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Male Poisoners in Renaissance Revenge Tragedies

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Abstract - Contribution to Knowledge

Poisonings are the staple of revenge tragedies of the late Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, and contrary to a common perception that poison is a female weapon, male characters are often portrayed as the main perpetrators. I argue in this thesis that the plays discussed show a distinct type of male poisoner who employs poison as a weapon in a way that effeminises and emasculates them. I shall explore the character traits of this distinct male poisoner in six revenge tragedies: *Hamlet*, *The Tragedy of Hoffman*, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, *The Tragedy of Claudius Tiberius Nero*, *The Second Maiden's Tragedy*, and *Albovine, King Of The Lombards*. I will attempt to demonstrate that there are two categories of male poisoner: one is the heterosexual male who poisons others because of ambition, lust, or revenge (for example, the Duke in *The Revenger's Tragedy* or Claudius in *Hamlet*); the other is the distinct male poisoner who acts in ways more associated with females than with males; and it is these characters that I focus on in this thesis. These distinct male poisoners are not just represented as effeminate, but are shown forming close homoerotic relationships with other males through their language and actions; in effect, these male poisoners take on the subordinate role of the female within these relationships. My contribution to knowledge is to bring attention to this distinct type of male poisoner and demonstrate that, while not all male poisoners are presented as identical to each other, all these insidious characters have deficient manhoods that are empowered by poison.

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Introduction

Although academic study of the subject of poison¹ in the early modern period appears more popular in recent years, there is a gap in this area of study that has been comparatively neglected by scholars. My contribution to knowledge in this thesis is to address this gap by concentrating on the figure of the distinct male poisoner in six revenge plays that date from the early 1600's to 1629 and bring together a set of plays, some of which have been overlooked, to foreground the characteristics of a distinct type of male poisoner. This thesis will focus on the masculinity of the male poisoner in six revenge tragedies² that will be discussed chronologically to make prominent their development and to show that, although they share commonalities, there are also differences in the way the sexuality of the male poisoner is portrayed. I shall argue that the plays problematise these insidious male characters by providing a sub-category of male poisoner that allows them to work in a different way. Playwrights give this particular *type* of male poisoner the capability to respond erotically to other characters of the same sex and to display recognisable traits associated with the female, for example, weeping, blushing and fainting, which other *male* poisoners do not exhibit. This sub-category of distinct male poisoner is presented in the plays discussed as male but is given roles that mimic that of the subordinate, obedient, and non-confrontational female. This sub-category of male poisoner has been neglected by critical scholarship, but I seek to demonstrate how there is a clear opposition between a *male* and a distinct male poisoner in revenge tragedies of the early modern period and how they manifest as vitally important components of the development of the dramatic action within the plays discussed, adding to cultural attitudes and anxieties of masculinity. If the patriarchal society of the Renaissance saw masculinity as superior and femininity as inferior,

¹ There are numerous articles and books written on the subject of poison and how it was used in the Early Modern period both on and off the stage. For detailed information on how poison was used see Tanya Pollard, *Drugs and Theater in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Tanya Pollard, 'Drugs, Poisons, Remedies, and Theater' in *Middleton in Context*, ed. Suzanne Gossett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 2011), 287-94; Tanya Pollard, "A Thing Like Death": Poisons and Sleeping Potions in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Renaissance Drama* 32 (2003), 95-121; Tanya Pollard, 'Beauty's Poisonous Properties', *Shakespeare Studies* 27 (1999), 187-210; Miranda Wilson, *Poison's Dark Works in Renaissance England* (Maryland, USA: Bucknell University Press, 2014); Farah Karim-Cooper, *Cosmetics in Shakespearean and Renaissance Drama* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006); Fredson Thayer Bowers, 'The Audience and the Poisoners of Elizabethan Tragedy' (*Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, XXXVI no. 4 (October 1937), 491-504.

² The plays are discussed in the following order: *Hamlet* (1600?) William Shakespeare; *The Tragedy of Hoffman* (1603) Henry Chettle; *The Revenger's Tragedy* (1606/7) Thomas Middleton; *The Tragedy of Claudius Tiberius Nero* (1607) Anonymous; *The Second Maiden's Tragedy* (1611) Thomas Middleton; *Albovine, King of the Lombards* (1629) Sir William Davenant.

then the male that portrays a more female identity by acting in a subordinate way to another more dominant male, and shows a reluctance to use violence to defend an honour, must be viewed as a male who has relinquished his manhood and therefore can only be seen as lost to the world of men. The male actor who assumes the role and identity of a male by wearing male clothes and then portrays that male as having female traits by acting the role of the female to another male contributes, I suggest, to early modern anxieties of manhood.

I will show that the distinct male poisoner is a sexual type that deviates from notions of the male poisoner portrayed on the stage in the early modern period. Mario DiGangi³ identifies certain complex theatrical figures as 'sexual types', as he explains that

the sexual type functions as an easily recognisable figure representing socially abject or deformed modes of gender and erotic comportment; his very participation in familiar social relations can expose the ideological interests that draw the boundaries between the normative and the monstrous, the appropriate and the transgressive.⁴

Distinct male poisoners function within poison-plot plays in recognisably familiar social roles such as servants, minions, masters and/or sons, and hide behind the familiar and outward show of normative behaviour, yet they perform monstrous acts that transgress cultural expectations of morality and masculinity; it is through their use of poison that they are able to compensate for their lack of manly qualities.

³ Mario DiGangi's study on the sexuality of certain *types* of males, and females, in some ways extends upon the ideas put forward by Karl Heinrich Ulrichs and his theory of a 'third' sexual type in his publications of 1864-5. In Ulrichs' theory of homosexuality he names this third sexual type as 'urnings', and although criticised at the time, he believed that a man having a desire for another man was inborn and natural, and that the male carried the female psyche within their male bodies. Ulrichs perceived that there was a 'female element' that was part of the nature of some males, and he stated that the principal part of this female element was their erotic attraction to other men. See, Hubert Kennedy, 'Karl Heinrich Ulrichs First Theorist of Homosexuality', Vernon Rosario, (ed.), *In Science and Homosexualities*, (pp. 26-45), New York: Routledge, 1997. Also, Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, *The Riddle of "Man-Manly" Love: The Pioneering Work on Male Homosexuality* (Prometheus Books, 1994).

⁴ Mario DiGangi, *Sexual Types: Embodiment, Agency, and Dramatic Character from Shakespeare to Shirley* (United States of America Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), p. 4.

William Shakespeare's *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*⁵ c.1600-1601⁶ is the earliest play I discuss in the introduction, and I suggest that it provides a template for the other plays that I discuss in this thesis. Richard Courtney comments that Shakespeare's *Hamlet* 'defies [any] final analysis' because it is a 'living organism' that 'permits constant new interpretations' and that it is 'never the same from one moment to the next'.⁷ My intention is to demonstrate how Shakespeare challenges audience expectations of the male revenger in Prince Hamlet, and also calls into question the masculinity in some of his other male characters. There are three male poisoners in *Hamlet*, Claudius, Prince Hamlet and Laertes, and there are five characters that die from the effects of being poisoned: Old Hamlet, Prince Hamlet, Claudius, Laertes and Gertrude. We are informed that Ophelia dies from 'the poison of deep grief' (IV. v. 74). I suggest that Shakespeare's play establishes the characteristics of the male poisoner that are developed in the plays that follow *Hamlet*, and that contribute to my argument regarding a *distinct* type of male poisoner. Revenge tragedies with poison plots that were written after *Hamlet* give important evidence of the play's popularity and influence over other playwrights who develop and expand on the character of Hamlet and Claudius as male poisoners found in Shakespeare's play.

Terminology

The complexities of identification in relation to certain terms regarding 'males' calls for some clarification from the start; the terminology of certain words used in this thesis needs to be

⁵ Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (eds), *The Arden Shakespeare: Hamlet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). All subsequent references used will refer to this edition of the text.

⁶ The exact date when the play was written is difficult for scholars to pinpoint exactly, though it is safe to say that it was written in the late Elizabethan period. According to Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor: 'there must be at least three separate significant dates for any Shakespeare play: those of the completion of the manuscript, the first performance and the first printing'. *The Arden Shakespeare: Hamlet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 44. Katherine Duncan-Jones dates the play to 1601-2, see *The Arden Shakespeare: Ungentle Shakespeare, scenes from his life* (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2001), p.144. For further speculation on the dates of the play's first performance see: Stephen Mullaney, *Shakespeare Quarterly* (1994; 45,2; Proquest Art, Design and Architecture Collection, pg. 139, p. 149).

⁷ Richard Courtney, *Shakespeare's World of Death: The early Tragedies* (Canada: Simon & Pierre Publishing Co. Ltd., 1995), p.136.

explained. The concept of a *homosexual* identity⁸ was not an issue in the early modern period, not in the sense that we understand the term today, but there were expected norms relating to manhood, for instance, being married and fathering children. Alexandra Shepard observes that 'Marriage was synonymous with manhood,'⁹ and I have found that none of the distinct male poisoners discussed in this thesis has a wife or children, except for Albovine in Davenant's *Albovine, King of the Lombards*. In this play an heir to the throne is very briefly mentioned in the last few sentences; the king is on his second marriage, suggesting that even a male character with a wife can also display the traits of a distinct male poisoner. Neither do any of the characters discussed in this thesis (including Albovine) maintain a successful relationship with the opposite sex. In the plays discussed, a homosexual relationship may be hinted at through the language and actions of the characters, but at no point do I maintain that a male-male relationship involves any sort of sexual activity. When I use the word *manhood*, I equate it with practices of control, violence and power over other males (and females), and claim that the only way the distinct male poisoner can obtain any power is through the use of poison. Meanings attached to the terms 'masculine' and 'feminine' must be determined by the historical difference between men and women and the place they held in society. I shall refer to the term *masculine* as it is understood in today's world and to the culture of the Renaissance in which the plays discussed were written, published and/or received.

Catholicism, Poison and Death

First, I am going to discuss Catholicism in *Hamlet* in order to show the association between Catholicism and poison. I want to show that although Shakespeare set his play in Denmark, a country that was historically Lutheran, there are strong overtones of Catholicism to be found in

⁸ For a detailed explanation of homosexual identity in the Renaissance see Bruce Smith, *Homosexual Desire In Shakespeare's England*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 10-18. Also, Claude J. Summers' informative article on using the term homosexual as adjective rather than noun, especially with a modern understanding of the term when referring to the Early Modern period: 'Homosexuality and Renaissance Literature, or the Anxieties of Anachronism', *South Central Review*, 9, No. 1, *Historicizing Literary Contexts* (1992), pp. 2-23, Published by The Johns Hopkins University Press on behalf of The South Central Modern Language Association. Also Alan Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* (New York; Columbia University Press, 1995). Plus, Jonathan Goldberg, *Sodomities: Renaissance Texts, Modern Sexualities* (Stanford University Press, 1992).

⁹ Alexandra Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 75. In her book, Alexandra Shepard gives a comprehensive account of expectations of manhood in the early modern period.

the language used by the characters on the stage. I want to demonstrate that the ghost who appears on the battlements to his son is the catalyst that generates the main action of the play, and who also presents strong links with the Catholic Church. With the ghost of Old Hamlet who emerges from the torments of purgatory, Shakespeare foregrounds a concern in plentiful supply in revenge tragedies in the early modern period, that of Catholicism. Stephen Greenblatt writes, 'by 1563, almost forty years before Shakespeare's *Hamlet* was written, the Church of England had explicitly rejected the Roman Catholic conception of Purgatory and the practices that had been developed around it'.¹⁰ The Ghost's presence in the play is not only a reminder for Hamlet of his father, but also a reminder of Catholic beliefs for some members of the audience. Especially the belief that the souls of those departed who are not completely free from venial sins cannot go before God and must, by God's law, be:

Doomed for a certain term to walk the night
And for the day confined to fast in fires
Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature
Are burnt and purged away. (I. v. 10-13)

Stephen Greenblatt notes: 'various fifteenth-century devotional treatises known collectively as *The Lay Folks Mass Book* include for the recital after the elevation of the Host a vernacular prayer for the dead'.¹¹ Prayers would be said in 'vernacular faith, intended to be read while the priests conduct the Latin Mass-pleads [sic] that bonds shackling these dead be unlocked, so that they can pass from torment to everlasting joy'.¹² Shakespeare shows that Old Hamlet's 'foul crimes' cannot be easily cleansed by the flames because the 'uneffectual fire' (I. v. 90) can not lick them clean. The Ghost has been regurgitated from the 'marble jaws' (I. iv. 50) of the 'sepulchre' (I. iv. 48) after being 'quietly interred' (I. iv. 49) and gives a ghastly description of his present state (brought about by his own doing during his 'days of nature'), where he will stay for eternity in the 'sulphurous and tormenting flames' (I.v.3) until his 'foul crimes' are 'purged' from him, especially as he 'No reckoning made' (I. v. 78). The ghost of Old Hamlet has a tale [to] unfold whose lightest word

Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood,

¹⁰ Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), p 235.

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 14.

¹² *ibid.*, p. 14.

Make thy two eyes like stars start from their spheres,
Thy knotted and combined locks to part
And each particular hair to stand on end
Like quills upon the fearful porpentine – (I. v. 15-20)

The words Old Hamlet uses to convey his story would ‘harrow’, distress and mortify the soul of the listener; they have the power to ‘freeze’ blood and make ‘eyes’ start from their sockets in horror and also make each separate hair ‘stand on end’ and affect the listener.

With the ghost of Old Hamlet, Shakespeare provides a strong Catholic presence on the stage. The only way the Ghost of Old Hamlet can gain any kind of contentment, *not* absolution, in the ‘sulphurous and tormenting flames’ (I. v. 3), is to ask his son to avenge his murder committed by his ‘incestuous’ brother by unfolding his dreadful tale, contaminating and condemning Prince Hamlet with his words to a long spell in the flames of purgatory and eternal damnation. The Ghost’s words enter Hamlet’s ears and transform into toxic droplets that pollute and contaminate his ears.

We cannot escape Catholicism in *Hamlet*, as Laertes ‘anoint[s]’ (IV. vii. 138) his sword with the poison that was

so mortal that, but dip a knife in it,
Where it draws blood no cataplasm so rare,
Collected from all simples that have virtue
Under the moon, can save the thing from death
That is but scratched withal. (IV. vii. 140-143)

The poison Laertes uses is so lethal that even with the smallest scratch there would be no antidote or remedy, no poultice of herbal leaves that could be placed upon the wound that would deliver the victim from death. The word ‘anoint’ is used when extreme unction¹³ is administered as strength for the soul’s journey and is given in the last rites to those who are close to death; it is used by the Roman Catholic priest on the dying or sick and is also used for

¹³ For details see: Toner, Patrick. "Extreme Unction." *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. 5. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1909. 28 Dec. 2016 <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05716a.htm>>.

the ridding of sins. In 1603 James Balmford¹⁴ wrote scathingly about the use of extreme unction inferring that it was a practice born out of mere superstition, saying that

Papistes haue grounded their bastard Sacrament of Extreame unction. Which taken away, the cursed people (which know not the law) neither care to know it (being euer addicted to superstitious vanities) must néedes (forsooth) in stead thereof, haue a Minister to visite their sicke, though they be more then halfe dead. (sig. 21r)

The unction that is anointed on the sick and dying by the Catholic Church seems no more effective than the 'cataplasm' or 'simples' used as antidotes to counter Laertes' poison.

As well as calling attention to the fate of the soul, Hamlet also shows us the fate of the body, in the shape of Yorick's skull. If using the remains of the dead on the Renaissance stage was a means of ridiculing the holy relics used in Catholicism, then one has to question what message the playwrights were trying to give regarding Protestantism. Were the plays mocking Catholicism, mocking the dead, or simply mocking the living for venerating the dead? The plays discussed in this thesis do not show the dead sleeping, nor do they remain sacred in the memory of the living; instead the dead are dug up, handled and abused by the living. Henry VIII may have ended Catholicism with the abolition of purgatory in 1534, but Shakespeare brings Catholicism back from the dead in *Hamlet*. Shakespeare plays with the dead and gives Purgatory a unmistakable grasp on Old Hamlet, who, instead of resting peacefully in his grave, wanders amongst the living begging for assistance. The skull of Yorick is no longer revered as a holy relic, but is the empty memory of a Jester that makes Hamlet retch. When Albovine drinks wine from a man's skull he is mocking the Catholic belief that the blood of Christ is present when taking the sacramental wine at Mass which is taken in celebration of Christ's Last Supper. Vindice's man-handling of Gloriana's skull and his abuse of her memory mocks the revered skulls and bones of the saints venerated by the Catholic Church; the old Duke will 'eat' poison, mocking the Eucharist being placed in the mouths of Catholics at Mass. The crowns used to kill Otho, Germanicus and Sejanus mock the crown of thorns worn by Jesus the son of God at his crucifixion on the cross. In the *Second Maiden's Tragedy*, although the use of the name

¹⁴ James Balmford, 'A short dialogue concerning the plagues infection Published to preserue bloud, through the blessing of God'. London: Printed [by R. Rield] for Richard Boyle, and are to be sold at his shop in Blacke-friers, 1603.

Helvetius suggests that extreme forms of Protestantism are also not immune from criticism, the cosmetics used to give a life-like appearance to the face of the dead Lady mock the Catholic worship of idols, especially that of the revered Holy Mother of God, Mary. The symbol of the skull and its abuse in these plays may be a sign of lost Catholicism, but even though the last living remains of the skull are emptied out, the skull still remains visibly human. Shakespeare resurrects Catholicism and man-handles it, leading the way for Chettle, Middleton and Davenant to desecrate and violate the dead in their plays, which ensures that the dead do not stay hidden as a revered remembrance, but instead take on a vital macabre role to accomplish death by poison.

The next feature of later plays for which *Hamlet* provides a template is to associate poison and death with sex. The Ghost states that 'Lust, though to a radiant angel linked, / Will sate itself in a celestial bed' (I. v. 55-56). Chettle shows Hoffman's lust for Martha and his attempt at rape in a cave; Middleton employs the poisoned skull of the dead Gloriana to trap the Duke into a sexual liaison; Middleton uses the poisoned corpse of the Lady to entice the Tyrant into desiring her in death; Davenant utilises the skull of Rhodolinda's father to toast Albovine's victory. Old Hamlet alludes to quicksilver when telling his son how the poison poured into his ears and coursed through his body. Quicksilver is associated with the cure for the sexually transmitted disease syphilis and Tanya Pollard writes that 'Mercury, or quicksilver, was at this time the toxic medicine with perhaps the strongest hold on the popular imagination' and was becoming an 'increasingly popular medicinal remedy: ... in the wake of catastrophic syphilis epidemics'.¹⁵ Quicksilver links to Old Hamlet's diseased manhood, especially as his description tells us that his body displayed a 'vile and loathsome crust' and pus filled 'tetter[s]'. The Ghost's description associates Old Hamlet with syphilis, 'a disease to hide from one's family'¹⁶, which makes the Ghost's impotent simulation of Old Hamlet very apt. Gabriel Rieger observes that the 'play is fraught with descriptions of rotten, dissolute flesh and sexual crime'.¹⁷

¹⁵ Pollard, *Drugs and Theatre*, p. 37.

¹⁶ Joannes Fabricius, *Syphilis in Shakespeare's England* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2008), p. 26.

¹⁷ Gabriel A. Rieger, *Sex and Satiric Tragedy in Early Modern England: Penetrating Wit* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2009), p. 39.

Shakespeare, I suggest, makes clear from the beginning of the play that the Ghost represents the stale, unprofitable, rotten, and out of joint manhood of Denmark; his armour stands as a metaphor for the dissipated fighting spirit of Denmark. Even the earth that makes up the foundations of Denmark is impotent: 'a sterile promontory' (II. ii. 265) incapable of bearing fruit just like its men; indeed, the very air that its men breathe is only a 'foul and pestilent congregation of vapours' (II. ii. 269), marking the essential qualities of Denmark itself as a syphilitic and incestuous cesspit of contagion that poisons the manhood of its males. This seems to be a marker of other plays too, especially those located in Italy which suggest that the country itself may also act as a contagion to manhood.

Fredson Thayer Bowers believed that 'poisoning incidents in the tragedies were by no means so outlandish and beyond the experience or credulity of the audience as is usually believed'.¹⁸ Poisoning by means of the ear used by Shakespeare in his play *Hamlet* is also a method mentioned in Christopher Marlowe's play *Edward II* when Lightborn boasts to Young Mortimer of his knowledge of ways to kill:

Tis not the first time I have kill'd a man.
I learn'd in Naples how to poison flowers,
To strangle with a lawn thrust down the throat,
To pierce the wind pipe with a needle's point,
Or, whilst one is asleep, to take a quill,
And blow a little powder in his ears,
Or open his mouth, and pour quick-silver down. (V. iv. 29-35)¹⁹

Mortimer's catalogue of methods in which to murder is a chilling one, and emphasises contemporary opinions that link poison with Italy and also promote poison as an accessible means of murder. Poison is employed by the playwrights I discuss in this thesis in several inventive ways both in liquid form and powders; I suggest that Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is also a template for revenge plays as it strongly links poison with speech. Although Claudius slyly pours liquid poison into the ear of his brother while he sleeps, the king is not the only character to have an orifice poisoned either literally or metaphorically. Ears are also easy prey for those

¹⁸ Fredson Thayer Bowers, *Elizabethan Revenge tragedy 1587-1642* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940), p. 28.

¹⁹ J.B. Steane, *Christopher Marlowe: The Complete Plays*, (London: Penguin Group, 1969), p. 521.

wishing to impart some poisonous verbal detail that will lead to the infection of a body, contaminating not only the mind but also the soul. Ears are violently attacked in *Hamlet*, even when they are 'fortified' (I. i. 31) against verbal onslaughts; we see Barnardo 'assail' (I. i. 30) the ears of Horatio; the first player tells of the ears of Pyrrhus hearing a 'hideous crash' and how they are then 'take[n] prisoner' (II. ii. 414-415); Hamlet announces that he could 'cleave the general ear with speech' (II. ii. 498); and he metaphorically describes Claudius as a kind of parasite, a fungus, a diseased ear ('Here is your husband like a mildewed ear'). The word 'ear' is ambiguous and carries both meanings of ear of corn and human ear; the word makes Claudius a symbol for the contaminated ear of the court. Claudius is accused of being 'incestuous' by the Ghost and the words used for his gossip drop like poison into Hamlet's ear only to be regurgitated in verbal poison that will eventually destroy the reputation of Claudius.

Claudius abused his brother's ear by physically penetrating it with liquid poison that crept into the king's body. Once inside his body the poison mutated into words that were spewed out to contaminate the ears of Prince Hamlet. In the play *Believe As You List* by Philip Massinger, Berecinthus claims:

I haue tooke
poyson in at my eares; & I shall burst
yf it come not vp in my replie.²⁰

Later in the play Antiochus tells Amilcar to transform his tongue into a tool that must work hard to entice the listener: 'in poyson steepe / thy bloudied tongue, and let thy wordes as full / of bitternes, as malice labour to / seduce theis noble hearers'.²¹ The image of the bloodied tongue used as a phallus carrying poisoned words to seduce the listener is a violent one. Antiochus will once again use language as a poison for the listener: '... prompted mee ... / with pills of poysond language'.²² In *Hamlet*, male ears are abused and poisoned by male tongues. Words can act as a kind of aphrodisiac by seducing the hearer for a while, but can quickly set to work and destroy from the inside once they have entered the ear of the listener. According to the

²⁰ Philip Massinger, *Believe As You List*, edited by C. J. Sisson (Oxford: The Malone Society, 1928), p. 17.

²¹ *ibid.*, p. 32.

²² *ibid.*, p. 92.

gossiping Ghost, even the re-telling of the story of his death will leak and spread from out of the mouth of the listener to poison 'the whole ear of Denmark', which will then in turn be 'Rankly abused' (I. v. 36-38). The Ghost mirrors his brother's incestuous actions by making sure his own son is 'rankly abused'. Hamlet, the son, is 'abused' by the ghost of his dead father from beyond the grave with his poisonous words, and therefore, Hamlet will in turn abuse the ear of Horatio as he informs him: 'I have words to speak in thine ear will make thee dumb' (IV. vi. 23-24); words in Shakespeare's play have the power to render the listener impotent of speech.

Revenge plays often portray how minor characters can benefit from the sharing of private moments with their masters who seek revenge in the first instance. These opportunities allow for intimacy that is advantageous to the minion as it presents them with the ear of the master, gaining them favours that empower them and make them dangerous:

The eare yet heares ... It can listen to the whisperings of a Doeg, to the susurrations of a Divell, to the Boyse of a Syren, to the voyce of a Delilah. The Parasite through his windore creepes into the great mans favour: hee tunes his war. It is a wilde member, an Instrument that Sathan delights to play vpon.²³

It is easy for a favoured minion to pour verbal poison into the ear of their masters and sway opinion, and also opens up the opportunity to gain a certain amount of power and control over their master too.

Shakespeare links poison to words and physical disease in *Hamlet*; the whole of the text is riddled with words associated with contamination. The play carries words that link and suggest disease: 'the owner of a foul disease' (IV. i. 21); 'Diseases desperate grown' (IV. iii. 10); 'Contagious blastments' (I. iii. 41); 'hell itself breathes out / Contagion to this world' (III. ii. 379-380); 'I'll touch my point / With this contagion' (IV. vii. 144-145); 'foul, strange and most unnatural' (I. v. 28); 'foul and pestilent' (II. ii. 268-269); 'his poisoned shot' (IV. i. 43); 'incorrect to heaven' (I. ii. 95). The text conveys the message that Denmark and its political state, its religion, its monarchy, and even the heavens are all 'out of joint' like the majority of its

²³ Thomas Adams, *The sacrifice of thankfulness*, (London : Thomas Purfoot, Clement Knight, 1616), p. 33.

males, who appear polluted from conception, and develop into contagious individuals that will blight, infest and destroy society. Males in *Hamlet* with effeminate natures are portrayed as weak, cowardly and non-productive. The male characters discussed in this thesis that bear the 'mole of nature' that renders manhood impotent, take on the crucial role of a contaminant within the plays; I suggest that the character of Hamlet is a stimulus for distinct male poisoners in ensuing plays in terms of being vessels of verbal and physical contamination to other males.

Poison and Skulls

According to Andrew Sofer *Hamlet* was the first play to use a skull as a property,²⁴ and although given a minor role within the play, the skull as representative of death also foreshadows the four deaths by poison at the end of Act V. In the plays discussed in this thesis the dead do not lie buried, silent and motionless; instead they become silent members of the dramatic action. The image of the skull in the plays discussed appears to develop in importance from *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* to *Albovine, King of the Lombards*; skulls also take on a renewed life of their own. The skull is not just a property in these plays, but appears to take on a muted role and through the direction of the actor it then becomes a major participant in the development of the plot. The skull becomes another 'actor' upon the stage to be manipulated, held, spoken to, desired, kissed, capable of arousing sexual passion, fetishised, and even killing; the skull is a hollow shell and is a visual reminder of decay and death. With the introduction of the skull onto the stage, playwrights of poison plot plays utilised the skull to exploit its visual association with death and to link it to the invisibility of poison's lethality. For a brief moment in Act V, scene I of *Hamlet*, Shakespeare placed death centre stage, not in the guise of a fallen hero, but in the form of a human skull that once 'had a tongue in it, and could sing' (V. i. 71-72). The skull in Hamlet's hands stands as a signifier of death that reminds audience members that one day they too will have a 'pate full of fine dirt!' (V. i. 101) As Hamlet clutches death in his hands he brings Yorick, for a brief moment in time, back to the land of the living to foretell of Hamlet's own mortality and future death by poison.

²⁴ Andrew Sofer, 'The Skull on the Renaissance Stage: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Props', *English Literary Renaissance*, 28: 47-74. (1998), p. 47.

In *The Tragedy of Hoffman, or Revenge for a Father* Chettle embraces Shakespeare's idea of the skull and takes it much further by developing it into a whole skeleton. Audience members witnessed Chettle exhume the whole decomposed body, and not just one body but of three, then hang them centre stage. In the first scene of the play Prince Otho dies by having a burning crown placed on his head by Lorrique. This is later replicated in the play *The Tragedy of Claudius Tiberius Nero* when Sejanus faces his death in the very same manner, again drawing attention to the head and skull; in the plays discussed, the crown imagery draws attention to the head which links to skulls.

The skull for Vindice in *The Revenger's Tragedy* is a souvenir, a personal reminder of not only Gloriana's virginity but of his own lost manhood. Vindice may be repelled by the Duke's lust and deeds, but his own lust for revenge counteracts that of the Duke as he uses Gloriana's skull to sate his own desires. Middleton's skull is made more prominently visible than Shakespeare's and is an active participant in the action of the play. The skull is fondled, spoken to, clothed and is capable of murder; unlike the skull of Yorick who reminds of times past, Gloriana's skull wreaks its own revenge in the present with the help of poison. Vindice links the old Duke to the skull of Gloriana as he imagines the Duke's 'marrowless age' (I. i. 5) and 'hollow bones' (I. i. 6) that are 'dry . . . parched and juiceless' (I. i. 8-9) like the skull.

In the anonymous *The Tragedy of Claudius Tiberius Nero*, the living heads of Germanicus and Sejanus represent the skull motif. The head of Germanicus has a poisoned crown placed upon it and as the poison permeates his living flesh his head begins to swell; he is shown to writhe in agony on the ground before being released from his torture by death. Sejanus also dies with a crown encircling his head, but instead of the crown being poisoned it is a burning crown that will sear his brains in his skull, effectively turning his head into a cooking pot.

In the *The Second Maiden's Tragedy* the skull morphs into a whole fleshed corpse that is in the ravages of decomposition, unlike the clean hollow shell of Yorick's and Gloriana's skulls; the rotting corpse of the Lady is sexualised with poisonous cosmetics, making it perversely erotic

for the sole purpose of arousing the Tyrant's passion, before it takes an active role in his murder by poison.

In the final chapter, after approximately thirty years on the stage, the skull returns to its original form by being presented as just a skull. In the last play to be discussed in this thesis, Davenant's play *Albovine, King of the Lombards* takes the initial skull motif used by Shakespeare (held by the reminiscing Hamlet) and robs it of its gender and identity by presenting the skull as a faceless trophy. Albovine commits a most profane act against God and his creation - man - by showing no reverence for the dead and by using the skull of Rhodolinda's murdered father as a receptacle for drinking his wine. Davenant, who believed himself to be Shakespeare's son, thus reprises and rewrites *Hamlet*, bringing my group of plays full circle.

The Influence of Italy

Early Modern revenge tragedies that contain poison plots²⁵ as a means of eradicating enemies, family members and acquaintances are numerous. Italy²⁶ was a popular locale for the setting of poison plot plays as various visitors who saw fit to share their own experiences of the country spoke of Italy in unfavourable terms during this period. Shakespeare used the locale of Italy as a catalyst to spur Hamlet in his quest for revenge in the performance by the players of the *Murder of Gonzago*. By manipulating the players to perform this play within the play, Hamlet hopes to prick the conscience of Claudius; this action effeminises Hamlet by placing him in the role of the entrapper and links him to females that are used to trap males in other plays set in Italy that are discussed in this thesis: Middleton's Gloriana in *The Revenger's Tragedy* and the Lady in *The Second Maiden's Tragedy*. Sir Francis Bacon associated Italy with poison and cowardly behaviour and writes: 'Poyson [was] a forraign practice, fit for Rome and her

²⁵ I have included a graph of poison plot plays from the early modern period in the appendix - it is not an exhaustive list.

²⁶ There are numerous plays that depict the locale of Italy to highlight corrupt courts and insidious individuals; see the list of plays mentioned in the appendix.

The Papal Garland Concerning Poison.³² Several other publications and sources of information on the uses and effects of poison, which were mainly written for the medical profession, also made available vital information to the would-be poisoner and the playwright, showing the many ways poison could be administered.³³ The ideas of being Italianated³⁴ and of being corrupted by the use of poison as a weapon were also fears that were shared by Thomas Tuke in 1616:

But among all the devils murderers, which are many, these Italian devices by poisoning are most vile and devilish, and they say, *An Englishman Italianated is a devil incarnated*. If these arts should come in once amongst us, who shall be secure?³⁵

Lewis Einstein comments that an 'Englishman returning from Italy began to be looked upon as an enemy of society'.³⁶ Revenge plays set in Italian courts that portrayed insidious Italians shaped ideas about foreigners and exploited notions of revenge-seeking, toxic Italians.

Revenge tragedies made visible how easy it was to use poison instead of the sword. Italians and Catholicism were portrayed as morally and spiritually corrupt, and Italy as a place where sexual deviance was rife and masculine prowess was replaced by cowardly behaviour. Revenge tragedies using poison plots gave the theatres an exciting theme to exploit; vivid and realistic, poison themes were re-enacted upon the stage in scenes that imitated the Italian aristocracy while at the same time mocking the English court. Alastair Bellany points out that in 'Jacobean London, the public theatres staged graphic revenge tragedies set in courts where devious poison plots seemed a staple of political activity' and that 'poison was among the corruptions

³² Thomas, P. Harrison, Jr., *The Literary Background of Renaissance Poisons*, (*Studies in English*, 27, Number 1, 1948), p. 37.

³³ There are numerous inventive ways playwrights used poison to kill in their plays, for instance, kissing a bible, kissing a portrait, kissing a corpse, kissing a skull, eating a pomegranate, wearing a crown, sprinkled in a helmet, on the tip of a sword, and being placed in a drink, to name a few.

³⁴ *O.E.D.* Italianate, adj. and n.: 1. Rendered Italian; that has become or been made Italian in character: see *Italianate*. 2. Of Italian character, form, or aspect.

³⁵ Thomas Tuke, *A Discourse Against Painting and Tincturing of Women*, Imprinted at London: [By Thomas Creede and Bernard Alsop] for Edward Marchant, 1616.

³⁶ Lewis Einstein, *The Italian Renaissance in England Studies* (London: MacMillan & Co., Ltd. 1903), p.173.

commonly associated with degenerate courts'.³⁷ Revenge plays placed the spotlight on corrupt courts that were led by corrupt individuals and it was believed by some that even watching plays could poison opinion. Tanya Pollard comments that 'Playwrights themselves saw the theater not only as a vehicle for representing drugs and poisons, but as a kind of drug or poison itself'.³⁸ If this was the case then even the plays themselves were dangerous to watch and able to poison public opinion, giving playwrights a toxic tool to wield, bringing notice of political, religious and moral corruption closer to home. Plays set in Italy could sow the seed of discontent amongst astute audience members concerning the English court of James I. By highlighting corrupt courts, the playwrights brought into focus the role of the court favourite and minion who were portrayed as prominent perpetrators in the poisoning of others.

The Minion Favourite

Indulged favourites play prominent roles within the plays discussed in this thesis and are often portrayed as confidants of their master. King James VI and I was well known for indulging his favourites at court and would lavish gifts upon them that included titles and land; this is reflected in the many plays written in the early Jacobean period that depict those in positions of power doting on their favourites.³⁹ James I's last favourite George Villiers, the second Duke of Buckingham, was still a concern after James's death. Writing in 1626 George Eglisham railed against Buckingham, not only because of his close relationship with King James I but also because he even believed that Buckingham had used poison to murder the king:

Therefore of all injuries, of all the acts of injustice, of all things most to be looked into, murder is the greatest: And of all murders, the poisoning under trust and profession of friendship, is the most heynous.⁴⁰

³⁷ Alastair Bellany, *The Politics of Court Scandal in Early Modern England: News Culture and the Overbury affair, 1603-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp.146-7.

³⁸ Pollard, *Drugs and Theater*, p. 9.

³⁹ For an in depth and detailed discussion of the favourite in early modern England see, Curtis Perry's book *Literature and Favoritism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), and J. H. Elliott and L. W. B. Brockliss (eds.) *The World of the Favourite*.

⁴⁰ George Eglisham, *The forerunner of reuenge Vpon the Duke of Buckingham, for the poysoning of the most potent King James*, Franckfort [i.e. the Netherlands?], : [s.n.], 1626. pp. 5, 6. Unless it is otherwise stated in the Bibliography, early modern printed texts are cited from facsimiles in the database Early English Books Online, <http://eebo.chadwyck.com>. These texts are cited in old-spelling and original typography.

Poison plot plays brought into focus the judgement of a monarch; Curtis Perry noted that if 'a king cannot be trusted to choose favourites on a sound moral basis then perhaps the personal patronage of kings is institutionally suspect'.⁴¹ Under the guise of both loyalty and friendship minions became important tools in the administration of poison.

Minions were presented in revenge plays as dangerous individuals who were given power by their masters who surrounded themselves with these murky, sycophantic and often ambitious individuals; minions who would ingratiate themselves to win power and wealth only to exploit the friendship and closeness allowed them with treachery and murder. Focused attention on these minor characters highlights the importance they held in the machinations of the plays. In *Hamlet*, Hamlet uses Horatio as a confidant, but in later revenge plays the role of the main character's friend develops into something much larger and much more sinister.

A minion was often shown by playwrights to be a willing participant in the act of murder. Mario DiGangi states that 'the term "*minion*" in Renaissance usage can refer to either gender; it is often applied to men in homoerotic contexts'.⁴² A common pattern emerges in poison plots to show that males go beyond the role of master and minion to share intimacies that can appear homoerotic. Often the minion is given special privileges whilst being used as a tool, though it has to be noted not against his will; these willing villains appear happy to win the attention, admiration and praise of their masters whilst undertaking monstrous acts on their behalf. These minor male characters often take on the role of the subservient female, are usually successful poisoners and are as ambitious and manipulative as their masters. They are vital characters that are woven into the fabric of the play and, like the poison they use, often go unnoticed by critics. I shall investigate the minion's importance within the plays discussed and show that it is the

⁴¹ Perry, *Literature and Favoritism*, p.137.

⁴² Mario DiGangi, *The Homoerotics of Early Modern Drama*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 49.

minion who performs the deed of revenge for the master which not only exposes the cowardice of the master but also brings to light their effeminate⁴³ natures and lack of manliness.

The writer William Rankins (1588) lamented the control minions had over their superiors and blames them for corrupting those he calls 'pillar[s] of vertue', as he writes:

O strange condition of men, when the courte of princes, which is the pillar of vertue, the sword to cut vice, the stay of Iustice, and the axe to hewe downe each start vppe stemme, should (by the inferiour mindes of some suffered vnderminers) beé made the author of all pryde and ambition. These spyders that conuert so sweéte a flowre to poison, turne honney to gall, would be shaken from the stately pillers of a Princes dominion, & not be suffered to build their Nests vnder their Noses.⁴⁴

Here Rankins charges the minion with intellectual inferiority and at the same time appears to be praising their cleverness at being able to poison their master's mind. Evidence within revenge plays shows that minions are far from being intellectually inferior and quite capable of devising survival tactics that protect them, albeit for a short while, from danger and death. Minions are frequently portrayed as having political ambitions and in their elevated posts can shrewdly engineer, by subtle suggestion, the earning of favour and trust. Intimacy also gives the minion a proximity shared with their masters which gives them the advantage of knowing secrets they would otherwise not be privy to; they are the ones that have special privileged access to inner sanctums where there is no interference or interruptions from others, and they can say, do and hear what others cannot. William Rankins gave warnings to those harbouring high ambitions and wrote that those in lowly positions were not only dangerous but even comparable to poison:

First ambition (from the beginning) through out all ages, and in euery estate, from the mightiest to the meanest, from the greatest to the smallest, from the highest to the lowest, from the head to the foote, hath bin the vtter ouerthrowe both of the one and the other. For as poyson dispearst into the veines taking hold of the heart killeth without remorse: So ambition scattered in a common wealth, and dispearst

⁴³ The *O.E.D.* A adj.1. Of persons: That has become like a woman: a. Womanish, unmanly, enervated, feeble; self-indulgent ... ; b. Characterized by, or proceeding from, unmanly weakness, softness, or delicacy; B. n. An effeminate person.

⁴⁴ William Rankins, *The English ape*, (London : Robert Robinson, for Richard Iones,1588), p.10.

through the whole bodie thereof, taking holde of the cheefe member, destroyeth the whole bodie, and killeth (without care) the fatall life thereof. Those climbing mindes whose armes would reach to heauen and whose thoughts are stitched to the starres, are these men that like poison disperse themselues in y^e veines of the common wealth, & faine couet to desire that which they cannot aspire.⁴⁵

Rankins' ideas are reflected in the revenge drama of the period, in plays that portray masters and minions as ambitious, dangerous symbols of the poison they use to destroy others. I believe that the role of the male poisoner as minion-poisoner in revenge tragedies is an important one that has been overlooked by scholars so far.

Revenge plays portray patriarchal societies and predominantly all-male worlds, where male characters revenge wrongs and are either killed in the process. Plays with poison plots frequently portray *some* male characters lacking the qualities of the expected norms of masculinity; this is often because their social status, that of minion, is blurred with that of the subordinate female and therefore their position, and the role they play, effeminises them. The physical act of murder, violence and poisoning shared between the distinct male poisoner and their accomplice becomes a kind of bond, a shared physical experience often underpinned by homoerotic language that disguises close intimate relationships. Hence, these distinct male poisoners become incidental, unnoticed, overlooked and, like the poisonings themselves, unacknowledged.

Cultural Anxieties

In 1607 with the publication of the anonymous play *The Tragedy of Claudius Tiberius Nero* the playwright appears to have been making an attack on the ascension to the English throne of James VI of Scotland. In the play, the emperor Tiberius, the adopted son of Augustus, is placed on the throne like a usurper, giving the play a political edge. What makes this anonymous play

⁴⁵ Rankins, *The English ape*, pp. 9, 10.

so interesting is the dedicatee. The publisher, Francis Burton, made the decision to make the dedicatee of the play Sir Arthur Mainwaring. Sir Arthur Mainwaring was a graduate of Oxford University; he received his B.A. degree from Brasenose College 7 July, 1598, and his M.A. 15th June 1601. In 1611 Francis Burton made another dedication to Sir Arthur Mainwaring in a volume of sermons written by Lancelot Andrews (1555-1626), called *Scala coeli*, which reads: 'The right worshipful Sir George Mainwaring of Ightfield. Knight, and to the virtuous Lady, Madam Anne his beloved wife and to the right worshipful Sir Arthur, their son and heir, carver to Prince Henry, Prince of Wales'.

Arthur Mainwaring was romantically associated with Mrs Anne Turner who was the maidservant of Frances Howard. Anne was married to George Turner M.D. and when her husband died in 1610 he bequeathed '£10 to Sir Arthur Mainwaring, Prince Henry's Carver, by whom his wife was said to have had three children'⁴⁶ with the hope that he would marry her. Anne Turner sought the help of Simon Forman with her waning relationship with Mainwaring; Forman gave her love potions to incite his passion. Frances Howard also turned to Forman to aid her in her attachment to Robert Carr, Earl of Somerset, whom she later married. Carr was a favourite of James I, and friend of Sir Thomas Overbury who advised Carr against having a relationship with Frances Howard; because of this, she connived to have him imprisoned in the Tower of London.

Anne procured poison to murder Sir Thomas Overbury⁴⁷ in 1613 when he was imprisoned in the Tower of London. She was found guilty of poisoning Overbury and for her part in his murder she was sentenced to death and was hanged at Tyburn in November 1615. Robert Carr was a favourite of James I from the beginning of his reign; he gained many favours from James until he fell from grace after the poisoning and trial of Overbury. The poisoning of Overbury came to light in 1615 when the Earl was put on trial for murder alongside his wife Frances Howard; they

⁴⁶ Beatrice White, *Cast of Ravens: The Strange Case of Thomas Overbury* (London and Beccles: William Clowes and Sons, Ltd. 1995), pp. 192, 26.

⁴⁷ For further information on the murder by poison of Sir Thomas Overbury see: David Lindley, *The Trials of Frances Howard: Fact and Fiction at the Court of King James*; Beatrice White, *Cast of Ravens: The Strange Case of Thomas Overbury* (London and Beccles: William Clowes and Sons, Ltd. 1995); Anne Somerset, *Unnatural Murder: Poison In The Court Of James I: The Overbury Murder* (Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1997); Brian Harris, *Passion, Poison and Power* (London: Wildy, Simmonds & Hill, 2010).

were both found guilty and sentenced to death; they were put in the Tower and remained there until 1622 when they were reprieved by James and banished from the court.

Sir Thomas Overbury was a friend of Robert Carr⁴⁸ to whom Davenant dedicated his play *Albovine, King of the Lombards* published in 1629; Robert Carr, Earl of Somerset, is reported to have 'smil'd vpon't' when he first saw it, and Davenant in his response to Robert Carr signs 'Your humblest Creature, D'auenant' (sig. A1) on the manuscript. The relevance of the dedicatee, Robert Carr, Earl of Somerset, and the dramatic content of Davenant's play lies in the theme of the court favourite of the king and the inclusion of a poison plot. The link between the two plays is an important one; Francis Burton's dedicatee Sir Arthur Mainwaring and Davenant's dedication of his play to Robert Carr have associations to the Thomas Overbury murder trial in 1615-16; this demonstrates how these plays collectively tap into cultural anxieties about male rulers, their favourites, their courts and the association they have to poison.

Effeminacy and the Theatre

The most famous aspect of Hamlet as a revenger is his delay in actually taking revenge. Hamlet's admirable desire to avenge the murder of his father in Act I and his language of violence and vengeance in Act III—'Now could I drink blood / And do such business as the bitter day / Would quake to look on' (III. ii. 380-382) - are just 'words, words, words' (II. ii. 190). Hamlet can 'speak daggers' (III. ii. 386) but he can 'use none' (III. II. 386); Hamlet's 'thoughts [may] be bloody' (IV. v. 65) and he may wish to drink blood, but in reality he can only 'eat the air' that is 'promise-crammed' (III. ii. 90), because, as he tells Polonius, '[his] tongue and soul in this be hypocrites' (III. ii 387). Hamlet's obsession with Claudius has infested him with 'dull revenge!' (IV. iv. 32), made him 'thought-sick at the act' (III. iv. 49) of killing him. Hamlet's affection for his father is a mere show, 'an antic disposition'; he does not want the burden of taking on any manly action as shown in his outburst, 'O cursed spite / That ever I was

⁴⁸ For a detailed account of Robert Carr's relationship with Frances Howard and the Overbury trial, see Curtis Perry, *Literature and Favoritism in Early Modern England*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). Somerset, *Unnatural Murder*; Beatrice White, *Cast of Ravens*.

born to set it right!" (I. v. 186-187). Hamlet's reluctance for active confrontation will be mirrored in the passive actions of other male poisoners discussed later in the chapters. Even Laertes does his best to rid the feminine from within him:

Too much of water has thou, poor Ophelia,
And therefore I forbid my tears. But yet
It is our trick - nature her custom holds
Let shame say what it will. [*Weeps.*] When these are gone
The woman will be out. (IV. vii. 183-187)

Like most of the male characters in this play, Laertes has the 'woman' within that cannot be kept hidden.

Hamlet is a problematic male poisoner who broods and lurks about the court; Hamlet's behaviour prompts Claudius to comment: 'tis unmanly grief' (I. ii. 94). Hamlet is presented as a passive male revenger, and it is Hamlet's passivity and 'unmanly' conduct that I argue makes him a prototype for male poisoners in the plays I discuss in this thesis. The action of Shakespeare's play is based in or around the castle of Elsinore. Castles by definition were fortified to ward off violent assaults and protect those inside against attack from hostile and aggressive enemies. The very word *castle* conjures up images of masculinity, knights, armour, military prowess, battles, honour and chivalric codes, and although Elsinore was deemed a royal fortress, the first image given of masculine power conceal within its walls effeminate men that are closer to women in nature than warlike soldiers.

It is in this supposed masculine world that Hamlet was brought up; honour and manhood would have been a visual part of everyday life for the young Hamlet in the 'war-like state' (I. ii. 9) of Denmark. From the accounts given of the Ghost, Hamlet was used to seeing his father as a figure of visual masculinity about the castle; Horatio describes the Ghost as having a 'warlike form' (I. i. 46) and Hamlet confirms this when he first sees the Ghost for himself and recognises the way his father wore his beaver about the castle: 'My father's spirit in arms!' (I. ii. 253). Horatio recalls the sight of Old Hamlet when alive in his armour to Marcellus: 'Such was the very armour he had on / When he the ambitious Norway combated' (I. i. 59-60). Although Old

Hamlet was seen by several characters, both as a Ghost and a man, wearing armour, this, I argue, is no guarantee of his valour or honour. From the accounts given it is made clear that Old Hamlet wore his armour about the castle, yet there is proof from the start that his 'warlike form' could not protect him from losing his throne, his crown or his wife. Geraldo de Sousa argues that

Elsinore has already been conquered from within: Claudius has gained the throne and conquered the queen's heart. As now lord of the castle, he wants to leave his imprint on his house, household, and country.⁴⁹

It is clear that Claudius was undaunted by Old Hamlet's manly show of wearing his armour about the castle, but both Claudius and Old Hamlet display insufficient manly qualities. This suggests that Claudius knew that his brother was no threat to him physically, even though he displayed a 'warlike form'; it also suggests that he also knew that the armour worn by Old Hamlet was, like Elsinore, just an outward show of military strength covering a weak masculinity. Claudius fought a politically personal battle with his brother and won, not by wearing armour, or by fighting with swords; there was no manly combat or glory in Claudius's achievement, only his dishonour by using the coward's weapon, poison.

In Henry Chettle's *The Tragedy of Hoffman, or The Revenge for a Father* the character of Jerome is the most openly effeminate male poisoner in the plays discussed in this thesis, both in his language and his actions. Chettle portrays Jerome as incapable of performing manly activities such as tilting; he gives him unmanly language and also supplies him with the coward's weapon of poison to murder. Stephen Gosson⁵⁰ wrote about the fear and corruptive harm playwrights did by giving their male characters on the stage feminine traits:

Therefore as I haue already discovered y^e corruption of playes by y^e corruption of teir causes, The Efficient, the Matter, et [sic] Forme, the end, so will I concluded Effects yt this poyson works among vs. The diuel is not ignorant how mightely these outward spectacles effeminate, & sofen ye hearts of men, vice is learned wt

⁴⁹ Geraldo U. de Sousa, *At home in Shakespeare's Tragedies* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2010), p. 116.

⁵⁰ Stephen Gosson, *Playes confuted in fve actions prouing that they are not to be suffred in a Christian common weale, by the waye both the cauls of Thomas Lodge, and the play of playes, written in their defence, and other obiections of players frenedes, are truely set downe and directlye answered.* (London : Imprinted for Thomas Gosson dwelling in Pater noster row at the signe of the Sunne, 1582).

beholding, sense is tickled, desire pricked, & those impressions of mind are secretly conveyed over to ye gazers, which ye players do counterfeit on ye stage. As long as we know our selves to be flesh, beholding those examples in Theatres yet are incident to flesh, we are taught by other mens examples how to fall. And they that came honest to a play, may depart infected. (sig. G4r)

Gosson believed that characters like Jerome were a visual corruption to an audience and also states: 'So the Deuill, at Playes, wil bring the comfortable worde of God, which, because it nourisheth of nature is very conuenient to carry the poyson into our vaines' (sig. D8r). For Gosson, effeminacy acted like a poison; viewing male characters on the stage undertaking actions and language associated with the female would affect the manhood of males in the audience and had the power to soften the hearts of men.

Male weakness can be seen when focus is placed on Shakespeare's soldiers who stand guard on the battlements of Elsinore. As sentinels on duty and keeping watch for the approach of the enemy they would have appeared to audience members like fearsome protectors; yet the fortified exterior castle walls act as a façade, an exterior show of strength to protect the weak males within; this is proven when Fortinbras suddenly appears with his soldiers inside the castle in Act V. Jim Casey writes that 'It is within this martial world that Shakespeare's males establish their manhood. Like the living men of early modern England, the reality of masculine gender identification involves the ever-present potential of bodily harm'.⁵¹ It would be reasonable to assume that the soldiers keeping watch on the battlements of the royal castle were chosen because of their skill in matters of warfare; yet with closer scrutiny it becomes clear that Shakespeare presents these soldiers as weak, timid and afraid. One of the first sentinels we meet at the beginning of Act I is Francisco; he shows a welcome release from the anxiety of his duty when finishing his shift as he tells Barnardo: 'For this relief much thanks' (I. i. 6). Francisco goes on to also show an unmanly attitude to the weather, demonstrated in his declaration 'tis bitter cold' (I. i. 6), which reveals that he is sensitive, susceptible, vulnerable

⁵¹ Jim Casey, 'Manhood Fresh Bleeding: Shakespeare's Men and the Construction of Masculine Identity', *Gender Forum* 49 (2014). Online: <http://www.genderforum.org/issues/shakespeare-gender-and-sexuality/manhood-fresh-bleeding-shakespeares-men-and-the-construction-of-masculine-identity/>

and delicate of nature. Tanya Pollard⁵² employs Helkiah Crooke (1576-1635) to suggest the importance of a man's skin, which, like the walls of a castle, acts to fend off external dangers:

The skin it selfe is the wall of the Castle, so quaintly framed, that the more fiercelie it is besieged by the cold, the more safely it doth defend, and the more strength it doth giue to the inward parts: and therefore Hippocrates saith, In Winter the belly, that is, the inward parts of the body are hotter; the reason is, because all the spirits are immured, and the Naturall heate restrained from vaporeing forth.⁵³

In *Hamlet* it would appear that not all men's skin is the same, as proven by Francisco. His frail skin stands as a metaphor for the frail manhood of Denmark; his outer layer does not protect against hostile weather any more than the men supposedly guarding Elsinore castle are capable of fending off an attack from a hostile enemy. Hamlet also complains about the cold weather: 'The air bites shrewdly; it is very cold' (I. iv. 1). Horatio too feels there is a 'nipping, and an eager air' (I. iv. 2), and later in Act V Hamlet mentions the weather again when he is verbally making fun of the fawning Osric: ''tis very cold; the wind is northerly' (V. ii. 81). The men on the battlements of the castle in the dark after midnight who are about to meet the ghost are, I suggest, weak, frail, and emotionally vulnerable.

Although the sentinel Francisco has a relatively minor role in the play, his lamentation to Barnardo that he is 'sick⁵⁴ at heart' (I. i. 7) is the first indication that there is a contamination within the males in the play. This sickness, I suggest, is a deep rooted one, as Hamlet admits:

So, oft it chanches in particular men
That, for some vicious mole of nature in them,
As in their birth wherein they are not guilty
(Since nature cannot choose his origin),
By the o'ergrowth of some complexion,
Oft breaking down the pales and forts of reason,

⁵² See Tanya Pollard's essay, 'Enclosing the Body: Tudor Conceptions of Skin' in *A Companion to Tudor Literature* edited by Kent Cartwright, (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 2010), chapter 7, p. 111.

⁵³ Helkiah Crooke, *Mikrokosmographia a description of the body of man. Together with the controuersies thereto belonging. Collected and translated out of all the best authors of anatomy, especially out of Gasper Bauhinus and Andreas Laurentius.* London] : William Iaggard, 1615. p.61.

⁵⁴ *O.E.D.* II. †3. Spiritually or morally ailing; corrupt through sin or wrong-doing.

Or by some habit that too much o'erleavens
The form of plausible manners - that these men,
Carrying, I say, the stamp of one defect
(Being nature's livery, or fortune's star)
His virtues else, be they as pure as grace,
As infinite as man may undergo,
Shall in the general censure take corruption
From that particular fault ... (I. iv. 23-36)

The 'vicious mole' Hamlet speaks of is the blemish that cannot be washed away, the abnormality within, the malfunctioning of masculinity and manhood; he deflects blame from the males because 'they' are 'not guilty'. According to the *O.E.D.* the word mole⁵⁵ is associated with the female womb, abnormality and copulation; and 'the female body was understood to be both more vulnerable to contamination than a man's and, when polluted, more contagious',⁵⁶ making escape from contamination impossible for the male embryo. *Hamlet* is a play that depicts a contaminated world from the outset; Claudius is described as a 'mildewed ear' (III, iv, 62), and Hamlet appears as if 'clouds still hang' (I. ii. 66) upon him. Hamlet is also likened to a 'foul disease' (IV, i. 21) that feeds on the 'pith of life' (IV. i. 36), which links him to the vicious 'mole' found in 'particular men' nourished by their mothers in the womb. I suggest that the walls of the castle of Elsinore, which surround and protect the males within, function like a female womb to breed and nurture feeble, faint-hearted males.

Shakespeare's importance in influencing playwrights' portrayal of male weakness can be seen through his King, Claudius; this weakness is displayed in the passive reaction of Claudius to the threat of 'young' (I. i. 17) Fortinbras and his group of rebels. The only action Claudius decides to take is to write a letter to the uncle of young Fortinbras, who, he informs the court, is 'impotent and bedrid' (I. ii. 29-30), and though he is a character absent from the action of the play, he is another male portrayed with a failed and flawed manhood. Claudius's lack of manly honour and fighting spirit prompts him to request from the 'bedrid' uncle that he 'suppress / His (nephew's) further gait herein' (I. ii. 30-31). Here Claudius's inactive reaction raises the

⁵⁵ *O.E.D. mole, n.4.*

⁵⁶ Pollard, *Drugs and Theater*, p. 93.

question of him having any valiant spirit, especially as we learn that Fortinbras is 'young' and has only rallied a few 'lawless resolute' to his cause. Claudius, as king of Denmark with soldiers at his disposal, would rather use a letter to convey his concern of invasion than send his soldiers to give an immediate message to the young rebels that he (Claudius / Denmark) is not afraid of open combat. Richard Courtney writes that, 'In *Hamlet* ... , the new young men in Norway and Denmark are not in the heroic mould'⁵⁷; and when comparing Claudius to his father, Hamlet laments that he himself is no Hercules: 'no more like my father / Than I to Hercules' (I. ii. 152-153), again reiterating the lost manhood of Denmark's men. Young Fortinbras, like his father before him, believes the state of Denmark to be 'weak', as Claudius validates:

Now follows, that you know, young Fortinbras,
Holding a weak supposal of our worth,
Or thinking by our late dear brother's death
Our state to be disjoint and out of frame, (I. ii. 17-20)

Claudius confirms that although he knows that Fortinbras holds a 'weak supposal' of Denmark's worth, he also knows that Fortinbras believes that the state is 'disjoint' and 'out of frame'; meaning, I suggest, that the manliness of Denmark's men is held in 'weak supposal' by other men who gossip about them outside the state. Elizabeth Horodowich states that 'oral exchange, and word of mouth determined the crucial factors of honour and reputation',⁵⁸ therefore it would appear that 'whispers' about Denmark being 'disjoint' have been interpreted by other men outside the state of Denmark as implying that its *men* are 'weak'.

One of the reasons, I suggest, 'something is rotten in the state of Denmark' (I. iv. 90) is rooted in the unease about masculine identity. From the beginning in Act I the sentinels show an unmanly defect in their natures; this is shown in their weakness when faced with the dark and

⁵⁷ Courtney, *Shakespeare's World of Death*, p. 139.

⁵⁸ Elizabeth Horodowich, 'The gossiping tongue: oral networks, public life and political culture in early modern Venice', *Renaissance Studies*, 19: (2005), 22-45, p. 23.

unknown, and made especially clear in their sensitivity to cold weather. In 1598 Robert Barret⁵⁹ was categorical about the credentials that were essential to make a good soldier:

In skirmishes and encounters, he should be valiant and resolute, for the souldier that is timerous, can neuer incline his heart to any haughtie enterprise, nor a fearefull fainting stomacke neither dareth to attend, nor attempt any hote charge, which for viletie and feare, is noted with shame and infamie amongst all warre like nations.

The sentinels in *Hamlet* are presented as neither valiant or resolute, neither are they presented as stalwart or steadfast. Robert Barret continues to say that 'in Sentinels consisteth the security of the campe' and that commanders should always 'bee very carefull to bee alwayes vigilant, and readie, being placed for Sentinell'.⁶⁰ The first impression an audience has of Francisco is of him being ineffectual, timid, and vulnerable. Act I opens just after the stroke of midnight when it is too dark to see who approaches and when the anxious enquiry 'Who's there?' (I. i. 1) is spoken by Barnardo to Francisco. David Leverenz believes that these initial words 'raise a fundamental question about Hamlet's identity'⁶¹, especially with the use of the word 'Who?'. Leverenz points out that Hamlet's true identity is hidden in the multiple roles the character plays throughout the play. Hamlet undertakes the role of dutiful son to the Ghost, Old Hamlet the king, son to Gertrude, step-son and nephew to Claudius, heir gone mad to Polonius, love to Ophelia, and friend to Horatio. Leverenz concludes that it is a play about the effect of a mother's guilt upon her son and about the effects of identity. I agree that identity is a problem in this play, but suggest that the problem does not lie with Gertrude's guilt, but with manhood and masculinity. Hamlet struggles with his identity, especially with the *supposed* identity given to him by the Ghost, that of dutiful son to avenge a father's murder. This is a role that goes against Hamlet's nature to perform, which I suggest is a problem linked to the identity of manhood and how it is portrayed as flawed and tainted in the world of the play.

⁵⁹ Robert Barret, fl. 1600. *The theoricke and practike of moderne warres discoursed in dialogue wise. wherein is declared the neglect of martiall discipline: the incomenience thereof: the imperfections of manie training captaines: a redresse by due regard had: the fittest weapons for our moderne warre: the vse of the same: the parts of a perfect souldier in generall and in particular: the officers in degrees, with their seuerall duties: the imbattailing of men in formes now most in vse: with figures and tables to the same: with sundrie other martiall points.* London : Printed [by R. Field] for William Ponsonby, 1598. p.12.

⁶⁰ Barret, fl. 1600. *The theoricke and practike of moderne warres discoursed in dialogue wise.* p.12.

⁶¹ David Leverenz, 'The Woman in Hamlet: An Interpersonal View', *Signs*, 4, No. 2 (1978), pp. 291-308, 291.

Hamlet's flaw is his 'mole of nature' that is a cruel contaminant given by the female to 'particular men'. It is a certain kind of 'defect' that should be treated with contempt because it breeds fear of 'corruption' (I. iv. 35); it is a 'particular fault' (I. iv. 35-36) that cannot be tolerated. Hamlet's defect of nature is a permanent one and prompts Hamlet's desire for his 'Too, too sallied flesh'⁶² to 'melt' (I. ii. 129). Hamlet verbalises the faults he sees within himself and realises he is an unprincipled 'rogue' (II. ii. 485) who is confused and dirty, 'dull and muddy mettled' (II. ii. 502). He considers himself timid, cowardly, 'pigeon-livered and lack [ing] gall' (II. ii. 512), foolish and stupid ('what an ass am I' [II. ii. 517]), and influenced by something beyond his control ('slave' [II. ii. 485]), he also admits to being a 'coward' (II. ii. 506). Hamlet sees the faults within himself, and they are linked to his own conception that stamped him with a particular 'defect', which deprived him of his manhood.

In 1881, Edward P. Vining wrote that 'The depths of human nature which Shakespeare touched in him [Hamlet] have been felt by all, but it has scarcely been recognized that the charms of Hamlet's mind are essentially feminine in their nature'.⁶³ The female within Hamlet has attracted attention from modern critics too; Elaine Showalter comments that Hamlet 'is the only heroic male role in Shakespeare which has been regularly acted by women'⁶⁴, while Tony Howard⁶⁵ points out that numerous actresses have played the role of Hamlet and informs the reader that the first Hamlet on film was a woman, played by Sarah Bernhardt in 1900. On June 12, 1899, Sarah Bernhardt played Hamlet in a short run of her production of *Hamlet* at the

⁶² The word 'sallied' in the *O.E.D.*, s.v. 'salty'. 1. *intr.* 'Of a warlike force: To issue suddenly from a place of defence or retreat in order to make an attack; spec. of a besieged force, to make a sortie'. If 'sallied' means to 'sally' then this would infer that Hamlet was feeling attacked (besieged) by all the events he has recently witnessed, e.g. his father's death, and his mother's hasty marriage to Claudius his uncle. It could also link Hamlet's besieged flesh with the anticipated attack from Fortinbras and his rebels into Denmark. If this was the case then it suggests that in Hamlet's soliloquy his desire is to be able to 'Thaw and revolve' (dissolve: Note 130, p. 176) like a coward 'into dew' (I. ii. 130) before any attack was to take place. Thompson and Taylor explain that the word 'sallied' is often amended to 'sullied' by many editors of the text. 'Sullied', meaning contaminated, would link to Hamlet's 'mole of nature' and the polluted and blemished manhood of some of Denmark's males. For a more detailed explanation of the use and meaning of the word 'sallied' see Thompson and Taylor's note: 129, p. 175. Also, Sidney Warhaft's article that puts a case forward for the word 'solid': 'Hamlet's Solid Flesh Resolved', *ELH*, 28, No. 1 (Mar., 1961), pp. 21-30. Also: Fredson Bowers. "Hamlet's 'Sullied' or 'Solid' Flesh: A Bibliographical Case-History", *Shakespeare Survey*. 9 (1956), pp. 44-48.

⁶³ E. P. Vining, *The Mystery of Hamlet. An Attempt To Solve An Old Problem*, (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1881). ch. v. http://archive.org/stream/mysteryofhamleta00vini/mysteryofhamleta00vini_djvu.txt

⁶⁴ Elaine Showalter, "'Representing Ophelia: Women, Madness, and the Responsibilities of Feminist Criticism,'" in *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*, *Gale Shakespearean Criticism: Hamlet*, 59, (2001) p. 2.

⁶⁵ Tony Howard, *Women as Hamlet: Performance and Interpretation Theatre, Film and Fiction*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 1.

Adelphi Theatre in London. Frances de la Tour played Hamlet in the UK, in 1979, and more recently, in October 2014, Maxine Peake took on the role of Hamlet at the Royal Exchange Theatre in Manchester. It would appear that the role of Hamlet lends itself easily to female actors because of the female traits to be found in Hamlet. David Leverenz believes that 'Tensions between the head and the heart, noble reason and diseased emotion, centre the play',⁶⁶ and it is in Hamlet's diseased emotional state that we see these emotional tensions. Again Shakespeare appears to lead the way with vague manhoods and gender identity with the supposed love between Hamlet and Ophelia which goes nowhere in the play. Their conversations are fraught with schoolboy sarcasms and clever play on words. Hamlet treats Ophelia as he treats her father Polonius, more with contempt than with any true feeling or affection. In his confession that he loved her more than 'forty thousand brothers' (V. i. 258), there is no indication of any sexual interest or passion; Hamlet would rather send Ophelia to a nunnery than to bed. It is a curious fact that in Shakespeare's play neither Prince Hamlet, Laertes, Horatio, Barnardo, Francisco, Rosencrantz nor Guildenstern have a productive relationship with a female. Even Claudius's manhood is hearsay, related to the audience through the salacious imaginings of Hamlet's words; there is no evidence of Claudius producing fruit from his own loins. Old Hamlet's manhood and sexual prowess needs to be considered too, especially as Hamlet is 'his sole son' (III. iii. 77). The image of the untended garden that will not flourish could be viewed as a metaphor for the impotency of the lost manhood in the men of Denmark, who are also 'rank and gross in nature' (I. ii. 136). Even the copulation of male and female 'In the rank sweat of an enseamed bed' that is 'Stew'd in corruption' (III. v. 90-91) bears no fruit. The men of Denmark are depicted as contaminated and gross in nature, like Prince Hamlet: 'muddy mettled' (II. ii. 502), 'disjoint' (I. ii. 20), and 'lack[ing] gall' (II. ii. 512).

Playwrights showed in their plays that masculine strength was not needed to murder, making poison an attractive weapon to weak cowardly males who saw that poison offered distance and absence from the enemy and could alleviate any uncomfortable confrontation. Playwrights

⁶⁶ Leverenz, 'The Woman in Hamlet', p. 295.

made visible inventive ways to use poison; they revealed poison could be hidden in wine, apples, pomegranates, crowns, portraits, helmets, sword tips and cosmetics, to name but a few.

Revenge

Revenge is the final way in which Hamlet provides a template for other male poisoners. According to George Puttenham (1529–1590), ‘foes [are] a continuall torment and canker to the minde of man’; he explains that revenge is something that is in a man’s nature and that he cannot

shew that patience and moderation in such greifs, as becommeth the man profit and accomplit in all vertue: but either in deede or by word, he will seeke reuenge against them that malice him, or practise his harmes, specially such foes as oppose themselues to a mans loues.⁶⁷

This is not the case in Thomas Middleton’s *The Second Maiden’s Tragedy* when Govianus has his throne - a symbol of patriarchal power - stolen from him by what appears to be a more valiant and daring male. Revenge, according to Geoffrey Fenton writing in 1576, was not a man’s to seek; Fenton believed that

when a man that is iniured is hable to limitte his passion, and gouerne the affections of his hart, séeing that to the nature of man, nothing is more swéete then the passion of reuenge: yea, oftentimes we are unmindful to requite a good tourne, but seldome doe we forget to reuenge an iniurie receiued: But it is néedfull we deduce in particuler, those things wherein in good conscience men may be angrie, and that without scrupule of sinne: For that by how much more they were frendes and entertheyned amitie together, by so much more the offence, the anger, & the sinne, (which séemes but a dreame) would put amongst them diuorce and diuision: We may not be angrie against such as maliciously touch our honor, or by Ambicion aspire to our goodes: For that to the Noble minde it belonges to demaund his recouerie by iustice, and his honor by the swoorde. May we holde anger against such as haue done vs some notable iniurie, and published dishonest

⁶⁷ George Puttenham, *The arte of English poesie. Contriued into three bookes: the first of poets and poesie, the second of propertyortion, the third of ornament*, (London : Richard Field, 1589), p.47.

spéeche of vs? I say no, for that according to the rule of the Gospell we are bounde to pardon all wronges, and leaue the reueng to God to whom it belonges.⁶⁸

So, although revenge may be sweet and would appear to be a part of *man's* nature, Fenton adheres to biblical doctrine to request that man leaves revenge to God. Yet Francis Bacon was of the opinion that there was a kind of 'wild justice'⁶⁹ to revenging a wrong, that somehow justified the revenger's actions. John Kerrigan suggests that, 'in the transference of revenge from the dead to those who survive, questions of duty, justice, and loyalty are amplified'.⁷⁰ Michael Neill also puts forward this suggestion when he writes that 'the role of the revenger is essentially that of a remembrancer in two senses of that once potent word: he is both an agent of memory and one whose task it is to exact the payments for the debts of the past'.⁷¹ Neill's view can be witnessed in *Hamlet* when the ghost of the father relates the gruesome details of his murder to his son by asking him to remember him; this enlightens Hamlet to his father's murder and also places him in the position of having to exact the payment for that murder, transferring the Ghost's need for revenge onto the son's feelings of duty and loyalty to his dead father. In order to achieve revenge for the dead the revenger's actions needs to be swift and spontaneous; his sense of duty and belief in personal justice for a wrong must be steadfast. In revenge tragedies the male poisoners discussed in this thesis often opt to disguise their identity as well as their choice of weapon as Hamlet provides a model of this by using Luciano in, Act III scene ii, as his alter ego.

In revenge tragedies, disguise was a popular theatrical device in which male poisoners proved to be adept; it gave them the opportunity to show off their skills. Hamlet does not disguise himself, but does adopt an alternative persona, that of Lucianus in the play-within-the-play, to uncover the truth; other revenge heroes go further. The character of Vindice in Thomas

⁶⁸ Geoffrey Fenton, *Golden epistles contayning varietie of discourse both morall, philosophicall, and diuine: gathered as well out of the remaynder of Gueuaraes workes, as other authors, Latine, French, and Italian*, (London : Henry Middelton, Rafe Newbery, 1575). p. 43.

⁶⁹ Francis Bacon, *State Trials*, p. 970, 'cited from Perry', p. 104.

⁷⁰ John Kerrigan, *Revenge Tragedy: Aeschylus to Armageddon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), p. 7.

⁷¹ Neill, *Issues of Death*, p. 247.

Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy* is a stereotypical villain⁷² who takes full advantage of his ability to deceive through the use of disguise, not just himself but the dead too in the shape of the skull. Disguise can also include the taking on of mannerisms that conceal a poisoner's identity and allow him to transgress beyond social and gender boundaries. This is made evident in my first chapter in Henry Chettle's *The Tragedy of Hoffman* when Clois Hoffman takes on the identity and disguise of a dead son. In 1606, Lodowick Briskett wrote about how a man would fly from another man's vice if it was made obvious to him, therefore it was essential to the poisoner to have the fortunate opportunity of being close to their victim to ensure their death:

... if he were seene like himselfe, he presents himselfe vnder the shape of goodnesse, and hiding all his il fauoured face, deceiue the sensitue appetite; which being intised by the false image of goodnes, is so seduced, and through the corruption of his mind and iudgement, by the ill habit, contracted from his child hood, he embraceth that which (if his iudgement were sound) he wold neuer do. Wherefore Plato his meaning was (as it may be thought) that no man was willingly vicious, since, euill covering it selfe vnder the cloke of goodnesse.⁷³

Briskett recognises man's deceit in his quest for revenge and acknowledges that there is a corruption within the perpetrator at the time he seeks to do an evil deed. Indeed, each of the poisoners discussed have a strong belief in their actions; they all feel a belief that they seek justice for a wrong committed. But Briskett's 'cloke of goodnesse' is just that, a cloak under which to hide, as Francis Bacon wrote: 'poisoning requires proximity and a degree of intimacy, and is therefore a kind of 'murder under the colour of friendship'⁷⁴; this is witnessed in the characters of Vindice, Clois Hoffman, Sejanus, Tiberius, and Govianus who all employ some kind of closeness to entrap their victim.

⁷² Neill calls Vindice a 'villain-hero', in his article, 'Bastardy, Counterfeiting, and Misogyny', p. 398.

⁷³ Lodowick Bryskett, *A discourse of ciuill life containing the ethike part of morall philosophie. Fit for the instructing of a gentleman in the course of a vertuous life*, London : Printed [by R. Field] for Edward Blount, 1606. p.178.

⁷⁴ Curtis Perry, *Literature and Favoritism in Early Modern England*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p.104.

The Chapters

Chapter One links the character of Hamlet with the character of Clois Hoffman in *The Tragedy of Hoffman, or Revenge for a Father* as both seek revenge for a dead father. Hoffman employs the services of a minion to perform his poisonous deeds and like all distinct male poisoners fails to prove any manhood; this is highlighted in his unsuccessful attempt to seduce his 'adopted' mother Martha near to the end of the play. Lorrique, the minion, is keen to show his devotion to Hoffman and like most minions he poisons others and shares homoerotic language with his master. I intend to show how the playwright portrays the character of Hoffman with an impotent manhood. The play is strongly linked to *Hamlet* not only through Chettle's use of theme but also because of his use of the skull, which Chettle develops into a full skeleton, ending the play dramatically by displaying three dead bodies on the stage in an obvious parody of the crucifixion, with Christ and the two robbers either side of him.

In Chapter Two I shall focus on the character of Vindice in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, who epitomises all that is to be feared in the Italian. Middleton portrays Vindice from the beginning of the play as a deceitful character, and I will suggest that although Vindice is presented from the first scene as a man devoted to the memory of the woman he supposedly loved and whose skull he holds in his hands and addresses, in fact, he gulls the audience. Through the character of Vindice, Middleton blends together all that is dangerous in the male poisoner: he is homoerotic; lacking masculinity; vengeful; has an immoral disregard for the laws of man or God; cowardly; and impotent as a man. The skull in Vindice's hands is used in an active and productive way. The skull of Gloriana is not only a token of death throughout the dramatic action of the play, but it becomes a revenger, a weapon for murder, and a lethally toxic temptress.

The Italian (or at least Roman) setting continues in Chapter Three with *The Tragedy of Claudius Tiberius Nero*, where the dramatist has shown the male poisoner, Sejanus, as a substitute female

in his role as minion to Tiberius. I will show how Sejanus and Tiberius share homoerotic language and moments of close intimacy that blend their homoeroticism with poison. Sejanus fails to display a valid manhood throughout the play, clearly shown in the scene when he is unsuccessful in his attempt to seduce Livia. Sejanus is shown to be ambitious, selfish and dangerous. The skull in this play is presented by two living heads in those of Germanicus and Sejanus. Germanicus dies by having a poisoned crown placed on his head, and Sejanus meets his death by being forced to wear a burning crown.

In the fourth Chapter I shall discuss *The Second Maiden's Tragedy*, and I shall argue that the character of Govianus, a deposed king, is shown from the outset to be a distinct male poisoner who takes the role of subordinate to the ghost of the Lady, who easily manipulates and dominates him in the play. Govianus is portrayed by Middleton as weak, cowardly, effeminate and a poisoner, one who is morally corrupt and who shows no scruples. Middleton transforms the skull into a decomposing and toxic corpse used as a sex trap to kill the Tyrant.

In the final Chapter I shall discuss *Albovine, King of the Lombards*, again set in Italy and again a play that shows Italian men as effeminate, cowardly, and poisoners. Davenant's play highlights the distinct male poisoner's lack of manly courage through the use of military imagery. Davenant's play performs a sacrilegious act by transforming the skull into a vessel for drinking wine.

I shall argue that there is a link to connect the plays through the presentation of male characters that lack masculine ferocity, aggression and bravery, that choose to use poison over the sword. These distinct male poisoners are presented as insidious, morally despicable and dangerous; they share close homoerotic relationships with other male characters and also share character commonalities. These specific male poisoners lack the vital ingredients that in the Early Modern period made a man a *man*: courage, honour, and a wife and children (except for Albovine, who did have a wife and an heir, yet is shown to flaunt his penchant for another

younger male). This thesis argues that these distinct male poisoners have impotent manhoods that are linked to the image of the hollow skull, a symbol of lost life, death and poison. Through the image of the skull the characters and audience members look death in the face, only to see reflecting back their own mortality. The skull is associated with death and poison and is the silent master that triumphs in these plays.

Chapter One

The Tragedy of Hoffman, or The Revenge for a Father

Henry Chettle

Changes in the way male poisoners were presented within tragedies were about to take place with the production of Henry Chettle's play *The Tragedy of Hoffman, or The Revenge for a Father*.⁷⁵ Chettle's play was first performed⁷⁶ by the Admiral's Men in 1602 and

it is usually thought to have been performed shortly after the first productions of *Hamlet*, c.1601. According to details on the title page of the published text, the play had been acted and well received at the Phoenix, a small indoor theatre in Drury Lane patronized by the gentry.⁷⁷

Although the play was not published until 1631, it must have been a success, as Janet Clare points out: 'the Caroline revival of a tragedy designed for the very different Elizabethan open-air popular theatre is a clear illustration of the enduring appeal of revenge plays'.⁷⁸ And as a revenge play *Hoffman* does not disappoint; it is visually dramatic and offers a gruesome spectacle of death from the start. The play's main focus is that of a son avenging a father's death, a theme taken from Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*. Although *Hoffman* as a play is inferior in many ways to *Hamlet*, both in language and plot construction, the settings for both plays are

⁷⁵ For the purposes of this chapter all references to the play will be taken from the following edition: Emma Smith, (ed.), *Five Revenge Tragedies: Kyd, Shakespeare, Marston, Chettle, Middleton*, (London: Penguin Books Limited, 2012). For further criticism on the play see: Paul Browne, 'A Source for the 'Burning Crowne' in Henry Chettle's *The Tragedy of Hoffman*', *Notes and Queries*, 51.3 (Sep, 2004); pp. 297-299. Harold Jenkins, 'The 1631 Quarto of *The Tragedy of Hoffman*', *Library*, 5th ser., 6 (1951): pp. 88–99. Sarah Glady, 'Revenge as Double Standard in *The Tragedy of Hoffman*', *Discoveries*, 18, issue 2, 2001, pp. 3-4.

⁷⁶ Tom Rutter, *Marlowe, Hoffman, and the Admiral's Men*, *Marlowe Studies: An Annual*, 3, (2014), pp. 49-62 (14). http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/79192/3/WRR0_79192.pdf

Regarding the dates of the play Tom Rutter writes that: 'Hoffman was not printed until 1631, but it apparently dates from about 1602, since Philip Henslowe lent Thomas Downton of the Admiral's Men five shillings "to geue vnto harey chettell in p[ar]te of paymente for A tragedie called Hawghman" on December 29, 1602. Although Henslowe records no further payments for the play, his accounts continue only until March 1603, so Chettle presumably completed it shortly thereafter. . . The title page refers to performances "at the Phenix in Druery- lane," indicating that the play was revived after the opening of that theatre in 1617. Harold Jenkins points out that the Phoenix was occupied by Queen Henrietta's Men, not by the Palsgrave's Men (who evolved out of the Admiral's Men); this raises the (currently insoluble) question of whether the Admiral's Men ever actually performed Hoffman. However, since Henslowe's records indicate that Henry Chettle wrote it for the Admiral's Men, this problem does not invalidate my overall argument that he did so with a view to its appropriateness for that company's repertory'. See Henry Chettle, *The Tragedy of Hoffman*, ed. Harold Jenkins (Oxford: Malone Society, 1951).

⁷⁷ Janet Clare, *Revenge Tragedies of the Renaissance* (Devon: Northcote House Publishers Ltd, 2006), p. 49.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, p. 49.

geographically very similar, as they are both set around the Baltic, *Hamlet* in Denmark and *Hoffman* in Luningberg. Another similarity between the two plays is the use of human remains in the form of a skull. Whilst Hamlet holds the skull of Yorick for a brief time on the stage, Chettle takes the skull from Shakespeare and dramatically transforms it into a complete skeleton; if Shakespeare was the first to use a skull on the stage (mentioned in the introduction), then Chettle must have been the first to use a full skeleton on the stage, showing his originality as a playwright. Chettle may have wanted to surpass Shakespeare by hanging the full anatomy of Hoffman's father on the stage to create an immediate and shocking impression on the audience. Using a property that represents raw death, exposed, unadorned by mortal flesh, something to be looked at, inspected and pondered upon, is a reminder to all of man's mortality. Chettle gave Hoffman the words of a loving son towards a dead father—'dear soul' (I. i. 3), 'sweet hearse' (I. i. 5) and 'Whose very name dissolves [his] eyes to tears' (I. i. 61); yet, at the same time Chettle portrays Hoffman as obsessive about his dead father and shows him displaying a lack of respect for his father's corpse.

One of the many differences between Hamlet and Hoffman is that Hoffman intends to eradicate all those from the bloodline of his father's murderer. Hoffman's minion, Lorrique, informs Martha (mother to the dead Otho) that her son's murderer was 'Hoffman the son, full of revenge and hate / 'Gainst every hand that wrought his father's hurt' (V. i. 186-7); whereas Shakespeare's Hamlet initially only sought to kill the murderer of his father. Both protagonists berate themselves for their tardiness: Hoffman in his opening soliloquy says, 'That I thus tardy am to do an act' (I. i. 13); and Hamlet speaking to the Ghost queries, 'Do you not come your tardy son to chide'⁷⁹ (III. iv. 103). Yet, the major difference between the protagonists is that Clois Hoffman soon sets about eradicating his fault of tardiness and proves a fruitful revenger from the beginning, with the help of Lorrique; whereas Hamlet proves to be a reluctant revenger and takes a whole five Acts to accomplish the murder of Claudius. Writing on codes of honour and revenge, Robin Headlam Wells states: 'as a code of values that emphasised masculine physical prowess, self-assertion, and the willingness to use violence in the defence of personal,

⁷⁹ Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (eds.), *The Arden Shakespeare: Hamlet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). All subsequent quotations from the play will be taken from this edition and references will be given in the text.

family, or national integrity, it was a highly political issue in Elizabethan and Jacobean England'.⁸⁰ The defence of family honour does not play a part in *The Tragedy of Hoffman* especially as Hoffman's father was found guilty of piracy, and is charged according to the law. Clois Hoffman certainly does not show 'masculine prowess': he watches, like a voyeur from a safe distance the murder of his first victim, Otho, who dies an agonising death at the hands of Hoffman's male minion Lorrique. The similarities between Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Chettle's *Hoffman* are there to behold; but Chettle takes Shakespeare's grieving son and expands upon his lust for revenge to create a character that is both ruthless and inventive.

In this chapter I will suggest that the characters of Clois Hoffman, his minion Lorrique, and Jerome are examples of the distinct category of male poisoner found in the plays discussed in this thesis. These characters contain traits and patterns of behaviour that are not portrayed in the more 'manly' male character on the Renaissance stage. Commonalities among these distinct male poisoners can be found in their language and actions. I have found in the plays I discuss that being cowardly is a staple trait of the male poisoner, along with being non-confrontational; this enables them to show their mental agility by being precise planners and masters of disguise. In the disguise of another they are able to manipulate others into doing their bidding and exploit those around them. These distinct male characters tend to have obsessive tendencies, have a lack of empathy for others' suffering and are arrogant in their belief that their behaviour is morally right; as Hoffman states: 'mine's a cause is right' (I. i. 10). The playwrights of the plays discussed in this thesis portray male poisoners that show a reluctance to participate in more traditional and more confrontational methods of disposing of enemies, such as stabbing, duelling, or shooting, which spotlights the poisoners' cowardice as men. Chettle portrays Clois Hoffman as a coward from the start of the play, especially as he employs a male minion to perform murder for him, which makes his question 'what coward would not not fight?' (I. i. 9) rather paradoxical.

⁸⁰ Robin Headlam Wells, *Shakespeare on Masculinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.109.

As I have already suggested in the introduction, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* begins with the masculine setting of Elsinore Castle; Chettle begins *The Tragedy of Hoffman, or The Revenge for a Father* with a visual display of masculine aggression and a callous act of revenge on Prince Otho, the son of the Duke of Luningberg. With closer inspection it soon becomes clear that Hoffman does not take the initiative of revenge himself, but instead employs his male minion, Lorrique, to perform the act for him; any audience expectations of manly prowess from either Hoffman or Lorrique are met with disappointment. The use of a minion is important in poison plot plays and brings into the limelight their potential to be highly dangerous and insidious characters. Lorrique, who was first minion to Prince Otho before he is captured by Hoffman, trades in his loyalty to his master in an attempt to save his own life, showing no sense of duty or honour and then proves to be a callous and cruel murderer. He is also portrayed as a treacherous individual as he renounced his loyalty to his master, Otho, and will later betray Hoffman too. Lorrique informs his previous master, Otho, just as he (Otho) is about to die, that '[he]'ll turn anything sir, rather than nothing' (I. i. 204), and confesses that he (Lorrique) is an 'irreligious slave' that bears a 'religious name' (I. i. 86 - 7). This makes him also reminiscent of Aaron the Moor in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* and Barabas in *The Jew of Malta*. Lorrique does not want to die because he 'love[s] life so well' (I. i. 205), and although he may profess to value life, it applies only to his own and does not stop him from poisoning others. Hoffman employs the assistance of Lorrique from the first scene, and their alliance is a toxic combination of corruption and poisonous natures from the onset. As a male poisoner Clois Hoffman is a complicated one, especially as he does not actually carry out any poisonings himself. Curtis Perry suggests that 'poison itself has a special place in the imaginistic language of corruption because its secret, inner operation was felt to embody seditious inwardness and thus duplicity, hypocrisy, and deceit'.⁸¹ This is true of Hoffman as his inner corruption enables him to be ingenious with disguises that help conceal his true identity.

⁸¹ Curtis Perry, *Literature and Favoritism*, p. 99.

Summary

The Tragedy of Hoffman, or The Revenge for a Father

The play opens dramatically with Clois Hoffman, also called by different abbreviated names⁸², hiding with intent in a lonely wooded area that houses a cave near the sea. Hoffman has the sensational spectacle of the remains of his father's corpse (he was killed because of piracy) strung up upon a tree. The Duke of Saxony's son, Otho, is conveniently shipwrecked near Hoffman's cave, and becomes his first victim in his quest for revenge. Hoffman, with the sworn help of Otho's companion/valet, Lorrique, sends him back to the Duke to inform him that his son, Otho, is still alive and is recovering his health after being shipwrecked in the hermitage of the cave. After hearing news that his son and heir is alive, the Duke immediately sets off to bring Otho back to the court. Once back with his son Otho, (actually Hoffman in disguise), the Duke denounces and disinherits Jerome his own real son.

Meanwhile Hoffman disguised as the Hermit Roderick (the Duke of Saxony's brother) plots to have Mathias (son of the Duke of Saxony) kill his own brother Lodowick. Hoffman has persuaded Lodowick and Lucibella (daughter of the Archduke of Austria) to dress as Greeks and wait for Mathias to come to them. Hoffman discards the hermit's disguise, to then disguise himself as Otho again, greets Mathias and persuades him that Lucibella has been unfaithful with another man. Mathias then determines to find the Greek that is with Lucibella and kill them both (not knowing that it is his brother Lodowick in Grecian costume). With the help of Otho/Hoffman, Mathias stabs both Lodowick and Lucibella only to discover that he has killed his own brother. Hoffman (as Otho) also verbally poisons Roderick the Hermit's reputation by fuelling hate against Roderick, but the Duke of Austria sets the record straight by telling Mathias and the Duke of Saxony that Roderick was not at the court when Hoffman/Otho says he was and that Roderick has not left his hermit's cave all day.

⁸² For more information regarding the confusion with the protagonist's name see Harold Jenkins. "The 1631 Quarto of *The Tragedy of Hoffman*." *Library*, 5th ser., 6 (1951): 88-99.

The Duke of Austria, angered by being made childless, fights with Saxony, and while no one is looking, Hoffman stabs and kills Austria. Meanwhile, carrying the body of Lucibella, Roderick the Hermit notices that she is still breathing and takes care of her. Hoffman, elated from the previous events, sends Lorrique to Prussia to inform Duke Ferdinand that Mathias has killed his own brother and Lucibella. Jerome the son of Ferdinand, Duke of Prussia, who occupies a high position of social and political power, is gathering a small army along with his servant Stilt and Stilt's own father, Old Stilt, who used to serve Hoffman's father when alive. Ferdinand has disinherited his son, Jerome, in favour of Otho/Hoffman, Prince of Luningberg. Otho/Hoffman pleads to the Duke of Prussia to have mercy on Jerome and to reinstate him as his son and heir; that done they all go off to find Roderick and the Duke of Saxony. Jerome's jealousy of Otho (Hoffman in disguise) drives him on to want Otho/Hoffman dead. So, to rid himself of his rival for his father's affections and his own birthright, Jerome decides to poison Otho/Hoffman. Jerome employs the help of a French doctor (Lorrique in disguise) and takes poison from him to do the deed of murdering Otho/Hoffman. Being an incompetent fool, Jerome not only poisons his father, Ferdinand—made possible because putting 'poison into another person's body entails a violation of trusting intimacy',⁸³—but also manages to poison himself, because of his trust in Lorrique as the French Doctor, who gave him poison instead of the expected antidote.

Lucibella goes mad; Mathias chases after her; Roderick discards his life as a hermit and returns to the court of his brother Ferdinand. Lorrique and Hoffman meet with Martha and talk of how they are going to kill her; she wakes before they can kill her and Hoffman then informs her of her son's death and how he (Hoffman) has taken Otho's name for his own. Martha then accepts and adopts Hoffman as her own son and gives him Otho's name. Hoffman vows to quench his new-born desire for Martha by taking her sexually whether she accepts him or not. In Act V Lucibella, dressed in the dead Lodowick's clothes, exposes Hoffman's plots and Martha discovers the truth from Lorrique concerning Hoffman and her son. Lorrique repents of his deeds and joins with Martha, Roderick, Mathias and the Duke of Saxony in plotting the death of

⁸³ Curtis Perry, *Literature and Favoritism*, p. 100.

Hoffman. Hoffman's mistrust of Lorrique leads him to stab him and Martha leads Hoffman into a trap that will see him killed like his father by a burning crown.

Hanging Bodies and Religion

Hoffman obsesses about his father from the beginning of the play and has his body hanging on the stage as he tells us that he has stolen 'his father's anatomy from the gallows at Luninberg' (I. i. 99-100), with the crown used to kill him still perched on his skull: 'Upon the dead skull there's the iron crown that burnt his brains out' (I.i.101-102) as a 'dead remembrance of [his] living father' (I. i. 6). I suggest Chettle's sacrilegious act turns the pirate father into the iconic figure of Christ on the cross. The vision of death stripped and crowned is a display of idolatry on Chettle's part, both politically and spiritually. The anatomy of the patriarch as a man is symbolic on several counts, as the audience are forced to stare at this exposed presentation of manhood and death. The body perversely mirrors that of Christ, and the crown of thorns penetrating Christ's flesh is replaced with a burnt iron crown, a symbol of man's sadistic cruelty and sin mirrored in Hoffman's actions. The strong image of the burnt-out crown strips away Hans Hoffman's patriarchal power and honour as a man. Although powerless dead, the body of Hoffman's father emanates a macabre power of its own as it hangs from the 'base tree' (I. i. 175) and is turned into an object of desire by the son. Hoffman remembers the living father as heroic, idealising his qualities, as he tells Otho: 'Here were arms / That served the trothless state' (I. i. 49-50), reminding him that Hans Hoffman 'had in thirty fights / Filled all their treasures with foemen's spoils, / and paid poor soldiers from his treasury' (I. i. 51-153).

The language Hoffman uses to describe the way the physicians prepared his father's body is strangely erotic. His description of the autopsy has a hint of morbid sexual fantasy about it, as Hoffman imagines them 'Thrusting their dastard fingers in his flesh' (I. ii. 8). He appears to take delight that he has 'fitted my anatomy / In a fair chain too' (I. i. 10-11), fusing together in the ambiguous 'my' both his father as a possession and *his* own body. This sadomasochistic act

performed on the corpse of his father shows the necrophilic side of Hoffman as he plays with the bodies of both his father and Otho. Hoffman fetters his dead father for his own personal gratification and first positions both bodies to 'stand' side by side, then decides to hang them 'afore' each other. The hanging of Otho's dead body close to the body of his father - the 'image of bare death' (I. iii. 16) physically stripped of any mortal covering is placed to 'join side, to side, / With my father's naked bones' (I. iii. 16-17) - shows Hoffman's necrophilic interests. The love Hoffman bears for his father goes beyond the duty of a son or family honour, as his ultimate goal is not to see his father's soul gain peace or enter into heaven, but instead for them like lovers to enter paradise hand in hand (I. i. 21-22). His father's 'better part' (I. i. 63) was his; his was his father's (I. i. 63-4); and Hoffman admits that when his father died, a part of him died too (I. i. 65-6). This grieving son can never gain satisfaction from revenge because his heart will never stop bleeding until he can bury the corpse of his father inside him, using his own body like a living sepulchre. Hoffman tells Lorrique, 'Nor can my wounds be stopped till an incision / I've made to bury my dead father in'⁸⁴ (I. i. 70-2); therefore, by doing so they would become one flesh. This is an act of sacrilege which makes the act a parodic version of the eating of the body of Christ as part of the Blessed Sacrament undertaken during the Catholic Mass. I suggest that the implication being made here is an incestuous and homoerotic one as Hoffman wishes to become one with his father. Hoffman wishes to convert his body into a tomb for the corpse of his dead father to reside in, making this a eucharistic act; this would not only feed, nourish and rejuvenate the living Hoffman, but at the same time it would resurrect the dead father.

Chettle mocks the Catholic Church and mimics the Catholic Mass by hanging the father's anatomy on to a tree. Chettle turns the theatre into a place of idolatrous worship as he foregrounds the corpse of the father on the stage, mimicking the Divine image of Christ's body on the cross with the crown still visible on his head. The chains that bind the corpse act as a reminder of the Rosary holding the iconic image of Christ on the crucifix. I suggest that the audience do not enter a theatre, they also enter a mock Catholic Church; they do not hear a play,

⁸⁴ The ambiguous meaning of the language here could also relate to Hoffman wanting to cure his bleeding heart by surgically slicing open his enemy's heart and metaphorically burying his father in the hole he's made, therefore creating one flesh from the union of two male bodies.

but a mock sermon. The body is glorified and deified by the son, as Hoffman renders up promises of revenge to the body like prayers in mock worship: 'But thou dear soul, whose nerves and arteries / In dead resoundings summon up revenge, / And thou shalt ha't; be appeased sweet hearse' (I. i. 3-5), after which they will, like all good Christians, 'walk to paradise' (I. i. 22). Chettle's sacrilegious play re-enacts the Catholic Mass by placing the body of the father centre-stage, symbolising the crucifixion of Christ, which is the ultimate emblem of Christianity; Hoffman also performs the Eucharistic offering of cakes to Otho, parodying the last supper before Christ's death. The religious theme is continued with Lorrique in the role of Judas, as he has already betrayed Otho and will later betray Hoffman. Lorrique will attempt to take his own life (according to Matthew, Judas hanged himself), and roles will be reversed when Hoffman will play the betrayer of Lorrique by replacing a kiss with a whisper ('Hark in thine ear' [V. ii. 155]) and a hug ('how I hug thy plots' [V. ii 142]), before sealing Lorrique's fate.

Anatomies and Souls

Christian Billings, writing on anatomy theatres in the sixteen hundreds, tells us that surgeons performing dissections on the bodies of the dead seemed 'to have deliberately unseated God from his corporeal throne, thus paving the way for a liberation of the body from the soul'.⁸⁵ Hoffman unseats God when he makes the decision to end Otho's and Lorrique's lives, determining when and how they should die. Chettle combines religious imagery with the theatre of anatomy, where public autopsies were watched by the curious, as surgeons dissected the bodies of the dead in the name of science. To Hoffman the body of the hanging father was a sacred icon. Michael Neill suggests that

In the theatre of anatomy the shameful nakedness of death was violently dramatised in the progress stripping of the corpse to expose the signs of death within. It was an important feature of this ritual that the bodies so disgracefully exposed to the prying gaze of the crowd should have been those of condemned

⁸⁵ Christian Billings, 'Modelling the anatomy theatre and the indoor hall theatre: Dissection on the stages of early modern London', *Early Modern Literary Studies Special Issue* 13 (2004), 3.1-17.

criminals. For it was precisely the public display of all that should remain hidden which rendered this final punishment so degrading.⁸⁶

Chettle combines the theatre's irony with stark reality: the audience feast their eyes on the dead remains of a criminal pirate just as the spectators that crowded the anatomy theatres watched the dissection of criminal bodies. Neill goes on to say that

The drama of dissection extended the humiliation of the malefactor beyond execution, with an exemplary cruelty that not even prolonged exposure upon a gibbet could match, and at the same time enhanced the moral lessons of the whole theatre of punishment.⁸⁷

Chettle united the spectacle of the anatomy theatres with the dramatic action on the stage with the twice hanged body of the pirate: once lawfully on the 'gibbet' and again after being stolen and hanged on a 'base tree'. Jonathan Sawday writes of the souls of those hanged: 'To be gibbeted, to be exposed after execution to public gaze, was a fate reserved for the worst malefactors, since it compounded the punishment with a denial of Christian burial'.⁸⁸ And it could be argued that Chettle romanticises piracy in his play even though he demonstrates that being caught for piracy legally brought the punishment of death by hanging.

Surgeons of the anatomy theatre⁸⁹ can be imagined on the stage when Hoffman complains about the surgeons that had their hands on his father's body: 'There were a sort of filthy mountebanks, / Expert in nothing but in idle words, / Made a day's work with their incision knives / On my oppressed poor father' (I. iii. 4-7). This is a violent image that is ironically replicated by Hoffman, ready to perform as a 'filthy mountebank' himself, with incision knives at the ready to remove the flesh from the body of Otho. After Hoffman has performed the

⁸⁶ Michael Neill, *Issues of Death: Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 118.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, p. 118.

⁸⁸ Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 22.

⁸⁹ Christian Billings explains how the Renaissance playhouses resembled the anatomy theatres of the day: 'Certain links between Jones's anatomy theatre and indoor hall playhouse design are obvious: Like playhouses, anatomy theatres placed their performers, in this instance a cadaver and an anatomist, on a (i) raised platform surrounded with spectators. (ii) Like playhouses, anatomy theatres had a degree of scenic decoration that had a symbolic link to the activity taking place within them. (iii) A spectator's proximity to the action depended upon his social status. (iv) The spectacle of (and commentary upon) anatomical demonstration was guided by the 'script' of a published anatomy'.

gruesome task of stripping Otho's dead body of its outer skin, he then 'Burie[s] the flesh' (V. i. 206) in the earth and boastfully wonders 'If there live e'er a surgeon that dare say / He could do better' (I. iii. 1-2). Neill suggests that '[Chettle] dresses the stage to resemble the Barbour-Surgeons' moralized theatre of dissection',⁹⁰ but there are no moral virtues on this stage. Helkiah Crooke, a surgeon writing in 1615, believed (amongst other things) that the dissection of the body was an act of butchery and a violation against God:

it is not anatomy but butchery, to mangle the trembling members of mans body,
and vnder I know not what slender and idle pretence of profit, or behoofe, to
violate the sacred Law of nature, and of religion.⁹¹

Chettle has Hoffman violate the laws of nature for his own benefit and advantage. With his own hands Hoffman removes the mortal flesh off Otho's body and destroys his manhood; he strips Otho of his sexuality and exposes his de-sexualised body. In fact as Hoffman physically places the anatomies of his father and Otho together side-by-side, he promotes, I suggest, a macabre union between the two, a kind of unifying of the two bodies, a coming together of the dead, performed in a mock church, in front of a theatrical congregation.

Chettle appears to show no reverence in his play for the sanctity of the church. With the very nature of the layout and purpose of the theatre it was easy for Chettle to emulate the religious architecture of the church. Both have a central focal point: both stage and altar, both have spectators, congregation and audience; both have a protagonist, priest and actor; and most important of all, both have a hanging corpse centre stage, the iconic figure of Christ and Hoffman's father placed centre-stage for all to witness, turning the theatre into place of worship. The hanging of the father's body and the gaze and ears of the audience fixed upon the actions and words of Hoffman - in the role of priest - certainly give the theatre a religious architecture that is hard to ignore.

⁹⁰ Neill, *Issues of Death*, p.137.

⁹¹ Helkiah Crooke, 1576-1635. *Mikrokosmographia a description of the body of man. Together with the controuersies thereto belonging. Collected and translated out of all the best authors of anatomy, especially out of Gasper Bauhinus and Andreas Laurentius*. ([London]: William Iaggard, 1615), p. 18.

For Renaissance audiences the souls of both Otho and Hoffman's father would have been suffering too by being refused any 'burial, [and] exposed to public view, the soul, too, was held to have been punished by not being granted peace'.⁹² Hoffman is so blinded by his need to be avenged on those responsible for his father's death that he appears to give no thought to his soul. Lorrique also shows no concern for his own soul when he attempts to commit suicide after disclosing to Martha, Lucibella and Mathias how Otho lost his life: *Stage Direction: Lorrique makes to kill himself* (V. i.). Lorrique blames his participation in the crime and others he has committed on 'coward fear' (V. i. 159), but he is thwarted in his attempt at suicide only to live long enough for Hoffman to stab him when close enough to whisper, 'Hark in thy ear' (V. ii. 56) about 'a thing of weight concerns / thee near' (V. ii. 53-54). Lorrique's body will be strung up like a scarecrow alongside the other two bodies on the stage, and will again simulate the crucifixion of Christ with the two thieves either side of him.

Crowns, Revenge and Honour

The symbolic burning crown motif was a popular property to use on the stage in this period and can be seen in the play *The Tragedy of Claudius Tiberius Nero*, discussed in chapter four of this thesis. Christopher Marlowe also uses the crown motif in his play *Edward II* when Edward talks about his crown as being *misplaced power* on the head of Mortimer: 'But, if proud Mortimer do wear this crown, / Heavens turn it to a blaze of quenchless fire!' (V. i. 40-44)⁹³ A burning crown is also mentioned in the anonymous play *Looke about You*, where it is used as a threat:

By heaven put on thy Coronet, or that heaven
Which now with a clear, lends us this light, [*sic*]
Shall not be courtain'd with the vaile of night,
Eare on thy head I clap a burning Crowne,
Of red hot Yron that shall seare thy braines. (Sig. K3)

⁹² Billings, 'Modelling the anatomy theatre', p. 22.

⁹³ J. B. Steane (ed.), *Christopher Marlowe: The Complete Plays* (London: The Penguin Classics, 1986) 'Edward II', p. 509.

Paul Browne believes that Chettle may have been influenced by Marlowe for the burning crown image in his play:

There are several references to burning crowns in plays that may have been familiar to Chettle. One of the earliest is to be found in Marlowe's *Edward II* (c.1592): 'But, if proud Mortimer do wear this crown / Heavens turn it to a blaze of quenchless fire!' V.i.43-4)⁹⁴

However, this may not be the case as Anthony Munday translated the history of Palmerin D'Oliva which also mentions a burning crown and was printed in 1588 and was before Marlowe's *Edward II*:

Chap. VII. How the Prince Maurice came to the Court of the Soldne of Babilon, where he was deliuered of his burning Crowne that tormented him, by the loyaltie of Palmerin. (sig. B11)⁹⁵

And a burning crown is used at the end of Thomas Heywood's play *The Golden Age*, printed in 1611, where Pluto is given a burning crown:

Sound. Pluto drawes hell: the Fates put vpon him a burning Roabe, and present him with a Mace, and burning crowne. (s.d.) 'Pluto's made Emperour of the Ghosts below' (sig. K3).⁹⁶

The symbol of the burning crown can either show a loss of power or be a means of punishment. The burning crown reflects Hoffman's smouldering resentment at the loss of his 'better part' (I. i. 63-4), and also his lack of manly aggression to carry out the revenge he desperately wanted for the death of his father by physically placing the crown on Otho's head himself. By the end of the first Act Hoffman has already exacted revenge on his first victim: 'This scene is done / Father, I offer thee thy murderer's son' (I. i. 230-31). Hoffman offers the spoils of his

⁹⁴ Browne, Paul, 'A source for the 'Burning Crown' in Henry Chettle's *The Tragedy of Hoffman*', *Notes and Queries*, (2004), 51, 3, 297-299, p. 297.

⁹⁵ In 1588, a burning crown was mentioned in the history of Palmerin D'Oliva: Palmerin D'Oliva, *The mirrour of nobilitie, mappe of honor, anotomie of rare fortunes, heroycall president of Loue: VVonder for chiuallrie, and most accomplished knight in all perfections. Presenting to noble mindes, theyr courtlie desire, to gentles, theyr choise expectations, and to the inferior sorte, bowe to imitate theyr vertues: handled vvith modestie to shun offense, yet all delightfull, for retreation.* Written in the Spanish, Italian and French; and from them turned into English by A.M., one of the messengers of her Maiesties chamber. Munday, Anthony, 1553-1633 (Smell-Knave, Simon; Tonie, Sheepheard), (Imprint: At London : I. Charlewood, for William VVright, 1588), B11.

⁹⁶ Thomas Heywood, *The golden age. Or The liues of Iupiter and Saturne, with the deifving of the heathen gods As it hath beene sundry times acted at the Red Bull, by the Queenes Maiesties Seruants*, (London : Nicholas Okes for William Barrenger, 1611).

vengeance to his father, the gift of death to the dead, with the help of his minion Lorrique. Hoffman also used the same crown to kill Otho that was used to kill his father; this sadistic act makes Hoffman no better than the Duke that placed the burning crown upon his father's head in the first place. Hoffman announces that this was 'but the prologue to the ensuing play, / The first step to revenge' (I. i. 229-30); revenge for Hoffman is a journey which he appears to enjoy.

In the early modern period it was believed that all revenge belonged to God, yet, it is ironic that when a man's honour was challenged it was important for that man to protect his honour, as Bowers writes:

There can be little question that an Elizabethan gentleman disregarded without a qualm the ethical and religious opinion of his day in condemnation of revenge, and felt obliged by the more powerful code of honor to revenge personally any injury offered him.⁹⁷

In 1590 Richard Jones ambiguously expressed his opinion on revenge:

And in mine opinion, whosoeuer receiueth an Iniurie in deedes dishonorable offered, is thereby neither dishonored nor burthened: and for reuenge of such cowardlie and beastiall offences, it is allowable to vse any aduantage or subtiltie, according to the Italian prouerbe, *Ad vna sopercheria, si conuiene vn' altra sopercheria, & ad vn tradimento vn altro tradimento*, which is, that one aduantage requireth another, and one treason may be with another acquitted.⁹⁸

Here Jones agrees that if an injury has been committed then it is allowable to seek revenge for the said offence, but he also appears to be advocating using subtlety, treason and even any advantage to gain revenge. Therefore, one could assume that poison may not be out of the question so long as an advantage is gained to secure that revenge. Yet, according to Bowers, 'no matter what the position of the law, it was the method and not the act itself which was called into question'.⁹⁹ So it would appear that it was quite acceptable to face your offender and stab or club him to death or to even acquire a willing lackey to do the job for you, if you were not man enough to perform the deed yourself; but it was quite another matter to kill your victims by

⁹⁷ Fredson Thayer Bowers, 'The Audience and the Revenger of Elizabethan Tragedy', *Studies in Philology*, 31, No. 2, (1934), 160-175. p. 165.

⁹⁸ Richard Jones, *The Booke of Honor and Armes*: (At London: [Thomas Orwin for] Richard Ihones, 1590). p. 20.

⁹⁹ Bowers, 'The Audience and the Revenger', p. 165.

the cowardly means of poison, which went beyond the periphery of acceptable honour. Hoffman declares that if his destinies 'deny me not' then his revenge 'Shall pass those of Thyestes, Tereus, / Jocasta, or duke Jason's jealous wife' (I. iii. 20-21). Here, he compares his own personal tragedy to classical tragedies that concern rape, incest and murder, including a jealous wife, a mother that marries and copulates with her own son, a man that had a son with his own daughter, and another that raped his sister-in-law. Hoffman's own ideas regarding revenge involve disguise, a minion, and poison.

The idea of words and breath used as verbal poison poured being into the ear then entering into the body of another (discussed in the introduction) is used by Chettle through Hoffman. Although a misogynist and unwilling to seek a wife, Mathias embodies the one quality that is lacking in Hoffman, Jerome, and Lorrique, that of masculine bravery. Hoffman disguised as the dead Prince Otho and feigning melancholy, plies Mathias with his poisonous words regarding his brother's fiancée, Lucibella. Like Hamlet and Horatio in *Hamlet*, Hoffman gossips and pours out his lie about Lucibella running away with a Grecian, 'She with a grecian is but new-fled hence' (II. iii. 136). Hoffman adds to this that the Grecian was probably a previous lover of hers: 'Belike some other love of hers before' (II. iii. 137). Chettle reinforces the view that foreigners were hot blooded and licentious lechers, and that women succumb easily to their own sexuality. Mathias's distrust of women is shown in his belief that Lucibella must be at fault, and he is instantly annoyed by the news which makes his brother a cuckold. Mathias prepares for immediate justice, highlighting his sense of family honour: 'If you love honour, princely Luningberg, / Let's to the chapel, if you know the way, / That I may kill our shame ere it see day' (III. iii. 158-160). Mathias shows disbelief that Hoffman saw them go: 'at the sight of such inconstancy / My gentle heart was smit with inward grief / And I sunk down with sorrow' (II. iii. 143-5); Mathias's incredulity that Hoffman did not try to stop the couple is shown in his expletive after hearing Hoffman's admission of cowardice and effeminacy: 's' death'. Mathias immediately believes the female to be the instigator and sets out to follow 'her harlot-steps' (II. iii. 147) so he can kill 'our shame' (II. iii. 160). Mathias is determined to kill his foe without any hesitation, stabbing the sleeping pair immediately upon finding them. He shows all the signs of masculine honour an audience would have understood and recognised, as 'vengeance

for an insult to oneself or a member of one's family is a sacred duty; dereliction of that responsibility is sure to result in divine punishment'.¹⁰⁰

Revenge is also sought by Martha for the murder of her son. As Martha views her son's dead body hanging before her with the burnt crown upon his skull, united in death with the corpse of Hoffman's father, she appears at first to be amused¹⁰¹: 'Let them hang awhile, / Hope of revenge in wrath doth make me smile' (V. i. 208-209). The image of the crown used in *Hoffman* acts as both an instrument of torture and an enforcer of the law. This is demonstrated as Mathias, the Duke of Saxony, Lucibella and Martha all swear vengeance against Hoffman and form a ring around Lorrique as they lay their 'right' hands on his head to form a human crown: 'join hands and ring him around; / Kneel, on his head lay our right hands, and swear / Vengeance against Hoffman' (V. i. 24-26). The language of revenge mimics that of Hoffman at the beginning of the play as Mathias advocates using deceit to accomplish it: 'By sly deceit he acted every wrong, / And by deceit I would have him entrapped; / Then the revenge were fit, just, and square' (V. i. 280-283). Mathias forgoes any earlier honour visible in his character and deals out vengeance against Hoffman in the belief of retribution. Even Chettle's good characters succumb to man's innate need for revenge; Mathias, the Duke of Saxony, Lucibella and Martha are all willing participants in deceit to accomplish the murder of Hoffman.

According to Bowers, quoting from *The Courtiers Academie* (c. 1598) by Count Romei: 'revenge may be undertaken on those who wrong our father, son, brother, friend, and so forth, if the injury was done in contempt of us and through no manifest fault of the injured one'. This sentiment is matched with the belief of the English: 'It is dishonor to reuenge the fathers wronge if he be able to reuenge it personally if he be not the son is bounde to it'.¹⁰² Hoffman's father was a pirate and was killed because of his acts of piracy, informing us that justice according to the law was therefore undertaken. Yet from the beginning of the play Hoffman shows no

¹⁰⁰ Headlam Wells, *Shakespeare On Masculinity*, p. 108.

¹⁰¹ For an explanation of laughing when faced with extreme grief see Matthew Steggle, *Laughing and Weeping in Early Modern Theatres* (Ashgate, 2007), p. 14, and pp. 18-19.

¹⁰² Bowers, *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy*, p. 38.

honour or respect for the law or judicial system. An audience may have understood and accepted certain revenge killings seen on the stage as

blood-revenge shows a very strong undercurrent favouring private justice for murder in Elizabethan times, a sympathy with (and native knowledge of) blood-revenge, and a persistent tradition by which the son, or heir, must take personal cognizance of the murder of his ancestor.¹⁰³

Yet Bowers states that Hoffman's cause

was tainted from the beginning. His father had been legally executed as a pirate, and in spite of the fact that Hoffman vigorously defends his father's deeds in the light of the wrongs he had received, his action in seeking a personal revenge on the legal judges of his father strikes at the very root of the judicial system and could not be condoned. No man had secretly murdered his father; he had been executed in accordance with the law and thus a malefactor who, according to Elizabethan tenets, should not be revenged.¹⁰⁴

The rule on revenge seems to be a complicated one, giving mixed instructions to the revenger.

In 1597 John Norden¹⁰⁵ wrote:

Let no man be deceiued with vaine regard of the preseruati|on, or increase of his honor, by vsurping a law vnto himsefe, to shed the bloud of him, whom the law in euery gouernment (yea of armes) hath power to punish: and which (in stead of the first offender, being reuenged by the offended) inflicteth the lawe iustly vpon him, that might iustly haue craued the law against the other. Vengeance is the Lords, therefore should all men leaue it to him, or to the iudgement seate of his scepter bearer in earth. But he is the most honorable conquerour that freely forgiueth, ouer|comming euill with goodnesse. (sig. 26v)

According to Norden, *all* revenge belonged to God and his anointed one, the king. He clearly refers to the sceptre bearer, the King/Queen, linking the *crown* with honour, forgiveness, and the overcoming of evil. Therefore, all those who are shown to seek revenge in *Hoffman* do not act according to the law of the land; therefore Chettle shows his characters to be as lawless as

¹⁰³ Bowers, *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy*, p. p. 39.

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*, p. 127.

¹⁰⁵ John Norden, *The mirror of honor wherein euerie professor of armes, from the generall, chieftaines and high commanders, to the priuate officer and inferiour souldier, may see the necessitie of the feare and seruice of God, and the vse of all diuine vertues, both in commanding and obeying, practising and proceeding in the most honorable affayres of warre. A treatise most necessarie ...* (London : By the widowe Orwin for Thomas Man, 1597). p. 26.

Hoffman. John Norden¹⁰⁶ even believed that revenge brought trouble on those seeking revenge in the first instance:

... consider the issue of it to bee nothing els but a tragedie of diuellish practises, whereby men runne into their owne ruine by reuenge, as the Aegyptians enuying Israel, did. Reuenge is a braunch springing from the former roote, which taken as it is in it owne nature, is a desire to requite an euill receiued, by returning an euill againe, which hath some colour to worke iniurie, for iniurie. But such is the iniustice of enuie, that it boyleth with the furious heate of malice against innocent vertue, which carrieth no shape or resemblance, neither of valour, which consisteth in maintaining a iust quarrell, nor of reuenge, as it is truly reuenge: for that it seeketh to iniure such as iniure not. He is a simple man that enuieth and cannot pretend matter to beare colour of lawfull reuenge. But farre be it from a Commander, because it blindeth Iustice, and peruerteth Iudgement. (sig. 24v)

The idea of an evil returning an evil is demonstrated in Hoffman's excessive desire for revenge, which comes full circle like the image of the crown. Mathias justifies settling his score with Hoffman's own death as an 'iniure, for [an] iniure' and the characters that appear good, honourable and just on the outside all appear to show tainted and contaminated natures within. Chettle did not advocate in his play all that the emblem of the crown stood for, which Norden believed in; instead, he uses the burnt-out crown as a symbol of corruption and death.

Effeminacy and Homoeroticism

There appear several occasions in the play when some of the males are portrayed as less manly than other male characters. Chettle's Hoffman may mouth the words of a warrior but at the same time shows a lack of courage that is needed to be one. The use of a minion was a fashionable device in revenge tragedies, highlighting the lack of manhood of those seeking the revenge in the first place. From the start effeminate behaviour is shown in both Hoffman and Otho as they both shed tears and weep; Otho, when faced with death, prompts Hoffman to ask, 'What, do you weep?' (I. i. 194). Hoffman then sadistically has Lorrique bind Otho's 'coward trembling hands' 9I. i. 212) with cords, while he (Hoffman) watches him die in 'torture above measure!' (I. i. 209). Hoffman confesses when hearing the very name of his father that it

¹⁰⁶ Norden, *The mirror of honor*, p. 24.

'dissolves my eyes to tears' (I. i. 61). Hoffman's effeminacy is shown in his weeping but also in his ability to prepare food, as he asks Lorrique to 'Bring forth the homely cakes these hands prepared' (I. i. 144), despite the fact that it was usually 'women [who were] typically entrusted with food preparation'¹⁰⁷. Here Hoffman plays the role of the subservient woman showing off his hosting skills to his guest. Effeminacy is also prominent as Hoffman gives Lorrique a kiss with his 'soft lips' (I. i. 133):

Faithful Lorrique in your unfaithfulness:
I kiss your cheek, and give thee in that kiss
The moiety of all my earthly bliss. (II. iii. 15 - 16)

The kiss bonds the two men and goes beyond being just homosocial. Being intimate with other male characters seems an essential part of Hoffman's character, but Chettle shows that the act of being physical is also linked to sadism, shown in Hoffman's request that Lorrique must be able to 'kiss and kill, embrace and stab' (I. i. 80). This highlights Hoffman's association of the giving of affection with pain.

I suggest that Hoffman's sexual perversity for giving pain is demonstrated when he chains his father's body, and also at Lorrique's death. Hoffman desires Lorrique to be close enough to him to whisper in his ear before he gives him agonising pain by stabbing him, and also when he ties Otho's hands before his death. The hanging by chains of his father's corpse to a tree - 'Behold a father hanged up by his son!' (I. i. 184) - is a further example of how pain is linked to pleasure for Hoffman. He is presented as tactile and fond of intimacy, evident in his preference for holding hands and walking with those close to him. The language is charged with homoeroticism, as seen in Hoffman's language: 'Oh my dear Lorrique ... / Thus thy hand clasped in mine, we'll walk and meditate' (I. iii. 81/85); it would seem by the word 'thus' that their hands are already clasped together. Hoffman promises his dead father that they will 'hand in hand / walk to paradise' (I. i. 21-22), and when feigning the identity of Otho, the prince of Lunenberg, Hoffman holds hands at the request of the effeminate Jerome: 'Give me your hand' (III. ii. 136). Chettle does not shy away from body intimacy between male characters on

¹⁰⁷ Pollard, *Drugs and Theater*, p. 9.

the stage, which makes *Hoffman* different from *Hamlet*. Christopher Marlowe uses unambiguous language to expose the homoerotic closeness between the king and his minion Gaveston as Lancaster tells Warwick and Mortimer - the elder and the younger - 'Thus, arm in arm, the king and he doth march'¹⁰⁸ (I. ii. 20). Marlowe likens the king's new favourite, Spenser (the younger), to that of a strangling ivy: 'That from your princely person you remove / This Spenser, as a putrifying branch / That deads the royal vine, whose golden leaves / Empale your princely head, your diadem' (III. iii. 164-167). Mario DiGangi states that

the peers' imagery of parasitical corruption obscures the fact that Renaissance emblems of intertwined limbs and branches do not transparently or even primarily signify disorder. To the contrary, the vine embracing the elm is a common emblem of mutual love within marriage or male friendship. The rebellious peers translate this image of virtuous love into a putative sign of Gaveston's parasitical sodomy.¹⁰⁹

A decade after Marlowe, Chettle proves to be a radical and innovative playwright by having his male actors perform as males holding hands and openly kissing and hugging on the stage.

Chettle also exhibits intimacy between his the male characters through the language they share. The words in which Hoffman addresses Lorrique imply intimacy and affection: 'precious villain' (II. iii. 99); 'faithful servant' (II. iii. 105); the 'minion of my thoughts, friend to my love' (I. i. 96). Hoffman tells Lorrique: 'I'll seat thee by my throne of state' (II. iii. 87), and calls him 'Oh my dear self' (III. i. 252), showing his desire for closeness. With the death of Lorrique in Act V, Hoffman again shows that pleasure and pain come as one to him. Like all male poisoners Hoffman is sneaky and sly; his request that Lorrique be able to 'embrace and stab' is mirrored in the way Hoffman kills Lorrique. Lorrique is drawn close to Hoffman ('Oh my good villain! / How I hug thy plots' [IV. ii. 142]) as Lorrique reassures him that 'this breast is yours, / My heart's your treasury' (IV. ii. 151-2), before telling Hoffman: 'Oh slave, tha'st killed thy heart in wounding mine' (IV. ii. 161). The killing of Lorrique is the only murder with physical violence we actually witness Hoffman taking part in; the death of Lorrique is a

¹⁰⁸ J. B. Steane (ed.), *Edward II, Christopher Marlowe: The Complete Plays* (London: The Penguin Classics, 1986).

¹⁰⁹ DiGangi, *The Homoerotics Of Early Modern Drama*, p. 113.

physical act shared between the two men. By portraying effeminate males on the stage as vindictive, secretive, menacing, betrayers of trust and friendship, and callous poisoning murderers, playwrights highlight the potential dangers of the effeminate male as a target for hate and mistrust. It seems almost ironic that Chettle should therefore include a very masculine theme to his play by introducing jousting.

Jousting, Chivalry and Jerome

The notion of chivalric values was re-kindled by Robert Devereux 2nd earl of Essex (1565-1601), who wanted to restore military values. Robin Headlam Wells states that 'chivalry placed paramount emphasis on the masculine virtues of physical courage and military prowess as the guarantors of justice and honour'.¹¹⁰ Bruce Smith notes that chivalry 'engages all the dynamics of male bonding,' and that 'chivalry inspires a man to individual action, to the achievement of personal glory; on the other, it enjoins his loyalty to other members of his order of knighthood'.¹¹¹ Therefore, hidden under the outward show of masculinity, courage and honour that tilting, jousting and tournaments offered to males, they also publicly encouraged homosocial interaction between males and at the same time masked homoerotic male-male attachments.

Jerome is portrayed as a young male that is desperately reliant on the approbation of his father, the Duke of Prussia. He shows pain and distress at being discarded and replaced in his father's affections by another and very different 'son', who appears on the surface to be better suited to the masculine ideologies that are promoted in the play. The character of Jerome is openly presented by Chettle as an effeminate male, jealous and emotionally immature, as a coward and a callous poisoner. Nevertheless, the role of Jerome involved the actor being able to deliver some elements of comedy. Miranda Wilson gives a glimpse into the personality of the poisoner

¹¹⁰ Headlam Wells, *Shakespeare on Masculinity*, p.11.

¹¹¹ Bruce R. Smith, *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare's England: A Cultural Poetics* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 129.

by suggesting that although poisoners were to be feared they were also capable of having feelings:

While poisoners can function as nightmare images of the period's worst fears of the foreign, the feminine, the secret, and the invisible, when it comes to temporality, these would-be murders also express the same unfulfilled desires as many privileged, normative, and presumably non-murderous Englishmen and women.¹¹²

Jerome is a good example of Wilson's poisoner: on the one hand he appears almost child-like and naïve; on the other, he changes into a ruthless killer.

Jerome's immature manhood and emotional insecurity is demonstrated in his attempt at a masculine activity. In the play Jerome would like to become a tilter: 'You know I must be a tilter' (II. i. 1-2), he informs his man servant, but not because he wants to prove or show masculine prowess at the tournament joust, but because Jerome wishes to be reconciled in the affection of his father's bosom. In Act II Jerome is desperate to please his father; it is here that we learn that his father has coldly disinherited Jerome for the simple reason that he is 'witless and insufficient' (II. i. 52). The word 'insufficient'¹¹³ draws attention to Jerome's masculine inadequacies and his lack of aptitude; this is the reason why his father is so disappointed with him: he is inadequate as a *man*. Ferdinand tells his son:

Peace, thou unshapen honour, my state's shame
My age's corsive, and my black sins' curse!
Oh thou never been, I had been then
A happy childless man; (I. ii. 38-41)

This shows the father's shame and disgust at his son's lack of intellect and masculine valour. Ferdinand clearly defines his thoughts on what he holds to be important in the masculine world of the play, and it is not an 'unshapen', ill-formed manhood. Jerome is seen as corrosive and dangerous by his father; he is the product of his father's 'black sins', which not only show his father's virility, but also his lack of moral principles; Jerome is a curse, a child that should never have been born. So strong is Ferdinand's belief in manly honour that he wears 'sable

¹¹² Miranda Wilson, 'Watching Flesh: poison and the fantasy of temporal control in Renaissance England', *Renaissance Studies*: 27 No. 1, (2013), p. 99.

¹¹³ *O.E.D.* 1a, 2a.

ornaments' (I. ii. 45) because his son is a 'witless fool' (I. ii. 50); an embarrassment to have around the court. Here Ferdinand wears the colour of mourning for his idiot son; like Hamlet in his 'inky cloak' (I. ii. 77). Chettle parodies *Hamlet*: Jerome informs the audience that he is 'no fool, [and that he has] been at Whittenburg, where wit grows' (I. ii. 34); yet he is made to play the fool of the play by Chettle. Jonathan Sawday asserts that 'in the Renaissance court, ... not only a man's prowess at arms, his lands, his horse, his armour, his scholarship, and his wealth, were to be displayed, but also his mistress';¹¹⁴ Jerome is shown to disappoint on all these counts.

Jousting at tournaments was a good way to demonstrate masculine prowess and manly valour; yet Jerome demonstrates none of the essential qualities needed to perform chivalric deeds. In fact Jerome's servant, Stilt, despairs of trying to teach Jerome for the tournament and he points out to Jerome that as he 'cannot fit a hobby, [he]'ll hardly / manage [his own] tilt-horse' (II. i. 6-7). A hobby-horse was a small horse or pony probably used to train children to ride, certainly not a horse of the height, strength or power needed to carry a knight in full armour. Jerome hides his cowardice and sensitivity for tilting and riding under the guise of concern for the horse and its tack: 'I have determined with my self, not to run at tilt, least I hazard my horse and harness' (II. i. 19). This unmanly sentimentality in language and attitude shows weakness and effeminacy that is quite the opposite of what is required to joust on a large war horse; Jerome shows no masculine virtues, physical courage or the military prowess needed for jousting. Evidence of Jerome's effeminate nature and lack of manliness is also evident when he gives Mathias his glove as a token of offence against his manhood instead of a gauntlet: 'there's my glove for a gauntlet' (I. ii. 70). This is given as a challenge to Mathias's attempt to win Lucibella at the tournament. The relevance here is the difference between a glove and a gauntlet, as the gauntlet goes back to medieval chivalry when a knight in full armour would have worn a 'glove' over chain-mail that was made from leather and covered with plates of steel held together by rivets. The gauntlet would have been very heavy to wear and a necessary protection for warriors fighting in hand-to-hand combat as their wrists and hands would have been exposed, making them vulnerable. In Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part 2*, after hearing the

¹¹⁴ Jonathan Sawday, p. 203.

news of his son's death, the Earl of Northumberland says: 'A scaly gauntlet now with joints of steel / Must glove this hand' (I. i. 147). A gauntlet summons images of masculine toughness and manly valour. A 'glove' was a covering for the hand and was not made of steel; its purpose was to protect the hand from the cold or to look attractive. I suggest that the glove Jerome is wearing and challenges Mathias with is made of soft cloth, the type a female may have worn. This is shown in Middleton and Rowley's *The Changeling*, in De Flores' double entendre when he stoops to pick up the dropped glove of Beatrice Joanna: 'Now I know / She had rather wear my pelt tanned in a pair / Of dancing pumps, than I should thrust my fingers / Into her sockets here'¹¹⁵ (I. i. 229-32). It is also evident in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* when Romeo, watching Juliet on her balcony placing her hand on her cheek, says, 'See how she leans her cheek upon her hand. / O that I were a glove upon that hand, / That I might touch that cheek'¹¹⁶ (II. ii. 23-25); Romeo does not talk of a knight's heavy gauntlet of steel in this scene.

In Act II, in the disguise of Otho and feigning melancholy (like Hamlet), Mathias asks Hoffman if he is in 'meditation / Which part to take tomorrow at the tilt?' (II. iii. 116). Mathias proceeds encouragingly: 'Cheerily Prince Otho there's such a warlike sight / That would stir up a leaden heart to fight' (II. iii. 23-4). Hoffman then asks, 'For what?' (II. iii. 25), and Mathias replies, 'For honour' (II. iii. 26). Neither Hoffman nor Jerome show any interest in the manly sport of tilting; instead we are told that the effeminate Jerome would rather retire to his castle and finish a poem that has occupied his thoughts and time for the past 'ten years ... in praise of picktooths' (II. i. 22-23). Jerome's lengthy quest to finish the poem on the tooth-pick could be seen as another failed attempt at proving his manhood at the joust, as the tooth-pick resembles a miniature lance or spear, and, as knights jostled with lances between nine and fourteen feet in length, the toothpick seems to be a more manageable size for Jerome.

Further evidence of unmanly behaviour comes from Jerome's vanity when he commissions Stilt to help him with his appearance and help him 'set [his] countenance right to the mirror of

¹¹⁵ Joost Dallier, (ed.), Thomas Middleton and William Rowley: *The Changeling* (The New Mermaids, A&C Black Publishers 1990).

¹¹⁶ Brian Gibbons, (ed.), *The Arden Edition of William Shakespeare; Romeo and Juliet* (London: The Arden Shakespeare 2002).

knight-hood' (II. i. 37-8). He encourages Stilt to sprinkle him from his 'casting bottle'¹¹⁷ (II. i. 40) to help him smell more pleasant. Furthermore, by his own admission, he is 'able to entertain / A gentleman though I say't, and he be of any quality' (III. ii. 93-4); the language shows Jerome's effeminacy and also suggests homoerotic relationships. Jerome's effeminised obsession with his appearance is reflected in Hoffman's readiness to be flattered in Act V, when Lorrique is party to the trap that will capture him. Lorrique advises Martha: 'with fair words his flatteries entertain' (V. i. 299). John Norden links flattery with both poison and disguise:

If flatterie were plainly layd foorth before our eyes in it right shape (howsoeuer it appeare being couered and cloaked like loue) it would bee seene a pestilent deuourer of vertuous thoughts: for it is a spirituall poysen, an inuisible murtherer, a pleasing voyce, whereby aspiring hearts are vnawares wounded, and enchanted: it beguileth the minde with vaine conceit of things that neither are, nor will bee. It promiseth life, but practiseth death, and worketh vpon the highest and greatest, changing it selfe into what behaiour, manners, guize and quality, be it vice or vertue, that the obiect imbraceth: it giueth a dissimulate eccho to euery sound: it boweth and bendeth, it standeth stout and becomes mute, according to the president of the obiect. Insomuch, as were it possible, the flatterer could transforme his shape into the shape of him whom hee flattereth, yea hee would seeme content to dismember himselfe for imitations sake: (sig. 27r)

Behind Lorrique's poisonous words of flattery is his strong desire to live; Chettle shows both Hoffman and Lorrique flattering each other whilst hiding their toxic natures. Toxicity of character is highlighted through Jerome's weak and effeminate nature; Lorrique's foreignness and also in his disguise as a French physician when he administers poison to Jerome.

Poison and Foreigners

In Revenge tragedies poison is synonymous with securing vengeance and is shown as the weapon to empower cowardly males. Poison enables weak and unmanly males to determine the time and the place of their victim's death. It also allows poisoners to safely watch their grisly deed unsuspected from a safe distance, like an audience member. The act of poisoning involves

¹¹⁷ *OED*: 5. casting-bottle, a bottle for sprinkling perfumed waters.

villainy, and Lorrique confesses he has an inherited villainy in his blood: 'Villainy is my only patrimony' (I. i. 85 - 86). This suggests that Lorrique's father had also been a villain. Henry Goodcole¹¹⁸ writes on how nefarious murder by poison actually is:

THough there be sundry sorts of Murtherers with their severall degrees, as open, or secret, acted upon a friend, a stranger, or ones selfe, yet in my opinion, know not any of them which containes so much villany, neither including so many deepe circumstances in them, as that of poisoning. (sig. B4v)

Lorrique displays all the classic traits of the male poisoner: he is a loner with no mention of family ties; he is not married and has no love interest in the play; he has no loyalty to his previous master or to his present one, and shows no empathy for his victims. Lorrique's low social status within the play allows Hoffman to take advantage and to use him as his tool for revenge by using poison.

Chettle establishes poison as the weapon of weak males when Hoffman, Lorrique, and Jerome turn to the toxicity to achieve death. Jerome is presented as emotionally reliant on the approval of his father, who 'disinherits' (II. i. 52) him in favour of the usurper Hoffman who is disguised as Otho of Luningberg. Feeling dejected Jerome's thoughts soon turn to murder and poison; although Jerome is not a physically violent character, he does show a violent depth to his nature, hoping to see 'red revenge in robes of fire and madding / mischief run and rave' (II. i. 67-8). The tone of his language appears threatening here, but Jerome's brief spark of manly rage soon disappears when he wishes for 'courage [to] enter in' (II. i. 69) where it is not. Jerome informs the audience that he needs to take instruction from his 'notes of Machiavel', an Italian who 'hath driven even honesty from / all men's hearts' (II. i. 71-72) and advocated appearing as one thing and being another: 'Nevertheless it is of great consequence to disguise your inclination, and to play the Hypocrite well'.¹¹⁹ Jerome takes his lesson from Machiavel and conceals his

¹¹⁸ Henry Goodcole, *The adultrresses funerall day in flaming, scorching, and consuming fire, or, The burning downe to ashes of Alice Clarke, late of Vxbridge in the county of Middlesex, in West-smith-field on Wensday the 20 of May, 1635 for the unnaturall poisoning of Fortune Clarke her husband a breviary of whose confession taken from her owne mouth is here unto annexed, as also what she sayd at the place of her execution / by her daily visiter H.G. in life and death ; and now published by authority and commaund.* 1635 published by authority and command, London : Printed by N. and I. Okes, dwelling in Well-yard in little St. Bartholmews, neare unto the Lame Hospitall gate, 1635.

¹¹⁹ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The works of the famous Nicholas Machiavel, citizen and secretary of Florence written originally in Italian, and from thence newly and faithfully translated into English* (London : Printed for John Starkey, Charles Harper, and John Amery, 1680), p. 233.

intentions from all but Stilt his man servant, who calls Hoffman / Otho 'an arrant alien!' (III. ii. 99) and encourages him to take the poisons from Lorrique disguised as a French doctor: 'That were excellent, my lord, and it could be done, and nobody know on't' (III. ii. 238-239). However, in Act III, Jerome is unable to distinguish between the poison that he acquires from that of the medicine. As Lorrique (disguised as a French doctor) hands him over two bottles (s.d: *Gives him two potions*), Jerome enquires: 'This is the poison then, and this is the medicine?' (III. ii. 249). Ironically, the acquiring of the poison will also act as a medicine to Jerome, as it will cure his desire to have Otho dead.

Chettle reinforces fears of foreigners as Jerome eagerly takes the poison bottles from Lorrique disguised as a French doctor. In 1612 John Cotta¹²⁰ warned of taking poison in the disguise of medicine from false doctors:

Quacksaluers, bankrupt apothecaries, and fugitiue Surgeons euery where ouer traueilling the face of this kingdome, hunted by want of riot from place to place, are oft compelled to insinuate and creepe into the fauour of many meane people; and in their necessity do sell for gaine and entertainment, and in their prodigality for lust and loue, these generose and noble secrets carrying on the outside the titles of famous medicines, and being within infamous poysons. (sg. 34r)

By concealing Lorrique's identity under the guise of a French doctor¹²¹, Chettle associated the foreigner with syphilis, strengthening the potential danger the 'other' carried. Margaret Healey states that 'Syphilis first appeared in Europe as an epidemic of dangerous proportions when the French invaded Naples in 1494; in Italy they called it the French disease'.¹²² Writing about the use of French doctors on the stage, Lord McNair Q.C. confirms the dislike of foreigners and especially of French doctors: 'What the French Doctor did and why he was amusing, we do not know, but the popular dislike of foreign physicians was growing, and it is always easy to make a

¹²⁰ Cotta, John, *A short discoverie of the vnobserued dangers of seuerall sorts of ignorant and vnconsiderate practisers of physicke in England profitable not onely for the deceiued multitude, and easie for their meane capacities, but raising reformed and more aduised thoughts in the best vnderstandings: with direction for the safest election of a physition in necessitie*, (London: Imprinted [by R. Field] for William Iones, and Richard Boyle, 1612).

¹²¹ For a detailed discussion on the use of the French doctor on the Renaissance stage see the article: 'Why is the Doctor in the Merry Wives of Windsor Called Caius?' by Lord McNair, Q. C. n.d. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1033978/pdf/medhist00137-0008.pdf>

¹²² Margaret Healy, 'The Body in Renaissance Studies', *Renaissance Studies*, 25 (2011), Issue 5, pp.716-719. 717.

foreigner on the stage look a fool'.¹²³ In their article 'Contagion and Blame in Early Modern England: The Case of the French Pox', Louis Qualtiere and William Slights blame immoral sexual activity as the cause:

Insular Englishmen were especially quick to point an accusing finger at their traditional enemies across the Channel. The French, in particular, were attractive scapegoats, given stereotypes of their lasciviousness and general decadence. ... the pox was generally held to be a direct consequence of lewd behavior.¹²⁴

I suggest that there is a link between the representation of the French doctor peddling his poison and the debilitating disease that attacks the heart of a man's manhood that renders him impotent.

Doctors were usually in a position of trust and therefore should not have generated feelings of foreboding, but as Tanya Pollard states, 'doctors were widely feared as duplicitous, unreadable, and protean figures, with the dangerous capacity to poison rather than heal'.¹²⁵ Chettle not only fuels a xenophobic mistrust of foreigners in this play, but at the same time he spotlights the other 'other' - the effeminate male poisoner - as dangerous and poisonous through the characters of Jerome, Hoffman, and Lorrique. In the 1600s Henry Goodcole¹²⁶ warned about concealing poison under the guise of medicine, or even trying to conceal the deed from the eye of God:

Modus posterior, Celando, obtegendo, by a secret intent to hide it [poison] and conceale it from God if it were possible, so it is to the Patient under the shadow of some Physicke, or other medicine, coloured with an outward shew of an honest intent, and as far as they can from the Publick Magistrate; or else to make a distance of time, either to excuse themselves, or flye away from the hands of Justice. (sig. B4v)

By the very nature of poison it is understandable that poisoners believed they could get away with the crime of poisoning. What better way to do this than to be disguised as a trusted doctor who can prescribe medicine and then lace it with poison? Unlike Hoffman, Jerome only wants

¹²³ McNair, Q. C., 'Why is the Doctor', p. 318.

¹²⁴ Louis F. Qualtiere, and William W. E. Slights, 'Contagion and blame in early modern England: the case of the French pox'. *Literature and Medicine* (22:1) 2003, pp. 1-24, n.p.

¹²⁵ Pollard, *Drugs and Theater*, p. 26.

¹²⁶ Goodcole, *The adultrresses funerall day*.

to poison Hoffman / Otho, and is horrified when the French doctor / Lorrique suggests that his father drink from the poisoned cup of wine too: 'What, poison my father? no, I like not that so well' (III. ii. 242). Wine has been a favourite drink in which to disguise poison for centuries, and the link between Catholicism, wine and the taking of the holy sacrament is an obvious one. Wine stands as a token of bonhomie, generosity and friendship, and at the same time it can hide poison and death. Jerome's masculine weakness is highlighted when he chooses to use poison to gain power and control over his male rival for his father's love and affection. Through the character of Jerome, Chettle associates weak, cowardly males with poison, which reinforces fears of emasculating male reputations. He also implies through the character of Jerome that the effeminate male is gullible and unintelligent.

Lorrique as a French doctor uses his disguise to successfully placate the fears of the cowardly Jerome concerning the drinking of the poisoned wine. Lorrique assures Jerome that although they will be sick and have to endure the symptoms of poisoning he will then give them (Jerome and Lorrique) an antidote to the poison so not to raise any suspicion:

You shall drink too, and I too, and when wee be sick,
we shall have a petit rumble in da belly; dan take a dis same,
and give your fadra dis, but your cousin none of it, and be
gar nobody shall be dead, and kicka, and cry 'oh!' - but
Otho. (III. ii. 243-7)

Jerome is swiftly satisfied with the 'doctor's' explanation: 'Well Physician, attend my chamber here, till Stilt and I return; and if I pepper him not, say I am not worthy to be called a Duke, but a drawlatch¹²⁷' (III. ii. 152). Jerome is unsuccessful at poisoning the disguised Hoffman (as Otho) but he does succeed in committing patricide by poisoning his own father, Ferdinand, who exclaims, 'Why, this is deadly poison unprepared!' (IV. i. 141) and gives details of how this quick acting poison affects him:

Call no Physicians, for I feel't too late,

¹²⁷ *O.E.D.* 3. Applied opprobriously, esp. to a lazy laggard † 'drawlatch v. Obs. (intr.) to sneak, shuffle, lag behind. 1599 T. Nashe Lenten Stuffe 60 Bawwaw quoth Bagshaw to that which drawlacheth behinde.

The subtle poison mingled with my blood
Numbs all the passages, and nimble death
Fleets on his purple currents to my heart. (IV. i. 160-3)

As the poison 'fleets' through Ferdinand's blood it again brings to mind Shakespeare's play when Old Hamlet describes the poison racing 'swift as quicksilver [as] it courses through / The natural gates and alleys of [his] body' (I. v. 66-67). Poison is swift to bring death, but it also carries other connotations as the incompetent Jerome manages to poison himself: 'I have peppered myself' (IV. i. 154). The word 'peppered'¹²⁸ means not only to have sexual intercourse but to infect with a venereal disease, which is apt considering the the doctor is French and the connection has already been made with syphilis. As the toxic mixture descends into Jerome's body he declares that he feels 'a jumbling worse and worse' (IV. i. 136), before telling his father that he is 'dying too'. Poison does not allow death to come easy to the victim; first they will have to endure the agonies of a mock pregnancy. As soon as the poison is inside the body it takes on a life of its own and as it takes hold the victim will begin to feel nauseous, 'when wee be sick', as do many females in the first few weeks of pregnancy; they will then have to endure acute abdominal pain and excruciating cramps in the lower body area like the contractions felt when giving birth: '[a] rumble in da belly'. And as the poison grows and spreads it will 'kicka' the victim making them "cry 'oh!'" like a child quickening in the womb. In this scene Chettle diverges from Shakespeare's use of poison, and treats the serious crime of poisoning with levity; Marlowe also used a certain kind of comic humour with Barabas in *The Jew of Malta*. Through ludicrously comic language, Chettle reveals that poison is given life by the actions of the poisoner; consummation with the victim's body is needed to activate its deadly properties and allow it to mutate into a lethal kind of life-form. I suggest that poison has the power to transform male victims into gestating females before they are released from their agony by death.

¹²⁸ *O.E.D.* pepper, v., a. To have sexual intercourse with. Obs., b. To infect with venereal disease. Obs.

Misogyny and Females

Misogyny can be found in most revenge tragedies from this period and in *Hoffman* misogyny can be found in the language of Mathias. Mathias tells his brother Lodowick that only 'a fool would strive to win a wife' (II. iii. 165), as he describes Lucibella to him contemptuously:

She is as harlots: fair, like gilded tombs;
Goodly without, within all rottenness.
She's like a painted fire upon a hill,
Set to allure the frost-nipped passengers,
And starve them after hop. She is indeed
As all such strumpets are, Angel in show,
Devil in heart. (II. iii. 172-8)

Mathias views women as harbingers of death: an Eve before the fall, and a demon after. His analogy of woman equates to that of the poisoned apple, 'Goodly without' but 'all rottenness' within, tempting on the outside but polluted and deadly on the inside. Mathias's misogynistic opinion of women, that they are all just immense disappointments and as deadly as poison itself, links the female with the effeminate male poisoner. The idea of the female being poisonous to males is shown through the characters of Martha and Lucibella; this idea is reinforced by both women bringing death by association to the males they have contact with. Martha's son Otho is murdered because he is her son; once Lorrique has confessed Hoffman's plot to Martha he tries to take his own life and is then stabbed by Hoffman; Hoffman's lust for Martha brings about his death at the end of the play; and Lucibella's betrothed, Lodowick, is murdered in his sleep.

Though Chettle presents Hoffman, Jerome and Lorrique as cowards, he reverses gender expectations by presenting Lucibella and Martha as strong and brave (as does John Webster in *The White Devil*, another play that presents males as poisoners and women as strong, forceful and determined). Lucibella becomes the protector of the male when Lodowick is rendered powerless because he feels tired and weary: 'To rest my toiled head on your tender knee; / My chin with sleep is to my bosom bowed' (III. i. 36). Lodowick is presented as selfish; he thinks

of his own needs as he uses Lucibella's 'tender knee' as a cushion for his head: 'Oh, I am blest / By this soft pillow where my head doth rest' (III. i. 47-48); engrossed in his own weariness and comfort he tells Lucibella to 'do what you please' (III. i. 46). Chettle presents Lucibella as valiant, brave and unselfish: 'No, I'll be sentinel; / I'll watch for fear / Of venomous worms, or wolves, or wolvisch thieves' (III. i. 39-40). Lodowick's lack of manly virtues is evident enough, and like a mollycoddled boy he demands: 'I am drowsy, sing I pray' (III. i. 46); he not only wants to use her body as a tool for his own comfort but also uses Lucibella like a surrogate mother figure. Lucibella's selfless actions emasculate and effeminate Lodowick; at the same time Lucibella masculinises her own female body. This is reinforced after the murder of Lodowick when she dons his male clothes: 'The apparel was my lord's, your princely son's' (V. i. 142). Martha declares that she trembles at the sight of the female before her in her son's attire: 'Run my life's blood; comfort my troubled heart, / That trembles at the sight of this attire' (V. i. 135-6). Women in poison plot plays are usually shown as strong characters, with masculine qualities such as bravery and being level headed and are also able to emasculate a male.

In Act IV we see Hoffman lust after the mother of the dead Otho, Martha the Duchess, only to act at the moment of truth like an awkward adolescent. Martha not only adopts Hoffman as her own son but gives him her dead son's name: 'I here adopt thee mine; christen thee Otho, / Mine eyes are now the font, the water tears, / That do baptize thee in thy borrowed name' (IV. ii. 205-7). The language Martha uses - baptise, font, water and the giving of a name - all mock the language of holy baptism and the cleansing of sins. Martha bestows upon herself the role of the divine maternity and becomes priest, saviour and madonna, mother of mothers, and in this role is indistinguishable from that which is revered, since even her name is Biblical; but Martha is not *Mary* - mother of God / Jesus - she is a lesser Mary. Martha becomes the one symbol of female perfection a man should never have carnal thoughts for, his own mother, and by doing so Hoffman contaminates and poisons what should be revered.

Hoffman's desire to fornicate with the mother figure of the play, Martha, shows his corrupt nature. Hoffman's plan to rape Martha in his cave is a callous act of violence that contrasts with the open affection he shows towards Lorrique at certain points in the play. Hoffman's sudden desire for Martha appears like a desperate attempt to verify and establish his manhood, but his clumsy language exposes his inexperience:

But, new made mother, there's another fire
Burns in this liver; lust, and hot desire
Which you must quench. Must? ay, and shall: I know
Women will like however they say no (IV, ii. 218-221)

The tone of his language is petulant and demanding: reminiscent of the language already used to avenge the death of his father. Hoffman admits he has 'Lawless heats that burn' (V. iii. 84) within him and his aggressive nature is brought to the fore once again when he says that he will, if necessary, resort to 'lawless' rape and 'if she deny, / Force her' (IV. ii. 224-5). Lorrique too encourages Hoffman to be a man:

Now when you have her near your dismal cave,
Force her, I do't man, make no scruple do't,
Else you shall never win her to your bed:
Do a man's part, please her before she go,
Or if you see, that she turns violent,
Shut her perpetual prisoner in that den;
Make her a Philomel, prove Tereus:
Do't never fear it. (V. ii. 121-128)

Like all male poisoners Hoffman, Jerome, and Lorrique are defiant of the law, either man's or God's, and they create their own justice based on deceit and lies, fuelled by their own poisonous natures. Lorrique's misogynistic and ruthless advice to make Martha a 'perpetual prisoner' and to 'Make her a Philomel' (also used in *The Tragedy of Tiberius Nero*) shows his callous nature, as he advises Hoffman to 'prove [a] Tereus' advocating cruel violation of the feared female body. Lorrique advises the inexperienced Hoffman to 'Do a man's part', implying that the taking of the 'man's' part is not something Hoffman is used to doing, and advises Hoffman 'Do't never fear it'; the 'it' presumably implies to the act of copulation, but could also refer to

the female body or the rape itself. Lorrique's vile advocacy of rape only verifies his lack of emotion, seen previously with the murder of Otho, the poisoning of Jerome, and Jerome's father, Duke Ferdinand. It would seem that Hoffman fears being physical with a female and experiencing 'yet ... unseen sports' (V. iii. 83). However, Hoffman's masculine honour cannot be fulfilled and goes unrealised, because when faced with the opportunity, he is unable to perform a 'man's part' and his language turns once again into boyish bravado as he commands Martha to 'Yield to my love' (V. iii. 79). He also warns her not to arouse his anger because it will be 'more wild than wrath'. Yet we do not *see* his wrath; again, we only ever hear of it through his words. At this point in the play Chettle had the opportunity to portray Hoffman as a heterosexual male but instead portrays him as a male intimidated by a female. All Hoffman accomplishes in this scene is for Martha to 'sit and chat' and 'steal / loves hidden pleasures' (V. iii. 108). Martha's description of the cave is that 'It is frequentless for the use of men: / Some basilisks', or poisonous serpents', den!' (V. i. 84-85); but the only serpent hoping to quench 'lawless heates' (V. iii. 84) is Hoffman.

The 'dismal cave' is to Hoffman a refuge and a sanctuary away from the rules and boundaries that govern the lawful world beyond. Hoffman uses the cave to hide and plot revenge in; it is also a secret place that allows him the freedom to engage in savage fantasies of rape. Although caves can symbolise female genitalia, wombs, and new life, for Hoffman the cave does not yield to his desire. Instead Hoffman's cave represents the unexplored, the dangerous, the opening to the unknown, sexual encounters and the promise of manly prowess. Hoffman's fancy to be the beast within the cave devouring the maiden fails because he is unable to unleash the beast within himself, unlike Mathias who becomes a 'savage beast' when he stabs Lucibella with his sword: 'Some savage beast hath fixed his ruthless fang / Into my soft body' (III. i. 68-67). The language used by Lucibella to highlight Mathias's ruthless masculinity and violent action also carries suggestions of rape; the violent force felt by Lucibella upon her body by the thrusting sword contrasts with the non-action of Hoffman. The reality for Hoffman is that Martha has become the frightening monster to his cowardly attempts at rape. Intimate sexual contact with the female is the opposing force which Hoffman cannot overcome. Plus, by wanting to fornicate with the mother figure, he goes into the murky realms of incest, as Martha's shocked

enquiry confirms: 'What, my adopted son become my lover?' (V. iii. 85). The raping of Martha would have verified Hoffman's manhood and heterosexuality, therefore disempowering Martha. Martha transforms into the monster, and instead of being ravished by Hoffman she has emasculated him, proving his manhood to be void. The cave that was to turn him into a sexual predator and a devourer of women now becomes a place of sexual danger for him.

Conclusion

The Tragedy of Hoffman, or the Revenge for a Father is a play that consists of complex disguises, impersonations and murders that all shape the dramatic action. Chettle was not afraid to shock; he gave his audience members a gruesome spectacle of death by not only using a skull but incorporating the whole skeleton onto the stage. He portrayed his male poisoners as openly effeminate and brazenly showed them enjoying physical closeness with each other by kissing, holding hands and hugging; behaviour that goes beyond the accepted *philia* / friendship between two male characters. Chettle uses poison in a conventional way by placing it in wine. He then presents it with humour in a very comic manner through Lorrique as the supposed French doctor, and in the ludicrous language he uses to describe the symptoms and pain that will be felt as the poison begins to work inside the body. This theatrical device is also used by Middleton in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, discussed in the next chapter. In the six plays presented in this thesis it is not uncommon for poisoners to achieve death for their intended victims, but Chettle has Jerome not only poison the wrong person (his father) by mistake, but also manage to poison himself. The use of comedy at such a dramatic moment is unusual and unexpected, especially as *Hoffman* is a play that appears to value masculinity, manhood and honour, seen in the use of the joust. Chettle builds upon Shakespeare's contemplative character of Hamlet to create a character in Hoffman that is far more cunning, callous and energetic.

Chapter 2

The Revenger's Tragedy

Thomas Middleton

First printed in 1607,¹²⁹ *The Revenger's Tragedy*¹³⁰ has links to both Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Chettle's *Hoffman*; this is achieved through the use of the skull. How *The Revenger's Tragedy* differs from the other two plays is in the way Middleton took Yorick's skull and exploited its potential by giving the skull an active part in the dramatic action of the play. Middleton's protagonist Vindice seeks revenge for his poisoned love Gloriana; Brian Gibbons writes in his introduction that: 'Vindice desires to revenge his betrothed and also his dead father'.¹³¹ Vindice tells us: 'For since my father's funeral, / My life's unnatural to me, e'en compelled, / As if I lived now when I should be dead' (I. i. 118-120); Vindice dramatically claims that he 'should be dead' (I. i. 120) himself because, he tells us, without his father, life is 'unnatural' (I. i. 119) to him. Aimee Ross-Kilroy says that, 'Like Hamlet, Vindice has a murdered father'¹³² but this is not true because we discover that Vindice's father was an employee of the Duke who 'did much deject him' (I. i. 123), and that 'disgrace oft smothered his spirit' (I. i. 124), so much so that 'he died / Of discontent' (I. i. 125). Vindice is a son, just like Hamlet and Hoffman, who is portrayed as being overwhelmed with grief; but Vindice is no Hamlet or Hoffman, and his grief is not entirely for his father. In fact, in Vindice's opening apostrophe to the skull of Gloriana, Vindice refers to his 'poisoned love' (I. i. 14) but fails to mention his dead father. If Vindice's grief and desire for revenge is for his father too (as Gibbons proposes and Ross-Kilroy implies), then the skull, I suggest, becomes a symbol for the merged identities of both male and female genders, especially as the skull is not given an identity at the beginning of the play and is not

¹²⁹ Brian Gibbons writes that 'The play was entered in the Stationers' Register on 7 October 1607', p. ix. There are slight discrepancies on dates for the play: see Suzanne Gossett, (ed.), *Thomas Middleton in Context*, (Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. xxiii and 17. And also R.A. Foakes, (ed.), *The Revenger's Tragedy: Thomas Middleton and Cyril Tourneur*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), p. 1.

¹³⁰ Brian Gibbons (ed.), *The Revenger's Tragedy*, (A & C Black Publishers Limited, 2002). All subsequent quotations will be taken from this edition of the play. For information on the play's title see Michael Neill's article, 'Bastardy, Counterfeiting, and Misogyny in The Revenger's Tragedy', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 36, No. 2, Tudor and Stuart Drama (Spring, 1996), pp. 397-416. For the play's sources see, G. K. Hunter, 'A Source for *The Revenger's Tragedy*', *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, 10, No. 38 (1959), pp. 181-182. Charles Forker credits Cyril Tourneur as the author of *The Revenger's Tragedy*: see Charles L. Forker, *The Skull Beneath the Skin: The Achievement of John Webster*, (United States of America: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986), pp. 75- 109.

¹³¹ Gibbons, pp. x-xi.

¹³² Aimee Ross-Kilroy, "'The Very Ragged Bone': Dismantling Masculinity in Thomas Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy*", 33 Issue 4, *Renaissance & Reformation/Renaissance et Reforme*, (Fall 2010), p.52.

named until Act III, when we are told 'tis the skull / Of Gloriana' (III. v. 148-149). Therefore, up to this point in the play, the skull remains genderless. The skull is a conspicuous feature in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, and even though Chettle used shock tactics to include the whole skeleton, giving it a prominent place upon the stage, Middleton cleverly has his villain Vindice take full advantage of the skull he holds, not just by handling and talking to it (as Hamlet does to Yorick's skull and Hoffman who addresses his father's skeleton), but by giving the skull an important leading role within the play's dramatic action and climax.

In this chapter I want to explore the recurrent theme of the skull and its association with the male poisoner. Middleton seems to also link poison to the male's troubled relationships with women. What separates Vindice from other male poisoners discussed in this thesis is that he does not have a minion as an accomplice to his deeds, but instead relies heavily on the skull¹³³ to help him achieve his revenge.

Poison and Sexuality

Unlike *Hamlet* and *Hoffman*, which are set near the Baltic, *The Revenger's Tragedy* is set in Italy in an Italian court. Italy was a popular backdrop to revenge tragedies,¹³⁴ and the Italians were usually portrayed as cunning and vengeful poisoners; Italy and its link to poisons are discussed in the introduction to this thesis. Middleton establishes poison in *The Revenger's Tragedy* from the very first scene; he exploits poison's possibilities by having Vindice open the first scene clutching the poisoned skull of Gloriana, who was poisoned some nine years earlier by the Duke because her '...purer part would not consent / Unto his palsey-lust...' (I. i. 33-4). In this play, poison's fluidity permeates throughout; nothing is safe from poison's reach as Vindice reveals that the poison used on Gloriana has metaphorically seeped into his emotions and 'poisoned [his] love' (I. i. 14). Audience members can see and hear of poison's alarming capabilities to harm, demonstrated in the repetitive mention of the word (twenty two times)

¹³³ Laurie A. Finke, 'Painting Women: Images of Femininity in Jacobean Tragedy', *Theatre Journal*, 36, No. 3, *Renaissance Re-Visions* (1984), pp. 356-370. In this article Finke suggests that Vindice sees Gloriana's skull more as a threat to his masculinity and gives him a fear of his own mortality.

¹³⁴ For instance: John Webster, *The White Devil*; Barnabe Barnes, *The Devil's Charter*; Thomas Middleton, *The Duchess of Malfi*.

during the course of the play. Middleton showcases poison's multiplicity in a variety of ways. It can transform into a cannibalistic monster as Vindice tells Lussurioso: 'strong poison eats / Into the duke your father's forehead' (II. ii. 163); which signals the inner corruption of Vindice, who has 'eaten noble poison' (I. iii. 169), which works from within and hides from those on the outside. Poison is linked to both sex and death throughout the play, and especially with the kissing of the skull as the Duke finds out to his cost: 'Oh 't'as poisoned me!' (III. v. 150). Even law words can function as poison - 'there are old men at present / That are so poisoned with the affection of law words' (IV. ii. 61-2) - highlighting a failed justice system that is flawed with corruption.

Middleton showcases poison's boundless potential for eating teeth, melting souls, and destroying life; this is evident from the first scene of the play with the use of the skull which was by the 'Old duke poisoned' (I. i.14) and with the Duke's own words: 'My teeth are eaten out' (III. v.159). Middleton shows Vindice with his own quantity of poison; we do not learn of how this is acquired, but he tells Hippolito that Gloriana was 'poisoned with this drug' (III. v. 102), which he intends to use to kill the Duke. However, Vindice has a back-up plan just in case the poison is not strong enough to kill: 'What fails in poison we'll supply in steel' (III. v. 106). Poison is often linked to sex in revenge plays,¹³⁵ and the Duke confesses that he has often resorted to poison as a fatal punishment when his sexual lusts have been thwarted before, boasting that 'Many a beauty have I turned to poison / In the denial' (III. i. 29-30). It is poison that is used to trap the Duke, with the promise of a sexual encounter. The repetitive use of poison on Gloriana's skull reveals Vindice's disrespect for Gloriana's remains and disregard for her memory.

Vindice poisons Gloriana's skull with the same 'drug' the Duke used upon her nine years earlier. Vindice exploits the skull by using it as a sexual decoy to trap the Duke with the promise of a sordid sexual encounter; and although Vindice hates the Duke and wants him dead, he sacrifices Gloriana's remains with the expectation of them being re-seduced by the Duke in the hope that it will 'kiss his lips to death' (II. v. 105). As the Duke lies dying, poison's multiple capabilities

¹³⁵ In John Webster's *The White Devil*, Bracciano disposes of his wife Isabella by having her kiss a poisoned portrait so that he can advance his relationship with his lover Vittoria.

are shown when it transforms into an invisible creature capable of consuming human flesh: as Lussurioso gazes upon the gruesome, eroding face of his father he says, 'Oh sight, look hither, see, his lips are gnawn / With poison!' (V. i. 96). Middleton, I suggest, links poison, through the Duke and Vindice, to a man's lack of sexual activity; neither the Duke nor Vindice achieve a satisfactory relationship with Gloriana, alive or dead. Evidence of the Duke's shortfall in manly competence is candidly broadcast by the Duchess to her bastard son Spurio when she tells of the Duke's passionate shortcomings: 'an old - cool duke' (I. ii. 74). She provides further support for his doubtful manhood when she questions his dubious claim to fatherhood, informing Spurio that 'th'art his son but falsely / 'Tis a hard question whether he begot thee' (I. ii. 132). The Duchess then reiterates her suspicions by warning Spurio of the Duke's approach, she tells him, "'Tis the old Duke thy doubtful father' (III. v. 205). Caroline Bicks states that 'For men, fathering children was a definite mark of manhood'¹³⁶; the Duchess has cast doubt onto the Duke's manhood and his ability to father a child. Vindice's virility as a man is not proved throughout the play as he is neither married nor has a love interest in the play, except with the skull; he also has no offspring. There is very little to distinguish between the Duke and Vindice as both are willing to use poison to gratify and achieve their desires.

The Revenger's Tragedy is as much about sex as it is about poison; poison is manifested in acts of uncontrolled lust and corruption that end in death. Robert Ornstein writes that within the play there is a 'morbid fascination with the erotic' and that

The mind that created Vindice's world, the sexual is as intriguing and repelling as a hideous disease. The most characteristic and memorable lines in the play are concerned with some facet of illicit sexual desire or bawdy.¹³⁷

The revenge Vindice seeks so desperately originates with sex: the Duke poisoned Gloriana simply because she denied him sex; Lussurioso lusts after the virginal Castiza (whose name is from *casta* meaning chaste); the Younger Son of the Duchess meets his death because he raped Antonio's wife (I. i. 109); Spurio who was conceived illicitly and indulges the Duchess in her

¹³⁶ Caroline Bicks, *Gender and Sexuality*, in *Thomas Middleton in Context*, edited by Suzanne Gossett, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 263-286, p. 267.

¹³⁷ Robert Ornstein, *The Moral Vision of Jacobean Tragedy* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1960), pp. 108-109.

lust for sex only lives long enough to be stabbed soon after. Sex and poison are associated with the female and femininity. Evidence for this can be seen in the Duchess, who is desperate to gratify her lust with the Duke's bastard son Spurio. She warns him to 'Forget him [the Duke] or I'll poison him' (III. vi. 208), but it is only the (effeminate) males that poison in this play. The association of poison with the female is also demonstrated in the image of milk flowing from Vindice's mother's breast as 'quarled poison' (IV. iv. 7); this contaminated image of the female body continues when Gratiana declares that she has been poisoned by her own words: 'Oh see, I spoke those words, and now they poison me' (IV. iv. 137). The image of the female being linked to poison is confirmed by Castiza in her request for her mother to 'come from that poisonous woman' (II. i. 235). Poison is strongly linked to sex and the female in the play, and conversely to Gloriana's death by being poisoned for not relinquishing her honour. Antonio's wife meets her death because 'Her honour first drank poison' (I. iv. 11) after being raped by the 'Duchess's youngest son' (I. iv. 32). This vicious deed was covertly undertaken in 'the height of all the revels / When music was heard loudest, courtiers busiest, / And ladies great with laughter' (I. iv. 38-40); forced sex, rape, needs to be undertaken under the disguise of secrecy, hidden from public view and performed stealthily, like the use of poison. For Antonio's wife there was only one escape from her dishonour and that was to poison herself. The point being made here is the association between poison and the female, and its link to the emasculated male poisoner.

Middleton creates a kind of Sodom and Gomorrah world of lust and rape, where women are judged by their beauty, and virginity is seen as a male's to destroy at will for personal gratification. In this play male characters are portrayed as tainted, contaminated and unmanned. Vindice 'is aroused and revolted not by what is imagined ... He is fascinated with stealth rather than with sex. He is the Peeping Tom turned moralist and moralizing with the fevered sexual images dwelt upon by the impotent or the frustrate'.¹³⁸ It is doubtful that Vindice is a moralist: he poisons the Duke for poisoning his betrothed; he takes the law into his own hands and delivers his justice; by the end of the play, along with the Duke who dies a horrific gruesome death, most of his family has also been killed. For both the Duke - the 'frustrate' - and Vindice -

¹³⁸ Ornstein, *The Moral Vision of Jacobean Tragedy*, p. 109.

the 'impotent' - it is the allure of poison's promise of power and control that fascinates and the excitement of stealth. The pattern that emerges in *The Revenger's Tragedy* is that sex brings death; male poisoners do not like physical violence or confrontation and therefore use poison's strength to compensate for their own manly failings to create violence within their victim's body.¹³⁹

Misogyny, Disguise, and Homoeroticism

Middleton does not hide misogyny in this play. Misogyny is present throughout all the plays studied in this thesis and is first shown in this play in the way Gloriana meets her death nine years before the play's opening scene. Gloriana met her death defending her honour against the unwanted sexual advances of the Duke. Middleton's male characters value females for either the strength of their beauty or as sexual objects; Lussurioso says that women are 'Good only for their beauties', and when 'washed off', there could be 'No sin uglier' (1. ii. 29-30). Lussurioso voices the misogynistic attitude of repulsion at the sight of a female without cosmetics on her face; for him a woman in her natural state, as God made her, was unattractive and therefore also undesirable.

Throughout the play Vindice is presented as a misogynist. Vindice reduces Gloriana's memory to the status of a fickle 'self-affecting dame' (III. v. 83) and holds her skull '*dressed up in tires*' (s.d. III. v.), sexualised and objectified by him. To Vindice a female would 'Camphor her face' (III. v. 84) and bid 'twenty pound a night' (III. v. 87) in the vain hope of attaining 'Three velvet gowns' (III. v. 45). When clasping the skull of his 'love', Vindice admits that he 'could e'en chide [him]self / For doting on her beauty' (III. v. 68-9), which, according to Vindice, only lasts 'a bewitching minute' (III. v. 74), before he triumphantly addresses the skull: 'You deceive men but you cannot deceive worms' (III. v. 97). Talking with his brother Hippolito, Vindice states that 'Women are apt you know to take false money' (1. i. 103); and when Gratiana informs Vindice that his father 'was too wise to trust [her] with his thoughts' (1. i. 129), Vindice

¹³⁹ This can be witnessed in the agonizing descriptions of death by poison in the following characters: Lucretia Borgia in *The Devil's Charter* by Barnabe Jones; Old Hamlet in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*; Brachiano in John Webster's *The White Devil*; The Duke in *Women Beware Women* by Thomas Middleton, to name a few.

sneers in an aside, 'I' faith then father thou wast wise indeed, / Wives are but made to go to bed and feed' (1.i. 130-1), implying that women are only fit for two purposes. The hypocrisy of Vindice is made apparent in his dislike for the dishonesty of women wearing face-paints, used to disguise their true selves, but he sanctions his own wearing of a disguise to gratify his own desires. Vindice only exploits his own duplicity by exchanging one set of clothes for another; the magic of the theatre lies in the actor being able to transform from one identity into another by means of his costume. Costumes, voices, mannerisms, and the skill of the actor, may help to alter the outward show of identity, but the truth is that underneath the changed appearance of Vindice as Piato, he has not altered. The name Piato¹⁴⁰ in Italian appears to have several meanings which all seem to have a link to the character of Vindice; one meaning is 'two dimensional', which merges the identity of Vindice with his alter ego, Piato.

To dissemble is second nature to Vindice: he confesses that he can 'quickly turn into another' (1. i. 134), and has a 'habit that will fit it quaintly' (I. i. 101), suggesting maybe that has played the role before. Robert Ornstein comments: 'Vindice's disguises reveal more of the inner man than they hide, since a mastery of deception, requires some natural affinity for the assumed role'.¹⁴¹ Writing about Vindice and disguise in his introduction, Brian Gibbons states of Vindice, 'In some sequences his disguise enables him to act a detached, satirical and didactic commentator on the folly or evil of the other characters on stage'.¹⁴² I suggest that Vindice is not a didactic instructor imparting moral values to audience members; how could he be when Middleton has Vindice use Gloriana's skull as an implement with which to trap the lecherous Duke. Vindice man-handles the skull during the course of the play and then dresses it like a common strumpet; he smears poisoned cosmetics onto the skull to promote the promise of sex to the same man (the Duke) who, nine years earlier, lusted after her and then poisoned her because she was not willing to give him the sex he demanded from her. It appears that revenge plays chart the ways in which the revenger becomes like their target and Vindice's actions transform him into the

¹⁴⁰ In Florio's dictionary *piato* is glossed as "a plea, a suit in law, a controversy, a process, a pleading": <http://www.pbm.com/~lindahl/florio/search/393r.html>. It could be also an alternative form of *piatto*, which can be either a noun (= dish, plate, platter, course) or an adjective (= flat, even, level, two-dimensional). Also, a "revolving plate" (= *piatto girevole* in present-day Italian) this information was provided by Lisa Hopkins.

¹⁴¹ Ornstein, *The Moral Vision of Jacobean Tragedy*, p. 112.

¹⁴² Brian Gibbons (ed.), *The Revenger's Tragedy*, p. xi.

mirror of the Duke. By using poison on the skull of Gloriana for sexual purposes, Vindice replicates the murder of Gloriana nine years earlier by the Duke. Gibbons writes of Vindice that he is 'a revenger of blood who believes his motives to be pure and so retains the characteristic heroic stance',¹⁴³ but there is nothing heroic in Vindice's revenge. Vindice becomes as evil a character as any other on the stage and it could be construed that Middleton, and indeed other playwrights discussed in this thesis, use poison as a metaphor for revenge, as seen through the actions of both Vindice and the Duke. To accomplish his plan to poison the Duke, Vindice must first hide his identity behind that of another.

Vindice conceals his identity in the guise of Piato, but while he deceives other characters on the stage, he cannot deceive the audience. Therefore, in his dual identity as Vindice / Piato the actor must release some elements of Vindice's character too. When Vindice is in the role of Piato he takes on the role of pander¹⁴⁴ for Lussurioso: 'Where's the slave pander?' (IV. ii. 178), he asks, and Vindice replies: 'I [am he] which he calls the / pander' (IV. ii. 218-219). Eileen Allman confirms that pandering 'is not merely unmanly but feminizing'.¹⁴⁵ By taking on the role of pander, Vindice is submissive to Lussurioso's demands and by being so, subordinates himself.

The close relationship intimated between Lussurioso and Piato appears to go beyond that of just master and minion; their language is full homoerotic suggestion. Italian courts¹⁴⁶ are usually presented in revenge tragedies as places of danger, containing within them sexually depraved characters. Middleton portrays the Duke, Vindice and Lussurioso as representative of this depraved world, a world where women are not valued and one male can publicly strip another of his manhood and effeminate him. When Vindice, in the role of Piato, is alone for the first time with Lussurioso, their language is charged with homoerotic innuendo: 'be better

¹⁴³ Brian Gibbons (ed.), *The Revenger's Tragedy*, p. xi.

¹⁴⁴ *O.E.D.* pander, v. 2. intr. To act as a pander; to minister to the immoral urges or distasteful desires of another, or to gratify a person with such desires. Also in weakened use: to indulge the tastes, whims, or weaknesses of another.

¹⁴⁵ Eileen Allman, *Jacobean Revenge Tragedy and the Politics of Virtue*, (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1999), p. 43.

¹⁴⁶ There were numerous plays written in the early modern period that portrayed an Italian court harbouring insidious individuals, exploiting beliefs that Italy was riddled with poisoners. In the late Elizabethan and early Jacobean period insidious individuals who had perfected the art of poisoning so well they were capable of predicting their victims time of death, this is discussed in the introduction to this thesis. As the list of plays would be too numerous to catalogue here, please see the graph in the appendix for titles.

acquainted ... be bold / With us, thy hand' (I. iii. 32-3). The word 'bold' implies a desire for Vindice to be confident with his new master and hints at risk taking: 'How dost sweet musk-cat? / When shall we lie together?' (I. iii. 34). A Jacobean audience would have been familiar with the meaning of 'musk-cat'¹⁴⁷ as used by Lussurioso; it hints at immoral sexual activity. Lussurioso's dominant position as master undermines Piato's manhood by giving him a female role. Lussurioso is pleased by Piato's forwardness and calls him a 'Wondrous knave!' (I. iii. 35); Vindice physically shakes with excitement as he tells us, 'the slave's / Already as familiar as an ague / And shakes me at his pleasure' (I. iii. 37-8). Lussurioso demands Piato's compliance: 'Attend me, I am past my depth in lust / And I must swim or drown' (III. iii. 91-2). Vindice appears to enjoy his role as Piato as Jonathan Goldberg states, it allows him a 'sexist power that defies maleness'.¹⁴⁸ Vindice is only able to gain power through associations linked to sex, both with Lussurioso and the Duke.

As pander, Vindice takes on a subordinate role for Lussurioso which places him in the role of a female. When speaking of Vindice, Lussurioso's language is ambiguous as he admits: 'Troth I like him wondrously, / He's e'en shaped for my purpose' (I. iii. 57-8). The word 'shaped' is ambiguous and hints at Lussurioso admiration for Piato's body. Lussurioso enquires whether Piato has ever 'know[n] / In the world strange lust?'; Piato replies, 'Oh Dutch lust! Fulsome lust!' (I. iii. 59); Lussurioso tells Piato, 'thou'rt confirmed in me / And thus I enter thee' (I. iii. 87-88). The language is loaded with sexual innuendo; the word 'confirmed' evokes the rite of receiving confirmation into the Roman Catholic Church, a kind of initiation and a pseudo baptism for Piato. There is a hint in the language that the relationship between master and minion may have become a physical one: 'thus I enter thee'. Vindice tells us that Lussurioso 'Will thus enter any man' (I. iii. 89); and Eileen Allman suggest that 'Lussurioso's line identifies the pander as female to his male'.¹⁴⁹ Allman's claim would assert my argument that Piato's role, that of subordinate female to his male master, is suggested and hinted at in the language between the two characters.

¹⁴⁷ *O.E.D.* musk cat, n. and adj. 2. derogatory. A prostitute, a courtesan. Also: a foppish man. Also see Brian Gibbon's entry note for the word 'musk-cat' - Brian Gibbons, I. i. 34. p. 20.

¹⁴⁸ Jonathan Goldberg, (ed.), *Reclaiming Sodom*, (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 249.

¹⁴⁹ Eileen Allman, *Jacobean Revenge Tragedy and the Politics of Virtue*, p. 43.

Manhood

As Piato, Vindice enters into a power relationship with Lussurioso; his sexuality is controlled and mastered by Lussurioso, who denies him 'presence and voice in the political world of men'.¹⁵⁰ Lussurioso takes on the role of dominant master to Piato; as Eileen Allman states, 'In revenge tragedy, the tyrant presumes and reinforces contempt for women by feminising other men in order to control and humiliate them'.¹⁵¹ Lussurioso feminises Piato by being violent, dominating and abusive towards him; confessing his actions toward Piato he says: 'in rage [I] pushed him, from me' and 'Trampled beneath his throat, spurned him and bruised; / Indeed' Lussurioso admits, 'I was too cruel' (IV. ii. 155-7). Lussurioso plays the role of the dominant male in their relationship and simultaneously feminises and unmans Vindice, who was first unmanned by the Duke when he poisoned Gloriana. The Duke's virility was thwarted, and his male dominance could only be achieved through the use of poison. The only way Vindice would be able to gain back any dominance over the Duke is to unman him, which can only be achieved with the help of poison.

Vindice takes full advantage of Gloriana's skull to achieve a sense of male fulfillment. Middleton must have been aware of the readily available conduct manuals written to 'frequently deflect attention from men's failings by blaming women for many of the dangers posed to patriarchal manhood by marriage', as 'marriage was far more often portrayed as fraught with dangers for men than a source of either a delightful completion or unlimited authority'.¹⁵² Any proof of Vindice's manhood and virility might have been gained through marriage and children, but this was denied and robbed from him by the Duke when he poisoned Gloriana. The skull can only be a cruel reminder to Vindice of his reduced manly status; it is only with the help of the skull and poison that he is able to claw back some manly control over his humiliating position of unmarried man by degrading and unmanning the Duke, just as he was unmanned by him. Steven Mullaney suggests that Vindice's absence since Gloriana's death is 'inexplicably

¹⁵⁰ Eileen Allman, *Jacobean Revenge Tragedy and the Politics of Virtue*, p. 43.

¹⁵¹ *ibid.*, p. 107.

¹⁵² Alexandra Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 78.

put off for nine years'¹⁵³. I argue that Vindice's long delay in taking revenge for the murder of Gloriana is just another clear indication of his barren manhood and lack of masculine aggression. His nine-year reluctance to vindicate his male authority over the Duke only emphasises his passivity and reduces his unmanly grief to womanly cowardice. When Hamlet held the skull of Yorick and asked the grave digger, 'How long will a man lie i'th earth ere he rot?' (V. i. 154), the grave digger answers: 'Faith, if 'a be not rotten before 'a die (as we have many pocky corpses that will scarce hold the laying in) 'a will last some eight year - or nine year - a tanner will last you nine year' (V. i. 155-158). This may, I suggest, explain Vindice's nine-year absence, as the corpse of Gloriana would have had time to completely decompose by this time, leaving no trace of any physical resemblance of the female body, therefore making it safe for Vindice to encounter. All traces of femininity would have long disappeared and drained away, leaving only the genderless skeleton (there is no mention of how the skull became detached from the rest of the skeleton). Michael Neill points out that females consist of 'leaky fluid[s]' that make up the 'uncertain nature of womankind', and that 'female sexuality needs to be secured and contained by vigilant policing'.¹⁵⁴ By holding the skull Vindice can now have no fear of the leaky female because Gloriana's body has now become 'all male whom none can enter!' (II. i. 111); she is now no woman at all. As the skull is no longer to be feared it becomes a 'dumb thing' (3. v. 95) that cannot retaliate or resist him, and therefore cannot deny or reject him; consequently it becomes safe for Vindice to exploit. The skull provides Vindice the opportunity to act out his macabre sexual fantasy of revenge and gain some manly control over the Duke, who, like him, is 'slack ... in performance' (1. ii. 75). The poisoned 'bony' skull gives life to Vindice's lacking manhood by performing what he was incapable of, murdering the Duke face to face; it becomes a concoction of merging identities - female, male, death and poison.

Vindice shows a voyeuristic pleasure and rapture at the poisoning of the Duke and Gloriana's skull has become a poisoned whore and a crude pun, 'country lady' (III. v. 132), nothing more. The superficial physical appearance of the skull as female that is offered up to the Duke provides a conquest for both men; it becomes a representational symbol of their hollow

¹⁵³ Steven Mullaney, 'Mourning and Misogyny: *Hamlet, The Revenger's Tragedy*, and the Final Progress of Elizabeth I, 1600-1607', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 45, No. 2 (1994), p.159.

¹⁵⁴ Neill, 'Bastardy, Counterfeiting, and Misogyny', p. 407.

manhoods. The Duke's engagement with the faux female before him provides Vindice with pleasure; his language is graphic and suggestive: '...the violence of my joy' (III. v. 27). As Vindice watches from a safe distance like a 'peeping tom' he declares: 'Oh sweet, delectable, rare, happy, ravishing!' (III. v. 1). The intensity of the moment is evident in his words: 'I'm lost again, you cannot find me yet' (III. v. 29); he exclaims, 'Oh 'tis able / To make a man spring up...' (III. v. 3). This implies that at this point Vindice is sexually aroused by the morbidly erotic scene he is witnessing. But this is not a male and female coupling Vindice is witnessing, it is a 'bony thing', a 'palsy' part, a hollow skull capable of transforming from one thing into another like a great dissembler. The skull is a magical fantasy that can 'Give ... that sin that's robed in holiness' (III. v. 139), which promises 'there is no pleasure sweet but it is sinful' (III. v. 202), because a 'kiss' with a 'taste of sin 'twere sweet' (III. v. 201). The hollow skull has been given new life with the power to incite desire into 'marrowless age' and 'stuff the hollow bones with damned desires' (I. i. 5-6), and even inflame Vindice's passion to 'spring up'. However, no matter how triumphant the moment is for Vindice, I suggest that he only watches a man, the mirror of himself. This is emphasised in Act V when the (then) dead Duke is dressed in Vindice's own clothes as Piato; Middleton has Lussurioso request that Vindice murders Piato - 'You know him - that slave Piato' (IV. ii. 128), and then cleverly merges the identity of one man with that of another.

When Vindice dupes Lussurioso into believing that Spurio 'shadows the Duchess' and makes 'horn royal' (II. ii. 164), he is openly surprised to find that it is not Spurio in bed with the Duchess but the Duke himself. However, he is not caught in a sexual act, but pathetically portrayed as vulnerable and begging his intruders 'Oh take me not in sleep' (II. iii. 9). Instead of the 'lecher' being caught copulating, we find confirmation of his malfunctioning manhood sleeping, verifying that he is 'old' (I. i. 32), 'cool' (I. ii. 74), 'dry' (I. i. 8), 'parched and juiceless' (I. i. 9) after all. Even Spurio throws doubt on his own dubious manhood - 'I'm an uncertain man / Of more uncertain woman' (I. ii. 133-134) - and confesses to the Duchess: 'I would blush to say what I will do' (I. ii. 171). Spurio throws uncertainties on his own manhood, and the consummation and birthright of Lussurioso: 'The duke's only son / Whose birth is more beholding to report / Than mine, and yet perhaps as falsely sown' (I. ii. 95-197).

Michael Neill writes about bastardy in *The Revenger's Tragedy* as being a form of 'adulteration' because it is a mixture of polluted blood, and that the bastard is a 'debased substitute'. I have shown in this thesis that it is not only the bastard who carries a debased and polluted blood within him; the emasculated male poisoner is also a type of 'corrupt hybrid' and a distinct 'species of monster'.¹⁵⁵

Conclusion

Middleton creates a revenger in *Vindice* that is far more energetic and charismatic than either Hamlet or Clois Hoffman; this revenger treats death in a comic way, as if it is nothing to fear. There is no doubting the moral corruption within the play and I have shown in this chapter that this corruption is associated with male characters and their malfunctioning manhoods. If, as Robert Evans states, 'Writers could most effectively portray particular kinds of social or political corruption by pointing to specific examples of corruption in women'¹⁵⁶, then, I argue, this play promotes mistrust and contempt for the emasculated male character by reinforcing *Vindice's* lack of virility, manhood, and masculine aggression; it is only through poison's lethal qualities that the unmanned male is allowed any real power over another male.

As a moral revenger *Vindice* does not employ any accepted codes of honour in obtaining his revenge. Instead, Middleton has *Vindice* go through an elaborate poison plot instead of employing a more valiant and traditional duel with the Duke; Middleton gives *Vindice* the coward's weapon - poison - emphasizing and enforcing his lack of manly qualities. Miranda Wilson points out that

Stage poisons can offer audiences the satisfying pleasure of empirically determined cause and effect. Audiences can hear poisoners plan their attacks; they can see, as well as hear, the effects of the stage poisons on victims; at times, they might have been encouraged to experience (at least imaginatively) stage poisons at the olfactory level¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ Neill, 'Bastardy, Counterfeiting, and Misogyny', p. 399.

¹⁵⁶ Robert C. Evans, 'Women and the Meaning of The Revenger's Tragedy', *Postscript*, 4, (1987), 4: 65-73. p. 68.

¹⁵⁷ Miranda Wilson, *Poison's Dark Works*, (Maryland, USA. Bucknell University Press, 2014), p. 14.

As a male poisoner, Vindice makes the act of poisoning appear exciting and even pleasurable, qualities that could transmit wrong messages to a vulnerable spectator. Although male poisoners are evil sinners, they are necessary to the dramatic action of the revenge play given that they enhance the excitement and pleasure of the plot. *The Revenger's Tragedy* is a play that contributes to the anxieties of manhood and Middleton has exposed and exploited the emasculated male, showing him to be nothing more than a toxic coward. By setting his play in the popular locale of Italy, Middleton also reinforces the fear of the foreign and the 'other'. This theme is also continued in my next chapter with the portrayal of the Roman emperor Tiberius, in *The Tragedy of Claudius Tiberius Nero*.

Chapter 3

The Tragedy of Tiberius Claudius Nero

Anonymous

The Tragedy of Claudius Tiberius Nero was published for Francis Burton and was printed by Edward Allde in 1607.¹⁵⁸ The play was dedicated by Burton to Sir Arthur Mannering,¹⁵⁹ a 'knight and university graduate described in the DNB as 'a well known figure at the court of James I and a favourite of Prince Henry'.¹⁶⁰ *The Tragedy of Claudius Tiberius Nero* was written by an anonymous playwright, and there is little information regarding the author of the play as the editor of the Malone¹⁶¹ reprint observes:

... as to the history and authorship of the play nothing whatever appears to be known. The publisher, in his dedicatory epistle to Sir Arthur Mannering, describes it as an 'academic play founded on Tacitus by an author who prefers anonymity...' (p. vi.). Tucker Brooke says that the author was a 'young man of one of the universities'. See *A Literary History of England*, ed; Albert C. Baugh (New York, 1948), p. 470. Schelling quite as negatively laconic says, 'an English college play on Nero'. See Felix E. Schelling, *Elizabethan Drama, 1558-1642*, 2nd ed., (New York, 1959; First published 1908), II, 28. The 1964 British Museum General Catalogue of Printed Books continues to list as an unassigned author The Tragedie of Claudius Tiberius Nero 1607.¹⁶²

The unnamed playwright may possibly have been aware that his play contradicted beliefs held by James I regarding tyrants and absolute rule, especially as James¹⁶³ believed that 'a lawfull

¹⁵⁸ In the *Malone Society* reprint edition of the play, W. W. Greg notes that there are six copies of the play in existence: two in the British Museum, one in the Bodleian Library, one in the Dyce Collection, one at Eton College, and one was once reportedly in the possession of a Mr T. J. Wise.

¹⁵⁹ The spelling of Mannering-Maynwarding differs in texts, so I will use the spelling in Francis Burton's Front Matter.

¹⁶⁰ John Francis Abbick, *The Tragedy of Claudius Tiberius Nero* (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of North Carolina, 1967), p. iv.

¹⁶¹ *The Tragedy of Claudius Tiberius Nero, 1607*, printed for the Malone Society by Frederick Hall (Oxford University Press, 1914).

¹⁶² John Francis Abbick, *The Tragedy of Claudius Tiberius Nero* (Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of North Carolina, 1967), p. iii.

¹⁶³ James I, *The workes of the most high and mightie prince, Iames by the grace of God, King of Great Britaine, France and Ireland, defender of the faith, &c.* (London : Printed by Robert Barker and Iohn Bill, printers to the Kings most excellent Maiestie, Anno 1616).

King doeth directly differ from a Tyrant'(493). James wrote quite clearly on his beliefs on the matter:

For I doe acknowledge, that the speciall and greatest point of difference that is betwixt a rightfull King and an vsurping Tyrant is in this; That whereas the proude and ambitious Tyrant doeth thinke his Kingdome and people⁴⁹⁴ are onely ordeined for satisfaction of his desires and vnreasonable appetites; The righteous and iust King doeth by the contrary acknowledge himselfe to bee ordeined for the procuring of the wealth and prosperity of his people, and that his greatest and principall worldly felicitie must consist in their prosperitie. (495)¹⁶⁴

The playwright informs us from the very beginning that his play is 'of Rome's great Tyrant' (Ad Lectores); and before Sejanus dies he addresses Tiberius as a Tyrant - 'It may be, tyrant?' (V. iv. 74) and delights in relating how he, Sejanus, 'o'er reached a tyrant' V. iv. 82) by tricking him into killing his own son. Agrippina, daughter-in-law to Tiberius, defies Tiberius at the moment of her death by not remaining silent and she calls him a 'fond tyrant' and 'Nero, the butcher' (V. v. 47- 49), also 'Detested tyrant' (V. v. 176). Before Celsus puts a chain around his own neck to strangle himself, he too addresses Tiberius as '... tyrant ... ' (V. vii. 54). Caligula tells Macro that 'this water shall revenge / The tyrant's wrongs' (V. viii. 53-54), then says to Tiberius's face: 'Tiberius: / You monster tyrant' (V. x. 34-35). Tiberius is depicted as a tyrant throughout the play and has various instruments of torture as proof of his tyranny. As the playwright was a 'young man of one of the universities', we can assume that he would have known that Ben Jonson had courted trouble over his play *Sejanus, His Fall* (1603), which is based on Roman history and gives a view of tyranny on the stage. The anonymous playwright of *The Tragedy of Claudius Tiberius Nero* made it clear how he felt about tyrants through the character of Caligula, giving him the final say on the matter:

There Nero, the hate of Rome lies butcherèd,
He reigned no day, but some were murdered.
. . . he swillèd gore
More greedily then he did wine before
He slew a poet for this little cause,
Because that in a doleful tragedy,

¹⁶⁴ James I, *The workes of the most high and mightie prince, Iames by the grace of God, King of Great Britaine, France and Ireland, defender of the faith, &c.* (London : Printed by Robert Barker and Iohn Bill, printers to the Kings most excellent Maiestie, Anno 1616).

He railed on Agamemnon's cruelty. (V. x. 39-48)

Caligula vilifies the dead Tiberius and calls him a butcher because of all those that he murdered daily; he tells of Tiberius's thirst for blood being greater than his greed for wine. Playwrights writing plays with Roman settings relied on, and were indebted to, Tacitus¹⁶⁵ and Suetonius when producing plays that involved tyrant kings. Tacitus and Suetonius communicated the classical discourse that showed how emperors were tyrants; one only has to read their accounts of Tiberius, Caligula and Nero to see how these emperors were exposed as hedonistic, cruel, and sexually perverse individuals who enjoyed absolute control over those they ruled. It may be understandable that Tiberius would want to fight (by whatever method) to keep his position in the dangerous and hostile world of ancient Rome; this is where the role of the favourite / minion is placed in the spotlight and given a prominent role within the dramatic action of the play. In the play, this role is filled by Sejanus, who is depicted as ambitious and dangerously toxic to know and be around.

For the purpose of this chapter I will explore the relationship between Tiberius and Sejanus, not only as male poisoners, but also in their roles as master and minion. I shall also consider other minor male characters such as Spado, Piso and Macro, who all have direct involvement in the administration of poison to others in their roles as lesser minions. The playwright gives Caligula the last word in the play and admits he gathered and stored poisonous water for the sole purpose of taking his revenge on Tiberius for killing his father, Germanicus; this links him to Hamlet, Hoffman and Vindice, who all seek revenge for the death of a father.

As mentioned in my introduction, the locale of Italy is presented by several Renaissance playwrights as the home of poison; it has been well documented that English visitors saw Italy

¹⁶⁵ For the influence of Tacitus on the Renaissance see Thomas Spencer Jerome's article, 'The Tacitean Tiberius a Study in Historiographic Method', *Classical Philology*, 7, No. 3 (1912), pp. 265-292. In his article Jerome sets out the possibility that 'The conclusion that the sketch of Tiberius given us in the *Annals of Tacitus* is at least to a considerable extent untrustworthy has been reached by most scholars of today whose familiarity with the subject entitles their opinions to respect'. p. 265.

as rife with poisoners, effeminised males, and sodomites. William Lithgow¹⁶⁶ observed on his visit to Padua that 'beastly Sodomy, it is as rife heere as in Rome, Naples, Florence' (sig. 43r). Lithgow calls Rome the new Sodom - 'Tibris runneth through the new Sodome' (sig. 257r) and names the capital the 'second Sodome' (sig. 14v). The political message given by the playwright is, I suggest, a sinister one that details the favourite as dangerously ambitious and a danger to society. The playwright's deliberate portrayal of poisonous, emasculated males on the stage contributed to the fact that 'the Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre acquired a reputation for homosexuality'.¹⁶⁷ Philip Stubbes wrote about his concern regarding the moral welfare of the audience after watching plays at the theatre that verified his concern on how toxic to manhood the plays and the theatre actually were:

... these goodly pageants being done, euery mate sorts to his mate, euery one brings another homeward of their way verye fréendly, and in their secret conclaues (couertly) they play ye Sodomits, or worse. And these be the fruits of Playes and Enterluds, for the most part. ¹⁶⁸

The relationship the playwright portrays between Tiberius and Sejanus is revealed on the surface to be a close one. Audience members hear words of affection, devotion and loyalty from both Tiberius and Sejanus, but their words are a deliberate pretence for seditious motives. The actions of the two characters establish their poisonous natures and draw close attention to the reversal of gender roles, as Sejanus is emasculated by his own ambitious lust for power by succumbing to the role of minion and confidante for Tiberius and through his lack of manly behaviour.

In the play, male characters, especially subordinates, are thrown into the spotlight and are shown to be ambitious, insincere, deceitful, and dangerous. By using poison, these insidious characters are able to murder the innocent, and not so innocent, and gain advantage over enemies without endangering their own lives. The playwright's desire for anonymity may be better understood

¹⁶⁶ William Lithgow's account of his travels was first published in 1632 and entitled: *The totall discourse, of the rare Adventures and Painful Peregrinations* He first visited Italy in 1609. (London : By I. Okes, 1640).

¹⁶⁷ Alan Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), p. 54.

¹⁶⁸ Tanya Pollard (ed.), *Shakespeare's Theatre: A Sourcebook* (London: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2004), p. 121.

after reading / seeing *The Tragedy of Claudius Tiberius Nero*, as it is a play that also highlights tyranny through the character of Tiberius. The play appears to be a polemic on the wearer of the crown, and although the play is not set in a Catholic Rome, it does portray the tyrant Tiberius as the head of Rome which connects him to the figure of the Pope. William Struther¹⁶⁹ (1630s) suggested that 'the Pope [was] that Antichrist' (sig. Q1v); if this was the case, then the deliberate portrayal of Tiberius as a ruler being both wicked and unscrupulous, must also reflect on the rule of James I, particularly as James' mother, Mary Queen of Scots, had been a Catholic and also because of the anxieties that may have been felt regarding a male ruler.

A Short Summary of *The Tragedy of Claudius Tiberius Nero*

The Tragedy of Claudius Tiberius Nero opens at the funeral of the emperor Augustus, an emperor who, we are told by the Third Plebeian, 'was a goodly man' (I. ii. 10). Nerva states that 'Tiberius, the true heir / Of great Augustus [was] by adoption' (I. i. 77-78) chosen to be Augustus's successor. Nevertheless, Germanicus informs us that he himself is 'heir by nature' (II. i. 49), and more favoured by the Plebeians and Centurions to be emperor as they 'shall never see [Augustus's] like in Rome, unless Germanicus might be our Emperor' (I. ii. 12-13). Tacitus writes that Germanicus was 'extremely popular' and that

Tiberius was afraid Germanicus might prefer the throne to the prospect of it. Besides, in deference to public opinion, Tiberius wanted to seem the person chosen and called by the state - instead of one who had wormed his way in by an old man's adoption, and intrigues of the old man's wife.¹⁷⁰

According to Tacitus¹⁷¹ Germanicus was married to the granddaughter of Augustus, Agrippina, and was the son of Tiberius's brother Nero Drusus, making one of his grandparents of the Augusta. Tiberius was the adopted son of the emperor Augustus, and Germanicus was his

¹⁶⁹ William Struther, *A looking glasse for princes and people Delivered in a sermon of thanksgiving for the birth of the hopefull Prince Charles. And since augmented with allegations and historicall remarks. Together with a vindication of princes from Popish tyranny.* (Printed at Edinburgh : By the heires of Andro Hart, 1632).

¹⁷⁰ Grant, *Tacitus*, p 36.

¹⁷¹ *ibid.*, pp. 51-52.

(Tiberius's) nephew and was adopted by Tiberius. Suetonius writes: 'Tiberius was himself obliged to adopt his nephew Germanicus'.¹⁷² Germanicus returns to Rome in victorious glory from Germany and is crowned with garlands amongst cheers and adulation. Tiberius, disliking Germanicus, sends him to fight in Armenia, which takes him away from Rome and also eliminates the threat he poses to Tiberius's security. Tiberius then plots with his mother Julia and Sejanus, his favourite, to send Piso to poison Germanicus in Armenia. Meanwhile the ambitious Sejanus plots and manipulates Tiberius into poisoning Tiberius's own son Drusus Nero because of a grudge Sejanus held against him. Agrippina learns of the death of her husband Germanicus and his heart is returned to her in a box; then Tiberius forces her to eat a poisoned apple. Two of Germanicus's sons, Drusus and Nero, are imprisoned and starved to death. Livia, the eldest daughter of Germanicus, commits suicide by throwing herself down a well, and Caligula poisons Tiberius. While Tiberius lies in agony, Caligula smothers him with a sheet before stabbing him: 'That I may get Rome's royal Empery, / And to eternal glory of renown, / I was a fool, but all to get the crown' (V. x. 77-79). There are strong suggestions from Tiberius's mother, Julia, that she, Sejanus and Tiberius plotted the murder of the emperor Augustus between them to enable Tiberius to ascend to the position of emperor. In an aside, Julia admits her part in the plot: 'Say that he [Tiberius] was Augustus' murderer, / Yet therein Julia, you were counsellor' (I. ii. 47-48). When Julia talks to Sejanus she asks, 'Did not we make Tiberius Emperor?' (V. vi. 61) The play ends as it began, with an emperor murdered by a male poisoner and the murderer becoming the next emperor.

As the names of Drusus and Nero are overused in the play and may become confusing for the reader, and for the purposes of clarity in my chapter, I shall use the following names when discussing the characters in the play:

Tiberius - emperor

Julia - according to Suetonius, Livia, after the death of Augustus 'adopted the name Augusta';¹⁷³ Tacitus recorded 'Augusta - as Livia was now called', and

¹⁷² Robert Graves (translator) and Michael Grant (Introduction), *Suetonius: The Twelve Caesars* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1979), p.118.

¹⁷³ Graves (translator) and Grant (Introduction), *Suetonius*, p. 106.

wrote that Tiberius should be called the 'son of Julia'.¹⁷⁴ The playwright has chosen to call the mother of Tiberius Julia in the play though she refers to herself as Augusta several times and is called Augusta by Tiberius, Sabinus, and Sejanus

Drusus Nero - also referred to as *Drusus* and *Drusus Tiberius* in the play - son of Tiberius

Livia - usually spelt Livilla (but not in this play); wife to Drusus Nero, granddaughter of Julia and eldest daughter of Germanicus

Agrippina - wife of Germanicus

Drusus, Nero, and Caligula - sons of Germanicus and Agrippina

Sejanus - counsellor and favourite of Tiberius

Macro - lieutenant to Sejanus

Spado - servant to Sejanus.

Poison

Favourites of a monarch were in a strong position to monopolise situations in their favour; having the ear of the king gave them a certain amount of power and it was easy for them, with the aid of poison, to dispose of troublesome individuals who dared to expose or oppose them. Sejanus, as favourite to Tiberius, was a dangerously ambitious character; within his position he could easily gain the emperor's approval. Ben Jonson used the character of Sejanus to draw attention to Queen Elizabeth I's favourite Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex, and to the similarities of the Queen's court with that of the court of Tiberius. Within both Ben Jonson's play *Sejanus, His Fall* and the Anonymous *The Tragedy of Claudius Tiberius Nero*, attention is drawn to the dangers of favourites and sycophants who ingratiated themselves with the monarchy but who were secretly ambitious and feigned friendship to gain whatever power they could; some even harboured ambitions to usurp their masters. *The Tragedy of Claudius Tiberius Nero* is a polemic on court misdemeanours, a warning to king James I himself - though it is very

¹⁷⁴ Grant, *Tacitus*, p. 41.

doubtful that he actually saw this play - regarding his own favourites and court life, bringing into question his moral, religious and political duties. Curtis Perry writes that 'It is a curious truth about Tudor and early Stuart England that any royal favourite of sufficient longevity and influence to attract resentment tends to have been accused in the most spectacularly public manner possible, of using poison'.¹⁷⁵ Sir Francis Bacon asserted that 'poisoning requires proximity and a degree of intimacy and is therefore a kind of "murder under the color of friendship"¹⁷⁶; this is exactly what is revealed in the play, not only between Tiberius and Sejanus, but with Sejanus and Piso, Julia and Sejanus, and Caligula and Macro. Favourites of the monarch were often thought to be synonymous with poison, and, for this reason, resentment and mistrust were rife amongst the King James's critics. Douglas Bush informs us that 'All classes alike resented the king's extravagance, his attachment to unworthy favourites, and the moral and financial corruption of the court circle'.¹⁷⁷ In 1626 George Eglisam¹⁷⁸ publicly vilified George Villiers, 1st Duke of Buckingham¹⁷⁹, a well known favourite of James I, in a scathing attack:

... of the counsell, of the kings court, of the courtes of iustice to his violent pleasure, and as his ambitious villanie moueth him. ... To obtaine iustice he may dispaire, to provoke the Duke to send forth a poisoner (B1v) or other murtherer to dispetch him, and send him after his dead freinds allready murthered, he may be sure this to be the euent' (sig. B2r).

Eglisam showed no confidence in the king's court or in the courts of justice; he believed that the ambitious Buckingham was capable of sending his own minions armed with poison for the sole intention to murder, just as Sejanus employs Piso to murder Germanicus and arms him with poison. Eglisam goes on to voice his contempt on the use of poison as a weapon to murder:

¹⁷⁵ Curtis Perry, *Literature and Favoritism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p.95.

¹⁷⁶ Francis Bacon, *State Trials*, p. 970, "cited from Perry", p. 104.

¹⁷⁷ Douglas Bush, *The Earlier Seventeenth Century: 1600-1660* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 5.

¹⁷⁸ George Eglisam, *The forerunner of reuenge Vpon the Duke of Buckingham, for the poysoning of the most potent King Iames*, Franckfort [i.e. the Netherlands?], [s.n.], 1626.

¹⁷⁹ Although James' favourite the Duke of Buckingham post-dates the play's publication date of 1607, the relevance of the vitriolic feeling towards a favourite of the king is relevant to my argument.

Therfor of all iniuries, of all the actes of iniustice, and of all things most to be looked into, murther is the greatest, and of all murthers the poysoning vnder t r u s t and profession of freindship, is the most haynous. (sig. B1v)

Eglissham's words and thoughts concerning poison echo those of Bacon, and reaffirm the view put forward by the playwright of *The Tragedy of Claudius Tiberius Nero* that the world of the court was riddled with poisonous individuals (sycophants, minions, and favourites), all of whom were all too ready to employ poison's lethal promise to either gain favour or to further their own ambitions.

The title of emperor is synonymous with poison, intrigue, favourites and murder. Lisa Hopkins states that if 'to be Caesarian means to be a great ruler, it also in some sense means to be flawed or even a failed man'.¹⁸⁰ Within the first few scenes of Act II as Tiberius accepts the crown for himself, there are whispers of murder and talk of poison, with hints that the death of Augustus may not have been by natural causes. Indeed, Julia says that she, 'with great policy, / Buried in silence great Augustus' death, / And in the closet of my care-worn breast' (I. iv. 26-28). Julia's language suggests she had a part in the death of Augustus, which in the play aids Tiberius's claim to the throne. She later hints that Sejanus was her accomplice: 'Did not we make Tiberius Emperor?' (III. vi. 61). From the start of the play the playwright supplies Tiberius with poisonous language and shows him to be possessive of his emperorship: 'Nero will brook no rival in his rule' (I. iv. 89). He also shows how resentful he is of his tenacious mother: 'How am I Emperor and my mother rule? / Is she the Sun? Shall I the shadow be? ... A plague upon her, I will her confound!' (II. ii. 10-11, 16). Tiberius's language is derogatory and he shows a contemptuous regarding for his mother when he states that 'the hag is most ambitious' (II. ii. 57). He tells us that he intends to feign 'in policy..., / Under pretext of honourable mind' (I. ii. 51-2). Here Tiberius shows himself to be as equally corrupt as Julia his mother.

Tiberius begins his role of Emperor by trying to engage the populace of Rome while hiding his poisonous nature and feigning an outward show of piety, wisdom and self-deprecation. Here

¹⁸⁰ Lisa Hopkins, *The Culture of the Caesars on the English Renaissance Stage* (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2008), p. 2.

the opportunity for Tiberius to convince his peers and onlookers of his capability to rule also offers him the chance to validate his masculinity, while at the same time assuring his audience that he is adequately equipped with enough wisdom and manly characteristics expected to perform the role of emperor. First the playwright has Tiberius hide his treacherous and poisonous nature by appearing overwrought with emotion; the stage directions inform us that Tiberius '*feigns weeping*' (I. i.) and also '*feigns to swoon*' (I. i.). These actions are not only fickle and superficial but also portray Tiberius as weak, emotionally unstable and effeminate, as Nerva, who closely observes the actions of Tiberius, defines his unmanly demonstrations as public spectacles of delicacy and weakness, calling them 'Feminine waywardness [from an] inconstant mind' (I. i. 67). As emperor of Rome, Tiberius is given feminine qualities that make him appear weak, deceitful, and emasculated. As seen in the the plays already discussed, poison proves the perfect weapon for the emasculated male, and it is the males in the play who carry out the poisonings of other males. Apart from Germanicus, the males in *Tiberius* are presented as cowards who instruct other males to use poison for them; although Sejanus and Tiberius advocate the use poison to murder, it is the minions who carry out the actual poisonings. For example, Sejanus supplies Piso with poison to kill Germanicus, and gives Spado poison to kill Tiberius and Drusus; and Caligula employs Macro to poison Tiberius.

We learn of Tiberius's cowardice when Germanicus questions Tiberius's rule in his soliloquy: 'The legions love you, hate Tiberius, / Honour your virtues, scorn his cowardice ...' (II. i. 43-44). Sejanus is also named a coward when he tries to win Livia; she calls him a 'Leadened resolved coward' (II. iii. 219). Not that the *Tiberius* play shies away from violence: Sejanus tells us that 'Tiberius would have had him [Spado] tortured, / Hanged by the navel for confession' (V. i. 229-30). And although Agrippina compares the tortures of Tiberius to Phalaris,¹⁸¹ the tyrant of Agrigentum who made use of the most excruciating torments to punish his subjects, she asks Macro in disbelief:

Where are his tortures then?
His rod, his hatchets, racks, gyves, manacles,

¹⁸¹ J. Lemprière, *Lemprière's Classical Dictionary* (London: Bracken Books, 1990), p. 509.

Whips, gridirons, tumbrels, lions, tigers, bears
And all his uncouth new found messengers,
Which bloody Phalaris could never invent. (V. v. 18-22)

This catalogue of instruments creates gruesome images of violence and for those unlucky enough not to be in Tiberius's favour the torture they exact is cruel, undertaken by minions and sycophants all too willing to prove their loyalty to their masters. There is no denying the physical agony and pain the rods, hatchets, racks, gyves, manacles, whips, gridirons, tumbrels, lions, tigers and bears would bring when used on helpless victims. What makes poison so alluring to the poisoner is that it is subtle, quiet, non-confrontational and can, if desired, be carried out without the help of another person. The promise of poison is that it will deliver catastrophic damage to the victim and guarantees death. A poisoner needs to show careful planning and stealth to administer poison to a victim; there is also a certain amount of sadism attached to the process of using poison, which highlights the poisoner's sinister, cold-hearted nature as they select who shall live and who shall die. Although the anonymous playwright uses poison as a way of discarding enemies, he has also been creative in his quest to stage death in numerous inventive ways. These include: the drinking of stale water; drinking poisoned wine; choking to death by having food crammed down the throat; the eating of arms; being starved to death; strangling oneself with a chain; committing suicide by throwing oneself down a deep well; being smothered with a sheet; being stabbed to death; wearing a poisoned crown; being forced to wear a burning crown; death by being literally ripped apart limb by limb; eating a poisoned pomegranate and a poisoned apple.

In the play there are six male poisoners: Tiberius; Sejanus; Spado; Piso; Macro; and Caligula. They all display cowardice and all choose poison as their weapon to murder; poison by virtue of its stealth robs the male of his manhood and effeminises him. For Christians the link between the female and sin goes back to the first female, Eve. Eve was beguiled by the serpent in the garden of Eden to entice Adam with the forbidden fruit:

6. So the woman (seeing that the tree was good for meat, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to get knowledge) took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also to her husband with her, and he did eat. (Genesis. Ch. 6.¹⁸²)

Here women are accused of bringing sin into the world, and of being providers of food that is associated with sin. John Abott¹⁸³ was under no illusion about the evil that lies within the first woman: 'EVE was a cursed tree' (sig. 64v), he writes, before blaming Eve for the death that every man must suffer: 'EVE which gaue vs our deaths wound' (37). Abott also believed that women carried evil within them by association with Eve:

... You helpe him [man]; but in what? to goe to Hell.

No sooner weare you made, but you must walke,

To recreat your selfe, and enter talke.

with Satan: ...

You cast your eyes, now on this fruit, now that:

The Diuell by the wandring of your eye,

That your teeth water, presently doth spie,

And with much kindnes doth an Apple pare,

Praies you to taste it, and to giue a share

To your Good-man (for so good manners will)

It will suffice yea both to eat your fill. (22)

Here Abott categorically states that Eve, under the influence and 'kindnes' of the devil, was unable to resist temptation and shared the apple that 'Hath many poysons, [and] many Hels in it' with Adam. All the tree imagery prevalent throughout the play gives warning that an apple does not fall far from the tree; Thomas Bentley¹⁸⁴ wrote in 1582 that 'Adam [was] fallen as a rotten apple from a liuing tree' (128). In 1612 Francis Johnson¹⁸⁵ made a connection between Catholics and rotten apples: "Now if we examine the Popish church according to these properties, it will appeare that it is not a pure Church, but verie corrupt, like as a rotten apple is

¹⁸² http://www.genevabible.org/files/Geneva_Bible/Old_Testament/Genesis.pdf p.4.

¹⁸³ John Abott, *Iesus praefigured, or, A poëme of the holy name of Iesus in five bookes*. [Antwerp? : s.n.], 1623.

¹⁸⁴ Thomas Bentley, *The monument of matrones containing seuen seuerall lamps of virginitie, or distinct treatises; whereof the first fiue concerne praier and meditation: the other two last, precepts and examples, as the woorthie works partlie of men, partlie of women; compiled for the necessarie vse of both sexes out of the sacred Scriptures, and other approoued authors, by Thomas Bentley of Graies Inne student*. (London : Printed by H. Denham, 1582).

¹⁸⁵ Francis Johnson, *An advertisement concerning a book lately published by Christopher Lawne and others, against the English exiled Church at Amsterdam*. ([Amsterdam : G. Thorp], 1612).

in deed an apple, but corrupt' (113). The connection that the emasculated male poisoner has with Eve is evidenced in the play by Macro, who forewarns Agrippina that Tiberius is about to visit her with a poisoned apple:

Nero will hither come under pretext
To comfort, but to try your patience.
He has an apple in such syrup dipped,
Which he in kindness means to offer you:
If you accept, accept a present death. (V. v. 46-50)

Abbott calls the hidden intentions of the Devil 'kindnes' in the preparing of the apple for Eve to eat, but the word 'kindness' used by Macro associates the intentions of the Devil with the intentions of Tiberius; he too has prepared an apple for Agrippina to eat that is covered in a lethal 'syrup' which he hopes will bring her death. And as Tiberius offers his daughter-in-law the poisoned apple he assures her that it will make her feel better:

Meanwhile hold, here's an apple to refresh
The dried vapours of your fuming head.
Eat it and breathe, eat it and rail again,
Do so fair daughter to allay your pain. (V. v. 100-103)

Margaret Hallissy writes that: 'Ever since Eve, the image of the woman feeding a man something dangerous has stood as a symbol for her dangerous power'.¹⁸⁶ Tiberius, like Eve, is a provider of dangerous food that carries death within it; in the conversation that ensues between Agrippina and Tiberius she accuses her father-in-law of having poison within him - 'Nero's poison' (V. v. 113). As Agrippina describes Tiberius as contaminated, she finds it difficult to find the words to describe him: 'Monster of monsters', she says is 'too, too good' for him; she says that the word 'Cruel' is 'too mild a title for [his] deeds'; and even 'Nature could never find a man so bad' because of his 'foul villainies'. She states that 'Toad, crocodile, asp, viper, [and] basilisk' are all 'Too wholesome, tame, mild, gentle, virtuous, / For Nero's poison, fury, envy, [and] wrath' (V. v. 107-113). These dangerous iconic creatures give warning that contact with Tiberius is fatal, and through the poisoned apple, he is associated with Eve, sin and the female.

¹⁸⁶ Margaret Hallissy, *Venomous Woman* (U.S.A: Greenwood Press, Inc., 1987), p. 85.

Food is a perfect vehicle in which to conceal poison. Suetonius wrote that Agrippina was scared to even taste fruit that Tiberius would offer her at dinner for fear it was poisoned.¹⁸⁷ David Kaufman states that 'poison played a prominent part at the imperial court',¹⁸⁸ writing that 'poisoning became so common that those who were in enviable positions of wealth and influence could not take any food or drink with definite assurance of safety'.¹⁸⁹ From these accounts, Agrippina was wise to be cautious. However, in the play she suffers a terrible death at the demands of Tiberius as he instructs a servant to 'open her mouth and feed her' (V. v. 177). As Tiberius watches his daughter-in-law being physically force-fed by a male servant he commands: 'No, cram her then, and feed her fat withal' (V. v. 181). This barbaric and violent act of penetration is an intrusion that is not sanctioned by Agrippina, and therefore could be considered tantamount to a rape; moreover, Tiberius is not the only male witnessing what is taking place. The stage direction tells us that Tiberius enters with his attendants Spurius and Nerva, who are therefore also present and who are then followed by Macro and Caligula. It can only be assumed that these males are on the stage at the same time are witnesses to the cruel treatment of Agrippina, but it must also be noted that none of them defend her or try to protect her from this vicious action. Only Nerva sighs a small comment of discontent to Tiberius: 'Ah, Nero, Nero' (V. v. 184). Tiberius tells Nerva to be content and justifies his vile act by saying that Agrippina asked for it: 'She chose of this rather than banishment' (V. v. 186).

Tiberius is not the only male that crosses the boundaries into the female role of poisoned food-giver. The association of food and poison is again illustrated when Sejanus tricks Tiberius into believing his son Drusus Nero is about to poison him with a feast he has organised:

... Drusus, your dear son,
Aspires to be a present Emperor:
Believe not that this day he makes a feast,
Where mighty Caesar, should be poisoned.

¹⁸⁷ Graves and Grant, *Suetonius*, p.136.

¹⁸⁸ David B. Kaufman, 'Poisons and Poisoning among the Romans', *Classical Philology*, 27, No. 2 (Apr., 1932), p.159.

¹⁸⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 159-160.

Think not that Spado, that twig soon bent to it,
Is now corrupted to perform the act,
Who tasting first unto your Majesty,
With a vine-branch enfolded on his arm
Will squeeze in poisonous drugs to slay my Lord. (V. i. 142-150)

Sejanus cleverly accuses Drusus Nero of coveting the crown for himself, while at the same time exposing Spado as the poisoner. Sejanus shows off his skill at dissembling here; Spado was employed by Sejanus himself to 'Poison Tiberius' (II. ii. 18), and is to conceal the poisonous drugs under a 'vine-branch' that can be 'squeezed' by hand onto the food of Tiberius. The word 'twig' links Spado to the tree imagery in the play and also associates him with Eve, females and poisonous food.

Villains and Favourites

As Emperor, Tiberius overreaches the canons of virtuous amity as he lavishes attention onto his favourite Sejanus; it is through their close male friendship that sodomy can be explored. Mario DiGangi states that the word sodomite

meant more than 'a man who has sex with another man'. The label also meant that this particular man was treacherous, monstrous, heretical, and so on, and that he shared these defining traits with other deviants who may or may not have participated in same-sex relations.¹⁹⁰

Tiberius and Sejanus both encompass the realms of treachery and deviancy, and Tiberius is called a monster several times in the play. They are not portrayed as sodomites in the 'same-sex' meaning of the word, but they do share intimate moments through their language; both are villains, both hide their villainy under the cloak of close friendship. Tiberius deviously exploits his royal power by manipulating those closest to him and manoeuvres situations to his advantage. However, by entrusting power to his minion Sejanus, Tiberius empowers and endorses Sejanus's actions with his imperial consent; this encourages Sejanus to mirror the

¹⁹⁰ DiGangi, *The Homoerotics of Early Modern Drama*, p.4.

actions of his master and allows his corruption to go unchecked, giving Sejanus a licence to work freely under the disguise of the emperor's approval, highlighting Sejanus's devious and treacherous character.

In the play Sejanus likens himself to 'a discoloured chameleon' (II. ii. 72). The chameleon imagery links this play to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*; as Hamlet is asked by Claudius how he 'fares', and Hamlet replies: 'Excellent, i' faith; of the chameleon's dish' (3. 2). Tiberius is also chameleonic: he is changeable and inconstant; both characters hide their individual ambitions and agendas for absolute rule. Regardless of an outward show of close friendship, shared confidences, and intimate knowledge of each other, Tiberius and Sejanus remain duplicitous in their relationship; both are continually involved with some intrigue or plotting. According to Tacitus, Sejanus was a man 'Of audacious character and untiring physique, secretive about himself and ever ready to incriminate others, a blend of arrogance and servility, he concealed behind a carefully modest exterior an unbounded lust for power'.¹⁹¹ In the play Sejanus is portrayed as cunning, sly, and manipulative, carefully calculating his survival, yet at the same time cleverly manoeuvring his control over Tiberius (and others) in his quest for the crown. When trying to convince Tiberius that his innocent son Drusus Nero wants him dead and desires the crown for himself, Sejanus tells Tiberius: 'Drusus, your dear son, / Aspires to be a present Emperor' (V. i. 142-143). Regarding the death of Germanicus, Sejanus assures Tiberius: 'That were Germanicus imperious Jove, / Piso would poison him to gain my love' (III. iv. 20-21). Sejanus tells us that he is 'As fickle and inconstant as the air' (11. ii. 74), and that he plans to be:

With wise men sober, with licentious light,
With proud men stately, humble with the meek,
With old men thrifty, and with young men vain:
With angry, furious, and with mild men calm:
Humorous with one, and Cato with another:
Effeminate with some, with other chaste,
Drink with the German, with the Spaniard brave:

¹⁹¹ Grant, *Tacitus*, p. 157.

Brag with the French, with the Egyptian lie,
Flatter in Crete, and fawn in Greece.
This is the way, Sejanus use your skill:
Or this, or no way must you get your will.
If you do mean the Empire to obtain,
Swear, flatter, lie, dissemble, cheat, and feign. (II. ii. 79-91)

The megalomaniac Sejanus lays bare his deceitful strategies for success to obtain the emperorship and empire for himself; both the characters of Tiberius and Sejanus are portrayed in the play as selfish, ambitious and untrustworthy.

Within the play Tiberius and Sejanus both manipulate the actions of others, usually of lower social status, to further their own ambitions. They are both portrayed as contaminated characters that are a danger to those around them; Sejanus even admits to having a 'cloven heart' (V. i. 71), this identifies him as a devil-like being. Writing in the 1600s, George Abbot¹⁹² believed that the Devil performed his evil deeds with the full consent of God: 'the Diuell, who by the Lords permission hath false wonders of his, as God hath true of his'. Abbot goes on to say that 'Christ saith that false Christes, and false Prophets, shall shew great signes and wonders, so that if it were possible, they should deceiue the very elect', just as Sejanus is able to do. If it was believed at the time the play was published that the Devil had the permission of the Almighty to corrupt God's created with his destructive poison, then it could be argued that although both Tiberius and Sejanus act like devils and deceive others, they may do so with the sanction of God. This idea would also link Tiberius and Sejanus to Hamlet who believed he was a 'scourge and minister' of God. (III. iv. 180)

¹⁹² George Abbot, *An exposition vpon the propertyhet Ionah Contained in certaine sermons, preached in S. Maries church in Oxford. By George Abbot professor of diuinitie, and maister of Vniuersitie Colledge.* (London : Imprinted by Richard Field, and are to be sold by Richard Garbrand, [Oxford], 1600). p. 326.

Neither Sejanus nor Tiberius show any regret for the murders they carry out in the play; they express no remorse, nor are they troubled by guilty consciences. Fredson Thayer Bowers explains that

The standard religious concept of the time was that God intervened in human affairs in two ways, internally and externally. Internally, God could punish sin by arousing the conscience of an individual to a sense of grief and remorse, which might in extraordinary cases grow so acute as to lead to madness.¹⁹³

What makes Hamlet different from Tiberius and Sejanus as a male poisoner and revenger is that Hamlet may feign madness but he does not feign his repentance at murdering the innocent Polonius. None of the male poisoners in the *Tiberius* play actually repent their murders. Sejanus does say 'I am sorry' (V. i. 245) after the death of Drusus, but then goes on to say 'that you [Drusus] were heir to Tiberius' (V. i.33) and '[you were an] observer of my secrecies' (V. i. 34). Bowers continues to say:

But sometimes Heaven punished crime by human agents, and it was standard belief that for this purpose God chose for His instruments those who were already so steeped in crime as to be past salvation. ... When a human agent was selected to be the instrument of God's vengeance, and the act of vengeance on the guilty necessitated the performance by the agent of a crime, like murder, only a man already damned for his sins was selected, and he was called a scourge.¹⁹⁴

My point here is that the male poisoners discussed in this thesis may all differ from one another in certain ways, but they do all seem to share a common flaw of nature that even Hamlet acknowledged as he asked: 'Be all my sins remembered' (III. i. 89) as he admits he was a sinner. The Puritan William Bradshaw¹⁹⁵ (who died in 1618) wrote of Catholics 'amongst whom, so many & such monsters haue bin found, as amongst them; Murtherers, Poysoners of their Predecessors, ... , Sodomites, Adulterers, [and] Atheists'. The association between poisoners, monsters and Tiberius is that Tiberius is called a monster by several characters: Agrippina calls Tiberius a 'Monster of monsters' (V. v. 107); Julia calls Tiberius a 'Vile monster' (II. ii. 51);

¹⁹³ Fredson Thayer Bowers, 'Hamlet as Minister and Scourge', *PMLA*, 70, No. 4 (1955), pp. 740-749. 743.

¹⁹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 743.

¹⁹⁵ William Bradshaw, *A plaine and pithy exposition of the second Epistle to the Thessalonians. By that learned & judicious diuine Mr William Bradshaw, sometime fellow of Sidney Colledge in Cambridge*, (London : Printed by Edward Griffin for William Bladen, and are to be sold at his shop at the signe of the Bible, at the great north dore of Paules, 1620). p.124.

Drusus dubs Tiberius an 'ugly monster' (IV. iii. 24); and Caligula tells Tiberius he is a 'monster tyrant' (V. x. 35). As Sir Edward Coke stated, the 'Devil was the author of the poisoner's art'¹⁹⁶, and both Tiberius and Sejanus act like feelingless devils within the play as both use poison to advance their ambitions.

Although Sejanus is depicted as a callous, manipulating and poisonous liar, there is evidence within the play to suggest that at opportune moments he is capable of using the language of love, devotion and loyalty. When alone with Tiberius on the stage Sejanus is depicted at ease and confidently articulate, especially when trying to convince Tiberius of his love and devotion. The private conversations Tiberius and Sejanus share are certainly more convincing than Sejanus's feeble attempts to woo Livia in Act II, when his opening lines addressed to Livia appear awkward, stilted and contrived. Sejanus does not get to the point immediately, so Livia quickly dismisses whatever he wishes to say to her: 'By these your long circumlocutions, / Your business is of small import with me' (II. iii. 152). Sejanus retorts with a pathetic emotional response: 'Of more import, sweet Lady, than my life' (II. iii. 153). It is made obvious to the audience that at this point in the play Livia has had no previous inclination or idea about Sejanus's feelings towards her as she responds with, 'A matter of more weight than I must know?' (II. iii. 154). Paul Dean believes that in this scene Sejanus wins over the affections of Livia, and he writes that Sejanus 'begins to delude'¹⁹⁷ Livia into believing that he loves her, after which he tells her that it is she who has the power to 'salve his malady' (II. iii. 157). She pities his affliction and shows him hope when she says: 'God send [him] ease, adieu' (II. iii. 162). I argue that Sejanus has not deluded Livia, but instead is deluding himself as she is as surprised by his declarations of love as an audience would be. She astutely sees through his pantomime to declare that he is 'wonderfully metamorphosed!' (II. iii. 169), which strongly suggests that Sejanus plays the lover out of character from his normal self. As she is desperate to escape his presence she curtly asks him to 'Be brief' (II. iii. 183). Sejanus then tries to win Livia with flattery but she stops him abruptly: 'No, then I am gone if you begin to praise' (II. iii.

¹⁹⁶ Alastair Bellany, *The Politics of Court Scandal in Early Modern England*, 2002 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 146.

¹⁹⁷ Paul Dean, "'The Tragedy of Tiberius:' (1607): Debts to Shakespeare', *Notes and Queries* 31.2 (1984), pp. 213-14.

186). Sejanus resorts to violence by grabbing hold of Livia and attempting to kiss her. Livia's utter abhorrence at being detained in such a manner by Sejanus is made very clear in the violent imagery of her language: 'Let go my hand, or I will have your head' (II. iii. 199). Sejanus tells her that his heart is 'in your lovely but obdurate breast' (II. iii. 201), but Livia will have none of him, and in a last desperate retort at his advances, she informs him that she would rather 'unrip [her] breast and tear it [his heart] out' (II. iii. 203). Livia shows utter revulsion at the thought of having the metaphorical heart of Sejanus inside her body;¹⁹⁸ this does not appear to be the language nor the actions of a woman won over by the advances of a lover. Curiously, Dean interprets Livia's revulsion and attempts at protecting herself against such violent and aggressive actions as unnatural: 'Here ... show[ing] the woman behaving in a way unnatural for her sex, threatening to stab the man instead of yielding and kissing him'.¹⁹⁹ I disagree with Dean's interpretation; he continues with Livia and Lady Anne in *Richard III*: 'Both women are reluctant to admit they have been won, and are forced to temporize, stressing hope rather than promise'.²⁰⁰ After a long scene in Shakespeare's *Richard III*²⁰¹, Lady Anne does accept a ring from Richard, which he offers to her along with his feigned love. Through Richard's words we are made aware that he succeeds in having his ring firmly placed on her finger: 'Vouchsafe to wear this ring' (I. ii. 205). To this Lady Anne replies: 'To take is not to give' (I. ii. 206). This is proof that she has allowed herself to accept the token and have it adorn her finger. Richard then comments: 'Look how my ring encompasseth thy finger' (I. ii. 207). To seal his anticipation of a union he enquires, 'But shall I live in hope?' (I. ii. 203); she replies, 'All men, I hope, live so' (I. ii. 204), which seems to reassure him. I suggest that the language Livia uses is far from a woman wooed by the clumsy words, swooning, tears, and boorish attempts at courtship made by Sejanus. Livia informs Sejanus: 'Your business is of small import with me' (II. iii. 152) and quickly wishes to leave his company: 'God send you ease, adieu' (II. iii. 162). Just twenty lines further on she repeats her request: 'Farewell Sejanus, I must leave you now' (II. iii. 182).

¹⁹⁸ This is a trope that comes up in Sir Philip Sydney's love lyric 'My True-Love Hath My Heart and I Have His'.

¹⁹⁹ Paul Dean, 'The Tragedy of Tiberius', *Notes and Queries* 31.2 (June, 1984), p. 214. Dean's article compares the scene to William Shakespeare's *Richard the III* when Richard tries to win the love of Lady Anne (I. ii). As Dean points out the scene in Shakespeare's play is very similar to Act II, ii, in *The tragedy of Claudius Tiberius Nero* when Sejanus attempts to woo Livia, but where Richard is successful, I argue, Sejanus is not.

²⁰⁰ Paul Dean, 'The Tragedy of Tiberius', p. 214.

²⁰¹ Anthony Hammond, (ed.), *The Arden Shakespeare: Richard III* (London and New York: The Arden Shakespeare, 1987).

Sejanus begs one word more as Livia tells him to 'Be brief Sejanus then' (II. iii. 182); this indicates that she is polite but does not seek his company. When Sejanus again begins to flatter her, she again tries to leave: 'No, then I am gone if you begin to praise' (II. iii. 186). Livia calls Sejanus a 'Villain' (II. iii. 197) and demands that he does not touch her: 'Let go my hand' (II. iii. 199). Livia even threatens to stab Sejanus as the stage directions inform us: s.d. *She pulls his rapier*. Livia does, however, offer Sejanus some compassion and concern when he swoons, but she shows no signs of being deluded or succumbing to his schoolboy attempts at winning her affections; as she leaves him, she categorically states that she 'will not promise' (II. iii. 245) him any hope. True to himself, before leaving the stage Sejanus confirms his abhorrence at the thoughts of any sexual contact with Livia or any other female; he confesses that he does not actually intend to 'adulterate a prince's bed' (II. iii. 250) and admits that it is 'Not lust nor love' (II. iii. 251) that are inside his head.

Nevertheless, Sejanus proves he is able to articulate the language of love and devotion more effectively at opportune moments shared with Tiberius when they are alone together. During these private moments Sejanus appears more comfortable and confident with his use of language and is not clichéd, stilted or awkward. As Tiberius says: 'If that Sejanus loves Tiberius, ever Nero, did repay his love' (III. iv. 44-45); and, 'Speak, my Sejanus' (V. i. 67). Sejanus replies: 'Yet would Sejanus, like / Briareus, / Have been embowelled in this earthy hell, / To save the life of great Tiberius' (V. i. 35-7). Although Tiberius and Sejanus are consummate deceivers they use the language of love and devotion to veil their poisonous intentions; there is no real love or affection between the two, which is exposed in their asides. Tiberius confesses in an aside about Sejanus, 'When I have my will, I'll make you pattern of your villainies' (V. i. 217-18). As Sejanus plots the death of Tiberius with his mother Julia, he says, 'Madam, farewell. Go, stepdame Julia, / Plot with Sejanus, for Tiberius' death' (II. vi 102-3). Beyond his own actions and associations, our impression of Sejanus is equally influenced by our response to Tiberius, who shares the stage with him. The language used by Tiberius and Sejanus shows that both master and minion share a necessity for each other and both manipulate their language to survive.

Tiberius uses his skill with words to control Sejanus into murdering Nero and Drusus, the sons of Germanicus. Again the technique used here by the playwright is reminiscent of Shakespeare's play *Richard III*, when Richard Duke of Gloucester tries to persuade his cousin the Duke of Buckingham to kill his nephews secured in the Tower of London, but Buckingham is no Sejanus. Tiberius takes full advantage of the close relationship he has with his favourite and requests that Sejanus makes away with Drusus and Nero by using language tainted with affectionate bribes to achieve the response he requires: 'If that Sejanus loves Tiberius' (III. vi. 44). The word 'love' trips forth from Tiberius's lips easily, as earlier in the play we also see him sending his love to Germanicus: 'Asinius we do impose / To be our legate to Germanicus. / Tell him we love him, and be sure you do' (I. i. 249-251). Tiberius's words are empty and devoid of genuine emotion, as is Sejanus's response to Tiberius's request, which is equally meaningless, though quite eloquent:

If they did both Ulysses equalize,
Matchless Penelope's unmatched mate,
And if Minerva should becloud their thoughts,
As Cipria wrapped her Achesiades:
Aye, were Apollo their eternal friend,
They should not live if Nero sought their end. (III. vi. 52-57)

In his willingness to stay in favour with Tiberius, Sejanus exaggerates his boast that he would kill Drusus and Nero even if they had the cunning of Ulysses; his enthusiastic language is designed to please and impress the emperor. Sejanus as subordinate accepts Tiberius's authority and does not openly contest what is requested of him. The suggestion that their relationship is a homoerotic one is made more evident by the playwright having them liaise in a secret cave; this evokes Marlowe's *Dido Queen of Carthage* where the first encounter between Dido and Aeneas takes place in a cave: 'There is a cave, Spelunca called, / Vaulted by art, made by geometry' (III. vi. 82-83). Suetonius tells us that Tiberius used a natural rock grotto / cave at Sperlonga,²⁰² and

²⁰² For a brief mention of Tiberius being nearly killed by rocks in the cave see: Suetonius, *Tiberius*, 39. p.130. Also see the following newspaper article on the treasures found in Tiberius's cave: Special to The New York Times. 1957. New Finds Made In Laocoon Cave. *New York Times* (1923-Current file), Oct 02, 1957. And also: A. F. Stewart, 'To Entertain an Emperor: Sperlonga, Laocoon and Tiberius at the Dinner-Table', *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 67 (1977), pp. 76-90.

once while dining there he was nearly killed by falling rocks, but Suetonius does not mention that Sejanus was present; in the play Tiberius is saved from death in the cave by Sejanus.

Julia wants Sejanus to kill her son Tiberius while in the cave as she asks: 'can we not depose Tiberius?' (III. vi. 61). She asks Sejanus to 'Dive to the bottom of [his] memory / And plot some labyrinth of villainy' (III. vi. 69-70). Sejanus informs Julia that 'Here oftentimes the weary Emperor / Does banquet and refresh his troubled mind' (III. vi. 96-97), and he agrees to murder Tiberius for her: 'Madam, upon my honour I'll make him sure' (III. vi. 100). However, Sejanus is true to his nature in his closing soliloquy that shows his ambitious nature:

The cave shall fall, and yet Tiberius, live, But I will seem to under-prop the cave,
With these my pillars, and bear all the load. So shall I get more favour with the
Prince. (III. vi. 132-135)

Not satisfied with the power Tiberius has already furnished him with, and not giving any thoughts to the false promise made to placate Julia, the self-serving Sejanus sees an opportunity that will give him even 'more favour' with Tiberius.

The relationship Sejanus shares with Tiberius is a close one, regardless of the fact that for both men their relationship serves their darker individual purposes. Sejanus is portrayed as a wily opportunist; his close position to Tiberius enables him to play the role of a substitute for Tiberius's absent wife and be, on the surface, an obedient and supportive confidant. After Sejanus has duped Tiberius into believing that he has saved his life in the cave, Tiberius gushes with love to Sejanus:

Not Theseus' love unto Pirithous,
Not Alexander's to Hæphestion
Nor the two brothers of Paris sworn,
That in eternal courses scale the heavens.
Did ever manifest such demonstrations
Of faith unfeigned, and more than Turtle-dove,
Saved my life ...
Ah, my Sejanus, what can Nero find

Here Tiberius compares his love by using male-male examples that are charged with homoerotic suggestion. Tiberius subordinates his favourite Sejanus by using the phrase 'turtle-dove'²⁰³, a term of affection usually used between male and female, not male to male. He sighs, 'Ah, my Sejanus', which emphasises the intensity of his passion. The male-male love and friendship between Theseus and Pirithous insinuates homoerotic desires. Bruce Smith points out that 'Pirithous and Theseus admire ... each other's beauty.'²⁰⁴ Alexander and Hephaestion provide another example 'of famous homosexual lovers'²⁰⁵, and, in *Homosexuality and Renaissance Literature, or the Anxieties of Anachronism*, Claude J. Summers states, 'Hylas and Hercules, Patroclus and Achilles, Hephaestion and Alexander: this is a veritable roster of famous homosexual lovers who are often evoked in defence of homoeroticism'.²⁰⁶ By giving Tiberius a speech that is loaded with examples of 'homosexual lovers' the playwright insinuates a relationship between Tiberius and Sejanus that is more than just that of master and minion. In Sejanus's reply to Tiberius, he is equally demonstrative:

Most gracious Caesar, mighty Emperor,
Had Pelion and Ossa been conjoined,
Had mounting Tenarous with the snowy alps,
And high Olympus overwhelmed the cave,
Yet would Sejanus, like Briareus
Have been embowelled in this earthy hell,
To save the life of great Tiberius. (V.i.31-37)

Briareus²⁰⁷ was a famous giant and son of Coleus and Terra; he was believed to have had one hundred hands and fifty heads and was thrown under Mount Etna for assisting the giants in their war against the gods. Sejanus chooses mountains to express his love and devotion, maybe because they are prominent landmarks that can be seen for miles around and are admired for

²⁰³ *O.E.D.* 2 turtle, n.1 fig. Applied to a person, as a term of endearment, etc. (cf. dove2d), or (esp.) to lovers or married folk, in allusion to the turtle-dove's affection for its mate.

²⁰⁴ Bruce Smith, *Homosexual desire in Shakespeare's England* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 33.

²⁰⁵ Claude J. Summers, 'Homosexuality and Renaissance Literature, or the Anxieties of Anachronism', *South Central Review*, 9, No. 1, *Historicizing Literary Contexts* (1992), 2-23, p. 9.

²⁰⁶ *ibid.*, p. 9.

²⁰⁷ J. Lemprière, p. 121.

their majestic form; mountains do not change with time and are permanent structures created by nature that survive over time. In Sejanus's allusion to the two huge mountains, Pelion and Ossa, he also verbally shows how high his ambitions actually are, and alludes to *Hamlet*. The outward display of mutual verbal affection between the two men is heavily laced with homoeroticism and does suggest a closer male bond than just them being homosocial. It is also noteworthy that the female characters, though sparse in this male dominated play, are not portrayed sharing loving or affectionate language between themselves, nor are they shown to have intimate moments with each other.

Sejanus manages to keep his true ambitious inner-self hidden and concealed under the mask of love, friendship and concern for Tiberius. Bowers states: 'the accomplice, pretending to be the tyrant's tool, is actually the master, and as soon as the path is cleared for him plans to overthrow the tyrant and secure the throne for himself'.²⁰⁸ During the course of the play Sejanus schemes to disempower Tiberius in favour of his own autonomy even though Tiberius endows his favourite with privilege and power. Daniel C. Boughner writes about ungrateful, overindulged favourites²⁰⁹: 'They had been established by their emperors in such wealth, honor, and rank that they seemed to lack nothing to complete their power except the imperial rule. Ambitious to possess this also, they undertook to plot against their benefactor but met the destruction which their ingratitude merited'.²¹⁰ From the beginning of the play Sejanus has thoughts about exploiting his position with Tiberius and gaining the crown for himself, but his villainy is no match for the wiles of Tiberius. During the action of the drama, Sejanus and Tiberius both use each other to gratify their personal needs; both are a corruptive force and a danger not only to

²⁰⁸ Fredson Thayer Bowers, *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy* (Princeton, USA: Princeton University Press, 1940), p.158.

²⁰⁹ In his article, 'Sejanus and Machiavelli' (*Studies in English Literature*, 1500-1900, 1, No. 2, *Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama* (1961), pp. 81-100, Daniel. C. Boughner writes about the link made between Sejanus and Machiavelli in Ben Jonson's play *Sejanus, His Fall*, and of how Machiavelli 'singles out the conspiracy of Sejanus as one of the notable attempts on the life of a prince in the famous sixth chapter of Book III in *The Discourses*, on conspiracies. Jonson's inclination to link Machiavelli with Sejanus in his discussion of the prince in the *Discoveries* shows a thorough knowledge of this chapter. Here he found advice directed to the ruler no less instructive than the precepts of the more celebrated Prince, enriched with citations from Tacitus and Juvenal and illuminating the central event of his drama. The Florentine's aim in his analysis is to teach the prince how to protect himself from the dangers of such machinations. Plotters are lords or intimates of the monarch moved as often by too many benefits as too many injuries; such for example was Sejanus against Tiberius'.

²¹⁰ Daniel C. Boughner, 'Sejanus and Machiavelli', *Studies in English Literature*, 1500-1900, 1, No. 2, *Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama* (1961), pp. 81-100, 83.

each other but to all those who oppose them. Tiberius openly admits he has a poisoned soul: he refers to 'my festered soul' (III. iv. 35-36), and this is reiterated by Caligula who wishes 'To see the cankers of his [Tiberius's] festered soul' (V. x. 12), which is also described as a 'groaning soul' (I. i. 6), and also 'a troubled soul' (V. i. 211). Nevertheless, the psychological makeup of Sejanus is more complicated and disturbing than that of Tiberius. Sejanus admits that there is 'A farther reach' inside his head, and that 'Nor lust nor love, but hate and injury / Inspire ... [him]' (II. iii. 251) in his quest to eliminate those who stand in his way of the crown.

Sejanus wants to 'wreak revenge' (II. iii. 249-255) for 'his injuries', particularly on Tiberius's son, Drusus Nero for the 'box on the ear' (II, iii, 257-258) that he gave to him. Sejanus is urged on by his own lost pride and lust for revenge to gratify what he calls his 'injury' by purging his 'hate' on what he believes to be his enemies. This idea is demonstrated in Act 5 Scene i, when Sejanus spitefully has Drusus Nero murdered by his own father, Tiberius, for no better reason than he gave him a 'box on the ear' (which he later describes as a 'whirret on the ear' [V. iv. 85]) on some previous occasion to which the audience is not privy. The audience do not know that it was 'received in peace' (V. iii. 242). This promotes conjecture that on this particular occasion Drusus Nero, forgetting 'private secrecies' shared with Sejanus, simply forgot himself, prompting Sejanus to later vow 'Never to trust a friend in secret' (III. vi. 106). The word 'friend' suggests that Drusus Nero and Sejanus had a close relationship, while the word 'secret' strongly hints at something not known by others, something concealed and disguised under the cloak of friendship; it also strongly implies that there was a great trust between the two men. However, for some reason not disclosed by Sejanus, Drusus Nero did, maybe in an innocent moment of playfulness, give Sejanus a 'box on the ears' that may have wounded his male pride and was an affront to his manhood. Sejanus was in a position of privilege in the court and was humiliated by the 'box on the ears', which threatened and undermined his lofty position and authority. In one movement Drusus Nero, Tiberius's heir, restores his rank and position to relegate Sejanus; he takes the edge off Sejanus's authority and shows him to be his subordinate. Alexandra Shepherd states that a box on the ear was 'a staple of household discipline more

appropriate for chastising subordinates by masters'.²¹¹ As heir to the throne, Drusus Nero may have been articulating through his actions his higher social status, claiming his right to outrank Sejanus and put him firmly back in his place. Sejanus's pride was damaged by this action, and not being able to withstand the indignity or the disrespect shown to him, he carries the hurt inside until he is able to take revenge. However, there is also something else besides a dented pride and a loss of power, as Sejanus states: 'Oh, how I feared I should have been betrayed' (V. i. 183). This is a tantalisingly obscure statement that opens up conjecture with regards to the 'secret' that one cannot 'trust a friend' with because of the fear of betrayal. The reality of Sejanus facing up to Drusus Nero himself would have been impossible: Sejanus was subordinate in rank to Drusus Nero and would not want to lose his favour with Tiberius or his position in the court. Therefore, Sejanus resorts to exacting his own 'wild justice', and, just like all male poisoners, does so through deception and cunning.

Though Sejanus swears to avenge the affront made to his male pride in Act II, it is not until Act V that he actually sets about determining the fate of Drusus Nero. Sejanus uses as his instrument his own minion Spado. In his quest for vengeance, Sejanus devises the ultimate revenge plot by planning to have Drusus Nero drink poison in wine while he stands by and watches. To make the pleasure of the poisoning even sweeter, he devises that it should be Tiberius who should be the one to administer the poison to his own innocent son. First, in true villainous fashion, Sejanus plays a game with Tiberius, throwing him tantalising pieces of information to encourage his appetite for more information concerning his son Drusus Nero: 'May it please your Majesty to give me leave, / Here to set down a doleful period' (V. i. 101-102). Sejanus tells Tiberius that what he knows may not be the truth: 'But good my Lord, let Sejanus leave. / For on my honour, all may be but forged'. This phrase is repeated several times as Sejanus appears to enjoy reeling in Tiberius's curiosity. It gives Sejanus control over Tiberius until he is completely deceived and convinced into murdering his own son. Sejanus uses verbal stratagems to drip feed Tiberius with words of poison to provoke the emperor into

²¹¹ Alexandra Shepherd, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 144.

action; the same tactical approaches are cleverly used by Iago to draw Othello²¹² into his web of lies and conceit. However, wanting to repeat and expose a plot against Tiberius's life, Sejanus continues to intersperse his poisonous phrase among his words, suggesting that he thinks it is 'forged':

Why then my Lord, imagine all is false.
And what I say is all counterfeit.
Do not conceive that Drusus your dear son
Aspires to be a present Emperor:
Believe not that this day he makes a feast,
Where mighty Caesar should be poisoned
Think not that Spado, that twig soon bent to it,
Is now corrupted to perform the act,
Who tasting first unto your Majesty,
With a vine-branch enfolded on his arm
Will squeeze in poisonous drugs to slay my Lord.
Imagine this to be a lying dream,
Though Julia swore and vowed it should be so,
And made great joy that it should be so.
Believe it not, surely she said not true,
For on my honour I do think it forged. (V, i, 140-155)

In this speech rhetorical techniques help focus Tiberius's attention on what he might otherwise miss. By using amplification Sejanus demonstrates his cunning in controlling the planned poisoning of Drusus Nero; he reels the paranoid Tiberius in with his poisonous bait: he informs him of how his ambitious son wishes to be Emperor and how he, Drusus Nero (with help of Spado the 'twig'), is going to poison the wine to be drunk by Tiberius later at the feast. Spado's nickname is a reference to the tree imagery in the play, a twig being of little importance to the main branches and therefore easily broken and disposed of. Sejanus uses Spado because he is indispensable and his own subordinate. To reiterate his feigned disbelief that the charge against Drusus Nero cannot be true, Sejanus repeats and reinforces the same words: 'For on my honour I do think it forged'. During the course of this scene and within 155 lines Sejanus repeats this phrase five times to Tiberius. The same technique is used by Shakespeare in his play *Julius*

²¹² It could be suggested that Sejanus's verbal stratagems echo those used by Iago in Shakespeare's *Othello*. If *Othello* was performed in 1604 it could be a record of its early reception. For dates see, M.R. Ridley, *The Arden Shakespeare: Othello*, (London: Routledge, 1994), p. xv.

Caesar; when, in Act III, scene ii, Antony repeats that Brutus is an 'honourable man' five times in one speech, and several times throughout the whole scene. Once Sejanus has set his poisonous seed and roused the wrath of Tiberius, he then sets about to question who would believe such 'headlong fury in ambitious thoughts?' (V. i. 165); he hypocritically uses the word 'ambitious' to add weight to the feigned ulterior motives of Drusus Nero. Here Tiberius is shown to be extremely gullible and easily influenced by his own favourite Sejanus in allowing himself to believe that his own son and heir would actually be capable of poisoning him; he even congratulates Sejanus on his vigilance, remarking how it was 'well observed'. Tiberius starts to describe Drusus Nero as if he is nothing to him, referring to 'The haughty stomach of th'aspiring boy' and stating that he will 'pull down his lofty crested plumes' (V. i. 158). Tiberius talks not like a father but like the insecure paranoid tyrant he is portrayed to be: he threatens to 'teach him homage to his sovereign. / How dare the straggl'ing elf once look on me, / And not be turned into an aspen leaf, / To tremble at each breathed syllable?' (V. i. 159-162) The image of the delicate aspen leaf that easily quivers with the slightest breeze demonstrates Tiberius's illusions of power, dominance and tyranny; Suetonius states that 'Tiberius had no paternal feelings ... for his son Drusus'.²¹³ This is used here by the playwright to show Tiberius as a tyrant, father, emperor and man who finds it inconceivable that his own son should not be in awe of him. Sejanus stands back to watch and enjoy the scene he has created and carefully throws in occasional tit-bits of verbal poison: 'The hateful treasons of your wicked son?' (V. i. 181). Ambiguous language with poisonous meanings is drip-fed from the tongue of Sejanus, showing him to be a malicious and venomous character, insidiously created by the playwright to highlight ambitious servants and dubious monarchs.

In Act V the audience is privy to Sejanus's true feelings about the murder of Drusus Nero; concealed deep within him they are given air in his brooding yet revealing and sexually ambiguous soliloquy:

Why this is well, Germanicus is gone
With Julia and with Drusus into hell.
Follow, Sejanus, know your wits I mean.
Alas, poor Drusus, truth I pity you,

²¹³ Graves and Grant (Introduction), *Suetonius*, p. 135.

And Spado too, I think now I could weep.
 But that it is too womanly: this chopping boy
 Whom I corrupted for this stratagem,
 I did him a great favour, had he lived
 Tiberius would have had him tortured,
 Hanged by the navel for confession.
 Drusus, for you I could have wished your life.
 But reason did enforce your destiny.
 First, that you were heir to Tiberius.
 Next, observer of my secrecies,
 ...
 Fourthly, the blow which I received in peace.
 Until revenge might satisfy my will
 All these, or any were sufficient.
 I am sorry; I have used you too, too well. (V. ii. 222-245)

In this soliloquy Sejanus displays for the only time in the play feelings of remorse for his actions; this is shown towards both Drusus Nero and Spado. Sejanus admits that he 'used [Drusus Nero] too, too well' and 'corrupted' Spado. The word 'used' connotes exploitation, taking advantage and gratifying his sexual desires on the youth; by using the word 'used' shows that Sejanus took advantage of Drusus Nero's friendship and youth. John Rainolds warned against powerful and poisonous qualities held by young males: 'so beautifull boyes by kissing doe sting and powre secretly in a kinde of poyson, the poyson of incontinence'.²¹⁴ Drusus Nero proved to be inconstant in his friendship with Sejanus. Alone on the stage Sejanus addresses the dead Drusus Nero with what appears, through his language, to be true sentiment and emotion: 'Drusus, for you I could have wished your life'. Sejanus discloses that he and Drusus Nero shared intimacies, calling him 'an observer of my secrecies', proof that there was a special affinity between the two. These confessions, I suggest, prove there was a genuine closeness between the two men and that Sejanus appears deeply moved by his death. Sejanus ends with what appear to be sincere and contrite words 'I am sorry', before going on to admit, 'I could weep / But that it is too womanly'. This admission reinforces the idea of Sejanus keeping up

²¹⁴ John Rainolds, *Th'overthrow of stage-playes, by the way of controversie betwixt D. Gager and D. Rainoldes wherein all the reasons that can be made for them are notably refuted; th'objections answered, and the case so cleared and resolved, as that the iudgement of any man, that is not froward and perverse, may easelie be satisfied. Wherein is manifestly proved, that it is not onely vnlawfull to bee an actor, but a beholder of those vantties. Wherevnto are added also and annexed in th'end certeine latine letters betwixt the sayed Maister Rainoldes, and D. Gentiles, reader of the civill law in Oxford, concerning the same matter.* (Middelburg : Printed by Richard Schilders, 1599). p. 18.

the façade of manliness, unwilling to allow his real feelings to be seen by the patriarchal society that views tears as 'womanly' and enforces and controls male sexuality; tears would make his manliness 'womanly' and would also raise suspicions in its dark suggestiveness of a homosexual relationship, seen by Renaissance society²¹⁵ as both an affliction and a stigma. Here Sejanus shows in his isolation a deeply private face to the audience, hiding his suffering and weeping from the oppressive male dominated society of Rome, because he was afraid of being viewed as weak, inferior and woman-like.

Although Sejanus was callous in his treatment of others, he did occasionally show a more sensitive side to his nature regarding other males. Sejanus discloses that he took the life of the 'chopping boy' as a great favour to him, because he would have suffered torture at the hands of Tiberius and would have been 'Hanged by the navel'. One has to question why, after proving he can be extremely heartless, Sejanus would care whether death was quick or slow for Spado²¹⁶, whether the 'chopping boy' should meet his end without pain or suffer torture at the hands of Tiberius. I suggest that in the world of the play, any public sign of sympathy or emotion undermines a man's masculinity, jeopardising his reputation and status amongst his male peers, who may deem him effeminate (as already mentioned earlier with respect to Tiberius's feigned show of tears in Act I). Confronting the audience Sejanus shows genuine feelings for Drusus Nero and caring for the 'chopping boy' whom he 'corrupted'; not only does he conceal his inner feelings but admits his reluctance to display them in public. Sejanus admits that he sees himself as a 'discoloured chameleon' (II. ii. 72), hiding behind a façade yet implying that his true colours are tainted, stained and spoiled; and like the chameleon, he is dependent on his environment, public or private, homosexual or heterosexual, for survival. As Sejanus himself discloses, he is capable of being 'effeminate with some' men and 'with others chaste' (II. ii. 84).

²¹⁵ For a detailed account of attitudes towards discomfort with homoeroticism in the Renaissance see Alan Bray's *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*, chapter three: Society and the Individual. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

²¹⁶ Spado's name carries two meanings: *O.E.D. spado, n.1, A eunuch; a castrated person. spado, n.2, A cut-and-thrust sword.*

After Julia, Sabinus and Asinius are 'despatched' with the aid of poison, Sejanus relates all to Tiberius:

. . . my Lord; at supper time
She took a kernel of restorative
In a pomegranate, which did so prevail,
As that left her sicker with her physic.
Asinius and Sabinus, her dear friends,
From that apothecary did receive
The like restorative with like effect,
And then I posted to your Majesty. (V. i. 48-54)

The effeminate, caring and more sensitive side of Sejanus's character is highlighted once again. This time we hear of it from the perspective of Tiberius, through his own observations as he notices strong emotions in the facial expressions of Sejanus, even 'though well dissembled' (V. i. 58). Tiberius questions Sejanus on his physical reactions that rise to the surface of his face and appear difficult for him to keep under control. Here we catch an unusual glimpse of the feminine traits of this male poisoner (shown on his countenance) that are very telling:

What does your conscience then disturb your soul?
What means the careless rolling of your eyes?
Your loving sorrow? Folding of your arms
Your sudden sighs? Your wavering countenance?
Now all your blood does ebb into your heart.
Now your blushing visage overflows;
Speak, my Sejanus, saviour of my life,
And by my genius you shall obtain. (V. i. 61-68)

Tiberius's language describes Sejanus's unmanly reactions, and under scrutiny Sejanus tries to explain his display of emotion by admitting that his 'Fear and allegiance, duty and affection. / Honour and pity, loyalty and love, / Raise mutual tumults in [his] cloven heart' (V. i. 69-71). Sejanus's language betrays inner emotions otherwise unseen; 'Fear', 'affection', 'pity', 'love' and 'tumults', are not usually the words associated with a callous poisoner. Although we have seen Sejanus use the language of love and affection to manipulate certain situations, mostly when alone with Tiberius, here he cannot hide emotions within him that naturally rise to the

surface. The physical display of 'blushing' betrays his feelings of shame and humiliation, maybe even feelings of guilt that bring with them 'a sense of exposure, producing an urgent desire to be concealed and hidden'²¹⁷ from the scrutiny of Tiberius's stare. Sejanus has shown the audience a softer, more feminine side to his character. However, by his own confession he is a chameleon by nature and at the core of his being lies a 'cloven heart', which strongly links Sejanus to the cloven footed image of the devil. Francis Bacon's²¹⁸ translation of the twelfth psalm warns of men who flatter, having cloven hearts: 'But faire they flatter, with a clouen Heart, / By pleasing words, to worke their owne behoofe'.^{Br} Robert Jenison [sic]²¹⁹ goes further by directly linking those with a cloven heart with idolatry and the devil:

... Sincerity is a sure band of continuance; for where Religion seasons the heart, there Grace is as water in the fountaine, and as sap in the root, which makes the streames perpetuall, and the branches euer greene. The single heart in all things aimes at Gods glory, and makes the sincere Christian euer like himselfe, vpon all occasions in all estates and companies, as it did Ioseph and Iob. Whereas insinceritie and a clouen heart, or a heart and a heart, causeth instabilitie and inconstancie, and a falling away. (sig. C1-2)

The image of the sap rising in the tree only to nourish its branches with goodness is reversed in the portrayal of Tiberius in the play. Tiberius is like the poisonous tree: his contaminated sap fattens and poisons everyone he has contact with, especially evident in the poisoned apple he offers his daughter-in-law. While Sejanus may be insincere with Tiberius, Julia, and Livia, he does appear to be contrite when speaking of the death of Drusus Nero and Spado. Curiously, Sejanus is also presented as having a hint of sensitivity, which is something Hoffman, Lorrique, and Vindice lack. The image of the cloven heart that Sejanus possesses emphasises his evil,

²¹⁷ Ewan Fernie, *Shame in Shakespeare* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 9.

²¹⁸ Francis Bacon, *The translation of certaine psalmes into English verse by the Right Honourable, Francis Lo. Verulam, Viscount St. Alban.* (London : Printed for Hanna Barret and Richard Whittaker, 1625).

²¹⁹ Jenison, Robert, *The height of Israels heathenish idolatrie, in sacrificing their children to the Deuill divided into three sections: where is shewed in the first, the growth and degrees of this, and generally of other sinnes and idolatries. In the second, that the Deuill was the god of the heathen; with the meanes by which he obtayned that honour. With a large application to our times, against popery, shewing the pride thereof, and malice both against soule and body; together with the meanes, sleights, and policies by which it seduceth, killeth, and in the person of the Pope, raiseth it selfe to its present height. In the third, the blinde zeale of idolaters. Deliuered generally in two sermons preached at S. Maries in Cambridge: the first whereof is much enlarged: by Robert Ienison Bachelor of Diuinitie, and late Fellow of S. Johns Colledge in Cambridge.* (London : [G. Eld] for Robert Mylbourne, 1621).

dangerous nature, and although Samson Bond²²⁰ informs us 'that God cannot abide cor divisum, a cloven heart, a heart parted and divided within it selfe' (sig. E3), maybe the cleft in his heart is the divide between the two sides to Sejanus's nature.

In Sejanus we see a complex character, a killer who shows no compassion, is ruthless, callous and without any empathy for those he kills. On rare occasions the audience are privy to witness another side to his personality, which is kept quite private. But, in spite of this, Sejanus has all the major characteristic trademarks of the Machiavellian villain: 'a host of evil characteristics beginning with the most loathsome practices of stagecraft and extending to what was most vile in human nature generally. Rapacity, avarice, atheism, ruthlessness, craft and deceit, treachery, diabolism'.²²¹ Fred B. Tromly says that 'the dominant attitude was to depict Machiavellianism as a lethal Continental disease which must be kept out of the innocent, enclosed world of England at all costs'.²²² And it is through the characters of Tiberius and Sejanus that the playwright is able to exploit this xenophobic view and fuel notions of the emasculated male as being a poisonous danger to others. As a play, *Tiberius* has been overlooked by critics and it is difficult to find any modern critical consensus on the relationship between Tiberius and Sejanus; however, I believe that there is enough evidence in the play to prove the language between the two characters is homoerotic, even though there is no evidence of a sexual relationship between the two; it is their language that implies there is more between them than just that of master and minion.

²²⁰ Samson Bond, *A sermon preached before the reverend Committee of divines, the 20th of May 1646 At their usuall place of meeting in Westminster. Vpon a text given the day before, by that godly and learned member of the Assembly Mr John Ley chair-man.* By Sampson Bond minister of Gods word, at Mayden-head in Berks. Printed according to order. (London : printed by John Macock, and are to be sold at the sign of the three leggs in the Poultry, 1646).

²²¹ Douglas Cole, *Suffering and Evil in the Plays of Christopher Marlowe* (Princeton: New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1962), p.137.

²²² Fred B. Tromly, *Playing With Desire: Christopher Marlowe and the Art of Tantalization* (Toronto: Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1998), p.104.

Misogyny and Females

The playwright shows the only three female characters in the play not as mother, wife or daughter, but as self-haters wishing to destroy the very parts of their anatomy that distinguish them as female. Livia tells us that she would love to 'unrip [her] breast and tear it out' (II. iii. 203), and Julia says, 'my womb, / Which now I hate' (III. vi. 7-8). Tiberius shows a great dislike for the women in the play and sets about obliterating all the females around him: his mother, his daughter and his daughter-in-law, all because Tiberius sees them as a contaminant to him, a threat to his manhood, especially his mother, Julia. Julia's function at the beginning of the play seems to have been to help Tiberius secure the throne after the death of Augustus; as mother to Tiberius she is presented as strong and dominant. Alexandra Shepherd writes that 'Women were accorded bewitching capacities with an emasculating impact'²²³; it is shown that Julia's man-like qualities undermine Tiberius and pose a danger to his security as emperor. Humphrey Crowch,²²⁴ writing in the 1600s, wrote that: 'Women grow mankind, men effeminate' (sig. B5). By disposing of his mother, Tiberius not only rids his life of the threat to his power but also to his fragile masculinity. Tiberius and Sejanus both share a hate of women and both want absolute rule that will verify their need to demonstrate an outward show of masculinity; Tiberius says, 'of this world am not I Emperor' (I. i. 86); while Sejanus admits that he has an 'Empire to obtain' (II. i. 90). Tiberius's dislike for women is confirmed in the poisoning of his own mother.

Sejanus also admits to matricidal murder: 'I broke her neck in honesty' (II. ii. 22) and admits that he would willingly break a thousand mothers' necks in his quest to be emperor:

Yet if a thousand mothers' necks would serve
To get me to be Emperor of Rome,
By heavens I would not leave one neck alive:

²²³ Shepherd, *Meanings of Manhood*, 79.

²²⁴ Humphrey Crowch, *Loves court of conscience written upon two severall occasions, with new lessons for lovers. Wherunto is annexed a kinde husband's advice to his wife*. (London : Printed [by T. Harper] for Richard Harper, 1637).

And to be sure that they should all be broke,
I'd hire some honest jointer them to set,
And break them over twenty thousand times (II. ii. 24-29)

Like Tiberius, Sejanus showed his mother no love, though we do learn that she loved him (II. ii. 21). Sejanus is dismissive and patronising towards the women in the play; he treats Livia like a commodity, a stepping-stone to the 'Empire' and the throne. Sejanus naively plays Julia and Livia as fools and feeds them meaningless clichés. For instance, when he is supposedly plotting the murder of Tiberius with Julia, she questions his love for her, to which he glibly replies that he 'loved [her] more than the world' (III. iv. 41). The feigned language of affection between male and female in the play is overshadowed by the language of hate, murder and poisoning. Julia's character as the main dominant female within the play is depicted as ambitious and ruthless; she does not allow herself to be thwarted by her own son who was only made emperor through her own conniving and plotting.

Julia intends to rid herself of Tiberius and only wishes she had done so when he was first conceived in her womb, with the help of poison; she admits that she is a 'vile monster' (II. ii. 51); Tiberius is also described as being a 'monster' several times, which associates him with the same toxic female traits to be found in his mother. In Act II Julia promises Tiberius that he 'shall know a woman's hate' (II. ii. 8) as she says she

... did conceive the villain in my womb,
Which now I hate because it fostered him;
Could I not get some toxins²²⁵ to have made
My womb abortive, when I conceived! (III. vi. 7-10)

²²⁵ For a detailed account of toxins being used for abortive purposes see: *Historical perspective on induced abortion through the ages and its links with maternal mortality* by James Owen Drife, *Best Practice & Research Clinical Obstetrics & Gynaecology*, (2010), Aug 26; 24 (4) : 431-41. In his article he shows that written material from medical writers was readily available to women giving advice on which poisonous plants would induce an unwanted pregnancy, including Hippocrates, that gave methods for abortion: 'Plants with alleged abortifacient properties included silphium, which was harvested to extinction in Roman times, and hellebore ("Christmas rose"), an ingredient of so-called "abortion wine". Hellebore has poisonous constituents and can cause death'.

Julia was desperate to rid herself of the 'villain' growing inside her womb but failed to procure poisons to terminate²²⁶ her unwanted growth; by wishing to do so she also reveals contempt for that part of the body that strongly determines her as female. In an earlier soliloquy, in Act II, Julia admits it is 'true' that Tiberius was a 'bastard'; this throws doubt and suspicion onto her own moral standards:

Shall I call him a bastard? True it is,
But Julia, then you do yourself the wrong.
Say that he was Augustus' murderer,
Yet therein Julia, you were counsellor.
How then? A vengeance on his cursèd head,
So he was murdered, would that I were dead,
Vile monster that I am, to perish loath,
Yet heavens rain brimstone and consume us both,
I am impatient, yet I must dissemble. (II. i. 45-53)

In Julia the dangers and toxicity of females as mothers, wives and lovers are demonstrated. Julia is no virgin to murderous plots and has admitted her part in the murder of Augustus: 'therein Julia, you were counsellor'. Her dangerous nature is also shown in her incantation-like language in Act III. Here Julia is reminiscent of Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth (I. v. 40-54)²²⁷:

Proud Phaeton, ascend your father's throne,
And rouse the frozen serpent from his den.
Father of darkness, patron of confusion,
Reduce the chaos of eternal night,
Let heaven and earth, and air, be brought to nought,
For Nero lives and Julia's life is sought. (III. vi. 16-21)

The language Julia uses links her to evil and witchcraft, especially in her call to the 'Father of darkness' to ascend and assist her in achieving the death of Tiberius.

²²⁶ According to John Baptista della Porta the process for making abortion was relatively easy. In the third book of his *Natural Magick*, (USA: Basic Books Incorporated, 1957) pp. 100, 101, Porta gives the recipe for aborting unwanted infants under the heading: 'How to make that kind of wine which is called Phthorium, and kills children in their mothers wombes'. For knowledge of what to do to rid themselves of unwanted pregnancies, women only had to follow Porta's advice about fruit that would 'be operative either for purgation or for childe-bearing, either to hurt or help, either to kill or preserve'.

²²⁷ Clark, Mason, (eds.), *Macbeth*.

As Julia plots with Sejanus the death of Tiberius, we learn of his disrespect for her as he says 'the hag is most ambitious' (II. ii. 57), and admits that 'Nero will brook no rival in his rule' (I. iv. 89). Tiberius also mirrors Julia with thoughts of murder and is soon planning her death; it is ironic that like his mother, Tiberius turns to Sejanus to perform the necessary deed:

But now another cloud obscures our sun,
Of lesser favour but of greater show,
That infamous tigress, Julia.
Nemea never saw a lioness
Was half so furious as is Julia.
Did you not see her yawning sepulchre
Ravening to swallow up my Empire?
Did she not show Augustus' testament
To have discarded me from regiment?
How can I brook it? Do not make reply,
If Nero live, Julia shall surely die. (III. iv. 23-32)

From the evidence Tiberius provides he is unable to 'brook' any public humiliation. Tiberius wants no display of failure as a leader that may expose his weakness as a male to those around him; or show him to be a puppet for his 'tigress' of a mother to control. The double-dealing and treacherous Sejanus obliges Tiberius's request to kill Julia as we also learn of the numerous murders he has already performed for Tiberius: 'Of those that you by me have murdered' (V. iv. 72). Sejanus coldly tells Julia: 'Then, Julia, make your quick confession' (III. iv. 34). The word 'confession' roots the play within beliefs of the Catholic Church, as Julia needs to go through the judicial process of confessing her mortal sins in the hope of being absolved from eternal punishment. Sejanus wastes no time in acting swiftly as Julia is quickly dispatched with the help of a poisoned pomegranate: 'at supper time / She took a kernel of restorative / In a pomegranate, which did so prevail, / As that left her sicker with her physic' (V. i. 47-50). In addition to the murder of Julia we learn that Sejanus disposes of Asinius and Sabinus by applying a poison procured from the same apothecary: 'Asinius and Sabinus, her dear friends, / From that apothecary did receive / the like restorative with like effect' (V. ii. 51-53). It is ironic that the pomegranate should be used as the fruit to poison Julia, especially after her confessional desire to abort the newly conceived Tiberius in her womb, as the pomegranate was a symbol of

fertility: 'throughout history, [the] pomegranate has represented abundance and fertility'.²²⁸ In Greek mythology Persephone gathering flowers was seized by Hades and taken to the underworld; when Demeter her mother heard of this she was so unhappy she neglected the harvest of the Earth and caused widespread famine. Zeus intervened, commanding Hades to release Persephone but because she had eaten a single pomegranate seed in the underworld she could not be completely freed but had to remain one-third of the year with Hades, spending the other two-thirds with her mother. The pomegranate was also used as part of Catherine of Aragon's coat of arms and was accepted into English heraldry when she married King Henry VIII in 1509. The pomegranate has also been portrayed in many religious paintings²²⁹ alongside Mary, the mother of God. Pomegranates are one of the seven sacred plants mentioned in the Bible and the pomegranate is believed to have 613 seeds – one for each of the Bible's 613 commandments. The association of the pomegranate to religion is echoed in the murder of Julia through the use of a poisoned pomegranate; as the setting for the play is Rome, Italy, there is no doubting the playwright's contempt for the Catholic faith and reinforces a fear of foreigners and a hatred of Catholics.

Murder

The playwright uses inventive ways for Tiberius to mete out death to characters that are seen as a threat to his position as emperor. One inventive way to dispose of these characters is to use the iconic crown; in the play Germanicus and Sejanus both die with a crown. The anonymous playwright may have borrowed the burning crown motif from Henry Chettle's play *The Tragedy of Hoffman*, which was performed in 1602; the crown is a strong symbol of kingship, authority and power, and in the Renaissance was believed to come with the divine approval of God. The crown has strong associations with the suffering of Christ on the cross and because of this could easily be associated with Catholicism, as evidenced in the gospel according to Mark:

²²⁸ Vera Tweed, 'Pomegranate: Nutritional Jewel', *Better Nutrition*, 72 (2010), p. 24.

²²⁹ For instance see, 'Madonna of the Pomegranate' painting by Sandro Botticelli and 'Madonna and Child with Pomegranate' by Lorenzo di Credi or Leonardo da Vinci 1475-1480.

delyuered vp Iesus (when he had scourged hym) for to be crucified. And the souldiours led hym away into the comen hall, and called togyther the hole multitude, & they clothed hym with purple, and they platted a crowne of thornes and crowned hym withall, and began to salute hym: Hayle kyng of the Iues²³⁰.

Jesus was given a painful crown to wear, a mock symbol of kingship; so too did Germanicus and Sejanus have painful crowns placed upon their heads that would mock their ambitions, authority, and claims to the crown; and like Jesus Christ, their crowns would also bring them great suffering and ultimate death.

The crown is easily recognisable for a symbol of power and rule. We learn that Germanicus was entitled by birth to the crown: 'Germanicus, heir to the crown' (V. i. 38). We also learn that Sejanus's ultimate goal was always the crown: 'All your [his own] devices for to get the crown!' (III. vi. 108) as he confesses that 'Under this vale of love enveloped, ... An opportunity to claim the crown' (II. iii. 255). The crown is a strong symbolic reminder to the audience of the King, his court, corruption and poison wielded by emasculated males. When it comes to the death of Germanicus, Tiberius again entrusts his favourite Sejanus with the task. Sejanus then uses his own minion Piso to actually carry out the deed for him; Sejanus also supplies Piso with the necessary poison to perform the murder. Tacitus states that Germanicus suspected 'that Piso had poisoned him', and we are told that Germanicus said it was the 'wickedness of Piso ... that has cut [him] off'.²³¹ Tacitus states that Piso had been deceived by insincere promises made by Sejanus²³², this corroborates the playwright's portrayal of Sejanus in the play; however, Suetonius writes that it was Tiberius who arranged for Piso to poison Germanicus.²³³ In the play Sejanus dispatches Piso with the appropriate poisons, which he boasts would not even be known by the sorceress Circe:

My Lord, upon mine honour I'll aver

²³⁰ Anon. *The Byble in Englyshe that is to saye, the content of all the holye scrypture, bothe of the olde and newe Testament, truly translated after the veryte of the Hebrue and Greke textes, by the diligent studye of dyuers excellent lerned [men e]xperte in the fore[saide] tongues*, (Prynted at L[ondo]n : by [Thomas] Petyt, and [Robert] Redman, Thomas Berthelet: 1540), CAPI. XV.

²³¹ Grant, *Tacitus*, p.112.

²³² *ibid.*, p.126.

²³³ Graves and Grant, *Suetonius*, p.136.

Speedy performance of this action.
I so inveigled Piso, so enwrapped him,
So conjured his traitorous resolution,
Storing the villain with such poisonous drugs,
As never Circe nor Arêtes knew.
I so incensed his damnèd ambition,
Soothing his humour, praising his great worth,
Adding the favours of Tiberius,
That were Germanicus imperious Jove,
Piso would poison him to gain my love. (III. iv. 11-20)

The word 'inveigled' shows how crafty and persuasive Sejanus could be. Sejanus enticed Piso into agreeing to the murder of Germanicus through his use of flattery and speaking of his 'great worth', inflaming his 'ambition'; in addition to this, he promised him 'favours' from Tiberius himself, proving that Sejanus could be eloquent, persuasive and manipulative. Yet we are told that Piso was 'the very dregs of licentiousness, the very vice of villainy, the very excrement of evil' (IV. iv. 8-9), which, I suggest, is a description that would fit the majority of male poisoners in plays in the early modern period.

Thwarted ambition is a common stimulus for revenge in plays with poison plots, and Piso already desired the death of Germanicus because Germanicus refused him the crown of honour. Piso believes that his manhood has been publicly humiliated and he desperately needs to defend it; he regards the crown, which represents valour, courage and bravery, should by rights be placed on his head: 'The crown of honour that I have deserved' (IV. i. 212). Germanicus has a different interpretation of events to Piso and humiliates him by disparaging his manhood; he tells Piso that he is all talk: 'His deeds, alack, are tongue-tied orators' (IV. I. 190). Germanicus continues to mock the account given by Piso of his participation in the battle by saying 'that Piso, by some postern gate, / Crept through a mews and by the winding stairs, / Panting and breathless, stole up to the walls' (IV. i. 204-206). 'Panting and breathless' tells of Piso being unsuitable for action and unworthy to perform the duties of a soldier; 'crept' insinuates that he was sneaky, avoided being noticed, and links to his servile actions and of his desire to please Sejanus and gain favour with the emperor Tiberius. Through the words of Germanicus we learn

that Piso entered by a 'postern gate' like a coward, proving that he would rather choose the easy option of poison to kill Germanicus rather than fight him in one-to-one combat, man to man.

The advantage of choosing poison for a weapon is that it guarantees success in revenge. Piso desires revenge on Germanicus for publicly belittling and trivialising his manhood; this mirrors Sejanus's hurt manhood when Drusus Nero publicly boxed his ear. Piso's stealth with poison is seen by the audience in his actions: *Piso at the other end of the stage sprinkles powder on the crown, and then he sets it on Germanicus' head* (s.d. IV. i.). Vengeful and full of spite, Piso declares: 'that crown shall be the last [he] ever shall wear, / [because it] ... decks [his] speedy funeral' and so sure is he that the poison will work, he claims: 'Piso's a fool, Sejanus had no wit. / That powder which I sprinkled on the leaves / ... him of his life bereaves' (IV. i. 238-243). The agony in which Germanicus dies is graphically retold by Maximus to Agrippina; he witnessed the death and tells of how Germanicus lay in 'torment' and 'gnaw[ed] the earth in fellness of his mind,' and how like a true warrior he 'disdained to moan, / Or roar in torment of his agony' (IV. iii. 135-141). Another soldier later describes the violent death throes of Germanicus, created by the strong poison sprinkled onto the crown: 'his head swelled, / his hair would not burn, and he died in a fury, and we all know that Piso / had mortal hatred against him because he would not let him have his mural crown'²³⁴ (IV. iv. 3-5). Later in the play the Ghost of Germanicus will tell us that 'This mural crown wrought [his] untimely death, / By Piso's envy' (IV. ii. 26-27). The crown symbolises military triumphs and it would appear that Piso's grudge against Germanicus was already known to others regarding the mural crown and who should wear it. However, Piso appeases his hate for Germanicus by his murder, giving him a personal triumph as he utters exultantly: 'I lost the crown, but I have won the day' (IV. i. 230).

²³⁴ *O.E.D.* mural, adj. 1. Designating a crown or (later also) a garland, wreath, etc., conferred as a mark of honour (originally by the ancient Romans) on the first soldier to scale the walls of a besieged town. In extended use: designating any similar crown, esp. in heraldic depictions or as worn by the goddess Cybele. Freq. in mural crown (also crown mural). The crown Piso sprinkles the poison onto presumably has leaves which marks it as a laurel leaf crown and not the actual mural crown that is coveted and mentioned by Piso. It is not a crown that denotes kingship nor is it an imperial crown but one denoting military achievement. The crown motif is also used as an instrument of death in *The Tragedy of Hoffman*.

In the final scenes of the play Sejanus becomes a dispensable irritation to Tiberius as he is needed no more. Sejanus has run his useful course for Tiberius and is empowered with self importance and position; this makes him an even greater menace to Tiberius's status as emperor. Melvin Seiden comments that this is 'An effective use of the situation in which the villain becomes perilously dependent upon his lackey ... Then suddenly decides that his dependents must be terminated. Because of his embroilment in the villain's schemes, the lackey constitutes - so the villain must inevitably feel - a threat to his own security'.²³⁵ The murder of Sejanus is not undertaken in the heat of an emotional spat between the two men; it is undertaken by other minions of Tiberius willing to ingratiate themselves into his favour. Seiden seems quite clear in his dichotomy of who dies a hero's death and who dies at the hands of the villain: 'one is represented by the dramatist and accepted by the audience as being a morally detestable act evoking out deepest fears; while the other, the act of a good man who has suffered a grievous injustice is represented as being morally just'.²³⁶ Seiden's thesis cannot be applied to the two main protagonists in this play as both master and minion are as villainous as each other. I think it very unlikely that an audience would have any sympathy for Sejanus or Tiberius at the moment of their deaths. Tiberius is not depicted as a courageous male; like most male poisoners he overestimates his ambitious plots and schemes, as does Sejanus. Both Tiberius and Sejanus have a certain charm in their villainous natures; qualities to be found in a hero, but these male characters are no heroes. Tiberius and Sejanus's flawed manhoods are exposed during the course of the play; it is through their use of poison to murder others along with their deceptive, cowardly actions that they receive their just retribution.

Death for Sejanus is a horrendous and gruesome experience and involves excruciating pain created by a burning crown. Sejanus seals his fate when he warns Tiberius that he will 'from your hand rend the imperial crown' (V. iv. 101). The death of Sejanus comes in Act V and is an act of barbarous proportions as it ridicules his ambition to become emperor. As Sejanus calls Tiberius a 'lunatic usurper of the crown,' (V. iv. 19) he reminds Tiberius of the fact that he was

²³⁵ Melvin Seiden, *The Revenge Motive in Websterian Tragedy*, *Salzburg Studies in English Literature* under the Direction of Professor Erwin A. Stürzl, *Jacobean Drama Studies*, ed. Dr. James Hogg (Institut Für Englische Sprache und Literatur Universität Salzburg Austria, 1973), p.140.

²³⁶ *ibid.*, p. 26.

the adopted son of Augustus; he also refers to the secret machinations of Julia and himself to instate Tiberius as emperor. Sejanus tells Tiberius: 'My right as good as yours is to the crown, / For both but false, and both but villainy' (V. iv. 22-23). The word 'false' is ambiguously apt here as neither have a rightful claim to the throne. The word also refers to the way they have both conducted themselves with each other and with others; both have been villainous and cruel in their schemes and murders. Tiberius taunts and ridicules Sejanus with his words, 'I do resign my crown imperial / Unto Sejanus, and do invest him Caesar. / All hail, Sejanus! Rome's great emperor' (V. iv. 131-132), as he orders a burning crown to be placed on the head of Sejanus: '*Enter Spurius with a burning crown*' (s.d. V. iv). Although Sejanus dies an excruciating death his defiance has to be admired, for in his last words he calls for revenge for his death:

All hail: hell, death, destruction plague you all,
Let all the tortures, torments, punishments,
In earth, in heaven, in hell, revenge my death,
Whose burning pain torments me not so much
As that there comes not from my scalded brains,
Sufficient smoke to smother all of you. (V. iv. 132-137)

Even in his great suffering Sejanus wishes to use poison to kill Tiberius with the toxic fumes of his burning brains. Earlier in the play Sejanus had wished that he could poison Tiberius: 'This will I do: no this, no villain this, / Poison Tiberius' (II. ii. 17-18). Sejanus's torture of having his brains cooked by the burning ring upon his head leads to the greater agony of knowing that there may not be enough poisonous smoke to kill Tiberius. Sejanus imitates Tiberius in this last address: 'All hail' he utters, with vindictive curses on all participants to his murder. The crown being placed onto Sejanus's head at the time of his death may have possibly evoked the death of Christ for a Jacobean audience; the playwright parodies the crown of thorns placed as a gesture of mockery on the head of Christ as he was hailed King of the Jews:

Than the de+bites souldiers takynge Iesus in the commune hal, gathered vnto hym
al ye company. And stryppyng hym out of hys clothes, put a purple robe about
hym. And platynge a crowne of thornes, they set it vpon hys heade, and a rede in

hys ryghte hande: and the knyge bowed afore hym, they mocked hym, sayenge:
Hayle kynge of the Iewes. (Fol. 43)²³⁷

Tiberius Caesar is mentioned several times in the Bible and also lived during the time of Jesus; therefore the playwright may have been trying to make biblical link to the context of the play and also inferring to contemporary unease concerning James I. A crown is a strong symbol of royalty, majesty and power, but the playwright attacks the iconic symbol of the crown and turns it into something painful, degrading and dangerous.

The wishes of Sejanus become a reality near the end of Act V as Tiberius meets his own end. It is in his death that Tiberius suffers in burning agony; not with a burning crown, but by the burning agony of poison coursing through his body. In his death throes, Tiberius complains of physical bodily torments as he tells Caligula:

Cursed be all happiness, for I have none.
I have a fire, a fire within my bowels,
That burns and scalds, and mads me with the pain: (V. x. 19-21)

In the last tortuous moments of his suffering, Tiberius wishes he was able to physically rip his own bowels from out of his body: 'Give me my hands that I may rend my flesh, / And tear this raging from out my burning entrails' (V. x. 26-27). In Act V we learn that Caligula commissioned the minion Macro to undertake the evil deed of poisoning Tiberius; he plied him with poisoned water that Caligula had kept in preparation for the moment he could wreak his revenge on Tiberius:

Do not prolong with idle breathing words,
The date of cold revenge: for even this night
Nero, shall be enrolled in Pluto's court.
In Germany, far on the Northern side,
Within the circuit of a deserted wood,
A wilderness of deadly basilisks,

²³⁷ Myles Coverdale, *The newe testamente both Latine and Englyshe ech correspondent to the other after the vulgare texte, communely called S. Ieroms. Faythfully translated by Myles Couerdale. Anno. M.CCC.CC.XXXVIII.* (Southwarke : James Nicholson, [1538]). Fol. 43.

Within this circuit is an hellish pool,
Cold in the tenth degree. Not Styx so cold,
Wherein the fearful Thetis drenched her son;
In a mule's hoof this water have I kept,
As fatal drink to Philip's worthy son,
And even this night this water shall revenge
The tyrant's wrongs unto Caligula. (V. viii. 43-54)

Caligula, like Sejanus, is portrayed with an unforgiving nature, which is revealed here in his language. The revenge he seeks for the 'wrongs' Tiberius has done to him is primarily for the murder of his father Germanicus. Caligula, like Hamlet, admits to hiding behind a feigned madness in order to gain the throne: 'I was a fool, but all to get the crown' (V. x. 79). The play does not end in resolution and hope, but rather ends with yet another male poisoner in the role of emperor of Rome. In his last speech, Caligula tries to justify his murder of Tiberius by cataloguing the murders committed by Tiberius, including the murder of Saint Peter the founder of the Roman Catholic Church in Rome; though Saint Peter was crucified upside down by the emperor Nero and not Tiberius. Caligula gains the throne only to guarantee a rule based on terror, cruelty and deception. Caligula is a callous male poisoner who eventually stabs Tiberius several times on his death bed because he isn't dying quickly enough from the poisonous water he supplied for him to drink. Caligula is not the saviour of Rome and does not rescue Rome and its people from a poisoning tyrant; he just replaces him with yet another one. This toxic tragedy ends mirroring its beginning, with the murder of an emperor and the murderer usurping the throne, therefore setting an unbroken cyclical pattern of contamination and injudicious rule.

Conclusion

The Tragedy of Claudius Tiberius Nero exposes the insecurities and deceptive natures of the male poisoner through the depiction of Tiberius and Sejanus. Throughout the play the playwright presents us with male poisoners that rely heavily on each other's trust and loyalty,

which is often gained through the language of love and devotion between master and minion. Both Tiberius and Sejanus use each other as a crutch to achieve their goals and to compensate for their lack of masculine valour; both are easily able to manipulate the fate of others to serve their own personal interests. Poison is used by emasculated males to veil their lack of masculine bravery and weak manhoods. *The Tragedy of Claudius Tiberius Nero* foreshadows the next play to be discussed by linking the theme of poison to a coveted crown and an emasculated king.

Chapter 4

The Second Maiden's Tragedy

Thomas Middleton

As this is the second of Middleton's plays to be discussed, it is worthy to linking the two plays through their use of cosmetics, dead females, and misogyny. Both *The Revenger's Tragedy* and *The Second Maiden's Tragedy* share recurring themes to be found in Middleton's plays. The date of the licence on the MS prompt book for Thomas Middleton's play *The Second Maiden's Tragedy*²³⁸ is 31 October 1611.²³⁹ The characters in the play are similar to Medieval allegorical representations of morally symbolic figures but, I suggest, in name only. The play's central theme has echoes of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1601), with a usurped king and a ghost that desires revenge. Anne Lancashire writes in her introduction to the play that the revenge taken by the deposed king Govianus is 'reluctantly entered into, and rises out of unselfish and proper reverence for the virtuous dead, and a focus on spiritual matters'.²⁴⁰ I suggest in this chapter that Lancashire's rather ideological perspective on the character of Govianus is open to debate; the revenge Govianus metes out to his usurper, the Tyrant, demonstrates a lack of masculine valour on his part. Govianus's manhood and pride are publicly challenged when we are told that he stands about the court 'Readier for doom than dignity' (I. i. 5); this shows that he has already been emasculated by the Tyrant's public display of masculine strength and manly gumption.

Lancashire states that 'at the play's end the main plot revenger-hero is triumphantly restored to his throne: whereas traditional revenge tragedy normally called for the death or punishment of

²³⁸ The manuscript Anne Lancashire uses of *The Second Maiden's Tragedy* is the copy that is in the British Museum used by the King's Men and dated 1611. For a detailed account of this copy see Lancashire's account in her introduction to the play. As for the author of the play, Lancashire explains the many names associated over time to the different authors, but best explains that there is enough internal evidence to suggest the author is Thomas Middleton. See Lancashire introduction, p.19 Also see, Leonora Leet Brodwin, 'Authorship of "The Second Maiden's Tragedy": A Reconsideration of the Manuscript Attribution to Chapman', *Studies in Philology* 63 (1966) 51-77. All references to this play used in this thesis will be taken from the following copy: Lancashire, Anne, (ed.), *The Revels Plays: The Second Maiden's Tragedy*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1978). I would like to make it clear that there are no scenes in Act III.

²³⁹ *ibid.*, p. 14.

²⁴⁰ Lancashire, p. 38.

the revenger, however just his cause'.²⁴¹ I will argue that Govianus is not a traditional revenge-hero, if indeed he can be considered as a hero. What makes *The Second Maiden's Tragedy* different from other revenge plays discussed in this thesis is that there is no homoerotic language shared between two male characters, and death by poison is not carried out by a male minion; indeed, it is heterosexual desire and lust that underly the themes that drive the dramatic action to its conclusion. However, the interest in skulls in this play extends to the whole body. In this chapter I aim to prove that Govianus, the usurped king, is represented as unmanly, effeminate, and cowardly.

Murder, Unmanliness, and Poison

Govianus does not spring into manly action in the first Act of the play when he is deposed by the Tyrant. We learn from the beginning of the play that the Tyrant had the 'constant loves' (I. i. 1) of the nobles who used their 'powers' (I. i. 1) in the first place to help him depose Govianus from his throne. The Tyrant says that he 'now has the kingdom's love' and that Govianus was 'Flattered awhile' (I. i. 4-5). Lancashire suggests that the Tyrant was an 'anti-Christ' and is established as 'satanic'²⁴² in the play, but one has to question why the nobles in Govianus's court consider being accomplices to the Tyrant's treatment of their king. Especially as Lancashire writes that Govianus

demonstrates his goodness in I. i and elsewhere in general moral (rather than personal or political) terms; he recognises the importance of mental or spiritual content, which comes from virtuous personal conduct and from love of things immaterial, and the relative unimportance of material success (which includes political kingship).²⁴³

Govianus cannot demonstrate a 'moral' 'goodness' after the murder of Sophonirus; he has taken another's life and committed the sin of murder, not in self-defence or against a fierce foe in

²⁴¹ Lancashire, p. 37.

²⁴² Lancashire, p. 28.

²⁴³ *ibid.*, p.40.

battle, but for no other reason than that Sophonirus was a 'bawd' (III. 28) and a 'panderous lord' (III. 26). These are 'personal' reasons that can never bring 'spiritual content[ment]'. Tanya Pollard deems Govianus 'upright and virtuous',²⁴⁴ but he stabs Sophonirus then cunningly says:

... I'll plant this bawd
Against the door, the fittest place of him,
That when with ungoverned weapons they rush in,
Blinded with fury, they may take his death
Into the purple number of their deeds,
And wipe it off mine. (III. 179-184)

Here the character of Govianus is shown as sly and deceitful; audiences witness a usurped king commit a needless and undeserved murder on Sophonirus and we do not see Govianus taking revenge on the nobles and courtiers who helped the Tyrant gain control of his throne. Furthermore, with unchivalrous disrespect for Sophonirus's dead body, Govianus drags and manipulates it into a sitting position behind a door in the hope that when others enter they will see it, stab it in their 'blinded fury', and count it with 'the purple number of their deed' in the hope that the murder will then be 'wipe[d]' off Govianus's own deeds. I argue that Govianus's actions can only be described as cowardly, sly and covert; he takes full advantage of the situation by allowing men of a lesser status to himself be held responsible for his own murderous deed. As king, wearing the symbol of authority and power, the crown, he should carry with it a personal confidence and an entitlement to feel that power and authority. With the Tyrant taking possession of the crown, I argue that the Tyrant has asserted his own manly power over Govianus; demonstrating to all other males in the court and kingdom that he is a man of valour and action. I argue that Govianus's passive response to the Tyrant's action would not actually instil any confidence into his subjects and therefore portrays a king that does not value his throne enough to put up a fight; and when Govianus hides the body of the murdered Sophonirus he does not display the actions of a 'virtuous' king. If, therefore, the deposed Govianus can now be counted as an ordinary subject in the kingdom, then Govianus should be punished like any other murderer; but instead we see him rewarded for committing two murders

²⁴⁴ Pollard, *Drugs and Theater*, p. 103.

by regaining the crown at the end of the play. Middleton transforms the crown from a symbol of authority, respect and power, to become a representation of deceit, cowardice and dishonour.

Govianus displays unmanly and unscrupulous actions throughout the play. The Tyrant calls Govianus his 'rival', which intimates that they were both competing for the Lady's love; though it does appear that the Lady already belonged to Govianus. The fact that the Tyrant asks Govianus if he thinks he was being 'bold' in his quest to win the Lady's love alongside the Tyrant implies his surprise that Govianus would even consider being an opponent to him. The Tyrant's love for the Lady does not falter throughout the play, especially after her death; whereas Govianus's love is proven shaky in Act I as he questions her virtues when it comes to the advancing of her position: 'O, she's a woman, and her eye will stand / Upon advancement, never weary yonder' (I. i. 63-4). Govianus's misogynistic remark carries a hint of contempt for women and establishes his mistrust of female moral values. However, any doubt regarding the Lady's motives is never mentioned in the language of the Tyrant. The Tyrant demonstrates manly qualities; he is decisive with a mind of his own, unlike the indecisive Govianus who needs to seek advice from his brother when faced with a need to decide what to do: 'I'll to my brother for his aid or counsel' (IV. iv. 87), he says. When Govianus eventually finds his brother dying, his address to him is not with any grief stricken eulogy but with words appertaining to his weak, self-absorbed nature: 'Brother, I came for thy advice, but I / Find thee so ill a counsellor to thyself / That I repent my pains and depart sighing' (V. ii. 190-193). This shows that the self-centred Govianus is not sighing for his murdered brother, but for the pains he took in seeking his brother out in the first place. Unmanliness runs in Govianus's family, as Anselmus's wife in the sub-plot - only known as The Wife in the play - complains that he is 'not so good as a Lord ought to be' (I. ii. 110), and informs us that he 'Has lost his kindness, / Forgot the way of wedlock, and become / A stranger to the joys and rites of love' (I. i. 107-109), hinting that there is no physical contact between the two.

Govianus proves he is weak and cowardly when in Act III the Lady, desperate to escape the Tyrant's advances, tries her best to persuade Govianus to take her life. The Lady's forceful and

decisive nature is proven when she asks Govianus if he has 'leisure to stand idle?' (III. 63) The Lady taunts Govianus and compares his unmanliness to the Tyrant's manliness, asking, 'Be not less man than he' (III. 72). This suggests that the Lady does think the Tyrant more of a man than Govianus and highlights Govianus's emasculated status (though Govianus has already proven that he is a weak male, when the Tyrant was capable of taking his throne so easily in the first place). The Lady continues to goad Govianus into action and asks if his 'care [is] so cold' (III. 66), as she chides, 'Come on, sir! / Fall to your business; lay your hands about you' (III. 67-68). Like so many other female characters in plays that incorporate male poisoners, the Lady shows her strength of character to be far greater than that of the male. The Lady admits that Govianus displays no manly courage: 'Sir, you do nothing; there's no valour in you' (III. 87). The words 'no valour' apply to Govianus's lack of courage throughout the play, particularly when he has lost the loyalty of the nobles in his court, his crown and his kingdom, and cannot fend off the Tyrant in defence of the Lady's honour. The Lady rails at him that he is 'the worst friend to a lady in affliction' (III. 88), and charges him with being a 'Dull and forgetful man' (III. 93). When the Lady accuses him of having a mind set on having her 'borne with violence to the tyrant's bed' and 'forced unto the lust of all his days' (III. 95-96), Govianus replies, 'O, no, thou liv'st no longer now I think on't' (III. 97); Govianus only appears to want the Lady dead when he imagines her in the Tyrant's bed. This shows his jealous nature (Govianus's jealousy was mentioned earlier with the death of Sophonirus) and through his choice of language he sounds more like a theatrical fop than an assertive king. Govianus accuses the Lady of turning him 'cruel 'gainst my heart' (III. 101), which also implies that he is gentle and compassionate; this also contradicts the way in which he achieves his victory over the Tyrant in Act V.

Govianus displays his frailty as a man when he covertly and cowardly poisons the Tyrant instead of confronting him man to man. Govianus faints at the Lady's request to end her life, and peevishly stabs Sophonirus only to sneakily place his body behind a door for others to stab and take the blame for his death. In 1558 John Knox wrote critically about early modern

perspectives on gender and sexuality and wrote that the female had a 'naturall weaknes'²⁴⁵; this view of the female as being the weaker sex links to the natural weakness displayed in Govianus; a king who displays very little masculine strength or valour throughout the play, and a king presented in an effeminate way by Middleton. Knox warns that men who exhibit female traits were corrupted with the weakness of women:

Let the reasons of this writer be marked, for further he yet procedeth: after that he hath in many wordes lamented the effeminate maners of men, who were so farre degenerate to the weaknes of women.²⁴⁶

There is evidence in the play when Govianus appears to cross the boundaries that divide the actions of men and women; throughout the play he becomes effeminised not only by the Tyrant but also by the influence of the Lady. He is presented throughout the play as unmanly, becoming tired at moments of high tension: 'It tired me' (III. 174) he moans. Other displays of Govianus's emasculated manners are highlighted when he goes to seek advice from his brother (already mentioned), and when the Lady speaks of his 'Cowardly flesh' and 'faintness' (III. 104). Govianus is also impotent when called upon to wield his weapon:

I know not which way to begin to come to't.
Believe me, I shall never kill thee well;
I shall but shame myself. It were but folly,
Dear soul, to boast of more than I can perform.
I shall not have the power to do thee right in't. (III. 123-127)

Attempt as he will, instead of performing the act with masculine dignity, Govianus's lack of manhood comes to the fore in Act III, when at the precise moment he is supposed to fulfil the Lady's wish and kill her to protect her from the lustful desires of the Tyrant, he faints (as both Tiberius and Sejanus do). Evidence of Govianus's weakness is also shown when the Lady tells of his trembling at the sound of bad weather approaching: 'I felt thee shake / Even when the storm came near' (III. 104-105). Once Govianus has recovered from his fainting spell he is relieved to find that she has killed herself and that he has had no part in it: 'O, 'tis done, / And never beholding to my hand' (III. 168-9); he tells us, 'it was more / Than I was able to perform

²⁴⁵ John Knox, *The first blast of the trumpet against the monstrous regiment of women*, [Printed in Geneva : By J. Poullain and A. Rebul], M.D.LVIII. [1558], p. 12.

²⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p. 24.

myself', even with 'all the courage that I could take to me' (III. 171-2). Here at the crucial moment to prove his manhood Govianus exposes his inability to wield his weapon and perform; his absence of bravery exposes both his lack of courage as a man of action and his impotent manhood. Govianus's non-performance also links him to Anselmus and his brother's inability to sexually satisfy his wife, who complains of a 'famine of affection' (I. ii. 206). Furthermore, if this wasn't proof enough of Govianus's unmanly character, he then admits that the whole episode has 'tired me' and that he needs to 'fall and rest' (III. 173-4).

Anne Lancashire believes that 'the Lady is not murdered but heroically commits suicide'.²⁴⁷ This may be the case, but the Lady's intentions, I argue, can only be seen as selfish as she does not consider the implications for Govianus in his becoming a party to her committing suicide. The Lady does not end her life to save Govianus's honour but her own; her death is not an act born out of heroism or love for Govianus but for herself alone. I do not intend to detail her act of self destruction as a kind of martyrdom or personal glory to herself²⁴⁸ as my concern in this chapter is to explore the relationship between the Lady and Govianus, and to show that as a male poisoner he lacks manliness. There are also religious implications for Govianus's soul as murder was a sin against God. The fact that the Lady wanted to involve Govianus in her death taints her intentions and shows them to be neither brave nor noble.

From the beginning of the play Govianus's lack of motivation and emotional involvement with either his reduced status or the Lady (when alive) is established. The only time the audience sees Govianus animated or aroused with any kind of enthusiasm is at the sight of the Lady's ghost:

²⁴⁷ Lancashire, p. 37.

²⁴⁸ For a more detailed view on suicide see Rowland Wymer's book, *Suicide and Despair in The Jacobean Drama*. Wymer states 'that there is no single view of suicide common to the different philosophical schools of antiquity' p. 10. Wymer does detail suicide and its religious implications, debating whether suicide is an act that can be viewed as self asserting or self cancelling and whether it is the right of God alone to release the spirit from the body. Wymer looks closely at how suicide was perceived in history and in the Renaissance, especially how Plato's *Phaedo* discusses suicide with the belief that 'men are the possessions of the gods. To kill oneself is to claim rights over something which does not belong to one. This argument, together with the closely related belief, which he also mentions, that the soul has been placed in a prison, or perhaps garrison, from which it should not release itself' p. 11. However, Wymer shows that there are contradictions by differing philosophers who like Socrates 'allows himself the escape-clause that God might in fact send such an order' p. 11.

O, never came astonishment and fear
 So pleasing to mankind! I take delight
 To have my breast shake and my hair stand stiff
 If this be horror, let it never die!
 Came all the pains of hell in that shape to me,
 should endure 'em smiling. Keep me still
 In terror, I beseech thee. I'd not change
 this fever for felicity of man
 Or all the pleasures of ten thousand ages. (IV. 45-53)

Govianus is in rapture and plainly wishes the intensity of the moment to last and 'never die'. Never before has Govianus seemed so animated and excited: 'I'd not change / This fever for felicity of man / Or all the pleasures of ten thousand ages', he enthuses. It is evident that it is the physical experience he enjoys here; it does not appear to have anything to do with a spiritual or divine happening, but one loaded with suggestion of necrophilic excitement. To both Govianus and the Tyrant 'death intensifies rather than diminishes the erotic appeal of the Lady's body'²⁴⁹ and seems to infuse great excitement into the otherwise sedate and 'dull' (III. 93) body of Govianus. In fact, he is so enraptured with the dead Lady that he admits: 'I desire to have it haunt me still / And never to give over, 'tis so pleasing' (V. ii. 197-198). His language, I suggest, mirrors the exact sentiments expressed by the Tyrant when he first beholds the corpse of the Lady after the stone has been removed from her tomb: 'Oh, blessed object! / I never shall be weary to behold thee; / I could eternally stand thus and see thee'. At times it is difficult to distinguish the differences from either the Tyrant or Govianus.

The dead body of the Lady becomes for both Govianus and the Tyrant a macabre object of desire. The Lady's corpse becomes a thing to be physically fondled and kissed; both characters use the corpse for their own gratification and as a means to an end. Govianus is motivated by the opportunity of exploiting the corpse's potential as an instrument to bring about the Tyrant's death. He does not restore the Lady's body straight away, as she desired ('My rest is lost; thou must restore 't again' [IV. iv. 79]), nor do any of his court rally behind their lost king to support

²⁴⁹ Pollard, *Drugs and Theater*; p. 104.

or help him overthrow the Tyrant as they rallied behind the Tyrant to overthrow Govianus: 'my lords, your powers and constant loves / Hath fixed our glories' (I. i. 1-2). Instead, Govianus decides to associate himself with the most condemned of murders by using poison.

After death the Lady's suicide does not set her free; she may have escaped the Tyrant's unwanted advances but like a mischievous evil spirit who teeters between this life and the next, she initiates the death of the Tyrant. It would appear that she is neither content nor triumphant in death, nor is she saintly or virtuous. In the play the Lady uses her powers to control the state by manipulating Govianus; she bids Govianus commit murder and initiates the poisoning of the Tyrant by intimating to Govianus that he should put himself forward when the Tyrant requests that the Lady's dead face resemble life again. In Act IV the ghost of the Lady informs Govianus that the Tyrant will request 'the paleness of her cheek' (IV. iv. 73) be restored with the aid of face-paints. James I wrote against trying to restore life to the dead:

it is certaine the soules going out of the bodie, is the onely difinition of naturall death: and who are once dead, God forbid wee should thinke that it should lie in the power of all the Deuils in Hell, to restore them to their life againe:²⁵⁰

The Lady's ghost may verbalise displeasure at being exhumed from her tomb, but does not appear to display any concern at Govianus applying face paints onto her face when dead.

Thomas Tuke wrote that it is

very pleasing to see such a face, as God created: whereas on the contrarie, a countenance ... full of red and white colours, otherwise then naturall, is disallowed. ... but painting being discerned and knowne, is branded alwaies with reproch and infamie. ... those women are matter of scandall to Christian eies, ... which doe paint their faces and eyes with certaine artificiall colours, Whose faces ... being plastered and deformed with too much brightnesse, are counterfeits of idols. ... that this furniture is not the Lords, this covering is of Antichrist, ... Sure it is not for Christ, but rather against Christ, and ill beseemes

²⁵⁰ James I, *Daemonologie in forme of a dialogue, diuided into three bookes*. (Edinburgh : Robert Waldegraue, 1597), p.41.

chast and godly Christians, suting fitter with the favourites and lovers of that Mother of harlots, araid in purple and scarlet colours, and full of allurements.²⁵¹

Although Tuke was writing about women when alive, this can also be applied to females when they are dead, especially as the Tyrant requested the Lady's face to be painted to give her a life-like appearance. Whether alive or dead, painting the face 'full of red and white colours' to be admired would link the Lady's body to Mary, mother of God and to idolatry. When Tuke writes of the 'mother of harlots' his ambiguous language could either refer to living women or dead icons; if the latter, then Tuke was not only being disrespectful to Catholics but also to Mary the mother of God. When the ghost of the Lady appears before Govianus he does not dismiss it, nor does he renounce it as an evil spirit; instead Govianus willingly acknowledges the Lady's spirit, associating him more with the beliefs of Catholicism than with a Protestant belief. As Anne Lancashire observes, 'The Lady's ghost might also be thought to have Roman Catholic associations, in that Protestants, unlike Catholics, were not supposed to believe that ghosts of the departed could return to earth'.²⁵² According to Stephen Greenblatt 'The Protestant argument [is] that ghosts, when they are not simply frauds, are demons'.²⁵³ Govianus's acknowledgment and compliance with the visual reality of the ghost and his willingness to comply with the requests of the demon-like ghost of the Lady associate him with Catholicism. The spirit's duplicitous nature is demonstrated when, after the Tyrant has taken her body from its tomb, she suggestively informs Govianus that the Tyrant will 'send privately for a hand of art / That may dissemble life upon my face / To please his lustful eye' (IV. iv. 74-75). The words 'send privately' and 'lustful eye' should be enough to incite the passive Govianus into action; instead when he is told that her 'monument is robbed' (IV. iv. 61) it is incredible that Govianus then needs to ask: 'What villain dares so fearfully run in debt / To black eternity?' (IV. iv. 63-64). Here the Lady's spirit appears to have to spell it out to Govianus: 'The Tyrant!', she tells him. The exclamation mark emphasises her lack of belief and reinforces the Lady's earlier observation that Govianus is both 'Dull and forgetful' (III. 93).

²⁵¹ Thomas Tuke, *A Discourse Against Painting and Tincturing of Women*, Imprinted at London: [By Thomas Creede and Bernard Alsop] for Edward Marchant, 1616, p. 9.

²⁵² See Anne Lancashire's note 254, on p. 81.

²⁵³ Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 158.

Although the spirit of the Lady does not actually ask Govianus straight out to seek revenge, she does insinuate a way it may be achieved. The Lady begins by telling Govianus of 'all [the] wrongs' (IV. iv. 54) done to her corpse and that the 'peace that death allows me is not mine'; and that she is 'now at court' in the Tyrant's 'private chamber' where he 'woos' her and 'plies his suit' to her corpse, 'folds' her in 'his arms' and sets 'sinful kiss[es]' upon her lips' (IV. iv. 66-72), before she disappears and says that she will 'leave 'em to thy thought' (IV. iv. 78), the 'em' being the wrongs she mentions to Govianus. The Lady requests that Govianus restore her body back to its rightful resting place as she exclaims, 'My rest is lost; thou must restore 't again' (IV. iv. 79). The word 'must' is an authoritative command and highlights her insistence that Govianus acts upon her words; here Govianus needs to be told what to do, he is subordinated and emasculated by this female ghost. Even after hearing that her body has been removed from its tomb and that the Tyrant intends to paint her dead face for his own pleasure, Govianus's first thought is for himself: 'I'll make myself / Over to death too, and we'll walk together / Like loving spirits; I prithee let's do so!' (IV. iv. 82-83). Govianus's weakness and frailty as a man continues to be demonstrated when he says that he 'must dispatch this business upon earth' (IV. iv. 85), which tells us that he will have to handle the situation himself. However, Govianus does show some hesitation to participate in immediate action when he goes first to seek advice from his brother (as previously mentioned). Although Govianus may pray for metaphorical armour he also wishes that he should not be injured as he later laments: 'Give me a sober fury, I beseech thee, / A rage that may not overcharge my blood / And do myself most hurt!' (V. ii. 52-53). Here Govianus shows a selfish regard for his own safety first, but to comply with the instructive order of the Lady, he resorts to poison and not the more manly option of the sword to deal with the Tyrant.

In death the Lady gains a different kind of life, as she now possesses a power that enables her to communicate with, and manipulate, the living Govianus. The Lady may have taken her own life, defiling the gift of life from God, but through her manipulation of Govianus and the toxic face paints she is given a new and strange kind of life-form; it is in death that she now becomes a powerful tyrant temptress, able to entice and allure the desires of the Tyrant and Govianus, and

at the same time have her own desires sated. The Lady becomes frustrated with Govianus's lack of demonstrative action during the course of the play, yet in the afterlife she transforms into a dominatrix of the dead, wielding her sexual power over Govianus and the Tyrant. Rebecca Bushnell states that 'the woman who controls a man through her sexuality commits an outrage equivalent to the Tyrant's rape of wives and daughters'.²⁵⁴ From beyond the grave the Lady rules the actions of Govianus and by suggestion dictates the fate of the Tyrant. The Lady becomes a spectral pollutant, controlling Govianus like a puppet; the poisonous face-paints applied to her rotting skin blend with death to create a dangerously noxious substance that will secrete from her dead face and feed the desires of not only herself but both Govianus and the Tyrant.

The Tyrant's death is only accomplished by Govianus through disguise, deception and poison. Bushnell says that Govianus's return to his throne 'looks more like a Jacobean revenger's work than a rightful heir's triumphant victory', and continues to say that:

Govianus's return to power is not a public action fully supported by the nobles and people's armies (although the courtiers welcome Govianus after the fact). It is a furtive murder, questionable until we remind ourselves that he is, after all, the legitimate prince.²⁵⁵

As Bushnell points out, Govianus is only supported by his court after the Tyrant's death; there is nothing in the play to suggest that any of the nobles and courtiers of his court are in the least bit concerned about what has happened to their king. Govianus is not a valiant champion, he does not return to his kingdom a courageous hero having just killed the Tyrant in armed combat, a duel or battle; instead he has gained his advantage over the Tyrant through deceit and cowardice by using a female corpse and poisoned cosmetics. Frances Dolan states that 'Attacks on various forms of self-transformation, then, associate such practices with the feminine and thus participate in construing them as emasculating'.²⁵⁶ I suggest that within the play there is plenty

²⁵⁴ Rebecca W. Bushnell, *Tragedies of Tyrants: Political Thought and Theater in The English Renaissance*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 67.

²⁵⁵ Bushnell, p. 156.

²⁵⁶ Dolan, p.231.

of evidence to determine that Govianus is an emasculated male poisoner, one who obeys the commands of the Lady without question and shows no qualms at manipulating situations by using stealth or disguise.

To gain some control over the Tyrant and to alter the course of his own fallen destiny, Govianus turns to disguise as 'a picture-drawer' (V. ii. 36). There is plenty of contemporary evidence on the detrimental uses of cosmetics that was not only read by women; however, men who did read about the use of face-paints were labelled effeminate, with concern placed over their manliness:

The displacement of this anxiety conceals men's participation in behaviors denigrated as effeminate. Although attacks on face painting usually focus on women, men also used cosmetics. But those men who did so, like those who wore women's clothes, were summarily dismissed as unspeakably and irredeemably monstrous.²⁵⁷

Although the boy actor was most likely wearing face-paints for the role, the character of Govianus is so heavily disguised as 'a court school master, [and] a picture-drawer' (V. ii. 36), and 'wears security so thick upon him / The thought of death and hell cannot pierce through!' (V. ii. 58-59), that even the Tyrant does not recognise him.

Contemporary notions regarding face painting is vehemently addressed by Tuke writing in 1616 in his warning to all those who meddle with face paints:

O woman, thou defacest the picture, if thou dawbest thy countenance with materiall whitenesse, or a borrowed red. Tell me, if after one workman hath done, thou vset the helpe of another to ouer-lay the worke of the former with his new deuises, doth he not take it in ill part, who sees his worke to be disguised? Doe not take away Gods picturing, and assume the picture of an harlot, because it is written, Shall I take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. If any men adulterate the worke of God, he committeth a grieuous offence. For it is an hainous crime to thinke that man can paint thee better then God.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁷ Frances E. Dolan, 'Taking the Pencil out of God's Hand: Art, Nature, and the Face-Painting Debate in Early Modern England', *PMLA*, 108, 2 (1993), pp. 224-239, (Published by: Modern Language Association, Stable p. 231.

²⁵⁸Thomas Tuke, p. 3.

Surely this heinous crime appertains to the dead also; by Govianus willing to partake in covering over the pallor of death on the Lady, he too commits a grievous offence against God by a creating a harlot, albeit a dead one. Karim-Cooper comments on the sexual objectification of the Lady through the use of cosmetics and takes the metaphor of harlot to include the Lady's whole body and not just the painted face:

the visual embodiment on the stage of the fetishistic objectification of painted beauty is exemplified when the Tyrant exhumes the Lady's body from her tomb, dresses her up in iconic clothing and attempts to have her painted to maintain the appearance of life, ultimately turning her into a sexualised artefact, a painted statue: His desires are projected on to the 'house' or the body of the Lady.²⁵⁹

Some of this charge against the Tyrant must be levelled at Govianus too.

Govianus applies poisoned face paints onto the face of the dead Lady to gratify his lust for murder. Govianus admits that he knows that what he is doing is an affront against God as he says: 'A religious trembling shakes my hand / And bids me put by such unhallowed business, / But revenge calls for't, and it must go forward' (V. ii. 91-93). Govianus goes ahead because revenge calls for it; by using poison to murder he also jeopardises his own soul. Govianus contributes to the symbolic visual enactment of the play's concern with hidden deceit by employing the face-paints to conceal death's natural pallor and therefore also participates in idolatry. Although Govianus admits that face-painting is an 'unhallowed business' he is not deterred and continues with the 'grievous offence'; what makes it appear more appalling is the fact that Govianus is applying *poisoned* face paints onto a *dead* face. Farah Karim-Cooper suggests that the use of cosmetics is a way of 'cleans[ing] the political body of corruption',²⁶⁰ and goes on to say that in Middleton's *The Second Maiden's Tragedy* Govianus 'deploys face paint paradoxically as a political and spiritual restorative'.²⁶¹ Karim-Cooper continues to suggest that 'cosmetics function as an intriguing remedy for the restoration of morality and

²⁵⁹ Farah Karim-Cooper, *Cosmetics in Shakespearean and Renaissance Drama*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), p. 82.

²⁶⁰ Karim-Cooper, p. 69.

²⁶¹ *ibid.*, p. 69.

political stability'.²⁶² I argue that the restoration of morality is not accomplished at the end of this play, and that Govianus's retrieving of the throne in an attempt to restore stability to the kingdom is questionable and has come at a high spiritual price for Govianus.

The toxic face-paints Govianus uses to kill the Tyrant not only restore a life-like appearance onto the Lady's lifeless features, but also make her dangerously seductive to the Tyrant. Karim-Cooper declares that 'cosmetics ... take on a reformatory value and act as a weapon against sexual sin, or rather a purgation for it'²⁶³, but this is proven not to be the case in this play. Karim-Cooper proceeds to suggest that the Lady is 'not morally impure'²⁶⁴; this may have been the case when she was alive at the beginning of the play, but I argue that this is not the case when she commits suicide, nor is it the case when she expects Govianus to commit the sin of murder by taking her life. The Lady appears at this point to think only of her own spiritual welfare as she hints to Govianus that he should prevent her stolen corpse from being sexually molested and return it to its final resting place. Here Govianus manipulates the situation for his own advantage, to regain control of the state by using poison to indulge his jealousy of the Tyrant: 'The deed's done' Govianus declares to the ghost, 'he has his end upon him ... and has no pow'r / To vex thee farther' (V. ii. 160-162-3). More importantly, the Tyrant will not 'vex' Govianus either as Govianus will now be free to reinstate himself on the throne as the kingdom's rightful king. Nevertheless, Govianus has neither proved himself gallant or noble, nor has the Lady proved herself morally pure. Just as the Lady showed no consideration towards Govianus with her request to be murdered, he in turn shows no remorse when she is dead. Govianus shows selfish relief rather than grief at the sight of her dead body: 'Faith, she told me / Her everlasting sleep would bring me joy, / Yet I was still unwilling to believe her' (III. 232-234). Govianus's response to her death is greatly contrasted with the Tyrant's reaction; instead of her death bringing the Tyrant 'joy' he admits that 'We miss her 'mongst the glories of our court' (IV. iii. 21). Another example of the Tyrant's love and reverence for the Lady is when he does not enter her tomb like a barbarous savage but shows reverence to the

²⁶² Karim-Cooper, p. 79.

²⁶³ *ibid.*, p. 69.

²⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p.76.

dead by telling his soldiers to go 'Softly, softly. / Let's give this place the peace that it requires' (IV. iii. 1-2) and addresses the Lady with words of love and devotion: ''Tis I, sweet lady. Prithee speak! / 'Tis thy love calls on thee-thy king, thy servant' (IV. iii. 86-7). There is no hint here that the Tyrant is either a tyrant or a sexual fiend to be feared by women; in fact the Tyrant's adoration of the Lady is evidenced in the way he addresses her both alive and dead. When he dispatches a soldier in Act II with a jewel for the Lady he refers to her as 'our heart's saint' (II. 109); when seeing her body at rest in the tomb for the first time he adoringly exclaims: 'O blessed object!' The Tyrant then ardently continues: 'I never shall be weary to behold thee' (IV. iii. 59-61). In contrast, Govianus does not replicate the affectionate language of the Tyrant for the Lady in his language.

When the Tyrant eventually kisses the corpse of the Lady there is no evidence of any necrophilic violation of her corpse. Tanya Pollard is explicit about men who kiss corpses in plays as she states: 'men who embrace painted corpses in each of these plays are tyrannical rulers, for whom death is a just punishment'.²⁶⁵ I disagree with Pollard's statement because at the moment the Tyrant first kisses the corpse of the Lady, 'She's only pale, the colour of the court, / And most attractive' (IV. iii. 64-5); she is not painted at this time with poisoned cosmetics and if the Tyrant can be labelled as 'tyrannical' for kissing the Lady's dead face, so too can Govianus who does no less than the Tyrant when he is alone with her dead body. In Act III, Govianus kisses the Lady before he unemotionally comments, 'Thou'rt cold enough' (III. 250-1). If the tyrant crosses sacrosanct boundaries by holding the corpse of the Lady, then so too does Govianus. There are no verbal outpourings of sadness at his loss, in fact there are no words of anguish or distress, or indeed any signs of his emotional suffering at all. Govianus's reaction to stealing a kiss from the corpse is that it is a 'delicious treasure of mankind' (III. 244) that can be 'discreetly' (III. 246) loved. At this point in the play there can be no discriminating between the actions of either Govianus or those of the Tyrant. However, I have aimed to show that the Tyrant from the beginning of the play has been presented as brave, daring and masculine, and that in contrast, Govianus has been presented as weak, cowardly and unsporting.

²⁶⁵ Pollard, *Drugs and Theater*; p. 102.

Govianus is a murderer: he kills Sophonirus and the Tyrant. Govianus uses disguise, stealth, and poison instead of open combat to accomplish his desires; we do not see the Tyrant kill anyone in the play.

Govianus may bravely rail at the dying Tyrant but fails to mention anything about the Lady and instead uses language that is devoid of any emotion: 'robber of monuments'; 'all things'; he calls the Lady's corpse 'the body' and 'it'. Govianus's words are detached from any actual mention of the Lady. Govianus then takes full advantage of the situation the Tyrant has presented him with; the Tyrant does no more than Govianus does himself. In fact, at this point in the play, the two men appear to merge into one as the Tyrant desires face-paints to be put on the dead face of the Lady and Govianus uses poisoned face-paints on the face of the dead Lady. The Lady's corpse becomes a receptacle for decomposition, toxic vapours and death, and in her death she is empowered with a dangerous and curious life of her own; Govianus creates a monster that wields a strange power over both himself and the Tyrant. The climax of the play comes in Act IV, scene iii, when the Tyrant is overcome with passion for the Lady and succumbs to her deadly charms and life-like looks. When the Tyrant kisses the Lady's corpse he dies from the poison: 'Your king's poisoned!' (V. ii. 66) and he informs those around him; 'O, my torments!' (V. ii. 177), until finally saying 'That thunder strikes me dead' (V. ii. 179).

Middleton does not portray Govianus as either a man of action nor a man of words: 'I cannot better / Reward my joys than with astonished silence' (V. ii. 179-80), he declares. Govianus has already violated the corpse of the Lady by smearing it with poison and again chooses profane and irreverent actions to satisfy his own desires first, before returning the Lady's body back to her tomb. If, as Karim-Cooper suggests, the Tyrant is 'deluded by his notions of ownership and power',²⁶⁶ so too is Govianus, who has the corpse of the Lady placed onto the throne and crowned his queen: 'Here place her in this throne; crown her our queen' (V. ii. 200). Govianus decides to perform this gruesome necrophilic act whilst he manhandles the corpse of the Lady when he places it onto the throne to be crowned in death his 'queen of silence' (V. ii. 205).

²⁶⁶ Karim-Cooper, p. 82.

After this shocking self-indulgent act it is Govianus's 'will' (V. ii. 197) to have the corpse of the Lady seated upon a throne and crowned 'our queen'; and Govianus reinstates himself on the throne to then fittingly condemn himself to a life of celibacy that will leave the kingdom without an heir: 'crown her our queen, / The first and last that ever we make ours' (V. ii. 200-201). When the hasty and unceremonious act is over, Govianus appears pleased and relieved: 'That honour done' (V. ii. 203), he declares, before he finally commands those around him to 'let her be solemnly borne / Unto the house of peace from whence she came / As queen of silence' (V. ii. 203-204). Govianus appears relieved that the Lady's ghost is now finally at rest and shall trouble him no more from beyond the grave; it is in his final remark I suggest that seems to sum up his emasculated state: 'Our zeal is such / We cannot reverence chastity too much. / Lead on! / I would those ladies that fill honour's rooms / Might all be borne so honest to their tombs' (V. ii. 208-212). Govianus's wish that all women should remain chaste, silent and virginal confirms his lack of manly passion.

Tyrants

In the Renaissance there were conflicting opinions regarding tyrants.²⁶⁷ Writing in the late 1500s, George Whetstone authoritatively wrote about the lives of tyrants: 'The liues of tyrants are full of hatred, and their persons are subiect to many perrils, Horror and feare'.²⁶⁸ However, I find no evidence in *The Second Maiden's Tragedy* to suggest that the character of the Tyrant is full of hate; his passion and love for the Lady, though unrequited, remains constant throughout the play shown in his actions and words. Through the words of the Tyrant, his deep feelings for the Lady become apparent, he uses the words: 'Gently' (I. i. 193) and 'kindly' (I. i. 193); he

²⁶⁷ For an excellent detailed discussion on the nature of the tyrant, see Rebecca Bushnell's book: *Tragedies of Tyrants: Political Thought and Theater in the English Renaissance*.

²⁶⁸ George Whetstone, *The English myrror A regard wherein al estates may behold the conquests of emy: containing ruine of common weales, murther of princes, cause of heresies, and in all ages, spoile of deuine and humane blessings, vnto which is adioyned, emy conquered by vertues. Publishing the peaceable victories obtained by the Queenes most excellent Maiesty, against this mortall enimie of publike peace and prosperitie, and lastly a fortis against emy, builded vpon the counsels of sacred Scripture, lawes of sage philosophers, and pollicies of well gouerned common weales: wherein euery estate may see the dignities, the true office and cause of disgrace of his vocation. A worke safely, and necessarie to be read of euerie good subject*, (London : I. Windet for G. Seton, 1586), p. 162.

talks of 'love' (I. i. 193); and of not being 'hard-hearted' (I. i. 191) or unkind. Plus, it has to be noted that the usurped king Govianus was not killed by the Tyrant, nor was his life threatened by him at any point in the play. Indeed, when the Tyrant is reminded of the power he could wield by the Lady's own father, Helvetius - "'Tis in your power, my lord, to force her to you / And pluck her from his arms' (I. i. 188-89) - the Tyrant replies only to rebuke him, 'Thou talk'st unkindly' (I. i. 189). The Tyrant makes it clear that though it is within his power to 'force her' (her father's own words), the prize would not be 'worth' (I. i. 194) the receiving. We do not learn of the people living in the kingdom being subject to perils, horror or fear (apart from the Lady's fanatical objection to a physical relationship with the Tyrant); no other character appears to be in danger or indeed shows the Tyrant any fear at all. This includes Govianus, who at the beginning of the play is not portrayed as cowering in any corners fearful for his life, nor is he afraid to be lurking in the court with the Tyrant on the throne.

During the course of the play Govianus is portrayed as having tyrannical traits: he is obsessive, deceitful, selfish, murderous and unloving. Govianus's peevish and emasculated nature shows itself in his language towards the Tyrant. When questioned by the Tyrant about the colour of the cosmetics, Govianus appears to delight in telling him that "'Twas the best poison I could get for money' (V. ii. 125), before he then throws off his disguise in triumph. When the tyrant queries his boldness, Govianus provocatively says: 'I smile at thee' (V. ii. 140). He informs the Tyrant that the deed of poisoning 'honours [the poisoner] / Unto [his] mistress's spirit' (V. ii. 148-149); his words suggest his pleasure in telling the Tyrant that "'twas for her, charged me to do't' (V. ii. 151). In Act I, Govianus tells the Tyrant that "'Tis only wretchedness to be there with thee, / And happiness to be here' (I. i. 139-140). There are times when it is difficult to reconcile the fact that the emasculated and cowardly Govianus is a king, albeit a deposed one, and that the Tyrant is the tyrant in the play.

Conclusion

In her introduction, Anne Lancashire describes *The Second Maiden's Tragedy* as an 'orthodox Jacobean tragedy'²⁶⁹, seeing it as an exemplar that shows the rewards of virtue and the consequences of evil actions. Lancashire continues by saying that the play teaches morality through its characters' actions and language, and is a didactic mix of Christian philosophy and moral values that would have been easily understood by Jacobean audiences. In the light of her comments, I can only conclude that I have read a completely different play, as I can see no exemplars of moral values in any of the characters' actions. Middleton's Govianus easily transforms himself from a lurking usurped king, into a murderer, deceiver, make-up artist, necrophiliac snatcher of kisses, poisoner, and then back again to king; I suggest that under the mantle of virtue and goodness Govianus hides a complex personality that is both a menace and a danger to those around him. The moral character of Govianus has to be questioned. During the course of the play, he proves himself to be physically weak, to have effeminate qualities, be emotionally unstable, covert and sly; it is highly unlikely that he will prove to be a good and honourable king once reinstated onto the throne. It is not made clear in the play how, or even why, Govianus was usurped in the first place, but it must go in the Tyrant's favour that Govianus is still alive at the beginning and at the end of the play. In fact, there is no real evidence to prove that the Tyrant deserves the name of tyrant; during the play the deeds he performs appear no less tyrannical than those of Govianus, and in fact the audience do not witness the Tyrant committing a murder.

In this play, Middleton takes a dead body and directly integrates it into the actions of the play, even more so than Old Hamlet's ghost in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, or Vindice's skull of Gloriana in Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy*. The audience witnesses the whole corpse on the stage and see it sexualised, fondled, kissed and even crowned. The corpse of the Lady, with its potential eroticism, manifests into a necrophilic experience for both the Tyrant and Govianus as they both surrender to the allure of the corpse in pursuit of their own pleasure. Moral

²⁶⁹ Lancashire, p. 38.

boundaries are crossed when the Tyrant kisses the dead body of the Lady, but Govianus also crosses those same moral boundaries, as he tells the corpse, 'I will kiss thee / After death's marble lip!' (III. 250-251), all for his own gratification. The play is cyclical; it starts and ends with a dethroned king who has proven to be yet another tyrant on the throne.

I have shown in this chapter that by the end of the play Govianus has substantiated his emasculation and effeminacy by not confronting the Tyrant for usurping his throne and facing him man-to-man through his use of poison as a weapon to kill. The scholar and theologian William Tyndale²⁷⁰ wrote:

Yea & it is better to haue a tyraunte vnto thy kynge than a shaddowe. For a passiue kynge doth nought him selfe, but suffre other to do wyth him what they wyl, to leade him whether they lyst. And atiraunte, though he do wronge vnto the good, yet he punysheth the euyll & maketh all men obey, neyther suffereth any man to polle, but hym selfe onely. A kynge that is softe as sylke and effemi|nate, that is to say, turned vnto the nature of a woman, what with his owne lustes, whych are as the longynge of a woman with chylde, so that he can not resyste them, and (sig. 8r) shall be muche more greuous vnto the realme than a right tyraute. (sig. 9v)

During the course of the dramatic action Govianus faints, tires himself, is passive, is called a coward by the Lady, is covert, sly and deceitful, is indecisive, seeks advice from another male, and uses poison to murder. Govianus is presented to the audience as 'soft' and 'effeminate'; he thinks of his own pleasure when he kisses the corpse of the Lady and bows to his own desires when he has the body of the Lady manhandled and crowned his (dead) queen. Middleton could have been lamenting the loss of Elizabeth I with the macabre presence of the female corpse of the Lady on the stage being ceremoniously resurrected and re-crowned Queen. Looking beyond the boundaries of the text, it appears Middleton was making a personal statement about the male that is less of a man, the male that is rendered effeminate and emasculated by his language, actions and deeds; he shows audience members that such men are a potential danger to society and poisonous to manhood. Middleton shows how such males can be deceitful, use poison to

²⁷⁰ William Tyndale, *The Christen rule or state of all the worlde from the hyghest to the lowest and how euery man shulde lyue to please God in hys callinge. Item, the Christian state of matrimony: and how maf[n] and wife shuld kepe house together with loue. Item, the maner oe [sic] saynge grace after the holy scrypture.* ([London? : T. Raynalde and William Hill, 1548?]).

murder, get away with it and even be rewarded. Although Govianus as king lacks manly impetus in regaining his lost throne, he is governed and motivated into action by a ghost who only seeks his aid for selfish reasons. There is no evidence that the Lady's ghost has God's approval for her actions, and neither the ghost nor Govianus have the right to execute revenge on the Tyrant when it is only God's right to mete out justice. Lily B. Campbell writes:

The point cannot, it seems to me, be too much emphasized that the ghosts which the Catholics recognized as coming from purgatory to ask help from the living in the expiation of their sins did not demand revenge, but only masses, alms, prayers, and fasting. In fact, the chief argument against those who thought ghosts to be mere manifestations of the devil was the argument that since the ghosts never demanded other than things recognized as good, it was impossible to think their visits inspired by the devil. And visits of spirits which would move men to other deeds are regularly ascribed to the wiles of the devil.²⁷¹

The fact that the Lady asks Govianus to return her empty body to its tomb instead of requesting prayers for her wandering soul, associates her with the devil rather than sainthood; if this is the case, then Govianus obeys the demands of the devil and is doubly damned.

My aim in this chapter was to show that through the character of Govianus, Middleton creates a very weak and unconvincing king who is flawed from the beginning. The reason why this play is different from the other plays discussed in this thesis is that Govianus as a king does not employ a minion to undertake his murderous deeds; he performs them himself and is directed by a dead female. I have shown how Govianus is an unmanly, devious character that is emasculated and subordinated by a female; he is a king that is unmanned by his own decision to use poison's power to destroy his rival instead of using his own strength. The poisonous face-paints used to conceal death on the face of the Lady's corpse become a symbol of Govianus's own tainted mask that conceals his incapacity to think and judge clearly as a king, concealing his weak and corruptive self behind the façade of righteousness. In contrast to Govianus my last chapter focuses on king Albovine, a king who displays both heterosexual and homosexual desires in a play that desecrates the skull of a man in the pursuit of pleasure.

²⁷¹ Lily B. Campbell, 'Theories of Revenge in Renaissance England', *Modern Philology*, 28: 3 (1931), pp. 281-296 (p. 295).

Chapter 5

Albovine King of the Lombards

Sir William Davenant²⁷²

Sir William Davenant's play *Albovine, King of the Lombards*²⁷³ was published in 1629 shortly after the death of James I; it is the chronologically latest play in this thesis to be discussed. In this final chapter I will argue that Davenant manipulates audience expectations by developing the male-male relationship further than any previous playwright by presenting a king that flaunts a physical relationship with a younger male favourite on the stage. The skull motif that runs throughout all the plays discussed in this thesis, plays a more dominant role in *Albovine King of the Lombards* than discussed in the first chapter on *Hamlet*. Although a skull is man-handled in *The Revenger's Tragedy* and takes on a more active part throughout the play and especially in the murder scene; in Davenant's play audience members see the skull of a man dishonoured, desecrated and violated. The drinking from the skull of an enemy is the ultimate public show of one male's dominance over another male, and violates the other male's memory. I will show how Davenant combines both male / female and male-male sexual behaviour in his portrayal of his male poisoner Hermegild and his king Albovine. There is one variance in Davenant's play to other plays discussed in this thesis, and that is in his use of poison; poison is used for the purpose of murder but in fact, no character actually dies from poison in this play. Just as Lorrique in Chettle's play *The Tragedy of Hoffman* goes through the motions of being poisoned but is not actually poisoned, so too does Paradine (the king's favourite) feign the agonies of taking poison but does not die from poisoning.

²⁷² Sir William Davenant [D'Avenant], (1606–1668), poet, playwright, and theatre manager, was the second of four sons of John Davenant, vintner, and Jane, daughter of Robert and Elizabeth Sheppard. For more information see Mary Edmond's distilled version of her book-length study of Davenant: *Oxford DNB* Oxford DNB. See Curtis Perry, *Literature and Favoritism in Early Modern England*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 164. and, J. H. Elliott and L. W. B. Brockliss (eds.), *The World of the Favourite*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999).

²⁷³ For the purposes of my thesis I shall be quoting from the copy of the text copy on EEBO. Sir William Davenant, *The Tragedy of Albovine, King of the Lombards*, London : Printed [by Felix Kingston] for R. M[ooore] and are to bee sold in Saint Dunstanes Church-yard, 1629. For Davenant's sources for his play see Killis Campbell, 'The Source of Davenant's Albovine', *The Journal of Germanic Philology*, 4, No. 1 (1902), pp. 20-24.

Play Synopsis

Set in Verona, Italy, the play opens with Grimold and Hermegild discussing the king's captive Paradine who the king has made his favourite. Albovine, the king, has just returned to the city triumphant with several other captives after killing Rhodolinda's father. Albovine the king has taken Rhodolinda for his wife against her wishes. Paradine's wife, Valdaura is also a captive; Grimold was Rhodolinda's father's councillor and is now her favourite.

At a great banquet in celebration of Albovine's victories he requests the skull of Rhodolinda's father be brought to him; the skull has been fashioned into cup for drinking wine and he asks Rhodolinda to drink from the skull. Rhodolinda complies, but inwardly swears vengeance on the Albovine. Soon afterwards Rhodolinda contrives to have Paradine, the king's minion, lie with her, leading him to believe that she is one of the royal maid-servants of whom he is enamored. Rhodolinda then makes herself known to Paradine, and incites him to kill the king.

Meanwhile, Hermegild teaches Valdaura how to poison Paradine, but once she has given what is supposed as poison to Paradine, he feigns the agony of dying and then stabs her. Valdaura then informs her husband that the drink she gave him was not poison and that she wanted to gain his wrath so that he would kill her. Hermegild falsely promises Thesina matrimony after she loses her honour in his service, and Paradine kills Rhodolinda with his sword after kissing her and biting her lips till he draws blood. Hermegild questions Paradine about the effects of the poison he believes Valdaura has already given to him; and Paradine feigns dying by poison again to appease his curiosity before seizing his sword from his side. Paradine draws an arras to reveal the corpses of Albovine, Rhodolinda, and Valdaura all seated in chairs before he wounds Hermegild who finally dies by choking on his own blood. The play ends with Paradine being wounded by the governor's men whilst trying to retrieve his sword; he is taken away to explain the all the corpses left on the stage.

Killis Campbell notes that

Among the variations made by Davenant, are the following :— The maid- servant is not Paradine's mistress, but his wife; Rosamund and Hermegild do not die from the effects of poison, but are slain by Paradine; Paradine does not kill the king by the queen's instigation, but at the king's command.²⁷⁴

Also, that the important variations are to be found in Davenant's change of names and the introduction of characters not in the original story.

Poison, Witchcraft, and Catholicism

Davenant's presentation of king Albovine's favouritism of Paradine seems to evoke James I's favourite Robert Carr, the Earl of Somerset, especially as the play is dedicated to him by Davenant himself. *Albovine King of the Lombards* is a play that flagrantly exposes a sodomitical king, a court favourite lavished with attention, and a jealous favourite of the queen who hints at witchcraft; Davenant then associates these male characters - Albovine, Hermegild and Paradine - with poison. The theme of poison can be linked in the play to Catholicism, and to witchcraft through the character of Hermegild, a captive statesman and Rhodolinda's favourite. The play is set in Lombardy, a province of northern Italy;²⁷⁵ Robert Jones states that 'giving Italianate action its proper name and habitation did reinforce the audiences' responses to treachery and poison, viciousness and moral sickness'.²⁷⁶ The court of Albovine is no exception as it openly contains within it morally flawed characters. Jones also states that these 'politic schemes, poisonings and other sensational murders, and the craving for revenge that combines both scheming and violence all carried strong Italian associations',²⁷⁷ for 'what Elizabethans

²⁷⁴ Killis Campbell, 'The Source of Davenant's Albovine', *The Journal of Germanic Philology*, 4, No. 1 (1902), pp. 20-24, p. 20.

²⁷⁵ See the introduction for a discussion on Italy and its association with poison.

²⁷⁶ Robert C. Jones, 'Italian Settings and the "World" of Elizabethan Tragedy', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 10, No. 2, *Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama* (Spring, 1970), p. 261.

²⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p. 260.

saw and heard in the theater was what they expected of Italians'.²⁷⁸ Poison takes on many guises in this play and highlights a court where the elite and privileged live debauched lives, and the satisfaction of sexual desires overrides any political, religious and moral duties. The court of Albovine is shown to be a hotbed for poisonous verbal gossip, public displays of homosexual behaviour, effeminacy, cannibalism, witchcraft and murder.

Hermegild and King Albovine introduce poison in the play. We hear of Albovine's connection with poison through the words of a minor character called Thesina, a court lady who tells Paradine: 'I saw the King reach to Valdaura's hand / A poysonous violl; and with religious hints, / Taught her to mixe it in her husbands draught' (sig. K4); although we never see Albovine have any direct dealings with poison himself. The character of Hermegild, described as 'the Queenes Favourite' (sig. A6v), is presented as being akin to a male witch. As Frollo points out, 'He [Hermegild] sits like a Witch' (sig. Av), and Hermegild himself speaks of his 'darke practice' (sig. 13r), which suggests that he has a knowledge of witchcraft and the dark arts. It is Hermegild that instigates the poison scenes within the play. Hermegild is an insidious, calculating villain with the characteristics of a ruthless Machiavellian; he delights in causing mental suffering and death to those who stand in the way of what he desires. Hermegild is a captive of Albovine and speaks of his knowledge of poisons with the precision of an experienced apothecary (especially when he speaks of poisoning the king's favourite, saying 'Paradine must die!' [sig. Lr]):

Good, for when he thinks the King doth know that guilt,
His owne safety then, will soone prouoke him
Hasten our prodigious murther. This may
Be done, before the Poyson operate
In dire effect; for that delays its power;
Till fourescore houres expire their course: which then
No Antidote, nor humane skill resists. (sig. 14r)

²⁷⁸ Robert C. Jones, 'Italian Settings and the "World" of Elizabethan Tragedy', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 10, No. 2, *Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama* (Spring, 1970), p. 261.

Hermegild shows confidence in the knowledge that his poison will bring inevitable death for Paradine and, according to him, the victim cannot be saved by any 'humane skill' against the poison's lethal properties. Furthermore, the poison is so potent it will resist any 'antidote' once inside the victim's body. This fatal poison taken by the unsuspecting Paradine will release its power after 'fourescore' hours, when there will be no chance of a remedy being used. Hermegild tells us that 'VVhen that sad houre arriues, / Wherein the poysonous draught must worke, / No charmed med'cine can resist its strength' (sig. Lr). However, the poisoning of Paradine is not carried out by Hermegild himself: he 'decree[s], / Valdaura first shall minister his death' (sig. 14r), something which highlights Hermegild's deceitful nature and cowardice. Hermegild instructs Paradine's wife, Valdaura, in how to inform Paradine of the poison's strength: 'The Vipers vomit, nor the blue steame, / Which fat Toades doe breathe in tired motion, / Beares not such a dangerous enmitie / 'Gainst humane Nature, as that you drunke'(sig. K1r). The power of the poison given to Paradine is strong enough to resist mortal help and 'It takes a subtill leasure to disperse / Thorow all your Organs, and your Arteries, / That it may straitte with abler violence / Consume your strength' (sig. K1v). The 'subtill leasure' of the poison allows Hermegild, and the audience, the opportunity to observe Paradine as the poison disperses through his 'Organs' and 'arteries', and also allows Hermegild to gloat at his own wickedness and to congratulate himself: 'I huggle my Genius!' (sig. Lr). The poison we are told will be 'dire' and its effect will have a dreadful and terrible effect on the body of Paradine, so when death eventually arrives it will be agonising and violent. Hermegild, like all poisoners, not only violates another's body but also goes against the doctrine of religion, morality and the law.

Hermegild's wickedness and association to witchcraft is seen when Valdaura admits to Paradine that 'he [Hermegild] did / Entice me by a poysonous practice to / Contrive your death' (sig. K2v). The word 'entice' taints the character of Valdaura as female and wife, showing her to be fickle and disloyal. We learn again of Hermegild's power of enticement when Paradine informs Albovine that 'Hermegild / Had intic'd me now to lengthen this your sleepe, / Vntill the day of generall accounts' (sig. L3r). Hermegild's power to entice strongly suggests his link with the black arts. E. J. Kent writes that 'men were also accused of maleficium and were believed to

perpetrate the black magic of harm and injury'²⁷⁹; Hermegild's gender does not preclude a link with dark powers, especially since he boasts that he 'will mingle poyson in my Inke, write / with a Rauens Quill! 't will be a fatall / Scripture: and shall charme like to those wise Iigs / The Syrens sing' (sig. F6v). Hermegild's malignity is evident in his poisoned letter; his words will have the power to 'charme' and be potent enough to procure death for its recipient. The poisoned ink and words also suggests the ink used by the playwright's pen; his words having the power to poison, infect and corrupt his audience. Hermegild goes on to confess that 'silent contemplation; has made / My marrow thinne and black; like Inke within / My bones' (sig. 13r). The word 'Inke' links Hermegild to the poison he uses and confirms just how corrupt and dangerous he can be. Hermegild proves to be proficient at using poison in many ways; he mixes poison with drinks and ink, and poisons the ear of listeners with his words. Hermegild's admission of dark practices associates him with the art of witchcraft. George Gifford²⁸⁰, writing in 1587, confirms that witches were associated with poison:

More then this, that it is vsed for a kind of witches & sorcerers. Some do imagine that it was such a one as did deale, not by the deuill, but by poison only, so that in their opinion, where it is translated, thou shalt not suffer a witch to liue Ex. 22. It should be more fitly said, thou shalt not suffer a poisoner to liue. ... that witches do take vpon them to deale with medicines & confections which they vse together with their charmes: they make diuers ointmentes, which satan doth vse to delude them withall. He teacheth them also to make poisons: (sig. C2v)

Gifford makes no distinction between witches and poisoners. Hermegild even boasts about teaching Valdaura how to murder (Paradine) with poison: 'I haue decreed, / Valdaura first shall minister his death. / I u'e taught her too' (sig. 13r), he brags. Hermegild asks Paradine if he can 'Afford [his] eares in priuat' (sig. B2r). Paradine questions Albovine's love; he mentions how Hermegild whispers malicious words into his ear:

... Hermegild
Still whispers in my eare, the King doth hate
Thee, Paradine. But Hermegild is read in all

²⁷⁹ E. J. Kent, 'Masculinity and Male Witches in Old and New England, 1593–1680', *History Workshop Journal* No. 60 (2005), pp. 69-92, 85.

²⁸⁰ George Gifford, *A discourse of the subtile practises of deuilles by witches and sorcerers By which men are and haue bin greatly deluded: the antiquitie of them: their diuers sorts and names. With an aunswer vnto diuers fruitolous reasons which some doe make to prooue that the deuils did not make those aperationes in any bodily shape*. Imprinted at London : [By T. Orwin] for Toby Cooke, 1587.

The Arts of Court, and striues perhaps
My sence to poyson with leane iealousie. (sig. E5r)

Hermegild's intentions are to 'poison' Paradine with his words against the king and to throw doubt and 'jealousie' onto the close relationship he holds with the king. Hermegild also pours his malicious words into the ear of Grimold: 'Lend me your eare, Captaine!' (sig. Fr). When Hermegild gives Albovine advice on how to handle a female he counsels,

Sir, practise but your Courtship here. In troth
You must affect the amorous Cringe, gestures
Smooth and pliant; it will neuer doe else.
I'ue heard the Queene complaine, you are too rough:
And what these Ladies doe obserue, will take
A sudden flight vnto her eare. Strike but
Their sences gently with your tongue. Often
Flatter'em, and with a vigorous breath;
They'll then implore the Queene in your behalfe:
And, Sir, th' indeuour of their praise will soone
Procure your peace. (sig. F2v)

Hermegild advises that tender words from a 'gentle tongue' result in responsive females. He advises that his words must flatter with a 'vigorous' breath, because if Albovine's words are 'too rough', the ladies of the court will be very quick to report his words back to Rhodolinda's ear; and if he will Albovine will be instructed by Hermegild, the ladies will 'implore' and 'praise' him with their words to the queen.

Grimold complains that Albovine's head is made of rotten wood; when questioned by Gondibert as to why he thinks this, Grimold answers: 'That Court Earewiggs may liue there, and deuoure / His brains. Dost not perceiue how they begin / To creepe into his eares?' (sig. C1v) Grimold suggests here that sycophants of the court have the ear of the king and like cannibals eat into his thoughts to gain influence over him. Hermegild verbally poisons the ears of Rhodolinda when speaking of Valdaura: 'As for Valdaura---', he begins, 'I thinke that she is chaste, but---' (sig. F5r). Through the gossip of the courtiers and the malicious words of Hermegild words can be

altered, changed, and amended; Davenant demonstrates the ambiguity of language and its ability to be changed and amended to fit the purpose of the speaker. Hermegild, like a woman, delights in malicious gossip. Bever asserts that male witches used 'modes of conflict [that] included gossip, insults [and] threats'.²⁸¹ Hermegild uses language to manipulate others like Valdaura and Thesina to help him in his attacks on others: 'Already I haue vs'd perswasieue speech' (sig. D6v) he states. As Bever writes, 'women perform acts of murder surreptitiously', and in the play so does Hermegild; he uses poison to commit murder instead of using manly physical aggression.

Hermegild calls poison his 'precious med'cine!' (sig. M2v); he is so assured about the timing of the poison he administers he confidently says that 'He [Paradine] cannot possibly suruiue the next Minute' (sig. M2v). Hermegild cannot resist his curiosity concerning the effect that the poison may be having on his dying victim as he asks: 'Does it destroy your strength?' (sig. M2v). Davenant enjoys having a little fun with poison as the 'dying' Paradine feeds Hermegild's morbid interest to relate to him every agonising detail. Paradine likens his symptoms to that of a witch's brew: 'Oh, oh! It skorches all my entrailes vp: / As if like Porcia I had swallowed coales. / I spit scumme, such as o're th' hot Caldron boyles---' (sig. M2v). Hermegild's morbid interest spurs him on to enquire further; he continues to question the dying Paradine about how the poison affects his strength: 'And are you fastned in the chaire with weaknes?' (sig. M2v) he asks. Paradine replies with the answer that appears to satisfy: 'I cannot rise. A stiffe conuulsion in / My Sinnewes fetters all my limmes---' (sig. M2v). As if it is not enough that Paradine's strength is leaving him and he appears to be suffering, Hermegild delights in telling Paradine of the horrors to come: 'Ere long thy Ribs will start from thy / Loose Chine, thy lanke Belly swell into a hill' (sig. M2v); Hermegild's frightening anatomical description of how the poison will affect Paradine's body by making his ribs fall free of the backbone and the backbone itself become loose, seems to validate his belief in the poison's power. Once inside the body, the poison acts like a kind of semen by making the 'belly' swell so much it resembles a 'hill', giving the resemblance of a heavily pregnant female; this is

²⁸¹ Edward Bever, 'Witchcraft, Female Aggression, and Power in the Early Modern Community', *Journal of Social History*, 35, No. 4 (2002), p. 958.

similar to the effects of the poison taken by Jerome in Chettle's *The Tragedy of Hoffman*. Hermegild claims that 'This is Italian Spleene' (sig. M3r); the spleen²⁸² was thought to carry the emotions as the O.E.D. states that spleen also meant 'To regard with spleen or ill-humour; to have a grudge at'. Hermegild's words draws attention to the fact that 'Italian' spleen involved poison, agony and death for victims. When Hermegild is satisfied that Paradine is truly suffering from the poison's effects he begins to gloat—'I know th'Ingredients of thy poysnous draught' (sig. M2v); he then gleefully gives out a triumphant and spiteful 'Hah! hah! ha!' (sig. M2v). Margaret Hallissy writes that 'The image of the woman who uses poison or is venomous is, above all, an image of female power and male fear of that power'.²⁸³ Hermegild's knowledge of poison and his 'darke practice' (sig. 13r) empowers his deficient manhood and lack of masculine courage and links him to witchcraft. E. J. Kent writes that 'studies which do engage with gender and male witchcraft have suggested that these individuals were "feminized" men who "represented a failure of masculinity" to such a degree that they embodied negative female traits'.²⁸⁴ Hermegild's choice to use poison over manly strength and valour identifies him as unmanly and effeminate; poison enables him to play the woman's part.

Frollo observes that Grimold 'sits like a Witch, sayling in a siue' (Iv). Witches were depicted as being able to sail in sieves, as the First Witch in William Shakespeare's play *Macbeth* confirms: 'But in a sieve I'll thither sail' (I. iii. 8).²⁸⁵ Catholics were often associated with witches in the early modern period, as Julian Goodare states:

Witches were in league with the Devil, but so were Catholics. There was a theological sense in which witchcraft and Catholicism were both "superstition"- they both violated the first Commandment. Catholic sacraments, working *ex opere operato*, denied divine omnipotence and drew instead on demonic power.

²⁸² O.E.D. *spleen*, v. 1. †a. trans. To regard with spleen or ill-humour; to have a grudge at. Obs.rans. To regard with spleen or ill-humour; to have a grudge at. Obs.

²⁸³ Margaret Hallissy, *Venomous Woman* (U.S.A: Greenwood Press. Inc., 1987), xix.

²⁸⁴ Kent, 'Masculinity and Male Witches', p. 69.

²⁸⁵ Sandra Clark, Pamela Mason (eds.), *The Arden Shakespeare: Macbeth*, (London and New York: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare 2015).

Protestant polemicists elsewhere in Europe often made the link between Catholicism and witchcraft explicit.²⁸⁶

Grimold's association with witches is shown when he exclaims, 'Las! poore Maulkin!'²⁸⁷ This is again borrowed from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, as the First Witch says, 'I come greymalkin' (1. i. 8), referring to a familiar. According to Garry Wills, witches are subject to boasting,²⁸⁸ and both Hermegild and Grimold boast of what they can do and where they can go that is beyond the realms of ordinary mortals; Grimold boasts 'That's a trick I learnt of the deuill' (sig. C2v). He gloats to Albovine, 'yet I shall steale a passage / Ore the blacke Riuer, when Charon slumbers, / And fright your Grace' (sig. Fr). Albovine answers, 'I dare not strike thee (old man) lest thou shouldst fall / To dust, and choke me' (sig. F1), suggesting Grimold is from Hell where it is black and sooty from the eternal fires that perpetually burn. Edward Bever writes that 'the reality of poisonings [was] a source of belief in and fear of witches. ... for poisoning was only the most obvious, and far from the most frequent, form of aggression associated with witchcraft'.²⁸⁹ Hermegild is aggressive in his language and actions and is portrayed as evil, jealous and ambitious; he uses his knowledge of poisons to manipulate Rhodolinda, Valdaura and Paradine. Mario DiGangi states that Hermegild is 'Exploiting his intimacy with the queen to undermine the homoerotic bond between king and favorite'.²⁹⁰ With his malicious words and incessant gossip Hermegild does undermine the close relationship shared between Albovine and Paradine. However, Digangi could also be suggesting that Hermegild himself uses Rhodolinda to sate his own sexual jealousy for Albovine and / or Paradine, though this is not suggested in the text.

Although disguise is a prominent feature of the poisoner's success, Hermegild as male poisoner does not use physical disguises to hide his true identity or intentions; he uses language to manipulate the queen, Rhodolinda, and other characters to fulfil his own desire for the crown:

²⁸⁶ Julian Goodare, 'The Scottish Witchcraft Act', *Church History*, 74, No. 1 (Mar., 2005), pp. 39-67, 60-61.

²⁸⁷ Clark, Mason (eds.), *Macbeth*.

²⁸⁸ Garry Wills, *Witches and Jesuits: Shakespeare's Macbeth*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 64, 71, 141-42.

²⁸⁹ Bever, p. 965.

²⁹⁰ DiGangi, *Sexual Types*: p. 196.

'Mount, mount my thoughts, that I may tread on Kings' (sig. I5r). It is an unusual feature of the play that Davenant does not have his poisoner disguised; instead, his poisoner is within earshot and view of his victims on the stage for most of the time. There is a very humorous scene in the play where disguise is used for comic effect and this involves Grimold. He disguises himself 'in an old rug gowne, muffled with cloutes' (s.d. H2v) and pretends to be starving in a chair. In his ridiculous disguise, Grimold informs Hermegild: 'T'ue eaten nothing this moneth but raw ayre, / And that giues but weake nourishment to age' (sig. H2v). Grimold gets no satisfaction from Hermegild and so implores the king for mercy, but it is Thesina who restores his health by declaring her love for him, which helps Grimold to recover the use of his legs quite quickly. He tells Thesina that

Some strange influence from your touch, hath giuen
A second Youth vnto my faculties:
Before, I seem'd to crawle like to a Crab:
Now my ioynts grow supple, as if I were
Prouided for a Race. This hand inspires my strength --- (sig. Iv)

Grimold, 'An old souldier o' the Kings---' (sig. H5r) who tells Thesina 'I haue been old, / Euen since your first originall growth' (sig. H6v) supplies this unusual comic interlude, which strangely interrupts the scene where Hermegild and the vengeful Rhodolinda are maliciously plotting the murder of Paradine. Comedic scenes are not unusual in revenge tragedies: Hamlet dons the antic disposition of madness to create a comic scene with Polonius; Vindice utilises language and disguise that create comic effects; Lorrique when feigning being poisoned uses comic language. Audience laughter breaks up the tension created by the plotters on the stage and dilutes the horror of their actions. Tragedy can of course be found in plays considered to be comedies. For instance, there is nothing comic regarding the treatment of Malvolio in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night or What you Will*, or how Shylock is treated in *The Merchant of Venice*.

However, Davenant cleverly juxtaposes his comic scene with Grimold into the middle of the plotting scene. Afterwards, the audience hears Hermegild and Rhodolinda gulling Albovine into

believing that Paradine has raped Rhodolinda, as she confirms when telling Paradine of her plan:

Which do: and ere the Sun arriue ith'West;
Or with disheuell'd haire, my vestments torne
(As if I'd wandred thorow some Hathorne hedge)
I will approach the Tyrant, acquaint him
With this deed, and call my owne adultery
Thy fowle rape. (sig. G3r)

Their plan is an elaborate one, which involves rousing the jealousy of Valdaura to such a pitch that she will poison her own husband. Hermegild's complex scheme to rid himself of Paradine and the king relies on his skill to convince others of his lies with his malicious language to manipulate them. Hermegild verbally tries to rouse the jealousy of Paradine by telling him how the king made sexual advances towards him:

I haue other motiues to teach you doubt
His loyaltie in loue. Which my fond heart
Cannot conceale, though't would aduantage much
My owne profit. He hath of late, hung thus---
Vpon my neck; vtill his amorous weight
Became my burden: and then lay slabbering o're
My lips; like some rhumatick Babe. (sig. K5r)

His words are carefully chosen to hurt Paradine's youthful love and pride; he delights in making Paradine aware of how the king showed his sexual desire for him by using descriptive language: 'hung', 'amorous', 'slabbering', and 'lips' these are all words that carry strong associations with sex. The words 'rhumatck Babe' make the king sound like a sexual predator, dribbling with excitement over the prospect of sodomitc sex. Hermegild ends his falsehood by insisting to Paradine that the king's sexual preference has now moved on: 'I that am like coffing / Winter, old, and froward' (sig. K5r), and continues, 'Twas my wonder (Since you are cal'd his Minion) he could ere / Affect my looke' (sig. K5r) because Paradine was 'the darling / Of the lusty Spring' (sig. K5r). Hermegild emphasises his own age with the phrase 'coffing winter' and Paradine's youth with 'lusty spring'; his poisonous words are used to ignite feelings of

resentment and jealousy in Paradine; and Rhodolinda spikes his thoughts with all the opportunities available to him to take his revenge on the king:

Speak, is that Bag, that should containe thy Gall,
Shrunke vp; hast thou nothing bitter in thee?
Thou art farre, farre more opportunely stor'd
With time and place for thy reuenge, then wee.
Ith' middle age of day; when the bright Sunne
Most powerfully doth warme the world; in thy
Secret Clozet he takes his vsuall sleepe. (K5r)
Goe, drill his heart! and make the Couch whereon
He lyes, his easie moniment. (sig. K6v)

Rhodolinda goads Paradine about his lack of annoyance or concern at the news he has just heard and asks if he has anything 'bitter' within him, referring here to his lack of manly aggression. Rhodolinda reminds Paradine of his closeness to the king, which affords him a privileged opportunity to take his revenge upon him, especially as the king sleeps in the afternoon, like Old Hamlet. With the promise of marriage to Hermegild, Thesina is persuaded to join in and reminds Hermegild: 'My Lord, you'll not forget your kind promise / Of matrimony'. Thesina tells Paradine that she 'saw the King reach to Valdaura's hand / A poysonous violl; and with religious hints / Taught her to mixe it in her husbands draught' (sig. K4v), before informing him that 'Twas that night when he enjoy'd her person---' (sig. K4v). Thesina tries to influence the emotions of Paradine to aid Hermegild's murderous machinations. In Act V Paradine will question Hermegild's mortality: 'I will now see, if thou canst bleed like things mortall---' (sig. M3v), and states that Hermegild's scheming is as evil as anything sent from hell itself:

... Plots, darke as hell! proiections grimme!
Such, as threatned Nature, and seem'd to fright
The Genius of the world. (sig. M3v)

Paradine equates the power of Hermegild's skill with hell itself, a force that is both threatening to nature and fearful to God.

In the other plays discussed in this thesis, a favourite or minion, such as Sejanus or Vindice, is often the perpetrator of evil and ambitious actions, but Davenant deviates from the usual portrayal of the court favourite by having Hermegild instigate the poisonings in the play. DiGangi writes:

The monstrous favourite in *Albovine*, then, is not the king's minion, who represents the residual type of the Ganymede, but the queen's minion, who violently dislocates political and sexual alliances in his bid for power.²⁹¹

Paradine is not portrayed as a 'monstrous' favourite; it is Hermegild that initiates the dramatic action by plotting and scheming to murder. Furthermore, although Paradine is the favourite and 'minion' (sig. B2r) of the king, Davenant portrays him as having an unusual loyalty to his master. With echoes of Govianus and the Lady in *The Second Maiden's Tragedy*, Albovine the king commands that Paradine draw his sword to kill him: 'I haue now / Decreed it. Draw thy bright weapon!---' (sig. L4v), he asks. Albovine again requests that he 'Draw: and be nimble / In thy motion---' (sig. L5r). Paradine is unable to perform this duty: 'No prouocation like to this, could tempt / A danger from my Arme---' (sig. L5r). This prompts Albovine to ask Paradine, 'Why dost [he] dally thus with feeble motion?', before demanding that Paradine 'Beare vp! and vse more violence!' (sig. L5r). However, because of Paradine's impotent response Albovine takes charge of the situation himself and falls onto Paradine's unsheathed sword, forcing him (Paradine) to ask: 'Are you hurt, Sir? / You willingly oppos'd your brest against / My steele, and neuer sought t' indanger me / With yours' (sig. L5r). Paradine tells Albovine, 'I dare not so disgrace my Religion, / And my loue' (sig. L5r) and is depicted here as having genuine feelings for Albovine.

Favouritism and Effeminacy

Albovine, king of the Lombards is a play that flaunts favouritism and male-male sexual desire; its protagonist Albovine is portrayed as sexually self indulgent. He is a king who luxuriates in his own prestigious position by gratifying his sexual penchant for young males. Grimold tells

²⁹¹ DiGangi, *Sexual Types*, p. 196.

Volterri that the 'King forsakes / The Campe, he must maintaine luxurious mouthes, / Such as can vtter perfum'd breath'. (sig. C2r).

Albovine is portrayed from the first scene as a kind of sexual predator; his excessive and enthusiastic kisses for his favourite, Paradine, are described by Grimold as sexually salacious: 'Rauenous kisses, that you would thinke, he meant / To eate his lips' (sig. B2r). Although it would be unfair to assume that Davenant was basing his king on James I, there seems to be an evocation of James in the similarity between the actions of Albovine and the personal observations of Sir Anthony Weldon writing in 1652 and acting as scandalmonger; he suggested that James I had an obsession with his own nether regions:

His Legs were very weake, having had (as was thought) some foul play in his youth, or rather before he was born, that he was not able to stand at seven years of age, that weaknesse made him ever leaning on other mens shoulders, his walke was ever circular, his fingers ever in that walke sidling about his Codpiece.²⁹²

From Weldon's description it appears that James I was openly conscious of his crotch; Julie Crawford describes James as being 'phallically-fixated'.²⁹³

Before we even meet the king Albovine we are told of his very public demonstrations of lustful pederasty for his young favourite. Hermegild's comments verify Paradine's callowness and inexperience of life by his lack of facial hair: 'How smooth appeares the Brow of Youth!' (sig. D5r). Here Hermegild could be referring to Paradine's youthful smooth brow that is not yet furrowed with the troubles and burdens of life. Albovine too comments on Paradine's youthfulness: 'How now, Boy! Is my interest so decay'd / In your young person, that you giue away your selfe / Without my leaue!' (sig. Cr). Paradine comments on his own lack of sexual experience when talking of his physical relationship with the king: 'I long to lose my Youth in

²⁹² Sir Anthony Weldon, *The court and character of King James whereunto is now added The court of King Charles : continued unto the beginning of these unhappy times: with some observations upon him instead of a character/ collected and perfected by Sir A.W.* [London] : Printed at London by R.I. and are to be sold by J. Collins, 1651. p. 165.

²⁹³ Julie Crawford, 'Fletcher's "The Tragedie of Bonduca" and the Anxieties of the Masculine Government of James I', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 39, No. 2, (1999), pp. 357-381, 366.

warme / Embraces' (sig. D5r). Albovine verifies his physical attraction to Paradine when he states:

Boy, I bring thee home my chiefe Trophy:
Thou dost delight me more then victory.
Retire. I am in loue too violent.
My embraces crush thee, thou art but yet
Of tender growth--- (sig. B3r)

Davenant portrays Albovine as a sexual hedonist; his language - 'violent' and 'crush' - betrays eagerness and rough manners towards the youth. By having Albovine kiss and embrace Paradine openly and unashamedly in full view of the court, and audience, Davenant clearly shows the court of the king as decadent. The court also portrays men that have time on their hands and who stand around making conversations about appearance and vanity:

Grim. I'ue heard you haue transported from Paris
The Geometricall cringe, and the Art
Of numbring the haire vpon your chins.
Vollt. And of starching your Beards.
Gond. Yes, and of perfuming your very shadowes.
Grim. And they say, it is your custome to sleepe
In Pomatum Masques.
Vollt. And that you paint your pretty Vis'gnomies.
Grim. Yes, and colour them so red, that you seeme (sig. L1v)
To blush more, then the Signe of the Kings head
Before a Country Inne.
Gond. Y'abuse Astrology too; for you clip
Black-Taffeta into Starres; and for a foile
To your beauty; fix 'em in seuerall Regions
Of your face. (sig. L2r)

The men enjoy teasing the ageing Cunymond about what they have supposedly been told about him in gossip with other men: 'I'ue heard'. They infer that Cunymond has taken to mimicking the fashions of the men in 'Paris' and takes his time 'numbring' the hairs upon his chin and goes to the trouble of 'starching' his beard so it hangs stiff and stays in place. They highlight male

effeminacy by referring to the amount of perfume Cunymond supposedly uses, so much so that he even perfumes his 'very shadowes' and applies perfumed oils, 'Pomatum Masques', onto his face when he sleeps to protect and soften his skin. Vollterri speaks of the face-paints Cunymond uses on his 'pretty' face, while the excessive red cheeks give him the appearance of blushing like a woman; they also accuse him of covering his face with 'Black-Taffeta [made] into Starers' to cover up and hide any pox marks and blemishes he may have there. I suggest that the court of Albovine is a place that strips away manhood and transforms men into effeminated fops interested only in fashions that indulge their vanity and sexual desires. Although Cunymond is the subject of playful banter here, Paradine is the living embodiment of the effeminate male. This is verified by Hermegild's observation when he sees the king's favourite wearing silk: 't amble here at Court / In slippery silkes; to walke in cloudy mists / Of perfum'd ayre?' (sig. M3r). Paradine's excessive use of perfume poisons the air on the stage with effeminacy and may possibly be able to choke and weaken manhood in the audience.

The unmanly effeminate traits to be seen in Davenant's male characters spring from the example set by the king. The character of Grimold is described as a 'rough captain' with time on his hands to gossip and uses defamatory comments to disparage his king behind his back. Grimold informs the audience that 'the Royall foole greets him [Paradine] with such / Ravenous kisses, that you would thinke, he meant / To eate his lips' (sig. B2r). The king displays his degenerate nature in front of his court and also on the stage in front of an audience because he is unable to control his emotions. This lack of control and his inability to keep his lustful nature from public eyes undermines his authority as a monarch and also his manhood. In Act II, it is Albovine who checks the greedy kisses of the inexperienced Paradine: 'Thy breath / Is as the smoke of spices, I taste thy / Melting lippes, and straight ingender kisses' (sig. D2r). The language is highly charged with sexual excesses and sodomitical promise as Paradine confides that: 'I euer held your Maiesty my best / Example. Kisses nimbly gather'd, / The faster grow' (sig. D2r). Paradine's youthful description belies sexual knowledge maybe gained by association with Albovine. He later confesses to his sexual inexperience with a female when he says to Valdaura: 'Faire Saint, / To bed, I long to lose my Youth in warme / Embraces, and ere the pearly Morne appeare, / Make thee a teeming Mother. To bed! with winged hast / Expect my

presence' (sig. D3r). The language is full of youthful bravado and impatience, and there is no denying that the naive Paradine wishes to 'lose his youth' in a sexual encounter with a female. Although Albovine's lecherous and self-indulgent kisses with the adolescent Paradine do suggest sodomitical actions. In contrast Albovine's own lack of knowledge on the sensitive matter of courtship with a female exposes his scarcity of knowledge and experience. Here Hermegild chides Albovine's approach at wooing Rhodolinda and offers him some advice:

Herm. Sir, you neglect to vse her like a Louer;

With amorous gestures.

Albo. Fill me a Bowle with Negro's blood, congeal'd

Euen into Liuers! Tell her, Hermegild,

Ile swallow Tarre, to celebrate her health!

Herm. Sir, this dull Germane phrase, makes her suspect

Your temperance. Marke how she trembles.

Albo. I must go learne to complement. Dost heare?

Is't fit I proffer her to mingle limmes---Thou know'st---

Herm. Sir, not to night. ... (sig. I3v)

Albovine's vampiric gesture to drink congealed 'Negro's blood' links him to witches. In *Hamlet*, Hamlet says, 'Now I could drink hot blood' (3.2. 380), and in the footnote (380, p. 325) to the Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor edition they write that 'witches were supposed' to drink blood. Also, Hermegild will die from drinking his own blood: 'I stagger, and am drunk with my owne blood!---' (sig. M4v) he informs us. Albovine's inexperience with women is highlighted when he admits that he must learn how to 'complement' a woman and in the next sentence he asks if it is right to 'mingle lim[b]es' with her. Rhodolinda has already used this passionless phrase earlier in the play when Paradine informs her that Albovine's 'chiefe hope [is] that you will straight expect / His person in your bed'(sig. D6v). However, any designs Albovine may have had on Rhodolinda sharing his bed are dispelled when he tells her, 'This was [her] Fathers Skull' (sig. D2v) that he holds in his hands, full of wine.

In Act II, the celebratory drinking of wine from out of a skull is a public display of male bravado and is used as a symbol of savage masculinity and dominance over another male, albeit

a dead one. The drinking from another man's skull, and in this case Rhodolinda's father's skull, is an intimate action of domination, and not only degrades his memory but is also a public show of dishonour for his memory. Albovine has already exposed Rhodolinda's father's lack of ability with a sword by killing him - 'When your victorious sword depriu'd me of / My Father' (sig. Dr) - and now emasculates him in death by using his skull as a personal victory to humiliate the memory of the father's status as a man. Albovine demands, 'Bring vs the Bowle of Victory' (sig. D2v); his act of drinking from the skull also functions as a ghastly reminder of man's mortality. The skull Albovine holds in his hands was once part of another man's body and 'evokes its former identity as a living head'.²⁹⁴ The act of using the skull as a tool to be used or abused transforms the dead man into another captive and macabre minion, linking it with his rough treatment of his living male minion Paradine and the female captive Rhodolinda. The treatment of the skull can also be interpreted as a physical act of necrophilic intimacy; Albovine's possession and dominance over the dead man's skull is a violation of the dead and highlights Albovine's corrupt morality.

After being told her father's skull is Albovine's drinking cup, Rhodolinda vehemently declares to Paradine:

How! lye with him? Ile sooner choose a Mansion
In a sepulcher: There commit incest
With the raw remnant of my fathers bones:
Sooner imbrace an ayrie Incubus:
Mingle Limmes with some vlcrous Cripple,
Able to infect an Hospital. (sig. D6v)

Rhodolind's repulsion at having any sexual contact with Albovine is given proof in her dreadful analogies, which demonstrate her utter revulsion at the man who killed her father and now sits before her drinking from his skull. Rhodolinda's image of her mingling 'Limmes with some vlcrous Cripple' creates a horrid picture; the ulcerous, open sore imagery also associates

²⁹⁴ Melissa Walter, 'Drinking from Skulls and the Politics of Incorporation in Early Stuart Drama', *Arizona Studies in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, 18, (2007), pp. 93-105, 94.

Albovine with syphilis²⁹⁵, the destroyer of manhood and virility. Rhodolinda uses graphic necrophilic and incestuous language to show that she would rather 'commit incest' with her father's 'raw' corpse than share her 'bed' with Albovine, to 'mingle limmes' with him; this reveals her utter abhorrence of him. Albovine's reason for wanting Rhodolinda as his queen is not to produce an heir to his throne; it is curiously revealed in what appears like an after thought in the last few lines of Act V that Albovine does in fact already have an heir by a previous marriage, which is conspicuously not mentioned earlier in the play: 'Where we'le proclaime *Albovine's* young issue / By's former wife, to bee his lawfull heire' (sig. M5r). I suggest that this may have been an afterthought on Davenant's part, wanting to end his play with a little hope for the Lombards' future.

Davenant's play is peppered with lines that show Albovine's sexual interest in his favourite Paradine, especially revealed in the gossip of those observing in the court. Gondibert tittle-tattles about Paradine to his friend Grimold, saying that 'He is our Kings Minion, sleepes in his bosome' (sig. B2r). Paradine informs Rhodolinda that Albovine has 'Ta'ne me from the cold Earth, and warm'd me in / His bosome' (sig. E1v). Hermegild tells Paradine, 'you are cal'd his Minion' (sig. K5r). The word 'minion' implies a sexual²⁹⁶ relationship between the king and his favourite, as Blair Worden writes: 'In play after play the sexually charged word 'minion' (or 'mignon') is used to describe a political favourite'.²⁹⁷ The language the characters use strongly implies Albovine's indulgence in a homosexually charged relationship with his favourite. Hermegild suggests in his gossip that the king holds Paradine dear and shares his private confidences with him too: 'You are the Kings / Iewell, and hang richly in his eare' (sig. B2v) he informs him. The malicious gossip about James I after his death in 1625 also tells of the king's public displays of fawning over his favourites, as Weldon describes a scene from the court of James:

²⁹⁵ Davenant also suffered from syphilis; see Joannes Fabricius, *Syphilis in Shakespeare's England*, (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2008), pp. 250-52, 273.

²⁹⁶ Already mentioned in the introduction is DiGangi's interpretation of the word minion: 'the term 'minion' in Renaissance usage can refer to either gender; it is often applied to men in homoerotic contexts'.

²⁹⁷ Blair Worden, 'Favourites on the English Stage', in *The World of the Favourite*, eds J. H. Elliott, L. W. B. Brockliss, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), pp. 159-183, p. 163.

... the King hung about his neck, slabboring his cheeks; saying, for Gods sake when shall I see thee again? On my soule, I shall neither eate, nor sleep, untill you come again; the Earl told him, on Monday (this being on the Friday,) for Gods sake let me, said the King, shall I? shall I? Then lolled about his neck.²⁹⁸

The words used by Weldon echo the words spoken in Davenant's play by Hermegild when he describes the king's lustful actions towards him (already mentioned earlier in this chapter): 'hung'; 'Vpon my neck'; 'slabbering o're / My lips' (sig. K5r). Albovine's physical embraces of his minion evoke widely-circulated accounts of James I. Julie Crawford quotes Francis Osborne's observation of James's behaviour towards his favourites at court:

Nor was [James's] love... carried on with a discretion sufficient to cover a lesse scandalous behaviour; for the kings kissing [his favorites] after so lascivious a mode in publick, and upon the theatre, as it were, of the world, prompted many to imagine some things done in the tyring house, that exceed my expression no lesse then they do my experience." ... The nonpublic "things done in the tyring house" were, of course, sodomitical.²⁹⁹

The very public display of affection towards James's favourite appears to be replicated in Davenant's play. The 'Ravenous kisses' (sig. B2r) Albovine thrusts upon his favourite are reciprocated by Paradine and expose the king's lechery and suggest a sexual urgency. Gordon Williams writes that the word *kiss* means to copulate with³⁰⁰, and if the king is prepared to demonstrate his homoerotic desires in public, then there are strong hints that he can be as lascivious in private, especially as 'Kisses nimbly gather'd, / The faster grow' (sig. D2r). Albovine is portrayed as a king that is a sexual predator, one who seizes the moment in a voracious manner to glut his insatiable sexual appetite on his youthful minion. However, Albovine also observes how Paradine's sexual appetite can be as violent as his own: 'Heart! Boy, you are too ravenous!' (sig. D2r) Spectators watch the physical violence of the kisses that quickly grow, and are left to imagine something just as physical and just as violent happening in private. Grimold's comments invite speculation when he observes 'that you would thinke, he meant / To eate his lips' (sig. B2r); this establishes the sexual brutality that accompanies the

²⁹⁸ Elizabeth Horodowich, 'The gossiping tongue: oral networks, public life and political culture in early modern Venice', *Renaissance Studies*, 19: 22-45. p. 95.

²⁹⁹ Julie Crawford, 'Fletcher's 'The Tragedie of Bonduca' and the Anxieties of the Masculine Government of James I', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 39, No. 2, (1999), pp. 357-381, 366.

³⁰⁰ Gordon Williams, *A Glossary of Shakespeare's Sexual Language*, p. 178.

display of sexual desire in the play. The word 'eate' links this scene to *The Tragedy of Claudius Tiberius Nero*, when Drusus and Nero actually do eat each other's arms to assuage their starvation whilst they are imprisoned. The cannibalistic imagery is continued when Paradine's act of quasi-cannibalism is replicated in the final Act when Paradine devours the lips of Rhodolinda in his verbal and physical attack upon her. The play does not restrict lust to male characters alone; Rhodolinda is portrayed as having a sexual appetite that is just as fierce and insatiable:

Rhodolinda: Deare Paradine, ... ,

My appetite is growne so fierce. Let me

Begin with thy moyst lip---

S.D: Pulls her to kisse him in the Chaire.

Paradine: Let's to't like Monkeys, or the reeking Goat.

Rhodolinda: Oh! oh! oh! Helpe! helpe!

Both are bloody about their mouthes.

Paradine: Cease your loud clamor, Royall Whore.

Rhodolinda: Thou didst eate my lips.

Paradine: Thy flesh is sowre, musty; more tainted then

A Carion in a phlegmatick ditch for else

Like th' Anthropophagus, I had deuour'd thee vp. (sig. M1v)

The language highlights the ferocity, perverseness and sadistic nature of Paradine's passion; the stage direction tells us that they '*Both are bloody about the mouthes*' (sig. M1v). The vampiric imagery of Paradine's action portrays the savage cannibalism of his own passion. If, as suggested by Melissa Walter, the biting off of Rhodolinda's lips is a 'symbolic form of castration'³⁰¹, then this physical act of violence on Rhodolinda's lips betrays Paradine's fear of the female within himself. The devouring of the female lips evokes the labia majora, and while Paradine 'eates' her 'lips', he is repulsed by the very taste of the female and tells Rhodolinda that her 'flesh is sowre, musty; more tainted then / A Carion in a phlegmatick ditch' (sig. M1v). His brutality is a visual act of misogynistic violence and mutilation; it is a brutal act of sacrifice and an attempt to annihilate the female.

³⁰¹ Walter, 'Drinking from Skulls', 105.

Davenant uses the theatre as a vehicle to show the ‘scandalous’ and ‘lascivious’ behaviour of his king on the stage. After seeing and hearing of such behaviour publicly displayed some audience members must have questioned the actions of their own monarch regarding the behaviour of the king and his favourite in non-public places. The language spoken by Davenant’s characters is openly suggestive ‘you knew his Bed’ (sig. K6v), Hermegild tells Paradine. Albovine says to Valduarua, ‘Thou [Paradine] hast shew'd me physick for my passion. / Take him, Valdaura, and be proud! Tis I / That loue him’ (sig. C1v), and also admits to Paradine that ‘[he is] in loue too violent’ (sig. B3r). Michael Young remarks that ‘People did not generally talk about James being physically familiar with his wife in public; they did remark on the fact that he embraced, hung about the necks of and kissed his favourites in public’. Young goes on to state that ‘those were not platonic relationships; they were physical’.³⁰² Davenant makes it clear in the language of the play that the private moments shared between his king and his favourite were physical ones; he also makes it clear that the king bestowed gifts on his favourites, as Paradine reminds Hermegild:

Hermegild has full cause
 To blesse his bounty. But you (now our Queene)
 He valewes next to heauen; howe're this rash
 Error striues to disgrace his loue. We are
 His captiues too; heretofore not heeded
 By our Starres; though we now grow tall with titles
 And his fauour. (sig. E1v)

The bestowing of titles and lands to favourites and the sexually perverse behaviour of the king and his court must have been noticed by astute audience members. This would have had the effect of a poison to corrupt and taint their sight, ears and morals. William Prynne wrote: ‘these plaiers, ... whose pleasure as poison spreddeth it selfe into the vaines of their beholders’.³⁰³ John Green claimed that plays were ‘as bad Poyson to the Mined, as the byting of a Viper to the

³⁰² Michael B. Young, *James VI and I and the History of Homosexuality*, (London: Macmillan Press 2000), p. 36.

³⁰³ William Prynne, *The vnlovelinesse, of loue-lockes. Or, A summarie discourse, proouing: the wearing, and nourishing of a locke, or loue-locke, to be altogether vnseemely, and vnlawfull vnto Christians In which there are likewise some passages collected out of fathers, councells, and sundry authors, and historians, against face-painting; the wearing of supposititious, poudred, frizled, or extraordinary long haire; the inordinate affectation of corporall beautie: and womens mannish, vnnaturall, imprudent, and vnchristian cutting of their haire; the epidemicall vanities, and vices of our age*, (London: 1628). p. 11.

Flesh'.³⁰⁴ *Albovine, King of the Lombards* is dangerously political and gives a stark warning to future kings regarding lascivious behaviour, their treatment of favourites, and the consequences thereof. Davenant's court is depicted as a place where artifice and deception are the norm as Paradine observes that 'Hermegild is read in all / The Arts of Court' (sig. E5r). This suggests that the court is a toxic mixture of stratagems and wile and a place where sexual depravity can be fulfilled. The depth of baseness and depravity within the king is especially emphasised when he asks Valdaura to teach him to pray because religion 'has / Been long time out of fashion here in Court' (sig. F3). This reveals the court as a Godless place, a Sodom and Gomorrah that will eventually devour its subjects.

Albovine King of the Lombards gives its audience members a toxic royal court. Davenant's court erodes manhood and establishes the effeminate male as a kind of 'other', a contaminant capable of permeating the manhoods of weaker males, as Hermegild confirms: 'A womans will, / Is not so strong in anger, as her skill' (sig. G1v). This links to the male that is more female than male; is mild tempered and not confrontational which makes him more of a danger. I suggest that Davenant's play is a cautionary tale that shows a monarchy coupled with sin and a court deteriorating into chaos and death. Although James I was dead at the time of the play's publication, Davenant's choice of dedicatee for his play strongly hints at the dangers of court favourites. This is especially true of Robert Carr, who having been the favourite of James I for many years, was then shamed by a public scandal when he was implicated in the court case already mentioned in the introduction, that involved poison and murder; being found guilty for his part Carr lost favour with the king. Carr must bear some of the responsibility for his downfall and for the scandal and gossip attached to James I's court at this time. Davenant's play highlights the perils of the court favourite and gives a subtle, though strong, warning to future monarchs.

³⁰⁴ Prynne, *The vnloneliness, of loue-lockes*. p. 11.

Conclusion

In this thesis I have attempted to define a distinct category of male poisoner that is to be found in the plays of the early modern period and who, like the poison they use, appear to have been overlooked and gone unnoticed. This distinct type of male poisoner has proved to be dependent upon specific character traits that are used by playwrights to distinguish these characters as different from other male poisoners, such as Claudius, Laertes, or Marlowe's Barabas. These distinct poisoners are linked in the plays through their complexity of identities, which establish them as unmanly, cowardly, and / or effeminate through their actions, deeds and language. These male poisoners are often portrayed as charismatic and able to easily win the trust and friendship of other characters. They all share a determined focus to poison their chosen victim/s either for revenge, jealousy, or ambition, and are presented as having stereotypical qualities which include a social, religious and moral baseness that should alienate them from other characters in the world of the play. In fact, because they are so adept at disguise and manipulation, they are able to adapt to different situations. Their deceit is made believable, hence, they become successful poisoners. As this distinct type of male poisoner is often from the lower ranks of society and the focus usually falls upon the main protagonists in the play, these male poisoners go unnoticed, which enhances their hidden potential for danger. They are often depicted as a kind of 'other', which helps to create another kind of foreignness and something to be feared. They are nearly always portrayed as being close to the seat of political power. The punishment meted out to the effeminate male poisoner at the end of the plays must have seemed justified, in accordance with religious and judicial doctrines and designed to send a clear and consistent message to audience members about the dangerous nature of the crime of poisoning, but it also gave a warning regarding the dangers of the minion, the favourite and the effeminate male.

Poison

I have shown that there are subtle ways in which male poisoners differ from each other in the plays. In *Hamlet* Claudius's first poisoning takes place outside the realms of the play and is related to the audience through the words of a ghost; his second poisoning, with Laertes as his accomplice, is heard and witnessed by the audience. Neither Claudius or Laertes are presented as effeminate, and neither shares homoerotic language, either with each other or with another male character. However, Hamlet does share a close homoerotic relationship with another male. Hamlet as male poisoner uses poison to murder only when he realises it has been used against him and his mother; however, though he may not be a scheming poisoner, he does knowingly compel Claudius to drink poisoned wine before he stabs him with the poisoned sword. From the beginning of *Hoffman*, Clois Hoffman employs as his minion the traitorous Lorrique, who takes on the role of subordinate female to Hoffman's demands. There is physical contact in this play between Hoffman and Lorrique and they share intimate language; Lorrique the minion willingly uses poison to murder and even appears to enjoy his role. In *The Revenger's Tragedy*, Vindice is a master of conniving and manipulation and shares homoerotic language with Lussurioso. Vindice willingly uses poison to avenge the poisoning of Gloriana; by replicating her murder, Vindice makes himself no better than the Duke her murderer. Sejanus plays subordinate female to Tiberius in *The Tragedy of Claudius Tiberius Nero*; they share homoerotic language, but unlike Hamlet and Horatio, whose language appears to be heartfelt and genuine, the language shared between Tiberius and Sejanus is disingenuous. Both Sejanus and Tiberius use poison for selfish reasons to murder. In *The Second Maiden's Tragedy* the spineless king Govianus takes on the role of subordinate to the dominating ghost of the Lady and uses poison to achieve his revenge on the Tyrant. The deposed king Govianus is presented as weak, cowardly and effeminate; he does not share intimacies with another male in the play but he does adhere to the demands the Lady's ghost makes upon him. Govianus is subordinated by a female ghost and willingly steered into poisoning another male. In *Albovine, King of the Lombards*, Paradine the captive minion plays the role of female to Albovine the king. Paradine the effeminate minion is not the poisoner in this play; the role of poisoner is represented by a favourite of the queen, Hermegild. In this last play to be discussed Davenant shows a disregard

for any moral, religious, or civic laws. Davenant shocks by having the king and his favourite use homoerotic language, kiss, and embrace on the stage, which was subversively destructive to social expectations and order. The poisoner in this play is neither the king or his minion; in fact the minion Paradine is presented as loving and loyal to his master throughout the play. Hermegild the poisoner is presented as a master schemer and knowledgeable about poison and the black arts, but what makes this play so unusual is the fact that no character actually dies from poison. This does not mean, though, that the characters of Hermegild or Paradine are not dangerous; their very association with poison makes them so. In the plays discussed, manhood is associated with masculine power over other men and over women; for the weak, cowardly and effeminate male poisoner this was only achievable through the power poison allowed him.

The Skull

In the approximately thirty-year period covered by the six plays discussed in this thesis, the progression of the skull motif undergoes several modifications. Graham Holderness states that ‘The most famous theatrical prop in the history of drama, possibly in the history of Western culture, is a human skull, that which appears in the fifth act of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*’.³⁰⁵ At the beginning of the 1600s when Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* holds the skull of Yorick, it must have been a shocking spectacle for the audience to see death handled in such a nonchalant and disturbing manner. Subsequent playwrights borrowed the skull motif to promote and develop the skull idea even further, with shocking effects. Shakespeare may have had the character of Hamlet hold the skull of Yorick to provoke remembrance of his own childhood, but it would have been a stark reminder to audience members of their own inevitable mortality. Chettle develops Shakespeare’s skull to deliver an appalling visual effect by placing a complete skeleton on the stage, and even more shocking is the fact that Chettle places not just one skeleton but three on the stage at the end of his play. During the course of the play Chettle also has three living heads roasted alive with a burning crown. Middleton has more fun with the skull and includes it as

³⁰⁵ Graham Holderness, ‘I Covet Your Skull’: Death and Desire in *Hamlet*, *Shakespeare Survey: Theatres for Shakespeare*, 60, (May 28, 2007), 20:19. p. 225.

part of the *dramatis personae* in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, where it is treated with a grotesque irreverence; the skull is given a macabre afterlife that sees it sexualised and even kissed. In the *Tiberius* play the coveted crown of power on a living head creates jealousy, deceit and death; in the play the burning crown motif is used, like in *Hoffman*, to burn and murder two living heads. In Middleton's *Second Maiden's Tragedy* the skull is shown with the remains of mortal death still upon it; the decomposing flesh of the Lady is smeared with poisonous cosmetics and like the skull in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, it is sexualised to trap and murder with poison. In the final play to be discussed, Davenant takes the skull motif in his play *Albovine* and dismantles and eradicates any evidence of the man that once was. *Albovine* the sodomitical king desecrates another man's skull to show masculine power and dominance over that other man by using the remains of his skull as a drinking cup to celebrate victory. The human skull in *Albovine's* hands has travelled through the plays to have its identity and the life it once lived become nothing more than a meaningless hollow empty shell. Sharon Emmerichs says that 'Archaeologists who dig up ancient bones and funerary artefacts are called scholars; those who dig up and plunder more recent burials are described as grave robbers. Bodies buried in holy ground, as sanctified by a specific church or dogma, are deemed "blessed", while others buried in unconsecrated earth or an unmarked grave - or remain unburied entirely - may be construed as "damned"'.³⁰⁶ Playwrights make death visual with the use of the skull, turning it into an emblem of the unseen wickedness of the male poisoner.

The plays discussed in this thesis are interconnected through their use of poison, the homoerotic male, and the skull. The persistent trope of this distinct type of male poisoner implies that in the early Jacobean period the social attitude was one of contempt and fear for the court favourite, the jealous ambitious minion, and the effeminate male. I have shown that playwrights present the distinct male poisoner as a character type who not only resorts to the use of poison as a weapon to murder, but helps to highlight, and create, contemporary anxieties about a man's weak or inadequate masculinity. Behind the identification of this persistent trope, shown to disempower the masculinity of other men and undermine authority, lurks the familiar threat that

³⁰⁶ Sharon Emmerichs, 'Shakespeare and Landscape of Death: Crossing the Boundaries of Life and the Afterlife', *Shakespeare*, 8:2, (2012), 171-194, 173-4.

the effeminate male was inherently toxic, an unwelcome contagious presence in society that should be avoided and / or destroyed.

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Church of Englande. Comprehending likewise an aunswere to the arguments in a treatise named The iudgement of a most reuerend and learned man from beyond the seas, &c. Aunswering also to the argumentes of Caluine, Beza, and Danaeus, with other our reuerend learned brethren, besides Caenais and Bodinus, both for the regiment of women, and in defence of her Maiestie, and of all other Christian princes supreme gouernment in ecclesiasticall causes ... Aunswered by Iohn Bridges Deane of Sarum. (London: Printed by Iohn windet [and T. Orwin], for Thomas Chard, 1587).

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that it is not onely vnlawfull to bee an actor, but a beholder of those vanities. Wherevnto are added also and annexed in th'end certeine latine letters betwixt the sayed Maister Rainoldes, and D. Gentiles, reader of the civill law in Oxford, concerning the same matter. (Middelburg : Printed by Richard Schilders, 1599).

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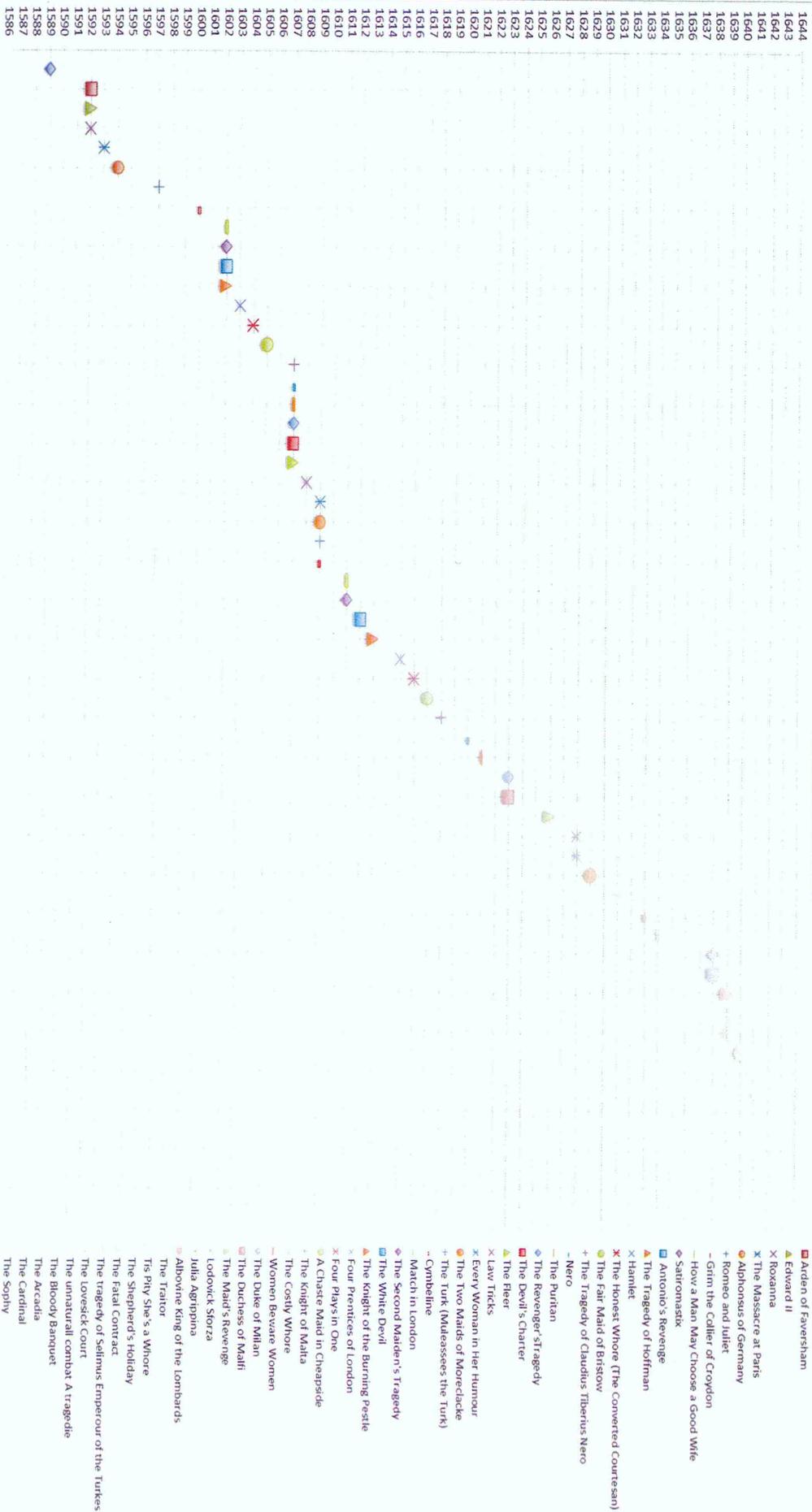
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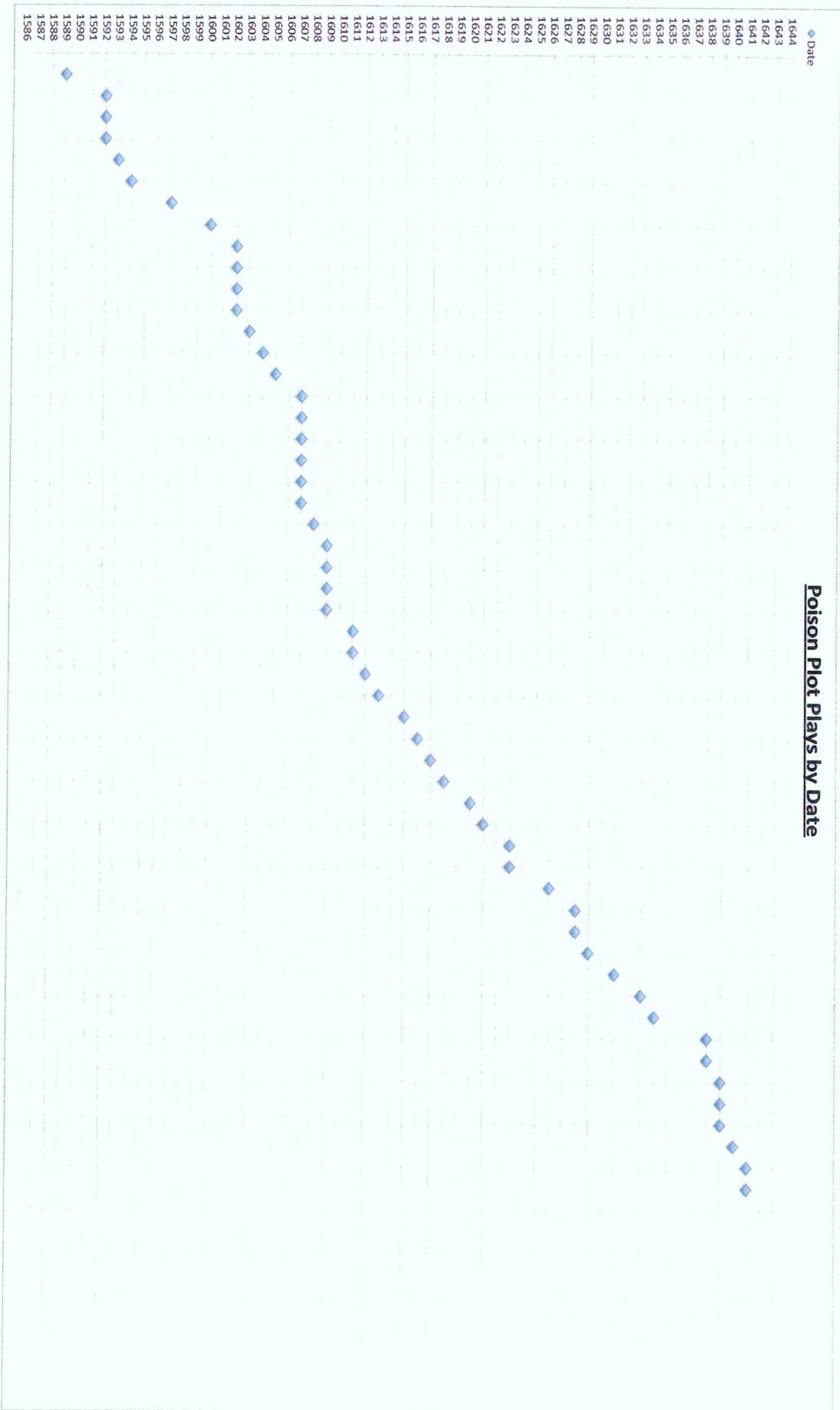
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Appendix

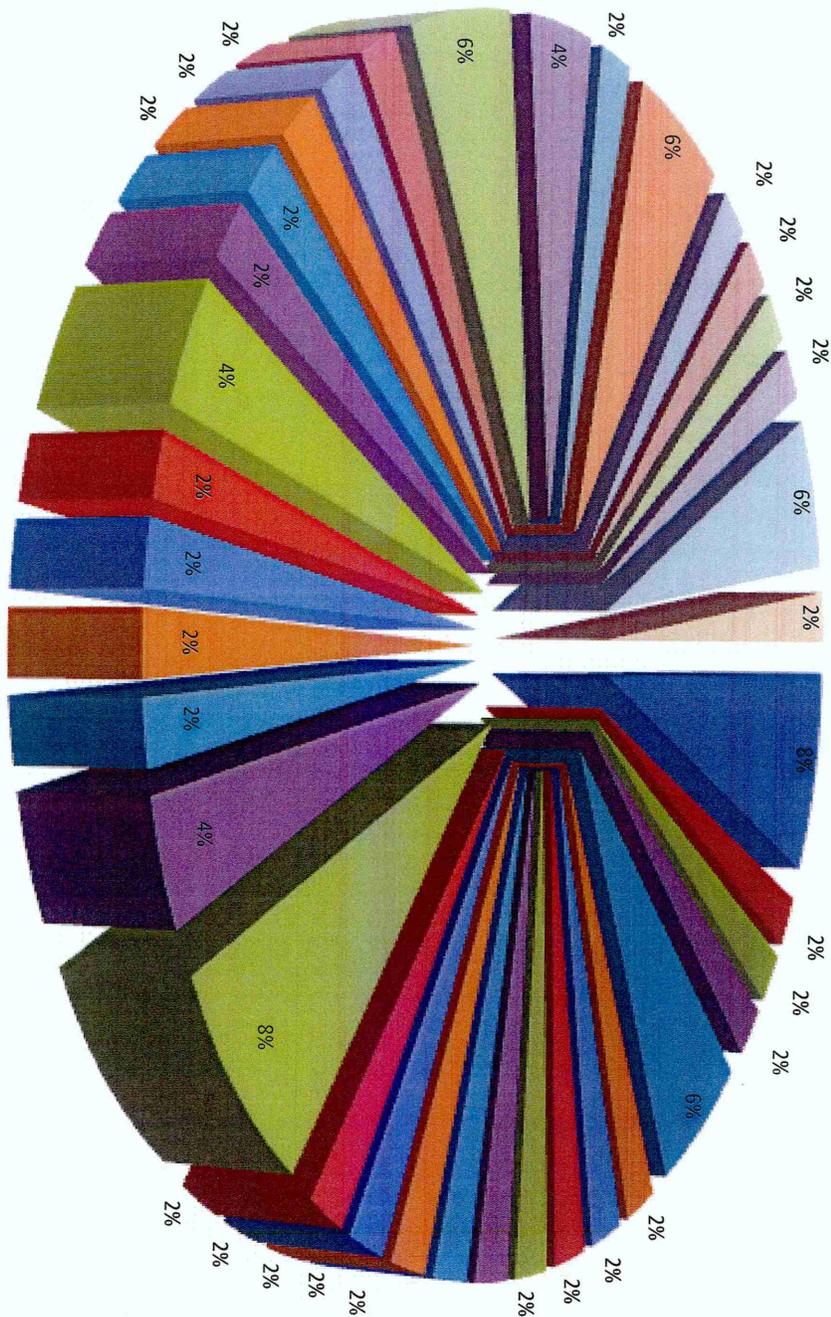
The following three graphs visually plot the rise and fall of revenge tragedies that contain poison plots and were written during the late Elizabethan and Jacobean periods. The graphs are not all inclusive, but they do highlight the popularity of poison and especially draw attention to the early reign of James I, showing a surge in revenge tragedies that include poison around the date of the gun powder plot.

Poison Plot Plays by Title





Poison Plot Plays by Author



Doctrine'.²⁷ Bacon believed that poisoners were cowards with no moral principles: he spoke of 'the basenesse and cowardliness of poisoners', and also believed that it was not in the nature of the English to use poison: 'how rare it was to heare of poysoning in England, so detestable to our Nation'.²⁸ None of the plays discussed in this thesis are set in England, with four being based in Italy and two being set near the Baltic Sea. The name of Claudius in *Hamlet* is a strong reminder to audience members of Rome, its Emperor Claudius and especially of Catholicism. Henry Peacham gave a frightening warning to any would-be traveller heading towards Italy, believing that they would go to 'Italy to be poisoned'.²⁹ Poison, as a secret weapon, was believed to be the traditional means of Italian vengeance as Fynes Moryson affirms with his own observation of Italians from his travels in the 1590s:

the Italyans aboue all other nations, most practise reuenge by treasons, and espetically are skillfull in making and giuing poysons. For poysons the Italyans skill in making and putting them to vse hath beene long since tried, to the perishing of kings and Eniperours by those deadly potions giuen to them in the very Chalice mingled with the very precious blood of our Redeemer. ... In our tyme, it seemes the Art of Poysoning is reputed in Italy worthy of Princes practise.³⁰

Horrifying accounts of poisonings by corrupt, evil, revenge-seeking Italians could only instigate anxieties of the English being Italianized. Writing in the 1590s Thomas Nashe³¹ wrote that 'Italy [was] the Academie of man-slaughter, the sporting place of murther, [and] the Apothecary shop of poyson for all Nations' (sig. C5). With the publication of several Italian books on poison the fear became more real; these included Peter de Abano's [sic] book on poisons dedicated to Pope John XXII (c.1245-1344), and Peter de Marra's book on poisons published in c.1362 and republished in the middle of the fifteen hundreds, dedicated to Urban V and entitled

²⁷ Francis, Bacon, *A true and historical relation of the poysoning of Sir Thomas Overbury* (London: Printed by T.M. & A.C. for John Benson and John Playford, 1651), p. 118.

²⁸ Bacon, *A true and historical relation*, p. 16.

²⁹ Henry Peacham, *The truth of our times revealed out of one mans experience, by way of essay*, London: Printed by N[icholas] O[kes] for Iames Becket, and are to be sold at his shoppe at the middle Temple gate, 1638. p. 138.

³⁰ Charles Hughes, (ed.), *Shakespeare's Europe: Unpublished Chapters of Fynes Morysons Itinerary* (London: Sherratt and Hughes, 1903), cited from the archive.org facsimile at: http://www.archive.org/stream/shakespeareseuro00moryuoft/shakespeareseuro00moryuoft_djvu.txt SHAKESPEARE'S EUROPE, pp. 405-6.

³¹ Thomas Nashe, *Pierce Pennilesse his supplication to the duel*, (Printed at London by Abell Ieffes, for I. B. 1592), sig. C5.