

The Popularity of The Spanish Tragedy

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Chapter I

The Question At Hand

In the Senecan Tradition, horror is underlined. Thomas Kyd's play, The Spanish Tragedy, is definitely of that tradition, but his technique of allowing the characters within the play to expound (sometimes at length) on their own plight, emotions and grief are typical of the Shakespearean Age. We find Kyd somewhere between the two traditions. To show that The Spanish Tragedy stands as one of the foremost pieces of dramatic literature prior to that of Shakespeare's is the purpose of this essay. In demonstrating this, it is hoped that the reader will gain not only a better appreciation of the text itself, but also of Shakespeare's works and the works of Kyd's contemporaries. Many of the techniques that Kyd employed in The Spanish Tragedy were applied to other works, both of his contemporaries and of those after him, almost to the point of plagiarism, as will be shown later in this paper.

The starting point for this research is the play itself, an edition (based on the Quarto of 1602 edition) by Charles T. Prouty, first copyrighted in 1951. For research purposes, five sections of the play (340 lines) which have been ascribed to Ben Jonson, have been separated and annihilated. The reason for choosing this edition instead of one of the other eleven editions¹ is pragmatic. This edition is considered, of the surviving editions, one of the best and most easily available, and one which is easy to work with.

Secondary sources are not so succinctly cited. Many different types of books have been consulted for this research. By and large, Alfred Harbage, E. K. Chambers, and Emile Legouis and Louis Cazamian are my main

secondary sources, each source concentrating mainly on Shakespearean Drama or Elizabethan ways, with slight references to Thomas Kyd or The Spanish Tragedy. This research has taken a lot of piecing together and tearing apart. Nowhere could a main source be found where all the answers were readily available. That is why a clarification of the list of secondary sources is necessary. Every source listed has given insight in one way or another. Each has been an integral part of this paper, whether through direct reference and quotation, or through the process of formulating an approach.

This research is limited by the information available today, and by the conflicting accounts of the history of Thomas Kyd and his Spanish Tragedy. There are vast amounts of books written on Shakespearean Drama, Tudor Drama, Medieval Staged Drama and the like. In these there are few actual references to The Spanish Tragedy or Kyd, but many to the age surrounding the writing of this play and the demands the author had to meet. Here also, is where the limitations can be found. In the following chapters, it will be shown that it was through the genius of Thomas Kyd, and his innovative approach to drama, that the stage changed drastically. To show that The Spanish Tragedy was a starting point, at which many Shakespearean plots originated and the impulsive beginning of a new wave of staged realism culminated, is another purpose of this paper. It will be shown that

the interest in Kyd's work takes its place in the development of English tragedy by revealing new possibilities and offering a model in technique . . . in construction, in the manipulation of plot, and in the effective situation.²

Overall, the purpose of this paper, along with showing the import of The Spanish Tragedy, is to show that Thomas Kyd roused the interest of the audience and demanded mental audience participation.³ In simplest terms, Thomas Kyd had a talent for provoking thought and demanding that thought to be emotively transmitted from the stage outward.

To get at the question, Thomas Kyd made The Spanish Tragedy the most popular play of its day. What are the most important contributors to this popularity? To adequately handle this question, it will be necessary, first, to understand the background of Thomas Kyd, and the influences under which he wrote his play. Secondly, it will be necessary to grasp the effects of the early theatres; their setbacks, assets and the types of performances most in demand. This background information and descriptions of early theatres will give a better basis for analyzing The Spanish Tragedy, itself. In this analysis it will be necessary to look at the main ploys of Kyd and their effects. In doing so, inevitably a better understanding of the popularity and the reasons for that popularity are acquired.

Chapter II

The Genius of Kyd

There is very little known about the life of Thomas Kyd, and what is known is a bit sketchy. He was born the son of a scrivener, in 1558. Although found to be a very promising student at the Merchant Tailors School, Kyd did not go on to a university as his father had hoped. In his class at Merchant Tailors School, though, he did count Edmund Spenser as one of his classmates. But Spenser's style did not influence Kyd, although both were quite gifted literarily. Spenser's style, beautiful, poetic, and enlightening, showed his mastery "of the language whose numbers flow as fast as spring doth rise."¹ Kyd was not an extremely poetic dramatist:

His genius lay in his instinct for effective theatre, for the complications of intrigue plotting, and for grim verbal and dramatic ironies. Time could not wither his most effective dramatic ideas, which survived almost fifty years of continuous employment on the stage.²

Medieval tragedy demanded little from the playwright. Usually there was a rise to the high life or a fall from it,³ and the playwrights generally wrote within the guidelines set by Aristotelian drama. In medieval tragedy, the greatest source of virtue was reason and by employing a sense of reason in drama the playwrights could give their characters "the power for the moderation and intelligent use of the lower faculties."⁴ Along with the employment of reason, the medieval playwright would generally turn the action around, reverse the plot in any number of adverse ways, (i.e. "plagues and diseases, bereavement, legal condemnation, murder, and sudden death"⁵). This ploy, too, was of the Aristotelian School of Drama.

Using Senecan ploys, Thomas Kyd followed partially the medieval tragic guidelines, but, in his realistic endeavors, instituted new guidelines, his own guidelines, which became part of the Elizabethan way. Kyd made his drama become alive for his audiences and captivated them for years. This, and the success of the figures of the revenger and malcontent, caused The Spanish Tragedy to be "rifled by dramatists hoping to exploit or rival its success."⁶

Looking back, we can say that in the later parts of the Elizabethan Age tragic drama was most progressive because of the great interest and emphasis on poetry and the professional theatre. We can also say that Thomas Kyd was responsible for planting that 'progressive' seed. By reworking Senecan plot devices and meeting audience demands, Kyd embodied a new school of drama. This new school, 'pedestrian verse' (as opposed to the school of 'poetic splendor' of the later Elizabethan Age) inspired the imagination of later writers.⁷ Shakespeare picked up many of Kyd's ideas and expounded upon them or at least dressed them up in a more impressive verse.

Also, well past Shakespeare, into the Jacobean Age of theatre, we can find "revenges accomplished in deadly masques; and we hear malcontented revengers crying out against the false appearances of life,"⁸ as we find Lorenzo crying out in The Spanish Tragedy. This will be shown later in this essay.

Overall, Thomas Kyd accomplished in The Spanish Tragedy effects that had never been accomplished before and drew a crowd to the theatres, a crowd that was never regained until Shakespeare. All this was accomp-

lished in a fairly simple and popular way. Kyd employed the language of his day:

The dialogue of his stately written tragedy
is more human and probable than anything
which had gone before, or was being done by
Marlowe.⁹

In order to impress the theatre-going public, though, he included a few highly impressive passages, and without knowing it, set a precedent for playwrights to come. In the impressive soliloquies, Kyd introduced the question of audience demand and response, and the question of action on the stage, its possibilities, appearances and effects. His "gifted sense of the theatrical" led him to create an utterly new type of play.¹⁰ Viewing The Spanish Tragedy today, the theatre-goer would have little difficulty following the verse, because the language has not changed considerably. Even in the aspect of pronunciation, the audience would have little difficulty figuring the difference in inflection.

There has been little research done specifically on The Spanish Tragedy, possibly because it became popular just prior to the Shakespearean Era. Also, many people consider Shakespeare to be the originator of the Revenge play. Even those who do not make this false claim and go back beyond Shakespeare, concentrate more on Marlowe's Tamburlaine than Kyd's Spanish Tragedy, because of Tamburlaine's novel approach to traditional morality.¹¹

But, "The Spanish Tragedy held the boards for a generation and was kept up to date."¹² Although we have no definite evidence in acknowledging the exact date that Thomas Kyd wrote the play, we do know when it was performed. In 1592, it was performed sixteen times at the

Rose Theatre by Lord Strange's Men,¹³ and was recorded to have run thirteen times by The Admiral's Men in 1597.¹⁴ It was run a number of other times between these two major showings,¹⁵ under many different titles. Henslowe, the manager of the Rose Theatre, lists these titles of The Spanish Tragedy in his diary:

spanes comodye donne oracoe
the comodey of doneoracio
Jeronymo (various spellings)
doneoracio
the comodey of Jeronymo
The comodey Jeronymo.¹⁶

Thus, there is little doubt that The Spanish Tragedy was well received during its first years.

Also, its popularity is evidenced in the number of revisions it underwent; the original, which is lost to our day, the editions of 1592, 1594, 1599, and then the Quarto of 1602, "newly corrected, amended and enlarged."¹⁷ This edition was reprinted in 1603, 1611, 1615, 1618, 1623, and 1633. Those editions after the 1599 edition, the Quarto editions, are the ones with the passages attributed to Ben Jonson. "Only one other play, *Mucedorus*, had a more extensive history of printing."¹⁸

Chapter III

London Theatres in the Late Sixteenth Century

At the outset, commercial theatres began with severe handicaps. Most of the areas which were chosen as sites for the theatre houses were recreational areas, formerly reserved for archery, cockfighting and other athletic festivities.¹ They were sites that most businesses would not consider because of the vast fields that had to be crossed to get to them. In the summer months the theatre would enjoy goodsized audiences, but in the winter months and early spring, the long trek across the public parks deterred many would-be patrons. Even after the first theatres had established themselves ('The Theatre' and 'The Curtain') they enjoyed a turbulent existence. The city councils of Shoreditch, Southwark and London would sponsor many different plays, those performed in English as well as those performed in Latin. The city fathers had the final say as to what could and could not be produced. Most generally, amateur companies and playwrights were hired before professionals, and were enjoyed more by the public for their simplicity in style.²

Even though its existence was shaky, the theatre of this time did enjoy a variety of productions and players. Harbage describes three basic divisions of the theatre groups.³ First, there were the romantic and historical narratives, mostly by renowned playwrights. These were performed by professional companies of adult men. These performances were technically spectacles, because of the precisions built into the plays. Secondly, there was the group that performed more classical than historical pieces, more comical than tragical in stock. These were performed by non-professional companies of boys, were well accepted by

the theatre-going public, and often included music. Finally, 'The Court Masque' enjoyed some attention. Similar to the ballet today, these pieces of drama were more dance than spectacle and ranged from mythical subject matter to the classical. Most often, the court masque was written to be performed for a special occasion or a special audience, therefore the general public did not often have the opportunity to enjoy these.

Consistently, playwrights wrote for the first group. It seems that when George Peele, Thomas Kyd, Robert Greene and Christopher Marlowe began to produce, the theatre in England began to stabilize, possibly because of the substantial and excellent material coming from the first group. Even though the theatre was stabilizing, all playwrights of this time had to be considerably conscious of their works because "for decades the city fathers had sought to suppress all theatrical performances."⁴

In trying to please the city fathers, the playwrights were obliged to follow a certain set of guidelines. One of these guidelines was 'adaptability'. All successful plays of this period had to be easily adapted to three different modes.⁵ First, a playwright had to take into consideration his place of performance. For the general public, the playwright had to accept the fact that his play would be performed mostly in courtyards, because of their availability. Seldom were roofed playhouses available for new plays. Thus, the setting was very important in the writing of the play.

Secondly, many noblemen and landlords would pay large sums of money for those pieces which could be presented in their estates. This usually meant, for the performance of the play, a much smaller stage area.

The playwright would try to conform his play to those needs when necessary.

Thirdly, there were the provincial playhouse performances. All plays had to be easily mobile so that they could be moved from one city to another, in a matter of days. If moving a play involved a considerable amount of time and money, few investors would support its production.

The frequency of these three was unequal. Together, the court performances and the provincial performances did not equal ten percent of the total performances. Nevertheless, the playwright had to take into consideration the advantages of adaptability.

"The constant demand for fresh materials beset all companies."⁶ Therefore plays were seldom kept in a company's repertory for more than one or two years. And, they were only kept this long if they were exceptionally well done, or if they underwent some deletions or additions during their run. Stage changes were quite frequent for this reason. Constantly then, fine plays were often dropped shortly after their debuts, only to be revived later, usually changed from the original.⁷

When we speak of the 'universality'⁸ of Shakespeare, we speak of those unchanging moral and religious feelings which have not been altered down through the ages. The playwrights prior to Shakespeare did not worry themselves with such things. Most playwrights wrote for their day and their day alone. Little consideration was given to making their plays timeless.

But still, the playwright had to "present variety and contrast in plot and types of characters, and . . . the actors must have a continuous lively awareness of this variety and contrast in their presentations."⁹

Therefore, the playwrights themselves had to be familiar with the physical makeup of the theatre where their plays would be staged, in order to make any necessary or desired alterations, and also to inform the cast or company of more effective means of presentation.

The early theatres themselves, consisted of a basic courtyard, with two or three tiers of balconies surrounding it in the round or hexagonally. If there was a ceiling at all, two pillars in the middle of the courtyard would hold it up. After the curtains in the rear of the theatre were removed, two doors, for the entrances and exits of the actors, were installed. There was generally very little scenery, no more than a back-drop, and a few small accessories--table, chair, etc.--to indicate the place of action.¹⁰

Even though these theatres were not glamorous, they did attract the entire town:

The theatre was open to all: the whole town was . . . enthusiastic for it. It was truly national. For many it took the place of the church they neglected; to most, in this time of no newspapers and few and little-read novels, it was the only source of intellectual pleasure.¹¹

The nature and demands of the audience determined the material to be presented and the way it would be presented. Since the audiences were representative of all walks of life in England, from noblemen to peasants, "no play was written for performance on a public stage which did not combine contraries, (and) pass from extreme coarseness to extreme refinement."¹²

Not only the playwright, but the actors themselves contended with the audiences. For instance, if the audience was made up of 'simple

folk', by and large a group fascinated by long rhetorical passages, the actor, in order to heighten their fascination, would

advance to the very front of the stage and direct the speech--whether a soliloquy or part of a dialogue--full at the audience, and upon its conclusion, bow in acknowledgment of the applause and return back into the play.¹³

Thus, we can imagine Hieronimo stepping forth, with one of his longer passages. Therefore, playwrights could easily please all viewers in one way or another. In The Spanish Tragedy Kyd was able to contend with the influence of the "great and the lowly, the gentlemen and the people, the literate and the ignorant, the exquisites and the boors,"¹⁴ all those likely to be in a playhouse at any given performance. The great, the gentlemen, the literate and the exquisites would have been pleased with many passages from The Spanish Tragedy, like Bel-Imperia's words to Horatio in the midst of the confusing action at the beginning:

Let dangers go, thy war shall be with me,
But such a war, as breaks no bond of peace.
Speak thou fair words, I'll cross them with
fair words;
Send thou sweet looks, I'll meet them with
sweet looks;
Write loving lines, I'll answer loving lines;
Give me a kiss, I'll countercheck thy kiss:
Be this our warring peace, or peaceful war.¹⁵

Also, the Latin passages were written with these groups in mind since they were the ones capable of translating them.¹⁶

On the other hand, the lowly, the people, the ignorant and the boors, too, would have found their interest satisfied in The Spanish Tragedy. Their interest in the theatre was more for action than words, although words fascinated them. There is definitely plenty of both in

the play. For examples, when Bel-Imperia receives the letter written in blood¹⁷ and when Pendringano is hung on stage.¹⁸

Kyd's cultivation of the passions, through the bloody murders and the polished love scenes in The Spanish Tragedy, "revealed the way to popularity for a new kind of tragedy, presenting involved romantic intrigue instead of simple rise and fall."¹⁹

Chapter IV

Intrigue: Kyd's Main Ploy

It was Thomas Kyd who adapted the academic Senecan tragedy to the popular theatre. He was the first great English master of melodrama.¹ He struggled with drama and found its existence very precarious in the private court productions and losing ground in the public performances, because of the more powerful comic tradition of the time.² When The Spanish Tragedy was first produced, around 1587, the English concept of Senecan drama became very popular with the audiences. Kyd's power to arouse "horror and excitement,"³ proceeded from his use of action in the Senecan tradition of tragedy. Kyd tried to have all the action in The Spanish Tragedy performed on stage before the audience. By doing this he did not have to resort to messengers delivering the news of a death; the audience experienced the death on stage. A good example of this is the hanging scene which would have presented some problems to many of Kyd's contemporaries. Kyd employed an arbour or trellis-work arch,⁴ covered with leaves to distort the audience's vision, to accomplish this action. The audience could make out what was happening behind that arch.

It is likely that Kyd . . . strengthened an impulse toward dramatizing famous murders of everyday life and helped particularly to inspire the domestic tragedy of guilty love and bloodshed.⁵

This bloody tragedy succeeded, most scholars say,⁶ because Kyd was willing to develop his plot with a dependence upon the presentation of the sensational in staged action. Although it has been said that The Spanish Tragedy wanders from act to act,⁷ it is not true that it wanders aimlessly. Thomas Kyd specifically refers back to Revenge's promise at the end

of each act, tying the audience back into the otherwise non-consecutive plot.

The displayed insanity of Hieronimo became "one of the marked features of Kydian tragedy, even outvaluing as a theatrical asset, the inherited Senecan ghost."⁸ In this crude conception of madness, Kyd attempts the portrayal of individual character, and in doing so, "created a permanent stage type which long retained its popularity in the face of all efforts at psychological truth."⁹

Kyd also showed that Elizabethan drama could be romantic and melodramatic simultaneously:

There was a section of its (drama's) public whose preference was for modern and topical subjects and there were playwrights to satisfy these tastes. The majority, however, expected and desired romantic melodrama, and the first writer who supplied this demand was Thomas Kyd with his Spanish Tragedy.¹⁰

The Spanish Tragedy is both romantic and melodramatic, not in the sense that it denied individuality, or was characterized by a weak interest in nature, or was a revolt against neoclassic adherence to rules, forms and traditions, but rather because it "developed a sudden variety and an amazing breadth of achievement."¹¹ The complication of action in Kyd's work, that element of intrigue, becomes the center of the playgoer's attention several times throughout the work. Kyd employed "comic methods with tragic materials."¹² This is evidenced when Pendringano and the hangman, on walking to the gallows, converse over Pendringano's execution:

Hangman: Come on, sir, are you ready?

Pendringano: To do what, my fine, officious knave?

Hangman: To go to this gear.

Pendringano: O sir, you are too forward . . .¹³

This is one of those renowned horrors that Kyd became so famous for; his frankness in handling the stage, using comedy to bring about tragedy.

Some would say that Thomas Kyd could not adequately handle and present his horror-filled play and that its careless composition made for bad theatre. But, others see this as an asset rather than a negative aspect. Farnham, for instance, says:

The renowned horrors of The Spanish Tragedy are presented in a way that may be called merely innocent. They are put before us carelessly, as though they had little power to make the dramatists or their audience brood upon them and quail before them. The horrors of Shakespeare's major tragedies are presented in a way that is not innocent, yet it is not the way of fearful fascination. The Elizabethan tragic world outfaced death and horror, if not with medieval faith in another life, then with defiant carelessness or with gallant faith in this life despite its ugliness . . . (as evidenced in The Spanish Tragedy). . .¹⁴

Harbage, too, saw Kyd's use of intrigue as an asset to the horror-filled play. This element of intrigue seemed to surface in Kyd's work because he was

. . . successful in exercising his spell upon us when he (was) being most true to his own tradition. Although intrigue itself might be new to tragedy, it was not new in its association with evil.¹⁵

Kyd created, in The Spanish Tragedy, influences and effects not common to tragedy before him. The revenge motif itself is not of primary interest in the play, but rather, how this revenge is carried out on the stage.

The primary interest of the Kydian revenge play is in action. It holds its audience

by a crude sensationalism, by an artificially stimulated suspense and by the shocking nature of the events it depicts.¹⁶

Kyd not only utilized phraseology to exhibit his intriguing action. The stage itself, when one was available (outside of the courtyards) was an essential point for his departure from established 'weak' drama. This was also the case with playwrights to come after him. These playwrights realized the import of the stage and all the possibilities it had.

Kyd, most notably, used the stage to its fullest as evidenced by all the bloody action in The Spanish Tragedy. As a synopsis of some of the action in the play, and a witness to his excellent sense of the possibilities of the stage, we have this passage by the Ghost at the end of the work:

Ay, now my hopes have end in their effects,
When blood and sorrow finish my desires:
Horatio murdered in his father's bower,
Vild Serberine by Pendringano slain,
False Pendringano hanged by quaint device,
Fair Isabella by herself misdane,
Prince Balthazar by Bel-Imperia stabbed,
The Duke of Castille and his wicked son
Both done to death by old Hieronimo,
My Bel-Imperia fall'n as Dido fell,
And good Hieronimo slain by himself.¹⁷

And throughout the entire play, Kyd assumes the responsibility for trying to elucidate the action. Thomas Kyd is not greatly distinguished for his character portrayal, but he does manifest intrigue in several of his characters. We cannot look directly at the character of Hieronimo, for too much of his exposition has been attributed to Ben Jonson.¹⁸

We can turn our interest to Lorenzo though, "who, utterly soulless and heartless, could composedly intrigue out of his way the innocent obstacles

to his ends, and, if necessary, could meet his own fate with a like egotistical composure."¹⁹ Kyd indicates the character of Lorenzo, his feelings towards life, and the type he represents in the words of this soliloquy:

As for myself, I know my secret fault,
And so do they; but I have dealt for them.
They that for coin their soul endangered,
To save my life for coin shall venture theirs;
And better it's that base companions die
Than by their life to hazard out good haps.
Nor shall they live, for me to fear their faith.
I'll trust myself, myself shall be my friend;
For die they shall; slaves are ordained to no
other end.²⁰

In this soliloquy, Kyd, at another rare moment, gives a broader background to the play; a background that does not obscure the reality of revenge. Because tragedy prior to this day was crude and had little force of its own, Kyd and those who followed after him profited by this novel approach.

Thomas Kyd, with primarily an excellent base for intrigue and the right mind working from that base, manufactured The Spanish Tragedy in a manner unlike other tragic playwrights that had come before.

Chapter V

Looking Beyond Intrigue

The unique way that Thomas Kyd was able to keep his play within the guidelines of innocence, on one end, and fearful fascination, on the other,¹ is by means of the unique plot devices or ploys he incorporated in The Spanish Tragedy. These ploys came into such widespread use after the debut of The Spanish Tragedy that they are often referred to as "Kydian". The theme of the play, the persecution, madness and revenge of a deeply hurt old man, was very successful for Thomas Kyd. Shakespeare saw that success "and this theme . . . has been 'lifted' bodily by the new author (in Titus Andronicus) and served up in a different setting."² This thematic ploy was only one of many that Shakespeare borrowed from Kyd.

In looking at Othello, we can surely see why Shakespeare has been credited with tremendous verbal violence. But that verbal violence comes from a time prior to his own. "He uses the language of a splendour and an extravagance that recalled the utterances of the old days of The Spanish Tragedy and the grief-maddened (Hieronimo)."³

Hieronimo's first line in the fifth scene of Act I, "What outcries pluck me from my naked bed, . . ." is "quoted, misquoted, parodied by Shakespeare and others to a degree that suggests they have become catch-phrases, . . ."⁴

There are many other ploys that Kyd used which were reused by many of his contemporaries such as Marlowe, Lyly and Burton, to mention but a few. Some of these ploys became an integral part of Shakespearean

drama: the tragedy surrounding the beautiful garden scene between Horatio and Bel-Imperia; the aspect of an acted play within The Spanish Tragedy itself,⁵ the use of a dumb-show as an integral part of the play,⁶ the conversation between Andrea and Revenge, foreshadowing and analyzing the entire course of the play; and the subplots, most notably that of Serberine and Pendringano filling out and relieving the grimness of the main course of action.

Each of these plot devices is "the result of Kyd's quick sense of striking effect--passed into the common stock of the theatre, and repeated . . . in numerous variations in the plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries."⁷ These devices were employed by Kyd because he disregarded the unities of the then popular drama.⁸ In the formation of The Spanish Tragedy, Kyd cloaked the work with gloom and displayed the most effective stage expedients known.

In the last chapter, we spoke of Lorenzo and how his view of life reflected Kyd's. This, in itself, is another ploy which Kyd used and which later became a prominent feature in Elizabethan drama. In the genius of Thomas Kyd we see that

Time could not wither his most effective dramatic ideas, which survived almost fifty years of continuous employment on the stage. Well into the Jacobean period we find revenges accomplished in deadly masques; and we hear malcontented revengers crying out against the false appearances of life.⁹

To look into the ploys of The Spanish Tragedy leaves us looking at the playwright himself,

casting loose from conventional literary materials and embarking on (his) own voyage

of artistic discovery. For Kyd soon dispenses with Senecan and medieval ideas and finds his true direction in portraying Hieronimo's secret despairing struggle to avenge his son.¹⁰

To the neoclassicist in Kyd's day, Elizabethan tragedy was considered to be full of excesses.¹¹ But Kyd tried to remedy this situation. The neoclassicist believed that in order for drama to enjoy its rightful praise, it should not complicate real life. The theatre should not allow things to happen on stage that did not happen in real life. The idea of manipulating man was intolerable, and the cleverness associated with those characters who were manipulated was good only if they were bound, in the play itself, to be rejected.¹² This is evidenced in the case of Balthazar, who has slain Bel-Imperia's lover, Andrea. In speaking to her, he reveals the deceitful, yet clever, mask Kyd afforded him in the script:

Yes, to your gracious self must I complain,
In whose fair answer lies my remedy,
On whose perfection all my thoughts attend,
On whose aspect mine eyes find beauty's bower,
In whose translucent breast my heart is lodged.¹³

If the ghost, in the opening lines of the play, had not informed the audience that Balthazar was the murderer of Don Andrea, the audience surely would have taken this passage as sincere and poetic. But since the revelation does come forth,¹⁴ the audience sees Don Balthazar as a deceitful character and accepts the actors, even though his clever lines and action are misleading.

Thomas Kyd, with his intense sense of theatre, complied just enough with the standards of his time to capture larger audiences than his contemporaries for quite some time. This compliance was not the

main attraction in Kyd, though. Moreso, it was the active and demonstrative way in which Kyd spoke to the people, as if the play were history, real and exciting. All his plot devices were subtly influential, but evidently necessary, as without them, The Spanish Tragedy would be somewhat less than it is.

Chapter VI

The Question Answered

Why was The Spanish Tragedy so successful? After looking into the elements surrounding Thomas Kyd as playwright, it was obvious in The Spanish Tragedy that the way he handled exposition of plot and the revenge theme was admirable, and good reason for its popularity. The way the audience was aroused by action never before seen on stage (again, the case of Pendringano's hanging fits for an example) and the somewhat ambiguous wanderings of the play, although confusing at times, are examples of Kyd's masterful interpretation of the stage and the effects it could produce. He tied the play together beautifully at the end of each act, alleviating the script partially of its ambiguity and allowing the audience to follow its plot development.

In this way, The Spanish Tragedy, unlike some of the plays of Shakespeare (Hamlet and The Tempest specifically) and those of his contemporaries, was less complicated. By alleviating the script of ambiguity, the entire audience could follow and understand the direction The Spanish Tragedy was taking in its plot development and characterization.

Greene, a contemporary of Kyd, plotted his plays James IV and Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay, in a manner similar to Kyd:

Greene draws the many threads of his plot together into a whole. The story is very complicated in the play, but there is an interrelationship between the different episodes,

very much like the interrelationship between each act in The Spanish

Tragedy.

Woven together as they are, they produce suspense, surprise and 'coups de théâtre' in an amount approached only by Kyd.²

As an example of construction, then, The Spanish Tragedy is worthy of much acclaim. And although Kyd may be stylistically inferior to Marlowe, Shakespeare and other contemporaries,

he surpasses them all in building his scenes around the emotional responses of his characters to the pressure of circumstances, in effective preparation for scenes of rapid action, and in employing a more definitely theatrical technique to move the hearts of his audience.³

It was these and other dramatic devices that made The Spanish Tragedy popular with the audiences and allowed Kyd's tragedy to retain its exclusive association with Shakespearean drama.

Kyd's use of comedy within the tragedy also showed a sensitivity to the stage, in that there was little of this previous to him. The popularity of The Spanish Tragedy was seen by playwrights of Kyd's time and after, and it is evidenced in the number of times the play is referred to, directly or indirectly, in the works of his contemporaries. The following, taken from Shakespeare's Hamlet, is an example:

For if the King like not the comedye,
Why then he belike he likes it not, perdy.⁴

This is almost a direct burlesque of Kyd's

And if the world like not this tragedy,
Hard is the hap of old Hieronimo.⁵

In using this burlesque, whether to make fun of Kyd's lines or not, Shakespeare at least recognized The Spanish Tragedy, indicating he had a working knowledge of it.

Many other instances of the popular use of The Spanish Tragedy are readily accessible,⁶ evidencing the renown the play must have had. Kyd's contemporaries borrowed from him not only phraseology and plot devices, but also direct themes,⁷ as in Shakespeare's Titus Andronicus and Marlowe's The Massacre at Paris. And it was the exploitation of Kyd's themes that became his most effective contribution to the stage. This effective stage awareness is evidenced by the audience, "on whose approval the success of the play would ultimately depend."⁸ Kyd's appeal was more for simplicity and horror, simultaneously, through Senecan devices,⁹ than for judgements and idiosyncrasies through ultra-classical devices:

An audience that is not dramatically sophisticated requires an appeal to the senses rather than to the intellect. It comes, in the first instance, to see and hear, and to exercise not its judgement but its emotion.¹⁰

From the numerous accounts of the reception of The Spanish Tragedy, it is apparent that Thomas Kyd did satisfy his audience in this way.

Overall, The Spanish Tragedy is probably the most vivid, popular, pre-Shakespearean play written. The ploys of Kyd and the heritage of his dramatic devices are reason enough for the play's acceptance by the audience, but also for its popularity. The limits of this conclusion begin with the shaky start of The Spanish Tragedy stylistically. But, as in any case of disregard for the accepted forms or ideas of tragedy, The Spanish Tragedy's prominence and survival were strictly dependent upon the contentment or discontentment of those affected most, the audience. The play's long run on the English stage attests to the

contentment of his audiences.

The reasons for that popularity, apart from Kyd's masterful use of intrigue, are simple. He staged action never before staged; his language was such as to impress and be understood by both the ignorant and the sophisticated; his purpose was "to interest us, but not to disturb us by the presentation of direful circumstances";¹¹ and he accomplishes his revenge theme through character cleverness and diabolical schemes.¹²

Apparently other playwrights of this time and after saw Kyd's combination for success and tried to expand upon it. The popularity, then, of The Spanish Tragedy is not doubted. Hopefully this study has given some new insights into the reasons for that popularity, other than just 'audience acceptance'. Although this must remain one of the most important reasons, it is not the only one.

In this research, it was found that Thomas Kyd may not have been the most poetic or artistic playwright, but he was definitely one of the most realistic and diabolic. It was also discovered that, although there were high demands from the audience, the playwrights could satisfy those demands, and in the case of Thomas Kyd, go one step further and leave them in amazement.

The values of this study are obvious: a better working knowledge of Shakespearean drama; a more sophisticated approach to research; and the reasons for the popularity of The Spanish Tragedy have, at least in part, been revealed.

FOOTNOTES

Chapter I: The Question at Hand

¹Robert Ornstein and Hazelton Spencer, Elizabethan and Jacobean Tragedy: An Anthology (Boston: D.C. Heath and Co., 1964), p. 3.

²A. R. Waller and A. W. Ward, editors, The Cambridge History of English Literature, Vol. V, The Drama to 1642 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1933), p. 184.

³Willard Farnham, The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1956), p. 394.

Chapter II: The Genius of Thomas Kyd

¹Louis Cazamian and Emile Legouis, A History of English Literature (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1967), p. 269. (The inner quote is taken from Edmund Spenser's Shepherd's Calendar.)

²Ornstein and Spencer, p. ix.

³Ornstein and Spencer, p. viii.

⁴Farnham, pp. 218-219.

⁵Farnham, p. 220.

⁶Ornstein and Spencer, p. vii.

⁷Ornstein and Spencer, p. viii.

⁸Ornstein and Spencer, p. ix.

⁹Richmond Croom Beatty and Edd Winfield Parks, editors, The English Drama: An Anthology 900-1642 (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1935), p. 247.

¹⁰Charles T. Prouty, editor, The Spanish Tragedy by Thomas Kyd (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1951), p. vi. (All references to the play will be from this edition, unless otherwise noted.)

¹¹Cazamian and Legouis, p. 399.

¹²Beatty and Parks, p. 246.

¹³Karl Holzknecht, Outlines of Tudor and Stuart Plays (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1947), p. 66.

¹⁴Ornstein and Spencer, p. 3.

¹⁵The Spanish Tragedy by Thomas Kyd, edited by Phillip Edwards (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1959) p. 1xvi.

¹⁶Edwards, p.137.

¹⁷Ornstein and Spencer, p. 3.

¹⁸The Spanish Tragedy, Prouty, p. v.

Chapter III: London Theatre in the 1580's and 90's

¹M. St. Clare Byrne, Elizabethan Life in Town and Country (Britain: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1961), p. 259.

²Alfred Harbage, editor, William Shakespeare; The Complete Works (London: Allan Lane The Penguin Press, 1969), p. 21.

³Harbage, William Shakespeare, p. 22.

⁴Harbage, William Shakespeare, p. 23.

⁵Harbage, William Shakespeare, p. 24.

⁶Harbage, William Shakespeare, p. 24.

⁷Harbage, William Shakespeare, p. 25.

⁸Alfred Harbage, Shakespeare Without Words and Other Essays (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), p. 3.

⁹Cecile de Banke, Shakespearean Stage Production Then and Now (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1953), p. 127.

¹⁰Cazamian and Legouis, pp. 380-381.

¹¹Cazamian and Legouis, p. 377.

¹²Cazamian and Legouis, p. 384.

¹³de Banke, p. 128.

¹⁴Cazamian and Legouis, p. 384.

¹⁵Prouty, p. 24.

¹⁶Prouty, pp. 4, 33, 46.

¹⁷Prouty, p. 38.

¹⁸Prouty, p. 50.

¹⁹Farnham, pp. 391-92.

Chapter IV: Intrigue; Kyd's Main Ploy

¹Holz knecht, p. 66.

²C. F. Tucker Brooke, The Tudor Drama; A History of National Drama to the Retirement of Shakespeare (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1911), p. 209.

³Brooke, p. 209.

⁴Edwards, p. 41. (footnote #53)

⁵Farnham, p. 399.

⁶Farnham, p. 392.

⁷Brooke, p. 210.

⁸Brooke, p. 211.

⁹Brooke, p. 214.

¹⁰Cazamian and Legouis, p. 396.

¹¹Farnham, p. 340.

¹²Harbage, Shakespeare Without Words, p. 89.

¹³Prouty, p. 49.

¹⁴Farnham, pp. 427-28.

¹⁵Harbage, Shakespeare Without Words, p. 95.

¹⁶Irvin Ribner, Patterns in Shakespearian Tragedy (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1960), p. 16.

¹⁷Prouty, p. 100.

¹⁸Brooke, p. 211.

¹⁹Brooke, p. 211.

²⁰Prouty, p. 42.

Chapter V: Looking Beyond Intrigue

¹Farnham, pp. 427-28.

²Martin Holmes, Shakespeare's Public: The Touchstone of His Genius (London: John Murray Press, 1960), p. 7.

³Holmes, p. 158.

⁴Holmes, pp. 5-6.

⁵Prouty, pp. 91-101.

⁶Harbage, William Shakespeare, p. 1126.

⁷Brooke, p. 215.

⁸Cazamian and Legouis, pp. 396-97.

⁹Ornstein and Spencer, p. ix.

¹⁰Ornstein and Spencer, p. ix.

¹¹Harbage, Shakespeare Without Words, p. 92.

¹²Harbage, Shakespeare Without Words, p. 97.

¹³Prouty, p. 15.

¹⁴Prouty, p. 3.

Chapter VI: The Question Answered

¹Donald Clive Stuart, The Development of Dramatic Art (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1928), p. 219.

²Stuart, p. 218.

³Ornstein and Spencer, p. 3.

⁴Harbage, William Shakespeare, "Hamlet, Prince of Denmark", p. 955. III, ii, 1282.

⁵Prouty, p. 89.

⁶Stuart, pp. 213-19, 226.

⁷Holmes, p. 7.

⁸Holmes, p. 8.

⁹Stuart, pp. 205-06.

¹⁰Holmes, p. 8.

¹¹Farnham, p. 394.

¹²Ribner, p. 15.

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