

Justice Delays Revenge-  
The Spanish Tragedy and Revenge Tradition

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Letters  
and the Institute of Economics and Social Sciences  
of Bilkent University  
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts in  
English Language and Literature

by

Erhan Kuhnert  
September, 1991

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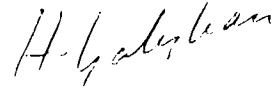
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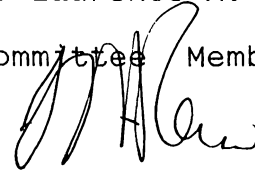
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## A b s t r a c t

### Justice Delays Revenge-

#### The Spanish Tragedy and Revenge Tradition

Erhan Kükner

M.A. In English Literature

Advisor: Asst.Prof.Dr. Hamit Çalışkan

September, 1991

The Spanish Tragedy, one of the best examples of English Renaissance drama, contributed towards the establishment of the revenge tragedy genre, which gained popularity in the years to come. Kyd in this play not only indicates that when the law is unjust, man will resort to revenge; but also demonstrates that a citizen should obey the ruler and regard revenge as a revolt against the state. The play tells the story of Hieronimo, who expects the murderers of his son to be punished. However, Hieronimo gradually discovers that the institutions of justice are useless and therefore takes revenge. His belief in justice and religious ban on revenge prevent him from taking his revenge. To emphasize this point this thesis will focus on the tradition of revenge; point out the connection between the king's authority and revenge; and demonstrate how Hieronimo takes revenge.

## Ö z e t

### Adaletin İntikamı Geciktirmesi-

### The Spanish Tragedy ve İntikam Geleneği

Erhan Kükner

İngiliz Edebiyatı Yüksek Lisans

Tez Yöneticisi: Yard.Doç.Dr. Hamit Çalışkan

Eylül, 1991

İngiliz Rönesans tiyatrosunun en iyi örneklerinden biri olan The Spanish Tragedy daha sonra çok popüler olan intikam trajedisi geleneğinin yerleşmesine katkıda bulunan oyunlardan biridir. Bu oyunda Kyd, haksızlık karşısında bireyin intikam alacağını göstermekle kalmayıp, krala tam itaat ve intikamın devlete başkaldırı olarak görülmesi üzerinde de durmaktadır. Oyun oğlunun katillerinin cezalandırılmasını isteyen Hieronimo'nun öyküsünü anlatmaktadır; ancak Hieronimo zamanla adalet kurumunun işlemediğini farkeder ve suçluları kendisi cezalandırır. Hieronimo'nun adalete olan inancı ve Hristiyan dininin intikamı yasaklaması onun bu kararı almasını geciktirir. Bu görüşün irdelenmesi açısından önce intikam geleneği, daha sonra kralın otoritesi ve intikam arasındaki ilişki ve son olarak da Hieronimo'nun intikam alış biçimi tezde incelenmiştir.

I am grateful to my advisor Asst.Prof.Dr Hamit Çalışkan and the committee members for their guidance, understanding and patience.

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## Chapter I

### Introduction

The connection between blood revenge tradition and application of justice has always been a topical subject and has taken a crucial place in the cultures of most societies. In the past, revenge was considered a way of enforcing justice, but it was outlawed when societies and governments attempted to assert their authority.

The main concern of the writers of Elizabethan revenge tragedy was to show the consequences arising from the rule of an unjust monarch. <sup>1</sup> The Spanish Tragedy is one of the best examples of revenge tragedy from the 1570s/1580s. In this play the forced revenger Hieronimo is faced with an impossible conflict of values. On the one hand, the tradition of revenge encourages him to take revenge without hesitation; on the other hand, devoted to the application of law, he is aware that revenge represents a rebellion against a divinely ordered society.

This thesis contends that Hieronimo's belief in human and divine justice delays his revenge. In the second chapter, the traditions of English revenge and the Elizabethan idea of revenge are outlined, to illustrate why Hieronimo believes that revenge is solely for the punishment of villains. The third chapter outlines the prohibition of revenge in relation to rebellion against the king, and the religious injunction of revenge, in order to show why these bans are so effective: Hieronimo cannot choose between taking revenge and waiting for

justice. In the fourth chapter, I will focus on Hieronimo's dilemma, and how he undergoes a radical change of heart and takes his revenge.

## Chapter II

### Blood Revenge Tradition

Although blood revenge had been forbidden since the Anglo-Saxon period, it was still practised during the Elizabethan era. This deep-rooted custom, which provided a quick and definitive solution to a quarrel was regarded as just. In fact, the concept of blood revenge assumed an extremely important position in English history, and its origins dates back to the early Anglo-Saxon period.

Fredson Bowers in his Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy argues that during this time, blood revenge was not considered a crime against the state, for the state did not exist as an institution. In fact, blood revenge "...was the mightiest,<sup>1</sup> the only possible form in which a wrong could be righted." In this case, one individual had to be stronger than his opponent. When a member of a family was murdered:

...the injured family...[did] not seek out and punish the actual murderer. The solidarity of the family...[was] so strongly felt that it sufficed for any member to kill any other representative<sup>2</sup> of the murderer's family.

And since there were no laws preventing revenge, the revenger was not punished.

The Anglo-Saxons established the traditions of feuding, fighting for a private quarrel, and integrated them into the wergeld(one of the earliest English laws), which forced

the criminal and his family to pay a certain amount of money to the family of the offended. The decision was at the discretion of the family; they either chose to fight or collect the money.<sup>3</sup> Once the Anglo-Saxon kings had established their authority however, they banned feuds because they considered them a potential threat to their supremacy. Moreover, they demanded an equal share from wergeld, which emphasized "...the idea that an offense against another subject was an offense against the king and state."<sup>4</sup>

However, these developments did not stop the practice of blood revenge. William the Conqueror established certain statutes which presented the option of fighting with the offender, or putting him on trial:

The whole procedure was so slipshod, however, that the murderer stood an even chance of escaping punishment completely.<sup>5</sup>

It was not until the early sixteenth century that, Henry VII created the basics of modern prosecution by introducing indictment (accusation of a criminal by the nearest relatives of the murdered). This prohibited blood revenge and penalized those who resorted to it as severely as possible.<sup>6</sup>

In the Elizabethan period, although the processes of law worked effectively, (Queen Elizabeth herself set an example by re-establishing friendly relationships between her courtiers, or punishing the parties involved in a quarrel) the tradition of revenge continued:<sup>7</sup>

In spite of the fact that justice was the sole prerogative of the Elizabethan state, with any encroachment on its newly won privilege liable to severe punishment, the spirit of revenge had scarcely declined in Elizabethan times....The right to punish their own wrongs was dear to many Elizabethans, who did not approve the interpretation of premeditated<sup>8</sup> malice put by the law upon their revenges.

In most cases the Elizabethans took revenge by means of duels, which themselves provided a justification for blood revenge. Fredson Bowers outlines the connection between duels and revenge:

(1) If there were no duels, all persons would draw their swords who have an interest in the injured person's honor [i.e. collective revenge]; (2) The fear of damnation keeps men from indulging in unjust quarrels; (3) If an act is lawful for many, it is lawful for one: armies challenge one another and so should individuals; (4) Since laws value private honor no farther than concerns the public safety, the individual must revenge his own dishonor; (5) The laws of knighthood bind all men to revenge an injury; (6) Since no one shall judge of honor but him who has it, the judges of civil courts (who are

base in their origin) are unfitted for the duty; (7) Soldiers are reasonable men, yet we condemn a custom which they have brought in and authorized; (8) Many murders are committed which are undiscovered by law; if private men were allowed to punish these with the sword, murders<sup>9</sup> would decrease.

There were other situations in which revenge could be perceived as justified. It was permissible in situations where there was no authority to restore the honor of the offended. Alternatively, revenge could be taken when no<sup>10</sup> clear evidence was found to sue the responsible party.

Although blood revenge was strictly forbidden and punished in the Elizabethan period, it was often exercised when justice was not meted out.

This tradition provided the inspiration for several plays- Thomas Kyd makes use of it in The Spanish Tragedy. By putting Hieronimo into a position where he is forced to make a choice between revenge and legal and divine punishments, Kyd asserts that this tradition cannot be eliminated.

### Chapter III

#### Prohibition of Revenge

In the Elizabethan period the legal prohibition of revenge was directly related to the authority of the Queen, and revenge was deemed to be a rebellion against her. The reasons for this originated in the notion of the monarch assuming total authority, and the way she used it.

In the Middle Ages, the nobles were given the responsibility for providing security and peace in their domains. As the power of the monarch declined, so they gained total control of their lands and often ignored the central governments, who were unable to collect taxes. Consequently, they started to sell the crown lands to the nobles and the church. However, the social changes of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries put an end to this state of affairs. Most people (excluding the nobles), favoured monarchical power, because they perceived the central government as the only institution which could eliminate the oppression of the local authorities, controlled by the nobles. The middle class, in particular, believed that prosperity lay in a stable government. After a violent conflict, the power of the local authorities was dismantled and the monarch reassumed his authority. Nonetheless, the problem of the church still had to be overcome.<sup>1</sup>

Historically, the church had always rejected the authority of the king. However, the church gradually lost its supremacy when Henry VIII declared himself the head of the

church. During the same period new ideas as to the sovereignty of the church emerged. It was believed that God had chosen the most suitable person to rule on earth—therefore the king was not responsible to the church. Such views established the divine right of kings, reinforced their authority and made it irrefutable. For instance, in his much debated book, (which was widely read in the Elizabethan period) The Prince (1513–14), Niccolo Machiavelli suggests that no matter how an ecclesiastical principality is acquired, the king does not have to worry about his authority, and his subjects do not have the right to rebel against him. The king is invested with power by God and this is absolutely indisputable.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, in The Book Named The Governor (1531), Thomas Elyot insists on unconditional obedience to monarchical authority of the king and makes it clear that: "...disloyalty or treason seldom escapeth great vengeance [from God]."<sup>3</sup>

The authority of the king had been established after a long struggle with the nobles and the church; to sustain this authority, every potential area of resistance was brutally suppressed. The crime of revenge (which was considered tantamount to rebellion), carried the worst penalty.

At the same time the king had to be just in his decisions and behaviour; this was advocated in several treatises. For instance, in his second book, The Discourses (1513–19), Machiavelli suggests that it is a very baleful thing for kings :



...to keep the minds of their subjects in  
 suspense and fear by continually inflicting  
 punishment and giving offence. Than this there  
 is unquestionably no practice more pernicious.  
 For when men begin to suspect that evil may  
 befall them, they take any means to protect  
 themselves and grow more bold....<sup>4</sup>

In The Book Named The Governor Elyot asserts that  
 although the kings derive their power from God, this does not  
 mean that they are free to execute justice according to their  
 own ideas and pleasures. They should look after the rights of  
 their subjects, because God shows mercy towards them, whereas<sup>5</sup>  
 he always observes the justness of the powerful. If those who  
 are in charge of justice find that their subordinates are not  
 fulfilling their duties, they should make an example of them-<sup>6</sup>  
 this may prevent others from becoming corrupt. Such notions  
 assume particular importance in The Spanish Tragedy.

However, the idea of a just king was mainly confined  
 to books; by contrast the fear of possible troubles,  
 which could be brought about by an unjust king, continued to  
 dominate Elizabethan England.

Recent historians have asserted that this period was  
 one of considerable disorder, arising from the continual threat<sup>7</sup>  
 of civil and religious wars, or foreign invasion and conquest.  
 In the face of such dangers, the Queen gradually asserted her  
 authority by eliminating her opponents and strengthening

the legal system. In this context, revenge was certainly considered unlawful:

Elizabethan law felt itself capable of meting out justice to murderers, and therefore punished an avenger who took justice into his own hands just as heavily as the original murderer. The authorities, conscious of the Elizabethan inheritance of private justice from earlier ages, recognized that their own times still held the possibilities of serious turmoil; and they were determined that private revenge should not<sup>8</sup> unleash a general disrespect for law.

Her authority was strengthened through the assistance of the Anglican Church. Several homilies published during this period urged people to obey the ruler; the "First Part of the Sermon of Obedience" declared that God had created the universe and appointed Queen Elizabeth as his vice-regent on earth. Her counsel had to be followed:

Let us consider the Scriptures of the Holy Ghost, which persuade and command us all obediently to be subject, first and chiefly to the Queen's Majesty, Supreme Governor over all, and next to her honourable counsel, and to all other noblemen, magistrates, and officers,<sup>9</sup> which by God's goodness be placed and ordered.

The second part of the sermon argued that the rulers had to be

obeyed; it was not important whether they were good or bad, because an evil ruler might have been chosen to punish the past evil deeds of people. To justify this view, Jesus Christ and his followers was cited as an example. Although they suffered from the rulers, they obeyed them, for they knew that such rulers had been appointed by God.<sup>10</sup> The third part of the sermon forbade any act of disobedience against a ruler:

The violence and injury that is committed  
against authority is committed against God,  
the common weal, and the whole realm....<sup>11</sup>

Despite the proliferation of treatises during this period, there was an increasing awareness-especially amongst intellectuals-of the potential of individual self-determination. Even in the fourteenth century, the corruption of the church and clergy had enabled the middle class to lead a relatively secular life, and disbelieve the tenets of Christianity-particularly the subjection of one's will to religious authorities. The coming of the Renaissance gave rise to the belief in individuality and the reasoning power of man. A Renaissance man was no longer interested in the other world; but was keen to study religious texts; to investigate the reasons behind religious prohibitions; and test them against his own views. While the Protestant Reformation claimed that religion was an entirely personal affair (which did not need the intercession of the church), the sixteenth century man believed that he was capable of ignoring religious strictures when the occasion arose. This is particularly true of Hieronimo;

when faced with the decision of whether or not to take revenge.

This particular way of reasoning also conflicted with the notion which came directly from God, and which assumed as much significance as the authority of the king himself: "Vengeance is mine, and I will reward."<sup>12</sup> Murder according to the Elizabethan homilies meant eternal damnation; consequently several of them stipulated that no one, but the king was permitted to execute a wrongdoer:

And the places of Scripture which seem to remove from among all Christian men judgment, punishment, or killing, ought to be understand, that no man of his own private authority may be judge over other, may punish, or may kill, but we must refer all judgment to God, to kings and rulers, and judges under them, which be God's officers to execute justice, and by plain words of Scripture have their authority<sup>13</sup> and use of the sword granted from God....

It was clear that, the fundamental piece of advice offered by the homilies was that when one's relatives had been murdered, one was to pray to God and wait patiently for the murderer to be punished.

## Chapter IV

### Hieronimo's Delayed Revenge

The Spanish Tragedy can be considered a revenge tragedy through its use of "blood-vengeance as the core of its dramatic action."<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, Martin S. Day directly relates the play to Renaissance ideas of individualism. It:

...matures from its simple origin into a psychological and philosophical analysis of the human situation. The avenger is not a mere feudist but a Renaissance humanist confronted with basic moral and spiritual questions.<sup>2</sup>

In the play Kyd depicts what happens if an unjust monarch provokes an individual to take revenge into his own hands. The central protagonist, Hieronimo, finds it extremely difficult to resort to revenge, as he knows that it is an offence against God and the king. Consequently, he waits for legal and human justice to be executed; in the end, however, he discovers that both are non-existent. As we have seen from the previous chapter, such questions of whether to submit to monarchical authority, or assert one's individuality, were particularly topical at this time.

Kyd makes use of a familiar convention at the beginning of the play, with the appearance of the ghost of Andrea and Revenge. Such conventions (which would be used later on in plays such as Hamlet) suggest that an injustice has been committed and that disaster might follow. Although Revenge explains that

they (i.e. Andrea and himself) won't do anything but "...serve for Chorus ...." (I.i.91), he reveals that Andrea has been brought back to see if his lover Bel-imperia will take revenge on his murderer.

It is clear that the possibility of revenge exists in this society, as the authority of the king is corrupt. This is revealed in the second scene, when we learn that the King of Spain did not command his army in the war with the Portuguese; and that he has no idea as to the winner of the war until the general informs him. Although not directly influenced by Machiavelli, it is clear that Kyd rehearses some of his arguments. In The Prince Machiavelli claims that:

A prince, therefore, should have no other object or thought, nor acquire skill in anything, except war, its organization, and its discipline. The art of war is all that is expected of a ruler; and it is so useful that besides enabling hereditary princes to maintain their rule it frequently enables ordinary citizens to become rulers. On the other hand, we find that princes who have thought more of their pleasures than of arms have lost their states. The first way to lose your state is to neglect the art of war; the first way to win a state is to be skilled in the art of war....So a prince who does not understand warfare, as well as the other misfortunes he invites, cannot be respected by

3

his soldiers or place any trust in them.

When the king learns that his army has won the war, he thanks God for his justness, in an attempt to suggest that God is always on the side of the monarch, and that the divine right of kings is indisputable: "Then blest be heaven, and guider of the heavens, / From whose fair influence such justice flows" (I.ii.10-1). However, this does not justify his refusal to fight—clearly he is either too cowardly or more interested in wealth than in the lives and security of his people. He is ready to ignore the war altogether once he receives the tribute from the Portuguese king:

Now lordings fall to, Spain is Portugal,  
And Portugal is Spain, we both are friends,  
Tribute is paid, and we enjoy our right.  
(I.iv.132-4)

Another aspect of the king's corrupt authority is his partiality towards his relatives. Although the general tells him that Horatio has captured Balthazar in battle, the king ignores this fact; and instead of giving the ransom for the capture of Balthazar to Horatio, he divides it between Horatio and Lorenzo. When Lorenzo sees that he has received equal treatment, he immediately considers Horatio his enemy.

While Spain has been at war with Portugal, the King of Spain himself has misused his authority for his personal interest. In the third scene we see that the King of Portugal is equally corrupt. He blames fortune for his crushing

defeat (I.iii.5-42). However, when the King of Portugal attempts to investigate the reason why he did not fight, we are clearly invited to believe that his explanation is meaningless. Like the King of Spain he has not been involved in any bloodshed; as a king he should have fought at the head of his army instead of evading the battle.

In the meantime, it turns out that the King of Portugal is more unjust than the King of Spain. When Villuppo accuses Alexandro of cooperating with the enemy, and shooting Balthazar in the back, the King of Portugal refuses to give Alexandro any chance to refute this accusation against him, and instantly sends him to prison.

In Act 3, Scene 2, the King of Portugal still objects to what has happened to Alexandro, and thus decides on his execution:

No more Villuppo, thou hast said enough,  
 And with thy words thou slay'st our wounded  
 thoughts.  
 Nor shall I longer dally with the world,  
 Procrastinating Alexandro's death:  
 Go some of you and fetch the traitor forth,  
 That as he is condemned he may die.  
 (III.i.25-30)

This king, likewise departs from the model of the ideal monarch outlined by Machiavelli, who suggests that a king is evaluated by the men he rules. If he neglects his duties,



questions will be raised as to his suitability to rule:

The choosing of ministers is a matter of no little importance for a prince; and their worth depends on the sagacity of the prince himself. The first opinion that is formed of a ruler's intelligence is based on the quality of the men he has around him. When they are competent and loyal he can always be considered wise, because he has been able to recognize their competence and to keep them loyal. But when they are otherwise, the prince is always open to adverse criticism; because his first mistake has been in<sup>4</sup> the choice of his ministers.

The Portuguese king lacks the ability to make wise decisions for the good of his country. While Machiavelli argues that even if a king's intelligence is limited, this may not be a problem (if he "has the discernment to recognize the good or<sup>5</sup> bad in what another says and does"), the Portuguese king does not even possess this quality. His lack of intelligence brings about his country's ruin.

By creating two unjust and inadequate kings, who do not deserve their high office, Kyd suggests that the countries themselves are heading for disaster. If a king (the person who is at the top of an autocracy), misuses his power, then the belief in his sovereignty will be subject to question. He cannot maintain a just authority: the result, inevitably, is

a disordered nation.

This disorder is evident in the Castile family who devise strategies to achieve their self-interested aims. Bel-imperia, (who is described by Philip Edwards as "...a woman of strong will, and not a little courage...."),<sup>6</sup> continues her relationship with Andrea in defiance of her father, who requires her to marry Balthazar. This marriage is clearly political, allowing the King of Spain to forge an alliance with the King of Portugal. By contrast, Bel-imperia wishes to take revenge on Balthazar in Act I, as she believes that he has murdered her lover Andrea. Finally, in the play within the play she manages to kill Balthazar.

Another member of the family with the same passion is Lorenzo, who unhesitatingly murders Horatio. Bowers argues that his villainy lies in:

... his ruthlessness toward all who stand in the way of his plans, in his perfect indifference to the sufferings he causes others, in his mania for secrecy and willingness to employ other men as catspaws, and in the tortuous and deceitful<sup>7</sup> means he uses to attain his ends.

Lorenzo has two major reasons for killing Horatio. Firstly, he thinks that he has been humiliated by Horatio's capturing of Balthazar, (II.iv.60-1). Secondly, he sees Horatio as a real threat to the royal marriage. If Horatio (Bel-imperia's second lover) marries her, the unification

of Spain and Portugal will not only fail, but Horatio will achieve wealth and power.

It is clear that such a family will cause disaster for the Spanish nation; this is also true for Portugal. Balthazar, the future leader of Portugal, knows very well that Bel-imperia will not marry him:

My feature is not to content her sight,  
 My words are rude and work her no delight.  
 The lines I send her are but harsh and ill,  
 Such as do drop from Pan and Marsyas' quill.  
 My presents are not of sufficient cost,  
 And being worthless all my labour's lost.  
 (II.i.13-18)

Moreover, he is also aware that if he kills Horatio, this will definitely damage his relationship with her:

Glad, that I know on whom to be reveng'd,  
 Sad, that she'll fly me if I take revenge.  
 Yet must I take revenge or die myself,  
 For love resisted grows impatient. (II.i.114-7)

Yet, he still wants to woo Bel-imperia, even if it costs Horatio's life: "But in his fall I'll tempt the destinies, / And either lose my life, or win my love" (II.i.132-3).

When these so-called rulers are compared with Hieronimo, it is clear that Hieronimo and his peers are the forces of stability who attempt to maintain order in Spain. Hieronimo exemplifies the perfect official and citizen described by

Machiavelli:

...a man entrusted with the task of government  
should never think of himself but of the prince,  
and should never concern himself with anything  
except the prince's affairs.<sup>8</sup>

He is even ready to sacrifice Horatio, if Horatio acts against the king: "Long may he live to serve my sovereign liege, / And soon decay unless he serve my liege" (I.ii.98-9). As Hieronimo is the Knight Marshal of Spain, he believes in his king and the doctrine of the divine right of kings-which advocates monarchical supremacy, even if the ruler himself is unfit for the task. Through this Kyd shows the inadequacies of an unquestioning acceptance of the belief in divine right. Hieronimo (being unaware of the king's true nature), expects the murderers of his son to be punished by the processes of law: "To know the author were some ease of grief, / For in revenge my heart would find relief" (II.v.40-1). At this stage it is rightly argued by Hamit Çalışkan that by "revenge" Hieronimo means legal action, for he is not aware of the murderers' identities.<sup>9</sup> Likewise, his wife maintains an absolute confidence in human and divine justice:

The heavens are just, murder cannot be hid,  
Time is the author both of truth and right,  
And time will bring this treachery to light.  
(II.v.57-9)

Hieronimo's grief is nonetheless so profound that he expects

justice to be applied immediately. He blames the heavens; and by doing so demonstrates that he cannot help thinking of revenge:

O sacred heavens! if this unhallow'd deed,  
 If this inhuman and barbarous attempt,  
 If this incomparable murder thus  
 Of mine, but now no more my son,  
 Shall unreveal'd and unrevenged pass,  
 How should we term your dealings to be just,  
 If you unjustly deal with those that in your  
 justice trust? (III.ii.5-11)

Hieronimo upholds the legal processes of justice; if he were a revenger, he wouldn't wait until he had found evidence to support Bel-imperia's accusations that he was not taking the task of revenge in Act 3, Scene 2. However, Hieronimo continues to procrastinate; as he does so, his confidence in the power of legal forces of justice starts to waver:

But shall I never live to see the day  
 That I may come, by justice of the heavens,  
 To know the cause that may my cares allay?  
 (III.vi.5-7)

He does not receive any justice for the murder of his son; and this leads him to believe that it is inaccessible: " But they are plac'd in those empyreal heights / Where, countermur'd with walls of diamond, " (III.vii.15-6). Once Pedringano's letter concerning the murder of Horatio arrives, his suspicions

are dispelled about the identities of the murderers. Although Hieronimo's hatred is implacable and his faith in human and divine justice has been questioned, he does not choose to take revenge, on account of his fidelity to the king. He decides to obtain justice from him at any cost:

I will go plain me to my lord the king,  
And cry aloud for justice through the court,  
Wearing the flints with these my wither'd feet,  
And either purchase justice by entreats  
Or tire them all with my revenging threats.  
(III.vii.69-73)

At the same time, as a result of his frustrations-having to conceal Horatio's body, knowing the murderer's identities, yet being unable to obtain justice and witnessing the mental torture of his wife-Hieronimo starts to lose his self-control. He discloses his intense hatred for Lorenzo when he is asked the location of Lorenzo's house:

There, in a brazen cauldron fix'd by Jove  
In his fell wrath upon a sulphur flame,  
Yourselves shall find Lorenzo bathing him  
In boiling lead and blood of innocents.  
(III.xi.26-9)

Finally, Hieronimo's mind turns toward a cerberean justice, which could be enacted, if the king fails to listen to his words:

Hieronimo, 'tis time for thee to trudge:

Down by the dale that flows with purple gore,  
 Standeth a fiery tower: there sits a judge  
 Upon a seat of steel and molten brass,  
 And 'twixt his teeth he holds a firebrand,  
 That leads unto the lake where hell doth stand.  
 Away, Hieronimo, to him be gone:  
 He'll do thee justice for Horatio's death.  
 (III.xii.6-13)

This is the point where the individuality of Hieronimo emerges and his belief in king's authority is seen to be losing its validity. This rehearses a conflict of values that we looked at in the previous chapter, particularly with regard to the Renaissance man. Such ideas affect his mental faculties so much that he is unable to prevent Lorenzo from foiling his plans for obtaining justice from the king. Hieronimo starts to dig the floor in an attempt to bring Horatio back, and openly says that he will take revenge:

And here surrender up my marshalship:  
 For I'll go marshal up the fiends in hell,  
 To be avenged on you all for this.  
 (III.xii.76-8)

Once again we see that the Spanish king lacks the qualities of a good and just king to such an extent that he fails to pay attention to his Knight Marshal, (who is behaving most weirdly), and overlooks Lorenzo's evasive answer when he asks the reason behind Hieronimo's behaviour (III.xii.85-9).

It is clear that Hieronimo has already decided to take revenge for a number of reasons: Philip Edwards outlines them succinctly:

- (i) Revenge will bring him emotional relief;
- (ii) it is a duty; (iii) a life for a life is the law of nature, and (iv) is, in society, the<sup>10</sup> legal penalty for murder.

However, Hieronimo's religious beliefs still prevent him from carrying out his task:

*Vindicta mihi!*

Ay, heaven will be reveng'd of every ill,  
Nor will they suffer murder unrepaid:  
Then stay, Hieronimo, attend their will,  
For mortal men may not appoint their time.  
(III.xiii.1-5)

Yet, Hieronimo suddenly decides to take revenge (III.xiii.7-11). This abrupt change of mind is a direct result of Hieronimo's long and fruitless wait for justice. As John D. Ratliff argued in 1957, Hieronimo:

...does not call into question the belief that heaven would revenge Horatio's murder in time. He merely expresses his conviction that if he waits, heaven will have to revenge his own<sup>11</sup> murder too....

Since Lorenzo is almost bound to kill him, Hieronimo feels the need for self-protection, and thus executes justice for



himself. Nonetheless, he knows that as he "...is unable to overcome his enemies in open confrontation...." <sup>12</sup> he decides to wait for a suitable time:

Wise men will take their opportunity,  
Closely and safely fitting things to time:  
But in extremes advantage hath no time,  
And therefore all times fit not for revenge.  
(III.xiii.25-8)

He is finally provoked into action by the loss of his son and his wife, who commits suicide:

Behoves thee then, Hieronimo, to be revenge'd:  
The plot is laid of dire revenge:  
On then, Hieronimo, pursue revenge,  
For nothing wants but acting of revenge.  
(IV.iii.27-30)

He has to prepare a play in celebration of the wedding of Bel-imperia and Balthazar; this gives him the chance he has been waiting for. In the play Balthazar (the Turkish emperor Soliman) explains his desire for Bel-imperia (Perseda) to Hieronimo (the Pasha). This information prompts Hieronimo to kill Lorenzo (Perseda's husband); on the other hand, Bel-imperia revenges Lorenzo's murder by murdering Balthazar and then committing suicide. The only person who is left is Hieronimo, who as a religious man, cannot carry the burden of the murder, because what he has done so far has been corrupt. In order not to continue with this corruption he bites his

tongue out. This is a shocking moment, which emphasizes the corruption of the nation arising from the misuse of power by the Spanish king. The scene itself contains five murders—clearly the nation is in a state of total corruption, with each character pursuing his or her strategies at the expense of others. However, Andrea's words emphasize that Hieronimo will not be punished for what he has done but will be rewarded: "I'll lead Hieronimo where Orpheus plays, / Adding sweet pleasure to eternal days" (IV.v.23-4). This is also confirmed by Revenge in the epilogue: "Then haste we down to meet thy friends and foes, / To place thy friends in ease, the rest in woes:" (IV.v.45-6).

## Chapter V

### Conclusion

The threats of civil and religious wars and foreign invasion marked the period in which The Spanish Tragedy was written. Kyd handles these in such a way as to show what may happen to a country, if neither the king nor his people act according to the law.

He draws attention to the consequences of a corrupt king's behaviour. So long as the Spanish king acts in his own self-interest, he creates disorder in his country. Although he tries to secure the successor of the throne by marriage, the way he chooses to realize this aim also causes trouble, because he attempts to impose his will upon his subjects who wish to assert their individuality. Even Hieronimo at length asserts his individuality as he commits revenge and is apparently exonerated at the end of the play. However, this doesn't mean that Kyd urges his audience to rebel against the monarch. His play appears to reinforce Elyot's view concerning a strong king and the exercise of justice:

The most excellent and incomparable virtue called justice is so necessary and expedient for the governor of a public weal that without it none other virtue may be commendable, nor wit or  
<sup>1</sup>  
 any manner of doctrine profitable.

If the monarch is corrupt, however, Kyd suggests that revenge is unavoidable, even though it will ruin one's life and in the

end force an individual to commit suicide.

Although this situation may seem to contradict Machiavelli and Elyot's pronouncements, it should be borne in mind that the possibility of disorder was a fundamentally important issue during this period. The Spanish Tragedy not only engages with the views expressed by polemicists such as Machiavelli and Elyot, but also functions as a warning as to the dangers of having an unjust monarch. To illustrate this point the play makes use of the revenge tradition-whose importance later on might have caused Sir Francis Bacon to write about it<sup>2</sup>-and the concept of delayed justice; but like all good works of art these points are interpreted in terms of contemporary issues.

## Notes

### I. Introduction

<sup>1</sup> All references are to the following text of The Spanish Tragedy: Thomas Kyd, The Spanish Tragedy, ed. Philip Edwards (London: Methuen, 1969). References will be indicated parenthetically in the text.

### II. Blood Revenge Tradition

<sup>1</sup> Fredson Bowers, Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy 1587-1642 (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1966) 3.

<sup>2</sup> Bowers 4.

<sup>3</sup> Bowers 4-5.

<sup>4</sup> Bowers 5.

<sup>5</sup> Bowers 7.

<sup>6</sup> Bowers 7-8.

<sup>7</sup> Bowers 31.

<sup>8</sup> Bowers 8,10.

<sup>9</sup> Bowers 33.

<sup>10</sup> Bowers 36-9.

### III. Prohibition of Revenge

<sup>1</sup> Hamit Çalışkan, "1562-1642 Yılları Arasındaki İngiliz Trajedilerinde İktidar ve Güçlülük Kavramı," diss., U of

Ankara, 1986, 9-11.

2

Niccolo Machiavelli, The Prince, trans. George Bull (Middlesex: Penguin, 1979) 73-4.

3

Thomas Elyot, The Book Named The Governor, ed. S.E. Lehmberg (London: Everyman's Library, 1970) 178.

4

Niccolo Machiavelli, The Discourses, trans. Leslie J. Walker, S.J., ed. Bernard Crick (Middlesex: Penguin, 1979) 221-2.

5

Elyot 95-6.

6

Elyot 233.

7

E.H. Carter and R.A.F. Mears, A History of Britain (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1960) 382.

8

Bowers 11.

9

Certain Sermons or Homilies Appointed to be Read in Churches in the Time of Queen Elizabeth (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1864) 110.

10

Homilies 113-4.

11

Homilies 119.

12

Homilies 111.

13

Homilies 112.

#### IV. Hieronimo's Delayed Revenge

1  
Bowers 65.

2  
Martin S. Day, History of English Literature to 1660  
(New York: Doubleday, 1963) 256.

3  
Machiavelli, The Prince 87-8.

4  
Machiavelli, The Prince 124.

5  
Machiavelli, The Prince 124.

6  
Philip Edwards, introduction, The Spanish Tragedy, by  
Thomas Kyd (London: Methuen, 1969) liv.

7  
Bowers 76-7.

8  
Machiavelli, The Prince 125.

9  
Çalışkan 160.

10  
Edwards, introduction, lv.

11  
John D. Ratliff, "Hieronimo Explains Himself,"  
Studies in Philology 54.2 (1957): 117.

12  
Ratliff 117.

## V. Conclusion

1  
Elyot 159.

2  
Francis Bacon, Essays ( London: Everyman's Library,  
1986). In his essay "Of Revenge" Bacon shows that revenge is illegal  
and that, should be left to the governors to punish the wrongdoers.

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