In contrast to *The Atheist’s Tragedy*, Beaumont and Fletcher’s *The Maid’s Tragedy* (1619) effects a more overt attack on the position of the earthly sovereign. And unlike in other revenge tragedies (e.g., *Hamlet*, *Titus Andronicus*, or *Antonio’s Revenge*), we are not dealing with a tyrant who
“deserves,” in some ethical sense, death. A seemingly just and generous sovereign, the King simply marries off his mistress to a member of the nobility, an all too common arrangement at this time. What is uncommon, however, is that his mistress, Evadne, murders him in his royal bed. This unmerited regicide becomes the ideal instance in which to examine whether or not vengeful assassination undermines the crown. If this murder does not subvert monarchical power, how might one make sense of the perverse persistence of these literary assassinations?

Not surprisingly, much has been made of this assassin. Adrienne Eastwood remarks that while Evadne would unquestionably have been considered a whore (sexually active and sexually provocative) and therefore worthy of censure, Beaumont and Fletcher depict her as beautiful, honest, and with a power and assertiveness unmatched by any other character in the play....the playwrights use the figure of the single woman to complicate their culture’s gender conventions. (13)

While refraining from praising the playwrights as feminists, Peter Berek similarly admires Evadne’s revolutionary stature: “Her enactment of revenge stands in notable contrast to the conspiratorial dithering of her brothers, Melantius and Diphilus, and to the clowning of Aspatia’s father Calianax” (370). Moreover, she “figures rebellion against both female submissiveness and loyalty to the sovereign” (370).
Despite Evadne’s propensity for subversion, the King remains confident in his subjects’ respect for his position. When Amintor, the husband of Evadne, reaches for a weapon – an act that is prohibited in court – the King calmly rebukes him: “Draw not thy sword. Thou know’st I cannot fear / A subject’s hand; but thou shalt feel the weight / Of this, if thou dost rage” (3.1.245-47). The “this” to which the King refers is his sword, and he subjugates his subject once more with the sheer “weight” of his authority, an authority that is defined by the King’s *incapacity* to fear his “subject’s hand.”

Given these circulating conspiracies, the King’s security in his power seems all the more remarkable. When the King magnanimously pardons one such plot, he tells Melantius: “Not to instruct your knowledge, but to show you / My ears are everywhere: you meant to kill me, And get the fort to escape” (4.2.120-23). Referring to his spies – the “ears” that represent the sovereign’s continuous power throughout the court and kingdom – the King privately reveals his knowledge of the assassination plot against him. In his guise of leniency, the King maintains the upper hand in this royal panopticon because he reveals himself as the one who knows the court secrets.

Nevertheless, one cannot forget that those “ears” ultimately fail to alert the King. For all his calculatedly nonchalant displays of omnipotence, the King is dead by the conclusion of *The Maid’s Tragedy*. I would argue that it is not Evadne’s dagger but the subsequent humanization that kills the king – that Evadne reveals him as *human* rather than *magisterial*. Remarking on
Evadne’s quick departure from the sovereign’s bedroom, an unnamed nobleman whispers: “I see kings can do no more that way than other mortal people” (5.2.119). Though the meaning of this bawdy joke at the king’s expense shows that his “will” flags as much as his imperfect subjects’, the emphasis on “mortal” also plays on the mortal wound the King has just received at her hands. This revelation of the king’s supposed lack deflates his imperial aura. By drawing attention to the king’s imperfect body – one that rises, falls, and dies – Evadne ostensibly exposes the fallibility of the sovereign.

Furthermore, this attention to the king’s mortal body manifests itself as anything but somber. While the first nobleman initiates the criticism of the king’s sexual performance, the second one continues the punning: “How fast he is! I cannot hear him breathe” (5.2.121). On the one hand, this line emerges as a relatively innocuous observation of the king’s deep sleep, an observation that presages his actual death. Yet another reading suggests that, insofar as “fast” follows the earlier joke about the king’s bedroom activities, this second comment emphasizes his speed. And given that they cannot hear him “breathe,” he has not, perhaps, labored all that much in bed with Evadne. His lack of exertion, in other words, also betrays his impotence.

Still, if one has not caught the subtlety of that line, the second gentleman brings it to a point when he discovers the king’s body, remarking: “He’s stiff, wounded and dead” (5.2.125). To continue our dissection of this post-mortem moment, I would offer that the king’s corpse materializes the
metaphor of “le petit mort.” In contrast to earlier asides, the king’s “stiff[ness]” suggests not simply rigor mortis but also his potency while his “wounded” body betrays his penetrability. My point here is not that these jokes and puns coalesce into a singular, unified interpretation but rather this: even within the range of possible interpretations, each one undermines the gravity of an onstage assassination of a sovereign. In that way, the text demonstrates the far-reaching consequences of Evadne’s radical attack on the sovereign position. The preoccupation with the king’s natural body – a preoccupation that is coupled with double entendres – diminishes not only the dignity of his death but also his position.

And critics agree. William Shullenberger writes this of Evadne’s audacious act: “In the act of murder, [she] assumes herself some portion of the mystique which had rendered the king inviolable” (147). Touting the subversive qualities of revenge in the capable hands of characters like Evadne, Alison Findlay calls Renaissance revenge tragedy a particularly “‘feminine genre’ because, among other reasons, it violates the Law of the Father, resists the practices of patriarchy, and ‘promotes insubordination’ even when the avenger is male” (Liebler 362). And Naomi Liebler, analyzing the referent in the play’s title, argues that it “refers to both Evadne and Aspatia; though only the latter is a virgin, neither one can accurately be called anyone’s ‘wife’; the play belongs to both of them” (371). Pursuing this close reading, Liebler speculates that the text itself exonerates Evadne. According to Liebler’s line of logic, Evadne’s radical act of vengeance
overthrows institutionalized sovereign power and demystifies the very face of sovereignty. Much like the earlier claim of Katharine Eisaman Maus, revenge – particularly in the hands of a woman – shakes this system up.

But this rare moment of scholarly agreement ought to give one pause: does Evadne really expose the fallibility of the sovereign position? Such a pronouncement disregards the very Hydra-headed nature of sovereignty. Within this same scene, the former king’s brother pronounces himself sovereign over the regal corpse, and the other members of nobility accept his declaration without any hesitation. Even if we were to sidestep that inconvenient truth, Evadne’s attack is not altogether as subversive as many critics have argued. Despite the audacity of a woman assassinating the king, despite the revolt of his subjects on his mortal body, our reading would be far too optimistic if we concluded on this point. Given the presence of the king’s two bodies, her exposure of his human side, flagging “will” and all, only reveals one body, and it is the obviously lesser one. Whatever errors in judgment the earthly king might commit, the body politic – the monarchical position – remains unscathed.

It is in this manner, then, that one understands why the noblemen call out “treason” rather than “murder” when they discover the king’s corpse, for it deflects the reality of the assassination. Should one consider this substitution an inadvertent slip, it is of note that the noblemen exclaim “treason” four times in two short lines. Yet according to the “Treason Act,” first created by Edward III in 1351, treason encompasses assassination
attempts on the monarch, not successes. By law, assassinations are
categorized as murder or, more precisely, regicide:

Whereas divers Opinions have been before this Time the King,
at the Request of the Lords and the Commons, hath made a
Declaration in the Manner as hereafter followeth, that is to say,
When a Man doth compass or imagine the Death of our Lord
the King. (II)\textsuperscript{110}

“Compass[ing]” or “imagin[ing]” signifies assassination plots, not deeds.

Finally, another nobleman’s response accentuates this interpretive
possibility: “How now, where’s the traitor? (5.2.131, emphasis added).
Though “traitor” is synonymous with “betrayer,” it also indicates one
convicted of treason in the legal language of this time.\textsuperscript{111} By exclaiming
“treason” and by emphasizing the guilt of the “traitor,” the death of the king is
disavowed here as if he cannot be killed, and a new king steps in to take his
place.

As we have observed in our readings of The Atheist’s Tragedy and The
Maid’s Tragedy, it is difficult, if not impossible, to evacuate the Sovereign
from the text, for there is always one more effort to be made. Mack describes
the dilemma:

In simplest terms, what has been shown is that killing the king
is almost inevitably to be attempted and yet is almost
inevitably unperformable. The king can be killed, but the whole
world, human, natural, and supernatural, reacts to offer a new
king. Regicide is finally in some strange way impossible, for better and for worse. (184)

Mack fails to offer hypotheses as to why this is the case. If the king cannot be killed, why is this always already failed action compulsively rehearsed in Jacobean revenge tragedies? What, in other words, is the real aim of these rehearsed regicides?

**Perversion**

If the monarchy may withstand atheism and assassination, how do we understand these failed attempts? I want to suggest that the psychoanalytic concept of perversion offers one method by which we may understand these literary moments of sovereign challenge. In *Imagine There's No Woman: Ethics and Sublimation*, Joan Copjec offers this definition:

> Thus the ‘worst pervert,’ as Jacques-Alain Miller has argued, is not the most obscene or the most flagrantly transgressive figure you have met in literature or life, but the one who is the most righteous, the savage moralist who sees himself as a mere instrument of the law. (229)

To clarify her argument, Copjec offers an example from a moment in our recent history, arguing that prosecutor Kenneth Starr – insofar as he forces former President Clinton to recount his extramarital liaisons before a grand jury – is the pervert par excellence. Starr emerges as the pervert not “because he sought to institute a revolutionary new order, to overthrow the law, but because he wanted to purify it” (230). Perversion adheres to and enforces
the very letter of the law, and I make use of this model not to psychoanalyze dramatic characters or early modern culture but to suggest the innate conservatism of these attacks on the king, I locate this perverse dynamic in revenge tragedy insofar as the king might be killed but he is not expelled from the text. Perversely enough, I would argue, regicide sustains the structure of sovereign power.

Returning, then, to The Maid’s Tragedy, we must consider why the King is the target of assassination. Melantius, brother of Evadne, first urges her to “kill this base king.” When she declines because “all the gods forbid it,” Melantius replies: “No, all the gods require it, / They are dishonored in him” (4.1.144-47). Though Melantius’ use of “base” connotes the king’s degraded or inferior state, it also implies the king’s illegitimacy, that his actions, in other words, have contaminated his office. Before Evadne murders her former lover, she prays: “O God, / Why give you peace to this intemperate beast / That hath so long transgressed you?” (5.1.24-26). In this second example, the “base king” is demoted to the level of “beast”; prior to his assassination, he does not exist in the realm of the human. The coupling of “intemperate” with “beast” emphasizes the king’s indulgent, even violent passions; here, he emerges as not simply an animalistic king, but as a creature. Furthermore, Evadne’s unorthodox prayer calls into question God’s protection of this “beast,” as she challenges God’s judicial pronouncements. In these brief examples, regicide becomes the means by which one purifies
the “dishonored” king. It aims to rid the sovereign position of its ungodly “transgressions.”

But it’s not just the motives themselves that seem more than a little perverse; the didactic conclusion is as well. Berek remarks: “The critique [the play’s criticism of the juxtaposition of royal absolutism and royal sexual license] fades into unconvincing orthodoxy” (370). Yet the complexity of the concluding soliloquy does not warrant Berek’s easy dismissal. Lysippus, the new King, opines: “May this a fair example be to me / To rule with a temper! For on lustful kings / Unlooked-for sudden deaths from God are sent; / But curst is he that is their instrument” (5.3.292-95). Given that Lysippus is surveying the theatrical body count, his use of “fair” – which, according to the OED, signified comely, just, and good at this time – seems more than a little odd. In this relatively straightforward passage, the adjectival use of “fair” emerges as the proverbial fly in our interpretative ointment. Even if one considers fair’s multivalence, it remains a positive term. Thus, this audacious revenge act – regicide – culminates in a “fair example” to “temper” the behavior for this new and improved king. Moreover, one cannot forget that this act of revenge is at the behest of another, more powerful Sovereign. Though the revenger, as “instrument,” may be “curst” due to earthly consequences and condemnations, s/he imposes the will of God. As such, the revenger materializes, in the words of Copjec, as little more than an “unwavering instrument of ‘the rule of law’” (229). Rather than challenging the sovereign, the revenger enforces his position, even purifying it.114
To purify, however, presupposes a lack or, at the very least, some inconsistencies in the sovereign. And thus far, my argument has presumed a substantive sovereign, one with content. But the Other, in the early modern guise of the sovereign, is little more than an empty placeholder in the structure of power. From a psychoanalytic framework, the Other is always incomplete, and there is no “Other” that would guarantee this “castrated” Other. In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan gestures towards the empty Other when he writes: “A lack is encountered by the subject in the Other, in the very intimation that the Other makes to him by his discourse” (214). Alenka Zupančič extends Lacan’s claim in *Ethics of the Real* when she argues that “the story of Oedipus shows us, rather, that it is the big Other who is lost without the subject. Without the act of Oedipus, the oracle would have been nothing but an inconsistent and senseless babbling” (166). It is the subject turned pervert who enables the existence of this Other by giving meaning to its otherwise meaningless decrees. And for Agamben, what differentiates the sovereign from the subject is the “cipher of the absolute and inhuman character of sovereignty” (101). Focusing on Agamben’s employment of “cipher,” I emphasize the radical nothingness of sovereignty already at work in his theory; for our purposes, the pervert enforces not a deconstruction of that fabricated content but stands, rather, as the last outpost against that abyss.

What, then, is the point of perversion? Why does the pervert persist in disavowing this nothingness? Simultaneously offering support and
antagonism, an antagonism that is always in the service of “helping” the
Other, the pervert sustains sovereign power. To do so, he reifies the
boundaries between the phantasmatic Sovereign and his Law and what we
know to be the radical emptiness of the Other. Yet the pervert’s action –
insofar as he reifies boundaries, insofar as he demands perfection, insofar as
he veils the radical abyss – betrays the permeability of those same
boundaries. A sovereignty is upheld that is, at its core, little more than a void
around which perverts police its perimeters.

Yet even as perversion maintains the sovereign structure, it also
complicates current understandings of sovereignty. Both the historical and
theoretical frameworks used thus far imagine a centralized sovereign power,
one that is manifested through a highly visible individual. But perversion –
because it upholds and purifies the sovereign and his law, because such a
duty demands, according to the pervert’s logic, the involvement of others in
the service of the Other – suggests a democratic model of sovereignty.¹¹⁷ By
this, I mean a sovereignty that is not simply operating through the king and
his agents but rather one in which the subjects qua perverts remain complicit
in this power. In this way, perversion provides our “missing link” between
the monarchy and the development of the commonwealth. Through
perversion, in other words, one arrives at a form of sovereignty that remains
even when there is no sovereign of which to speak.

What’s at stake in such an argument is one of revenge tragedy’s best-
kept secrets: the latent conservatism of the seemingly radical attacks on the
Early modern revenge, then, emerges as a most unlikely articulation of “God Save the King.” Rather than a revolutionary force that revises the political power structure, revenge – in relation to the sovereign – simply offers more of the same. But better. Therefore, in overthrowing a sovereign, the revenger does not overthrow the monarchy itself, for there will always be a new king to replace the old. The structure – in spite of the man – endures. And this perverse impulse enables the endurance of that structure.

**Conclusion: Moving Towards Republicanism**

Stepping back from the particularity of Jacobean drama and looking ahead, albeit retrospectively, to the historic trial and execution of Charles I with which we first began, what remains most shocking is the English audacity to put the sovereign on trial, to *criminalize* the king. What, though, constitutes the audacity of this act, an act so astonishing that not even the drama could presage this turn of events? From our literary examination of regicide, we know that sovereignty endures, what Agamben identifies as the sovereign’s “unsacrificability,” even after an assassination.

Yet critics have concluded that something more radical occurs in the instance of criminalization. Providing an example from the French revolution, Agamben argues that when the Jacobins discussed the option of executing Louis XVI without a trial, they tacitly acknowledge the manner in which the king is not mere man (103). Such a possibility – to execute the king without a trial – would have denied him the rights afforded to “regular”
citizens. In entertaining this possibility, as Agamben observes, the Jacobins inadvertently acknowledge the sovereign's difference. And certainly it seems that when Charles I is put on trial and executed, the English forfeit that concept of the sovereign’s “unsacrificeability” over a century prior to the French. By treating the king as any other citizen who has violated the law, these nations diminish both the difference and the distance between sovereign and citizen. The sovereign, via his criminalization, falls from his throne and becomes mere man.

But when Agamben focuses on this potential outcome – that the Jacobins considered executing him without a trial at the 1792 convention – he aims to emphasize their impulse to preserve sovereign unsacrificeability while diminishing their actual historical choice. It is as if Agamben’s argument stalls out when confronted with the king's criminalization: “In the eyes of the people of the time, the enormity of the rupture marked by Louis XVI’s decapitation on January 21, 1793, consisted not in the fact that a monarch was killed but in the fact that he was submitted to a trial and executed after having been condemned to capital punishment” (Agamben 102-103; Walzer 184-185). Yet Agamben fails to pursue the line of inquiry that ought to follow: does criminalization effectively “rupture” sovereign “unsacrificeability”? In contrast to the examples of literary assassinations, does the criminalization of the king render sovereignty null and void?

To approximate an answer, I look to the most minor of decorative details from Charles I's trial, details that send more than a mixed message
about the status of sovereignty during his criminal proceedings. Charles’ regalia, for instance, still hung at his trial even as he was asked to remove his crown (a request, not surprisingly, that he refused). In “Staging the Trial of Charles I,” Sean Kelsey remarks:

Significantly, this icon of parliamentary authority bore the royal coat of arms, whose clear symbolic import was echoed and amplified by the same regal device that hung on the wall at the back of the High Court of Justice itself, over the heads of the king’s judges. Whatever it might mean for Charles I, the trial seemed, at first, to pose only a limited threat of any further violence against the regal core of the ancient constitution. (77)

Though this trial inflicted real violence, it did not, I would argue, undermine his “unsacrificeability,” the enduring structure of sovereignty itself.119 Paradoxically, this trial preserves the symbol of sovereign power even as it simultaneously challenges it. Or, to be more precise, the very emblem of sovereign authority animates his trial.

By stressing a hypothetical acknowledgement of the sovereign’s essence, Agamben sidesteps the implications of his argument that arrive in the face of sovereign criminalization. In contrast, I would argue that it is less the point that the Jacobins were “remaining absolutely faithful” to sovereign unsacrificeability when they proposed executing the king without a trial (Agamben 102). Rather, the overwhelming structure of sovereignty demands such faithfulness, even from its most treacherous subjects. Indeed, I propose
the following: even when one criminalizes the sovereign, that stain of sovereignty persists – in the courtroom and in the language of the republic’s documents. His regalia emerges as the irresolvable stain in his moment of criminalization. Its presence over the heads of the presiding judges asserts its ghostly, yet superior, authority as if to say, “Englishmen, some more effort if you wish to become Republicans.”

But what happens when Englishmen are republicans? If, as I have argued, the Sovereign endures, how might we make sense of the events that occur after the execution of Charles I? Approaching this event from the perspective of the newly formed Commonwealth under Cromwell, I consider how vengeance shapes not only the literary cult of Charles I, but also engenders a new subject – the republican – in my final chapter. What, then, is the relationship between the Sovereign, the Republican, and revenge?
Chapter Four

The Republic and the Revenge Machine

“Long live our own ruin.”

--Machiavelli, Discorsi

Introduction

According to Catherine Belsey, a new subject emerges from the January 1649 execution. During the ensuing period of turmoil in which the Commonwealth was formed, the act of suicide becomes the republican act par excellence:

Suicide is a means of escaping humiliation and control. In this sense it is, paradoxically, the supreme assertion of both the autonomy of the subject and the sovereignty of the social body, since it is only in so far as it is subject to the social body that the liberal-humanist subject works by itself to become heroic...Suicide re-establishes the sovereign subject...In the absolute act of suicide the subject itself is momentarily absolute. (124)

But questions arise from Belsey’s assessment. Though the act of suicide, insofar as it establishes a “sovereign subject,” is a statement of republican subjectivity, this act is also supremely antagonistic. Because suicide breaks down the “social body,” a body that “humiliat[es] and control[es]” the subject, might the act of suicide be a form of revenge? What would be the
connections, then, between republicanism and revenge? More generally, how does one reconcile the lofty objectives of republicanism – freedom and equality – with self-annihilation and destruction? If the suicidal subject is only “momentarily absolute,” might that suggest the impermanence of republican goals? And given the conclusions drawn from my previous chapter – namely, that the sovereign persists even when he is executed – is the establishment of a sovereign subject ever really possible?

By focusing on issues of subjectivity and temporality in relation to vengeance, this chapter aims to answer these questions. Specifically, I examine the manner in which revenge drives post-execution literature and subjects. The commemorative verses on the martyrdom of Charles I as well as Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (1674) become the vehicles by which I investigate this phenomenon. In this seemingly disparate combination of royalist and republican texts, revenge emerges as a savvy political tool in epic, commemorative, and elegiac verse. While I am not attempting to produce a universalizing argument that would override salient political differences and literary genres, I would claim that revenge ties together issues of time, subject formation and production within these works.

In the first section of this chapter, I analyze portions of Charles I’s literary cult, and my selections include John Quarles’ *Regale Lectum Miseriae*, Henry King’s *A Deepe Groan*, and John Cleveland’s *Monumentum Regale*. In these texts, I chart out a form of revenge predicated on remembering a different version of history than that of the Commonwealth. Royalists achieve
this vengeance through repetitive literary structures and repeated
narratives. While repetition maintains an always present past, the cult of
Charles I also constructs a future that metes out revenge to the republicans
and their descendants. Even as royalist revenge is fixated on the past, the
future assures royalists of their inevitable success.

Such a stance meets its antithesis in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, as Satan
and his legions resist God, commit themselves to revenge, and embrace
failure. Making use of Milton’s poetry and political prose, I consider how the
structure of revenge develops the nascent republican subject. Connecting
revenge and narcissism, I argue that this subject is informed by a narcissism
that tends towards death and write against the valorization of narcissism
found recently in Leo Bersani and Adam Phillips’ *Intimacies*. In this critique, I
challenge humanist notions of the republican subject, notions that put forth
this subject as autonomous and self-determined. Insofar as revenge seems
part and parcel of the burgeoning republican subject, this subject is driven
even as he strives towards autonomy.

Why, then, does revenge remain of use in this critique? In this final
chapter, my purpose is two-fold. First, my examination of poetry and literary
propaganda diminishes the emphasis on dramatic revenge tragedy
heretofore found in early modern scholarship. As I have argued throughout
this project, I propose that critical attendance to the *structure* of revenge will
prove more useful than fidelity to a predetermined canon. My second
objective is to examine the subjectivity produced by the revenge of the
republican. I cannot adequately do so without considering both royalist and republican voices, without considering, in other words, how the republican differentiates himself from the royalist subject. Few, if any, projects bring together these disparate voices, yet, fascinatingly enough, both groups avail themselves of the same technique – repetition – to achieve their revenge. For both, repeated actions and words emerge as modes of resistance. Despite this similarity, republicanism diverges from monarchism and generates a new subject, one that resists futurity and is indebted to futility.

Repetition Kills

To establish the royalist background, I begin with the literary cult of Charles I. I use these texts to investigate the intersection of revenge, repetition, and memory. Most recently, John Kerrigan has put forth an argument concerning the relation between these items in Revenge Tragedy, positing that “the past incit[es] violence but...retrospection can offer its own satisfactions and draw an avenger back from his task” (171). It is “retrospection,” according to Kerrigan, that derails the revenge plot. In The Revenger’s Tragedy, for instance, Vindice’s obsession with the remnants of Gloriana might serve as the initial impetus behind his revenge plot, but this obsession hinders the actual progress of his revenge even as it enables its most spectacular instantiation.

Yet might memory and revenge work in tandem, diminishing the distance between the past and present? The cult of Charles I suggests as much, as it offers a more complicated relationship between memory and
revenge than Kerrigan’s reading provides. In contrast to Kerrigan, then, I argue that remembering, especially remembering differently, constitutes a form of revenge. And to enact this vengeance, royalists make use of repetition. But this technique has temporal consequences as well. By fixating on the past, royalist repetition inhibits the usual progression of time; simply put, repetition freezes time. Because these texts recount obsessively the death of Charles, the literary cult emerges as an attempt to stay in that past moment.

Immediately following the execution of Charles I, troops dispersed the gathered crowds, an act that effectively prohibited public mourning (Potter 241). Consequently language and literature become the means by which Charles I was memorialized privately until the public mourning of the Restoration. Speaking to the literary nature of this private mourning, Andrew Lacey observes that “in an English Church centered on the Word, here was a cult fashioned almost exclusively around the word” (Martyrs 204). The seminal text of this cult is *Eikon Basilike*, the purported spiritual autobiography of Charles I that was released days after his execution to shame republican traitors for his murder. John Gauden, who edited *Eikon* from papers left by Charles I, proclaims that

when [Eikon] came out, just upon the King’s death, good God! What shame, rage, and despite filled his murderers! What comfort his friends! How many enemies did it convert! How
many hearts did it mollify and melt!...In a word, it was an army
and did vanquish more than any sword could.

By referring to political opponents as “murderers” and slashing his prose
with exclamation marks, Gauden commits the same linguistic violence to
avenge the deceased king that Eikon aims to achieve. In this cult, words are
agents of action and are, according to some, more effective than any “army”
or “sword.”

In addition to Eikon Basilike, the literary cult of Charles I encompasses
elegies and sermons (Martyrs Lacey 216). Despite the differences in genre
and author, these texts present a “remarkably consistent image of [Charles I]
the martyr,” countering the state-sponsored version of history (Cult Lacey
77). This image of Charles I as martyr was predicated on the notion that a
martyr “loses his life to save it, and the failure of the earthly career is a sign
of heavenly victory in the service of truth” (Martyrs Lacey 204). In contrast to
the Puritan equation of earthly success with virtue – that material success, in
other words, guarantees private virtue – Protestants made much of Charles
I’s defeat precisely because this defeat guaranteed his authority, not in the
material world, but in heaven.124

How, then, did the literary cult construct this “remarkably consistent
image” of Charles I? In order to remember differently and resist the
Commonwealth’s version of history, writers make use of repetition. The
literary cult embeds itself into a larger narrative of Protestant scripture to
augment the deceased king’s authority and to write against the
Commonwealth’s dominant version of history. Andrew Lacey notes, “Charles and others successfully built up a series of images of suffering kingship, with overtones of Christ’s passion, images which were successfully transposed into a fullblooded cult of martyrdom in 1649” (7). By repeating this trope, writers connect Charles I to scripture. *Eikon Basilike*, for instance, invokes scripture to turn Charles I into a Protestant martyr, and prayers and meditations, which stylistically resemble the Psalms, conclude each chapter (Lacey 82). Moreover, these prayers are “composed...in a style familiar to a generation raised on the King James Bible and *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs*” (Lacey 82). The combination, then, of Protestant scripture and Foxeian rhetoric situates Charles I within the larger family of martyrs who died for the Protestant cause.

This construction of Charles as martyr is extended to Charles as Christ. *Eikon Basilike* makes much of Charles’ association to “suffering kingship in the tradition of David and Christ” (Lacey 82). For example, *Eikon’s* frontispiece shows Charles holding a crown of thorns. And the written text bears out this relationship. Addressing his subjects, Charles writes: “Let not my blood be upon them and their children whom the fraud and faction of some, not the malice of all, have excited to crucify me.”

Attending to the significance of “crucify,” Lacey observes how Charles “links his act of forgiveness with that of Christ whose Passion he is repeating” (84). In the cult’s reappropriation of scripture, Protestant Christianity represents
not just the legacy of Jesus but also of Charles I. And from the royalist vantage, to remember one is to remember both.

The Protestant Christian connection was not the only manner in which the populace could return to and repeat the legacy of Charles I. There were also a number of commemorative lyrics set to popular tunes that “recalled” the tale of Charles’ martyrdom, a story that was approaching a near mythic status in the years following his execution. Ballads, with their simple rhyme scheme and multiple stanzas, were the most popular vehicles by which this history could be disseminated and coalesce national memory about this rupture in English history. Two popular examples include “King Charles his Glory, and Rebels Shame” and “A Coffin for King Charles.” This first song, for instance, was sung to the tune of the popular broadside ballad “The Crost Couple.” This song features thirteen stanzas, and within each stanza, the “Fa la la la la la” line is repeated three times. In this way, “King Charles his Glory,” like Eikon, maintains the presence of this past event through its deferred conclusion. With this delay, the text inhibits forward movement.

“A Coffin for King Charles,” a ballad sung to the well-known tune of “Faine I would,” features an opportunity for singers to act out three parts: “King Charles in His Coffin,” “Cromwell on the throne,” and the “People in the Pit.” As the participants take up these roles, they rehearse the crimes against Charles and return to the traumatic moment of execution. Moreover, the formal structure of this ballad, much like the previous one, embeds repetition
in each stanza. For instance, when Charles addresses Cromwell from the grave, he does so in iambic meter and with a rhyme scheme of ABABCDCD for each octet:

Think'st thou, base slave, though in my grave
Like other men I lie,
My sparkling fame and royal name
Can (as thou wishest) die?
Know, caitif, in my son I live
(The Black Prince call'd by some),
And he shall ample vengeance give
To those that did my doom.

While the alternating lines of eight and six syllables for each couplet diversify the meter pattern, they simultaneously guarantee its consistency. In the repetitive structures of commemorative verse and song, the end is delayed or perpetually deferred as the memorial technique fixates on a past event. In this way, repetition freezes time and creates a past that is always already present.

**The Future...is Coming!**

Yet a paradox emerges in relation to temporality: insofar as repetitious revenge halts the progression of time, this vengeance simultaneously fabricates a telos such that the revenge act may be asymptotically approached in the future. In other words, the structure of revenge facilitates a contradictory relationship to time. It keeps the present moment static while
imagining a limitless extension into the future. And it is this construction of the future, with its perpetually deferred revenge, that guarantees success for royalists: reinstatement of Charles II and punishment for the republican traitors. This paradigm of forward movement, then, is perhaps less a paradox and more a promise of redemption.

On one hand, the future becomes the means by which royalists and repentant republicans stave off divine vengeance for the death of Charles I. Returning once more to the ballads, we shall see that these songs also offer singers an opportunity to admit their collective guilt. For instance, "King Charles, His Glory" enables the populace to expiate their guilt by apologizing to the deceased Charles, who now reigns alongside God in heaven. To prove their renewed loyalty, singers promise to avenge Charles I by challenging Cromwell and the other republicans more directly involved in the execution. One stanza, in particular, demonstrates how penitence is the only manner in which one might circumvent vengeance:

When Dame Fortune casteth a frown,
These upstart Gallants fall headlong down,
I could wish they would view their own state,
And Repent before tis to late,
For fear lest a Gibbet will be their last fate.

Sincere “repent[ance]” is the means by which one evades execution (i.e. the “Gibbet”), and it is these “upstart Gallants,” the republicans, who are in most need of it – not only to escape execution, but also to avoid this death as their
“last fate” (i.e., no redemption or eternal life in heaven). The verb tense of this stanza shifts the focus from the past (i.e., repentance) to the future (i.e., punishment). Indeed, the text makes clear that this punishment – “fall[ing] headlong down” – is upcoming. It is not a question of whether or not “Dame Fortune” will “frown” but “when.”

The royalists’ construction of the future also allows them to address the “delay” in divine vengeance. Because republicans read this “delay” as proof of heaven’s approval, royalists need to assure fellow royalists and unbelieving republicans that vengeance will arrive. “A Coffin for King Charles” offers an example of how one might negotiate this ideological conflict:

But there’s a thunderer above,
who though he winke a while,
Is not with your black deeds in love:
he hates your damned guile.
And though a time you pearce upon
The top of fortunes wheele,
You shortly unto Acheron,
(drunke with your crimes) shall reele. (8)

This period of waiting (i.e. “winke a while”) emerges as a form of retributive guile, designed to lull the republican criminal into further complacency until damning him forever. Moreover, this waiting period subverts Puritan ideology by encouraging republicans to mistakenly believe they are
victorious. Finally, by referring to “fortunes wheele,” this text suggests that the republican victory is only temporary. With another turn, republicans will be pitched down into Acheron.

In *A Deepe Groan*, Henry King similarly warns that present happiness does not correspond to a moral victory. But his warning correlates the delay in vengeance to a harsher punishment:

> And though his sleepie Arm suspend the scourge,
> Nor doth loud Bloud in winged Vengeance urge,
> Though the soft houres a while in pleasures flie,
> And conquering Treason sing her Lullabie.
> The guilt at length in fury he’l inroul
> With barbed Arrows on the tray’t’rous Soul.
> Time may be when the John-a-Leyden King
> His Quarters to this Tombe an Offring bring...
> Yet if just Providence reprieve the Fate,
> The Judgement will be deeper, though’t be late. (35)

Though the royalists anticipate a victory (and with God, this victory is guaranteed),\(^{129}\) the republicans experience little more than a Providential “reprieve” that tricks their “trayt’rous Soul[s]” into complacent self-satisfaction. *A Deepe Groan* articulates a more radical comeuppance reserved for the souls of Puritan radicals and their leaders. In fact, it is precisely this delay that portends a “deeper,” or more severe Judgment, and the future emerges as the space onto which these texts project their literary vengeance.
Yet the present moment still offers inspiration for the future. "John-a-Leyden," an allusion to an Anabaptist leader, bears an uncanny resemblance to Oliver Cromwell as Lord Protector of the Commonwealth. After reigning as King of Munster for a year, John of Leiden was tortured and executed. His remains were on display until fifty years after his death. If one is to follow, then, the connections between these illegitimate leaders (only illegitimate, of course, from the royalist perspective), Cromwell awaits a similar end.

Because the royalists require a future to contain the enormity of their vengeance, they also require generations onto whom they may project their revenge (i.e., recipients of their revenge). In “A Curse against the Enemies of Peace,” John Quarles issues the following invective: “May heav'n whose frowning countenance doth show / An angry resolution, overthrow / You, and your prick-ear'd Progeny, and make / Your children suffer for their parents sake.” The curses that follow – which include plagues, famine, and disease – are some of the most explicitly vengeful in the literary cult. When revenge extends to generations, the future exists, it seems, to hold the excess punishment demanded by the republican crimes against the king and God, punishment that corresponds to the republicans’ *excessive* criminality.

This fantasy of vengeance reaches a full frenzy when Quarles conflates his earlier anticipatory revenge with the present moment:

> May your souls burn, till heav'n shall think it good
> To quench them in your generations blood,
> That all the world may hear you hisse, and cry
Who lov’d no Peace, in Peace shall never dye.

Envisioning a hell on earth in which the souls of the damned are extinguished in the blood of their progeny, Quarles effects a dizzying temporal shift. Though he begins in the subjunctive present as he addresses the traitors (i.e., “May your souls burn”), the vengeance on behalf of Charles I is only completed when the “generations” issuing forth from these traitors have died as well. Much like the conclusion to The Spanish Tragedy, this poem portrays perpetual anguish, implying that the act of revenge, once completed on the material plane, must continue in the afterlife. In this overwrought, hyperbolic fantasy of vengeance – a vengeance that arrives not necessarily at the behest of Charles I but on his behalf – the republican assassins are revealed in their true natures. The “hisse” that we hear is not only that of liquids encountering burning objects, but also aligns the traitors with the “hiss” of the serpent – the guise of the Devil.

Though the royalists’ desire to remember differently might constitute a form of revenge against the Commonwealth and its leaders, Andrew Lacey contends that it was not ultimately successful. But one cannot deny the strength of this mythos when one considers its resurgence during the Restoration. Divergent memories coalesced into explicit revenge during these public displays of mourning. Exploring the history of mourning during the Restoration, Lois Potter remarks: “The fact that the first commemoration of the 30 January anniversary was also the day on which the exhumed carcasses of Cromwell, Ireton and Bradshaw were hanged at Tyburn can be
seen as a belated rewriting of the king’s execution” (214). Yet I read this historic moment not merely as a “rewriting” but as vengeance for the death of Charles I. Undoubtedly, this hanging of Republican leaders invoked the earlier execution, but there are salient differences that Potter neglects. For instance, Charles was beheaded at Whitehall while Cromwell, Ireton, and Bradshaw were hanged at Tyburn, an execution site reserved for common criminals. And, most obviously, this “revenge” functioned symbolically, extinguishing not the former leaders but lingering republican sympathies. Indeed, one might argue that the royalists’ temporal paradox – memorializing the past through repetition while envisioning a future that could encompass the scope of their revenge – enabled them to bring both the past and future together in this “execution.”

**Future – Fail!**

While the future – a construction onto which others project their fantasies – promises success for royalists, Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (1674) issues a provocative reversal. Encoded in Satan’s grand revenge project is a future that is predicated on failure. In contrast to royalists, Satan does not have God on his side. And from the perspective of Protestant theology and from the literary logic of *Paradise Lost* itself, Satan cannot win his fight against God. This failure, however, does not deter him as he, too, demonstrates the repetitive compulsion examined in the previous section. But whereas the royalists repeat to remember their history and to create their future, Satan’s project has no such purpose. Indeed, both his project and progeny stand in
opposition to the reproductive, future-oriented dogma of royalist propaganda. Satan’s pointlessness leads one to consider the following: what is driving his vengeance, a vengeance that is nothing more than a repetitive, spectacular failure?

Though Satan points to repetition as the reason behind his rebellion, he is actually enraged by his position as a worshipping subject. Bitterly recounting his heavenly servitude, Satan remembers:

I ‘sdained subjection, and thought one step higher
Would set me highest, and in a moment quit
The debt immense of endless gratitude,
So burdensome, still paying, still to owe...
By owing owes not, but still pays, at once
Indebted and discharged; what burden then? (IV: 50-57)

The “servile pomp” of heaven demands an infinite repayment system in an attempt to make good on an impossible debt. One can only praise “endless[ly]” yet never free oneself from that “burden” to God. Rebellion “discharge[s]” Satan from this dynamic and becomes the means by which he is no longer doomed to make incremental payments of devotion.

But an abhorrence of repetition cannot be Satan’s motivation, for his eternal revenge project demands something similar. Speaking to his fellow fallen in Hell, he offers his plan for a future, a future that offers, much like the pervert in the previous chapter, more of the same: “We may with more successful hope resolve / To wage by force or guile eternal war /
Irreconcilable, to our grand Foe” (I: 120-22). Insofar as Satan articulates an “eternal war” – one that remains “irreconcilable” – he envisions an eternal dialectic, a Manichean struggle that cannot be resolved or overcome. In the lines that follow, Satan emphasizes the repetitious nature of his plan: “To do aught good never will be our task, / But ever to do ill our sole delight, / As being the contrary to his high will / Whom we resist” (I: 159-62). As the eternal contrarian, Satan’s battle plans never evolve beyond “resistance”; because of the stunted nature of this “resistance,” Satan remains “ever” in a deadlock.

This repetition yields little more than failure, however, as Adam’s concluding speech drives home the futility of Satan’s resistance:

That all this good of evil shall produce,
And evil turn to good; more wonderful
Than that which by our creation first brought forth
Light out of darkness! full of doubt I stand,
Whether I should repent me now of sin
By me done and occasioned, or rejoice
Much more, that much more good thereof shall spring. (XII: 470-76)

Ruled by God, the universe cannot escape the construction that evil produces good. Yet it is not simply that malevolence metamorphoses into benevolence; rather, evil will yield even “more” good. With such words and phrases as “much,” “more,” and “much more,” this passage shows how evil engenders a
benevolent fecundity. In this manner, Satan challenges the originary totality of God as the good; there would be less good, in other words, if there were no Satan. Of course, this production of “more good” is not his primary aim.

Does Satan himself recognize that his revenge project has no future? Judging from the criticism generated by this question, the answer is fraught with contradiction. Some critics argue that Milton fashions Satan as a stock character of evil. According to this line of logic, Satan lacks a motive precisely because he is evil. This one-dimensional characterization bars him from questioning the outcome of his project. In “The Motivation of Satan’s Rebellion in Paradise Lost,” Arnold Williams explains that the dramatic genre enables Milton to “sidestep this issue [of origin],” as Paradise Lost “starts with the premise that Satan is evil, that he needs no motivation and hardly an occasion.” (259). Evoking Williams’ criticism, Neil Forsyth remarks that “Satan comes into being in Raphael’s narrative quite simply in reaction to God’s word. Suddenly he is there, not as Lucifer, his earlier name, but as the enemy, as he who disobeys” (“Origin” 527). Forsyth expands this claim in Satanic Epic: “The primal scene of the birth of evil is thus eluded, as in all such myths” (187). Satan’s original motivation, according to many, is rendered irrelevant by the text.

Still other scholars acknowledge this question’s relevance and address it head on. William Empson argues convincingly in Milton’s God that Satan does not know of God’s omnipotence before the rebellion. In contrast, Balachandra Rajan posits the following in “The Problem of Satan”: “We know,
and even Satan knows, that the God against whom he is contending is omnipotent” (409). On first glance, Empson and Rajan put forth contradictory arguments. Yet both admit that Satan realizes God’s omnipotence following the rebellion’s failure (i.e., when readers first encounter Satan in Book II).

Given Satan’s tacit acknowledgement of God’s omnipotence, then, I also argue that he recognizes the futility of his project even as he continues his plans for revenge. I locate an awareness of his project’s inevitable demise in one of his most audacious speeches:

To do aught good never will be our task,
But ever to do ill our sole delight,
As being the contrary to his high will
Whom we resist. If then his Providence
Out of our evil seek to bring forth good,
Our labour must be to pervert that end,
And out of good still to find means of evil
Which oft-times may succeed, so as perhaps
Shall grieve him, if I fail not, and disturb
His inmost counsels from their destined aim. (I: 159-68).

As discussed earlier, Satan commits himself to an eternal dialectic with God, a dialectic that manifests itself as a perpetual conflict between good and evil. By the fourth line, however, Satan entertains the possibility that God may turn more than a few tricks to transform his evil into good. Yet in the
following line, Satan reiterates the same game plan – “to pervert that end,” which is to say God’s good. Satan aims, in other words, to isolate a kernel of evil from that too-pure good. But this secondary aim is no different from his first: to stand contrary to God’s “high will.” In other words, Satan’s “Plan B” is identical to “Plan A.” Beyond this redundancy, however, Satan espouses a commitment to resistance even (or especially) in the face of failure (i.e., if God will "seek to bring forth Good"). Here, Satan locates success not in overthrowing God, but by demonstrating his equality to Him insofar as Satan can generate evil as endlessly from good as God can generate good from evil.

Even as Satan scales back his definition of victory, the description of his project foreshadows problems through the liberal use of conditional phrases.134 “Oft-times” and “may” – terms that modify “succeed” – present a linguistic over-kill that underscores the hollowness of his aspirations. “Perhaps” diminishes the ambitious scope of Satan’s fantasy (i.e., to produce a “grieving” God) while his success is couched in decidedly ambiguous terms: “if I fail not.” This definition of success emerges as the mere absence of failure. Satan’s speech, then, admits the precariousness of his project, a recognition that frames Paradise Lost almost from the very start.

Given Satan’s understanding of his futility, an understanding that emerges in Book II and coalesces in subsequent ones, it seems all the more remarkable that he repeatedly attempts the impossible: to “pervert” God’s good. Acting as an obstacle to the “be fruitful and multiply” mandate of God and to heteronormativity more generally, Satan stands for antigenerativity
and non-productive failure. My project, then, remains committed to asking the following: how does one understand Satan’s refusal to stop playing the game, even as he realizes it is a game that he will ultimately lose? What, if anything, is produced by Satan’s fidelity to failure?

To address those questions, I will first consider the form in which Satan’s revenge takes shape. To implement his revenge project, Satan spawns monstrous progeny – Sin, fathered via paternal parthenogenesis, and Death, generated by incestuous rape. Though Rajan describes Adam’s genealogical narrative as “barren,” (Murphy 145) and Adam himself regards his future as a “Birth/Abortive” (11.768-69), such terms are more apt for Satan’s progeny. Not only are these “children” the methods by which Satan perverts humanity, they also emerge as queer (re)productions of Satan himself. In other words, narcissism is critically linked to this failed revenge project.

Sin, emerging from Satan like a parodic Athena, becomes pregnant via her progenitor, “who full oft / Thyself in me thy perfect image viewing / Becam’st enamoured” (II: 765-67). Here, the seemingly separate selves of Sin and Satan are conflated (i.e., “Thyself in me”). Though “perfect[ion]” modifies the “image” of Satan– which is to say his daughter, Sin – this perfection more appropriately describes Satan himself because she is his image. In fact, it is Sin’s mirroring of her father’s greatness that causes him to “becom’est enamoured.” When Satan makes love to her, he is making love to himself.

Even when Satan fails to immediately recognize his image in his daughter, the ensuing speech nevertheless reflects his narcissism. On his
dangerous journey out of Hell, Satan unknowingly rebukes Sin during their first encounter in Hell. Begging her pardon for this misrecognition, Satan listens to the story of Sin’s traumatic delivery of Death, a story that similarly echoes Satan’s original narcissism:

I fled, and cried out Death;

Hell trembled at the hideous name, and sighed

From all her caves, and back resounded Death.

I fled, but he pursued (though more, it seems,

Inflamed with lust than rage) and swifter far,

Me overtook his mother all dismayed,

And in embraces forcible and foul

Engend’ring with me, of that rape begot

These yelling monsters that with ceaseless cry

Surround me, as thou saw’st, hourly conceived

And hourly born, with sorrow infinite

To me. (II: 790-97)

As in the moment of incestuous love-making between Sin and Satan, this passage also demonstrates the narcissism of Satan’s lineage. In the span of seven lines, “I” and “me” are repeated six times, thereby suggesting a preoccupation with the self – a self that is, of course, Satan’s very self. Sin’s narcissism, to put it differently, is actually Satan’s narcissism. The name of “Death” is not only repeated, but “resound[s]” through the “caves” of Hell. Given the “echo” of the original Greek myth of Narcissus, the resounding
name of “Death” associates this moment with traditional narcissism. Yet pathetic fallacy also marks this excerpt as narcissistic precisely because a narcissistic subject finds his reflection in external objects. Sin’s environment, in other words, reflects her abhorrence of Death insofar as it similarly recoils from Death’s hellish entrance into the universe. This mirroring guarantees that the narcissist’s world is, truly, all about her. Or him.

As such, the narcissistic subject exists uneasily in relation to the Other — the same Other that preoccupied my previous chapter. On one hand, the narcissistic subject may overinvest in the Other (e.g., the relationship between the Sovereign and the subject or between God and a devotee), and the subject’s “self” disappears into that abyss of otherness. Of this relationship, Maire Jaanus remarks: “This ancient Vedic utterance – ‘I am you’ – is a bond, narcissistic and empathic, loving and hating, unholy and sacred at once. It is the declaration of union at the heart of imaginary love. To be the other is not to be me” (337-38). But in this formulation, Jaanus overlooks the inverse of her equation: There is no Other because there is only me. The Other exists, in other words, only to the extent that it is a reproduction of the narcissistic subject. In this way, then, the Other cannot exist because it threatens the narcissistic subject. Focusing on Satan’s underinvestment in otherness in “Yet Once More’: Re-Creation, Repetition, and Return,” Regina Schwartz argues: “In Satan’s refusal to confront a genuine Other – for such an Other would be an insult to the grandeur of the all-encompassing self – he reproduces only projections of the Self” (433). But whereas Schwartz
locates narcissism only in Satan and other characters in *Paradise Lost*.

I argue that this narcissism extends beyond his revenge project and to republican subjectivity. My aim here is not to pathologize this developing subject, but to understand the manner in which revenge and narcissism inform early modern subjectivity.

**The Narcissistic Subject**

In these final sections, I will follow the line that originates from Satan’s revenge project, his narcissism, and his curiously republican rhetoric in *Paradise Lost*. Because Satan serves as the bridge between the literary and political texts of Milton’s works, I would contend that revenge informs a developing republican subjectivity that is predicated on narcissism. To do so, I continue to rely upon *Paradise Lost*, but I also make use of Milton’s republican tracts that include *Tenure of King and Magistrates*, *The Readie and Easie Way to Establish a Commonwealth*, and *The Second Defence of the English People*. I put these texts in conversation with Leo Bersani and Adam Phillip’s *Intimacies*, whose argument valorizes narcissism as a means by which strife and violence are diminished. In contrast to their claim, however, I posit that narcissism encompasses a radical violence that tends towards death within the republican subject.

Republicanism itself, however, is a contested term. Within current scholarship, there have been two major ways of defining it. Quentin Skinner describes republicanism as a “commitment to kingless government,” what Blair Worden calls a “constitutional republicanism” (307). This traditional
understanding of republican ideology sets it in direct opposition to monarchism. The second definition, “civic republicanism,” is indebted to J.G.A. Pocock’s *The Machiavellian Moment* and emerges as “part of the intellectual landscape” of pre-civil war England (Worden 308). Civic republicanism, in other words, coexists within a monarchical government. To that end, Sean Kelsey, David Norbrook, and Markku Petonen demonstrate the prevalence of republican ideals in political tracts and literature prior to the Civil Wars.144 According to these scholars, republican ideology did not emerge suddenly but rather evolved over a period of decades and, perhaps, centuries in England.145 Derived from classical Greek and Roman sources, this “classical” or “civic” republicanism envisions men “not so much as subjects, but citizens, characterized...by active participation in the political life of the community through counseling and the law-making process” (Petonen 2). Despite differences between “constitutional” and “civic republicanism,” Markku Petonen locates some common ground and offers a useful definition with which to proceed:

> The citizens’ participatory role was chiefly based on their virtuous characters, which enabled them to promote the public good. The term ‘classical republicanism’ thus embraces a cluster of themes concerning citizenship, public virtue and true nobility. But it also refers to a more specific constitutional stance...to ensure that the most virtuous men governed the
commonwealth and to control corruptions, magistracy should
be elected rather than inherited. (2)

These ideals were promulgated throughout the republican canon, and
if we admit, as most historians and literary scholars do, that Milton's writings
are not only a part of but define the English republican canon, we begin
there.\textsuperscript{146} Though *Paradise Lost* led us to republicanism, it does not
necessarily mean that Satan is the voice of English republicanism. Indeed,
some scholars go to great lengths to expunge politics from *Paradise Lost*,
regarding the text as a cautionary tale in which Milton instructs his readers
to eschew Satan’s seductive heroism and hollow calls for liberty.\textsuperscript{147} Dennis
Richard Danielson argues that the success of Milton’s epic is dependent on
the positive characterization of God: “If Milton presents a God who is wicked,
or untruthful, or manipulative, or feeble, or unwise, then his epic poem
[because he sought to justify the ways of God to man] must suffer
accordingly” (ix). To allegorize (and subsequently valorize) the construction
of the republic, according to Danielson, would compromise Milton’s entire
literary project.\textsuperscript{148} Yet other scholars, recalling the political history
surrounding the production of *Paradise Lost*, read Satan’s rebellion as an
allegory for the establishment of the commonwealth – that, in other words,
this republican Satan challenges a tyrannous God.\textsuperscript{149} Blair Worden is among
these critics and uncovers the curious similarities between Satan’s language
and the rhetoric of popular republican tracts such as Milton’s *The Ready and
Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth*. But even Worden qualifies his
claim by noting “the exactness with which Satan’s republican credentials are proclaimed and undermined” and later asserts that Satan metamorphoses into a “portrait of Cromwellian or Puritan hypocrisy” (241; 243).

I offer these examples to emphasize how Satan's “republican” voice is contested. I recognize the limitations of reading Satan as little more than Milton's political mouthpiece; indeed, even those who view Satan as a mouthpiece for Milton admit that he ultimately fails in that regard. Consider, for instance, the manner in which Milton introduces his readers to Satan:

High on a throne of royal state, which far
Outshone the wealth of Ormus and of Ind,
Or where the gorgeous East with richest hand
Show'rs on her kings barbaric pearl and gold,
Satan exalted sat, by merit raised
To that bad eminence; and from despair
Thus high uplifted beyond hope, aspires
Beyond thus high, insatiate to pursue
Vain war with Heav'n. (II: 1-9)

By depicting Satan on his opulent throne in Hell, Milton insinuates that Satan has embraced not the role of republican leader but of emperor. The thrice-repeated “high” emphasizes both Satan's “insatiate” desire for power, a desire that exceeds his capabilities (i.e. to win his “vain war with Heav’n”) and his need to be “raised,” “exalted,” and “uplifted.” Satan, in other words, benefits from the
hierarchy that a monarchical government provides. Therefore, I make use of Satan as a tentative example of republican subjectivity. To locate strains of narcissism in republican subjectivity, I focus exclusively on my readings of Milton's political tracts. How, then, does narcissism manifest itself in republican treatises? It does so, I will argue, by evincing a radical commitment to sameness and equality – that all men, in other words, are made in each other's image.

In *The Tenure of King and Magistrates* (1649), Milton argues the limits of monarchical power and articulates the inherent similarity of all humans:

No man who knows ought, can be so stupid to deny that all men naturally were borne free, being the image and resemblance of God himself, and were by privilege above all the creatures, born to command and not to obey: and that they liv'd so. Till from the root of *Adams* transgression, falling among themselves to doe wrong and violence, and foreseeing that such courses must needs tend to the destruction of them all, they agreed by common league to bind each other from mutual injury, and jointly to defend themselves against any that gave disturbance or opposition to such agreement. Hence came Citties, Townes and Common-wealths. And because no faith in all was found sufficiently binding, they saw it needful to ordaine some authoritie, that must restrain by force and
punishment what was violated against peace and common right. (1060)

In this abridged history of monarchical development, Milton first begins by stressing the unity of all men: insofar as all persons are in the “image” of God, there is no difference between men or distance from God. And insofar as men are created in the “image” and “resemblance of God,” no man’s value exceeds that of another. To that end, Milton emphasizes repeatedly their sameness: their “privilege,” their “free[dom],” their ability to “command and not to obey.” In this republican understanding of subject relations, all are same: all reflect God and each other.

Underscoring equality throughout his republican treatises, Milton makes use of this logic to deconstruct hierarchies of power. In *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, Milton explains: “This autoritie and power of self-defence and preservation being originally and naturally in every one of them [all men], and unitedly in them all, for ease, for order...they communicated and deriv’d either to one, whom for the eminence of his wisdom and integritie they chose above the rest, or to more than one whom they thought of equal deserving” (*Tenure* 1060). By essentializing the natural “autoritie” and capacity for “self-defence” in each man, Milton takes power away from a centralized form of government that seeks to provide such structures for its people. The governing institution emerges only for the sake of convenience (i.e., “ease” and “order” of the people). Yet Milton’s commitment to sameness is troubled as he expounds on the “eminence of [the sovereign’s] wisdom and
integritie." To put it simply, there is one man (or a group of equally deserving ones) who stands above the rest. To mitigate that hierarchical difference, Milton cites the people’s *choice* in leadership. In addition, his use of “deriv’d” rather than, for instance, “deferred,” suggests that the public gives rise to its leader – that, in other words, the best qualities of the sovereign originate from the people.

Despite the contradictions that emerge from his formulation, Milton insists on equality between monarchs and their subjects: “Be he King, or Tyrant, or Emperour, the Sword of Justice is above him” (*Tenure* 1059). By pointing to the ways in which government leaders, legitimate or otherwise, are beneath “Justice,” Milton diminishes the difference between leaders and their subjects. This equalizing gesture, a gesture that recalls Schwartz’s comment on Satan’s and his “refusal to confront a genuine Other,” renders all subjects equal. Of course, Milton’s construction of Justice as Other is no different from that of Sovereign as Other – a structural similarity that he fails to observe. But by diminishing the power of the Sovereign Other, an Other who is also a *person* as much as an abstraction, Milton’s republican ideology creates the world and its people in narcissistic projections of the Self, projections that, if subordinate, are subordinate to an abstraction (i.e., Justice).

The self remains a focal point in *The Second Defence of the English People* (1654) when, for instance, Milton writes: “In short, it is the renewed cultivation of freedom and civic life that I disseminate throughout cities,
kingdoms, and nation” (1099). The first-person voice functions to emphasize Milton's presence within and ownership of republican ideology. Milton expands his project beyond the boundaries of the Commonwealth and into unnamed, untold “cities, kingdoms, and nations.” In his use of “disseminate,” for instance, Milton positions himself as father of republicanism and implies possession. Within the same document, Milton poses the following rhetorical question to his readers to maintain his focus on the individual: “For who does not consider the glorious achievements of his country his own?” (Second Defence 1097). Here, Milton makes use of the self for a seemingly nationalistic end. But, in contrast to nationalism in which one’s achievements belong to one’s country, Milton’s version of republicanism expects that the individual will “own” these achievements. Collective achievements, in other words, are not ours but mine. In these examples, Milton suggests the ways in which the “Self” is the primary focus of republicanism.

Anticipating objections to his radical ideology, Milton refers to Protestant Christianity to lend authority to republicanism. But even Milton’s brief references highlight the narcissistic undercurrent:

> And what government coms nearer to this precept of Christ, then a free Commonwealth; wherin they who are greatest, are perpetual servants and drudges to the public at thir own cost and charges, neglect thir own affairs; yet are not elevated above thir brethren; live soverly in thir families, walk the
streets as other men, may be spoken to freely, familiarly, friendly without adoration. *(Readie 1139)*

As Milton locates a reflection of his beliefs in Protestant scripture insofar as the republican government “coms nearer to [the] precept of Christ,” he effects a paradoxical treatment of the Commonwealth’s leaders. Much like Satan and his inability to brook an “Other” that might threaten the “all-encompassing Self,” Milton envisions a leader who is at once the “greatest” but is simultaneously a “servant” and a “drudge.” This ideal leader, according to Milton, is one who lacks a “self” insofar as he must “neglect [his] owne affairs” to tend to the other selves that constitute this free Commonwealth. But Milton simultaneously stresses how these leaders are the same as other men: free, familiar, and friendly. In this remarkably idealized portrait of leadership, republican ideology evinces a desire for an evacuated government leader – one who has no other focus save the well-being of other men – which is to say, the mirrored reflections of one grand “Self.” In psychoanalytic terms, the republican leader emerges as the narcissistic object, a leader whose only purpose is to fulfill the needs of the narcissist.

**Malignant Narcissism?**

For many, though, narcissism is not a pejorative term. In *Intimacies*, Bersani and Phillips valorize narcissism on the grounds that it enables a more loving, peaceful relationship to the outside world. In contrast to psychoanalytic understandings of subjectivity, the authors stress that individualism, not narcissism, breeds aggression and strife. Corroborating Bersani’s argument
in a later chapter, Phillips emphasizes the importance of narcissism, a seemingly unevolved stage of development:

Indeed the paradox that object-relations theory presents us with is that the individual’s narcissism is seen as the saboteur of his development, development (maturity) in this picture involving exchange with real objects recognized as beyond omnipotent control. And yet what is taken to mobilize the greatest violence in the individual is the abrogation of his narcissism. The very thing one needs to do, the very thing one's development apparently requires is the very thing that unleashes the most violent destructiveness....In promoting the developmental necessity of overcoming narcissism, object-relations theorists have been, as it were, encouraging the greatest possible violence between people. (91)

The traditionally “evolv[ed]” subject, one who has a concretized identity, views herself in opposition to the outside world and exhibits “violent destructiveness” in relation to it. In contrast, Bersani and Phillips advocate for a more regressive position, one that fails to differentiate between self and world. And if the narcissistic subject is invested in self-preservation, this focus, according to their logic, is extended to the world.

Terming this alternative “impersonal narcissism,” Bersani calls it such “because the self the subject sees reflected in the other is not the unique personality central to modern notions of individualism” (85); rather, this
form of narcissism is “preservative at once of survival and pleasure” (98). This impersonal narcissism emerges as the means by which subjects exist in a “friendly accord” with others and the world (125). Whereas difference and individuation produce dissension, a “passion for sameness” allows for a more radically peaceful coexistence (108). Phillips explains:

We tend not to be sufficiently narcissistic: that, to use an old language, we don’t quite have the courage of our narcissism. It is not that we need to inhibit our narcissism, it is that our narcissism is itself inhibited. We are at our most controlled (and controlling) in our regulation of narcissistic desire. (98)

But unlike Bersani and Phillips, I remain unpersuaded by this optimistic depiction of narcissism. Though Bersani and Phillips are correct insofar as narcissism features an erotic component, one based on attraction and affinity, they disavow the other face of narcissism: aggression.

Far from being a refuge from violence and aggressivity, narcissism actively engages in both. Lacan’s “Mirror Stage” offers one example of the hostile face of narcissism. After the child has “jubilant[ly] raised himself up to find his own image in the mirror,” Lacan explains the consequences of this achievement:

But the important point is that this form [the proximity of the subject to the ‘ideal-I’] situates the agency known as the ego...in a fictional direction that will forever remain irreducible for any single individual or, rather that will only asymptotically
approach the subject's becoming, no matter how successful the
dialectical syntheses by which he must resole, as I, his
discordance with his own reality. (Ecrits 4)\textsuperscript{150}

This “asymptotic approach” guarantees that the specular image (i.e., the
ideal-I) will never coincide with the subject herself. While the mirror image
“anticipates the maturation of [the subject’s] power,” that image is not the subject.

While that lack of correspondence engenders dissatisfaction in the
“normal” subject, narcissism takes this dissatisfaction one step further. Joan
Copjec writes:

Narcissism, then, seeks the self beyond the self-image, with
which the subject constantly finds fault and in which it
constantly fails to recognize itself. What one loves in one’s
image is something \textit{more} than the image (in you more than
you’). Thus is narcissism the source of the malevolence with
which the subject regards its image, the aggressivity it
unleashes on all its own representations. (37; Edelman 51)

Because the self and this “something \textit{more} than the image” do not and will
not correspond, the narcissistic subject must avoid, deny, and destroy
evidence that indicts this “ideal-I.” This is the “malevolence” and
“aggressivity” that is wholly occluded in Bersani’s argument.

Moreover, this narcissistic aggression is in the service of death or,
more specifically, links up with the death drive.\textsuperscript{151} Lacan first associates the
death drive with a “nostalgia for a lost harmony, a desire to return to the
dreoedipal fusion with the mother’s breast” (Evans 82). This “fusion” in
which there is no difference between the subject and his world exemplifies
primary narcissism. Lacan’s early formulation owes much to Freud’s work in
*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*: “The tension [activity, life] which then arose in
what had hitherto been an inanimate substance endeavoured to cancel itself
out. In this way, the first instinct came into being: the instinct to return to the
inanimate state” (46). For Freud, the death drive compels the subject to
return to a state of nothingness, of stasis, of nonexistence.

In his later work, Lacan expands on Freud’s identification of stability
with death, as he recognizes the embrace of the alternative to stability.
Insofar as the death drive refuses any stable signification, this drive
promotes disorder and frantic movement. For Lacan, the death drive aims to
unravel coherent constructions of identity and meaning. If the death drive
preserves anything, it preserves instability, dissolution, and
meaninglessness. For this chapter, then, I graph Freud’s drive onto Lacan’s to
make use of a death drive that accomplishes two contradictory objectives. On
the one hand, the drive unleashes chaos. On the other, this same drive moves
the subject towards stasis and stillness.

The logic of narcissism asymptotically approaches the death drive.
Ragland-Sullivan explains: “Lacan maintained that primary narcissism was
impossible as a state of being precisely because there is no perceptual
opening to the world in the concept. The idea of a psyche enclosed on itself,
imprisoned within elemental hallucinations or fantasies, describes a state of ‘death,’ not a stage in development” (23). The narcissistic subject forces his world to reflect that static “ideal-I” (or, in Copjec’s words, “the image beyond the self”) back to him – an act that is guaranteed to fail. Of this static subject, Lee Edelman writes: “Narcissism, construed as libidinal investment in the formalized ego it cathects, by means of which the self attempts to assure its own preservation, comes nonetheless to designate a life-denying economy, a Scrooge-like self-containment, marked by a fatal rejection of the energies on which social survival depends” (52). Indeed, it is only after a subject has achieved her drive towards death – and returns to dust – that she achieves fully the halcyon unity envisioned by Bersani and Phillips.

A brief moment from *Paradise Lost* illustrates this peculiar desire as Adam articulates elements of the death drive after the Fall. For Adam, God’s admonition to reproduce metamorphoses into a most awful curse: “O voice once heard / Delightfully, *Increase and multiply,* / Now death to hear!” (10: 729-31). What Adam now recognizes is that “death” is always already at stake in this frenzied multiplication. Viewing his future with hopelessness and fearing a “deathless death,” he welcomes, in contrast, a return to nothingness:

That dust I am, and shall to dust return:

O welcome hour whenever! why delays

His hand to execute what his decree

Fixed on this day? why do I overlive,
Why am I mocked with death, and lengthened out
To deathless pain? How gladly would I meet
Mortality my sentence, and be earth
Insensible, how glad would lay me down
As in my mother’s lap! there I should rest
And sleep secure. (10: 770-79)

The problem for Adam is that he knows, given God’s “decree,” he will die. But it is God’s many “delays,” delays that are “lengthened out / to deathless pain” that cause Adam grief – not the death sentence itself. As Adam “gladly” imagines “be[ing] earth / insensible” – which is to say inanimate, unconscious, free of all that is human – he (or rather Milton’s text) makes a surprising analogy. Adam imagines his eventual unity with the earth as “dust” to “lay[ing]” down in “[his] mother’s lap.” But Adam has no mother, and Eve has not yet provided an example. The oddness of this analogy is furthered by the possessive adjective “my” – that Adam claims, in other words, this fictive mother.

By pointing out this oddity, I am not attempting to make much of Milton’s “mistake.” Rather, I argue that Adam’s desire for his mother or, more precisely, her “lap,” eerily anticipates Freud’s writings on the death drive. This death drive is not a drive towards death per se but rather the means by which one ceases the “overliv[ing]” of perpetual movement. Adam’s return to “dust” (which is, of course, that from which he came) is analogized as a
return to the womb – to nonexistence, a place in which one could “rest / And sleep secure.”

While *Paradise Lost* allows its readers a glimpse of the death drive, Milton’s political writings most explicitly manifest the narcissism that constitutes republican ideology and the drive that underpins the republican subject. And it is the republican construction of the body politic that embroils us in the death drive. Analyzing English republican views of the political body, Quentin Skinner determines that these writers take the metaphor of the body politic as seriously as possible. A political body, no less a natural one, is said to be at liberty if and only if it is not subject to external constraint. Like a free person, a free state is one that is able to act according to its own will, in pursuit of its own chosen ends. It is a community, that is, in which the will of the citizens, the general will of the body politic, chooses and determines whatever ends are pursued by the community as a whole.

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The problem for republicanism is that individual citizens constitute this body politic and that conflicts arise with the “free person[s]” and “[their] own will[s].” Indeed, even Skinner’s rapid shift from singular to plural nouns symptomatizes this conflict. For instance, Skinner reduces the pluralized “citizens” to a singular “will.” And whereas a “community” is comprised of multiple “free person[s],” the singular “community” and “body politic”
dissolve the multiplicity of its citizens (and their wills). Even as Milton and other Republican writers value the “self,” it is precisely this privileging of the individual that potentially runs counter to the “ends...pursued by the community as a whole.” The individual “selves” that constitute the body politic threaten immediately to deconstruct that community. The body politic, in other words, disintegrates in the face of the numerous individual wills.

Not surprisingly, English citizens are much, if not all, of the problem for Milton. In “Milton’s Republicanism and the Tyranny of Heaven,” Worden concludes: “Through his work there runs a doubt, not about the healthiness of republican rule, but about the fitness of the English people to sustain it” (223). Maintaining Worden’s focus on the English people, I want to examine Milton’s rhetoric concerning his fellow citizens. By welcoming the return of the monarch, the English people, according to Milton, are self-destructive and wreck the very foundations of English republicanism. Connecting these self-destructive impulses to the death drive, I argue that, in light of republicanism’s inherent narcissism, the English people’s manifestation of republican traits may exceed Milton’s pessimistic assessments.

In The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates, Milton refers to his fellow citizens as “slaves within doors” (1057). These individuals are doubly-enslaved, held captive by their voluntary servitude to the king, or “slave[ry],” and by their “doors,” or self-made domestic prisons. Later, Milton laments the predicament of attempting to free this populace: “What wise and valiant
man would seek to free / These thus degenerate, by themselves enslaved, /
Or could of inward slaves make outward free?” (Worden qtd Milton 245).

Here, Milton allows no doubt as to the source of enslavement: the “degenerate” are self-enslaved. Because this slavery is “inward” and tenacious, imposing republican values would only remedy the “outward” façade. In his rhetorical question, then, “wisd[om] and valian[ce]” are predicated on recognizing the self-enslaved and allowing them to remain as such. To bring freedom would be folly, for the English people could only be outwardly free.

Milton enumerates subsequent instances of folly in the “ingrateful backsliding” of the English people. In The Readie and Easie Way (1660), Milton begs his fellow citizens to resist the siren call of servitude: “We may be forc’d perhaps to fight over again all that we have fought, and spend over again all that we have spent...if by our ingrateful backsliding we make these fruitless” (1138). Here, Milton expresses his thinly veiled rage over the restoration of Charles II. What remains fascinating about this passage, however, is the manner in which Milton refuses to imagine that the Commonwealth could be a permanent loss. Rather, the people will just have to “fight over again” and “spend over again.” While recognizing that such expenditures are “fruitless,” Milton’s project, much like Satan’s, is indebted to repetition.

But the blame for this “fruitless” repetition lies squarely with the “degenerate” masses and their penchant for self-destruction: “That a nation
should be so valorous and courageous to winn thir libety...basely and
besottedly to run their necks again into the yoke which they have broken”
(Readie 1140). Here, Milton identifies a central paradox that preoccupies
much of The Readie and Easie Way: why do the English people achieve their
end in the establishment of the Commonwealth only to throw it all away with
the restoration of Charles II? Invoking the slavery trope once more – and
with it, the rhetoric of the “inward slave” of his earlier writings – Milton calls
the current predicament a “gilded yoke which thus transports us” (Readie
1145).

Such gilding, however, wears thin as Milton expostulates and
identifies the original source of degeneracy: “How thir necks yok’d with these
tigers of Bacchus, these new fanatics of not the preaching but the sweating-
tub, inspired with nothing holier then the Veneral pox” (Readie 1148). To
associate the throne with syphilis, a “French” disease that causes madness, is
to render the royalists’ support of Charles II little more than the lunatic
ravings of an unpatriotic (i.e., French) mob. Indeed, the degeneracy about
which Milton has complained throughout his writings now presents itself as
a corrupted and corrupting physical body, and the source of this disease is
the monarchy.

This disease runs rampant amidst the body politic, according to
Milton, when he castigates the “inconsiderate multitude [which] are now so
madd upon” (Readie 1144). While Milton uses “madd” to suggest the
popularity of Charles II’s return to England, his usage also alludes to the
“Veneral pox” insofar as that disease engenders madness. Gone is Milton’s vision of a Republican “community”; replacing that dream is a portrait of a mob running amok and headlong toward its own destruction. Citing the Romans who also shook off the chains of servitude only to embrace it later, Milton proclaims them a “licentious and unbridled democratie, as in fine ruind themselves with thir own excessive power” (Readie 1142). From the sixteenth century onward, the definition of “democratie,” as a government ruled by its citizens who have equal rights, is in circulation. Insofar as “democratie” influences civic republicanism and Milton is its advocate, his pejorative usage seems surprising, even contradictory. Why would Milton admit the possibility of a bad “democratie” as he argues for the reestablishment of the Commonwealth?

And to admit problems with democracy is to admit problems with the people. Milton believes that his countrymen, this “licentious and unbridled” body politic, are corrupted by “thir own excessive power.” In the slippage from the singular subject (“democratie” to the plural possessive (“thir”), he admits the major tension in his republican ideology: the manner in which multiple individuals are at odds with the singular body politic or “democratie.” Ruin comes not from the royalists or even Charles II but rather from the subjects themselves, these former citizens who gave up on the Commonwealth. As a parting shot, Milton warns: “But if the people be so affected, as to prostitute religion and libertie to the vain and groundless apprehension, that nothing but kingship can restore trade, not remembering
the frequent plagues and pestilences that then wasted this citie...it might prove a dangerous matter” (Readie 1148). His usage of “prostitute” hearkens back to his earlier criticisms of licentiousness and disease; this “prostitute,” in turning towards the diseased monarchical government, only spreads the “Venereal pox.” There is no reason, from Milton’s perspective, why the people should welcome back Charles II. To do so is to welcome “the frequent plagues and pestilences” that not only wreaked havoc with London but also “wasted” it. But the situation in which Milton finds himself is the grand legacy of the narcissistic preoccupation with “Self” in English republicanism, for it is the death drive that underpins this narcissism. And it is this drive that impels the undoing, the deconstruction, the destruction, and the “wast[ing]” of both republicanism and the English people.

Yet even as this drive promotes frenzied motion, its ultimate aim is to restore the subject to inertia, to stillness, to nothingness. In Milton’s idealized republican government, one catches a glimpse of the static embodiment of the death drive. Explaining how the death of a sovereign disrupts the government, Milton argues in favor of the Commonwealth, which will remain unaffected by death:

Kingship it self is therefore counted the most safe and durable, because the king and, for the most part, his counsell, is not chang’d during life: but a Commonwealth is held immortal; and therin firmest, safest and most above fortune: for the death of a king, causeth oftentimes many dangerous alterations; but the
death now and then of a Senator is not felt; the main bodie of
them still continuing permanent in greatest and noblest
Commonwealths, and as it were eternal. (Readie 1141-42).

It is Milton's praise of the Commonwealth as “immortal,” “most above [the
wheel of] fortune,” and “permanent” that characterizes it as static. And it is
this static “etern[ity]” in which even death fails to cause a glitch in its
machinery that Milton’s republicanism achieves the unmoving, paralyzed
drive toward death. If narcissism becomes the model by which the
republican subject establishes itself and narcissism is predicated on the
death drive, might we understand both Satan’s repetitious revenge project
and the “ingrateful backsliding” of the English people, as manifestations of
that drive towards inertia? In their return to monarchy, in other words, the
English people prove themselves to be republican subjects because they
choose repetition and destruction, because they are driven rather than
driving. I am not suggesting, however, that there is an alternative – that one
could choose, in other words, not to choose narcissism and its accompanying
drive. Rather, my point is the following: in contrast to the ways in which
English republicanism constructs and markets itself, citizens are driven as
much as monarchical subjects.

Of course this republican revenge project is cast against the backdrop
of the royalists’ own project of vengeance in the literary cult of Charles I. But
insofar as repetition immures royalists in the past, royalists simultaneously
construct a future onto which they may project their limitless revenge.
Whereas royalists embrace a future that guarantees their success, Milton’s Satan finds no such refuge. Subsequently, Satan commits himself to failure – a commitment that, intentionally or otherwise, is reflected in Milton’s republican rhetoric and the actions of the English people. To understand what drives Satan and Milton, I identified the shared narcissism of Satan and his republican counterparts. This narcissism is not, in contrast to Bersani and Phillips, a halcyon sameness. Rather, republican narcissism is underpinned by violence against oneself and others, and by a drive that tends towards death. This drive occasions destruction, contradiction, and chaos, and it is a drive that is only fully realized in the idealized portrait of Milton’s commonwealth: an eerily unchanging government.

Because early modern republican ideology informs much of U.S. democratic ideals, parallels to current politics emerge almost immediately. We, too, pay homage (though most frequently in the form of lip-service) to egalitarianism and freedom; some even move beyond words in an attempt to create a more equal and just society. For those who value equality, my project in this final chapter may seem alarming as I uncover the proverbial fly in the ointment of a most cherished ideal. How could one posit an argument against equality?

But the logical extension of my argument is not a sweeping condemnation of equality per se. Instead, my reading of Milton demands an interrogation of how one constructs a democratic society and the consequences of that construction. We must admit, for example, that there
are finite limits to equality. It is not a “right” that extends to all. Indeed, with every new civil rights movement, marginalized groups must simultaneously assert their equality and demand equal rights. This phenomenon, in and of itself, points to the manner in which equality is neither natural nor inherent. Moreover, the pressures of assimilation, which too often dictate the politics of civil rights movements, urge us to consider the ways in which the imperative for sameness becomes tyrannous. To whom, in other words, is one equal? Is that, in fact, good enough? And, finally, what of those who are left behind by this project of equality?

By attending to the manner in which revenge structures our democratic ideals, I chart out an alternative history. Rather than subscribing to the versions of history that encourage us to laud the development and positive progression of the individual, we might consider how the republican subject qua narcissist enacts a desire to return to a state of oblivion – an evolution that is quite the opposite of sentimentalized notions of humanist progress, an evolution that suggests that we are driven rather than driving.
Coda

Nearly four months after riots swept across the UK in August of 2011, The Guardian released the results of a study, conducted in conjunction with the London School of Economics, that examined the rioters’ motives. In the 270 interviews with participants, policing problems were featured prominently. Indeed, 85% cited policing as an “important” or “very important” factor in the riots, and most interviewees offered personal stories of police harassment and brutality in communities of color. Yet it was the article itself that underscored the connection between policing and the riots as “retribution.” For instance, the title of the article reads: “English riots were ‘a sort of revenge’ against the police.” Here, the title showcases the riots’ uneasy relationship to revenge – that these riots, in other words, are only “a sort of” revenge. Or, to put it differently, there is something about the 2011 UK riots that escapes categorization altogether. In later paragraphs, Raekha Prasad, the author, explains the dynamic more fully: “Rioters recounted how they sought revenge against police...The riots provided a long-sought opportunity for settling scores; rioters spoke of ‘payback.’”

However spectacular these revenge riots might have been, they offered little in the way of a revolution. In fact, some rioters articulated a surprising level of conservatism in their interviews. For instance, one 21-year-old London rioter recounted:
We had [the police] under control... We had them on lock. On smash. Running away from us. We weren’t running away from the police. They were the criminals today. We were enforcing the law. Getting them out of our town because they ain’t doing nothing good anyway for no one.

Here, the interviewee evinces an awareness of the temporal limits of this “revenge” insofar as the victory lasts only for “today” – despite, of course, the fact that the riots persisted for weeks. And while these riots might have seemed particularly unruly to witnesses, this loss of control was not the rioters’ goal per se. Indeed, according to this participant, rioters valued their “control” over the police. Most importantly, however, is the participant’s depiction of the riots not as a break from or violation of the law, but as the means by which rioters “enforc[e]” it and criminalize the police. Riot participants, it seems, did not take issue with the law itself – even though the law institutionalized many of the racist and classist policies that contributed to the political situation.

This anecdote offers a useful point at which to conclude. Throughout this project, I have aimed to demonstrate the ways in which revenge operates as a contradictory force, one that supports and undermines simultaneously. And the recent example of the UK riots suggests how the contradictory structure of revenge is still at work. On the one hand, the details of the “revenge” riots defy logic. If, for instance, the rioters were targeting police forces, then why were so many locally owned stores destroyed in the very
communities in which rioters lived? Why were rioters’ own neighborhoods decimated? This self-destruction gestures towards the way in which revenge refuses logic and fails to make meaning.

But, on the other hand, this academic study makes legible the politics behind the seemingly “senseless” destruction. By identifying revenge as one of the major motives, this study politicizes the riots and constructs a narrative by which one might make sense of this destruction. Indeed, it is through the attention to the structure of revenge in early modern texts that we may see the ways in which revenge continues to structure (and undermine) our own existence.
Endnotes

Notes to Introduction

1 So too does Marjorie Garber. See “The Tempest,” *Shakespeare After All* 871.
2 Prospero orders Caliban to “go, sirrah, to my cell. / Take with you your companions. As you look / To have my pardon, trim it handsomely” (5.1.295-97).
4 Bate, 24. For the original source, see “The Tryal of Philip Howard, Earl of Arundel, the 18th day of April, 1589 in the 31st Year of the Reign of Queen Elizabeth.”
7 Bate, “Introduction,” 1.
8 Philip Henslowe’s diary records *Titus* performances in 1592-93. However, he makes no mention beyond the date and space of these performances. See *Henslowe’s Diary,* ed. R.A. Foakes, 2nd edition (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002).
10 See, for instance, Lukas Erne’s *Beyond The Spanish Tragedy: A Study of the Works of Thomas Kyd* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2001). And, according to Samuel Pepys, there was a 1688 performance at the Nursery Theatre in Hatton.
11 Even in her introduction to *Four Revenge Tragedies,* Katharine Eisaman Maus does little to complicate the genre. At best, her inclusion of two “anti-revenge tragedies,” plays that critique the employment of revenge and valorize revengeless avengers, posits some difference even as she, too, does not look beyond the canon set forth by Bowers.

Notes to Chapter One

12 J.W. Lever observes of Ford’s *’Tis Pity She’s a Whore* that it “does not derive from classical drama” because it “belongs rather to the Elizabethan tradition which ... prided itself on its capacity to shock.” Indeed, the shocking spectacle of Elizabethan (and subsequent Jacobean and Caroline) revenge tragedies marks a departure from their Senecan influences. Lever, “Tragedy and State,”

13 Providing an early modern perspective, Susan Zimmerman explains the corpse’s “mysterious, semi-animate status”: “It could take up to a year or more for the corpse to decompose, to become a skeleton, during which time it was perceived as ‘active, sensitive, or semianimate, [and] possessed of a gradually fading life’ or ‘personhood.’ In this interim, the corpse had the power to pollute and also to torment the living” (129). See The Early Modern Corpse and Shakespeare’s Theatre.

14 Paranoia is also of particular interest to queer theory insofar as it is aligned with homophobia within the Freudian psychoanalytic framework. In his study of the written memoirs of paranoiac Dr. Daniel Paul Schreber, Freud theorizes that paranoia emerges as a defense against homosexuality, “arguing that the different forms of paranoiac delusion are based on different ways of negating the phrase ‘I (a man) love him’” (Evans 134). Paranoia, in other words, reflects repressed same-sex desire. And it is precisely this relationship to repressed desire that piqued the curiosity of queer theorist Eve Sedgwick to evaluate its viability as a critical reading practice.

15 Though Sedgwick has most recently articulated the notion of paranoid reading, she is not the only critic to foresee its problems. Anticipating concerns like Sedwick’s, Susan Sontag bemoans the insistence on interpretation and criticizes allegorical attempts to render the illegible legible in Against Interpretation: “Real art has the capacity to make us nervous. By reducing the work of art to its content and then interpreting that, one tames the work of art. Interpretation makes art manageable, conforming” (8). And in The Pleasure of the Text, Roland Barthes writes that these analyses are “hermeneutics based on the exclusive search for the signified” (39). The signifier, the word itself, is rendered irrelevant in such analyses. Though Barthes and Sontag couch their criticisms differently, both gesture towards the problems with this extremely popular and also extremely exclusionary “hermeneutics of suspicion.” As such, paranoid reading has become the classic and widely accepted position for the literary critic; it is meaning-making par excellence.

16 When Kelleher writes about the “queer theoretical appropriation of paranoia,” he refers to the paranoid readers who aim to uncover queer desire or relationships in literary texts. Most “queer” readings of cinematic or literary texts are indebted to this particular reading practice. See, for instance, Judith Halberstam’s influential Female Masculinity.

17 Sedgwick states that “the paranoid trust in exposure seemingly depends, in addition, on an infinite reservoir of naïveté in those who make up the audience for these unveilings” (Touching 141).

18 Even Sedgwick herself seems aware of the limitations of her theorization of reparative reading: “The prohibitive problem [in conducting reparative criticism], however, has been in the limitations of present theoretical vocabularies rather than in the reparative motive itself” (Touching 150).
At times, Barthes interchanges “bliss” and “pleasure” in The Pleasure of the Text. Richard Howard explains the distinction that “pleasure is a state, of course, bliss (jouissance) an action, and both of them, in our culture, are held to be unspeakable, beyond words” (“Preface” vi).

Bruce Fink explains that phallic jouissance is differentiated from feminine jouissance insofar as it is “the jouissance that fails us, that disappoints us. It is susceptible to failure, and fundamentally misses our partner” (“Knowledge and Jouissance” 37). Feminine jouissance is an ecstically destructive jouissance.

Even if this italicization reflects its “foreign” status, this typographical choice highlights jouissance’s place as stranger, as Other, as that which does not belong.

I will challenge Artaud’s expectation of a progressively, positive evolution in my final chapter, for he asserts the redemptive qualities of his theatre of cruelty insofar as it “urges them to take a nobler, more heroic stand in the face of destiny” (22).

Puritan opponents to theatre, including Phillip Stubbes in The Anatomie of Abuses, argued that onstage representations of murder, adultery, and villainy inspired spectators to real-life re-enactment. Conversely, individuals such as Thomas Heywood in An Apology for Actors denied the evil effects of spectatorship and furthermore defended tragedy on the highest moral grounds (Bower 261).

Despite this high-profile, shockingly public revenge, critics assert that Hieronimo’s actions do not necessarily alienate him from his contemporary audience. For instance, C.L. Barber’s argument suggests that Hieronimo may even bridge the gap, so to speak, between actor and audience member insofar as he has “a very clearly-defined social position that makes him an appropriate figure for a middle-class London audience to identify with. He is not a member of the high nobility but a high civil servant...the sort of man Kyd would look up to, himself the son of a scrivener, and a client of a noble family who respected learning” (135-36). See Creating Elizabethan Tragedy: The Theater of Marlowe and Kyd, ed. Richard P. Wheeler (Chicago, 1988).

On the matter of revenge in The Spanish Tragedy, Christopher Crosbie argues that this drama is more interested in socioeconomic standing: “[Its] opening – with its subtle yet distinct assumption of Aristotelian psychology and its ghost more preoccupied with locating his former class position and cataloguing his successes than seeking vengeance – suggests revenge not as the play’s raison d’etre but as a vehicle for its stymied middling protagonists to redirect their energies for advancement into a darker register” (12). Though Crosbie certainly makes an interesting point here, his argument seems far too dependent on the Don Andrea framing. See “Oceonomia and the Vegetative Soul: Rethinking Revenge in The Spanish Tragedy” English Literary Renaissance (2008): 3-33.

In Frank Ardolino’s later work, he explores the relation of Hieronimo to the biblical King Zedekiah and asserts that “Hieronimo’s revenge is almost a
point-for-point reversal of Zedekiah’s narrative” (9). Stating that “the presence of multiple biblical parallels...suggests that Kyd wanted his audience to recognize the typological justification for Hieronimo’s actions,” Ardolino argues that “these parallels raise Hieronimo’s actions above those of a private revenger to a nationalistic level of vindication against the Catholic Babylon (i.e., Spain)” (5). In contrast to what I will argue in Chapter Two, Ardolino differentiates between “private revenge” and this latter patriotic type that is “sanctioned by God” (6).

27 In Seminar VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, Lacan writes: “You should understand that it is a real that we do not yet have to limit, the real in its totality, both the real of the subject and the real he has to deal with as exterior to him” (118). From the perspective of the subject, the Real exists within (i.e. traumatic dreams, hallucinations) and outside.

28 As Dylan Evans explains, “Lacan coins the term extimité by applying the prefix ex (from extérieur, ‘exterior’) to the French word intime (‘intimacy’). The resulting neologism, which may be rendered ‘extimacy’ in English, neatly expresses the way in which psychoanalysis problematises the opposition between inside and outside, between container and contained” (58). See An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis.

29 Hieronimo performs the play before the court even as the choric figure of Revenge, alongside the ghost of Don Andrea, watch the events unfold. Nor can we forget, finally, that we are the outermost spectators of this dramatic hall of mirrors.

30 Eric Griffin touches briefly on the possibility of this disorienting conflation between theater and reality. Griffin examines Hieronimo’s closing soliloquy in later productions of “Kyd’s” play: “For I hope there’s never a Jew among you all; / And so I leave you” (xiii. 15-16). In response, Griffin writes: “‘What Jew?’ we should ask, and where? When Hieronimo turns to wish the “kind gentles” in the playhouse “good night” – with the “comic” potential in his lines apparently heightened by a child actor’s delivery – does he mean that the play soon to follow will feature a Jewish character? Or is he encouraging audience members to scan the theater, suggesting that around them might lurk some judaizing marrano of the ilk of the traitorous Roderigo Lopez?” (367). It is this latter option in which I am most interested insofar as this threat extends from the stage into the audience itself. See “Nationalism, the Black Legend, and the Revised Spanish Tragedy,” English Literary Renaissance (2009): 336-370.

31 One reason, of course, for the private nature of this spectacle relates to Edward’s kingship. Because the monarch had two bodies – the body politic, which remained infallible and unassailable, and the private body – this separation enabled the imperfections of the monarch to be heaped onto the private body. In the sad case of Edward II, his ineffectual rule as well as his unseemly appetites were consolidated and heaped onto his private body. Thus, monarchical power, generally speaking, went unchallenged while Edward II – the man – became the scapegoat for both public and private
issues. Therefore, the king could not be disposed of publicly; to do so would require an assault on the existing power structures.

32 To that point, Drayton writes that "Some slanderous tongues, in spightful manner sayd, / That heer I liu’d in filthy sodomy / And that I was King Edwards Ganemed."

33 Goldberg’s argument is indebted to Alay Bray’s landmark work, Homosexuality in Renaissance England (London: Gay Men’s Press, 1982).

34 Goldberg argues: “Rather, sodomy was disseminated throughout society, invisible so long as homosexual acts failed to connect with the much more visible signs of social disruption represented by unorthodox religious or social positions” (75-6). Jonathan Goldberg, “Sodomy and Society: The Case of Christopher Marlowe,” Staging the Renaissance, eds. David Scott Kastan and Peter Stallybrass (New York: Routledge, 1991): 75-82.

35 Despite the grave threat associated with sodomy, very few individuals were prosecuted for this offense. During the combined reign of Elizabeth I and James I, only one individual was convicted and executed for sodomy. And in this case, the person was also convicted of rape (48). Bruce Smith, Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare’s England: A Cultural Poetics (Chicago: U of C Press, 1994).

36 Lars Engle writes that “Edward and Gaveston presumably use each other as did the sinner of Sodom” (355). Jonathan Goldberg similarly assumes Edward’s homosexuality but admits that class transgressions are the main issue of the play: “Mortimer charges Gaveston with a travesty of class, not gender, the theatricalization of social difference, not sexual difference” (117). Goldberg, Sodometries: Renaissance Texts, Modern Sexualities (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1992).

37 Alan Bray points to John Lyly’s Elizabethan novel Eupheus as “typical of the carefully beautiful manner” in which masculine friendship was presented: “But after many embracings and protestations one to another they walked to diner, where they wanted neither meat, neither music, neither any other pastime; and having banqueted, to digest their sweet confections they danced all that afternoon. They used not only one board but one bed, one book (if so be it they thought not one too many). Their friendship augmented every day, insomuch that the one could not refrain the company of the other one minute. All things went in common between them, which all men accounted commendable” (45-46). Bray, “Homosexuality and Male Friendship,” Queering the Renaissance, ed. Jonathan Goldberg (Durham, Duke UP, 1994): 40-61.


Corpse of her brother, “like a bird that has just lost its young.”

Lacan admits

The paradox is that all of this occurs retroactively. The subject is not constituted until (s)he enters the Symbolic order, and the individual – once granted subjectivity via the entrance into the Symbolic – is retroactively traumatized due to this entrance. It bears resemblance to the retroactive recognition in the Lacanian mirror stage.

By the Thing, I refer to Lacan’s concept of das Ding, the element that is beyond the signified world of the Symbolic order. Though the Thing is nothing, it is transformed into something vis à vis our desire. Because the Thing is beyond signification and resists comprehension, it is associated with the Real. As such, an encounter with the Thing is traumatic insofar as the experience is inassimilable. In later seminars (post Ethics), Lacan substituted objet petit A for the Thing. Bruce Fink explains that the “Object (a) is the leftover of that process of constituting an object; the scrap that evades the grasp of symbolization” (94). See The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1995).

Or, more succinctly, Alain Badiou writes that “they designate as their Other the barbarism of which they are wholly innocent” (5). The Other, in other words, enables me to maintain my identity as the good, authentic human. The Century, trans. Alberto Toscano, (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2007).

Many excellent pieces have addressed the status of the human and whether or not it is a category worth preserving. See, for instance, Giorgio Agamben’s Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life or Lee Edelman’s No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive.

“Ec” stands for Ecrits while “S” stands for the particular Lacanian seminar.

Lacan reads Antigone’s metamorphosis in her act of moaning alongside the corpse of her brother, “like a bird that has just lost its young.” Lacan admits
that "it’s a very strange image. And it is even stranger that it should be taken up and repeated by other authors. I found in Euripedes’ Phoenissae four lines where she is also compared to the lonely mother of a lost brood, who emits pathetic cries. That proves what the image of a bird always symbolizes in classical poetry. Let us not forget how close pagan myth is to ideas of metamorphosis – remember the transformation of Philomen and Baucis. It is the nightingale that appears in Euripides as the image of that which a human being is transformed into through his plaintive cries. The limit we have reached here is the one where the possibility of metamorphosis is located – metamorphosis that has come down through the centuries hidden in the works of Ovid and that regains its former vitality, its energy, during that turning point of European sensibility, the renaissance, and bursts forth in the theater of Shakespeare. That’s what Antigone is" (264-5). See The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960 ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter (New York: Norton, 1997).

51 While Mortimer exists in this gap, he metamorphoses into what Giorgio Agamben defines in Remnants of Auschwitz as the “Muselmann” as “the non-human who obstinately appears as human; he is the human that cannot be told apart from the inhuman” (81).

52 Remember, of course, that Kristeva designates the corpse, “seen without God and outside of science,” as “the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life” (4). Earlier in the essay, she explains that “refuse and corpses show me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live...If dung signifies the other side of the border, the place where I am not and which permits me to be, the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything. It is no longer I who expel, ‘I’ is expelled” (3-4). Julia Kristeva, “Approaching Abjection,” The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection (New York: Columbia UP, 1982): 1-31.

53 William West explores this “gap” in the text of The Spanish Tragedy as well, citing differences between the 1594 and 1602 quartos. Hieronimo’s lines regarding the “inviolable” secret are excised from the later edition, and it is in this manner that the text itself closes the gap. See “But this will be a mere confusion’: Real and Represented Confusions on the Elizabethan Stage,” Theatre Journal 60 (2008): 217-233.

54 Like Hieronimo’s mouth that refuses to tell its secret, Edward’s anus represents the gap in signification. Given such a threat, it is little wonder that this hole is “filled” with a “horn” and “red-hot poker.”

Notes to Chapter Two

55 Following the accession of James I, there was a major increase in dueling. As opposed to Elizabeth’s tight control over privatized acts of vengeance, James’ rule seemed more permissive. Many believed the “degenerate” Scottish influence was to blame. See Bowers, Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy: 1587- 1642, 31.
For instance, Bacon identified revenge as “a wild kind of justice” and the revenger as one who “finds himself pitched against the very authority that should be responsible for the implementation of justice” (Neill 329). But, revenge, despite its “wild[ness],” still resides within the realm of justice. “Of Revenge” is taken from Bacon’s Essays, first composed in 1597 and later expanded and revised in 1625. These quotations are from the 1625 version.

This dynamic between vengeance and sovereignty will be examined more fully in the following chapter.

Many thanks to Jenny Howe of Tufts University for observing the avengers’ demi-god status via the reference to Hercules in the senate’s speeches.

Genevieve Romeo of University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill most recently made this argument in her 2010 M/MLA presentation titled “Large Interest for Blood: Antonio’s Revenge and Protestant Ethics.”

Explaining early modern conceptions of evil, Johannes Dillinger writes: “Whereas Good was increasingly confined within the boundaries of fulfilling the commandments, Evil became potentially ubiquitous. The reformation did not solve the problem. The new denominations of the 16th century as well as Tridentine Catholicism emphasized the importance of the Decalogue even more” (169).

This quotation is taken from the 1568 Bishops Bible, which was authorized by the Church of England. In the passage itself, Paul quotes from Deuteronomy: “Uengeaunce is myne, and I wyll rewarde, their feete shall slyde in due tyme: For the day of their destruction is at hande, and the thynes that shall come vpon them, make haste” (32:35).

Of course such an exchange also hearkens back to pre-Elizabethan notions of wergild.

It is in this section that Aristotle addresses revenge and other behaviors that arise from anger.

To this end, Dollimore remarks: “Vindice becomes the agent of the parody and is invested with a theatrical sense resembling the dramatist’s own” (140).

Further clouding (or complicating) our judgment, Antonio also remarks on Lussurioso’s death: “It was a deadly hand that wounded him” (5.3.99). Editorial commentary argues that this line demands justice for the unknown assassin. (n. 7). Yet this line implies no such value judgment of the assassin. Moreover, a close reading of “deadly” does not even allow for such an interpretation insofar as the adjective refers to “mortal” or “causing death.” See the Oxford English Dictionary Online.

Recall that the first instance of “good” is uttered by Vindice: “All for Your Grace’s good” (5.3.115).

Haber notes: “Castiza, who like Vindice theoretically intends the good, is inextricably caught in the contradictions the play explores” (68).

Jonathan Dollimore is the most prominent critic who argues in favor of the play’s “subversive black camp.” See Radical Tragedy.
In the Norton edition, for instance, the editors shut down the multivalence of “quaintly” insofar as they translate it as “cunningly” for the reader.

Throughout the second act, the stage directions call for Balurdo’s beard to be “half off.”

See Act 1 Scene 2 of Antonio’s Revenge.

Examples include The Spanish Tragedy, The Duchess of Malfi, Macbeth, The Revenge of Bussy D’Ambois.

France, too, branded their vagabonds with a “V.”

Following the Gundpower Plot of 1605, the nuisance posed by vagrants and their “idlenesse” commences its metamorphosis into a national security issue. Vagabonds were believed to work as mercenaries for foreign powers. Mass poisonings and arson were considered to be their particular métier. For instance, the 1666 London fire was attributed to Dutch and Frenchman living in England (Dillinger 170):

The decisive fact was that the authorities believed in their existence. The consequences of their fear of terrorism were real enough: Europe’s princes passed severe laws against vagrants collectively suspected as fire raisers. Harmless beggars were apprehended and executed...under the assumption that cities and whole countries were in danger of being burnt down. (Dillinger 173)

This hysterical assumption that whole countries could be incinerated – by roaming bands of vagrants under the control of a Machiavellian foreigner – speaks to a notion that England is always already under attack from the inside – or, more precisely, from an unassimilated inside. This mass hysteria turns on the belief that one cannot discern the difference between “the deserving poor and the criminal fraternity” (Slack 93). Other inflammatory tracts include the work of Barnabe Barnes (1606) and Thomas Adams’ England’s Sickness (1615).

See Jankowski, Pure Resistance 218. Consider, too, Madhavi Menon’s introduction to Shakesqueer in which she posits “that a queered Shakespeare is never a queer Shakespeare” (1). Rightly criticizing the association of queer theory with nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature (to the exclusion of, for instance, medieval or early modern periods), Menon argues: “Such an insistence on location chronologically orients the very theory that seeks to be disorienting” (3).

As a transitive verb, for instance, the OED defines revenge as the means by which one exacts vengeance or obtains retribution. Revenge also influences the definition of “payment” from the 15th century onward. See Oxford English Dictionary Online.

That said, there are additional reasons for Antonio’s refusal. To accept payment, for instance, would undermine the legibility of the motive for his act. Insofar as revenge is linked to an economy of honor, to accept payment in addition would be dishonorable.

The choric figure of revenge gloats similarly upon a never-ending afterlife of revenge at the conclusion of The Spanish Tragedy.
excellent introduction to the relationship between revenge and the

...himself is the offending party because, in their view, the monarch fails to dispense justice fairly or because the monarch himself is the offending party (xiv). Though Maus offers an excellent introduction to the relationship between revenge and the

Notes to Chapter Three

81 Sean Kelsey argues convincingly that the execution of Charles I was unintended by the participants in his trial; their aim was to peacefully depose him. His death, to put it crudely, was a game of chicken gone terribly awry. See “The Death of Charles I,” The Historical Journal 45.4 (2002): 727-754.

82 With regard to the popularity of revenge tragedies, see Fredson Bowers, Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy, 41-61. Also, Stevie Simkin cites their “obvious prominence” in Elizabethan and Jacobean, listing a number of the popular ones. See Revenge Tragedy (New York: Palgrave, 2001) p. 3 and note 10 on p. 20.

83 That said, the Elizabethan crown utilized revenge to augment its political power. For instance, by signing the Oath of Association, Elizabeth’s subjects committed themselves to avenging her murderers in the event of an assassination. And, as Harry Keyishian quips in The Shapes of Revenge, “We should recall that Drake named the sea vessel he led against the Armada not Forgiveness or The Turned Cheek but The Revenge” (7). Revenge, under the direction of the sovereign, is a most useful political instrument.

84 In The Sinners Guyde (1564), Luis de Granada condemns the act of revenge on the grounds that “it is a thing...altogether to be detested, that thou shouldest revenge another mans maliciousness with thine owne maliciousness; and appointing thy self Judge in thine own cause, shouldest chastice another mans injustice with thine owne.” For de Granada and other Elizabethan ecclesiastical authorities, an act of revenge is not the prerogative of humans; rather, it is the appropriate domain of God – the authentic “Judge.” In The Revenger’s Madness, Elaine and Charles Hallett argue that “the act of revenge does not correct an imbalance and restore order, purely and simply, with the even exchange of eye for eye, tooth for tooth” (11).

85 In Chapter Two, I debunk this notion of “agents of the Good.” So for those aforementioned reasons, along with Dollimore’s assertion, I remain skeptical of these so-called “instruments of divine providence.”

86 A longer list might include Gorboduc, Macbeth, Paradise Lost, The Spanish Tragedy, Titus Andronicus, The Tragedy of Hoffman, and The White Devil.

87 Of The Spanish Tragedy, The Revenger’s Tragedy, and The Revenge of Bussy d’Ambois, Maus writes that “persons who take justice into their own hands implicitly proclaim their lack of faith in this [monarchical] system: either because, in their view, the monarch fails to dispense justice fairly or because the monarch himself is the offending party” (xiv). Though Maus offers an excellent introduction to the relationship between revenge and the
sovereign, this is the extent to which she examines the relationship between revenge tragedies and the figure of the sovereign.

88 In Government by Polemic, Lori Anne Ferrell criticizes the tendency to focus simply on Charles I: “Yet historians rarely, if ever, go farther back than the Scots rebellion of 1637 or Charles’ general ineptitude in ruling his father’s native kingdom” (28). Historians Kenneth Fincham and Peter Lake trouble the binarism that recent scholarship has imposed to differentiate between James I and his son. It is too facile, they contend, to point the finger at Charles I, whose mismanagement “caused” the civil war: “Caroline policies and priorities make sense only in the ideological and political context of James I’s reign. Hardly any of the ideas translated into policy under Charles were intellectually novel or even new to the court by 1625” (23).

89 As a puritanically-minded leader, Abbot was known for his harsh stance against Roman Catholics. Yet he also managed to anger royalty by opposing their divorces during his tenure as Archbishop of Canterbury. Nevertheless, he was present on James I’s deathbed and crowned the heir, Charles I.

90 Given such primary texts, I am unconvinced when Catherine Belsey asserts that “the Anglican position did not allow for disobedience, but it did tend to locate the sovereign within rather than above the law” (111). Though I believe that Belsey is, like the rest of us, fumbling with the paradox of sovereignty, I do not see how these historical materials enable us to subjugate the sovereign to the Law. See The Subject of Tragedy.


92 By the conclusion of the play, Müller-Wood argues that “Charlemont’s resemblance to D’Amville becomes apparent….Affirming the character’s closeness to his evil other, it also draws attention to the playwright, who exploited the language whose pitfalls he saw in as cunning a way as his characters” (123).

93 In Novum Organum (1620), Francis Bacon investigates natural forms of heat: “Lightning, and coruscations, and thunder, however, rarely happen in winter, and generally at the time of the greatest heats.” Later, Bacon admits that “the flame of vivid lightning appears to exceed all the above, so as sometimes to have melted even wrought iron into drops, which the other flames cannot accomplish” (8).

94 The question of D’Amville’s reading is central to this play. Huston Diehl reads the axe as “God’s final vengeance on the atheist at the Last Judgment” via Cesare Ripa’s Iconologia (1603). Furthermore, Diehl attends to the fact that D’Amville’s head is explicitly under attack in this execution scene: “This self-inflicted blow may therefore call to mind the conventional belief that the atheist in his denial of God murders his own God-given reason” (55). See “Reduce Thy Understanding to Thine Eye’: Seeing and Interpreting in The Atheist’s Tragedy.”
Of course it would be difficult to exist in the material world without the tools of empiricism. Yet, as Thomas Rist and others observe, Castabella and Charlemont posit decidedly empirical language in an almost parodic display of scientific protocol.

And indeed, I think that we ought to. It’s too facile to take any of D’Amvillé’s performances literally, for he is nothing if not a trickster. Of D’Amvillé’s hyperbolic funeral performances, Thomas Rist writes: “Being conspicuously related to the Kyrie Eleison, [his] self-consciously Catholic remembrance exemplifies the genre’s religio-funerary debt: entailing repeated rhetorical questions and exclamations, invocations of the heavens and persistent hyperbole – dead tongues, tennis-ball eyes – the remembrance suggests the characteristically extravagant style of revengers since Hieronimo” (110).

Ornstein elaborates the role between naturalism and atheism: “It was taken for granted that the Renaissance atheist was well read in ‘Nature and her large Philosophie.’ In The French Academie ‘naturall philosophie’ and atheism are consistently linked, and La Primaudaye complains that too much curiosity about the natural world has led many men away from belief in God” (196). See “The Atheist’s Tragedy and Renaissance Naturalism," Studies in Philology 51.2 (1954): 194-207.

D’Amvillé does not utter “God” in the entire text. From an early modern perspective, this sentiment would be deemed heretical. But the simple substitution of terms – God and Nature – suggests that the logic of this belief system is still intact.

Furthermore, some critics suggest that atheism becomes the logical extension of puritanism. In his examination of funerary ritual, Thomas Rist argues that Tourneur aligns the figures of the atheist and puritan (107). See Rist's Revenge Tragedy and the Drama of Commemoration in Reforming England.

In his study of Beaumont and Fletcher’s plays, Peter Berek argues convincingly that “Amintor occupies a ‘feminized’ relationship to the monarch. His devotion to the sovereign renders him far less capable of action than Evadne” (370). Indeed, even in this moment, Amintor, with flagging will, drops his sword before the King in a symbolic gesture of impotence. See “Cross-Dressing, Gender, and Absolutism in the Beaumont and Fletcher Plays," Studies in English Literature 44.2 (2004): 359-377.

Jason R. Denman also grasps the importance of “cannot” in this line. See “The Corporeal Rhetoric in The Maid's Tragedy.”

One cannot but think of Queen Elizabeth's “The Rainbow Portrait” (1600) in which eyes and ears spot her gown in this metaphorical demonstration of the panopticon.

Lysippus announces: “Gentlemen, I am your king.” On behalf of the group, Strato responds: “We do acknowledge it” (5.1: 146-47).

In contrast to my point, Denman concludes that “Evadne has divested him [the King] of mystery, tempered his 'high veins,’ and, in so doing, anatomized
the body politic” (328). But Denman accords far too much subversion to
Evadne. Given the king’s two bodies, Evadne has wounded only the mortal
one; the body politic remains unscathed. Furthermore, the body politic
immediately offers a new king in the following act.

106 A few lines from a poem frequently attributed to Charles I also depicts this
tenuous duality: “With my own power my majesty the wound / In the king’s
name the king himself uncrowned” (Mack 9). At first glance, the king
commits a self-reflexive action insofar as the king uncrowns himself. But it is
the name of the king – the monarchical position itself – that “uncrowns” the
king qua man. With his human power, Charles I inflicts the “wound” onto the
“majesty” of the monarchy; unlike the man, however, this monarchical
position heals more easily.

107 A notable exception occurs in Marlowe’s Edward II. Following the
assassination of Edward II, both Edward III and his mother exclaim
“murder,” bringing this dead king to the fore: “My father’s murdered through
thy treachery...Traitor [to Mortimer Jr.], in me my loving father speaks, / And
plainly saith ‘twas thou that murd’red’st him” (5.6: 28-42).


109 Though the “Treason Act” was revised over the centuries, Elizabeth I’s
1571 revision maintains the focus on “imagining” and “compassing” of the
1351 original: “if any person or persons whatsoever, at any time after the last
day of June next coming during the natural life of our most gracious
sovereign lady, Queen Elizabeth...shall, within the realm or without,
compass, imagine, invent, devise, or intend the death or destruction, or any
bodily harm tending to death, destruction, maim, or wounding of the royal
person of the same our sovereign lady, Queen Elizabeth.” It was not revised
until Charles II’s “Sedition Act” in 1661.

110 This excerpt, of course, does not reflect the entirety of the article. Yet the
quoted portion is all that relates to the person of the king. In “The Juristic
Foundation of Regicide,” D. Alan Orr writes: “the theory of the king’s two
bodies rendered it not simply a crime against the king’s person but a crime
against his (or her) kingship in the abstract as a juristic fiction. Essentially,
the king’s two bodies redefined treason as a crime against the king by virtue
of his sovereignty over the whole state...Crimes against the body politic were
necessarily also crimes against the body natural. Consequently, attempting to
destroy the king’s political body was necessarily also an attempt to destroy
the king’s person” (118-119).

111 “Traitor” here is defined as “one adjudged guilty of treason.” See Oxford
English Dictionary.

112 As for the pervert’s “aim,” Slavoj Zizek offers the following: “The true aim
is no longer to hit the goal but to maintain the very circular movement of
repeatedly missing it” (199). See Tarrying with the Negative.

113 Between these two examples, they feature an inconsistent usage of “gods”
and “God,” suggesting that both Christian and pagan elements are at work
here. Therefore, it would be problematic to apply a strictly Christian or, for instance, Greek understanding of revenge to this play.

114 Even in *The Revenger’s Tragedy*, arguably one of the most irreverent revenge tragedies, the revenger (Vindice) purifies the ruler’s position. Consider, for a moment, that manner in which Vindice purges the vice-ridden clan of the former Duke and institutes the near-perfect Antonio as the new one.

115 See Zizek’s “The Big Other Doesn’t Exist,” *Journal of European Psychoanalysis* (1997). To paraphrase Zizek’s argument, the Other exists only in the realm of the Symbolic, and insofar as that register is little more than material fictions, this “big Other” is without content.

116 From a strict Lacanian interpretation, perversion returns us to the realm of the drive. In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan explains that the pervert is “he who, in short circuit, more directly than any other, succeeds in his aim, by integrating in the most profound way his function as subject with his existence as desire” (206). To exist as desire is to exist not as a subject, but as an unsubjected object.

117 Such a model of sovereignty is indebted to Foucaultian notions of discursive power. However, in contrast to Foucault’s assertion in *Power/Knowledge* that “We need to cut off the King’s head; in political theory that has still to be done,” I argue that such an act is impossible. It will remain forever undone for the reasons I have already enumerated. And Foucault’s text itself preserves the unique essence of sovereignty by capitalizing “king.”

118 This perverse motivation is not simply a particularity of *The Maid’s Tragedy*. Numerous revenge tragedies – for instance, *Hamlet*, *Antonio’s Revenge*, and *Titus Andronicus* – feature it as well. Insofar as these revenge narratives remain committed to exposing the inadequacies of the sovereign, purging weakness from the throne in the form of assassination, and instating better rulers, these plays perpetuate perversion. This phenomenon is not, in other words, of a few isolated revenge tragedies. Rather, it is indicative of a generic trend.

119 In the case of the French Revolution, the *Proclamation of the Convention to the French People* declares in its opening sentence: “Citizens, the tyrant is no more.” Insofar as this document refuses to acknowledge the sovereignty of Louis XVI, insofar as it refers to him simply as “tyrant” rather than “king,” this text disavows killing the king in the linguistic register. Despite criminalizing and executing the king, the texts cannot articulate that the king is dead. In that manner, then, one might suggest that the stain of “unsacrificeability” persists here as well.

120 See Marquis de Sade’s *Philosophy in the Boudoir: Or, The Immoral Mentors*, 104.
Notes to Chapter Four

121 Though John Milton’s epic poem *Paradise Lost* features a creation myth bound up in a revenge project, scholars have not examined Satan’s revenge project in any detail. Vengeance similarly infuses the elegiac and commemorative poetry so popular with the cult of Charles I. Andrew Lacey observes, “At its heart was the Old Testament concept of blood-guilt -- the conviction that Charles’ innocent blood called out for vengeance” (242). Though Lacey rightly gestures towards the prominence of revenge in this literature, his comment marks the extent of the critical investigation of revenge in the literary cult of Charles I. See *The Cult of King Charles the Martyr* (Woodbridge and Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2003).

122 Though royalists may also resist futurity (particularly when that future includes Cromwell) and embrace futility, my project is more interested in characters, like Satan, who do so openly. Given Satan’s querness, narcissism, and antisociality, Satan is not unlike Lee Edelman’s unapologetic “sinthomosexual.” See *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke UP, 2004).

123 To address the transparent “politricks” of *Eikon Basilike*, Milton wrote *Eikonoklastes* in October of 1649.

124 Please note that I do not use “Puritan” and “republican” as synonymous terms. While Puritans and Presbyterians were invariably in support of republican ideals, republican ideology encompassed more than just the members of these religious groups. Puritans, of course, are a radical Protestant sect.

125 *Eikon* is also structurally repetitive, especially given the identical format of its 27 chapters. Through sheer volume, this repetition delays the text’s conclusion such that readers fixate on the past moment of execution; with this delay, the text prohibits forward movement.

126 Lacey also notes this trope, remarking that the literary cult focused on “the Christ-Charles parallel” and identified “the rebels with the Jews” (77). See *The Cult of King Charles the Martyr*.

127 Questions of authorship have plagued *Eikon Basilike* since its publication ten days after the execution of Charles I. Purportedly the spiritual autobiography of the recently deceased king, *Eikon Basilike* was most likely edited by John Gauden, bishop of Worcester, as well as Jeremy Taylor.

128 Penitence is the sole means by which republicans stave off that end. Soon enough, the private day of fasting metamorphosed into a public day of mourning. As Lois Potter details in the “The Royal Martyr in the Restoration: National Grief and National Sin,” this day served as a penitential memorial precisely because Christian royalists anticipated God’s vengeance upon them for the wrongdoing of England:

    Thus the proclamation of the 30 January fast asks worshippers to pray that they and their posterity will not be punished for the king’s death, and the first collect of the Common Prayer
service for the day is a confession that ‘the sins of this Nation have been the cause which hath brought this heavy judgment upon us.’ (245)

By memorializing the executed Charles I on an annual basis – even after Charles II was on the throne – royalists sought to delay, or perhaps simply diminish, national culpability for his wrongful death.

129 As in previous examples, outside agents effect revenge on behalf of the royalist cause. Here, “just Providence” is the agent of vengeance, not Charles I. This deferral is significant because it emphasizes not only the superior morality of the royalist position (i.e., “God is on our side”), but puts forth a posture of ethical impartiality. Charles’ treatment, in other words, was so egregious that God himself stepped in.

130 “Prick-eared” was a derogatory term for Puritans because they favored short haircuts that ostensibly made their ears stick out.

131 Lacey writes: “Its weakness was that a significant proportion of the population remembered a different historiography. They had a different memory of Charles’ rule and the reasons for the Civil War. This divergence of historical memory and the fact that Royalist historiography could not discuss the origins of the Wars dispassionately may be one of the reasons for the eventual failure of the cult” (74). See The Cult of King Charles the Martyr, 2003.

132 Regarding this fictive relation to futurity, Edelman issues a valuable warning: “Futurism thus generates generational succession, temporality, and narrative sequence, not toward the end of enabling change, but, instead, of perpetuating sameness, of turning back time to assure repetition – or to assure a logic of resemblance” (60). Such repetition is readily apprehensible in the royalist revenge project as they envision a future of simply more revenge. See No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive, 2004.

133 As many scholars have observed, Satan sets up a hellish throne that mirrors the heavenly worship that he previously disdained. See, for instance, William Flesch, “The Majesty of Darkness,” John Milton’s Paradise Lost: Modern Critical Interpretations, ed. Harold Bloom (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publications, 1986): 293-311.

134 Admittedly, the expression of God’s production of good from evil (i.e., “If then his Providence / Out of our evil seek to bring forth good”) is also embedded in a conditional clause. Yet Satan does not seem to be questioning God’s ability to generate good. It is not, for example, as if Satan challenges whether God “can” do this but rather if He “seeks” to do this. In other words, Satan imagines tactical possibilities through his use of the conditional construction (e.g., “If God does this, I shall do that”).

135 Paradise Lost is similarly invested in a future that promises not hope but vengeance, or rather that hope is predicated on the assurance of the revenge act. Let us not forget Adam and Eve’s own commitment to live and bear fruit, a commitment that is, in and of itself, tied up with avenging their fall in the
garden. Dissuading Eve from suicide, Adam tells her: “our grand Foe / Satan, who in the serpent hath contrived / Against us this deceit: to crush his head / Would be revenge indeed” (10: 1032-36). This type of revenge project in which the children avenge their parents is prominent throughout traditional revenge tragedy.

136 For instance, readers learn of the paternal origins of Death, begotten by Satan on the body of his daughter, Sin. If the incestuous reproduction were not enough to designate it as a queer mode of production, the delivery of Death and his subsequent rape of his mother, “engend’ring” the monsters of Hell, ought to be. This fiendish family tree contrasts with the future-oriented mode of heteronormative reproduction featured in the royalist literary canon, for the doubly incestual origins of these creatures are regressive rather than progressive.

137 Satan, Sin, and Death also exist as a sacrilegious inverse of the holy trinity. Sin tells her father: “Thou wilt bring me soon / To that new world of light and bliss, among / The gods who live at ease, where I shall reign / At thy right hand voluptuous, as beseems / Thy daughter and thy darling, without end” (II: 866-70).

138 Sin explains her creation: “All on a sudden miserable pain/Surprised thee [Satan], dim thine eyes, and dizzy swum/In darkness, while thy head flames thick and fast/Threw forth, till on the left side op’ning wide,/Likest to thee in shape and count’nance bright,/Then shining Heav’nly fair, a goddess armed/Out of thy head I sprung” (II:752-58).

139 According to Ovid’s Metamorphoses, Echo loses her voice, due to Juno’s jealousy, and is only able to repeat the words of those around her. She falls in love with Narcissus, who repudiates her, and refuses to leave him until his death. Instead, Narcissus falls in love with his own reflection: “I burn with love for my own self...If I could just be split from my own body!” (96). Due to his love and obsession, Narcissus died but continued to stare into his own reflection after death: “Even when/the world below became his home, he still/ would stare at his own image in the poor/of Styx (97). See Metamorphoses, trans. Allen Mandelbaum (San Diego: Harcourt, 1993).


142 Eve also reenacts the myth of Narcissus immediately after she is created: “As I bent down to look, just opposite, / A shape within the wat’ry gleam
appeared / Bending to look on me: I started back, / It started back, but
pleased I soon returned, / Pleased it returned as soon with answering looks /
Of sympathy and love; there I had fixed mine eyes till now, and pined with
vain desire” (IV: 460-66). While Eve is depicted as narcissistic (particularly
as she initially repudiates Adam for his comparative lack of beauty), this
characterization is part of an extended condemnation of feminine vanity and
frivolity. Milton’s God also demonstrates an absolute narcissism insofar as he
cannot brook otherness in the form of Satan. One could easily argue, for
instance, that Satan only mirrors God’s narcissism.

Too often, however, early modern scholarship resists the application of
such terms as if psychoanalysis is only relevant to our current period and
uniquely complicated subjectivity. To that end, literary critics have
demonstrated a scholarly investment in the self-constructed, coherent, and
structurally stable subject, subscribing to a teleological narrative of
subjectivity propagated by literary historicism for decades. More recently,
critics have put forth erudite challenges to this widely held notion. See
Charles Taylor’s Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity
Modernists; or, Reflections on Literary Critics Writing the ‘History of the
Subject,’” Culture and History 1350-1600: Essays on English Communities,
Identities, and Writing, ed. David Aers (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1992): 177-
202. In The Shattering of the Self, Cynthia Marshall explores the “deep,
constitutive impulse within the early modern subject, an undertow that pulls
against the drive Greenblatt identified as ‘self-fashioning’” (12). She explains:
The degree to which early modern subjects were conflicted in
their emergent selfhood, not just unstable structurally but
dynamically and often simultaneously pulled towards 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. (14)

Galenic humoralism, for instance, accounts partially for this fluid and
frequently contradictory subject. In The Body Embarrassed, Gail Kern Paster
describes the unpredictability built into this model: “Bodies were always
filled with humors, but the quantity of humors not only depended on such
variables as age and gender but also differed from day to day as the body
took in food and air, processed them, and released them” (9). Even the
hysterical treatises of antitheatricalists, such as Phillip Stubbes and William
Prynne, betray a cultural anxiety regarding protean subjectivities. See Laura
Levine, Men In Women’s Clothing: Anti-theatricality and Effeminization 1579-
1642 (New York: Cambridge UP, 1994); William Prynne, Histriomastiz: The
Players Scourge, or Actors Tragedie, 1633 (New York: Johnson, 1974); Phillip
Stubbes, The Anatomie of Abuses, 1583 (New York: Garland, 1973). For these
reasons, I argue that early modern subjectivity is sufficiently complicated to
withstand the weight of these psychoanalytic terms and protean enough to benefit from further analysis.

144 Even Worden admits that admiration for a republican form of government predates the Civil War, emerging, for instance in More's *Utopia* and in the works of Philip Sidney and Francis Bacon (309). In addition, see Markku Peltonen, *Classical Humanism and Republicanism in English Political Thought 1570-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995); David Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic: Poetry, Rhetoric, and Politics 1627-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000).

145 That said, Blair Worden issues a useful reminder in “Republicanism, Regicide, and Republic: The English Experience”: “No single definition of republicanism can claim historical authenticity for itself. No one in or before the Puritan Revolution called himself or herself a republican. ‘Republican’ and ‘republicanism’ were terms of abuse and caricature” (307). *Republicanism Volume I: A Shared European Heritage*, eds. Martin Van Gelderen and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002).

146 However, Milton himself is not immune to canon revisions. Most recently, William Walker has put forth an argument that undermines Milton’s status as a republican. Walker fixates on the claim that Milton does not explicitly criticize kings but tyrants. Milton admits, according to Walker, the possibility of “good” monarchs. But Walker neglects the fact that Milton is not unique in his desire to distinguish tyrants from kings. Many republicans articulate the same distinctions in their political writings. In “Milton’s Republicanism and the Tyranny of Heaven,” Blair Worden reminds his readers that the republican canon was “never a self-contained or self-sufficient programme” (227). See William Walker, “Antiformalism, Antimonarchism, and Republicanism in Milton’s ‘Regicide Tracts,’” *Modern Philology* 108.4 (2011): 507-537.


148 While Wilma Armstrong does not go so far as to align the literary merits of *Paradise Lost* with Milton’s portrayal of God, she places the blame for this seemingly tyrannous God – a God who is “every inch a king,” according to Robert Fallon – with Satan and his fallen angels: “They [the inhabitants of Hell] choose their own government of tyranny and punishment because they have left ungoverned their own dissensions, jealousies, outrages, rapine, and lusts, as have the people Milton describes in Second Defence of the English People” (95). See Robert Thomas Fallon, *Divided Empire: Milton’s Political Imagery* (Pennsylvania: Penn State UP, 1995). 27; See Wilma Armstrong, “Punishment, Surveillance, and Discipline in *Paradise Lost,*” *Studies in English Literature* 32.1 (1992): 91-109.


151 In contrast to Schwartz, I align narcissism with the death drive. Schwartz links narcissism to thanatophobia and argues that Satan’s repetition is the means by which he defers death. See “‘Yet Once More’: Re-creation, Repetition, and Return,” in *Remembering and Repeating: On Milton’s Theology and Poetics* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1993): 91-110.

152 In later seminars, Lacan articulates a major difference from Freud regarding the death drive. Whereas Freud opposes the drives of Eros and Thanatos, Lacan argues that there is only one drive: the death drive. He later associates this drive with the Real and jouissance.

153 There are, of course, critical differences between republicanism and early modern democracy. In a republic, for instance, sovereignty is granted to the individual while a democracy grants it to the group or majority. Consequently, the minority or individual is left unprotected in a democracy. However, even the minority is not well-protected in a republican government: “[Civic republicanism] was a participatory and elective culture based upon incorporated privileges which at once calibrated citizens according to those criteria influence office-holding and distinguished them as a community from ‘straingers’ and ‘forreigners’ who were not enfranchised within the city’s constitution” (139 emphasis mine). See Alexandra Shepard and Phil Withington, *Communities in Early Modern England: Networks, Place, Rhetoric* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000).
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