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The Political Folly of Malcontents in Early Jacobean Drama

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"Malcontent": the connection of the noun, as opposed to the adjective, with political restlessness or rebellion was established in France in 1574, when, under the name of "Malcontents", François, Duke of Alençon, the youngest son of Catherine of Medicis, and other Catholic and Protestant noblemen, including Condé, Montmorency and Turenne, later joined by Henri of Navarre, entered into open rebellion against a tyrannical intolerant Roman Catholic policy inspired by the League, which had led to the Saint Bartholomew's day massacre. The rebels also opposed the Medicis' and the Guises' supremacy at the court of France, which resulted in changes to the laws of the realm, as well as the barring of certain French noblemen from power.[1]

Today's "indignant" citizens in many parts of the world[2]—Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, etc.—and the deflagrations caused by, on the one hand, the lack of opportunities for deserving young people and, on the other hand,

1 See Mironneau, pp. 29-30, and Jouanna for a more general context.

2 I refer to the movement inspired by Stephan Hessel's little book *Indignez-vous!* (2010), which was immediately translated into more than ten languages. "La révolution du jasmin" started in Tunisia in early 2011, followed by Egypt and Libya.

the lavishing of offices and fortunes on the families and time-pleasing parasites of men in power, make the political malcontents of the late sixteenth century and the emergence of malcontent types in the English drama of the early seventeenth century topical to a certain extent.

Since Lawrence Babb's *The Elizabethan Malady*, it has been customary to link what he calls "malcontent types" to the vogue of melancholy under Elizabeth.[3] Yet Babb makes no chronological distinction, although he covers more than six decades, and mixes malcontents with melancholy lovers, scholars, cynics and villains. In the late 1580s, Elizabethan fiction and prose satire offer some portraits of malcontent citizens which might have influenced the characterisation and appearance of later dramatic malcontents. Some of Shakespeare's characters, notably Hamlet, have been labelled "malcontents" by critics, though never by their author. Hamlet has far too complex a personality and is not sufficiently concerned with social and political problems to be reduced to one of the malcontent types which appeared on Stuart stages, and whose dissatisfaction is mainly political and social, unlike that of Jaques, Iago, Thersites and other cynics.

This study is concerned with two of these figures: the eponymous Malcontent of John Marston's tragicomedy, which presents malcontentedness in a light mode in 1604, and the much darker version of Middleton in 1607, the eponymous revenger of his *Revenger's Tragedy*.[4] In both cases, the focus will be on the political folly or follies of the malcontent character. By political folly I mean a venturesome, ill-advised action, which aims at a political benefit but has, or might have, a destructive, self-defeating outcome.

Altofronto and Vindice, Marston's and Middleton's malcontent heroes, seem to me to reflect, not only the growing favour of tragicomedies, then of tragedies, but the contemporary increase in tensions among English "disaffected" or ill-affected young graduates and members of the gentry or aristocracy. As was the case of the French "Malcontents" thirty years or so before, many could find no position in Church or State. Many accused a Stuart power founded on favouritism and simony, and bluntly criticized the follies engineered by the sovereign's lustful, covetous, sycophantic courtiers.

3 Babb's Chapter 4, pp. 73-101, is headed "The Malcontent Types".

4 The author of the play was long thought to be Cyril Tourneur. Many critics now favour the authorship of Thomas Middleton. All quotations from the play are from the 1996 Revels Student edition, ed. Foakes, which gives Middleton and Tourneur as authors. All quotations from Marston's *The Malcontent* are from the 1998 New Mermaids edition, ed. Kay.

Both Altofronto and Vindice, having reasons to hide their true identities, put on a disguise to assume their malcontent role or roles. These disguises are not mere lunatic poses or "antic dispositions". Do the actors who play these parts emulate Thomas Lodge's character, called "Scandal and Detraction", who is "a right malecontent Devill, who skulks in the back aisles of Paul's", "his looks suspicious and heavie", a reader of Machiavelli "who delighteth in nought els but traiterous and devilish stratagems" (*Wits Miserie and the Worlds Madnesse*, cited in Kay, ed., Marston, *Malcontent*, p. xx)? Does the character they play appear, like Thomas Nashe's "Counterfeit Politician" in *Pierce Penniless*, as a solitary fellow who "goes ungartered like a malcontent cut-purse, and wears his hat over his eyes", as well as "a scornful melancholy in his gait and countenance, and talk[s] as though our commonwealth were but a mockery of government, and our magistrates fools, who wronged him in not looking into his deserts" (Nashe, pp. 65-66)? Apart from one allusion in Marston's play to Malevole's entering "in some frieze gown", which we assume to be of coarse texture (III.ii SD), and Vindice's reference in *The Revenger's Tragedy* to a costume that will fit the part "quaintly" (I.i.102), the dramatic texts do not give us clues about these disguises. Was the short-cut hair which characterized the French "*coiffure à la malcontent*" in the 1570s part of them?[5] We cannot say. Nor is Vindice's "quaintly" a clear indication. Whatever their physical appearance, dramatic Malcontents share scornful dissatisfied countenances evincing intellectual and political superiority; they voice mocking and even pessimistic views of their society, if not of mankind, and affect a great tendency to seclusion. Indeed, they are not part of a collective entity, unlike the "Malcontents" in the fifth French civil war (1574-76). They rather appear as more-or-less crazed individuals whose political enterprise seems doomed from the start, hence foolish. They are shrewd and may be witty, but often lack diplomacy and even prudence.

I

John Marston's Giovanni Altofronto, the former Duke of Genoa, has been deposed by Pietro Jacomo. His disguise as Malevole, a malcontent, and his impeccable judgment save him from what might have proved mere political folly on his part, namely to return, alone, to the court of Genoa, from which he has

5 See the Littré dictionary under "malcontent".

been "forever banished" (I.iv.7), while his enemies, and notably his usurper, whose wife, Aurelia, is related to the mighty Duke of Florence, are still in power, and his own wife, Maria, is imprisoned. Moreover, although he accuses himself of having, while in power, "slept in fearless virtue, / Suspectless, too suspectless" (I.iv.13-14), Altofronto reveals his true identity to Celso, trusting him to be a "constant lord" (2). This confidence might have proved politically foolish, too, had not his judgement been impeccable, since Count Celso now serves the new Duke. Malevole may feel too secure. Speaking of the chief villain of the play, Mendoza, he exclaims:

> Oh, my disguise fools him most powerfully.
> For that I seem a desperate malcontent,
> He fain would clasp with me. (III.iii.33-35)

At the beginning of the play, he has gained a reputation as Malevole, a spitting critic, lavish dispenser of satirical, even insulting comments, railing openly against individual or general vices at the court. This solitary cynical misanthrope is modelled on Diogenes the Cynic and, among his other descendants, Shakespeare's fools and professional railers like Jaques or Thersites. Altofronto boasts of "the fetterless tongue" (I.iii.162-63) he owes to his disguise. Indeed, Pietro himself, who is wary of flatterers, gives his "dogged sullenness free liberty" (I.ii.10) and appreciates his frankness. However, he says, "his speech is halter-worthy at all hours" (26), and "his highest delight is to procure others' vexation" (20-21), as he soon experiences himself. Even the music that emanates from Malevole's window above, at the very outset of the play, is "the vilest out-of-tune" (I.i SD) "discord" (I.ii.2) that can be heard.

The malevolence Altofronto's assumed name advertises manifests itself brutally in the third scene of the play, when he informs his usurper that he is made "a becco, a cornuto" (I.iii.73), a "horned beast" (79), by Mendoza, a treacherous Machiavellian favourite aiming at seizing power by any means. The Malcontent takes the risk of deliberately torturing Pietro's soul by conjuring the general infamy of cuckoldry, "every page sporting himself with delightful laughter, / Whilst he must be the last to know" (I.iii.98-99). Iago-like, he dwells on the "lewd heat of apprehension" (124) his adulterous wife forms in the presence of her lover, and other outrageous physical details, not to mention the possibility of having bastards and incestuous descendants born from them (130-36). Unlike Iago, Malevole does not lie. At the end of the scene, when he is alone, we discover

that it is his "just revenge" (168) that Altofronto is feeding with the "hideous imagination" (137) he fosters in Pietro's mind by delivering unpalatable truths:

> Lean thoughtfulness, a sallow meditation,
> Suck thy veins dry, distemperance rob thy sleep!
> The heart's disquiet is revenge most deep. (154-56)

Altofronto's method might well prove political folly, we feel, not only because it involves a slow process, but because Mendoza is prompt to turn Pietro's jealous rage against another lover of Aurelia, the young Ferneze. This courtier's being caught unbraced as he flies from the Duchess' room almost proves fatal to him; it discredits Malevole's testimony and deflects the Duke's trust. The Malcontent is rejected, not only by Pietro ("Begone, I do not love thee; let me see thee no more; we are displeased" [II.iii.4-5]), but by Mendoza ("Out with him" [13]) and by time-pleasers like Bilioso: "Out, ye rogue! Begone, ye rascal" (23). Altofronto, however, relies on discord, which "to malcontents is very manna" (I. iv.38), and on his ability to turn his sarcastic malcontentedness to his advantage with the vain Mendoza.

Like Tudor dramatic figures modelled on Diogenes, like Kinsayder, the "barking Satyrist" of Marston's own verse satires, and indeed, like Marston, the Scourger of "Villanie", himself, under the guise of Malevole, this Malcontent makes scathing and scurrilous but witty attacks against ambition, lust, opportunism, flattery and other courtly vices. And he does so with great relish:

> Well this disguise doth yet afford me that
> Which kings do seldom hear or greatmen use
> Free speech …
> I may speak foolishly, ay, knavishly,
> Always carelessly, yet no one thinks it fashion to poise my breath. (I.iii.159-61, 164-65)

Fools' and buffoons' jests were still considered a nobleman's standard entertainment under the Stuarts and were allowed free play. James I had several fools at his court. In Marston's play, it was as a free-speaking fool that Malevole had gained Pietro's confidence. As he adapts his speech to his addressee, he manages, thanks to his gleeful "knavish strain", to be hired as a villainous instrument by Mendoza. He professes to be a moneyless bastard, a malcontent willing to serve Mendoza's aims by any means, to be his "slave, beyond death and hell" (III. iii.70). When asked how he feels about murdering the present Duke, he answers

enthusiastically: it is "My heart's wish, my soul's desire, my fantasy's dream, / My blood's longing, the only height of my hopes!" (III.iii.72-73). Richard Burbage, who played the part of Malevole at the Globe after having played Richard III and Hamlet,[6] must have made the most of the diversity and gusto of this "malcontentedness", humorous, clever, high-flown, scatological, punning, sarcastic, learned, inspired, wise and mad in turn.

Faced with a Machiavel whose self-aggrandizing and oversexed dreams are almost comical (see notably I.v.20-50), Malevole's crude banter, in which insulting comments are mixed with animal imagery and unrecognised mythological references ("Ah, You whoreson, hot-reined he-marmoset! Aegisthus" [I.v.7-8]), although not welcome at first, does not deter the man he calls "a treacherous villain" and likens to "a filthy incontinent fishmonger" (10) from hiring his services. Indeed, it triggers in him a new fantasy. Malvolio-like, Mendoza imagines himself as a favourite surrounded by courtly sycophants "licking the pavement with their slavishness" (28), or "odd palace lamprels that engender with snakes and are full of eyes on both sides, with a kind of insinuated humbleness" (29-30), the very butts of Malevole's satire.

Unlike Middleton's Vindice later, Altofronto does not feel bound by the promises he makes when disguised as a malcontent. He avails himself of the opportunities offered—first, money, then weapons: "Lend me rapier, pistol, cross-bow; so, so, I'll do it" (III.iii.79). He collects first-hand information from the self-proclaimed "politic" (89) Mendoza:

> My utmost project is to murder the Duke, that I might have his state, because he makes me his heir; to banish the Duchess, that I might be rid of a cunning Lacedaemonian, because I know Florence will forsake her; and then to marry Maria, the banished Duke Altofronto's wife, that her friends might strengthen me and my faction. (91-96)

But this "crash course" in Machiavellian politics does not influence his mode of action. Although he sounds as overjoyed as Marlowe's Barabas at the prospect of using diabolic ferocity, he is not intent on murdering anyone, an attitude which will become exceptional among tragic malcontents, especially those who are primarily revengers. In the case of Pietro, his usurper, he is satisfied with working

6 The play was first performed by the Children of the Chapel Royal/Queen's Revels at the Blackfriars Theatre in 1604, but the King's Men obtained a copy and played it at The Globe the same year. See Kay, ed., pp. xiv-xvi.

on his soul. He first inflicts on him the pangs of jealousy. He then opens his eyes to the treachery of Mendoza and other courtiers. Mendoza's successful counteraction and his immediate disgrace do not discourage him. Taking his time and, "with most servile patience" (II.iii.14), waiting for the errors and dissensions of overconfident enemies is his policy. And it proves political wisdom rather than folly. Learning from his mistakes when he was in power, when his "suspectless virtue" blinded him to the ills of the court—flattery, lechery and so on – is also political wisdom. Always on his guard, he recommends secrecy to Celso. When the latter impulsively cries, "let's mutiny and die!" (I.iv.25), Altofronto's answer is politically wise:

> Oh no, climb not a falling tower, Celso;
> 'Tis well held desperation, no zeal,
> Hopeless to strive with fate. Peace, temporise. (26-28)

Pietro, for whose rise "No stratagem of state untried was left" (21) by the Florentine father of Aurelia, is now "a falling tower", Mendoza having regained the favour of Aurelia. Initially, Pietro had appreciated Malevole's independent and frank malcontent foolery, of a kind inherited from carnival fools: "I like him, faith; he gives good intelligence to my spirit, makes me understand those weaknesses which others' flattery palliates" (I.ii.26-28). As his credulity concerning Mendoza proves boundless, Malevole shows his usurper the weapons the traitor has given him to murder him, and rails against his "foggy dullness":

> Oh fool, fool, choked with the common maze of easy idiots, credulity! Make him thine heir! What, thy sworn murderer! … Whose hot unquiet lust straight toused thy sheets, and now would seize thy state. Politician! Wise man! (III.v.6-7, 16-17).

And when Pietro overreacts to the villain's malice—"Oh let the last day fall, drop, drop on our cursed heads! Let heaven unclasp itself, vomit forth flames!" (IV. iv.2-3)—he distances the potential pathos with his ironical advice: "Oh … do not turn player; there's more of them than can well live one by another already" (4-5). As far as he is personally concerned, Malevole responds to Mendoza's viciously alert plotting—the villain has, of course, given him instructions to poison the hermit and the hermit to poison him—with vigorous, sound rusticity: "Cross capers, tricks! Truth o' heaven, he would discharge us as boys do eldern guns, one pellet to strike out another. Of what faith art thou now?" (13-15).

Reconciled to Malevole's being "his affliction" rather than a servile flatterer, Pietro, whose own moral conversion is supported by his recent experience and by his fool's energetic and eloquent *contemptus mundi* speeches, repents having usurped Altofronto's dukedom, renounces power forever and vows to dedicate his life "to solitary holiness", "prayer" and "Restoring Altofront to regency" (IV.v.126-28). Undisguising himself, after declaring, "we accept thy faith" (129), the former duke does not waste time in self-congratulations. He shows his political wisdom in knowing when to temporise, but also when to seize opportunities for action. He shows it, too, in knowing whom he can trust and when. At the end of Act Four, Scene Five, having accomplished the first of his self-appointed tasks, he makes his first political appointments with his three allies—the faithful Celso, Ferneze, whose life he saved when asked by Mendoza to bury his body (II.v.118), and Pietro, his new ally:

> The time grows ripe for action; I'll detect
> My privat's plot, lest ignorance fear suspect.
> Let's close to counsel, leave the rest to fate;
> Mature discretion is the life of state. (IV.v.145-48)

The change of tone, language and pace is immediately perceptible. Authority, aphoristic sententiousness, together with iambic insistence and rhyming emphasis, characterise the resolute statesman, who has had a secret counterplot ready in his mind and has decided to disclose it to his allies and quickly take "action", now that the "time" is "ripe".

As far as women are concerned, Altofronto is ready to find an exception in Maria, although, in this Genoan court, which resembles that of James I, several ladies, with the help of the cynical Maquerelle, "illustrate the licentiousness of a [place] where fidelity to one's spouse is subordinate to profit and pleasure" (Kay, ed., p. xxvii). Commissioned by Mendoza, he tests his wife's fidelity under his Malcontent disguise, offering jewels, money, love and shared power in the villain's name, while Maquerelle, also present, insists that honesty and constancy are but "fables feigned, odd old fool's chat, devised by jealous fools to wrong [women's] liberty" (V.iii.12-14). Maria is incorruptible, as expected. Retrieving her and his dukedom is now possible, if his own scheming can defeat Mendoza's machinations.

Of all dramatic malcontents, Altofronto is the first one to claim the malcontentedness of his namesake. He is also the least afflicted with political folly.

Laughter, sound judgement and final mastery of the action save him from ultimate disgrace, unlike later dramatic malcontents, including Marston's own Antonio.[7] Altofronto's disguise has allowed him to expose the treacheries, predations and lecherous vices which pollute the court, to bring his usurper to desperation, repentance and renunciation, and finally to make him contribute to his own battle against Mendoza. His giving Pietro a hermit's garments and making him tell a moving story of his own death from despair because of his wife's adultery achieves two objectives: fooling Mendoza and the rest of the court about the Duke's death, and leading Aurelia to repentance. His foresight about the villain's intentions, gained by becoming his confidant, prevents a double poisoning. Altofronto becomes a trickster himself. He tricks Mendoza with boxes, one of which, he tells him, "being opened under the sleeper's nose, chokes all the power of life, kills him suddenly" (V.iv.38-39). Asked if he could poison, he had answered, "Excellently, no Jew, 'pothecary, or politician better" (32). (Here the theatre-goers were probably alert to Marston's Marlovian intertextuality!) As expected, Mendoza immediately opens the box under his nose, and Malevole pretends to be dead.

The comic tricks and the general mood of this tragicomedy prepare the audience for a happy end. Ironically, it is Mendoza himself who provides the opportunity and the means for Altofronto's last victory. The villain asks Celso to organise "some pretty show to solemnise / Our high installment, some music, masquery" (V.iv.54-55). The word "masquery" obviously denotes a dramatic entertainment based on mythological or allegorical themes, like those provided with great success at James I's court by Ben Jonson and Inigo Jones, but also the various disguises, false pretences and masquerades which are at the core of the play. Rising from the dead on Mendoza's leaving, Malevole exclaims, "Death of the damned thief! I'll make one i' the masque; thou shalt ha' some brave spirits of the antique dukes" (82-83). His ultimate victory over the villain in the final scene is, however, to scorn to kill him: "An eagle takes not flies" (V.vi.156).[8] He and his friends, Pietro, Ferneze and Celso, entering, after Genoan dukes led by Mercury, which are part of Mendoza's installment masquery, "in white robes,

7 In *Antonio's Revenge*. I consider that Marston's Antonio, like George Chapman's Charles, Duke of Byron, and Bussy d'Ambois, both French historical characters, is a revenger rather than a malcontent type.

8 Cf. the Latin proverbial saying, "Aquila non captat muscas", implying that little things are beneath a great man's contempt.

with dukes' crowns upon laurel wreaths, pistolets and short swords under their robes" on the sound of cornets (V.vi.65 SD), have made Mendoza's and the ladies' presence "their Elysium; / To pass away this high triumphal night / With songs and dances" (56-58), each one taking his wife or lover to dance, before surrounding Mendoza, pointing their pistols at him, then removing their disguises, to his great dismay. The "pretty show" engineered by Altofronto has a happy end for all, audience included, but Mendoza. The restored Duke knows he has taken action at a propitious time: "there is a whirl of fate comes tumbling on, the castle's captain stands for me, the people pray for me, and the great leader of the just stands for me"(V.iv.86-89), he had told Celso encouragingly. Yet he is not overjoyed at his victory. This is part of the political wisdom of what Marston chooses to present as a man who trusts providence but also his newly acquired prudence. He is generous, but, like Prospero later, he asserts his right and imperiously disposes of good and bad characters, embracing the faithful, kicking out or dismissing the time-pleasers. He is no longer multivoiced. Having converted his usurper and outmanœuvred the villainy of Mendoza, he can now remove his Malcontent disguise. When wearing it, he was mostly satirical. Very blunt in his playing the fool, he remained, however, vivacious and cheerful, on the whole, not averse to singing or dancing, jesting wittily, even egregiously, with parasites, various fools, licentious women and Maquerelle, a very comic creation of Marston, and Mendoza himself. He has not allowed his feigned malcontentedness to make him completely despair of mankind or womankind or become a murdering revenger. Above all, once his power is reestablished, he trusts he can exercise a virtuous influence on his duchy.

Marston's tragicomedy, although first published in 1604, was probably written in 1602. It seems to comply with the rules of tragicomedy as defined by Guarini's *Il Compendio della Poesia Tragicomedia* (1601). The pattern for the majority of plays including "malcontents" under the Stuarts is, however, mostly tragic, although the characters in question are less and less "great persons". Webster, who contributed "Additions" to the last expanded version of Marston's play, gives important roles to "malcontent types" – Flamineo and Bosola in *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi*, respectively—but the next object of my study is an earlier play, which sets the tone for malcontent types in numerous revenge tragedies.

II

Vindice, the eponymous revenger of *The Revenger's Tragedy*, which appeared in print in 1607, is, in his own guise, a malcontent whose motives are immediately impressed upon the minds of the audience. The son of a man who "died of discontent, the nobleman's consumption" (I.i.26-27), and, above all, the mourner of his "betrothed lady" (16), he holds and watches, with some morbid fascination, the skull of her whom, nine years earlier,

> The old duke poison'd,
> Because [her] purer part would not consent
> Unto his palsy-lust. (32-34)

He vows to "give Revenge her due" (43). His malcontentedness, however, expands to include the whole Italian dukedom, from which purity, justice, and poor noblemen's preferments have been exiled, a dukedom in which he, his brother, their sister and their mother live poorly, depending on Hippolito's place at court, the Duke's chamber and the Duchess' pleasure (60, 61). At the end of the play, he claims his aim has been to "blast this villainous kingdom vexed with sin" (V.ii.60). The malcontentedness of Vindice as himself runs through the play, when he soliloquises, speaks in asides, or is alone with Hippolito, his brother and ally. The rest of the time, he puts on a malcontent disguise, then another one, so that the play illustrates three forms of malcontentedness, two of which are feigned in order to secure his presence at the court. Their interaction is often counterproductive.

In the first scene of the play, Hippolito shows some impatience at his brother's "still sighing o'er death's vizard" (I.i.50). He has found at the court the opportunity they had long been seeking. He can "prefer" Vindice for a job offered by Lussurioso, the luxurious son of the old lecherous Duke. Vindice agrees to put on a disguise in order to present himself as the malcontent defined by Lussurioso himself:

> some strange-digested fellow …
> Of ill-contented nature, either disgrac'd
> In former times, or by new grooms displac'd
> Since his stepmother's nuptials; such a blood,
> A man that were for evil only good —
> To give you the true word, some base-coined pander. (I.i.76-81)

Disgrace, loss of a position or property, fall into discredit and unscrupulous poverty found a malcontentedness that breeds tool-villains and panders. Simple foolery gives way to utter villainy. Vindice says he has a costume that will fit the part "quaintly" (102). Whether this costume was worn out, very old-fashioned, messy or otherwise ungainly, by convention it was impenetrable. This disguise, like others, necessarily entailed a change of name, humour, mode of speech, circumstances, and varied according to the actor who played the part and the possessions of the company. Vindice, under his disguise and his new name, Piato, plays the Malcontent with such "strange-composed" (96) foppery, bold familiarity, sauciness and bawdy innuendoes in his first exchange with the Duke's son and heir that his affectation appears politically foolish. Seemingly forgetting his rank, he impetuously embraces Lussurioso, who demands more restraint in public (I.iii.32-41). Vindice, as Piato, is, however saved by his bragging of having played the fool, or pander, on behalf of many knaves, and of being very knowledgeable in "Drunken procreation" (56), incest, adultery and all the forms of sinful betrayal. Lussurioso says he is "past my depth in lust" (88) and welcomes Vindice's experience "In this luxurious day wherein we breathe" (110).

Vindice's next act of political and moral folly is to swear he will make his brain "swell with strange invention" (120) in order to satify his new master's desire to seduce a young virgin who is "foolish-chaste" (95). He then learns it is Hippolito's and his own sister and mother that he is meant to "cozen … of all grace" (112) with "a smooth enchanting tongue" (111). Foolish enough, unlike Altofronto, to feel morally bound by a promise which, he says, turns both brothers into "innocent villains" (170), he seems to consider forswearing as a greater evil than becoming a pander to his sister, Castiza, and his mother, Gratiana, who, as their names indicate, are chaste and virtuous. At this point, he commits himself to another murderous revenge, this time upon the son of his first offender:

> Swear me to foul my sister!
> Sword, I durst make a promise of him to thee;
> Thou shalt dis-heir him, it shall be thine honour. (172-74)

Meanwhile, his impaired scale of values and his fierce misogyny hinder him from doubting the decision he makes:

> And yet, now angry froth is down in me,
> It would not prove the meanest policy
> In this disguise to try the faith of both. (175-77)

A disguise meant to abuse villainous enemies is now somewhat perversely turned against Vindice's own family. His own basic malcontentedness interferes with the one he affects. The latter is made to serve a "policy" that is base, cruel and dangerous for his relations.

His chaste sister, Castiza, is impervious to temptation. It is in vain that this supposedly well-intentioned ambassador makes a brilliant vindication of the "pleasure of the palace"(II.i.199). Indeed, his eloquence vies with that of devils and vices in Tudor Moralities and Interludes. Piato plays his part with such conviction that we are given the impression that Vindice is not immune to the mad pursuit of luxury, revels and lust he denounces constantly. Neither humiliation, achieved through reminding his sister that it is very "foolish to keep honesty" when a woman is "not able to keep herself" (184-85), nor long disquisitions on the sad, lonely, secluded life that will result from her "honest" refusal of the favours of the future heir have any effect on Castiza, but the fortress of her mother's virtue proves less impregnable. The more foolish seems the policy of Vindice. Instead of being content with her brave resistance at first—"Oh fie, fie; the riches of the world cannot hire a mother to such a most unnatural task!" (84-85)—he uses his command of language and emotions with such impassioned power, and he makes money so tempting for the impoverished old woman, that, when he actually gives her many "angels" (86), asking, "can these persuade you / To forget heaven?" (121-22), she avidly rushes on the "shine" (127) of the coins, proving Lussurioso's words true. Scorning the novice who thought then that it was "mere impossible that a mother by any gifts should become a bawd to her own daughter" (I.iii.150-52), the Duke's son had declared that "nowadays" the name of bawd "does eclipse three quarters of a mother" (156-57). In the light of what follows, Vindice's answer, "Let me alone then to eclipse the fourth" (159), appears to be, not simply a precaution, but a foolish, vainglorious boast. When he sees his mother's virtue is weakening, he proves in an aside that his motives are rather cynical and misogynistic:

> I e'en quake to proceed, my spirit turns edge;
> I fear me she's unmother'd, yet I'll venture.
> *That woman is all male, whom none can enter.* (II.i.110-12)

After "unmothering" Gratiana, and imprudently recounting this to Lussurioso, he takes a further foolish risk in allowing her to try to turn his sister "into use" (II. ii.99), as he realises later, when alone:

I was a villain not to be forsworn
To this our lecherous hope, the duke's son;
For lawyers, merchants, some divines, and all
Count beneficial perjury a sin small. (II.ii.100-3)

Having been encouraged by Piato's transmission of Gratiana's "promising words, … / 'My lord shall be most welcome'" (59-60), Lussurioso, counting his "desires … happy" and "freemen" (70), and thanking his "precious" (71) procurer with the prospect of a preferment, tells him he will visit Castiza this very night. Vindice's reaction recalls Hamlet's in the "prayer scene":

[*Drawing his sword*] O, shall I kill him o'th' wrong side now? No;
Sword, thou wast never a back-biter yet.
I'll pierce him to his face;
He shall die looking upon me:
Thy veins are swell'd with lust, this shall unfill 'em;
Great men were gods, if beggars could not kill 'em. (90-95)

A man of words rather than of action, he goes on vituperating about the degeneracy around him, even when his brother brings him news from the court. "You flow well, brother", says Hippolito. Vindice replies, "Puh, I'm shallow yet, / Too sparing and too modest—shall I tell thee?" (146-47). As a consequence, he has foolishly forgotten his decision to save his sister's honour, so that, when Lussurioso is on his way to Castiza's house, and wants Piato to accompany him, "I ha' no way now to cross it, but to kill him" (157), he first thinks. "Do it now!" must have been the response of the audience! But Vindice hits upon an idea to deflect his master's course: the Duke's bastard is making his father a cuckold, according to Hippolito. Lussurioso, informed by Piato, suddenly attempts to save his father's honour by killing the bastard. The two vengeful brothers gleefully anticipate this event: "Good, happy, swift; there's gunpowder i' th' Court, / Wild-fire at midnight" (171-72), exclaims Hippolito, hoping that Lussurioso's "heedless fury" (172) will turn against him. It does, indeed, being interpreted by the Duke, who was in bed with the Duchess, as an attempt to kill him (II.iii.4-17). "'Tis now good policy to be from sight"(29), decides Vindice. His revenge is delayed. His single achievement, access to the Duke's court, thanks to his malcontent disguise as Piato, has almost led him to pander his own sister. His improvised attempt to have Lussurioso's "vicious purpose … cross'd" (30-31) is successful only to a point:

neither the Duke nor his heir is durably harmed, whereas Piato loses his job as "slave-pander" (36).

Two acts later, it is again Hippolito who offers Vindice an opportunity to serve Lussurioso, this time as his real self, since he is not known at the court, but he prefers to put on a new disguise in spite of his brother's apprehensions:

> How will you appear in fashion different,
> As well as in apparel, to make all things possible?
> If you be but once tripp'd, we fall forever.
> It is not the least policy to be doubtful. (IV.ii.22-25)

The disguise Vindice chooses is that of a "discontented" (36) rustic man with a melancholy, "heavy sounding" (29) voice and an old-fashioned demeanour. Relishing this "quainter fallacy" (5), he snatches off his hat and bows to Lussurioso as he greets him: "How don you? God you god den" (42). The Duke's heir wonders at this god-naming rusticity, then at a "parlous melancholy" (106) which, to illustrate the fact that it has been caused by twenty-three years in law, adorns its language with legal terms mingled with "Barbary Latin" (62). While the spectator may have enjoyed Burbage's performance as two very different malcontents, he might also have questioned the political wisdom of the Revenger's policy. The dramatist, however, makes his villain foolishly think of Vindice, "'Has wit enough / To murder any man"(106-7), little supposing himself to be the man Vindice means to kill, having already killed his father, in a sequence to which we shall return.

Ironically, it is for killing himself as Piato that the "ill-monied" (108) malcontent is given means, Piato being a mad fool who, according to his employer, has attempted to corrupt his virgin sister and his mother. In fact, Lussurioso wants to rid himself of "a slave … when he knows too much" (193). "Deep policy in us makes fools of such" (192), brags the villain. Encouraged by Heaven's thunderous response to his indignant appeal (199), Vindice decides to dress up the corpse of the old Duke in Piato's disguise, "For that disguise being on him which I wore, / It will be thought I, which he calls the pander, did kill the Duke, and fled away in his apparel, leaving him so disguised to avoid swift pursuit" (219-22). His self-congratulation about his inventive device finds a new incentive when, in between two disguises, he and his brother frighten and scold their mother into weeping repentance and she says, in her defence, "No tongue but yours could have bewitch'd me so" (IV.iv.33). While her other son tries to interrupt the mor-

alising flow of Vindice – "O brother, you forget our business" (82) – she adds, "I'll give you this, that one I never knew / Plead better for, and 'gainst, the devil than you" (87-88). To this he histrionically replies, "You make me proud on't" (89). Like many revengers before and after him, he displays an excited enjoyment of role-playing and of outsmarting the powerful villains, who are made foolish by their constant pursuit of lust, debauchery and luxury. He even outdoes the sadistic machiavellism of these devilish characters. His staging of his great revenge makes his brother marvel at "the quaintness of thy malice, above thought" (III.v.109). "Quaint", rather than pleasantly old-fashioned, suggests ingenious, odd and monstrous. Parody vies more and more with tragedy, as in many other contemporary revenge dramas, and morality is on neither side. The "malcontent type" is no longer primarily an agent of purification. He now serves theatrical horror.

Act Three, Scene Five, the climax of the play, starts with Vindice's exulting, and probably bouncing, expression of a "joy" of such "violence" (27) he has missed telling his brother the plan he has hit upon: "o sweet, delectable, rare, happy, ravishing!" (1). Hired by the still-lecherous old Duke to procure a lady in a place safe from the eyes of the court, he has chosen the very place where the Duchess and the bastard are to consummate their incestuous adultery to "greet" him with a very quaint lady indeed. "Now nine years' vengeance crowd into a minute!" (123), he says, just before instructing the Duke to be bold and immediately kiss the veiled and masked "country lady, a little bashful at first" (134) whom he has brought. "Give me that sin that's rob'd in holiness" (141), says the Duke, before ravenously kissing what has become a very "ragged bone" (154). Vindice then invites Hippolito to place his torch so that the old man's "affrighted eyeballs / May start into those hollows" (147-48) of the skull he holds, while he cries, "My teeth are eaten out" (161). Stamped upon, he is shown that the now undressed and unmasked lady is the poisoned skull of his victim, the "once betrothed wife" (167) of Vindice, himself one of the sons of another victim who "fell sick upon the infection of thy frowns / And died in sadness" (170-71). He is also told that he is made a "mighty cuckold" (179) by his bastard son, but his torture is not merely verbal, like Pietro's. He is forced to watch, with open eyes and tongue nailed down by Hippolito's dagger, the "damned clips" (184) of the two incestuous lovers. "Horrid laughter", to quote Nicholas Brooke, is at its height among the audience when Vindice tells his brother:

> If he but wink, not brooking the foul object,
> Let our two other hands tear up his lids,

And make his eyes, like comets, shine through blood;
When the bad bleeds, then is the tragedy good. (202-5)

"And the revenger is mad", the audience may think, especially when, far from having moral qualms about vengeance, Vindice invokes heaven to justify his ferocious actions: "Heaven is just, scorns are the hire of scorns" (187). His heaven is much more broadminded than that of Altofronto, who still believes in a providential order.

As we have seen, the two brothers go on gleefully cracking gruesome jokes when asked by Lussurioso to stab the drunken Piato, who is in fact the dead Duke's body in Piato's disguise. Their disguises and their sick jokes mingle, at the end of a play fertile in fiendish intrigues, with those of others. Borrowing the device of the final masque of revengers from Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* and Marston's *Antonio's Revenge* and *The Malcontent,* the dramatist duplicates it with another masque of revengers. Vindice has made sure that his men are wearing suits identical to those of the other masquers (V.ii.15-17). As a result, the malcontents, who think of themselves as good, are indistinguishable from the villainous characters, a resemblance which signals their having become morally alike. R. A. Foakes rightly says: "Vindice effectively undercuts his own moral stance and implicitly brushes off any concern with the possibility of life after death and punishment for sins" (p. 22). The Revenger completes his task: not only does the heir to the ducal throne die during the revels celebrating his installation, stabbed by Vindice (once more given his cue by thunder—God's blessing for him, a conventional theatrical device for the spectator), but the other revengers, who include all the sons of the Duke and Duchess, finding their proposed victims dead, and, all aiming at power, turn their swords against each other and die.

Not satisfied with whispering in the dying Lussurioso's ear that Vindice is his murderer (V.iii.78-79), he and Hippolito claim their responsibility for the murder of the new Duke and the fact that "'twas somewhat witty carried", "well manag'd" and for the "good" of the next duke (97, 100, 103). Politically foolish to the end, they march to death on Vindice's last boast:

This murder might have slept in tongueless brass
But for ourselves, and the world died an ass.
. . . . . .
We're well, our mother turn'd, our sister true;
We die after a nest of dukes. Adieu. (113-14, 124-25)

III

The two malcontents upon whom I have chosen to focus my analysis exemplify, I think, the quick evolution of the spirit of dramatic malcontentedness. They are both malcontents and revengers. They both put on malcontent disguises to hide their identities, enter or reenter the courts from which they were alienated and probe into their enemies' intentions. But the first one recovers the high position from which he had fallen without killing anyone. His malcontentedness is feigned. It is but a political tool. Although there are anger and frustration under the cunning satirical mirth he puts on as a court fool and a malcontent, he believes he can laugh the better part of his audience into reform, as Erasmus did with his *Praise of Folly*, *Adagiae* and *Colloquia.* Vindice's own malcontentedness mingles with those he adopts to serve the same purposes as Altofronto. He has, however, never been powerful. His vindictiveness is caused both by a sexual crime he has had no opportunity to avenge and an angry frustration at not being treated as he deserves. His treble malcontentedness reflects a world which has become more cynical, sadistic and desperate. While his satire still draws on old traditions—moralities, flyting and vice literature—his lurid images mirror new, deep-seated anxieties. His values are more and more ambiguous. He has, in fact, allowed affectation to become infection. Like his own, the later dramatic malcontents' options for getting preferment diminish. Flamineo, Bosola and their likes no longer believe in providential help, or in salvation. Their moral purpose becomes more and more ambivalent. Instead of feigning to render the services they are hired for, they really become spies, panders and murderers, although they are aware of being futureless even as tool-villains. Fascinated by the villainies they accomplish, they are made to serve a theatricality and sensationalism that blur all political and moral concerns. Horrid laughter has replaced mirth, and folly has become desperate madness. Stage malcontents no longer inhabit the world of comedy. For the dramatists who devise them under the Stuarts, the tragic mode has become more apposite.

The French political "Malcontents" of 1574 had some future. They gained more religious tolerance and the dissolution of the League for a while, after the Peace of Beaulieu in 1576. Some of their main leaders were preferred. The Duke of Alençon became Duke of Anjou, and Henri of Navarre began to pave his difficult way to the throne of France. On the Jacobean stage, Altofronto alone had a future. Whether the recent "Arab Spring" and "Indignants" movements

around the world have a future in the world's political arenas is still an open question. The answer will probably depend on the political foolishness of all parties. Whether "Indignants" will become important stage characters, successful or not, comic or tragic, is another open question.

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