

*The Revenger's Tragedy*

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Submitted to the graduate degree program in Scenography and the Graduate Faculty at the University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master's of Fine Arts.

The Thesis Committee for Elizabeth Grim certifies that this is the approved Version of  
the following thesis:

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**Table of Contents**

Play selection.....	1
Original Production.....	3
Conceptualization and Research.....	3
Design Process.....	10
Costumes.....	11
Set.....	19
Wheel of Fortuna.....	19
Scaffold Structures.....	21
Lights.....	26
Conclusion.....	27
Bibliography.....	30
Index.....	34

## The Revenger's Tragedy

### Play Selection

I have been a fan of Thomas Middleton since I saw a production of *The Changeling* in the summer of 2006 in London's Barbican Theatre. Subsequently, I also worked on *Measure for Measure* by William Shakespeare, and have learned recently that Middleton may have been a consultant on that play. This period of history is also a point of interest to me, starting with Henry VIII to Oliver Cromwell. The works borne out of the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods have been produced for centuries and have been considered precious not just by English-speaking cultures but by any culture or group that is oppressed. The reason could be merely due to canonical status but I would argue that it is more to do with these plays' artful way of disguising civil disobedience. Although many works of the period tackle the subject of civil disobedience, *The Revenger's Tragedy* is significant because it does so through dark satire.

During this period, the English were struggling with questions of identity, both as a society and as individuals; moreover, this crisis of identity came even more to light with the regime change from Elizabeth I to James I. A break away from the orthodoxy consequently led to a new individual self-fashioning and a need to explore a different relationship with the government and its people. With the break away from tradition, specifically religious tradition, during the monarchy of Henry VIII, there was an opening of new possibilities, opportunities, and temptations that continued into the reign of James I. The English Renaissance and Reformation left people with more questions than answers, important questions that are still being fleshed out today. In particular, these

periods questioned how best to ethically manage the mass of society while still taking consideration of the individual.

Middleton's skeptical tone in his work is a reflective symptom of these questions of society, morality, and theology – questions that are yet to be solved entirely in the present, for utopia has yet to become a reality. Some would be put off by Middleton's cynicism and the complete and utter depravity of some of his characters. I, however, feel empathy for them because even though they may be despicable, they speak to a larger truth of the human condition and survival. This is true of *The Revenger's Tragedy*: the characters are depraved *with perhaps the exception to the chaste Castiza*, but because of its satiric edge, they are *playfully* depraved, which makes them compelling to watch for five acts. The satiric nature of the piece becomes even more amusing with the knowledge that *The Revenger's Tragedy* is Middleton's answer to Shakespeare's *Hamlet* ("Thomas Middleton: Marriage"). The juxtaposition is hilarious, especially when comparing Hamlet's unwillingness to decide with Vindice's decisive rush. Vindice is perhaps well intentioned – who wouldn't want justice for a slain loved one? – But revenge is revenge and revenge is selfish, despite being well intentioned. Another important consideration is Middleton's critique of James I's management of the monarchy after he is endowed with the reins of rule from the much successful and stable Elizabeth I. James I squandered the relationships Elizabeth I built in the House of Commons and his relationship with Parliament was tense at best, especially when it came to financial matters ("James I (1603-25 AD)"). Most important is Middleton's critique of the courts of law and justice itself, which is matter close to Middleton's heart, as he spent most of his life dragged into court due to family lawsuits ("Thomas Middleton: Early Years").

His courts were in an abysmal state of failure in terms of financial matters, and even more in their treatment of criminal cases. It's conceivable that the jaded part of Middleton is reflected in a jaded Vindice, who resorts to revenge when justice of the society fails him.

### Original Production

James IV, King of Scotland, became James I, King of England and Scotland in 1603. Shortly after James's succession, plague hit London, forcing theatres to shut down and many, including Middleton, to evacuate ("Thomas Middleton: Marriage and Maturity"). In 1606, however, Middleton, who worked mostly as a free agent, sold *The Revenger's Tragedy* to the King's Men and it was subsequently performed at The Globe Theatre ("Thomas Middleton: Marriage and Maturity"). In this performance, Vindice, who is considered to be longest, most complex role in the early modern repertoire, was most likely played by the famous actor Richard Burbage ("Thomas Middleton: Marriage and Maturity"). That the King's Men produced the original production of *The Revenger's Tragedy* is interesting because the King's Men were under royal patronage and officially titled "Grooms extraordinary of the Chamber." This may have seemed an amusing joke to Middleton because, arguably, the play was intended as a brutal critique of the King ("Thomas Middleton: Marriage and Maturity").

### Conceptualization and Research

In thinking about the question of the play, long before I had fully developed what I thought that question might be, I began by focusing on satire . If nothing else and

regardless of how dark this play is – and indeed it is very dark – I believe Middleton wanted the audience to laugh. This may seem peculiar, but the success of this play depends on a particular type of laughter because, due to the appalling violence and the depravity of most of the characters, it is a hard sell for empathy and it is an equally hard sell for critical thinking. In a first read of the script with this thought in mind, I directed my focus to a present-day vehicle of frivolity and hell-bent revenge: wrestling. World Wrestling Entertainment (“History of the Women’s Championship”) has had the market on both these elements for years. For example, the WWE official website lists a history of women’s championships going back to the Fabulous Moolah of 1956, mapping out more than five decades of female revenge matches. I also found the WWE compelling as a concept because, even though it’s ridiculous and scripted, fans participate in these events on an enthusiastic level. I was intrigued in channeling that sort of enthusiasm, perhaps somehow turning it on its head in the way that Middleton uses his play to turn *Hamlet* on its head.

For many reasons, the WWE concept did not pan out, but it did lead me down the path of framing the question of play in regards to consumption. Christopher Marlowe, one of Middleton’s contemporaries, was certainly concerned with this idea of materialistic consumption, and his plays reflected a society concerned about economic and ethical ideas surrounding consumption (Greenblatt 199). In some readings, this is one of the critiques Middleton is making of James I, who is represented in the play by the character of the Duke. It is certainly true that James I was a huge consumer when it came to power, especially in comparison to his predecessor Elizabeth I, who was the model for the character of Gloriana (the dead beloved) in *The Revenger’s Tragedy*. James’s

consumption of power was partly due to his being Scottish and unacquainted with English law and mostly to do with his belief in the divine right of the monarchy; in any case, it created significant tension between the King and his legislators (“James VI of Scotland – I of England”). This also caused him to be compared with Elizabeth I, who made sure to have members of the House of Commons serve on her Privy Council easing the tension between the nobility and the common man (“James VI of Scotland – I of England”). It is also said that he spent a fortune on clothes and often bestowed gifts of money, which is ironic because he considered his wife, Anne of Denmark, frivolous. She was also known for her consumption, as she hosted the largest and most extravagant salons of the time (“Anne of Denmark”). Collectively, James and Anne invested in and coveted cultural and artistic elements of society, such as theatre, but James was also covetous of more power in legislature and religion. In *The Revenger's Tragedy*, this idea of consumption is characteristic of the Duke and the Duchess and their offspring, and is reflected in their descriptive names, such as Lussurioso, which means lecherous (Tourneur? xii). The Duke and Lussurioso, the Duke's only legitimate son are interested in political consumption and sexual consumption while Vindice, whose name is reminiscent of the word vindictive, is greedy for increasing the body count of the greedy. This is an idea that is relevant to the ethics concerning consumption in our own society. A specific example is food consumption: food items that are nutritional inedible are consumed heartily by the mass public, and even come to be considered food staples, simply due to convenience, low-cost, or clever marketing.

At certain point, the play is revealed as an anti-morality play, since its world doesn't end in a sunnier light than when in began – or, in other words, there is no

Fortinbras to ride in and bring new-found clarity. Instead, the act of revenge for Vindice seems to be a futile undertaking, as is life sometimes. As a designer still in need of fully developed concept, and depressed by the state of consumption then and now, I was intrigued by the almost beautiful, poetic, and hyper-realistic cyclic conclusion the piece comes to. This anti-morality makes itself a force to be reckoned as Antonio, the nobleman Vindice plots to set up as the next duke, passes judgment on Vindice:

*Away with 'em! Such an old man as he;*

*You that would murder him would murder me. (Act 5, Sc 3, Ln 104)*

In essence, Antonio is denouncing Vindice as horrible, poetic, and childish, recognizing that “if you that’s how you did in my predecessor who’s to say you won’t do it to me, too.” It could be that Vindice’s hope is to install a better ruler in the Duke’s stead as a compliment to revenge, and it would be seem that Antonio would be an appropriate choice (if for no other reason than because of his piety), but that this hope of any sort of vindication is demolished by the two lines above. Antonio may be different from the Duke but he’s only a different side of the same coin, so the despotism and depravity that characterizes Vindice’s world continues.

The idea of the wheel of fortune arose out of my cyclic interpretation of the play and my research of the period’s satiric devices and morality plays. The wheel of fortune had a history in both aspects, as it originated as a device from the morality repertoire, where it suggested that perhaps that everyone is at the mercy of a greater power, and then evolved into a satiric device (“Early Stuart Libels”). This correlates well with *The Revenger’s Tragedy*, as Middleton is using the *anti-morality* play as a satiric vehicle. In most of the images of the wheel of Fortuna or Fortune that I found, the people on the

wheel seemed imprisoned in it; this accurately reflects the circumstance of the play's characters.

I spent quite a bit of time trying to flesh out this idea of the wheel of Fortuna as literal mechanism to frame the play. In my head, *The Revenger's Tragedy* production utilizing the wheel of Fortuna would manifest itself like this: Vindice could pay Fortuna out of the Duke's pocket by pickpocketing (consuming and ultimately ending up empty) from the Duke or his sons or somehow bribe Fortuna to turn the wheel to the next scene, satirizing the corruption of fate. Vindice prostitutes everyone around him to get what he ultimately wants, revenge, but in doing so he sets up his own downfall because in the end he becomes the catalyst for the selfish, mistrusting greed and corruption that he thought he was putting an end to. Fate or Fortuna, despite bribery, in the end spins the wheel as she sees fit, and the cycle of corruption, consumption, and cruelty lives on to see another day.

As I previously stated, due to the fact that the audience does not end with the world in a better state than when the play first began or even receive an epiphany from its protagonist (who could arguably be the antagonist), the play becomes an anti-morality piece and has the potential to be so brutally satirical in its social commentary on human nature that everyone is left devoid of hope. This, however, brings me back to research and Middleton's period context. A play's value depends on its ability to reveal hope, and if any hope can be derived from this work, which laments the loss of a golden era (i.e., Elizabeth I) and begs to prevent the perceived corruption and consumption in a new one (i.e., James I), it is that social change and social justice can't be brought on through revengeful violence. It is said that "the one who seeks revenge must dig two graves, one

for who he is revenged against and one for him/herself” and this is the truth for Vindice in *The Revenger's Tragedy* he doesn't not receive any sort of atonement for the sins enacted against him or for the sins he commits.

The Wheel of Fortuna did not eventually work for logistic space reasons, but also as a concept it possesses some particular weaknesses. The futility of life is not a subject worth watching and it doesn't ultimately ask the right question of the play – which is, I believe, “what potential for reconciliation do people truly have when the power or system that controls them is ready and equipped to condemn?” Academically, the ill fate of Vindice, the Duke, and his offspring could lead to interesting places regarding Middleton's possible Calvinism. For example, it might therefore lead to a discussion about predestination and determinism, questioning whether Vindice was unable to be “saved” from the beginning, whether the hope of “salvation” is futile if the playwright is god, and whether God predestines his society to be beyond salvation. This was an interesting thought exercise, but ultimately unhelpful for tangible design.

Returning once again to contemplating Middleton in respect to his period, *The Revenger's Tragedy* could be read as Middleton lamenting the regime change from Elizabeth I to James I and putting Elizabeth I (Gloriana) on a gold-gilded pedestal. Ultimately, I do not think this is the case; if it is, it is ironic because Gloriana (the dead beloved) is eventually prostituted as a means to revenge. In this play, every name is descriptive of its character, and in the case of the name “Gloriana,” two elements are worth consideration. First, Gloriana was the name of the title character in Edmund Spenser's 1590 poem *The Faerie Queene*, where Gloriana is a representation of Elizabeth I. Secondly, Gloriana is a flowery form of the Latin word for “glory” (“Gloriana”).

These meanings suggest several possible interpretations of Middleton's choice. For example, as the theme of consumption suggests, Middleton may be critiquing James I by bastardizing a former, more pious legacy and revealing how it gives way to a world of consumption. Middleton may also be critiquing James I by emphasizing how past monarchs, even if their rules were "golden times," were also soiled by corruption. Finally, Gloriana's skull can be compared to Yorick's skull, which is a symbol of the inevitability of death. Gloriana's skull also represents the inevitability of death, but in a perverse way, by being an administrator of death, doing in death what she refused to do in life – that is, succumb to the advances of the Duke (Case 223–26).

Ultimately, this is a play about human nature and the nature of justice. In part, is it about the political climate of Middleton's time; however, because it comments on a governing body and how human nature deals with power in a satirical guise, it may also have relevance to today's circumstances. For example, a present-day interpretation might suggest that Gloriana represents the former Bush administration and the Duke is the current Obama administration, but this premise would work for only a few. A stronger present-day interpretation could be that Gloriana is symbolic of the Clinton administration because it was an economic "golden age" as compared to the state of the economy at present. In that case, the Duke would be emblematic of the Bush administration and the Obama administration would be exemplified through Antonio, a promise for a hope for change that doesn't exactly come. However, I didn't use a present-day political direction as a concept because, although it is interesting as a parallel to the English Monarch lineage of Elizabeth I, James I, Charles I, and his son Charles II,

a blatant present-day slant has the potential to detract from Middleton's much stronger and more compelling idea of the ouroboros of human nature.

Nonetheless, exploring the political present and past brought me to a revelation about a device in the play. Setting the concept in Middleton's period gives the production a solid foundation of its original context without risking a knee-jerk, politically-based reaction; for the same reason, Middleton's play worked in its own day under the guise of the setting being in Italy. The exoticness of Italy allowed the audience to think critically about the subject matter before stopping to analyze how it relates to them, and this objective distance allows room for the audience to laugh. For my production, I could do the same by moving the piece to the setting about which it is commenting and using caricatures of James I and Anne of Denmark as models for the Duke and the Duchess. In doing so, the period alone contributes the same sort of exotic distance; therefore, instead of the setting and costumes in this production reflecting an Italian setting, as was Middleton's original intent, these elements are predominately English in style. To that end, I chose to do an English-inspired production coupled with reading the text through the lens of human-nature archetypes. This led me to focus on condemnation and reconciliation within the scope of a corrupted power and the system that upholds it.

### Design Process

With this theoretical understanding of the play in place, I can now describe how those ideas translated into the "theoretically practical." As a designer it's my job to take concepts and make them tangible or ground them in some way. Therefore, my own

answer to the question that the play poses about justice and human nature is best articulated through my design process.

### Costumes

*The Revenger's Tragedy* is a tale driven by characters who are all symbols or possess hyper-realistic attributes that can be construed as nothing else but satire. The women in particular, because there are so few female characters in the play, are very evocative as archetypes, as I will explain in detail below. Because the nature of the piece is primarily character driven, even though it is a very theme-heavy play, my design journey started with costumes. The characters depicted in *The Revenger's Tragedy* are not undeveloped, but each one is developed with a particular intent and a particular driving force or personality trait that makes them tick.

To explore these character types, I looked first to the history of illustrated satire, because when I imagined these characters, I didn't really see *people*; I saw exaggerated personalities. This response is somewhat appropriate because modern illustrative satire as we know it in the western world had its beginnings in London with Wenceslaus Hollar (1607-1677) (Bills 17). Unfortunately, however, illustrative satire didn't really find its voice until the eighteenth century, which is too late of a period to use for this play. Nonetheless, caricature, which is the high art of wit and politeness, had been around for some time (Bills 18). Caricature is the systematic distortion or exaggeration or personal appearance based on physiognomy, which was largely developed by Giovanni Della Porta (Bills 18, 20). I tried unsuccessfully to get a copy of Porta's *De Humana Physignomia* (1586), but could only find sample illustrations on the Internet. Instead,

therefore, I focused my attention on the bodies and faces of the caricatures sketched by Leonardo Da Vinci and Annibale Carracci.

This exaggeration of body and face is an important strategy in my design. It reinforces the satiric qualities of the characters and, because the characters do not look like real people, it also gives the audience an opportunity to be both objective and amused. To develop this idea, I practiced drawing people even before I started drawing individual characters. Specifically, I based the nobles' faces on Da Vinci's grotesques and, in contrast, based Castiza on one of Da Vinci's divine female faces (Clayton 78-99, 151). All facial features both grotesque and the divine as depicted in the renderings are meant to be realized through applied prosthetics or masks. For all of the characters that are wealthy or directly in the court of the wealthy, I gave them bloated cheeks to exaggerate their facial features and to give the impression of a bloated, rich aristocracy that has nothing better to do than sleep around and kill each other.

Besides using the caricature as device to distinguish personality and physical features, I also used the historical figures in the period as an amusing guise for the characters and as a template to develop the actual costumes. For the Duke, it seemed appropriate that since this character is a critique of James I, the Duke should be based off of historic paintings of James. Again, because the period makes the play's setting exotic to a modern audience, I saw no reason to not use the English court. The Duke's attire is drawn from James's, but his face is based on an etching I found of a commedia pantaloon character; the face and posture read to me as lecherous. Characteristically, the pantaloon character is fitting for the Duke because the pantaloon represented an old rich merchant

or nobleman who believed that everyone was trying to steal his gold; in the Duke's case, everyone is trying to steal his power (Delpiano).

In designing the Duke's costume for Act III Scene 5, when he goes to meet the young lady Vindice has picked out for him to ravage, I made his doublet and trunk hose softer and shimmery in color with a dark floor length cape. I made this choice because even though the Duke, Lussorioso, Vindice, and Junior have put women on bizarre pedestals and have sexualized them to the point of dehumanization, the Duke's lines to Vindice in disguise seem to suggest that he has romanticized the situation and he seems to think that he is on some level a lover wooing a beloved:

*Vindice. Faith, my lord, a country lady, a little bashful at first, as most of them are; but after the first kiss, my lord the worst is past with them. Your grace knows now what you have to do; Sh' has somewhat a grave look with her, but Duke. I love that best; conduct her...In gravest looks the greatest faults seem less. Give me that sin that's rob'd in holiness. (Act III, Sc. 5, Ln. 134-141)*

In the respect that Duke sees himself as lover of women, I thought it would appropriate to give him a codpiece, even though the portraits of James didn't reflect this. Although he is a clever man at the end of the day, that part of his anatomy is what he thinks with and ultimately brings him to his demise, so, in the spirit of satire, it seems appropriate to highlight it. The Duke also talks about his sins being green, which is a striking image, so I ran with that idea for his character color and consequently the color of his household (Act II, Sc. 3, Ln. 132).

The character of the Duchess is based off of Anne of Denmark, James's wife, although Anne was not known to be the whore that the Duchess is. The Duchess is a symbol of all unscrupulous women who have no problem making a mockery of their marriage beds; she does so by having an affair with her stepson, Spurio, under her

husband's nose. When the Duke is missing, she flaunts her relationship with Spurio in the open, which ultimately leads to her banishment (Act V, Sc. 1, Ln. 166-168). The Duchess is actually more of a secondary character in terms of Vindice's revenge plot and the end result of the play. I propose that her purpose is to be a representative of what the male characters think of women: that they are ultimately whores. Also, she stands as juxtaposition to Castiza because the Duchess has conceded morally where Castiza would not, in terms of using sex for power and wealth. The Duchess's character colors are green, blue, and orange. I chose green because she is the Duke's wife and a part of his court, blue because that is the character color for her three sons, and finally hints of orange because that is the character color for Spurio, her stepson and lover.

Lussurioso is the Duke's legitimate son and Lussurioso means lecherous, a dominating character trait that he gets honestly from his father. Vindice's main target for revenge is the Duke but Lussurioso puts himself in harm's way by attempting to deflower Vindice's sister, Castiza. Lussurios reveals this to Vindice, who is in disguise:

Lussurioso. *Ravish me in thine answer; art thou rare?  
Hast thou beguil'd her of salvation,  
And rubb'd hell o'er with honey? Is she a woman?* (Act II, Sc. 2, Ln. 21-23).

Because Lussurioso is the Duke's honest son, it made sense to base his costume design off of James's son, Charles I. James had issues with his Parliament because of his value of the monarchy's divine right to rule, and his son took this same value and ran with it until his execution for treason in 1649 ("Charles I"). In *The Revenger's Tragedy*, the downfall of the father becomes his son's down fall as well. I based Lussurioso's first costume off of a striking portrait of a young Charles where he is decked out in red. I chose to put him in a different character color than the rest of the Duke's court because

Lussurioso stands out in the text over other characters in the court. Lussurioso is the only legitimate son, which makes him a target to the other individuals who are in line to be Duke but don't have as strong of a claim. His second costume, however, is based off of James because now Lussurioso is officially the new Duke. This costume is mostly green because that was the Duke's color, with a red sash accent. He too has a codpiece with both of his costumes because of his inherited trait with father by taking action based on his male member.

Vindice, the revenger, has a base costume and a disguise. I attempted to make his base costume tongue in cheek by using a big, floppy, white commedia collar against a red black velvet jacket, short pants, and hose with built in soles. Vindice is surely a malcontent, lamentous, and irate, but is not without amusing quips. His disguise is based off of Guy Fawkes, the most recognizable conspirator of the Gun Powder Plot in 1605 ("James I"). This was an interesting choice, especially considering the sort of anarchist hero persona Guy Fawkes has evolved into through works like *V for Vendetta*. In keeping with my focus on dominating character traits, Vindice's disguise is a green and red black jacket and trunk hose with a fall down lace collar, a large brimmed hat, and a half-mask that is a caricature of Guy Fawkes' face. The mask hides his face and renders him unrecognizable, but the iconic Guy Fawkes look reveals his intent for vengeance.

Hippolito is Vindice's brother and is the straight man in the duo. Every time Vindice wants to preemptively kill someone, such as Lussurioso, Hippolito puts the brakes on the situation. I couldn't find a meaning for Hippolito's name but it sounds like hypocrite, which Hippolito is to a certain extent. He is a groom to the Duke's chamber, and as a person in the Duke's household he would be well dressed with the Duke's livery

somewhere on his person; however, he has no loyalty towards to the Duke and uses his position to the Duke's demise ("Master's and Servants"). Hippolito is wearing green of the Duke's household and the livery over his heart is the Scottish Thistle, a royal symbol of Scotland ("The Scottish Thistle, Emblem of Scotland").

Spurio is the Duke's bastard son. His name was derived from "spurious" because he usually portrays a face that is not true. Spurio is also out for revenge but out of bitterness because of his illegitimacy, and he uses the Duchess as a part of his scheme. Spurio feels that he has been dealt a bad hand but at the same time embraces his lot in life:

*Duke, on thy brow I'll draw my bastardy.  
For indeed a bastard by nature should make cuckolds,  
Because he is a son of a cuckold-maker. (Act I, Sc. 2, Ln. 202-204).*

His costume is designed to embrace his cuckold heritage and based on a portrait of man sitting with playful ennui. Spurio is wearing a doublet with twisted vines and cut low to reveal the top part of his chest, with a collar that stands up and fans out like a peacock. A big pearl earring dangles from one of his ears. His colors are green to affiliate him with the Duke – not that he would forget, but to remind the Duke himself of the connection. He also has accents of bright orange; although this is a bold choice, it is important because Spurio is sneaky and dangerous and, as in nature, bright colors usually indicate a warning of danger.

Antonio is a nobleman who seems to find a version of morality precious. The Duchess's son Junior Brother rapes Antonio's wife and because of her defiled shame she commits suicide by poison. In Antonio's grief, even though he has lost his wife he is thankful because her suicide proved her chastity (Act I, Sc. 4, Ln. 74-77). As Antonio is

for a while believed by both the audience and Vindice to be the antithesis of the Duke, I costumed him in darker, sedated colors. These choices are based off of paintings of Thomas Cromwell and Sir Thomas More; although those figures are dated within the period of production, I thought the choice was warranted considering they are both important figures in the development of politics, theology, and ethics in English history and I wanted to Antonio to look more traditional, as opposed to the Duke's fashionable attire. Antonio's final costume for the banquet scene is drawn from a portrait of Sir Francis Bacon, who rose in prestige and power during the reign of James until Bacon was found guilty of accepting a bribe while a judge ("Francis Bacon (1561-1626)"). Antonio is also a fallen character and, in the trend of other Middleton works, he seems to be pious but once he gains power he acts out of violence, not piety (Act V, Sc. 3, Ln. 104-105).

Ambitioso, Supervacuo, and Junior Brother are the Duchess's sons, presumably from another marriage. Ambitioso is the eldest and ambitious, Supervacuo is vain, and Junior Brother is a wretched twerp. The brothers aren't specifically based on anyone in history; therefore, my goal with these characters was to use their costumes to highlight their dominating character traits. Ambitioso's first costume is the most sedate compared to the other two brothers because he is sneaky and desires to be taken seriously, but his banquet costume is brighter and more lavish because he would still be prideful of his appearance. Supervacuo wears an extra-large brimmed hat with big lavish feathers and big, almost panier-like, trunk hose to accentuate his hips. He also has long, beautiful hair and on his belt he carries a mirror instead of a sword. Junior Brother is the youngest and I designed him to be clearly young. In part, this is because of how protective the Duchess is of him. Mostly, however, I wanted Junior Brother to have the appearance of a baby-

faced young man so that it is that much more shocking and perhaps confusing when he casually delivers lines about rape, such as:

Junior Brother. *My fault was sweet sport, which the world approves;  
I die for that which every woman loves.* (Act III, Sc. 4, Ln. 80-81).

Castiza, Vindice and Hippolito's sister, and Gratiana, Vindice and Hippolito's mother, are victims of Vindice's revenge. Gratiana is seduced by a disguised Vindice to consider selling Castiza's virginity for a bit of wealth. It is her willingness to consider this option that almost gets her stabbed by her own sons – the same sons who tricked her and put her in a position where an offer of that nature would be desirable. Vindice, self-absorbed in his own misery and his own personal injustice, does not work to take care of Gratiana and Castiza, creating a circumstance that would be horrible for any mother. Gratiana means grace: it is by grace that her sons do not kill her and it is by grace that she reconciles with the daughter she would have made a prostitute. In this moment, she delivers some of the most hopeful lines of the play:

Gratiana. *Good child, dear maid if there be any spark  
Of heavenly intellectual fire within thee,  
Put not all out, with woman's willful follies.  
That haunts too many mothers; kind, forgive me,  
Make me not sick in health. If then  
My words prevail'd when they were wickedness,  
How much more now when they are just and good!* (Act IV, Sc. 4, Ln. 117-125).

Castiza means chastity, and so I drew her face based one of Da Vinci's divine portraits of a young woman. This sort of serenity is needed partly because of Lussurioso's insistent persistence to defile her, and also because she is something divine in this world, as she was not defiled but at the same time understands the power of female sexuality can have over men (Act IV, Sc. 4, Ln. 149-154). Both women are dressed in earth tones with rougher woven material than the courts' attire, as they are close to destitution. Earth

tones also reinforce both Gratiana's and Castiza's down-to-earth mentality, suggesting not that they are simple women but that they are reasonable. Castiza's peasant look also clashes with her great beauty and makes her even more exotic and desirable for Lussurioso. These women, despite their poverty, still manage to employ their servant, Dondolo, who is a fool and dressed like a foolish peasant I found in a woodcut.

The fact that the skull gets a costume is amusing in itself. Initially I was going to make the skull's costume very whore-like to accentuate the irony that Vindice is prostituting his beloved Gloriana to achieve his revenge. In the end, I took a different direction: her mask is actually a copy of Elizabeth I's death mask. It brings the history parallel full circle and it is also amusing because of all the jokes about how "she has a grave look about her" (Act III, Sc. V, Ln. 134-137). It is also haunting to think of using a death mask as both a seductive tool and as an instrument of death.

The Guards, Judges, and Attendants are all products of both visual and scholarly research. The guards, for example, are a modified version of the uniforms for the Yeoman of the Guard (more popularly known as the Beefeaters), which was created in 1485 by Henry VII ("Queen's Body Guard History"). The Beefeater uniform hasn't change much in 525 years so what is recognizable as a Beefeater today is close to what a guard of the royal court would have worn during the rule of James IV and I ("Queen's Body Guard History"). Like Hippolito, the guards, judges, and attendants all bear the crest of the Scottish thistle.

## Set

### Wheel of Fortuna

As, I mentioned previously I worked to developed on a concept based on the Wheel of Fortuna and the subsequent research informed the set that eventually

manifested. While studying the etchings and caricatures from the artists of the time, I noticed an intriguing movement in line, especially in depictions of English settings, which tended to be more masculine and stark in comparison to their Italian counterparts. I discovered several abstract cages in windows and elaborate wood paneling, and this reminded me of Sir Thomas More's statement that "all the while we live in this world, we be but prisoners, and within a sure prison, out of which there can no man escape, but few of us have ever glimpsed the walls, and we strut about as though we were free" (Greenblatt 26).

More's observation of how the world functions through an ironic theological lens is applicable to *The Revenger's Tragedy* because the great question of the play is not "will someone die?"; rather, it is "who, if anyone, will be redeemed?". It would be easy, and even justifiable, to say that no one is redeemed and the cycle of selfishness and depravity of this world of living bodies with dead souls continues with a new face of hypocritical piety. However, although this is true, it is not the whole truth, because it is Vindice's family that is torn apart through the death of his beloved and the revenge that follows – and it is Vindice's family that becomes reconciled in the end. If there is a glimmer of redemption, it can be found in the scene between Gratiana and Castiza, mother and daughter, specifically through their reconciliation with each other and Gratiana's discovery of Castiza's preserved chastity.

A reduction of architecture to line and form, which creates a tension of positive and negative, fits with my choice to abstract character into caricature because caricature also explores the human face and body by use of abstracted, exaggerated line and form. It also works with the idea of the Wheel of Fortune in that fate is, perhaps, the vastest

prison without walls. In attempting to contain the many different locations on a turn-table I narrowed the locations down to four basic settings. Having the palace and Antonio's house function in the same space foreshadows Antonio eventually taking the Duke's position in government and in morals. The palace bedchamber and the lodge bed from Act III, Scene 5 occupies the same space because it makes an interesting comparison, between a marriage bed supposedly, but not actually, defiled and a love nest used by the Duke to commit adultery.

### Scaffold Structures

Despite my initial ideas, the design of the Wheel Fortuna was not the final product. Instead, the final product is based on scaffold structures. This choice stemmed out of possibility of utilizing religious symbolism a scenic mechanism. Religion in society; requires a certain amount of orthodoxy to run an organization but is nonetheless a form of legalism. For example, Henry V's choice to make himself pope was essentially a step towards humanism. Theatre is the pulpit for humanism. A step away from a tradition is a step closer to something else, and in *The Revenger's Tragedy* Middleton is concerned with the moral integrity of both the tradition and the step away from it. (Ribner xi). Just as theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer was interested in a church without religion, as he described in his letters written while imprisoned by Nazis, Middleton in *The Revenger's Tragedy* is interested in a society and a justice system that isn't subject to the whims of those that happen to be in power and does not marginalize those who happen to be powerless (Bonhoeffer). Ultimately, despite good intentions and the goodness of human individuals, the institution fails because of human nature's inherent desire for

power, as those in powerful positions concede to bowing to their own needs and agendas while enforcing that agenda upon the masses of their institution.

The justice system is an institution that is subject to corruption, and so can ultimately disintegrate the fiber of a civil society. From the beginning of the play's plot, there is a mismanagement of judgment because judges rule for quick death penalty for the admittedly guilty Junior Brother and the Duke immediately defers execution, without a second thought, to appease his wife (Act I, Sc. 2, Ln. 61-93). Then there is mismanagement in the handling of an execution, illustrated through the text in the circumstance of Junior Brother's execution. Ambitioso and Supervacuo are so dedicated to the pretense of lament over serving the execution order for Lussorioso that they don't specify which brother the Duke's signet is intended to condemn (Act III sc. iii).

A powerful symbol of the finality of justice that has haunted me throughout the process is the depictions of hangings I found in several woodcuts. These scaffolds were built with two posts, not like the scaffolds seen in Western movies meant for hanging one man, but a full post meant for multiple people. I was intrigued by the way that, throughout history, it has been human nature to make death more efficient. The need to take the lives of people *en masse* is a symptom that suggests a morality gone astray. However, the state viewed public, judicial massacres as an attempt to teach through terror, and this branding, hanging, or disemboweling was in fact theatrical performance to a rapt audience (Greenblatt 201). This is a world bigger than the Duke's corruption or the Duke's family's corruption; it is an institution of corruption that allows the Duke to become what he is in the first place. Thus, and it is both hilarious and poignant to see particular people who are living behind the guise of nobility act as though they are not

rooting around in the remnants of centuries' excrement, symbolized eventually by the uneven tile in the set. This idea lead me to play up the vastness and symbolism of the set itself, since the play's audience is asked to deal with elements of humanity that are vast and perhaps unmanageable. When its all said and done, humanity is the living dead, walking over the past dead, waiting for the slate to be wiped clean, and finding sustenance on those few rare moments that might be construed as hope this is the arch of that the play follows and ultimately the image I wanted to present.

To execute this image of a corrupted institution, I started with the image of the scaffold and Golgotha. However, it didn't seem to be a strong enough choice to have the play take place on an execution hillside, so through image research I found a floor treatment to cover the landscape. The floor treatment helps reinforce this idea of institutional excrement: despite the characters' guise of nobility, they would be forced to stumble around in the rocky world that they themselves have contributed to. The floor also suggests an interior space, since most scenes take place inside. Based on the look of the model, it would seem that the tiles are intraversable, or at least difficult. Most of action is concentrated downstage center where the ground is much more even, but I do see scenes or entrances happening on the hill elements. It does not bother me to see the Duchess have difficulty walking across the landscape during her moonlit walk with Spurio, because it is as ridiculous as the moral conditions in which she and the other characters live (Act III Sc. 5).

The grandiose nature of the set correlates with the vastness of the issues and themes the text addresses but it is counterintuitive to the scale of the dramatic action that happens through out most of the play. Most scenes do not have more then three people

talking to each other at one time and the characters are usually having an intimate conversation, with the exceptions of the courtroom (Act I Sc. 2) and banquet (Act V Sc. 3) scenes, where public address is given. This is why a flatter playing area exists to demarcate a more manageable, smaller playing space.

As a part of the smaller playing space there is a scaffold that includes a platform. The higher plane was inspired by the stage directions in Act I Scene 1, which describe that the Duke, Duchess, Lussurioso, and Spurio pass over the stage by torchlight (Tourneur? 3). This is not only a great image but is also an interesting way to support the exposition, and the torchlight sets up the atmosphere in which the characters are working. This image is so strong and decisive that it was worth working in a platform. Also, in order to get to that height it necessitates the use of stairs (although flying the Duke and Duchess briefly crossed my mind). The stairs creates an interesting silhouette against the scaffolds and the floor because they repeat the same line and form of the rectangle in a new, dimensional way. The repetitiveness of the rectangles found in English architecture suggests to me institutional masculinity. This idea is repeated in the Duke's Bedchamber bed, which is an abstraction of the images of heavy wood paneling and prison bars I found in several woodcuts and pictures of period locations. This idea of line repetition to form an institution works because moral rearing and one's self-fashioning, starting with the Tudor monarch and continuing to this period, were reinforced through repetition (Greenblatt 201).

This lays out the broad aspects of the scenic elements, but the play also requires several specific locations. Because there are several locations as well as dramatic changes of locale within acts and scenes that consist of two-person exchange (e.g., Act III

Sc.2), it seemed prudent to be selective with the elements that distinguish a location. For example, the stairs set in a certain orientation behind the Duke's throne suggests the palace, while with a different orientation of the stairs and a new chair, the setting becomes Antonio's palace. The use of design elements that are aesthetically similar reinforces the idea that the Duke and Antonio are not entirely different but just wrapped in different packages. For Vindice's house, a rough-hewn bench serves as its designation. There are two beds: a more formalized bed serves as the Duke's bed chamber and a more romantic four-poster serves the as the lodge where the Duke goes to rendezvous with the lady whom the disguised Vindice sets up for him. The prison bars, brought in by the guards and hooked to the platform scaffold unit, serve both as Junior Brother's cell and Lussorioso's cell because they are never in prison in the same scene. I think this also provides a moment for farcical slight of hand. In the final scene (Act V, Scene 3), there is a banquet. I chose not to have a long banquet table because I felt it would a counter intuitive obstacle between the audience and the action. This is an important scene and even though the reason all these characters are in the same room is the banquet, the important part is the dance of violence that happens as Hippolito and Vindice stab Lussorioso and Amibitioso, Supervacuo, Spurio, and the fourth noble all stab each other before the guard intervenes (Act V, Sc. 3, Ln. 49-60).

The production requires quick transitions with the attendants and guards acting as stage crew. To get major pieces, stairs and the two beds, off and on they will be on castor wheels. I toyed with the idea of tracks in order to get the scenery safely over uneven terrain, but tracks in ground or above would create even more of an issue for the actors

walking around on stage. The simplest solution then is to make the downstage playing space as even as possible to support the movement of castor scenery.

### Lights

The set also includes several upstage moving panels, although I see these as lighting elements. The purpose of the panels is to keep the world in closed while letting occasional peeks of light into the world. At the end of the play, the stage directions call for a “blazing star,” which is when the panels move to the sides for the big reveal of the crinkled cyc (Tourneur? 93). The white cyc is crinkled and sprayed down because a purely white cyc would be blinding compared to the dark scenes previous. I also wanted the cyc to be textured to fit as a part of the world of the play because it’s not the bright light of hope, but is more emblematic of the bright light of inevitability in the final act. There are other times that a the cyc is used. For example, it is lit with red light during Act III, Scene 5, when the Vindice murders the Duke. It is also lit with a bright slit of warm light when Castiza is on stage, as an another element to reinforce her divine qualities, also to distinguish her space from that of the courts.

Due to the vastness of the set and the importance of the characters, the use of modeling and color is important, in order to have the characters be highlighted in the bleakness. For modeling, I studied Carracci, Da Vinci, and Holbein and in studying portraits for the costumes I was essentially studying the use of light source on the body.

To assist in distinguishing each particular setting, I chose a different, prominent light source for each scene. Because the characters each have distinct personalities, the settings should be similarly distinguishable to complete the world of the play. This

requires using side, top, and back light in different ways in each scene to highlight something different the in actors' face and in the set. I have included front light because some the bigger scenes, such as the courtroom scene in Act I and the banquet scene in Act V, would be better served by such lighting. However, I intend to use mostly spotlight because most of dealings and action of the piece happen in intimate venues and are conversations for only particular ears. This is why torchlight in particular is called for several times in the script.

I used saturated color to specified by the character colors and also mood. Green light is used in all of the scenes when the Duke is present; as a symbol of an institution corrupted by the Duke, it is also used to highlight corrupt or malicious acts. Vindice has red and black in all of his costumes so to accentuate his intentions when he is actively menacing or acting on his revenge plot, plasma red is used. Red light and green light make brown light which ends up being the product of the clash between the Duke and Vindice – that is, when Antontio, whose character color is brown, is put into power.

### Conclusion

In hindsight through writing this thesis, perhaps I spent too much time pontificating and researching the ideas of the piece. Perhaps not, however, because it is important to me and my process as a theatre artist to explore the question of the play and to allow the answer to evolve out of this research, as it did for me in this circumstance. If I were to design this play again I would have a vastly different approach and I think I would concentrate on the sexualization of women in the play and how it compares to contemporary culture. I think I still need to work on my approach to researching and

conceptualizing a play and on being more decisive. I think I'm getting better at this, but I still struggle with research overtaking the project and almost missing the point that can be found in the play's text itself.

Costumes could stand to be cleaner all around, especially the color plot. For the most part I am happy with the way the rendering style turned out but at times the figures are inconsistent with one another and could be even bigger. I'm not happy with the Act V Scene 3 costumes because there are elements that seem to be missing, like the masks for the masque banquet. I read the banquet scene to be more of pageant parade of the characters in their "Sunday best," so to speak, but I think that this is a misinterpretation of the text. The color palette in general was a problem for me. I made a choice and was dedicated to it but what didn't appear from the color plot was how much green there actually was, and I fear that it might make the audience think of *Wicked*, which was not the goal. Throughout my research I studied images that were pencil sketches and monochromatic and my roughs reflected that study, but lost that clarity when colors were added. I think that this was my biggest disappointment of the project.

The set took on a life of its own, which happened as a result of an organic process. Working organically is rewarding and fun, but gets complicated when not considering wing space and sightlines until after the fact. It is clear to me that actor safety is a huge issue in my design and it would be difficult to find a director and a cast willing to work on this haphazard landscape.

Technically, my drafting has gotten better but could still improve, especially in precision and clarity. That reflects my weakness overall, in that I need more precision and clarity to harness my ideas and communicate them to others. I'm actually very

pleased with my model especially considering how I struggled with model building in the beginning, but again it could be even cleaner. The fabric draping for the bed for the lodge (Act III Scene 5) in particular is not up to par with the rest of model. The interesting result of this process and recent designs is that I have started working out design problems more through experimenting with the model than I had done before. For this production, I went back and forth between several versions models and sketches and I believe the end product is more developed because of this work. Overall, I found this to be the greatest victory of my process, as I am becoming confident enough in my design arsenal to arrive at a solution I'm proud to put my name on.

Lights were both a joy and frustration for me. The scaffold units created some really interesting shadows and I think I got some evocative looks in my storyboard. The storyboard in general leaves something to be desired; at least, it fell short in communicating the images that I had hoped to see. I used two-dimensional silhouettes of the characters to create my storyboards and they worked better than figures I have used in the past, but this made it difficult to create an impression of modeling. I like the way I used the cyc and the panels, but I think that I could have used them more or differently. I do think that using the cyc as the blazing light in the final scene was successful and in fact Act V, Sc. III is what I'm most pleased with over all.

Again, like my scenic draftings, my light plot could always be cleaner and clearer, as could the rest of my paper work. When it comes to light design the paper work is my biggest struggle, but with that said I have noticed improvement, which is really encouraging. The element of lighting that I'm most proud of is being able to develop an intelligible light plot from a lighting storyboard.

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## Index

### **SCENERY**

1. Scenic color renderings
2. Groundplans of all scenes & variations, ¼" scale
3. Side section, ¼" scale
4. Elevations of all scenic units, ½" scale
5. Painter's Breakdown
6. Shift plots for all scenes & variations

### **COSTUMES**

1. Costume color renderings of every character & all changes.
2. Costume plot
3. Costume color layout
4. Costume list for each character

### **LIGHTS**

1. Lighting storyboards for all scenes
2. Light plot
3. Instrument schedule
4. Magic Sheet
5. Dimmer hook-up
6. Gel lists for all units