'Tis Murder's Best Face When a Vizard's On

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Abstract

Lauren Vezina

Theater as an art form demands disguise for many reasons. It allows a character to act in uncharacteristic ways against society’s customs and expectations. It frees the user from society’s rules as well as his own sense of morality; nonetheless, it also restricts the wearer to certain behaviors and actions. This dichotomy is reflected in how the masked character is free to act outside of the law but is still its subject in the end. Disguise allows a character freedom from social obligations but he is still responsible and punished for his actions by the end of the play. Although disguise is used decoratively in the actual costume changes that take place on the stage, disguise is more than a material covering; it can be performative. It allows the character the ability to be something more. For example, Hamlet is also mad Hamlet; his disguise relies entirely on his performance. The action of concealing one’s identity becomes a part of the performance; therefore, used within a play, it calls attention to the pretense of the show and forces audiences to address the larger issues being presented.

This thesis examines how the plots of The Spanish Tragedy, Titus Andronicus, and Hamlet are driven by performative disguise; in particular, Hieronimo, Titus, and Hamlet feign madness in order to plot revenge. Feigned madness is a form of performative disguise because the character is pretending to be something he is not, in the same way that a character might change costumes. Kyd and Shakespeare set the stage for the flourishing of revenge plots that would become a staple of the Jacobean theater. In these plays, the performative disguise is used as a vehicle for male retribution and vengeance. Revenge allows characters to take justice into their own hands when the law
fails. It allows characters to fix perceived wrongs against them. In the plays being addressed, the protagonist’s desire for retribution comes about because of the wrongs perpetuated against them. The philosophy of performatives is examined because it shows how words can be used to manipulate the performance.

There are many revenge scenarios in the English Renaissance canon; however, *The Spanish Tragedy*, *Titus Andronicus*, and *Hamlet* make a similar statement about using feigned madness in order to plan and justify their revenge. Because of the disguise of madness, Hieronimo, Titus, and Hamlet were able to prove the guilt of their target while publicizing their actions. Without their disguise, revenge would have been virtually impossible because they would not have been able to stay close to their targets. Shakespeare’s and Kyd’s plays address the idea that proof and justification are necessary for revenge. What Kyd and Shakespeare set forth was used to create many different scenarios and many different kinds of revengers.
‘TIS MURDER’S BEST FACE WHEN A VIZARD’S ON

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‘Tis Murder’s Best Face When a Wizard’s On\(^1\)

One of the most defining characteristics in the drama of the early modern period is the use of disguise. It comes in many forms, from a decorative costume where one character physically becomes someone else on the stage to a bloody banquet serving human flesh. It is the shipwrecked twin who decides to dress as her brother for safety. It is also the girl who dresses as a boy in order to escape her home. It might be a lover sneaking away before being caught or a disgruntled son pretending to be mad in order to exact revenge. It is used for the disowned son who decides to mask his identity with dirt and the angry Goth pretending to be justice. These examples are barely a glimpse of how often disguise was used on the Renaissance stage. In all of these situations, however, the character uses a disguise to pretend to be someone else in order to achieve some desire or escape some fate. And there is always a revelation at the end of the play where the truth is finally uncovered and the disguise is removed.

Disguise is used for many different reasons, for all genres, and for both genders. Victor Oscar Freeburg, who wrote the first comprehensive study of disguise\(^2\), writes: “If we narrow our view to a single type of literature, the drama, we shall find a long succession of disguise situations reaching its height in the Renaissance drama of Italy, England, and Spain. On the London stage alone, disguise occurs with important dramatic functions in more than two hundred extant plays which were produced before the death of

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\(^2\) Freeburg lists the few studies he found prior to his work but believes little attention has been paid to disguise preceding Disguise Plots in Elizabethan Drama (1-2n1).
Shakespeare” (1). Freeburg defines disguise as “a change of personal appearance which leads to mistaken identity” (2). In another comprehensive study of disguise on the Early Modern stage, Peter Hyland pays tribute to the many critics who focus on disguise but claims they speak of role-playing (9-10) and take “the idea of disguise even further away from change of physical appearance” (10). In *Disguise on the Early Modern English Stage*, Hyland wants to demonstrate what disguise does to the theatrical or material performance, with particular focus on the actor and his costume (11). Nevertheless, Freeburg and Hyland only account for material disguise, or the actual changing of a costume on or off the stage which results in a different character.

Disguise is more than just this physical costume change, it is also performative. It allows a character the ability to impersonate something he is not. It might be said that all disguise is performance but there is a distinct difference between a material disguise and a performative disguise. A material mask requires some kind of external factor, prop, or wardrobe change. Viola needs the help of the Captain to camouflage herself: “I pray thee—and I’ll pay thee bounteously— / Conceal me what I am, and be my aid” (1.2.49-50) and when she enters as Cesario, stage directions read: “VIOLA in man’s attire [as Cesario]” (s.d. 1.4). Viola is no longer Viola; the other characters see her as Cesario [or Sebastian] and only the audience knows that she was ever Viola. In Thomas Middleton’s *The Revenger’s Tragedy*, when Vindice decides to “put on that knave for once” (1.1.93), he asks his brother, “am I far enough from myself” (1.3.1) for reassurance that he is unrecognizable. Vindice becomes Piato, “another man” (1.3.2). In any situation, material disguise adds another character to the dramatis personae.
On the other hand, a performative disguise can be turned on and off at will and is entirely internal. The character has only to change how he speaks as Hamlet switches from verse to prose as soon as he is “alone” (2.2.484) or how he behaves—in *The White Devil*, Flamineo’s capricious dialogue shows how easily he can switch between personas:

\[\text{[ aloud]}\] An excellent scholar—\[\text{[ aside]}\] one that hath a head filled with calves’ brains without any sage in them—\[\text{[ Aloud]}\] Shall a gentleman so well descended as Camillo—\[\text{[ aside]}\] a lousy slave that within this twenty years rode with the black guard in the Duke’s carriage ‘mongst spits and dripping pans—

(1.2.127-32)

Flamineo’s behavior is entirely a matter of performance because he has to make the audience understand his asides and alouds since they are not following John Webster’s manuscript. For this type, the character remains who he is only slightly different to the others: Hamlet is also mad Hamlet. This is different from a material disguise because Vindice is Vindice and Piato—there is a definitive line between the two identities. The line between Hamlet and mad Hamlet tends to blur throughout the play until it becomes difficult to separate the two.

Furthermore, performative disguise also allows the character to remain within his society for most of the play. Vindice must have his brother Hippolito “prefer” (1.1.97) Piato to the Duke’s son in order to be “better / Acquainted” (1.3.32-33) with Lussurioso. Hamlet, Hieronimo, and Titus do not have to explain themselves to the people around them. In fact, the other characters usually have explanations for the “mad” behavior. Polonius tells Claudius and Gertrude why Hamlet is behaving oddly: “I have found / The very cause of Hamlet’s lunacy” (2.2.48-49). Lorenzo explains to the King of Spain that
Hieronimo’s “fury” (3.12.80) was caused by jealousy at Horatio receiving “The ransom of the young Prince Balthazar” (3.12.88). And of course, Marcus sees how “Grief has so wrought on [Titus] / He takes false shadows for true substances” (3.2.81-82). This is very different from material disguise because Hamlet, Hieronimo, and Titus never have to actually say they are mad, the other characters just assume. When Piato is proved “a knave” (4.1.16) because he does not behave as Lussurioso wants, Lussurioso plans to see him “dead” (4.2.192). Vindice has to account for Piato’s absence by dressing “up the body of the Duke— / In that disguise of [his]” (4.2.213-14). In Vindice’s case, being reliant on his material disguise forces him to take care of an additional persona; therefore, he has less control over his plans.

Other devices that can be considered disguise are the play within a play, masques, and dumb shows. These contrivances can be considered a form of disguise because they allow a character to act in strange ways. For example, in The Revenger’s Tragedy, Vindice and his brother kill Lussurioso and his men at the end of a masque; this masque disguised their intent and allowed Vindice and Hippolito to distract Lussurioso. They can also be considered both performative and material—the characters are wearing actual costumes on the stage while performing different roles. Sarah P. Sutherland writes “This device, the masque within a play, is...at once show and disguise” (ix). Hyland discusses masques as a form of disguise or “suspension of disbelief” (41) which allow the idea that as theatrical devices, masques and disguise are similar in that they both ask audiences to suspend reality. Freeburg acknowledges that disguises add “theatrical glamour” and are “conceived in the spirit of the masque” (177).
More often than not, comedies utilize material disguise (Shakespeare’s *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Two Noble Kinsman*, *As You Like It*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *Twelfth Night*, and Middleton and Dekker’s *Roaring Girl* just to name a few) and the use of disguise is traditionally thought to be a comic device. Hyland argues “that it is fundamentally a comic device...almost all comedy involves false appearance or mistaken identity, often because of confusion of the signs, especially clothing, by which identity is conventionally recognized” (71). Although Hyland acknowledges that disguise is used in tragedies, he believes it to be “almost never used” when considered in conjunction with the 200 or so Renaissance plays (72). Critics who do discuss disguise in tragedies refer to the comedic nature of disguise. John Kerrigan writes:

> The shows and bloody banquets which end such works as *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Titus Andronicus* have a manipulative and recapitulative force which gives them comic potential...Given the providential ideology of much post-Reformation drama—its belief that punishments enacted in the world are an expression of heavenly wrath—it is hardly surprising that comedy of this sort would flourish in Jacobean tragedy (202).

When disguise is used in tragedy, it is disturbing because of its comedic nature.

The plots of *The Spanish Tragedy*, *Titus Andronicus*, and *Hamlet* are driven by the many facets of disguise: costume changes, masques, the play within a play, feigned madness and impersonation. Kyd and Shakespeare set the stage for the flourishing of revenge plots that would become a staple of the Jacobean theater. While aspects of Jacobean plays such as *Othello*, *The White Devil*, and *The Revenger’s Tragedy* will be mentioned, the focus will remain on how *The Spanish Tragedy*, *Titus Andronicus*, and
Hamlet are driven by performative disguise; particularly, the performative disguise is used as a vehicle for male retribution and vengeance. There are exceptions to this, such as Aspatia, who pretends to be her brother in The Maid’s Tragedy, but these examples are few when compared to the sheer number of plays produced in the English Renaissance. In fact, Evadne in the same play uses performative disguise in order to enact revenge; she transforms herself into a “tiger... / That knows not pity” (5.1.67-68) to give her the strength to purge her “shame” (5.1.98). Because disguise is used to create disorder in the play, the chaos of a society reflected in a revenge plot is strengthened. In truth, disguise allows acts of revenge to flourish: “A masque is treason’s license, that build upon; / ‘Tis murder’s best face when a vizard’s on” (The Revenger’s Tragedy 5.1.188-89).

Furthermore, in each of these plays, some characters desire revenge for actions brought against them. In particular, the plot of Hamlet is driven by Hamlet’s desire for vengeance against Claudius. Othello is also driven by Iago’s desire for revenge; however, both men use performative disguise differently in order to achieve that end. Hamlet feigns madness in order to seek revenge against his uncle for his father’s death. Iago pretends to be Othello’s friend while plotting to destroy Othello’s life. Even though these two archetypes are a part of the foundation that revenge tragedy is built upon, feigned madness is more prominently used for revenge that needs an audience to see it justified. Although Hamlet was preceded by The Spanish Tragedy and Titus Andronicus, the feigned madness of Hieronimo and Titus is not as premeditated or complicated as Hamlet’s. Hamlet decides in the first act that he is going “To put an antic disposition on” (1.5.170) whereas Hieronimo waits until Act III to decide to “rest me in unrest, / Dissembling quiet in unquietness” (3.13.29-30). Before this decision, Hieronimo is
already behaving madly with grief, questioning his “world, no world, but a mass of
crimes” (3.2.3). Titus says nothing about his behavior until the very end of the
play; when Tamora is at his door pretending to be Revenge, he says, “I am not mad, I
know thee well enough” (5.2.21). While Hamlet’s grief for his father is as real as
Hieronimo’s and Titus’, Hamlet tells the audience his plan from the beginning and his
language (prose to verse and back again) reflects his disguise throughout the play.

Disguise challenges spectators into thinking beyond the plot in the way it
manipulates the performance. It calls attention to the pretense of the show and forces
audiences to address the larger issues being presented. Disguise, as a reminder that a
performance is underway, compels the audience to think about what the actions
symbolize, in addition to what is actually shown. A spectator, who feels sympathy for a
ruthless killer, might question what he believes to be just or fair in society. The fact that
the character acts outside of the law questions the reliability of the courts to punish
wrongdoers. If a king fails to punish a murderer so that the wronged party has to take
revenge into his own hands, what does that say about the king and laws? The revelation
of a character’s true identity at the end of a play demonstrates society’s need to publicize
and prove crimes. This is seen in how Hieronimo explains to the court his reasons for
murdering Lorenzo. It is also visible in Hamlet’s decision not to kill Claudius when he is
kneeling in the church. There is a reason why so many playwrights use disguise in order
to give their protagonists the ability to act outside of society’s norms. Moreover, there is
something that connects impersonation, alter egos, and the use of disguise to an identity.

Although performative disguise is the means for male revenge, material disguise
does play its part in helping the protagonist’s plot. For example, Vindice dresses up as
Piato in order to get close to Lussurioso. Tamora disguises herself as Revenge, to “work confusion” (5.2.8) on Titus. In both of these situations, disguise is used to confuse or trick the other characters into allowing the revenger close to his (or her) target. Although some characters might require an introduction, as illustrated with Vindice/Piato, all that was needed for a material disguise was a change of clothing. Because clothes have significant value and meaning to the Renaissance audience, costumes allowed the audience insight into a character’s status and identity. Clothes were transformative on the stage because they were indicators of class, status, and identity. In her comprehensive study on clothes, Ann Rosalind Jones writes, clothes “are bearers of identity, ritual, and social memory, even as they confuse social categories” (5). Clothing had this power because “Apparel was one of the primary means through which [Elizabeth] realized her authority. While Elizabeth’s clothing symbolized her majesty, the clothes of her subjects signaled their various social positions” (Bailey 249). Material represented status “and apparel was one of the preeminent forms by which individuals experienced and expressed their sense of social value” (Bailey 249). On the stage, a change of clothes meant a change of identity.

The plot of *The Spanish Tragedy* is enacted through performative disguise but material disguises are required for the actors in Hieronimo’s “Suleiman and Perseda” which is how Revenge is finally served. Although the stage directions do not reveal anything about how they are actually dressed for their roles (*Enter Balthazar [as Suleiman], Bel-Imperia [as Perseda], and Hieronimo [as the Bashaw] 4.4.10-11*), Kyd does address an aspect of their costumes: “HIERONIMO...What, is your beard on? / BALTHAZAR. Half on; the other is in my hand” (4.3.18-19). Additionally, Hieronimo
“draws back the curtain and shows his dead son” (4.4.88-89) after the performance which is similar to a character revealing his true identity after revenging himself. Both of these acts unveil the truth behind revenge.

The actual use of material disguise is prevalent in the plot of The Revenger's Tragedy. Vindice uses disguise for a number of reasons. He decides to “put on that knave” (1.1.93) and pretend to be Piato to work for Lussurioso. While playing the part of Piato, Vindice is given his revenge because the Duke, “Thinking my outward shape and inward heart / Are cut out of one piece... / ... / Hires me by price to greet him with a lady” (3.5.9-12). Vindice also dresses up the skull of his Gloriana to deceive the Duke:

Now to my tragic business. Look you, brother,
I have not fashioned this only for show
And useless property; no, it shall bear a part
E’en in it own revenge. This very skull,
Whose mistress the Duke poisoned, with this drug,
The mortal curse of the earth, shall be revenged
In the like strain, and kiss his lips to death.

(3.5.99-104)

In this way, disguise allows Gloriana to be able to play a part in revenging her own death.

Similar to Hieronimo revealing his son's body after his play, once the Duke has been sufficiently poisoned, Vindice reveals the skull: “Duke, dost know / Yon dreadful vizard? View it well; ‘tis the skull / Of Gloriana, whom thou poisoned’st last” (3.5.147-9). Likewise, Vindice's possession of the skull is similar to the scarf of Don Andrea, possessed first by Horatio who tried to give it to Bel-Imperia but she wanted Horatio to
“wear thou it both for him and me, / For after him thou hast deserved it best” (1.4.48-49).

The scarf is later seen at the end of Hieronimo’s play, “And here behold this bloody handkercher, / Which at Horatio’s death I weeping dipped / Within the river of his bleeding wounds” (4.4.122-24). “Revengers like Vindice...are possessed of piercingly individual memories of lost mistresses, brothers and fathers. These intimate recollections are often, as in *The Spanish Tragedy*, shared with the theater audience. In Kyd, objects held as mementos combine with a sweepingly explicit rhetoric to publish Hieronimo’s bond with Horatio” (Kerrigan 172-73). These objects are used to make the relationships to the deceased public [as well as garner sympathy] just as the revealing of the disguise makes known the reasons for revenge.

In *The Revenger’s Tragedy*, Vindice’s original intent changes once he discovers Lussurioso’s own corruption: “Swear me to foul my sister! / Sword, I durst make a promise of him [Lussurioso] to thee; / Thou shalt disheir him; it shall be thine honor” (1.3.172-74). Vindice decides to use the disguise in order to judge his mother and sister’s honor, “In this disguise to try the faith of both” (1.3.177). Vindice believes his mother and sister to be honorable: “...though I durst almost for good / Venture my lands in heaven upon their blood” (1.3.184-85) but still decides to test them as Piato, Lussurioso’s messenger. Castiza passes Vindice’s test, “...Bear to him / That figure of my hate upon thy cheek / Whilst ‘tis yet hot, and I’ll reward thee for’t” (2.1.35-37) but Vindice must still approach his mother about Lussurioso’s proposition to Castiza:

And yet, for the salvation of my oath,

As my resolve in that point, I will lay

Hard siege unto my mother, though I know
A Siren’s tongue could not bewitch her so.

(2.1.50-54)

Vindice feels honor bound by his oath (see 1.2.147-65) to Lussurioso. When his mother proclaims “The riches of the world cannot hire a mother / To such a most unnatural task” (2.1.87-88) to Vindice’s suggestion about Lussurioso and Castiza, Vindice continues to push [test] her into acceptance. Once Vindice bribes Gratiana with gold, she agrees to talk Castiza into accepting Lussurioso.

Vindice’s disguise reveals his sister and mother’s true natures but Vindice also plays a part in forcing his mother to accept Lussurioso’s proposition:

VINDICE. In that disguise, I, sent from the Duke’s son,

Tried you, and found you base metal,

As any villain might have done.

MOTHER. Oh, no,

No tongue but yours could have bewitched me so.

(4.4.30-33)

Although Vindice believes his mother is just shifting the blame, “Oh, nimble in damnation, quick in tune! / There is no devil could strike fire so soon” (4.4.34-35) the dialogue shows Vindice continuing to persuade his mother after her first refusal (see 2.1.87-129). Gratiana also immediately begs her sons to “forgive me! To myself I’ll prove more true. / You that should honor me, I kneel to you” (4.4.37-38). How much of Gratiana’s behavior was influenced by her son? There are multiple reasons for revenge in the play and this question invites audiences to think about what validates revenge and
how culpable the revenger is in his or her role. Vindice’s line “‘Tis time to die when we are ourselves foes” (5.3.130) shows the debt he must pay for his revenge.

Furthermore, this idea brings up a question about recognition: how much do characters perceive their loved one in disguise? Gratiana swears that only Vindice could have convinced her but in the moment with Piato, Gratiana shows no awareness of her son; however, she admits in an aside: “He touched me nearly, made my virtues bate, / When his tongue struck upon my poor estate” (2.1.111-12). Perhaps she did not visually recognize Vindice in his material disguise, but he could not hide his verbosity from her. There are some things that cannot be hidden with a material disguise. This is also seen in *Titus Andronicus*, when Tamora enters “in this strange and sad habiliment” (5.2.1). Titus identifies the empress and her sons but says “But we worldly men / Have miserable, mad, mistaking eyes” (5.2.65-66). Tamora chooses to believe that Titus is “mad” (5.2.74) and leaves her sons with him.

This illustrates the problem with material disguises. Titus sees through Tamora’s disguise and knows her and her sons. She must still convince him that she is “Revenge, sent from th’infernal kingdom” (5.2.30) with “Rape and Murder” (5.2.62) by her side. On the other hand, Titus has to convince no one that he is suffering from “brainsick humours” (5.2.71). With a material mask, a character has less control over how he (or she) is perceived by the others. Titus knows that Tamora “calls herself Revenge and thinks me mad” (5.2.185) but Tamora cannot see through Titus’ madness. This is why performative disguise features more prominently in revenge tragedy—the revenger has more control over how he is perceived. Piato is eventually found out to be an “ingrateful villain” (4.2.136) who Lussurioso wants to see “bleed” (4.2.171); therefore, Vindice is
forced to create the illusion that Piato “Did kill the Duke and fled away in his apparel, leaving him so disguised to avoid swift pursuit” (4.3.226-27). Although Vindice’s disguise allows him his revenge, he has to continually adjust his planning because of how Piato is perceived. And Tamora’s failed disguise is what finally provided Titus his revenge—had she succeeded, the play would have been an entirely different revenge tragedy. These instances of material disguise help to emphasize how performative disguise was crucial for revenge. It allows the character the ability to conceal his identity and his intent while remaining within the society. It provides the character the necessary proof in order to justify his revenge.
The Plot is Laid of Dire Revenge

The masculine desire for revenge is expressed throughout these plays by different characters and while there are many plays written about revenge, performative disguise takes an especially prominent role in the revenge plots of *The Spanish Tragedy*, *Titus Andronicus*, and *Hamlet*. In order to appreciate how performative disguise is used to manipulate the course of the play, it is necessary to recognize how revenge was performed on the stage. Revenge allows characters to take justice into their own hands when the law fails them. It allows characters to fix perceived wrongs against them. In the plays being addressed, the protagonist’s desire for retribution comes about because of the wrongs perpetrated against him. In *The Spanish Tragedy*, Hieronimo seeks vengeance for his son’s death: “Dear was the life of my belovéd son, / And of his death behooves me be revenged” (3.2.44-45). When Titus and his family were “wrung with wrongs more than our backs can bear” (4.3.49), Titus decides to “solicit heaven and move the gods / To send down Justice for to wreak our wrongs” (4.3.51-52). King Hamlet’s ghost tells Hamlet to “Revenge his [father’s] foul and most unnatural murder” (1.5.25). Furthermore, these three men are a pre-cursor to the revengers who dominate the Jacobean theater. For example, Vindice in *The Revenger’s Tragedy* desires the blood of the “Duke, royal lecher! Go, grey-haired adultery” (1.1.1) for poisoning his betrothed “Because thy purer part would not consent / Unto his palsy lust” (1.1.33-34). In *Othello*, Iago is angry with Othello for promoting “One Michael Cassio... / That never set a squadron in the field” (1.1.19-21) over Iago, who was recommended by “Three great ones of the city” (1.2.7). Count Ludovico and Francisco plot revenge against Vittoria and Brachiano for the death of Isabella in *The White Devil*. 
It is difficult for today’s audience to see revenge as anything but violent and gruesome but that does not mean the Elizabethan and Jacobean audience felt the same. Ronald Broude addresses the way modern readers interpret the word “revenge” and how that affects opinions formed about the Elizabethan and Jacobean audience. Broude clarified: “The Renaissance revenge and vengeance denoted not only the general idea of retribution but also each particular species of retribution authorized by any of the several socio-legal systems which coexisted in Tudor-Stuart England” (40). Furthermore, “revenge” and “vengeance” were terms that described the response of the outraged party, “whether individual, state, or god...without the intervention of any civil authority” (Broude 41). In a play as gruesome as The Revenger’s Tragedy, it is important to understand that Vindice was an injured party seeking retribution; at the end when his many murders are revealed, Antonio seizes him and his brother, but Vindice is surprised and confused: “Heart, was’t not for your good, my lord?” (5.3.124). Vindice’s actions throughout the play represent what he thinks is necessary for his revenge and sense of honor. Furthermore, Vindice’s disguise emphasizes the idea that he has no other option but to mask his intent.

Many critics focus exclusively on the genre of revenge, including Fredson Bowers who “in 1940 isolated revenge tragedy as a genre” (Woodbridge 5). Bowers traces revenge from its primal beginning; in Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy, he writes “For redress of [a] personal injury...the only possible action for the primitive individual was a direct revenge upon his injurer. Since an act of violence was not a crime but merely a personal injury, the revenge for it in kind was the first manifestation of a

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3 Martha Rozett and Linda Woodbridge open their studies with substantial descriptions of how modern readers have trouble with revenge plots.
consciousness for justice, for private revenge was the mightiest, the only possible form in which a wrong could be righted” (3). His chapter “The Background of Revenge” is illuminating because it shows how the “blood-revenge” (15) of the Middle Ages evolved into a public system of justice and execution in Elizabethan times (16). Bowers establishes the foundation for private revenge which helps the audience understand the audience’s reaction and attraction to the tragedy (34). Once he establishes the background, Bowers goes on to discuss a playwrights’ response to revenge: “Retaliation for base injuries, then, was the first occasion on which certain writers tolerated revenge. There was a second occasion when revenge was considered allowable... ‘when violence is offered, and the Magistrate absent’” (36). Characters sought revenge on their own when the law failed them. Disguise was necessary because revengers were forced to work outside the law. Without it, the revenger might be caught before completing his revenge.

In some cases of revenge, the law and the state cannot help because they are to blame for the wrongs being committed. In *The Revenger’s Tragedy*, the ruler is one of the characters responsible for the violence. The entire royal family in *The Revenger’s Tragedy* is corrupt:

Duke, royal lecher! Go, grey-haired adultery,
And thou his son, as impious steeped as he,
And thou his bastard, true-begot in evil,
And thou his duchess, that will do with devil—

(1.1.1-4)
From the very first lines of the play, the audience knows Vindice is against the court and therefore he will get no help from the system. In other cases, the ruler desires revenge but cannot act with impunity. For example, in *The White Devil* Francisco seeks revenge for his sister’s death; however, he is the Duke of Florence and cannot just “seek revenge” (4.1.4) against another duke without imposing “a war/ Most burdensome on [his] poor subjects’ necks” (4.1.5-6). Disguise is used to further Francisco’s goal because he has no other option; Monticelso tells Francisco to “Bear your wrongs concealed, / ... / ...till the time be ripe / For the bloody audit, and the fatal gripe” (4.1.14-19). Disguise is crucial in *Hamlet* for revenge because Hamlet is the heir to the throne and his target is the king of Denmark. Without a disguise, Hamlet may not have adequate time to find his proof. In these plays, the body count at the end is much higher because of the rulers’ participation in the degradation of the courts. When there is no just ruler present, there can be no order.

Moreover, the lack of a just ruler responds to the Elizabethan idea of unfairness which “was like the weather: everyone talked about it. But revenge plays did something about it. Many revengers are disempowered people, unjustly treated, who step up and take control” of their situations (Woodbridge 6). The Elizabethan and Jacobean tragic performance of a corrupt court is discussed critically in a number of ways. Woodbridge describes the reasons for revenge plays as “four violations of fair payment...: unrewarded merit, reward, unpunished guilt, and undeserved punishment” (7). Woodbridge writes, “We could classify unrewarded merit and unmerited reward as economic issues, unpunished guilt and undeserved punishment as legal issues but all four rest on an economic substratum: it was the rich whose guilt went unpunished, the poor who were
harshly penalized” (12). Jonathan Dollimore writes about “how individuals become alienated from their society. Bereaved, dispossessed, and in peril of their lives, they suffer extreme disorientation and are pushed to the very edge of mental collapse. Self-reintegration can only be achieved through social reintegration” and this assimilation only happens through “revenge” (29). No matter the actual reasons which drive revenge, the plays react to an idea of unfairness and how one should oppose it. Iago symbolizes this idea because he feels mistreated when Cassio receives the promotion over himself; it does not matter if Iago is in the right or not, he sees an injustice and he counters it as he sees fit. The revenge theme is a tool playwrights use to reflect society’s desire to correct perceived wrongs, whether they are caused by individuals or the state.

As a means to act out their revenge, the characters in the plays being discussed use manifestations of disguise. In *The Spanish Tragedy*, Hieronimo directs and acts in a play in order to kill his son’s murderers. Although the audience of Hieronimo’s play is aware of each character’s identity, Bel-Imperia and Hieronimo are acting out parts in order to kill their intended victims. Hamlet pretends madness and he uses *The Mousetrap* to test Claudius’ innocence; then Hamlet waits to kill him until there is an audience at the end of the play. In *Othello*, Iago pretends to be Othello’s friend while plotting against him; Iago also creates the semblance of a play when he plants Desdemona’s handkerchief in Cassio’s room. *The White Devil* features multiple forms of disguise: feigned madness in Flamineo to escape revenge, multiple masques to murder, and material disguises to enact revenge at the end of the play. In *The Revenger’s Tragedy*, Vindice, pretending to be Piato, dresses up a skull to look like a woman in order to poison the duke, he disguises the Duke’s dead body, and he uses a masque to kill the Duke’s successor. Vindice has an
opportunity to kill Lussurioso but he does not want to stab him from behind because that would be dishonorable, “Oh, shall I kill him o’th’wrong side now? No! / Sword, thou wast never a backbiter yet. / I’ll pierce him to his face; he shall die looking upon me” (2.2.93-95). Even though Vindice is disguised when he kills Lussurioso, he reveals himself before Lussurioso dies, “Now thou’lt not prate on’t, ‘twas Vindice murdered thee— / ... / Murdered thy father” (5.3.93-95). Similarly, Titus’ mad ruse is revealed at the end of his play while serving Saturninus and Tamora her sons in a pie. In these plays, revenge is performed by actors pretending to be someone else or impersonating something they are not.

The protagonist disguises himself in order to right the wrong he believes was committed. Nevertheless, it is no secret that the revenger plans on killing someone by the end of the play. In fact, the revenger usually tells the audience in the beginning why he or she is seeking revenge and what they hope to do about it.

Vengeance, thou murder’s quit-rent, and whereby
Thou show’st thyself tenant to Tragedy,
Oh, keep thy day, hour, minute, I beseech,
For those thou hast determined! Hum, whoe’er knew
Murder unpaid? Faith, give Revenge her due;

(The Revenger’s Tragedy, 1.1.39-43)

In the opening scene of The Revenger’s Tragedy, Vindice tells the audience that he has been abused, who abused him and how he will repay them with murder. Despite the audience’s awareness, Thomas Middleton incorporates many elements of disguise
throughout his play. Furthermore, in any production which utilizes disguise, there is a big reveal, which reminds audiences of the need for public recognition (proof) of a crime and its punishment (satisfaction).

Even in contemporary culture, people are forever watching and reading about people who dress up in order to obtain revenge (*V for Vendetta* and anything Batman-related comes to mind). A disguise allows someone to act in uncharacteristic ways, against society’s customs and expectations; when seeking revenge, disguise allows a character the freedom to act as he must in order to achieve his goal. The use of disguise also calls attention to the artifice of a play and is a reminder for the audience they are watching something staged. Indeed, before the performance of his play in *The Spanish Tragedy*, Hieronimo states: “The plot is laid of dire revenge. / On, then, Hieronimo, pursue revenge, / For nothing wants but acting of revenge” (4.3.28-30). The repetition of revenge emphasizes the fact that it is a performance; just like an actor who prepares for his role, Hieronimo must make sure that he is prepared for his. If he does not carefully plan out every single aspect of his revenge, something could go wrong and he would fail. The audience knows Hieronimo’s play ‘Suleiman and Perseda’ reflects his immediate concerns and this action in turn mirrors the anxieties and fears which *The Spanish Tragedy* represents. Additionally, the play within a play performed in *The Spanish Tragedy* is the foundation for the play within a play in *Hamlet* and the masques used in the later Jacobean plays. Both of these devices further enhance the element of disguise while demonstrating the need to publicize revenge and justice.
TO PUT AN ANTIC DISPOSITION ON

It is useful to review what modern critics have said about performatives and speech acts because it shows the differentiation between the analysis of a performance and the analysis of the written language. It is hard to associate the word “performative” with anything other than drama and theater but it is a phrase rooted in linguistics and philosophy. Performative was first defined by J.L. Austin in *How to Do Things With Words* and indicates the idea that saying something is the performing of an action (6-7). Austin’s theory represents the idea that “to say something is to do something” (64). This principle applies to performative disguise because the playwright’s words alone are creating the disguise on the stage. These words are the only indication that someone is no longer who he was. Austin did not address literature or dramatic texts and in fact only considered certain types of words to be performative—words that do not describe or report and are part of a serious action such as the marriage vow “I do” (5-9); however, his principles on performativity are a part of the foundation for performance studies.

Austin considers dramatic language to “be hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage...or spoken in soliloquy” (22). Austin elaborates on this claim in *Philosophical Papers* where he creates a distinction between serious and non-serious (fictional) utterances. He believes that acting in a play or writing a poem is non-serious because it is not “seriously meant” (241). The example Austin gives is: “If a poet says ‘Go and catch a falling star’ or whatever it may be, he doesn’t seriously issue an order” (241). Austin’s speech acts theory is too literal and considers only the speaker’s actual speeches; it does not account for all of the different literary devices that transform language and its meaning. Although these concepts help to develop the theory of performatives, they fail
to consider the importance of dramatic texts. Of course individual words are important and playwrights use words but their words are special: every single one is meant to be performed. Aristotle recognized this fact in ancient times. In *Poetics*, he defines tragedy as an imitation of a serious action "by means of language...enacted by the persons themselves and not presented through narrative; through a course of pity and fear completing the purification of tragic acts which have those emotional characteristics" (25). Austin sees only what the poet says and does not ask what he means by "Go and catch a falling star."

Many critics have taken up Austin's philosophy on speech acts but John Searle was the first. In Searle's observations of Austin's work, he concludes that all speech is an act. In "Austin on Locutionary and Illocutionary Acts," Searle writes, "Making a statement or giving a description is just as much performing an act as making a promise or giving a warning" (406). Searle also begins to develop speech acts in terms of literary analysis. In "The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse," Searle attempts "to explore the difference between fictional and serious utterances" (321) that Austin initially established. Searle latches onto the idea of pretending and attempts to distinguish between two senses of the word. The first is deception and the second is that "to pretend to do or be something is to engage in a performance which is as if one were doing or being the thing and is without intent to deceive" (324). Fiction falls under the second type. Furthermore, Searle establishes a relationship between the meanings of the words people say and the acts people actually perform while saying them; and in turn connects this relationship to fiction. He addresses the problems with applying the theory of speech acts to fiction as being a paradox: the "words and other elements in a fictional story have
their ordinary meanings” but the rules that determine this meaning are not followed (319).

Like Austin, Searle distinguishes fictional speech as non-serious because “if the author of a novel tells us that it’s raining outside he isn’t seriously committed to the view that it is at the time of writing actually raining outside” (321). He goes on to show how the meaning of a fictional utterance is based on the intentions of the author (322-25) and that the “author of fiction pretends to perform illocutionary acts which he is not in fact performing” (325). Searle admits that dramatic texts are a “special case” because the characters in the actual performance are “doing the pretending” (328). He writes, “A fictional story is a pretended representation of a state of affairs; but a play, that is, a play performed, is not a pretended representation of a state of affairs but the pretended state of affairs itself, the actors pretend to be the characters” (328). Searle uses dramatic texts only in the context of how they are different from fiction; he never fully engages with drama. Although Searle expanded on the topic to include the written word, he focuses on an author’s intent and how an audience should not take what an author writes to be true or binding in the same way that “I do” produces a marriage.

It might seem irrelevant to examine theorists who believe dramatic texts to be non-serious but Austin and Searle’s works on performativity help to establish a framework for examining literary texts. This is because of the critics who take up what Austin started. Jacques Derrida’s work on performativity favors the idea that all language communicates and all forms of communication, especially the written word, are performative. In Limited Inc., Derrida writes that communication is a way to “transport” (1) the meaning of language and that “the ambiguous field of the word ‘communication’
can be massively reduced by the limits of what is called a *context*” (1-2). Derrida questions whether the conditions of a context are “ever absolutely determinable” (2) and examines how utterances can have different meanings depending on their contexts. In particular, if the context of a performative is the written word, then all the rules and conventions of grammar apply (12-14). This is very different from Austin and Searle who focus on the intentions of the speaker or author. For example, in *Words*, Austin believes that people uttering promises should have certain intentions while uttering them (11). When a speaker does not mean what he says, his intent is to deceive, which Austin describes as an infelicitous act or “hollow” (16)—a word he also uses to describe an actor’s soliloquy or performance. Searle makes a similar point in “The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse.” The status of a fictional performative only becomes clear when contrasted with a lie because the author’s *intent* was not to deceive (326). Both intent and context are important in studying dramatic texts because while Derrida’s theory is relevant to understanding Shakespeare’s written words, especially in light of the fact that we can never know his intent, it does not fully address that Shakespeare was writing with the *intent* that his words will be performed.

Quentin Skinner utilizes the work done with performativity to establish a new methodology in analyzing historical literary and philosophical texts. In *Visions of Politics*, he believes that theorists who want to write the history of ideas in a proper historical style have to situate the historical texts within the correct contexts in order to “recognize what their authors were doing in writing” (vii). Skinner appreciates the efficacy in examining what words do as Austin and Searle did before him; while recognizing Derrida’s notion that all language is an act of communication and “when we
use language to communicate, we are doing something” (2). Skinner is interested in the actual performance of speech acts as defined by Austin and believes that the author’s intentions are useful only to help “understand what [an author] was doing in issuing [a] particular utterance” (112). There are so many variables in attempting to understand an author’s purpose so Skinner looks to the discourse of the times instead of an individual author (118). He agrees with Derrida that “even an utterance can be assigned to a highly determinate context...[but] we can never hope to know ‘for sure’” (121) what was meant. The method that Skinner sets forth is to study the historical sources while at the same time acknowledging “that texts do, after all, have authors, and that authors have intentions in writing them” (119). Furthermore, Skinner’s method addresses the fact that if texts are acts, “the process of understanding them requires us...to recover the intentions embodied in the performance” (120). Skinner’s method of analyzing historical texts provides an evocative way of analyzing Renaissance drama because it addresses all aspects of the play: the author, the words, and the performance.

Although Skinner does not develop ideas about Shakespeare in *Visions of Politics*, he did refer to him as “an eminently political author” (63). Moreover, Skinner does address Shakespeare in the Afterword of *Shakespeare and Early Modern Political Thought*. In particular, he notes the difficulty one finds in making any assumptions about Shakespeare’s intentions:

There is almost no evidence outside his works that would enable us to corroborate any claims we might feel inclined to make about his plays and poetry as statements of his beliefs...Shakespeare never shouldered any civic responsibility and was remiss in discharging even such basic duties as paying his subsidies.
None of his manuscripts survive, and there is only one moment in the historical record when he speaks his own name (271-72).

Because there are many unknown variables involved in Shakespearean studies, performativity is a useful way of addressing the plays. This theory, in its many incarnations, examines what words do while taking into consideration historical context, audience response and participation, as well as author's intent and the perceived intention of the performance. Examining performative disguise shows what the Renaissance believed and knew about behavior and identity. Additionally, being mad in the text is not the same as being mad in real life but the differences between the two help to define a clear understanding of how madness was perceived as well as what sanity looked like.

The ability to recognize an identity through the performance of a particular behavior (or the performance of an identity) was developed in Judith Butler's work on gender. Like Searle, she uses Austin's distinction between locutionary and illocutionary. In Excitable Speech, she writes, "the distinction is tricky, and not always stable" (44). She questions Austin's view that actual words are different from the things being done and asks, "What would it mean for a thing to be 'done by' a word or, for that matter, for a thing to be 'done in by' a word? When and where, in such a case, would such a thing become disentangled from the word by which it is done or done in" (44). In "Performance Acts and Gender Constitution," Butler brings a sense of the theatrical into the discourse on acts and the performative—the idea that all people are actors and society is the audience. Defining gender performance, she writes, "If gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous, then the appearance of substance is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social
audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief” (520). Although Butler does not address specific plays, the structure of the dramatic act allows her to illustrate how “The act that gender is, the act that embodied agents are inasmuch as they dramatically and actively embody and, indeed, wear certain cultural significations, is clearly not one’s act alone” (525). Acts are not personal, they are shared experiences and they are influenced by the “pre-existing cultural relations” (526) that make up society.

In order to understand how performative acts in drama reflect society, it is necessary to look at the liminal nature of performative disguise. This provides a way to examine Renaissance notions of identity and the performance of self. Liminality was a term first coined in Victor Turner’s *The Ritual Process*, a study of ritual as a social performance. Turner was an anthropologist whose interest in drama led to a groundbreaking theory on ritual as an outward expression of society. Rituals are performative: they are a prescribed set of symbolic actions that have some meaning for the participants; the meaning can be religious, cultural, social, or even personal. Turner writes, “Rituals reveal values at their deepest level...men express in ritual what moves them most...Rituals [are] the key to an understanding of the essential constitution of human societies” (6). Turner explored Arnold van Gennep’s threefold structure of the rites of passage which consisted or separation, transition, and reincorporation. The first phase signifies the separation of a subject, individual or group, from the social structure or “a set of cultural conditions (‘a state’)” and the third phase symbolizes the subject’s return (94). In particular, Turner expanded on the theories of the transitional, or liminal, phase. This phase is ambiguous because the subject is no longer classified or categorized:
The attributes of liminality or of liminal *persona* are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. (95)

Performative disguise is liminal because it represents a transitional phase for the character "wearing" it. Furthermore, the liminality of the character mirrors the society of the play which is also in state of flux.

The revenger represents the subject that Turner describes; as such, a separation of some sort is enacted at the beginning of the play. Turner believes "each individual’s life experience contains alternating exposure to structure and communitas, and to states and transitions (97); therefore, the separation might occur within an individual subject or within the community of the play. All of the revenge tragedies in the Renaissance begin with a breech in tradition. For example, in *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Titus Andronicus*, the separation is symbolized as a break from custom. "By law of arms" (*The Spanish Tragedy* 1.2.168), Balthazar’s ransom should go to Horatio, but the King splits the spoils between Horatio and Lorenzo, the king’s nephew. *Titus Andronicus* begins with a question about who will be emperor: Saturninus believes it is his “right” (1.1.1) but “the people of Rome, for whom we stand / A special party, have by common voice” (1.1.20-21) chosen Titus. These acts demonstrate what Turner writes about communitas: "We are presented, in such rites, with a ‘moment in and out of time,’ and in and out of secular social structure, which reveals, however fleetingly, some recognition of a generalized social bond that has ceased to be and has simultaneously yet to be fragmented into a
multiplicity of structural ties” (96). These breaches at the beginning of the play destroy the social bonds that should have joined the characters and in turn cause the disintegration of the community until it is transformed into something new at the end of the play.

It is safe to say that all dramas begin with a type of violation that brings about the conflict and indeed, Turner writes about social dramas in *From Ritual to Theatre*: “What has happened is that a public breach has occurred in the normal workings of society...[and] the social drama concludes either in the reconciliation of the contending parties or their agreement to differ” (10). He believes that these social dramas, which exist in every society, are performed on the stage to “probe a community’s weaknesses, call its leaders to account, desacralize its most cherished values and beliefs, portray its characteristic conflicts and suggest remedies for them and generally take stock of its current situation in the known ‘world’” (11). In a revenge tragedy, Turner’s theory is essential because the revenger not only exists in a liminal state, he is performing liminality in such a way that every audience member must recognize and sympathize with his struggle to rectify what originally separated him. Moreover, performative disguise is crucial for this stage because it embodies what it means to exist in a liminal state. In particular, Turner writes that a liminal state is compared to “on the one hand ghosts, gods, or ancestors, and, on the other, with animals or birds” (27). Madness, too, is often described as bestial or animalistic.

Furthermore, in the revenge tragedy, the act of revenge is the ritual performance, the rite of passage, that helps the character (and the society) move through the liminal phase. Revenge is a public action so that the community can participate in the ritual
performance. Turner writes about the rite that occurs as a subject moves through each of the three phases:

There must be in addition a rite which changes the quality of time also, or constructs a cultural realm which is defined as “out of time,” i.e., beyond or outside the time which measures secular processes and routines. It includes symbolic behavior—especially symbols of reversal or inversion of things, relationships and processes secular. (24)

Additionally, he writes: “Many passage rites are irreversible” (25). What is more irreversible than death? Most revenge tragedies begin with a death: King Hamlet, Tamora’s eldest son, Don Andrea, Vindice’s love Gloriana. Although Othello does not begin with a death, it does begin with a reference to a rite: Othello and Desdemona’s marriage; which is actually a violation of a rite because they eloped without Brabantio’s knowledge or permission. These rites thrust the protagonist and the community of the play into disorder. The only way to move through this liminal state is to perform another ritual. The only response to the cause of the confusion is revenge because the character has no other option.

Turner describes the ritual that precedes the incorporation as including “symbolic phenomena and actions which represent the return of the subjects to their new, relatively stable, well-defined position in the total society” (24, italics mine). The subject in a revenge tragedy cannot be returned to society because he commits murder and must be punished in the end. Even justified, the system of law that existed in the time of Shakespeare would have punished murderers. Revenge is necessary for the individual because it allows the revenger closure or in the case of Hamlet: “silence” (5.2.342) from
“this harsh world” (5.2.332). Revenge is also necessary for the community because it establishes order. Hamlet tells Horatio that Fortinbras “has [his] dying voice” (5.2.340) so there should be no conflict when Fortinbras “with sorrow I embrace my fortune” (5.2.372). Even though there is order at the end of the play, it is a new order from what existed at the beginning. This is seen in Hamlet’s burial “like a soldier” (5.2.380) when he was not a soldier. Moreover, because the final ritual mirrors the ritual that begins the play, it reflects a society that will constantly need rituals in order to move through the phases of life.

To describe something as performative one would have to consider all aspects of the stage and theater—staging, sets, props, costumes, a specific actor’s performance, or the director’s interpretation of the text. However, the term performativity has more to do with how the actual words perform an action and not the material elements of drama. For example, when Edgar hears himself “proclaimed” (2.2.172) in King Lear, he describes what he will do:

...My face I’ll grime with filth,
Blanket my loins, elf all my hair in knots
And with presented nakedness outface
The winds and persecutions of the sky.

(2.2.180-83)

His words are performative because he is becoming “nothing” (2.2.192) in front of the audience with this soliloquy. The audience sees his transformation through his words and not an actual costume change. This paper does not consider how Edgar enters
"[disguised as Poor Tom]" (3.4.45 s.d.) because his disguise is based solely on the
director's choice of costume and not on how the words are performed.

Feigned madness is performative because the disguise is entirely a matter of the
words spoken: through the dialogue of the characters performing the disguise and the
descriptions of the characters watching it. A material disguise requires an actor's
performance because he has to actually put the disguise on during the play which is
utterly dependent on the material or props provided. Imagine if the actor playing Falstaff,
in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, forgot to cover his head with "linen" (4.2.77) and forgot
to "put on the gown" (4.2.79) when he was hiding from Mistress Ford's husband. Ford
would still treat Falstaff as an "old woman" (4.2.171) because those are his lines but the
audience would have trouble suspending their belief because there are no physical
indicators that Falstaff has entered the scene disguised. On the other hand, performative
disguises have no need for materials or props because they are created through the
dialogue. Shakespeare did not write stage directions for Hamlet's behavior; instead,
Ophelia describes what he looks like: "Lord Hamlet, with his doublet all unbraced, / No
hat upon his head, his stockings fouled" (2.1.75-76) and Polonius describes Hamlet's
erratic behavior, how he "Fell into a sadness, then into a fast, / Thence to a watch, thence
into a weakness" (2.2.144-45). Of course, Hamlet's dialogue is also necessary for his
ruse but his speeches require nothing external. While we can never see an original
production of *Hamlet*, we can see how Shakespeare uses his words to enact the
performance. An actor can behave madly on stage, but the audience understands
something about madness and identity when Polonius describes Hamlet's "mad"
behavior. The audience sees how Hamlet is perceived by the other characters and how
quickly he is labeled “mad”. It is very easy to judge someone on his outward appearance without reflecting on the inner workings of his mind.
T’Assume a Pleasing Shape

In Renaissance drama, the revenger needed a way to prove the guilt of his target before he could complete his revenge. Some revengers choose to use material disguise, like Vindice, but this choice forces the character to take on a completely new persona within the play. Most dramatists choose to use a form of performative disguise that enabled the revenger to remain himself and not have to rely on outside factors such as costume changes or props. Madness is the perfect performative disguise because it can be performed as many different types of emotions. Like an actual disguise, it is explored extensively by the Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights. Madness in any genre encompasses strong emotions: rage, jealousy, love, folly, or melancholy. However, it is more than a list of emotions; it has historical and psychological implications. It reflects and questions the medical, cultural, political, religious, and psychological beliefs of the time period embodied in the literature. It has been used by playwrights since before Seneca’s Hercules killed his wife and children in a mad frenzy.

Senecan tragedy was one of the greatest influences for Elizabethan playwrights. In “The Madness of Hercules and the Elizabethans,” Rolf Soellner writes:

The [Elizabethan] dramatists and the more discerning audience knew more about the outbreak of madness in the ancient hero than appears to a modern reader of the Hercules furens. Theories about the causes and form of Hercules’ madness were in the air. As the dramatists wrote about heroes other than Hercules, they were likely to adapt whatever they knew of his passion-induced madness to their own purposes. And, since they were no meticulous antiquaries, they would also use whatever else they knew of passion, madness, and epilepsy. (319)
Seneca’s *Hercules furens* inspired Shakespeare and his contemporaries who represent the principles of their time by creating characters and situations based on traditional views of madness and questioning what actually created these emotions.

In *Madness in Literature*, Lillian Feder lists two documents as potential influences for the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century treatment of madness: Reginald Scot’s *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* and Timothy Bright’s *A Treatise of Melancholie* (116). Scot and Bright view madness, especially melancholy, as a disease of the brain. Scot’s work addresses the idea that women accused of witchcraft were only mentally incompetent or insane; he writes: “melancholik persons imagine, they are witches and can work woonders, and doo what they list: so doo other, troubled with this disease, imagine manic strange incredible, and impossible things” (Scot 30). Bright also describes how melancholy upsets reason and causes apprehension of the self. He explains all the different emotions that stem from melancholy and madness:

Let us consider what passions they are that melancholie driveth us into and the reason how it doth so diversely distract...The perturbations of melancholie are for the most parte, sadde and fearfull, and such as rise of them: as distrust, doubt, diffidence, or despair, sometimes furious, and sometimes merry in apparaunce.

(Bright 102)

Bright’s work encompasses traditional views of madness that stemmed from the classical and medieval views.

Bright’s *Treatise of Melancholie* represents the Elizabethan theory of humors and “clearly indicates a direct debt to Galen” (Reed 68-69) who was influenced by the Hippocratic treatise on the theory of the four humors. Hippocrates’ theory proposed that
four humors—yellow bile, black bile, phlegm, and blood—governed the body and caused physical disease. Galen believed that these humors were not only responsible for physical disease but also affected how a person behaved. Each was associated with a different temperament: choleric, melancholic, phlegmatic, and sanguine respectively:

Man was not a unity, and was not reducible to one element or one humour: he was “born out of a human being having all these elements.” All the elements and substances were present in each individual, from birth to death; all four humours made up “the nature of his body, and through these he feels pain or enjoys health.” (Arikha 8)

This theory provided a rational explanation for why people behaved the way they did; for example, when someone was choleric or angry, he had too much yellow bile. Although everyone possessed each humor, they were not equally distributed in the body. The temperament of an individual was determined by the amount of humors present (Arikha 9-10). Someone with too much yellow bile was easily angered and bad-tempered. Black bile caused a person to be dejected, restless, and ill-tempered. A phlegmatic person was detached and unresponsive to others; and the sanguine personality was someone passionate, hopeful, and daring. The humors were invisible but they were based on real substances: yellow bile was found in the pus of wounds or vomit, black bile could have been clotted blood or excrement, phlegm appeared in the form of runny noses or even tears, and blood was visible to everyone (Arikha 8). The fact that the humors were based on real substances suggests that it was important to be able to see something physical in order to believe or to understand it.
Until Bright modernized Galen, most humor theory was concerned with the anatomy and the physical functions of the human body (Reed 66). James Reed describes the “once-famous Elizabethan treatise on anatomy” written by Dr. Thomas Vicary in 1548 which was “republished less than thirty years later, in 1577, as testimony to the authority in which it was then held” (66)⁴. Vicary connects the liquids associated with each humor to specific bodily functions but “was not concerned with a psychological interpretation of them” (Reed 67). Bright accepted these functions but connected emotions to anatomy and “expounded an almost purely psychological doctrine, the purpose of which was to explain as logically as he could the pathology of the humors” (Reed 69). Bright’s theory added a new dimension to humoral theory; he allowed for more than just physical properties questioning the intangible nature of emotions and their causes.

Bright’s work can be considered one of the “most representative thesis upon melancholy and insanity of the Elizabethan period” (Reed 69) and the playwrights of the time owe a great debt to his work. Reed proposes a clear date in which the majority of the playwrights began to address mania and melancholy on the stage—1601 (72-73). He believes that before *Hamlet* “There is only one fairly convincing Elizabethan dramatic study in madness before 1601; that, of course, is Hieronimo” (73). Reed suggests that the madness of Hieronimo has been primarily influenced “by Senecan dramatic

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⁴ Mary Ann Lund’s work, *Melancholy, Medicine, and Religion in Early Modern England*, also addresses melancholy in the Renaissance; specifically, Lund engages mostly with Robert Burton who wrote *Anatomy of Melancholy*, first published in 1621. She describes Burton’s reasons for choosing melancholy as a suitable subject “because of its generality: it is a disease ‘grievous’ and ‘common,’ and hence he can do no ‘more general service’ than to ‘prescribe means how to prevent and cure so universal a malady’” (9). She references the idea that melancholy was “an infinitely varying condition” (9) that was thought to be related to an excess of black bile. Lund does address Bright but only as a source and contemporary of Burton. Because Burton was published after Shakespeare, he could not have been the source that Bright was. Reed’s explication of Bright is more relevant for this paper.
interpretations of madness” (73); these influences are shown in the fact that insanity is “inflicted suddenly and without pathological cause” (73). Reed briefly mentions Titus Andronicus as a pre-cursor to Hamlet’s madness but does not give Titus the same credit as Hieronimo. Reed pays tribute to the influence that Kyd’s Hieronimo had on Shakespeare’s Hamlet; however, he emphasizes the change in the dramatic interpretation of madness after 1600 (73-74). Starting with Hamlet, playwrights began to question the causes of mental diseases as something more than just a physical imbalance of humors. While Hamlet’s performance addresses the idea that madness is certainly complicated, Hieronimo’s and Titus’ performances also present many of the same questions.

Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights were familiar with the theory of humors because humoral language is found in many of the plays; the individual humors were mentioned by name or associated emotion, explored in different ways, with a variety of connotations. In the language of the plays, it is apparent that playwrights knew which humor was related to the particular element as well as the emotions associated with it. For example, in The Revenger’s Tragedy, Hippolito describes his brother as “a man in whom much melancholy dwells” (4.1.61) and Lussurioso responds that “He being of black condition, suitable / To want and ill content, hope of preferment / Will grind him to an edge” (4.1.76-78). Melancholy was associated with black bile or in this case with a “black condition.” In The Maid’s Tragedy, Lysippus describes the women of the court as “young ladies, in their wanton blood” (1.1.101). Blood is associated with a sanguine personality and is a good way to describe women who “Tell mirthful tales in course that fill the room / With laughter” (1.1.102-3). And in Hamlet, when Gertrude asks Hamlet “Why seems it so particular with thee” (1.2.75), Hamlet responds:
'Tis not alone my inky cloak, cold mother,
Nor customary suits of solemn black,

That can denote me truly.

(1.2.77-83)

Melancholy is associated with “black” and Hamlet’s reminder that his mourning is more than what he is wearing shows how melancholy is more than just a physical condition, such as too much or too little black bile.

The four humors are united in the body and an ideal temperament is one with a balance of humors: “In a healthy body the four humours were perfectly balanced and in harmony with each other. However, if one or more humours was predominant or deficient, the individual became physically ill or mentally unbalanced” (Kail 142). Any of these behaviors in excess was regarded as a kind of madness. Understanding how the humors relate to each other and to madness shows the connection between mania and melancholy: dichotomous emotions but both represent Madness. Manic madness is usually signified by excessive and often violent behavior, such as when Flamineo is pretending to be mad in *The White Devil*; while fighting with Ludovico about Vittoria, Flamineo says, “This laughter scurvily becomes your face. / If you will not be melancholy, be angry” (3.3.121-22) and then strikes Ludovico (3.3.122 s.d.) for emphasis. On the other hand, melancholic madness is typically enacted as pensive or gloomy. This is the most common representation of madness in the revenge tragedies under discussion; multiple characters suffer from it throughout the plays.
Although mania and melancholy are commonly thought of as opposites today, they are not that different. Michel Foucault discusses the relationship between mania and melancholy in *Madness and Civilization*. He describes how “the discussion of melancholia remained fixed within the traditions of the four humors” (119) until the early part of the seventeenth century. Around this time, people began to wonder about the origin of melancholy: “must one necessarily have a melancholic temperament to be afflicted with melancholia? Is the melancholic humor always cold and dry—is it never warm, or humid? Is it the substance which acts, or the qualities which are transmitted” (119). In Foucault’s summative response to this debate, he describes a forcefulness to melancholy: the conflict between cold and dryness (119) or how the quality of melancholy can be turned upside down. He uses an example from Hippolyte-Jules la Mesnardiére to elucidate “when ‘the entrails are heated, when all simmers within the body...and all the juices are consumed,’ then this conflagration can turn to cold melancholia—producing ‘almost the same thing caused by the flow of wax in a torch turned upside down’” (120). Although Foucault does not discuss Shakespeare or his contemporaries in this chapter, the connection between melancholy and mania can be seen in a few examples from the plays being discussed in this paper.

Isabella and Hieronimo feel very real grief for their son’s death: Hieronimo says, “Here, Isabella, help me to lament” and Isabella responds, “What world of grief—My son Horatio” (2.5.36-38). This melancholy is immediately followed by forceful thoughts as Isabella cries, “Oh, gush out, tears, fountains and floods of tears! / Blow, sighs, and raise an everlasting storm” (2.5.43-44). However, Isabella’s melancholy transforms her into a
“lunatic” (3.8.5 s.d.) “With outrage for [her] son Horatio” (3.8.6) while Hieronimo decides to use his grief to his “advantage” (3.13.27):

Thus therefore will I rest me in unrest,
Dissembling quiet in unquietness,
Not seeming that I know their villainies,
That my simplicity may make them think
That ignorantly I will let all slip;
For ignorance, I wot, and well they know,

Remedium malorum iners est. [Is a futile remedy for evils.]

(3.13.29-35)

Hieronimo is going to behave madly in order to fool Lorenzo and Balthazar into believing his ignorance about their part in Horatio’s death. He plans to wait for his revenge until he knows “when, where, and how” (3.13.44) to achieve it. Similarly, Titus and Tamora feel real sadness over the deaths of their children. Tamora’s “mother’s tears” (1.1.110) transform into the desire to “raze.../ The cruel father and his traitorous sons” (1.4.456-57). On the other hand, Titus’ “wrath” (1.1.424) and “fury” (1.1.443) over his sons’ betrayal becomes despondency when he tells his “sorrows to the stones” (3.1.37).

Madness is represented as melancholy and mania and both emotions are interchangeable in the characters of these plays. Hamlet, Hieronimo, and Titus are ruled by their melancholy until they realize they must take actions into their own hands. This is why revenge is important to performative disguise. The act of revenge is necessary when the law is unwilling or unable to compensate for the character’s loss. When
Hieronimo seeks justice from the king in *The Spanish Tragedy*, he confronts Lorenzo’s father Castile about the transgressions of Lorenzo:

CASTILE. Hieronimo, I hope you have no cause,
And would be loath that one of your deserts
Should once have reason to suspect my son,
Considering how I think of you myself.

HIERONIMO. Grant me the combat of them, if they dare.
I’ll meet him face to face to tell me so.

(3.14.135-42)

Hieronimo seeks equal repayment for the death of his son, but Castile offers him “satisfaction” (3.14.150) through an “embrace” (3.14.155). It is unimaginable that a hug and a let’s “be perfect friends” (3.14.155) would in any way repay the death of a child. Hieronimo has no choice but to seek revenge on his own terms. Titus still believes in the law and justice when Marcus shows him the maimed Lavinia; in speaking about his sons’ guilt in the crimes against her, Titus says, “If they did kill thy husband, then be joyful, / Because the law hath ta’en revenge on them” (3.1.117-18). Titus believes in the law so much that “With all my heart I’ll send the emperor my hand” (3.1.162). Titus is repaid “For that good hand thou sent’st the emperor. / Here are the heads of thy two noble sons” (3.1.236-37). It is at this betrayal that Titus declares, “I have not another tear to shed” (3.1.267) and decides to plot his revenge “on Rome and Saturnine” (3.1.301).

Not to downplay the difficult decisions of Hieronimo and Titus to revenge, Hamlet’s choice was more complicated because of his role in Denmark’s society.
Hieronimo, as the marshal, represents justice and fairness in the play. “For blood with blood shall, while I sit as judge, / Be satisfied, and the law discharged” (3.6.35-36). Hieronimo’s satisfaction requires the blood of his son’s killers and he is not going to get that through the law: “For here’s no justice. Gentle boy, begone, / For justice is exiled from the earth” (3.13.139-40). Hieronimo needs a way to kill Balthazar and Lorenzo so that “all the world shall say Hieronimo / Was liberal in gracing of [revenge] so” (4.1.153-54). In a tragedy, which he describes as “containing matter, and not common things” (4.1.161), Hieronimo will be able to act out his revenge for everyone to see. If Hieronimo had escaped immediately after killing Lorenzo and Balthazar, he might have gotten away with the murders because the Viceroy and King believed it was a show “bravely done” (4.4.68). Instead, Hieronimo reveals his dead son behind the curtain and states:

Soliciting remembrance of my vow

With these, oh, these accursed murderers,

Which now performed, my heart is satisfied

(4.4.127-29)

It is important for Hieronimo to have an audience for revenge because he is a man of justice. This is what allows Hieronimo to spend his afterlife “where Orpheus plays, / Adding sweet pleasure to eternal days” (4.5.23-24) as opposed to “deepest hell / Where none but Furies, bugs, and tortures dwell” (4.5.27-28). The public revenge allows the murderer honor in his killings and even though the revenger usually dies, he does not have to suffer in death.
Hamlet does not represent justice in the same way as Hieronimo and Titus, who is Rome’s “friend in justice” (1.1.182-83); Hamlet’s father was king, now his uncle is king, and Hamlet is “the most immediate to our throne” (1.2.109). Hamlet must consider what is right for the state just as much as he considers what is right for the man. Laertes tells Ophelia to “Think it no more” (1.3.10) about Hamlet because:

...his will is not his own.

He may not, as unvalued persons do,
Carve for himself, for on his choice depends
The safety and health of this whole state,
And therefore must his choice be circumscribed
Unto the voice and yielding of that body
Whereof he is the head.

(1.3.17-23)

Hieronimo and Titus represented justice within Spain and Rome; Hamlet is Denmark.

Hamlet’s performance does not articulate whether his actions represent justice because he is constantly aware that his decisions affect Denmark. He is not allowed to mourn his father because if he does not “cast thy nighted colour off” (1.2.68), then he does not “look like a friend on Denmark” (1.2.69). Gertrude and Claudius are worried about how Hamlet’s grief is going to look to the rest of the world. Claudius, in particular, does not want Fortinbras to think the “state to be disjoint and out of frame” (1.2.20) because everyone is still in mourning for old King Hamlet. Although Hamlet struggles with his grief because he is “too much in the ‘son’” (1.2.67), he understands how his grief
can affect his reputation and in turn, Denmark’s. Hamlet knows that it takes only “one defect” (1.4.31), such as “unmanly grief” (1.2.94), and no matter:

His virtues else, be they as pure as grace,

As infinite as man may undergo,

Shall in the general censure take corruption

From that particular fault

(1.4.33-36)

Furthermore, Hamlet is annoyed that while Claudius censures Hamlet’s grief, he “takes his rouse, / Keeps wassail and the swaggering upspring reels” (1.4.8-9). Claudius is worried about Hamlet’s behavior but his own behavior “makes [Denmark] traduced and taxed of other nations” (1.4.18).

Hamlet’s concern for and role in Denmark make his decision to revenge much more complicated than Hieronimo and Titus. Hamlet the son, “with wings as swift / As meditation or the thoughts of love / May sweep to my revenge” (1.5.29-31) but Hamlet the prince must think about Denmark and the fact that the council has “freely gone” (1.2.15) along with Claudius on the throne and Gertrude as his wife. Hieronimo chooses revenge when the King fails to help him and Titus chooses revenge when his emperor betrays him; but Hamlet is not as free to act because the King will not help him and to betray the king is to betray Denmark as well as himself. Because of his lack of freedom to immediately revenge his father, Hamlet laments “That ever I was born to set it right” (1.5.187).

Madness is the perfect disguise because Hamlet can remain close to Claudius in order to “observe his looks” (2.2.531) and make sure the ghost did not just “assume a
pleasing shape” (2.2.535) in order to damn Hamlet. Where there is some uncertainty about how “mad” Hieronimo and Titus really are because their plans are revealed so late in the play, there is no doubt that Hamlet’s madness is entirely a performance. The ghost tells Hamlet “If thou hast nature in thee bear it not” (1.5.81) and Hamlet responds:

I’ll wipe away all trivial fond records,
All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past
That youth and observation copied there
And thy commandment all alone shall live
Within the book and volume of my brain
Unmixed with baser matter.

(1.5.99-104)

Like Hieronimo and Titus, Hamlet sets aside his mourning and melancholy and focuses his entire being on revenge. Unlike Hieronimo and Titus, who chose revenge in Act III and Act IV respectively, Hamlet’s decision comes about in Act I. Because this is also a play about theater and stagecraft, Hamlet’s revenge needs to be carefully plotted, set up, and enacted. Furthermore, Hamlet’s fake madness eventually contrasts with Ophelia’s very real madness, which allows Shakespeare to address Renaissance notions of madness and identity.

The first time the audience is presented with Hamlet’s “madness,” it is through Ophelia’s description. Because performative disguise has no physical indicator, it is important for the audience to hear how Hamlet looks “As if he had been loosed out of hell” (2.1.80). Ophelia also plays a necessary part in Hamlet’s ruse. He chooses “to speak of horrors” (2.1.81) to her and this action gives Polonius a plausible reason for
Hamlet’s behavior: “the very ecstasy of love, / Whose violent property fordoes itself / And leads the will to desperate undertakings” (2.1.99-101). Polonius’ belief in this reason helps to convince the King and Queen that Hamlet’s “madness” is not just “his father’s death and [their] subsequent hasty marriage” (2.2.57). Without Ophelia, Hamlet is just a son overcome with grief—Ophelia adds a perfectly valid reason for Hamlet’s madness and distracts Claudius from worrying about “Hamlet’s transformation” (2.2.5).

In a similar fashion, Titus needs Tamora to strengthen his own madness and revenge plot. Saturninus is “Troubled, confronted thus” (4.4.3) with Titus’ “frenzy and his bitterness” (4.4.12); therefore, the emperor plans to show Titus:

...that justice lives
In Saturninus’ health, whom, if she sleep,
He’ll so awake as she in fury shall
Cut off the proud’st conspirator that lives.

(4.4.23-26)

Without Tamora, Saturninus would have moved against Titus; but Tamora, thinking of “Th’effects of sorrow for [Titus’] valiant sons / Whose loss hath pierced him deep and scarred his heart” (4.4.31-32), tells Saturninus to “Calm thee and bear the faults of Titus’ age” (4.4.29). And when Saturninus worries about “warlike Lucius general of the Goths” (4.4.68), Tamora offers to go “to that old Andronicus, / And temper him with all the art I have” (4.4.107-8). Tamora’s faith in Titus’ “lunacy” (5.2.70) is so strong that she continues to pretend to be Revenge even though Titus says “I know thee well” (5.2.25) and “Good Lord, how like the empress’ sons they are, / And you the empress” (5.2.64-65). Tamora hands her sons over and tells them to “Yield to his humour” (5.2.140).
Revenge would have been a lot more difficult for Titus without Tamora’s help; likewise, Polonius defends Hamlet’s madness and tells the King to “mark” (3.2.107) Hamlet’s compliment to Ophelia: she’s “metal more attractive” (3.2.106) than his mother. In fact, Polonius’ belief sets the stage for his own death—he tells the King to let Hamlet “show his grief” (3.2.182) to Gertrude while Polonius listens “Behind the arras” (3.3.28).

Ophelia also provides a necessary contrast to remind the audience that Hamlet is feigning madness. Ophelia’s madness begins with the death of her father and is at first described by the Gentleman to Gertrude: “She speaks much of her father, says she hears / There’s tricks i’th’ world, and hems and beats her heart” (4.5.4-5). Ophelia’s madness is very different from Hamlet’s. When Hamlet is alone, he is introspective and his dialogue switches back to verse but Ophelia has no such meditative moments and does not even have lucid dialogue after her father’s death. Furthermore, there is no question that her madness was caused by anything other than her father’s death as Claudius assumes: “…It springs / All from her father’s death” (4.5.76-77). On the other hand, there is much discussion about why Hamlet is mad: Claudius says to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern: “What it should be/ More than his father’s death, that thus hath put him/ So much from th’understanding of himself/ I cannot dream of” (2.2.7-10). Of course, Polonius and Gertrude also have opinions about the cause; in fact, there are almost 160 lines of dialogue in this scene alone about the cause of Hamlet’s madness.

The difference between Hamlet’s and Ophelia’s madness also provides a commentary on gender distinctions within real and fake madness. Carol Thomas Neely writes, Ophelia’s characterization “represents women’s madness as gender-inflected in the context of bodily illness, lost love, and family” (53). Ophelia sings songs about a
"cockle hat and staff" (4.5.25) and discusses "rosemary" (4.5.169), "pansies" (4.5.170), "fennel," "columbines," and "rue" (4.5.173-174). There are other female characters who suffer in the same way. In *The White Devil*, after Cornelia's son Flamineo kills his brother Marcello, Cornelia's grief "Hath turned her child again" (5.4.74). Cornelia sings songs about "The friendless bodies of unburied men" (5.4.99) and thinks her son Flamineo is "the grave-maker" (5.4.79). Cornelia also mentions different herbs: rosemary and heartsease (5.4.64, 75, and 76). In *The Spanish Tragedy*, Isabella's dialogue is not as obtuse but she still confuses her maid (3.8.13) and laments that there are no herbs that "will purge the heart" (3.8.3). Isabella also takes her own revenge on the arbor where Horatio was killed; she cries: "I will not leave a root, a stalk, a tree,/ A bough, a branch, a blossom, nor a leaf,/ No, not an herb within this garden plot" (4.2.10-12). Desdemona also suffers after Othello takes her "for that cunning whore of Venice / That married with Othello" (*Othello* 4.2.91-92); Desdemona sings "a song of 'willow'" (4.3.26) and bemoans "O, these men, these men" (*Othello* 4.3.59) to Emilia. In these revenge tragedies, female madness stems from the loss of a loved one, usually a child or father, and is performed through songs and references to the natural world. Furthermore, female madness is presented as being very real and highly emotional while male madness is feigned and calculated.

The truly mad female is a necessity in revenge tragedy because she highlights the contrast between real and fake madness while also being a constant reminder that the revenger is grappling with real madness. Hamlet and Ophelia share the same type of grief: loss of a father. Hamlet begins the play with persevering "obsequious sorrow" (1.2.93) for his father's death; this melancholy is so encompassing that Hamlet "forgets"
himself (1.2.161). He displays mad behavior when he meets with the Ghost. Horatio begs him to “Be ruled” (1.4.81) but Hamlet no longer controls his own actions: “My fate cries out / And makes each petty artery in this body / As hardy as the Nemean lion’s nerve” (1.4.81-83). And of course, after seeing his father’s ghost, Horatio believes Hamlet speaks with “wild and whirring words” (1.5.132) and his behavior “is wondrous strange” (1.5.163). Instead of wallowing in his grief, Hamlet chooses to use it for his revenge. Even though they share the same type of grief, Hamlet and Ophelia are not allowed the same outlet to channel it within the society of the play; therefore, Ophelia stays mad while Hamlet plots revenge. This shows that it is important for the revenger to remain lucid in order to prove that his actions are just or else it becomes simply murder. Hamlet cannot kill Claudius “Out of [his] weakness and [his] melancholy” (2.2.536), he has to “have grounds / More relative than this. The play’s the thing / Wherein [he’ll] catch the conscience of the King” (2.2.538-40). This fact is emphasized when Laertes comments on Ophelia’s madness; he says, “Hadst thou thy wits and didst persuade revenge” (4.5.163). Regardless of any other factor, Ophelia cannot plot revenge as long as she remains afflicted.

Similarly, in Titus Andronicus: Tamora and Titus share grief over losing a child. In the beginning of the play, Tamora begs Titus to spare her son, crying: “And if thy sons were ever dear to thee, / O, think my son to be as dear to me” (1.1.110-11). Titus’ sons are dear to him and because he “buried one-and-twenty valiant sons, / Knighted in field, slain manfully in arms / In right and service of their noble country” (1.1.198-200), he believes that Alarbus’ death is a fair sacrifice “T’appease their groaning shadows that are gone” (1.1.129). His emotions coincide with Tamora’s only when Quintus and Martius
head to their execution; Titus’ performance mirrors Tamora’s: “For these two, tribunes, in the dust I write / My heart’s deep languor and my soul’s sad tears” (3.1.12-13).

Although Titus and Tamora share tears and a desire for revenge, only one of them succeeds. Tamora’s failed revenge points to the fact that she is unable to move beyond her grief over Alarbus as evidenced when she gives up Aaron’s baby because she needs Rome and Saturninus for her revenge and “Rome will despise her for this foul escape” (4.2.115). If she keeps the child, she loses her ability to revenge so she attempts to have the child murdered and sends it to Aaron to “christen it with thy dagger’s point” (4.2.72). These actions create the circumstances that have Tamora “Eating the flesh that she herself hath fed” (5.3.61): first Aaron betrays her to save the child: “Lucius, save the child, / ... / If thou do this, I’ll show thee wondrous things” (5.1.53-55); then the Goths choose to follow Lucius, “Whose name was once our terror, now our comfort, / ... / ...We’ll follow where thou lead’st” (5.1.9-13). Like Ophelia, as long as Tamora is focused solely on the death of Alarbus, she cannot successfully pursue revenge.

Another reason for Ophelia’s lack of revenge and Tamora’s failure has to do with justice and the right to revenge. Although private revenge was not allowed in Elizabethan times, “The right to punish their own wrongs was dear to many Elizabethans” (Bowers 10) so the audience might have empathized with Ophelia and Tamora. However, Polonius’ death was an accident; Hamlet thought it was Claudius and cries “I took thee for thy better” (3.4.30) after he discovers Polonius’ body. Even if Ophelia could ascend from her madness long enough to plot revenge, how could she kill Hamlet, who “loved” her (5.1.258), for mistakenly killing her father? An audience who saw revenge as a “criminal passion” (Bowers 20) would not have felt strongly about
Ophelia or Laertes’ right to revenge Hamlet, especially in light of the fact that Laertes planned to “anoint [his] sword” (4.7.138) with poison enough that the slightest touch “may be death” (4.7.146). Similarly, while Alarbus’ death may be seen as “cruel, irreligious piety” (1.1.133) in the beginning of Titus Andronicus, there is no excusing the fact that Tamora willingly gave up her child. If, as Bowers writes, “the revenger of the drama started with the sympathy of the audience [because] his cause were good and if he acted according to the typically English notions of straightforward fair play” (40), then Tamora’s betrayal of Aaron violates her right to revenge Titus.

Because Isabella served her own private revenge on the bower where Horatio died, she does not provide as much of a contrast as Ophelia and Tamora did for Hamlet and Titus. The Spanish Tragedy uses a different type of performative disguise to supply a foil for Hieronimo’s revenge. Don Andrea and Revenge are omnipresent spectators for the events that occur in The Spanish Tragedy. Their presence on stage is a continuous reminder to the outer audience that they are watching a play; and their presence allows the audience to question the validity of revenge because Don Andrea’s personal reasons are not entirely justified. Don Andrea was killed in battle and seeks revenge because he was separated from his love, Bel-Imperia:

Death’s winter nipped the blossoms of my bliss,
Forcing divorce betwixt my love and me.
For in the late conflict with Portingale
My valor drew me into danger’s mouth
Till life to death made passage through my wounds.

(1.1.13-17)
Before he was killed, he fought bravely in battle and if Balthazar had not been the better soldier, he probably would have survived: “Brave man at arms, but weak to Balthazar” (1.2.72). Don Andrea was good but not good enough and his death seems entirely fair; he is not the typical revenger, who seeks to avenge the death of a loved one wrongfully slain. An English audience would “not become excited over a ghost seeking vengeance for a fair death in the field. Personal interest cannot be aroused in the early action of the play if it proceeds solely from the point of view of an alien ghost, and with Horatio as the successful avenger of his friend” (Bowers 66). Why then is Don Andrea allowed to introduce Revenge into the play? And why does he do it as a spectator?

Don Andrea is necessary because he is the constant reminder that the audience is watching something designed by Thomas Kyd:

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

(1.1.86-91)

Don Andrea and Revenge represent “an audience for the play’s main action; actual plays within the play; a dumb show directed by Revenge for Andrea; as well as several scenes of spectatorship” (West 224). From the opening scene, the audience knows that Bel-Imperia will kill Don Balthazar and therefore Revenge’s: “Be still, Andrea” (1.5.5) is also a cue for the audience to be patient.
Throughout, Don Andrea and Revenge are used to mirror an audience’s reaction and pay tribute to the tricks of drama. When Don Andrea laments about the “abuse” (2.6.4) of Bel-Imperia, Revenge says “Thou talkest of harvest when the corn is green. / The end is crown of every work well done” (2.6.7-8). The finale will resolve Don Andrea’s concerns. Revenge also shows Don Andrea a dumb show in Act III to show him how plays represent reality:

ANDREA: Awake, Revenge! Reveal this mystery.

REVENGE: The two first the nuptial torches bore

   As brightly burning as the midday’s sun;
   But after them doth Hymen hie as fast,
   Clothèd in sable and a saffron robe,
   And blows them out and quencheth them in blood,
   As discontent that things continue so.

ANDREA: Sufficeth me thy meanings understood,

   (3.15.29-36)

Because Andrea is confused about what Revenge is saying, Revenge provides a dumb show to explain. This was also seen after Hieronimo’s dumb show in Act I: “Hieronimo, this masque contents mine eye, / Although I sound not well the mystery” (1.4.138-39). Hieronimo describes what his characters represent for the Ambassador and the King (see 1.4.140-67). Afterward, the King says “Hieronimo, I drink to thee for this device” (1.4.172). Although this example does not illustrate feigned madness, it is useful because it shows how a performative device, the dumb show, is used to provide meaning for the
audience as well as a way for characters to disguise their intent without material costumes.

The question of validity is seen in all revenge tragedy because there are many causes for murder but not all of them are just. Dramatizing the different kinds of murder and reasons for revenge in a performance examined the discordant system of justice in England. Queen Elizabeth, who “put down with an iron hand the squabbles of her touchy nobles” (Bowers 17), was at the end of her reign. King James was beginning his reign after ruling in a Scotland where “Self-help and blood-revenge flourished practically unchecked” because of “The weak state of law” (Bowers 17-18). Shakespeare and his contemporaries examine this system of justice; and the form of a revenge tragedy mirrors a trial with the revenger playing the judge and executioner. This is what makes performative disguise so important to the revenge tragedy; especially feigned madness because it allows the character to feel real emotions that an audience could empathize with. Hamlet feels passionate about his right to kill Claudius but he does it in a way that proves Claudius’ guilt first. Furthermore, a society who detests “secrecy and treachery” (Bowers 16-17) would appreciate how Hamlet proves and punishes the crime as Hamlet, even if he pretends to be mad.

Revenge tragedies usually end with a public death as a way to reiterate society’s need to publicize crimes. However, there is a difference between revengers like Hamlet, Hieronimo, and Titus who use performative disguise and Vindice who uses material disguise. At the end of his play, Hieronimo explains his role as “Actor and author in this tragedy” (4.4.147) and heads off stage “to hang himself” (4.4.152 s.d.) because his revenge is satisfied and he has “no more to say” (4.4.152). Rather than repeat himself,
Hieronimo bites off his tongue and when the King wants him to write instead, Hieronimo stabs himself and the Duke (4.4.201 s.d.). Titus also explains his revenge publically in the end. Although he is not putting on a play like Hieronimo, he is playing “a cook” (5.3.25 s.d.) for Tamora and Saturninus. Saturninus remarks on this by asking, “Why art thou thus attired, Andronicus” (5.3.30) to which Tamora answers, “To entertain your highness and your empress” (5.3.32). After explaining Lavinia’s rape and mangling, Titus says, “‘twas Chiron and Demetrius: / ... / ...that did her all this wrong” (5.3.55-57); and even though Saturninus kills Titus after Titus stabbed Tamora, Titus’ death is witnessed by the “people and sons of Rome” (5.3.66). Hamlet, too, commits his revenge in public while performing a duel with Laertes for the court. Even though Hamlet does not announce Claudius’ guilt while dueling, Laertes cries “the Kings to blame” (5.2.305) for the Queen’s death, and he asks to “Exchange forgiveness” (5.2.131) with Hamlet. In the end, Hamlet does not get to explain his revenge but asks Horatio to explain his actions “To the unsatisfied” (5.3.324); Hamlet also gets to exercise some power in the future of Denmark, saying “th’election lights / On Fortinbras: he has my dying voice” (5.2.339-40).

Hieronimo, Titus, and Hamlet all have public revenges and deaths. Because murder is still a crime, no matter how justified, they must all die, but they are allowed some type of forgiveness at the end. Hamlet receives it from Laertes, Titus is given “obsequious tears” (5.3.150) from his brother and “The last true duties” (5.3.154) from his son, and Hieronimo is allowed to spend his eternal days “where Orpheus plays” (4.5.23) a place with heaven’s blessing for people who die virtuously (Bevington 3.13.116-17 n). On the other hand, Vindice suffers a different fate. He is allowed a
public revenge in the form of a masque but he uses trickery. Vindice sets the stage so that Ambitioso, Supervacuo, Spurio, and a Fourth Noble take the blame; rather than announcing for everyone to hear, Vindice whispers in Lussurioso’s ear: “Now thou’lt not prate on’t, ‘twas Vindice murdered thee” (5.3.93). He has his revenge but no moment of satisfaction. At the end, Vindice says, “‘Tis time to die when we are ourselves our foes” (5.3.130) and is taken off stage “under guard” (5.3.146 s.d.). Unlike Hieronimo, Titus, and Hamlet, Vindice does not die on stage. No matter their death or burial, Hieronimo, Titus, and Hamlet all die with a modicum of dignity and respect. Vindice is taken off stage like a criminal and Antonio remarks, “How subtly was that murder closed” (5.3.147). Vindice used material disguise; therefore, his revenge was subtle and fraught with trickery. Using performative disguise, Hieronimo, Titus, and Hamlet committed their revenges openly, as “mad” versions of themselves, and died accordingly.

There are many revenge scenarios in the English Renaissance canon; however, *The Spanish Tragedy*, *Titus Andronicus*, and *Hamlet* all seem to be making a similar statement about needing proof to justify revenge. Moreover, each of these plays asks how far someone will go for revenge; and while each man will go as far as murder, they will make sure their murder is adequately justified. Without the disguise of madness, this would have been virtually impossible because Hieronimo, Titus, and Hamlet would have been forced to find other means of finding proof and other ways to publicize their actions. Performative disguise is necessary because it affords the revenger autonomy to prove the righteousness of his revenge; he would not be free to find out the truth if stuck behind a material mask. Furthermore, feigned madness allows the protagonist to feel real emotions while providing enough clarity for them to plot revenge. This in turn creates a
protagonist that an audience could feel sympathy for. All in all, Shakespeare and Kyd’s plays address the idea that proof and justification are necessary for revenge. What Kyd and Shakespeare set forth was used to create many different scenarios and many different kinds of revengers. The use of feigned madness addresses the idea that a revenger needs to be fully in control of his plan. Revenge could not succeed without sanity and the pretense of madness affords the revenger enough time for his plot. Disguise allows characters to act bravely and at the end, they all die honorably, which is as righteous an ending tragedy is going to get.
WORKS CITED


