



TITLE · The Spanish Tragedie, Containing the lamentable end of Don Horatio, and Bel-imperia: with the pittifull death of old Hieronimo.

AUTHOR · Thomas Kyd

TYPE OF WORK · Play

GENRE · Tragedy

LANGUAGE · English (with interspersed Latin)

TIME AND PLACE WRITTEN · 1582–1592 (most likely in the late 1580's), England

DATE OF FIRST PUBLICATION · 1592

PUBLISHER · Edward Allde

NARRATOR · Andrea and Revenge serve as quasi-narrators

CLIMAX · There are two: the murder of Don Horatio in Act II.v, and the playlet *Soliman and Perseda*, in IV.iv.

PROTAGONIST · Hieronimo, the Knight-Marshal of Spain

ANTAGONISTS · Lorenzo (primary) and Balthazar (secondary)

SETTING (TIME) · Late sixteenth-century

SETTING (PLACE) · The Spanish and Portuguese courts, and the estate of the Spanish King surrounding his court

FALLING ACTION · After killing Lorenzo and Balthazar, Hieronimo runs off to commit suicide. The King, the Viceroy, and the Duke of Castile attempt to stop him, and question him; but he ends up biting off his tongue. When he asks for a knife to sharpen his pen so that he can write out a confession, he stabs himself and the Duke of Castile.

FORESHADOWING · The "dumb-show" in Act III.xv; Lorenzo's threats in II.ii.

TOPE · Ironic; serious; tragic

THEMES · Justice and revenge; love and memory; fortune; reality vs. appearance

MOTIFS · The Classical World vs. the Christian world; Machiavellianism; antithesis and irony; the meta-theater

SYMBOLS · The bloody handkerchief

Born in 1558, Thomas Kyd began life with a series of good omens. He was the son of a prosperous middle-class family; his father, Francis Kyd, was a scrivener—a type of scribe that was very important in the complex world of Elizabethan law. When he was seven, Thomas began to attend the Merchant Taylors school, a new and modern school for boys. Admission to Merchant Taylors required a significant knowledge of either Latin or Greek as well as the Bible, so Thomas's entrance was no small accomplishment. In fact, among his classmates at the prestigious academy was Edmund Spenser, future author of the Elizabethan epic poem *The Faerie Queene*. There was little hint, in Kyd's early events, of the misfortunes and sufferings that would plague his final years, sufferings almost worthy of one of his tragic protagonists.

It was at school that Kyd probably first encountered the works of classical authors, such as Virgil and Seneca, who later on would have such a profound impact on him. After completing his education at Merchant Taylors, Thomas did not attend either of Cambridge or Oxford, as did his fellow playwright and sometime friend Christopher Marlowe. Instead, he probably became apprenticed in his father's trade. He also found employment as a translator, but it is believed that by 1583 (or thereabouts) he was already writing for the stage. Here he was to make his reputation and gain lasting fame mainly as the author of *The Spanish Tragedy*—one of the most popular, beloved, parodied, reviled and influential plays of the entire era, a play that was still being performed and read fifty years later and was to shape the work of all future tragedians to come, including Shakespeare.

Tragedy had first achieved greatness in ancient Greece, in Attica (the region surrounding Athens), where it developed out of religious festivals that celebrated the cult of the god Dionysus. The stories of Greek tragedies generally focused on a somehow gifted protagonist, who, through some act of

hubris, suffered incredible misfortune, which usually culminated in a kind of redemptive moment of understanding and usually death. This brief flowering of tragedy was followed by an extremely long hiatus during which tragedy was virtually absent from the drama of the Western world, with the exception of some crude Roman attempts to imitate the Greek masters. And tragedy was almost entirely absent from the Christian drama, which generally tended to focus on celebrating the morality of Christ or, especially in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, inculcating morals through the use of morality plays. It was only with the Elizabethans, most critics agree, that tragedy regained its viability and its existence as a living art form. This would make *The Spanish Tragedy* a very important play, since it may be the first extant "Elizabethan classic" of the tragic genre, though this depends on whether it was written before or after Marlowe's *Tamburlaine I & II* and *Doctor Faustus*.

Interestingly enough, Kyd took as his model not the ancient Greeks, but the Roman playwright Seneca, whose blood-soaked tales of the downfalls of royal families proved fascinating to the Elizabethan mind. Kyd took Senecan conventions, however, and used them to create a type of play, known as the revenge tragedy, that would serve as a fertile genre for contemporary playwrights. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* became the most celebrated example of the revenge tragedy (as well as being perhaps the most celebrated play ever written). Kyd, interestingly enough, is rumored to be the first playwright ever to put the story of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark onto the stage, but his version was much less popular than Shakespeare's and has been lost to history.

But Kyd's play does not need to be justified in terms of its effects on later dramatists, since it was a huge success in its own right and was extremely popular with contemporary audiences despite (or perhaps thanks to) its gory violence and sometimes over-the-top rhetoric. This is surely due to Kyd's talent and craft as a dramatist and writer, but it may also have to do with the topical relevance of Kyd's themes.

The theme of revenge, for example, was a very controversial one in Elizabethan times. It is difficult to gauge the exact state of the Elizabethan mind with regards to revenge, because much of what survives on the subject comes from the preachers who were trying to discourage it. But we have reason to believe that there was a conflict between the old custom of seeking private revenge for wrongs done to one's family, inherited largely from the Anglo-Saxon and Danish influences on English culture, as well as from the Christian injunction of *Vindicta mihi*; "Vengeance is mine, sayeth the lord; I will repay". In other words, for the Christian, revenge against wrongdoers is the responsibility of God, not men. In Elizabethan times, a third factor had entered into the debate, namely the increasingly centralized and powerful state, which also discouraged private revenge in favor of revenge under the auspices of the law. In such circumstances, there was probably a great deal of confusion as to the moral status of revenge, though some types of revenge were definitely held to be worse than others: for example, a hot-blooded revenge committed in a fit of passion was preferable to a cold-blooded revenge, carefully, methodically plotted out in a Machiavellian manner. Though they abhorred Machiavellianism in public, the Elizabethans were fascinated when it was represented on stage, and most of the interesting avengers of Elizabethan drama, including Hieronimo, the hero of *The Spanish Tragedy*, employ deception and ruse to achieve their ends.

Another emotion that Kyd may have evoked was the strong anti-Spanish sentiment prevalent among his countrymen. Kyd wrote his play sometime between 1582 and 1592, most likely in the late 1580's. 1588 was the date when the first Spanish Armada—the fleet built by Philip II of Spain to invade England—was defeated, and Spain was regarded during that time as England's most hated enemy. The conflict had religious significance in the public mind, with the Spanish begin regarded as the anti-Christ and the English representing God's chosen people. An Elizabethan audience may have therefore been somewhat pleased at the denouement of the tragedy, where the royal lines of both Spain and Portugal are wiped out in a frenzied orgy of violence.

It is ironic that Kyd's play—and therefore his success and fame—may have been partly due to this English xenophobia, for it was on suspicion of writing threatening anti-foreigner graffiti that Kyd's lodgings were searched by agents of the Queen in 1593. They found no anti-foreigner treatises, but they did find a pamphlet which they deemed "atheistical." Thus Kyd ended up in prison, being tortured on suspicion of spreading heresy and atheism. Kyd protested that the pamphlet belonged to Marlowe, with whom he had been roommates in the summer of 1591, and that it had accidentally been shuffled in among his papers; Marlowe was killed in a tavern brawl before he could confirm Kyd's testimony.

By the time Kyd was released, he had probably been extensively tortured. Moreover, his reputation had been ruined, and the lord on whom he had previously relied on for patronage now turned a deaf ear, unconvinced of Kyd's innocence. Kyd spent the last year-and-a-half of his life in abject poverty, completing a translation of Robert Gardiner's play *Cornelia* from the original French, in the hope of establishing a patron in the Lady to whom the translation was dedicated. She did not fulfill his hope. He was dead by the end of 1594, as is known from a court document in which his mother, shortly after his death, in effect disowned him, to avoid having to pay his debts. He thus died alone and penniless, but not before having unknowingly bequeathed to the Elizabethan age what may be its first masterpiece and a genre that was to produce that age's greatest accomplishment.

The Spanish Tragedy begins with the ghost of Don Andrea, a Spanish nobleman killed in a recent battle with Portugal. Accompanied by the spirit of Revenge, he tells the story of his death; he was killed in hand-to-hand combat with the Portuguese prince Balthazar, after falling in love with the beautiful Bel-Imperia and having a secret affair with her. When he faces the judges who are supposed to assign him to his place in the underworld, they are unable to reach a decision and instead send him to the palace of Pluto and Proserpine, King and Queen of the Underworld. Proserpine



decides that Revenge should accompany him back to the world of the living, and, after passing through the gates of horn, this is where he finds himself. The spirit of Revenge promises that by the play's end, Don Andrea will see his revenge.

Andrea returns to the scene of the battle where he died, to find that the Spanish have won. Balthazar was taken prisoner shortly after Andrea's death, by the Andrea's good friend Horatio, son of Hieronimo, the Knight Marshal of Spain. But a dispute ensues between Horatio and Lorenzo, the son of the Duke of Castile and brother of Bel-Imperia, as to who actually captured the prince. The King of Spain decides to compromise between the two, letting Horatio have the ransom money to be paid for Balthazar and Lorenzo keep the captured prince at his home. Back in Portugal, the Viceroy (ruler) is mad with grief, for he believes his son to be dead, and is tricked by Villuppo into arresting an innocent noble, Alexandro, for Balthazar's murder. Diplomatic negotiations then begin between the Portuguese ambassador and the Spanish King, to ensure Balthazar's return and a lasting peace between Spain and Portugal.

Upon being taken back to Spain, Balthazar soon falls in love with Bel-Imperia himself. But, as her servant Pedringano reveals to him, Bel-Imperia is in love with Horatio, who returns her affections. The slight against him, which is somewhat intentional on Bel-Imperia's part, enrages Balthazar. Horatio also incurs the hatred of Lorenzo, because of the fight over Balthazar's capture and the fact that the lower-born Horatio (the son of a civil servant) now consorts with Lorenzo's sister. So the two nobles decide to kill Horatio, which they successfully do with the aid of Pedringano and Balthazar's servant Serberine, during an evening rendezvous between the two lovers. Bel-Imperia is then taken away before Hieronimo stumbles on to the scene to discover his dead son. He is soon joined in uncontrollable grief by his wife, Isabella.

In Portugal, Alexandro escapes death when the Portuguese ambassador returns from Spain with news that Balthazar still lives; Villuppo is then sentenced to death. In Spain, Hieronimo is almost driven insane by his inability to find justice for his son. Hieronimo receives a bloody letter in Bel-Imperia's hand, identifying the murderers as Lorenzo and Balthazar, but he is uncertain whether or not to believe it. While Hieronimo is racked with grief, Lorenzo grows worried by Hieronimo's erratic behavior and acts in a Machiavellian manner to eliminate all evidence surrounding his crime. He tells Pedringano to kill Serberine for gold but arranges it so that Pedringano is immediately arrested after the crime. He then leads Pedringano to believe that a pardon for his crime is hidden in a box brought to the execution by a messenger boy, a belief that prevents Pedringano from exposing Lorenzo before he is hanged. Negotiations continue between Spain and Portugal, now centering on a diplomatic marriage between Balthazar and Bel-Imperia to unite the royal lines of the two countries. Ironically, a letter is found on Pedringano's body that confirms Hieronimo's suspicion over Lorenzo and Balthazar, but Lorenzo is able to deny Hieronimo access to the king, thus making royal justice unavailable to the distressed father. Hieronimo then vows to revenge himself privately on the two killers, using deception and a false show of friendship to keep Lorenzo off his guard.

The marriage between Bel-Imperia and Balthazar is set, and the Viceroy travels to Spain to attend the ceremony. Hieronimo is given responsibility over the entertainment for the marriage ceremony, and he uses it to exact his revenge. He devises a play, a tragedy, to be performed at the ceremonies, and convinces Lorenzo and Balthazar to act in it. Bel-Imperia, by now a confederate in Hieronimo's plot for revenge, also acts in the play. Just before the play is acted, Isabella, insane with grief, kills herself.

The plot of the tragedy mirrors the plot of the play as a whole (a sultan is driven to murder a noble friend through jealousy over a woman). Hieronimo casts himself in the role of the hired murderer. During the action of the play, Hieronimo's character stabs Lorenzo's character and Bel-Imperia's character stabs Balthazar's character, before killing herself. But after the play is over, Hieronimo reveals to the horrified wedding guests (while standing over the corpse of his own son) that all the stabbings in the play were done with real knives, and that Lorenzo, Balthazar, and Bel-Imperia are now all dead. He then tries to kill himself, but the King and Viceroy and Duke of Castile stop him. In order to keep himself from talking, he bites out his own tongue. Tricking the Duke into giving him a knife, he then stabs the Duke and himself and then dies.

Revenge and Andrea then have the final words of the play. Andrea assigns each of the play's "good" characters (Hieronimo, Bel-Imperia, Horatio, and Isabella) to happy eternities. The rest of the characters are assigned to the various tortures and punishments of Hell.

Hieronimo - The protagonist of the story. Hieronimo starts out as a loyal servant to the King. He is the King's Knight-Marshal and is in charge of organizing entertainments at royal events. At the beginning of the play, he is a minor character, especially in relation to Lorenzo, Balthazar, and Bel-Imperia. It is not until he discovers his son Horatio's murdered body in the second Act that he becomes the protagonist of the play. His character undergoes a radical shift over the course of the play, from grieving father to Machiavellian plotter. After his son's murder, he is constantly pushed the limits of sanity, as evidenced by his erratic speech and behavior.

Read an [in-depth analysis of Hieronimo](#).

Bel-Imperia - The main female character of the story. Bel-Imperia's role is prominent in the plot, especially toward the end. The daughter of the Duke of Castile, she is headstrong, as evidenced by her decisions to love Andrea and Horatio, both against her father's wishes. She is intelligent, beautiful, and, in moments of love, tender. She also is bent on revenge, both for her slain lover Andrea and for Horatio. Her transformation into a Machiavellian villain is not as dramatic as Hieronimo's, but only because she shows signs of Machiavellian behavior beforehand—her decision to love Horatio, in part, may have been calculated revenge, undertaken in order to spite Balthazar, Andrea's killer.



Read an [in-depth analysis of Bel-Imperia](#).

Lorenzo - One of Horatio's murderers. Lorenzo's character remains fairly constant throughout the play. He is a proud verbal manipulator and a Machiavellian plotter. A great deceiver and manipulator of others, Horatio unsurprisingly has an enthusiasm for the theater. Lorenzo has a foil in Horatio; they are both brave young men, but Horatio's directness, impulsiveness, and honesty, contrast and highlight Lorenzo's guardedness, secretiveness, and deception.

Read an [in-depth analysis of Lorenzo](#).

Balthazar - The prince of Portugal and son of the Portuguese Viceroy. Balthazar is characterized by his extreme pride and his hot-headedness. This pride makes him kill Horatio along with Lorenzo, and it turns him into a villain. He kills Andrea fairly, though with help, so it is unclear whether he is as "valiant" as the King and others continuously describe him. But his love for Bel-Imperia is genuine, and it is this love that primarily motivates his killing of Horatio.

Horatio - The proud, promising son of Hieronimo. Horatio's sense of duty and loyalty is shown in his actions towards Andrea, and he gives Andrea the funeral rites that let the ghost cross the river Acheron in the underworld. He also captures Andrea's killer, Balthazar, in battle, thus recovering Andrea's body. His sense of pride is shown in his confrontation with Lorenzo; though Lorenzo greatly outranks him in stature, he does not defer, but instead continues to argue his case in front of the King.

Ghost of Andrea - Andrea's ghost is the first character we see in the play, and the first voice to cry out for revenge. His quest for revenge can be seen both as a quest for justice, since it is sanctioned by Persephone, the Queen of the Underworld, and as a quest for closure. Andrea is denied closure when he travels to the underworld, because the three judges there cannot decide where to place him; ironically, at the end of the play he becomes a judge himself, determining the places of the various characters in hell.

Revenge - Andrea's companion throughout the play. Revenge is a spirit that symbolizes the forces of revenge that dominate the play's action. He talks of the living characters as if they were performing a tragedy for his entertainment.

Isabella - Hieronimo's suffering wife, her inaction is a foil to his and Bel-Imperia's action. Her inaction, along with her visions of a dead Horatio, torment her increasingly throughout the play, providing an extreme version of Hieronimo's more subdued madness. Her death by her own hand foreshadows Hieronimo's suicide.

The King - The King of Spain is an ambivalent character. At times he appears noble and is definitely a friend to Hieronimo, resiting Lorenzo's attempts to have the Knight-Marshal dismissed. But he is also complacent (a typical English stereotype about the Spanish), as demonstrated by his callous conversation after the Spanish victory in Act I, his subsequent dialogue with the ambassador, and his failure to know that Horatio has been murdered on his estate.

The Viceroy - The King's counterpart in Portugal. The Viceroy is shown as both a loving father but also a weak king. He is defeated in battle, wallows in self-pity when he believes his son Balthazar to be dead, is easily led astray by Villuppo into condemning Alexandro to death, and then renounces his kingship in favor of his son. All of these are signs of bad leadership, especially to an Elizabethan audience.

Pedringano - Bel-Imperia's servant. Pedringano is easily bribed, and he betrays Bel-Imperia and is one of the gang of four murderers who kill Horatio. In fact, Pedringano seems to have no moral considerations, only following the person whom he thinks can help him most. Ironically, this leads him to trust Lorenzo, who ends up betraying him.

Serberine - Balthazar's manservant who, along with Lorenzo, Balthazar, and Pedringano, kills Horatio. Lorenzo suspects Serberine of informing Hieronimo of the crime, and has him killed by Pedringano.

Bazulto - An old man. Bazulto visits Hieronimo because his own son has been murdered, and he wants the Knight-Marshal's help in finding justice. The appearance of the old man makes Hieronimo feel ashamed at his own inability to avenge Horatio's death.

The Ambassador - The Portuguese Ambassador is the agent of communication between the King and Viceroy. His presence appears purely functional, exchanging information between the Portuguese and Spanish court.

Alexandro - A Portuguese nobleman who fought at the battle in Act I. Alexandro is betrayed by Villuppo, who falsely informs the King that Alexandro has shot Balthazar, the King's son. Alexandro's character appears exceptionally just; even when Villuppo is discovered, he begs the Viceroy (unsuccessfully) for mercy on Villuppo's behalf.



Villuppo - A nobleman who, for no reason clear to the audience, betrays Alexandro. Villuppo's role is so short and so tied in with his lie about Alexandro that he almost serves as a personification of deceit, contrasting against Alexandro's personification of honor.

General of the Spanish Army - The General simply describes the battle between Spain and Portugal in Act I. His account of Andrea's death (or lack of account of it) and description of the Spanish casualties as minimal provides an ironic contrast to Andrea's lamenting of his death in battle.

Christophil - A servant who attends on Bel-Imperia while she is kept prisoner by Lorenzo.

The Hangman - The hangman is witty and jovial, and he exchanges verbal retorts with Pedringano before hanging him. Later, the hangman discovers the letter on Pedringano's body that confirms Hieronimo's suspicions of Lorenzo and Balthazar's guilt.

The Page - The page is a messenger boy who brings Lorenzo's empty box to the execution, which is believed to hold a pardon for Pedringano. After the page looks inside, he does not tell anyone that it is empty, out of fear for his own life. This has a distinct impact on the play, since Pedringano's belief that he will be pardoned stops him from exposing Lorenzo as one of Horatio's murderers before it is too late.

Hieronimo

Hieronimo is the Knight-Marshal of Spain and the protagonist of the play. The Knight-Marshal was, in the Spanish government, the top judge responsible for any legal matters concerning the King or his estate. Hieronimo's occupation thus links him to the play's key theme, that of justice and revenge. Hieronimo equates the two frequently, and, indeed, the play seems to support his equation with its various calls for revenge and retribution. Only one character in the play, Alexandro, shows mercy on someone who has wronged him, and in that case the wrong did not end in death.

There are problems, however, with revenge, problems that Hieronimo must face. That Hieronimo does face these problems is what gives him the psychological complexity and verisimilitude typically associated with the tragic protagonist, making Hieronimo a sort of proto-tragic protagonist in English literature. Not even an important character until the murder of his son Horatio, Hieronimo is suddenly thrust into the center of the action. His character then develops over a series of soliloquies, wrestling with several key questions. These questions include: whether to end his misery by suicide instead of waiting to seek revenge, where to seek revenge against murderers with far more influence over the king than he, how to reconcile his duties as a judge with his inability to find justice for his son, whether to leave revenge to God once his legal means are exhausted, and—having decided to seek his revenge—how to do it in the face of enemies who could easily destroy him with their vastly greater influence and power at court.

Hieronimo resolves each of these questions and decides to seek revenge in a Machiavellian, deceitful manner. This is a radical shift for Hieronimo, who effectively adopts the tactics of the murderer Lorenzo against Lorenzo himself. And though his revenge is successful, Hieronimo's grief is not relieved, only death and silence manages to do this.

Hieronimo's conversion to Machiavellianism and his violent, bloody revenge, may raise problems for both an Elizabethan and a modern audience. Sympathizing with someone who reveals himself to be both deceitful and bloodthirsty is difficult. But Kyd does sow the seeds of Hieronimo's conversion in the first Act, when Hieronimo presents a masque to entertain the court. If we think of Hieronimo as an author of stories related to the downfall of Spanish and Portuguese princes (the subject of the masque), instead of a deceiver, then we see that Kyd has foreshadowed Hieronimo's later transformation. And we may see Hieronimo's revenge less as a violent, evil act than as a creative way to find justice in an unjust society.

Bel-Imperia

Bel-Imperia is the main female character of the story, and she has the misfortune to fall in love with both Andrea and Horatio shortly before they die. She also has the misfortune to have an evil brother in Lorenzo and to be the object of Balthazar's affection, when Balthazar is the very man who murdered her beloved Andrea and then went on to murder her beloved Horatio. She is then forced by both her father, the Duke of Castile, and her uncle, the King of Spain—the two most powerful men in the country—to wed this very same Balthazar.

Bel-Imperia does not, however, appear as a victim in all of this misfortune, which is a testament to the strength with which Kyd has portrayed her. He does this by giving her opportunity to display her rhetorical ability in *stichomythia* (line-by-line exchanges) between her, Balthazar, and Lorenzo. She also has several soliloquies, during which we have access to a mind, an *interiority*, with very strong opinions, desires, and motivations. We also have evidence that she has the necessary strength of will to act on her desires and motivations; the clearest example of this may be her participation in Hieronimo's revenge playlet, *Soliman and Perseda*.

Further, we can object that Bel-Imperia may be too calculating, too cold, and that her thoughts focus too much on revenge. Bel-Imperia, indeed, bears a vindictiveness for the wrongs done to her. Her love for Horatio seems partly motivated by a desire to revenge herself on Balthazar (which, of course, disastrously backfires in Horatio's murder). And she spurs Hieronimo on to revenge when he seems to be lazy in pursuing it. But this makes her murder at the end of the play acceptable—more acceptable, perhaps, than Hieronimo's actions. And as the litany of misfortunes above indicates, if she is angry, then she has very good reason to be.



Lorenzo

Lorenzo is an example of the Machiavellian villain, typical of many Elizabethan tragedies and dramas. Other good examples of this type of villain include Iago, from Shakespeare's *Othello*, and Marlowe's Barabas from *The Jew of Malta*. This character exploited the popular disapproval of the early sixteenth-century Italian political philosopher Niccolò Machiavelli, whose *The Prince* portrayed a picture of a political ruler who (very broadly speaking) used manipulation over persuasion and fear over love to ensure the loyalty of his subjects. These characters also drew heavily on the traditional Vice figure in English literature.

The Vice figure would use verbal cleverness to lead a protagonist into sin, using that protagonist's inherent moral weakness. Similarly, Lorenzo uses his verbal cleverness to lead the people around him to injustice, playing on their moral weakness as well as their lack of knowledge. And like the Vice figure, Lorenzo has a foil. In the morality plays, the foil was usually a virtuous old man. In this tragedy, the honest and virtuous Horatio acts as a foil. But a key difference between the Machiavellian villain and the Vice figure is that the villain is human, whereas Vice is supernatural (much like Revenge in this play). So Lorenzo is weak in the same way those he manipulates are weak, and he is as easily manipulated as those he manipulates. This ironic fact is proven by Hieronimo when he lures Lorenzo into the playlet, manipulating the young nobleman's love of theater and erroneous belief that Hieronimo bears him no hard feelings.

Themes

Revenge and Justice

"Vengeance is mine; I will repay, sayeth the lord" (Romans.xii.19). This Bible verse is quoted by Hieronimo in Act III, scene xiii, and it can be said to epitomize the official Elizabethan attitude toward revenge: that it is something that should be left to God. But this position is silent on the relationship between revenge and justice, which are identified with each other throughout the play—Hieronimo makes the connection explicitly several times, and revenge is officially sanctioned by Proserpine (Persephone), the Queen of the Underworld, in the play's opening scene. Revenge should be performed by God (or the State, which derived its power from God), but it still needs to be performed. This is the presupposition that underlies Hieronimo's doubts whether the Heavens (and God) are in fact just, which are doubts he expresses after the murder of his son and the apparent escape of his murderers. This link between revenge and justice also explains why, in III.xii, and IV.i, Hieronimo decides to revenge Horatio's death himself and why he interprets Bel-Imperia's offer of help as a sign that Heaven favors his decision. Hieronimo may here consider himself the agent of the divine vengeance that a just God must bring against his son's murderers, the man chosen by God to revenge Horatio's death. His act would thus be a service to God and not an usurpation of God's role.

There is, unquestionably, doubt in the audience's mind as to whether Hieronimo is right, and a similar ambiguity is felt toward other cases of revenge in the play as well—Andrea's and Bel-Imperia's, for example. Exactly what deaths should be revenged and who should do the revenging were topical questions for Elizabethans, who were living in a time when the Elizabethan state was bringing a centuries-old tradition of private revenge in England under control. It was also a state whose preachers advised leaving revenge to God, while at the same time describing the horrible revenge God would take on sinners. But the problems posed to us by revenge—and the intense desire for it when we or a loved one is injured by another, especially when the law fails to provide us with redress—is something that can be felt by modern audiences as well.

Love and Memory

Not only is revenge a form of justice in the play, it is, ironically enough, an expression of love. Bel-Imperia's love for Andrea leads her to desire revenge against Balthazar; Balthazar revenges himself against Horatio because he loves Bel-Imperia. Bel-Imperia and Hieronimo make the most explicit connection between the two, interpreting the failure to revenge one's loved one as a lack of love. The presupposition that underlies all these actions and words is that love for a murder victim finds its fullest expression in vengeance. In effect, vengeance is an assertion that the loved one is not forgotten. Thus, Andrea's desire for vengeance is understandable as a desire not to be forgotten by those still living, and love and revenge are intertwined in the symbol of the bloody handkerchief, which starts out as a simple memento but ends by becoming, for Hieronimo, a symbol of both the memory of his son and the need to revenge his son's death.

Fortune

The wheel of fortune was a potent image in Elizabethan iconography. It signified, in the Elizabethan consciousness, the vagaries and constant revolutions of Fortune, from low to high and everywhere in between. Lorenzo makes an allusion to it when he notes that the social-climbing Horatio is, hanged from the trees, "higher" than he ever was in life, and the Viceroy makes explicit reference to it in mourning the loss of his son in Act I (though his mourning is ironic, because it is premature). From Andrea onward, the characters we meet all experience drastic reversals of fortune—the loss of a son, the loss of life, the loss of a lover. This vicarious experience of the precariousness of human happiness—the way, in an instant, it can be changed to misery—is one of the unique pleasures that tragedy affords us: we are allowed to experience this loss without actually experiencing the tragic loss ourselves.



Appearance vs. Reality

Kyd uses dramatic irony throughout the play to drive a wedge between the world as his main characters see it and the world as it actually is. Balthazar and Bel-Imperia see their evening rendezvous in the orchard as a safe space in which to express their love, because Bel-Imperia thinks that Pedringano is a trustworthy servant. In fact, Pedringano is deceitful, and, because of his treachery, the orchard turns into a place of death.

Furthermore, Lorenzo enthusiastically agrees to play his part in Hieronimo's tragedy, not knowing that Hieronimo intends not only his character to die, but for him to die as well. But, perhaps the most concrete and dramatic example of this wedge is Pedringano's belief that a pardon is contained inside the box Lorenzo has sent him. The box then comes to symbolize, in the view of many critics, a more fundamental and general limitation on human knowledge. In other words, the characters' inability to get past appearances is typical of all human beings' inability to penetrate appearances.

Motifs

The Classical World vs. the Christian World

Kyd uses many allusions to the classical world. The topography of the underworld he provides is directly taken from Virgil's *Aeneid*, with some minor modifications. And he borrows many plot conventions and some rhetorical devices—for example, *stichomythia*, or a dialogue consisting of line-by-line exchange—from the Roman playwright Seneca. He also seems to adopt a pagan idea of revenge and justice: that humans must attempt to find justice for themselves (if they can), because the world full of injustice. There are also indications, however, that Hieronimo considers himself acting on God's behalf in his revenge.

Madness

Madness becomes manifested in two distinct persons in the play: Hieronimo and Isabella. The first case of madness eventually leads to bloody revenge, while the second leads to suicide. One turns outward for destruction, and the other seeks it inward. They are, however, both manifestations of a desire to escape from a horrible reality. Interestingly, the cases of madness are paradoxical, because they are a kind of "sane" madness—madness in the face of a world that has itself gone insane and to which madness is the only possible response. This madness places the sane and happy, such as the King, in an ironic position, especially if we understand "madness" as a disconnected state from reality. In the world of the play, it is the sane and happy who are truly disconnected from reality, unable to even see the pervasive evil that surrounds them.

Machiavellianism

An Elizabethan audience would easily recognize in Lorenzo, the chief antagonist of the play, the influence of Machiavelli, sixteenth-century Italian political philosopher. In Elizabethan England, Machiavelli's name was synonymous with evil. Though undoubtedly its impression of his philosophy was simplistic, Elizabethan England associated Machiavelli with duplicity and use of violence and fear. Machiavelli's philosophy was actually intended for the rulers of cities; he maintained (reasonably) that such rulers could not be bound by conventional morality. The Machiavellian villain however, of which there are many other examples in Elizabethan literature, applied the philosopher's principles to private life. Ironically, Hieronimo, the play's protagonist, is forced to adopt Machiavellian tactics in order to avenge his son.

Antithesis & Irony

Both rhetorically and in terms of characterization, Kyd loves opposites: Lorenzo is unequivocally unjust, while Hieronimo is unequivocally just. Horatio is honourable, while Lorenzo is typically dishonourable. This love for opposition expresses itself in the frequent occurrence of the rhetorical device of *antithesis*, where the opposition of two ideas is expressed in one sentence or in a parallel structure of sentences. But these antithetical structures will often culminate in a final sentence that resolves the differences between the two into an underlying similarity, either through a direct statement of this similarity, such as Balthazar's "I yield myself to both" or through an oxymoron, such as Bel-Imperia's "warring peace."

Similarly, many of the initially antithetical characters at times seem very similar to each other. At the end of the play, Hieronimo adopts Lorenzo's Machiavellianism, and Lorenzo plays Hieronimo's part of the innocent dupe. Because of Lorenzo's plot, the just Hieronimo ends up committing an act of injustice in the hanging of Pedringano. These resolutions and exchanges are ironic, because they show how both meanings and intentions are ambiguous and easily reversed: Bel-Imperia's love is both war and peace; Hieronimo needs to be a villain in order to be a hero and avenge his son; Bel-Imperia's desire to revenge herself on Balthazar by causing him pain ends up causing her intense grief; and the commission of justice can often turn into a commission of injustice (for example, in the case of the hanging of Pedringano). Such ironies pervade the play and help create the double perspective in which we view the action. We are separated from the actions of the characters, especially Hieronimo, by the knowledge that they act in error, but we also empathize with them because of the uncertain situations in which they are forced to act, in which the meaning and intentions of their actions often slip away.



The Meta-Theater

We have, in addition to the play, a character within the play who watches the play's main events and is as isolated from them as we are: Don Andrea. We also have another character, Revenge, who—while separated from the play—seems to be affecting it in spirit and to have a knowledge of what is to come. He uses this knowledge to continually tease Andrea. We see ourselves in a very similar position at times, to both Andrea and Revenge, knowing what is going to happen and then not knowing, isolated from the action and yet identifying with the characters to whom it happens. The existence of this meta-theater thus serves to make the relationship between the play-world and the real world ambiguous; on one hand, we are still separated from the characters by a radical divide (we exist, they do not), but on the other, we exist in a position almost exactly identical to Andrea and Revenge. This ambiguity is played upon and further heightened by Hieronimo's revenge playlet in Act IV.

Symbols

The Bloody Handkerchief

The handkerchief starts off as a symbol of love and memory, becomes a symbol of the memory of a lost loved one, and then a symbol for the desire to avenge that loved one. Ironically, by the end of the play, it can be seen as a symbol of the need to erase memory through death. Before Andrea went off to war, Bel-Imperia gave him a scarf, which he wore into battle something by which to remember her. Initially a symbol of love between Andrea and Bel-Imperia, Horatio takes it off his friend's dying body as a memorial, and it then becomes a symbol of Horatio's remembrance of his friend, a symbol of love between Horatio and Bel-Imperia, and of Bel-Imperia's memory of her lost knight. Of course, Bel-Imperia's love for Horatio is itself a form of revenge against Balthazar, so the scarf begins to take on connotations of vengeance. After Horatio's death, Hieronimo presumably takes the same handkerchief. It is now a symbol of both love and vengeance, intertwined in Hieronimo's desire to avenge his beloved son. By the end of the play, it becomes a symbol of annihilation and erasure. Hieronimo holds the handkerchief up in the midst of the corpses onstage and then runs off to commit suicide, embracing death and the erasure of all memories.

Act I, scene i



Summary

The play begins when the ghost of Andrea and the spirit of Revenge enter the scene. Andrea informs the audience that during his life, he was a nobleman at the Spanish court. The ghost then tells the story of his last days, how in the prime of his youth he won the love of the beautiful Bel-Imperia, but was soon thereafter killed in battle between Spain and Portugal.

Andrea's narrative then shifts to what happened after his death. He "descended straight" down to a classically pagan underworld or Hell, where he arrived at the river of Acheron only to be blocked passage by the ferryman Charon, because of his unperformed funeral rites. When his friend Horatio finally performed his rites three days later, Andrea descended into the underworld where he came to sit before three judges, Minos, Eacus and Rhadamant, who were to determine which "field", or area of the underworld, he should spend the rest of eternity—the field of the lovers or of the warriors. The judges are conflicted over their placement of Andrea because of the circumstances surrounding his death: Andrea died in war, but seems to have died for the love of Bel-Imperia. So, Minos decides to defer the matter to Pluto, king of the underworld. On his way to the palace of the king, Andrea came to a place with "three ways," the right one leading to the field of the lovers and the warriors, the left one to "deepest hell" of villains in eternal torment, and the middle way to the Palace. Taking this middle way, he soon arrived at the palace, where Proserpine, Pluto's wife, took a special interest in his case and asked if she could be his judge. After which, according to Andrea, she immediately sent him, along with the spirit of Revenge, through the gates of horn into the world, which, according to Andrea, is the last thing he remembers before arriving "here," at the start of the play.

The spirit of Revenge then goes on to predict that Andrea will see his killer, Prince Balthazar of Portugal, slain by Bel-Imperia and explains that he and Andrea will now both watch and serve as the chorus for the tragedy that they and the audience are all about to witness.

Analysis

The first scene begins the play's *exposition*, where we are introduced to the play's key characters and themes. The plot of *The Spanish Tragedy* is a tragic one, full of love that is cut short, violence, the delay of justice, and the clamoring of voices for revenge.

The first scene grounds the plot in three important ways. First, we are given the narrative background of the main story: Andrea and Bel-Imperia's ill-fated love, Andrea's death at the hands of Balthazar, and Andrea's desire for revenge. Using a very ornate rhetorical style—with a great deal of alliteration, assonance, and consonance—Kyd sets up the narrative that will follow. It should be noted, though, that it is not Andrea's death but his friend Horatio's death that will provide the impetus for the play's bloody end. In fact, it should be noted that Andrea's case for revenge is rather weak;



he was killed in a fair, if uneven battle, and an Elizabethan audience would have little sympathy for his desire to even the score. In fact, the main revenge plot of the play takes a long time to get started, and it is not until Act II, scene v that we will see the principal murder to be avenged and the emergence of Hieronimo as the play's tragic protagonist and avenger.

Second, the scene sets the mood and tone of the story and creates its "moral universe." Andrea's speech is delivered in measured blank verse, occasionally lapsing into rhyme, and his tone is serious and vengeful. And he inhabits a mixed Christian/pagan universe, which draws on Virgil's *Aeneid* for its geography of the underworld, though in a slightly expanded version with the introduction of a "third way" for souls like Andreas who do not fit neatly into either the group of lovers or the evil who are punished horribly for their crimes. Such a "third way" is necessary if we are to have a figure like Andreas, a figure who still has some interest in the world and who has not moved on to the next life completely. This world is one in which justice is delayed, where the judges of the underworld pedantically argue and are unable to come to conclusions, and where the final judges (Pluto and Proserpine) send Andreas on a quest for revenge, a tactic that will introduce further delay in the pursuit of justice as the machinations of revenge work their way to fruition. Such delays, with eventual vindication, have been seen as demonstrations of the Medieval commonplace "Truth is the daughter of time", a favorite subject of sermons; in other words, one of the play's main themes is the delay of justice and its eventual realization through that delay.

In a properly Christian world, revenge would be strictly in the hands of God, but in the play, Proserpine endorses revenge, and it is she who sends Andreas through the gates of horn (the gates through which true dreams come) so that he can revenge himself on his killer. The arrival through the gates of horn indicates that we should believe Andreas and Revenge in what they say. And the endorsement of revenge places the play in a universe somewhat, though not completely, removed from the world of the ordinary Elizabethan, for whom revenge was a controversial issue.

Finally, the play introduces us to its theatrical world, where we are quickly introduced to several important structural features, or conventions, that the play uses. Many of these are drawn from Senecan tragedy. Seneca was a Roman playwright of the first century A.D., whose bloody, sensationalistic plays were widely read by Elizabethans and used as models for Elizabethan tragedy, especially revenge tragedy. Revenge tragedy was a sub-type of tragedy where the primary motivation for the protagonist is revenge. *The Spanish Tragedy* is perhaps the earliest extant version of such a tragedy, and Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is undoubtedly the most famous.

Conventions of Senecan tragedy that we have already seen include: the angry ghost, calling for revenge from beyond the grave; the brief expository speech made by that ghost in order to inform the audience of the play's back-story; and the *chorus* composed of Andreas and Revenge. But as with Virgil, Kyd does not blindly copy the theatrical conventions of Seneca. The chorus is unlike anything in Seneca; it does not merely comment but, rather, has a perceived and direct interest in the action, and Andreas is introduced to us as a full-blooded character in his own right. In effect, Kyd places two mediating characters between us and the central action of the play, and these two act as an audience to the events of the play, while we perceive them as being part of the play itself. This ambiguous actor/audience status also serves to make ambiguous the relationship between the world of life and the world of the play, as we are more ready to identify real life with the events of the main plot that Andrea and Revenge watch as if they were at a play. Thus, this meta-theater setup conveys an ambiguity not only about the distinction between the "play" and "reality" but also makes ambiguous the line between the natural world and the supernatural.

Act I, scene ii–iii



Summary

Act I, scene ii

The Spanish King, a Spanish Lord General, the Duke of Castile (the King's brother), and Hieronimo, Knight-Marshal of Spain, return to discuss the aftermath of their battle with Portugal, which is the same battle in which Don Andrea died. When the King asks him to give a report on the status of the troops, the Lord General reports good news: the Spanish troops have gained victory and with "little losse." After congratulations from the King and Castile, the General proceeds to give a run-down of the battle. This includes a more detailed description of Don Andrea's death at the hands of Balthazar, Prince of Portugal and the son of the Portuguese Viceroy which we first heard described by Andrea himself in I.i. The General also relates the subsequent capture of Balthazar by Horatio, Hieronimo's son and Andrea's friend, a capture that resulted in the retreat of the Portuguese forces. The General informs the King that the Viceroy of Portugal has made an offer of conditional surrender, promising to pay tribute to Spain if the Spanish armies cease their attack. The Spanish King seems to accept this offer and asks Hieronimo to celebrate with him the success of his son's capture of Balthazar.

The Army returns from the battle, with Balthazar held captive between Horatio and Lorenzo, son of the Duke of Castile and brother of Bel-Imperia. The two Spaniards hotly contest which one should receive credit for the capture of Balthazar; Horatio, who knocked Balthazar off his horse after battling with

him, or Lorenzo, who after Balthazar was cornered persuaded him to surrender using gentle persuasion. Hieronimo, while avowing his partiality, pleads for his son's case. The King ultimately takes a compromise position, giving Balthazar's weapons and horse to Lorenzo, while giving the ransom money Balthazar will bring from the Viceroy, as well as the prince's armor, to Horatio. He also deems that Balthazar will stay at Lorenzo's estate, since the estate of Horatio (and Hieronimo) being too small for a man of Balthazar's stature.

Act I, scene iii

The scene is now at the Portuguese court. The Viceroy and two Spanish noblemen, Alexandro, who is the Duke of Terceira, and Villuppo, enter, having received news of the Portuguese defeat. The Viceroy mourns his son, believing him to be dead, and blames himself for not having gone in Balthazar's place. Alexandro comforts the king, assuring him that the Spanish have probably taken Balthazar prisoner and are keeping him for ransom.

Villuppo then steps in and offers to tell the king the "real story" of what happened at the battle. According to Villuppo, Balthazar was engaged in combat with the Lord General of Spain when Alexandro came up behind him and shot him in the back with a pistol. The story is a complete fabrication, but the Viceroy believes it and asks Alexandro whether it was bribery or the hope of inheriting the Portuguese crown that made him betray the prince. He then sentences Alexandro to die the second he confirms that Balthazar is dead. After the other two characters leave, Villuppo confesses his deception to the audience, explaining that Alexandro is his enemy and that he hopes to gain by his death.

Analysis

One characteristic of the First Act in general is the way in which the story of Andrea's death is continuously told and retold. The Lord General's version is the second of these, and it contradicts Andrea's own account in tone. For the Lord General, the battle is an almost unabashed success, a "victory, with little loss of life". The clash between Andrea's version and the version of the Lord General create irony, in this case situational irony; contrary to expectations, Andrea's death is not viewed as particularly regrettable at all by the Lord General or the King. Instead, he is just another one of the three hundred or so Spanish soldiers who perish during a glorious triumph for Spain. As the Ghost of Andrea never leaves the stage (or at least is never directed to leave in the text), we can easily imagine this deflation of Andrea's importance being reacted to by a disappointed facial expression in Andrea during the Lord General's speech. Also, the juxtaposition of the Viceroy's grief in scene iii, coming as it does right after the celebration of the Spaniards, adds to this sense of irony, casting the joy of the Spaniards in a bitter light, since it is founded upon the sadness of others. The Viceroy also explicitly introduces the idea of cruel, unkind, arbitrary Fortune. "Fortune is blind and sees not my deserts," says the grief-stricken Viceroy, believing that his son is dead. But we cannot wholly empathize with the Viceroy either, for his situation is founded upon *dramatic irony*: he believes his son to be dead, when in fact he is not, and is led by this belief into wrongly condemning an innocent man (Alexandro) to death.

Kyd uses irony throughout *The Spanish Tragedy* to create a tension in the audience, a tension between the need to identify with the suffering and pain of the characters and the realization that the characters in question are limited or flawed in a way they cannot initially perceive, but one in which we can. He in particular uses *dramatic irony* to great effect, the irony created when a main character doesn't know certain facts that the audience and perhaps some of the other characters do. The tension arises from the fact that irony creates distance between us and the characters, such as when we see that a character's words don't mean what he intends in a certain context, that he is the subject of an ironic attack, or that because of a lack of information, his actions appear foolish. Despite the characters' ignorance of things which we may very well know, we are still able to identify on a deep level, especially if the character's limitation is one common to most human beings. In the case of Andrea, his limitation seems to be his mortality, his pride, and his lack of knowledge, which prevents him from recognizing that after he dies, he will eventually be forgotten in a world that will move on. In short, he is a limited, finite being, both in knowledge and in time—a condition that defines the human species.

Scene ii also introduces Kyd's fondness for antithesis. Antithesis is the development of contrast, usually in a parallel structure. A perfect example of this is contained in Balthazar's speech describing his capture by Lorenzo and Horatio. "To him in courtesy, to this perforce", says the young prince, referring to Lorenzo and Horatio respectively. He then begins a series of contrasts between the two, defining one as a fierce warrior, the other as a verbal manipulator. Kyd uses this passage primarily for the purposes of characterization, setting Horatio and Lorenzo off against each other as foils: both proud young men, but one prone to interact directly, honestly and fiercely while the other (Lorenzo) is prone to using verbal guile. These characterizations will prove true over the rest of the play. The ending, however, again provides a slight ironic commentary, this time on the proud Balthazar; for though the two warriors pursued radically different tactics, in the end it doesn't matter: he "yields [him]self to both."

Act I, scene iv–scene vi



Summary

Act I, scene iv



The scene switches back to Spain, where Bel-Imperia and Horatio are walking together in her garden. Bel-Imperia was Don Andrea's lover, and she asks Horatio to tell her how he died. So Horatio recounts the story of Andrea's death for the third time in the play, now emphasizing how Andrea was outnumbered by Balthazar's horsemen, thrown from his horse, and then quickly finished off by Balthazar. Then Horatio continues with how he took Balthazar prisoner and retrieved Andrea's corpse. He then describes how he took Andrea's lifeless corpse back to his tent, futilely attempting to revive his friend with his tears and then finally giving Andrea the funeral rites he deserved.

Horatio also recounts how he took a scarf from Andrea and now wears it in remembrance of his friend. Bel-Imperia reveals that the scarf was originally hers and that she gave it to Andrea when she last saw him before he went off to war so that he could wear it in battle as a keepsake. She asks Horatio to wear it now, for both her and Andrea. Horatio then tells her he must leave to go seek Balthazar. When he is gone, Bel-Imperia confesses that she now loves Horatio but still wishes to avenge the death of her first love Andrea. This she will do through her love for Horatio, since we now learn that Balthazar, the man who slew her husband, is in love with her.

That man, Balthazar, soon enters with Lorenzo, who asks his sister Bel-Imperia why she looks so glum, for the prince has arrived to see her. She then exchanges several lines with the prince, in which his love and her barely repressed hatred become apparent. Bel-Imperia finally tires of Balthazar and leaves, but as she does so, she drops a glove, which Horatio, coming in again, picks up off the ground. Bel-Imperia tells him to keep it. Lorenzo then consoles Balthazar, telling him that women are fickle. Horatio, Lorenzo, and Balthazar then leave to attend the feast being held at the Court for the Portuguese ambassador.

Act I, scene v

The King and Portuguese ambassador both enter. The Portuguese ambassador, upon seeing Balthazar, remarks how the Viceroy of Portugal mourns his son. Balthazar replies that the only thing he has been "slain" by is the beauty of Bel-Imperia. The King remarks upon his newfound goodwill for Portugal, now that they have paid their tribute to him. He then wonders aloud where Hieronimo, the Knight-Marshal was supposed to provide entertainment for the guests, is.

Hieronimo then enters, followed by actors who perform a masque that he has prepared. The masque consists of three knights, each with an escutcheon (a shield with armor). Hieronimo then brings in three kings, each of whom has their crown stolen by one of the knights. When the King asks what the scene is supposed to mean, Hieronimo explains that each king and knight represents a scene from Spanish and Portuguese history, in which either Portugal or Spain were defeated by "little England." The first knight represents Robert, Earl of Gloucester, who during the reign of King Stephen subdued the "Saracen" King of Portugal. The second knight re-enacts Edmund, Earl of Kent's conquest, during the time of King Richard, of the Christian king of Portugal. And the third represents John of Gaunt's capture of the King of Castile (the royal family that later went on to assume the monarchy of Spain). After each Portuguese defeat, the Spanish king makes patronizing remarks to the ambassador, to the effect that Portugal shouldn't be upset by its latest defeat at the hands of Spain, having already been defeated by "little England." After the third act, the Portuguese ambassador makes a remark that the Spanish should not be too arrogant in their victory, having also been defeated by England. The King then proposes a toast, and the guests leave to commence their feast.

Act I, scene vi

Don Andrea accuses the ghost of not fulfilling his promise; instead of witnessing Balthazar's brutal death, he instead has seen the prince feast and be merry. Revenge reassures Andrea that Balthazar and Lorenzo's current happiness will, before the play is over, turn into misery.

Analysis

These scenes serve to introduce the heroine of the play, Bel-Imperia. They also mark the emergence of revenge as a theme of concern to the characters, specifically to the character of Bel-Imperia. Her mourning and grief over the death of Andrea provide motivation for her hatred of Balthazar (and possibly for her love of Horatio). This lust for revenge will set up the groundwork for the murder of Horatio in Act II and, thus, commence the main storyline of the work. The lust for revenge is symbolized by the bloody scarf that Bel-Imperia gives to Horatio, as it links both her and him to the vengeful ghost of Don Andrea, and will also come to symbolize the need for Hieronimo to avenge Horatio's murder.

Ironically enough, the scarf also symbolizes the love that Bel-Imperia and Andrea shared. And it now symbolizes both Horatio and Bel-Imperia's love, as well as the memories of their dead friend. The scarf is thus a multi-valenced symbol. In other words, it symbolizes many different things and intertwines them in so doing. The scarf is a symbol of an ironic fact: that love and memory easily become hatred expressed as a demand for revenge and justice, hatred of those who have killed the loved one, and in so doing, reduced him or her to just a memory. For Bel-Imperia, the emotions of love and hatred are so intertwined that she views her love for Horatio as a form of revenge, an expression of hatred, against Balthazar, the murderer of Andrea.

In Bel-Imperia, Kyd presents us with a complex heroine. She is at once loyal and devoted to her lost lover Andrea, yet already embarking upon a new love. And her motivations in her love are somewhat suspect as well, when she remarks that loving Horatio can be seen as a form of revenge against

Balthazar. She is, however, aware of some of these contradictions within herself and always appears intelligent and strong, especially in her desires for revenge and justice. Kyd shows Senecan influence once again, in his use of the Senecan device of *stichomythia*, a line-by-line exchange between one character and another, in this case taking the form of a dialogue between Balthazar and Bel-Imperia. The device serves to do two things: 1) highlight Bel-Imperia's wit (enhancing her identity as a strong, likeable, interesting character) and 2) bringing out the conflict between Bel-Imperia and Balthazar. The contrast Kyd develops in these lines is clear: Balthazar is madly, foolishly in love with Bel-Imperia, while Bel-Imperia can scarcely conceal her loathing for him.

At this point in the play, Andrea might very well seem to be an unsympathetic character. His complaint that revenge has not been served—that the living are, in other words, too happy and enjoying themselves too much—reeks of selfishness and pride. But he does currently represent two key emotions with which the audience can sympathize. First is the anger and despair at realizing that one's death matters very little in the grand scheme of things and that the world will go on, and may even improve, after one has left it. The second emotion is impatience. This is something the audience may very well feel in common with Andrea; we were promised with a tragedy, but instead we now seem to have a not-so-funny romantic comedy, played out against the story of diplomatic negotiations between sixteenth-century Spain and Portugal. Kyd certainly takes his time with exposition. But in Kyd's defense, he is setting up the dramatic machinery necessary for his play; the rising action preceding the first climax, or turning point, has already begun with these scenes and will continue up until Horatio's murder.

Act II, scene i–scene iii



Summary

Act II, scene i

Lorenzo and Balthazar enter, discussing Balthazar's affection for Bel-Imperia. Lorenzo consoles his friend, telling him that in time, he will succeed in winning Bel-Imperia's hand; Balthazar, however, professes that his case is hopeless. Lorenzo then informs him that he has begun investigating whether Bel-Imperia is in love with another knight and has summoned Pedringano, one of Bel-Imperia's close confidantes, to gather information on Bel-Imperia's thoughts and affections. Pedringano arrives, and Lorenzo begins questioning him. At first, Pedringano seems reluctant to tell Lorenzo about his sister's affections. At first he offers affection and reward (presumably in the form of money or advancement) for Pedringano's help; when Pedringano refuses, Lorenzo turns to threats of violence and death. These prove effective, and Pedringano reveals that his lady loves Horatio. Lorenzo then tells Pedringano to let him know the next time the two lovers meet and then sends him back to Bel-Imperia. When he is gone, Balthazar affirms that he will seek revenge against Horatio for "stealing" Bel-Imperia's love from him; Lorenzo then spurs him on.

Act II, scene ii

Horatio and Bel-Imperia now enter the scene, presumably somewhere else on the King's estate. As Pedringano, Lorenzo, and Balthazar watch on, Horatio asks why Bel-Imperia seems reticent, now that their love affair has started to become serious. She replies that she is simply lovesick for him, to the great disgust of Balthazar. The two lovers then begin to discuss the dangerous course of their secret affair (for, like Andrea's love for Bel-Imperia, it is still secret), and they exchange vows of love, to the increasing disgust of Balthazar. Bel-Imperia then suggests that they meet later, at sunset, in Horatio's father's garden. As they leave, Lorenzo vows that Horatio will be sent into "eternal night."

Act II, scene iii

The scene switches now to a meeting of the King of Spain, the Portuguese Ambassador, Don Cyprian (the Duke of Castile), and others. They discuss Balthazar's love for Bel-Imperia; the King asks Castile of Bel-Imperia's opinion of Balthazar. Castile replies that however she may act now, she will eventually love Balthazar, for he has threatened to revoke his own love for her if she does not. The King then tells the Ambassador that the diplomatic marriage has been decided and that all that rests now is to gain the Viceroy of Portugal's consent. To sweeten the deal, the king offers to release the Viceroy from his tribute if he agrees and stipulates that Balthazar and Bel-Imperia's children will be the heirs to the Spanish throne. The King reminds the ambassador that his offer does not, of course, include the ransom to be paid for Balthazar, which is a private matter to be dealt with between the ambassador and Horatio, the prince's captor. The ambassador replies that everything on that score has been arranged.

After the ambassador leaves, the King has a little talk with his brother the Duke, reminding him, in essence, that there will be trouble if Bel-Imperia does not consent to marry Balthazar, and, therefore, the Duke should make the utmost effort to ensure that she does.

Analysis

We now enter the rising action that precedes the play's first crisis. Lorenzo and Balthazar's discovery of Bel-Imperia's love for Horatio has exactly the wounding effect on Balthazar that she hopes it will. But it ironically also creates the desire in him, thanks to the prodding of Lorenzo, for counter-revenge and thus threatens the life of the man she has come to love quite independently of any vengeful considerations. This irony thus sets up the tension that the rising action—the development of the love affair between Horatio and Bel-Imperia and the plots of the Lorenzo and Balthazar—serves to increase.

The rising action is marked by the emergence of Lorenzo as a truly Machiavellian villain. Niccolo Machiavelli was a sixteenth-century Italian political philosopher, whose name in Elizabethan England was synonymous with evil; many saw his philosophy as blasphemous, since it suggested that affairs of state were not subject to conventional morality—one should try to be both loved and feared, but feared if one could not be both. The Elizabethan Machiavellian villain applied this philosophy to a private sphere, as evidenced by Lorenzo's verbal and physical manipulation of Pedringano and Balthazar.

The eavesdropping scene neatly captures Lorenzo's Machiavellian dynamic. It also juxtaposes to great effect the bitterness of Lorenzo and Balthazar against the beauty of the lovers' love, and it captures the conflict between them (which right now forms the conflict of the play). The exchange of loving words between Horatio and Bel-Imperia are ironically juxtaposed against the threats of Balthazar and Lorenzo, making their poetic exchanges seem tragic. At one point, they surreptitiously participate in a *stichomythia* between Horatio and Bel-Imperia, inverting Horatio's sentences, ominously foreshadowing bad events for Horatio. The use of the *oxymoron*, "warring peace," and of a parallelism that develops an elaborate *analogy* between love and war also adds to the sense of paradox and irony attached to the scenes, where love and hatred seem to give birth to each other—Bel-Imperia's hatred for Balthazar gives rise to her love for Horatio, and Balthazar's love for her gives rise to his hatred for Horatio. The culmination of these ironic juxtapositions comes in the final lines of scene ii, where Horatio's remark, "dangerous suspicion waits on our delight," is, unbeknownst to him, confirmed by Lorenzo: "Ay, danger mixed with jealous despite / Shall send thy soul into eternal night," foreshadowing Horatio's eventual death.

The scene is thus rife with dramatic irony. Horatio makes arrangements for a lover's rendezvous, but Lorenzo knows (as we do) that he is in fact making arrangements for his death. Dramatic irony is a calling card of tragedy, since it helps create the mixture of necessity and free choice essential to the tragic mindset. That Horatio will be in his father's bower tonight is an expression of his free will and his love for Bel-Imperia. That he will meet his doom there is a product of forces beyond his control: the jealousy and hatred of Balthazar and Lorenzo. Another key irony, however, is that Bel-Imperia conceived her love, at least from one angle, as a revenge plot on Balthazar. This revenge is now about to backfire disastrously.

The juxtaposition of scene iii, in which the King and the Duke of Castile decide that Bel-Imperia should marry Balthazar, is an ironic juxtaposition. As the two old men decide Bel-Imperia's marriage, she is already rushing off into the arms of Horatio. The scene opposes Horatio and Bel-Imperia's love against the social order of the day. This makes the lovers seem more heroic, more significant, more tragic; the irony lets the audience know the social forces that are working against the young lovers. Horatio is not a prince, or even a Duke, and this is part of the reason that Lorenzo and Balthazar hate him, since, in loving Bel-Imperia, Horatio is usurping the position of the noble class. When Lorenzo hears that Bel-Imperia loves Horatio, he calls him "Don Horatio our Knight Marshal's son?" The Knight-Marshal could be considered something like the Attorney-General, or a Supreme Court Justice, the top lawyer and judge in the kingdom. But he is still merely a civil servant, far inferior in social rank to both Balthazar and Lorenzo, a prince and the son of a Duke. So Hieronimo's son is an upstart, who has humiliated them both on the battlefield, by capturing Balthazar and then gaining at least partial credit for it from Lorenzo. This partially explains their eagerness to avenge themselves for the perceived stain upon their honor.

Act II, scene iv—scene vi



Summary

Act II, scene iv

It is sunset and time for Horatio and Bel-Imperia's rendezvous. Horatio, Bel-Imperia, and Pedringano enter Hieronimo's garden. Bel-Imperia sends Pedringano to keep watch and alert the pair if anyone approaches; instead, Pedringano goes off to inform Lorenzo and Balthazar of the two lovers' whereabouts. While he does this, Horatio and Bel-Imperia talk, first flirtatiously, then seductively, about their growing love. However, just at the second the two are about to "stop talking", Pedringano returns with Lorenzo, Balthazar, and Balthazar's manservant Serberine, who hang Horatio up on a tree (or a tree-covered trellis, "arbour" can mean both) and then stab him several times for good measure. The drag Bel-Imperia away kicking and screaming, as she cries out for Hieronimo's help.

Act II, scene v



Hieronimo, awakened by screams, runs into his garden to discover a man hanging from one of his trees. Only after cutting the man down does he recognize him by his clothes as his son, Horatio. He cries out in anguish, begging his son to speak if he lives, soon realizing that he has died. His wife Isabella, disturbed by his absence from their bed, discovers the horrifying scene and begins to cry out in grief. Hieronimo takes a bloodstained handkerchief from his son and vows to wear it until he takes revenge on his boy's murderers. He and his wife then carry away their son's corpse, with Hieronimo briefly considering suicide, then rejecting it in favor of revenge.

Act II, scene vi

Andrea is now very upset with Revenge. Not only has he failed to see Balthazar killed, as he had hoped; he has instead been forced to witness the murder of his friend Horatio. But Revenge promises Andrea that he is premature in his condemnation and that, in due time, Balthazar will suffer vengeance.

Analysis

The murder of Horatio is the play's first turning point and the culmination of the initial rising action we have just seen. In effect, the main plot up until this point has centered around Bel-Imperia's desire to revenge Andrea against Balthazar, and Balthazar's counter-desire to revenge himself against both Bel-Imperia and Horatio. From now on, these revenge motives will disappear, and the main plot will now be driven by Hieronimo's desire to seek justice for his son, his increasing madness, and his eventual bloody revenge. This shift in protagonist also reflects a shift in the play's central theme, from that of simple revenge to revenge as a form of justice.

The tragic protagonist is characterized by psychological complexity or an *interiority* that is frequently conflicted both with itself and with the world around it. This interiority often expresses itself in a question or series of questions that the protagonist must address, a series of internal struggles with which the protagonist must deal. Kyd uses a series of soliloquies to give us access to this interiority, and the first one comes in II.v, with the discovery of his son's body. His question is simple and direct: how can the world be so unjust as to let his son be murdered and to let the murderers of his son go unpunished? Hieronimo expresses his anguish over the seeming injustice of the world by using *apostrophe* (the addressing of inanimate objects) in succeeding rhyming couplets: "O heavens, why made you night to cover sin? ... O earth, why didst thou not in time devour / The vild profaner of this sacred bower?" But Hieronimo's anguish is answered by Isabella's faith that the murderers will be exposed: "The heavens are just, murder cannot be hid, / Time is the author both of truth and right," she says, and this could be taken as the play's optimistic premise, the hope that with the passage of time, justice will be done.

The equation between revenge and justice on the one hand and simple relief on the other also becomes important. "To know the author were some ease of grief, for in revenge my heart would find relief." But another source of relief is readily available: that of suicide. Hieronimo only explicitly mentions this possibility in the Latin section at the end of the scene: "Emoriar tecum: sic, sic juvat ire sub umbras./At tame absistam properato cedere letho," (I will die with you: thus, thus it will please me to go to the shades below / But however I will refuse to hasten my death). He refuses the option of suicide because to do so would mean that Horatio's death would pass unavenged. Revenge is thus not a means solely for Hieronimo to satisfy his own longing for retribution: it is something necessary because it is only just that Horatio's death should be revenged. This emphasis on justice is not something that was present in Andrea's vengeful speeches or in Bel-Imperia's.

Hieronimo's removal of the "bloody handkercher" off of his dead son signifies the transfer of revenge from Andrea to Horatio. This may very well be the same "scarf" Andrea rode into battle and which was then given to Horatio. It now becomes a symbol of Hieronimo's love for his son and commitment to avenge him. Having been linked to two separate deaths and two separate revenges, it now clearly takes on the status of a universal symbol; not just a symbol of Andrea's death and his revenge, but of love, memory, and revenge in general. Now, in addition, through its association with Hieronimo (a judge, and just man), it becomes a symbol of justice as well.

Contrast this emphasis on justice with the words of Lorenzo and Balthazar at the murder of Bel-Imperia. When Horatio is hung and killed, Bel-Imperia pleads for his life, humiliating herself as a scorned woman in an attempt to save her lover: "I loved Horatio, but he loved not me." Note the irony; the proud Bel-Imperia, who was determined to seek revenge on Balthazar, now forced to grovel in front of him and her brother. Balthazar complains that *he* loved Bel-Imperia, indicating his self-centeredness. Lorenzo's reply is a cynical joke: "Although his life were still ambitious proud, / Yet is he at the highest now he is dead," jokingly referring to Horatio's "height" now that he has been hanged from a tree. The image also reminds an Elizabethan reader of "Fortune's wheel," the conventional symbol for Fortune (which we might wish to call "chance" or "contingency"). The wheel of Fortune was conceived as being indifferent to the hopes and aspirations of humanity. Balthazar's and Lorenzo's rhetoric effectively identifies each as a similarly inhuman mechanism, indifferent to the loves and hopes of others and to justice, and solely concerned for their own ambitions. As such, they take on both a superhuman and subhuman quality—superhuman in that they seem not to be affected by the weaknesses with which ordinary humans are affected (weakness of will, sentimentality), but subhuman in that they are incapable of normal human emotion. They are the injustice that Hieronimo must eliminate if he is to find justice. And their inhuman nature serves, by contrast, to highlight Hieronimo's anguished humanity, encouraging us to identify with him even further.

Act III, scene i—scene ii



Summary

Act III, scene i

At the Portuguese court, the time of Alexandro's execution has arrived. The King, several nobles, and Villuppo enter, discussing the unexpected nature of Alexandro's treason. The Viceroy soon orders Alexandro to be brought in. The condemned nobleman arrives, still protesting his innocence. The King orders him to be quiet, and, at the king's orders, Alexandro is then bound to the stake, where he is to be burnt. Just before the fire is lit, however, the Ambassador arrives from the Spanish court, with news that Balthazar still lives and that Villuppo has been deceiving the Viceroy. He provides proof of this fact to the Viceroy in the form of letters. The Viceroy, realizing his mistake, orders Alexandro to be released and asks Villuppo why he falsely accused Alexandro; Villuppo admits he did so only out of greed and hope for advancement. The King then condemns Villuppo to a horrible death, ignoring Alexandro's pleas for mercy on behalf of his tormentor. The Viceroy then, while not apologizing to Alexandro for nearly executing on completely baseless grounds, nevertheless seems eager to renew his friendship with the young nobleman.

Act III, scene ii

The setting returns to Spain, where Hieronimo mourns the death of his son in an extended soliloquy. Suddenly, a letter drops, seemingly from the sky, written in blood. The letter has been written by Bel-Imperia and is addressed to Hieronimo. In it, she states that Lorenzo and Balthazar murdered Horatio and then hid her (presumably somewhere in the royal palace) from society so that she could not inform on them. She then urges Hieronimo on to avenge Horatio's death. Hieronimo does not entirely believe the letter at first, suspicious of being led into a trap and resolves to wait for further evidence. Spotting Pedringano, he asks him where Bel-Imperia can be found; Pedringano says that he does not know. Lorenzo arrives, and Pedringano informs him of Hieronimo's question. Lorenzo says that his father, the Duke of Castile, has "removed her hence" because of some "disgrace" and offers to give Bel-Imperia whatever message Hieronimo might have for her. Hieronimo declines, confusedly explaining that he desired Bel-Imperia's help with something (a thing which he does not specify) and then rejects Lorenzo's offer to help in his sister's place. When Hieronimo leaves, Lorenzo reveals his alarm at Hieronimo's question and immediately assumes that Serberine (Balthazar's manservant) has confessed the details of Horatio's murder to Hieronimo. Pedringano objects that Serberine could not possibly have done this, because the manservant had not been out of his sight since the murder. But to be on the safe side, Lorenzo decides to have Serberine killed and offers Pedringano gold if he will do so, which Pedringano accepts. Lorenzo tells Pedringano to be at St. Luigi's Park, assuring him that Serberine will also be there. Pedringano then leaves, and Lorenzo sends a page to Serberine, with the message that the manservant should meet him and Balthazar at St. Luigi's Park at eight o'clock. After the page leaves, Lorenzo reveals in soliloquy that he intends to have the park heavily guarded that night, so that Pedringano will be apprehended upon killing Serberine and most likely executed himself. In other words, Lorenzo is cutting off all the loose ends that connect himself and the Prince to the murder of Horatio.

Analysis

Scene III.i functions as an ironic reversal of the final scenes of Act II. The ambassador arrives in time to save Alexandro's life, whereas Hieronimo arrives too late to save Horatio's. The grieving Viceroy learns that his son is still alive, whereas the proud Horatio learns that his son is dead. And whereas scenes iv and v of Act II show the commission of a grave act of injustice, Act III shows the remedy of injustice and the commission of justice.

Such an ironic reversal has several effects. First, it allows us some "emotional breathing room" within the play, relieving the unrelenting horror of Act II. Kyd places a hopeful event right after a hopeless event. In doing so, he indicates that in the world of the play, justice is indeed possible. This keeps alive our interest by holding out the possibility of redemptive justice for Hieronimo. Yet the juxtaposition of justice right after an act of injustice also serves to bring out, by contrast, the injustice of Hieronimo's death, the element of unfortunate accident involved in it (that Hieronimo was too late in arriving to save his son or apprehend his murderers and that Bel-Imperia and Horatio had no one to defend them from Pedringano), and the terrible grief now suffered by Hieronimo. And finally, at the Portuguese court, reality and truth are revealed. In Hieronimo's garden, they are hidden from him; he is unable to reach the reality of his son's murder and instead can only perceive the horrible appearances afterwards. So these scenes heighten, in the minds of an attentive viewer or reader, the pathos of Horatio's murder.

The question of justice is taken up by Hieronimo again in his soliloquy in scene ii. "How should we term your dealings to be just / If you unjustly deal with those that in your justice trust?" asks Hieronimo, directing his questions to the "sacred heavens." His soliloquy indicates internal struggle, over two key questions. First, he agonizes over his need for evidence as to the identity of his son's murderers. This is framed as a conflict between him and an unjust world that refuses to provide him with any clues, but once he receives the letter from Bel-Imperia, written in her blood, that identifies the killers as Lorenzo and Balthazar, his conflict becomes internal. Will he believe the letter or not? "Hieronimo, beware, thou art betrayed, / And to entrap thy life this train is laid." In giving himself advice, Hieronimo indicates that he himself is divided on this issue, between the advice-giving self and the self

that wishes to seek out justice swiftly. A similar division can be seen in his vague references to "dire visions" that "plague his soul": "The ugly fiends do sally forth of hell, / And frame my steps to unfrequented paths." Here, the Christian imagery of temptation is used to express Hieronimo's horror at what must be visions of bloody revenge; yet the fact that he experiences such visions indicates the violent urges and impulses that are growing within Hieronimo's mind.

There is a parallel in the two scenes, in that they are both scenes involving a revelation. In the first, the revelation comes in the form of the arrival of the Portuguese ambassador, who brings news of Balthazar's survival. In the second, it is the blood-written letter of Bel-Imperia that serves as the source of revelation. In the first scene, this revelation is a source of salvation. It saves Alexandro's life and prevents injustice from being done. In the second scene, the revelation does nothing of the sort, since the injustice it seeks to rectify has already been committed. Furthermore, it is not trustworthy, at least not to Hieronimo, though the audience knows that it is indeed truthful. Kyd again creates dramatic tension by placing the truth in front of his protagonist's eyes but only in such a way as to make him suspicious of it. The dramatic irony of Hieronimo's suspicion that someone is deceiving him lies in this: the letter he doubts is actually the true revelation of exactly such a deception, perpetrated by Lorenzo and Balthazar on the entire royal court.

Act III, scene iii–scene v



Summary

Act III, scene iii

Under Lorenzo's orders, Pedringano enters Saint Luigi's park with a pistol. He is intent on killing Serberine and hopes for good luck (literally, he asks Fortune to look kindly upon him). Unbeknownst to him, three watchmen enter the park nearby. Serberine then arrives for what he believes to be his eight o'clock rendezvous with Lorenzo. Pedringano sees him and shoots him dead. The watchmen hear the shot and quickly find and apprehend Pedringano, and they decide to take the murderer to the Knight-Marshal's house. He speaks defiantly to them, believing that Lorenzo will protect him from any possible harm.

Act III, scene iv

Lorenzo and Balthazar have awoken early the next morning, and Balthazar wonders why Lorenzo seems so nervous. Lorenzo reveals his fear that both he and the prince have had their role in Horatio's murder exposed to Hieronimo. Balthazar chides him for being silly. A Page enters with news of Serberine's death the previous night. Balthazar is shocked and grieved by the news, for Serberine was his personal servant. When the page reveals that Pedringano committed the murder, Balthazar becomes enraged. Lorenzo assured Serberine that he will help Balthazar seek revenge against Pedringano, in a legal manner; Balthazar agrees that Serberine must be put to death for his crime and leaves to summon the meeting of Hieronimo's court so that the sentence can be carried out quickly. After Balthazar has left, Lorenzo reflects how well his plan is working; he will rid himself of both Serberine and Pedringano. A messenger then arrives with a letter from Pedringano, asking for Lorenzo's help now that he, Pedringano, has committed the murder that the Duke of Castile's son requested. Lorenzo tells the messenger to return to Pedringano and reassure him. After the messenger leaves, Lorenzo then gives the page (who announced Serberine's death) a box and tells the page to inform the murderer that the box contains his official pardon, already signed. But, says Lorenzo, the young boy must not look in the box, and in fact must not open the box for anyone on pain of death, even when Pedringano stands on the gallows. The page runs off, and Lorenzo congratulates himself on how only he knows the true intentions of his plans.

Act III, scene v

The page from the previous scene enters and speaks directly to the audience. He has, of course, opened the box and looked inside. And he has, of course, found nothing—the box is empty and contains no pardon. He believes that his lord's actions are dishonourable and reflects on how odd and it will be to stand at the gallows, pointing at the box as if there were a pardon inside, while Pedringano mocks the proceedings, right up until the point he is hanged. But he still will go along with his master's deception, because he realizes that if he does not, then Pedringano will still die and he will die along with him.

Analysis

These scenes present an interesting dramatic situation: the opposing action, in the form of Lorenzo's plot to eliminate all possible connections between him and the crime, becomes dominant, and Hieronimo, now clearly identified as the play's protagonist, fades into irrelevance. In fact, the only mention of Hieronimo in these scenes is in III.iv, when he is mentioned as the judge who will carry out the sentence on Pedringano. Again, the protagonist is entrapped in an ironic situation: he will be the agent of "justice" who will in fact enable Lorenzo to safely carry through his unjust plans.



These scenes also serve to confirm that Lorenzo, not Balthazar, is the main antagonist of the play. It is he who both devises and carries out his plans, alone, manipulating the emotions of others (even his accomplices in Horatio's murder) to serve his own ends. This can be seen in his dealings with Pedringano (whom he fools into killing Serberine) and Balthazar (whose outrage he uses against Pedringano). Lorenzo fits the character type of a Machiavellian villain, a private-sphere version of Machiavelli's ideal prince, as described in [The Prince](#) (1513). He utilizes the emotions of others to his own ends and never lets his own emotions get in the way of his plans and actions, which are motivated out of pure, calculating self-interest. To the English of Elizabethan times, Machiavellianism was a synonym for evil, so they would have been filled with the appropriate disgust for Lorenzo's actions. This is not to say that on a certain level they would not admire his cleverness: indeed, Kyd again seems to exploit the nature of the stage-audience relation to create ambivalence between audience and character, a "double perspective", in which Lorenzo is both someone to be scorned for his evil, yet admired for his wit and decisiveness. This very decisiveness and action contrasts with Hieronimo's indecisiveness and inaction at this stage, increasing the dramatic tension as we wonder whether Hieronimo will ever find the justice he deserves and whether Lorenzo and Balthazar will not simply manage to escape unpunished.

But even Lorenzo is not free from dramatic irony. His entire plan is based on the false belief that Serberine informed Hieronimo about the identity. This is an important fact, because it indicates that Lorenzo is fallible, and human: he lacks complete information. And this lack will eventually prove his downfall.

Much critical interpretation of this scene has focused around the symbolism of Lorenzo's empty box. G.K. Hunter interprets the box as a cynical symbol of man's hope for justice. This fits in nicely with the current thematic emphasis of the play, which focuses around Hieronimo's search for justice: Pedringano believes that he has found his justice in the black box. The emptiness of the box not only proves Pedringano wrong on a literal level, it can be seen to express metaphorically Hieronimo's doubts about the possibility of justice ever being achieved. Frank Ardolino has seen the box as a type of inverted Pandora's box, out of which evil comes in the form of nothingness (as opposed to the plethora of things—including hope, disease and suffering—that came out of the box in the Greek legend).

Whatever the box may symbolize, it sets up a situation again full of dramatic irony. Lorenzo has plotted carefully to have Pedringano condemned to death, but Pedringano still looks to his lord as a possible source of salvation; Lorenzo now cruelly uses this false belief to ensure that Pedringano will stay silent in front of Hieronimo. And Pedringano's silence places Hieronimo in the position of carrying out "justice" upon Pedringano in the form of an execution. This situation is doubly ironic, first since Hieronimo himself is unable to find justice in his own life, yet is now charged with carrying out justice upon others. But it is also ironic because, in believing that he carries out justice, Hieronimo actually carries out an injustice that, by destroying the last living link between Lorenzo and the crime (besides Balthazar), may prevent him from ever finding the justice he seeks. This is a situation that, like most instances of dramatic irony, is rife with both tension and a grim sort of humor, as the audience watches while a sympathetic character unwittingly brings about his own failure, observing how easily the best intentions of men are turned against themselves.

A small formal note: Lorenzo's page speaks entirely in prose. The Elizabethan literary convention was that "low" characters (low in social standing) would often speak prose, while their social superiors spoke verse. In the page, the prose can also be seen to indicate a low moral character, as he almost seems to laugh at the deception being played on Pedringano.

Act III, scenes vi–viii



Act III, scene vi

The time has come for Pedringano's execution for the murder of Serberine. Hieronimo and a deputy enter. Hieronimo reflects on the irony of his situation, since in carrying out his official role as a judge by executing Pedringano, he will do justice for others, while still completely unable to find justice for himself or his son. Pedringano soon enters, along with some officers and Lorenzo's page. He reveals that he had written another letter asking for Lorenzo's help, but after the arrival of Lorenzo's page, realized that that letter was redundant. His attitude is now one of joviality and defiance, for he believes (wrongly) that the box contains his pardon. The Hangman asks Pedringano to step onto the gallows; Pedringano does so, confesses to his crime, but instead of showing repentance and remorse, begins to joke with the Hangman, trading witty insults, and continually dropping hints that he does not expect to be hanged; all the while, the page is continually pointing to the box, leading Pedringano on. The Hangman soon becomes annoyed, and Hieronimo is eventually forced to leave in disgust at Pedringano's impudence. The Hangman finally asks Pedringano directly whether he hopes to live; Pedringano says yes he does, by his pardon from the king. But the boy does not reveal the pardon, because it does not exist, and the Hangman immediately carries out the execution. The deputies take away Pedringano's body.

Act III, scene vii



Hieronimo, having left the execution, now wanders around his estate, mourning his son. He asks where he can possibly find relief from his grief and concludes that his grief is inescapable and that it demands that he finds justice for his son's murder. The Hangman finds him and tells him that a letter was recovered from Pedringano's body, which indicates that in fact Pedringano was operating under the orders of a superior and was therefore executed unjustly. Hieronimo assuages the Hangman's fear of punishment for the hasty execution and takes the letter from him. Hieronimo then reads the letter aloud. The letter is addressed to Lorenzo, and it restates Pedringano's request for help from his lord. It also contains a threat: that Pedringano will, if not aided by Lorenzo, reveal that Lorenzo ordered him to kill Serberine and also that Lorenzo and Balthazar killed Horatio with their servants' help. Hieronimo, upon reading the letter, finds confirmation for the first letter he received (from Bel-Imperia). He becomes enraged, realizing the truth of the allegations, finally convinced of the identity of his son's murderers. He resolves to seek justice from the king and heads directly toward the court.

Act III, scene viii

At the Knight-Marshall's house, Isabella circles with her maid, discussing different medicines. Complaining that there is no medicine that will restore the dead to life, she has a fit, running wildly across the room. Her maid attempts to console her, but she will not be consoled; the only thing that seems to help is the thought of her son sitting happily in Heaven "backed with a troop of fiery cherubins," singing and dancing in perfect bliss. But then the thought of his murder returns to her, and she again screams out a demand for justice against the murderers of her son.

Analysis

These scenes show two important developments: the increasing mental disturbance of Horatio's parents over their son's unrevenged murder, and the culmination (and simultaneous foiling) of Lorenzo's plans. These developments indicate a shift in the action, away from Lorenzo's opposing plans (which he believes, falsely, to be successful) and toward Hieronimo's plans for revenge. In other words, Hieronimo's actions now control the direction of the play.

We can see this in a change in the situations of Lorenzo and Hieronimo, regarding their respective knowledge. Lorenzo has had privileged access to the real significance of recent events. Whereas everyone else, including Hieronimo, believed that the murder of Serberine was a simple, hot-blooded killing, Lorenzo knew that it was all part of his plan. But now it is Lorenzo who is in the dark, and Hieronimo who is in the know, thanks to Pedringano's letter. And Hieronimo has now achieved certainty, thanks to yet another revelation (this time from a reliable source) as to the identity of his son's true killers.

The fact that Hieronimo was made a dupe of Lorenzo does provide some ironic distance between us and the tragic protagonist. When he condemns Pedringano to death and leaves the execution, his disgusted comments are a perfect example of dramatic irony: he consciously believes that he refers both to Serberine's and his son's murder, and he does not know that he is in fact about to hang one of his son's murderers or that in doing so he is helping his son's chief murderer escape punishment. Again, our feeling of tension and pity for Hieronimo is increased by the lack of information that propels him into this unfortunate act.

But the irony reverses back onto Lorenzo with the discovery of Pedringano's letter. It is situational irony, in which Lorenzo's intentions backfire: instead of hiding his identity from Hieronimo, his plot to trick Pedringano into murdering Serberine, and then having Pedringano executed, actually reveals his identity to the Knight Marshal. This reversal of information also presages a reversal in the respective characters of Lorenzo and Hieronimo: from now on it will be Hieronimo who behaves in a Machiavellian manner and Lorenzo who will become his innocent dupe.

Hieronimo's eventual decline is also foreshadowed in the fracturing of his mind under the strain of Horatio's murder and his inability to find justice for his son. "Where shall I run to breathe abroad my woes, / My woes whose weight hath wearied the earth?" Justice and revenge—the two are explicitly linked on line 14—have become something unreachable, locked behind the "windows of the brightest heavens." Again, we experience his anguish and frustration vicariously as dramatic tension. We empathize with his suffering, but also wish him to discover what we already know: that Lorenzo and Balthazar murdered his son. His suffering and our tension finds a momentary release when he confirms the identity of his son's murderers: now there is the possibility of action. And for the spectators, there is the possibility of a plot. Had Horatio remained in the dark, the play would have soon become uneventful and boring. Again, the idea of a double perspective is useful: on the one hand, we see Hieronimo as a dramatic character in a play and therefore know more than he does and are separated from him. But on the other hand, we view him as a human being, very much like ourselves, and thus empathize with him. This empathy creates our tension and unease at his suffering and our identification with his desire to find justice.

But in case we doubted the severity of his parental grief, and how close Hieronimo had come (and may still be) to madness, we can look to Isabella, whose "running lunatic" in scene viii illustrates what happens when this grief goes unrelieved. Isabella has nothing to console herself with, not "physic" (potion) to bring the dead back to life, and she does not know the identity of Horatio's murderers. Her only consolation is a vision of Horatio in heaven, "Backed with a troop of fiery cherubins, / Dancing about his newly-healed wounds." The backbreaking grief she experiences contrasts with the solace Hieronimo finds in thoughts of revenge. Furthermore, her madness foreshadows his, but will contrast with it as well: whereas Hieronimo is obsessed with evil thoughts of revenge, Isabella retreats into a world of the imagination where Hieronimo is alive and happy.

Act III, scene ix–xi



Summary

Act III, scene ix

Bel-Imperia sits at the window of the room in which she is being kept by Lorenzo. She wonders why she has been treated so unkindly, why her brother has behaved so evilly, and why Hieronimo has been so delayed in seeking out revenge against the murderers of his son. She briefly thinks of Andrea, who must be angry at the way she and Horatio have been abused and murdered. She resolves to be patient until the opportunity for freedom arises. Christophil, a servant, then enters to take her away from the window (in case she is seen by someone outside).

Act III, scene x

Lorenzo and Balthazar receive information from Lorenzo's page, confirming that Pedringano is indeed dead. He then gives the page a ring, telling him to give it to Christophil, who in turn is to give it to Bel-Imperia. Lorenzo and Balthazar then discuss Balthazar's continuing affections for Bel-Imperia, until Bel-Imperia arrives. She is angry at her brother for killing Horatio and imprisoning her. Lorenzo attempts to explain that he was acting out of concern for her. Lorenzo hints at the fact that Bel-Imperia's marriage to Balthazar had been arranged by the King and Viceroy. He then says that having found her in the wood with a man far below her social rank (as Horatio was), and remembering her old affair with Don Andrea, another man considered beneath her, he and Balthazar saw no other means to preserve her honor and hide her transgression from the king and her father than to kill the Knight-Marshall's son and take her away. Bel-Imperia (ironically) thanks them for their troubles, but then asks why she has been kept prisoner; to which the two co-conspirators reply that they merely wished to protect her from her father's anger, which had been exacerbated by her continuous melancholy following Andrea's death. Lorenzo and Balthazar then turn the discussion to the matter of Balthazar's affection for Bel-Imperia. Bel-Imperia seems courteous to Balthazar at first, but eventually rejects him just as before, leaving the pair with a stinging rebuke delivered in Latin. Lorenzo then consoles his friend, who pities himself for the pain he has suffered thanks to his unrequited love.

Act III, scene xi

Two Portuguese men are on their way to the Duke of Castile's, and they run into Hieronimo. They ask him for directions, and he informs them. They then ask whether Lorenzo is at his father's house. In reply to this, Hieronimo tells them where they can find Horatio; past a dark forest, near a rocky cliff where the sea spouts foul-smelling fumes, in a gigantic cauldron bathing "in boiling lead and blood of innocents." The two Portuguese laugh nervously and leave, concluding that Hieronimo is a lunatic.

Analysis

Scenes ix and x introduce the following question: How long will Bel-Imperia have to wait until she her lover's murder is revenged? Scene xi introduces the following simple question: How correct are the Portuguese travelers in judging that Hieronimo is insane? These are the two main dramatic questions that will dominate the rest of the play. The answers could be summarized as follows: not very long, and more right than you think. When Bel-Imperia waits in her room, she echoes the questions Hieronimo asked in the previous scene, before he discovered the identity of his son's murderers: why has her brother treated her so evilly? Why has Hieronimo not yet taken his revenge? Again, we are put at an ironic distance from Bel-Imperia—: We know that Hieronimo has only just become convinced of the guilt of Lorenzo and Balthazar; we know that Lorenzo and Balthazar murdered Horatio partly out of hatred of his ambitiousness and partly out of jealousy. But her questions still have a poignancy, because they are questions that in one sense can never be answered. "Accursed brother, unkind murdere, / Why bends thou thus thy mind to martyr me?" Whatever answers we can give regarding Lorenzo's motives, the question remains essentially unanswerable, because it is a fundamental question about how humans can become so evil.

Scene x further develops Lorenzo as a representative of human evil. His sophisticated explanation of his reasons for killing Horatio displays his Machiavellian nature. The Machiavellian villain—good examples of which include Iago from *Othello* and Barabas from the *Jew of Malta*—always uses exceptional verbal and argumentative abilities to manipulate others, which this links him to the Vice characters of earlier English morality plays. He skillfully combines the surprise revelation—that Bel-Imperia's father was aware of her affair with Andrea—with reminders of the powerful forces he can muster against Bel-Imperia, in the form of his high social status and the wrath of his father, all the while claiming to be acting in Bel-Imperia's best interests. Lorenzo manages to construct a plausible argument for an evil act, and we fear that Bel-Imperia might be fooled. But Bel-Imperia proves resistant to these manipulations, demonstrating herself again as a woman of superior intellect and strength, a worthy protagonist for which to root and hope. In a delicately balanced rhetorical figure, she parallels and inverts Balthazar's profession of love for her into a profession of fear of herself. This repudiates Lorenzo's chain of reasoning, which aimed to portray her as someone who needed protection: on the contrary, others need protection from

her. But ironically, she half-confirms Lorenzo's point with the admission that she too needs protection from herself, and this admission foreshadows her own self-destruction in Act IV.

The line between good and evil begins to blur in these scenes. Bel-Imperia adopts the ornate rhetoric of Lorenzo and Balthazar and ends up threatening them in the same way they have been threatening her—she reveals her own Machiavellian side. And Hieronimo's dark vision of revenge in scene xi makes a shift in his character, from one who we (and certainly an Elizabethan audience) could empathize with almost completely, to one whose motivations are less clear and whose psyche is more frightening than we thought. This is a shift that will continue throughout the rest of the play, culminating in Hieronimo and Bel-Imperia's own Machiavellian conspiracy and bloody revenge.

Act III, scene xii



Summary

Hieronimo enters with a dagger and a piece of rope. He has come to see the king in order to demand justice for Horatio. The implements he has in his hands, however, are those commonly used for suicide, and he seems to contemplate taking his own life. But he decides that if he does not avenge Horatio, no one will.

The King of Spain then arrives, along with the Ambassador, the Duke of Castile, and Lorenzo; Hieronimo hopes that his king will help avenge Horatio's death. But the king is preoccupied with affairs of state, since the Portuguese ambassador has returned. He brings the news that the Viceroy has accepted the marriage arrangement first proposed by the king in Act II, scene iii: that Balthazar and Bel-Imperia be wed, thereby uniting the royal lines of Spain and Portugal. The wedding ceremony will be held at the Spanish court, and the Viceroy will attend in person. Furthermore, as soon as the rites are performed, the Viceroy will abdicate his kingship so that Balthazar may take his place, and Bel-Imperia will become queen. As mentioned before, their offspring would then become the royal line of both Spain and Portugal.

The Ambassador also mentions that he brings the ransom to be paid to Horatio for the release of Balthazar. Upon the mention of his son's name, Hieronimo seems to go into a fit: he begs the king for justice, but the king, not knowing that Horatio has been murdered, does not understand what his Knight-Marshal is talking about. The king demands an explanation; Hieronimo leaves in a fury, and Lorenzo explains that Hieronimo is filled with such pride for his son, and such excitement about the prospect of the huge ransom, that he has gone insane as a result. The king is full of pity for Hieronimo and tells the Duke of Castile to go and give Hieronimo the ransom. When Lorenzo suggests that Hieronimo be removed from his post, the king refuses, saying that such an action would only increase Hieronimo's instability and that he will carry out his Knight-Marshal's judiciary functions until Hieronimo's mental health improves.

Analysis

Again, Hieronimo's soliloquies give us access to his troubled interiority. And this interiority is again wracked, by a question. "This way or that way?" he demands, and the two paths are clearly defined. The first is the path of suicide, as symbolized by the "poniard" (dagger) and rope he carries in his hand. The dagger and rope were the traditional instruments of suicide in Elizabethan times, and thus the recognized symbols for the act. His tossing aside of them physically represents his rejection of suicide as an option. For an Elizabethan audience, this tossing aside would be a moment of great psychological importance. It is Horatio's decision to take "that way", the way of revenge, and "justice for Horatio's death."

But the path of revenge and justice has suddenly acquired horrific attributes. It is a path through hell, "down by the dale that flows with purple gore," a path that leads to a judge who sits "upon a set of steel and molten brass, / And twixt his teeth he holds a fire-brand, / That leads unto the lake where hell doth stand." Kyd's ornately rhetorical style, full of alliteration may seem artificial when used to represent Hieronimo's sense of growing madness, counteracting the impression of Hieronimo as someone driven to his wit's ends. But it may help to convey the danger and seriousness of the task Hieronimo is undertaking. We may ask why Hieronimo finds this path so dangerous and difficult, and why he does not simply run to the king with his information.

But there are severe obstacles to such an easy resolution of his problem, obstacles presented by social class and of diplomacy. Lorenzo is the son of the Duke of Castile, the King's brother, and so is the nephew of the king. Balthazar is the son of the Viceroy of Portugal, with whom the king is negotiating an important diplomatic treaty. The king's own interests and familial relations make the possibility of Hieronimo finding justice seem remote, especially to an Elizabethan audience, who would be much more conscious of the importance of class differences.

To emphasize the king's interest in matters other than justice for Hieronimo's son, the king is shown entering with the Portuguese ambassador, arranging the details for Balthazar's wedding to Bel-Imperia. He does not know (implausibly, since he is the only one) that Horatio has been murdered

and does not even see Hieronimo. Lorenzo keeps Hieronimo out of the King's sight, just as he has kept Horatio's murder out of sight. In effect, Lorenzo has placed a veil between the king and Hieronimo. This veil is only pierced by Hieronimo's sudden descent into madness upon hearing his son's name. Ironically enough, it is the king who speaks it, believing Horatio to still be alive and ordering that Balthazar's ransom money be sent to him. But this madness is real, not contrived, and so Hieronimo loses the self-control necessary to make his case. Lorenzo is again easily able to shield the king from the knowledge of Horatio's death and his own complicity in it.

But the king is not completely insensitive to Hieronimo, and in fact has great affection for his Knight-Marshal. He demonstrates this by rejecting Lorenzo's suggestion that Hieronimo be dismissed from his post. It makes one wonder what the king would have done if Hieronimo had been able to speak to him coherently. Again, notice the irony of the situation: the king unwittingly prompts Hieronimo's madness and then forgives him for it, preventing himself from learning of his friend's real problem. This is one of those ironies that will contribute to the eventual tragedy by convincing Hieronimo that he has no recourse to the law. The law is embodied in the king, and the king cannot, will not, or simply does not hear him.

Act III, scene xiii



Summary

Again, Hieronimo is alone in his house, and now he has realized that he will not find justice with the king. He briefly considers leaving the matter of Horatio's revenge to God, as the Bible suggests. But he then considers that Lorenzo will probably have him killed to eliminate the threat of revenge, no matter what Hieronimo decides to do.

These considerations seem to prompt the Knight-Marshal to consider his vengeance against Lorenzo as part of his destiny, something fated by Heaven to happen. Now viewing himself as an instrument of divine vengeance, Hieronimo hatches a plan to pursue his revenge through subterfuge. Since both Lorenzo and Balthazar are of much higher rank than he, and could crush him easily if they knew his intentions, he will pretend to be grieving. If he acts unaware of Lorenzo's crimes and is friendly towards both of his son's murderers, when an opportune time comes for revenge, the two will not suspect him of seizing it.

A servant informs him that several petitioners are at the door, asking that Hieronimo plead on their behalf to the king. Hieronimo lets them in; they number four in total, and one of them is an old man. As they enter, the first speaks of Hieronimo's reputation as the most educated, skilled, and fair legal official in all of Spain. Hieronimo asks the men to plead their cases. The first three citizens all do so: the first case related to a debt, the second concerning some undetermined financial dealing, and the third an appeal of an eviction notice. The men provide Hieronimo with written documents and evidence, after which Hieronimo asks the old man to speak. The old man proclaims himself unable to speak his case, because it is too terrible; he instead provides Hieronimo with a document entitled "The humble supplication of Don Bazulto for his murdered son." Hieronimo is immediately moved into a fit of grief and shame over his own dead son and his inability to avenge Horatio's death. He offers the old man, who has been crying, a handkerchief, then realizes that it is the same handkerchief he pulled from Horatio's dead body.

He gives the old man coins and then goes into a diatribe in which he accuses himself of not grieving enough for his murdered son, not being a "loving father" as the old man has been. He vows horrible revenge, invoking the name of Proserpine, then runs off and tears up the legal documents of the various petitioners. They protest that he has gone mad. He runs out, only to return to speak to the old man. He asks the old man whether he is Horatio, returned from the dead to spur his father on to vengeance; the old man says no. He then asks the old man whether he is a Fury, come from the underworld to torment Hieronimo for not avenging his son. The old man replies that he is not a Fury either, but simply a distraught old man seeking justice for his murdered boy. Hieronimo then says that he knows what the old man is; he is the embodiment of Hieronimo's grief. The Knight-Marshal then asks the old man to accompany him into his house to meet Isabella, where all three of them will "sing a song" of the grief they all share over their lost sons.

Analysis

Scene xiii gives a detailed portrait of Hieronimo's interiority—his inner psyche—that is both disturbing and profoundly moving. On the one hand, Hieronimo seems to accept his role as a Machiavellian villain. On the other, we are presented with an image of Hieronimo as an essentially just and kind human being, almost destroyed by grief for his son. And so the scene presents us with several questions of interpretation: these questions ponder whether Hieronimo is a hero or a villain; whether he freely chooses to act the way he does, or is forced into it by uncontrollable grief; and whether his act repudiates Christianity, or acts within it.

These questions are interrelated, especially for an Elizabethan audience. When Hieronimo enters and suddenly declares "*Vindicta mihi!*", he is quoting the bible: "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, sayeth the lord" (from Romans). Elizabethan preachers used this phrase to demonstrate how vengeance

was something that should be left for God to invoke and not humankind. Hieronimo elaborates upon this Christian sentiment but then appears to reject it. The quotations he uses to explain his decision all draw from Seneca, and the book he holds is presumably a copy of the ancient Roman writer's works. But his reasoning is somewhat unclear. He proposes that Lorenzo will kill him to eliminate the threat of an avenger, if he does not kill him first. Another premise he states is that the worst that can happen to him if he acts boldly is death, which (since "Heaven covereth him that have no burial") is nothing to fear. But it is a logical leap from those two premises to the conclusion that he should reject the Christian injunction against revenge. Francis Bowers has suggested that we read this passage not as providing justification for Hieronimo's decision, but instead as an illustration of how he has turned from hero to villain. In other words, it shows his rejection of the Christian ideal of letting God decide and his adoption of the pagan idea of personal vengeance, as symbolized by the pagan writer Seneca. For an Elizabethan audience, the choosing paganism over Christianity and choosing evil over good were the same thing.

But this interpretation is somewhat inconsistent with the events that follow. These events emphasize Hieronimo's goodness—for example, the three citizens who praise Hieronimo's justice and fairness—and his anguish not only over his son's death but also over his reluctance to seek revenge for his son's death (as revealed by his conversation with the old man). An Elizabethan audience would undoubtedly feel discomfort with Hieronimo's decision, most likely believing it to be wrong. But it would also empathize with Hieronimo's suffering and his need to seek justice for his son. It must be remembered that all legal means to this justice have, at least in the eyes of Hieronimo, been exhausted after his failed meeting with the king. To Hieronimo, Lorenzo and Balthazar now have the law on their side, whereas Hieronimo has justice on his. Furthermore, private revenge had a long history in England, which had only fallen out of favor in the previous 100 years; no doubt Hieronimo was expressing an ambivalence probably felt by many in the audience. That they might not agree with the way he resolved his ambivalence does not mean that they would not sympathize or agree with his decision.

Furthermore, his decision does not amount to a wholesale rejection of Christianity. His reference to "Heaven" is an indication that he does not consider his actions as contradictory to Christian salvation. The stealth and deceptiveness he says he will pursue of course have a Machiavellian tinge. But they can also be interpreted as the patience of the righteous Renaissance man, as noted by Ronald Broude, or as the slow, patient revenge of God, described by the Protestant Theologian John Calvin, whose theology deeply influenced the English church. Hieronimo thus has an ambiguous relation to Christianity, where he may be usurping God's role or acting as God's agent. Even if he acts as God's agent, this is no guarantee that he acts justly.

It may be tempting, in the face of all this ambiguity and contradiction, to declare Hieronimo insane, and view his actions as those of a madman. As for his sanity, Hieronimo seems to be hanging onto it by a thread, if at all, as demonstrated by his running away from the citizens and his hasty reasoning in his soliloquy. When he demands of the old man whether or not he is Horatio, or a Fury from Hell, the audience may feel that Hieronimo has lost it, but this tension is relieved in his final speech to the old man, where he describes him as "the lively image of my grief" and asks him to come and grieve with him and his wife, to sing a song "[t]here parts in one, but all in discord framed." It is an act of profound understanding and compassion, which encourages us to see Hieronimo not as a bloodthirsty villain, but as a noble man under a great deal of strain, who we find it difficult to condemn, even though he makes what audiences both Elizabethan and modern would mainly regard as the wrong decision. Again, we are forced into a double perspective, unable to either condemn Hieronimo or support him, instead both sharing his pain and recoiling from the action he is about to undertake.

Act III, scenes xiv–xvi



Summary

Act III, scene xiv

The scene now shifts again to the Spanish court. The king, the Duke of Castile, Lorenzo, Balthazar, the Ambassador and Bel-Imperia have all congregated to greet the Viceroy of Portugal, who has arrived to see his son's wedding to Bel-Imperia. The king and Viceroy exchange speeches of welcome and praise. Everyone then leaves for a more private chamber in which to celebrate, except for Castile, who keeps his son Lorenzo behind as well.

Castile and Lorenzo then have a father-son talk, during which Castile tells his son that he is worried that Lorenzo's behavior might be endangering Bel-Imperia's marriage prospects. Specifically, Castile has heard rumors that Lorenzo has been denying Hieronimo access to the king and treating him unfairly; he pointedly reminds his son that Hieronimo has gained much admiration at the Spanish court, and it would be an embarrassment if the Knight-Marshal accused Lorenzo of wronging him. Lorenzo claims that these rumors have no foundation. Castile counters that he has seen it happen himself, but his son reassures his father that he was merely trying to prevent Hieronimo from embarrassing himself, in his madness, in front of the King. Lorenzo points out if Hieronimo has misconstrued his actions as hostile, it is only to be expected from a man who has gone out of his mind upon the murder of his son. Castile orders one of the servants to bring Hieronimo to them.

Balthazar and Bel-Imperia enter, with Balthazar speaking words of praise for his love, and Bel-Imperia, for once, returning them in kind. Castile greets both of the lovers and tells Bel-Imperia not to look sternly at him; he is no longer angry with her, he says, now that she is no longer in love with Andrea and instead engaged to the prince.

Hieronimo now enters with the servant, suspicious at having been summoned, fearful that his son's murderers may wish to tie up a loose end to their crime by finishing him off. But he immediately realizes this is not what will happen. The Duke informs him that he wishes to speak about the rumors that Lorenzo has been denying him access to the king and that Hieronimo now finds himself enraged at the Duke's son. Hieronimo dramatically insists this is not the case, drawing his sword and threatening to kill anyone who says otherwise. The Duke then asks Hieronimo and his son to embrace, which they do, exchanging words of friendship. As soon as the Duke is out of earshot, Hieronimo mocks both his and the Duke's words of friendship.

Act III, scene xv

Andrea is getting angrier and angrier; not only does Balthazar still live, but he is now engaged to Bel-Imperia. Moreover, Revenge has been sleeping all this time. Andrea wakes him up noisily, complaining that he has been neglecting his job. Hieronimo has now become friends with Lorenzo, seemingly having forgotten his son's murder. Revenge insists that Hieronimo has done nothing of the sort and that even though he may pretend to be at peace with Lorenzo, in fact his lust for revenge is simply slumbering, as the ghost was.

Revenge then stages a dumb show (a silent masque) for Andrea's sake, which shows a wedding party, at first happy, then descended upon by Hymen, god of marriage, who blows out their wedding torches and drenches them with blood. Andrea says that he understands the meaning of the masque and that the ghost can sleep if he wants to now, while he watches the rest of the play unfold.

Analysis

The juxtaposition of the rich, sophisticated, happy Spanish courtiers, arranging the wedding of a murderer (Balthazar) to the lover of the man he has murdered, makes a striking contrast with the grief of Hieronimo and the old man. The ornate speeches of the King and Viceroy can be seen as doubly ironic. First, they are based on the idea of Bel-Imperia and Balthazar's union being a happy one, whereas it is in actuality founded upon murder and the persuasion of the Duke of Castile. Secondly, their close friendship now stems from ulterior motives made plain in their speeches: the King treats the Viceroy nicely because he has beaten him in war, and the Viceroy is just happy that his son is alive. The Spanish court is a place where appearance and reality have a very sharp wedge driven between them. Even Bel-Imperia joins in on the act, professing her love for Balthazar, while revealing her true emotions with her tears. It is therefore understandable why Hieronimo enters in this scene fearing for his life: "*Pocas palabras!*(few words) mild as the lamb,/ Is't I will be revenged? No, I am not the man." The shifting alliances and appearances of the Spanish Court, along with the presence of Lorenzo at its center, make it difficult to know what to expect. The Machiavellian nature of the court thus helps justify Hieronimo's own Machiavellian behavior.

One way in which the Elizabethan audience differed from a modern audience is the immediate negative connotations that Spain and Portugal, but especially Spain, would have for them. Spain was England's chief enemy, and they were hated with a religious intensity. Understandably so, since the conflict (at least for the general public) was essentially a religious one, between Catholic Spain and Protestant England. Never had anti-Spanish sentiment been so strong as in the late 1580's, roughly during the time Kyd wrote *The Spanish Tragedy*. 1588 was the year the Armada, an invasion fleet of Spanish warships, left Spain for England. The years before this invasion were filled with anxiety about Spanish conquest, and Englishmen viewed the defeat as a sign from God, a victory of the true religion (Protestantism) over Catholicism.

So such an audience would take it as a given that the Spanish court was evil, making them more ready to sympathize with Hieronimo's Machiavellian behavior. They would easily accept the claim that the Spanish king and nobles were unjust. Since the king controlled the law, justice would have to be found through illegal means. And Hieronimo's behavior is unquestionably Machiavellian at this point. His profession of friendship for Lorenzo is laced with verbal irony: "For divers causes it is fit for us/ That we be friends", says Hieronimo, and we know (though Lorenzo doesn't) that what they both have their reasons for *appearing* to be friends. And when Lorenzo hopes that "old grudges are forgot," Hieronimo will reply that "it were a shame it should not be so." And it will be a shame, because Hieronimo will not forget his grudge. Hieronimo here foreshadows the destruction he is going to bring, while making a false show of friendship similar to the one Lorenzo displayed to Pedringano in III.ii.

Andrea and Revenge by this time seem particularly nasty characters. Their only function in the plot seems to be foreshadowing Balthazar's ultimate doom. But Kyd makes the characters interesting in the following sense: he makes them human. The human traits he emphasizes are unattractive ones, though—Andrea seems bloodthirsty, and Revenge seems extremely lazy. But it is precisely this laziness, this "slumbering," that makes Revenge an interesting character. At this point in the play, we might very well wonder with Andrea whether Balthazar will see any punishment, and if so, how Hieronimo could possibly effect that punishment. Revenge's dumb show provides a cryptic foreshadowing, a "code" or puzzle for which the next Act will provide the solution. Revenge's ambiguity, his need to speak in code, his refusal to say anything concrete, draws the audience along, keeping them interested yet still guessing, like a movie trailer that reveals just enough yet not too much of the plot to get people interested. It also serves as a

practical demonstration of the play's hopeful thesis enunciated by Isabella in II.v, which is that Time will eventually reveal the truth. In Time, we will see what Revenge means by the dumb show, and whether he speaks the truth or not.

An interesting and hard to answer question is how much time has elapsed so far during the course of the play. The idea that there has been enough time for rumors to have spread of Lorenzo's behavior suggests that it has been at least several days, perhaps a week or more, since Lorenzo's murder. The traveling back and forth between the Spanish and Portuguese courts also suggests a time frame of perhaps several weeks. There are two problems with such a time frame. First, the king has not yet heard of Horatio's death. We have to accept that the king is very unaware of the events that are happening around him, if we are to believe that a murder on his estate could escape his notice for so long. Second, there is the fact in IV.iv, Hieronimo unveils the dead body of his son. If several weeks had passed since Horatio's murder, one would expect his body to reek at that point and already be significantly decomposed. But in this case, Kyd may have sacrificed logical consistency for dramatic effect.

Act IV, scene i



Summary

Act IV, scene i

Bel-Imperia and Hieronimo enter the scene. Bel-Imperia upbraids Hieronimo for his failure to seek vengeance for his son and questions where his grief has gone. She tells him that if he doesn't avenge Horatio, she will be forced to do so herself. Upon hearing this, Hieronimo realizes that he has an ally. He begs her forgiveness for not acting sooner but resolves, in front of her, that he will kill those who murdered his son. She pledges to help him in any way she can. He simply instructs her to go along with the plan he is about to put into action.

Just at that moment, Balthazar and Lorenzo arrive, and Hieronimo begins to enact his plan. The two ask for Hieronimo's help. Apparently, Hieronimo's entertainment at the feast for the Portuguese Ambassador was such a success that he has been asked to provide the entertainment for the approaching royal wedding. Hieronimo agrees wholeheartedly and says that he has just the play: a tragedy he wrote in his student days at the University of Toledo. He asks each person present (Balthazar, Lorenzo, and Bel-Imperia) to act one of the parts. Balthazar seems initially shocked that Hieronimo suggests they play a tragedy, but eventually he and Lorenzo go along.

Hieronimo then explains the play's plot, which revolves around a knight of Rhodes (Rhodes-or *Rodos* is a small Greek island in the Mediterranean, conquered by the Turks near the turn of the sixteenth century) and his bride, Perseda. This bride was so beautiful that she drew the love of Soliman, the ruler of Rhodes. Soliman then decided to have the knight killed by his bashaw (a nobleman, or courtier) so that he could marry Perseda. Perseda, instead of marrying Soliman, killed him in revenge and then killed herself.

Lorenzo is utterly impressed by the plot, which ends with the *pasha* killing himself on a mountaintop. Hieronimo assigns the parts: he will be the murderer, Balthazar will play Soliman, Lorenzo will be the knight of Rhodes, and Bel-Imperia will play Perseda. He then hands out descriptions of each character to the respective actor, descriptions which detail which props and costumes each must wear: Balthazar, a Turkish cap, black mustache and broad, curved sword (falchion); Lorenzo, a cross like a knight of Rhodes; and Bel-Imperia must simply dress herself. Balthazar suggests that a comedy might be better material for a wedding, but his suggestion is spurned by Hieronimo.

Furthermore, Hieronimo dictates that each actor will have to improvise their lines and do so in a foreign language: Lorenzo in Latin, Hieronimo in Greek, Balthazar in Italian, and Bel-Imperia in French. Balthazar reasonably objects that no one will understand the play if they do this, but Hieronimo says that he will explain everything in a concluding speech.

Balthazar remains suspicious, but Lorenzo advises him to appease Hieronimo by going along with his plan. After they leave, Hieronimo contemplates the revenge he is about to obtain.

Act IV, scene ii

Isabella enters Hieronimo's garden with a dagger. She is railing against the injustice of her son's murder. She then cuts down the trellis or tree from which Horatio was hanged, hoping to destroy the memory of her son's death. Unable to be apart from her boy any longer, she pleads with Hieronimo to join her in death. She then stabs herself and dies.

Analysis

We are now in the rising action before the final *crisis*, or climax, of the play (the first crisis came in II.v, with the murder of Horatio). In other words, the central problem of the play since Act II scene v, Hieronimo's need to revenge of his son, now comes close to a resolution. The situation is almost an exact parallel of the rising action that preceded the first climax, except now roles have been switched. Lorenzo and Balthazar now play the roles of "innocent dupes." Hieronimo and Bel-Imperia are, by contrast, Machiavellian villains, plotting their revenge. As Hieronimo says when Lorenzo and Balthazar approach, "the plot's already in mine head." He then convinces Balthazar and Lorenzo to play a tragedy against the will of Balthazar, keenly manipulating Lorenzo's natural enthusiasm for a good play to his own ends.

The reversal of roles poses some problems in terms of the audience's sympathy for the characters. Machiavellian behavior has never been endearing, especially not in Elizabethan England. We must ask what the difference is, then, between Lorenzo and Balthazar's revenge and Hieronimo's revenge. For the murder of Horatio was also driven by revenge. One might say that that Hieronimo and Bel-Imperia are driven by love: Bel-Imperia's first question to Hieronimo is "Is this the love thou bear'st Horatio?" and she insists that she loves Horatio enough that she will kill his murderers if he won't. But if love were an adequate excuse, then Balthazar could be excused as well, because he committed his crime out of love for Bel-Imperia.

Hieronimo does however use the language of justice to describe his and Bel-Imperia's cause. "I see that heaven applies our drift / And all the saints do sit soliciting / For vengeance on those cursed murderers." The murders of Lorenzo and Balthazar, in Hieronimo's eyes, have heaven's approval on their side; the murder of Horatio was, by contrast, "causeless," unjustifiable. That Hieronimo feels his revenge to be a form of divine justice is clear, and it is also clear that the injury done to his son was much worse than any injury Horatio could have done to his murderers. Horatio's wrongs were merely personal slights, exacerbated by the murderers' keen sense of pride. So we have reason to distinguish between the two cases for revenge, even if the Machiavellian behavior of Hieronimo and Bel-Imperia makes us uncomfortable.

Hieronimo's deception has even fooled his wife, and this results in one of the play's saddest moments. Isabella's suicide is full of apocalyptic imagery: "I will leave ... not an herb within this garden-plot / Fruitless for ever may this garden be!" According to S.F. Johnson, her toppling down of the arbour (the tree from which Horatio was hanged) is an allusion to Hieronimo's prediction in IV.i: "Now shall I see the fall of Babylon, / Wrought by the heavens in this confusion." Her apocalyptic imagery has a common theme: the complete and total rejection of life, whether it be the life of the orchard, her own life, or the lives of any children she may have. This rejection is in effect a rejection of the future for the past, as shown by the juxtaposition of her suicide with the memory of her dead son: upon stabbing her breast, she describes it as "The hapless breast that gave Horatio suck." Her breast, and by extension her life, is given its meaning only by the memories of Horatio attached to it, not by anything that could happen in the future.

Act IV, scene iii–scene iv



Summary

Act IV, scene iii

Hieronimo begins building the stage for the play. The Duke of Castile walks by and asks him why he is building the stage by himself (literally, he asks where are his helpers). Hieronimo replies that it is important for the author of a play to ensure all aspects of its performance run smoothly. Hieronimo then asks Castile to give the king a copy of the play and to throw a key onto the floor for him when the audience has been seated. Castile consents and leaves. Balthazar comes along, with his beard half-on and half in his hand. Hieronimo scolds him for being unprepared. Then, along again, Hieronimo reminds himself of the reasons for his revenge: the death of his son and the recent suicide of his wife. He again resolves aloud to get revenge.

Act IV, scene iv

The time has arrived for the wedding festivities. The King, the Viceroy, the Duke of Castile, and their entourage sit down in front of the stage. The King hands the Viceroy the night's program, which summarizes the play's plot. Then, the play begins.

In the text of *The Spanish Tragedy*, a note is included to any readers (or perhaps audience members) explaining that the play was transcribed in English for the benefit of the general public; so the characters are comprehensible to English-speakers, despite Hieronimo's instructions to the contrary. Balthazar opens the production by entering—along with Hieronimo and Bel-Imperia—and giving a speech in the character of Soliman (the Turkish emperor), describing his pleasure at the conquest of Rhodes and his love for the beautiful Perseda. The king praises Balthazar's acting, and both the Viceroy and Castile note that he draws on his real-life love for Bel-Imperia. Hieronimo and Bel-Imperia, meanwhile, act the parts of the bashaw and Perseda. Soliman professes his affection for his friend Erasto, but when Lorenzo enters in the part of the knight Erasto, Erasto and Perseda exchange professions of love to Soliman's dismay. Hieronimo then persuades Soliman to have Erasto killed, against Soliman's initial reluctance to kill a

friend. He then stabs Erasto. When Soliman tells the grieving Perseda that she can have his love to replace the loss of Erasto, she angrily rejects him, stabs him, and then stabs herself.

The watching nobles are all extremely impressed by the play. The King congratulates Hieronimo, and the Viceroy remarks that Bel-Imperia would have treated his son better had the play been reality. But then Hieronimo goes on to provide his promised conclusion, revealing that the murders that were just enacted were in fact committed, the stabbings were real, and all the other actors are now, in fact, dead. Hieronimo graphically provides the reason for his revenge by revealing his dead son's body from behind a curtain where it has been hidden. He describes the cruel murder of his own son and then directly addresses the Viceroy whose own son Hieronimo has just killed, telling the Portuguese ruler that he understands his grief, having felt it himself. He reveals that he constructed the play specifically as a device of revenging himself on the murderers of his son and also notes that he rewrote Bel-Imperia's part so that she would not have to die at the end but that she decided to take her life anyways, out of despair for the loss of Horatio.

Hieronimo then runs off to hang himself, but the King, Viceroy and Castile, now enraged and confused by the sudden disaster, manage to find him and stop him. Hieronimo curses them, as they angrily demand his reasons for killing the Viceroy's son and Castile's children. Hieronimo repeats the fact (previously explained) that Lorenzo and Balthazar killed his son. The Viceroy realizes that Bel-Imperia must have been Hieronimo's accomplice, since she stabbed Balthazar. The king then berates Hieronimo for not speaking (even though he has already told the king everything he needs to know), at which point Hieronimo vows silence, perhaps intending to never reveal (though the Viceroy has already guessed it) the fact that Bel-Imperia helped him. He then bites out his tongue. The King, Viceroy and Castile are disgusted as the tongue plops to the floor. They then insist that Hieronimo write down his confession (though he has already spoken it), and Hieronimo then asks, using signs, for a knife with which to sharpen his pen. They provide him with one, allowing Hieronimo to immediately stab the Duke and then himself. The king, surrounded by the bodies of the dead, realizes and laments the fact that the heirs to the Spanish monarchy have been destroyed. The Viceroy echoes his grief, voicing a desire to sail across the world weeping for his dead son.

Analysis

This scene is both ingenious and problematic. The ingeniousness lies in the way Kyd constructs the ironic deaths of Balthazar and Lorenzo. Believing that they are acting out a play to celebrate a wedding—a new beginning to life—they in fact act out their own, very real deaths. In a piece of grim wordplay, the "plot" Hieronimo spoke of in IV.i becomes the plot of the play. And the plot results in Hieronimo's long-awaited revenge.

The central irony of the act, however, is that even in revenge, Hieronimo does not find relief from his pain. First of all, Bel-Imperia is dead, needlessly, by her own hand, overcome by grief. And the murder of his son's murderers does not even relieve Hieronimo's grief. When Hieronimo agonized over how his grief felt oppressive and inescapable in the opening lines of Act III, scene vii, revenge was then held out as a possible relief. Instead, Hieronimo finds only more grief after the death. "Here lay my hope," says Hieronimo, and the repetition of the words "Here lay" at the beginning of his next four lines (an example of *anaphora*), echoes the words "Here lies ...", the introduction to many epitaph inscription. And Hieronimo does recite an epitaph, both for himself and his son. The two deaths are in fact linked as the same death. Those who murdered Horatio "murdered me", says Hieronimo, and the corpse that lies on the stage is not only Horatio's corpse but also the corpse of Hieronimo's "hope" his "heart", his "treasure", his "bliss." In short, it is his own corpse, the corpse of everything he found valuable in life. And as the long description of Horatio's murder and his plot for revenge makes clear, there is no joy attached to the act. Hieronimo only wishes for silence: "I have no more to say" are his final words before running off and attempting to hang himself, to silence himself forever.

And Hieronimo is conscious of the new grief he has created on top of the old. "Speak Portuguese," he demands, "whose loss resembles mine: / If thou canst weep upon thy Balthazar, / 'Tis like I wailed for my Horatio." Hieronimo still uses the language of justice to describe his act: night covers "accursed crimes," the murderers were "traitors," he took a "vow" to revenge Horatio when he dipped the bloody handkerchief in his wounds, a handkerchief that now makes its final appearance. But this consciousness of the suffering in others, and its similarity to his own pain, demonstrates that Hieronimo still has *empathy* for others. Indeed he seems to feel the pain of others as well.

In classic Greek tragedy, there was often a defining moment in a play where the tragic hero would realize his folly, his fatal error or *hamartia*. This moment was called the hero's *anagnoresis*. Tragedies do not need such a moment to be tragic (Shakespeare's plays often didn't possess such a moment), and Hieronimo does not seem to have a moment of self-recognition here. He doesn't consciously renounce revenge or reflect on the futility of replacing death with death. But Kyd has created a very poignant image of that futility in this scene, and if Hieronimo cannot realize it, then the audience can. At this moment, Hieronimo is the closest he has come to being a true tragic protagonist, destroyed by evil forces beyond his control yet still recognizably human. It is a terrible moment but also a profound one.

In the rest of the scene, though, it seems that Kyd loses control of his play. Hieronimo's speech already pushes the edges of sensationalism, and his biting out of his tongue only makes the action more sensational. It is a fairly obvious symbol of his already stated desire to be silent, to have no more words. It must, of course, be theatrically effective; but it also paints Hieronimo as completely insane. And when Hieronimo stabs the Duke of Castile,

we are much more likely to feel pity for Castile and his friends than we are for Hieronimo. Castile was innocent of any crime and actually spoke highly of Hieronimo in III.xiv. In short, this scene wipes out Hieronimo's ambiguity (the conflict between a good man driven to Machiavellian means and a murderer who understands the grief his victims feel) and replaces it with lunacy.

The scene does heighten the ambiguity and tension that have existed in the entire play, between the "play" world and the real world. This tension is related to the double perspective in which the play encourages us to view Hieronimo. If we watched the *Soliman and Perseda* playlet within IV.iv as a member of an audience, we would be a viewer watching two viewers (Revenge and Andrea, who, remember, never leave the stage) watching several other viewers (the assembled nobles) watching a play. Several levels of reality separate us from the world of *Soliman and Perseda*, and on one level we are very isolated from this action. But if we look into the world of *The Spanish Tragedy*, we see an exact mirror of ourselves—spectators in the middle of watching a tragic play. This increases the viewer's sense of identification with the world of the play, as does the sudden collapse of the distinction, of the real world and the world of *Soliman and Perseda*. The murders are real, the actors are really dead, and so the boundaries between real world and play world are revealed to be, from one perspective, unbreakable, but fluid, and collapsible when we look at it another way.

Act IV, scene v



Summary

Andrea has finally achieved satisfaction, having seen his killer and his friend Horatio's murderers receive violent ends. He sums up the violence that has been committed in the play (nine deaths in total, ten if one counts Andrea's death), and then he describes the various paradises awaiting the heroes of the story, who will spend the rest of eternity in Elysian fields. Horatio will rest with the warriors, Isabella with those who grieve, Bel-Imperia with the vestal virgins, symbols of chastity and purity, and Hieronimo with the musician Orpheus. And as for his enemies, they will all be sent to the deepest pits of hell. The Duke of Castile will take Tityus's place in the talons of a giant vulture; Lorenzo will be spun about on the wheel of Ixion for eternity; Balthazar will be hung from Chimaera's neck, Serberine will take Sisyphus' place rolling a stone up a giant hill only to watch it fall down again, and Pedringano will be dragged through the boiling river of Acheron. Revenge has the final speech of the play, vows to make the after-lives of the villains of the play a never ending tragedy.

Analysis

The decision on the part of Kyd to literally give Revenge the last word in the play reflects the thematic message of the final scenes of *The Spanish Tragedy*: revenge does have the last word, crowding out mercy and all other human emotions, seeking its inexorable satisfaction in an orgy of bloodshed and violence. The final scene implies that Hieronimo's action serves as the fulfillment of justice, but the blood, waste, and carnage of the penultimate scene works against this presumption, seeming to deny the possibility of justice in a world where the machinations of class and power determine the course of men's lives.

The theme of judgment also makes an explicit appearance. Andrea effectively sets up a tribunal of his own, sentencing his friends to heaven and his enemies to hell. What changes this appearance of justice from previous appearances is the fact that justice is served. It is not delayed or deferred, as it was for Andrea, Isabella, Hieronimo, and all the other characters throughout the play. Instead, it is simply dispensed, at no cost, by Andrea.

The ending, then, is not tragic at all. Hieronimo is not annihilated in his quest for vengeance and justice: instead, he will enjoy an eternity of peace and happiness. The wicked will pay for their crimes. It is true that the King and Viceroy have had their royal lines wiped out, but for an Elizabethan audience, this would be a cause for celebration, not sadness. In other words, the scene attempts to completely undo the tragic implications of the play's action, by giving all the good characters happy endings and giving the bad ones sad endings, while wiping out the ambiguities that made Hieronimo and Bel-Imperia such engaging characters.

Additions



Currently, most editions of *The Spanish Tragedy* work from the earliest known version, published in 1592. But throughout the seventeenth century, the version most often read and performed was that printed in a 1602 edition. The difference between these two editions is small, consisting of five added segments in the 1602 version.

Three of these additions were simply inserted into the text, and two replaced certain lines in the original text. The places of insertion were as follows: act II, scene v, between line 45 and 46; act III, scene ii, replacing line 65 and part of 66; act III, scene xi, between line 1 and 2; act III, between scene xii and scene xiii; act IV, scene iv, replacing 168 to 190. The additions were extremely popular in their day, and we imagine that this is because the

elements of the play they expand upon were those that most impressed audiences of *The Spanish Tragedy*—Hieronimo's incredible grief and his increasing madness. For example, the first addition portrays Hieronimo going briefly insane after discovering the body of his son. The fourth addition (the longest at over 160 lines and the most famous, frequently referred to as the "painter scene") focuses on Hieronimo's grief and need for justice in much the same way that scene xiii does.

So these sections are valuable in the sense that they provide a hint as to the initial audience reaction to Kyd's play. But editors have become increasingly less fond of the additions, recognizing that their more exuberant, unrestrained style contrasts jarringly with Kyd's refined, formal, and ornate poetry. In the "painter scene", for example, Hieronimo speaks in prose, something he never does anywhere else in the text. One might say this is more naturalistic, but since they were all composed after his death, he had no hand in composing or approving them. Moreover, no new thematic ground or significant plot developments are introduced in the additions. They are merely extra "goodies" for an audience that loved to see people going insane with grief.

But, the additions are undeniably well-written in parts; energetic, emotional, moving (especially the third addition, and its speech about sons). There is much contention as to their authorship, some people even suggesting that Shakespeare wrote them. Traditionally, authorship is assigned to Ben Jonson, though they are very different from Jonson's neoclassical style. In any case, most modern editions allow the reader to decide for themselves whether or not the additions contribute to the play, by printing them if not within the body of the text then at the end of it, indicating where each passage should be added.