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Biting one's tongue: autoglossotomy and agency in The Spanish Tragedy

Alanna Skuse

What does it mean to lose one's tongue? This is the dilemma presented by Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* when Hieronimo, a father bent on vengeance for his murdered son, bites out his own tongue before stabbing himself to death:

> HIERONIMO: What lesser liberty can kings afford
> Than harmless silence? Then afford it me.
> Sufficeth I may not, nor I will not, tell thee.
> KING: Fetch forth the tortures! – Traitor as thou art, I'll make thee tell
> HIERONIMO: Indeed thou mayst torment me as his wretched son
> Hath done in murdering my Horatio.
> But never shalt thou force me to reveal
> The thing which I have vowed inviolate.
> And therefore, in despite of all thy threats,
> Pleased with their deaths, and eased with their revenge,
> First take my tongue, and afterwards my heart.
> *[He bites out his tongue]*
> KING: Oh, monstrous resolution of a wretch!
> See viceroy, he hath bitten forth his tongue
> Rather than to reveal what we required.
> CASTILE: Yet he can write.
> KING: And if in this he satisfy us not,
> We will devise th'extremest kind of death
> That ever was invented for a wretch.
> Then Hieronimo makes signs for a knife to mend his pen
> CASTILE: Oh he would have a knife to mend his pen.
> VICEROY: Here, and advise thee that thou write the truth.
> Hieronimo with a knife stabs the Duke [of Castile] and himself [to death]
> (4.4.178–96 [Q1])[1]

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[1] All references are to the Calvo and Tronch edition (Thomas Kyd, *The Spanish Tragedy*, ed. Clara Calvo and Jesus Tronch, Reprint edition (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2013)). In keeping with that edition, lines added to the 1597/1602 editions are cited with separate line numbers, e.g. 4.4, *1602 add. l.4*. In-text references are to the 1592 edition unless otherwise specified.

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This tongue-biting, or 'autoglossotomy', comes at the climax of a series of bloody plots and counter-plots. Against a backdrop of war between Spain and Portugal, the Spanish officer Don Andrea has been killed by the now-captive Balthazar. His ghost watches the action alongside the figure of Revenge, who often seems to be literally asleep on the job. Don Andrea's love interest Bel-Imperia soon transfers her affections to Horatio, son of the Spanish Knight-Marshall Hieronimo. Beset by jealousy, Balthazar and the villainous Lorenzo kill Horatio, whose body is discovered by his parents. Lorenzo employs various machinations to cover his tracks, but at last Hieronimo, in collaboration with Bel-Imperia, convinces the pair to act in a play of Hieronimo's device, *Soliman and Perseda*. In a striking piece of metatheatre, the knives in the scene turn out to be real, and Balthazar, Lorenzo and Bel-Imperia are killed, the latter by her own hand. Revealing his son's body behind a curtain, Hieronimo explains his scheme and the events which have led to this point, before declaring his refusal to speak further.

Even by the standards of this labyrinthine plot, Hieronimo's tongue-biting is confusing. Ostensibly, this is a means to prevent the King from forcibly extracting information from him about the revenge plot which he has 'vowed inviolate,' but Hieronimo has already given a detailed explanation of the conspiracy (4.4.185). The only point he has omitted is the identity of his accomplice, but as Bel-Imperia is already dead, this is not a particularly valuable secret to keep. Furthermore, it is obvious – indeed, explicitly stated – that Hieronimo is already 'resolved to die' by his own hand, making his tongue-biting even more redundant (4.4.160). In this article, however, I argue that far from being inexplicable, for early modern audiences Hieronimo's autoglossotomy was both dramatically effective and highly referential. In the first section, I show how Hieronimo's tongue-biting draws on a classical tradition of autoglossotomy which was associated with political resistance. The second section argues that through reference to this cultural script, Hieronimo positions himself as stoic and anti-tyrannical, and by default interpellates his captors as tyrants. His subsequent suicide completes his assertion of bodily agency. Finally, I discuss how Q4 rewritings of the play which emphasised Hieronimo's madness clashed with these narratives and instead invited audiences to read his mutilation as the actions of a self out of control, manipulated by forces unseen. Overall, I argue, autoglossotomy generates a plurality of meanings, which collide and overlap with one another to generate tensions and contradictions and are not easily read as a unified whole. Nonetheless, the possibility of reading Hieronimo's tongue-biting as an act of integrity in the midst of chaos remains in play, contrary to scholarly readings which have viewed this scene as severing the link between thought, action, and language.

I. TONGUES AND TYRANTS

The Spanish Tragedy was both a popular and an influential play. Performed 29 times by 1597, it was published in ten quarto editions before 1633. Kyd's

cocktail of violence, self-conscious theatricality and psychology is credited with influencing Marlowe, Tourneur, Middleton, Webster and Ford, while the deferment of Hieronimo's vengeance arguably provides a model for Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.[2] Given the play's unquestionable importance to the development of early modern revenge tragedy, then, it is surprising that the puzzle of Hieronimo's autoglossotomy has not received more sustained critical attention.[3] That which does exist firmly allies tongue-biting with breakdown, in various forms. Emily Shortslef, for instance, sees Hieronimo's tongue-biting as signalling a psychological collapse resulting from Hieronimo's struggle to come to terms with the fissure between the living and the dead.[4] Hieronimo, she notes, repeatedly talks of hearing Horatio cry out from the bower just before his murder. However, this is a cry which never actually happened; like the bloody handkerchief, it is a means for Hieronimo to fantasise about a connection between life and afterlife which does not exist. This influence of this void throughout the play means that despite his complaints, Hieronimo never appeals to the King for justice, and Shortslef argues that it is this silence which is literalized by self-mutilation of the tongue. Other critics have viewed autoglossotomy as a breakdown in a more abstract sense, linked to the play's moral indeterminacy and plurality of meaning. Michael Hattaway, for instance, asserts in his analysis of the play's 'architectonic design' that Hieronimo's logic in the closing scenes is probably unfathomable, arguing that 'what an audience should be aware of is dissolution of order and the savage comedy at the end.'[5] A. J. Piesse views the episode in similarly abstract terms as 'signifying an end to spoken language' which is entwined with a 'whole series of questions about meaning, action, and ability to act.'[6] In an astute reading of the play's fears about multilingualism, Carla Mazzio likewise views the loss of Hieronimo's tongue as part of the 'externalisation of his psychic fragmentation.'[7]. As a whole, she argues, *The Spanish Tragedy* is preoccu-

[2] Nicoleta Cinpoeş 'Introduction' in Nicoleta Cinpoeş (ed)., *Doing Kyd: Essays on The Spanish Tragedy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), 2.

[3] A surprising number of analyses of language and violence in *The Spanish Tragedy* treat this strange episode briefly or not at all, including Scott McMillin, 'The Figure of Silence in the Spanish Tragedy', *ELH*, 39 (1972), 27–48, https://doi.org/10.2307/2872289; John Wesley, 'Quintilian's Forensic Grief and The Spanish Tragedy', *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500–1900*, 60 (2020), 209–28, https://doi.org/10.1353/sel.2020.0009; Catherine Clark Zusky, 'Staging Pain in Late Medieval and Early Modern Drama' (Ph.D., University of California, 2015).

[4] Emily Shortslef, 'The Undemanding Dead: Fantasy and Trauma in The Spanish Tragedy and Post-Reformation Revenge Drama', *ELH*, 86 (2019), 467–94, https://doi.org/10.1353/elh.2019.0011.

[5] Michael Hattaway, *Elizabethan Popular Theatre: Plays in Performance* (London: Routledge, 2005), 127.

[6] A. J. Piesse, 'Kyd's The Spanish Tragedy', in *A New Companion to English Renaissance Literature and Culture* (Oxford: Wiley, 2010), 77, 72, https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444319019.ch44.

[7] Carla Mazzio, 'Staging the Vernacular: Language and Nation in Thomas Kyd's The Spanish Tragedy', *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900*, 38 (1998), 221, https://doi.org/10.2307/451034. See also Carla Mazzio, *The Inarticulate Renaissance: Language Trouble in an Age of Eloquence* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016); Carla Mazzio, 'Sins of the Tongue in Early Modern England', *Modern Language Studies*, 28 (1998), 95–124, https://doi.org/10.2307/3195467.

pied with issues of hybridisation, linguistic confusion, and national identities. Within this narrative, Hieronimo's revenge constitutes a 'revenge on language, on representation.'[8] The actors in his play conspicuously fail to understand one another, and his tongue-biting repudiates communication in the most violent way. Mazzio recognises the parallels between Hieronimo's autoglossotomy and that of Zeno the Stoic, a theme which I explore below. However, she views the comparison as a negative one: 'While for Zeno, self-mutilation constitutes an act of stoic heroism, a literalized spit in the face of tyranny, for Kyd it signals a profoundly anti-heroic surrender to (and complicity with) a world of fragments and self-alienation.'[9]

As I shall discuss, my analysis accords with those of Mazzio, Shortslef and others inasmuch as I view *The Spanish Tragedy* as containing multiple interpretive possibilities. However, I suggest that one interpretation which has thus far been neglected is that Hieronimo's self-mutilation is in fact an outward-facing act, designed to affirm his identity rather than signalling its dissolution. In order to view autoglossotomy in this way, we need to understand the tropes which attended tongues and tongue loss in early modern thought. As Mazzio has explored, the tongue in early modern culture was a potent and liminal organ. As the organ of speech, it was, she argues

> imagined in early modern religious, rhetorical, anatomical, and literary texts as the most powerful and the most vulnerable member of 'man', … Because 'tongue' (like the Latin 'lingua' and the Greek 'glossia') also means 'language', the very invocation of the word encodes a relation between word and flesh, tenor and vehicle, matter and meaning.[10]

The intimacy of this connection between tongue-organ and tongue-language was shown by early modern texts' insistence that the strongest evidence of the necessity of restraint in speech was the anatomy of the tongue; as a 1595 text argued, 'The tongue is placed in the middle of the mouth, and it is compassed in with lippes … and teeth as with a double trench, to shew us, how we are to use heed and preconsideration before wee speake.'[11] The body was here viewed as a container within which speech was both generated and policed, and the tongue as its most powerful and vulnerable boundary. In his 1592 *Treatise of the Good and Evell Tongue*, for instance, John Marconville insisted that

[8] Mazzio, 'Staging the Vernacular', 213.

[9] Mazzio, 221.

[10] Carla Mazzio, 'Sins of the Tongue in Early Modern England', 94.

[11] William Perkins, 'A Direction for the Government of the Tongue According to Gods Worde (Cambridge: 1595)', in Nathalie Vienne-Guerrin (ed.), *The Unruly Tongue in Early Modern England: Three Treatises* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2012), 79.

> the chiefest perfection, the best propertie perteining to a man, is to moderate his tongue, for overmuch babble is ever subject to controlment, and he that warely weareth his own tongue sheweth himselfe to be wise, and he that gards his mouth and tongue, gards his own soule.[12]

There was, therefore, traffic between the tongue as imagined in literal terms but with moral significance, and idiomatic exhortations to 'hold one's tongue' which had been in circulation for at least two hundred years by the time of *The Spanish Tragedy*.[13] Though the origins of the related phrase 'to bite one's tongue' are obscure, it was certainly in use by 1591, when Shakespeare's *Henry VI part 2* used the phrase in its modern sense of keeping quiet:

> So York must sit and fret and bite his tongue,
> While his own lands are bargained for and sold. (1.1.230–1)[14]

Of course, to bite one's tongue and to literally bite *out* one's tongue were rather different prospects, which once again overlapped but were not identical in their meanings. Loss of or damage to the tongue functioned as a motif for loss of agency in numerous late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth-century plays, including Shakespeare's 1592 *Titus Andronicus*, John Marston's 1601 *Antonio's Revenge*, and Cyril Tourneur's 1607 *The Revenger's Tragedy*. In all these cases, tongue mutilation is a punitive means of attempting to take agency away from the tongue-less individual, though with varying degrees of success. Injuries to the tongue thus make concrete something which is usually expressed as metaphor; cutting out somebody's tongue is a way to make sure that they 'hold their tongue,' or a punishment for their failure to do so. However, the act of damaging one's *own* tongue had its own rich history and ideology. Whilst Mazzio has pointed out the connection between Kyd's Hieronimo and Zeno the Stoic, this still somewhat underestimates the depth and breadth of the tongue-biting tradition.[15] In fact, accounts of historical figures biting out their own tongues recurred throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Marconville, for instance, noted that

> An example [of autoglossotomy] … is recited by Pliny, of the Philosopher Anazerxes [Anaxarchus], who bereft himself of his tunge, & teeth also, that he wold not reveal a certain secret which the tyrant Nicocrion sought violently to

[12] Jean de Marconville, 'A Treatise of the Good and Evell Tongue (Translated by T.S. (London: 1592))', in Nathalie Vienne-Guerrin (ed.), *The Unruly Tongue in Early Modern England: Three Treatises* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2012), 47.

[13] Chaucer uses the idiom in *The Tale of Melibus* (*c.*1387): 'This is to seyn, that thee is bettre holde thy tonge stille than for to speke' (l.1219) (Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd edn. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008)).

[14] William Shakespeare, *Henry VI, Part 2*, 1.1.230–1. From John Jowett et al. (eds.), *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[15] Mazzio, 'Staging the Vernacular', 221; see also Mazzio, *The Inarticulate Renaissance*, 111.

> wrest from him. The like we reade of Zenon a philosopher, which chose rather to cut of his tongue, then to disclose his freendes councell.[16]

That text probably drew from the 1576 *A philosophicall discourse, entituled, The anatomie of the minde*, which, in a chapter marked 'of constancie' told how

> Zeno the Stoic being cruelly tormented of a King of Cypres to utter those things which the King was desiro[s] to know, at le*n*gth because he woulde not satisfie his minde, bit of his owne toung, and spit the same in the tormentors face. But the constancie of Anaxarchus was more straung, for being taken of Nicocreon, a moste cruell of all other Tyrants, and afterwarde hearing that by the commaundement of the Tyrant he should in a morter be brused and broken into peeces, said most constantly unto him in this manner: Bruse and breake this body of mine at thy pleasure O Tyrant, yet shalt thou never diminish any whit of Anaxarchus. Then the Tyrant because he could not abide his bolde speech, commaunded that his tung should be cut out of his mouth. But Anaxarchus, laughing at his madnes, thought he should never have his minde, and therefore he bit out his owne toung, and spit the same by mamcks [pieces] uppon the tyrants face.[17]

The 1613 *treasurie of auncient and moderne times* likewise attested that Anaxarchus 'bit his tongue off in the midst betweene his teeth, because he would not disclose the secret complot; and afterward, he threw it in the Tyraunts face'.[18] These texts make clear that while it may have been particularly iconic, Zeno's tongue-biting partakes in a nascent tradition rather than single-handedly instituting a new form of protest. Hieronimo's autoglossotomy thus aligns him with a heroic trope rather than an individual hero.

Famous tongue-biters tended to have features in common. Many, Anaxarchus included, were said to be philosophers and orators, and tales of tongue-biting were reserved for rebels with a good cause rather than criminals seeking to evade justice. In a 1602 translation of Plutarch's *Morals*, for instance, it was noted that Hyperides, an Athenian politician and student of Plato, possessed 'a singular name above all other oratours, for speaking before the people', but when he fell foul of the Macedonian general Antipater, 'being set upon the racke, and put to torture, he bit his tongue off with his owne teeth, because he would not discover the secrets of the city'.[19] This link between oratory and self-injury played to an intense interest among contemporary

[16] de Marconville, 'A Treatise of the Good and Evell Tongue', 51.

[17] Thomas Rogers, *A Philosophicall Discourse, Entituled, The Anatomie of the Minde* (London: John Charlewood, 1576), fols. 2r–2v.

[18] Thomas Miles, *The Treasurie of Auncient and Moderne Times* (London: W. Jaggard, 1613), 41.

[19] Plutarch, *The Philosophie, Commonlie Called, the Morals Written by the Learned Philosopher Plutarch of Chæronea. Translated out of Greeke into English, and Conferred with the Latine Translations and the French, by Philemon Holland of Coventrie, Doctor in Physicke.*, trans. Philemon Holland (London: Arnold Hatfield, 1603), 936.

writers in the use of the body as a tool for communication.[20] Taking their lead from the writings of Quintilian, Renaissance rhetoricians emphasised the centrality of 'gesture and action' as persuasive tools 'both more excellent and more universall than voice'.[21] The performativity involved in tongue-biting stories suggests that they too were rhetorical as well as pragmatic in character. In particular, it was frequently specified that the protagonist spat their tongue at their tormentor, as above and in the 1578 *Thesaurus linguæ Romanæ & Britannicæ*, which told how

> A common woman of Athens, who (after Harmodius and Aristogiton had slaine Hipparchus the tyrant) being tormented in sundrye facyons, to the intent shée shoulde discouer the confederates of that murder, spake not one worde, but byting in sunder hir tongue, she spit it in the face of Hippias the tyrant, who caused hir to be tormented.[22]

The deliberate juxtaposition here of 'spake not … but [bit her tongue]' makes clear that autoglossotomy offers an alternative to speaking which is nonetheless situated in the same conceptual field – not *this*, but *that*.

All these texts positioned the tongue as a site of self-expression, but also as the point at which the crucial quality of restraint might be exercised, even to the extent of destroying one's capacity for speech. In so doing, they engaged with an intellectual landscape in which self-regulation was vitally important. As scholars including Christopher Tilmouth and Gail Kern Paster have shown, early modern selfhood 'was habitually constructed with reference to a generic typology of the passions and within a moral framework'.[23] Both physiology and psychology were imagined as at least partly governed by liquid humours which were in turn profoundly influenced by one's environment. The 'turbulent interior plenitude' of these humours was to be brought into balance by

[20] On this topic, see Lynn Enterline, *The Rhetoric of the Body from Ovid to Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); John Wesley, 'Rhetorical Delivery for Renaissance English: Voice, Gesture, Emotion, and the Sixteenth-Century Vernacular Turn', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 68 (2015), 1265–96, https://doi.org/10.1086/685126; Robert Cockcroft, *Rhetorical Affect in Early Modern Writing: Renaissance Passions Reconsidered* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230005945; John Wesley, 'Original Gesture: Hand Eloquence on the Early Modern Stage', *Shakespeare Bulletin*, 35 (2017), 65–96, https://doi.org/10.1353/shb.2017.0003.

[21] Abraham Fraunce, *The Arcadian Rhetorike: Or The Præcepts of Rhetorike Made Plaine by Examples* (London: Thomas Orwin, 1588), sig. Jfv.

[22] Thomas Cooper, *Thesaurus Linguæ Romanæ & Britannicæ* (London: Henry Denham, 1578), fol. sig. Llllll3.

[23] Christopher Tilmouth, 'Passion and Intersubjectivity in Early Modern Literature', in Freya Sierhuis and Brian Cummings (eds.), *Passions and Subjectivity in Early Modern Culture* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 24; Gail Kern Paster, 'Nervous Tension: Networks of Blood and Spirit in the Early Modern Body', in David A. Hillman and Carla Mazzio (eds.), *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 107–25; Gail Kern Paster, Katherine Rowe, and Mary Floyd-Wilson, *Reading the Early Modern Passions: Essays in the Cultural History of Emotion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

careful attention to Galenic non-naturals such as weather, diet, and exercise.[24] Self-management was thus ingrained into the patterns of everyday life and was in itself a moral pursuit, since as Paster describes, such interventions encouraged ever greater 'bodily refinement and self-mastery'.[25] However, the same broad goals were at work in moral texts which emphasised the improvement of the immaterial soul.[26] Many of the tongue-biting tales cited above identified their protagonists – either implicitly or explicitly – as Stoics, and in the process appealed to an 'enormous vogue' in contemporary moral thought.[27] A. A. Long asserts that 'No secular books were more widely read in the Renaissance than Cicero's *On Duties* (*De Officiis*), the *Letters* and *Dialogues* of Seneca, and the *Manual* of Epictetus.'[28] A flurry of translated and original works bolstered the movement, including Guillaume Du Vair's *A buckler against adversitie* (1622), Tacitus's *The Annales* (1598), and Michel De Montaigne's essay 'In defence of Seneca and Plutarch' (1580). Perhaps most influential was Sir John Stradling's translation of Justus Lipsius's *De Constantia* in 1594. Marrying ideas from Tacitus and Seneca with Christian values, *De Constantia* was foundational to Neo-stoicism, a system of ethics which emphasised justice and constancy while leaving 'a considerable amount of room for the practice of pagan and Machiavellian statecraft'.[29]

Stoic texts of all flavours were thus readily available to contemporary writers. Daniel Cadman, for instance, finds that 'Neo-stoicism … gained a following from a niche group of courtiers in the late Elizabethan and early Jacobean eras. Its popularity amongst members of the Sidney and Essex circles ensures it would have been familiar to the writers of the neo-Senecan dramas.'[30] Colin Burrow contends that 'Seneca was *the* high-status model for drama in the formative years of the English professional stage', while Michelle and Charles Martindale argue of Shakespeare, 'There is no more point in asking whether he endorsed or rejected [stoic] commonplaces than in asking whether he endorsed or rejected classical mythology. They constituted raw material to be

[24] Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1993), 13.

[25] Paster, 14. Recent criticism has reinstated the importance of 'somatic spiritualism' as well as 'psychological materialism' in early modern concepts of self; see for example Angus Gowland, 'Melancholy, Passions and Identity in the Renaissance', in Freya Sierhuis and Brian Cummings (eds.), *Passions and Subjectivity in Early Modern Culture.* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 79.

[26] On the overlap between medical idiom and neo-stoic politics, see Margaret Healy, 'Curing the "Frenzy": Humanism, Medical Idiom and "crises" of Counsel in Sixteenth- Century England', *Textual Practice*, 18 (2004), 333–50, https://doi.org/10.1080/0950236041000173289O.

[27] Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, Vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 278.

[28] A. A. Long, 'Stoicism in the Philosophical Tradition: Spinoza, Lipsius, Butler', in Brad Inwood (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics*, Cambridge Companions to Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 365, https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL052177005X.016.

[29] Theodore G. Corbett, 'The Cult of Lipsius: A Leading Source of Early Modern Spanish Statecraft', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 36 (1975), 143, https://doi.org/10.2307/2709016.

[30] Daniel John Cadman, 'Republicanism and Stoicism in Renaissance Neo-Senecan Drama' (Ph.D., Sheffield Hallam University, 2011), 18–19.

refashioned in immortal plays.'[31] Arguably, the classical stoicism of Seneca and Tacitus was more appealing to Kyd and his contemporaries than that of Lipsius and Montaigne, for while Quentin Skinner argues that the neo-stoics advocated submission to authority in almost all circumstances, stories such as those of Zeno and Anaxarchus were strongly anti-tyrannical in emphasis.[32] They also highlighted a particularly appealing aspect of stoic doctrine, its approach to pain. Though stoics did not deny the reality of pain sensations, they counselled that feelings of pain were exacerbated by the emotional belief in pain's undesirability, and this response could be controlled. 'It is incredible', argued Du Vair, 'what power Reason and Discourse have … not onely to make us constant, but even to make paine appeare to us sweet and pleasant'.[33] In one sense, such a view emptied pain of meaning, because pain was a 'false evil', a sensation to which opinions did not need to be ascribed.[34] However, it also empowered the individual to use pain as a means to fortify the rational self against the vicissitudes of sorrow and anger: 'The Stoic individual, then, constitutes himself in part through pain; pain offers an opportunity to exercise true self-control.'[35]

II. 'SPEAK, TRAITOR'

Classical stories of autoglossotomy thus provided a framework within which *The Spanish Tragedy's* tongue-biting could be viewed as stoic, political in focus, and specifically anti-tyrannical. This framework not only makes Hieronimo's self-injury meaningful rather than nihilistic but has the added effect of interpellating the King as tyrant. By asserting control over his own body, the tongue-biter bypasses the authority of the state, whose agents are left on the back foot, struggling to make sense of what they have seen. It is little wonder, then, that the King – previously a relaxed if somewhat oblivious ruler – steps so rapidly and violently into the role of tyrant carved out for him by Hieronimo's scene-setting. It is notable that his first response to Hieronimo's bloody playlet is to demand he 'Speak, traitor' (4.4.161), despite that fact that at that point, Hieronimo has only just finished explaining and has not yet refused to elaborate further, nor has he yet been asked a question. The

[31] Colin Burrow, *Shakespeare and Classical Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 162; Michelle Martindale and Charles Martindale, *Shakespeare and the Uses of Antiquity: An Introductory Essay* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 1994), 167.

[32] Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2:279–82.

[33] Guillaume Du Vair, *A Buckler against Adversitie, or, A Treatise of Constancie* (London: Bernard Alsop, 1622), 32.

[34] Justus Lipsius, *Two Bookes of Constancie. Written in Latine, by Justus Lipsius. Containing, Principallie, A Comfortable Conference, in Common Calamities. And Will Serue for a Singular Consolation to All That Are Priuately Distressed, of Afflicted, Either in Body or Mind* trans. John Stradling (London: P. Short for Richard Johnes, 1595), 15.

[35] J. F. van Dijkhuizen and K. A. E. Enenkel, 'Introduction: Constructions of Physical Pain in Early Modern Culture', in *The Sense of Suffering: Constructions of Physical Pain in Early Modern Culture* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 15.

words have the ring of a theatrical prompt as well as a command; in attempting to assert his authority, the King reproduces perfectly the part of the 'most cruell' tyrants who populate classical autoglossotomy stories. The monarch's next demand to 'Fetch forth the tortures' (4.4.179) confirms his desire to reassert sovereignty over the will of his subject by subjecting his body to corporal control.

The King's order expresses both his desire to see Hieronimo suffer, and his belief in the efficacy of that suffering to yield information, 'draw[ing] truth from the body just as a knife draws blood.'[36] Moreover, it may have struck a nerve for Elizabethan audiences. Timothy Turner has shown how the summary justice meted out throughout *The Spanish Tragedy* might have recalled episodes in which Queen Elizabeth attempted to use martial law to execute her detractors without trial.[37] Even more troublingly, while torture was associated with Catholicism and Spain in particular, it was also employed in England, particularly in cases of treason. 'Given the right conditions,' Turner contends, 'even the diffuse Elizabethan power structure could exhibit near-despotic tendencies.'[38] Belief in the necessity and efficacy of torture was linked to an increasing emphasis on interior life or 'inner self' which made prominent the capacity of individuals to withhold the truth. Sixteenth-century Protestant authorities were, for instance, troubled by the practices of equivocation and *mentalis restriction* (mental reservation) which allowed persecuted Catholics to lie even under oath. Kimberley Huth describes how in response

> Pain becomes a tool of exhibition, or more aggressively, extraction. For example in the rhetorical tradition and the legal practices that it helped to shape, pain was considered to be an effective way to disable an individual's ability to lie or dissimulate … By working on and through the body to get at what was hidden inside, pain seems capable of producing authentic information by disabling an individual's ability to "fashion" reality as he or she may have liked.[39]

Despite its intention to enforce discursive hegemony, however, torture also exposed the limits of authoritarian power over individuals, an irony which is powerfully evident in *The Spanish Tragedy*. When the state had failed to enforce or inspire loyalty, it became reliant on torture victims to supply information. As we have seen, however, the pain which was intended to effect 'extraction' might become a means of self-fashioning when it was embraced

[36] Lisa Silverman, *Tortured Subjects: Pain, Truth, and the Body in Early Modern France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 22.

[37] Timothy A. Turner, 'Torture and Summary Justice in "The Spanish Tragedy"', *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900*, 53 (2013), 282–3.

[38] Turner, 281; Elizabeth Hanson, 'Torture and Truth in Renaissance England', *Representations*, 34 (1991), 53–84, https://doi.org/10.2307/2928770.

[39] Kimberly Huth, 'Figures of Pain: Suffering and Selfhood in Early Modern English Literature', PhD. (University of Wisconsin, 2009), 9.

and even inflicted by the sufferer themselves. The presence of Hieronimo's bloody tongue on stage thus attests both to the King's readiness to exert authoritarian power over the body of his subject, and the subject's capacity to resist that authority.

Read in this context, Hieronimo's suicide no longer renders his tongue-biting redundant, but rather completes a series of acts by which he attempts to make himself heroic rather than pathetic and 'inviolate' rather than violated. Classical stoicism was well-known for advocating self-destruction in the service of personal and political integrity. In Seneca's words,

> [the] body is all that is vulnerable about me … I shall dissolve our partnership when this seems the proper course, and even now while we are bound one to the other the partnership will not be on equal terms: the soul will assume undivided authority. Refusal to be influenced by one's body assures one's freedom.[40]

In this formulation suicide was innately anti-authoritarian, since it asserted that the individual's rights over their own body trumped those of the state or sovereign. Moreover, it once again ties Hieronimo's actions to contemporary anxieties about state authority, which was increasingly involved in the prosecution of suicides. Whereas in the medieval period, most suicides were deemed *non compos mentis*, Eric Langley finds that between 1485 and 1660, government crackdown, and small rewards for coroners recording a *felo de se* verdict, meant that only 2 per cent of suicides were judged to be of unsound mind.[41] While religion supplied the foremost reason to condemn self-killing, it was also noted that such acts undermined or usurped the rights of the judicial system, and by extension the sovereign, over individual bodies. As the author of *Self-homicide murther* pointed out, 'If Self-killing were lawful, the power of life and death immediately invested by God in the supream Magistrate, would by degrees shrink to a despicable nothing.'[42] Antipathy to suicide was thus arguably of a piece with an expanded judicial system which demanded that citizens seek justice through the courts rather than through private vengeance.[43] As Knight-Marshall, Hieronimo is well placed to appreciate this tension between private and public justice, and his suicide marks a total abandonment of the latter; the power of life and death now belongs entirely in the hands of the individual. Despite its bloody nature, then, Hieronimo's self-mutilation and

[40] Seneca, quoted in Sheetal Lodhia, '"The House Is Hers, the Soul Is but a Tenant": Material Self-Fashioning and Revenge Tragedy', *Early Theatre*, 12 (2009), 137.

[41] Eric Francis Langley, *Narcissism and Suicide in Shakespeare and His Contemporaries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 212–13.

[42] Thomas Philipot, *Self-Homicide-Murther, or, Some Antidotes and Arguments Gleaned out of the Treasuries of Our Modern Casuists and Divines against That Horrid and Reigning Sin of Self-Murther* (London: W. Downing for Edward Thomas, 1674), 9.

[43] Deborah Willis, '"The Gnawing Vulture": Revenge, Trauma Theory, and "Titus Andronicus"', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 53 (2002), 23–4. See also Michael MacDonald and Terence R. Murphy, *Sleepless Souls: Suicide in Early Modern England* (Clarendon Press, 1993), 5.

self-destruction can be viewed as purposeful, even rational. Rather than signalling a breakdown of meaning, autoglossotomy draws on both long-established cultural tropes and newly emerging national anxieties to supply a surprisingly positive interpretation of an otherwise troublingly violent revenger.

III. 'HIERONIMO IS MAD AGAIN'

Does this reading hold if we accept, as the 1615 edition of *The Spanish Tragedy* suggested, that 'Hieronimo is mad again'? This is an important question given that much of the play's popularity and influence after 1600 rested on its portrayal of mental disorder. Carol Thomas Neely has shown how additions to Kyd's tragedy fleshed out and brought to the fore Hieronimo's bouts of insanity:

> In the first extant edition (Q1 ca. 1592) … madness is only briefly represented in a couple of scenes, which blend classical motifs with early modern vocabulary of distraction. However, in the fourth extant edition (Q4, 1602), the protagonist's madness is developed further in five (inappropriately named) 'additions'; these 325 new lines are not add-ons but significant textual revisions that, by transforming Hieronimo's madness, make a new play.[44]

The Spanish Tragedy Q4 had a formative role to play in literary depictions of madness: 'the motif of tragic madness … enlarged in the additions, and circulated widely throughout the culture, created a powerful secular model of tragic madness that would be subsequently developed for many different ends'.[45] As Neely observes, making Hieronimo 'mad' makes the play in some respects more coherent, providing a clearer logic for both the delay in enacting revenge, and the overwrought nature of the final revenging playlet. It also interacted with the early modern vogue for discussions of madness and melancholia which participated in 'a newly urgent focus of representation, theorization, and treatment across a wide range of cultural documents and practices'.[46] In narrative terms, madness provides another cultural script with which to read Hieronimo's autoglossotomy – one which interacts with and complicates the interpretive framework provided by discourses of agency and tyranny.

As has been argued elsewhere, self-wounding in this period was not in itself generally viewed as pathological.[47] Medical texts which described acts of self-wounding told how physicians stitched up the injured person, but very rarely

[44] Carol Thomas Neely, *Distracted Subjects: Madness and Gender in Shakespeare and Early Modern Culture* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2004), 33.

[45] Neely, 45.

[46] Neely, 2.

[47] Alanna Skuse, '"One Stroak of His Razour": Tales of Self-Gelding in Early Modern England', *Social History of Medicine*, 33 (2020), 377–93, https://doi.org/10.1093/shm/hky100.

suggested that their actions indicated anything more than a drastic response to a particular set of circumstances. Nonetheless, the sustained emphasis on Hieronimo's madness in Q4 may have framed his self-mutilation as an act of despair or of reckless self-endangerment, both of which were symptomatic of mental disorder. In the 'newly urgent' focus on madness which Neely describes, medical texts presented suicide as the most dangerous side-effect of melancholia. While the state was pushing *felo de se* verdicts for suicides, treatises such as Robert Burton's 1621 *Anatomy of Melancholy* urged sympathy:

> in some cases those hard censures of such as offer violence to themselues, are to be mitigated, as in such as are mad, beside themselues, or knowne to haue bin long melancholy, and that in extremity, they know not what they doe (…) Who knowes how he may be tempted? is it his case, it may be thine; we ought not to be too rash & rigorous in our censures, as some are, charity will judge the best. God be mercifull to us all.[48]

Melancholy was particularly dangerous when it coincided with spiritual despair, when it might, as the 1586 *Treatise on melancholie* put it, 'grindeth into powder all that standeth firme'.[49] This despair and temptation characterises both Isabella's sudden descent into madness and suicide at 4.2, and Hieronimo's contemplation of suicide in 3.12:

> Away, Hieronimo, to him be gone,
> He'll do thee justice for Horatio's death
> [*Points at the poniard*]
> Turn down this path, thou shalt be with him straight;
> [*Points at the rope*]
> Or this, and then thou need'st not take thy breath (3.12.12–15)

Madness could also present a physical danger when it caused the patient to become simply indifferent to pain and hazard. In the 1607 *Admirable and memorable histories*, Simon Goulart related the case of a young woman afflicted by madness thought to have been caused by a mixture of natural and supernatural causes. The woman 'cast her selfe so sodainly from one side unto the other, as if she had not beene presently stai'd, she had beat her head against the wall, or against the bed post … Sometimes she beat her breast so violently, as she was like to kill her selfe.'[50] Later texts on melancholy madness repeatedly

[48] Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (Oxford: John Lichfield and James Short, for Henry Cripps, 1621), 276–7.

[49] Timothie Bright, *A Treatise of Melancholie Containing the Causes Thereof, & Reasons of the Strange Effects It Worketh in Our Minds and Bodies: With the Physicke Cure, and Spirituall Consolation for Such as Haue Thereto Adioyned an Afflicted Conscience* (London: Thomas Vautrollier, 1586), 184.

[50] Simon Goulart, *Admirable and Memorable Histories Containing the Wonders of Our Time.*, trans. Ed. Grimeston (London: George Eld, 1607), 3–4.

emphasised the fact that sufferers could 'endure the greatest Cold, Hunger, and Stripes, without any sensible harm'.[51] As Thomas Tryon asserted in 1689,

> they can attempt and perform many wonderful things without the least suspition of Danger, which at other times they would tremble to think of, and would not for the greatest rewards be prepared to undertake.
> Nay, when the Soul-Fires are kindled in the poysonous Root, a man can without Dread and Fear lay violent hands on himself, so wonderfully great is its power, for this is madness of the highest degree, since no man (as the Apostle said) hates his own Flesh, but loveth and cherishes it, which ought well to be considered by all Jurors concerned in such cases.[52]

This trope of the madman's indifference to bodily harm resonates with Hieronimo's tongue-biting; he too acts in a frenzy of violence, which includes lashing out at the relatively blameless Duke of Castile.

The potential for Hieronimo's violence to be read as mad is bolstered by Q4 additions which allow for a degree of manic or delusional behaviour on Hieronimo's part. Delusions were a commonly cited symptom of melancholy madness; Burton described how 'Humorous they are beyond all measure', the melancholy man 'supposeth … He is a Giant, a Dwarfe, as strong as an hundred men, a Lord, Duke, Prince, &c.'[53] While Hieronimo does not attain such full-blown misbeliefs, he readily suggests to the horrified Viceroy that 'we shall be friends' (4.4, *1602 add. l.4*), before asserting that '[I] am grown a prouder monarch / Than ever sat under the crown of Spain' (4.4, *1602 add. l.10-11*). Indeed, his blurring of the boundaries between real and fictional in *Soliman and Perseda*, along with his willingness to keep 'directing' the scene after the playlet ostensibly ends, could be taken as evidence of grandiosity. Burton warned that

> Many of them [madmen] are immouable and fixed in their conceipts, and others vary vpon every object heard or seene. As, if they see a stage-play, they runne vpon that a weeke after, if they heare musicke and see dancing, they haue naught but Bagpipes in their braines.[54]

Burton's description of monomania here could plausibly apply to Hieronimo's single-minded pursuit of revenge. In any version of the play, the drive to vengeance is so strong that by 4.3, it is watermarked into the language of the play:

[51] David Irish, *Levamen Infirmi: Or, Cordial Counsel to the Sick and Diseased* (London: Isaac Walker, 1700), 45.

[52] Thomas Tryon, *A Treatise of Dreams & Visions Wherein the Causes, Natures, and Uses, of Nocturnal Representations, and the Communications Both of Good and Evil Angels, as Also Departed Souls, to Mankind Are Theosophically Unfolded* (London: S.N., 1689), 282.

[53] Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 239.

[54] Burton, 239.

> Behoves thee then, Hieronimo, to be revenged.
> The plot is laid of dire revenge.
> Oh then, Hieronimo, pursue revenge,
> For nothing wants but acting of revenge. (4.3.26–9)

Hieronimo's monologue shows him stuck in a linguistic and psychological loop – however he turns over the idea of revenge in his mind, he returns to a vision of himself as the actor in a 'plot' from which he cannot deviate.

This is not to diagnose Hieronimo as criminally insane, or as having diminished responsibility. Even in Q4, Hieronimo's autoglossotomy does not appear a straightforward effect of madness, and the murders which precede and follow the tongue-biting are morally ambiguous to say the least. It is, however, inflected by madness, and utilises the tropes of delusion and disregard for self which are found in other kinds of madness text. This does not disallow his act from doing ideological and interpellative work, since there are multiple explanatory tropes at work in the play at any given time. Nonetheless, the enhanced proximity between madness and self-wounding in Q4 adjusts the balance between interpretive frames by adding to the general sense that Hieronimo's actions are not entirely under his own control. The added scene with the painter Bazardo at 3.12 sees Hieronimo predicting his own fate even before he has decided on a course of action: 'the end is death and madness. As I am never better than when I am mad, then methinks I am a brave fellow, then I do wonders' (3.12 *1602 add. l.159–61*). At the close of the playlet, Hieronimo asserts that 'I am at last revenged thoroughly / Upon whose souls may heavens be yet revenged / With greater far than these afflictions' (4.4. *1602 add. l.25–6*). The King and Castile respond with invocations to 'Fall, heaven' and 'Roll all the world within thy pitchy cloud' (4.4. *1602 add. l.44, 45*). If emphasis on Hieronimo's madness throughout the drama coincides with emphasis on the role of fate in the final scenes, it makes sense that madness may be one of the means through which Revenge as a supernatural entity attains its ends. Moreover, the play's sophisticated 'nested' structure allows Hieronimo to be both free and un-free when viewed from different perspectives, for the on-stage drama contains three frames: *Soliman and Perseda*, the Spanish court, and the realm of Revenge and his bosses Pluto and Proserpine. Hieronimo's tongue-biting still asserts individual freedom and achieves specific ideological aims within frame two of the play-world, the court. However, his pursuit of those freedoms and aims is determined by larger forces working in frame three. As Musica suggests,

> if Nemesis and Revenge are to be considered avatars of the same power, then Revenge really *is* the author of *The Spanish Tragedy* in the sense that Andrea's death in that battle is the *sine qua non* of the entertainment for Pluto and Proserpine, *as well as* for Andrea's Ghost (and for us, the audience).[55]

[55] Eughenii Musica, 'Vindicating Revenge', in Nicoleta Cinpoeş (ed.), *Doing Kyd: Essays on The Spanish Tragedy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), 49.

This perspective also offers an alternative way of interpreting Hieronimo's autoglossotomy as spectacle. Critics have long noted the metatheatricality both of the play's nested frame structure and its arrangement of critical moments as quasi-tableaux. Bate, for instance, observes how 'the play is thoroughly suffused with an interest in the resources and semiotic potentialities of theatre (there is, for instance, a profusion of wittily deployed props: box, dagger, rope, book, napkin, pen)'.[56] Episodes of violence are aesthetic events, described by Hattaway as having their 'origins in the pageantry of the court, the street dramas of executions'.[57] Hence, Lorenzo and Balthazar hang Horatio in the bower, but they also stab him 'thus, and thus; these are the fruits of love' (2.4.54). Like Hieronimo's tongue-biting, this is violence without a clear cause – we can assume Horatio is already dead from being hanged, so the stabs are performative rather than pragmatic. The aesthetics of violence are also at work when Hieronimo describes how he shall conclude his play 'with a strange and wondrous show … behind a curtain' (4.1.177-78). When he reveals Horatio's corpse, his first words are 'See here my show, look on this spectacle' (4.4.88). In Hattaway's analysis of the play as a 'gestic' piece structured by memorable scenes rather than plot per se, he asserts that 'motive-hunting' for Hieronimo's tongue-biting is 'pointless'.[58] However, it seems clear that as a theatrical device, Hieronimo's self-inflicted violence is a literal play on the 'dumb show' which is also recollected in the hanging of Horatio in the bower. Indeed, Hieronimo himself imagines the possibility of a play without words when in the added scene 3.12 he asks the artist Bazardo to 'paint a doleful cry' (3.12 *1602 add. l.123–4*). The final flourish of autoglossotomy thus repeats the sensationalism which has been attached to violence throughout the play. Kyd is staging a man 'staging' his own mutilation to recollect a specific classical context. However, if we doubt his capacity – because of insanity, or the workings of fate, or both – then the status of that act shifts from 'spectacular self-determination' to simply 'spectacle.' This raises uncomfortable questions for the audience. Do we, and should we, enjoy the sight of a madman doing himself harm?

Ultimately, this question remains unresolved, and productively so. Within the play world, autoglossotomy shows how the body can be made to do ideological work. Hieronimo's autoglossotomy taps into very specific discourses about tongues and tongue-biting which consistently place the biter in the role of hero and his interrogator in the role of tyrant. In a demonstration of the power of stories and of gestures, playing out that well-established scene creates the illusion of there being more to tell; as Mazzio puts it, 'the secret is that there is

[56] Jonathan Bate, 'Enacting Revenge: The Mingled Yarn of Elizabethan Tragedy', in Nicoleta Cinpoeş (ed.), *Doing Kyd: Essays on The Spanish Tragedy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), 35.

[57] Hattaway, 'The Spanish Tragedy: Architectonic Design', 111.

[58] Hattaway, 127.

no secret'.[59] It also makes us interpret the King's actions in a new light – no longer horrified spectator, but furious thwarted oppressor. These questions interact with contemporary debates about self-ownership and the rights of the state over its subjects. In a rapidly changing political and religious climate, jurisdiction over the individual body was up for grabs, and damaging one's own body was a potentially subversive activity. This ideological freight is complicated, but not erased, when later versions of the play show us that Hieronimo is 'mad again'. Madness is not the efficient cause of Hieronimo's self-mutilation. However, casting the pall of madness over Hieronimo's actions draws renewed attention to the fact that violence unfolds in *The Spanish Tragedy* with an inevitability and an aesthetic flourish which makes the play's theatricality visible.

At the outset of this article, I argued that contemporary criticism has generally viewed *The Spanish Tragedy*'s polysemy as multiplying meaning to the point of collapse. The play is riddled with accidental misinterpretations, missed connections and deliberate misdirections which thwart any didactic interpretation, and Hieronimo's rejection of language may be seen as exemplifying this resistance. However, if we reread this episode as potentially referential, outward-facing, and meaningful, then the possibility of Hieronimo's story having a coherent and even satisfying end remains in play. It is too much to insist on this protagonist's heroism when, as I have shown, his morality, sanity and free will are far from certain. Nonetheless, Kyd refuses to exclude the possibility that Hieronimo is above all else a man of integrity – one fixed point in the play that is exactly as it seems.

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[59] Mazzio, *The Inarticulate Renaissance*, 110.

Abstract

When the protagonist Hieronimo bites out his own tongue in Thomas Kyd's The Spanish Tragedy, his actions seem to make little sense. After all, he has already explained the very plot which he claims to be keeping a secret through his self-injury. However this article argues that Hieronimo's tongue-biting taps into rich discourses about self-injury, personal agency, stoicism and madness. I argue that self-injury was related to suicide in its assertion of control over the individual body, and could therefore operate as a type of protest. Moreover, stories of tongue-biting from classical sources functioned as stoic exemplars of resistance to political tyranny. Revisions of The Spanish Tragedy shifted the meaning of this scene by placing increasing emphasis on Hieronimo's madness and the role of the supernatural forces in determining the play's events. overall, however, I argue that Hieronimo's tongue-biting should be read as bringing together a number of cultural scripts, which interact and overlap to produce a morally ambiguous and richly allusive scene.