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Corrupt Leadership and Its Impact On Social Morality in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*
and Thomas Middleton's *The Second Maiden's Tragedy*

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Abstract of the Thesis

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Utilizing historical texts and conduct manuals of the Renaissance Period in England, this thesis examines the consequences of corrupt leadership within drama. With specific focus on William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Thomas Middleton's *The Second Maiden's Tragedy*, the connection between the public and private sectors of a society are studied in order to prevent future leaders from making the mistakes of monarchs of the past. Used as a medium to discuss and analyze current political policy and leadership, these plays act as a window into the minds of a past society and its cultural practice.

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Introduction

When the corruption of the court is more severe, then the impact on society is greater. This disruption of order trickles down from nobility to the common family unit leading to the destruction of the moral constitution of society. Within this system of existence there can be no social conscience or application of justice. If the strongest abandon virtuous action then the weak will certainly fall prey to ethical decay.

Two texts which engage this frightening reality are William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Thomas Middleton's *The Second Maiden's Tragedy*. Written during England's Renaissance Period, these two tragedies act as a platform for critical analysis of leadership and the hierarchical institutions and social beliefs which governed the nation. At times reflective of the English monarchs, these two plays indulge the minds' most pressing questions and concerns in a time where public criticism was not tolerated.

As one moves from *Hamlet* to *The Second Maiden's Tragedy*, it is clear that both the fictional world of these dramas and the real world of their audience are on a collision course with political suicide and economic ruin. The people of England are unhappy and Middleton unabashedly expresses their disgust. Utilizing historical events and texts to contextualize these two plays, this paper will show how crucial adept leadership is to maintaining a balance between social values and lawful justice.

Relevant History

Towards the end of her reign, Queen Elizabeth still faced some problems that carried over to James I's rule. Although Elizabeth had managed to balance all other

matters of state and protect England from foreign occupation, internally, her breadth of knowledge and political aptitude could not eradicate this financial burden from her beloved people. In his book *The Age of Shakespeare*, Frank Kermode explains that, “a succession of bad harvests in the last decade of the century caused food shortages and popular unrest. Inflation was severe; the cost of living was multiplied three and a half times in the course the century, and was certainly not under control in the time of James I” (46). Many attempts were made by each monarch to solve this problem but they were unsuccessful. This system only provided wealth and advancement for the already rich aristocracy and merchant class. The common man bore the worst of this crisis.

Not only were economics an issue for each monarch, so were attempts on their lives and usurpation of their throne. In 1601, upon his return from Ireland, Lord Essex organized a march on London in an attempt to remove Elizabeth and replace her with a more preferred monarch, such as James Stuart the current king of Scotland. His plan was ill-devised and poorly executed. Essex was captured and put to death for his treachery.

James did eventually ascend the throne after Elizabeth’s death in 1603. And, in 1605 opposes to James’ religious policy organized a violent attempt on his life and members of Parliament, known as the Gunpowder Plot, which was also thwarted. The men involved were hanged and James became aware that his perception of himself as a beloved monarch was somewhat skewed. Yet this did not sway his staunch views as he was used to threats on his life from a very young age when he was made successor to his mother, Mary Queen of Scots. James had other plans for England and for his monarchy.

King James I was initially welcomed in England. Though Elizabeth’s reign was seen as the Golden Age of England, the people were eager for change and hopeful for

reprieve from economic hardship and religious conflict. At first James seemed adept at the task, but his true passions soon surfaced and it became apparent that he had other plans for his court, England's government, and the state. James was often perceived as a fool due to his lavish lifestyle, egregious spending habits, and his lack of political prowess. James was nothing short of pompous and, according to author Russ Mc Donald, intended to "deliberately set about to make his court the envy of Europe, spending enormous sums on courtly entertainments, and to some extent achieved that goal."

His "taste for spectacle," manifested itself into the court masque, of which James was a huge fan. James was not only chastised for his opulence but also for his practice of bringing in many Scots and providing them with ornate titles that had previously not existed. This made many of his subjects critical of his ability as a King. All misgivings aside, though immense, there was one benefit that stemmed from James' love of the arts: James supported theater and commissioned Shakespeare's acting troupe which became known as The King's Men. Theater thrived during James' reign.

But James did not stop at fanciful endowments. He was a strict proponent of Divine Right and believed in the absolute power of the monarchy. He saw the Parliament as somewhat unnecessary and frequently undermined their authority in favor of his sovereignty as king. James relished in the fact that he was head of the Anglican Church and wrote his own version of the Bible. James also authored many edicts on authority and leadership such as the *Basilikon Doron* of 1594, in which he imparts wisdom about the divine right of kings and its implementation within a parliamentary monarchy to his son for future guidance when he should rule.

James saw no facet of public matters as off limits. Where he could demonstrate

his ambition, philosophy, and brilliance, he would. He was a great legend in his own right and in his own mind. To all others he, more often than not, came across as a fool. Though James was married to Queen Anne and had many children, suspicions of James sexuality also sparked much controversy within Parliament and amongst the people. Many of James council were given preference in the political realm when perhaps they were not giving the most sound or impartial advice or guidance.

During the 16th and early 17th centuries, power was a constant balancing act between the monarchy, their councilors, and members of the aristocracy. Public opinion greatly mattered and James' eccentricities and extreme policies wound up weakening his power instead of making it stronger. The people became nostalgic for Elizabeth's monarchy as she was quite astute at maintaining balance between the various factions of government. The monarch's absolute power was limited to certain areas of public policy and taxation was something that Parliament clung strongly to. James' relentless use of taxation of the people to fund the monarchy caused great friction between him and Parliament. The inability to resolve this incongruence eventually led to civil war in England.

Divine Right, The Head and The Body, and the King's Two Selves:

During the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, people believed in Divine Right, that the King was the head, both literally and figuratively, of the country, and that the king had two selves, his public body and his private body. Based on these beliefs there were certain expectations set for leadership and procedure for ascending the throne. If these rules and laws were not respected or were disregarded, there were often dire

consequences and the people would not favor the current monarch. Without cooperation from the people, success as a ruler was almost always impossible.

According to the principles of Divine Right, God appointed the ruler for England and this monarch would act as a channel for God's will in regard to the people and the country. The King was an extension of God's power and not to be questioned or disobeyed. Kings were not elected by the people but were granted kingship through paternal succession. The king's first born son would inherit the throne upon the king's death and if there was no immediate male heir then the throne would go to the eldest male of the same bloodline. This was God's will and no man had the right to question it or to defy it. Usurpation was not looked upon fondly by the people nor was tyranny. If one usurped the throne then he was not the "rightful" leader and would be going against God. If one is a tyrant then it is believed that he perceives himself to be more powerful than God. In this particular instance it is believed that God's will is not being applied properly and that the people may contest the monarch's right to rule.

Along with Divine Right, the people believed that the king was the head and the state the body of the country. During the Renaissance, the body was used as a symbol for the sanctity and social order of the country. Like the head rules the human body, so does the king run his state. The head governed the body with supreme authority and without question. But, like the human form, if there was an infection in the head it would spread throughout the body causing destruction and decay. If the infection was not treated quickly, there was no chance for survival. Maintaining a level head and sound mind was of the utmost importance to a monarch and to its people. Modeled after this public structure was that of the familial domain. Like the king was the head of his country, so

was the father the head of the home. In a domestic setting, the father is the appointed authority and is not to be questioned or disobeyed.

Not only was the king the literal and figurative head for the country, he was also of two selves. The king had a public self which ruled the country with a firm and honest hand and owed all allegiance and duty to the people and the throne. This public self was married to England. Then there was the private self which was the actual man behind the scenes. The father and husband who raised his family also ruled his home. It was essential that the king kept these two selves balanced in order to maintain peace and order within the state. If the king ruled with his private self and its desires rather than his public self, then civil unrest would follow and an unjust world prevail. This is where the royal “we” comes from and why the king often refers to himself in the first person plural. The royal “we” in texts signifies the king’s public self and usually means that the action is set in a public venue or arena.

By examining sources both theatrical and scholarly from the time of *Hamlet*’s publication as well as contemporary critical sources, it will become clear that a corrupt government cannot sustain its people in any manner. Using these texts as a window into Shakespeare’s era will allow us to better understand how theater, specifically plays like *Hamlet* and *Second Maiden’s Tragedy*, was used to question and criticize society, politics, and common beliefs, under the guise of entertainment. By focusing specifically on leadership, it becomes apparent that the current political state of England was no laughing matter and that these works display the most extreme outcomes for an unsettled nation.

As the country’s monarch changed so did its peoples’ livelihood and moral

adherence. As England transformed so did its literature. Moving from a solely revenge to a revenge-domestic tragedy, it is clear that the further one's leader moved from his or her duties as monarch and head of state, the further corruption seeped into society. By pursuing carnal desire and power instead of one's moral and stately duty the more chaotic one's public becomes.

Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Prince* and Sir Thomas Elyot's *The Boke Named the Governor*

During the Renaissance Period, many manuals were written with instructions on how to be an effective leader. Not only did these texts provide guidance to future rulers, they also established a structural framework for international affairs and stately politics as well as discussed political theory. If followed, these guides were usually a foolproof blueprint to being successful as a leader. These guides often incorporated ancient cultures' political history as well as stately history in order to drive home moral decorum and deter inappropriate action. One exception to this genre was Machiavelli's *The Prince*.

Written in 1513 and directed towards current and future leaders of Italy, *The Prince* provided a chilling blueprint for dominance and shrewd leadership. Much of Machiavelli's work became associated with malice and deceit. In his edition of *The Bedford Companion to Shakespeare*, Russ Mc Donald describes chapter XVIII: *In What Way Princes Should Keep Their Word* as, "probably the most provocative of all in its endorsement of equivocation and its exploration of the link between language and power" (335). *The Prince* was one of the most influential discourses on political philosophy and practice of the 16th century in Europe.

If read carefully one will find that Machiavelli was a perceptive man with great insight into the workings of public office and service. His guide is what many people thought about ruling but never would dare to pen on paper. His view of fortune and dealing with ones' enemies provide crucial advice for future leaders. Taken out of context his words may seem ludicrous and contemptuous, which they were at the time of plays such as *Hamlet* and *The Second Maiden's Tragedy*. But if properly analyzed, much of his tactics seemed necessary to survive in a world that was greatly expanding and exploring unknown territory.

On stage, Machiavelli's work was interpreted through the character and character traits of the Machiavel. This personae was cold, calculating, wily, and cruel. Careful to feign from suspicion, this person would often slink along the plot of a play unnoticed; the mastermind behind all the chaos and debauchery. Often adept with verbal manipulation and persuasion, this amalgamation of all things evil was at the heart of some of the theater's most vile villains. So good at what they did that they were often loved as much as they were hated. This archetype is most often seen as being exemplified in the character of Claudius in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Though he may be more Machiavellian than a Machiavel.

There were less controversial texts that provided great resources for both fictional leaders and real ones. Sir Thomas Elyot's *The Boke Named The Gouernor*, is such a text. Published in 1531, *The Boke* instructs members of the king's council and other political leaders on proper behavior, actions, and decorum for those in an important position of power. In his guide, Elyot speaks of the dangers of having excessive pride and how it weakens one's power. His book warns of the many dangers associated with ambition,

infidelity and other vices that feed on such extreme behavior. More than just warning leaders of potential pitfalls, Elyot also advocates for positive attributes such as patience, reason, and fidelity which Elyot sees as the foundation for justice. Elyot not only relies on historic example to drive home his points but also uses strong rhetoric to gain his readers' confidence, attention, and trust. His work was seen as more attune to the current political attitudes of the times and less controversial than that of Machiavelli.

By incorporating the principles of these texts into the analysis of both *Hamlet* and *The Second Maiden's Tragedy*, the severity of internal corruption and its quick infusion into society will become even more apparent. Conduct manuals such as these were necessary to remind leaders how crucial their occupation was. In conjunction with social pressures, the manuals solidified the edict of etiquette that all to follow. Only when politicians veer from the guidelines of these books and laws of society is it necessary to produce criticism to highlight potential weaknesses in leadership.

Shakespeare's *Hamlet*

Amidst a world of impending warfare, *Hamlet's* Denmark is in desperate need of stability and sound leadership. With the recent death of their King, it seems both essential and fortunate that Claudius, King Hamlet's brother, takes the throne and rule Denmark with its queen, Gertrude. Having made a public appeal to assert his motives for ruling the country as well as justification for marrying his sister-in-law, Claudius is not only fit to rule his country and be victorious against Fortinbras, but also has secured his moral right to rule. If the public accepts Claudius as King then he has the right to act as its ruler. As a revenge tragedy, *Hamlet* highlights the damaging effects of having a leader or future

successor ignore his duty to the public and jeopardize the public's welfare in order to serve private, personal matters.

Denmark seems to be on a path to reclaiming peace when its prince, Hamlet, decides something is amiss with his uncle's ascension to power. Since Hamlet was at school during his father's passing Claudius became the next appropriate "heir" though Hamlet was next in line to inherit the throne. Hamlet suspects that Claudius used unscrupulous means to acquire power but he has no legitimate proof and no public support to prove his hunch. Both of which he would need to pursue the matter further. Seeming at odds with his country and family, Hamlet sinks deeper into depression.

When it seems like Hamlet may have no recourse to better his situation, he is visited by a ghost which is believed to be the spirit of his dead father, King Hamlet. The ghost tells Hamlet that he has died at the hands of Claudius in a "foul and most unnatural" manner. Though Hamlet is suspicious of the ghost's intentions at first, he is easily convinced that it is his father's spirit and that he must avenge his murder. Now, for himself at least, Hamlet has the validation needed to reclaim the throne from his evil uncle. There still remains one large catch; Hamlet is the only person the Ghost will speak to.

In order to get the public on his side, Hamlet would have to catch Claudius in a compromising situation that proves that he is a manipulative, amoral, murderer. It seems easy enough, but Claudius is no idiot and Hamlet isn't as wily as he would lead us to believe. In a country where there is stability yet also impending conflict, why would its prince set out on a quest to wreak havoc on its ruler and jeopardize its future success? Although we know that King Hamlet was murdered by Claudius, it becomes almost

selfish of Hamlet to avenge his father's death. Hamlet would be putting his own desires ahead of his duties as prince of Denmark. Hamlet's quest to revenge a "murder most foul" is only the beginning of the dismantling of Denmark. In a country where a crafty politician can claim the throne and its own heir apparent can satisfy his every whim, it seems as if the people will never be safe. These two characters place political ambition above honor and duty. In the end it appears as if the Ghost is the only one concerned with the future of Denmark and her people.

Upon closer examination it becomes apparent that Denmark is decaying from within. Not only has its current leader disposed of its previous monarch, its noble councilor has his own plans for political gain and advancement and his children are not exactly living a morally sound existence. Its prince is determined to stop at nothing to uncover the truth and its Queen seems happy to oblige her new husband's every request.

Although it remains an examination of a royal family and its close societal ties, *Hamlet* is still a play that scrutinizes domestic life as much as it does political stratagem. Society and its inner working are an integral part of this play's interpersonal dynamics. By viewing Denmark from the top down as well as inside out, it becomes painfully clear how a society ruled by corruption, greed, and desire can only lead to the complete disintegration of its moral fiber. With no moral compass Denmark and its people are left with an uneasy future; if a future at all.

Character Implications:

As the prince and the potential future king of Denmark, it is Hamlet's obligation to put the people first. Within minutes of his appearance on stage it is quite noticeable

that Hamlet is stuck in a melancholic existence. Mourning his father's death and the recent marriage of his mother to his uncle his mood could be justified. But upon further examination and thought it becomes clear that Hamlet's grief is greater than normal. This doesn't seem the appropriate state for the prince to be in and to make matters worse; he incites his mother and uncle in a verbal argument in public. Hamlet comes across as an obnoxious teenager not a noble and stately leader. Could this be a sign of future ineptness in his duties as a king?

After he has been summoned by the Ghost to revenge his father's murder, Hamlet sets on an ominous path. Already disillusioned and jaded by the world he inhabits, Hamlet sees no other feasible means to attain his goal. He must rid Denmark of Claudius so rightful order and control can be restored. This seems noble yet selfish at the same time. Knowing that there are foreign enemies vying for control of Denmark it seems to be the wrong time to crusade for vengeance. Yet, Hamlet does not consider the people or the state while making his plans for Claudius' demise.

As the play progresses it becomes clear that Hamlet cannot escape corruption or moral depravity. The more he takes on the role of avenger, the deeper he falls into the noxious suffocating world that he so loathes. He cannot escape it, but desires not to be a part of it either. By the third act it is clear that Hamlet's actions, though clearly calculated, are transforming him into a Machiavel. Other than Claudius, Hamlet's preferred target is Ophelia. Having already deceived her, Hamlet again approaches Ophelia in hopes of uncovering the truth:

Hamlet
Ha, Ha! Are you honest?
Ophelia
My lord?
Hamlet

Are you fair?
 Ophelia What means your lordship?
 Hamlet That if you be honest and fair your honesty should admit
 no discourse to your beauty.
 Ophelia Could beauty, my lord, have better commerce than with
 Honesty?
 Hamlet Ay, truly, for the power of beauty will sooner transform
 honesty from what it is to a bawd than force of hon-
 esty can translate beauty into his likeness. This was some-
 time a paradox, but now the time gives it proof. I did
 love you once.
 Ophelia Indeed, my lord, you made me believe so.
 Hamlet You should not have believed me; for virtue cannot so
 Inoculate our old stock but we shall relish of it. I loved
 you not.
 Ophelia I was the more deceived. (III.i. 103-120)

As this scene progresses, Hamlet realizes that Ophelia is part of a greater scheme devised to expose him that was set in place by Polonius and Claudius. Though he has already wounded Ophelia by reneging on the love he once professed to her. Instead of seeing how precarious her situation is, Hamlet aligns Ophelia with all women, his mother most of all, as being instinctually deceitful and manipulative in matters of the heart. It is clear that Ophelia is pained by her conversation with Hamlet. As he continues to berate her with horrible accusations and cruel insults, it is clear that she is dead to him; she can be nothing more than a tool in his own web of deceit.

Hamlet dismantles his only ally bit by bit until she is left cold and crying, crumpled in a ball on stage. He debases her so much that she never really recovers. When her father dies, Ophelia's last grasp with reality dissolves and she goes mad. Hamlet may have been feigning madness but has no qualms with destroying the sanity and souls of others as long as it leads him closer to Claudius' ruin. It is in this scene that Hamlet can no longer be seen as the honest and loyal man he once was. Whoever falls into his path

becomes his next target should they try to cross him.

Hamlet devises a greater plan when a troupe of actors come to court. Remembering a scene from an old play that would perfectly fit his purpose, Hamlet asks the actors to slightly edit their performance. Being the prince, they oblige his request and become yet another piece of Hamlet's master plan. He will use their performance to finger Claudius for his father's murder and since it will be during a public performance it will be the proper way to call him out. Claudius will surely react to the actors' words proving that he is guilty. If only Hamlet had not been so impetuous, his Mouse Trap may have worked.

Shakespeare's play within a play acts as a mirror for the conflict at the heart of *Hamlet*. This device strengthens the structure of the play by allowing the actors to become audience members and the audience to become part of the play. By eliminating the fourth wall, Shakespeare has transformed the audience into characters in the play. Now completely invested in the lives of these players, both the actors in the Mouse Trap and those in the court, we become wholly invested in the remaining action of the play. This guarantees the authenticity of Shakespeare's message about honesty and correct leadership.

When Hamlet yells, "What, frightened with false fire!" (III.ii.249) it becomes clear that he has ruined any chance of catching Claudius in this trap. Immediately Claudius ends the play and proving to Hamlet that this means he is admitting guilt. Yet, Claudius' guilt is not proven to the others present for the show. Had Hamlet allowed the play to continue Claudius' discomfort would have increased and perhaps he would have snapped as Ophelia had done in the previous scene. But the audience is never given this public

moment of satisfaction and Hamlet must comprise another course of action.

In Scene iii, Claudius confesses his sins and only the audience knows it. Again the audience is privy to knowledge that those on stage are not. This moment of dramatic irony is only compounded by the falsity of Claudius' confession and Hamlet's inaction. Now is the perfect time to kill Claudius. He is alone and no one can prove that Hamlet did it. He has motive and opportunity but forgoes this chance; embroiled in another moment of philosophical debate. Hamlet craves a greater venue for his avengement.

Up, sword, and know thou a more horrid hent.
When he is drunk asleep, or in his rage,
Or in th'incestuous pleasure of his bed,
At gaming, swearing, or about some act
That has no relish of salvation in't (III.iii. 89-93)

In this speech Hamlet becomes self-righteous and hypocritical. It is God's place, not his to punish humans for the sins they commit on earth. Hamlet cannot force Claudius to hell nor send him to heaven. It is not his choice or right. By qualifying his inaction in terms of religious doctrine he is not only sacrilegious but completely depraved. Though he perceives Claudius in prayer, it is not prayer which sways his judgment but a need for a greater display of Claudius' malevolence in order to justify his death.

As a prince and an avenger this is the moment to enact retribution for his father's murder and restore order and rightful rule to the court and country. He cannot be the ultimate judgment because no man, prince or king is above God. Again, Hamlet's self-indulgences deter him from the greater task at hand and plunge him deeper into the odious world he craves release from. No one is safe as he sees only potential avenues for manipulation and opportunity instead of people's faces. His mother, his friends, his love, and even his dignity are victimized, chewed up and mangled in his desire for retribution.

Though he clearly is sickened by a Machiavellian world, he cannot avoid its

vices. Feigning madness to remain undetected, Hamlet's true motives are only clear to the audience. If he exposes Claudius for the fraud that he is, then he will be vindicated from his melancholic existence and restore honor to his father's name. Despite these moments of great desire and calls to action, Hamlet remains indecisive. So much so, that the ghost must return to remind him of his task.

While Hamlet contemplates mortality and the constancy of women, Claudius reigns free and Fortinbras continues his advance towards Denmark. When Hamlet finally chooses to act, his inability to temper his passion destroys any chance of proving that Claudius is a murderer and discredits his plight. Hamlet becomes more desperate and violent as he seeks greater opportunities for destroying Claudius. Consumed by corruption Hamlet becomes the mouse in the trap he created for his uncle, inching closer to self-destruction.

Seen as the classic Machiavellian villain, it is not surprising that Claudius is so adept at being a politician. He wields power through rhetoric, sly manipulation, and confidence in his ability to govern the public and the private sectors of court. Wholeheartedly committed to this lifestyle Claudius is the epitome of a great leader. He is experienced and mature and uses rationality and grace to rule and act. Though his path to the throne may seem suspicious, at the onset of *Hamlet* there is no reason to question his current position. In perhaps the greatest example of Claudius' political aptitude, he addresses the court of Denmark,

King Claudius
Though yet of Hamlet our dear brother's death
The memory be green, and that it us befitted
To bear our hearts in grief and our whole kingdom
To be contracted in one brow of woe,
Yet so far hath discretion fought with nature
That we with wisest sorrow think on him,
Together with remembrance of ourselves.

Therefore our sometime sister, now our Queen,
The imperial jointress to this warlike state,
Have we, as 'twere with a defeated joy,
With an auspicious and a dropping eye,
With mirth in funeral and with dirge in marriage,
In equal scale weighing delight and dole,
Taken to wife. Nor have we herein barred
Your better wisdoms, which have freely gone
With this affair along. For all, our thanks.(I.ii.1-16)

In his speech Claudius assumes the role of king seamlessly. Knowledgeable in social and stately law, he knows that in order to marry Gertrude and ascend the throne that he must win the approval of the court. Addressing the public in a respectful and diligent manner Claudius aligns himself with public policy and gains acceptance as the new monarch and future leader of Denmark. By acknowledging the public's grief for their fallen leader as well as its gravity and importance above any celebration of his union with Gertrude, Claudius assuages any fears or misgivings the court and public may have with his appointment. He also establishes his plan of action in protecting the country from invasion by Fortinbras of Norway.

As his speech continues, Claudius makes sure to hit upon every point of contention that may undermine his current and future authority. He respects the council that surrounds him and speaks kindly of their Queen. He assures them that he will continue to value their wisdom and power and will consult them on all matters of state and international policy. They will be an integral part of his reign of Denmark. Having covered all his bases in an astute and gracious manner Claudius has maintained stability in a time of great worry and solidified his public's support.

Claudius continues to practice proper politics. When concerning matters of the state and people, Claudius always handles them in a public venue with the utmost diligence. Only within private chambers does he conspire to keep Hamlet on a short leash and engage in the debauchery we realize he is capable of. As a stalwart leader, Claudius

must protect his interest and eliminate any threat to his life or the vitality and stability of Denmark. As any Machiavellian must do, Claudius needs to eliminate the remaining family of King Hamlet so that he can rule without any threat of usurpation. Since Gertrude is already his wife, the only potential problem is Hamlet. Claudius sees him as no serious competition and appeals to Polonius, his councilor, to keep an eye on him and report and suspicious acts or behaviors.

It is not until the third act that we discover that the Ghost's words are true and that Claudius did kill his brother. Although not too surprising, it is a strange coincidence since it happens after Hamlet's failed Mouse Trap plot. It is perhaps the only moment where the audience is privy to any frailty in Claudius. Operating from behind the scenes it is because this potential betrayal is set amongst the public that Claudius has such a strong reaction. As Hamlet's pursuit becomes more hostile, Claudius' depravity greatens. He must eliminate Hamlet and he will use his wife, his advisor, and his subjects to enact his own revenge.

Perhaps the vilest display of Claudius' inner Machiavel is in Act IV, Scene vii:

King Claudius

Laertes, was your father dear to you?
Or are you like the painting of sorrow,
A face without a heart?

Laertes

Why ask you this?

King Claudius

Not that I think you did not love your father,
But that I know love is begun by time,
And that I see, in passages of proof,
Time qualifies the spark and fire of it.
There lives within the very flame of love
A kind of wick or snuff that will abate I;
And nothing is at like goodness still,
For goodness, growing to a pleurisy,
Dies in his own too much. That we would do
We should do when we would, for this 'would' changes
And hath abatements and delays as many
As there are tongues, are hands, are accidents;
And then this 'should' is like a spendthrift sigh,

That hurts by easing. But, to the quick o' the ulcer
Hamlet comes back. What would you undertake
To show yourself your father's son in deed
More than words? (IV.vii.105-123)

After the death of his father Polonius and the mental degradation of sister Ophelia, Laertes is beyond grief stricken. Though no saint, Polonius did not deserve to die and preying upon his weakened state, Claudius uses Laertes to secure Hamlet's place in the hereafter. He will get what he deserves, Laertes will be at fault, and no one will be able to finger Claudius for any of it. Claudius must be sure of Laertes fortitude and loyalty, which is why he so meticulously questions then pacifies him throughout their conference. So diseased is this state that no one is uninhabited by infection. Moral decay has seeped into every fiber of society.

Laertes is suspicious of Claudius' inaction after Polonius' death. But, through rhetorical persuasion, Claudius is able to convince Laertes to trust him and that his father did not die in vain. Laertes has become what Polonius once was. Claudius further gains Laertes' trust by making him privy to the letters that came from Hamlet during his trip to England. Claudius is undoubtedly surprised since Hamlet was to be executed upon his arrival on foreign soil.

As their conversation continues, Claudius is able to qualify his insensitivity and lay the foundation for the actions which Laertes will undertake. By discussing the fickle nature of human emotion Claudius is able to further convince Laertes that plotting to kill Hamlet is justified. When Hamlet is dead, Laertes can restore sanctity to his family's name. Laertes is so captivated by Claudius speech that loyalty isn't what is at stake here but honor. And so, Claudius' devilish pursuits unfold, Laertes none the wiser.

Laertes	To cut his throat i' the church.
King Claudius	No place, indeed, should murder sanctuaries. Revenge should have no bounds. But, good Laertes,

Will you do this? Keep close within your chamber.
Hamlet returned shall know you are come home.
We'll put on those shall praise your excellence
And set a double varnish on the fame
The Frenchman gave you, bring you in fine together
And wager on your heads. He, being remiss,
Most generous and free from all contriving,
Will not peruse the foils, so that, with ease,
Or with a little shuffling, you may choose
A sword unbated, and, in a pass of practice
Requite him for your father.

Laertes

I will do't!

And, for that purpose, I'll anoint my sword. (IV.vii.124-138)

By asking Laertes' advice the King transfers power to Laertes, fueling further his intense rage for Hamlet and intentions for vengeance. Since it will be in the name of his father, Laertes sees no amoral spirit in his actions. Claudius is so manipulative and Laertes mind so warped in its current state that he begs Claudius to let him be the messenger of this duplicitous plan of action. He wants to kill Hamlet. If this set-up is successful then both men will get what they want. Hamlet's death without consequence. By now it should be evident that more is "rotten in the state of Denmark" than ever fathomable.

Amongst this world of fraudulence and irrationality there does exist one glimmer of hope. Horatio is voice of reason and moral compass in this play. Hamlet's best friend and confidant, Horatio is a grounding presence throughout *Hamlet*. He is loyal to the state, brave, upholds the bonds of male friendship and is the only one capable of reasoning with Hamlet. He is respectful of social and political boundaries and though he is extremely intelligent, does not intercede where he is not welcome. It is when Hamlet shies away from this sensibility that he fumbles.

By the end of the play, Horatio is the only character who remains sound and unchanged by the corruption of the entire noble state. Hamlet asks Horatio to tell his story so that others will not follow his path and learn from his mistakes. When all other

see Hamlet as long gone, Horatio is his only true friend and ally. Though a stock character, Horatio does provide a chance for normalcy at the resolution of this tragic drama.

Middleton's *The Second Maiden's Tragedy*

Believed to be written c. 1611, *The Second Maiden's Tragedy*, by Thomas Middleton, showcases man's inability to temper desire when in a position of ultimate power. As in *Hamlet*, *The Second Maiden's Tragedy*, exposes the negative impact that inept leadership has on humanity. During the eight year gap between the two plays, England gained a new monarch when King James I ascended the throne. Although the end of Elizabeth's reign had its problems, nothing could quite compare to the ridiculous nature of James' leadership. Increasing discontent with James I can be seen in the characters of the Tyrant and Govianus. As a result of his political practice there were many attempts on James' life, much civil unrest, and devastating economic repercussions for the people of England. Unlike earlier plays, *The Second Maiden's Tragedy*, does little to hide the public's discontent with their self-indulgent and illusive leader.

Set in an unspecified location, this play displays the immediate consequences that misguided and tyrannical leadership have on both the royal court and the private domain of domestic living. Both the current ruler and the one usurped, rule(d) the country without major concern for their people or state while using the country's resources for personal gain and opulence. From the first scene it is obvious that this play will explore the underbelly of politics and the dark side of human nature, which seems somewhat disjointed from the usual subject matter of a revenge tragedy. But, this play is more of a

domestic tragedy than one that seeks revenge. By focusing on the every day man, the play's message is quite explicit. Absolute power corrupts the moral fiber of society. No rational person can exist in such an environment.

While examining the behavior of a nation whose ruler has been usurped, Middleton also delves into the life of the everyday man in the character of Anselmus. Dubbed the subplot of this drama, Anselmus' story highlights how pervasive corruption can be within the social and political hierarchy of a nation. The king is the father of his country as the common man is to his home, when the people are left without a strong ruler to guide them, it is inevitable that chaos will consume them. This secondary study is what sets *The Second Maiden's Tragedy* apart from most tragedies of the time. Throughout the play we are reminded how connected these two threads are as their action and conflict runs parallel. The constant shift from the public to private sectors of this society provide the audience with an unambiguous account of the ill-effects of perverted power. As the monarchy disintegrates so do the bonds of family, matrimony, and friendship within Anselmus' world. It seems apparent that as long as the head of this state is diseased than no public that inhabits its body can thrive. In a world ruled by pride and sin no bond is sacred and death is imminent.

But the everyman is not the only subject on display within this demented society. Although the king is the head, he is surrounded by council. And, when these men are self-serving it seems logical that a former king may be easily overthrown. It is obvious that Govianus was never a great ruler. If he was, he would not be pleading for his life, love, or freedom. He was consumed by the love he had for the Lady and it is clear that she superseded any kingly duty or responsibilities that Govianus had to the throne or his

people.

Whereas *Hamlet* focuses on revenge and the restoration of a stable governing monarchy, *The Second Maiden's Tragedy* divulges the secret desires and intrigues of men who are obsessed with their desire for women, power, and proof of infidelity. Public matters are no longer essential in the lives of the men and women of this play, only deception as a means for individual success. Revenge becomes an afterthought within the play and though it appears to be a noble venture, is really a cover for more sinister action and self indulgence. When stability is restored it is upon shaky ground. The once usurped king is back in power but so are his advisors. Can a once faulty king become a reliable leader amongst those who once deceived him?

Character Implications:

Govianus is the deposed leader of the unknown world in *The Second Maiden's Tragedy*. It is apparent from the first few lines that he was dethrone due to a lack of leadership skills. Even when threatened with death, the only thought on his mind is his betrothed, the Lady. It seems insane that a man would be so consumed by love that even his own mortality becomes insignificant. In a world where men were thought of as the rational, level headed gender of a society it is a bit unnerving that one who should be the archetype for constancy and fortitude is nothing more than a lovesick coward. One can immediately sense impending doom for not just Govianus and perhaps his Lady, but also his people.

As the play progresses more of Govianus' flaws are uncovered. When imprisoned with the Lady he is of little comfort to her mounting fears. After the Lady is confronted

with bodily violation and abduction she begs Govianus to kill her so that she may remain pure and leave this world spiritually sound. Lacking any aptitude for chivalry or kingly brilliance, Govianus leaves the Lady to commit suicide when he faints. In the most dire and exigent of circumstances, Govianus is unreliable, inept, and useless. He seems more of a woman in society's eyes than the Lady.

Towards the end of the play, Govianus is visited by the Lady's spirit. When she entreats him to act, his response is much like that of the Tyrant at her tomb.

Lady

I leave 'em to thy thoughts, dearest of men.
My rest is lost; thou must restore't again.

Govianus

O, fly me not so soon!

Lady

Farewell, true lord. *Exit Lady*

Govianus

I cannot spare thee yet! I'll make myself
Over to death too, and we'll walk together
Like loving spirits. I prithee, let's do so.
She's snatched away by fate, and I talk sickly.
I must dispatch this business upon earth. (IV.v.78-85)

In a moment that offers him redemption for his earlier misstep, Govianus again falters.

His immediate reaction is that of selfish grief. He wishes death so that he and the Lady may be together. He should heed to action to save the Lady's soul and ease her spirit's torment. But he is slow to this logic. And once resolved to heed her request, he decides he must first seek the council of his brother, Anselmus.

Although he completes the spirit's request, he does so with the intention of making her corpse his wife. Though somewhat touching due to his rationale, it leads one to believe he is as disturbed as the Tyrant and makes his reclamation of the throne a bit impetuous. Instead of going after the Tyrant in order to reclaim the throne, restore his reputation, and provide solace for his people, Govianus becomes the avenger when prompted by the Lady's spirit. Once again, a woman is set above and before the country

or its people. What makes this even more ironic is that he uses makeup, a feminine tool, to enact revenge upon the Tyrant. Posing as a great painter, Govianus uses poisoned face makeup to ruin the Tyrant. Though artful and crafty, this approach seems cheap. After all, he did not come up with any shred of this plan on his own.

The Tyrant is maniacal, vindictive, malicious, and disturbed. His propensity for vulgarity will disgust even the most staunch realist. Ruling on whim and impulse instead of strict political prowess, he too uses emotion to govern the world he has seized. Consumed by lust and greed, the Tyrant sees the Lady as his property to use as conduit for carnal desire. Having already claimed the throne Govianus is only a threat to him when concerning the Lady's affection. The Tyrant decides to spare Govianus' life to gain the favor of the Lady and decides to jail Govianus to flaunt the Lady in his face. He sees her as easily won and using her to torture Govianus as a bonus. Out of pure enjoyment and malice, the Tyrant sees this punishment as more fitting than death; Govianus cannot return to the kingdom and the Lady cannot be his.

Machiavelli comments on cruelty in Chapter VII: *Those Who Come To Power By Crime*, where he states that, "Cruelty badly used is that which, although infrequent to start with, as time goes on, rather than disappearing, grows in intensity. Those who use the first method [cruelty applied once for all] can, with God and with men, somewhat enhance their position...the others cannot possibly stay in power." The Tyrant uses cruelty as a means for pleasure. If we view his application of malevolence throughout the play, it is clearly not "used well." In this sense, he is not a very Machiavellian leader nor one that will be King for long.

Determined to have what he sees as rightfully his, the Tyrant approaches

Helvetius, the Lady's father, with an enticing offer. Power and wealth for his daughter. Helvetius accepts. With a new monarch that is completely unstable, it is almost comical that none of his subjects are pillars of moral decency. His corruption has imbedded itself in the already weakened moral fiber of the society that he has consumed. An example of this pervasive trend is in the character of Helvetius.

When his initial plan to "woo" the Lady fails, the Tyrant must resort to other means of persuasion. He orders his guards to retrieve the Lady from prison where he had placed her for being defiant and dismissing his advances. No amount of force or any means of recovery are to vile or of consequence to the Tyrant. He must have her. His actions are directly responsible for the Lady's suicide.

After the Tyrant learns of the Lady's death, he is consumed with grief. Grief for the body of the Lady more than her person. Warped, depraved and despicable, his next request trumps all of his previous deeds. He descends to the Lady's tomb to unearth her remains. Even her tomb is a shrine to her purity and warmth. The Tyrant's infatuation has clearly manifested into rationality within his mind. Now, that she can no longer resist, he may do with her all that he wishes. After all, she is still pure a virgin at death. The Tyrant sees nothing wrong with this grotesque proposition.

Tyrant: How Pleasing art thou to us even in death!
I love thee yet, above all women living,
And shall do seven years hence.
I can see nothing to be mended in thee
But the too constant paleness of the cheek.
I'd give the kingdom but to purchase there
The breadth of a red rose in natural colour,
And think it the best bargain
That ever king made yet. But fate's my hindrance,
And I must only rest content with art,
And that I'll have in spite on't! (V.ii.24-43)

Not satisfied with the liveliness of her appearance after he has dressed her, the Tyrant orders a painter to the court to restore his masterpiece. Though he sees her corpse

as perfection, it is still lifeless. This is the closest to reanimating her the Tyrant can come to. His desire for her is insatiable. Claiming her under the royal we shows how the Tyrant has blurred the line between the public and private body of the king. His unnatural affection for the Lady is so ingrained in his being that he can no longer maintain the façade of adept ruler or sane man for that matter. The tyrant loses his ability to balance his emotions with rational action. His disturbed psyche is stripped of any disguise he may have created and is laid bare in this speech.

As if to further assert his prowess, the Tyrant curses fate seeing it as his only adversary in this twisted life he inhabits. He has to settle for an imitation of life because it is mortality which prohibits his happiness. This final act of defilement to the Lady is so wicked that her spirit comes forth from the dead to seek retribution. The Tyrant succumbs to vice because he is still human. Ambition, Lust and finally Gluttony are what seal his Fate. He may curse it, but tempt it and it will always be the victor.

Within the subplot the depravity multiplies. Convinced that his wife is truly unfaithful, Anselmus devises a plan to catch her in the act. Fueled by irrational jealousy, Anselmus sacrifices the bonds of marriage and friendship when he enlists the help of his best friend Votarius to seduce his wife. Anselmus sees this as the perfect plan to solidify his suspicions while quelling any moral trepidations he may have. After all, Votarius is his loyal confidant and the bond between two males is of the highest regard within Jacobean society. Wary of this plan, Votarius tries to persuade Anselmus to abandon his venture, but to no avail. Anselmus is as stubborn as he is jealous and will not be satisfied until he has caught his wife in the act. Not only do his actions jeopardize his marriage, Anselmus is unable to provide guidance to his brother Govianus when he needs it the

most.

Being the king of his household, Anselmus should rule with truth and virtue. Instead he uses deceit and fraud. These two paths of action are considered dire in the work of Sir Thomas Elyot in *The Booke Named The Gouernor*. The worst of which is fraud. “Wherefore of all iniuries that which is done by fraude is moste horrible and detestable, nat in the opinion of man onely, but also in the sight and iugement of god”(216).

By using fraud and deceit to prove that his wife is unfaithful as well as rationale for straining the bonds of male friendship, Anselmus is seen as detestable by his peers as well as in the eyes of God. Within the play, his actions are rarely hindered but ultimately he discovers the error of his ways when his wife and best friend are dead and he is breathing his last breath. As Elyot reminds the reader that virtue is always esteemed in God’s vision so is treachery and injustice damned. Anselmus fails as a leader, husband, brother, man, and servant of god. Middleton uses this domestic setting to illustrate how severe the corruption of humanity has become.

Just as Horatio in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, Votarius appears to be the only voice of reason amongst a plethora of maniacal and immoral human beings. He strongly believes in the bonds of male friendship and greatly respects the relationship that Anselmus has with the Wife. From the moment Anselmus appeals to him with his plan to test the Wife, Votarius strongly urges his best friend to think rationally. As a friend it is his duty to keep his friend from doing anything rash or amoral. Though he knows the power that women can wield over men’s minds, he is convinced that he will be able to comply with Anselmus’ request. By the middle of Act I, Votarius is fighting a losing battle with his

morality. He is swayed by his once insincere words and tries to snap himself out of Lust's spell before he succumbs to its power. Though he seems capable of success, he quickly falters and is condemned by his own conscience.

Votarius:

All's gone. There's nothing but the prodigal left.
I have played away my soul at one short game
Where e'en the winner loses.
Pursuing sin, how often did I shun thee?
How swift art thou afoot, beyond man's goodness,
Which has a lazy pace. So was I caught.
A curse upon the cause! Man in these days
Is not content to have his lady honest
And so rest, pleased with her, without more toil,
But he must have her tried, forsooth, and tempted
And when she proves a quean then he lies quiet,
Like one that has a watch of curious making,
Thinking to be more cunning than the workman,
Never gives over tampering with the wheels
Till either spring be weakened, balanced bowed,
Or some wrong pin put in so spoils all.(II.ii,1-16)

Like those around him, Votarius fell victim to inherent weakness and commits the ultimate transgression when he has sex with the Wife. Votarius grapples with the duty of male friendship and his waning conscience. Though a sinner, Votarius still remains the moral center of this corrupt universe. He offers a strange moment of clarity within the chaos. He acknowledges that there is no redemption for himself but questions man's obsession with tangible proof for the intangible, such as Anselmus seeking proof of his wife's fidelity. The only way to do so is to prove that she is lecherous which would defeat the purpose.

Votarius knows that once man tempts sin that he cannot be satisfied nor can sin be stopped. One dishonest act leads to more. It is a vicious cycle. Votarius completed his task, keeping his end of this unsettling pact. Yet, what can he say to Anselmus? If he tells the truth then Anselmus will know that his wife is a whore, but at the same time he will find out that his best friend is a traitor. The only logical choice is to continue to deceive

Anselmus which will only create more strife if the truth is discovered.

From this point on, Votarius' fate is in the hands of the Wife. Votarius must conspire with her to hide their affair while feigning grace under pressure with regard to Anselmus' requests for information about the task at hand. Because he continues to be dishonest and remain prey to vice, Votarius dies at the hand of his new love: his best friend's wife. Under these circumstances, Votarius should have upheld the bonds on male friendship and marital fidelity resisting temptation. But, he was set up. His means for maintaining his morality would have been walking away from his friend and risking his reputation. Had he tried harder to convince Anselmus that his jealousy was unfounded, perhaps Votarius could have preserved these sanctimonious bonds and his life.

More extreme than *Hamlet* in verbal content and action, *The Second Maiden's Tragedy* is what would have happened in Denmark had there been no Horatio or Fortinbras. In this unknown state, inept leadership enabled corruption to seize the throne through the body of the Tyrant. Reappointing Govianus seems little consolation for the general public after the Tyrant's death. Unlike Hamlet's Denmark, Govianus' country didn't start its treacherous journey on solid ground. Being that his first act as rightful king is to crown the Lady's body, it seems as if Govianus learned nothing from the four previous acts of the play. If another powerful political figure were to arrive in this country it appears plausible that he could easily overthrow Govianus. Does this ending prove to be a comforting resolution?

Comparing the Texts

Both Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Middleton's *The Second Maiden's Tragedy* clearly show how dangerous a government is when run by corruption. When there is no structure then vice is allowed to thrive and flourish. When there is an alternative to a fallible monarchy, like in *Hamlet*, then there is a chance for stability. Though this option may not be the best for the people of the country, it is better than the alternative presented at the end of *The Second Maiden's Tragedy*. As the genre progresses from revenge to a mixture of revenge and domestic tragedy the importance of the every day man or woman magnifies. Whereas before this was the focus of one scene, such as the gravediggers in *Hamlet*, the people have now become the truth speakers of society and occupy the majority of the action within the play.

By narrowing the scope of the plot to a specific area of social hierarchy it is easier to understand the necessity for a balance in power and a stern monarch on the throne. The common man still exists as a gage for truth within the play but one that is broken by the time one reaches *The Second Maiden's Tragedy*. Using the principles for proficient leadership as set forth by Machiavelli and Elyot, this section of the paper will illustrate how far society has plunged into the dark world that both *Hamlet* and *The Second Maiden's Tragedy* so clearly try to dissuade future leaders from. "For where the ruler in liuyng is nat stable,/Bothe lawe and counsaile is tourned in to a fable" (qtd. in Elyot 10).

Containing many structural similarities, *Hamlet* and *The Second Maiden's Tragedy* provide textual evidence that corruption in leadership leads to moral decay. Through the conventions of tragedy, the audience is able to suspend their own views of

moral decency in order to utilize the criticism of current social practice portrayed onstage. With the expectation of violence and vice attributed to this genre, the audience feels a deeper sense of uneasiness, which would not exist in a comedy, where they could laugh off their discomfort. By not allowing this nervousness to subside, actions such as murder or the desecration of human remains have a greater impact and are more likely to be engrained in a collective conscience. Even though tragedies have a certain amount of anticipated fatalities, these two plays conclude with the majority of their characters piled up onstage. The little hope that exists in *Hamlet* is completely decimated by the end of *The Second Maiden's Tragedy*.

Shakespeare uses Hamlet's Mousetrap to further develop his criticism of Claudius' leadership. This scene may also provide a conduit through which the current sentiments towards Elizabeth's political ventures could be excised. Though mostly supportive of the Virgin Queen, during the last few years of her reign, economic hardship threatened the livelihood of her nation and its people. Although due to circumstances beyond her control, this devastation cast a small cloud on the Golden Age of England.

By the introduction of the subplot within Middleton's *The Second Maiden's Tragedy*, it is clear that this meta-theatrical device had developed into full blown criticism of current monarchical policy. Though the strongest instances of moral depravity can be found within the actions of the Tyrant, it is also clear that Middleton is speaking of King James in the character of Anselmus. Not only did James purport himself to be an amazing political activist and rhetorician he also saw himself as a wise sage to his sons. So far from reality did he live, that only such a plot could do James justice. To all others' he appeared a fool yet in his own mind, much as the Tyrant, he was

a king of the people and a great force to be reckoned with. But James was much more an Anselmus, an arrogant imbecile consumed by decadence and vice.

Along these lines exists the many social contracts which all moral members of society adhere to. These institutions relegate both responsibility and allegiance between man and his wife, man and his country, man and his king, man and his friend and man and God. These laws are strict guidelines for social decorum and moral etiquette. Elyot sees the bond between man and God as being the most crucial in creating stability for domestic and political rule. Elyot states that:

First, and above all thing, let them consider that from god only procedeth all honour, and that neither noble progenie, succession, nor election be of suche force, that by them any astate or dignitie maye be so established that god beinge stered to vengeaunce shall not shortly resume it, and perchance translate it where it shall like hym. (2)

Though this belief confirms that God anoints power to governing bodies, such as the king, it is also important to note that Elyot does not see this as condoning tyrannical or hedonistic leadership. Whereas James manipulates the tenants of divine right to suit his cause, Elyot's opinion augments them. If viewed through Elyot's assertion, both Hamlet and Govianus are flawed leaders as much as Claudius and the Tyrant are corrupt. Under this umbrella, all the actions of their subjects are justified by the society in which they inhabit. Any social contract within these hierarchies becomes null and void. If the penultimate belief in this system is completely perverted then it is safe to conclude that those of a lesser position in society will collapse as well.

Both being the future rulers of their respective kingdoms, Hamlet and Govianus are important characters to understand. Each owning their own destiny, these two men become entwined in the chaos that embroils their home. Whereas Hamlet is not initially responsible for the disenfranchised state of his country, Govianus is directly responsible

for the fall of his kingdom and its usurpation by the Tyrant. Hamlet is aware of his potential destiny and vehemently tries to alter its winding path. Completely dehumanized by his, Govianus become apathetic towards fate and wallows in self pity and cowardice. Hamlet takes on the role of avenger to escape what life has planned for him but by doing so only speeds up his inevitable demise. All opportunities for absolution and resilience are thwarted by his intolerance and self-righteous regard for humanity. Hamlet's abuse of authority counteracts any noble right or justification for his actions. Not only does he manage to destroy his own life he annihilates both the public and private worlds in which he resides.

On the other hand, Govianus begins his venture close to self destruction. Whereas Hamlet originally has redeeming qualities, Govianus has none. He is completely inept as a leader, has no moral compass, and values the Lady's physical existence more than his own. It is somewhat incredible to believe that he was ever a sound ruler. It is by some strange twist of fate that he escapes death at the hands of the Tyrant. Sadly he does not even use this chance wisely.

Since he has no inner strength to pull from, Govianus does not grapple with the same issues of morality and dignity that Hamlet does. But, much like Hamlet, he does fall victim to vice and continues on a path towards self destruction. Even his own brother cannot be bothered with his salvation. It is only with feigned divine intervention that Govianus chooses to act. After the Lady's spirit visits him he becomes the classic avenger much like Hamlet after the Ghost appears. Yet, the most glaring difference between these two men is that Govianus succeeds where Hamlet fails. But as a member of the audience there is no relief when Govianus defeats the Tyrant, saves the Lady, and

ascends the throne. Whereas Hamlet's end is consistent with his course of action, Govianus' achievement lacks merit, prompting a faulty resolution.

Using the following Machiavellian principle as a point of comparison, it becomes clear that Elyot is not the only source for sound advice on leadership and that Hamlet and Govianus are not the only leaders who become unscrupulous. Machiavelli writes:

But if it is a prince who builds his power on the people, one who can command and is a man of courage, who does not despair in adversity, who does not fail to take precautions, and who wins general allegiance by his personal qualities and the institutions he establishes, he will never be let down by the people; and he will be found to have established power securely. (35)

Claudius is such a man. It is obvious that his style of rule is firmly planted amidst Machiavelli's belief. He is a powerful public speaker and is able to assuage the fears of his council and the people regarding Nordic invasion. He is liked by all within the court except Hamlet. He also is able to keep Hamlet's madness quiet and is stalwart when faced with challenges to his integrity. Only when Claudius becomes consumed with exposing Hamlet's true purpose does he transform from the epitome of a Machiavellian leader into a coldhearted vindictive Machiavel. While Claudius begins from a solid place in terms of Machiavelli's beliefs, the Tyrant represents where Claudius could have been if *Hamlet* started at Act V. Though they may appear to be at opposite ends of the Machiavellian spectrum, in actuality the Tyrant is just an exaggeration of Claudius' position on this line. The Tyrant is a Machiavel in every sense.

Unlike Claudius, the Tyrant never concerns himself with public relations or political fortitude. He abuses his role in the social order of his newfound country by forcing the soldiers to desecrate the holy sanctum of the Lady's mausoleum. Whether in life or death, the Tyrant only wished to possess the Lady's body and even propositioned her father in order to have her. He also make swift use of his courtiers to meet his every

whim and played with Govianus' life for entertainment. Even though both monarchs acquired the throne through unlawful means, Claudius' crime is absorbed by his astute judicious manner until Hamlet attempts to uncover the truth. The Tyrant, on the other hand, is so blatantly ruthless that no one needs to highlight any of his misgivings. It is his flagrant disregard for all things moral and his need to overindulge his desire that thwarts him in his mission for total domination. Perhaps if he had abided by Machiavellian ethics instead of those belonging to a Machiavel, he would have been successful in his outlandish pursuits.

In addition to political leadership, domestic leadership played a key role in the action of these two dramas. Whether through Polonius and family in *Hamlet* or Helvetius and the Lady in *The Second Maiden's Tragedy*, domesticity is an arena where much of the negative impact of corrupt leadership is visible. Although Machiavelli speaks mostly of noble rule his principles can be applied to the common man, specifically fathers, as well. He asserts that, "...the gulf between how one should live and how one does live is so wide that a man who neglects what is actually done for what should be done moves towards self-destruction rather than self-preservation"(50). In this sense both Polonius and Helvetius fail as fathers and human beings. Responsible for maintaining order within their households and for properly steering their children's future, these men neglect their social role in life for personal gain and monetary compensation.

Polonius does not literally offer up his daughter Ophelia as collateral for political advancement, but he does use her to uncover the origins of Hamlet's madness. His abuse of this patriarchal bond is so great that he contributes to the mental collapse of his daughter. Although Polonius seems to receive harsher punishment for his crimes, he is as

deserving of these consequences as Helvetius. Whereas Polonius is held up as an example of what happens when one is too advantageous, Helvetius is left to reclaim his position as courtier at the end of *The Second Maiden's Tragedy*. Though one could argue that Helvetius' daughter's death is punishment enough for his crimes, the fact remains that this solution provides no solace or justice for either the Lady or society. The audience is left feeling disgusted and disillusioned with no hope of recourse and little faith in the public and private bonds of social order.

Current Criticism

In a collection of essays titled *Shakespeare As Political Thinker*, modern critics theorize that Shakespeare's dramatic works are less about theatrical entertainment and more a commentary on political affairs. Seen as a philosopher instead of a playwright, Shakespeare's words become engaged in a theoretical discussion in which the critics cite specific plays, such as *Hamlet*, as proof of his aptitude for and diligence in social politics. One such critic is John E. Alvis.

In his essay "Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Machiavelli: How Not To Kill A Despot," Alvis explores the implications of Hamlet's motivation for action and its impact on the society he inhabits. Alvis argues that, "Hamlet's all or nothing absolutism here demands a vengeance in excess of what justice requires because he convinces himself to inhabit a world so shot through with evil that nothing short of ensuring the perdition of all bad men seems worth his effort"(305). Alvis sees Hamlet as so self-righteous that he forgoes all appropriate methods of moral restitution to achieve his view of justice. Alvis hones in on Act III, Scene iii where Claudius confesses as the ultimate example of

Hamlet's disregard for proper protocol for princes and future leaders. This is the most appropriate means for Hamlet to enact revenge yet he purposefully avoids it. Alvis asserts that murdering Claudius while in prayer would resolve the issues at court, complete the Ghost's request for revenge, and would ensure his position as heir apparent without jeopardizing his moral integrity because the murder would be committed away from public view securing Hamlet's innocence (305).

Alvis' critical connections reinforce the point, one that is made continually throughout this paper, that Hamlet's actions directly affect not only his wellbeing but also that of his fellow countrymen and future subjects. By solely investing his energy in selfish pursuits Hamlet continues to disassemble the moral fiber of society, the very one his is meant to protect. Influenced by his distorted vision of vengeance, Hamlet's actions become more egregious and their impact more severe. By the end of *Hamlet*, it is apparent that what Alvis discusses is accurate. Whereas Hamlet could have defused Claudius' power and properly guided Denmark to prosperity, he instead chose to crusade for extreme justice, damning all parties that crossed his path.

Another approach to critically analyzing Shakespeare's text is through studying his involvement with critical sources of the time. In his book *Shakespeare and Machiavelli*, John Roe compares and contrasts the social and political implications of Shakespeare's works with the principles and stratagem of Machiavelli's works. In particular, his discussion of *The Prince* and its application to Shakespearean drama is pertinent. He sets up one of the main premises for the argument within this paper: the difference between the 'Machiavel' and a Machiavellian in Renaissance drama, more specifically Shakespeare's.

Throughout his book, Roe's analysis helps to explain Shakespeare's tendency to emphasize morality over justice and conscience over virtue. There are times where he feels that Shakespeare's views run parallel to Machiavelli's but there are also points where they diverge from each other often residing on opposite ends of an ethical dilemma. Roe contends that,

"Shakespeare continually confronts the threat of the amoral in his plays...and the dramatist makes use of such an occasions to reflect on what the nature of reality would be if certain of Machiavelli's implications were to prove irrefutable...Notwithstanding, he often pauses at climactic moments in the drama, as if in contemplation of the possibility of an amoral universe, before reaffirming the conventional certainty." (xi)

Considering this opinion in relation to how Shakespeare interprets Machiavellian thought in his plays is crucial when discussing leadership. If Shakespeare sees the truths within *The Prince* as plausible relativities, then it is understandable that he would seek to adhere to the expectations of his audience and restore both political and moral order in his plays. If they exist within a fallible world, amidst an infallible set of social mores and contracts, then it is imperative that Shakespeare maintain an air of constancy and resilience amongst the words and actions of his characters. When viewing the actions of Hamlet, Claudius, and Polonius through this lens their punishment is not only thoroughly justified it is crucially essential to the survival of a moral universe. Balance must be restored.

Although neither of these critical texts explicitly mention *The Second Maiden's Tragedy*, their arguments can be applied to the text with the same success as that of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. By connecting *The Second Maiden's Tragedy* to the text of *Hamlet* through the theme of leadership it is possible to glean a clear perspective on the purpose and importance of Middleton's play. Despite the fact that Roe and Alvis, theories enter the discussion from two different avenues, their work collectively unifies the premise that corrupt leadership leads to a morally distorted society.

Conclusion

In a world where tyrannical leadership runs rampant it is inevitable that the public who inhabit the state will fall victim to vice and moral uncertainty. Using the works of William Shakespeare and Thomas Middleton as a venue for the sentiments of a country embattled by great governmental change and economic hardship, social constructs and lawful practice can be scrutinized. By comparing these tragedies to contemporary historical text as well as modern criticism it becomes apparent that much more than the fictional destruction of Denmark or the restoration of Govianus to the throne is at stake.

In conjunction with Elyot's *The Boke Named The Governor* and Machiavelli's *The Prince*, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Middleton's *The Second Maiden's Tragedy* become an in-depth study of the consequences of leadership that is motivated by lust, greed, and ambition. In this reality where fathers pimp their daughters for advancement, leaders murder and defile human remains for lusty ventures and where husbands tests their wives' virtue it is impossible for any rational human being to remain unfettered. Morality is lost forever.

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