

# The Dramatistic Action of Language in Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*\*

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Kenneth Burke's rhetoric on language as a symbolic action offers an enlightening perspective for revealing the connection between the motivations and actions of the characters in Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*. This work is a Renaissance drama that features hues of rhetorical language. Linguistic obfuscation, scapegoat mechanism, and the malfunction and dysfunction of language in victimization and revenge are thrown into relief through Burke's elaborate system of the symbolism of language. Analyzing the discursive performances of the main characters, readers could get clues of their motives that drive their actions, which are both a representation and an illustration of how language as a symbolic action works in literature.

**Keywords:** *The Spanish Tragedy*, discursive performance, Kenneth Burke, symbolic action, terministic screen

## Introduction

Kinney has said that Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, one of the most famous Renaissance dramas, is "set in motion by desires of revenge" (Kinney, 2006, p. 146). This is the motivation that propels almost all the major characters' speeches or actions, including Andrea the ghost, Bel-imperia, Balthazar and Lorenzo, and finally Hieronimo. However, the excessive actions that these vengeance seekers take are out of all expectation and thus have generated many questions: How do readers explain Andrea the ghost's role as a mere observer, without any obvious action, despite his strong will for revenge? How does Bel-imperia's relationship with Horatio function in her revenge schema? Why does Lorenzo seek an alliance with Balthazar while seeking revenge against Horatio? How shall we justify Hieronimo's revenge in the brutal and extreme form of the play-within-a-play? To put it in general terms: From what perspective can readers best understand the connection between the motivations and actions of the characters?

Readers can begin to move toward an answer to these questions by noting that *The Spanish Tragedy* is a play full of rhetorical language: The speeches about the Spanish-Portugal war, the amorous expressions around the love affairs that involve Bel-imperia, Horatio and Balthazar, and the insane utterances by Hieronimo, together with his revenge drama framed in different languages, all show that *The Spanish Tragedy* relies much on its discursive performance. This should attract readers' attention in understanding the motives of the characters. This need for a rhetorical theory of motives is addressed by Kenneth Burke in his *A Grammar of Motives*. Burke's five

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key terms of “dramatism” identify five questions that encompass all elements of rhetorical motives: “what was done (act), when or where it was done (scene), who did it (agent), how he did it (agency), and why (purpose)” (Bizzell & Herzberg, 2001, p. 1298). According to Burke, “no form of discourse is exempt from motivation” (Bizzell & Herzberg, 2001, p. 1193). Burke’s rhetorical theory on the “dramatistic” features of language enables readers to explore the way language backs up the speeches and revenge actions of the characters in *The Spanish Tragedy* and to explicate the motivations implicit in their discursive performances.

In using the term “dramatism” to describe the nature of language, Burke foregrounds the post-modernist view of language as unreliable to reveal truth, due to the rhetorical motives that underlie its use. Language, as early as the Renaissance, has been recognized as deviant from its classical role, and no longer “a clear medium for the exchange of information, but opaque, resistant, and imbued with cultural bias” (Bizzell & Herzberg, 2001, p. 1196). The slippery and obfuscate features of language are highlighted at the very beginning of the play with Kyd’s presentation of a tone that is full of confusion and the reversal of binary oppositions, especially in the prologue by the Ghost of Andrea, who says he is judged by Minos as having “both lived and died in love” (Kid, 2014, p. 521). This paradoxical language is further thrown into relief in the court scene in Act One, when the Spanish General reports on the latest battle with Portugal in a way that hints at brotherhood and harmony between the two kingdoms despite their belligerent relationship. In the General’s report, several parallels are articulated: “Both furnished well, both full of hope and fear/Both menacing alike with daring shows/Both vaunting sundry colors of device” (Kid, 2014, p. 617). Here the General sounds like a third-party observer, objective and without any obvious partiality.

This tone foreshadows the swiftly renewed friendship between the two regimes, which is proclaimed by the Spanish King when in the banquet he announces to the Portuguese Ambassador and the prince Balthazar that when the tribute is paid, “Spain is Portugal/And Portugal is Spain” (Kid, 2014, p. 1127). This chiasmus, in its paradoxical juxtaposition of the two kingdoms’ names and its blurring of the meanings carried by the two names, illustrates language in its deviance from its original function of signifying. The obfuscation, antithesis, and dysfunction of language in this play, considered from Burke’s taxonomy of language as symbolic action full of motives, work as a series of symbolic actions that propel the tragic plot. In the light of the Burkean idea that language is “dramatistic” a symbolic action that figures and manifests motives, readers can see that the victimization and revenge in the tragedy are produced, steered and finally fulfilled by the symbolic action of language.

### **Terministic Screen and Linguistic Obfuscation in *The Spanish Tragedy***

Language deviates to “dramatism” explains Burke, because of human nature. Man is the “symbol using” animal and the linguistic symbols that humans use come with motives: “the mere desire to name something by its ‘proper’ name, or to speak a language in its distinctive ways” (Burke, 1966, p. 16). These motives explain the decisive nature of man in responding to an inborn principle of perfection: “There is a principle of perfection implicit in the nature of symbol systems; and in keeping with his nature as symbol-using animal, man is moved by this principle” (Burke, 1966, p. 17). Consequently, Burke claims that man is “goaded by the spirit of hierarchy (or moved by the sense of order)” which is embedded in the symbol systems that are created and used by man (Burke, 1966, p. 16). Thus readers are always driven by a permanent desire, and “all sorts of people are variously

goaded to track down their particular sets of terministically directed insights" (Burke, 1966, p. 19). Here three words are worth readers' special attention: "variously", "particular", and "directed". They indicate that the terminology Burke uses here is not what readers deem as the structural or scientific signification of things in nature, such as the corresponding natural existence signified by "tree", "wind", or "cosmic"; instead, it refers to the terms that attempt to designate things in what Burke calls a "sociopolitical order" (Burke, 1966, p. 376). Terms in the sociopolitical order are never stable in their designation but "vary" according to a "particular" person's or group's "directed" insight and thus always subject to sociopolitical context. In *The Spanish Tragedy*, what the Spanish King and Horatio mean by "Spain" and "Portugal" are totally different; the former's political connotations are more subtle and manipulative than the latter. What Bel-imperia calls "love" is distinguishable from Balthazar's terms due to their different genders, stances, and experiences and expectations in their personal love affairs.

In this way, Burke distinguishes the function of "dramatistic" terminology from scientific:

...its essential function may be treated as attitudinal or hortatory: attitudinal as with expressions of complaint, fear, gratitude, and such; hortatory as with commands or requests, or, in general, an instrument developed through its use in the social processes of cooperation and competition. ... Such considerations are involved in what I mean by the "dramatistic", stressing language as an aspect of "action", that is, as "symbolic action". (Burke, 1966, p. 44)

In the sociopolitical order, language no longer designates something unchangeable in the order of nature, but is regarded as an action in man's "perfectionist" pursuit for attitudinal or hortatory expressions. This helps to resolve the paradox in the Spanish King's conflating of the terms of "Spain" and "Portugal", which no longer refer to the geographically objective existence of the two kingdoms in the natural order, but represent the king's intention to establish mutually-interested cooperation, either as an attitudinal hope or as a hortatory command in a diplomatic setting. In his articulation of the relation between the two kingdoms he reflects what he believes to be the "reality" that exists between the two kingdoms (the affinity between Spain and Portugal) by using terms ("Spain" and "Portugal") as though they describe reality itself.

No matter how authoritative the king is, his way of reflecting reality is only one way, a deflection away from the obvious feuds that once existed and still exist between the two countries. Thus what comes along with the reflection of reality is the "deflection" that is regarded by Burke as a variant of the "terministic screen", which "concerns simply the fact that any nomenclature necessarily directs the attention into some channels rather than others" (Burke, 1966, p. 45). A geographer's terms for Spain and Portugal are different from the Spanish King's; whereas the former concentrates on the geographical features, the King, in his chiasmic juxtaposition of the two terms, deflects the geographical differences and the political disharmony, directing attention to the mutual-dependency and inextricable interrelations between the two kingdoms.

It is exactly due to the different ways of reflecting and deflecting "reality" that a linguistic obfuscation is felt in *The Spanish Tragedy*, particularly in the characters' varied and confusing discourses. Not a few critics<sup>1</sup> have drawn attention to the diverse narrative versions of the Spain-Portugal battle in the first act; as many as six characters (the Ghost of Andrea, the General, Horatio, Lorenzo, Balthazar, and Villupo) have witnessed and verbalized their experiences, all put in different ways with different judgments, providing a multiplicity of

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<sup>1</sup> See the papers by Cinta Zunino Garrido, Carla Mazzio, Ian McAdam, and Scott McMillin on *Spanish Tragedy*.

perspectives on the event. This diversity of discourse inevitably leads readers to question the objectivity of reality, of “whether the past can or should be known objectively” (McMillin, 1972, p. 31), even whether “the correspondence between words and things has ceased to be effectual” (Garrido, 2001, p. 347). However, a closer comparison of these narrative “deflections” of the battle shows that they share one common rhetorical strategy: They are all literalized by a particular speaker’s desire to assimilate to a certain order of discourse that they deem as perfect or idealistic.

### **Principles of Discontinuity and Continuity and the Scapegoat Mechanism**

Rhetorically, the two most elaborate speeches on the battle, both representative of the dramatic feature of language, belong to the General and Horatio—speakers who purposefully conform to specific discourses. The General’s account of the battle sounds quite objective, as he acts like a third-party observer in his paralleling of both sides’ military power. Nevertheless, the embellishment of his narrative, “in spite of the succinct exposition requested by the King”, shows that his report is not actually objective, but carries a strong rhetorical intention (Garrido, 2001, p. 344). As the sovereign of the conquering side, the condescending king only requires a “brief discourse” of the battle from the General, whereas the General, by deliberately portraying the counterbalance between the two armies, is attempting to demonstrate how Spain has won its great victory with much hardship; in fact, his narrative aims to best represent the “blissful chivalry” regarded by the King as the reason to “reward” the General (Kid, 2014, p. 610). Since the King has used the term “chivalry”, and it would not be a chivalric victory to win against a rival who is too weak, the General stresses that after “three long hours and more/The victory to neither part inclined” in order to foreground the difficulty that the Spanish army underwent and consequently give prominence to the glory they have won (Kid, 2014, p. 657). The elaborate narrative by the General is deliberately made to effect the emulation of “chivalry”, which the General understands to be one of the most important characteristics of the monarchical discourse of the King. While the General is almost 43 lines into his chivalric story before mentioning Don Andrea (Kid, 2014, pp. 594-645), Horatio’s version of the battle is a shortcut to Andrea’s saga, ranging from the fifth line throughout his entire 36 lines of story-telling (Kid, 2014, pp. 955-90). Thus, in the General’s narrative, the hero is the Spanish Army as a whole, while in Horatio’s version it is Andrea who becomes the hero: two very different ways of “reflection” on the event.

This is not to argue the innocence and objectivity of Horatio’s speech; in the discursive dynamics of his speech, Horatio’s rhetorical intention also emerges. Horatio’s version responds to Bel-imperia’s appeal, “I must entreat thee to relate/The circumstance of Don Andrea’s death”, who is her “garland’s sweetest flower” (Kid, 2014, p. 957). In order to fulfill this “heavy doleful charge” (Kid, 2014, p. 957), Horatio successfully depicts how Andrea, Bel-imperia’s “worthy chevalier” (Kid, 2014, p. 968), gloriously fights against his enemy but unfortunately ends his life due to “envying” and “wrathful Nemesis” (Kid, 2014, p. 974). Beyond fulfilling the simple task to “relate/The circumstance of Don Andrea’s death”, Horatio’s rhetoric, as he elaborates on his own crucial role in the story of Andrea, resembles the General’s over-fulfillment of the King’s narrative request. Bel-imperia’s subtle blame and regret in her plaint to Horatio against Balthazar—“Would thou hadst slain him that so slew my love” (Kid, 2014, p. 990)—are evaded by Horatio who carries on his story by relating how he brought back the wounded body of Andrea and completed the funeral, “for which I chiefly strove” (Kid, 2014, p. 993). In this way, through his rhetorical strategies, Horatio assimilates his discourse to that of Bel-imperia’s.

The two narratives' differences in rhetorical intentions bring readers back to Burke's theoretical meditation on the "terministic screen". While admitting that all human beings "reflect" and "deflect" reality "through various media of symbolism"—with different modes of terministic screens—Burke claims that all the possible modes can be classified into two kinds: "either a way of 'dividing' us" by the principle of discontinuity or "a paradoxical way of 'uniting' us with things on a 'higher level of awareness'" by the principle of continuity (Burke, 1966, p. 52). Thus while the two versions of the battle narratives exemplify the discontinuity that distinguishes the narrators from each other, they also embody the principle of continuity, since both speakers try to assimilate themselves to their desired order of discourse. It is by the same principle of "continuity" that the General strives to involve himself in the monarchical discourse, and Horatio attempts to step into Bel-imperia's realm of discourse by demonstrating affection for Andrea. Both speakers have achieved their different purposes by maintaining a "discursive continuity" with their idealized order of discourse: The General is satisfactorily awarded by the King, and Horatio becomes Bel-imperia's "second love", to successfully "sit in Bel-imperia's thoughts" (Kid, 2014, p. 1026).

Then what is the mechanism that enables both speakers to achieve continuity? To assimilate to a desired counterpart and to associate their interests with which of the other, they have to deflect or screen out those elements that are excludable with respect to both party's interests. Burke calls this filtering "scapegoat mechanism",<sup>2</sup> a form of sacrifice for the reinforcement of continuity, of unity out of discontinuity, and regards it as the intrinsic principle of language in its resolving of linguistic antithesis. As an example to explain the mechanism, he uses the case of a political scapegoat (Burke, 1966, p. 18), but it can also be illustrated in *The Spanish Tragedy* through the attempts of the General and Horatio for continuity with their respective desired discourse. The General, in rhetorically embellishing his great "blissful chivalry", sacrifices the severity and significance of Andrea's death in the battle, understating it as "little loss" (Kid, 2014, p. 591). Therefore, Andrea actually becomes the scapegoat in the discursive continuity between the General and the King, partially explaining the anger and revenge of Andrea's ghost.

However, Andrea serves not only as the scapegoat for the General and the King's discursive continuity, but unfortunately and in a more subtle sense, he is also the scapegoat who must be disposed of if Horatio is to gain absolute continuity with Bel-imperia. Ian McAdam is acute in discovering this point, using the discrepancy between Horatio's account of taking care of Andrea's dying body and the narrative of Andrea's ghost to demonstrate Horatio's intentional rhetorical obscurity on this issue. In Horatio's sorrowful story, taking care of Andrea's "carcass" is what he "chiefly strove" to do:

I took him up and wound him in mine arms,  
And welding him unto my private tent,  
There laid him down and dew'd him with my tears,  
And sigh'd and sorrow'd as became a friend.  
But neither friendly sorrow, sighs nor tears,  
Could win pale death from his usurped right.  
Yet this I did, and less I could not do,  
I saw him honour'd with due funeral. (Kid, 2014, p. 1001)

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<sup>2</sup> For an elaboration on "Scapegoat Mechanism", see *The Scapegoat* by Rene Girard.

As McAdam cuttingly points out, what Horatio terms as “honour’d with due funeral” is not in accord with the truth of why Andrea is refused by the “churlish Charon” to pass across Acheron: His “rites of burial” were left uncompleted (McAdam, 2011, p. 43). Even though the funeral was eventually performed after three nights, “a delay of almost three days is hardly in keeping with the anxious and tender solicitation of Horatio’s account” (McAdam, 2011, p. 43). This deflecting from the reality of Andrea’s funeral is Horatio’s application of the scapegoat mechanism. Even though Horatio’s scapegoat strategy seems similar to an outright lie, its rhetorical obscurity successfully helps in his discursive continuity with Bel-imperia in a much subtler and more potent manner. This may even more strongly enrage Andrea: When the ghost of Andrea appeals to the spirit of Revenge for action, he is inflamed not only by a sense of the futility of his death suggested by the coalition between the two kingdoms, but also by his status as the scapegoat for the newly established love (continuity) between his friend and his beloved: “These pleasant sights are sorrow to my soul/Nothing but league, and love, and banqueting!” (Kid, 2014, p. 1194).

In the complexity and chaos of political conflicts, the scapegoat mechanism, with its processes of continuity between different groups of people, seeks other victims besides Andrea. Two potential scapegoats exist in the Horatio-Bel-imperia continuity and the Lorenzo-Balthazar continuity, since the two pairs of relationships take up most of the plot and their mutual conflicts directly lead to the later actions. The bout between the two pairs is suggestive of the significance of the finally victimized scapegoat. Interestingly enough, the desired scapegoat in both pairs of the relationships is one member of the other pair. Horatio, in order to attain final continuity with Bel-imperia, is supposed to complete her revenge on the killer of her first love, as expressed in her soliloquy after Horatio finishes his narrative and leaves her: “But how can love find harbor in my breast/Till I revenge the death of my beloved?/Yes, second love shall further my revenge” (Kid, 2014, p. 1030). Thus Balthazar needs to be disposed of as the scapegoat for Horatio’s continuity with Bel-imperia. In the Lorenzo-Balthazar relationship, what they find as their mutual interest that can transform their relationship from discontinuity to continuity is the disposal of Horatio. What caused their discontinuity in the beginning was exactly Horatio; because when Lorenzo tried to establish himself as Balthazar’s conqueror, it was Horatio who disputed against him as to who had actually seized the prince (Cheng, 2007, p. 16). Since the King assigned Lorenzo to keep the prince in his place, Lorenzo has actually discovered the mutual interest between them, and being a most cunning politician who is acute enough to notice the King’s command-ridden discourse—“Spain is Portugal/And Portugal is Spain”—how is Lorenzo not going to ally himself with the Portuguese prince? Thus, when Lorenzo hears about Horatio’s intimacy with his sister, he immediately determines to victimize Horatio as the scapegoat in his continuity with Balthazar.

It is when Balthazar shows his affection for Bel-imperia that the identity of the final scapegoat becomes self-evident: Confronting the powerful discursive continuity between the two kingdoms implicit in the Lorenzo-Balthazar relationship, Horatio is doubtlessly too weak to achieve his continuity with Bel-imperia. Lorenzo’s effort to assimilate with Balthazar is fated to be much easier than Horatio’s, since what he desires is in accordance with the hegemonic monarchical discourse, felt earlier in the King’s terminology and its strong hortatory expression: “Spain is Portugal/And Portugal is Spain”. Horatio’s endeavor to couple with Bel-imperia is a form of subversion against the monarchical discourse, rendering himself the antithetical part in opposition

against the established hierarchy. What makes it even worse for the Horatio-Bel-imperia continuity is that they are employed and delayed by the dramatism of language, while Lorenzo manipulates it.

### **The Malfunction and Dysfunction of Language in Victimization and Revenge**

During the Renaissance, humanists made a shared effort to pursue an idealized rhetoric against “an empty pomposity, a willful mendacity, a love of display for its own sake, an extravagant artificiality, a singular lack of originality, or a necessary subordination of substance to form and ornament” (Gary, 1963, p. 498), all of which are vividly represented in the diverse and obfuscated language of the battle narratives, revealing the malfunction of language as manipulation. It is precisely by way of the malfunction of language that the Lorenzo-Balthazar continuity wins over the Horatio-Bel-imperia continuity and thus victimizes Horatio as the scapegoat.

Besides Horatio's risky attempt to go against the hegemonic discourse, what ultimately causes Horatio and Bel-imperia to lose the game is that both take words as reliable signifiers while neglecting the “deflecting” function of language. Their understanding of language is classical, an approach already outdated in their time. As Michel Foucault points out:

In the sixteenth century, real language is not a totality of independent signs, a uniform and unbroken entity in which things could be reflected one by one, as in a mirror, and so express their particular truths. It is rather an opaque, mysterious thing, closed in upon itself, a fragmented mass, its enigma renewed in every interval, which combines here and there with the forms of the world and becomes interwoven with them: so much so that all these elements, taken together, form a network of marks in which each of them may play, and does in fact play, in relation to all the others, the role of content or of sign, that of secret or of indicator. (Foucault, 1971, p. 34)

Unable to realize the “mystery” and “enigma” of language, Horatio is not shrewd enough to understand the political coalescence when he hears the King's terminology of the two kingdoms at the banquet; by the same token, he cannot realize and comprehend the sudden change from discontinuity to continuity between Lorenzo and Balthazar when he sees the two lords' intimacy. This is evidenced by what Horatio says to Bel-imperia when he asks about her melancholy appearance in their dating: “And that with looks and words we feed our thoughts/(Two chief contents, where more cannot be had)/Thus in the midst of love's fair blandishments/Why show you sign of inward languishments?” (Kid, 2014, p. 1381)

While holding that language (looks and words are different forms of language) is the major way to “feed our thoughts”, Horatio is still naive in his belief in language's “reflection” of reality, not fully aware of its “deflection” from reality. Thus, when Bel-imperia asks him “What dangers and what pleasures dost thou mean?” (Kid, 2014, p. 1414). His answer is put in a simple way, “Dangers of war, and pleasures of our love” (Kid, 2014, p. 1416), without adequately noticing the potential dangers embedded in their love, in which the words of “love” to him function, as Foucault says, “as in a mirror, and so express their particular truths”. Bel-imperia, in a similar way, clings to the conventional belief in language—its reliability and trustworthiness of communication—as embodied in her readiness to respond to Horatio's words with corresponding language:

Speak thou fair words, I'll cross them with fair words,  
Send thou sweet looks, I'll meet them with sweet looks,  
Write loving lines, I'll answer loving lines,  
Give me a kiss, I'll countercheck thy kiss  
Be this our warring peace, or peaceful war. (Kid, 2014, p. 1424)

Unlike Horatio and Bel-imperia, Lorenzo's approach to language is as "the ultimate cynic"; for him "Words are merely a way, and one of the less effective ways, of controlling others. He cares 'not to spend the time in trifling words' (Kid, 2014, p. 1257), but to work upon men with objects, objects which can be held close in the hand as a lure or a threat" (McMillin, 1972, p. 32). Lorenzo not only recognizes the "deflecting" function of language; he also uses the malfunction of language in order to redirect attention to the effects that he desires. In Lorenzo's language game, he successfully lures Pedringano into his scheme, with whose help he kills Horatio, his scapegoat. Then Lorenzo silences this messenger and sends him to death by giving him a blank promise and an empty box that is supposed to contain a pardon—another means for Lorenzo to play with language.

Lorenzo is not the only manipulator of language in the political chaos of the play. As father of the victimized scapegoat and the prime judge of the kingdom, Hieronimo never lacks for knowledge of the political darkness and the malfunction of language. When Bel-imperia tries to confer to him the truth of his son's murder by writing a letter with her blood (which again embodies her persistent belief in language), Hieronimo deeply doubts the credibility of the letter by asking himself a series of questions:

What means this unexpected miracle?  
My son slain by Lorenzo and the Prince!  
What cause had they Horatio to malign?  
Or what might move thee, Bel-imperia,  
To accuse thy brother, had he been the mean? (Kid, 2014, p. 1921)

His disbelief in language, in its function of conveying information, unfortunately delays his revenge for his son and leads to the suicide of his wife. The loss of trust in words, the sense of a malfunction and even a dysfunction in language, leads to the silence of the Old Man, who is "virtually wordless, incapable of addressing the past" (McMillin, 1972, p. 36), and is not willing to rely on the spoken language to appeal for his son's death. This brings the prime judge, Hieronimo, into further doubt about the trustworthiness of language and the hortatory function that language carries through the law. When God's hortatory language of law, "thou shalt not", does not work anymore, Hieronimo finds no reason *not* to work against the mundane law which has become a protector and embodiment of the hegemonic discourse. Thus, the revenge for his son is also revenge against the prevailing and ruling hegemony, which is certain to change his continuity with the monarchical discourse into discontinuity. Yet, as a quite discerning judge of the political complexity in the court, he is well aware of the mechanism of scapegoating: If he shows forth his intention of discontinuity and separation, he will be the scapegoat: "Nor aught avails it me to menace them/Who, as a wintry storm upon a plain/Will bear me down with their nobility" (Kid, 2014, p. 2949).

Fighting against the prevalent discourse of the existing hierarchy as indicated and intended by the King and further reinforced by Lorenzo and Balthazar, Hieronimo finds no rhetoric immediately available; in the "wintry storm" of the hegemonic continuity in the court his words are not going to be heard and sympathized with, so he exclaims with melancholy, "I find the place impregnable; and they/Resist my woes, and give my words no way" (Kid, 2014, p. 2434). This dysfunction of words is again evidenced in the final scene, when Hieronimo tries to explain the whole story behind the schematic murder of his son and the motivation for his revenge, but the King, seemingly having heard nothing, still shouts out, "Speak, traitor; damned, bloody murderer, speak!" (Kid, 2014, p. 3970). Because of the failure of the linguistic function in law and justice, the first thing that Hieronimo decides



to do for revenge is to disguise himself in madness, through which he will “enjoin/Thine eyes to observation, and thy tongue/To milder speeches than thy spirits affords” (Kid, 2014, p. 2952). The only way for Hieronimo to break with the hegemonic order is to deflect attention from his antithetic position against the monarch. It is in his language of madness, and only in his language of madness, that he triumphantly redirects the lords’ attention from his personal tragedy to another tragedy: the play-within-the-play. By terming tragedy as noble, as “fitting kings/Containing matter, and not common things” (Kid, 2014, p. 3622), Hieronimo makes Lorenzo and Balthazar believe that they all, including Hieronimo himself, share the common goal (continuity) of involvement in the monarchical discourse. The aim for Hieronimo is to render the tragedy “in an alienating cacophony of four different languages” (Greteman, 2009, p. 194) and thus to absolutely render language into dysfunction; in a time when the malfunction of language is so severe as to prohibit the functioning of law and justice, his only recourse is to disable language in all its forms of communication. As Hieronimo has them perform in mutually unknown languages, he is manipulating language in a way that even outmaneuvers Lorenzo’s language game; by separating the discursive continuity in the court, Hieronimo has disturbed the existing hierarchy.

### Conclusion

As Burke tells readers with great insight, man cannot escape his desire to track down the “perfect” order of discourse and thus man will be unfortunately “rotten with perfection” (Burke, 1966, p. 16); the characters in *The Spanish Tragedy* presents to readers a vivid but tragic picture, in which they seek for continuity with their desired order of discourse and finally are rendered “rotten” in the pursuit. Underneath the surface of each character’s rhetorical performance, whether being the various narratives of the Spain-Portugal battle or the discourses about love, law, or politics, there is a motive of pursuing a “perfect” continuity. Among the network of various “perfectionist” pursuits of continuity, conflicts or discontinuity are produced, which lead to the tragic facilitating of the scapegoat mechanism and the disposal of the “unwanted” scapegoats. The decisive element in determining who is to be the scapegoat is the power implicit in the continuity. Therefore, being already dead, Andrea the Ghost becomes the first scapegoat for the continuity of the self-advancers (the General and Horatio) in their pursuit of the representatives of the monarchical discourse (the King and Bel-imperia). Then, due to his weakness in power and failure to recognize the malfunction of language, Horatio becomes the next scapegoat, sacrificed for the continuity within the monarchical order (the collaboration between Spain and Portugal through marriage between Bel-imperia and Balthazar).

Horatio’s death leads to another discrepancy of discursive continuity—the paternal discourse represented by Hieronimo against the monarchical discourse. However, it seems to lead readers into a predicament: The Duke of Castile, Bel-imperia’s father, should not have been killed by Hieronimo since he shares continuity with him in the paternal discourse. But it is not until the Duke tries to offer Hieronimo a knife to write down the whole story and the causes of his revenge that Hieronimo kills him with the knife. This suggests that the reason he kills the Duke may not rise from their discontinuity within the paternal discourse, but from his animosity against language itself (here language is symbolized by the knife that is proposed by the Duke to “mend his pen”) (Kid, 2014, p. 4018), or to put it more exactly, Hieronimo has already discerned the malfunction of language, of the way people manipulate language to achieve their own social and political continuity; this was not fully recognized by his son and thus caused his victimization. Therefore, the dramatistic action of language represented in the complex

rhetorical performance of the characters becomes the original sin, to be judged guilty by Hieronimo. This also explains his intentional use of mad language and the hybrid languages of the play-within-the-play in his revenge. Language, in this way, becomes the last scapegoat in the play; the disposal of language becomes the last request that Hieronimo makes before his death: "What lesser liberty can King afford/Than harmless silence? then afford it me" (Kid, 2014, p. 3994).

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