

The revenger's tragedy essay



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In the extract, the key themes of lust, moral decay, misogyny and corruption are demonstrated and reinforced through the exchange between Vindice and Gratiana. In the Italian court in which the play is set, it is evident that moral bankruptcy is, and almost the only way of life and this is reflected in Vindice's words; " The world descends into such base-born evils/ That forty angels can make fourscore devils" (II.

i. 88-89). The endless lust for wealth and ambition in court are conveyed with these lines, where he points out the fact that money is in fact, the root cause of evil. Here, ' the world' can be seen as a metaphor for the various characters in the court, where the supposedly ' noble', in the attempt to fulfil their individual agendas, have been in fact, reduced to become the most morally corrupt group of people.

As such, one would be compelled to contemplate the extent of debauchery in the duke's court; if Vindice, who appears to be the purveyor of justice but deceives and murders through the play, can act like a moral spokesman in the play, it would seem that the entire court practise much more evil in comparison. This hence, further reinforces the idea that general moral decay runs rampant in the court. Furthermore, Vindice acknowledges the fact that despite his disgust, it was not surprising that the court would be mired in corruption, this being seen in the line " Tis no shame to be bad, because 'tis common" (II. i.

18). As such, the audience is all but well prepared for the utter depravity that would reveal as the story unfolds, and this serves as a basis for further development of the themes. The presentation of character in the extract

reveals the inherent ability of every human to discard their moral codes to satisfy their selfish needs, this being seen in how Gratiana is swayed by Vindice to prostitute her daughter for money. In the beginning, Gratiana appears to be horrified at Vindice's audacious and unthinkable proposal that she sells her daughter for money, claiming that "the riches of the world cannot hire a mother to such a most unnatural task" (II. .

84-85). However, upon further persuasion, she allows herself to be convinced that it could be an acceptable thing to do, for a daughter should only repay her mother for bringing her up. Furthermore, Gratiana capitalises on the weakness of her gender, using it as an excuse for being swayed by Vindice, even claiming that she is 'overcome' by his words, for as a woman, she is but 'so weak', and that the words of men could easily 'overthrow' her and weaken her virtues. With this, the author also creates a basis for the misogyny apparent in the play; it is precisely due to the fact that the women see themselves as weak creatures that are naturally incapable of denying men, that the men in turn, see them as untrustworthy and lustful and hence, to be hated. In addition, the hypocrisy of Gratiana's character is revealed in her words; she finds no shame in her actions, only reasons that would free her of the guilt and responsibility of her actions.

Hence, from the fact that a mother would betray even her own flesh and blood for the sake of wealth and advancement in court, the theme of widespread moral corruption is forcefully reiterated. On the other hand, it is evident that Vindice, despite his clever and manipulative nature, is rather morally disoriented. While he condemns the courtiers who sin and discard their morals, he also regards their behaviour as a given; he sees it as a

commonplace occurrence. In addition, this recognition of moral decay in others does not prevent him from doing the same; to persuade Gratiana to prostitute her daughter, his conscience only going as far to hope that she would reject the proposal.

As such, it is evident that Vindice, like the rest of the courtiers, was capable of an abhorring degree of evil in order to pursue their individual agendas. Interestingly, when Vindice thinks of how he as 'entered' the mind of Gratiana in touching and overcoming her with his words, it also appeared to him as the sexual penetration of her body. In the lines "' I e'en quake to proceed, my spirit turns edge, / I fear me she's unmothered" (II. i.

109-10), Vindice reveals that he is in fact, perturbed by the power that he has over Gratiana; an instance of his moral confusion. While he discards morality in order to reach his objectives, he is at the same time, disturbed when he succeeds in achieving them. With the insinuation of Vindice's 'sexual penetration' of Gratiana, it is in fact, a foreshadow of the incest that was to come later in the play. One dramatic technique that is rather prominent in the play is the use of 'asides'. With the revealing of the characters' inner thoughts to the audience, a different level of insight is achieved; thoughts that are often contradictive to the words that are spoken. As such, Middleton is able to masterfully present the ambivalence and the different facets of his characters to the audience.

This in fact, serves as a fine balance to the often rhetorical style of the play, as the audience is then able to draw their own conclusions to the nature of the characters. In addition, the recurring imagery of all things related to

money is evident; angels (gold coins), estate, and the phrase 'bring you home'. As such, the audience is constantly reminded of the theme of corruption in the story, allowing the plot to progress in a linear fashion that never strays from its theme. Lastly, the stylistic element of foreshadowing can also be seen in Middleton's writing, one instance being Vindice's supposed 'sexual penetration' of Gratiana. With this, the audience is given clues to what was to come later on in the play, which is in this case, incest.

From this short extract, it is evident that the themes of the play are thoroughly demonstrated through the use of language, presentation, and dramatic techniques. The audience is exposed to a world mired in corruption, while lust and the thirst for money and revenge further contaminate the characters. On the other hand, the ambivalence of the characters is also revealed, compelling the audience to be constantly second guessing the authenticity of the characters' presentations of themselves. The incessant theatrics and play acting that comes so naturally to so many of the characters in the play also serves as a reminder to the hypocrisy that also exists in the real world, and the fact that at times, life itself is but a play.