

"Tragedies naturally performed": Kyd's Representation of Violence

THE SPANISH TRAGEDY (c. 1587)

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According to Stephen Greenblatt's by now familiar formulation, there "is subversion, no end of subversion [in Elizabethan drama], only not for us." Nor, seemingly, for the Elizabethans either, since for Greenblatt subversion is always and necessarily contained: the "apparent production of subversion" is "the very condition of [royal] power."¹ It is a depressing conclusion, especially for those who want to see the theater as an agent of social change. Perhaps the vicious cycle of "subversion contained" is not quite as grim as Greenblatt would have us believe: he himself acknowledges that plays like *King Lear* strain this process to "the breaking point,"² while other new historicists, working backwards from the political and social dislocations that followed the closing of the theaters in 1642, have located the source of these revolutionary impulses in the earlier drama.

Nevertheless, both those who would argue for containment and those who insist that the drama is ultimately subversive tend to speak of *state power* and (to an even greater extent) *theatrical representation* as stable, fixed entities. Invariably, these critics "demonize" the absolutist state while "valorizing" the transgressive theater that would seek to challenge it. Evidence suggests, however, that the Elizabethan theater's relationship to political and judicial authority was more complex than either subverting or confirming state power; the theater's boundaries as a judicial institution were especially problematic. As a result of new historicism's totalizing view of antagonistic state and theater, the fluidity of the borders marking the respective domains of the theater and the state has generated little interest. Although scholars like Steven Mullaney have helped us identify "the place of the stage" geographically in Shakespeare's London,³ its boundaries in relationship to competing sources of social and political authority in Elizabethan England remain largely uncharted.⁴

This essay examines the overlapping of authority that occurred at the site of one such boundary: staged violence. Since both the public theaters and the public authorities enacted high drama on scaffolds before crowds of spectators, it is easy to understand the need to keep these two kinds of performances distinct. Official forms of capital punishment were taboo in the theater no doubt because, as Foucault has argued, the scaffold of the state functioned not only as a "judicial" but also a "political" ritual in which a "momentarily injured sovereignty is reconstituted" and restored "by manifesting it at its most spectacular." Accordingly, the "public execution did not [merely] re-establish justice; it reactivated power." For the Renaissance ruler, then, the "ceremony of the public torture and execution displayed for all to see the power relation that gave his force to the law."⁵ To permit the theater to imitate state spectacle could undermine the terrible power of officially sanctioned violence by showing it often enough to make it familiar or by resignating it within ethically and politically ambiguous contexts.

Consequently, though Tudor and Stuart drama was an extraordinarily bloody affair, playwrights steered clear of trespassing on this royal prerogative: characters are stabbed or poisoned, have their throats slit, or are shot while hanging chained from the upper stage, but only on the rarest occasions do we see them hanged from a noose, decapitated, or tied to a stake and then burned, or punished in the other ways carefully prescribed by the state.⁶ We can search the canons of Marlowe, Shakespeare, Jonson, Webster, and others in vain for instances where characters are put to death the same way that convicted felons were in Elizabethan England.⁷

* Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* (c. 1587)⁸ stands as a striking exception. Its audience watches as Pedringano is tried, condemned, and "turned off" by a hangman, and witnesses as well the preparations for the torture and execution of Alexandro, who is bound "to the stake" onstage and prepared to be burned to death. It would also seem to offer the paradigmatic example of how drama can be a powerful agent of social change: the staging of Hieronimo's play results in the death of a royal heir and destroys the political accommodation between Spain and Portugal. Yet Hieronimo's court spectacle only attains this power when it oversteps the bounds of what we would ordinarily consider theater. The lines separating official and theatrical violence are blurred, as Kyd's play insistently seeks out representational no-man's-land, testing the boundaries between the prerogatives of the state and those of the theater. In so doing the play raises the possibility that it is not the opposition between state and theater, but their poten-

tial confusion and indistinguishability, that makes theater powerful and (to the political authorities) dangerous.

In exploring this possibility, this essay questions whether the terms and categories of thought that dominate current historicist and materialist discourse (e.g., "opposition," "containment," "subversion," "resistance,") are simply too inflexible, or themselves too ideologically bound (however "retheorized") to admit the possibility that the changes that may occur in individuals or societies through the mediation of theater can be quite random, subject to all kinds of unexpected and unpredictable forces. Theater, this essay argues, can be "subversive," but it is usually so in ways that are unforeseen by author, censor, or functionalist historicist.⁹ Hieronimo's old play, "long forgot" (4.1.80), only becomes subversive within the context of a situation unimaginable when Hieronimo first wrote it; so too does Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*: in its afterlife upon the Jacobean and Caroline stages it was identified with the transgressive behavior of Englishwomen in ways unimaginable at the time of its composition. It is theater's unpredictability, then, that makes it so dangerous and at the same time so difficult to suppress or censor effectively.

The Privy Council knew exactly what subversive writing it was looking for in the spring of 1593: someone had posted a "lewd and vyle tucket or placarde" inciting London's apprentices "to attempt some vyolence" upon the city's foreign workers.¹⁰ In the course of the investigation Kyd's lodgings were searched and atheistical tracts were found in his possession. Atheism was a capital offense. Kyd desperately maintained that the tracts were Marlowe's and had been accidentally shuffled among his papers when they had shared chambers two years before. He was imprisoned in Bridewell, where he was tortured by strappado.¹¹ In his written confession addressed to Sir Thomas Puckering, Kyd protested that

[I]f I knewe any whom I coul[d] iustlye accuse of that damnable offence to the awfull Maj[est]y of god or of that other munitous sedition tow[ar]d the state I wol[ul]d as willinglie reveale them as I wol[ul]d request yo[ur] L[ordsh]ips better thoughts of me that never have offended you.¹²

Life, cruelly, was imitating art: five years before, Kyd had written a comparable declaration in *The Spanish Tragedy*, when Alexandro, falsely accused of treason, protests that he is innocent:

But this, O this, torments my labouring soul,
That thus I die suspected of a sin,
Whereof, as heavens have known my secret thoughts,
So am I free from this suggestion.

(3.1.43-4)

The Viceroy's response—"No more, I say! to the tortures!" (3.1.47)—was apparently echoed by the Bridewell authorities. In Kyd's play *Alexandro* was spared from torture at the last moment. Kyd himself was not so lucky. He wrote shortly after his release of "bitter times and privie broken passions"¹³ and was dead by the following August. In one of the darker ironies of the period, a playwright who explored so insightfully the workings of state violence had become, through unforeseen circumstances, its victim. It is likely that even as Kyd suffered in prison his play was being performed to admiring spectators.¹⁴

The same authorities who had so rigorously suppressed materials "lately published by some disordered and factious persons in and about the citie of London"¹⁵ nonetheless allowed a different kind of writing, Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*, to circulate freely throughout England, both in print and on stage. Unlike atheistical tracts or racist placards, Kyd's play did not contain lines or passages whose potential subversiveness could be easily identified. Kyd and his fellow playwrights were careful enough to avoid writing that would lead to violent social disturbances. When they did not, the Master of the Revels was responsible for identifying and censoring such passages. But neither he nor the Bishop of London and Archbishop of Canterbury (who censored printed texts) were equipped to deal with the kind of subversion that occurred when the boundary between the domains of theater and the state was transgressed.

The action of Kyd's play repeatedly returns to the site of this contested boundary. The appearance of *Alexandro*, tied "to the stake" (SD 3.1.49), provides an intimation, though not a fully realized example, of state violence enacted onstage. The most obvious example is Pedringano's lengthy trial and public execution in Act 3, scene 6, which conforms closely in its outward features to the spectacle of public execution with which Londoners would have been familiar.¹⁶ Pedringano enters "bound" to the "court," is asked to "[c]onfess [his] folly and repent [his] fault," and does so: "First I confess, nor fear I death therefore, / I am the man 'twas I slew Serberine" (3.6.29-30). As Foucault observes, such a confession "for satisfaction of the world" (3.6.25) was a crucial part of the ceremony of state execution, as was the condemned individual's relationship with the executioner, also elaborated upon in this scene.¹⁷ Pedringano even partakes of the obliga-

tory prayers and address to the spectators who have come to witness his execution. He asks the hangman to "request this good company to pray with me" (3.6.84), before reversing himself: "now I remember me, let them alone till some other time, for now I have no great need" (3.6.86-87). Hieronimo, as Knight Marshall overseeing this ceremony, is appalled to see "a wretch so impudent." He exits, ordering that the execution take place. The stage direction indicates that Pedringano's hanging occurs in full view, as the hangman "turns him off" (SD 3.6.104).

Yet the execution fails both judicially and politically. The judicial failure is underscored when the hangman, having learned of Lorenzo's role in Horatio's murder, approaches Hieronimo, admits that "we have done [Pedringano] wrong," and asks that the Knight Marshall stand between him and "the gallows" (3.7.26). It fails politically because Pedringano thinks that he is only playing his part in Lorenzo's plot, in which disaster will be averted with the reading of the King's pardon. For him the execution is just good theater. As a result, the representation of state violence undermines the authority of the state, since the symbolic meaning of a public execution, that which gives it sufficient integrity to reinscribe and reactivate the power of the sovereign, never occurs. Rather than confirming state justice, Pedringano's death merely parodies and demystifies it, as it parodically recalls the unceremonious execution (and perhaps even token disembowelment) of Horatio, who had been hanged from an arbor, then stabbed, in Act 2, scene 4.

Pedringano's mistaken belief that his execution is merely theater points to something particularly disturbing about theatrical representations of violence: neither the actor to be executed nor the spectators who witness the execution can be entirely sure that the violence is not real. We tend to speak of theater as a place where violence is merely represented, but it is well to remember that the Elizabethan stage doubled as a site of actual violent spectacle. Bear and bull baiting, for example, alternated with play production at the Hope Theater, while fencing was popular at others. Around the time of the first production of Kyd's play there was even a notorious incident in which spectators were accidentally killed. Philip Gawdy writes in a letter to his father on 16 November 1587 that:

My [lord] Admirall his men and players having a deuyse in their playe to tye one of their fellowes to a poste and so to shoote him to deathe, having borrowed their callyvers one of the players handes swerved his peece being charged with bullet missed the fellowe he aymed at and killed a chyld, and a woman great with chyld forthwith, and hurt an other man in the head very soore.¹⁸

The state might resort to what Greenblatt (borrowing from Thomas Harriot) refers to as “invisible bullers”¹⁹; the actors fired real ones. It is also worth remarking that the theaters were identified as a place for violent riots, and that they were situated nearby—and perhaps in the minds of Londoners identified with—the other sites of theatrical violence: London’s prisons. Even more remarkably, the theaters served not only as sites of theatrical executions, but, on occasion, a place where individuals were put to death. Stow reports in his *Annals* (1615) that around the time of the earliest production of *The Spanish Tragedy* hangings took place at the Theatre. W. Gunter, a foreign priest, was hung “at the Theater” on August 28, 1588, and on October 1, of that same year, another priest, William Hartley, was also executed “nigh the Theator.”²⁰

Elizabethans were aware that the practice of using the playhouse for public executions had a precedent in the theater of ancient Rome. Thomas Heywood, for example, in his *Apology for Actors* (written c. 1607), describes the Roman practice of executing capital offenders in the theater. Heywood substantiates his account by citing a passage from Kyd’s *Spanish Tragedy*:

It was the manner of their Emperours, in those dayes in their publicke Tragedies to choose out the fittest amongst such, as for capital offences were condemned to dye, and imploy them in such parts as were to be kill’d in the Tragedy, who of themselves would make sure rather so to dye with resolution, and by the hands of such princely Actors, then otherwise to suffer a shamefull & most detestable end. *And these were Tragedies naturally performed.* And such Caius Caligula, Claudius Nero, Vitellius, Domitianus, Commodus, & other Emperours of Rome, upon their festivals and holy daies of greatest consecration, used to act. Therefore M. Kid in the *Spanish Tragedy*, upon occasion presenting it selfe, thus writes.

Why Nero thought it no disparagement,
And Kings and Emperours have tane delight,
To make experience of their wits in playes.²¹

[4.1.87–89]

In Foucault’s terms, the actions of these “princely Actors” displays, without the mediation of a public executioner, “the dissymmetry between the subject who has dared to violate the law and the all-powerful sovereign who displays his strength.”²² Such action would have placed an Elizabethan ruler in a double bind, since, as scholars like Stephen Orgel, Jonathan Goldberg, and Stephen Greenblatt have urged, royal power was manifested theatrically;²³ the sovereign had a considerable interest in not being represented in the public theater.

Heywood’s quotation from *The Spanish Tragedy* is taken from a scene in which precisely this issue is at stake. When Hieronimo invites the Portuguese prince to perform in his play, Balthazar is shocked at the very idea—“What, would you have us play a tragedy?” (4.1.86). He knows that princes do not act in tragedies for good reason: since rulers are *de facto* actors, a prince would only expose the foundations of his power by performing onstage. Although he wishes to humor Hieronimo, Balthazar knows that the stage is potentially subversive in that it can easily collapse carefully circumscribed social roles by confusing two kinds of performances.²⁴ Notably, in the example Heywood offers, the tyrants, the victims, and the audiences were all aware that this was tragedy “naturally performed”; there is no pretence or deception. The question that remains is what distinguishes these executions from official ones, except that these take place in the theater (or, for that matter, what distinguishes this production from another, except that the actor is killed)?

The possibility of theatrical performances in which people were actually killed onstage without their (or the audience’s) knowledge was seized upon by the anti-theatrical writers, who warned that the kind of bloody spectacle supervised by Hieronimo was one of the dark secrets of the Elizabethan stage. I.G., the author of *A Refutation of the Apology for Actors* (1615), insinuates that Elizabethan actors took advantage of this confusion of theater and real life to kill unwitting actors onstage in front of unwitting spectators. Responding to Heywood’s “memorable example of Julius Caesar, that slew his own servant whiles he acted *Hercules furens* on the Stage,” I.G. finds in the same anecdote evidence against the players:

Which example indeed greatly doth make against their Playes. For *it’s not unlikely but a Player might doe the like now, as often they have done.* And then what a lamentable project would there be for the Spectators to behold: As many times it happens when their supposed innocent persons are falsely hanged, and divers of them ready to be strangld.²⁵

I.G. conflates a number of disturbing scenarios. The first is one in which, like Heywood’s “princely Actors,” a ruler acting in a play kills a subject. The story of Julius Caesar killing his servant differs from the ones quoted above in that Caesar’s actions were not premeditated, nor were they intended as a display and confirmation of royal power. Rather, Caesar, caught up in the part he was playing, forgot that he was only acting. I.G. then implies that this is a common danger of theatrical practice—that it is not unlikely that a player may forget

himself, or, he then suggests more cynically, that players may capitalize on the audience's inability to distinguish between a real and a fake onstage murder, permitting actors to hang their victims "falsely." After all, given the sophistication of Elizabethan stagecraft, how can we be sure that, in Hieronimo's ambiguous phrase, the "wondrous plausible" (4.1.85) violence is merely represented?

All this might be dismissed as the fantasy or nightmare of an empowered theater out of control, appropriating the prerogative of the state by taking justice into its own hands. But according to an account by Will Kempe, the famous comic actor for Lord Strange's Men and subsequently the Chamberlain's Men, the public theater did on occasion usurp the state's role in punishing criminals. Kempe recounts in his travelogue, *Kempe's Nine Dates Wonder* (1600), that while passing through Burrit-wood, on market day,

two Cut-purses were taken, that with other two of their companions followed mee from London (as many better disposed persons did:) but these two dy-doppers gave out when they were apprehended, that they had laid wagers and betted about my journey. Whereupon the Officers bringing them to my Inne, I justly denied their acquaintance, saying that I remembered one of them to be a noted Cut-purse, such a one as we use to a boast on our stage, for all people to wonder at, when at a play, they are taken pilfing.²⁵

Apparently, cutpurses caught in the act in the public theater were hailed onstage, and tied to one of the posts of the stage. What makes all this even more confusing is that cutpurses are busily playing a role, masquerading as members of an audience and preying on their unsuspecting fellows. They are unmasked by revealing their true identity onstage, where, like criminals, they are forced to perform a different kind of role. Just as the state freely appropriates theatricality, so too (at least in such instances) the theater took upon itself the prerogative of the state, and in a kind of publicly authorized theatrical display, acted very much as the state did.

What would have happened to our conception of theatrical representation, one is tempted to ask, if a cutpurse had been caught and dragged onstage at that moment in a production of *The Spanish Tragedy* when Pedringano was bound to "the stake" (or, for that matter, during the anonymous Admiral's Men's play of 1587, when the actor about to be shot at is tied to the stage post)? Would the actor have been cut down and the cutpurse put up in his place? Has that stage post taken on the symbolic identity as the site of a criminal's punishment (and in a regular production, when an actor rather than a cutpurse was tied to it, would

it have retained that symbolic force)? What distinguishes the punishment of an actor playing a criminal from the punishment of a criminal brought onstage and turned into a kind of actor? For that matter, when actors punish cutpurses onstage, is it still theater? Theater within theater? A state within theater?²⁷

Kyd's exploration of the potential indistinguishability of theatrical and state violence reaches its climax in the denouement of *The Spanish Tragedy*. In his role as Knight Marshal, Hieronimo is called upon to fulfill a double function: both to "punish such as do transgress" (3.6.12) within the verge of the court, and to provide royal entertainment. In Act 4, scene 4, these roles coincide in the "tragedy" in which Hieronimo is both "Author and actor" (4.4.147). Kyd fully exploits in this scene the representational no-man's-land between official and theatrical violence. The result is a drama that serves as an immediate and unqualified agent of social change: Hieronimo's entertainment results in the death of Lorenzo, nephew to the King of Spain (and his apparent heir), as well as Baltazar, son and heir to the Viceroy of Portugal.²⁸ Hieronimo achieves justice by inverting the practice of "kings and emperors" like Nero who "have taken delight/To make experience [i.e., trial] of their wits in plays" (4.1.88-89).

Hieronimo's revenge drama depends upon a blurring of representational boundaries. Not only the onstage audience, comprising the "Spanish King, [the] Viceroy, the Duke of Castile, and their train" (4.4.1 SD), but the audience in the London theater is unaware that the murders they witness in the play are "permanent." Hieronimo triumphantly explains that their expectations are misplaced:

Haply you think, but bootless are your thoughts,
That this is fabulously counterfeit,
And that we do as all tragedians do:
To die today, for fashioning our scene,
The death of Ajax, or some Roman peer,
And in a minute starting up again,
Revive to please tomorrow's audience.
No, princes.

(4.4.76-83)

Drama is empowered, but only when Hieronimo's play becomes more than imitation of action. A play written in another time and place turns out to be politically transgressive by accident. Hieronimo had "by chance" (4.1.78) written it in his university days at Toledo, when

he was "young" and "plied [himself] to fruitless poetry" (4.1.71–72). The playbook, "long forgot," was, he says, "found this other day" (4.1.80). There may be an additional level of irony at work here, if in fact the subject of Hieronimo's play—the tragedy of *Soliman and Perseda*—was taken from an extant play of that title attributed to Kyd himself.

Kyd goes to considerable lengths to show that it is not the words by themselves which are transgressive; in fact, for no apparent reason Hieronimo insists that his play be spoken in sundry languages, which Balthazar fears will be "a mere confusion, / And hardly shall . . . be understood" (4.1.180–1). It is not what Jerzy Limon has called "dangerous matter"²⁹ that is politically subversive, but the theatrical use to which those words and actions could be put. The anxieties of Elizabethan anti-theatrical writers were not entirely misplaced.

The *Spanish Tragedy's* own transgressive potential, like that of Hieronimo's revived play, would be realized in a historical moment unimaginable at the time of its composition, when Kyd's play became identified as a site of female resistance to patriarchal constraints. This identification first appears in Richard Braithwait's conduct book, *The English Gentlewoman* (1631), in the chapter on female "behaviour," where Braithwait holds up for "reprooffe" those women who "give too easy raines to liberty" (53). He offers as an example a woman who was so enamored of the theater, which she frequented regularly, that on her deathbed she still cried out for Kyd's play. Going to the theater both to see and be seen

is her daily taske, till death enter the Stage and play his part; whom shee entertaines with such unpreparednesse, as her *extreme act* presents objects of infinite unhappinesse: "As it sometimes fared with a Gentlewoman of our owne Nation, who so fairly bestowed the expense of her best houres upon the Stage, as being surprized by sickness, even unto death, she became so deafe to such as admonished her of her end, as shee clozed her *dying scene* with a vehement calling on *Hieronimo*." (53–54)

The anonymous (and probably fictitious) Englishwoman's obsessive attendance at the theater has so stripped her of reason that she dies confusing life with theater, calling not on her Maker but "on Hieronimo."

Braithwait's anecdote clearly appealed to the anti-theatricalist William Prynne, who offered an embellished version of the story in his

Hieriomastix (1633). In Prynne's account the woman dies crying out "Hieronimo, Hieronimo; O let me see Hieronimo acted" (556). Prynne tries to make the story more plausible by insisting that Braithwait, his source, was "then present at her departure" (556). A decade later, when Braithwait "revised, corrected, and enlarged" *The English Gentlewoman* (1641), he retells the story in greater detail, and changes the ending to make her transgression even more shocking. Here, the woman "who so daily bestowed the expence of her best houres upon the Stage" (199) thinks, in her maddened state, that she actually is Hieronimo:

when her Physician was to minister a Receipt unto her, which hee had prepared to allay the extremity of that agonizing fit wherewith shee was then assailed, putting aside the Receipt with her hand, as if shee rejected it, in the very height and heate of her distemper, with an active-resolution used these words unto her Doctor: ["I]Thankes good Horatio, take it for thy paines.[""] (299)

In this version her actions are made to seem even more horrifying, as the dying woman's reflexive theatricality condemns her soul: she turns her deathbed into theater, projecting onto her physician the role of Horatio, retaining for herself Hieronimo's (or is this the dying Hamlet speaking?). Her soul is lost even as she loses her own identity by assuming that of the male actor's, and reverses (and mirrors) *The Spanish Tragedy's* blurring of theatrical and real death.

The various versions of the anecdote suggest that Kyd's play, having entered the cultural vocabulary, becomes the means of expressing transgressive social attitudes: the play becomes the symbol of a dying woman's refusal to conform to cultural norms, even as the public theater, in Braithwait's account, becomes one of the few places where a woman could transgress the constraints placed on where she can go and what she can do. It may well be that Kyd's Belimperia provides a model for Braithwait's transgressive Englishwoman: only in the theater, after all, in her role as Perseda, was Belimperia sufficiently empowered and "able" (4.4.65) to revenge the wrongs done to her.³⁰ Kyd's great insight, though one that he did not live to see realized (if, indeed, he really saw it at all), was that theater's most serious threat to rival cultural practices and institutions derives from its unactivated potential, making dormant transgressive possibilities difficult to predict and even more difficult to control. As more archival material on theatrical practice becomes available in projects like the Records of Early English Drama (evidence that will no doubt qualify the largely anecdotal history that characterizes my own and many other historicist studies) the

complex relationship between theater and state in Elizabethan culture will have to be rewritten. At this juncture the best that can be said is that there is no end of subversion, even for us; it just may not be the subversion we had been looking for.³¹

Notes

1. *Shakespearean Negotiations* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1988), p. 65.
2. Grenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations*, p. 65.
3. *The Place of the Stage: License, Play, and Power in Renaissance England* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1988).
4. There are some important recent exceptions: see *The Violence of Representation*, ed. Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tenenhouse (New York and London: Routledge, 1989), especially Peter Stallybrass, "Drunk with the Cup of Liberty: Robin Hood, the carnivalesque, and the rhetoric of violence in early modern England" (pp. 45-76); and Leonard Tenenhouse, "Violence done to women on the Renaissance stage" (pp. 77-97). Also see Peter Spierenburg, *The Spectacle of Suffering* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1984); J.A. Sharpe, "Last Dying Speeches: Religion, Ideology and Public Execution in Seventeenth Century England," *Past and Present* 107 (1985), 144-67; David Nicholls, "The Theatre of Martyrdom in the French Reformation," *Past and Present* 121 (1988), 49-73; and Samuel Y. Edgerton, Jr., *Pictures and Punishment: Art and Criminal Punishment during the Florentine Renaissance* (Ithaca and London: Cornell Univ. Press, 1985).
5. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), pp. 47-50.
6. J. H. Baker, "Criminal Courts and Procedure at Common Law, 1550-1800" in *Crimes in England, 1550-1800*, ed. J. S. Cockburn (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1977), provides a useful summary of official punishment of commoners in England. Until 1790 the judgment read to convicted male traitors and felons was as follows:

You are to be drawn upon a hurdle to the place of execution, and there you are to be hanged by the neck, and being alive cut down, and your privy-members to be cut off, and your bowels to be taken out of your belly and there burned, you being alive; and your head to be cut off, and your body to be divided into four quarters, and that your head and quarters be disposed of where his majesty shall think fit. (p. 42)

Playgoers crossing the bridge to Southwark would pass under those heads on their way to and from the theaters. The judgment for male petty-traitors was to be "drawn and hanged," while capital felons like Pedringano were "to be hanged by [the] neck . . . until dead." See, too: John Bellamy, "To the gallows and after," in *The Tudor Law of Treason* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), pp. 182-227.
7. The Admiral's Men's stage property for a lost play—"i frame for the heading in Black Jone"—indicates that behangings could be represented onstage (see E.K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, 4 vols. [Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1923], 3:97). In addition, an episode in Marlowe's *The Massacre at Paris* in which a dead man is hung "upon this tree" (line 493) suggests that there was some sort of

convention for hanging individuals onstage. There is the further possibility that Barabas's fate in Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* (death by boiling in a cauldron) recalls the punishment for poisoning decreed by Henry VIII (though repeated in 1547). Barabas brags of poisoning wells (2.3.178) and subsequently poisons the nuns who have occupied his house. (For a brief account of this legislation, see Parry Williams, *The Tudor Regime* [Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1979], p. 225). For a discussion of Marlowe and state violence see Karen Cunningham's "Renaissance Execution and Marlovian Elocution: The Drama of Death," *PMLA* 105.2 (1990), 209-22.

8. Quotations from the play are cited from Philip Edwards, ed., *The Spanish Tragedy, The Revels Plays* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1959).
9. Foucault (unlike many of his followers) is careful to acknowledge the unpredictable and improbable basis of much resistance: "there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case: resistances that are possible, necessary, improbable; others that are spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant, or violent; still others that are quick to compromise, interested, or sacrificial." Foucault further urges that the search "for the headquarters that presides over" the "rationality" of power-be-misguided; "neither the caste which governs, nor the groups which control the state apparatus, nor those who make the most important economic decision direct the entire network of power that functions in a society." *The History of Sexuality*, Volume I: An Introduction, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), pp. 95-96.
10. *Acts of the Privy Council*, ed. J. R. Dasent, n.s. 24, 1592-1593 (London: 1901), p. 187. The Council was aware of the potential danger of such writing: "oftentimes it doth fall out of suche lewde beginnings that further mischeife doth ensue" (187).
11. For an account of the modes of torture in Elizabethan England see John H. Langbein, *Torture and the Laws of Proof: Europe and England in the Ancien Régime* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1977), esp. pp. 73-90. That Kyd was not racked (as many have assumed) is made clear by Langbein's findings that after 1588 Bridewell replaced the Tower as the regular venue for torture; unlike the Tower, Bridewell was apparently not equipped with a rack. Under the Stuarts, the Tower regained its former prominence, and both rack and manacles were used in torture (84). Langbein also notes that the "reign of Elizabeth was the age when torture was most used in England" (82).
12. Quoted from the transcription of the letter provided in Arthur Freeman, *Thomas Kyd: Facts and Problems* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 182. Sir Thomas Puckering had recently helped prosecute in the "Arraignment of Sir Richard Knightly, and other persons, in the Star-Chamber, for maintaining seditious Persons, Books, and Libels: 31 Eliz. Feb. 31, A.D. 1588." Knightly and fellow defendants were accused of publishing Puritan material described as "a most seditious and libelous pamphlet, fit for a vice in a play—and no other" (Howell, *State Trials* 1:1265 [italics mine]).
13. In his dedicatory epistle to the Countess of Sussex prefacing *Cornelia*, in F.S. Boas, ed., *The Works of Thomas Kyd* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), p. 102.
14. The play had a very strong run at Henslowe's Rose from the early months of 1592 through December-January 1593. The theaters were closed because of plague during the time of Kyd's imprisonment, but the players toured the provinces, and if we take Thomas Dekker's account of Ben Jonson's early career as an actor playing Hieronimo as indicative, Kyd's popular play was no doubt performed in

- the countryside at this time (see Ben Jonson, *Works*, 12 vols., ed. C.H. Herford and Percy and Evelyn Simpson [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925-52], 1:13). *The Spanish Tragedy* may well hold the record for performances at different theaters: Michael Hartway lists (in addition to the Rose) the Cross Keys Inn; the Theatre; Newington Butts; the Fortune; the Curtain; the Globe; and even Second Blackfriars; in addition to provincial and foreign tours (*Elizabethan Popular Theatre* [London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982], p. 103). By 1633 the play had gone through eleven editions.
15. As quoted in Freeman, *Thomas Kyd*, p. 25.
 16. Members of Kyd's audience could recently have witnessed the public executions of Anthony Babington and his co-conspirators for treason, in late September 1586. The account of their execution should give some idea of the spectacle of the scaffold:

Ballard was first executed. He was cut down and bowelled with great cruelty while he was alive. . . . Savage broke the rope, and fell down from the gallows, and was presently seized on by the executioner, his privities cut off, and his bowells taken out while he was alive. Barnwell, Tichbourne, Tilney, and Abington were executed with equal cruelty. The other executions took place the next day. Queen Elizabeth, being informed of the severity used in the Executions the day before, and detesting such cruelty, gave express orders that these should be used more favourably; and accordingly they were permitted to hang till they were quite dead, before they were cut down and bowelled. (Howell, *State Trials* 1:1158, 1160-61)
 17. See Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, esp. pp. 51-59.
 18. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, 2:135.
 19. See the chapter with that title in Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations*, pp. 21-65.
 20. See Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, 2:396, n. 2. Also see: A True Report of the Inditement, Arraignment, Conviction, Condemnation, and Execution of John Waldon, William Hartley, and Robert Sutton, who Suffered for High Treason (1588); and "Unpublished Documents relating to the English Martyres, 1584-1603," ed. J.H. Pollen (Catholic Record Society, 5, 1908), p. 327.
 21. Richard Perkinson, ed.; Thomas Heywood, *An Apology for Actors* and I.G., *A Refutation of The Apology for Actors* (New York: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1941), sig. E3, E3^v [italics mine].
 22. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 49.
 23. See Orgel, *The Illusion of Power: Political Theater in the English Renaissance* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1975); Goldberg, *James I and the Politics of Literature* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1983); and Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations*, esp. pp. 63-65.
 24. A Caroline parodic recollection of *The Spanish Tragedy* makes this point clearly. Thomas Rawlins's *The Rebellion* (1641) includes a scene in which a group of tailors (descendants of *A Midsummer Night's Dream's* rude mechanicals) have rehearsed Kyd's play and prepare to entertain the king of Spain. The lead tailor, Vermine, like Shakespeare's Bottom the Weaver, greedily wants to play all the parts, but will "Leave all to play the King," so that, as he declares in the real King's presence, "1 Vermine / The King will act before the King." The syntax is ambiguous: is there a pause after his name or does he introduce himself as "Vermine the King"? Is he a king who will act before the king, or is he to act the king before the King? Theater's capacity to confuse and elide social difference—a favorite subject of anti-theatrical tracts in the period—proved disturbing to a society that sought through institutional constraints to maintain these distinctions.
 25. Perkinson, *A Refutation*, p. 28 [italics mine].
 26. G.B. Harrison, ed. William Kempe, *Kempe's Nine Dales Wonder* (1600) (London: the Bodley Head, Ltd., 1923), p. 9 [italics mine].
 27. Even after the closing of the theaters the slippery relationship between theatrical violence and political theatrics was recalled: "For when the Stage at Westminster, where the two Houses now Act, is once more restored back againe to Black-Fryers, they have hope they shall returne to their old harmlesse profession of killing Men in Tragedies without Man-slaughter" (from *Mercutius Anti-Britannicus* [11 August 1645], p. 20, rpt. in *The English Revolution III: Newsbooks I, Oxford Royalist*, Vol. 4, [London: Cornmarket Press, 1971], p. 322). I am indebted to William Sherman for this reference.
 28. For an outstanding and groundbreaking discussion of the political implications of Hieronimo's play, see S. F. Johnson, "The Spanish Tragedy, or Babylon Revisited," in *Essays on Shakespeare and Elizabethan Drama in Honor of Hardin Craig*, ed. Richard Hoxley (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1962), pp. 23-36.
 29. See Limon's *Dangerous Matter* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987).
 30. Alternatively, Hieronimo's self-silencing may have offered itself as an appropriate model of resistance to dominant authority. For a discussion of silencing, subjectivity, and *The Spanish Tragedy*, see Catherine Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy* (New York and London: Methuen, 1985), esp. pp. 75-78.
 31. I am indebted to Jean Howard, David Scott Kastan, Stuart Kurland, William Sherman, Edward W. Taylor, and René Weis for their criticism of various drafts of this essay.