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**Motif of Justice in The Revenger's Tragedy**  
**A Close Study of Revenge and Justice in Cyril Tourneur's**  
**The Revenger's Tragedy**

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**Abstract**

The genre of revenge tragedy has been an obsession with most writers throughout literature of different ages, starting from ancient Greek drama as seen in the works of three major tragedians, Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides and later dominant in the drama of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> c. England.

The thematic significance of revenge became especially popular at the hands of the Jacobean dramatists. This paper endeavours to explore this ancient theme of revenge in the play The Revenger's Tragedy by Cyril Tourneur, a Jacobean dramatist who exposes political manipulation during the course of the play and parallel to that the ultimate destruction of the avenger – Vindice whose mission is to uproot corruption but in vain, and this notion is explicit in the very title of the play.

**Key Words:** damnation, hell, evil, revenge, justice, corruption, power

**Motif of Justice in the Revenger's Tragedy**

**Cyril Tourneur**

“Revenge is a kind of wild justice which the more man's nature runs to the more ought law to weed it out ... certainly, in taking revenge, a man is but even with his enemy; but in passing it over, he is superior.” (Bacon, 1997: 13).

Bacon's statement adequately is applicable to the character Vindice in **The Revenger's Tragedy**. It is the story of a man, who in the process of taking revenge, stoops lower than the level of his enemy, and thus the play terminates as **The Revenger's Tragedy**- the word tragedy emphasizing the ruin of not only the Duke's family, but the ruin and fatal destruction of Vindice and his family. Once again in this play as in other Jacobean plays, such as Webster's The White Devil and The Duchess of Malfi there is a dilemma over the word 'villain'. Who is the real villain – Vindice or the Duke or both? One may not arrive at a decisive conclusion, but an attempt will be made to make certain distinctions between the victim and victimizer, and this will be done by tracing the story from the start to the end, and thereby mapping out the metamorphosis within the character of Vindice.

However, before analysing the character of Vindice, it would be interesting to quote a few lines from Jonathan Dollimore – **Radical Tragedy**

It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness. (Dollimore, 1989:153)

If readers keep this statement in mind and then seek to analyse Vindice, it would at least offer the readers a less biased attitude towards Vindice. Most of the criticism in relation to the play such as M.C. Bradbrooks Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy concentrates on the character of Vindice as the villain. Not much has been written about the Duke, who is the root of evil in the play. However, the focus on Vindice can reflect two points: Firstly that Vindice is the central character of the play, and it is his character that has given the critics an opportunity to analyse the play deeply. The second point could

possibly be that whilst unquestionably he is condemned and conceived of as the villain, the real villain is nearly neglected. Vindice has often been placed in the same category as the Cardinal and Ferdinand in **The Duchess of Malfi**. However, the writer of the paper feels that this categorization is not justifiable. In **The Duchess of Malfi** the Cardinal and Ferdinand are the roots of evil and manipulators of character such as Bosola and the Duchess. In this play it is the Duke who is the root of all evil – Vindice merely wishes to take revenge. And as Dollimore states: “It is their social being that determines their consciousness.” Man is a product of his society, he is moulded by the norms and practices of his society. A man who is wronged seeks justice and, if the court itself is corrupted, on which door would Vindice knock to seek justice?

At the start of the play, when Vindice enters carrying a skull, he addresses the Duke and the Duke’s family with utter degradation, and introduces them to the audience as

Duke, royal lecher! Go, grey- haired adulterer,  
 And thou his son, as impious steeped as he:  
 And thou his bastard, true begot in evil:  
 And thou his Duchess, that will do with Devil,  
 Four ex’lent characters – O that marrowless age  
 Would stuff the hollow bones with damn’d desires. (I i 1- 8)

At this point of the play, Vindice is still unchanged, and the audience are already introduced to the Duke’s family in a degrading manner. There is certainly a distance between Vindice and the Duke’s family, Vindice the victim, the Duke the

victimizer. However, during the course of the play, and especially by the end, one can analyse Vindice in Francis Bacon's words:

“a man that studieth revenge, keeps his own wounds green, which otherwise would heal, and do well. ...

Vindictive persons live the life of witches who as they are mischievous, so end they unfortunate. (Bacon,1997:13)

A man who has been wronged, even if he wishes to ignore his enemy and not take revenge, does not necessarily forget the injury. Injustice and wrong action cause a wound that never heals, a scar which is always prominent. Hatred for the Duke and his family is a natural reaction on the part of Vindice. Perhaps what aggravates him further is the fact that the Duke makes not the slightest pretence of sin and evil action.

But back to Act I scene one when Vindice, holding a skull in his hand, is contemplating revenge and constantly refers to the Duke as 'lustful', 'royal lecher', 'adultery':

Age as in gold, in lust is covetous! (I i 37)

Vindice's mind at this point is saturated with hatred, contempt, and vengeance. The manner in which he addresses the Duke reflects obviously that his 'wounds are still green', waiting to find the right opportunity to strike back. But Vindice knows that it is not sufficient to hate a person and to have been injured to take revenge. He knows he has to alter himself, undergo a severe metamorphosis and stoop to the level of his enemy. Vindice is also aware of the fact that the court of the Duke is not a place where civic and political affairs take place; on the contrary, the

Duke misuses his powers and shows off his position by exploiting women. The court is shown as the centre of corruption and vice and every member of the court seems to indulge in vice and sin. Thus, in order to fight sin and corruption, Vindice cannot remain virtuous and honest. Contaminated people like the Duke and Duchess can only be spoken to in a language they understand – and that language is the language of vice, sin, and corruption. If Vindice is bent upon taking revenge, that is, private revenge, he has no other option than to fight corruption with a corrupted mind. In this play, unlike in a Shakespearean tragedy, it is not a moral fight between the forces of good and evil; but evil confronting evil, and that perhaps is the only way open for a man wishing to seek revenge. There is another option open to Vindice – the path taken by Antonio, ignoring what has happened, and thereby, as Bacon states, “when a man passes over revenge, he is superior to his enemy”:

Vindice as malcontented satirist is corrupted by the society he condemns because inescapably a part of that society; to put it another way, he condemns it because he is corrupted – inevitably corrupted by it. (Dollimore, 1989:149).

Thus at the beginning, before Act I scene one terminates, Vindice already realizes the liability of being honest and virtuous:

Vindice:           For to be honest is not to be i'th' world.  
                          Brother, I'll be that strange-composed fellow. (I i  
                          94- 95)

Also the first Act seems to be crowded with words like 'lust' and 'adultery' and no doubt in Act I scene two, when the Duke's youngest son Junior is brought into court for having raped Antonio's wife, the judge himself comments:

A rape! Why, 'tis the very core of lust,  
Double adultery (I ii 42-43)

The audience is constantly reminded that the atmosphere surrounding the play is an environment of corruption, sin and filth and unfortunately begins to affect its inhabitants. From the very beginning, the audience is literally pushed into a kind of marshland, where it literally feels that, along with the other characters, it is sinking into filth and dirt. Evil action is followed by evil action. Hardly any time has lapsed since the audience has learnt of Junior's rape of Antonio's wife and then one learns of the Duchess's incestuous love for her stepson:

Duchess:       And here comes he whom my heart points unto,  
                  His bastard son, but my love's true-begot, (I ii  
                  109-110)

And then she wishes that Spurio would admit his love for her:

Duchess:       ... what have you thought of me?  
                  ... upon my love, I mean.

Spurio:         I would 'twere love, but 'tis a fouler name  
                  Than lust; you are my father's wife, your Grace  
                  may guess now.  
                  What I could call it. (I ii 125- 130).

Thus it is not Vindice who alone shoulders the vicious actions of the play; the sky is overcast with rape, murder adultery, incest.

What Vindice does is that he merely wishes to correct a wrong, but the method he chooses is perhaps not morally correct. In order to fight filth and corruption, he had to become a part of it. But passion for revenge is self-destructive and, as Bacon in his essay states, “Anger like ruin, breaks itself on that it falls.” This is what happens to Vindice. On the other hand, Spurio continues to condemn his father for lust and adultery:

Spurio:           I was begot in impudent wine and lust.  
                      Stepmother, I consent to thy desires;  
                      I love thy mischief well, but I hate thee.”  
                      ... Duke, on thy brow I'll draw my bastardy.  
                      For indeed a bastard by nature should make  
                      cuckolds, Because he is the son of a cuckold –  
                      maker. (I ii 190-205)

And thus we get a clear-cut picture of the court – a place of extravagance, gaiety, wine, women, adultery, sin and incest. This is the world that Vindice will have to enter. What is necessary to ponder upon is that a world which is already black, cannot be darkened any further. Vindice will certainly not add to its darkness. It is already pitch black. On the contrary Vindice will be lost in this pitch black world. Thus from the start of the play one witnesses that those who have power abuse the law, and the blame is not upon the corrupted authority, but only upon those who think of reaching justice by using violence. And this is the fate of Vindice. Thus:

Vindice's villainy in **The Revenger's Tragedy** begins with his departure from a definite self. (Smith, 1987: 48)

**The Revenger's Tragedy**

Vindice: "What brother, am I far enough from myself?"

Hippolito: As if another man had been sent whole  
Into the world, and none wist how he came.

Vindice: It will confirm me bold, the child o' the court.

(I iii 1-4)

As the last sentence of Vindice indicates, he is now 'the child o' the court.' Since the play established the Duke and the Duke's family as corrupted, and has introduced them as representing all

sorts of vice, Vindice's gradual metamorphosis into the like of them is not much condemnable. The ground has already been laid and, as far as Vindice and his actions are concerned, one tends to justify them, as opposed to those in power who commit wrong only to prove their position and authority. The very fact that Vindice disguises himself as Piato for taking revenge, confirms the fact that Vindice could not be Vindice and fight corruption. The disguise is a reflection of the forced mask that he wears to be successful in the enactment of an avenger. The words that he utters reflect a very bitter and disillusioned mind. When talking to Lussurioso and expressing his disgust, Vindice simultaneously is expressing his strong belief in the ultimate abolishment of power and corruption:

Vindice: ... I have been witness  
To the surrenders of a thousand virgins,  
And not so little;  
I have seen patrimonies washed apieces,  
Fruitfields turned into bastards,  
And in a world of acres,  
Not so much dust due to the heir 'twas left to  
As would well gravel a petition. (I iii 51-5)

Vindice's disguise and strong words are like a mirror held up to reality as far as the members of the court are concerned. When Vindice talks to Lussurioso about wine, incest and lust, the repulsive manner in which he describes it expresses his bitterness



about the court. But Vindice also wishes to expose to Lussurioso the corrupt power of the court and its artificialities. He brings to the surface the conduct and behaviour of the court members:

Vindice: O Dutch lust! Fulsome lust!  
 Drunken procreation, which begets so many drunkards,  
 Some father dreads not – gone to bed in wine – to slide  
 from the mother  
 And cling to the daughter-in-law;  
 Some uncles are adulterous with their nieces,  
 Brothers with brothers' wives. O hour of incest!  
 ... well, if any thing be damned  
 It will be twelve o'clock at night, that twelve  
 Will never 'scape,  
 It is the Judas of the hours, wherein  
 Honest salvation is betrayed to sin. (I iii 58-71)

And when Lussurioso suggests to have his sister, no doubt Vindice is a little shocked but, on his way to revenge, he needs to use his family as a sacrificing goat, and thus his sister seems to be the first victim. Although Vindice uses his sister as a scape-goat, it is not a very easy decision for him, it does give him pain to put forth his sister for the lustful satisfaction of Lussurioso. For Vindice it is painful, but as Piato it is a necessary step. At the moment the end is important for Vindice, not the means, just as in **The Changeling** one witnesses that for Beatrice the end is important – to have Alsemero, the means she chose was DeFlores, and the means defeated the end. It is the same in the case of Vindice. The end is his revenge from the

Duke and the Duke's family; the means he chose was his disguise, both physical and moral disguise as Piato. And, as stated earlier, the means defeated the end. The change in Vindice is not unconscious but he is fully aware of his actions and perhaps of its impending danger.

Vindice:            Now let me burst, I've eaten noble poison!  
                               We are made strange fellows, brother, innocent  
                               Villains (I iii 170-1)

The phrase 'innocent villains' certainly implies a heavy meaning. Vindice's actions are villainous but in his heart of hearts he is still innocent. Once again one is reminded of the Marxist axiom that it is man's social consciousness that determines his being. The predicament of his life forced Vindice into this disguise. On the contrary one encounters Antonio as more collective and reasonable. When he hears of the calamity which befalls his wife, he states: "Judgement in this age is near kin to favour." (I iv 55)

He is aware of the fact that fighting powerful people is a fatal task and that, as long as absolute power resides, so does corruption.

When Vindice needs to convince his mother to coax Gratiana in accepting the Duke's son, it is once again seen as a rather difficult task, to act as a pander for his own sister. It does not take a very long coaxing for Gratiana to be tempted into giving up her daughter to the lecherous appetite of Lussurioso:

Gratiana:            Oh fie, fie, the riches of the world cannot hire

A mother to such a most unnatural task.

Vindice: No, but a thousand angels can,  
Men have no power, angels must work you to 't.  
The world descends into such base-born evils  
That forty angels can make fourscore devils:  
... I fear me she's unmothered ...  
'Tis no shame to be bad, because 'tis common.  
(II i 85-115)

As soon as Vindice tempts her with gold, she immediately submits. Thus, we see that it is not Vindice but all characters who are presented as greedy – they have a greed for power, or greed for gold and money or greed for sexual gratification. The world that is pictured in the play is a world that is devoid of any morality, a world devoid of the faintest streak of goodness, a world in which all its inhabitants are merely existing as beasts and no more.

As stated earlier, Vindice, although now in the guise of a wicked man – Piato, yet talks of modesty and chastity, and this reflects that Vindice still regards both honour and chastity as virtues. There surely must be an internal struggle within Vindice, he is thinking as Vindice but living and acting as Piato. This inconstancy makes him suffer severely, when he not only needs to fight with his own inner self, but consciously destroys his mother and sister. He acknowledges the lack of chastity and honour in the world in which he lives:

Vindice: All thrives but Chastity, she lies a cold.  
Nay, shall I come nearer to you? Mark but this:

**The Revenger's Tragedy**

Why are there so few honest women, but

Because 'tis the poorer profession? (II i, 227-230)

Vindice thereby acknowledges that honesty and poverty cannot complement one another. Those individuals who wish to come out of the nets of poverty, fall prey to such opportunities and perhaps what counts for such individuals is money, not morality. In this play all characters are immoral, not amoral as the Duchess in **The Duchess of Malfi** or Vittoria in **The White Devil**. Tourneur's world is like Dante's Book on **Hell**. It is a hellish world and only the degree of sin varies from one individual to another. Just as Dante describes the three beasts representing pride, greed, and avarice, and all circles of hell are in one way or the other reflecting one of these sins, the same is to be seen in this play – all sins stem from greed, and avarice.

All sins are moral sins rather than Christian sins – just as in Dante's **Divine Comedy** – **Hell**. Vindice is so immersed and surrounded by sin and vice that he pleads:

Vindice:           Why does not heaven turn black, or with a frown  
                           Undo the world? Why does not earth start up  
                           And strike the sins that tread upon it? Oh,  
                           Were't not for gold and women, there would be no  
                           damnation –  
                           Hell would look like a lord's great kitchen  
                           without fire in't  
                           But 'twas decreed before the world began,  
                           That they should be the hooks to catch at man.  
                           (II i 256-260)



These lines reflect Vindice's attachment to his family, but, just as ambition overpowers Renaissance men like Faustus and Macbeth, so does in this play the obsession for revenge overpower his family attachments but does not necessarily negate it.

Throughout the play, the sins and corruption of the Duke overpower the entire play. His sins are so deep-rooted that he himself not only acknowledges his sins and ways but knows that they will never lessen in degree, not even due to old age. He is aware of the corruption surrounding him.

Duke:           It well becomes that judge to nod at crimes  
                     That does commit greater himself and lives.  
                     I may forgive a disobedient error.  
                     That expect pardon for adultery  
                     And in my old days am a youth in lust.  
                     Many a beauty have I turned to poison  
                     In the denial, covetous of all.  
                     Age hot is like a monster to be seen:  
                     My hairs are white, and yet my sins are green.  
                     (II iii 128-35)

The Duke then is a perfect representative of powerful men who live in a vain – glorious world in which they take pride in their excessive ways, they are individuals who are completely devoid of a moral consciousness, which still seems to show its streak in Vindice. In the play then we see the

portrayal of a world in which people are nothing more than desperate little bodies consuming each other,

indistinguishably in sex and murder. (Braunmuller 1995:333)

This is reflected in the scene when Vindice dresses up the skull of his love and then exclaims: “So, so; now nine years’ vengeance crowd into a minute.” (III v 121)

Duke: ... Age has no fault.  
Pleasure should meet in a perfumed mist.  
Lady, sweetly encountered: I came from court, I  
must be bold with you. (III v 142-145)

Duke: What are you two?

Vindice: Villains – all three! The very ragged bone  
Has been sufficiently revenged. (III v 153-55)

The Duke has been murdered with the poisoned skull. Poison is not only poison which is fatal to the body but here is a symbolic implication of poison as an unseen destructive element. Not only are some characters poisoned but the poison of lust and passion has destroyed a family, a court, and is seeping through to society. The end of poison is fatal, there is no chance of being saved. With the death of the Duke Vindice gets a feeling of satisfaction, and the thirst for revenge has been partially quenched: Vindice: when the bad bleed, then is the tragedy good. (III v 200)

However, the revenge of Vindice has not come to an end, but Lussurioso’s statement about Vindice is very revealing ...Discontent and want

Is the best clay to mould a villain of. (IV i 53)

Vindice’s loss and his bitter resentment at his loss made a villain out of him. There is sympathy for Vindice because if we

had been in the place of Vindice and had lost a dear one to a greedy, powerful man, perhaps our anger and rage would have been as strong as that of Vindice although we might not have the courage to enter such a dark abyss. Man's frustration and aggression can turn him neurotic, and this is what has happened to Vindice.

However, no sin and corruption in the play can surpass the sins and corruption of the Duchess, who is not ashamed of having an incestuous relationship with Spurio . Her actions are so vulgar and debased that one of the Duk's sons, Ambitioso, exclaims:

“O our disgrace!

Most women have small waist the world  
throughout,

But their desires are thousand miles about.”

Supervacuo: “Come, stay not here, let's after and prevent,  
Or else they'll sin faster than we'll repent.”

(IV iii 15-20)

What is interesting about the play is that, as age increases, so does the sin. The duke's sins and lustful desires are far greater than those of his sons. The Duchess, well into her middle age, is lustful and sinful. So is Gratiana, who consents to be a bawd for Castiza, who at least makes all possible efforts to retain her honour and chastity. And what is lurking throughout the play is the attraction of the characters towards gold, money, and power and, in order to have these, all virtue is readily sacrificed and

Vindice seems to be right when he comments: Were't not for gold and women, there would be no damnation... (II i 225)



And again when he talks to his mother about Castiza: Who shall be saved when mothers have no grace, (IV iv 27)

Gratiana is ashamed and regretful about her actions, and Castiza, while forgiving her mother, exclaims:

A Virgin honour is a crystal tower  
Which, being weak, is guarded with good spirits;  
Until she basely yields, no ill inherits. (IV iv 152-155)

The last line seems to be more an axiom than a mere dialogue uttered by one of the minor characters. The play then is simultaneously uttering its moral lessons while exposing vice.

Another instance when the dialogue is more of an axiom: Lussurioso: He that climbs highest has the greatest fall. (V iii 81)

The play wastes no time as far as the actions are concerned. Crime is heaped upon crime, murder upon murder, and, as for moral implications, large doses of moral axioms are given to the audience, to maintain perhaps a kind of balance between aggression, vicious action and striking, words on morality. The speech and dialogue of the play are as important and integral as the actions. The actions certainly would not be sufficient to give the right effect to the audience; it is always the play of words that has a greater impact upon the audience. The words and speeches of the play have given life, meaning and depth to the play, especially words spoken by Vindice. Through dialogue the writer has been able to attack a powerful political centre – the court, the empty glamour of the court, and its accompanied corruption. The Jacobean writers have attributed immensely by

depicting historical events, not by distortion but by highlighting certain traits and behaviour; perhaps these plays are social and historical documents, as the characters in the plays have been realistically portrayed. One encounters them not only as court people but, in some cases, there is a possible identification between characters and the audience.

As morality and virtue seem totally eclipsed in the play, except for two characters – Castiza and Antonio, the rest of the characters indulge in a kind of deception, either self-deception or deception of other characters. The Duke attempts to deceive Ambitioso and Supervacuo, the Duchess deceives her own husband by establishing an incestuous relationship with Spurio.

Vindice as Piato wishes to deceive his mother and ultimately sister into accepting Lussurioso, only to gratify his thirst for revenge. Also Lussurioso wishes to destroy Spurio. Vindice's deception of the Duke and the Duke's family differs from the deception practiced by the Duke. The Duke, the Duchess, and the sons practice deception only to gratify a personal feeling or their passions. It is a personal, destructive deception, in which the self and others are intentionally destroyed. However in the case of Vindice, deception is for the wrong-doers, not for the innocent. It must be admitted that, while practicing deception on others, Vindice ruins his inner self completely.

In **The Revenger's Tragedy**, Tourneur depicts a Court governed by lechery and cruelty. So corrupt are the characters that they seem symbols of the vices rather than human figures. These unnatural

puppets he moves with the precision of a master of some macabre ballet, and this certainty of theatrical intention gives an intensity to the whole action. Like Webster, he is a poet, and the verse, by its imagery, suggests a world where, beneath the light of the torches, one can see the sinister faces, the monstrous intrigues, the scenes of horror and the lurking figure of the Revenger. (Evans, 1948: 107)

Nonetheless, the corruption which is apparent throughout the play is corruption of the individual which counter-reflects the corruption of the court and state, and this forces Vindice to act or react, even if it is at the cost of moral disintegration. In Jacobean plays power is seen not as a positive entity but as a negative force, because power becomes an obsession and is then misused and abused. The play is indeed a perfect picture of corruption in Jacobean England. It seems to be society which breeds monsters like the Duke. Like Hamlet, Vindice broods because he too has been victimized by a superior force. However, in his endeavour to attack corruption and take revenge, Vindice often becomes identified with the corruption that he attacks. And Vindice is determined to attack and ultimately abolish those evils that are fatally destructive for individuals in a society. And it is for this reason that a revenger is able to provoke the sympathy of the audience, since the revenger fights evil and injustice, and this gives the audience a feeling of satisfaction, security and a feeling of poetic justice, and thus viewers accept revenge as morally justifiable. In every age and nearly every society there are always tyrant rulers and,

as long as they exist, societies need more men like Vindice to abolish them, although crime cannot be abolished from its roots – it is too deep-rooted, but at least those who are arrogant of their power should be aware that power may be absolute but it is not permanent, and tyrants can sometimes be nearly destroyed by the likes of Vindice. J.W. Lever in **Tragedy of State** lists the atrocities and crimes committed by tyrannical rulers, their plots and inhuman behaviour. States Lever:

“One reads of Gian Maria Visconti, the dictator of Milan, who kept a pack of dogs fed on human flesh and trained them to hunt down and savage his political prisoners. At Rimini in 1444 Raimondo Maltesta was stabbed by his two nephews, disguised, like the assassins of Webster's **White Devil**, in the habit of friars.” (Lever, 1987:20)

Crime begets crime and there are many more deeds of tyranny, revolt and bloodshed passed into the literature of Renaissance Europe, just as the atrocities of modern times have affected the writers of the age. This is why revenge dramas are not dismissed as an adventure story with imaginative events. They have a historical base, and the writer's aim is to show the reality behind the façade. These events, which are portrayed in the form of a drama, perhaps go unnoticed in history books but, by creating a story around these obscure historical facts, the dramatists in fact have lent themselves as social critics of the time:

Life and affairs at court are not seen from within, but judged as they appear from below-stairs, from the street,

from rumour and report, where they present a monstrous affront to all popular conceptions of human behaviour. (Lever, 1987:29)

Throughout the play words like ‘damnation’, ‘hell’ and ‘devil’ constantly recur but are all used as labels for the Duke and his family. The sin of the Duchess seems to be the worst of all other sins – her incestuous relationship with Spurio. Women are shown to lack morality and in this play especially women (the Duchess) are considered to be the fountain-head of corruption.

Decay and corruption are the key motifs throughout the play, which are obviously shown at the start of the play with Vindice carrying a skull in his hand. This also displays the notion that a corpse has been dug out (metaphorically), to remind him of the past injury, which is evergreen in the mind of Vindice. It also establishes the contrastive picture between victim and victimizer. Also, one naturally expects Antonio to help Vindice with the revenge plan but Antonio has no intention of taking revenge, for he knows that Vindice would first destroy himself and, merely by murdering the Duke and the Duke’s family, he would not be able to uproot sin and corruption from society. Antonio, being an older and wiser man, knows that, as long as man lives and societies exist, tyranny cannot be abolished. Therefore, throughout the play, Vindice acts alone. Perhaps the reason for the title being **The Revenger’s Tragedy** is the tragedy of Vindice who dedicates his life to seek justice through revenge and, at the end, becomes a victim of the law, a victim to the power that he challenged. This shows that personal revenge does not succeed but, as far as Vindice is concerned, he does not regret his actions and goes unrepentant to his execution, for he thinks he has been successful in his mission.

If the aim of the seventeenth century dramatists was to show the significance of evil and obsession for revenge within certain individuals who have been victimized by either religious representatives or state representatives then simultaneously they also seem to be establishing a certain religious notion – what happens when man ignores religious teachings, regarding abstaining from vice and temptation.

The plays of the age seem like a two-sided coin. One side presents man as a helpless creature in a world governed by power-thirsty individuals. The power system is like a labyrinth enclosing the innocent and, amongst these people, some wish to find a means to escape the labyrinth, and that means fighting against the system – even if it requires self-destruction. The other side presents a different picture. Man is shown to be a victim, not at the hands of external circumstances but a victim of his own passions, and that is because he has deviated from religious and ethical values. These individuals are shown to be moving towards darkness and thus towards damnation.

Vindice in the play is wild with the passion for revenge, which seems to have shut the doors of humanity upon him. He has resolved in his mind to take revenge, not only for his own loss but because he seems to feel as acutely for Antonio's loss also. It is not completely a personal resentment or grudge but he feels it a moral duty or obligation, to eradicate this evil root from society. For this he brings about an intentional split within his personality and this split brings about a fatal damage. Near the end of the play, he can neither come out of the guise of Piato and return to his former self-Vindice, nor can he completely abandon his true self and adopt the new façade of Piato. And he never did completely depart from his true self- or how else could he talk of morality and right conduct? (Certain citations have been made earlier. To avoid unnecessary repetition, it is best not to repeat them again). When he enters the guise of Piato, the thirst for revenge is so strong, that he is all too excited to live up his role, especially when he convinces his mother to coax Castiza into accepting Lussurioso. The heat seems to lessen gradually when he realizes he had gone too far ahead, and thereby condemns his mother for accepting the deal. Although vindice is more than obsessed to destroy the Duke and the Duke's family, yet his original self occasionally beckons him, and this prevents a total departure. He is constantly fighting a battle between his inner moral consciousness and outer social being. It seems Vindice's mission is more to purge society of its evil nature than merely a personal revenge. Throughout the play one feels Vindice is a commentator on moral issues and the

conduct of other characters whom he seems to observe very closely.

There is sympathy for Vindice, especially at the end of the play. He was wronged by the Duke, waited for nine years to take revenge and ultimately, when he did take revenge, he was condemned and executed. However Vindice himself was totally unrepentant, even up to his execution. In his own eyes, he is justified, and perhaps in the eyes of his audience. But certainly not justified in the eyes of society, or the law. In the eyes of the audience Vindice as a law-breaker is different from the Duke, a violator of law and justice. The Duke is representative of a state, supposedly a maintainer of law and justice, but apparently violator of social laws and moral codes. His corruption is seen as the corruption of the court. Vindice reacts against the unlawful, unethical behaviour of the Duke. Vindice's thirst for revenge and justice leads through to violent actions. But he seems to have no other choice, and this puts him in a tight situation. He feels that he needs to retaliate against social exploitation and the prevalent instability of his society. In exposing these crimes, he undergoes several changes. Thus, characters like Vindice sacrifice themselves to cleanse a society of corruption and filth: No power is angry when the lustful die; When thunder claps, heaven likes the tragedy. (V iii 50-51)

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