

“We think caged birds sing, when indeed they cry”
The power and powerlessness of women
in Jacobean Revenge Tragedy

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The theme of revenge in drama and literature is a very old one. Ancient playwrights like Aeschylus in the *Oresteia*, followed by classical writers like Seneca in his play *Thyestes*, explored the theme of revenge and its impact socially, politically and personally. Revenge came into vogue for the Elizabethan's with writers like Kyd, Marlowe, and Shakespeare. However with the change of rulers in England from Elizabeth to James I, this popular type of theatrical entertainment underwent a clear and definitive change. It morphed from the 'highly moral' message of the Elizabethan stage, where violence was a testing ground for the human spirit, to the sensational and gratuitous violence of the Jacobean, with its focus not on heroism but on villainy, horror, and love.¹

The history and development of Revenge tragedy as a specific genre on the Jacobean English stage has provided succeeding generations with many interesting psychological character studies. Beginning roughly in the late 1580s with Thomas Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*, followed by Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* in the early 1590s, through to *Hamlet* in 1601, these plays were very popular with audiences of the times, and gave rise to a whole new generation of writers. The earliest productions, pre-1600, were rather crude and full of what we would consider bombast with rivers of gratuitous blood and violence. With the ordination of King James and his more urbane court the later playwrights began to tone down the blatant violence, and instead began to focus on more nuanced studies of character and society. Now, a new generation of writers was producing more and more sophisticated and psychological character studies in this field.

There are many intriguing elements that make up the conventions of Jacobean revenge tragedy : murder and revenge themes, Italianate settings, deep corruption in the Church, and lust for political power and money. Its paradoxical treatment of women is among the most under commented on and yet, most interesting aspects. In this genre, women are expected to emulate unrealistic chivalric and Petrarchan ideals of chasteness, purity, and submission to whatever is demanded of them, yet this medium is full of studies of women who are strong or determined enough to transgress the mold that patriarchal society has cast them in. Regardless of the conse-

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quences, characters like Livia in *Women Beware Women*, and Putana in *Tis Pity She's a Whore*, wink at incest, Beatrice-Joanna in *The Changeling* contracts a murder, and the *Duchess of Malfi* firmly rejects patriarchal and societal control so that a woman may marry for love well below her station. These types of women abound in the dramatic literature of the period, roughly between 1607 to the English Civil War in 1641. It seems possible that many of these explorations of the ever-expanding parameters of feminine roles in Jacobean England, shattering centuries of masculine underestimation of women, result from the following. They could be seen as an evolving cultural response to medieval and contemporary Jacobean misogyny, the long exploited economic potential of women themselves, and finally, the relative social and political freedom of women in English society of the time.

It is useful to understand what traditions the women in the various Jacobean tragedies are reacting to, the obstacles they are trying to overcome, and the importance of what they may be trying to achieve. The texts make it clear that the feminine role in society was a complicated issue for that time, and one important enough for that society to explore in the relatively safe world of the stage.

That these plays are in a sense, a response to the historical treatment of women is fairly clear. The medieval Church's misogyny was well documented, as they sought both to perpetuate women's culpability in man's fall from biblical grace, and to control feminine sexuality. In 1486, *Malleus Maleficarum*, "*The Hammer of the Witches*," put the evils of feminine sexuality into print.

All witchcraft stems from carnal lust, which is in women insatiable.²

This equation of evil, co-existent with feminine sexuality was being actively explored on the stage one hundred and fifty years after the publication of that document. The traditional view of women in the earlier Renaissance society is reflected in Francis Meres' 1598, *Second Part of Wits Commonwealth*,

The temples of the Egyptians were builded of very fayre stone, and beautified with Gold, Silver and Ivory, but if you searched into them, you should find nothing but a Cat, a Crocodile, or a Serpent : So many women are very beautifully adorned without, but if you look into them, you shall find nothing but Enormous & Adulterous minds.³

Even the question of whether or not women actually possessed souls was bandied about until at least 1620, topical enough to merit a mention by Middleton in *Women Beware Women*.

Duke. I'll believe
Henceforward they have ev'ry one a soul too

'Gainst all the uncourteous opinions

That man's uncivil rudeness ever held of'em.

(*Women Beware Women* III. III. 24-27)

The tensions regarding conceptions of women meriting such concerted stage and literary discussion were partly fuelled by the two monarchs of the period. For political reasons, Elizabeth perpetuated the noble myths of virginity and chasteness. For her, truly, love was a snare. The echoes of Elizabethan ideals of the position of women in society had already become outdated. James on the other hand, considered love to be merely an end to political means. His "*Divine Right of Kings*" manifesto emphasized his maleness (in stark contrast to his female predecessor) and established his misogynistic and hierarchal views of marital equality.

I am the husband and all the whole isle is my lawful wife ; *I am the head and it is my body.*⁴ (Italics mine)

Of course, both positions were synonymous with patriarchal authority over women at home and in society, and had been in effect for centuries.

Women were, in fact, accused of willfully refusing to fulfill their duty and made scapegoats for the violent upheavals in English life. Increasingly banished from the public to the private spheres, used as commodities in the economy's burgeoning capitalism, denied subjectivity and voice, they were repeatedly and publicly exhorted to fashion their behavior according to their ordained role and punished for offenses like shrewishness and gadding.⁵

It was the growing controversy surrounding women, unofficially begun in print in 1560, and continuing well into the next century, that brought women's issues out into the open, with both sides expressing their views in ballads, pamphlets, and satires.

The growing awareness of English women themselves and their evolving roles in society, compounded with those women's determination to insist on ever expanding rights and freedoms, were the potential inspiration and strength of many of the women characters in Jacobean Revenge tragedy. The growing prosperity of the middle class seeking to educate their daughters, emulating the educated women of the aristocracy, also fuelled the controversy surrounding women. Swiss traveler Thomas Platter visiting in 1599, who famously, wrote about and illustrated his observations of the English stage, also had this to say about the women in England.

The women-folk of England... have far more liberty than in other lands, and know just how to make good use of it, for they often stroll out or drive by coach in very gorgeous clothes, and the men must put up with

such ways, and may not punish them for it, indeed the good wives often beat their men.⁶

That a growing number of women were becoming educated and in the process of finding their public voices is evident by the fact that women writers began to appear, and ever more frequently in order to defend their sex in print. In 1620, the concern over the masculinization of women in dress, reached a zenith with the *Hic-Mulier/Haec-Vir* essays. *Hic-mulier* was a published criticism of the growing phenomena of female to male transvestism in England, seen as a challenge to social order and masculine hierarchy. The response *Haec-Vir* written ostensibly by a female character, challenges the masculinity of Englishmen and flatly says, “*Custom is an idiot*,” following with an assertion of feminine equality :

We are as free-borne as Men, have as free election, and as free spirits, we are compounded of like parts, and may with like liberty make benefit of our creations.⁷

This quoted passage has larger social reverberations. Up to this time, the patriarchy had been successful in limiting the political and social mobility of women, and in exploiting their usefulness for economically advantageous marriages and property inheritance. This financial and highly exploitable function of women in England’s marital stakes is a concern that permeates Revenge tragedy. In this medium, love has nothing to do with marriage and “the requirements of lineage and inheritance always override those of personal love and affection.”⁸

This helps to explain why revenge tragedy of this period is so concerned with the issues of adultery and incest. The stage reflects a patriarchal society concerned with controlling the sexual behavior of their women, not simply for domination, but also to ensure that a family’s bloodline remained true. Any child not of the husband’s would negate the business oriented, transactional aspect of marriage in this society. In addition, the act of incest is even more disturbing in this type of institutionalized form of marriage. It undermines unions with other families, inherently affecting the legitimacy of heirs to family fortunes, and carries a powerful social stigma that could destroy any hope of future marital negotiations. Since women are considered the ‘breeders’ in this society, it is important to keep the bloodlines pure. Any misbegotten child would ruin consideration of any woman as a useful commodity in the eyes of this society. The incestuous pregnancies in *’Tis Pity She’s a Whore*, and *Women Beware Women*, would create offspring which would make illegitimate the union of families, thus voiding those transactions. The sin of incest is even more terrible due to its financial implications in such a world.

After the installation of a misogynistic king whose views on patriarchal authority were well known, Jacobean society was stimulated to re-evaluate the role of women in their world. The controversy about women’s evolving rights in society was raging in the government, church, and in the medium of print. Playwrights emanating from a society that encouraged masculine prerogative were intrigued by these women’s issues and explored them through the medium of the stage. Jacobean revenge tragedy intimates a new awareness of the

emerging social, political and economic potentialities of women in society. It explores the validity of a traditional ideal of malleable chastity, and how the effects of women intent on autonomy utilizing masculine means, affects a patriarchal society.

Later Jacobean tragedians switch tragic emphasis from hero to heroine, from betrayer to betrayed.⁹

What are the issues about women in Jacobean society that so interest these playwrights? What does their society so inflict on them that these women feel compelled to react so strongly? It seems that the playwrights of the period were taking inspiration from conventions of their world, shaping and highlighting what they felt to be the more oppressive and interesting aspects of it.

The Revenger's Tragedy, *The Duchess of Malfi*, and *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* assume the forms they do because their authors simultaneously participate in, and call into question, the Renaissance's cultural repression of the feminine and its concomitant assertion of masculine power.¹⁰

The primary thing that most of these dramatic explorations are interested in is that women are the chief commodities. There is often wealth and favor forthcoming to any man that will help another wealthy or powerful man gain access to a woman. Flamineo panders his own sister to a Duke in *The White Devil*, and Guardiano and Livia in *Women Beware Women* stand to gain financially by helping their duke to the young and unsuspecting Bianca. Seduction of women is usually a financial transaction, and we even notice that some young husbands are paid a bribe for their wives, like Leantio in *Women Beware Women*, though, unfortunately, some are simply murdered outright like Camillo in *The White Devil*. Women of this world must bring financial gain, either to the buyer or the seller, by dowry or by cold, hard cash.

Mont. T'was my cousin's fate-

Ill may I name the hour-to marry you,

He bought you of your father.

Vitt. Ha?

Mont. He spent there in six months

Twelve thousand ducats, and to my acquaintance

Reciev'd in dowry with you not one julio.

(*White Devil* III. II. 237-241)

It was a good thing for her impoverished father, that his daughter was beautiful enough to merit such a sum. Vit-

toria's servant Zanche doesn't fare as well, planning to steal a dowry to buy a husband.

Zan. So that though the prince like not the
 ambassador's person nor words, yet he likes
 well of the presentment : so I may come to you
 in the same manner, and be better loved for
 my dowry than my virtue.

(*White Devil* V. I. 221-225)

The articulation of the dowry and marriage as a transaction is unpleasant, and Middleton offers an effective comment from a woman's point of view, as to just how bad the downside of this institution could be.

Isa. When women have their choices, commonly
 They do but buy their thralldoms, and bring
 great portions
 To men to keep'em in subjection -
 As if a fearful prisoner should bribe
 The keeper to be good to him, yet lies in still,
 And glad of a good usage, a good look sometimes.
 By'r Lady, no misery surmounts a woman's :
 Men buy their slaves, but women buy their masters.

(*Women Beware Women* I. II.169-176, italics mine)

These Jacobean playwrights show us that the thralldom of marriage can be considered and utilized in a myriad of dramatically effective ways. First, it can be a respectable way of supporting ones-self while taking a lover, while seemingly subscribing to societal conventions. Secondly, it can offer a woman a life of noble suffering, as Penthea and Isabella experience in the *The Broken Heart*, and in the *The White Devil*. Finally, it can be utilized and sanctioned by the church in order to cover up an incestuous pregnancy, as Annabella learns in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*. It is not clear if these were actually ways of dealing with the institution of marriage in Jacobean society, but we come to understand that marriage in this artificial world is often merely a form of prostitution, though never verbally acknowledged as such within the worlds of the plays. Rather, it is when a woman exercises her free will seeking to change marriage partners or lovers that that her society garners her with the name of whore.

True to its patriarchal orientation, we see that it is socially permissible for men to have sexual relations out

of wedlock, at the very least society winks at it, though occasionally, one must flee to another estate or stronghold. This is not so for women, who are instantly harlots the minute anyone perceives them to be compromised by a man. We can see that Vittoria in *The White Devil* and Hippolita in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, both experience this humiliating assessment of harlotry, simply for trying to exercise their own prerogatives. It often seems in this genre that widows and married women are especially attractive to the opposite sex. Often it is an older powerful man taking a younger less experienced woman. In *Women Beware Women*, Bianca is approximately sixteen years of age, and the duke is named as being fifty-five. Bianca, upon first seeing him says,

Bia. That's no great age in man, he's then at
best for wisdom and for judgement.

(*Women Beware Women* I. III. 91-93)

Her limited experience of men causes her to perceive the duke as a wise, fatherly older man. The enlightenment that comes from her unexpected sexual involvement with the Duke enables Bianca to more fully comprehend concepts of sin, and disgrace, as well as discover her own articulate voice. We also note in Webster's source materials based on the murder of the real Vittoria Accoramboni in Padua, on December 22, 1585 for *The White Devil* that Bracciano's character is twenty years the senior of Vittoria. The men in the world of these plays often court their objects of lust in terms of honor, power, or riches. Women on the other hand like Leonora in *The Devil's Law Case* and Livia in *Women Beware Women*, (since they are thirty-nine and over), are forced to simply, and more directly, buy their paramours. Leonora offers her daughter's suitor a chest full of coins even though she is aware he has a gambling problem, and we see that Livia offers Leantio an equitable sum.

Liv. ...How abundantly worldly fortune has blessed me
in worldly treasure ; trust me I have enough sir,
to make my friend a rich man in my life,
a great one at my death.

(*Women Beware Women* III. III. 359-362)

Because we see women so often judged and measured by the men in the worlds of Revenge tragedy, as either goddess or whore, it is may be useful to bear in mind Machiavelli's observations on human behavior.

Men in general judge by their eyes rather than by their hands ; because everyone is in a position to watch, few are in a position to come in close touch with you. Everyone sees what you appear to be, few experience what you really are.¹¹

Male misconceptions of women are clearly explored in these terms in Revenge tragedy. The Church is usually completely corrupt in these plays. (*Likely a reflection of the religious tensions between Protestant England and Catholic Europe, which in turn can be viewed with more irony, bearing in mind the Stuart sympathy to Catholic causes.*) These shady churchmen are usually either locked into the traditional social conventions espoused by the Church, or are unwilling to rise above established dogma to attempt any understanding of woman in a more benevolent and enlightened way. More often, churchmen are too blinded by familial orientation, greed and financial considerations to offer any inkling of compassion or empathy to the heroines of these plays. It is myopia and avarice however, that inspires and creates the movement of these plays. This Machiavellian “*judging by their eyes*” syndrome makes the men of Revenge tragedy spectacularly unable to deal with the repercussions of their actions involving women, or with the evolving reality of strong women themselves.

This increasing freedom of women in Jacobean society, however inexplicably explored on stage, nonetheless, maintains patriarchal misconceptions of its women’s growing sense of self-maturation. It seems to be interpreting this change as societal disorder, not evolution. In the world of King James I, men considered women to be valued property, and crucial to protect against plunder from other stronger men. Moreover, like Ferdinand in *The Duchess of Malfi*, they were unable to conceive that women might have a right to their own voice and self-determination. The need for male monopoly over female movement was simply included into the equation. All the men of these worlds can do after instilling into women like Vittoria, and the *Duchess of Malfi* (who is never even assigned a name), masculine models and inspiration for acquisition of their goals, or motivating their irreversible ego driven circumstances, is to simply punish them for their actions.

The fact that they understand that public shame and death usually result from challenging patriarchal control is still little deterrent to this generation of enlightened women. They are clearly interested in achieving emotional and sexual fulfillment, acquisition of wealth and power, and above all, emancipation to practice self-determination with a measure of personal control within their worlds. Illicit, sexual relations with powerful dukes provide both Vittoria and Bianca with the confidence to take on the church, which in turn judges them in a truly negative fashion for their social aspirations.

Bianca displays one of the most resonant voices against religious misogyny to come out of Jacobean Revenge tragedy when she questions the spiritual integrity of the Cardinal. Isabella exults in the freedom of her illegitimacy so she can enjoy the older lover who offers her sexual and emotional fulfillment, and who only “incidentally” may or may not be her uncle. Leonora, in revenge on her son for the murder of the man who might have fulfilled her sexually and emotionally, attempts to destroy his reputation in court, in order to strip from him his name, honor, and remaining property. The women in these worlds use treacherous revenge tactics, because the men of these worlds would rather suffer death than public dishonor.

We see older women confident in joining their male counterparts in exploiting sexual urges towards young lovers. We also see women capable of orchestrating murder as a means to an end, such as Livia in Middleton’s

Women Beware Women. Her idea is more horrible in that she convinces her niece become her brother’s lover, so that she can enjoy her niece’s husband as her paramour, not knowing that ultimately her brother will kill this young lover in a duel. Contrast that to Alsemero who only plans the simple murder of Alonzo de Piracquo under the pretense of an honorable duel. We also see that women have developed and cultivated a keen sense of survival and discretion, which many of the men of Revenge tragedy certainly lack. Leantio verbally flaunts his arrangement with Livia to Bianca, while Bianca herself, usually feeling that things are better off left unsaid, takes deep offence at his spiteful boasting, and alerts the Duke her lover, to her husband’s public proclamations. Perhaps she is justified. She is a self-possessed young woman, much more in tune with the ways of the world than Leantio, who initially felt that marriage was great because it brought him a lot of free sex.

Lean. Is she my wife till death, yet no more mine?

That’s a hard measure. *Then what’s marriage good for?*

(*Women Beware Women* III. II. 323-24, italics mine)

By examining two of the plays frequently mentioned above, John Webster’s *The White Devil*, and Thomas Middleton’s *Women Beware Women*, it is possible to explore the conventions discussed previously in a more detailed fashion. When one reads these two plays closely, the richness and paradox of the worlds created by these playwrights provides an insight into the world of sexual politics in Jacobean England.

In one of Webster’s most memorable plays, we see women surrounded by men, constantly reacting to the sexual and misogynistic machinations of their society. *The White Devil* is a landmark portrayal of a headstrong young woman in Jacobean tragedy. The intentional irony of the title is apparent. White is a symbol for purity and chastity, while “devil” has its own dark connotations. The title’s juxtaposition in imagery sets up the contrasts and conventions, which will be examined and upturned in the play. It starts with typically patriarchal and misogynistic terminology by the man who represents the voice of the state as its murderous tool, destroying the young woman who stands up to it.

Lodo. Fortune’s a right whore.

If she give aught, she deals it in small parcels

that she may take away all at one swoop.

(*White Devil* I. I. 4-6)

While it was proverbial that fortune is a whore, the articulation of the proverb at the play’s opening is significant. It’s clear that the effect that Vittoria has on Bracciano’s marriage and standing in the community, however inadvertently, reflects the masculine conceptions of the insatiable appetite “fortune” has in affecting men’s

earthly affairs. The fact that Webster chooses to call ‘*fortune*’ a whore at the beginning of *The White Devil*, forces a conception of women on to the audience or reader which may or may not be countermanded by the end of the play. Webster seems determined to put forth a concept of women, which he will challenge throughout its course in a very subtle manner.

It has been noted that Vittoria appears to be less dominant in the play than Bracciano and Flamenio, but it is her story and she is its catalyst. She influences all of the characters in some way, both men and women. Even before we first see her, we sympathetically recognize that she cannot have had any choice in the selection of Camillo for a husband, and we are able to see the result of marriage as a financial transaction. For Vittoria, marriage to a fool like Camillo is a prison. While most critics see Vittoria as a pawn in the hands of her money hungry brother, only breaking free at the end of the play, it is also conceivable that Vittoria is subtly using Flamineo throughout the play. She lets him believe he is the active force, in case anything should go wrong. She *allows* Flamineo to orchestrate her liaison with Bracciano, and she *depends* on him to trick Camillo out of her bed. These are chores that Flamineo is only too happy to do for her. She preys on Flamenio’s greed like she preys on Bracciano’s lust.

Flam. Excellent,

 His jewel for her jewel ; well put in Duke.

Brac. Nay let me see you wear it.

Vitt. Here sir.

Brac. Nay lower, you shall wear my jewel lower.

Flam. That’s better ; she must wear his jewel lower.

(*White Devil* I. II. 214-218)

She utilizes Flamineo’s presence while she sits with Bracciano, fully aware that the sight of their exchange of rich gifts will stimulate his greed. It is her wearing of the jewel, knowing the effect it might have on Bracciano that furthers Flamineo’s recognizance of the financial possibilities of this union. By maintaining her aura of helplessness in the hands of these rapacious males, she increases her chances of successfully achieving her goal of exchanging a fool for a powerful duke. It would be very unseemly for a woman to do what these men are so eager to do, and Vittoria understands that she would be swiftly and brutally reprimanded by the patriarchy should she take any more of a direct hand in these proceedings. She knows that her best chance of successfully achieving any sort of rank and control of her world is through the use of these men.

Vittoria’s dream is an indication of how subtly she is able to influence these two men to clear away the spousal obstacles. It is never clear if it was a real dream or not. The fact that she refers to the Yew tree as a “*godly*” Yew tree initially in feminine terms, “spread her large root in ground” (I.II.234), perhaps allows her to

subconsciously take root in their imaginations. Usually in Jacobean and in the earlier Renaissance tradition, Yews are mythologically representative of sadness and death, but here, it is used as a symbol of a joyous, worldly freedom, though perhaps this incongruous use of the Yew imagery is intended as a harbinger of the disasters that are impending. This manipulation of Yew imagery alters our expectations, stimulating both the duke and her brother to unleash the forces of chaos. It is after Bracciano becomes the Yew tree symbolically, that he will come to her rescue with his “massy arm” and free her from an unfulfilling marriage. Yet, her more basic need for the duke as protector becomes clear at the play’s end when he dies, and she realizes all is lost.

Vittoria’s manipulation of Bracciano and Flamineo keep her hands technically clear of any implication in the murders, and thus she can play the virtuous indignant when she is put on trial ostensibly for her beauty, gay clothes, and merry heart. In many ways the trial scene is the most crucial scene of the play, highlighting the mettle and cleverness of this “powerless” woman. She refuses to be tried in Latin,

Vitt. I will not have my accusation clouded

In a strange tongue : all this assembly

Shall hear what you can charge me with.

(*White Devil* III. II.17-19)

This “strange” tongue is the official language of the Church, and she has obvious scorn for that institution, as it is the sanctifier of marriage as a transaction. Though primarily, she wants the assembly to understand exactly what she is being tried for in vernacular language, so they will appreciate how well she acquits herself, a victim of the oppressive patriarchy. Her thinly veiled sarcasm is inspired by the confidence of her physical guiltlessness in the murder, by the fact that the actual (male) murderers are not on trial, and by the knowledge that she is only on trial for being a whore by a hysterical patriarchy, a crime that doesn’t carry a death penalty.

Mont. This whore, forsooth was holy.

Vitt. Ha? Whore, what’s that?

Mont. Shall I expound whore to you? Sure I shall ;
I’ll give you their perfect character. They are first
Sweetmeats which rot the eater : in man’s nostril
Poison’d perfumes. They are cozening alchemy,
Shipwrecks in calmest weather. . . .

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...What are whores?

They are the flattering bells have all one tune,

Her scorn for Lodovico is our scorn, as he pathetically considers this slaughter to be his finest moment. In *The White Devil* we see Vittoria exploiting the structures and parameters built into patriarchy, without surrendering her femininity, or self-identity, rejecting all masculine attempts to define and limit her.

When we examine Middleton's *Women Beware Women*, we see this formula of strong women manifesting self-determination in a decidedly masculine way. Middleton creates an environment where women can actively play off of each other, revealing unique masculine machinations of women.

The transaction of marriage and seduction now offers financial incentive to women as well as men. Livia, as the sophisticated older woman of the play, and example to Isabella and Bianca, has no qualms about helping her brother to their niece, or procuring young Bianca for the duke's physical enjoyment for the promise of extensive financial compensation. This is a rather sinister turn of events, seeing women turning upon themselves, demolishing traditional sexual barriers between conventional gender and socially inspired revenge motifs.

Livia has many masculine qualities ; she is unafraid to be outspoken, she possesses a gallery of erotic paintings in her residence, and is in touch with the appetites of sexuality.

Liv. Besides he tasted of many sundry dishes
 That we poor wretches never lay our lips to :
 As obedience forsooth, subjection, duty, and
 such kickshaws,
 All of our making, but served in to them,
 And if we lick a finger then sometimes,
 We are not to blame ; your best cooks use it.

(*Women Beware Women* I. II. 40-45)

We may now clearly understand that see that “custome *is* an idiot.” Livia is subtly telling these men that women should be equally allowed to acknowledge their sexuality and lick a few fingers, which certainly would not be as threatening to the male ego as “tasting many sundry dishes”. She makes ‘tasting’ seem almost harmless. Indeed, her effectiveness in the play is based on the fact that she has managed to secure the alliance of men in this world.

She is, nevertheless, a good companion--especially of men, who admire her unsentimental shrewdness and candour. Indeed, her pleasure in being treated as their equal helps explain the callousness with which she betrays her own sex.¹²

It is precisely because this is much more the world of England that she succeeds as much as she does, without the hindrance of the traditional Italianate obstacles that Vittoria faced. Her familiarity with the men in her

world also allows her to more subtly undermine the patriarchy, encouraging incestuous liaisons, and buying her younger, and unfortunately, indiscreet lover. This transaction, paralleling the duke's, remains different in that it will be merely a contract for services, not a marriage proposal. Though we see Livia will have to *demand* constancy as part of the transaction, while the duke may *assume* it. Indeed, Livia swears that she has buried two husbands, and will not marry again, a fact that her male family members choose not to take seriously. She may have forgotten their power of marrying off widows when it will be advantageous to them-selves but they haven't. This is an interesting contrast with Vittoria's character, which inherently understands the limitations of self will in her world. Livia assumes sexual equality, and fails to ascertain the limitations of self will in hers. She falls victim to the patriarchy because she imagines a degree of independence, which ultimately is only superficial at best. Her confidence that procurement of sexual pleasure for herself will be as winked at, as she has winked at all the procuring she has done for the men of her world, leads to her tragic fall and the unraveling of all the mischief she has helped to perpetuate.

She is a great teacher and example to the younger, more impressionable women, who fall into the orbit of her cynical world. Her niece Isabella who becomes her uncle's lover, learns from Livia that public honor can be maintained by practicing absolute discretion.

Liv. All the business
 So carefully and so discreetly carried
 That fame received no spot by't, not a blemish.

(Women Beware Women II. I.149-151)

It's a wonderful irony in this play that Isabella is herself the product of her mother's extramarital affair with a Spanish Marquis, rendering her illegitimate and completely unsuitable to marry the rich young Ward. Livia also provides Isabella with the knowledge and techniques to further a marriage of convenience and convention. Isabella takes an older lover and wittingly sows the seeds of incest, ultimately creating her own societal downfall. Inspired to experience her own self-will and emotional independence, Isabella also adopts Livia's attitude of invincibility, leading her into the conception that she is morally superior to the rich and crass young suitor, the Ward, which enables her to endure his humiliating inspection of her teeth, legs, and various other parts of her anatomy in act III, scene III.

Ward. But Sordidio, how shall we do to make her laugh, that I may see what teeth she has?
 For I'll not bate her a tooth, nor take a black one into th'bargain

(Women Beware Women III. III. 73-75)

Ward. For of all creatures I cannot abide a splay footed woman. She's an unlucky thing to meet in a morning.

(*Women Beware Women* III. III. 100-103)

While we see her blossoming of confidence as a positive survival technique for a woman reduced to a commodity, we also see that her sense of moral superiority over the Ward is a false one. Her exultation in her bastardy, taking a man who is her mother's brother as a lover, proves her no better morally than this buffoon, who thinks with his private parts, and is "not so base to learn to read and write" (I.II.126). She is his equal in vice. Isabella is given a sufficient sense of self will by Livia so that she may plot revenge on her aunt after she publically discloses the family secret. It seems likely that Isabella designs to murder Livia more for indiscreetly revealing the secret, than for perpetuating the lie in the first place.

Now we come to Bianca, whose victimization by Livia, and perhaps endow her with a greater sense of self and clarity of voice than Isabella. She certainly rises to Livia's level in her state of newly discovered independence, but the stripping away of her innocence and youthful illusions is rather sordid. Initially she is a victim of patriarchal lust, delivered up by a woman to a man who will rape her if she doesn't acquiesce peacefully. But immediately after this experience, we see how effectively she has been changed by it.

Bia. I thank thy treachery, sin and I'm acquainted,
No couple greater. And I'm like that great one
Who making politic use of a base villain,
He likes the treason well, but hates the traitor.

(*Women Beware Women* II. II. 439-443)

Her exploitation by the patriarchy actually empowers rather than destroys her, as many a lesser heroine has been in Renaissance tragedy. She casts off the unreality of Leantio's world to return to the level of society from which he has stolen her.

A society in which the usefulness of others is the excuse for one's own immorality, in which chastity is merely a physical fact and honour is synonymous with reputation.¹³

She is handed the ducal protection and power of limited self-determination that Vittoria fought so hard for, though we notice she was born to it and Vittoria wasn't. Her meteoric rise gives her both the confidence and composure to take up Vittoria's torch and respond to the church in a much more sophisticated and slightly less vituperative way.

Bia. Sir, I have read you over all this while
In silence, and I find great knowledge in you,
And severe learning ; *yet' mongst all your virtues*
I see not charity written, which some call
the first born of religion, and I wonder
I cannot see't in yours.

(*Women Beware Women* IV. III. 47-52, italics mine)

She goes on in this speech to eloquently rebuke the church for centuries of misogynistic treatment towards women.

Bia. If ev'ry woman
That commits evil should be therefore kept
Back in desires of goodness, how should virtue
Be known and honoured? . . .
.
....To take light
From one that sees, that's injury and spite.
Pray, whether is religion better served,
When lives that are licentious are more honest
Than when they still run through a sinful blood?
T'is nothing virtues temple to deface,
Than build the ruins, there's a work of grace.

(*Women Beware Women* IV. III. 59-61, 64-69)

She is notifying the Cardinal that the church's traditional and inflexible ways of perceiving and punishing women's transgressions would be better served by forgiveness and gentle correction of moral wrongdoing. Ostracizing women with no hope of social or spiritual redemption sends a poor message to the very flock these men are supposed to be guiding, and greatly weakens any moral authority he may claim to possess. After she realizes that this argument won't sway the Cardinal to remove his obstacles to her marriage and thus her consolidation of power in society, she decides to remove the cardinal himself by murdering him. This is significant in itself ; most churchmen are killed for their corruption and brutality in Jacobean revenge tragedy, not because they merely represent an obstacle to someone's ambitions. In this way Bianca is the pinnacle of independent, strong-willed women in this medium ; far worse than Livia, Hippolita in *Tis Pity She's a Whore*, or even Vitto-

ria in the *White Devil*. Bianca is as ruthless as her male counterpart, and perhaps even more cold-blooded. For this she must die, but not by the hand of the patriarchy, or in fear of its repercussions. Rather she realizes that the wheel has come full circle, and she must plummet from its heights.

Bia. Pride, greatness, honours, beauty, youth, ambition,
 You must all down together, theres no help for't.
 Yet this my gladness is, that I remove
 Tasting the same death in a cup of love.

(*Women Beware Women* V. II. 218-221)

True to the convention of this medium, her death like most of the women in this genre, is inspired by love, and not power or politics.

In death, the duchess exposes the poverty and impotence of their reduction of human life, male and female, to buyable, coercible matter. Her tenacious adherence to her humanity explodes their small world of tyrant-gods and subject creatures and deconstructs the gendered binary that supports their dominance.¹⁴

Ultimately, the achievements and victories scored by the women in Renaissance tragedy are Pyrrhic ones. Inspired by a society that provides them with no-win situations, they are required to surrender their lives if not their souls in their pursuit of self-determination. Their push for independence within their worlds lasts as long as the patriarchy can be suborned into assisting, or chooses to tolerate. The patriarchal church or family members always curtail any freedom of choice or movement. These women are always forced to push their resourcefulness to extremes. Though they manage to exploit some societal conventions, they are always hamstrung by their degrading position as commodity. We see that it is possible to be self-willed like Livia, as long as one doesn't cross that invisible boundary. We see shifts in personal perspective that take place after sexual exploitation by the powerful for better or for worse, and we see women adapting to the masculine world by utilizing masculine techniques for survival. While these playwrights seem genuinely sympathetic to the plights of women in their plays, they do subscribe to the conventions that women are usually done in by their frailty, and disposition to love. Zanche confides a mistress' dark secrets, which undoes her mistress in her search for love, and Livia, in a fit of passion over the murder of her lover, reveals the incestuous scandal of her family.

Women who transgress their cultural, societal limitations for whatever reasons are always punished. Beatrice-Joanna in *The Changeling* dies begging forgiveness from an unforgiving husband and father. Annabella in *Tis Pity She's a Whore*, seduced by her brother, actually a better candidate for husband than any of her three suitors, dies by his hand, a whore in the play's closing words. We also note that the Duchess of Malfi is mur-

- ⁵ Eileen Allman, *Jacobean Revenge Tragedy and the Politics of Virtue*. Delaware : University of Delaware Press, 1999, 8.
- ⁶ Thomas Platter's journal (1599) reprinted in Peter Razell, ed., *The Journals of Two Travellers in Elizabethan England : Thomas Platter and Horatio Busino*. Pittsburgh : Caliban Books, 1995, 46.
- ⁷ Quoted by Linda Woodbridge, *Women of the English Renaissance*. Sussex : The Harvester Press, 1984, 147.
- ⁸ Lisa Jardine, "Wealth, Inheritance, and the Spectre of Strong Women", *Still Harping on Daughters*. Brighton : Harvester Press, 1983, 83.
- ⁹ Robert Ornstein, *The Moral Vision of Jacobean Tragedy*. Madison : University of Wisconsin Press, 1965, 171.
- ¹⁰ Laurie A. Finke, *Images of Femininity in Jacobean Tragedy*. Theatre Journal, Vol. 36, Renaissance Re-Visions Baltimore : Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984, 360.
- ¹¹ Quoted by Jonathon Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy*. London : Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1984, 233.
- ¹² Robert Ornstein, *The Moral Vision of Jacobean Tragedy*. Madison : University of Wisconsin Press, 1965, 233.
- ¹³ Ibid. 195
- ¹⁴ Eileen Allman, *Jacobean Revenge Tragedy and the Politics of Virtue*. Delaware : University of Delaware Press, 1999, 138.

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【Abstract】

私たちは確かに、彼らが泣くとき、 愛玩鳥が歌うと思います

マイケル ランドルフ*

ジェームズ王朝時代の一文学的様式である復讐悲劇の歴史とその発展は、これまで長きに渡って多くの批評家達に興味深い心理分析的な人物研究の視座を提供してきた。復讐悲劇が最も繁栄したその時代は、イングランドにおける大きな変革の時代でもあった。チューダー王朝が終焉を迎え、より洗練されたものの結局紛争が多かったスチュアート王朝の時代になると、イングランドは政治・社会の両方面において内省的時代に入った。特に、父権制社会の伝統に対しては、逆反応が起きるようになった。女性の力が向上したと絡む問題が顕在化し、それについての賛否両論がバラードやパンフレット、そして風刺などに書かれるようになったのはこの時代である。劇場もまた、中立的な立場を貫くことはできなかった。というのもこの時代の劇場は鋭い社会批判へと急速に変わりつつあったからである。舞台における女性の人物表象のされかた、彼女らが行動的な主人公へと変化したこと、さらに彼女らが復讐悲劇の世界へ主体的に介入してくるようになった事実に目を向けると、社会における女性観や女性自身の考える女性観が、この時代には変化していたことがみとれる。作家はみな男性であったが、復讐悲劇の様式、人物造形、そして芝居全体をよく読むと、女性に関してこれまで言われてこなかった興味深い点に気付く。芝居という娯楽の形をとりながらも、そこに社会問題を探求しようとする自由の萌芽が垣間見られ、そして、迅速に変化する世界において、女性の経済的・集団的地位が向上しつつあることを是とする考え方がそこにみとれるのである。

キーワード：ジェームズ王朝、結婚、父権制、不儀、女性嫌悪

The history and development of Revenge Tragedy as a specific genre on the Jacobean English stage has provided succeeding generations with many interesting psychological character studies. The apogee period of Revenge Tragedy was a time of great change in England. With the close of the Tudor period and the rise of the more sophisticated but ultimately contentious Stuart court, England was forced into reexamining itself not just politically, but socially as well. In particular, there was a growing counter-reaction to the traditions of patriarchy. It was during this period that the issues surrounding the growing power of the women in England, spilled out into the open with both sides expressing their views in ballads, pamphlets, and satires. The theater couldn't remain neutral in the discussion as the Stuart court theater was swiftly developing into a medium of shrewd social commentary. The characterizations of women on the stage, and their development into active protagonists and willing participants in the dark world of Revenge Tragedy marks a remarkable transition in how the views on and by women themselves were evolving during the Jacobean period. While the authors are all male, a closer look at the genre, the characters, and the plays themselves reveals a fascination with a previously unexplored aspect of women, a growing freedom to explore social issues under the guise of theatrical entertainment, and implicitly, an acceptance of the developing economic and collective power of women in a rapidly changing world.

Key words : Jacobean, Revenge, Marriage, Patriarchy, Incest, Misogyny

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