

المأساة الإسبانية بوصفها ميثادراما تعليمية

الملخص

يتناول هذا البحث فكرة الميثادراما كنظرية نقدية في المسرح وبناقش أيضاً بعض عناصر الميثادراما التي تشكل مسرحية توماس كيد (المأساة الإسبانية) بوصفها مسرحية ميثادرامية استثنائية. وتشرح هذه المقالة عنصرين فقط من عناصر الميثادراما وهما المسرحية داخل المسرحية ولعب الأدوار حيث يكون دور هذين العنصرين هو التعليم لأن المسرحية بشكل رئيسي هي ميثادراما أخلاقية محورها العدالة الإلهية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: ميثادراما، مسرحية داخل المسرحية، لعب الأدوار، العدالة الإلهية

***The Spanish Tragedy* as a Didactic Metadrama**

Abstract

This paper discusses some of the metadramatic components that make up Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* as an exceptionally metadramatic play. This article will only single out two metadramatic elements the-play-within-the-play and role-playing whose primary function is didactic because the play is mainly moralistic metadrama of divine justice.

Key words: metadrama, the play-within-the-play, role playing, divine justice

An in-depth reading of *The Spanish Tragedy* powerfully indicates that it is a metadrama to the core by the reason of its heavy reliance upon metadramatic devices such as choric observations in an effort to affirm their moralistic and didactic design.

But first, let us consider the conceptual significance of metadramatic theory as a critical approach. In his pioneering book, *Metatheater: A New view of Dramatic Form* (first published in 1963), Lionel Abel coins the term “metatheater”. In his investigation of the dramatic works of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, “metatheater”, for him, means “drama about drama” which features whenever “the subject of a play turns out to be, in some sense, drama itself”. (31) This implies self-reflexivity or a kind of literature that is aware of itself as a literary work concerned with the process of its own making and overall functions. This self-reflexivity is suggested by the play’s chorus that keeps referring to its nature as a theatrical or fictional work with its didacticism.

In his definitive book, *Drama, Metadrama and Perception* (1987), which emerges as another significant breakthrough in metadramatic scholarship, Richard Hornby identifies five metadramatic strategies which confirm the identity of plays as metadramas. These strategies are “the play-within-the-play, the ceremonies-within-the-play, role-playing-within-the-role, literary and real life references, and theatrical self-reference”. (32)

Evidently, for Hornby theatrical self-reference “imply the play’s recourse to such dramatic devices as the chorus, the aside and the soliloquy, whose chief function is to assert that readers/spectators are reading or watching a drama. Additionally, we can mention choric observations which keep confirming the play’s “theatrical self-reference”. (32)

As mentioned before, *The Spanish Tragedy* emerges as wholly metadramatic by the virtue of its development of metadramatic tools like the play-within-the-play and role-

playing-within-the role. These metadramatic strategies serve to emphasize the play's didactic themes of revenge and justice.

An apposite approach to the metadramatic strategies of the play-within-the-play and role-playing-within-the role can be best conducted through an investigation of Hieronimo who plays a role different from his stage role as a knight marshal of Spain when he resolves to author and direct play-within-the-play in which he acts as a revenger so as to achieve justice for his murdered son.

It is to be stressed that Hieronimo is forced to enact his role as a revenger mainly because Lorenzo prevents him from approaching the king to inform him about the murder of his son, Horatio. This point is evident in the following extract:

HIERO. Justice! O, justice to Hieronimo!

LOR. Back! see'st thou not the king is busy?

HIERO. O! is he so?

KING. Who is he that interrupts our business?

(III.xii.27-30)

Obviously, Lorenzo and the king's unreadiness to listen to Hieronimo prompt the bereaved father to seek personal revenge. His only alternative figures in his pre-meditated determination to author a play-within-a-play in which he casts his enemies beleaguered Bel-imperia and himself so as to exact his revenge. This is gleaned from Hieronimo's following response to Bel-imperia:

HIER. On then, and whatsoever I devise,

Let me entreat you grace my practice,

For-why the plot's already in mine head.—

(III.i.49-51)

The term "device" glossed as plot is not without its theatrical implications. This point gathers momentum when Hieronimo states to unravel his skillfully concealed plot, which emerges as conspiratorial scheme to liquidate his foes.

As a role-player, Hieronimo immediately changes the subject as Bel-imperia arrives. Hieronimo's studied retort to

Bel-imperia shows the former's attempts to conceal the grudge that he is nursing against him:

BAL. How now, Hieronimo?

What, courting Bel-imperia?

HIERO. Aye, my lord,

Such courting as, I promise you,

She hath my heart, but you, my lord, have hers.

(IV.i. 53-55)

Hence, Hieronimo seems to be diplomatic in his reply to Bel-imperia. This diplomacy is part and parcel of his dissimulation as a role-player because he is fully aware of Bel-imperia's extreme hatred to Lorenzo, who slew Andréa and Horatio.

As a role-play actor, Hieronimo does not fail Bel-imperia.

LOR. But now, Hieronimo, or never

We are to entreat your help.

(IV.i. 61-62)

The role-play, Hieronimo, declares his unwavering readiness to help them on the spot.

HIE. My help?

Why, my good lords, assure yourselves of me;

For you have giv'n me cause,—

Aye, by my faith, have you!

(IV.i. 57-60)

Fortunately, bel-imperia's and Lorenzo's impassioned plea for help tallies well with the playlet which is taking shape in his mind.

BAL. It pleased you

At the entertainment of the ambassador,

To grace the King so much as with a show;

Now were your study so well furnished

As, for the passing of the first night's sport,

To entertain my father with the like,

Or any such like pleasing motion,

Assure yourself it would content them well.

(IV.i.60-68)

Thus, Hieronimo takes full advantage of his enemies' request for a "show" (whose metatheatrical sense is obvious) to entertain the ambassador, the king and the vice-roy. He does express his readiness to stage a play-within-a-play as his following speech indicates:

When in Toledo there I studied,
It was my chance to write a tragedy,—
See here, my lords,—

He shows them a book.

Which, long forgot, I found this other day.

(IV.i.77-80)

The terms "write a tragedy" are self-evident metadramatic terms as they show him to be author of the tragedy that he is intending to direct and present.

Hieronimo's assumption of the role of theatrical director emerges as when he requests Balthazar and Lorenzo to perform certain roles in his forth coming playlet:

Nor would your lordships favour me so much

As but to grace me with your acting it,

I mean each one of you to play a part.

Assure you it will prove most passing strange

And wondrous plausible to that assembly.

(IV.i.81-85)

Balthazar's abrupt enquiry: "What, would you have us play a tragedy?" (IV.i.86) is answered by Hieronimo interestingly, Hieronimo's retort is couched in metadramatic terms:

HIERO. Why, Nero thought it no disparagement,

And kings and emperors have ta'en delight

To make experience of their wit in plays!

(IV.i.81-85)

Hieronimo's deliberate reference to "Nero", a Roman emperor widely infamous for his violence and deeds of bloodshed, is of every moment here as it reveals the former's attempts to

stigmatize his actorly enemies by reason of atrocious murder of Horatio, his son.

Hieronimo's reply appeals Bel-imperia who immediately offers play parts in his upcoming playlet. Balthazar says:

BAL. In faith, Hieronimo, and you be in earnest,
I'll make one.

(IV.i. 92-93)

Similarly, Lorenzo promises to enact a role in that playlet:

And I another

(VI.i.94)

As a director, Hieronimo has recourse to dissimulation when he begs Lorenzo to entreat his sister, Bel-imperia to perform a role in his upcoming playlet. This powerfully negates any suspicion that he has been coordinating with Bel-imperia to revenge themselves upon their enemies.

HIERO. Now, my good lord, could you entreat,
Your sister, Bel-imperia, to make one,—
For what's a play without a woman in it?

(VI.i.95-97)

Lucidly, this shows that Hieronimo is a skillful role-player here as he exerts his rhetorical capacities to stage his playlet.

Like Hieronimo, Bel-imperia merges as a role-player as she expresses her readiness to act her assigned role in his play:

BEL. Little entreaty shall serve me, Hieronimo,
For I must needs be employed in your play.

(VI.i.98-99)

Bel-imperia's "Little entreaty shall serve me" is so significant here that it powerfully reveals that she conceives of her role as a scheme through which she can exact her vengeance upon Balthazar who deprived her of her lovers Andrea and Horatio. Evidently, her excitement as well as Balthazar's and Lorenzo's readiness to act their parts in the forthcoming playlet increase Hieronimo's elation at resuming his histrionics towards his vengeance.

As a stage director, Hieronimo comments on the dramatic nature of his playlet:

Why, this is well! I tell you, lordings,
It was determined to have been acted,
By gentlemen and scholars too,
Such as could tell what to speak.

(VI.i.100-103)

Close attention implies Hieronimo's histrionic expertise as a director who laboriously strives to make his playlet a success as he has intended it to be played by "courtiers" who are "as skilled as gentlemen and scholars" in these matters". (IV. I 101 and below). (VI.i.101)J. R. Mulryne proceeds to indicate that "scholars are good at invention" while "courtiers ...are good at elocution" (IV. i. 103-105 and below).

Hieronimo's authorial role gathers momentum as he proceeds to flesh out his playlet's argument glossed as "plot" or narrative (IV.i. 107). Referring to the sources of his playlet, Hieronimo uses meta-writing terms such as: (the chronicles of Spain", "record" and "written" in his following unraveling of its plot:

The chronicles of Spain

Record this written of a knight of Rhodes;
He was betroth'd, and wedded at the length,
To one Perseda, an Italian dame,
Whose beauty ravish'd all that her beheld,
Especially the soul of Suleiman,
Who at the marriage was the chiefest guest.
By sundry means sought Suleiman to win
Perseda's love, and could not gain the same.

(IV.i. 109-116)

This denotes that Hieronimo's playlet is a resurrection of the tragic events on which the play proper pivots. This point takes shape in his following addition:

Then 'gan he break his passions to a friend,
One of his bashaws whom he held full dear.

Her has this bashaw long solicited,
And saw she was not otherwise to be won
But by her husband's death, this knight of Rhodes,
Whom presently by treachery he slew.
She, stirr'd with an exceeding hate therefore,
As cause of this, slew Sultan Suleiman,
And, to escape the bashaw's tyranny,
Did stab herself. And this is the tragedy.

(IV.i. 117-125)

Hieronimo's closing metadramatic term "tragedy" is telling as it mirrors the tragic identity of the play proper.

Hieronimo then resumes his former role as a director as he sets out to allocate his fellow role-players their theatrical parts, as the following excerpt indicates:

BAL. But which of us is to perform that part?

HIERO. O, that will I, my lords; make no doubt of it;

I'll play the murderer, I warrant you;

For I already have conceited that.

BAL. And what shall I?

HIERO. Great Suleiman, the Turkish emperor.

LOR. And I?

HIERO. Erastus, the knight of Rhodes.

BEL. And I?

HIERO. Perseda, chaste and resolute.(IV.i. 131-140)

Hieronimo's role as a stage director/ producer prominently figures in his following address to his fellow role-players in which he offers them scripts and necessary regalia for their theatrical presentation:

And here, my lords, are several abstracts drawn,

For each of you to note your several parts.

And act it as occasion's offer'd you.

You must provide you with a Turkish cap,

A black moustache and a fauchion.

Gives paper to BALTHAZAR.

You with a cross, like a knight of Rhodes.

Gives another to LORENZO.

And, madame, you must then attire yourself

*He giveth BEL-IMPERIA
another.*

Like Phoebe, Flora, or the huntress Dian,

Which to your discretion shall seem best.

(IV. i. 141-149)

A look at the passage powerfully reveals that it is abundant with metadramatic terms: “abstract drawn” (glossed as “outlines written out”) as well as the self-evident “note your parts/ and act it. Prominent among the theatrical regalia are “a Turkish cap”, “A black mustachio” and a “fauchion” (glossed as “a broad curved sword”) as well as “a cross like to a knight of Rodes” (IV. i. 141-145 and below).

In addition to these costuming trappings of their roles, we can visualize the dress that enables Bel-imperia to appear as “Phoebe”, “Flora”, or “the huntress” is of the essence here as it has several levels of meaning. The reference to Phoebe turns Bel-imperia into a clever lady as the former is the goddess of intellect and prophecy in Greek mythology (Miller17).

Also, the invocation of the Greek Goddess Flora makes Bel-imperia as a rose which usually symbolizes love and beauty (Owens 18). Additionally, the allusion to the Greek goddess, Diana, is very effective. She is a mythological figure who was the goddess of wild animals and the hunt (Fischer-Hansen and Poulsen125). Hence, Bel-imperia will play a role with its layers of meaning: a clever and prophetic lady akin to a flower in beauty and capable of staying her enemy as she is dressed as a huntress.

As a stage-director, Hieronimo promises to spend lavishly on his forthcoming “tragedy”.

And as for me, my lords, I'll look to one,
And with the ransom that the viceroy sent
So furnish and perform this tragedy
As all the world shall say Hieronimo

Was liberal in gracing of it so.(IV.i.150-154)

Hieronimo's conception of the "world" as a public spectatorship is part and parcel of his role as a director\producer who is at pain to furnish and set out his tragedy with lavish costumes and props.

However, Hieronimo's role as an author/ director/ producer and actor features prominently when he dismisses "comedies" because they are "fit for common wits" (VI.i.157) and advocates "tragedia" as a sublime are reason of its "matter", that is, its "serious content:

A comedy? fie! comedies are fit for common wits;
But to present a kingly troupe withal,
Give me a stately-written tragedy,—
Tragedia cothurnata, fitting kings,
Containing matter, and not common things!

(IV.i. 156-161)

Thus, he painstakingly strives to convince his fellow role-players that his proposed tragedy is a fitting show at the current court celebrations:

My lords, all this our sport must be perform'd,
As fitting for the first night's revelling.
The Italian tragedians were so sharp
Of wit that in one hour's meditation
They would perform any-thing in action.

(162-166)

Careful inspection indicates that Hieronimo's recommendations of a tragedy as an appropriate royal show is telling here as it touches upon the very nature or function of this class of play which consists in defrosting readers/spectators from committing murders and other felonies. The didactic and admonitory identity of tragedy echoes Sir Philip Sidney's viewpoint of this sub-dramatic genre in his famous book, *An Apology for Poetry* (1580), where he asserts that tragedy encourages kings to shun committing villainies. (35)

Hieronimo emerges as an accomplished role-player by the virtue of his historic machinations; therefore, he decides to produce his playlet in “sundry language”:

Each one of us
Must act his part in unknown languages,
That it may breed the more variety:
As you, my lord, in Latin, I in Greek,
You in Italian, and, for-because I know
That Bel-imperia hath practised the French,
In courtly French shall all her phrases be.

(IV.i.172-178)

Bel-imperia’s objection that such a multi-lingual performance “will be a mere confusion” and that he and his fellow role-players will “hardly ...be understood” elicits Hieronimo’s following retort which abounds with metadramatic terms which in turn betray his prowess as an arch-actor:

It must be so; for the conclusion
Shall prove the invention and all was good;
And I myself in an oration,
That I will have there behind a curtain,
And with a strange and wondrous show besides,
Assure yourself, shall make the matter known.
And all shall be concluded in one scene,
For there's no pleasure ta'en in tediousness.

(IV.i.182-189)

The term “conclusion” refers to his playlet’s finale which contains the “invention” glossed as the “basic idea” (IV. i. 183 and below). Hieronimo’s determination to present an “oration” is so significant here as it subtly turns him into a chorus-like actor who is going to deliver the playlet’s epilogue which typically sums up its gist (Escola 19). As a choric figure, or an epilogue presenter, Hieronimo expresses his keenness to make his playlet a success by promising to subordinate this “scene” with a strange and wondrous show” (that is, Horatio’s dead body which has placed behind the stage’s curtains) which will make

his playlet's "matter known". Horatio's dead body emerges as a semiotic sign, that is, an "emblem that justifies and explains the whole elaborate business" (IV.i. 185 and below).

Hieronimo conceives of his playlet as an act of divine retribution as he soliloquizes:

now shall I see the fall of Babylon
Wrought by the heav'ns in this confusion.
And, if the world like not this tragedy,
Hard is the hap of old Hieronimo.

(IV.i. 195-198).

Thus, Hieronimo renames his playlet/ "tragedy" as "the fall of Babylon" an epithet which serves to refer to both the Tower of Babel and the wretched city of Babylon which were familiar to the Elizabethan spectators/ readers. (IV.i. 195 and below). Clearly, the fall of Babylon prefigures the "tragedy" (namely, the revenge which Hieronimo will exact upon his enemies) that will befall the Spanish Court.

Interestingly, Kyd momentarily casts the Spanish King in the role of a prologue presenter in order to intensify the metadramaticity of the playlet:

Now, viceroy, shall we see the tragedy
Of Suleiman, the Turkish emperor,
Perform'd by pleasure by your son the prince,
My nephew Don Lorenzo, and my niece.

(IV.iv. 1-6)

As a prologue presenter, the king casts his brother, the Duke of Castile, in the role of "the book-keeper" and says:

This is the argument of that they show

(IV.iv.9-10).

The king "giveth him a book" which opens as follows:

[Gentlemen, this play of Hieronimo in sundry languages
was thought good to be set down in English more largely,
for the easier understanding to every publique reader.]

Indeed, the translation of this playlet into English tallies with its didactic design which in turn affirms that of *The Spanish Tragedy* as a whole.

In accordance with Hieronimo's suggestion, his fellow role-players perform their parts to the letter. Hieronimo stabs Lorenzo and Bel-imperia stabs Balthazar and then commits suicide. Hieronimo reassumes his role as an epilogue presenter and asserts to the king and his entourage that the playlet which they have just watched was not "fabulously counterfeit" (IV.iv.77). Rather, it was earnest.

Then he launches into oration in which he tells his latest tale to "show his dead son" (IV. iv. 85-88 and blew). Hieronimo's presentation of his son's dead body justifies his recourse to the playlet scheme which has enabled him to carry out his vengeance upon his enemies. This revenge is in line with the play's didactic motifs which are time and again reiterated by the Ghost of Andrea and Revenge who present themselves as a Chorus that keeps commenting upon the action as it evolves. Early in the play Revenge tells Andrea:

Here sit we down to see the mystery,
And serve for Chorus in this tragedy.

(I.i.90-91)

As a choric figure, Revenge reassures the impatient Andrea by exclaiming in such metaphorical terms:

Thou talk'st of harvest, when the corn is green;
The end is crown of every work well done;
The sickle comes not till the corn be ripe.
Be still, and, ere I lead thee from this place,
I'll show thee Balthazar in heavy case.

(II.vi. 7-11)

Here, Revenge is at pains to assure Andréa that divine justice will eventually come into fruition, though it might be very slow. And as we have already seen the play ends with a series of punishments and rewards befitting their deeds. Revenge tells Andrea:

Then haste we down to meet thy friends and foes;
To place thy friends in ease, the rest in woes.
For here though death doth end their misery,
I'll there begin their endless tragedy.

(IV.v. 42-

48)

Thus, we see that Andrea and Revengereinforce the play's didactic moral through their repeated choric observations.

As choric figures, they are part and parcel of the play's metadramatic tools that go hand in hand with Hieronimo in his playlet plot which has enabled him to act out his vengeance. This is the gist of the play whose metadramatic figures derive its moral messages home.

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