

Madness and revenge in the spanish tragedy assignment

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Nann Harwood September 26, 2011 Eng 534 The Madness of Revenge in The Spanish Tragedy In Thomas Kyd's The Spanish Tragedy*, Hieronimo is consumed with obtaining revenge for the unjust death of his son, Horatio. Revenge plays a vital role in this exemplar revenge tragedy, not just as a motivator for those who are unable to obtain justice but in the guise as a main character and companion to Don Andrea. Don Andrea is obstinate in being certain that his death is avenged as Revenge verbalizes the following: " Be still, Andrea, ere we go from hence. I'll turn their friendship into fell despite, / Their love to mortal hate, their day to night, / Their hope into despair, their peace to war, / Their joys to pain, their bliss to misery (1. 10. 5-9). The character of Revenge has set in motion the unfolding events as if Revenge has predestined the players in the tragedy to their doom. In order to achieve that end, madness will consume Balthazar, Hieronimo and even Isabella. Balthazar becomes mad in his desire to possess Bel-Imperia. He is controlled by his lust for her and states that "...in her heart set him where I should stand" (2. 2. 129). Balthazar's madness drives him to commit a senseless murder which will dictate the actions of Hieronimo for the duration of the play. Horatio is murdered because he is an obstacle which prevents Balthazar from acquiring Bel-Imperia, against her will. The letter which she writes in her own blood is foreshadowing the blood that will be spilt throughout the play as Balthazar slaughters more victims to conceal his actions.

Consequently, Hieronimo's madness fluctuates between obtaining justice and revenge for the death of Horatio: " I will go plain me to my Lord the King, / And cry aloud for justice through the court" (3. 7. 71-72). Hieronimo
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attempts to achieve justice through the standard channels but is disappointed. The usual conduit of the law has weakened and subsequently, Hieronimo falls back on the friend of those who never receive justice ??? Revenge. He contemplates suicide but reconsiders when he realizes that no one will “revenge Horatio’s murder” (3. 12. 7), but Hieronimo is fully aware that the person to procure justice for Horatio will be himself. However, Isabella is delusional when she perceives that her husband will not exact revenge for the senseless murder of their son. By play’s end, Isabella is completely overwrought with grief so much that she cuts down the tree from which Horatio was hanged before being stabbed, and then stabs herself after hearing that her son’s murderers are freed from their guilt. Bel-Imperia is disdainful of Hieronimo, as well, and chastises him for avenging his son’s death: “Is this the love thou bear’st Horatio? Is this the kindness that thou counterfeitst? / Are these the fruits of thine incessant tears?” (4. 1. 1-3). In spite of this declaration, Hieronimo declares he “will ere long determine of their deaths” (4. 1. 44) and bring about the justice that has been denied for Horatio. Hieronimo’s madness has devoured him and Revenge has manipulated Balthazar, Lorenzo and others to achieve this result. Bel-Imperia assists Hieronimo with his masque as a means to gain justice for her lover’s death while Balthazar and Lorenzo unwittingly participate in the masque.

Although the characters speak in different languages, this demonstrates that Revenge has no barriers that will prevent justice for those who cannot acquire it for themselves. In the final act, Hieronimo has overcome his powerlessness and secured justice for his son. Likewise, Don Andrea has avenged his death and will judge his traitors for their crimes, per his request.

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Revenge has similarly achieved something as well - the tragedy that has unfolded has satisfied his own selfish desires as well as allowing him to continue the vicious cycle of tragedy.