# REVENGE IN SHAKESPEARE:
# AN USURPATION OF GOD'S AUTHORITY

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# PREFACE

To understand and appreciate Shakespeare, one must study comprehensively his works and the age. It is the object of this thesis to present one of the facets of Shakespeare, namely, the use of the subject of revenge in his plays. Thus, it is the intention and hope that this study will lead to a more profound understanding of his plays. The author's specific purpose is to show the ways in which Shakespeare presented revenge and to delineate how Shakespeare's audience probably interpreted the plays.

I wish to acknowledge several authors whose works have been helpful to me in my research. Hardin Craig's The Complete Works of Shakespeare has been invaluable as a primary source for the plays and for his editorial comments on them. Lily Bess Campbell and Fredson T. Bowers' studies have contributed to my knowledge of the views of the audience and of the age toward revenge.

I am deeply grateful to Dr. Charles E. Walton, whose guidance and encouragement have led to the completion of this study. I have thoroughly enjoyed my research on the subject of revenge, and I wish to thank him for suggesting this study.

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El Dorado, Kansas
August, 1970

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## CHAPTER I

## AN HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO ELIZABETHAN-JACOBEAN REVENGE ATTITUDES

Elizabethan revenge attitudes are traceable to four main currents of thought, of which two are major in influence and two of lesser importance. Of the two major influences, that of the old revenge code, rejuvenated during the pre-Renaissance period as the gentleman's code of honor, reaches back to primitive times.[1] The second major influence, Christianity, extends for approximately fifteen centuries. The two minor influences are those of Machiavellianism and of the Senecan drama, and their influence was contemporary.

Blood revenge was used among primitive peoples, because it was the only way to right a wrong; and since one had to be strong enough to carry out revenge, there developed the same sense of pride in one's ability to revenge as there was in being a strong warrior or a great hunter.[2] With primitive peoples, the Old Testament maxim of "An eye for an eye; a tooth for a tooth" existed. This same standard, known as the lex talionis principle, was used when the old Babylonian King, Hammurabi,

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1 Fredson T. Bowers, Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy, p. 3.

2 Loc. cit.

had his law coded on stone tablets.[3] This earliest of written law codes meant that punishment for wrong-doing was no longer in private hands to be accomplished by means of blood feuds but was, for the first time, the province of the state.[4] However, blood revenge existed in other places.

Later, when kinship and clan ties were stronger, blood revenge became quite common.[5] It was soon a family duty to avenge the life of any member of one's own family by taking the life of any member of the murderer's family if the murderer himself could not be found.[6] This method, known as the vendetta, was in use among the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes at the time of their migration to England.[7] Such pre-Christian reformers as Aeschylus, Euripides, Isaiah, and the writer of the Book of Jonah had all tried to break the revenge code.[8] With the spread of Christianity, pressure to break the code was brought about by the Church;

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3 T. W. Wallbank and Alistair M. Taylor, Civilization Past and Present, II, pp. 65-6.

4 Ibid., p. 66.

5 Curtis Brown Watson, Shakespeare and the Renaissance Concept of Honor, p. 38.

6 Bowers, op. cit., p. 4.

7 Loc. cit.

8 Victor H. Strandberg, "The Revenger's Tragedy; Hamlet's Costly Code," SAQ, LXV (Winter, 1966), 95.

but, fifteen centuries later, the Christian ideal of patience and forgiveness was still being propounded by the Church without much success.[9] With William the Conqueror came Norman ideals, and personal injury began to be seen as a private wrong that must be avenged by duelling.[10] The law-abiding citizen was expected to leave punishment to the courts, although the courts were notorious for allowing law-breakers to escape. However, because of the code of honor, a gentleman still killed his enemy by duelling.[11] It was this code of honor that held off complete acceptance of the Christian ideal of forgiveness and patience. Hence, these two conflicting ideas of the gentleman's code of honor and the Christian ideal existed side by side.[12]

The concept of honor stems from the classic love of virtue, the practice of which brought one honor.[13] The more virtuous that one was, the more honor he gained. According to Plato, a truly good man would never be influenced by motives of avarice or of ambition, but only by love

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9 Loc. cit.

10 Bowers, op. cit., p. 6.

11 Elinor Bevan, "Revenge, Forgiveness, and the Gentleman," REL, VIII (July, 1967), 55.

12 Patrick Cruttwell, "The Morality of Hamlet: 'Sweet Prince' or 'Errant Knave'?" Hamlet: Shakespeare Institute Studies, p. 122.

13 Watson, op. cit., p. 23.

of virtue.[14] Aristotle said that the practice of virtue, in order to gain fame or praise, was a worthy goal.[15] The key words in his statement are "in order to gain." Aristotle saw morality as a matter of daily living and, therefore, concluded that honor and ambition were both proper and useful to the citizen in service to the state.[16] Cicero's philosophy was close to Aristotle's. He proposed that no material gain can compare with virtue, but the seeking of honor may be an adjunct to the practice of virtue.[17] He believed that the danger of ambition lies in one's getting carried away and losing sight of the claims of justice.[18] Although the Stoics, like Plato, held human praise in low esteem, Seneca, however, considered a posthumous reputation to be a desirable asset.[19] He thought that with such a reputation, one would bring honor to the family by bequeathing to his descendants the honor of having an illustrious ancestor, and, perhaps,

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14 Plato, "The Apology," The Dialogues of Plato, Great Books of the Western World, p. 206.

15 Marcus Tullius Cicero, "Nichomachean Ethics," De Officius, p. 67.

16 Ibid., p. 68.

17 Cicero, op. cit., pp. 25-6.

18 Ibid., p. 26.

19 Watson, op. cit., pp. 27-8.

even the honor of having an ancestor about whom someone might conceivably write a biography.[20]

Among the Christian writers on honor, St. Augustine found human praise of little worth compared to God's.[21] This attitude held sway until the twelfth century, when Aquinas wrote his theological works.[22] Aquinas called on man to glorify God but also reminded man to take care of his worldly life, to seek human praise (but to be aware that such praise was far less desirable than God's), to seek honor (but not to become proud and ambitious).[23]

The medieval code of chivalry esteemed glory, honor, and reputation to such an extent that dishonor, or the taking away of a man's honor, could not be tolerated.[24] If a man felt dishonored, he was required by the code to seek revenge.[25] The English looked with horror at Italy, where almost all of the discord that arose among men in the

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20 Ibid., p. 143.

21 Marcus Dods (ed.), The Works of Aurelius Augustine, Vol. XV, 311-312.

22 Douglas Bush, The Renaissance and English Humanism, p. 30.

23 St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, Vol. I, p. 590.

24 Bevan, op. cit., p. 55.

25 Ibid., p. 66.

sixteenth century was concerned with honor.[26] For example, in England, during the sixteenth century, brawling increased, duelling reached alarming proportions, and the revenge tragedy flourished.[27] Young men went to court for the specific purpose of winning honor by gaining the favor of the monarch, and dishonor was revenged immediately among the courtiers.[28] The code of honor was in full use. As Geoffrey Fenton wrote in his Golden Epistles: ". . . by little and little, under couller to chastice, most men execute revenge . . . ."[29] Thus, revenge was becoming a problem.

The second major influence, Christianity, found its basis for teaching revenge in three Biblical texts -- Paul's Epistle to the Romans 12:17 and 12:19, and Deuteronomy 32:35, as follows, respectively:

> Repay no one evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all.
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> Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay,' says the Lord.

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26 Frederick Robertson Bryson, The Point of Honor in Sixteenth Century Italy: An Aspect of the Life of the Gentleman, p. 1.

27 Eleanor Prosser, Hamlet and Revenge, p. 23.

28 Watson, op. cit., p. 147.

29 Quoted in Lily Bess Campbell, "Theories of Revenge in Elizabethan England," MP, XXVIII (February, 1931), 288.

> Vengeance is mine and recompense, for the time when their foot shall slip; for the day of their calamity is at hand, and their doom comes swiftly.

Hence, for the sixteenth-century English, not only did God forbid man to return evil for evil, but he also said that vengeance was one of the powers reserved to God.[30] To attempt to take to oneself the power of God is to commit the same sin committed by Lucifer. For usurping the power of the Almighty, Lucifer was damned to hell for all eternity. Thus, revenge was seen as one of the greatest sins a man could commit. The Biblical command and its implications to man were not lost to the writers of the early miracle and morality plays. The fall of Lucifer may be seen in each of the extant miracle play cycles.[31] The Antichrist, another interesting type of the usurper of God's throne is found, later on, in the morality plays.[32]

Still a third force, Machiavellianism, exerted an influence upon Elizabethan concepts of revenge. Machiavelli had applied the principles of pure science to theories of how a prince ought to govern, leaving out entirely any consideration of morality, an idea that was

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30 Ibid., p. 281.

31 Honor V. Matthews, Character and Symbol in Shakespeare's Plays, p. 7.

32 Ibid., p. 9.

thoroughly repugnant to the Elizabethans.[33] Machiavelli saw man as basically evil:

> For it may be said of men in general that they are ungrateful, voluble, dissemblers, anxious to avoid danger, and covetous of gain; . . . for love is held by a chain of obligation which, men being selfish, is broken whenever it serves their purpose; . . . .[34]

He appalled and fascinated the English through his reviling of society. "A prince should seem to be all mercy, faith, integrity, humanity, and religion. And nothing is more necessary than to seem to have this last quality."[35] Elizabethans thought Machiavelli an atheist, a corrupter, and a devil who used religion to gain political goals.[36] To be called a Machiavellian, as were the Italianate Englishman and the Puritan, was to be classified or described as ruthless, calculated, tricky, and opposed to humanism in all things.[37] Niccolo Machiavelli's name -- Old Nick --

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33 Paul N. Siegel, Shakespearean Tragedy and the Elizabethan Compromise, p. 61.

34 Niccolo Machiavelli, The Prince, p. 90.

35 Ibid., p. 96.

36 George T. Buckley, Atheism in the English Renaissance, p. 31.

37 Siegel, op. cit., p. 62.

had been used for the devil, ever since the publication of The Prince.[38] In the theatre, Machiavellianism took over as playwrights presented his character type, distorted to suit their purposes, and the Machiavellian villain was often the revenger in the plays of the time.[39] Indeed, Elizabethan literature contains 395 references to Machiavelli.[40] His philosophy permeated the thought of the Renaissance, not only in England but in all of Europe.[41] All of the popular playwrights used Machiavellian villains and his philosophy in their plays.[42] Yet, most Elizabethans learned about Machiavelli through Gentillet's Contre-Machiavel, translated into English sixty-three years before the publication of The Prince.[43] Even so, Machiavelli exerted a large influence upon Elizabethan life, upon the revenge tragedy, and upon the question of revenge.

The other contemporary influence was that of the Senecan

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38 Buckley, op. cit., p. 31.

39 M. M. Reese, The Cease of Majesty, p. 31.

40 Wyndham Lewis, The Lion and the Fox: The Role of the Hero in the Plays of Shakespeare, p. 65.

41 Ibid., p. 66.

42 Loc. cit.

43 Buckley, op. cit., p. 41.

tragedy, really an offshoot of Machiavellianism. Unlike Machiavellianism, which permeated the everyday life of the Elizabethan first and, then entered the theatre, Seneca's influence occurred in the school and in the theatre first. Seneca's tragedies were translated between 1559 and 1581, but he was read in Latin and used as a translation exercise in the Latin grammar schools.[44] By the opening decade of Elizabeth's reign, almost all of Seneca's plays were produced in English.[45] Seneca's plays appealed to the Elizabethans because of their similarities to the popular drama of the medieval church.[46] They were moralistic, didactic, and sermon-like.[47] The "rigid fatalism and sense of overhanging doom" was very prominent and not unlike the hellfire doom that relentlessly pursued the sinner in the miracle and morality plays.[48] Seneca's moral viewpoint, his Stoic philosophy, his acceptance of fate and of the world as the work of divine wisdom made him seem more like one of their own play-

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44 John W. Cunliffe, The Influence of Seneca on Elizabethan Tragedy, p. 9.

45 Loc. cit.

46 H. B. Charlton, The Senecan Tradition in Renaissance Tragedy, p. xxv.

47 Loc. cit.

48 Loc. cit.

wrights than one of the ancients.[49] Senecan characters had individuality, and the men of the Renaissance were just the ones to appreciate a sense of individuality.[50] Seneca's Machiavellian ideas and sensational themes -- themes of blood, lust, the fickleness of fate, and the fleetness of life -- were exactly suited to Elizabethan taste.[51] His plays contained that odd combination of morality with violent passion and revenge that the English seemed to take to with relish.[52] Also, Senecan rhetoric, spouting its philosophy of "skeptical fatalism" and Machiavellian revenge, appealed to the Renaissance ear.[53] It was not long until the Senecan tragedy, with revenge motif intact, was being imitated on the English stage.

Thus, four concepts, the gentleman's code of honor, the Christian ideal, Machiavellianism, and Senecan tragedy, were exerting forces on Elizabethan concepts of revenge. There are no easy answers, and one cannot say that a man felt himself obliged to follow the code of honor, or was bound to think of his soul, or would do exactly as he saw

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49 Cunliffe, op. cit., p. 15.

50 Charlton, op. cit., p. xxvi.

51 Ibid., p. xxv.

52 Arthur Percival Rossiter, English Drama from Early Times to the Elizabethans, p. 169.

53 Cunliffe, op. cit., p. 25.

the Machiavellian villain do in the Senecan drama that he witnessed in the Elizabethan theatre. The whole question was being argued everywhere — from the pulpit, in the tracts, in the inns, at the court of Elizabeth and later that of James I. One reads in Geoffrey Fenton's Golden Epistles (1577) an opinion of the very real problem faced by a man who had been wronged: "To the nature of Man, nothing is more / Sweete then the passion of revenge."[54] Another viewpoint, contained in A Discourse of the Felicitie of Man (1598), states: "All praise patience, and yet who resisteth the sweet passion of revenge?"[55] Hence, the Englishman of the Renaissance recognized the question of revenge as a problem faced by many.

Nicholas Stratforde in A Dissuasive from Revenge (1684) reiterated the religious doctrine that ". . . private vengeance usurps God's prerogative," and that ". . . revenge may be sought on No man for No reason."[56] From The French Academie: Concerning the Soule and Body of Man (1594), another reason to forego revenge is given in that "God commaundeth us to render good for evil and not evil for evil" at all times, and the concept of ultimate punishment is repeated, ". . . there

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54 Quoted in Prosser, op. cit., p. 5.

55 Ibid., p. 4.

56 Quoted in Campbell, op. cit., p. 289.

is no sinne that canne avoid punishment . . . ."[57] Thomas Cooper's pamphlet, The Cry and Revenge of Blood, is interesting for its comment on how God's vengeance seems to be at work while man is unaware of it:

> While they slept securely, the vengeance of God was bestirring itselfe . . . the blood of these murthered souls cried loud in the eares of the Lorde . . . .[58]

Prosser relates that, up to 1610, there is not one example that can be construed as a noble revenge, not one example of a play whose audience was clearly intended to regard revenge as a moral duty.[59] Bevan feels that in the sixteenth century honorable revenge was not identifiable either with public justice or with the natural biological impulse to retaliate, although it can contain elements of both and especially the last; honorable revenge was neither natural nor civil but part of the revenge code of the gentleman.[60] Revenge deliberately undertaken for honor's sake must never be passionate.[61] Bowers emphasizes that private

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57 Ibid., p. 287.

58 Ibid., p. 284.

59 Prosser, op. cit., p. xii.

60 Loc. cit.

61 Loc. cit.

blood revenge was a very definite Elizabethan problem, one that worsened under James when the influx of Scots caused a rise in the revenge rate: first, because the Scots and the English were each jealous of the places at court; and, second, because the naturally hot-headed Scots were used to the tradition of blood-revenge in their own land.[62] He concludes that there were many forces against private revenge and few for it.[63]

Siegel believes that there was a very real tradition existing for revenge under certain circumstances, and especially of the heir's duty to revenge his father, which he says was tantamount to an unwritten law.[64] He points out that both church and state were trying to overcome the revenge tradition, because personal revenge was seen as a feudal action that undermined the authority of the state.[65] Anything that recalled the feudal system, at this time when nationalism was at its height in England, seemingly was regarded as dangerous.

Campbell writes that revenge was condemned in England in Elizabethan times.[66] Her view is that, although the code of honor

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62 Bowers, op. cit., pp. 17-18.

63 Ibid., p. 18.

64 Siegel, op. cit., p. 101.

65 Loc. cit.

66 Campbell, op. cit., p. 289.

existed, the English tended to see the whole problem from the religious standpoint, a point of view that was certainly being forced upon them from all sides.[67] However, human nature being what it is, not all people would feel bound by religious, moral, or state considerations at all times. Human temperament and specific circumstances would enter into the question as well. And, finally, dramatists played upon the contradiction by presenting revengers with whom the audience would obviously sympathize, but who, in carrying out their revenge, heaped crime upon crime, bringing death and destruction to themselves, their victims, and those around them.[68]

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67 *Loc. cit.*

68 Siegel, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

## CHAPTER II

## PUBLIC REVENGE AND SHAKESPEARE'S HISTORY PLAYS

Elizabethan attitudes toward public revenge seemingly were influenced by several peculiarly Elizabethan concepts -- the concept of order and degree, the divine right of kings, the Tudor concept of history, the idea of ultimate retribution, and the doctrine of passive obedience. A brief consideration of these concepts and ideas is necessary in order to understand the workings of the Elizabethan mind in considering public revenge.

The concept of order and degree depends on the idea of order as opposed to chaos, that is, an orderly world governed by laws of nature and set in motion by God versus a chaotic world.[69] The concept of an orderly world was a basic one for the Elizabethans who continually searched for patterns in all of life, both in the past as far back as the Old Testament and in the present.[70] One facet of order was the Great Chain of Being in which all matter, animate and inanimate alike, was ranged in links or degrees with God at the zenith, his angels in

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69 M. M. Reese, op. cit., p. 111.

70 Eustice M. W. Tillyard, The Elizabethan World Picture, p. 18.

varying ranks below him, continuing down through man, the various orders of animals, birds, fish, finally to dust.[71] A degree was a hierarchy of importance or of value to the world.[72] The degrees of beauty in gems or of nobility in metals (from gold on down to lead) are two examples of how degree was measured.[73] The Book of Genesis in the Bible mentions "each according to its degree" several times.[74] Thus, early church fathers placed particular emphasis on order and degree within God's world, and, thus, the morality plays developed further the idea of man's proper place in the order of the cosmos.[75] Besides God, only men and angels were endowed with reason and, through its use, could break the fundamental order of things.[76] However, one would be extremely foolhardy to do so, for not only would he commit the Luciferian sin of usurping the prerogative of God, but he would risk plunging all of creation into chaos -- a real, whirling confusion of matter from the Elizabethan

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[71] Hardin Craig (ed.), The Complete Works of Shakespeare, p. 10.

[72] George R. Price, Reading Shakespeare's Plays, p. 42.

[73] Ibid., p. 43.

[74] Genesis 1:12, 1:20, and 1:24.

[75] Matthews, op. cit., p. 11.

[76] Price, op. cit., p. 43.

point of view.[77] A man who went beyond his own limited sphere of social rights violated the authority of another; thus, to be ambitious or to take more authority than was rightfully his was to usurp another's rights.[78]

According to the theory of the divine right of kings, God, in establishing world order, set kings over men, and the order of succession must be followed for that was the way God in his wisdom had ordained that things should be.[79] To upset God's order risked chaos. Therefore, any rebellion, that might change the order of succession, was, in effect, a rebellion against God.[80]

With the reign of Henry VII, the Tudor myth and the Tudor concept of history reinforced the idea of fixed order.[81] The Tudor myth was a claim by Henry VII that, besides his Lancastrian descent and his Yorkist marriage, he had a further right to the British throne through the Welsh Owen Tudor and through Cadwallader, a descendant of

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77 Matthews, op. cit., p. 12.

78 Price, op. cit., p. 45.

79 Reese, op. cit., p. 39.

80 Matthews, op. cit., p. 13.

81 Eustice M. W. Tillyard, Shakespeare's History Plays, p. 29.

Arthur.[82] Thus, Henry VII could claim that the old legend, stating that Arthur would bring the rebirth of the Golden Age in England, would come about through his eldest son, Arthur.[83] Later in the century, the English saw in Elizabeth and the Elizabethan Age the reincarnation of Arthur and the Golden Age.[84] The Tudor concept was a deliberate encouragement to the chroniclers to write history favorable to the Tudor kings.[85] Among those who adhered to the Tudor concept were such chroniclers as Polydore Vergil, Sir Thomas More, and Edward Hall, of whom the last was the most significant source for Shakespeare's history plays.[86] Hall made a dramatic pattern of history by pointing out that England's troubles began only after Henry IV had usurped the throne from Richard II.[87] God's vengeance on Henry was postponed until the reign of his grandson, the child King Henry VI, when God allowed France to be lost,

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82 Ibid., p. 30.

83 Reese, op. cit., pp. 44-5.

84 Ibid., p. 45.

85 Loc. cit.

86 Tillyard, Shakespeare's History Plays, pp. 39-40.

87 Reese, op. cit., p. 53.

the civil war to be fought, and Richard III to come to the throne.[88] What Hall actually did was to join English history (favoring the Tudors) and the religious idea of God's punishment for rebellion.[89] The Elizabethans were firm believers in ultimate retribution for sin; a sin would be punished either now or later, but ultimately it would be punished.[90] Such sins as usurpation and regicide demanded great suffering to purge the land and to appease God's wrath.[91] On the popular stage, retribution had been familiar to the English audience for some time in the early religious plays having to do with such tyrants as Herod, Pharaoh, and others.[92] Elizabethans knew that a tyrant visited on the land was to be suffered by the people as punishment for sin.[93] This well-known doctrine of passive obedience to a tyrant was also fostered by the Tudors.[94]

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88 Tillyard, Shakespeare's History Plays, p. 60.

89 Reese, op. cit., p. 52.

90 Ernest A. Strathmann, "Introduction to Richard II," William Shakespeare: The Complete Works, p. 5.

91 Reese, op. cit., p. 53.

92 J. M. R. Margeson, The Origins of English Tragedy, p. 112.

93 Strathmann, op. cit., p. 6.

94 Price, op. cit., p. 46.

Three very good reasons existed for passive obedience to a tyrant. The first one, the suffering as punishment for sin, has already been explained. A second reason was that the tyrant, like all sinners, should have the right to live in order to repent.[95] The opportunity to repent is, in fact, one of the reasons given by the Church for foregoing revenge.[96] Still a third reason was the fact that the only other alternative to passive obedience was usurpation, rebellion, and disorder.[97] Though the Tudors cited all three reasons for the doctrine, their greatest interest lay in the promotion of passive obedience as an alternative to rebellion.[98] Thus, the people were to have constant faith in God's eventual deliverance from a tyrant.[99] They were required to obey passively until God in his own time was pleased to remove the tyrant, sometimes viewed as a scourge of God.[100] To dispose of an evil monarch

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95 Loc. cit.

96 Prosser, op. cit., p. 32.

97 Price, op. cit., p. 47.

98 Tillyard, Shakespeare's History Plays, p. 67.

99 David M. Bevington, Tudor Drama and Politics, p. 157.

100 Price, op. cit., p. 55.

would only lead to God's further punishment of the people.[101] To pray for deliverance and to submit passively were much better than armed rebellion that risked usurpation, regicide, disruption of the order of succession, civil war, and chaos.[103] Having experienced all these upheavals in the recent past, the Elizabethans were not given to ignoring their lessons of history. If his people seemed negligent at all in this respect, the ruling monarch was not above jolting the memory of his subjects.[104] The usual method taken by a monarch to remind his subjects was the homily, a sermon for the popular audience to be delivered from the pulpit on Sunday.[105] The Homily Against Disobedience and Rebellion, published in 1571, was required to be read in all churches, nine times a year during every year of Elizabeth's reign.[106]

All of the foregoing precepts were so imbedded in Elizabethan thought that they are found in the drama of the Age, beginning with the miracle and morality plays and continuing through the drama of

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101 Bevington, op. cit., p. 157.

102 Loc. cit.

103 Price, op. cit., p. 56.

104 Siegel, op. cit., p. 47.

105 Tillyard, Shakespeare's History Plays, p. 65.

106 Siegel, op. cit., p. 47.

Elizabethan-Jacobean times.[107] Rebellion is the archetype of sin, Luciferian in nature; rebellion against God's chosen monarch would result in ultimate retribution, civil war, tyranny, and chaos.[108] Thus, public revenge could not be condoned under any circumstances. This conclusion is a logical step-by-step process and totally justifiable, and yet there is a dissenting point of view, which will be explored later in the discussion of Richard II.

Although Shakespeare's plays make no explicit statements about public revenge (he gives varying points of view on many subjects), yet his condemnation of public revenge is implicit in the plays that deal with usurpation, regicide, and retributory justice.[109] The history plays consist of two tetralogies and two single plays.[110] The first tetralogy composed is actually the second in order of historical event, but the themes used link the historical past of Richard II with the historical present.[111] In examining these history plays, one will not be concerned

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107 Ibid., p. 92.

108 Matthews, op. cit., p. 11.

109 Bertram Joseph, Conscience and the King, p. 45.

110 Ibid., p. 73.

111 Tillyard, Shakespeare's History Plays, p. 234.

with the order of composition but, rather, with the historical order of event; therefore, he will examine Richard II first. In essence, the Richard II-Henry V tetralogy looks forward, the action and portents pointing toward the retribution to follow, whereas the Henry VI-Richard III tetralogy looks backward, the events of the civil war and the chaos in the realm pointing to the early cause, the usurpation of the throne, and the death of Richard II by Henry IV.[112]

Richard II is a portrait of a weak king, who, though not a tyrant, is by no means a good king.[113] A power vacuum exists into which the audience will soon see evil begin to flow, since good (the rightful use of power by a strong king for the good of the state) is absent.[114] In this case, the evil assumes the form of Henry Bolingbroke, who takes over the power that the king, almost willingly, surrenders.[115] It was Richard's duty to govern the state well, and he has not done so, as the imagery of the weed-choked garden reveals:[116]

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112 Loc. cit.

113 Richard G. Moulton, The Moral System of Shakespeare, p. 18.

114 Eleanor H. Hutchens, "The Transfer of Power in King Lear and The Tempest," REL, IV (April 1963), 83.

115 Moulton, op. cit., p. 18.

116 Reese, op. cit., p. 234.

> . . . our firm estate,
> When our sea-walled garden, the whole land,
> Is full of weeds, her fairest flowers choked up,
> Her fruit-trees all unpruned, her hedges ruin'd,
> Her knots disorder'd and her wholesome herbs
> Swarming with caterpillars. . . .[117]
> (III. iv. 42-7)

Since there is no proof of anything further than weakness and a mismanagement of the kingdom and since he is the true king, Richard II cannot be called a tyrant.[118] Elizabethans and Jacobeans distinguished between a weak king who only ruled badly and a tyrant or usurper.[119] God's chosen ruler could not be rejected.[120] In taking the throne of Richard II, Henry Bolingbroke (1) upset order and degree, (2) rebelled against the will of God, (3) set in motion the workings of Divine Providence toward an ultimate retribution for himself and his realm, and (4) opened the way for possible civil war and chaos in the land. The Bishop of Carlisle may be viewed as the oracular voice of the play as he

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117 This and all succeeding quotations from the plays are from Hardin Craig (ed.), The Complete Works of Shakespeare.

118 Tillyard, Shakespeare's History Plays, p. 261.

119 John Sibley, "The Duty of Revenge in Tudor and Stuart Drama," REL, VIII (July, 1967), 48.

120 Craig, (ed.), op. cit., p. 645.

states what will be the outcome of the crowning of Henry IV:

> Car. . . .
> My Lord of Hereford here, whom you call king,
> Is a foul traitor to proud Hereford's king:
> And if you crown him, let me prophesy:
> The blood of English shall manure the ground,
> And future ages groan for this foul act;
> . . .
> O, if you raise this house against this house,
> It will the woefullest division prove
> That ever fell upon this cursed earth.
> Prevent it, resist it, let it not be so,
> Lest child, child's children, cry against
> you 'woe!'
> (IV. i. 134-49)

Revenge comes up more than once in the play. First, John of Gaunt resists revenge when the Duchess of Gloucester, his brother's widow, would have him avenge his brother's death of which Richard is suspect. Gaunt will have none of it. He gives the answer that both church and state would applaud:

> God's is the quarrel; for god's substitute,
> His deputy anointed in his sight,
> Hath caused his death: the which if wrongfully,
> Let heaven revenge; for I may never lift,
> An angry arm against His minister.
> (I. ii. 37-41)

Thus, Shakespeare reveals the view that the audience should take toward the crime of Henry Bolingbroke to be portrayed in the play. And Gaunt has much greater reason to revenge than Bolingbroke ever has throughout the play.

Richard II seems to have as undecided a view on revenge as he has on everything else. He says, "Lament we may, but not revenge thee dead." (I. iii. 58) However, when all the claims of dishonor are being

bandied about by Bolingbroke and Mowbray, Richard sets up a duel for the two. Duels were frowned upon in Elizabeth's time, but would have been common in the historical setting of the play. Then, at the last minute, Richard changes his mind, substituting the banishment instead of the duel. In the end, however, in not allowing the duel, Richard agrees with the attitude of church and state in Elizabethan-Jacobean times.

Aumerle, cousin to both Bolingbroke and King Richard, has sympathies that lie with the king, and, on hearing of the usurpation, he plans a counterplot to overthrow Henry IV. The plot is not referred to in terms of revenge, but it must be considered as such, since York mentions later that Aumerle is lost for having been Richard's friend. (V. ii. 42-6) Therefore, Aumerle's plot must be seen as a revenge for the usurpation of the throne and for the dishonor that his friend, the King, has suffered. It cannot be seen as revenge for the death of a friend or as revenge for a regicide, since the death of Richard has apparently not yet come to light in the play. When Aumerle confesses, knowing that the king will find out about the plot as soon as Aumerle's father arrives, Henry's first impulse is to draw a dagger against Aumerle. But he holds back his anger and listens to Aumerle, to the Duchess, and to the Duke as each pleads his case before him. Moved by the sight of his aunt on her knees pleading for the life of her son, Henry IV utters the ambiguous words, "I pardon him, as God shall pardon me." Presumably, he means that the fact of his extending mercy to Aumerle would be in his favor when he came to beg God's mercy for his

crime of rebellion and usurpation.

Until the time of the regicide, Henry's and Aumerle's respective crimes were not too different, and, perhaps, Henry was right to think that God would extend him mercy as he had Aumerle. In the eyes of the church, at least, the fact of Aumerle's having considered the rebellion was tantamount to the crime for had not Christ said that if a man merely lusted over a woman, he was, in fact, as guilty as if he had committed the adultery? Thus, at the point in the play in which Henry makes the ambiguous remark of pardon to Aumerle, Henry and Aumerle are to be considered equally guilty. It is the regicide that, later, makes Henry the guiltier of the two. Had Aumerle rebelled after the regicide, would it have been a sin and a crime or an heroic act? Opinions differ on this question.

The opinion of John Sibley is representative of a minority who feel it would have been looked on as an heroic act to rebel against a tyrant. Sibley points out that a poor ruler, even one with a weak title, was to be obeyed.[121] Therefore, Sibley would not, presumably, see the regicide of Richard II as an heroic act, but the case of Henry IV would differ. Pointing out that tyrant often meant usurper at that time (and in the history plays of Shakespeare it does), Sibley refers to two important documents of the period, the Papal Bull Regnans in Excelsis (1570), which deposed Queen Elizabeth and released all good Catholics

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121 Sibley, op. cit., p. 48.

from allegiance to her, and the Bond of Association Act (1585), which was passed by Parliament after three uprisings caused by the Papal Bull's being released.[122] According to this act, any usurper successful against Elizabeth was to be turned upon by the whole populace, and a provisional government would be set up:

> . . . we . . . wil . . . withstand, pursue, and offend, as well by force of arms as by all other means of revenge all manner of persons of whatsoever estate that they be . . . whereby any that have, may, or shall pretend title to this crown . . . that the same may be avenged . . . but do also further vow . . . to prosecute such person or persons to death with our joint and particular force, and to act the utmost revenge upon them that . . . we or any of us can devise. . . .[123]

Of course, no such act existed in the historical period of Richard II. If the Elizabethan audience saw the play in light of the present times, and they often did, a revenger of the rebellion and regicide of Henry IV would have been, according to the state and the state-established church, totally justified.[124] Thus, Sibley feels

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122 Ibid., pp. 49-50

123 Ibid., p. 51.

124 Reese, op. cit., p. 39.

that acts of public revenge were justified against an usurper.[125]

On the other hand, Tillyard, Reese, Rossiter, Bevington, and others feel that all actual possessors of the throne, even assassins or usurpers, were to be suffered in patient obedience by trusting to God to right the wrong. They point to the fact that a scourge of God (and a tyrant was often seen as such) was to be suffered for sins against God. Furthermore, the Elizabethans saw anything to be preferable to civil war and chaos. The homily on obedience also seems to have stressed the above two facts. However, two conflicting viewpoints may have existed, i.e., the Bond of Association viewpoint and the homily on obedience viewpoint. Since more Elizabethans would have been familiar with the homily on obedience, because of greater access to it and its repetitious nature (nine times a year!), it seems the homily would hold greater significance. Another view is that the Bond of Association Act applied only to Elizabeth, and it named the Queen therein. Thus, one cannot see how this act could be applied to any of the plays. Since the act could not be applied to any monarch in the plays, the viewpoint of the homilies must hold for the plays. According to the homilies (and the divine right of kings rests therein), then, one must say that Aumerle was guilty of sin and crime, as was Henry IV, upon whose descendants God's wrath falls in the history plays of Shakespeare. The punishment in Shakespeare's plays is that the kings thus guilty either

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125 Ibid., p. 57.

fall immediately, as in Macbeth, or their dynasties fall when their grandchildren come to the throne, as in the histories.[126] The dynasty of Henry IV is overthrown in the reign of Henry VI as the Bishop of Carlisle and, later, Queen Margaret prophesy.

Throughout the Henry IV plays, Henry is pictured coping with his two major problems, the problem of further rebellion and the problem of his madcap son, Prince Hal, both of which he attributes to punishment from God for his usurpation and regicide. In this play, the audience is shown how the wrath of God could punish the land, for the rebels plan to partition the realm in three ways. But the vengeance of God is reserved for later, the rebellion is quelled, and the wayward prince shows his father and all others that he was only biding his time and learning about his subjects. Hotspur's revengeful rebellion ends, properly, with his death at the hands of Prince Hal, for which Falstaff, characteristically, takes the credit. At his death, Henry IV warns Prince Hal to keep the people busy with foreign wars so that no one will have time to remember the usurpation.

Only three minor scenes from Henry V are of interest to this paper. One is the assassination plot discovered by Henry V. The King says, "Touching our person seek we no revenge," but then he adds that, for the safety of the kingdom, the law must deal with the would-be assassins. All three ask God and the King to pardon them, and all three

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126 Loc. cit.

profess joy that the plot did not have a chance to go into effect. Another item of interest in the play is the prayer scene before Agincourt in which one sees that Henry V has, as had his father before him, a guilty feeling about the usurpation and regicide. Henry prays:

> . . . . Not today, O Lord,
> O, not today, think not upon the fault
> My father made in compassing the crown!
> I Richard's body have interred anew;
> And on it have bestowed more contrite tears
> Than from it issued drops of blood:
> (IV. i. 309-14)

One other noteworthy speech is the Archbishop of Canterbury's speech on keeping one's place within the kingdom and, like the bees, bending all the efforts of those within the kingdom toward the winning of the war. The speech depends on order and degree for its meaning within the play. (I. ii. 183-204)

In the Henry VI plays, the theme of order versus the dissension and the chaos of civil war begins. In Act II of Part I, Richard Plantagenet learns that his father, who had been involved with Aumerle against Henry IV and had lost his dukedom and died in disgrace, was not really a traitor. Instead, the real traitor was Henry IV, whose grandson is now on the throne, while Plantagenet is rightfully the Duke of York and the only true heir to the throne of Richard II. He brings it to the attention of Henry VI, who promptly restores to him the properties and title of Duke of York and promises him that if Richard, Duke of York, gives his allegiance to the king during his lifetime, then the king will promise him the crown at his death, and York agrees. By the end of Part

One, all that was won at Agincourt has been lost on the field of Bordeaux, and Margaret and Suffolk oppose the intrigue of York, who is having second thoughts about having to wait for a crown that is his by right. As the play ends, both York and King Henry VI are racing to Parliament, each wishing to have the support of the lords at Parliament for his claim to the throne. Each calls the other "usurper".

In 3 Henry VI, Shakespeare portrays the disorder and chaos of civil war, during which King Henry, the Prince of Wales, the Duke of York, his young son, Rutland, and nine powerful nobles are all killed. Edward, eldest son of the Duke of York, proclaims himself King Edward IV after killing the young Prince of Wales. He now mounts the throne, having committed usurpation and regicide to get it. Shakespeare has thus shown his audience that, because Henry IV usurped the throne and committed regicide, his dynasty fell with the grandson amid the chaos of a kingdom at civil war. But another usurper is on the throne and must get his due. Shakespeare pictures the fall of Edward IV in the next play, Richard III.

In the bloody bath of the time of crooked-backed, crooked-minded Richard III, brother to Edward IV, almost the entire royal family is massacred. The play has Senecan elements with its portentuous curses and prophesies, its revenge plots and nemesis theme.[127] It was in the middle of 3 Henry VI that Shakespeare had begun to portray Richard's villainous plotting. In Richard III, his imagery is diabolic, and

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127 Craig, op. cit., p. 300.

Richard even refers to himself in terms of the old Vice character. (III. i. 81-3) He is a Machiavellian-type absolute villain and the doom of the House of York.[128] Richard also becomes a usurper and a regicide. Thus, a vicious circle of usurpation and regicide culminating in Richard, has been formed with each one worse than the other.

Since Edward IV dies a normal death, the throne is not usurped from Edward. Rather, Richard has, prior to Edward's death, eliminated the remaining older brother, the Duke of Clarence, who stood between Richard and the throne. In 3 Henry VI, Richard had been the killer of Henry VI, and he had had a part in the killing of the young Prince of Wales. Immediately after he takes possession of the throne, he arranges for the murder of the young true King, Edward's son, and his small brother, the Prince. Without telling precisely what has happened to him, Shakespeare leaves no doubt that Richard has had something to do with the disappearance and possible death of Clarence's son, Ned Plantagenet. (IV. iii. 30 and IV. iv. 146-7) All of those mentioned were possible successors to the throne before Richard. So there is little doubt that Richard is also usurper and regicide. He is a tyrant in both senses of the word, for he has usurped and, in all, has killed eleven, and possibly twelve people, on his way to the throne and afterward.

Tillyard thinks that the cause of Edward's downfall is his

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128 Ibid., p. 301.

weakness for women.[129] It is clear, however, that Edward IV, in striking the first blow with his sword, is directly responsible for the death of the Prince of Wales and that he has guilt in the death of Henry VI. Like Henry IV before him, the guilt lies with Edward, though neither is the perpetrator of the deed, for neither issued direct orders for the safe-keeping of the king in the Tower. If Shakespeare had not wanted the audience to think of Edward as an usurper and regicide, he would have omitted the Lancastrian references to him as an usurper, and he would not have shown Edward striking the first blow with his sword against the Prince of Wales. No sympathy is ever shown by Shakespeare for Edward IV, in his accession, his courtship, or his rule, although he is regal.[130] God's vengeance on Edward IV is the illness and early death, and his succession is broken when his issue are killed before the Coronation takes place. Thus, both Edward IV and Richard III are guilty of the same crimes as Henry IV, and they must fall. Shakespeare portrays a vicious circle of usurpation and regicide.

When Richard III says, "Our strong arms be our conscience, our swords our law," the Elizabethan audience knew he was a tyrant, for he was defying all their ideals of Christian rule.[131] A tyrant acts through his

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129 Tillyard, Shakespeare's History Plays, p. 198

130 Matthews, op. cit., p. 22.

131 Reese, op. cit., p. 129.

own emotions for his own selfish purposes and not through reason for the good of the realm.[132] In thinking only of his evil passions a tyrant disrupts order, putting down good and promoting the wicked, disunifying and weakening the kingdom.[133] Richard III is a tyrant, and the English saw the accession of a tyrant as a visitation of God's wrath on a nation for its sins.[134]

Moreover, it is possible to see Henry of Richmond, at whose hands Richard III meets his doom, as a scourge and minister of God's justice. Unless he is viewed in such light, it is difficult to justify Shakespeare's treatment of Henry of Richmond, later to become Henry VII, for Richmond seemingly usurps the throne from Richard II and is the agent for the death of Richard. (V. v) "The concept of the scourge of God was used to explain the paradox that Divine Providence operates even when evil appears to triumph."[135] This is particularly true of war as a tool of God's vengeance, as a purging of the land, and as a visitation of God's justice.[136] Within the play are two hints that Richmond and his part in

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132 Siegel, op. cit., p. 50.

133 Ibid., p. 51.

134 Bevington, op. cit., p. 157.

135 Prosser, op. cit., p. 200.

136 Loc. cit.

the war fulfill this role. The first is in the prayer of Richmond the night before he engages Richard in battle:

> . . .
> O Thou, whose captain I account myself
> Look on my forces with a gracious eye;
> Put in their hands thye bruising irons of wrath,
> That they may crush down with a heavy fall
> The usurping helmets of our adversaries!
> Make us the ministers of chastisement,
> That we may praise thee in the victory!
> (V. iii. 108-14)

The second indication is in the same scene on the next morning after Richard has endured the visitation of the ghosts who cursed him one after another. Richard's oration to his soldiers before battle includes the following:

> . . . yet remember this,
> God and our good cause fight upon our side;
> The prayers of holy saints and wronged souls,
> Like high-reared bulwarks stand before our faces;
> Richard except, those whom we fight against
> Had rather have us win than him they follow:
> For what is he they follow? truly, gentlemen,
> A bloody tyrant and a homicide;
> One raised in blood, and one in blood established;
> One that made means to come by what he hath,
> And slaughter'd those that were the means to help him;
> A base foul stone, made precious by the foil
> Of England's chair, where he is falsely set;
> One that hath ever been God's enemy;
> Then if you fight against God's enemy,
> God will in justice ward you as his soldiers;
> If you do sweat to put a tyrant down,
> You sleep in peace, the tyrant being slain;
> . . .
> Then, in the name of God and all these rights,
> Advance your standards, draw your willing swords.
> (V. iii. 239-64)

Shakespeare makes use of the Elizabethan view that God will

intervene on behalf of a care-laden populace.[137] God could intervene by using an evil man, one already damned, as scourge, but a scourge and minister called for another type, a man who not only punished, but who also had the right motives and used the correct methods.[138] A minister of God must not combat because of an urge to kill but, rather, as a minister to execute God's divine will.[139] Shakespeare clearly indicates Richmond's intentions to be those of a scourge and minister.

King John and Richard II are very much alike in story and in themes. Shakespeare presents in King John an extreme example of a situation in which rebellion might, if ever, be justified.[140] John is an usurping king, and various characters in the play call him usurper in several places. Moreover, King John is a tyrant in a second way. He is a cruel king who rules far worse than did the wasteful Richard II. John subverts what is for the good of the kingdom to his personal passions. As Salisbury says, "The king hath dispossess'd himself of us." (IV. ii. 23) The Bastard Falcounbridge is a marvelous picture of a man who is king in all but legitimacy. He would be far better on the throne of England than King John.

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137 Reese, op. cit., p. 212.

138 Loc. cit.

139 Loc. cit.

140 Ibid., p. 275.

The king orders that the child in the Tower, his own half-brother, Arthur, be killed. The keeper has mercy and does not kill him but tells the king that the boy is dead. Later, the lad falls from the Tower while trying to escape. There is an uproar. The nobles immediately suspect John of having the boy murdered, and they leave to fight for the other side. To kill a child was a terrible thing, far worse than anything else a man could do in that time.[141]

The Bastard is faced with the problem of whether to follow the nobles into rebellion against all his standards of loyal service to his king and to his country or whether to continue to serve this king and his country, overlooking the terrible crime of the murder of the young child, who had a right to the throne. He doubts only for the space of a few lines, and he makes his decision quickly. It is better to serve such a king than to rebel, and he will hope that God will turn the king to repentance.[142] Because he makes the right decision, the kingdom is saved and does not fall to the French.[143]

As William Ames wrote in Conscience With the Power and Cases Thereof (1643):

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141 Ibid., p. 264.

142 Tillyard, Shakespeare's History Plays, p. 225.

143 Ibid., p. 226.

> "Publike Revenge, whether it be executed by a Magistrate or sought by a private man, if it proceed out of Envy, Hatred, thirst of blood or Cruelty, or if by any other meanes it be tainted in the impulsiue, formall, or finall cause, doth in that respect become private and unlawful."[144]

Thus, in the history plays, Shakespeare pictures public revenge used properly (by a minister of God's justice) as well as wrongfully used.

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144 Quoted in Bowers, Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy, pp. 201-2.

## CHAPTER III

## PUBLIC REVENGE IN OTHER SHAKESPEAREAN PLAYS

Public revenge occurs in Shakespearean plays other than the history plays. It is almost impossible to separate the two types of revenge, public and private, by saying that this is a play of public revenge and that of private revenge. The two are often intermingled and the two motives are so interwoven at times, as with Hamlet, for instance, that much thought is required to separate the two. King Lear, for example, has been placed in both the chapter on private revenge and this present chapter on public revenge, which could obviously have been done with some of the history plays. However, public revenge as a main theme is found in Macbeth, King Lear, Julius Caesar, and The Tempest, to be discussed here.

Macbeth was written around 1606 for King James and is filled with matters that would be in accord with James' beliefs.[145] The Scottish theme, the witches three, the reference to the royal touch, the union of Scotland and England, and the inclusion of Fleance, son of Banquo from whom James claimed descent, are all in the play for the

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145 Craig, op. cit., p. 1043.

pleasing of James.[146]

Macbeth is the possessor of great virtue and has won much honor in battle for his country. Duncan, the king, has just made him Thane of Cawdor, but Macbeth cannot forget the promise that the three weird sisters have made -- i.e., that he will be king. No sooner is he proclaimed Thane of Cawdor than he is, within the space of twenty lines in the play, thinking about becoming king. The sin of ambition is within both Macbeth and, as is seen later, Lady Macbeth. Usurpation and regicide are in his thoughts before he ever arrives home, as his letter to Lady Macbeth attests. The witches were popularly supposed to be from the devil, and it is obvious that Shakespeare stresses this fact when Macbeth encounters them for the second time. (IV. i) Therefore, Macbeth, in satisfying his sin of ambition, is dealing with the powers of darkness, and he does the deed of his own free will.[147]

Furthermore, Shakespeare stresses Duncan to be a great and virtuous king. The best speech, relative to Duncan's virtues, comes from Macbeth himself when he is planning the murder. (I. vii. 12-28) Moreover, at the same time, he speaks of the double trust that he will break if he murders Duncan that night. The first trust is that Macbeth is both kinsman and subject to Duncan. The second trust is that Duncan lies under Macbeth's roof that night, and he, thus, has all the

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146 Loc. cit.

147 Brents Stirling, "The Unity of Macbeth," SQ, IV (October, 1953), 386.

obligations of host to him. He says he stands "as his host/ Who should against his murderer shut the door,/ Not bear the knife myself." Yet, he continues with the plan.

Malcolm, who is to effect a public revenge by the end of the play, can only think that he and his brother, Donalbain, should flee. Shakespeare's audience would have seen an analogy here with the play, Richard III, wherein, when the tyrant Richard was on the throne, Henry of Richmond fled to the court of Brittany.[148] In England with Macduff, Malcolm vows revenge and says Macbeth is ripe for God's vengeance. (IV. iii. 216 and 237-9) Both Malcolm and Macduff, though they have private revenges for the deaths of the members of their families, place public revenge over that of private revenge. Macduff speaks, thus:

> . . . each new morn
> New widows howl, new orphans cry, new sorrows
> Strike heaven on the face, that it resounds
> As if it felt with Scotland and yell'd out
> Like syllable of dolour.
> (IV. ii. 4-8)

and Malcolm, somewhat later, states:

> . . . What I am truly,
> Is Thine and my poor country's to command:
> (IV. ii. 131-2)

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148 Tillyard, Shakespeare's History Plays, p. 316.

Lennox and other lords are beginning to refer to Macbeth as tyrant (usurper), and Macbeth's next act, the killing of Macduff's wife and children, marks him as a dread tyrant. Herod, most dreadful of all tyrants, had killed babies, and Elizabethans were familiar with Herod through the miracle plays.[149] Thus, when Richard III and Macbeth killed infants and children, Elizabethan-Jacobean audiences knew that they were villains among villains. Hence, Macbeth reinforces Shakespeare's earlier statement in the tetralogies about public revenge. Malcolm is a minister of God's justice with the purpose of executing God's will to rid the land of a tyrant. Matthews sees Malcolm as "saviour prince" (i.e., minister of God's justice) and thinks this function of Malcolm may be the reason that Macduff, and not Malcolm, is the slayer of Macbeth.[150]

There also is an example of public revenge in King Lear. When Cordelia and her husband, the King of France, enter England to fight against the forces of Cornwall and Edmund, they have no foreign conquest motive. At the end of the play, the King of France, in spite of the fact that Cordelia is now dead and he might conceivably have changed his mind, turns the land back to the English survivors, Edgar and Kent. Kent is close to death, so the audience would have seen Edgar as successor to the throne of Lear.

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149 Matthews, op. cit., p. 37.

150 Loc. cit.

Thus, the role of scourge and minister must be assigned to Cordelia and the King of France, as well. Shakespeare does not emphasize such an interpretation in the play, but France's intentions can only be referred to as sublime. A war visited upon England in the hope of saving it from Edmund, from the two evil daughters of Lear, and from Cornwall, all usurpers of more power than was granted to them and all to be viewed as possible evil tyrants, would be called a scourge upon the land. Then, too, the usurpers become regicides in that they have turned the King out to wander in the wilds during a tempest that weakened him so that the final blow, the death of Cordelia at their hands, fells him. Therefore, the King of France must be viewed as a scourge and minister in his use of public revenge.

One of the first things that Shakespeare reveals in Julius Caesar is that Caesar is a usurper and a regicide. When the townspeople would welcome Caesar home, the tribune, Marullus, upbraids them, saying,

> You blocks, you stones, you worse than senseless
> things!
> O you hard hearts, you cruel men of Rome,
> Knew you not Pompey? . . .
> And do you now put on your best attire?
> And do you now cull out a holiday?
> And do you now strew flowers in his way?
> That comes in triumph over Pompey's blood?
> (I. i. 39-41 and 53-6)

It is seen that, unlike other emperors of Rome, who have obtained glory by means of conquests or battles with foreigners, Julius Caesar has

triumphed over Pompey, another Roman.[151] Since the battle involved Roman against Roman, Marullus says that there should be no rejoicing. Caesar's scheme to have himself crowned would have reminded the Elizabethan audience of the similar scheme of Richard III.[152]

Moreover, the play goes on to state other things that are wrong with Caesar. He puts himself above others who, in the Republic of Rome, should be equals. Also, Caesar refers to himself as Caesar in the way that royalty is prone to do.[153] Ambition is, thus, seen to be the great failing of Caesar to whom the cheers of the populace are indeed sweet. Caesar has weaknesses and illnesses, as well. He cannot swim across the Tiber as can Cassius. His residence in Spain is marred by the "fever" during which his courage in the face of illness left something to be desired. He has epilepsy, and he is deaf in one ear. All these physical weaknesses also point to the possibility of moral weaknesses in Caesar.

In the play there is a storm such as Shakespeare also uses in King Lear and Macbeth.[154] The storm in Macbeth, particularly, is like

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151 Craig, op. cit., p. 773 fn.

152 S. F. Johnson, "Introduction to Julius Caesar," William Shakespeare: The Complete Works, p. 895.

153 Maurice Charney, Shakespeare's Roman Plays, p. 70.

154 Ibid., p. 73.

that of Julius Caesar for both are terrifying events such as men have not seen the like of in their lifetime, and both are full of portents.[155] Of this one Casca says,

> . . . O Cicero,
> I have seen such tempests . . .
> But never till tonight, never till now,
> Did I go through a tempest dropping fire,
> Either there is civil strife in heaven,
> Or else the world, too saucy with the gods,
> Incenses them to send destruction.
> (I. iii. 4-5; 9-13)

Cassius is the type that, far from being frightened by the storm, is exhilarated by it, but Casca says, "It is the part of men to fear and tremble,/ When the most mighty gods by token send/ Such dreadful heralds to astonish us." The storm is also significant of the dark plans being laid that night. Pompey's porch, aptly enough, is to be the conspirators' meeting-place that night. At the meeting, they decide to murder only Caesar, to make of Caesar a sacrifice and not a butchery, and to do it "boldly, but not wrathfully," -- in other words, with the correct sacrificial attitude. They will proclaim the deed necessary because of Caesar's ambition and not because of any envy on their part, so that they will be called "purgers, and not murderers".

However, they are called murderers. Shakespeare portrays the mob as easily swayed by either orator. None of the mob blames the conspirators until Mark Antony's speech implies they should. Caius

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155 Loc. cit.

Ligarius, for instance, "bears it hard" that Caesar has ". . . rated him well for speaking of Pompey." Metullus Cimber's brother has been banished by Caesar, and Caesar's mind will not be changed. If Caesar recognizes Cassius as a "lean and hungry" individual, it must be that he reads a sort of envy in his face. But, with the deed done, it takes Mark Antony to point out these things to the crowd. Mobs must be led to begin with, but, once incited, a mob has a mind of its own. In Cade's rebellion, 2 Henry VI, Shakespeare had shown his audience the absurdity and danger of mob rule. The mob is, of course, ruled by passion. In Julius Caesar, the mob is shown in as bad a light, for, here, the citizens of Rome are seen dragging off Cinna the Poet, though he explains that he is not the Cinna who is one of the conspirators. "No matter," says one of the mob, "his name's the same. Pluck but his name out of his heart." "Tear him, tear him!" cries another. Shakespeare, like others of his time, seemed to abhor mob violence.

Mark Antony says, "Brutus is an honourable man;/ So are they all, all honourable men--." The implication is that Brutus is mistaken about Caeser's ambition and that, really, no one is honorable at all in this deed. The mob moves off to find the conspirators, and Mark Antony calls for revenge over the body of Caesar:

> And Caesar's spirit, ranging for revenge,
> With Ate by his side, come hot from hell,
> Shall in these confines with a monarch's voice
> Cry 'Havoc,' and let slip the dogs of war;
> That this foul deed shall smell above the earth
> With carrion men groaning for burial.
> (III. i. 270-5)

The citizens, too, call for revenge, and they run the conspirators out of town. Thus, the regicide of Caesar and the curse of Mark Antony again bring Rome to civil war where Roman fights Roman. The bathing in the blood of Caesar is symbolic of the bloody war brought to Romans by the killing of Caesar. Public revenge, regicide, and civil war are all interwoven in Shakespeare.

Brutus knew that the conspirators would be called upon to give up their lives for having murdered Caesar. Both he and Cassius are willing to sacrifice themselves to insure that Romans will be free from tyranny:

> Bru. Fates, we will know your pleasures:
> That we shall die, we know; 'tis but the time
> And drawing the days out, that men stand upon.
>
> Cas. Why, he that cuts off twenty years of life
> Cuts off so many years of fearing death.
> (III. i. 98-102)

Both Cassius and Brutus call for the gods' vengeance on Cassius. Shakespeare puts these speeches in the quarrel of Cassius and Brutus over trifling affairs, but they may be seen as appropriate for the larger context of Caesar's murder as well. Brutus cries,

> . . .
> Be ready, gods, with all your thunderbolts;
> Dash him to pieces!
> (IV. iii. 81-2)

Just fifteen lines later Cassius himself taunts the gods:

> Come, Antony and young Octavius, come.

> Revenge yourselves alone on Cassius,
> For Cassius is aweary of the world;
> Hated by one he loves; . . . .
> (IV. iii. 93-6)

The gods do use their thunderbolts on Cassius, for he is the first of the conspirators to die. His death is by his own hand and by the same sword that killed Caesar. As he dies, Cassius calls out, "Caesar, thou art revenged." One after another, the conspirators are either suicides or casualties at the hands of the opposing forces. At the end Brutus also contrives a suicide so that he will not give honor to any other man by his death at that man's hands. However, Shakespeare had Brutus debate with himself to some extent before using suicide. Brutus is the only Roman in the play who seems to find something as shameful in suicide as in falling at the hands of the enemy. But, then, Shakespeare also made him the only one of the conspirators who demurred at all in the death of Caesar.

Hence, it is seen that Shakespeare shows, once again, that tyranny is better suffered than the horror of regicide and civil war, for these occurrences solve nothing. In Shakespeare rebellion, regicide, and civil war are always, solutions that are worse than the problem. Brutus was as honorable a man as may be found in humankind, yet no man can so order events as to stave off civil war. The ordering of events, the Renaissance knew, is God's domain, as is the removing of tyrants from the throne. God shapes the patterning of events toward civil war for punishment to man for usurping His power over the occupancy of his earthly throne.

In only a few cases does Shakespeare allow the one who commits regicide to live. One is Henry of Richmond, later Henry VII, who was not only the grandfather of Queen Elizabeth, but also too recent a king for Shakespeare to portray him in any way other than he did. Another case occurs in King Lear when the King of France gave aid as a man interested only in good and did not gain in any way from the regicide. In these two instances, the role of scourge and minister of God's justice was assigned to these men. Finally, Malcolm, in Macbeth, since he was James I's ancestor, could not be portrayed in any other way than as scourge and minister. However, it is significant that MacDuff, not Malcolm, kills the previous occupant of the throne. Thus, Malcolm is saved from the taint of regicide.

Shakespeare shows in The Tempest an instance wherein the usurped ruler forsakes an opportunity for revenge in favor of all concerned living happily ever after. The Tempest, as a romance, lends itself more to this sort of ending, whereas the tragedies do not. Prospero, the king of the island, is bent on vengeance from the beginning to the end.[156] Prior to the action of the play, Prospero is usurped by his brother in league with the King of Naples. Many years later, Prospero uses his magic and sorcery to put the usurpers in his power; then, by the same means, he wills love between his daughter and the son of the King of Naples. When the King of Naples shows repentance, Prospero is willing to forgive and live in amity

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156 John P. Cutts, Rich and Strange, p. 87.

afterwards. He says:

> "Yet, with my nobler reason 'gainst my fury
> Do I take part: the rarer action is
> In virtue than in vengeance: they being penitent,
> The sole drift of my purpose doth extend
> Not a frown further."

He requires only the return of his dukedom, which Alonzo offers immediately, as he requests pardon for his wrongs. To his brother, Prospero extends the same forgiveness, probably because of the fraternal relationship, although the brother neither requests pardon nor mentions repentance. However, the romance by its very nature requires the happy ending, and Shakespeare complies.[157]

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157 Ibid., p. 102

## CHAPTER IV

## PRIVATE REVENGE IN SHAKESPEARE

Shakespeare depicts private revenge in the same way that he does public revenge. The one who revenges for private wrongs is setting himself against the command of God and must pay for it with his life. Opportunities are given for the assigning of the wronged one's vengeance to God. God's vengeance falls on the revenger, when he forgets the Biblical injunction, "'Vengeance is Mine,' saith the Lord." Often not only the revenger, but also many innocent characters in the play die during the course of action.

Titus Andronicus cannot be called a characteristically Shakespearean treatment of the subject; but, as a typical revenge play assigned to Shakespeare, it will be treated here. If it is Shakespeare's, it must be remembered that it is very likely his first attempt at a tragedy.[158] He probably chose the revenge tragedy because of its extreme popularity at the time. The play is Kydian and Marlovian in certain aspects -- in the characters of Andronicus, Tamora and Aaron, for instance.[159]

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158 Craig, op. cit., p. 366.

159 Ibid., p. 367.

The play depicts a snowballing of revenges. Titus is the first one in the play to revenge -- not the first to call for revenge, but the first one to accomplish it. He kills his own son, Mutius, for dishonoring him. Then, he almost denies the boy burial, but is finally persuaded by his last three remaining sons -- out of twenty-five, twenty-two are now dead -- to give the boy a place in the family tomb. In the same scene (I. i), Titus offers Tamora's son for sacrifice to appease the gods, appoints as emperor a man who immediately turns on him, saying that he will never again trust Titus or any of his brood, and upbraids his other sons and his brother for having dishonored him. In addition, the Emperor Saturninus, in revenge for the loss of Lavinia, makes Tamora, the captured evil queen of the Goths, Empress of Rome, and she swears revenge on Titus for his having sacrificed her eldest son. The scene sets the stage for the play and is the only scene in the first act. All the characters are introduced in this first scene except Aaron, who is the object of the queen's lust and enters the play in the opening of Act II.

In the play, Aaron, Tamora, her two sons, Chiron and Demetrius, and the Emperor, Saturninus, are all members of the faction opposing Titus and revenging themselves on him in the first half of the play. Tamora later becomes Revenge personified, and her two sons become Rape and Murder personified. Thus, Shakespeare shows murder and rape to be direct descendants of revenge.[160] All three are also lust figures.

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160 A. C. Hamilton, "Titus Andronicus: The Form of Shakespearean Tragedy," SQ, XIV (Spring, 1963), 211.

Aaron becomes a devil figure or a Vice character. By the end of the play, Revenge is revenged, Murder is murdered, and Rape is mutilated.[161] For the death of Alarbus, first-born of Tamora, Demetrius invokes "the self-same gods that arm'd the Queen of Troy/ With opportunity of sharp revenge . . . ." Hamilton points out that Titus destroys the bonds of family in slaying his own son, the laws of society in denying Lavinia's betrothal to Bassanius, the order of the state in denying pure election and freedom of choice, and divine law when, like Creon, he refuses to bury the dead.[162] Titus' misfortunes all stem from this stern inflexibility which causes him to ignore the just arguments of Tamora, his brother, and his sons.[163]

Tamora's revenge, in which both her sons and Aaron take an active part, consists of the rape and mutilation of Titus' daughter, Lavinia, the killing of Bassanius, the killing of Titus' two sons, Quintus and Martius, ostensibly for Bassanius' murder, the banishment of Titus' one remaining son, Lucius, and the loss of Titus' hand. By III. i, Titus has reached bottom, and he laughs in madness. For the first time, he now vows revenge. Lucius has been banished and leaves

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161 Ibid., p. 207.

162 Ibid., p. 208.

163 Gustav Cross, "Introduction to Titus Andronicus," William Shakespeare: The Complete Works, pp. 823-4.

to go to the Goths to raise an army to aid him against Saturninus. At this point, the question arises whether Lucius is a public or private revenger. It is almost unresolved, but at the end of the play when Lucius kills Saturninus, he states that it is because Saturninus has killed his father. Thus, a private revenge motive must be assigned to Lucius.

Both Titus and Marcus, his brother, call to the gods for vengeance again when they find out that Tamora's two sons are Lavinia's rapist-mutilators. Titus says, "Ruler of the mighty heavens, art thou so slow to see and hear the crimes that are committed?" (IV. i. 81-2) This time, all three kneel and swear revenge by the gods. At the end of the scene, Marcus, left on stage alone, cries out for God's vengeance on their enemies:

> O heavens, can you hear a good man groan,
> And not relent, or not compassion him?
> Marcus, attend him in his ecstasy,
> That hath more scars of sorrow in his heart
> Than foemen's marks upon his batter'd shield;
> But yet so just that he will not revenge.
> Revenge, ye heavens, for old Andronicus!
> (IV. i. 124-30)

Four times in IV. i., the Andronici faction are seen crying to the heavens to revenge their wrongs.

It is soon apparent that most of the gods have ignored the Andronici. Only Pluto has answered. He sends word that, if Titus wishes Revenge from hell, he shall have it. They also learn that Justice is neither on earth nor in hell; Justice resides in heaven. Therefore, if Titus wants Justice, he will have to wait patiently. (Patience,

according to the Elizabethans, was the opposite of revenge.)[164] Since Justice is in heaven, Titus decides that he will "solicit heaven to move the gods/ To send down Justice for to wreak our wrongs." They write letters to Jove, Mars, Apollo, and Mercury but not to Saturn, since he is Saturninus' god. They shoot the letters to heaven by means of arrows. In the next scene, Saturninus' men have brought the letters to him, and he is incensed with the Andronici faction. On the heels of this discovery comes the news that Lucius and an army of Goths is heading toward Rome. Saturninus sees Lucius as a real threat for the people like Lucius and resent his banishment. Tamora and her two sons at this time disguise themselves as Revenge, Murder and Rape and visit Titus to ask that Titus invite Lucius to his home to "parle" with Saturninus. Titus recognizes the three, and, pretending to go along with Tamora's scheme, asks that she leave Murder and Rape with him while she goes back to the emperor to get him to come to parle. While she is gone, Titus, Marcus, and Lavinia cut the throats of Chiron and Demetrius, grind their bones, using this mixture with their blood to make a paste, and cook their flesh in pasties. When Tamora and Saturninus arrive, they are served Tamora's sons and then told what they have eaten. Then, Titus kills Lavinia and Tamora, too. Immediately, Saturninus kills Titus for murdering Tamora and Lavinia, and Lucius, having come in, kills Saturninus for killing Titus. Lucius, as the new emperor, young Lucius, and Marcus remain. Lucius

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164 Bevington, op. cit., p. 101.

pronounces the death sentence on Aaron, the only remaining member of the faction under Tamora. The sentencing is a visitation of justice, not further revenge.

Titus Andronicus seems to be totally unlike Shakespeare in that it has no moral structure, but is only a series of revenges.[165] In its resolution, there is no self-knowledge and no increased understanding of the human condition.[166] Lack of a moral reference detracts from its use within this study, but it has been included as an example of Shakespeare's revenge tragedy. It may be seen as an example of the result of choosing revenge over patience and the justice of heaven. God's vengeance is visited upon Titus, upon Tamora, upon Aaron, and upon Tamora's two sons by the end of the play. In other words, on all who have revenged, except for Lucius, the gods have taken vengeance. The weakness of the play lies in the playwright's leaving Lucius alive without sufficient justification. There is no forgiveness to account for the author's having done so as there is with The Tempest, nor can there be, for this is a tragedy. Neither is there justification in calling Lucius a scourge since he is not evil enough to be considered damned already nor are his motives sufficiently chaste to consider him as a minister of God's justice. The resolution within the play is weak and totally unlike the other plays of Shakespeare with which this study is concerned. Therefore, if Titus

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165 Cross, op. cit., p. 823.

166 Loc. cit.

Andronicus is Shakespeare's, it is likely that it is either an early effort at tragedy or an unfinished play.

In Romeo and Juliet, the young lovers act the part of scourges or of sacrifices for the sins of their families in carrying on the feud. Tybalt is first in wanting to revenge the feud, and, with his hot-headedness, he will not let it rest. He even wishes to carry the feud over into the province of hospitality the night of the party, but old Capulet will not have it so. Thus, when Tybalt does meet the Montague group the next day, he is even more determined, having been forced to wait. He picks the quarrel, and it is all that Romeo can cheerfully do to hold him off. However, Romeo does hold him off; but then Mercutio, bent on upholding the Montague honor, is fatally injured by Tybalt. Significantly, he cries out, "A plague on both your houses," before he dies. No one will listen to Benvolio's account of the story, and Romeo is banished. Friar Laurence enters into duplicity with the two lovers, having already conspired to marry them secretly, and he aids Juliet by giving her a potion to simulate death. Romeo was to be informed of the circumstances, but the plague -- an act of God -- holds up the letter to Romeo.

God's vengeance is mentioned twice, once in IV. v, and once in V. ii. The first mention is by Friar Laurence, when he says at the wedding-turned-funeral, ". . . follow this fair corse unto her grave:/ The heavens do lour upon you for some ill;/ Move them no more by crossing their high will." (IV. v. 93-5) The second instance of God's vengeance is the plague already mentioned as an act of God. Because of the plague,

the friar delivering the letter was detained, and Romeo was not notified that Juliet's death was only a simulated one.

At the end of the play, Romeo, Juliet, Paris, Mercutio, Tybalt, and Romeo's mother are all dead, either as a direct or an indirect result of the feud. The Prince refers to the scourge as a result of the feud, saying, "Capulet! Montague! See what a scourge is laid upon your hate,/ That heaven means to kill your joys with love." It must be noted that Romeo, in revenging himself on Tybalt for Mercutio's death, did so immediately at the moment that Tybalt returned to the scene. There could not have elapsed more than a few minutes -- certainly less than thirty minutes -- from the time of Mercutio's receiving the fatal wound to the duel with Tybalt, so that Romeo must have been acting while in the throes of grief and, therefore, could not be guilty of having deliberately planned Tybalt's murder. Yet, he is an example of the surrender of reason to passion; and from the very moment in time that he does surrender reason, he and Juliet are doomed.[167] Lady Capulet is well-versed in the Italian vendetta as a way of life, for she voices immediately, on hearing of Tybalt's death, her request to the Prince for justice, negating the effect of Benvolio's plea for Romeo.[168] (III. i. 181-6) She assumes that the

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167 Prosser, op. cit., p. 79.

168 Loc. cit.

promise of revenge for Tybalt's death will soothe Juliet's grief.[169] (III. v. 88-93) Lady Capulet's desire for revenge is of the Italianate villain type. Romeo is not guilty, as is an Italianate villain, of planning for revenge. His is a reflex type of action in which passion has overruled his reason. Romeo repents the murder of Tybalt deeply and would undo it if he could. Both Romeo and Juliet are innocents sacrificed on the altar of their families' hate. Their death brings renewed life to "the older and failing generation."[170]

The sentence of the Prince in banishing Romeo is more than just, for the Prince has two commitments, one to keep the peace in the state and one to God to give retribution in this life to those who sin. The Prince, the link between man and God and God's representative on earth, and Friar Laurence, also a go-between of man and God, are the two who recognize that God's hand is in the fate of the two young lovers. All recognition of God's vengeance comes from these two. Blindness to the ways of God afflicts all other characters within the play.

Troilus and Cressida, like Titus Andronicus, is a strangely unresolved play. There is no clue in the end of the play as to whether Troilus ever killed Diomedes and Ajax with whom he was engaged in fighting. (V. vi. 10) Also, though Troilus calls for the gods' vengeance on Achilles and the Greeks for the dishonorable manner in

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169 Loc. cit.

170 Matthews, op. cit., p. 189.

which Achilles treated Hector, who just two scenes before had given Achilles a chance to stop fighting and rest, the audience is never, within the scope of the play, given the opportunity to see this vengeance take effect. However, during the Renaissance, the story of the Trojan War and its heroes was so familiar to the Elizabethans that the audience would have known that Paris, brother of Hector, killed Achilles later in the war.

Because of the ambiguity of moral values in the play, Whitaker calls the play a comical satire.[171] Ornstein sees destruction as the underlying principle in the play.[172] If not destruction it is certainly a play of the mutability of all life, a play that begins with love and honor and ends with the emphasis on whores, cuckolds, venereal disease, revenge and dishonor. It is a play on the degeneration of humanity, and the emphasis shows the audience that this takes place through the misuse of the principles of order and degree. Ulysses' speech to the Greeks on order and degree (I. iii. 75-137) and the speech of Hector to the Trojans (II. ii. 163-93) are parallel speeches.[173]

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171 Virgil K. Whitaker, "Introduction to The History of Troilus and Cressida," William Shakespeare: The Complete Works, p. 978.

172 Una Ellis-Fermor, "Discord in the Spheres: The Universe of Troilus and Cressida," in Discussions of Shakespeare's Problem Comedies, p. 25.

173 Whitaker, op. cit., p. 978.

After both speeches, passion overrules reason in the decisions that follow.[174] The love of Troilus and Cressida, like that of Helen and Paris, seemingly is a love in which passion overrules reason. By all the rules of order and degree, Helen belongs with her husband, Menelaus, who is being cuckolded by Paris. Order and degree, also, would call for a marriage relationship between Troilus and Cressida rather than the ugly affair in which they must hide from discovery that which others know is going on and which is being snickered at by all.

Revenge in the play predates the beginning of the action. The Greeks had stolen an aunt of the Trojans, and Paris had stolen Helen, partly in revenge and partly because Aphrodite had promised Paris the most beautiful woman in the world. In the eyes of Paris and of all others of the time, Helen was the most beautiful woman in the world. Menelaus' revenge is the Trojan War. The Greeks will not leave until Helen is returned to Menelaus, their king, and, stubbornly, the Trojans will not give her up. Shakespeare uses the order and degree speech of Ulysses to illustrate how warped is their reasoning in the face of all of the death. Shakespeare has pictured a Helen totally degraded to show that she is not worth the cost to either side. Also not worth the cost is Cressida, another inconstant whore, for whom Troilus fights Diomedes.

On the field of battle, Menelaus seeks out Paris, and Troilus seeks out Diomedes because of their rivalry over women. But also,

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174 Loc. cit.

Achilles finally deigns to battle with Hector when Hector slays Patroclus, Achilles' friend. When the great Achilles finally battles, it is in such a dishonorable way that no one is able to respect him. He attacks the unarmed Hector, giving him no chance to arm himself, and then ties Hector's body to the tail of a horse and drags him back and forth in front of the walls of Troy. As the play ends, Troilus, bitter about both love and honor, goes out again to battle the Greeks with vengeance still in his heart.

If one goes beyond the scope of the play, -- and the Elizabethans knew the story well and would have remembered how it ended, -- one sees that Menelaus achieves his vengeance in the sacking of Troy. Troilus, in seeking vengeance, dies. Paris, who precipated the war in his vengeance, dies, and revengeful Achilles dies also before the whole affair is settled. Even Thersites calls for vengeance on both armies for fighting so foolishly for a whore. He, ironically, calls for "the Neopolitan bone-ache," venereal disease, as his vengeance on both armies. Pandarus' speeches, too, are full of such ironical expressions as "my aching bones!" Irony, as Tomlinson points out, is one of the chief ingredients of revenge tragedy.[175] Another example of irony in Troilus and Cressida is Diomedes' speech to Paris in which he tells Paris that Helen is not worth fighting for; yet, he is fighting in the war to gain her back, and he has Cressida, who, if no worse, is at least no better

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175 T. B. Tomlinson, A Study of Elizabethan and Jacobean Tragedy, p. 74.

than Helen. Diomedes says of Helen:

> "She's bitter to her country: hear me, Paris:
> For every false drop in her bawdy veins,
> A Trojan hath been slain: Since she could speak,
> She hath not given so many good words breath
> As for her Greeks and Trojans suffer'd death."

Thus, Shakespeare, in being satirical and ironical and in showing degeneration of humanity because of lack of order and degree, seems to allow the entire play to stand for his expression of distaste for human foibles. He does not follow up on God's vengeance on each individual for using revenge in the scope of the play. In the first place, the play would have been far too long had he done so; and, in the second place, the vengeance is subordinate to the abuse of order and degree and the parallelism of the two women. The play is not a true tragedy and would not call for the same tragic resolution that is required for a tragedy.

In the tragedy of Othello, the hero is a truly noble person overthrown by the conniving of a villain who would have fooled anyone.[176] Othello has no tragic flaw in his nature, but he makes a tragic error that is extreme in its consequences.[177] Like Hamlet, Othello puts revenge before love and is destroyed by the exhorbitant price that he must pay

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176 Craig, op. cit., p. 945.

177 Mark Eccles, ed., Othello: The Moor of Venice, p. ix.

for breaking the code of revenge, i.e., damnation.[178] Othello shows full awareness of his damnation by the end of the play. Thus, already damned, he commits suicide. He is deceived by Iago because of two circumstances -- one, Othello is a black, a Moor, and is an alien in Venice; and, two, he is a soldier who has spent his life primarily with men, is unfamiliar with the ways of women, and feels he must trust Iago when it comes to Venetian women.[179] According to Iago, Venetian women are different, more lustful, he implies.

Iago and Othello invite comparison. Othello's motives for the murder of Desdemona are justice and revenge, and he swings back and forth between the two.[180] Iago's motives also seem to be justice and revenge. He feels that Othello has been unjust in not appointing him lieutenant. He also entertains the suspicion, as does Othello, that his wife had been unfaithful. Othello wishes Cassio killed for having cuckolded him; Iago wishes revenge on Othello for having cuckolded him. Each man has only the suspicion, but he will go into action only on the mere suspicion.[181] He believes that he would be seen as perfectly justified

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178 Strandberg, op. cit., p. 100.

179 Eccles, op. cit., p. ix.

180 Paul Siegel, "The Damnation of Othello," PMLA, LXVIII (December, 1953), 1071.

181 Clarence Valentine Boyer, The Villain as Hero in Elizabethan Tragedy, p. 125.

in the eyes of the world if he revenged for cuckoldry; and, since the scene of the play is Venice, the Italianate point of view would seem to hold.[182] Revenge for adultery was tolerated then in every European country, but Moryson says, Italy, especially, was noted for such revenge.

> . . .
> In Italy . . . the lawe cannot inflict greater (which private revenge by murther upon just grounds of jeloyse is Commonly taken secretely, and if knowne, yet winked at and favoured by the Magistrate, in his owne nature approving as well the revenge as the secrecy thereof, for avoiding shame).[183]

Thus, both Othello and Iago are right in thinking that no one will blame them for what they do in the name of cuckoldry. But what they are to be blamed for is their not seeking absolute proof before acting. Othello, of course, thinks that he has absolute proof when Iago tells him of a time when he heard Cassio talking in his sleep, and when he sees the handkerchief Cassio has given to Bianca. Iago, on the other hand, believes that all people act only in their own interests; and, therefore, he would not put sexual joy with another beyond Emilia.

Both Iago and Othello have immense confidence in their own abilities. That is the reason Othello has no qualms about facing Brabantio in front of the Senate, and that is the cause for Iago's feelings that he has been slighted in having been overlooked by Othello when he selected

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182 Watson, op. cit., p. 159.

183 Quoted in Watson, op. cit., p. 160.

his lieutenant. Iago thinks he is the best man for the job, having learned in the field by practice what Cassio has only learned by books. Each man, however, has qualms of unworthiness at times. Othello, in searching for Desdemona's motives, says,

> . . . Haply for I am black
> And have not those soft parts of conversation
> That chamberers have, or for that I am declined
> into the vale of years -- yet that's not much --
> . . . . (III. iii. 263-6)

Iago, on the other hand, is continually telling himself that Cassio is the better man and has virtues that he has not. Moreover, he sees Othello as a man of virtue above any that he possesses. When Othello feels his world collapsing about him, he kills Desdemona; Iago does the same to Emilia when he cannot quiet Emilia in the final scene, and his world is collapsing about him.[184] At the end of the play, each man stands revealed as he really is. Othello is no longer the noble Moor "whom passion could not shake" but a man who has been duped by another into losing all reason until he has become a savage beast.[185] Iago is finally shown to be not the "honest" ancient but a devil whose machinations are exposed before the world, a trapped beast who turns

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184 Robert B. Heilman, Magic in the Web, p. 157.

185 Harley Granville-Barker, Prefaces to Shakespeare, p. 77.

upon Emilia when she will not cease exposing him.[186] Iago has known himself for what he is all along. But Othello does not really see himself until the last one hundred lines of the play gradually reveal him to himself.[187] By his final speech, he knows himself for what he is.[188]

Each man stands damned in his effort at revenge. Othello's fatal errors are susceptibility to deceit and putting revenge before love.[189] Iago's inability to see that others may set lofty altruistic motives before self is his downfall.[190] He does not dream that Emilia will put love for her mistress above her husband's welfare and her own.[191] Each man's effort to revenge has thrust him into the power of hell. Othello realizes that he is damned and, thus, the suicide can harm him no further. His revenge on Desdemona, however, is not so Italianate as to include her damnation. He wishes her to confess and

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186 Loc. cit.

187 Gerald Eades Bentley, "Introduction to Othello: The Moor of Venice," William Shakespeare: The Complete Works, p. 1020.

188 Loc. cit.

189 Boyer, op. cit., p. 117.

190 Loc. cit.

191 Loc. cit.

to pray that she may be forgiven so that she will go to heaven and not to hell. Iago must be aware that he is damning Othello if he thinks of damnation at all. He does not seem to think of it, even in his own case. However, Iago's imagery is hellish, and perhaps Shakespeare thought it would be inappropriate in Iago's case to present a religious "devil." It might be well to consider here Iago's ability to speak to each person in accordance with character and situation. This is Iago's one great talent; and when he uses this ability to the greatest advantage, he is at his happiest. He is absolutely gleeful to see that other people are like chessman on a chessboard, and he is able to call the moves. Iago enjoys having this power over people and seeing his own will triumph over others who are "good" people.[192] He has an "obsession" for maneuvering others.[193] Iago commands, and others obey.[194] He is a brilliant improvisor, even turning unexpected situations to his advantage, a marvelous talent for a soldier.[195] Iago enjoys his manipulation of the present as a practice exercise in the handling of the power that he will

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192 Ibid., p. 119.

193 Hoover H. Jordan, "Dramatic Illusion in Othello," SQ, New Series I (July, 1960), 150.

194 Paul Siegel, "The Damnation of Othello," PMLA, LXVIII (December, 1953), 1070.

195 Eccles, op. cit., p. x.

have if he succeeds in gaining his ends.[196] He not only coerces others into doing what he wants them to do, but he even succeeds in making them thank him.[197] In fact, Iago, gets so carried away with the whole game that he goes far beyond his original purpose. He contrives that Othello come up with the idea of killing his wife! However, in using this ability to control others, Iago usurps the prerogative of God. Iago's damnation lies in usurping from God this mastery over Mankind. He also falsely swore he was honest to Othello on pain of double damnation. Along with Othello, he is also guilty of taking vengeance out of the hands of God. Thus, even in the case of adultery, where the Renaissance was very lax in condemning revenge by the wronged husband, Shakespeare takes care to indicate damnation for those who use revenge. Othello, the noble Moor, Desdemona, his angelic and innocent wife, Emilia, and Roderigo are all dead by the play's end.

In contrast to Othello, a tragedy, the romantic comedy, Cymbeline, has no such depth of thought. Yet the two plays have plots that are surprisingly similar. Posthumus, like Othello, has points that are against him; but, again like Othello, he has a noble character. Both men have married well to lovely creatures who are also paragons of virtue. Cymbeline has its Iachimo, another Iago, who also wishes to prove the wife of Posthumus to be unfaithful. Iachimo works to undermine

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196 Marion D. Hope Parker, The Slave of Life, p. 157.

197 Robert B. Heilman, "The Economics of Iago and Others," PMLA, LXVIII (April, 1963), 565.

each spouse with the other. While he does not succeed with Imogen, he does succeed in convincing Posthumus of Imogen's unfaithfulness by using false proof. Like Othello, Posthumus, too, plans his wife's death and issues orders to a trusted servant to kill her.

However, because the play is a romantic comedy many things fall into place, and the ending is a happy one. That which started out vengefully is cleared up through the use of justice and mercy. Posthumus, for instance, and Belarius do not avenge themselves on the king by fighting against him.[198] Iachimo is not successful either in promoting the revenge of Imogen against Posthumus or in the invasion of Britain, though he is successful in convincing Posthumus that Imogen has been unfaithful. But Pisanio, the old servant, is wise enough not to kill without certainty. Thus, Shakespeare in Cymbeline has tempered the revenge plot in order to adjust it to the requirements of the romantic comedy. Through the use of justice, mercy, and patience the invader has been turned back, and all are alive to rejoice in the return of the two lost princes and Posthumus.

Cymbeline resembles another tragedy, King Lear, as well. Cymbeline is a good king but a rather poor parent.[199] Lear is somewhat foolish in both his kingly and his parental duties. King Lear also

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198 Robert B. Heilman, "Introduction to Cymbeline," William Shakespeare: The Complete Works, p. 1293.

199 Matthews, op. cit., p. 180.

banishes someone, his daughter. Cymbeline's actions against Belarius, a servant, are like those of Lear against his servant Kent, except that Cymbeline loses his two infant sons through his actions.[200] However, he regains them, whereas the action in King Lear is irrevocable.

King Lear is a tragedy in which patience seems to be contrasted with wrath and revenge. Eight of the major characters use revenge, some more than once. Lear, himself, revenges twice and calls for vengeance at other times as well. Lear is not a totally bad king. He is essentially a good king, but he is shown to have several flaws as the play begins.

First of all, Lear is a king who does not know himself. To know himself and be master of himself is the first requirement of a good king.[201] As Regan says of Lear, "he hath ever but slenderly known himself." Besides, Lear does not know his own children, a fact that is very apparent in the first scene. Gloucester, as will be seen later, is another who does not know his own children. Finally, Lear is shown to be the sort of king who gives in to wrath, and wrath, in Elizabethan-Jacobean times, was a cardinal sin.[202]

At the very outset of the play, Lear is seen ready to divide

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200 Loc. cit.

201 Reese, op. cit., p. 145

202 Campbell, Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes, p. 185.

his kingdom. Lear, himself, refers to it as "a darker purpose." (I. i. 37) The Renaissance thought it a terrible thing to divide a kingdom.[203] Such actions made a realm vulnerable to attack by larger foreign powers. But as Goneril tells the audience, "The best and soundest of his time hath been but rash." Then, in the way Lear goes about the task of dividing his kingdom, Shakespeare indicates that Lear is filled with self-love and pride. Lear seeks an ultimate declaration of love from Cordelia and her sisters. Cordelia will not give more love than is a father's due. In seeking of Cordelia more than filial love, Lear is a Lucifer figure usurping what only God should have -- absolute love.[204] When Cordelia will not give it, -- she respects her father too much to resort to meaningless flattery -- Lear's wrath is awful to behold. In succumbing to wrath, he usurps from God, also, for only God is allowed awful wrath.

Before the first scene of the play is over, Lear has revenged himself twice, on Cordelia by disinheriting her and offering her for marriage dowerless and on Kent by banishing him for standing up to Lear and insisting he reconsider. In contrast to the wrath of the king and his revenge, Cordelia is so patient and submissive as to be Griselda-like. She submits to Lear's cutting off of her inheritance, if one may refer to part of a kingdom as such, and to the losing of her dowry without a murmur.

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203 Matthews, op. cit., p. 141.

204 Ibid., p. 144.

She is docile when Burgundy renounces her because she has no dowry. Kent, also, meets wrath and revenge with patience as he hears his sentence of banishment. For both these actions of revenge, Lear receives the gods' vengeance throughout the rest of the play.

Gloucester is the next to plan revenge. Believing the lies that Edmund, his bastard son, has fabricated about Edgar, his legitimate son, Gloucester has vowed to find Edgar and have him killed in revenge. Apparently, Edmund uses these lies to revenge himself on a brother, who is both older and legitimate, and on society for looking down on him, for referring to him as base-born, and for giving all, by the rule of primogeniture, to the eldest son. He has always had to submit to a lesser place in the world, and, by means of "villainous melancholy," he plans to get even. Gloucester is blindly credulous in accepting Edmund's lies, and God's vengeance on him later is his physical blindness.[205]

In the meantime, Lear, who has gone to live with Goneril, has struck Goneril's servant, Oswald, for chiding the King's fool. Goneril says she will endure no more of her father's trifling with her household, and her revenge is to give Oswald permission to ". . . put on what weary negligence you please, you and your fellows." Oswald revenges himself on Lear by calling him to his face "My lady's father," a direct insult to

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205 Siegel, Shakespearean Tragedy and the Elizabethan Compromise, p. 169.

the king to have his daughter placed ahead of him in respect.[206] Oswald, who is base-born and would play the gentleman, meets his punishment later at the hand of Edgar, a gentleman who masquerades as a beggar Tom O' Bedlam.[207] Goneril's complaint is that Lear's men are "riotous." Lear contends that they are "of choice and rarest parts." Lear unquestionably has the right to keep the hundred knights; they are part of what he had reserved to himself when he divided the kingdom in the first scene. However, since Lear knows neither himself nor his own children, one wonders whether he really knew his own men. Regardless, Goneril owes him love, loyalty, esteem, and honor, none of which she gives to Lear.

Lear departs for Regan's house threatening vengeance on Goneril, and, later, having found Kent in the stocks, calls for vengeance against Regan for such an act and for not admitting him to her house. He cries:

> "I will have such revenges on you both,
> That all the world shall -- I will do such things --
> What they are, yet I know not; but they shall be
> The terrors of the earth."

It is then that Lear makes his dramatic choice.[208] He has no illusions; he knows that he must either grovel in degradation for the rest of his

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206 Watson, op. cit., p. 188.

207 Siegel, Shakespearean Tragedy and the Elizabethan Compromise, p. 167.

208 Robert P. Adams, "King Lear's Revenges," MLQ, XXI (September 1960), 226.

life or confront death by braving the storm in all its fury.[209] At this point in the play, the suffering becomes a sort of purging for both Lear and Gloucester that burns away their previous selfishness and brings them to insight and a self-knowledge that neither man had attained before.[210] Stampfer points out that, by the middle of the play, Lear has been gradually stripped of everything - his clothing, his dignity, and even his sanity.[211] Thereafter, to the end of the play, Lear's soul is purged, he is re-clothed in his regal style, and he gains all he formerly had except his daughters.[212] However, it is all too late for him and Cordelia.

Turned out into the storm, Lear cries, "You heavens, give me that patience, patience I need!" It is in the storm that he first tries to hold back wrath, knowing that the tempest, according to Renaissance thought, enters the mind of man, and makes man mad.[213] Thus, Lear seeks patience, the opposite of revenge, in the storm.

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209 Loc. cit.

210 Siegel, Shakespearean Tragedy and the Elizabethan Compromise, p. 170.

211 J. Stampfer, "The Catharsis of King Lear," in Shakespeare: Modern Essays in Criticism, p. 373.

212 Loc. cit.

213 Campbell, Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes, pp. 199-200.

Edgar, like Cordelia, is patient. As befits a man, however, he is not submissive but active as soon as he finds out what turned his father against him. He guides his blind father to acceptance when his father would commit suicide.[214] Suicide is one kind of rebellion against God, for only God has sway over the life and death of men.[215] Then, Edgar seeks for a way to regain his place, his name, and his title. After his father's death, Edgar challenges Edmund to fight and wounds him. Edmund, dying, forgives Edgar for killing him, and Edgar forgives his brother the lies he told their father. Edgar joins Cordelia's husband, the King of France, who, with no ulterior motives, is fighting in England merely to aid Cordelia's father.

Goneril and Regan, Cordelia's sisters, have been continuing their evil ways. In blinding Gloucester, they have shown such terrible vengeance for his aid to the King of France that even the servants have risen against them. One servant picks up a sword and fights with Cornwall, Goneril's husband, who kills the servant, but is injured himself. Cornwall has tried to revenge himself on the servant for interfering. Then, God's vengeance strikes Cornwall down in an ignoble way. He dies from the injury, thus suffering a gross indignity in having been killed at the hands of a servant rather than in a fight with one who was his social

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214 Siegel, Shakespearean Tragedy and the Elizabethan Compromise, p. 174.

215 Loc. cit.

equal.[216] Albany, who has rejected the company of the evil sisters and Cornwall, says, on hearing of Cornwall's death, "This shows you are above,/ You justicers, that these our nether crimes/ So speedily can venge." Thus, Cornwall receives his ultimate retribution.

Goneril poisons Regan, and Goneril is stabbed. It is in doubt by whom she is stabbed, but the inference is that Regan has done it. Evil, thus, consumes evil.[217] Albany refers to the two deaths as "This judgement of the heavens." Both of the sisters had lusted over Edmund, and both had offered him marriage.[218] Regan had planned to kill Albany, in order to facilitate her marriage with Edmund. Both were guilty of the blinding of Gloucester and, indirectly, of the deaths of both Lear and Gloucester. Thus, God's vengeance has struck them.

Cordelia has been loving obedience and patience to the end. She had sent out one hundred knights to find her father and to escort him in as befitted his position. She has a physician working to cure Lear's madness. Lear is cured, and they are reunited, only to have Edmund capture them. He sends them to a prison and gives the captain orders to kill them. Soon after, the dying Edmund repents and tries to have the order rescinded, but it is too late. Cordelia has been hanged,

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216 Ibid., p. 167.

217 Prosser, op. cit., p. 77.

218 Watson, op. cit., p. 300.

and Lear dies of grief over her body. Cordelia has been sacrificed to Lear's pride, self-love, wrath, and revenge to which he succumbed when the play opened. All have received God's vengeance for usurping God's prerogative. The innocent Cordelia also dies in the tragic ending.

Hence, one sees that Shakespeare treats private revenge in the same manner as public revenge. Both are usurpations of authority that belongs only to God. Thus, both public and private revenge are followed by God's vengeance, which often falls on the guilty and innocent alike in a tragedy. In a romantic comedy, the revenge is not accomplished, since the ending must be a happy one. Instead, the resolution of the comedy makes use of justice, mercy, patience, and forgiveness.

## CHAPTER V

## HAMLET

Like Julius Caesar, The Merchant of Venice, and other Shakespearean plays, Hamlet offers many interpretations. Yet more than any of the others, Hamlet puzzles and intrigues today's readers of the play. It is more ambiguous than the others, but whether it was as ambiguous in the period contemporary to the play is an unanswered question. Shakespeare may have purposely endowed the play with ambiguity. Of this and other questions much has been written in recent years. It seems that recent criticism is aiding in a clear understanding of Hamlet. Although textual studies and studies of the documentary evidence of the time are turning up further insights into all of the plays, Hamlet, in particular, appears to have gained from such studies.

One of the newer fields of investigation has been that of the ghost. The way one sees the ghost has much to do with how one sees Hamlet's dilemma. Revenge plays normally had a ghost.[219] The interest in humours in turn brought an interest in supernatural appearances, one manifestation of the melancholy humor being the

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219 George Bagshawe Harrison, Shakespeare's Tragedies, p. 93.

tendency to see ghosts or spirits.[220] The Senecan influence as well may have helped create the popularity for ghosts in the plays of the time. A very few ghosts of the time were different from most others in one significant way; they were set in Christian context.[221] One such ghost was Hamlet's.[222] Only in Hamlet is the audience called upon to decide the true nature of the ghost.[223] What complicates the problem is that not only did Catholics and Protestants have differing beliefs about ghosts, but there are some who feel that Shakespeare used both Catholic and Protestant doctrine for the Hamlet ghost.[224]

Catholic doctrine concerning ghosts was more explicit than Protestant, Protestant doctrine not yet having had time to formulate to the extent of Catholic doctrine.[225] Catholic doctrine, as stated by Lavater in Of Ghostes and Spirites Walking by Nyght (1596), taught that ghosts might be spirits of the dead returning to earth while enduring the

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220 Campbell, Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes, p. 84.

221 Prosser, op. cit., p. 257.

222 Loc. cit.

223 Ibid., p. 258.

224 J. K. Walton, "The Structure of Hamlet," Hamlet: Shakespeare Institute Studies, p. 45.

225 Joseph, op. cit., p. 34.

fires of Purgatory, or they might be souls of those who are in heaven or in hell, or they might be angels from heaven or demons from hell.[226] King James I, cited as a representative of Protestant doctrine, said that ghosts might be either angels from heaven or devils from hell.[227] But no Protestant believed in the souls of the dead returning from heaven or hell.[228] Furthermore, Purgatory was a "Papist fiction" from the Protestant point of view.[229] But Protestantism had not yet so strong a foothold in England, and many Protestants were confused on the issue, some, in fact, still holding to the older, more familiar Catholic doctrine.[230] Both Catholics and Protestants believed that a ghost, if a demon, could assume any shape it pleased to confuse the person to whom it appeared, and, according to Protestants, might even aid in promoting the "false" Catholic doctrine of Purgatory.[231] Thus, a devil might assume the shape of a person

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226 In Campbell, Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes, p. 121.

227 Loc. cit.

228 Robert W. West, "King Hamlet's Ambiguous Ghost," PMLA, LXX (December, 1955), 1108.

229 Loc. cit.

230 Loc. cit.

231 Ibid., p. 1110.

not long dead, both sides agreed.[232]

Lavater indicates from Catholic doctrine how a ghost should be approached and how to test a ghost to see if it were a good or bad spirit. One should, he says, begin with a prayer, and, only after that, should one question the spirit, asking him to name the one to whom he will speak.[233] A spirit should be questioned soberly, at night, and without fear, for a spirit cannot do bodily harm to one.[234] The friends of Hamlet and Hamlet himself all follow the Catholic doctrine quoted above in approaching and questioning the ghost.[235] Since the ghost will not speak to Horatio, Bernardo, or Francisco, Horatio determines to bring the prince to the scene. When Hamlet talks to the ghost, he first utters a prayer, then questions the ghost according to the prescribed manner, and is not afraid of the ghost doing him any bodily injury. Yet Walton points out that Hamlet must see the ghost from the point of view of the Protestant; for Hamlet is a prince of Protestant Denmark, educated at one of the seats of Protestantism, Luther's place of study, the University of

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232 Joseph, op. cit., p. 32.

233 Campbell, Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes, pp. 122-3.

234 Loc. cit.

235 Ibid., pp. 124-5.

Wittenberg.[236] That analysis would seem to be true, and, thus Shakespeare would, indeed, have set up the ghost so that the individual members of the audience could interpret it in various ways. The theory exists that Shakespeare did this to encourage the "widest possible response."[237]

If Catholic, a member of the audience would know that there are four tests that might be applied to see if the spirit were a good spirit or a bad one: the good spirit may frighten but will leave only after having comforted the one to whom he appears; the evil spirit is most likely to come as one of the more dreaded animals or as a black ghost; the voice would be sweet, low, or sorrowful if it were a good spirit and reproachful or terrible if a bad spirit; and if a good spirit, his words would conform to the teachings of the Church.[238] The ghost in Hamlet has a "countenance more in sorrow than in anger," but he has not comforted Hamlet before leaving him, and he has not conformed to the teachings of the Church in requesting revenge.[239] Thus, the

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236 Walton, op. cit., p. 46.

237 Prosser, op. cit., p. 123.

238 Campbell, Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes, p. 123.

239 Ibid., p. 125.

Catholics would have suspected King Hamlet's ghost. And the Protestant knows, as Hamlet does, that "the devil hath power to assume a pleasing shape." Moreover, the Protestant did not believe in Purgatory and did not believe that any dead soul ever could return to earth under any circumstances.[240] Hence, the ghost is suspect of being a devil from either point of view.

Furthermore, in the lines that follow (I. v. 148-82) it is seen that the ghost is in the "cellar" beneath the stage where hell always was in the morality plays.[241] Hamlet refers to the ghost as "truepenny," a name for the devil, and as "old mole" a name for one who works in a place of darkness.[242] It is significant, too, that Hamlet has Horatio and Marcellus swear an oath of secrecy by his sword and not by God or by heaven. It would have been ludicrous to swear an oath of a heavenly nature for the sake of the devil. However, the mission of the ghost gives even further suspicion that the ghost may be a devil. The ghost, against all teachings of the Church, both Catholic and Protestant, asks that Hamlet revenge its murderer, and it does so without

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240 Joseph, op. cit., p. 34.

241 Walton, op. cit., p. 54.

242 Ibid., p. 55.

once mentioning a "divine minister" of God's vengeance.[243] Also, immediately after speaking to the Ghost, Hamlet says, "O all you host of heaven! O earth! What else?/ And shall I couple hell?" (I. v. 92-3) His uncertainty seems mirrored in that one statement. Some critics feel, as Hamlet apparently does, that there is still room for doubt as to the nature of the ghost. Rabkin says that "the dual nature of the ghost indicates the dual moral status of the task that it assigns to Hamlet."[244] Of that duality in the minds of the Elizabethans, there is little doubt, since Elizabethans were pulled in two directions by revenge. Another hypothesis is that Shakespeare left the ghost purposely ambiguous for the sake of "dramatic impact."[245]

What of the command to revenge his father's death? Even if Hamlet were one of those who felt it would be the "sacred duty" of a son to avenge the death of a father, he should be wary of the manner in which the ghost tells of his death by poisoning at the hands of Claudius.[246] The appeal is to the passions entirely, and Hamlet, as an

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243 Prosser, op. cit., pp. 135-6.

244 Norman Rabkin, Shakespeare and the Common Understanding, p. 4.

245 West, op. cit., p. 1111.

246 Prosser, op. cit., p. 135.

educated man and a philosopher, should be swayed only by reason.[247] The ghost is, in fact, pouring poison into Hamlet's ear. Hamlet does not seem to be aware of the need to test the ghost by the four means discussed on page eighty-four. Instead of testing the ghost, Hamlet settles on testing the king![248] But Hamlet's greatest error seems to be in not questioning the ghost's motives -- love of God would have indicated that Claudius should live to repent and receive God's grace and mercy.[249] However, one finds no divine grace in Hamlet. Hamlet subordinates all these considerations and promises that he will set aside all he has learned and consider only the opportunity to revenge. (I. v. 92-112)

The play leaves unanswered the following important questions, namely: Is Claudius an usurper? What are Hamlet's motives? Is Hamlet considering, and does he commit, private or public revenge? Again, various answers are given. It is difficult to say whether Claudius occupied a throne that was young Hamlet's by right; but, if Claudius has murdered the previous occupant of the throne, he is

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247 Loc. cit.

248 Roy Battenhouse, Shakespearean Tragedy: Its Art and Its Christian Premises, p. 238.

249 Matthews, op. cit., p. 98.

certainly a regicide and an usurper of the throne of the elder Hamlet. However, Hamlet had no proof of the truth of the ghost's statements, and, as shown, the ghost is of suspicious nature. To act without any more proof than the words of the ghost and the actions of Claudius at the play within the play would put Hamlet in the same position as Othello, acting without sufficient proof. There are differences of opinion on whether Hamlet was acting as a public avenger or as a private avenger. Wickham sees Hamlet's revenge as a private revenge.[250] Stabler calls it a private revenge because Hamlet was bitter over his loss of the throne.[251] He states that the proof lies in Hamlet's speech to Horatio.[252] Hamlet says:

> "Why should the poor be flatter'd?
> No, let the candied tongue lick absurd pomp,
> And crook the pregnant hinges of the knee
> Where thrift may follow fawning. Dost thou hear?
> Since my dear soul was mistress of her choice
> And could of men distinguish her election,
> S' hath seal'd thee for herself; . . . ."
> (III. ii. 65-70)

Hamlet has "thwarted ambition."[253] Joseph says Hamlet had a duty to

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250 Glynne Wickham, Shakespeare's Dramatic Heritage, p. 192.

251 A. P. Stabler, "Melancholy, Ambition, and Revenge in Belleforest's Hamlet," PMLA, LXXXI (June, 1966), 209.

252 Loc. cit.

253 Loc. cit.

private revenge for honor.[254] Because of his mother's incest and his father's death at the hands of a villain, Hamlet had lost honor.[255] Sibley, whose dissenting opinion was discussed in Chapter Two, says that by the Bond of Association Act all subjects were obligated to overthrow a usurper and thus, Elizabethans felt Hamlet had to kill Claudius or judgment would again fall on a nation as it had when all the people merely sat passively by while the usurper, Henry IV, had broken God's order of succession.[256] Fergusson sees Hamlet as the young prince "born" or destined to cure the illness of the state and therefore it is Denmark and not honor or vengeance with which Hamlet is concerned.[257] Campbell feels Hamlet was chosen by God to execute a public vengeance; therefore, he does not suffer eternal damnation at the end.[258] In Prosser's opinion, Hamlet is doomed from the moment he kills Polonius.[259] Prosser thinks that it is an impossibility to be,

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254 Joseph, op. cit., p. 45.

255 Loc. cit.

256 Sibley, op. cit., p. 54.

257 Francis Fergusson (ed.), Shakespeare's Tragedies of Monarchy, p.19.

258 Campbell, Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes, p. 147.

259 Prosser, op. cit., p. 192.

as Hamlet thinks he is, both scourge and minister, because the two terms were contradictory in nature -- a scourge being damned before he ever became a scourge, and a minister of God's justice being one with only the most sublime of motives and methods.[260] In Prosser's eyes, Hamlet is not a public revenger, for nowhere, except in Hamlet's mistaken concept of himself, is there any such conception; and Horatio, as surviving speaker for Hamlet's side of the story, says nothing about righteous revenge, about divine justice, or about the workings of Providence.[261] An unusual point of view is that of Bowers in which he says that Hamlet was commanded to enact public revenge; but his motives, tainted as they are with private revenge motives, are not sufficiently sublime; thus, he is punished by killing Polonius in error and exposing his hand to Claudius.[262] Since by this act he is already damned, he now knows himself to be a scourge rather than a minister of justice, and herein lies the ironical meaning of the "scourge and minister" claim of Hamlet.[263] Vyvyan explains the allegorical Hamlet in which Polonius is Fidelity and Ophelia is Love, and Hamlet cannot proceed

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260 Ibid., pp. 199-200.

261 Ibid., p. 237.

262 Fredson T. Bowers, "Hamlet as Minister and Scourge," PMLA, LXX (September, 1955), 745.

263 Ibid., p. 746.

toward his revenge until he has killed Fidelity and Love and allowed revenge to usurp their place in his soul.[264] The fact that Fidelity and Love must be killed first accounts for the "delay" between the determination to revenge and the act.[265]

Hamlet's supposed madness is a question on which there are many points of view. Most agree, however, that Hamlet's actions seem to be tied in with his melancholy, but Hamlet is not a melancholy person by nature; he is of the sanguine humour as his northern birth, the "too, too solid flesh" statement, and the statements about Hamlet by others in the play indicate.[266] The queen's statement, "He's fat and scant of breath," and Ophelia's lament about Hamlet's madness in which she describes Hamlet are both indicative of Hamlet's nature being one of the cold and moist types.[267] (III. i. 158-62) Melancholy in all its forms had become a very popular humour on the stage.[268] Just to say that a man was melancholy, however, did not necessarily mean that

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264 John Vyvyan, The Shakespearean Ethic, pp. 48-9.

265 Loc. cit.

266 Campbell, Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes, p. 111.

267 Loc. cit.

268 Harold R. Walley, "Shakespeare's Conception of Hamlet," PMLA, XLVIII (April, 1933), 790.

he was of the melancholy humour.[269] The pouring in of more melancholy than his natural blend of humours was used to containing, especially of the black bile of melancholy, caused by extreme heat in the body to become adust, turned one's natural humours into a malign and ulcerating thing.[270] Hamlet, a naturally sanquine man, is not the man he was; he is suffering from "melancholy adust" because of his inconsolable grief over the death of his father.[271] Sir Thomas More cites some of the characteristics of extreme sorrow at work on a man.[272] Inconsolable grief may cause dullness, lethargy, sloth, loss of memory, rashness, hasty anger, and ire.[273] The black bile of melancholy also disposed one toward suicide.[274] Hamlet's grief, furthermore, was tempered by his feelings of dishonor over his mother's incestuous marriage to Claudius.[275]

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269 Joseph, op. cit., p. 28.

270 Ibid., pp. 29-30.

271 Campbell, Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes, pp. 112-13.

272 In Campbell, Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes, p. 113.

273 Ibid., p. 114.

274 Prosser, op. cit., p. 127.

275 Hilton Landry, "The Leaven of Wickedness: Hamlet, I. iv. 1-38," Pacific Coast Studies in Shakespeare, p. 123.

Elizabethans tended to view a marriage to a brother or to a sister of a dead spouse as incestuous in accordance with Leviticus 18:16 and 20:21 and Paul's First Corinthians 5.[276] The Biblical command that a husband and wife be of one flesh meant that each assumed the other's relationships within the family; therefore, Gertrude had technically married her own brother.[277] Queen Elizabeth owed her accession to the throne to this interpretation of the Bible.[278] Henry VIII had belatedly insisted that his marriage to Catherine of Aragon was sinful because she was his dead brother's widow, and their daughter Mary's claim to the throne was weakened to the extent that Elizabeth was offered the crown instead.[279] Gertrude's sin is against the whole chain of being, and the Elizabethans would have thought she had sunk to the condition of a beast.[280] Thus, Hamlet had every right to feel that he had been disgraced by his mother's actions.

Hamlet, however, is not the only revenger in the play. It is clear that Shakespeare, as he did with Othello and so many of his plays,

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276 Harrison, op. cit., p. 93.

277 Ibid., p. 94.

278 Joseph, op. cit., p. 46.

279 Loc. cit.

280 Tillyard, The Elizabethan World Picture, p. 77.

has used parallels and contrasts with Hamlet by means of the characters of Laertes, Fortinbras, and, to a lesser extent, of Horatio and Ophelia.[281] Laertes, like Hamlet, is a revenger for the death of a father, and, ironically, the victim he seeks is Hamlet.[282] Laertes uses passion, not reason, and, thus, he does not discern that Claudius is using him.[283] Also, Laertes changes for the worse, becoming a liar and a deceiver determined to avenge even by treachery if by no other means.[284] Both Laertes and Ophelia face damnation in their deaths -- Laertes for the revenge for which he dared damnation and Ophelia for the suicide.[285] Ophelia, in her grief and madness, is, like Hamlet, inconsolable.[286] She chooses suicide rather than vengeance.[287] Fortinbras also has lost a father;

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281 Campbell, Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes, p. 109.

282 Harold Jenkins, "The Tragedy of Revenge in Shakespeare and Webster," SS, XIV, 46.

283 Matthews, op. cit., p. 127.

284 Strandberg, op. cit., p. 102.

285 O. B. Hardison, Jr., "The Dramatic Triad in Hamlet," SP, LVIII (April, 1960), 150.

286 Campbell, Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes, p. 139.

287 Hardison, op. cit., p. 150.

the elder Hamlet has killed the elder Fortinbras and won his kingdom.[288] Thus, young Fortinbras, in order to regain his kingdom and to revenge his father's death, should logically be seeking revenge on young Hamlet, too, but he does not do so.[289] If Hamlet shares his mother's guilt in the incest, he, thus, would share his father's guilt in the elder Fortinbras' death; but young Fortinbras foregoes revenge, and, in doing so, is spared to pick up the pieces and rule after Hamlet's death.[290] However, he is no ideal prince either, for he has a long list of rash acts to his credit as Horatio, in the opening scene, has noted.[291] Horatio, as an example of the use of reason over passion, is the true Renaissance ideal in the play, for in him "blood and judgment are so well commingled" that Hamlet wishes he were like Horatio.[292] Like Laertes and Ophelia, Hamlet is damned.[293] Again, Shakespeare seems to show the folly of

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288 William W. Lawrence, "Hamlet and Fortinbras." PMLA, LXI (June, 1946), 673.

289 Loc. cit.

290 Loc. cit.

291 Campbell, Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes, p. 236.

292 Ibid., p. 147.

293 Strandberg, op. cit., p. 98.

allowing the passions to rule over reason in pursuit of blood revenge. Revenge can only lead to damnation, since it is a Luciferian sin to usurp God's prerogative to punish man. God's vengeance will be enacted to the full when man rises against him. But, as always, Shakespeare disliked the explicit statement. One must find condemnation in the deaths and apparent damnation within the play for nowhere does Shakespeare ever say a word against revenge.[294]

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294 Joseph, op. cit., p. 45.

## CHAPTER VI

## CONCLUSION

In Elizabethan-Jacobean England, the church, the state, the historian, the moralist, and the popular pamphleteer were all in agreement that ultimately retribution would come to the sinner, that God was a jealous God, jealous of his prerogative to punish the sinner, that He had decreed that "Vengeance is mine," and that those who took revenge away from the hands of the Lord would surely bring the wrath of God down upon them.[295] It seems true that the gentleman's code of honor, deriving from the exaltation of virtue, existed as a counter-force during Elizabethan-Jacobean times and that other forces, such as Machiavellianism and the Senecan drama, worked both with and against the code of honor, particularly in literature and the theatre. But the combined pressure of the throne and the church must have produced results.

One very effective weapon, for instance, was the Homily on Disobedience which Elizabeth decreed must be read from the pulpit no less than nine times a year during her reign.[296] Another was the

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295 Campbell, Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes, p. 253.

296 Siegel, Shakespearean Tragedy and the Elizabethan Compromise, p. 47.

concept of order and degree upon which even the throne depended for suppression of rebellion.[297] One feels that the concept of passive obedience could not have held without the order and degree ideal as its basis. And finally, the idea of ultimate retribution fostered by a God whose whole creation functioned by means of natural laws was man's greatest security in the Renaissance.[298]

Shakespeare, as a man of the Renaissance, made use of his pagan humanist, his Christian, and his classical heritage in writing his plays; but never in Shakespeare does one find an absolute statement of good or evil.[299] Shakespeare was a man who, in his writings, shunned the explicit and the obvious; he believed in letting the play itself become the vehicle for the thought.[300] He opposed and contrasted parallel situations for the sake of dramatic impact and for the purpose of pointing up to the audience the blindness of man.[301] Furthermore, when men give

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297 Tillyard, The Elizabethan World Picture, p. 16.

298 Loc. cit.

299 Watson, op. cit., p. 6.

300 Joseph, op. cit., p. 45.

301 Ibid., p. 73.

in to passion, as they do in revenging, the results can only be tragic.[302]

In his use of revenge, Shakespeare was following a trend of the times, but he used the theme to suit his own purposes. In his history plays, he used Edward Hall's idea of drama in English history and wrote into the plays the idea of ultimate retribution.[303] Always in his plays having to do with public revenge, the revenger suffers either immediate or ultimate retribution, with three notable exceptions. Two are special cases in which he would have offended the ruling monarch had he done so. Henry, Earl of Richmond, the grandfather of Queen Elizabeth, could not be shown as anything other than a minister of justice when he took over the throne of Richard III.[304] Shakespeare also had two other traditions, that of Henry VII as a good king and that of Richard III as the dread tyrant, to contend with when he wrote of the rise of Richmond against Richard.[305] The other cases are those of Malcolm in Macbeth, who was an ancestor of James I and could only be treated as a minister of

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302 Prosser, op. cit., p. 94.

303 Reese, op. cit., p. 52.

304 Ibid., p. 212.

305 Loc. cit.

justice, and the King of France in King Lear, to whom Shakespeare assigns motives so sublime that the role calls for a minister of justice interpretation. However, all other public revengers had as a motive lust for power and therefore received God's vengeance.[306]

Shakespeare is more decisive in his condemnation of private revenge, since it is one form of passion, but, again, he is not obvious.[307] He does, in fact, seem to be saying just the opposite by making the audience sympathize with a revenger, though he may be doing this for purposes of empathy when the revenger is also the hero.[308] One way in which Shakespeare indicates his true purposes in the play of revenge is by means of his imagery, which is often of demons and hell when the revenger is plotting his revenge.[309] Other ways Shakespeare uses to make the audience take another look at revenge are by his use of irony and by his use of the theme of madness.

Examples of use of diabolic imagery are Richard III's imagery, Othello's and Iago's imagery. The best clue to the nature of the ghost in Hamlet seems to lie in its alliance with darkness and with the moles

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306 Prosser, op. cit., p. 76.

307 Ibid., p. 94.

308 Loc. cit.

309 Matthews, op. cit., p. 138.

beneath the earth and in its quick retreat as the cock crows. Titus Andronicus' speech says revenge comes from hell, and even Caesar's ghost comes "hot from hell."[310] In Troilus and Cressida and other plays lacking the Christian framework the imagery of revenge is of barbarism, savagery, and "venom'd vengeance."[311]

Troilus and Cressida makes much use of irony with its emphasis on love and honor and its concern with whoring and dishonor and revenge, the basic cause of the Trojan War.[312] Coriolanus would take revenge on all of Rome, and King Lear on his favorite and most virtuous child and on his most loyal and trusted servant. The honesty and loyalty of Iago are not what they seem to be, and, because he does not recognize a dissembler, Othello takes revenge on his "pearl of great price." The irony lies in the fact that he and Posthumus, Imogen's husband, in Cymbeline, both have virtuous women and will not believe it. Brutus, who puts love of country over love of his best friend, ironically causes civil war, the most dreadful thing that can happen to a country. The traitors in Henry V are made to pronounce their own sentence by means of a ruse.[313]

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310 Prosser, op. cit., p. 94.

311 Ibid., p. 82.

312 Tomlinson, op. cit., p. 74.

313 Prosser, op. cit., p. 80.

Madness or seeming madness is often associated with revenge, as with other crimes of passion.[314] Hamlet is the obvious example, but others are Titus Andronicus and Lear. The workings of abnormal melancholy may be interwoven or confused with madness as it is in Hamlet.

Revenge in Shakespeare is generally self-destructive.[315] Not only do Othello, Brutus, Hamlet, Coriolanus, Romeo, and Titus, all the great protagonists, suffer death, but secondary characters, such as Laertes, and many innocents, of whom Juliet and Ophelia are two examples, meet death because the revengeful fury cannot be selective. The wicked daughters in King Lear destroy each other. Iago, who does not die in the end, certainly loses all for which he did his wicked scheming -- the position for which he envied Cassio, his wife whom he has killed, all are gone. Succumbing to the passion of revenge leaves one open to manipulation by those less concerned with honor.[316] Laertes is one whose hotheadedness puts him in this predicament. Hotspur's passion for revenge for wrongs he feels he has suffered at the hands of Henry IV leaves him in a position in which he is manipulated.[317] Othello is another, but the

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314 Campbell, op. cit., p. 132.

315 Prosser, op. cit., p. 77.

316 Ibid., p. 80.

317 Ibid., p. 81.

difference in the case of Othello is that Iago has already begun to play with Othello directing him as he wishes before he ever considers revenge.

Doctrinal language familiar to everyone in the Rennaissance was often used by Shakespeare in speeches of those surrounding the revenger, in speeches of those left living at the end of the play, and of those who repent.[318] The repentance of Posthumus in Cymbeline, which continues through several scenes (V. i., V. iii., and V. iv), has much of a doctrinal nature in it. John of Gaunt with his speech, "Let Heaven revenge! For I may never lift/ An angry arm against His minister," is using the language of doctrine.

Revenge in Shakespeare is often no sooner accomplished than the revenger regrets his action. Though not always uttered vocally, the wish to have his revenge undone is sometimes seen to be in the revenger's mind. This irrevocability of revenge is a major theme played upon by Shakespeare particularly in the tragedies of Othello and Romeo and Juliet. To a lesser extent, it is seen in Hamlet when Laertes finds he has been tricked by the king, and in the history plays.

The English were fascinated by the revenge play.[319] It was Kyd's The Spanish Tragedy that first made use of the scourge and minister

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318 Loc. cit.

319 Matthews, op. cit., p. 87.

idea. The scourge and minister was the human agent who would effect God's vengeance within the pattern of an orderly creation by using the idea of a heaven-ordained wreaker of God's divine justice.[320] Shakespeare used Kyd's idea when the situation seemed to call for it; but, more than that, he went further in achieving action and character unity than any of his forerunners in the drama.[321] Shakespeare's plays thus are often considered outside the realm of the ordinary revenge drama and not as part of conventional revenge drama at all.

Though Shakespeare let the play make the statement and was never obvious and though the most famous tragedies in particular appear to be left ambiguous for the sake of dramatic impact, yet, in the final analysis, all the evidence seems to indicate that Shakespeare kept within the confines of church and state teachings where revenge is concerned. Revenge was God's prerogative and, as such, its use by man was a sin that would surely be punished by God. Revenge was also one of the base passions and no man of reason could yield to passion without bringing about great tragedy. There is no play in Shakespeare wherein a protagonist succumbs to revenge without suffering dire consequences. Thus, revenge in Shakespeare follows the edict to "Take not the quarrel from His powerful arm;/ He needs no indirect or lawless course/ To cut

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320 Prosser, op. cit., p. 192.

321 Craig, op. cit., p. 25.

off those who have offended him." (Richard III. I. iv. 223-25)

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