

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE  
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## EARLY ENGLISH TRAGEDY

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### 1. GORBODUC

**Thomas Norton (1532 –1584) and Thomas Sackville, 1st Earl of Dorset (1536 – 19**

#### The Backdrop

To the contemporary theater goer--who hustles into Broadway or into Covent Garden-- the intimacy and personal referencing of the sixteenth century British theatrical experience, is inevitably a surprise. The present play was first performed in the Inner Temple, one of the four inns of Court--the vetting source for the barristers of England and Wales. The audience will have been part of the new upper-middle to elite city folk-- living and working in the City of London and participating in the new values and modish expressions of this early modern age. The relevance of the current play, to the lives of a contemporary theater goer, would have been as tangible as the proximity of the colorfully dressed actors. The play before them would have dealt with the subject of royal inheritance, and particularly with the disastrous consequences of a disorderly monarchical succession. The talk of the culture, after all, was Queen Elizabeth's much hoped for impending marriage, an event passionately hoped for by the British people. The plot of the present play at all points reflects the central importance of a good succession, and of an orderly government to support it.

#### The Play

As the manuscripts of ancient classical literature made their way through the scriptoria of European monasteries, from the beginning of the Christian era to the Renaissance, such Roman writers as Seneca ( 4 B. C-65 A. D) came into significant prominence. A moralist and essayist, a prolific letter writer, Seneca came gradually to be viewed as a quasi Christian writer, in which guise he came to be read with close respect by the fourteenth century, square at the moment of Chaucer. It is not of course that Seneca had picked up elements of Christianity--the dates don't fit, not to mention the issue of personal style--but that Seneca's Stoicism, restraint, patience and self-discipline bordered on what influential Christians considered prominent virtues of the new religion. There was no savior in the Stoic cult but there was the kind of deep personal guidance that Buddhist practice then as now offers the searcher. There was in addition, to support the influential popularity of Seneca, the underground sense that he respected the hyper dramatic passions for the singular impulse they give us to calm and quell our passions.

The material of Senecan dramatic presentation will be the opposite of the calm to which the author wants to lead us. In a Senecan drama full exercise will be given to the emotions of jealousy, anger, rage, cruelty--and all to the point of turmoil in displaying tragic consequences. In other words, turmoil is for Seneca the condition in which peace can be generated. In the play before us it is precisely that generation that we experience. The conflicts inherent to the present play will eventuate into a culture world in which the necessity for social peace displaces the human need for possession and domination.

## PLOT

The plot of the present play is relatively stark and simple, although the unique traits of it are noteworthy. Most remarkable, in the refinement of this play, is the prosody: this is the first British drama to advance in blank verse presentation; Gorboduc proclaims that

*Nature hath her order and her course  
Which (being broken) both corrupt the state*

Potent lines of thought which have Shakespeare written all over them. To which be added that the same play is deeply involved with political struggles within the Kingdom of England, between Ferrex and Porrex, the two sons of King Gorboduc. The prominence of the political element in this play is the more conspicuous in that the national topic up front and center, the hoped for marriage of Queen Elizabeth, carries with it the robust fears and anxieties of the people attending the play. The drama itself advances starkly, one act of violence and fury followed by another, and always under the shadow of anarchy in the state, a frightful anxiety lest the shaky foundations of the state should totter.

Gorboduc is a central launching point for this killing- filled tragedy, although to be sure he dwindles in importance, as the play increasingly drifts into political drama, juxtaposing a furious and violent populace against a noble elite.

Gorboduc decides, against good advice, that he should arrange for his kingdom to be divided between his two sons. This is a bad mistake, for it is not a carefully planned move and the sons fight for power between themselves, each claiming his right to the greater portion of the inheritance. Before long, with the help of a mother who has herself entered the fray, brutally, the subjects in this kingdom are preternaturally horrified and infuriated by the mother's killing of one of her sons, and rebel against Gorboduc and Queen Videna, slaughtering them both. This political insight seems to do as political philosophy--take care of your subjects.

That, in fact, is just about where the drama leaves us, with Eubulus, the secretary to Gorboduc, arguing that parliament and with it order, should have been called into the deteriorating scene far sooner--but also that much has been learned and a brighter future lies ahead.. A surprising ending, given the bleak pall otherwise cast over the human condition as depicted in the play.

## CHARACTERS

Gorboduc, mythical King of Great Britain. A titular paternal figure and revenger around whom an aura of order outspreads. Ultimately he is blamed by the people for the death of Porrex, and in the end, after his death he is looked back at critically, for having failed to act early, by bringing his parliament in to maintain order.

Videna, Queen and wife to Gorboduc. Favoring her older son, Ferrex, whom her older son, Ferrex, has slain, she in turn kills her son, (An act of revenge, on behalf of the preferred son, carried out with Senecan blood thirstiness). Might well add that characterization in this play is one-dimensional, as in the contemporary British comedy *Ralph Roister Doister (1567)*. Either of these two dramas promotes a character--Gorboduc or Ralph--who is simply an aggregate of character traits--paternal but ill prepared; lecherous and greedy--so that in the end the play in question has developed no issues and raised none of the questions posed by personal dilemmas.

Ferrex, elder son of Gorboduc  
 Porrex, younger son of Gorboduc  
 Clotyn, Duke of Cornwall  
 Fergus, Duke of Albany  
 Mandud, Duke of Leagre  
 Gweard, Duke of Cumberland  
 Eubulus, Secretary to King Gorboduc  
 Aostus, a counsellor to King Gorboduc  
 Dorean, a councillor assigned by the King to his eldest son Ferrex  
 Philander, a councillor assigned by the King to his younger son, Porrex  
 Hermon, a parasite of Ferrex and a slave of Fergus.  
 Tyndar, a parasite of Porrex.  
 Marcella, a lady of the Queen's inner chamber

Chorus; four ancient and wise Britons. The strains of string and lute, intertwined with voice, enchant the entire archaic setting of the play casting an aura of Arthurian spell over the performance.

Dumb shows, dramatic enactments of future developments within the play; a mummery which bespeaks the rooting of the entire play in the popular street drama of the Middle Ages. The one dimensionality of this play's characters derives from the representative rather than full bodied presence of these pre modern actor-roles.

## THEMES

While still living, King Gorboduc attempted, wisely it seemed, to share his power by dividing it between his two sons, Ferrex and Porrex. Unfortunately the drive for power set the two sons to fighting against one another. The younger son, Porrex, killed his older brother, which brought on its own murderous onslaught. The Queen, Videna, preferred her older son, and in a fit of vengeance killed her younger son. This act of vengeance naturally inspired its own response. That response is violent throughout the state; a suppressed minority, facing off against an entrenched nobility, rises in horror and slaughters its oppressors. The political analysis of this uprising, and its consequences, reminds us of the considerable modernity we have reached by this point in early Renaissance culture.

*Power* Power pervades this entire drama. The initial power struggle breaks out between the two sons of Gorboduc, who go to war with one another over their father's land. The younger son, Porrex, kills his brother. This of course is a dreadful affront to the Queen Videna, whose favorite is her elder son, Ferrex. To show her own power, and of course to wreak her own vengeance-- *a close cousin to power after all*-- the Queen killed her younger son. At this point we run directly into the people, who are horrified and appalled by the behavior of the Queen.. The power of the people explodes at this instant, as they turn against and slaughter both the King and the Queen. At this point the coalition of power with vengeance reaches its climax.

*Politics* Power and vengeance are of course already fundamental ingredients of politics, but the present play emphasizes the political in an even wider sense, as the overall functioning capacity of a social whole. What is needed in Gorboduc's Kingdom is the interaction of a parliament with the behaviors of individual competitors.

## EVENTS

'The sons fell into dissension,' remarks the ancient playbill, introducing the oldest opener in the book ; a litany of the fall takes over at this point, indeed the following play is little besides a litany of disasters brought down on the house of King Gorboduc by the jealousy, violence, and fury of his descendants. There will be an eventual ray of sun--after much turmoil in the kingdom; after almost total collapse of the civil government--with the decision that a new King must replace the defunct Gorboduc, and that justice will eventually prevail.

Gorboduc's own folly plays into the drama from the outset; despite the fatal results of a kingdom division between his two cousins. Gorboduc to the death ignores this destiny, and proceeds to divide his kingdom between his two sons. Their murderous relation to one another leads straight into the heart of the present tragedy, thus into the fatal dissolution of Gorboduc's own family.

With the help of scummy parasites the two children of Gorboduc invent pretexts for war with one another. Gorboduc only too late grows aware of the serious accident he has made in dividing his kingdom. Just as he is preparing to fight against his two sons he is informed of the death of Ferrex. Porrex, called before his father declares that he has acted in self-defense, but for his effort he is slain at the hands of Queen Videna, Gorboduc's wife. It is at this point in the killings that we realize the deep pinch of the Senecan tradition, devoted as it is to the hot and heavy presentation of manslaughter, and at the same time, by an alchemy distinctive to the drama of the Middle Ages, to a call for calm, patience and self-control. The bloody peace established around the death of the Christ rises before us in this unique medieval aesthetic.

#### A LOOKING BACKWARD

The present play sits directly atop the literature we call mediaeval. Within that literature--in *The Niebelungenlied*, Dante, Boccaccio, Chaucer, Petrarch--there is much poetic imagination, much tale-telling, much hymnology, but in addition a somber and tragic thematic--running through all genres; in addition there is a stark theatrical motif of human sin, with its roots in the dark recesses of Our creation. The present play, following such darkness, taps studiously into those spiritual veins through which we imbibe our native 'turn of the screw.'

#### A LOOKING FORWARD

The present play concludes with Eubulus' heavy admonition to his people that they should maintain their state in order, and above all apply their Parliament to serve the purposes for which it is intended--oversight and legislation. The awesome power of the rebellious populace is highlighted; exemplifying, as it does, the threats inherent in regal carelessness, an ill considered inheritance, a brutal homicide, such as the Queen's of her own less favored son.

## 2 THE SPANISH TRAGEDY. 1582-92

### Thomas Kyd 1556-1594

#### BACKGROUND

Thomas Kyd is widely viewed as the master of the revenge tragedy in Elizabethan literature. Once again, as in *Gorboduc*. it is the figure of the Roman playwright and *essayist*, Seneca, who looms generatively in the background, delighting in the self-nourishing substance of 'getting back at someone.' Elizabethan audiences proved reliably sensitive to this genre of forbidden emotions, and more than able, say in Shakespearian drama like *Hamlet* or *MacBeth*, to turn the inherent complexities of revenge into powerful theater.

The writer to whom the present adventure in revenge is owed, Thomas Kyd, is little known to us from his time, and yet his thrilling excursus into psychological horror has made him one of the most fascinating Elizabethan dramatists. We can read Kyd today with an awe as great as Shakespeare inspires in us.

Thomas Kyd was the son of a scrivener. He seems not to have attended University. He seems to have worked for some years in the employ of a Lord, and yet little more is known of his public life than that which is involved with his equally powerful contemporary Christopher Marlowe. (Kyd is known for one other play, *Cornelia* (1594).) In 1591 Kyd was sharing lodgings with Christopher Marlowe; in this situation Kyd was arrested and put to torture, suspected of treason. His room had been searched, and certain 'matheistical' documents found there, denying the divinity of the birth of Jesus Christ. Kyd himself, apparently attributed the papers to Marlowe. The rest of the affair, and of Kyd's biography, remains there.

Kyd himself was dead by the end of 1594.

## The Plot

We know little about Thomas Kyd's life, thus must if possible understand him from the inside out, by observation and analysis. Behind the present play churns a bitter battle between the forces of Spain and Portugal, events normative for this age of adventure, discovery, and the incorporation of vast new sums of wealth. In the present battle a singular event sets fire to the sequence of events that trigger the drama. The Spanish King's son, Balthazar, kills the Spanish officer, Andrea, before being taken prisoner by the Spaniards. Thus the scene is set for an inward struggle between the ghostly Spanish Andrea--for this brave warrior has survived the war as a ghost, and appears to us at the outset of the play as a spirit buddy to the Personification of Revenge--and to the Figure of Balthazar, prisoner of the Spanish. The mediaeval taste for allegory continues to direct the movement of the drama, for all the fustian clutter of languages and people that crowd its pages. The Ghost of Andrea and Revenge continue to hover over the play, invoking Andrea's lust for Revenge. Mustn't we interpret this audience taste as an Elizabethan melodramatic version of our current taste for television murder and horror? Hadn't the Elizabethan audience some of the bloodlust that keeps many of us glued to True Crime on the tv?

A romantic complication is soon introduced, with the hatred of Be-Imperia--the Spanish daughter of the Duke of Castille-- toward Balthazar, the killer of her former lover.the Andrea who has paired himself with the spirit of Revenge. Bel-Imperia, like the ghost of Andrea, devotes her passions to the desire for revenge, which is on its way toward becoming the overriding theme of the play. The reader of *Hamlet* will find himself freshly immersed in the argument of that play: that when the need for revenge meets intellectual indecisiveness action is thwarted and easily turned self-destructive. Hamlet himself is turned by the evolution of such a crisis, into an exemplar of conflicted modern man, cut off from his roots in belief.

A labyrinth of events brings Hieronimo, the Marshall of Spain, to the center of the action. In essence Hieronimo is a slighted figure; his son, Horatio, is denied credit for the capture and slaying of Balthazar, at the outset of the play. Then Bel-Imperia falls in love with Horatio, Hieronimo's son. (She wishes to torture Balthazar, who killed her former lover, Andrea, and she knows that erotic jealousy is the sharpest way to torture him.) In the event, Hieronimo does his best to intervene, which he does, only further inciting the passion of Balthazar and ultimately leaving Hieronimo and his wife Isabella to find the fruits of their intervention, their son, Horatio, hanged. The total devastation of Hieronimo, by this tragic and unexpected loss, gives the drama its powerful and unexpected center.

Hieronimo essentially goes mad with the discovery of his son's body. His wild horror brings the entire tragedy to a standstill.

Lorenzo, who is behind the murder of Horatio, does all he can to conceal the truth of the murder. But the truth comes out, insistently, thanks to Bel-Imperia and Hieronimo, alerted by the truth, realizes how deeply he has been deluded. His whole mental house collapses, especially after the grief-destroyed Isabella commits suicide. (The verse of Kyd fits hand to glove around line 431 of T.S. Eliot's *Wasteland*, in which the author declares himself ready to write a tale of the greatest destruction. Eliot's brilliant adaptation of Kyd's lines brings the Elizabethan vision potently to the center of contemporary English poetry.)

The audience, properly horrified by the injustice done to Hieronimo and his son, will have watched with fascination, to see what kind of revenge Hieronimo will exact, for the suffering he and his family have been through. After a period of anxiety, during which the murderer Lorenzo does everything possible to keep the actual truth away from Hieronimo--he explains to the King that preoccupation with Isabella's death is the source of her husband's deranged behavior--Lorenzo goes on to fabricate a fantasy psychology for Hieronimo, which ultimately only deceives the liar himself. Finally Hieronimo goes beyond himself with acting out--incoherent rants, stabbing the earth with his sword--and decides on a genuine strategy. Taking Bel-Imperia as an ally, Hieronimo fakes a reconciliation with the murderers, and asks them to work with him in staging a play. The play, *Soliman and Perseda*, is intended as an entertainment for the court. Hieronimo so arranged the play that real--rather than make believe--daggers were used; in the course of the drama, and Lorenzo and Balthazar are stabbed to death in front of the Spanish King. The play inside a play, which makes us think ahead to the same literary device in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*,

'the play's the thing wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King' being brutally foreshadowed in the murderous intent of Hieronimo. As we read the play today, in our studies or library carrels, we need to stretch the mind backward into an era of bloody staged melodrama, in which traits of our own taste can be keenly read.

## CHARACTERS

### *The Frame*

The ghost of Don Andrea  
The embodiment of revenge

### *Spain*

The King of Spain, a figurehead, overseeing the turbulent events which transpire in his postwar court  
Don Cyprian, Duke of Castile ; the King's brother  
Don Lorenzo the Duke of Castile's son  
Bel-Imperia, the Duke of Castile's daughter; central to various consequential love affairs at the Spanish court  
Pedringano, Bel-Imperia's servant  
Christophil, Don Lorenzo's servant  
Don Lorenzo's page boy  
Hieronimo, Knight Marshall of Spain; father of the murdered Horatio; ultimately deviser of the play, in which the murderers of Horatio are themselves stabbed to death  
Isabella, his wife; commits suicide after murder of her son  
Don Horatio, Isabella and Hieronimo's murdered son  
Don Bazulto, general in the Spanish Army  
A hangman

### *Portugal*

The Portuguese Viceroy  
Prince Balthazar, his son; captured by the Spanish and a major player in the court intrigues which lead up to the murder of Horatio.  
Don Pedro, the Viceroy's brother  
Alexandro and Villuppo; Portuguese noblemen  
The Portuguese Ambassador

### *In Hieronimo's Play*

Soliman, sultan of Turkey  
Erasto, Knight of Rhodes  
Bashaw  
Parseda

## EVENTS

The play opens with the apparition of Andrea, who was killed by the Portuguese, and of The Spirit of Revenge. These symbolic figures, each speaking for a dominant element of the play, an inevitable feature of the human landscape, book-end the language of the drama, reminding us that from start to finish the desire for revenge drives the action. From the outset, with the defeat of the Portuguese and the capture of Balthazar, each side has undertaken actions which infuriate the other. The open dagger slaughter, during the inner play of Hieronimo, is the climax of the central revenge of the play.

Hieronimo increasingly moves into the deepest role in the play. Once he has learned, through Bel-Imperia that Lorenzo and Balthazar are behind the murder of Horatio, his desire for revenge grows overwhelming.

We are not led to the interior of the play, *Soliman and Perseda*, but are able to judge. From the assignment of roles--Balthasar as Soliman; Bel-Imperia as Perseda--that the play brings together forces violently opposed to one another as well as forces eager for revenge.

Heralding in the final drama, the Hieronimo play, we are introduced to the true madness and suffering of this bereft father, Hieronimo. It is only in view of this inner scenery that we understand how murderously ready Hieronimo is to take action. The entire play has oscillated between melodrama and hard core emotions, and at this point the stress on Hieronimo breaks out into violence, leaving him digging in the soil with his sword, and crossing the line between insanity and homicide. We are reminded, perhaps, of the madesses of Ajax or Lear, whose playwrights have barely been able to contain them.

## THEMES

**Revenge** \The personification of revenge--the making this abstraction into a concrete figure--hovers over the beginning of the play. It is paired with the soul of Andrea, who is himself determined to have vengeance on the Portuguese. This note of profound resentment sequesters, in the magic hand of Kyd, into high poetic divagations into the ancient underworld, with a profusion of gate Guardians, myth figures, Acherontic borders and sulphurous fires of hell; the classical landscape of Hades, in and through which the present play will regularly take us. Revenge is the basic diet of many of the players: the tenor of the entire play will drift through this wounded atmosphere. Within the play, Bel-Imperia smarts with desire for revenge against Balthazar who killed her former lover, Andrea. Above all Hieronimo is vengeful, consumed in the end by fury at the murder of his son.

**Love** The emotion of love is complicatedly intertwined with the emotion of love. The emotions of Bel-imperia provide a case in point. She is comforted by Lorenzo for the loss of Andrea, with whom she was in love, to the Portuguese. Before long, however, Bel-Imperia falls in love with Horatio, The lady confesses that her falling in love with Horatio is in part driven by her desire to take vengeance on Balthazar, who killed her former lover Andrea. Hieronimo learns that bel-Imperia is in love with Horatio. Ultimately Bel-imperia is able to inform Hieronimo that the murderer of his son was Balthazar. From this complexity it turns out that the nexus of love with vengeance is a constant threat to human relations.

**The Depths of Human Experience** *The Spanish Tragedy* is a deeply felt excursus into modalities of human experience. From the outset of the work a great loss is made apparent--the Portuguese loss to the Spaniards. Ghosts have appeared, as have dead men walking, who are the relics of the war. From that point on we plunge into the intricacies of life at the Court of Spain, much involved with the events of the previous war, jealousies (swirling around Balthasar, the captured relic of the Portuguese army) or agonies attached to the dreadful loss of Andrea, which ushers in the ghostly presences which preside over the entire play. One might say that the entire play is a ghostly love sonata, leading up to the excruciating cadenza of the murder of Horatio and the madness of Hieronimo.)

### **3. BUSSY. D'AMBOIS. 1603-4** **George Chapman. 1559-1634**

About the financial life of Chapman we know less than about his work. The leitmotif of the biography centers relentlessly on his poverty. True it is, rumor maintained that Chapman was a student at Oxford, though apparently he did not take a degree from Oxford. He marched on into thickets of financial difficulty. Ambitious to step upward into the nobility, Chapman took out a loan sufficient to cover his expenses as a page in training in the household of Sir Rafe Sadler Knight, a kind of vertical move frequently adopted by aspiring young men of quality. As could easily happen, however, Chapman was stepping into a trap. He never received the money due him for the loan, yet was subsequently and for much of his life, plagued by his creditors. Though his financial situation long remained a burden to him, Chapman did, apparently, manage to spend substantial years in Sir Sadler Knight's household and to those years he owed the work of his splendid Homeric translations, both of Homer and of various poems from the Latin--Ovid always the favorite.

In the early 1590's Chapman saw military action in the Lowlands and wrote-obscure classical reference.- texts of pretty erudite classical reference. Chapman's major creative period was bedeviled by the search for an appropriate patron, and for the persistent poverty he seemed unable to escape. Chapman died in London in 1634, his tomb adorned by a monument by Inigo Jpnes.

His legacy is of major body of poetic work, dashingly impressive both in its sense of the line--robust and lyrical, and susceptible, like Shakespeare's line, to outbursts of daring lyricism. His reference toward such as Donne and Herbert-the Metaphysicals--will remind us of his daring with metaphor and his unusual sensitivity to line endings and line breaks, the verbal of what was to become modern poetry.

## PLOT

One hovers over the opening of the play, in which the author, of whom we know of his perennial poverty, declares

Fortune, not reason, rules the state of things  
Reward goes backwards, honor on his head,  
Who is not poor is monstrous, only need  
Gives form and worth to every human seed...

A strong hint lurks here, of the forthcoming curve of the play, the so-called late mediaeval *De casibus* type of drama, concerned with the ups and downs of fate. And so the play will indeed advance, as its bustling main driver, the Faust like Bussy, insults and jokes and mocks his way through the highest echelons of the French court, finding himself maligned, taken up into friendship, and ultimately ambushed out of the life he loved. Starting at point zero of poverty, where he began, Bussy is condemned by fortune to see the love of his life tortured away from him.

From the start, when the feisty Bussy falls into conversation with Monsieur, the brother of the French King, Henry III, Bussy banters and expostulates with a variety of highborn and sassy members of the King's inner circle. His first dramatic encounter with the King's inner circle occurs as he resists in heavy flirting with the wife of the duc de Guise. The duc and his two best friends challenge Bussy to a duel, with the result that all but Bussy are killed, a violent act of bravado, for which all expect the King to condemn Bussy.

This tacit permission, provided by the King, emboldens Bussy to persist in his efforts at conquest, in which he becomes reckless and daring. He starts in with the wife of the duc de Guise, with whom his freshness leads to her husband's fury, and to a devastating duel. He then turns his charms on Tamyra, the Countess of Montsurry, with whom Bussy has any case been on touchy terms.. After many contorted inter-exchanges of letters and innuendoes, accusations and denials, Montsurry finds his jealousy and suspicion driven to the boiling point. He directly accuses Tamyra of making him a cuckold, and most cruelly, on the rack, forces her to write in her own blood to her lover, Bossy, with the view to setting up an assignation. The assignation is the point, of course, at which Bussy becomes the tool of fortune, and in the end meets his death by ambush.

## THEMES

Jealousy abounds around the court of France, helping give rise to the widely spread view that the French court is far riper with lust and flirtation than the British court. Bussy is very forward in the address he makes to the wife of the duc de Guise, and the affected husbands are reliably infuriated by this behavior.

Cruelty is not rare in the present play, or for that matter in the culture of its time in Europe. We are still a couple of centuries prior to either the Age of Sentimentality in Letters or the Age of Animal Rights in social philosophy. In the present play we tend to blink at the vicious cruelty of Montsurry, to his wife Tamyra, or at the savageness of the ambush of Bussy. Yet whoever goes to sleep at night watching 'I Survived' or 'True Crime' will agree to the abundant cruelty of contemporary entertainment.



Bravado makes an occasional appearance in world drama. For the Greeks this trait of mind might cloak itself as *hybris*, an unseemly boldness of thought or action, like the rash irascibility Oedipus gives expression to in so boldly presenting himself as the appropriate authority figure for interpreting the mystery of the illness of Thebes. Similar outbreaks of bravoure--make their appearance in great world drama--in Marlowe's *Tamburlane*, or in Goethe's *Goetz von Berlichingen*.

## CHARACTERS

Henry III, King of France; a tepid figure, but an interesting ally of Bussy. Sperm aware of the corrupt morals of his own court.

Monsieur, the King's brother, and the initial entry point for Bussy into the royal ambience. He himself has contempt for Bussy's roughshod impulsiveness.

The Duke of Guise, bitter opponent of Bussy after charging him with brassy flirtation with Mme de Guise.

Bussy d'Ambois, from the start an unemployed soldier, stuck in poverty; his life, and the dangers of his life, are turned around by a chance encounter with Monsieur, the King's brother. From that point on he is drawn into royal circles, where he lands on his feet, confident and aggressive. He fights a deadly duel to defend his rather reckless honor, risks some dangerous affaires at court, and is in the end ambushed by Monsieur and his hired assassins. On the whole a brash and bravado hero, who 'does it his way,' Renaissance style. It goes with that territory that the man undergoes many ups downs of fortune.

Montsurry, the Count. Husband of Tamyra, aroused by court rumor to suspicion oh his wife's fidelity--she has a reputation for sleeping around--and increasingly doubtful of his own wife's fidelity. He asks his wife to write to Bussy--the prime suspect--asking for an assignation. (This will be a way of outing her true feelings.) When she refuses, he stabs her, then puts her on the rack, until she finally gives in--to outrageous torture. Living proof, this, of the depravity reigning in the French court.

Barrisor, Enemy of d'Ambois; killed by him in the duel around the duc de Guise and Madame.

Lanou, Enemy of d'Ambois

Pyrhot, Enemy of d'Ambois, slain in the six person duel.

Prisac, friend of D'Ambois, his ally in the fatal duel

Melynell, friend of D'Ambois, killed in duel.

Comolet, a friar; supporter of Bussy, who warns him of the danger of pursuing Tamyra.

Nuncius; reports to the King the results of the murder of Bussy. Lavish in his praise of Bussy

Murderers; led by Montsurry. The actual murder, it seems resulted from a shot fired from an offstage balcony.

Behemoth, devil, a spirit called up by the friar, to determine what is transpiring between Bussy and Tamyra. The magical forces of this spirit are in the air of Elizabethan culture, and make up no small part of the audience's delight in such plays as this.

Umbra of friar; ghost who appears regularly onstage, passing whispered information back and forth between Bussy and Tamyra. Like dumb shows and masques, no small element in Elizabethan stagecraft.

Elenor, Duchess of Guise

Beaupre, niece to Elinor, scornful of Bussy

Annable, maid to Elenor

Pero, maid to Tamyra; reports to Monsieur and the duc de Guise that Bussy had visited Tamyra's chamber.

Charlotte, maid to Beaupre

Pyra, a court lady among the entourage, present when Bussy defies the duc de Guise. A rich habitat of minor players characterizes the early modern British tragedy.

Pages; regular accompanists of all the major players onstage.

## EVENTS

One might say that the language of this play is the first event to tumble over the reader. From Bussy's initial declaration, about poverty and his own pride, the main character is on top of the language. Not even Shakespeare shows more confidence in turning all the resources of the iambic pentameter line to effect. In Chapman the blessings of a deep classical education undergird a powerful imagination.

*Man is a torche borne in the wind, a dreame  
But of a shadow, summ'd with all his substance...*

picks up an archaic Greek formula and adds it brilliantly to the characterization of Bussy.

The fire of the present language throws us directly into confrontation, for as Bussy wanders into talk with Monsieur we see how self-willed is this impecunious soldier, how feisty he is in rejecting the offer of money, and how likely he is to prove rebellious and defiant at court.

Action is destined to assemble itself around this man, and so no wonder that his entrance into court life, he brushes against established macho interest groups. His habit of flirtation leads him directly into conflict and bad blood. A bloody duel, in which he proves his virtue--last man standing, out of six-- heralds him in unmistakably as a fighting member of the royal team.

Flirtation--or is it unlimited desire to possess? Bussy leads farther down the path of involvement, until he presses his luck too far, flirting with Tamyra, the lady of Monsieur himself. Monsieur's natural jealousy is driven through the roof, with disastrous consequences for all involved. The high drama of the play is thus constricted around a short period in the lives of a few intensely interrelated members of the court elite.

The death of Bussy by ambush follows directly on his lecherous behavior, and to the end of what moral point? Daring. Chapman is far too bold to settle for a prudent conclusion, that one should strive for the mean, even for the tepid, in life. After all, Bussy's attraction for us is in his daring. One might say that his ebullient effrontery is what makes Bussy a kind of directing image for human attention. The Nietzschean of Elizabethan drama is the powerful seal of interest for us, in this early modern expression of human vivacity.

To use the expression 'early modern' for the world stance of the literary material we are now reviewing heralds a challenge, to define the sense in which the modern of our last two centuries has advanced beyond the senses of identity and imagination the Renaissance allowed into existence.

## **4 Dr Faustus. 1692** **Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593)**

Elizabethan Poetic Drama

The genius of poetic creation in Elizabethan culture assumes multiple forms: the epic of *The Faerie Queene*, in which Spenser dazzles us with original stanzaic strategies; the Platonic romanticism of Sir Philip Sidney, who in *Astrophil and Stella* and in his *Defense of Poetry* gives heart and soul to the expressions of love; the sonnets of Shakespeare, unparalleled for their blend of passion with perfect subtlety. (The theatrical legacy of Shakespeare is of course the world summit of the British gift to culture.) The British tradition of poetic eminence is fully launched well before the advent of what we later called the Metaphysical, in the early Jacobean Age. By that point, the moments of Donne, Herbert and Crashaw the

dramatic lyric impulse, such as we find it in Marlowe, has largely replaced the grandiosity of tone to which Marlowe had leashed his sensibility.

### *The Young Marlowe*

Christopher Marlowe was one of the generative forces in Elizabethan poetic drama.. He was not high born. He was born to John Marlowe and Elizabeth Archer, in Canterbury, in 1564. His father was a shoemaker, and an aggressive one, who had a volatile temper like his son, and early became familiar with street fighting. In 1589, when he was twenty five, the younger Marlowe was involved in a violent confrontation, in which a man was killed. Marlowe was briefly imprisoned, but not dissuaded from engaging not only in further fights but in behaviors that had his downfall inscribed upon them. Whether through calumny or his own recklessness, Marlowe managed to create around him a sturdy reputation for blasphemy and atheism—particularly scorn for Islam-- and for including a furious burning of the *Koran* in the play *Tamburlaine*-- for homo-eroticism, for street brawling, and above all for espionage, of which he was accused by his enemies, whose constant charge was that Marlowe was a crypto-Catholic, in league with Queen Elizabeth's sturdy army of Protestant agents, who were scattered throughout Western Europe.

### *Marlowe no street ruffian*

All of which is not to say, however, that Marlowe entered his culture at a ruffian point, a sensibility of the streets, for in fact he was indebted to Cambridge University for a much needed scholarship, for which he had made use, in order to position himself for a broad education in Greek and Latin. One thinks, in the Marlowe case, of Francois Villon, and of the wonderful if gross ballads he wrote straight off the streets of Paris, a century earlier; another scholar-lyricist, who was far from the elegance of literary salons. Both men seemed able to pick diamonds out of the mud, and in Marlowe's case, in poetic drama, it meant being able to open in full throttle pentameter and to sustain a vast panorama onto the human condition.

### PLOT

The field of imagination from which Marlowe takes off, into the following excursion onto the human condition, is from the outset high lyrical--dramatic. We open into the voice and mind of Faustus himself, a seasoned academic deeply immersed in learning of all the mediaeval sciences:

*And live and die in Aristotle's works  
Sweet Analytics, tis thou hast ravished me...*

This obsessed academician comes before us at just the moment when his life crisis overwhelms him, and, like Goethe's *Doctor Faustus* (original; 1808)) arrives through soliloquies to see that he must change his life. He must drink at the wellsprings of life. He knows he has come to a break point in the continuity of being-here. (The vehicle of this elevated discovery is unfolded, in multiple punctuated scenes of blank verse, which are significantly punctuated both by soliloquies and by plot-informing contributions by the chorus; like an ancient Greek chorus, which frames a play, managing to generate new perspectives onto the action.) For Marlowe's Faustus, unlike Goethe's, the turn inward is to magic and the powers it confers, rather than to the fruits of lust and eternal youth. Thus from the start of Marlowe's play this learned scholar, who though of lowly birth had schooled and studied himself, could call on the highest powers of necromancy to give him empire over the world. Nietzschean he is in the sense that he exemplifies mysterious and dangerous powers, without input from any creator of the universe.

Faust's quest for magic power begins by a request to his servant Wagner, to fetch a couple of local magicians, Cornelius, a good angel and a bad angel Valdes, who have for some time been touting to Faust the grandeur of magical power. A good angel and a bad angel flutter by, urging Faust in their two opposed directions, toward magic or toward god. The battle for Faust's soul is at this point fully engaged.

Faust's familiarity with the diabolic crew--Lucifer and Beelzebub join in--grows increasingly potent; Faust agrees to a contract with Mephisto, and signs it with his own blood, agreeing that Mephisto will serve him

for twenty four years, at which time Lucifer, the master of Mephisto, will reclaim and possess Faustus' body and soul. In the following scenes Faust begins to waver, wondering whether h was right to abjure God, but regularly reassured by Mephistopheles, and ultimately threatened by Lucifer, who reminds him of his contract. An interview with the Seven Deadly Sins reminds Faust of his strong Christian past, and yet at the same time of his contractual obligation. The widening of the tale breaks loose from this point, Faust and Mephistopheles setting out on an extensive trip around Europe, in the course of which they visit and play tricks on the Pope, on an obstreperous horse dealer, and at the court of the Holy Roman Emperor, where they conjure up the ghost of Alexander the Great. In other words the Faustian pact with the devil digresses off into that blend of dead seriousness with roughshod horseplay, which is Marlowe's persistent relation to the mediaeval as it lies latent in the early modern.

As Faustus nears the end of his 24 year commitment, he bequeathes his possessions to Wagner, ample evidence of the tapering off of his desires. Nonetheless he must venture once more into the hell hole of desires; for a group of curious students he conjures up the image of Helen of Troy and falls in love with her, begging Mephistopheles to allow him to make love to Helen. The circuit of the Fall is complete.

The unity of *Dr. Faustus* is rough edged and anecdotal. There are, fer example, recurring soliloquies in which Faustus reviews his condition and the ultimate prospects awaiting mankind. These reflections--jovial, cynical, scatological, bombastic--hold the entire drama together by tone.

## CHARACTERS

The Pope, on whom Faust plays antic tricks

Cardinal of Lorrain  
The emperor of Germany  
Duke of Vanholt

Faustus; Marlowe's name for his world figure, and archetype of world search. The German tale of Dr. Faustus was circulating in England in Marlowe's time, and perfectly fitted the author's questing imagination. Having contracted a 24 year pact with Mephistopheles. Faustus spends the according me time in world travelling, and fooling around, with Mepstopheles. The tale of Dr. Faustus, of course, was to thrive in later European culture. For Goethe Faust was foremost a symbol of the eternal longing for life, sensuality, the passionately secular, while for Thomas Mann Faust was a German intellectual swept into the decisions and positions of second World War Fascism.

Valdes. Local magician  
Cornelius. Local magician

Wagner, servant of Faustus; a wit.  
Clown; a rustic and yokel, after the Shake;spearian model

Robin  
Ralph  
Vintner  
Horse courser  
A Knight  
An Old Man  
Scholars, Friars, Attendants  
Duchess of Vanholt

Lucifer; the master Devil, proper owner of Faust's body and soul, after the blood pact has been signed.

Beelzebub  
Mephistophilis, the devil who first comes to Faust with the proposal for a blood contract; the diabolical force most intimate to Faustus.

Good Angel  
Evil Angel

The Seven Deadly Sins

Spirit shapes of Alexander and Helen; by products of Faust's nimble gift for calling up mind forms as personal presences.

## THEMES

**Power and Temptation** Already tempted by the prospect of power, Dr. Faustus is haunted, from the start, by the temptation to take over, for himself, the powers offered to him by Mephisto and assorted devils. He is already--the moment he first appears as voice-- tempted by the prospect of power, and arguably considers trading his soul for such power. (Do the names of Vladimir Putin, Donald Trump, and Elon Musk fit the character type we are talking about?) When he concludes his bargain with Mephistopheles he believes that he will exercise all power--although in fact, when you come down to it, the nature of this power is hard to define.

**Bargaining and Betting** The play is riddled with the notion of the gamble which Faust makes with Mephistopheles, to acquire absolute power in his life. This gamble is at least loosely related to the famous *pari*, or bet, which Pascal makes, on the likelihood that there is a god. For Pascal there is a preponderant likelihood that god exists; while for Faustus there seems reason to count on Mephistopheles. Faust is still a mediaeval figure, torn between bustling ambition and daring; Pascal is modern and risking, but still faithful to the hands of god.

**Fate and Free Will** It was a burning question, in Marlowe's time, whether or not mankind is doomed by predestiny, or has the choice, along the course of his life, to make free and independent choices. Dr. Faustus is deeply entangled with this issue, which he embodies in such a way as to universalize it. So deep is this embodiment in Faustus that we must think of him as a living question mark, poised between brash Renaissance individualism and the mediaeval respect for spiritual authoritarianism.

**Knowledge and Learning** Faustus opens the play by declaring his lasting desire to learn, to study Aristotle. To thrive on scholarship is his entire life, though on the other hand he has come to find learning useless, to give him neither power nor riches. He thus generates the universal question, what is to be gained from knowledge? Can knowledge, say of the history of mankind or of the earth save us, or, lowering the demand, help us to care for ourselves? Faustus seems to be putting that crucial question to himself, and coming up with doubt, at least until he comes up with his alternative answer, that knowledge may be a pathway to power and riches. He seems never to return to the perspective in which we initially meet him, as a distinguished professor in a purely academic setting.

## EVENTS

Interspersed through the play are flights both of wild fantasy and of rusticity which stand out as trademarks of Marlowe's unique imagination. Robin and Rafe, the clown, the unfortunate beneficiaries of horns, antics galore in the realms of the Vatican--this play arguably devoted to the starker topics of predestination and free will finds ample room to prance, play and cut up. These points, at which the mediaeval rough and ready meets the pre modern speculative, characterize the drama of Marlowe.

On the high serious end Marlowe strives to formulate the mood of unlocking the heavens and speaking with the directive powers of the universe. He delves constantly into questions of free will, the diabolical, and grace. By giving play to his passion for magic he also aligns himself with those for whom the religious issue of transubstantiation lay at the heart of one's worldview. While Faustus is not a religious man he is hungry for power, a bit different from salvation, but still part of our repertoire of paths to life everlasting.

## 5 The Witch of Edmonton. 1621

**Dekker**, Thomas (1572-1632)-**Rowley**, William (1585-1626)-**Ford**, John (1586-1639)

### Background of the play

The background to the present play lies in events, current with the play itself, which occurred in the parish of Edmonton, outside London. (This closeness to events on the street or, so to speak 'in the papers,' is not the norm in tragedy, nor is it generally in high literature; even in the novel, a genus born in the daily matter of life, essentially a child of newspapers, the social media of its time. As modernly as the Goncourt brothers (1822-96; 1830-1890), who prepped their realistic fiction by touring factories and industrial suburbs, pen in hand, compiling extensive notes on 'the way people live, it was still new to approximate the texture of ordinary life in making fictional accounts of it.) One sees from the outset that the sociological impulse rests at the root of the present play, which explores the real life consequences of diabolism and social morbidity, as they can still be found today. The factor of diabolism, which sits at center of *The Witch of Edmonton*, may in fact seem to project the play's trajectory into the past, and yet that factor, presented in the present play,

### CHARACTERS

Cuddy Banks, local rustic and clown, leader of the morris dancers. This innocent country guy is unique in his ability to sympathize with Mrs. Sawyer.

Dog, Tom, a black dog who is an embodiment of the devil, and who appears on occasion to spread the sense of evil.

Frank, servant of Sir Arthur Clarington. He marries Winnifred, in the mistaken belief that he is the father of her child. In the end he is executed for having stabbed Susan to death.

Justice; the representative of the law, who passes final sentence on Mrs. Sawyer and Frank.

Sir Arthur Clarington, a wealthy landowner, he has had covert sexual relations with Winnifred, Frank's bride, and adopts unscrupulous means to cover up the scandal.

Katherine, daughter of Old Carter, discoverer of the incriminating murder knife on Frank.

Mother Sawyer, the witch, so called because her neighbors have decided that this quite decrepit old Lady is the source of the withering of their crops. In other words she is a scapegoat, and on the basis of that suspicion she is hanged by an angry crowd.

Winnifred, maid of Sir Arthur, falls in love with Frank Thorney. She is pregnant with the child of Sir Arthur, with whom she has had a secret affair

### PLOT

The play opens on a scene out of a text on family life. Frank and Winnifred come before us. Frank and Winnifred find themselves in a room in the house of Sir Arthur Clarington, at prominent of the community of Edmonton. It is an intimate scene--one might say Ibsen avant le fait-- one feels disclosures in the air and yet can barely suspect the degree to which the confidential talk that opens before us is taking place in a deep atmosphere of deception. Frank is there ostensibly to reassure the innocent and virtuous Winnifred, maid of Arthur Clarington, that he will take care of her in her pregnancy--he refers to the child she is carrying, and of which he fully knows that Sir Arthur is the father. He assures her, while living his lie, that he will meanwhile, as he says comfortingly see to the child, housing her with his uncle, and visiting her at least once a month. The true story behind this set of assertions is that Sir Arthur is the child's father, is determined to keep the potential scandal quiet, and has paid Frank to take the scandal off his

back by 'marrying' Winnifred, and keeping her out of sight. A tangle of corruptions, in a circumscribed communal setting, seems to point only inward, to a true social heart of darkness.

By a sharp and brilliant transition, Dekker shifts us into a field near Edmonton, where Mrs. Sawyer, the witch of Edmonton, is gathering sticks. She is an ugly ordinary looking 'old lady,' minding her own business, when she is accosted by old Banks, out walking the fields. She is muttering to herself about her virtual ostracism from Edmonton, ostracism based on the rumor that she is a witch with dark powers, who has brought ruin onto the farmers' crops by her mere toxic presence. Banks is at once hostile and brutal toward her. He beats her and throws her to the ground, as though she is an infected thing. He represents the view of the Edmonton farm establishment,

For whom this allegedly toxic witch is the source of their dried up farmlands. (Significant parallel can be drawn here with the situation in Thebes, at the outset of Sophocles' Oedipus the King, in which the plague harrowing the Theban countryside is caused the network of violence and temper, Oedipus' own witch like nature--as the people saw it).

The course of the drama, the first two acts, continues by juxtaposing the 'witch' --and Tom, her accompanying devil-dog--with the son of the nasty old Banks. Cuddy Banks is a local yokel, fond of wandering in the countryside with his fellow rustics and old buddy type Morris dancers. He lives straight out of the pagan rustic tradition--perfectly genuine at Dekker's time--for which the kind of ostracism central to the present play is alien. He is of a different universe from the morally gnarled figures--Frank, Sir Arthur Clarrington, old Banks, Old Carter--whose cruel and limited thought parameters are narrow and egotistic.

The remainder of the play transpires under the rubric of Frank, his destiny and, ultimately events which could seem to shed an aura of brightness over the earlier dark tones of the play (Hard though it is to call the work even a tragicomedy, the final scenes may seem to lean in that direction).

It seems that moral tone and possibility decline, as Frank's faked marriage to Winnifred leads to a dreadful conclusion, generated by the world of evil that lies on all sides in the society of Edmonton. Frank's father is interested in his children's marriages for one reason, his own personal monetary advantage.

Not love. The result is that he insists Frank should marry Susan, Old Carter's daughter, a financially more valuable step for the family. However the imposing of this bigamous relation, on the anyway morally weakened Frank drives the young husband to flee, his 'wife' Winnifred with him disguised as a pageboy. The result of this break for independence is that Susan, the newly appointed wife for Frank, follows after him, so maddening him with demands to recover her dowry money, that he stabs her to death.

In the end both Frank and Mrs. Sawyer, the witch, are executed. (Frank is surrounded by sympathy and understanding, while there is little sense of remorse at the disappearance of Mrs. Sawyer) Her devil dog, Tom, persists in his plan, to spread the spirit of evil.

## THEMES

**Social differentiation.** In this 'early sociological' drama, it is of great importance into what class you fit. Mrs. Sawyer, the witch, is at the bottom, by every standard of measurement. Sir Arthur Clarrington is near the top of the social pyramid--financially if not morally.

**The spirit of evil.** The village of Edmonton comes on as permeated by the sense of evil. Tom, the devil dog, is bluntly present, as ally of Mrs. Sawyer, but, more widely than that, as an obstreperous symptom of Edmonton's disorder.

**Madness.** At the bequest of Mrs. Sawyer Mrs Ratcliffe is driven mad. A brushing against Tom the devil dog is enough to do it. Madness is volatile in this play, and just under the surface of all events.

**Envy and self-transcendence.** Most of the gentry whom we get to know are flagrantly self-interested--Sir Arthur, Old Carter, Old Banks--interested either in the value of their property or in the marriage value of their children.

#### EVENTS AND COMMENTARY

Discussion of this play must retreat through an historical cloud. Have we seen portrayals of low or middle class life, in early English drama? In *Gorboduc*? *Everyman* in his humor? In the roster of rustics who make their ways through Elizabethan and Jacobean drama? We have indeed extended our lens out beyond the parameters of that 'upper social level, which we find in *The Spanish Tragedy* or *The Changeling* or for that matter the vast majority of the works analyzed here. We have to stop, though, at the instance of a Mrs. Sawter, a relatively non-descript, indeed characterless 'witch,' a product more of her social setting than of any inherent evil. 'Evil' there is in her, of course, but nothing rivalling the evil of her fellow citizens, whose inherent immorality generates the entire sordid panorama of *The Witch of Edmonton*.

Is there then a mysterious spirituality to Mrs. Sawyer, or is she simply a projection of the calamities and disorders of her society? We need to retreat, for an explanation, to an historical moment which precedes the scapegoat thinking of modern social anthropology or of Arthur Miller's astute sociology of Colonial Massachusetts. We have returned to an era in which the mysterious, even the mediaeval is close to the daily, and requires less clarification than would the daily. Mrs. Sawyer is, as she appears to be, just a simple old lady who is harmless unless you want her to be something else.

## 6. *Bonduca* 1611-1614 John Fletcher (1579-1625)

#### BACKGROUND

As pre-modern Britain makes its way toward the outlines of a modern state, that which will in a century become the 'era of Elizabeth,' the cultural self-awareness of the British Isles grows increasingly more robust. What will in later cultural thinking seem the dominance of such a figure as Shakespeare, has at the time of Shakespeare himself, as he shifted from one flat to another in the walled-in, energy-packed new city of London, will to Shakespeare himself, and to his fast growing number of theatrical co-creators, have been just what it was, a throbbing new cultural powerhouse, coming into being from fresh new perspectives onto what then seemed the world. New mentalities and points of expression were bursting up on all sides.

Within this ambience of creativity--the fast blowing cultural currents of a world as that world once was known in Athens, then in Florence--currents that were blowing perspectives drunkenly deep for the thinking Londoner. Was it possible, just possible, that a new cultural world could just then be forming right there at the foot of Big Ben? There could have been many zones of evidence for this fresh awareness. And one of the most potent pieces could have been the vigor of the theater itself, as we see from the outburst of dramatic energy surrounding such already brilliant figures as Jonson and Shakespeare.

Fletcher's play *Bonduca* belongs in this setting. (The name *Bonduca* is a linguistic recasting of the name *Boadicea*, embedded in the aura of British national heritage. *Boadicea*, famed as the stellar queen of the East Anglians, symbolic of the resistance of native Britons to the Roman 'foreigners?!' Given the closeness of British to Ancient Roman culture, this ready to hand reference point is no surprise.) With the revival in premodern times of the archaic *Boadicea* the semi-modern Briton returns into his sense of national heritage. We have the makings of nationalism on stage, as, perhaps, we Americans found a similar heritage point in the highly successful musical *Hamilton*, *In which we were enabled to play with and recreate our own founding days*.



## PLOT

Bonduca prides herself on her victories over the Romans. Her chief military commander, Caratach, warns her that the conflict will be arduous and drawn out. (Think Netanyahu warning the Israelis that the conflict in Gaza will be arduous). The conflict between these two individuals takes center stage, and will remain at the heart of this drama. At this point we switch to the Roman camp. The Romans are debating whether to advance against the Britons. Some favor attack, while others consider it suicide. The two sides make their plans for battle, and carry out the necessary rituals and prayers to the gods.

Slowly, from within both camps, the pressure for full scale combat increases. Caratach berates His sister for having failed to prepare adequately, while the Roman forces are disciplined and orderly. That is not the end of the conflict between Caratach and Bonduca. Caratach and his nephew, Hengo, escape the battle and are able to flee. Bonduca and her daughters find themselves trapped in a fortress. Then the micro texture Fletcher loves sets in.

The younger daughter begs her mother to surrender, but is rejected. Her mother and her sister will have nothing of it. When the wall of the fortress is breached, Bonduca forces her younger daughter to kill herself. (Previous rapes by Roman soldiers have driven a madness into Bonduca )At this point the older daughter of Bonduca gives a powerful oratory--to suit Roman ears--about the value of self-sacrifice. One of the Roman commanders thereupon falls in love with her--they are on the whole a romantic bunch. At this point, however, the Queen and her daughter kill themselves.

The following micro events let us further into the intricacies which characterize Fletcher's creativity. Hengo and Caratach watch from the British heights, from where they can see the funeral of Penius, the most eminent of the Roman commanders. Meanwhile the Roman soldier, Petilius, has continued thinking of Bonduca's elder daughter, on whom he has been seriously soft. While Petilius has been fantasizing a love, he comes in for some mockery from the Roman fellow-soldier, Junius, who was earlier romantic toward another daughter of Bonduca, a sensitivity for which he had taken his share of ridicule.

The fine tuning that characterizes the final scenes of the play takes off from the central actions, and brings us even further down toward the declining of a great battle.

## CHARACTERS

Bonduca is the revered warrior queen of the Britons, who has won important victories over the Romans, and stands for the national power of her people. She is the sister in law of Caratach. In historical terms she was the Queen of the Iceni (in East Anglia, as noted. Anglia). She is known for having driven headfirst against the Romans in the past, and for having gloated triumphantly over her battle victories. Her gloating is part of an exuberant wilfulness for which she was noted above. In the second and major battle of the play, Bonduca ruins the contest for the Britons, by attacking headfirst, and without sufficient organization. Upon her defeat by the Romans she retires to a fortress with her daughters. Besieged by the Romans, the women take poison and die. The tragedy, of this in some ways simply romantic drama, breaks through with the deaths of the women. Bonduca has spun her life thread out too thin.

Caratach is the uncle of Hengo, the young nephew of Bonduca. He is loyal to the Britons but has abundant respect for the manly Roman invaders. He is a counterpoint therefore to the nationalist feminism of Bonduca. His complex attitude toward the Roman British relationship makes him one of the most interesting characters in the play. When Bonduca assaults the Romans, Caratach accuses her of slackness, and himself plays the valorous role of protecting Hengo, her young nephew. Ultimately Caratach is conquered by the Romans, but not greatly to his displeasure, as his Romanophilia continues to dominate him.

The daughters of Bonduca have been raped by Roman soldiers and for the remainder of the play remain fixed on the passion to avenge their humiliation. They have little but contempt for the love advances of the Roman military.

Corporal Judas, Roman officer, commands four starving Roman soldiers. Captured by Caratach, they nonetheless are freed, thanks to their captor's fondness for Rome.

Decius, a Roman officer and friend to Junius the lovelorn and depressed wooer of a daughter of Bonduca.

Druids, background cultists, whose singing accompanies the Britons' prayers to the gods. One should not minimize the archaic-ritual dimension of this drama.

Drusius, compassionate and intelligent Roman officer, who offers Caratach the opportunity to mourn over a fallen corpse he is carrying. Though we think this play a tragedy--fury of clashing armies, the ultimate devastation of one of them--it is criss crossed with romance and the occasional outbreak of tenderness. Fletcher moves here across strikingly premodern territory.

Hengo, nephew to Caratach and Bonduca.

Suetonius, a Roman general who assumed command over the Roman forces in England. He took over from Penius, who was beginning to doubt that the Britons could be defeated. At the play's end he has narrowed his focus to the capture of Caratach, the strong remaining representative of the British army. He succeeds in bringing Caratach back to Rome.

## THEMES

*Romance.* Junius, a junior officer with the Roman army, develops a crush on the daughter of Queen Bonduca. The presentation of this affection makes the young man's mood read as extraordinarily romantic, essentially a crush. ('Crushes' were not normal affective modes in pre modern--let alone ancient-- cultures, except of course in corners like Hellenistic sculpture or in literary ambiances like Petronius' *Satyricon*. In daily Athenian life, of course, middle aged men typically cuddled their hairless favorites down at the palestra, but that was more nearly a social act than a romantic one).

*Feminism.* Bonduca herself comes on as a powerful military minded figure, with none of the feminine entrapments of a Cleopatra. She is an adamant foe of the Romans, and along with her daughters and allies makes a strong stand against the army of Suetonius. Her implacable courage, demonstrated against one of the world's great armies, has given her a long lived emblematic status among the peoples of the British Isles.

*Nationalism* The present play is in some regards, as the above entry suggests, built around a nationalist theme. Britons, even at the time of Fletcher himself, were engaged with empire building, assembling properties which were to become the United States--or India or Australia. It is of course not that the Britons emerged triumphant from even the kind of battle they engage with the Romans. But it is that a figure like Bonduca personified the latent power of the British. A fierce and courageous defiance marks her from start to finish.

*Ambivalence.* One of the most richly tinted figures in the play is the Roman commander, Caratach. He is marked as a pagan Briton, a defender of Bonduca, yet at the same time a determined supporter of the Roman military discipline and control.

## EVENTS

The perspectives of this play defy the perspectives habitual to our contemporary mindset. While we know that a nationalist can be at the same time an admirer of many aspects of 'the other side,' still the behavior of Caratach, who so brazenly accuses Bonduca of disorganization, and the readiness of Caratach to protect the Romans who find themselves trapped or beleaguered by the Britons' attitudes -- does this set of attitudes congeal into a plausible historical picture?

So what kind of British self-flattery does the present play-document propose to be? Is this a relatively contemporary play, in which the complexity of social constructions is recognized? Or does Fletcher feel free to level a hearty broadsides at his own past, while at the same time saluting one of its emblematic heroines?

By and large we have to feel that the present drama plays the kind of complex role that, say, Aeschylus' *Persians* played for the Athenians in the early fifth century B.C. His remarkable achievement was to portray both sides, the victorious Athenians and the defeated Persians, in sympathetic lights. The Athenian audience was thus coaxed into seeing the strengths of both sides. The folly of war was also brought to the fore, by demonstrating the damage done to both sides by the conflict. (The same dramaturgical effect was achieved by Aristophanes, later in the century, in a play like the *Acharnians*, in which we are made to experience up close the damage done to small farmers by the Athenians' incessant fighting). Though a military people, the Athenians were at all times intelligent in approaching the pros and cons of military action.

An even wider purview extends outward, around the present play. We are prompted to consider the *raison d'être* for the very existence of literature. What are Aeschylus, Aristophanes and Fletcher doing, by sharing through an intricate verbal artefact their inner pictures of war in action? They are adopting a strategy for unburdening the strain of raw life, life as the weight of life. Letters, concatenations of verbal construction tools, spin out webs of clarity, through which we are enabled to peer freshly into the seething textures that generate a life or the history of a group of lives.

## **7. THE CHANGELING. 1622**

### **Thomas Middleton (1580-1627)**

#### Background

#### Middleton the Man

Middleton was the son of a bricklayer who had through his own determination raised himself to the social level of a gentleman and came to own significant properties in the London theater district. When Middleton was five his father died, and for the next fifteen years the law courts did all they could to make life difficult for the family; Middleton and his family were preoccupied with acquiring John's and his sister's inheritance from the legal system. For this reason, it seems, Middleton developed a lifelong animosity toward the legal profession, which he often pilloried in his dramas. In a wider sense one might want to trace Middleton's broadly bitter view of mankind the changeling--to the prolonged bitterness of his childhood.

The growth of the self-conscious modern mind is implicit in the biographical squibs with which we interlace these brief entries--Middleton and the rest. We are, of course dealing here with tragedies, and cannot expect upbeat or happy conclusions to all the mind outflowerings we are reading into these stories born in bitterness and loss. There is a mindset that belongs with the creativity of the tragedian: What we may not think, from tragedy, is the self-awareness that belongs with the mindset of the tragedian: pain and loss, after all, are where we cannot sidestep ourselves, or pretend to be other than we are. Middleton's own private pain resonates through the wounded world-sense that pervades the present drama. In the instance before us, however, it will be worth adding a counter point indicative of the way adversity can nestle into prosperity, by a subtle historical turn. Middleton, after all, was the son of an entrepreneurial man of considerable grit, who had worked his way up the social and financial ladders by dint of determination. He had lived his way into the tragic perspective but he had worked his way up through it into a creative height from which to look down on the tragic.

#### CHARACTERS

#### *Alicante*

Vermadero, father of Beatrice, governor of the castle of Alicante. Of normal sight, Vermadero fails to see what is going on under his nose. In particular, he has no sense of the turbulent and depraved inner life of his daughter, Beatrice.

Beatrice, Vermadero's daughter, is the most prominent character involved in the fatal games of love and jealousy in the castle of Alicante.

Diaphanta, her waiting woman, a passive operant in various malign love games.

Tomazo de Piracquo, a nobleman.

Alonso de Piracquo, brother of Tomazo, suitor of Beatrice. Ultimately victim of jealousy and murder.

Alsemero, suitor of Beatrice, a nobleman; the preferred by Beatrice herself

Jasperino, Alsemero's friend.

DeFlores, servant of Vermadero; a gentleman hit man, a perverse lover.

### *Asylum*

Alibius, a jealous doctor; afraid of losing his sexy wife Isabella

Lollio, Alibius' waiting man; a womanizer and a go between, a kind of parallel to DeFlores in the castle.

Isabella, wife of Alibius; interested in the madhouse for her own sexual reasons.

Franciscus, the counterfeit madman; drawn to Isabella.

Antonio, counterfeit fool.

Pedro, Antonio's friend.

### PLOT

There are two parallel plots, one a tragedy, one a comedy, and the two of them intertwined. Each of them involves a saga of love, and violence, jealousy, murder, and confession

The first plot centers around Beatrice, Vermadero's daughter, and her two suitors--Alonso to whom her father has betrothed her--against her will--Beatrice turns to DeFlores, ----and Alsemero, with whom she is truly in love. To get rid of Alonso. Beatrice turns to another admirer of her, DeFlores, whom she loathes, and who is a servant of her father, Vermadero. Beatrice wants DeFlores to murder Alonso for her, thus to help her develop her love for Alsemero. Murder as the pathway to true love is thus the formula of the first plot. The plot is being hatched in Beatrice's mind.

The second plot, the comedy, takes place in a madhouse presided over by Dr. Alibius, the husband of Isabella. of his wife Alibus is jealous of his wife, especially because he can no longer satisfy her sexually. Two lovers are pursuing her--Franciscus and Antonio--they pretend to be a madman and a fool, respectively, in order to remain in her presence.

The drama as a whole opens on a scene introducing us to Alsemero and Beatrice, as they first make a flirtatious encounter with one another. While they are talking, Jasperino's eye falls on Diaphanta, the waiting woman of Beatrice. and he decides that he too should have a girl. The play is vigorously launched on the theme of desire and impulse.

In what follows the author brings together Vermadero with Beatrice, and with DeFlores-- --Beatrice's loathing, who loves her enough to put up with all her abuse.

Beatrice begins to realize that she needs to get Alonzo out of the way, and the best solution seems to her to that DeFlores--who adores her and will do anything for her--should be paid to murder Alonzo. He readily agrees to commit this murder, believing it will be a pathway to sex with Beatrice. He is of course wrong, for she can't wait to get rid of him. De Flores commits the murder, in the course of which he spots a brilliant jewel on Alonzo's finger; he cuts off the finger, and takes it with him.

Back in the madhouse we rejoin Lollio and Isabella, who has just entered the premises. There she finds Antonio, who starts to make out with her, explaining that he has only been pretending to be mad. At this point the jealous husband Alibius enters, unaware of what is going on--which also includes not only the sexual play with his wife, but also an amazing scene in which the mad occupants of the asylum, birdlike in form, descend on the occupants of the madhouse, as chilling as the furies in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, or as a modern madhouse drama into the work of Antonin Artaud.

Back in the castle, too, an extraordinary scene ensues, in which Beatrice has to realize, into what a fatal trap she has fallen by implicating herself with DeFlores in the murder of Alonzo. It is at this point that she recognizes how far she has fallen into a vicious cycle of sin. Of course she had simply misunderstood DeFlores, thinking that she could buy him off, not realizing how deeply in love with her he was. We are in the process of accumulating evidence for how readily people--Alibius, Vermadero, DeFlores--fail to represent clearly to themselves what kinds of danger they have right before their noses.

Act IV is a fascinating dumb show, a mute forecast of the future. Many of the dramatis personae are there, including even Isabella, the wife of the director of the madhouse. (The two worlds of this double drama intersect here, eerily.) In this future world, forecast before us, Beatrice has married Alsemero, whom she still loves, but is unable to make love to him because she is too shamed, by the falsehood she has lived with and the blood she has shed, in order to gain him as a husband. To these evil recourses she adds the additional deception of drawing Diaphanta into an evil scheme. Since Beatrice is too shamed to sleep with her new husband on his wedding night she arranges for Diaphanta, who is still a virgin, to take her place in the dark of night.

After the dumbshow we return to the madhouse, where Isabella appears, dressed as a madwoman--the outlines of Beatrice begin to show on the person of Isabella. Antonio and Lollio circulate among the madness. Alibius the director enters, and the mad revel and dance in readiness for the marriage of Beatrice.

We return to the scene that brings Diaphanta into the bed of Alsemero, and find that morning is approaching, when Alsemero will discover he is not in bed with Beatrice. Searching her mind once more for a solution, Beatrice takes up a suggestion of DeFlores, this time that he should set fire to Diaphanta's quarters. Beatrice takes him up on this, even, incredibly, agreeing that DeFlores should then murder Diaphanta. The vicious cycle joining Beatrice to her hit man, DeFlores--would be once more fatefully at work.

Meanwhile we enter the asylum again, where Isabella is enduring her own trial by sexuality, beset by lovers, and particularly by Lollio. Unaware of Isabella, he acts as master of ceremonies for the varied assaults on the availability of Isabella. In a final scene events bring all the characters together in the castle, where in a violent sequence of personal collisions the major characters induce themselves to confess to the different ways in which each of them has changed, become a *changeling*, in the course of the play. Beatrice confesses to her sins, highlighting the deception she has carried out with Diaphanta. DeFlores admits to having killed Alonzo, and stabs himself to death to escape retribution from Alonzo's brother.

The notion of the changeling permeates the present play. This notion goes into deep anthropology, where it connotes a child of faery and witchcraft, who has been deposited on earth in place of a human child. The changeling is inherently evil. Evil inclinations drive all the major players in the drama, except those,

like Vermandero or perhaps like Alibius, who fail to see, smell, or intuit the presence of evil until they confess their ways back to true humanity. The remainder, the congenitally evil, like Beatrice, DeFlores, or Lollio are damned to their evil until they confess.

## THEMES

**Perception and illusion** Much is made, in this play concerned with delusion and illusion, of the deception wrought by our eyes, which are in many ways inferior to intellectual sight, which probes deeply but which itself often misses the material. It is reviewing. The inability of lovers to identify their beloveds' true emotions is a driver of much of the action of the play. Beatrice inevitably dominates the play's mélange of dark and limited perceptions. She comes into this dramatic world radiant and popular, but is unable to distinguish between male lust--the case of DeFlores--and male congeniality--Alsemero.

**Lust** The impulsive feelings of Beatrice, toward the multiple would be lovers who surround her, lead her to follow her heart into dark corners of lust: into an unnegotiable passion for Alsemero, a deep aversion to Alonzo, and a total disgust for DeFlores, who is at the end the one to whom she seals herself in a pact of homicide. Her dreadful death, stabbed by DeFlores, who had in the end become her lover, illustrates the folly of ignoring her initial engagement to Alonso. Her prioritizing of her own private choices is reckless and impetuous, and takes its own toll in the end. The same must be said of Isabella, who gives her own free rein to her passions. She lets herself be overtaken by the self-interested guidance of Lollio, who wants her for his own lustful reasons.

**Madness** Middleton is a master of interweaving the issues of daily life, ambition, and jealousy with the world of a mental asylum which is for the most part the mirror image of daily life in an upside down version. (Isabella is the chief crossover from the asylum world to the 'real world,' and in fact we are never sure how she makes the transition from one world to another.)

**Confession** The play ends in a flurry of confessions. It is as though Middleton sought here to dramatize first the theological error of sin, then to drive away the implosion of sin by a mass confession of guilt. The saving grace of evil it is, to be willing to clear one's inner platters. Once opened for expression, the human soul is halfway to telling all.

## EVENTS

In the rolling structure of this play, the mad and sane worlds continually intersect, with a little of both traits on each side of the divide. Even those in Vermandero's castle are subject to desire, jealousy, and venality--as in readiness to murder for hire. The mad, or fake mad who are feigning so that they can get sex, carry on in a shadow world, enforcing the overall sense that madness and evil intentions are closely interwoven. Middleton's emphasis is on the omnipresence and infectious range of evil. Tragedy customarily traffics in pain and suffering, but these misfortunes frequently have bad judgment or bad luck as their driver. For Middleton the driver is often conscious self-interested evil, the destruction of others for one's own pleasure.

## 8. *The Duchess of Malfi* 1623 John Webster 1576-1632

### SETTING

As imagination

The *Duchess of Malfi* is a Jacobean revenge tragedy written by John Webster in 1612-13. Published in 1623, it has an actual background, unlike the majority of the tragedies of its time. It is loosely based on events that occurred between 1508 and 1513 concerning the Duchess of Amalfi, whose father was an illegitimate son of Ferdinand I of Naples. After the death of her husband, she secretly remarried, but

beneath her class, as in the play before us. The real life story, as in the play, is taken up by the terrible punishment brought down on the Duchess, by her infuriated brothers, when she married beneath her class. We are plunged into the seventeenth century version of honor killing, as we know it from Pakistan or Greece, today. We know that the revenge enacted, for such infractions of cultural norms, can bring out the worst brutality- and self-destruction, in the human repertoire.

Webster's choice of the present theme enabled him to imagine out from the Elizabethan fashion of the revenge tragedy. He is set upon a simple and direct theme, that of a charming and dignified lady, widowed and of high estate (a princess), who finds herself ready to remarry, but in fact is fatally attracted to one of her servants, from whom she receives a reciprocal passion. While the finest lines of this romance belong to the Duchess and her love, we are made to experience the play as a looming shipwreck, in which the brutal power inevitably rests with the thugs of successional order, in whose deep interests it is, that the widow should choose a mate of power and authority, through whom the power of the Amalfi kingdom can be secured and increased. The power with which Webster conducts this dramatic tragedy--and the lyric intensity with which he sustains two great characters--the Duchess and Bossola--generates a tragedy of Shakespearian magnitude.

## PLOT

The Duchess of Malfi, widowed, finds herself beset by unsuitable flattering courtiers. Although her brothers, one of them a cardinal, do everything possible to prevent her remarriage, which could mean loss of position and wealth for them, she goes with her heart, and arranges a secret marriage with her beloved and trusted servant, Antonio. The establishment comes to realize that the Duchess has three children by the still unidentified culprit. Bossola is given the job of discovering the unidentified lover. A series of whirlwind developments set in at this point.

Bossola finds out the truth about Antonio and reports it to the Cardinal. The Cardinal is enraged, and sends out a search party. Antonio and one of the children escape. But the Duchess, her younger children and the maid are captured, and strangled--a bloody outcome. In the wake of this disaster Bossola is horrified at what the two brothers have undertaken, and passes into a depression, a personal crisis of deep remorse. He has already proven himself of an elevated nature, and will in the end be the true revenge bearer, striving to bring justice to the cause of the Duchess. In a bloody brawl, Bossola mistakenly stabs Antonio to death. Bossola and the Cardinal stab each other to death. In the end Antonio's son arrives, to inherit the Duchess' wealth. The carnage is over, a new regime and outlook are revealed.

## CHARACTERS

**THE DUCHESS.** Far the protagonist of the play, dignified and independent after widowhood has left her vulnerable, she remains as long as possible witty and tender. She has three children by Antonio--her lover, new husband, and faithful servant. The finale of the drama forces us to experience the strangling of this lady--the height of the revenge enacted for the crime of upsetting her family dynasty.

Antonio returns from France with contempt for the French courtiers, whom he views as more corrupt than the English. This kind of value judgment characterizes the man, and is his leading point of attraction for the Duchess. His marriage to the Duchess is idealistic, based on true love, but bears heavy consequences; the marriage must be kept secret, and neither title nor money go to Antonio.

Delio is Antonio's best friend and confidant, throughout his complex marital experiences.

Daniel de Bossola is a convicted murderer, used by Fernando and the Cardinal--brothers of the Duchess--to spy on the Duchess. (He is involved in her murder,- and in the deaths of her children.) Unhappy and cynical, he is a shrewd judge of the culture of his time, as well as of the ups and downs of life on the planet. Cf. for equal brilliance Jacques in Shakespeare's *As you like It*.

The Cardinal. rother of the Duchess Corrupt, cold and determined, at any cost, to prevent the Duchess' remarriage. Cynical, like de Bossola, but far less understanding of the human condition.

Ferdinand, brother of the Duchess, ultimately turned into the imagination of a wolf, from remorse for the evil that he has inflicted on his sister.

Cariola, the Duchess' waiting woman, she too strangled at the same time as her mistress.

The doctor, sent for to diagnose the wolf-complex madness that has overwhelmed Ferdinand.

## THEMES

**Politics and corruption** The Duchess is a charming and gentle persona who has the misfortune to have been brought up in a court where corruption and malice reign. Her desire is to remarry, but that desire puts her on a collision course with her brothers and with their enforcer, Bossola. Her wish is to marry a simple upright person--like the Antonio she in fact marries, but her brothers--the court in general--want her to marry into wealth, family, and power--which means into a politically useful family. The age old conflict between love and self-interest is here primed to lead to disastrous conflict.

**Love and true love** The Duchess may well be said to bestow true love on Antonio, from whom. after all. She has nothing to gain. Her love speeches to him are among the masterpieces of stage dignity and to them Antonio himself responds with equal, though humbled, dignity. The other side of the social coin can be represented by the vulgar and sensuous elite of Florence, whom Bossola scathingly characterizes in his diatribes against the culture of his time.

**Love and class** Antonio is a courtier in the noble milieu of the court of Amalfi, but he is not of noble birth or wealthy, and thus he is--in the eyes of the Cardinal and Ferdinand-- totally unsuited as a match for the Duchess. The intensity of their determination is at its most vivid in their final warnings to the Duchess, about marrying within her own class. Little do they realize how far she has already gone beyond their worst fears.

**Violence as resolution** The finale of the play calls us back to the very human recourse of violence. Because she cardinal and Ferdinand have lost control of their strongest political weapon, they have no recourse but to use violence against her whole coterie. In the end, we are reminded of how the Israeli Defence Force violence defeats itself, in its attempt to wipe out Hamas.

## EVENTS

The present play flows like molten lava from characters initially ensconced in an almost idyllic setting, tucked into the corner of a mediaeval Italian principality, *a piccolo mondo Italian*; from there we will have to pass to a calamitous conclusion in which most of the characters we care about perish. Is there a lesson for us here? Can we catch our breath, wipe away the bloodshed, and proceed to look back on the action?

The lesson we derive will depend on the character in whom we invest our feelings. . If it is the Duchess, and we override our feelings, that she is excessively naïve when it comes to her romantic innocence, we have virtually no alternative figure to steer with. (Only the most attuned text reader would have been ready to double listen to the double edged words of Bossola, who for a long time appears solidary with the classy thugs of the Amalfian polity.) We must subscribe fully to the duchess' nobility, before we realize what a plurality of beloved seconding voices lie out beyond her in the play. She has a devoted and honorable husband, Antonio although she cannot reveal their marriage. And she has her faithful palace retinue.

What goes wrong, to detach this rightful and delightful and honorable woman from the path of order? The explanation must lie in some inherent wretchedness of the company with which she is surrounded. We know nothing about her former husband, but easily surmise that his rank and pocketbook have rendered



him of great value to the Amalfi court. The hierarchy of court leaders were to find Antonio--when finally they knew his social identity,- -intolerably out of place. This realization leads to one of the most dramatically choreographed scenes of the play, in which Ferdinand and the Cardinal remonstrate with the Duchess, stressing and overstressing the importance of an honorable marriage, and of the disastrous implications of failing to uphold the family dynastic standards. Aware as we are, of the Duchess' independence and lofty personal standards, we realize a momentous family clash is on the horizon.

## **9 The Duke of Milan 1625**

### **Philip Massinger 1583-1640**

#### OVERVIEW

Massinger the person and creator

Philip Massinger was born a commoner, but was able to manage a serious education at Oxford, where his father, too, had received his Master's degree, and remained a vigorous presence throughout his life. The son took his own direction, upon graduation from Oxford. But what was that direction? From 1606-13 Massinger effectively disappears from sight, reappearing finally in the London theatrical milieu, collaborating with his friend and frequent collaborator, John Fletcher. (He worked his way into the inner circle of the theatrical world, rising to the position of chief playwright to the King's Men theatrical company. Throughout his professional career he remained immersed in the theatrical world--though few details are known of him. His death perplexes us as do the details of his life. He died in his home, on March 18 1640, alone and having enjoyed, apparently, quite good health to the end. He was buried in St. Saviour's churchyard, alongside his friend and frequent collaborator, John Fletcher. Both men were deeply embedded forces in the London theater.

The play before us here reflects the high drive and action crowded atmosphere of Jacobean theatrical culture. The truth of history is visible in the background, that is the rough outlines of the account of the sixteenth century struggle between France and the Holy Roman Empire, for control over the states of North Italy--where Milan, the axis of the present play, is the key player. "The truth of history is visible." This is the way I put it. The fact is that Massinger knew even minimally more than his audience about this truth--of which he changed or altered many details. It will surprise no creator in the arts, to know that in Massinger's case, as in many others, ignorance was a step on the way to genuine creativity.

#### PLOT

The plot of the present play involves the intense and durable love affair of Ludovico Sforza, the Duke of Milan, for his wife, the Duchess Marceia. The launching pad for the highly fictionalized working over of history, which Massinger undertakes, includes the years when the long simmering antagonisms between France and Spain were at their most intense. and when the Milanese were able to occupy a potent middle ground between the great powers. The Ruler of Milan, in the north of Italy, is Ludovico Sforza, a potent autocratic being whose power is defined by his absolute devotion to his wife. The Duke's mother, and his sister Ariana are not pleased with this absolute devotion to Marcellia, and therein lies much of the upcoming bitterness of the play.

At this point international politics enters the picture; an old friend intrudes on the Duke, with the news that the armies of the Emperor are marching on Milan, and that Sforza must prepare for defeat. The duke's last act, before heading into this fateful conflict, is to instruct his best friend and brother in law. Francisco, that if he, Sforza, does not return alive, Francisco should kill Marcellia. This amazing demand overwhelms Francisco, who begs for an explanation. He learns that the duke could not endure to have his wife marry another.

This fraught and tense situation, culminates in impressive and dignified discussions between the Emperor's court, and that of Milan, with the result that Sforza is securely reinstated in his governorship of

Milan, and returns home--but to find that Francisco has not only not killed Marcellia, but that he is actively making advances to her. One has only to imagine the wildness of his reaction.

Francisco, meanwhile, has used his trump card, showing Marcellia the Duke's letter, in which he outlines the steps Francisco should take to kill her. Now it is Marcellia's turn to be horrified. She has had no premonition of what was in the duke's mind. First the desire to kill her, then the desire to keep her. After a series of complex love-hate relationships, Francisco tells the duke that Marsilia has propositioned him. Sforza stabs Marcellia to death, but then in her dying breath she tells her killer the truth about Francisco, who flees the court, confirming his guilt.

An even more macabre conclusion puts an end to all this. In it, Sforza and Francisco have been old love rivals in the past, Francisco waits until Marcellia is dead--while he pretends that she is alive, and leads Sforza to her corpse, which Francisco has painted to appear fully, cosmetically alive. The corpse however has been covered with poisonous perfumes, and when Sforza leans over to kiss its lips he dies.

## CHARACTERS

Sforza, the Duke of Milan. man of power and passion, presiding over a small and fiercely independent city state, itself surrounded by major contesting powers.

Marcella, Duchess and wife to Sforza.

Francisco, the Duke's best friend, in love with the Duchess, and married to the Duke's sister, who hates the Duchess.

Eugenia, sister of Francisco.

Tibero and Stefano, lords at the court,

Isabella, mother of Sforza, hates the Duchess. Notoriously tall of stature, and feisty, she squares off against her mother in law and her short sister in law.

## THEMES.

**Jealousy** Jealousy is a constant theme in Elizabethan drama. Prone anyway to this weakness, the Duke sets himself up for an excess of this emotion, when he undertakes his mission to the Holy Roman Emperor. He has to make the trip, for his own power is threatened with overthrow, if he can not win a surcease from the powerful Spaniards. The dilemma, for the Duke, is that in undertaking this mission he will leave the gorgeous Duchess to the ravages of would be lovers, back in Milan. The worst possible development transpires, of course, for Francisco, the Duke's best friend, betrays the Duke by falling in love with, and making out with the Duchess. Francisco thus takes revenge on the sexual possessiveness of his best friend. The fall out from Francisco's revenge, consequently, determines the rest of the tragedy, not to mention the stabbing of the Duke himself.

**Duplicity** is an inevitable traveling companion to jealousy, for both states of mind hide in the shadows and thrive on dark clammy emotions. From the outset of the play, Sforza, Francisco and the Duchess seem to be bound together by intense love and respect for one another. The beauty and fidelity of the Duchess are legendary, a Hollywood set of perfections, Francisco is the classic male buddy, and Sforza is the image of confident success and power. Deftly, Massinger reveals to us--at the end of the first Act--that these appearances are all false. No one is truly what he or she seems. The duchess is only nominally attached to the Duke, whose trophy wife she is. The Duke adores his wife as a beauty, but seems to have little more in common with her. Francisco, as subsequent events will soon reveal, has a lethal sexual passion for the Duchess.

## EVENTS

Events, in the vulgar sense, abound in this play. That is, in fact, the hallmark of Elizabethan drama, where elements of the early modern world--bustling, proto-industrial, competitive guarantee an audience full of vociferous enthusiasts eager to make their preferences known. We will have noticed, in discussing a growing number of early modern English plays, a passion, of approaches to hatred through violence. A large cargo of passions, requited or not, full bodied intensity; these ingredients compose the torrent of life embedded in this drama. *The Duke of Milan* is a perfect example of these characteristics.

The play boldly situates itself at the center of these tastes of its time and audience. Take the historical element, which is prominently constructed as the framework of the drama. That element is in the air of the culture; the events backgrounding the play widely known to the educated, though hardly in detail or with precision. (We are, after all, in an age of information, more than two centuries into the printing press, an age of feuilletons, newsletters, and international travel--and even the man on the street will have his internalized map of current affairs inside him) Onto this map he will have projected any number of attitudes, values, and tastes, among which will be appetites for adventure, gain and loss, personal involvements, such as today's television watcher brings to his morning scan of the day's news. Today's at home couch watcher will.

## **10. The Bondman. 1624**

### **Philip Massinger. 1583-1640**

#### MASSINGER MORALIST

To a contemporary American, Massinger will seem here, as often, to have written a carefully moral play, and one that touches issues that transcend the local, that reaches us where we are. We see the familiar pattern of a small state (Syracuse, in Sicily) about to be gobbled up by a larger and rapacious state. (Hitler and the Sudetenland? Russia and Ukraine?) We have the portentous state of affairs in Syracuse, that a large and restive slave population is ready to break loose from its bondage in Syracuse, a not unfamiliar resonance, for us, with the frequent and always simmering slave uprisings that pockmarked our own tradition of slavery. (Howard Fast's *Freedom Road* (1944) picks up freedom themes that Massinger was sensitive to). We understand a close knit, carefully plotted picture of corruption in a state, the rotten selfishness of the elite. This particular Massinger play could have sprung from the pen of a last century New York intellectual. What is the tale around which Massinger spins his version of modernity?

#### PLOT

The play opens on scenes of the upcoming military encounter, which is going to pit the ancient Syracusans against the stronger and belligerent Carthaginians. Archidamus, the Syracusan regent, urges the upper class ladies of Syracuse to be friendly to the regent of Corinth, Peisander, who is coming with his army to protect the Syracusans. Evidently the ladies are given to looking down their noses at foreigners.

Timoleon appears before the assembly of the Syracusans, offering the support of the Corinthians and Peisander. In what was a brutal upcoming assault from the armies of Carthage. Timoleon demands that the wealthy citizens of Syracuse should turn jewelry and other precious objects to the State Treasury!. Cleora is among the first and the most munificent in contributing. The slaves of Syracuse mutter and worry, making their own contingency plans. Leosthenes advances his suit of Cleora, who promises not even to lay eyes upon another man until her beloved returns.

Corisca and her husband Cleon gather in the latter's house--an uprising is in the air-- and as old married extravagants the ladies gossip with one another about their recent affairs.

Pisander, disguised himself as a slave, plots with slaves from Syracuse to stage a slave rebellion, while the upcoming war with the Carthaginians distracts the Syracusan leaders. Peisander's sister, also

disguised as a slave, keeps her brother updated from her position as slave maid to Cleora in Syracuse. Bit by bit, Peisander readies a core of slaves ready to spur the resurrection.

The slave rebellion takes place in Syracuse, momentarily upside downing the pattern of culture, turning masters into slaves, and vice versa. It is a moment of chaos in Syracuse. The Syracusan army returns, victorious, but finds that the gates of the city have been locked against them by the reigning slaves.

In a series of touching reenounters the slaves return to their old quiescence, and peace is restored. Post conflict grievances have for the most part been forgotten but there remain cases like that of Peisander, whose insurrectionist role has for the most part been well remembered. Peisander has been imprisoned, and doubts arise about how to deal with this suitor of the slaves, and suitor of Cleora.

## CHARACTERS

**Archidamus** The praetor of Syracuse, father of Tmagoras and Cleora. He turns the power of Syracuse over to Timoleon, and asks the women of the society to be kind to the occupiers and allies

**Asotus.** A degenerate fop, who abuses his slaves and makes very unsuccessful love to Cleora.

**Cimbrio,** a slave who runs amok, at the whiff of freedom, and who is freed at the end, on condition that he return to his master.

**Cleon,** father of Asotus, a greasy lord who has no respect for his slaves, though after the insurrection he blames himself for the damage he has done to his community.

**Cleora,** daughter of Archidamus, pursued by Leosthenes and Marullo. Expresses an initial interest in Leosthenes, promising to wear a bandanna over her eyes, to shield her from the sight of men. In the end she falls for Peisander.

**Timoleon,** general from Corinth, chosen to make the Syracusans aware of their own corruptness, and so to protect and guide the Syracusans. He builds up the army, against Carthage, and puts down the slave revolt in Syracuse.

**Peisander,** a Theban gentleman disguised as a slave. Leads a slave rebellion against Timoleon. At the close of the play Peisander is first imprisoned and then married to Cleora, thanks to the intercession of Archidamus.

**Leosthenes,** Syracusan who falls in love with Statilia, then with Cleora. Returns to marry Statilia after the war.

**Corisca,** a wanton lady, wife of Cleon, sleeps around freely, abuses her slaves. After the rebellion is put down, she apologizes to her husband for her misbehavior.

**Statilia,** sister of Peisander. Disguises herself as the slave Timandra. Promised to Leosthenes at the close of the play.

In the final scene, in which Timoleon presides over the ceremony, lovers are appropriately rejoined, injustices forgiven, and the classic resolution, known to us from ancient Greek drama, once again casts its balm over the human condition.

## THEMES

### **Human rights**

Through the course of the play Massinger threads issues of slave insurrection taking place in the interstices of the Syracusan war with Carthage. The slave rebellion appears to be opportunistic, taking advantage of the state's preoccupation with foreign conflict, in order to bubble up through the cracks in the general society. Massinger gives us, on the whole, a sympathetic picture of the slavery underclass which, in ancient society, comes in for relatively little sympathy, and which itself is different from the hereditary bondage familiar in modern forms of slavery. (Ancient slaves were by and large prisoners of war, in rare cases permitted to serve within captor families, on the whole however confined to manual labor service, often in such arduous workfields as mines or galleys.) Massinger belongs in the forefront of British dramatists, in his sympathy for this class. By the end of the present drama he has shown us the growth of a maturing relation of Syracusan slaves to their rights and obligations within the society. We may appreciate more richly the Massinger of *A New way to pay Old Debts*, who there probes into the dubious financial practices by which the newer structures of lending and indebtedness were strangling small farmers and agriculturalists. Drama as social critique is making its appearance in the age of Shakespeare, for whom, notably, the world of imagination supersedes the world of social actuality.

**Love and politics** By the end of the present play the lovers appropriate to one another have been apportioned, a degree of harmony has been restored in the city of Syracuse, and the slave uprising has been quelled. The chaos of war and conflict has been pacified. In this manner the classical task of the drama exfoliated into a new practice of resolution in literature. The roughness of literary exploration has been rounding itself off. Massinger gives us, on the whole, a sense of the origins of literary drama in the west. The origins of that drama, as we learned over a century ago from Cambridge anthropologists like A. B. Cook and Jane Harrison, lay in rural festivals in which dance and song exfoliated into ritualized ceremonies where marriage rites consummated social stability and the healing power of delight. This basic social achievement, naively though it may reach in our ears today, is a lasting effort to account for the deep springs of dramatic energy which penetrate Drury Lane or Broadway at our moment. .

**Degeneracy** In the figure of Cleon, the corrupt--fat, self-indulgent, immobile--husband of Corisca-- Massinger presents us with the type of character who renders a society sluggish and incapable of self-analysis. The wife of this slug, Corisca, is animated, but only so that she can venture forth to seek lovers younger and more vigorous than her husband. (A vital young doctor takes up a good deal of her time). She is a lecherous counterpart to her slug husband, and only at the end of the play do she and her husband recognize their previous childishness. The demands of Peisander, that all citizens sacrifice their jewelry and finery to the war effort, take a long time to sink in, but the eventual victory of Syracuse makes the point vivid in the end. Even Corisca and Cleon begin to understand.

**Women's ways** Massinger has a satirical gift for putting women into the grinder. It seems that the advent of Peisander and his troops in support of Syracuse, leads the women of Syracuse to indulge in much anticipatory gossip. What are the men of Corinth like? How do they look? How are they as lovers? One is reminded of Aristophanic humor, as we see it in a play like the *Ecclesiazusae*, or the *Thesmophoriazusae*, where the women of Athens employ a certain sacred day to exercise a sacred rite-- to pick out passing guys from the street, who have no choice but to give the ladies immediate pleasure. The exercise of such rights, and rites crops up equally in the *Lysistrata*, where Athenian women declare their refusal of the ongoing war, by declaring to their mates that there will be no more sex until the war ends. Massinger goes to the heart of these archaic social relations.

**The Classical Instance** It is familiar knowledge to us that Renaissance writers, Renaissance culture in the wider sense, embracing all the arts, was drawn to western classical models for its work. It is not that the Romans or Greeks were in fact active in the world lived by Renaissance writers, for in fact the territories once held by the Greeks and the Romans were by the time of the Renaissance long separated from their days of glory. Rather the power of the Classical, over the Renaissance, derived from the literary traditions of the Middle Ages, which though rich and imaginative and chivalric were largely cut off from any relation to the ancient cultural past. It was in the later Middle Ages, with the revivals of education and scholarship, that the sense of the potent actuality of the classical base was reawakened. The development of classical studies, along with the growth of a proto- tourist industry which set out to visit the grand sites of the eastern Mediterranean, opened up social awareness which made for increasingly

alert audiences for drama, needless to say for the drama which founded itself, like Massinger's, on a wide ranging familiarity with ancient history and literature.

## EVENTS

Cinematic.

There is a narrative boldness in much early English drama that can remind us of the swashbuckling early cinema westerns, the John Wayne era. Warfare figures prominently in the present play, featuring armed conflict, and hard hitting men of command, like Timoleon and Peisander. Real bloody conflict linked cities like Syracuse, Corinth, and Carthage, and Massinger writes straight out of ancient chronicles, from Herodotus to Plutarch. At the same time slave rebellions were in the air of early Roman history, and figure in various early modern plays as theme setters, and pathways into the discussion of political values. Sexual issues weave themselves generously through battles, affairs of uprisings and invasions. Massinger is not to be overlooked in this last respect. The Syracusans ooze with cultural libido. A wanton like Corisca sleeps around recklessly, with anyone except her lecherous husband Cleon, who is squalidly waiting for the guys to come to him. There is nothing subtle about the power with which this play plunges ahead, though there is a moral axis, Massinger's trademark. Slave abuse, indifference to human values, is unacceptable. Fidelity to one's vows is vigorously affirmed--such gestures as Cleora's, to avoid all contact with any man except Leosthenes. When he returns from the war; though, the same playwright is quick to mock the moral unsteadiness of Cleora, when she turns around and falls for Peisander.. On the positive side, Massinger comes out strongly onto his belief that a more humane and sociable society emerges in Syracuse, from the slave uprising and its worthy demand for rights.

## **11 Tis pity she's a whore. 1626** **John Ford. 1586-1639**

### Background

We have come to see that Elizabethan and Jacobean tragedy are bold in narrative themes; In this such tragedy resembles the tragedy of the ancient Greeks, which revels in the bold and bloody. Take the seven remaining plays of Aeschylus. The Oresteia revolves around Orestes' revenge killing, for the adulterous behavior of his mother. Son and daughter eventually coincide on a plan to murder the adulterous wife, Clytemnestra, and her husband Aegisthus. Murdered in the bathtub, Greek style. Aeschylus' Prometheus, pinned to a rock in the Caucasus, is suffering from the peckings on his liver administered by a perpetually circling eagle. Despite this torture, and limited to a bare windy corner of the Caucasus, Prometheus carries on pained and suffering discourse with a colorful cohort of passing victims of Zeus' tyrannical rule. The plays of Sophocles and Euripides are equally peppered with violence and pain--the self blinding of Oedipus, the madresses of Ajax or Medea, in which powerful characters act out, no doubt of their psychopathic danger. Ford, Massinger, and Shakespeare simply step into ancient Greek shoes, as they glve free expression to replicas of human suffering and action at its most painful. They have learned the secret of Lessing in whose Laocoon we see pain frozen, and realize how beautiful agony is. To all of which it seems appropriate to add that the French notion of bienséance developed in the traces of a totally different strand of the ancient tradition .Bienséance, in Corneille and Racine, means something like propriety, a notion which precludes onstage violence, and restricts accounts of militant clashes--or other public violence--to narrative reports by messengers.

### Events

We have mentioned the cycles of passion and lust found generating the present play. As it works, incestuous desire plays out into a nexus of socially unacceptable passions. Plays out? The onstage violence, or Giovanni's lust for Annabella, not only concludes with the rush of three suitors--Grimaldi, Bergetto, Sorranzo-- toward Annabella, but sets the drama in motion.under the same miasma of impurity as does Giovanni's lust. The fruitfulness we would like to think associated with pure love--Dante's for Beatrice in the *Vita Nuova*--the cycles of malignity have been set in motion--should we now replace our

Dante example with a scene from *The Streetcar named Desire*. Putana, the whore maid of Annabella, sets her stamp of approval onto the union of Giovanni and Annabella, clamors to be included among the drivers of the new drama.

The violence of these initial relationships is carried directly over into its precise spawn. Hippolita, a former lover of Sorranzo, is drawn into wanting a revenge trap. She arranges for Sorranzo's servant, Vasques, to join her, in murdering Sorranzo. She will subsequently murder Vasques, adding violence--another cardinal sin--to the culpae Giovanni planted on his return from University. It is Giovanni who appears, walking down the avenue, to catch the lustful eye of his sister, as his gait seems to imply. Putana affirms Annabella's sense that the handsome young man is her lover. The cycle of infections is nearly complete. Perhaps the literary parallel we want, here, is Eugene O'Neill's *Mourning becomes Electra*. Ford is bursting with parallels.

All of these miasmatic prefaces lead us toward what will give the title of the play its meaning. As Putana's whorish body sizzles in the flames of the Church's final solution. Its sanctifying removal of her from the face of the earth, the Cardinal himself seems to self-expostulate 'tis pity she's a whore.' Does he mean what he seems to imply, that the lady's sensual attractiveness, which grounded so many moral failures, might have been an overwhelming beauty, had she been virtuous? Or is that too Pollyanna a view of the Cardinal's words? Does he mean a more sensuous turn of thought? Meaning, if only I too could have had a piece of that lady before she coruscated?

#### Plot

Giovanni has recently returned to his home town, Parma, after returning from University in Bologna. He quickly develops a fatal passion for his sister Annabella. She seems to him the most beautiful woman in the world. His first action is to consult with Friar Bonaventura, a representative of traditional Catholic virtues, to understand the nature of his, Giovanni's, sin. The friar, of course, recommends a strict period of penance and prayer and of course absolute absence from the object of his desire.

Annabella, meanwhile, is beset by a number of suitors, none of whom she likes, and one of whom, Sorranzo, she contrives to have murdered, so that in fact she and her brother enter the middle of the drama equally stained by mortal sin; a rotten prelude to a love affair, and one already bearing harbingers of disaster. The upshot of the dilemma is that Giovanni fails to comply with the deep intentions of his friar. It takes little time before Annabella is persuaded to follow her brother's passion into the same bed, and to ignite an incendiary set of passions, which unfold the story of this drama.

The story of the drama is the tale of the various amorous entanglements that ensue among the suitors of Annabella, their loyal servants, and the two principals, whose tortured incestuous love precludes any happiness and peace. In the climate of illicit affairs, back stage murders, and terror, the eventual killing of Annabella by Giovanni inevitably seems a relief.

#### THEMES

**Passion and Lust** Passion and lust, especially Giovanni's for Annabella, generate the events of the entire play, which in a sense has no meaning apart from the display of those two intense emotions. Nothing external avails to temper the reckless forward march of those two emotions. In the end, however, passion and lust prove themselves empty, and wear themselves out.

**Desire versus Duty** There is little call on the value of duty in this play. The friar, of course, is dutiful toward the principles of his church, to which he remains faithful. Vasques, for example is faithful to his master Sorranzo. On the whole, though, the play is a profound treatise on the necessity of boundaries and on the rewards of a life lived within those boundaries.

**Female sexuality** Female sexuality is largely unrestrained in the play. Putana of course is the exemplar of this kind of looseness. She not only approves of Annabella's incestuous affair, but supports

her mistress throughout her love life, egging her on to take new chances, and praising her when she gains men's approval.

**Injustice** Arguably the greatest injustice of the play is the sacrifice of Putana in the flames. She is a bawd, but nothing worse. Perhaps you would say that she has the mind of a pimp, but nothing extra ordinarily different from that. It is to be noted that while it was the Cardinal who sanctioned the burning, the friar fled the ensuing tumult, having done his best to convince Giovanni to change his pattern of life.

**Religion and Piety** What is the value of religion and piety in the world presented here? The issue of incest and its consequences puts this theme at the center of the work. Religion is presented as essentially incapable of curing a distorted passion, and prone to overkill when it comes to the exercise of punitive power. However--and this is part of the genius of Ford in the present play--the author appears not to intervene onto his text with his own opinions, one way or the other. He neither rails against incest nor against the Catholic Church.\

## CHARACTERS

Giovanni himself comes home, tp Parma, inexperienced with girls, as the stock young European University graduate, a bit pallid and studious, He proves himself later to verge on the psychopathic, as we see in his relationships with his sister Annabella. Indeed it is his sister with whom he falls in love upon his return. He insists that his love is based solely on her beauty; he refuses to accept that his love for Annabella is incestuous. In the end, Giovanni's murder of Annabella perplexes us, as does much psychopathic acting out. Giovanni may have said it best himself. He murdered Annabella so that he could see her in heaven.

Florio, the well meaning father of Giovanni and Annabella. A good man, he is stricken to death by the moral limits his two children have crossed.

Annabella, sister of Giovanni, is an attractive--attracts many men--woman who as far as we can know has no predisposition in favor of her brother Giovanni. She is surrounded by young upper class suitors, who seem endlessly ready, with time on their hands--to pull out a dagger or a poisoned drink, for the sake of love or death. It is to be remembered that Annabella was not the initiator of the love affair with Giovanni. But rather she seeded to be forcefully persuaded, by Putana , before she would accept the proposal to sleep with Giovanni. After her pregnancy is discovered her father, in order to cover the sin. is willing to follow the advice of others, even to the extent of marrying another putative husband to cover the sin. To be murdered in the end by her brother is a wrong and vicious end for Annabella.

The friar is deeply shocked, as per the teachings of the Church, by the notion of incest. When Giovanni comes to him for counsel, the priest cones down hard on the sin of incest. He urges Giovanni to seek seclusion to undertake a deep sequence of prayers and to remain in seclusion until his prayers for purity of soul have been answered. At the end of the tragedy, however, the Friar flees the scene of horror created by an unrepentant Giovanni.

Richardetto, the doctor who is husband to Hippolita. He appears in various guises and disguises.

Vasqes, the witty and loyal servant of Sorranzo.

Putana is the faithful but scandalous maid of Annabella. She encourages her mistress in all her licentious adventures, and for this series of sinful behaviors, she is ordered by the Cardinal to be put to death by fire.