

**REVENGE TRAGEDY AND IDENTITY**

**by**

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis attempts a reading of Revenge Tragedy using concepts found in Psychoanalytic theory to explore the idea of identity formation. Revenge tragedy was a popular form of drama in the Jacobean period, although the first revenge play, *The Spanish Tragedy* was written before the end of the sixteenth century. Revenge tragedies feature an individual who takes private action for a crime committed against a loved one, usually because he/she is denied legitimate justice. This type of drama is said to reflect the anxieties of its age, one of which is the question of identity.

Identity is also a major concern of psychoanalytic theory, in which the self is not a stable or unified entity since the human subject is constituted through the representational dynamics of desire itself. According to Freud, the core of selfhood resides within the ego which mediates between the desires of the id and external reality. Lacan reformulates Freud's concept of the ego through identity formation which occurs through a series of identifications with objects of the external world.

Such concepts are examined, then tested against revenge tragedies where the revenger uses role play and identification to refashion the self so that vengeance can be obtained.

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## INTRODUCTION

Jacobean tragedy has been described by Lever (1971) as “the tragedy of state” while Dollimore (1984) introduced the term “radical tragedy” Among the reasons cited for these related descriptions of Jacobean tragedy is the evidence of the decentered subject (normally the protagonist) in these tragedies as well as the influence of external forces, especially the state, in the formation of selfhood. Dollimore (1984) contends: “Because informed by contradictory social and ideological processes, the subject [in these tragedies] is never an indivisible unity, never an autonomous, self-determining centre of consciousness” (p. 269). Instead, human consciousness is determined by social being (p. 153). Revenge tragedy, which was popular during this period, enacts the degeneration of the revenger as he falls victim to injustice, and the resulting conflict which pitches the desires of the individual against a higher earthly power who offers no legitimate access to the fulfillment of these desires. Having no recourse to justice, the subject in these tragedies loses self-autonomy as a result of which he needs to refashion the self in order to achieve his desire for blood revenge.

The keynote of Jacobean tragedy was therefore its contrast between the state of outward seeming and the inner monarchy of man, which resisted tyranny in various ways (Lever, 1971, p. 6). Contrary to the Aristotelian concept of tragedy however, Lever points out that the protagonists in Jacobean tragedy meet with their downfall not through an inherent flaw in character (*hamartia* or error of judgement) but because of the world they inhabit. While the circumstances confronting the respective revengers might command more attention for Lever than the individual character study, it has to be pointed out that to some extent, the circumstances in these plays are as they are *because* of the individual characters. We might speculate that the tragedy of *Hamlet* would have taken a different turn if the protagonist had been, say, Othello. By this I mean that if we were to transpose the character of Othello (as he is portrayed in the play *Othello*) and put him in the situation faced by Hamlet, where he is told by the ghost of his murdered father to “Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder” (*Hamlet*, I.V.25) and what’s more, have the identity of his father’s murderer disclosed to him at the same time, the Moor’s warrior

spirit would never have allowed Claudius to live as long as he does in *Hamlet*. The basic premise of the revenge plot, by contrast, is generally similar by convention. Thus, a discussion of revenge tragedy which ignores the human dimension, while possible and definitely plausible, would nevertheless be somewhat selective and thereby limited in scope.

Brooks (1987) in arguing for a “psychoanalytical literary criticism” states that the traditional application of psychoanalysis to literary study has mistaken the object of analysis, focussing on the author, the reader or the fictive characters in the text. This misrecognition has resulted in interpretations of literary texts which essentially miss the point of psychoanalysis as a tool of literary criticism. He suggests that classical psychoanalytic criticism does not exploit the full potential of psychoanalytic theory as it simply displaces the object of analysis to some person (i.e. the author, reader or fictive character) without paying due attention to the primary source, which is the text itself (p.2). Brooks thus suggests that instead of trying to explain literary texts using psychoanalysis as a tool, the critic should view the relationship between literature and psychoanalysis as a negotiation between the two fields, an encounter which can prove mutually illuminating. This view had previously been expressed by Felman (1977): “What the literary critic might thus wish, is to initiate a real exchange, to engage in a real dialogue between literature and psychoanalysis, as between two different bodies of language and between two different modes of knowledge” (p. 6).

To expand on Felman’s suggestion, Brooks argues that psychoanalytical criticism can and should be textual and rhetorical because the structure of literature is in some sense the structure of the mind, and as such, affords access to the way human desires really operate. He thus describes the relationship between human fiction-making and psychic processes as “convergent activities and superimposable forms of analysis” (p. 9). This evokes the psychoanalytical concept of transference to describe the encounter between reader and text, where the reader rethinks, reorders and interprets based on the discourse of the text. Laplanche and Pontalis (1983) define transference as “a process of actualisation of unconscious wishes” (p. 455). The text functions as the analyst whereby

it constructs a hypothetical piece of narrative which is communicated to the reader (analysand) so that it may work upon him. As in the psychoanalytic situation of transference, the reliving and reinterpretation of life's experiences through the "mastery of resistances and the lifting of repressions" which occurs via the working out of the text can help the reader to rephrase his perceptions and submit to the power of the text's conviction (Brooks, 1987, p. 12).

While Brooks' argument for a structural application of psychoanalysis to literature may help to illuminate our understanding of the working of the human mind, and offer some form of explanation for the attraction that fiction holds for us, it provides no explanation for the pleasurable effect of tragic drama on the spectator. It is assumed that Brooks does not take drama into account in this essay because the focus is on the structure of narrative. Nevertheless, as the notion of structure is not unique to narrative alone, Brooks' formulation can be and should be applied to drama as well. While acknowledging the correspondence between form in drama and the structure of mental life, we should not ignore the content of drama, which is essentially human experience reconstructed through characters onstage.

Freud, following Aristotle, points out that the purpose of drama is "a question of opening up sources of pleasure or enjoyment in our emotional life" by "the process of getting rid of one's own emotions" (*Psychopathic Characters on the Stage*, 1942, p. 121). The experience of being a spectator in a play is similar to the gratification that children achieve through play, an imitation of grown-up life. Witnessing a play, in other words, allows the spectator to identify himself with a character on the stage (usually the protagonist). Aristotle is said to have approved of the cathartic effect which tragedy can bring, as the experience of emotions such as pity and fear while watching a tragedy can discharge the tendency to experience such emotions in excess (Heath, 1996, pp. xxxv-xlii), which in turn leaves the emotion in a more balanced state. By relieving the mind of excessive emotion, catharsis (or *katharsis*) brings pleasure: and since catharsis is achieved through the witnessing of tragedy, then tragedy too must ultimately bring pleasure. This pleasure is achieved however, only after the spectator has suffered during



the course of witnessing the tragedy. The process is thus remarkably similar to the trade-off which Freud contends is made by the ego in surrendering to the reality principle: a momentary unpleasure is tolerated in order to gain an assured pleasure at a later time (*Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning*, 1911, p. 41). The medium through which the suffering is conveyed is of course, the dramatic character on the stage. Because of this negotiation between spectator and text as embodied in character, the application of psychoanalysis to drama must necessarily include a study of character if it is to be of any value.

In studying dramatic character one is led inevitably to notions of the self and identity, a major concern of psychoanalytic theory. Elliott (1994) summarises this concept using Freudian terminology: "In psychoanalytic terms, the self is not a stable or unified entity. Rather, the human subject is constituted to its roots through the representational dynamics of desire itself ... we cannot really speak of the self outside desire, fantasy, sexuality, and ... identification ..." (p. 2). Freudian theory posits three agencies within the structure of the mind: the id, which is made up of purely unconscious instinctual drives, the ego which is the organized realistic part, and the super-ego which is essentially the conscience. The ego, as mediator between the desires of the id and external reality represents the core of the formation of selfhood within the individual, as the self can only come into being by differentiating itself in relation to an other. Identity thus has to be created by the individual (Elliott, 1994, p. 13). Lacan later re-reads Freud's theories of the ego and attempts a reformulation of the concept of the ego via identity formation "Because the ego is formed from the outside world, individuals depend on one another for "self" validation throughout life ... This means that no person's ego is ever whole or autonomous" (Ragland, 1995, p. 19). Individual subjectivity according to Lacan depends on external reality, specifically as defined in the order of language. The ego is formed primarily through a series of identifications with the objects of the external world because it (the ego) lacks innate being.

Since Lacan's concept of identity formation was made possible by his reformulation of Freud's controversial theory of the death drive, this same theory will serve as a starting

point for this project's inquiry into revenge tragedy, psychoanalytic theory and identity. Dollimore (1996) states, "[The] perceived links between death, desire, and language connect revealingly with what, in modern theory, is variously called the subversion, the death, or the decentering of the subject" (p. 369). Drama of the Jacobean period reflects a poverty of spirit, a mood of spiritual despair and a preoccupation with violence and death. Freud records a similar movement in his thinking, beginning from the essay *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920). Where his earlier writings were concerned with the conflict between the sexual instincts and the ego-instincts, the later phase pitted the life instincts (Eros) against the death drive (Thanatos) in the attempt to account for human mental processes in the face of external pressures. Three centuries before Freud, Jacobean dramatists had explored similar concerns. The term "Jacobean" in this project does not correspond to the accession of the monarch James I, as I will be looking at two plays which were written before 1603; rather, the use of the term here refers to that theatrical style and temper which evokes "cynical disillusionment commonly associated with the epithet 'Jacobean'..." (Salgado, 1980, p. 85). Such a mood was apparent in plays like *The Spanish Tragedy*, *Hamlet* and *Antonio's Revenge*, all of which had already been performed before the sixteenth century closed. Thus, as Salgado notes, this darker mood of the drama belongs as much to the later 1590s as to the Jacobean era proper. A reading of revenge tragedy in the light of psychoanalytical formulations which posit a primordial death drive in man might therefore provide some insight into the manner of conflict faced by Jacobean man as communicated through the drama of the period. At the same time, it is hoped that re-reading Freud in the light of revenge tragedy will disclose the extent to which psychoanalytical theory may plausibly be applied to literary texts without speculating at the socio-historical factors surrounding the composition of these plays. As such, this hopes to be as much a reading of psychoanalytical theory in the light of revenge tragedy as a reading of revenge tragedy in the light of psychoanalytical theory.

The main concern of this project will be to examine the concept of identity-formation as implied in the character of the revenge figure. An attempt will be made to follow the creation of the subject in Freudian (and Lacanian) psychoanalysis to compare it with the representation of the subject in revenge tragedy, as there appears to be a parallel between

the two. The idea which links them is the fact that in both psychoanalysis and revenge tragedy the notion of the unified subject is an illusion: the subject does not exist as an autonomous entity in either. Formed through a series of identifications and misrecognitions, the subject does not possess a stable identity. A tentative analogy will be drawn between the formation of the subject (the ego) with the experience of the revenger in Jacobean revenge tragedy. The revengers are not essentially murderers or villains to whom evil is second nature. However, they are unable to obtain justice for a wrong committed upon a loved one, and this effectively forces them to take the law into their own hands. Using the analogy of ego formation I will attempt to trace the metamorphosis of the character of the revenger who uses madness, disguise and role-playing to recreate identity. To examine this issue, the revengers will be perceived as characters in their own right. However, following Lever's suggestion, attention will be paid mainly to the quality of their responses to their respective situations, not as a means of drawing moral conclusions but as a study in human behaviour. Three revenge plays will be examined: *The Spanish Tragedy*, *Antonio's Revenge* and *The Revenger's Tragedy*.

## CHAPTER ONE

### FREUD, DEATH AND THE EGO

In *Freud's Masterplot* Peter Brooks (1977) ties Freud's speculations in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) to the structure of narrative plot. He quotes Barthes who argued in *SZ* that "the passion that animates us as readers of narrative is the passion for (of) meaning" where "meaning [for Barthes] resides in full predication, completion of the codes in a "plenitude" of signification" and as such, "this passion appears to be finally a desire for the end" for "[i]t is at the end ... that recognition brings its illumination" (p. 282). For Brooks therefore, "[t]he sense of beginning ... is determined by the sense of an ending." He then links this with "the human end" : "All narration is obituary in that life acquires definable meaning only at, and through, death." Death here need not necessarily be confined to its biological sense, for the very act of expressing something in language implies its absence, its death: "the symbol manifests itself first of all as the murder of the thing." Catherine Belsey (1994) explains that "[l]anguage erases even as it creates. The signifier replaces the object it identifies as a separate entity; the linguistic symbol supplants what it names and differentiates, relegates it to a limbo beyond language where it becomes inaccessible, lost ..." (p. 55). From his reading of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Brooks points out that Freud's discovery of the primacy of the act of repetition can also be applied to narration in that "[n]arrative always makes the implicit claim to be in a state of repetition, as a going over again of a ground already covered ..." Repetition is also constantly present in our experience of literary texts: "rhyme, alliteration, assonance, meter, refrain, all the mnemonic elements of fictions ... are in some manner repetitions which take us back in the text ..." (1977, p. 289). Linking devices such as ellipsis perform a similar function. Although drama differs from narrative fiction in that the action is played out before an audience rather than narrated (as in a novel or short story), there still exists the element of narrative in most drama, the recounting of events or feelings of the characters, and hence the act of repetition. The added value of drama is that this repetition can be witnessed or detected not only in the words of the characters but also in their actions.

How does the repetition compulsion tie in with the death drive (or instinct) in narration? Freud defined the term *instinct* as "an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things" (quoted in Brooks, 1977, p. 290). The truth in this statement can be witnessed even in ordinary, every day life where routine appears to be a prerequisite for the

stable existence of most humans. Given the inevitability of death as the end of all life, what is the purpose of all routine, all efforts to “get on with life”, if not death? Storr (1968) however, disagrees with Freud’s hypothesis of the death drive by contending that the aggressive drive (which is a manifestation of the death drive, according to Freud) performs a biological function in terms of the preservation of the individual and of the human species, and therefore, cannot be viewed as self-destructive. At the risk of appearing to argue in circles it must nevertheless be pointed out that paradoxically, since death is the one thing in life that we can be sure of, everything we do and hence certainly all our self-preservative instincts ultimately “function to ensure that the organism shall follow its own path to death” Hence, “the aim of all life is death” Brooks (1977) ties this in with the narrative text by stating that “[w]hat operates in the text through repetition is the death instinct, the drive toward the end”, literally, the end of the story. For “the desire of the text (the desire of reading) is ... desire for the end ... ” (p. 292). When we read fiction we want to know what happens at the end. Similarly, in drama, an audience wants to know what happens to the protagonist at the end of the play. A.D. Nuttall, in his essay *Why Does Tragedy Give Pleasure?* (1996) states that tragedy leads always to a conclusion: “Of all the literary genres tragedy is the one which lays the heaviest emphasis on ending, and the ending is a mimesis of a death. In so far as we sympathise, we experience the dying but of course we do not die” (p. 78). This provides a first clue as to the link between tragedy and death, and the audience’s negotiation of the two: it is a process of identifying with the portrayal onstage.

Before embarking upon an examination of the workings of the death drive (demonstrated in the form of repetition compulsion) in narration, specifically in dramatic action, it would be useful to summarise the main points in Freud’s essay *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) where he first introduces the concept of the death drive. In this essay Freud recaps what he believed to be the role of the pleasure principle in regulating mental activity. He believed that the main function of mental activity was the lowering of unpleasurable tension: “In the theory of psychoanalysis we have no hesitation in assuming that the course taken by mental events is automatically regulated by the pleasure principle. We believe ... that the course of those events is invariably set in motion by an unpleasurable tension, and that it takes a direction such that its final outcome coincides with a lowering of that tension - that is, with an avoidance of unpleasure or a production of pleasure” (p. 275). Feelings of pleasure and unpleasure were related to the quantity of excitation in the mind, whereby unpleasure

corresponded to an increase in the quantity of excitation while pleasure resulted from its diminution. The aim of the mental apparatus, therefore, according to Freud, was to keep the quantity of excitation present in it as low as possible or at least, to keep it constant - this constituted the pleasure principle (which followed from the constancy or 'Nirvana' principle). He conceded, nevertheless, that it would be incorrect to assume the dominance of the pleasure principle over the course of all mental processes for if such a dominance existed, the majority of our mental processes would be pleasurable, whereas universal experience contradicts such a conclusion: "The most that can be said ... is that there exists in the mind a strong *tendency* towards the pleasure principle, but that that tendency is opposed by certain other forces or circumstances so that the final outcome cannot always be in harmony with the tendency towards pleasure" (p. 278, Freud's emphasis). He then went on to provide an example of the inhibition of the pleasure principle in daily life, namely the force of the reality principle, which is essentially the curbing of primary instincts to conform to external conditions, under the ego's quest for self-preservation. The reality principle is effected by, among other methods, the postponement of satisfaction and the temporary toleration of unpleasure. However, Freud was not satisfied that this reality principle alone was responsible for all the experiences of unpleasure faced by any individual. He found that victims of traumatic neurosis had recurring dreams where they were repeatedly brought back into the accidents which had caused the trauma. The traumatised mind, in other words, was fixated to its trauma, thus constantly subjecting itself to unpleasure. Similar findings were recorded with respect to victims of war neuroses. Such clinical evidence contradicted Freud's initial hypothesis of the wish-fulfilling function, and by extension, pleasure seeking role played by dreams.

The next piece of evidence Freud evoked which appeared to contradict the pleasure principle was the *fort-da* game he observed in his little grandson. Here, the boy was seen to derive satisfaction from throwing a wooden reel (which had a piece of string tied to it) into his cot then pulling it out of the cot again so that it would reappear. Freud interpreted this game as the staging of the disappearance (and reappearance) of the boy's mother, and his attempt at mastering that situation. Nevertheless, he wondered how this repetition of a distressing experience as a game could fit in with the pleasure principle. He could only conclude that there must be another instinct which influenced mental activity, an instinct more primeval than, and independent of, the pleasure principle. This instinct was characterised, Freud found, by a compulsion to repeat which overrides the pleasure

principle in that what was repeated was not always a source of pleasure. Freud thus combined the notion of instinct with the compulsion to repeat and came up with "... a universal attribute of instincts and perhaps of organic life in general ... [namely] *that an instinct is an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things* which the living entity has been obliged to abandon under the pressure of external disturbing forces; that is, it is ... the expression of the inertia inherent in organic life" (p. 308, Freud's emphasis). Based on this idea of the conservative nature of organic instincts, the aim of the living entity must therefore be, by following through Freud's logic, to return to an initial state i.e. become inorganic once again since "... '*inanimate things existed before living ones*'" (p. 311, Freud's emphasis). Thus Freud was "... compelled to say that '*the aim of all life is death*'..." (ibid.). Once the entity has achieved its aim (death), there would of course be no possibility for excessive excitation to threaten the equilibrium of the mental apparatus. Death therefore, was the ultimate condition which would ensure that the mental apparatus was maintained in a condition of minimal tension; hence, to Freud, this was the Nirvana towards which all living organisms must surely aspire. Bearing in mind that Freud linked pleasure to the diminution of excitation within the mental apparatus, this proposed universal aim of instincts would indeed appear to comply with the pleasure principle. The conclusion which can be drawn from all this is that the death instinct, which strives to keep the quantity of excitation within the mind at a minimal level, serves to uphold the pleasure principle. However, Freud states this conclusion in the reverse. At the end of the essay, we are told that "[t]he pleasure principle seems actually to serve the death instincts" (p. 338). This shows that to Freud, the death instinct is more primordial than the pleasure principle; this is reflected in the title of the essay, which locates in the death drive something beyond the pleasure principle, something perhaps even independent of the obtaining of pleasure (in Freud's sense of the word), something which cannot be explained away by the pleasure principle. However, as will be shown, the pleasure principle and the death drive are actually closely linked, for in keeping with Freud's logic, it would appear that in achieving pleasure (again, as Freud defined it) the mental apparatus actually serves the death instinct.

In considering the relationship between the death drive and fiction it is useful to bear in mind a little reminder Freud provides which links his speculations on the nature of children's play with the repetition compulsion. In his discussion of the *fort-da* game, one of the explanations suggested for the behaviour of the boy was that this game was the repetition of an unpleasurable experience (the child being left by his mother) as an attempt

at mastering the situation and as such, this would yield some form of pleasure (enjoyment). Borch-Jacobsen (1989) in contrast, sets aside the notion of pleasure and suggests instead that the repetition phenomena “stem from mimesis, from the *ambivalence* of the identification with the other, and, especially, from the reversibility of that identification” (p. 32, his emphasis). This conclusion however, can only be arrived at “... once we recognise that desire is not governed above all by the obtaining of pleasure, but by an identificatory model.” This is because mimesis, says Borch-Jacobsen, has no goal of its own and as such, is indifferent with respect to pleasure and unpleasure - hence it lies “beyond” the pleasure principle. According to this view therefore, the child who throws the wooden reel so that it disappears over the edge of his cot is actually identifying with his mother and “...treating [his toys] the way his mother treats him” i.e. leaving him. The child is thus “playing at being his mother, and in so doing, *identifying* with her; he loses himself in the very gesture through which he is attempting to constitute himself as a proper subject, an autonomous ... subject” (p. 33). Freud interpreted the *fort-da* game as an active attempt on the part of the child at mastering the (unpleasant) situation: “... by *desiring to repeat* the painful experience, he would not suffer or be subjected to it [the pain of the experience]” (ibid., emphasis added) -and since this painful experience is willed upon himself by the child, it serves his own purpose, which lies beyond the simple attainment of pleasure. A link is thus established between the manifestation of the death drive, i.e. the repetition compulsion, with the formation of identity, which lies beyond the pleasure principle.

Similarly, in artistic imitation such as tragedy the audience derives enjoyment from the aesthetic mastery of painful experiences of loss re-enacted for them onstage (Ellman, 1994, p. 7). The desire for the end in tragedy is not only the desire for denouement but also for catharsis. Nuttall (1996) explores the Aristotelian concept of catharsis in an attempt to account for the element of pleasure derived by the spectator of tragic drama. He argues for what he terms the ‘medical’ interpretation of catharsis i.e. ‘purgation’ He claims that to Aristotle, it is the purgation of emotions, such as pity or fear, which brings pleasure to the spectator. The emotions, in other words, “... are, precisely, the impurity which is removed” (p. 6). This is necessary for the well-being of the person, for “... as the body seeks to ease its load of waste matter, so the soul ... seeks to ease its burden of emotion” (p. 36). He also stresses that in Aristotle’s scheme of things it is the feelings of the audience which are aroused and purged by the action of tragedy, not those of the characters. A precondition, however, is that the suffering represented onstage must be known to be just that: “ ...



however mirror-like [the] scheme of representation, the representative sign must be distinguishable, as having a sign-like character, from the thing it signifies ..." (p. 17). In this way, according to Nuttall's interpretation of Aristotle's *Poetics*, the poet imitates the real world, but does so in the hypothetical mode: the sequence of events must be probable rather than actual to enable "the delight of tragedy" as Samuel Johnson termed it, for if the spectator thought that say, a man was really being stabbed to death onstage, it is somewhat unlikely that he/she could actually derive pleasure from being a witness to such brutality. To quote Dr Johnson: "[t]he delight of tragedy proceeds from our consciousness of fiction; if we thought murders and treasons real, they would please no more" (quoted in Nuttall, p. 17). The function of tragic drama is thus to activate the emotions (through a fictional or hypothetical situation) to enable them to be discharged while tragic pleasure "... consists ... in a *psychic discharge* ..." (p. 39, emphasis added). If we accept Freud's contention in *Psychopathic Characters on the Stage* (1905-6) that drama, of which the subject matter is suffering, allows the spectator to derive some form of pleasure through identifying himself/herself with the hero, then it follows that it is mainly self-inflicted suffering (since there is no external compulsion to witness the play) which gives the audience pleasure. This suffering, which manifests itself in various forms such as fear, anxiety or sorrow would, to use Freud's language of psychic energetics, increase the quantity of excitation within the psychical system. Drawing on Freud's argument for his theory of the death drive (the compulsion to repeat/replay in the mind unpleasurable experiences which he viewed as evidence of a masochistic tendency on the part of the ego) can we view the enjoyment of drama, particularly tragedy, as a form of manifestation of the death drive, at least on the part of the play-goer?

In an attempt to follow the progress of Freud's theorising on the nature of instincts, of which his formulations in the essay *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* marked a turning point, it is necessary to outline briefly, from his earlier writing, his speculations on the nature of mental functioning in which he attempted to explain the nature of both the normal as well as neurotic psyche. Bearing in mind Freud's aim in positing the opposition between the death drive and the life instincts, which is ultimately to account for the (conflict in the) human psyche which results in neurosis, this study of Freud's writing will have two aims, namely to attempt a reading of the theory of the death drive, as well as to locate the function of the ego within this scheme of things since it has been described as the defensive pole of the personality in neurotic conflict: "... it [the ego] brings a set of defensive

mechanisms into play which are motivated by the perception of an unpleasurable affect ...” (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1983, p. 130). If there is truth in Brooks’ contention that the structure of literature mirrors the structure of the mind then it would appear that tragedy essentially reflects man’s (innate?) desire for suffering and death.

Since Freud titled his essay *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, it might be helpful to begin the study by considering the concept of the pleasure principle. Laplanche and Pontalis (1983) give the following definition : “One of the two principles which, according to Freud, govern mental functioning: the whole of psychological activity is aimed at avoiding unpleasure and procuring pleasure” (p. 322). The next question would thus be, what is the significance of the pleasure principle in regulating mental functioning? The essay *Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning* (1911) explores the distinction between the regulating principles (the pleasure principle and the reality principle) which affect mental processes. Having defined the pleasure principle, the concept of the reality principle, too, needs a definition: “One of the two principles which for Freud govern mental functioning. The reality principle is coupled with the pleasure principle, which it modifies: in so far as it succeeds in establishing its dominance as a regulatory principle, the search for satisfaction does not take the most direct routes but instead makes detours and postpones the attainment of its goal according to the conditions imposed by the outside world” (Laplanche and Pontalis, p. 379). In the essay mentioned above, Freud (1911) acknowledges the significance of the external world on the mental state of the individual, as observed in cases of neurosis “ ... every neurosis has as its result, and probably therefore as its purpose, a forcing of the patient out of real life, an alienating of him from reality. ... Neurotics turn away from reality because they find it unbearable ...” (p. 35).

To understand mental functioning, psychoanalysis takes unconscious mental processes to be the older, primary processes which are “ ... the residues of a phase of development in which they were the only kind of mental process” [in childhood] (p. 36). The point to be noted about these primary mental processes is that they are governed by the pleasure principle in that they strive towards gaining pleasure while drawing back from any event which might arouse unpleasure - and it is in the course of these mental processes that repression is introduced, which functions to enable the mind to avoid eventual unpleasure. It would appear that repression occurs in the development of the subject at a very early stage - although the repression referred to here would appear to be concerned mainly with

the sexual instincts. In Freud's scheme of things, the term "sexuality" is not to be confined to one particular field, namely genital sexuality. Brown (1959) using Freud's theories on infantile sexual development argues that "... the pattern of normal adult sexuality is not a natural (biological) necessity but a cultural phenomenon" (p. 24) devised for propagating the species, while Freud, by contrast, intends a more general definition of the sexual instinct: "... the energy or desire with which the human being pursues pleasure, with the further specification that the pleasure sought is the pleasurable activity of an organ of the human body" (p. 26) - any organ of the human body. As the child matures and conforms to culture and civilisation, which narrow the field of sexuality to the function of reproduction, however, he has to repress this (wide encompassing form of) sexuality, pushing it into the unconscious. This is why Freud posits in his theory of psychoanalysis that dreams and neurotic symptoms are evidence of the adult's repressed sexuality; besides that, his theory implies that the notion of (adult) sexual perversion is really an indication of the repressive influence of social forces.

Brown (1959) recaps the Freudian notion of infantile sexuality as "... nothing more or less than delight in the active life of all the human body" (p.30) - a view similar to the one held by the poets of the Romantic period. His theory of infantile sexuality is thus "... essentially a scientific reformulation and reaffirmation of the religious and poetical theme of the innocence of childhood" (p. 32). Freud's theory has at its core a biological basis in that it takes into consideration the prolongation of infancy in the human species, which enables infantile sexuality (in his sense of the term) to achieve a full bloom before the onset of puberty and the consequent narrowing of sexuality to its genital function. This is why there is a conflict in the sexual life of man "In man infantile sexuality is repressed and never outgrown ..." ( *ibid.*, p. 28). Thus to Freud, "the theory of repression is the corner-stone on which the whole structure of psychoanalysis rests" (quoted in the Editor's Note to *Repression*, 1915*b*, p. 141). The biological, inevitably, encroaches on the psychological. With the process of maturation the child's psychological apparatus is denied the constant satisfaction and pleasure it seeks. He/she needs to negotiate the real circumstances in the external world and endeavour to make real alterations in them (*Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning*, 1911, p. 36). This necessitates the introduction of reality to the mind (the setting up of the reality principle), even if it happens to be disagreeable. It is here that Freud introduces the notion of the ego. Laplanche (1976) summarises three perspectives from which the ego can be defined as "the special prolongation of the

individual” (p. 51) : in terms of its genesis, its situation in neurotic and psychotic conflict (the dynamic perspective) and in terms of the energy disposed of in the midst of conflict.

The ego is said to emerge when the individual comes into contact with the external world. In Part IV of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Freud suggests a model of the ego where a portion of the mental apparatus, upon the impact of shocks coming from the external world, is differentiated and forms a kind of perceptual and protective envelope. Reality is seen to exert some kind of force which compels the ego to act upon the instinctual drives of the id and endeavour “to substitute the reality principle for the pleasure principle which reigns supreme in the id” (quoted in Laplanche, p. 53). With the advent of the reality principle, the sensory organs take on a more active role in bringing to the attention of consciousness other qualities aside from pleasure available in the external world. With this development, motor discharge is converted into action in the bid to alter reality; at the same time, thinking is pressed into service as “an experimental kind of acting” (Freud, 1911, p. 38). It appears that the ego is somehow plugged directly into reality by virtue of what Freud terms the Perception-Consciousness System and the sensory organs. This enables the ego to carry out “a testing of reality”, which Laplanche explains as “correcting the distortion imposed on reality by our desires” This correction is achieved by disposing of an amount of energy contained in the drives of the id, which is why Laplanche conceives of the ego as “a transmitter of the id’s “vital” energy, which it purifies, dominates, and channels as best it can”. It would appear that reality is the main factor which causes the mind to think. Freud remarks that “[i]t is probable that thinking was *originally unconscious*, in so far as it went beyond mere ideational presentations and was directed to the relations between impressions of objects, and that it did not acquire further qualities, perceptible to consciousness, until it became bound to *verbal residues*.” (Freud, 1911, p. 39, emphasis added). Clearly, Freud acknowledges the role of language in representing to the conscious mind thoughts which originate from impressions of objects gathered through the sensory organs. The question thus arises as to the nature of the material which is repressed (the id’s “vital” energy which is converted by the ego) - that is, whether it remains in the form of sensory impressions, or whether it is converted through the medium of language into thoughts then repressed because it does not fit in with the reality principle. In other words, is repression a conscious mental process (since thoughts have to be verbalised in order to be brought to the attention of consciousness)?

In a later essay, *Repression* (1915b), we find that the concept of repression is to be applied to the instinctual impulses. Freud had earlier described the nature of ‘instincts’ in *Instincts and their Vicissitudes* (1915a) as originating in sources of stimulation within the organism itself, and appearing in the form of a constant force. ‘Instinctual stimulus’ is thus better described as ‘need’, which can only be appeased by satisfaction. To Freud, instinctual stimuli contribute a great deal to the development of the nervous system which in turn, cause the individual “... to undertake involved and interconnected activities by which the external world is so changed as to afford satisfaction to the internal source of stimulation” (1915a, p. 116). This is because the nervous system functions to rid itself of the stimuli, or reduce them to the lowest possible levels. As usual, Freud is still concerned with maintaining the primacy of the pleasure principle in regulating mental functioning. He claims that unpleasurable feelings are connected with an increase in stimulus while pleasurable feelings correspond to a decrease. Thus, he concludes that “[t]he aim of an instinct is in every instance satisfaction, which can only be obtained by removing the state of stimulation at the source of the instinct” (ibid., p. 119). Repression comes into the picture when the satisfaction of an instinctive impulse, and therefore, the achievement of pleasure, would be possible but irreconcilable with other claims and intentions, thus causing pleasure in one place but unpleasure in another (1915b, p. 146). A condition for repression therefore is that the threat of unpleasure far outweighs the pleasure obtainable from the satisfaction of the instinctual impulse. Thus, *the essence of repression lies simply in turning something away, and keeping it at a distance from the conscious* (ibid., p. 147, Freud’s emphasis). It would appear at first glance, that the act of repression cannot involve consciousness, since the instinctual impulse which is repressed within the ego has to be prevented from reaching the conscious mind. Hence, “... repression does not hinder the instinctual representative from continuing to exist in the unconscious ... Repression in fact interferes only with the relation of the instinctual representative to one psychical system, namely, to that of the conscious” (ibid., p. 148). Can we thus take it one step further and equate the unconscious with the repressed?

To answer this, we need to look at Freud’s more exhaustive formulation on the nature of the unconscious - *The Unconscious* (1915c). Freud states again that “... thought processes, i.e. those acts of cathexis which are comparatively remote from perception, are in themselves without quality and unconscious, and ... they attain their capacity to become conscious only through being linked with the residues of perception of words ... [B]y

being linked with words, cathexes can be provided with quality even when they represent only relations between presentations of objects and are thus unable to derive any quality from perceptions” (1915c, p. 208). Here again, Freud states that language is the means by which what goes on in the unconscious is represented in consciousness. The term ‘cathexis’ is ubiquitous in Freud’s writing, and Laplanche and Pontalis have pointed out that “[t]he notion of cathexis ... plays a part in Freud’s conceptual apparatus without his ever having given a rigorous theoretical definition of it” (1983, p. 63). Thus, “[t]he concept is generally taken in a metaphorical sense, ... [to] express an analogy between psychological operations and the working of a nervous apparatus conceived of in terms of energy” (ibid.). Presumably the “quality” to which Freud alludes in the sections quoted above denotes a positive load of energy invested in the objects represented in the thought processes. More important than that, it is language (“words”) which enables thoughts to be represented in consciousness. In his theory of the unconscious, Freud reiterates that the essence of repression lies not in annihilating the idea which represents an instinct, but in preventing it from becoming conscious. He also points out that the repressed does not cover everything that is unconscious although the repressed *is a part of the unconscious* (1915c, p. 167, emphasis added). In order to recover the unconscious, its contents have to be transformed or translated into something conscious, or something accessible to the conscious mind, such as dreams. The significance of the reality principle to mental functioning thus, is that with its introduction, one “species” of thought activity is split off and remains subordinated to the pleasure principle alone i.e. the activity of “phantasying” and “day-dreaming” which does not depend on reality.

Returning to the question of the unconscious and the repressed, Freud states later in the lecture “The Dissection of the Psychological Personality” in his *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (1933) that “ ... large portions of the ego and the super-ego can remain unconscious and are normally unconscious [...] ... the individual knows nothing of their contents ... It is a fact that ego and conscious, repressed and unconscious do not coincide” (p. 102). Freud then goes on to differentiate between the permanently unconscious with a psychological process which is unconscious but can easily become conscious again, which he terms “preconscious” The mind is thus divided into the “conscious”, “preconscious” and “unconscious” With this formulation, the notion of being “unconscious” is no longer restricted by Freud to denote a quality, a state of mind but now encompasses the topographical as well : “[we] have used the word more and more to denote a mental

province rather than a quality of what is mental” (p. 104). Since there were portions of the ego and super-ego which remain unconscious, Freud thus needed a different term to designate the permanent unconscious, the province of the mind which is “... alien to the ego” (ibid.) and settled for the term “id” He then describes the nature of the id : “... the dark, inaccessible part of our personality; ... open at its end to somatic influences ... [and hence] filled with energy reaching it from the instincts, but it has no organisation, ... only a striving to bring about the satisfaction of the instinctual needs subject to the observance of the pleasure principle” (p. 106). What then is the repressed and where does it fit into in this scheme of things? To answer this it is necessary to bring the ego into the picture. Freud describes the ego as “... that portion of the id which was modified by the proximity and influence of the external world, which is adapted for the reception of stimuli and as a protective shield against stimuli ...” (p. 108). The ego thus, functions to regulate and control the instinctual needs, which collect in the id. This is achieved by the act of thinking : “The ego controls the approach to motility under the id’s orders; but between a need and an action it has interposed a postponement in the form of the activity of thought ...” (ibid.). This is why Freud summarises the difference between the ego and the id as follows “... we might say that the ego stands for reason and good sense while the id stands for the untamed passions” (p. 109). In bringing reality to bear on the id, the ego often represses the unbound instinctual needs of the id and these merge into the remainder of the id, which is why the repressed remains unconscious.

Laplanche (1976) points out that Freud’s classification of instincts demonstrates an inherent propensity for dualism, for his theory is based on conflict, and conflict involves duality : something is always opposed to the basic instinct, which to Freud, is sexuality. Brown (1959) similarly, states that “[t]he dynamic relation between the unconscious and the conscious life is one of conflict, and psychoanalysis is ... a science of mental conflict” (p. 4). He reiterates the importance of the Freudian notion of repression in understanding the unconscious: “Repression is the key word in the whole system; the word is chosen to indicate a structure dynamically based on psychic conflict” (p. 5). Following Freud, he sums up the notion of psychic conflict as follows “The pleasure-principle is in conflict with the reality-principle, and this conflict is the cause of repression” (p. 8). Our wishes and desires aim ultimately to procure pleasure; however, if they do not conform to external factors such as the demands of civilisation and culture they are repressed by the mind - and this, in Freud’s view, can lead to neurosis. At the early stages of Freud’s theorising the

sexual instincts are opposed by the ego-instincts. With the onset of the reality principle in the child, one of the two sets of instincts must necessarily come under its sway. Since at the early stages of the individual's development the sexual instincts (or instincts for sensuality) behave auto-erotically, i.e. obtaining satisfaction from the subject's own body, thereby fulfilling the pleasure principle, this can only mean that it is the ego-instincts which attach themselves to the reality principle. Before proceeding further, the term auto-erotism needs to be clarified at this point. As Laplanche (1976) explains, Freud defined the term as "a sexual activity ... not directed towards other people" (p.18). The implication would be that satisfaction is obtained in the absence of an object i.e. the baby obtains satisfaction from the act of sucking and not from the breast (or bottle, as the case may be). This obtaining of satisfaction for a need (nutrition), is for Freud, the origin of the sexual instinct. According to Laplanche however, auto-erotism is not the initial condition of sexuality: rather, it occurs as a second stage, at the point of the loss of the object, which is actually a displacement i.e. the breast (or the bottle), the source of the actual object which satisfies (milk). This second stage also marks the introduction of desire for the lost object. Thus Freud states in the third essay in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905, quoted in Laplanche, p. 19):

At a time at which the first beginnings of sexual satisfaction are still linked with the taking of nourishment, the sexual instinct has a sexual object outside the infant's own body in the shape of his mother's breast. It is only later that he loses it, just at the time, perhaps, when he is able to form a total idea of the person to whom the organ that is giving him satisfaction belongs. ... [T]he sexual drive then becomes auto-erotic, and not until the period of latency has been passed through is the original relation restored. ... The finding of an object is in fact a re-finding of it.

Freud's last point is clarified by Laplanche (p. 20, his emphasis) as follows :

...[t]he sexual object is not identical to the object of the function [the need for nutrition], but is displaced in relation to it; they are of essential *contiguity* which leads us to slide almost indifferently from one to the other, from the milk to the breast as its symbol ... [thus] the object to be rediscovered is not the lost object but its substitute by displacement; ... [this gives rise to] the impossibility of ultimately ever rediscovering the object since the object which has been lost *is not the same* as that which is to be discovered.



If sexuality represents the model of every drive, any drive which is opposed to it must ultimately, be modelled upon this same drive, yet act in opposition, leading to psychological conflict. In his later formulation of the death drive, Freud will be led to hypothesise the primacy of self-aggression over what Laplanche terms heteroaggression, aggression directed towards another. However, if we bear in mind the fact that auto-erotism is not the initial or primary state of sexuality, then by analogy, we must conclude that self-aggression, as an expression of the death drive can only gain precedence in the psyche in the absence of an object against which aggression may be directed. At the same time, if the object of the sexual drive is based on a form of misrecognition as pointed out above, does this imply that a similar misdirection occurs with respect to the death drive? In which case, the instinct for aggression (as manifestation of the death drive) is directed against some external object, but because its aim is not allowed to be carried through (by a combination of external and internal forces - the consequence of reality) it turns against itself (in a non-sexual form of auto-erotism) as displacement. If this is the case for one instance of the manifestation of the death drive, then it must also work for the other representatives of the death drive which are essentially, centred around the compulsion to repeat (Ricoeur, 1970, p. 281).

To return to the opposition between the pleasure principle and the reality principle: Freud was reluctant at this early stage to renounce completely the importance of the pleasure principle, suggesting instead that the reality principle makes its appearance ultimately in the subject's bid at self-preservation: "...the substitution of the reality principle for the pleasure principle implies no deposing of the pleasure principle, but only a safeguarding of it. A momentary pleasure ... is given up ... only in order to gain along the new path an assured pleasure at a later time" (*Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning*, 1911, p. 41). The ego-instincts are linked to conscious activities which negotiate reality: the ego is transformed from a pleasure-ego into a reality-ego while the sexual instincts remain initially under the dominance of the pleasure principle (through phantasy) and later undergo changes " ... which lead them from their original auto-eroticism through various intermediate phases to object-love in the service of procreation" (*ibid.*, p. 42). The surrender of pleasure therefore, appears to Freud to be a kind of decoy. Elliott (1994, p. 13) suggests that the unconscious (sexual) drives only defer immediate satisfaction in order to achieve a more durable type of pleasure which is attained through the imaginary contours of selfhood. As such, "[p]leasure is not ... defeated; it merely takes new

forms, via the imaginary tribulations of identity” (ibid.). By assigning the negotiation of reality to the ego, which transforms it into a reality-ego from a pleasure-ego, then suggesting that the ego’s surrender to the reality principle is in effect simply a ministration to the pleasure principle in disguise, Freud transfers the psychical workings from the unconscious mental processes onto the (conscious) ego. The ego becomes the site for the development of the subject’s character, for a person’s thoughts and actions, which are an indication of character, are largely influenced by the negotiation which goes on between personal, inner wishes or desires and the myriad of external forces and influences which can perhaps be reduced to the term “reality” However, the unconscious needs which were repressed with the introduction of reality have not been obliterated, according to Freud, but will make their presence known in various forms which escape the censoring mechanism of consciousness. Hence, the occurrence of phenomena like dreams and slips of the tongue. According to this view, the ego nevertheless still pursues pleasure albeit in a different form. It is this quest for pleasure which leads to the development of selfhood. As Freud suggests however, our sense of selfhood is not assigned to us by the external world. Elliott (1994) summarises Freud’s thinking on the topic of identity creation as follows : “ego-formation occurs through the unconscious selecting or screening of objects by *identification*” (p. 13). Here identification refers to the process “...in which the human subject ‘introjects’ attributes of other people and transforms them through the unconscious imagination” (ibid.). The subject incorporates these identifications to form the basis of an ego, hence Elliott’s conclusion that “[i]dentification and incorporation are thus twin-boundary posts in the structuring of identity” (ibid.).

An analogy of the process of identity formation can be found in Freud’s essay on *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917). In this paper, Freud suggests that in melancholia an object-cathexis (a loved one who is ‘lost’ by the subject) is replaced by an identification. This identification is made manifest in the melancholic’s railings against himself: upon closer inspection Freud contends that the melancholic’s self-reproaches “ ... are reproaches against a loved object which have been shifted away from it on to the patient’s own ego” (p. 257). Freud’s explanation of the process is as follows the loss of an object-choice to which an amount of libido was attached does not result in a normal withdrawal of libido from this (lost) object and subsequent displacement on to a new one - instead, libido is withdrawn into the ego. There, it serves to establish an identification of the ego with the abandoned object. Thus the object-loss is transformed into an ego-loss, and the conflict

between the ego and the loved person into a cleavage between the critical activity of the ego and the ego as altered by identification (p. 258). A pre-condition, however, is that the object-choice must have been effected on a narcissistic basis, so that the object-cathexis regresses to narcissism.

To understand the concept of narcissism in object-choice, it is necessary to look at the essay *On Narcissism: An Introduction* (1914) where Freud explains the two ways by which a person may choose a love object: according to the narcissistic type or according to the anaclitic (attachment) type. A love object effected on a narcissistic basis means that the person loves another because he/she represents what he himself is, what he himself was, what he himself would like to be or because he/she is someone who was once part of himself (p. 84). As Freud does not elaborate on each of these types I can only assume that the last love object be understood in the literal sense i.e. as a parent loves his/her own child. Freud suggests in the essay on melancholia that the development of the ego consists in a departure from primary narcissism and gives rise to a vigorous attempt to recover that state (of primary narcissism). One of the means through which this state can be achieved is through object-cathexis, specifically, on to an ego ideal (which presumably has to bear some similarity to the original ego, since it is narcissistic to begin with). When libido is repressed, as when the subject has had to deal with the loss of a loved object, the erotic cathexis is felt as a severe depletion of the ego and the re-enrichment of the ego can be effected only by a withdrawal of libido from its objects and displacement onto the self. Since the melancholic has in essence absorbed his former love object within his own ego, the complaints he appears to be making about himself are actually directed at the other person. This, to Freud, explains why melancholics who appear to be filled with remorse and self-reproach seem to lack feelings of shame, which ought to be characteristic of the condition: on the contrary, they display an “... insistent communicativeness which finds satisfaction in self-exposure” (1917, p. 255). From this, Freud was led to the conclusion that there are different parts of the ego which enable one part to set itself against the other and judge or criticise the other part as if it were an object. He calls this part or agency the conscience. Thus, Freud at this point discerns three separate agencies of the ego: conscience, censorship of consciousness and reality-testing. This division of the ego forms the basis for his (later) reformulations, discussed above, where the psyche is divided into three agencies, namely the id, ego and super-ego.

The essay *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* links the ego with the death drive. In Part VI, Freud, in keeping with his dualistic view of instincts, equates the death instincts with the ego-instincts and opposes them to the sexual instincts. This is because "... the former exercise pressure towards death and the latter towards a prolongation of life" (1920, p. 316). It would be interesting to find out when and from where the ego-instincts originate, since Freud states in the essay *On Narcissism: An Introduction* (1914) that "... we are bound to suppose that a unity comparable to the ego cannot exist in the individual from the start; the ego has to be developed" (1914, p. 69). If the term ego-instincts implies that the instincts proceed forth from the ego (which does not exist in the individual from the start), then these same instincts cannot exist from the outset. However, this is not the case. The ego-instincts are described by Freud as self-preservative (quoted in Editor's Note to *Instincts and their Vicissitudes*, p.111) and the self-preservative instincts originate from the need for nutrition in the infant - the originary instinct in the true sense of the word if we take the meaning of instinct, following Laplanche (1976, p. 16) to be "that which orients the bodily function essential to life" - yet the ego does not exist in the individual from the start. At the same time, it is the self-preservative instincts which engage in conflict with the sexual instincts. For some reason, Freud later coins the term ego-instincts and aligns them with the self-preservative instincts, eventually merging them together. One is led to speculate as to whether this alliance resulted from Freud's positing the ego as an agency of defence in psychical conflict. Laplanche and Pontalis (1983) define the instincts of self-preservation as follows . "Term by which Freud designates all needs associated with bodily functions necessary for the preservation of the individual; hunger provides the model of such instincts" (p. 220). However, from this merging of a biologically-based notion with a "metapsychological" one, a pattern may be discerned in Freud's dialectic : just as in the notion of sexuality, he begins with a biological phenomenon then expands and enlarges his terms of reference to encompass basically anything which can (plausibly) fall within the said terms. Ricoeur (1970) remarks that "Freud's writings present themselves as a mixed or even ambiguous discourse ... [T]here are good grounds for this apparent ambiguity, [namely] that this mixed discourse is the *raison d'etre* of psychoanalysis" (p. 65). Laplanche, similarly, in *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis* (1976) analyses Freud's writing from the angles of "metonymical" and "metaphorical" derivation. In interpreting Freud's writing it would appear that one can approach it from the quasi-biological, the speculative and the metaphorical.

Freud was led to equate the death instincts with the ego-instincts probably because of the function he attributes to the ego with respect to the id: in bringing reality to bear upon the psychological apparatus, the ego disposes of excessive vital energy contained in the id, binding this energy for discharge. Laplanche (1976) links the ego and the id as follows : “These life drives [of the id] are found in desexualized form in the ego; the ego is a transmitter of the id’s “vital” energy, which it purifies, dominates, and channels as best it can” (p. 53). It is the id’s excessive energy which creates tension and excitation within the mental apparatus. Since the ego functions to reduce this energy and its resulting tension , the ego must, following Freud’s logic, be seen to serve the pleasure principle - which in turn, serves the death drive. Freud had earlier described the ego-instincts as self-preservative. The inherent ambiguity of the term “ego-instincts”, which was pointed out earlier, is acknowledged as well by Laplanche and Pontalis (1983) in that these instincts are tendencies emanating from the ego and directed towards external objects but at the same time, they are viewed as attached to the ego as if to their object (p. 147). By aligning these self-preservative instincts with the death-instincts, Freud in effect implies paradoxically that the death instincts actually attempt to preserve the life of the organism. The only way to make sense of this is to read it simultaneously at two separate levels, namely the biological and the dynamic ( i.e. with respect to the discharge of psychic energy). When Freud says that the sexual instincts push towards a prolongation of life he is speaking in terms of biology, for it is the sexual instincts which enable procreation which in turn, ultimately enables the continued existence of the species. When he equates the ego-instincts with the death instincts, on the other hand, he is presumably referring to the action of the ego which binds the excessive energy contained in the id - resulting in the expulsion of the energy and the lowering of psychological tension. Thus he says that : “ ... the life process of the individual leads for internal reasons to an abolition of chemical tensions, that is to say, to death ...” (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 1920, p. 329). Two factors led Freud to the idea of the death drive, namely the repetition of unpleasant memories in the dreams of war neurotics, and the tendency for the psychological apparatus to adhere to the Nirvana principle. The replaying of unpleasant memories in the case of war neurotics subjected the ego to fresh attacks of anxiety, introducing excessive psychic energy into the mental apparatus which was surely an unpleasurable experience. Freud’s attempt to explain this phenomenon however, (unintentionally?) links the death drive to the self-preservative instinct when he maintains that the traumatic neurosis came about because the mind had not been prepared for the influx of stimuli brought on by fright : “It [the element of fright] is caused by lack

of any preparedness for anxiety, including lack of hypercathexis of the systems that would be the first to receive the stimulus. Owing to their low cathexis those systems are not in a good position for binding the inflowing amounts of excitation ... [while] preparedness for anxiety and the hypercathexis of the receptive system constitute the last line of defence of the shield [the ego] against stimuli" (1920, p. 303). The dreams experienced by war neurotics thus "... are endeavouring to master the stimulus retrospectively, by developing the anxiety whose omission was the cause of the traumatic neurosis" (ibid., p. 304). Is not this an attempt at self-preservation? At the same time, as a manifestation of the repetition compulsion, these dreams embody the death drive. The death drive and the self-preservative instinct here seem to serve the same purpose: by repeating the unpleasant memory the mind attempts to develop a defence against excessive stimuli.

Nuttall (1996), in adapting this idea to the use of tragedy for a kind of emotional enrichment, suggests that the pleasure of tragedy may take on a more proactive goal, namely as "practice for crises" (p. 76). Thus the spectator revels not in watching another person suffer per se but by identifying and suffering with the protagonist, purges his/her own emotions (thereby lowering the level of psychic tension) and develops as it were a readiness for similar (future) emotional upheaval: a form of defence for the ego.

Freud appears to have been aware of the paradox inherent in his theory but refused to entertain the possibility that the death drive and the self-preservative instinct could have the same goal. This is why he states that "[w]e were prepared at one stage ... to include the so-called self-preservative instincts of the ego among the death instincts, but we subsequently ... corrected ourselves on this point and withdrew it" (1920, p. 326). At the same time, he concedes that "... we cannot ascribe to the sexual instinct the characteristic of a compulsion to repeat which first puts us on the track of the death instincts" (ibid., p. 329). That being the case, the logical step would have been to abandon the theory altogether - but Freud holds fast to it. Laplanche and Pontalis (1983) suggest that the introduction of the death instinct was a structurally necessary response in the evolution of Freud's thought in the 1920s. They posit that the need for the theory of the death instinct had already been made apparent in Freud's earlier theoretical models. Freud could not account for the repetition phenomena in terms of the pleasure principle except to conclude that whatever psychical force induced this phenomenon must necessarily operate in opposition to the pleasure principle. Thus, "... this hypothesis, pushed in turn to its logical conclusion, led him to see the death instinct as the very epitome of instinct" (p. 98). It was also

inconceivable to Freud that hate could be derived from the sexual instincts. Laplanche quotes Freud (1915a) in *Instincts and their Vicissitudes* as stating that “... the true prototypes of the relation of hate are derived not from sexual life, but from the ego’s struggle to preserve and maintain itself” (p. 99).

With the introduction of the concept of narcissism, where sexual drives are directed toward the self, a pattern of psychic circularity was identified by Freud, as pointed out by Williams (1995) where the repetitious nature of war trauma, the child’s ‘*fort-da*’ game as well as the recreation in some analytic situations of the patient’s most disturbing experiences all point to a deflection of psychic darkness on to the self (p. 157). According to Williams, the value of these repetitions is initially to be found in the 1914 paper on technique *Remembering, Repeating, Working-Through*, in which it is suggested that the compulsion to repeat forms part of the process of healing. If repetition is part of the process of healing, it again amounts to an attempt at self-preservation and as such, serves the death instinct.

However, since Freud was unwilling to equate the death drive with the self-preservative instinct it would perhaps be more fruitful to explore alternative interpretations of the concept of the death drive.

Boothby (1991) suggests an alternative rereading of the death drive using Lacan’s interpretation of the ego. Lacan introduced the three fundamental registers: the imaginary, the symbolic and the real. In discussing the formation of the ego, however, it is the imaginary register which will be of primary concern. Elliott (1994) describes the imaginary order as the pre-linguistic, pre-Oedipal state of being prior to differentiation and individuation. It is “... a peculiar realm of ideal completeness, merging all that is inside with that which is outside” (p. 93). Within this imaginary realm of being according to Lacan, the part-objects of the mother’s body (breasts, lips, gaze and so on) are given an emotional investment by the child. The imaginary was inaugurated with Lacan’s theory of the mirror stage. According to Boothby, this theory was inspired by research in ethology which associated behaviour patterns in animals with the perception of specific visual images (p. 18). Lacan believed that a similar function operates in human beings. Boothby summarises Lacan’s theory as follows: “In the “mirror phase,” the most rudimentary formations of psychic life are organized for the six- to eighteen-month-old infant as it identifies itself with a body image; either its own image in a mirror, or that of a caretaker or peer” (ibid.). The importance of this theory is that in locating the origin of selfhood in the mirror phase Lacan was able to account for the origin of the ego, namely, as a formation of

the imaginary. The infant makes an imaginary identification with the reflected image, and imagines himself to be a unified subject. Prior to this realisation, the infant has presumably not realised that the various limbs on his body are actually connected to one another and can be co-ordinated.

Lacan linked the ego with the death instinct through the idea of the alienating effect of the imaginary. This emerges when the human infant “gains the first inkling of its bodily integrity” (Boothby, p. 24) through the specular image (either of itself in the mirror, or another human being). Laplanche (1976) explains that the notion behind the mirror stage is that it is not necessarily confined to visual perception alone but is “only the index of ... [the process of] the recognition of the form of another human and the concomitant precipitation within the individual of a first outline of that form” (p. 81) and thus includes tactile perceptions as well: any perception, in other words, which delimits self from other. This realisation is, however, described as alienating because while it introduces the idea of a complete self to the infant, it also introduces a profound confusion of self and other in that the image perceived by the infant while it may be his own reflection in the mirror is nevertheless an other in the sense that this specular image (or imago) reflects a unified whole while in reality, the infant is still lacking in motor co-ordination. It is therefore, imaginary since it “represents an ideal of unity” (quoted in Boothby, p. 25) which the infant has yet to achieve, as he is still dependent on others in real life. As Elliott (1994) states, the mirror stage is profoundly imaginary because the image of unified selfhood which it generates is opposed to the bodily fragmentation that the infant experiences (p. 94). Selfhood is thus based on misrecognition. This imaginary formation “...mobilize[s] a nascent sense of identity and ... introduce[s] directedness into the chaos of infantile impulses” (Boothby, p. 26). Lacan was thus able to state that in a similar fashion, the ego is essentially a formation of the imaginary, constituted in relation to the perceptual imago of the body, formed when the infant relates his own body to the imago. Like the body image it perceives, the ego resembles a bounded unity. This identification however, takes place in the psychological apparatus. As such, the ego cannot be taken to be identical with the human, physical subject. To Lacan, the ego has to be differentiated from the subject : “...the unconscious is the unknown subject of the ego, ... it is misrecognized ... by the ego, which is ... [the core of our being]...The core of our being does not coincide with the ego” (quoted in Boothby, p.36). The ego, in other words, is an internal object, a fictive and alienating formation which fills what Lacan terms an imaginary function. The core of our



being, which is real, does not coincide with the ego because the ego exists only in the imaginary. Thus Boothby says that “[t]he imaginary formation of the ego is alienating not just because it is modeled on an other outside the subject but because imaginary identification somehow splits the subject from itself” (p. 47).

To explain the concept of imaginary alienation Boothby considers the ego from the aspect of what he terms “psychic energetics”, as it was the problem of the investment and disinvestment of energy in the ego and its objects which led Freud to propose his theory of narcissism thus paving the way for the theory of the death instinct. In the essay *Project for a Scientific Psychology* (1895) Freud, according to Boothby, attempted to construct a quantitative account of the psychic apparatus. He did this by recourse to a model of neuron activity which mimics the operation of the psychic apparatus as a whole. The function of the psychic apparatus is to regulate the flow of energy (which results from neuronal excitation), and operates upon two basic principles, that of neuron inertia or neuron constancy. Neuron inertia is achieved through the complete discharge of energy by passing it along a relay of neurones or directing the energy so that it is expended in motor activity. Alternatively, the energy is stored and establishes a reservoir of energy for the organism, thus ensuring that the organism is once again stabilised. It is this set of neurones, which operates in the second instance to stabilise the organism, which is “... identified with the secondary organization of the ego” (Boothby, p. 53). The ego here is therefore an “essentially defensive, regulatory structure” (ibid.). Lacan seizes upon this explanation to serve as an analogy for the construction of the ego which he relates to the idea of a visual *gestalt*, where a figure comes sharply into focus by blurring away its surrounding background. In a similar fashion, the ego “...is constructed by means of a bifurcation within the total economy of organismic excitations ... [and] inevitably represents a reduction of the total quantity of excitation, a limited charge that has been siphoned off and forced to circulate within the confines of a closed structure” (ibid., p. 54). In this way, Lacan is able to link the unconscious with the formation of the ego in that the unconscious is constituted essentially by what is refused, or, to use Freud’s term, what is repressed.

To return to the notion of imaginary alienation, it appears that in the mirror stage it is the self which is alienated from itself. By identifying with the imago, psychic identity is achieved. However, like the figure perceived in a visual *gestalt* there is always something

left out (in the surrounding background) which is not perceived because it has to be excluded in order for the imago to emerge into focus. Viewed from the aspect of psychic energetics, the ego can thus be seen to inhibit as well as refuse as it discharges energy, while repression is accorded a primordial status in that it occurs with the recognition of the imago: “What is split off [through repression] is not a particular psychic content or representation, but a quantity of energy that might otherwise animate such a representation” (ibid., p. 67). This interpretation of the agency known as the ego can subsequently be linked to what Freud called the “death drive” in that, as Boothby explains it, the source of this drive lies in the tension between the real of the body and the imaginary of its mental schema. It is described as a drive because it consists of somatic energies which have been alienated by the imaginary, yet strive for representation. By explaining the death drive in terms of psychic energy, Lacan in effect locates the target or object of the death drive not in the biological organism but in the unity of the ego. In this way, he manages to avoid the impasse a biological interpretation would inevitably produce, which would render the notion of the death drive illogical.

Lacan’s theory of “the mirror stage” attempts to account for “the new psychical action” necessary for the emergence of the ego. Freud, on the other hand, appears to have been undecided as to how the ego emerges, or for that matter, what the term ego itself refers to. Laplanche (1976) points out that at times the term refers to the individual as differentiated from the other, “... the biological individual but also the psychological individual as the site of conflict: what is at stake in the conflict, but not a participant in it” (p. 50). At other times the ego “... is taken as an “agency”, and, for that reason, as one of the protagonists in the conflict splitting the individual” (ibid.). This suggests to Laplanche that the slippage of meaning corresponds to a slippage in reality itself, which is why the term can be viewed as a metonym as well as a metaphor. Viewed metaphorically, the ego is seen to be a displacement of the living individual and of its image to another site, and consequently as a kind of intrapsychical reality, an intrapsychical precipitate in the image of the individual (p. 53). As to whether it is an image of the self, Laplanche observes that it would be useless to differentiate between the ego and the self because “... the genesis of the ego itself is marked by the indissolubly linked image of self and other” (p. 54). As in the case of the emergence of sexuality, the formation of the ego “props itself upon” a vital function, the need for nutrition. Since the infant’s first contact with another human is during feeding, it is most likely at this stage of complete dependence that he/she comes to distinguish between

him/herself and the individual who provides satisfaction of his/her needs. Thus Laplanche states that the instinct of self-preservation “ ... far from being in conflict with sexuality, shows it the path toward its object” (p. 74). The sexual drives are at the outset, as Freud states, attached to the satisfaction of the ego-drives, and this occurs at a very early stage in the life of the infant. This implies that the process of ego-formation too, has to occur at an extremely early stage. Lacan’s theory of the mirror stage inaugurates the process of ego-formation, where the ego is formed through identification. This process can presumably carry on throughout the duration of the individual’s life, and identification can be with reference to a whole object (person) or particular character traits and so forth. The effect of identification can be as Laplanche puts it, definitive i.e. have a structuring effect, or transitory as in the case of hysterical identification (p. 80). To sum it up, the ego “is formed from perceptions and primarily from the perception of a fellow creature” (p. 83).

Critics of the death drive appear to be of the opinion in some form or other, that this instinct was conceptualised as a result of elaborate theory spinning on Freud’s part. Laplanche and Pontalis (1983) for instance, think that Freud was so concerned to uphold his thesis of the death instinct despite the rejection of the theory by the psychoanalytic circle “ ... because of the theoretical value of the concept and its concordance with a particular view of instinct ...” (p. 99). This view held that instincts had to be structurally dualistic in nature, a tendency fundamental to Freudian thought. The death instinct was, in other words, posited by Freud as the opposition to the life instincts or Eros, pushed to its logical conclusion, especially since the phenomenon which marked its existence, namely repetition, tended to oppose the pleasure principle.

Fenichel (1935) in his commentary on the death instinct traces the origin of this new classification of instinct to the failure of Freud’s first class of instincts to account for his discoveries concerning narcissism. According to Fenichel, the death instinct was based on both speculation as well as clinical evidence. He locates the speculative aspect in the “conservative” character of the instincts, the so-called “Nirvana principle”. The psychic apparatus is likened to a reflexive apparatus which strives to discharge any external stimulus that excites or disturbs it, hence the use of the term “Nirvana” Fenichel is of the opinion that Freud in his essay clearly demonstrated that under certain circumstances the tendency to discharge or bind excessive excitation far exceeded the strength of the pleasure principle. Since Freud was dealing with “inorganic substances” it was legitimate to call this

“Nirvana” death. The question was whether this consideration should be applied to all the instincts or only for some (pp. 364-365). For the sexual instincts actually appear to seek out stimulation rather than eliminate it. From clinical evidence on the other hand, Freud found that aggressive tendencies constitute a high percentage of all human instinctual impulses. Masochism was found, in analysis, to be the turning of sadistic impulses against the self. Based on these two opposing sets of evidence, Freud produced his new instinctual theory. Fenichel’s bone of contention with Freud’s latest formulation of instincts lies in the use of the term instinct itself. He quotes Freud’s definition of instinctual need being “the demand made by the body upon the psychic apparatus” (p. 366). The problem also lies to some extent in the English translation of Freud’s term *trieb*. As Gay (1995) notes, “drive” is closer linguistically and in meaning to Freud’s intentions (p. 564 n.1). The editors of the *Standard Edition* use the term ‘instinct’ instead and as a result, the term is generally adopted in the discussion of Freud’s theories, sometimes interchangeably with ‘drive’ (Laplanche, 1976, p. 214). It is useful however, to distinguish the difference between the two terms. Laplanche explains that Freud used the two terms in quite distinct senses. To Freud, *trieb* was used to denote “...a pressure that is relatively indeterminate both as regards the behaviour it induces and as regards the satisfying object ...” (ibid.). The term *trieb* first appears in Freud’s writings in 1905, specifically in his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. The idea however, originated much earlier on when Freud made a distinction between two types of excitation to which the organism is subjected, and which it must discharge in accordance with the principle of constancy: the external and internal excitation, the latter of which the organism cannot evade and which is the basis of the functioning of the psychical apparatus.

Ricoeur (1970) observes that “*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is the least hermeneutic and most speculative of Freud’s essays; in saying this I refer to the enormous part played in that essay by hypotheses, by heuristic constructs, which are pushed to their extreme consequences” (p. 281) and that “... there is an excess of hypothesis compared with its fragmentary and partial verifications” (p. 282). He argues that the death instinct was introduced first and foremost to account for a set of facts which centre around the compulsion to repeat and in a second movement, recognised and deciphered in a number of clinical phenomena and then in a third movement, recognised and deciphered as destructiveness, on the individual plane and on the historical and cultural planes (p. 282). Like Fenichel, Ricoeur locates the speculative aspect in the hypothesis of the automatic

regulation of the psychical processes according to the principle of constancy. The supposed breakthrough occurs, however, according to Ricoeur, when Freud links the predicate of being “instinctual” with the compulsion to repeat and declares that “... an instinct is an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things which the living entity has been obliged to abandon under the pressure of external disturbing forces ... to put it another way, the expression of the inertia inherent in organic life” (p. 289). By attributing the status of instinct to the compulsion to repeat, inertia is placed “on an equal footing with the life instinct” (ibid.) - thereby enabling the notion of inertia to be pushed to its extreme, namely, to death. The crux of the issue for Ricoeur, is that Freud was basically conforming - again - to his dualistic view of instinct : “The result of this tortuous discussion is therefore a straightforward dualism of instincts” (p. 291). He recognises however, that Freud probably had a specific purpose in this new instinct theory: the recognition that the living substance by itself can find only death whereas the conjugation of two mortal substances allows the possibility of a fight against death. This principle of cohesion, attributed to Eros will be applied in Freud’s later writings where he shifts the emphasis from biological expressions to cultural expressions, culminating in the “metaculture” of *Civilisation and Its Discontents* (1930). A corresponding shift occurs in Freud’s own interpretation of the death instinct, locating it first in the realm of the id, ego and superego and later in the collective “sense of guilt” which keeps the individual’s desire for aggression in check.

Freud’s psychoanalytic theories of psychic conflict suggest a reading of Jacobean drama, particularly revenge tragedy as an examination of the notion of selfhood and identity in the face of social change and upheaval. The organisation of Freud’s essays on sexuality, for instance, implies a destruction of the popular, biologizing image of sexuality (Laplanche, 1976, p. 14), in that beginning with the topic “Sexual Aberrations” Freud shows how extended the field of perversions is, thereby demolishing the idea of a determined aim or object for human sexuality. If such a basic human instinct as sexuality has to be controlled and regulated by the demands of reality, then it is inevitable that the subject falls prey to conflict. By installing sexuality as the basic human instinct, the basis of psychic development and conflict, Freud resituates the source of selfhood within the self albeit beyond the conscious control of the individual. As a product of internal conflict (the self against the self i.e. the ego vs. the id, the ego vs. the superego but also the sexual instinct against the death instinct) yet subject also to external (repressing) factors, it is no wonder that the subject craves for the quiescence of “Nirvana” or “death”. In revenge tragedy, a

basic pattern may be discerned in the structure of the plays and certain motifs are repeated by the various playwrights albeit adapted to “the personal vision” of the particular playwright. One of these motifs is the play-within-the-play. Hallett and Hallett (1980) state that “ ... the whole structure of the revenge tragedy can be understood in terms of the revenger’s efforts to free himself from the restraints that forbid the act of vengeance, a process that involves moving from sanity to madness” (p. 9). To achieve this end, the revenger “must reject what is best in him” and this involves a radical shift in the way the psyche views the world. Thus, Hallett and Hallett suggest that the play-within-the-play, as the vehicle by which the revenger achieves his goal, is the culmination of the revenger’s efforts to restructure and remodel his world : the “entrance into this self-created illusory world is what finally allows the revenger to act” (p. 10). Following up this idea of a “self-created illusory world” I will explore a logical development to the play-within-the-play, namely role-playing. Role-playing here however, will not be confined to the play-within-the-play, which culminates in the murder of the villain. Using the concept of identification, it is possible to show that it is the series of identifications and introjections which he undergoes prior to the final act of revenge itself which enables the revenger to act so completely out of character. The play-within-the-play as a revenge motif therefore symbolises the blurring of the limits between self and other, fantasy and reality that occurs in a theatrical encounter carried to its extreme. The pre-eminence of revenge tragedy in Jacobean theatre suggests the questioning, at the time, of moral and legal rights which had hitherto been assumed to be part and parcel of being a subject of the state.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVENGE TRAGEDY: ROLE PLAYING AND IDENTITY

Joan Lord Hall (1991) explores the concept of role-playing as it is presented in late-Renaissance/ Jacobean tragedy and suggests that role-playing was more than a convention in the drama of the period: it supplied a means for the fictional characters to “ ... discover their potential through playing different parts” (p. 1) and this mirrors real life in that “histrionic awareness, or a conscious dramatisation of self , can enhance or undermine identity” (ibid.). This corroborates Freud’s theory on ego-formation and creation of identity where he posits that ego-formation occurs through the unconscious selecting or screening of objects by identification. By introjecting attributes of other people and identifying with others the basis for the structure of an ego is established. Jacobean tragedy frequently portrays protagonists who “assume personae and are subsequently changed by them” (ibid.). In revenge tragedy this process is noticeably reproduced in each play. The notion of the dynamic of role-playing, in other words, is incorporated into the structure of revenge tragedy. Hall examines the potential of role-playing for identity creation and points out that Jacobean playwrights on the whole explored both the creative as well as destructive potentiality of assuming a persona. Revenge tragedy arguably, pushes the notion of role-playing to its worst possible limits. Hall (p. 23) states:

More sharply than other genres, revenge plays define and explore the pressures of the role -whether it is felt to be alien or willingly assumed - on the dramatic self. The ontological challenge for the main protagonist is how to commit himself to retaliation and still retain his integrity: how to assume the role of revenger without becoming engulfed in savagery.

Thus, the notion of a stable, autonomous identity is questioned in this genre. While psychoanalytic theory has supplied various definitions of the self and self-identity as pointed out by Elliott (1994, p. 8-9), for the purposes of this thesis the primarily Freudian view on identity will be adopted: that is, that identity is structured through identification with, and incorporation of, others; and furthermore, that the identificatory process is engendered in and through loss. Identity, in other words, is not static; for if structures of identity are formed in relation to other individuals, then so too will changes in social

relationships affect the nature of the self (Elliott, 1994, p. 14). As Hall (1991) states, the revenger's situation questions the concept of the self-autonomous subject because he is not allowed to ignore the atrocities which have been committed against his loved ones. Something will not allow the revenger to overlook the crime, whether it is the appearance of the ghost of the murdered victim (as in *Hamlet*), the victim/revenger's own grief (as in the case of Hieronimo and Titus Andronicus) or the fact of the villain's continued assault on the victim's family (as in *The Revenger's Tragedy*). As such, "turning the other cheek" is generally not presented as a viable option in any of these plays.

By mirroring and reproducing the violence and bloodshed that has befallen his own family the revenger attempts to achieve a form of satisfaction or appeasement from his mental anguish. This however can only be achieved after a process of reinventing the self, a form of self-fashioning. By adopting a persona, the revenger is able to carry out his violent and bloody act of revenge because, like role-playing in theatre, the supposed "fictionality of [the] setting can initiate activity more daring, volatile, and free than the constraints and dangers of the world ordinarily allow" (Wilshire, 1982, p. 24). Unlike theatre however, the mayhem the revenger commits in his own piece of role-playing is not "an imagined experience of total activity" (p. 26). So far as the world of the play is concerned, the blood he draws is real, his victims will not get up and walk away once the curtain falls on his performance. Nevertheless, to a certain extent the revenger undergoes the same process of psychic transformation that an actor undergoes for theatre. If there is any truth to the psychoanalytic concepts of identity formation, particularly Lacan's theory of the mirror stage, then it is to be expected that within the boundaries of the revenger's world, role-playing and particularly the process of identification with, and introjection of characteristics of, other characters found in the revenger's environment exert an important influence on the revenger with respect to the process of reinvention of self or to use Greenblatt's term, "self-fashioning" which the revenger must undergo in order to ultimately achieve his goal of revenge. For the individual revenger portrayed in each of the plays is not by nature (as far as we know, given the plot of each play) given to treachery and cunning but rather has to refashion himself, to adopt a new persona in each instance before revenge can be executed. Revenge tragedy in other words may be viewed as an exploration of the process of identity formation in the Lacanian sense. It is linked to the



death instinct because of the confusion that arises as a result of the identification which splits the subject, in this case, the revenger, from himself. By taking on a new persona the revenger in most cases has to repress the side of himself which will not allow him to carry out revenge - for ease of reference let us call it his "better side" : as Hall states, "The usual pattern is for the revenger to absorb the dramatic character, either destroying or severely diminishing any individual self" (1991, p. 24). However, does he manage to suppress this side so successfully as to effect a complete transformation in character - or does he merely affect a pose right until the end?

Hallett and Hallett (1980, p. 9) suggest that the madness universally found in revenge tragedy is an integral part of the revenge theme which enables the revenger to free himself from the restraints that forbid the act of vengeance. While madness is an entirely plausible response to the situation in which the revenger finds himself, it fails to account for the change in his psyche which enables the accomplishment of the act of vengeance. In the course of this thesis, through the examination of the psyches of the individual revengers which will be exposed by their actions and their words, I hope to demonstrate that role-playing within the character of the revenger is not merely confined to the series of disguises or dissemblances he adopts in order to achieve his revenge, but rather, the habit of playing roles is deeply ingrained in the revenger. As an initial hypothesis, it is assumed that an examination of the development of character of the revenger from beginning to end, paying close attention to the responses he shows to other characters within each play who are in a similar plight, will reveal that it is these kindred characters who exert a formative influence on the revenger in each case. It is almost as though the revenger needs to be confronted by the spectacle of another victim seeking vengeance in order for him to realise what he himself must do.

In Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* Hieronimo is Knight Marshal in the court of the King of Spain, "an officer of the royal household with judicial authority over the palace and its environs" (Maus, 1995, p. 331). Clearly, he is in a position of considerable authority; within the body of the play, second only to the royal family. His tragedy begins when he discovers the body of his only son Horatio hanging in the arbour in his own garden, murdered by Lorenzo's servants. His grief is apparent (2.4.76-95); however, a more

immediate concern is to discover the murderers, for “To know the author were some ease of grief/ For in revenge my heart would find relief” (2.4.102-103). He further pledges in lines 113-118 to keep Horatio’s handkerchief, “besmeared with blood” with him until revenge has been exacted, and similarly, preserve Horatio’s body, unburied until such time. Kerrigan (1996) suggests that “Hieronimo sets out to secure retribution by equipping himself with objects charged with remembrance: the corpse, a surrogate ghost to whet his purpose should it ever blunt, and the gory napkin, a memento ...” (p. 174). Thus, for Kerrigan, the play focuses around the relationship between memory and revenge. At the same time, Hieronimo questions the idea of justice, both earthly and divine:

O sacred heavens! If this unhallowed deed ...  
Shall unrevealed and unrevenged pass  
How should we term your dealings to be just  
If you unjustly deal with those that in your justice trust? (3.2.5-11)

Thus must we toil in other men’s extremes,  
That know not how to remedy our own,  
And do them justice when unjustly we  
For all our wrongs can compass no redress. (3.6.1-4)

His office, which is essentially to deal justice to those who have been wronged now becomes a chore and he appears to be merely playing the role of adjudicator without believing in what he is doing any more:

This toils my body, this consumeth age:  
That only I to all men just must be,  
And neither gods nor men be just to me. (3.6.8-10)

Nevertheless, he administers justice according to the law even though he himself cannot receive the like: this is demonstrated in his sentencing of Pedringano to death for the murder of Serberine (ll. 35-40). However, the act of so doing and more importantly the sight of Pedringano’s unrepentant insolence for his crime causes Hieronimo to remember

his own anguish at the murder of Horatio which thus far, goes unpunished because Hieronimo has yet to discover the authors of the crime: "This makes me to remember thee, my son" (3.6.99). When left alone for awhile (3.7) Hieronimo bemoans the fact that he cannot make public his grief which so tortures his soul, and that justice and revenge seem to be beyond his reach, " ... placed in those empyreal heights,/ Where, counterwalled with walls of diamond,/ I find the place impregnable" (ll. 15-17). At this central point in the play, Hieronimo wavers on the cusp, desiring at the same time two antithetical ends. He wants justice and he wants revenge; he attributes them to the same source, yet realises that the two together are beyond his reach. In the subsequent speech within the same scene, having discovered the identity of his son's murderers, Hieronimo polarises his desires. While in the final couplet (ll. 72, 73) he vows to " ... either purchase justice by entreats,/ Or tire them all with my revenging threats", his earlier words inform us that it is in fact revenge that he desires: "But wherefore waste I mine unfruitful words/ When naught but blood will satisfy my woes?" (ll. 67, 68). In favouring revenge over justice Hieronimo takes the first step towards the dissolution of his perceived identity, because in calling for blood and revenge he is setting his self against justice. Bowers (1940) informs us that " ... justice was the sole prerogative of the Elizabethan state, with any encroachment on its newly won privilege liable to severe punishment" (p. 8) and as such, "[p]rivate blood-revenge ... had no legal place in Elizabethan England" (p. 10). Further to this, Bowers argues that there was a custom of revenge which, while not superseding the law, nevertheless had a concurrent authority in the minds of the people. As Knight Marshal, Kyd's character Hieronimo is in a prime position to understand the fine distinction between legal justice and private revenge. While he deliberately conjoins them in the speech quoted above, he also makes clear that together they cannot coexist. Bowers further states that as far as Elizabethan law was concerned, "[b]lood-revenge for the murder of a close relative ... falls in the same legal category as any other murder with malice aforethought" (p. 11). The cleavage in Hieronimo's identity thus begins to show, his private grief threatening to override his public persona. Hieronimo's decision to " ... cry aloud for justice through the court" (3.7.70) implies that while he has privately determined upon a course of revenge, the residue of his public persona demands that he go through the motions of attempting to procure justice.

In the next scene where we see Hieronimo however (3.11), his mask as it were slips noticeably. He meets two Portingales who ask to be shown the way to the house of the Duke of Castile, Lorenzo's father. Upon being asked if the Duke's son were there, Hieronimo replies "Who, my Lord Lorenzo?" (l. 8) the mention of whose name unleashes his pent up, repressed anger; whereupon he launches into a tirade detailing a description of a place " ... where murderers have built/ A habitation for their cursed souls" (ll.26, 27) - in other words, hell - and states that it is here that Lorenzo may be found. His outburst convinces the Portingales that he is mad; however, in Freudian terms it might be seen as a form of release from the excessive mental stimulation or excitation from within which threatens to overwhelm his psyche. He is, in his own mind, damning Lorenzo to hell for his crime. In this manner he attempts to master the situation and seems to regress to the state of "megalomania" mentioned by Freud in the essay *On Narcissism* (1914) which exists in the mental life of children and primitive people "a belief in the thaumaturgic force of words, and a technique for dealing with the external world" (p. 67). Hieronimo's shock at the traumatic discovery of Horatio's body hanging in the arbour has resulted in a psychic regression to a childlike state of mind in which his defined moral universe as an adult no longer exists. Later Hieronimo will set out, as a child will set out, to explore the moral dimensions of his newborn world. Since Lorenzo is, in a sense, the parent/initiator/author of Hieronimo's new psyche, Hieronimo, like the little boy in Freud's *fort-da* game who mimics his mother's action of leaving him, mimics Lorenzo's action of conspiring to murder. In this manner, he identifies with the desire of his enemies thereby losing his own identity, the loss of which will soon be complete.

Following immediately upon this, Hieronimo contemplates for himself the fate he has wished upon Lorenzo. With a poniard in one hand and a rope in the other he tries to decide which path to take to hell. The point to note here is that Hieronimo knows that suicide must lead to eternal damnation, yet turns his sights towards hell because it offers the possibility of justice (3.12.6-13) which appears to be slipping beyond his reach on earth. However, remembrance of his loss (Kerrigan, 1996, p. 176) brings him back to earth and he determines to avenge himself on Lorenzo and Balthazar by fair means. When he is prevented by Lorenzo from pleading his case before the king, Hieronimo once more aligns himself with the forces of evil and vows vengeance; of greater significance, however, is his

proclaimed surrender of his marshalship (3.12.76-78). This is the point, referred to above, at which Hieronimo's loss of identity is complete. He appears to cast aside forever his public role, opting instead to pursue justice for his private grievance even at the cost of his eternal soul. The fate he wishes upon his enemies is projected this time upon himself, so reminiscent of Freud's death drive turning aggression upon the subject's own self.

In the next scene Hieronimo again weighs his options, vacillating between divine intervention and Senecan vindication. Kerrigan (1996, p. 177) points out the deadlock of uncertainty expressed in the soliloquy '*Vindicta mihi!* ...' (3.13.1-44):

As Knight Marshal, a legal official, the kind of 'civil magistrate that the marginal glosses of the Geneva Bible equate with Paul's 'minister of God', Hieronimo is entitled to exact blood for the murder of his son. Yet because he would be acting in his own case- as a hating father not dispassionate judge - he cannot take the blood which in another sense he should. Destabilized by this, Hieronimo is denied that vengeance which, for Elizabethan audiences, was the most essential adjunct of his office. ... His will, in other words, is puzzled, and he consoles himself with classical commonplaces [taken from Seneca].

If the psychic split prior to this was between the public self and the private, the contest here appears to be between the eternal soul and secular desire. Bowers states that at this point Hieronimo becomes a villain, as he "consciously gives up an open revenge in favour of a secret, treacherous device" (p. 77). The progression (or regression, as the case may be, from the moral angle) of his psychic development has gradually built up to this climax, where he discards his own identity and adopts for himself the role of villain, and plots to mirror and reproduce the crime that his enemies have committed. This has been achieved in stages as his identity mutates and finally comes to resemble that of Horatio's murderers. The various roles he undertakes too, which for ease of reference will be contrasted as private versus public, appear to have been reversed. Previously he has been able to separate his private woes from his public duty :

... blood with blood shall, while I sit as judge,  
Be satisfied, and the law discharged.  
And though myself cannot receive the like,

Yet will I see that others have their right. (3.6.35-38)

Now however, the public persona and the private merge and become confused, as is witnessed in the scene with Don Bazulto. Arguably, Hieronimo's public persona as Knight Marshal, dispenser of justice may have been one imposed upon him; given his initial instinctive response upon the discovery of Horatio's body, which was to swear revenge rather than sue for justice (2.4.113-118), one may be inclined to believe that his faith in legal redress is merely a front. The continuous frustration of his efforts to obtain legal vengeance leads to his adopting another role, that of cunning revenger :

No, no, Hieronimo, thou must enjoin  
Thine eyes to observation, and thy tongue  
To milder speeches than thy spirit affords,  
Thy heart to patience, and thy hands to rest,  
Thy cap to courtesy, and thy knee to bow,  
Till to revenge thou know when, where and how. (3.13.39-44)

Hieronimo's public persona however, continues to make demands on him. Three citizens and an old man come to see him to bid him plead their respective cases before the king. However, it is Don Bazulto the old man whose case provokes an instant reaction from Hieronimo, for it resembles closely his own situation : " ... 'The humble supplication/ Of Don Bazulto for his murdered son'" (3.13.78, 79). Hieronimo identifies with Don Bazulto's plight : " ... wretched I, in thy mishaps, may see/ The lively portrait of my dying self" (3.13.84, 85) but contrasts Don Bazulto as living while he himself by comparison, is dying. This comparison reflects Hieronimo's perception of himself as ineffectual and unproductive with respect to the procuring of justice and vengeance for his slain son. The sight of the bloody handkerchief he draws out to wipe Don Bazulto's tears however, reminds him again of his vow to revenge Horatio's death and identification of situation becomes identification of self : " ... all as one are our extremities" (1.92)- sympathy becomes empathy. Hallett and Hallett suggest that this is the culmination of "[t]he process by which the maddened Hieronimo projects his psyche onto the exterior world ..." (p.151). The identification with Bazulto seems to open Hieronimo's eyes to his own inadequacy in

playing the role of loving father whose duty it is to revenge his son's murder; but more importantly, it contributes indirectly towards Hieronimo's metamorphosis from upright upholder of the law to murderous villain. The taking on of the villain's part is now more than skin deep, it is affected at the cost of Hieronimo's very soul: he pledges to obtain revenge neither through earthly judicial arbitration nor heavenly intervention but via the powers of hell (ll.109-123). Don Bazulto thus plays an important role here - that of a formative image with which Hieronimo identifies; but like the identification a child makes at the mirror-stage, Hieronimo's identity is based on misrecognition. He perceives of himself as a father, like Don Bazulto, filled with grief at his son's murder ("No sir, it was my murdered son"). Identifying himself with the grieving father is true recognition on Hieronimo's part; however, this recognition becomes misplaced. While he identifies totally with Don Bazulto's grief, Hieronimo's subsequent actions are in reality, those of a cunning revenger waiting to strike whereas Don Bazulto is attempting to achieve legal recourse for the murder of his son. Having subsumed the role of grieving father, Don Bazulto ceases to exist momentarily, as it were, in Hieronimo's tortured psyche and this is why he subsequently mistakes him firstly for the ghost of Horatio, and following that, "a Fury ... sent from the empty kingdom of black night" When Don Bazulto reminds Hieronimo that he is a grieving man who has come to seek justice for his murdered son, Hieronimo appears to regain his perspective, and recognises Bazulto for what he is - merely the image of his own grief.

From this point onwards, Hieronimo seems to focus all his attention towards ensuring that his revenge is carried out. He makes amends with Lorenzo (3.15.130-167) and conspires with Bel-Imperia and introduces her into his plans (4.1.29-50); in other words, his identity and actions have now reached a harmonious unity. When Balthazar requests that he put up some form of entertainment for his father the Viceroy of Portugal, Hieronimo replies "Why then, I'll fit you" Barber (1988, p. 147) comments that this implies "I am joining in the games you play" - the victim has identified with the aggressor. All that remains is the play-within-the-play, the actual means by which Hieronimo (and Bel-Imperia) achieve their revenge.

The final role Hieronimo plays is the orchestrator of the play-within-the-play, the clever and cunning villain who plots his crime with care and dissembling; so much so that his unsuspecting victims fall straight into his trap. He pays attention to detail to ensure that the audience will not suspect anything amiss until it is too late; for example as the author and director he distributes the parts to the respective actors, and decides that each of the parts be spoken in “unknown languages”. This is to create a general atmosphere of confusion which serves perfectly to mask his actions; so successful is his staging that the King and the Viceroy are not aware that their respective sons have been stabbed to death during the course of the performance. Thus does Hieronimo control his play world so that the control he craved for in real life which denied him the justice he desired is finally returned to him in his role as the author of his revenge. This brief period of control however, does not go without a hitch. Hallet and Hallett point out that the multiple murders indicate that Hieronimo’s plans go somewhat awry (p. 157). The two planned deaths “explode by a chain reaction into five” This mirrors the earlier crime, where the murder of Horatio led to Serberine being murdered by Pedringano, and Pedringano being executed for the murder of Serberine. In this manner Hieronimo’s actions resemble closely that of his aggressor. The identification is complete. His long speech at the end of his play where he reveals all to his audience is intended to end with his own death. This would have been a fitting end to Hieronimo the villain as decided by Hieronimo, Knight Marshal to the King of Spain; a punishment befitting the crime of murder. However, he is denied that justice and the King attempts to force him to reveal why he has orchestrated this bloody tableau. Hieronimo nevertheless no longer has any need for earthly justice of which the King is a representative since he has achieved his own private revenge. Hence, he refuses to cooperate and stabs himself instead. His identity, in a sense, has come full circle.

In *Antonio's Revenge* we are confronted by not one but two revengers or victims. Hallett and Hallett suggest that the opposing responses of Pandulfo and Antonio illustrate the psychic division between reason and passion : in Antonio is embodied the impetus towards revenge while Pandulfo represents the drawing back or procrastination from it (1980, p. 166). By splitting the revenger in two, which is what this division essentially accomplishes, Marston is able to examine the workings of the psyche in each respective area. Another area which benefits from this division is the conceptualisation of identity · by externalising



the functions of reason and revenge we can witness the interplay between the two as enacted by separate individuals which nevertheless act in unison at the end of the play to carry out the act of revenge. The implication which follows upon this view however is that Pandulfo embodies reason and stoical acceptance, while Antonio personifies the passion of revenge- and this may reduce the characters to mere caricatures instead of the realist characters they are, endowed with some degree of psychological depth.

While it is a fact that Marston wrote his plays for performance by children's companies, this need not reduce the play to a mere parody of adult suffering, for *Antonio's Revenge* seriously probes the psychology of its main characters, and contains several shockingly violent and vicious images, most notably the murder of Julio. The actors' youth, which would achieve a visual distancing from real life (thus potentially decreasing the distress factor for the audience), may on the other hand have an even more startling effect, in that the incongruity of emotional suffering with youth paradoxically intensifies the sense of pathos.

Structurally, *Antonio's Revenge* differs from *The Spanish Tragedy* in that Marston devotes almost equal attention to the atrocities of the villain Piero and his subsequent downfall as to the figure of the main revenger, Antonio (Hallett and Hallett, 1980, p.163). Piero is the first character to appear onstage after the Prologue, and he dominates 1.1 where his character gloats over the atrocities he has committed in his scheme of revenge against Andrugio. Sturgess (1997) states that Marston "certainly did not set out to write a two-part play but saw in the unresolvable elements of the first Antonio play the impulse towards a different kind of comi-tragic mix" (p. xvi). At the end of *Antonio and Mellida*, Piero and Andrugio are reconciled, and Piero gives his daughter Mellida to Andrugio's son Antonio in marriage, thereby uniting the two families. His entrance at the beginning of *Antonio's Revenge* is thus a startling contrast from the ending of the previous play, for he comes in "unbraced, his arms bare, smeared in blood, a poniard in one hand, bloody, and a torch in the other ..." (1.1, stage direction). He is elated with the crimes he has committed: "I can scarce coop triumphing vengeance up/ From bursting forth in braggart passion" and proceeds to reveal to his servant Strozso the catalogue of his crimes, all the while demanding bouquets for his cunning and hypocrisy. As an opening, this scene of evil triumph and a murderer revelling in his bloody deeds prepares the spectator for more

violence to follow, while advancing the plot from the previous play. It is shocking to witness such sheer joy in another person's suffering, as Piero demonstrates when informed by Strozzi that Maria, Andrugio's wife has most likely heard of her husband's death : "O let me swoon for joy! By heaven, I think/ I ha' said my prayers within this month at least,/ I am so boundless happy" (1.1.101-102). It is even more disturbing that the villain here is the Duke of Venice, the most powerful political character in the play, and that he takes such pleasure in his revenge. Strozzi, who is barely allowed to speak by Piero's excited interruptions accentuates the quality of Piero's vitality. Piero's general bluster seems to suggest the release of suppressed emotion, in this case, hatred against Andrugio; but it could, perhaps, be attributed also to the aftermath of murder. Having established the villain's character, the spectator would expect that some dire retribution must surely befall Piero during the course of the play. More than that, the frequent mention of the words "revenge" and "vengeance" (Piero uses these words a total of nine times in the space of a hundred and ten lines) suggests the central concern of the play. Although Piero is not technically speaking the revenger in this play, his character as portrayed here is motivated by revenge. His excessive, unnecessarily violent response to what is relatively speaking a minor issue (that he and Andrugio were rivals for Maria but Andrugio was the more successful suitor) is an oblique comment on the nature of revenge: that it is disproportionate and destructive; thereby setting the tone for *Antonio's Revenge*.

In 1.2 Marston examines the various ways of displaying grief. A situation is established to ensure that the worst possible shock befalls the two victims of the villain Piero: standing before Mellida's window Antonio and Pandulfo are confronted with the bloody spectacle of Felice's corpse stabbed thick with wounds hanging from a cord. The shock is compounded when Piero appears, mouthing threats to kill Mellida for committing adultery with Felice on her wedding eve. Following immediately upon that, Piero's servant Strozzi enters with the news that Antonio's father, Andrugio, is dead. Throughout this Antonio is silent; aside from his impulsive "Dog, I will make thee eat thy vomit up,/ Which thou hast belched 'gainst taintless Mellida" (II.203, 204) he does not say anything until line 256. Felice's father Pandulfo also remains silent. Piero and Strozzi however, in feigning grief (II. 232-245) put up an elaborate show. Maria, upon learning of her husband Andrugio's death is overcome by shock and sorrow, and faints. Pandulfo's reaction to the sight of his

dead son strung up at Mellida's window is a marked contrast to the rest. After the incredulous "Dead?" Pandulfo laughs. Antonio gives vent to his emotion (ll. 261-267) and Alberto's attempts to pacify him are met with outpourings of grief, and vehement rejection. While Antonio vents his frustration on Alberto (ll. 273-281) Pandulfo, by contrast keeps emotion in check, seeking release by laughter. Taken aback by this, Alberto attempts to elicit a more appropriate response from Pandulfo by commiserating: "He was the very hope of Italy,/ The blooming honour of your drooping age". When Alberto remarks again at the inappropriacy of Pandulfo's laughter, Pandulfo launches into a tirade against excessive displaying of grief, calling it "apish action, player-like". Certainly, by juxtaposing Antonio's passionate outbursts against the counterfeit sorrow of Piero and Strozco a similarity may be noted, namely the hyperbolic nature of the rhetoric. This conveys a sense of artificiality and posturing towards the respective displays of passion. If we compare Piero's words from ll.217-234 with Antonio's words in ll.264-267 and 285-292 we note a similar essence of theatricality in the excessive portrayals of grief and outrage; the difference is that for Piero it is merely an act whereas Antonio's grief is real. This is why Dollimore (1984), in opposing Pandulfo's stoicism against Antonio's passion, comments that "it is the theatrical convention as well as the experience which is being repudiated: passion is a kind of dramatic posturing" (p. 32). It would appear that the theatrical display of grief must necessarily be passionate to convey the element of suffering; however, passion does not always lend the air of authenticity to grief.

Marston explores another dimension of role playing in human behaviour: the response to grief. While Antonio confronts grief directly and acknowledges its source ("My father dead, my love attaint of lust") Pandulfo, embodying the Stoic stance, represses grief and seeks refuge instead behind a series of rhetorical questions. He rationalises the situation as such: if his son were innocent then his soul would be blessed for being unjustly murdered; if on the other hand he were indeed guilty of the crime of which he had been accused then his death need not be lamented - either way, tears would not be in order. He seems to displace his grief by focusing not upon the death of Felice but on the appropriate response; nevertheless, he still needs release from the grief he undoubtedly feels, and this is why he laughs "ostentatiously" as Sturges comments. His behaviour here suggests that he uses the role of stoical acceptance to come to terms with his loss; as such, his protestations to

Alberto come across as somewhat theatrical and hyperbolic - as do Antonio's. The probing of stoicism in opposition to passion as responses to loss and persecution as portrayed in this play suggests that neither response can successfully appease the psyche: Antonio's excessive passion results in madness while Pandulfo finds that he cannot keep up his stance of calm and dignified acceptance when faced with the physical sight of his dead son's body. In 1.2 the shock of seeing Felice's corpse strung up causes him to laugh in a somewhat hysterical fashion; however, he mouths the conventional stoic platitudes rejecting open displays of grief. However, when he has to beg Piero to release Felice's body so that his son may be given a burial Pandulfo finally gives way to tears in 2.1.88 at the possibility that Felice had been wrongfully killed; but his resolve is even stronger and he resists Piero's attempts to corrupt him. Piero's evil attempt here to convince Pandulfo that Antonio was responsible for his own father's death gives Pandulfo something extraneous to focus on and this is why he once again seeks refuge in his philosophy. The stoic resolve breaks in 4.2.69-75 when he finally acknowledges his loss:

Man will break out, despite philosophy.  
Why, all this while I ha' but played a part  
Like to some boy that acts a tragedy,  
Speaks burly words and raves out passion;  
But when he thinks upon his infant weakness,  
He droops his eye. I spake more than a god,  
Yet am less than a man.

The stoic stance was, in other words, as much a form of dramatic posturing as raw unrestrained grief, and this enabled Pandulfo to curb his emotion. By playing the role of the fool in 4.1, Antonio similarly forces himself to contain anger and outrage. When Pandulfo realises that playing the stoic role does not enable him to find peace within himself he resorts to the role of revenger instead.

Piero's scheming and manipulation are so successful that both Pandulfo and Antonio are soon relieved of the external components of identity. When he fails to corrupt Pandulfo, Piero uses his position to banish him instead : "Slave, I banish thee the town,/ Thy native

seat of birth" (2.1.152,153). Pandulfo thus becomes a man without a home, a political non-entity. Using Strozzi as a false witness, Piero has Antonio blamed for the murder of Andrugio and defamation of Mellida, a legally punishable offence. To preserve himself from Piero's persecution, Antonio has to feign his own death and take on the disguise of fool. Antonio discards his own identity. In this way, the play demonstrates how individuals become alienated from their society and can only be reintegrated via revenge (Dollimore, 1984, p. 29). In Antonio's case however, it is more than Piero's evil plotting which causes him to lose his identity - his own overwhelming grief results in madness. In 2.2 Alberto tries to persuade Antonio to set aside his grief (l. 40) and Antonio tries to comply (l. 41): however, when he reads in his book the exhortation to "endure with fortitude, despise grief, despise fortune", the incongruity of those platitudes when measured against his own grief and loss of status ("he that was never blessed/ With height of birth, fair expectation/ Of mounted fortunes, knows not what it is/ To be pitied object of the world") causes him to revert to self-pity. The chorus of sighs that follow upon Antonio's lamentations unite in his person when he says "Woe for me all; close all your woes in me,/ In me, Antonio!" (ll. 69, 70). While rejecting stoical philosophy, he identifies with the grief of the various lamentors. His grief is further compounded when he learns from Mellida that she is to be put to death; and that Piero, who pursues his life seeks his mother's hand in marriage. His identity has, in other words, been completely dismantled by Piero. Deprived of wife, father and mother, Antonio is bereft of family, an indicator of identity. The accumulation of all these shocks destabilises Antonio's psyche and this is why he descends into such inordinate grief.

The murder of Julio is symbolically a turning point for Antonio, as it initiates him into the role of revenger, giving him a new identity. This is supported by the fact that after 3.2 Antonio no longer appears in public as himself but instead, adopts the disguise of fool. In 3.2 all the grief and suppressed anger that Antonio has been accumulating finds release in a murder most noted for its excess. Admittedly, it occurs rather early on in the play and as such there has not been enough time for Antonio to effect a convincing transformation into the murdering revenger in the span of time between 2.2 and 3.2. The murder of Julio would thus be better viewed as an example of the excessive behaviour that can result from the overindulgence of passion, in this case, anger. In psychoanalytic terms, this murder

demonstrates how the ego attempts to appease the id while conforming to reality. Antonio is filled with grief at his own fate, and thinks of death : “Tomb, I’ll not be long / Ere I creep in thee, and with bloodless lips/ Kiss my cold father’s cheek” (ll. 13-15). The appearance of Andrugio’s ghost marks the externalisation of the anger that has been welling up in Antonio which has had to be held in check because of Piero’s power and Antonio’s own lack (“Thou that wants power, with dissemblance fight”). In terms of plot, the ghost functions to reveal the truth to Antonio, that his father had been poisoned by Piero; it also instigates Antonio to revenge. As in *Hamlet*, the sighting of the ghost stirs up the desire for revenge within the revenger. While Hamlet pondered over the information given by his father’s ghost, here Antonio springs to action and seizes the first opportunity he gets to be revenged on Piero. However, he does not attack Piero directly, opting for a more drawn out form of vengeance. Nevertheless, he must needs appease the intense anger he feels and seeks release in a substitute for Piero : his son Julio. It is clear that in Antonio’s mind murdering Julio is akin to murdering Piero, as he states in line 178 (“It is not thee I hate, not thee I kill”) and again in lines 200-202. In Antonio’s mind Julio takes on his father’s identity. By killing Julio Antonio appeases the demands of his id to be revenged on his enemy; by using Julio as a substitute, his ego postpones momentarily desire which can only be achieved by the destruction of Piero.

If it is true that Antonio embodies passion and Pandulfo reason, then *Antonio's Revenge* implies that neither faculty in its totality can offer a satisfactory mode of behaviour - the one because it is excessive and the other because it is too repressive. Following this line of thought, we may conclude that Marston viewed revenge as any other human endeavour requiring reason and passion in the process of its fulfillment. Without passion, there can be no impetus; without reason, all endeavour lacks structure and coherence. Marston, by separating these two faculties into the bodies of two separate protagonists, is able to demonstrate the interplay which must lie between the two in order to achieve a common goal. It is this fascination with the conception of revenge, the pathology of grief and suffering which is at the heart of the play; the weighing of moral ambiguities, which absorbs our attention in *The Spanish Tragedy* and in *Hamlet*, is here of secondary importance. At risk of appearing reductive, it is nevertheless interesting to note that this division between reason and passion seems to correspond to Freud’s division of the human

psyche into the ego and id, with the id representing unbridled desire or passion and the ego (reason) as the mediating force which tempers the drives of the id:

The id of course knows no judgements of value: no good and evil, no morality. ... Instinctual cathexes seeking discharge-that, in our view, is all there is in the id...

The ego controls the approaches to motility under the id's orders; but between a need and an action it has interposed a postponement in the form of the activity of thought ...

To adopt a popular mode of speaking, we might say that the ego stands for reason and good sense while the id stands for the untamed passions ... (*The Dissection of the Psychological Personality*, 1933, pp. 107-9)

Following this model, the revenge action represents the object-cathexis by which the ego attempts to recommend itself to the id, thereby diverting the id's libido on to itself; all this is in an attempt to substitute the reality principle for the pleasure principle. Passion demands that loss be avenged but reason dictates that murder and violence are not the solution. The ego appeases the id by identifying itself with the id's objects of desire: the act of revenge reflects the atrocities committed by the villain against his victims. The violent retribution which the id desires to befall the villain is eventually achieved. Thus, in *Antonio's Revenge*, reason gives way to passion and violence is committed. Unlike other revenge tragedies however, Marston's revengers do not meet with the usual, expected fate namely death. Nevertheless, they choose to spend the remainder of their lives "enclosed/ In holy verge of some religious order/ Most constant votaries". Thus they choose to live in social anonymity, known only as "the orphan of a murdered father" and "the father of a butchered son" (5.3.165,166). This is despite the fact that Galeazzo and the two senators in 5.3 laud them for "ridding huge pollution from [their] state" and wish to reward them for disposing of Piero (5.3.138-140). Their refusal to accept society's recognition which is bestowed upon them for an essentially violent and merciless murder reflects the moral dilemma which the genre presents. The action of surrendering completely to unrestrained passion which is reflected in the excessive cruelty and violence displayed in the final act of vengeance renders the division between the ego and the id as no longer tenable: the whole psyche becomes a seething mass of passion devoid of the mitigating influence of reason. Society's response to the revengers further confuses the issue: if society functions as the conscience/ego ideal/ super-ego in this play then what we are presented with is a psyche

which has given in to the urgings of the id while rejecting the moderating influence of the ego. The super-ego, whose function is to sublimate the desire of the ego and the id has ceased to function in such a society which attempts to reward individuals for murder. As metaphors for the psyche Antonio and Pandulfo have to reject the identity which society attempts to bestow upon them.

If in *The Spanish Tragedy* the notion of role-playing was shown to be the series of masks Hieronimo put on at different occasions befitting the social setting, role-playing for Antonio serves as a means to curb his overwhelming passion (4.1.38-59). Similarly, the role of stoical self-control adopted by Pandulfo enables him to restrain himself. While Maria, Alberto and Lucio doubt the effectiveness of his disguise Antonio embraces it with unbounded zeal, as it allows him licence to speak unpunished; but more importantly, taking on the role of fool forces Antonio to withhold his passion (4.1.67-70):

Now patience hoop my sides  
With steeled ribs, lest I do burst my breast  
With struggling passions. Now disguise stand bold.  
Poor scorned habits oft choice souls enfold.

Antonio acknowledges the virtues of being born a fool in 4.1.38-49 and wishes that heaven had made him a senseless fool. Had he been born a fool he would not feel the anguish he presently feels at the calamities which have befallen him and would not be in his present position, plotting and conniving to commit murder. At the same time, the disguise allows him access to Piero's court since the Duke is in effect, out for his blood and his life is thus in danger if he should continue to exist as Antonio, son of Andrugio. Role-playing thus serves multiple functions which work to Antonio's advantage. To complete the transformation from his former identity, Antonio has to kill himself off: "Alberto, see you straight rumour me dead" (4.1.65). This unfortunately, results in Mellida's death. If we agree that identity depends not only on the self but also on the recognition bestowed upon the self by others, then Mellida is the last character to have acknowledged Antonio as he was (i.e. her husband) before Piero effectively extinguished his existence. For although Alberto and Maria acknowledge Antonio's continued existence as Antonio son of



Andrugio, in order for Antonio's plot to succeed they can no longer do so publicly. The death of Mellida thus appears to complete the distancing from identity which Antonio has had to effect in order to achieve his desire. To regain identity Antonio and Pandulfo have had to repeat the evil plotting and carnage which the villain Piero used against them. Role-playing enables the revengers to achieve their revenge but once this has happened their respective roles are discarded. If suicide were not forbidden by Christianity they would have taken their own lives (5.3.146-149); since that is not permissible, the next best path is a life sequestered until death should claim them. By ending *Antonio's Revenge* in this way Marston comments upon the society for which morality is fluid. The revengers inflict punishment upon themselves while society attempts to reward them; reason is abandoned for passion momentarily until desire is achieved. Under such circumstances the individual determines his own identity and takes responsibility for his own actions. Role-playing is one of the means by which this is attained.

In 1.3 of *The Revenger's Tragedy* Vindice disguised as Piato asks his brother, "Am I far enough from myself?" His question here serves as a possible guide towards understanding Vindice's character. For although several critics consider Vindice to be a character in the Morality tradition, a "personified abstraction and moral or social type" whose "speeches reveal [his] world rather than [an] individual mind" (Salingar, 1986, p. 207) nevertheless as an example of the function of role play in creating identity, Vindice demonstrates how, by the taking on of a role, the individual recreates himself so that he is as far from himself as he can possibly be. As with the other revengers in this study, Vindice introjects characteristics of other characters in his environment to create a new self. He is however, unique in the sense that the character he introjects is not that of another revenger with whom he is planning the revenge, nor is it one of the villains in the plot. Rather, the villainous character with whom Vindice appears to identify is one created by the role which he takes upon himself in his disguise as Piato. Hall (1991), commenting on the character of Vindice, states that "... the play explores the destructive dynamics of role-playing as Vindice changes from a sensitive individual to the morally attenuated revenger" (p. 25) by means of the "[t]he bridge between his potential and actual character as revenger [which] is the persona of Piato" (p. 26). The role of Piato, according to Hall "serves as an alter ego, releasing the emotional attraction to vice that Vindice must repress and condemn

in his character of traditional moralist” (ibid.). Hall’s description of Vindice, however, implies that the character of traditional moralist is one that Vindice takes upon himself, and this curtails his penchant for vice; whereas the text shows his development (or regression) from moralist to villain-revenger to be the result of his losing himself (or perhaps even finding himself) in his role. The role, in other words, releases his destructive potential in that by assuming the role of Piato Vindice enables himself to succeed in his mission. Arguably, Vindice’s success is aided as well by good fortune and the obtuseness of his enemies. The point though, is not so much the fact that Vindice succeeds in taking revenge on the Duke, but that in the process of so doing he demonstrates an increasing sense of enjoyment at the plotting and manipulation which accompanies his revenge. If we agree with Hall’s suggestion of a doubleness in the character of Vindice, then it must be the enacting of the role of Piato, “the child o’ the court”, which liberates Vindice’s skill for mischief-making.

In *The Spanish Tragedy* the psychic split within Hieronimo was between the public self and the private; in *Antonio’s Revenge* Marston examines the psychic division between reason and passion with respect to revenge. Similarly, in *The Revenger’s Tragedy* two facets of a character appear to be juxtaposed, namely the moralist and the villain revenger. To begin with, the moralist in Vindice is suppressed as he employs a discourse replete with vice and “fulsome lust” in his attempt to win Lussurioso’s confidence, in his role as Piato. 1.3 demonstrates how Vindice attempts to juggle himself between the two roles as he worms his way into Lussurioso’s confidence. Vindice’s shock and anguish at learning the identity of the lady upon whom Lussurioso has set his sights are conveyed in the aside “O, my sister, my sister!” (l. 123). The moralist is dismayed that his own sister is to be subjected to Lussurioso’s lust, not in the estate of marriage but rather as a “friend”, admitted to his bed by stealth (ll. 103-105). Nevertheless, he succeeds in concealing his feelings (and true identity) from Lussurioso in a scene fraught with irony as he and the Duke’s son pat each other on the back at having succeeded in making Castiza’s own brother (Hippolito) into “the subtle instrument” which would now enable Piato “to entice and work his sister” Vindice gives vent to his anger in the speech at the end of the scene (ll. 164-180), vowing to kill Lussurioso with his own sword. Once he has controlled his fury, however, he reveals a curious plan: to tempt his mother and his sister as if they were no kin to him, to the extent

that he would “forget [his] nature”, to see whether they would be able to resist his tempting. Although he states that he would stake his salvation on their virtue, his decision to play the devil’s advocate here demonstrates an almost perverse desire to test the resilience of his own mother and sister, to see whether they live up to his expectations. It thus hints at a wish to control and to manipulate, and by extension, to create – what Foakes (1973) describes as Vindice the “‘artist’, the stage-manager and writer of his own playlets, becoming so absorbed in his skill that he treats life [and the people in his surroundings] merely as an exercise for his art ...” (p.29). This dimension of his character only comes to the fore once he successfully suppresses his moral side.

We are not given much insight into the character of Vindice prior to his taking on of the role of Piato, for Vindice decides to “quickly turn into another” as early as the end of 1.1. Freer (1981) however, charts Vindice’s “psychological enlargement” by studying his verse throughout the play. He suggests that Vindice’s opening speech displays an extreme nervousness of style and constant shift in focus which “convey[s] directly the character’s manic instability” (p. 65). The verse technique here “gives an immediate impression of Vindice’s tension and his tendency to aggravate the very thoughts that cause him the most pain” (p. 66). Certainly, the act of preserving the skull of one’s beloved is by modern standards morbid to say the least. The role of memory in fuelling the desire for revenge is taken to the extreme in Vindice’s case. Ellis-Fermor (1936) comments that the opening of the play functions simultaneously as prologue and self-revelation by the central figure, with Vindice “hover[ing] between a chorus and a participant in the play” (p. 36). She commends Tourneur [*sic*] for the artistic soundness of this scene, as it “set[s] to work a train of thought which will guide us in selecting and holding the main theme of the play” (ibid.). The opening scene thus fills the audience in on the salient details of the plot; more important than that, the first glimpse of Vindice presents a vindictive individual, filled with bitterness and a mind already committed to revenge. This portrayal truly befits the name given to the protagonist. Unlike the other revenge tragedies discussed thus far which examine the process by which the protagonist steels himself towards revenge, *The Revenger’s Tragedy* narrows its focus and dissects the action of revenge, showing that in the process of accomplishing this “wilde justice” the revenger inevitably becomes as evil as the object of his revenge. This fact however, would not come as a surprise to the spectator;

for in giving the revenger such a name as Vindice, Middleton (who is now generally acknowledged to be the author of the play) in essence preordains his character's fate, that he will embody vengeance in this play, and this is confirmed in the opening scene. By putting the words of the moralist in Vindice's lips as well however, Middleton problematizes the idea of the revenger's identity. For, as Prosser (1971) states: "According to ethics revengers are evil; according to theatrical tradition, evil men are *ipso facto* revengers (p. 39). If Vindice is truly evil and vindictive after all, as suggested by his name, then it can only mean that evil is more primary to his nature. At the same time, Vindice is deeply moral as well. This moral side, however, cannot withstand the onslaught brought about by the demands of his role, whether it be that of the bawd Piato or the revenger Vindice. We later learn that the crime committed by the Duke against Gloriana took place nine years before. It is therefore assumed that Vindice has spent the past nine years brooding on her death. Thus, when he first appears onstage he is already somewhat unbalanced; and this is reflected in his posture with the skull.

As with the other revenge tragedies, the action takes place within a corrupt court. However, Vindice is connected to the court in that his own brother Hippolito is a member of this same court which Vindice so detests ("But O, accursed palace!"). To some extent, Hippolito benefits from its lax morals, for he suggests in 1.1.62-63 that the Duchess's sexual interest in him may have kept him his job. There can thus be no simple Manichaean dichotomy which equates the court with the forces of evil. Nor can it be assumed that Vindice, as the revenger, will be the protagonist more sinned against than sinning. In volunteering himself for the "strange-digested fellow ... Of ill-contented nature" to pander for the duke's son, Vindice acknowledges the necessity to be "a man o' th' time" since "to be honest is not to be i' th' world" (1.1.94-95). His words display a worldly cynicism which is apparent in spite of the moralistic attitude demonstrated in his (earlier) opening speech. This suggests a rounder, more complex character than that of the moralist. Freer (1981) rightly points out that "to treat Vindice primarily as a moral commentator would be to move him into an area of discourse where large parts of his character development would be inaccessible" (p. 67), not to mention incomprehensible. Hence, there appears to be no moral touchstone in the world of this play. While Castiza demonstrates an incorruptible spirit, she nevertheless appears somewhat one-dimensional, merely the embodiment of the

virtue of chastity when compared to Vindice. Vindice's own father is said to have been "a worthy gentleman" who died "Of discontent, the nobleman's consumption" The impression we get of Vindice's father is one of passive resistance; as such, if we consider this in the light of Vindice's spirited plea to "Vengeance" in his opening speech, clearly his father would not serve as a satisfactory identificatory model for Vindice. When Vindice says "I'll quickly turn into another" at the end of 1.1, he decides to forego his moral stance and assume the manner and morals of "a man o' th' time", which his father was not. By placing this brief description of Vindice's father just before this decision to take on another's appearance/character, a link is established between the two. While it is assumed that Vindice intends to revenge Gloriana's murder, it is also possible that the thought of avenging his father's death plays on his mind as well, since in 1.1.120-121 he mentions that he has been out of sorts since his father's funeral, and in 1.1.57 he remarks to Hippolito: "Thy wrongs and mine are for one scabbard fit"

In fact, we are never really certain as to why Vindice decides to take upon himself the role of revenger. If it was to revenge Gloriana's death at the hands of the Duke, then there is really no reason for Vindice to carry on destroying the remaining members of the Duke's family once the Duke has been poisoned in 3.5. This is one of the factors which perhaps contributes to critical opinion which views Vindice as a type, an allegorical figure in the Morality tradition. Certainly if we compare between Vindice and Hamlet we find that Vindice lacks a true motive for revenge, and that at the end of the day Vindice's revenge appears pointlessly excessive save that it rids the court of several immoral individuals. In addition, Vindice suffers none of the moral anxiety that Hamlet is subjected to. The decision to revenge is a given at the beginning of the play. Vindice has no moral misgivings about what he has decided to do, and this causes his character to be a contradiction; for, apart from his dedication to blood revenge, his views and attitudes towards life convey the impression of a very moral individual. This contradiction however, lends more depth to his character, for as Vindice dismisses the stance of worthy malcontent/moral commentator and takes on the role of "strange-composed fellow", he moves further and further away from his moral centre, to the point that he begins to enjoy the creative potential of his evil plotting.

That Vindice is able to play his role as pander very well is demonstrated in the temptation scene, 2.1. While Castiza refuses to have anything to do with Piato and the message he brings her from Lussurioso, Gratiana by contrast is tempted by his persuasive speech (ll. 84-101) and replies “O heavens! This overcomes me.” Vindice who knows about the disadvantages of poverty uses this as the basis of his argument to convince Gratiana. While he is shocked at how easily she is won, and says in an aside, “I e’en quake to proceed, my spirit turns edge! / I fear me she’s unmothered” he nevertheless decides “*yet I’ll venture*” (ll. 108-109, emphasis added)- which he does, almost as though he cannot resist pushing his role as tempter to the limit even though it might work to the moral detriment of his sister. When Gratiana is won over by his present of money, Vindice’s remark (“O suffering heaven ... turn the precious side / Of both mine eyeballs inward, *not to see myself*” – emphasis added) suggests a sense of responsibility normally found in a deeply moral character : he does not condemn his mother’s weakness, but instead, focuses on himself, as though taking the blame for her weakness which results from his success in corrupting her. His words here suggest that he cannot bear to reflect on himself in this role as purveyor of vice. Maus (1995) notes that “Vindice associates the inward turn of his eyeballs with an absence of self-reflection; suggesting that he characteristically acquires his moral bearings not by introspection but by observing the effects of his actions in the world” (p. 359). In addition, the context suggests that Vindice here relinquishes moral responsibility in playing the role of corrupter, as he chooses not to reflect on what he is doing. This line thus demonstrates that Vindice does have a moral side in that he can differentiate between right and wrong. He fears that his mother is on the verge of yielding to temptation (l. 109), and is dismayed at her weakness, as shown in his asides. However, he chooses to persist. It is as though the moral side fears for his mother and his sister, yet compelled by his role as Piato he ruthlessly proceeds. Gratiana states in 4.4.34 that “no tongue but yours [Vindice’s] could have bewitched me so”, a testimony to his powers of persuasion and ability to dissemble. We can only speculate that his success in winning the confidence of Lussurioso, coupled with the fact that his own mother and sister fail to see through his disguise, increases his confidence in his own role-playing skill and this, in turn, motivates him to more ingenious improvisation, as seen in 2.2 where he neatly side-steps Lussurioso’s wish to an amorous encounter with Castiza by informing him that Spurio and his stepmother are engaged in incestuous activities.

While Vindice's asides might serve as reminders to the audience that he is merely playing his role as Piato, they function to remind himself of the fact as well. When Castiza remarks in 2.1.171-172 that her mother's words would sound better coming from Piato's lips, Vindice says to himself "Faith, bad enough in both,/ Were I in earnest, *as I'll seem no less*" (emphasis added) - as though to remind himself that he is merely playing a role. His persistent asides, curiously, appear to egg him on further, even as they reassure him that he is merely pretending to be the evil character he is portraying. His words and his deeds convey an ambivalent attitude: on the one hand, he wants to play his role convincingly yet on the other, at this point he is almost unable, as it were, to accept himself in such a role. Although Vindice has stated in 1.3.171-180 that some other person might have been called upon to perform his office in which case it would be far better for him to carry out the test upon his family himself as presumably, they would be in no real danger since he would be merely pretending and not really pandering for Lussurioso, the extent to which he goes in performing his role demonstrates a single-minded commitment to role-playing which surpasses the constraints of love for the family. It is perhaps in this way that he placates his conscience, in that by playing devil's advocate he is really working to ensure the safeguarding of his sister's virtue. The implication of all this however points to the conclusion that Vindice is not as averse to vice as his moral side would make him out to be. The temptation scene thus presents Vindice vacillating between the evil, cunning exterior and the moralistic core as the demands of his role take him over, to the point where, having played his role to great success, he begins to revel in his own evil plotting and scheming by which point the moralist is no longer apparent.

By the time we see Vindice again after he has managed to bring about Lussurioso's imprisonment, he is somewhat changed. In 3.5 he demonstrates none of the misgivings of the moralist compelled to committing evil but instead, exhibits pure joy and excited anticipation at his ingenious plot for revenge on the Duke ("O sweet, delectable, rare, happy, ravishing!") Indeed, it is a plot which will ensure that the Duke's final moments are most painful and humiliating, for not only will he be poisoned from the "lips" of the skull of Gloriana whom he poisoned nine years ago, he will also witness his wife, the duchess, committing incest with his bastard son, the sight of which "will kill his eyes." Although on

the verge of achieving his long desired revenge, Vindice's meditations here do not focus on the atrocities he is about to commit, except to gloat over his creative genius in dressing up Gloriana's skull to resemble a lady. The sight of the skull nevertheless, prompts Vindice's moralistic ruminations from ll. 68 until 97. The manner in which he contemplates the skull does not suggest in any way that it belongs to the woman he once loved. Instead, he appears capable only of focusing on how it could serve as a reminder of the eventual fate which awaits all man. According to Vindice the sight of the skull would cause those who beheld it to refrain from vice. The skull, in other words, becomes for him a useful implement to incite fear and the abstinence from vice, for "twould fright the sinner/ And make him a good coward, put a reveller / Out of his antic amble" This self-righteous preoccupation with evil is in fact consistent with his portrayal of the moralist. However, it also demonstrates the almost puritanical narrowing of the mind first noticed in the opening speech, as Vindice shuns beauty and human goodness. Here, as in 1.1 Vindice measures Gloriana's beauty in terms of the corrupting effect it would have on men who beheld her. It would appear that to his twisted, decaying mind a woman's beauty is capable only of provoking men to vice; women can only be chaste when they are dead and their beauty has been consumed by worms. This inability to find anything of value in beauty reflects a rejection of normal human interaction for a corresponding increase in self-absorption. This self-absorption however, does not include self-reflection, for the issues Vindice ponders upon while addressing the skull are far removed from his immediate situation. In contemplating the general depravity of the human condition specifically with respect to lust and lechery, Vindice gives final voice to the moralist, concluding that "... we are all mad people, and they /Whom we think are, are not" (3.5.79-80).

Freer (1981) suggests that in his speeches in 3.5 "Vindice's identification of himself as a corrupt character is complete" (p. 79). In this scene we see for the first time, Vindice proclaiming confidently, even proudly, his real identity to the Duke: "'Tis I, 'tis Vindice, 'tis I." Coincidentally, after this scene Vindice no longer needs to appear in his disguise as Piato but can resume his own identity as Vindice; of this fact we are reminded thrice in 4.2 (ll. 1,32 and 170). Hall (1991) confirms this: "Now [Vindice] no longer needs to resort to a disguise. He has only ... to 'turn myself' to furnish the 'villain' that Lussurioso is seeking..." (p. 29). While this comes about due to the development in the plot, it is



nevertheless very suggestive of the development in Vindice's character as well. Having murdered the Duke in a most cruel and violent manner, Vindice appears to have liberated himself from the strictures of the moralist. Freer points out the appropriate means by which Tourneur [*sic*] ends the life of one villain only to resurrect another : "The poisoned kiss is an apt means for the revenge because it literally eats the Duke; ... [the corrosive] is equally suited to Vindice, who has been practicing [*sic*] his own gradual self-disintegration" (p. 85). This self-disintegration is the substitution of the villain-revenger for the moralist.

This brings us inevitably to the issue of Middleton's choice of name for his revenger. After the murder of the Duke Vindice reconstitutes his identity as the revenger : "'Tis I, 'tis Vindice, 'tis I" It almost seems as though the playwright forces this identity upon the revenger; for as had been shown earlier, Vindice is not simply a one-dimensional embodiment of vengeance. Yet, he has no choice but to *be* revenge. Thus, Vindice is essentially deprived of the option of following his moral side. When Lussurioso remarks on his name in 4.2, Vindice reaffirms his identity : "Aye, a revenger." True to his words, he demonstrates a glee and enjoyment in his mission which seems designed to arouse the spectator's revulsion. 3.5 shows Vindice at his most sadistic as he tortures the Duke before killing him. It is not only the action of murder which chills the spectator, it is the corresponding lack of contrition on the part of the revengers. It is thus no wonder that Eliot (1964) remarks : "[*The Revenger's Tragedy*] does express ... an intense and unique and horrible vision of life" (p.128). This horrible vision of life nevertheless offers an interesting perspective on role playing and its effect on identity as witnessed in the character of Vindice. When forced to adopt an identity which conflicts with one's nature (as when Vindice takes on the role of the corrupt Piato which is at odds with his moral nature) the strain can push the psyche to the other extreme, so that it comes to embrace fully the alter ego. The role in other words is assimilated. As a form of defence however, the individual distances him/herself from what he/she has become. In Vindice's case, he assumes a grimly satirical attitude as in 5.1.3-5 when he is engaged by Lussurioso to kill Piato "Brother, that's I; that sits for me; do you mark it? And I must stand ready here to make away myself yonder. I must sit to be killed, and stand to kill myself." Similarly, when condemned to death at the end of the play Vindice displays no remorse nor regret and even seems to embrace death : "We have enough, / I' faith, we're well: our mother turned, our sister true, /

We die after a nest of dukes—adieu.” He seems almost relieved to bring his character to a close; however, he goes to his death very much as Vindice the revenger although this time he appears to turn his vengeance upon himself. For he states: “’Tis time to die, when we are ourselves our foes” – poetic justice for being unable to keep his mouth shut.

While there may be truth to the contention that “*The Revenger’s Tragedy* emphasizes the artificiality, even the silliness of many of the familiar procedures of English revenge tragedy” (Maus, 1995, p. xxi), it is nevertheless still possible to examine Vindice as a psychological character in his own right, even though to some critics he comes across as “frankly artificial” (Bradbrook, 1935, p 166). This supposedly unrealistic portrayal of character results from the attempt to reconcile two opposing attitudes within one character, the plausibility of which should nevertheless not be ruled out given the circumstances under which the character in question is placed. In fact, the theatrical nature of Vindice’s character is in itself an oblique comment on the nature of revenge, as are the elaborate and ingenious plots Vindice hatches to achieve his goal. The nature of the plot which contains in it several related sub-plots, all pertaining to revenge in some form or the other reflect the quality of Vindice’s mind which we are later told in 4.2 is in fact in a state of melancholy and discontent, having been brooding on vengeance for nine years. A mind which has been thus occupied for nine years is likely to be disorientated, no longer able to differentiate between itself and the object of its melancholia. Unlike the melancholic Freud describes in the paper *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917) however, Vindice is not given to self-reproaches. He has very specific objects against which he directs his railings, and these objects are very much external to himself, at least in the physical sense: the Duke, the Duke’s son, the Duke’s bastard, the “accursed palace” Vindice’s melancholia too, does not focus on the object he has lost, namely Gloriana. This leads back to the question as to whether her death is really what leads Vindice to plan this elaborate revenge in the first place, or whether she is merely the excuse he needs to unleash his vicious and violent side.

While the other revenge plots within the play reinforce the notion of the ludicrous potential of the revenge genre, they detract somewhat from the character of the protagonist since he is not directly involved in the other sub-plots. Nevertheless, it is possible to chart the progress of Vindice’s character as he determines “to turn into another”, and thus moves

further and further away from himself. The other that he becomes, however, is not the revenger per se but the vicious villain as well. It is only after he has killed the Duke that he reverts to his own name and identity: as Hippolito remarks in 4.2.1: “So, so , all’s as it should be; y’are yourself.” Vindice’s character thus moves from moralist-malcontent to pander to revenger to villain-revenger, with the corresponding changes in name: Vindice, Piato, Vindice, Vindice. The plot reflects ingeniously the substitution of one facet of Vindice’s character for another, as Lussurioso employs Vindice/Piato to prostitute his own sister, then later employs Vindice himself to kill Piato. While it is Lussurioso who unwittingly enables Vindice to undergo the ensuing metamorphosis, it is Vindice himself who uses all his creative powers to become the character(s) he sets out pretending to be. For example, in his first encounter with Lussurioso in his disguise as Piato, Lussurioso is clearly taken aback at the “grossly indecorous language and behaviour” exhibited by Vindice which, although a calculated attempt to convince Lussurioso of Piato’s unsavoury character nevertheless demonstrates an extreme stance to adopt, the attitude of one who takes his villainy to extremes. This is characteristic of Vindice who identifies so completely with the evil characters he plays that it undermines his identity; so much so that we never know which one of the various faces he puts on is the true Vindice.

To talk about a ‘true’ Vindice however, is an attempt to essentialise his character, to pin him down and label him with an authority which does not exist in the text. Possibly after all this dissembling Vindice himself no longer knows who Vindice is, except to acknowledge that he is the one who murdered the Duke and Lussurioso. There are two instances in the play when Vindice speaks his name to identify himself: when he is killing the Duke and when he kills Lussurioso. It would appear that it is in the act of murder that he reaffirms his identity: as villain. At the end of the play, Vindice again identifies himself (and Hippolito) as the murderers of Lussurioso. In a sense therefore, Vindice essentialises himself, in an attempt to bring the self to a close, to use McMillin’s expression (1984, p. 277). This attempt, however, is based on misrecognition, for Vindice is not merely the villain-revenger. The fact that he needs to first put on the disguise of Piato to release his evil potential implies that evil is not second-nature to him. That the potential for villainy is released by looking within rather than by identifying with someone specific in his present surroundings however, indicates that Vindice’s “mirror stage” must have occurred prior to

the decision to turn revenger. Who supplied the image with which Vindice identified? Since he has been observing the goings-on in the Duke's court for nine years and knows enough about its corrupt ways to conclude that "to be honest is not to be i' th' world", it is not unreasonable to assume that Piato is based on Vindice's observations of corrupt courtiers. Having been thus observing the court for so long it is not surprising that Vindice introjects characteristics of its members. This explains why he is able to play his role so well. Using this line of reasoning, it is also possible to explain why Vindice's melancholia does not appear to have an object of focus, namely Gloriana, but instead festers on the corruptive effect she had on those who beheld her. It is because he broods not so much over her death as over what she has come to represent in his mind- the transience of beauty (or by extension, anything good and pure) which is tainted once the court exerts its corrupting influence. Whether he associates the court with evil and corruption because of what the Duke did to her or whether her murder served only to reinforce a hatred already present we will never know because the text does not allow us to find out. What the text does show is that it is through the taking on of the role of Piato that Vindice is able to commit to villainy. By identifying with that which he despises, the child o' th' court, Vindice releases his potential for evil. Role-playing in this case is thus a means of recovering, or even discovering, identity.

## CONCLUSION

In his study on the link between role playing and identity in theatre, Wilshire (1982) examines *Hamlet* and suggests that Hamlet is drawn to the theatre because he hopes that it can eventually teach him to play his part, to carry out revenge against Claudius as demanded by his father's ghost (p. 71). In this project, the protagonists are, like Hamlet, displaced from access to control and authority. Two of the revengers previously occupied positions of (relative) autonomy: Hieronimo was the Knight Marshal, dispenser of justice while Antonio was the son of the Duke of Genoa. Vindice, we are given to understand, is socially dislocated probably due to poverty and his contempt for the ways of the court (and the Duke). Thrown unexpectedly into the position of revenger, each lacks initially a mimetic model upon whom to fashion himself so as to enable vengeance to be achieved. The identity each revenger possessed (Knight Marshal, proud father; son of a Duke, prospective bridegroom; morally upright individual) prior to the wrong committed against his loved one is no longer tenable. Each has to reconstruct identity before he can act, and role-playing appears to be one of the means by which each individual protagonist fulfills his need. Contrary to the initial hypothesis at the outset of this project however, the protagonists in the plays examined achieve the authorization they need in order to become revengers not from religious doctrine, nor from characters in similar circumstances- but from the villains themselves. Identity creation (ego formation) in this case is thus modelled on the protagonists' (corruptive) surroundings rather than on some ego-ideal, as had been proposed by Freud.

Viewed in these terms then, there would appear to be some truth to Freud's theory of the innate death drive in man. However, contrary to Freud's theory, the death drive as perceived in these plays is not a primordial instinct in which case the organism is propelled to seek its own destruction; rather it arises as a response to external factors which are beyond the individual's control. To paraphrase Freud's theory: the ego as the mediator between internal desire and external reality must perform a kind of balancing act, on the one hand attempting to appease the id while on the other appearing to conform to external reality to enable the individual to survive in the real world. The death drive in

this case takes the form of the unbound desires of the id which threaten the unity of the ego. Although Freud, with his tendency to biologize, largely overlooks the moral dimension, this cannot detract from the question of choice, moral or religious, which confronts the protagonists. While an attempt has been made to deal with the revengers as though they were characters in their own right, it has not been possible to ignore at the same time the personal vision of the respective playwrights. For although the analysis attempted in this project works for revengers moulded on what Bowers (1940) terms “the school of Kyd” (and indeed the plays selected here all fall within this same category for precisely that reason), it cannot pretend to such success with all revenge tragedy, notably the anti-revenge plays such as *The Revenge of Bussy D’Ambois* and *The Atheist’s Tragedy*.

While Dollimore, displaying almost Freudian pessimism, shows that Jacobean tragedy disintegrates the notion of the transcendent subject (albeit without recourse to psychoanalytic theory), this project has attempted to “[put] the ghost back into the machine of decentered self” to borrow a quote from Michael Neill, by examining the characters as individual psyches first and foremost before looking outwards. This perhaps explains why the analysis may not work for all revenge tragedy but can possibly be applied with some success to plays where the playwright seems to pay attention to the psychology of his characters, or at least, displays some interest in that direction. Although my response to the two anti-revenge plays mentioned above is of necessity only cursory, the general impression I am left with is that Chapman and Tourneur each had their own agenda in writing their versions of the genre, namely to convey their own moral reactions to the convention. As such, the revengers in these two plays seem to serve more as mouthpieces for their authors, propagating the virtuous response to loss in the case of Chapman, and the reward of (Christian) patience in the face of villainy which leaves revenge “[t]o whom the justice of revenge belongs” in the case of Tourneur’s Charlemont. Both plays present the respective playwright’s perceived alternative to the blood thirsty revenger of the (earlier) revenge plays. Bowers (1940) speculates : “It is possible that Tourneur ... was in this play [*The Atheist’s Tragedy*] a reformer and moralist and that he was writing a propaganda tragedy with a religious hero and a higher

moral to compete with the traditional amoral revenge play ...” (p. 143). Thus, if revenge tragedy is viewed as an insidious subversion of the accepted ideological status quo, then these anti-revenge plays subvert the subverted in rendering their revengers unwilling to revenge- thereby restoring or perhaps even reinforcing the (accepted?) order of the day.

While no one can say with absolute authority what triggered the “self-conscious anxiety” noted in drama (especially tragedy) of the late Elizabethan/Jacobean period, several critics have attempted to explain the phenomenon. One of the more popular arguments contends that the Elizabethans “... were born and lived in an age where the old universal faiths were no longer tenable in their traditional forms ... before new ones [faiths] had been fully formulated and established to take their place” (Hiram Haydn, quoted in Clay, 1974, p. 2). Ornstein (1965) attributes the “crisis” to epistemological concerns, where the death of the “Elizabethan World Picture” slowly defaulted to the scientific because it could no longer appease an age eager for empirical and utilitarian knowledge (p. 4). More specific to the topic at hand, Hallett and Hallett (1980) suggest that revenge tragedies probe beyond the individual, personal anger and “investigate the whole question of justice and order in a society that is experiencing a civilizational crisis” (p. 120). The revenger, in his state of disillusion with the concept of justice, thus became a figure with whom the Elizabethans could relate because they themselves were experiencing a similar epistemic crisis. Collins (1989) reads Shakespeare’s plays as dramatisation of the problem of order: “What is being sought is not absolute truth, as being, but order and meaning as becoming” (p. 13). His plays thus “[explore] Tudor ideals as expressions of human desire, a part of historical process rather than its authorized explanation” (Levaio, quoted in Collins, p. 41). Given that most critics acknowledge Shakespeare’s influence on the drama of his contemporaries it stands to reason that they (Shakespeare’s contemporaries) too attempted to explore similar concerns in their drama.

In examining revenge tragedy, there can be no denying the formative influence which Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* had on later plays of the genre. While *The Spanish Tragedy*, the earliest revenge drama served as a model for those which came later, *Hamlet*’s contemplative spirit seems to have affected later revenge plays; so that while the

identifying elements of the genre were still present, the motif (or even motive) of revenge is largely subordinated to other concerns. An interesting development is the focus of attention turning towards the villain rather than the revenger: almost as though the other playwrights concede that no revenger could live up to the precedent set by Hamlet, thereby necessitating a change in focus. While *The Revenger's Tragedy* does pay heed to the development of the revenger Vindice, his increasing villainy draws the attention away from the initial wrong committed against him, so that he holds our interest more as a villainous figure than as a revenger. In *The Atheist's Tragedy* D'Amville's presence is felt throughout the play and the final scene in court which culminates in the accident with the axe which kills him easily steals the thunder from Charlemont, the revenger; in *The Changeling*, one could be forgiven for failing to even notice the presence of the figure of the revenger in Tomazo for he effectively does nothing to procure vengeance- instead, Beatrice, the villain has to pay for her crime with her honour and the humiliation of being beholden to Deflores whom she detests. It is in this manner that vengeance is exacted, by circumstance rather than by design. Critics however, do not dispute *Hamlet's* influence on the development of tragedy. In taking the idea of revenge beyond the confines of the need to repay blood with blood, Hamlet "is less a tragedy than a frame and a stimulus for the creation of tragedies ... [as] Shakespeare uses an array of standard Renaissance tragic conflicts- mortality against ambition, Christianity against revenge, love against sexual horror, private truths against political imperatives- to compel a deep, sympathetic recognition of the way cultural contradictions agonize the sensitive individual"(Watson, 1990, p. 325). Using the framework of revenge tragedy, Shakespeare draws attention to the conflicts facing an individual in a world so morally ambiguous that "There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so" This brings us back to the question of revenge tragedy and psychoanalytical theory, how (and if) the one can illuminate the other.

While this project has largely concentrated on the individual revenger in reading the revenge plays in the hope of gaining some insight into the question of identity formation, it has to be conceded that this technique works well for some revenge plays, but not all. This is probably due to the fact that not all revenge plays have their center in the psyche



of the revenger. Nevertheless, as “a reflection *on* experience and not just a reflection *of* it” (Hattaway, 1990, p. 93, his emphasis) this existence of a group of plays in the revenge tradition which quite clearly explores the fluid nature of identity confirms that the “problematic of the ego” was not unique to the age of Freud alone. In fact, Freud has reiterated that he was not the first to discover the unconscious (of which the ego is an offshoot), an honour which he bestows to poets and philosophers before his time. This project would appear to confirm that as fact. At the same time, reading revenge tragedy (or for that matter, any piece of literature) as a reflection on the concerns of the age has suggested that Freud’s writing may benefit from a similarly contextualized reading. By this I do not mean that his essays be read as a reflection of his own personal history but rather that they be viewed as Freud’s reflections on the human psyche in relation to history at the time of the writing of the essays. Inasmuch as Jacobean drama is said to give voice to the general anxiety of the age so Freud’s study of the mind may reflect the concerns of his age.

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