

The Malcontent

DIVINE COMEDY

AURELIA'S CONVERSION

What is the thematic significance of Aurelia's conversion?

Does her conversion fulfill the terms of DIVINE COMEDY?

Temptation→Fall→Recognition (*anagnorisis*)→Redemption

"Joy to thy ghost, sweet lord! Pardon to me!" (4.5.51).

Compare to her calling for "music" while learning of Pietro's death.

Compare to her "turning" from Pietro to Mendoza to Ferneze.

CONVERSION OF THE STATE

WITRB the Conversions of Aurelia and Pietro and the State?

O, I am chang'd! For here, 'fore the dread power,
In true contrition, I do dedicate
My breath to solitary holiness,
My lips to prayer, and my breast's
care shall be,
Restoring Altofront to regency.
(4.5.146-50)

RECOGNITION (*anagnorisis*) →

- ENEMY→FRIEND
- "WHORE"→WIFE
- SICK SELF-IMAGE→CORRECTED SELF-IMAGE
- REVERSAL (*peripeteia*)
- LUST→LOVE
- FAVOUR→LOYALTY
- DISGUISE/DISPLACEMENT→REVELATION

THE EMPTY BOX: Symbolic value

The true, rehabilitated Machiavellian's ability to use the machinations of others to his own advantage;

Index of Mendoza's status: his "box" is "empty"; COMPLACENCY and ISOLATION of the failed Machiavel:

- "Now is my treachery secure, nor can we fall; / Mischief that prospers, men do virtue call. / I'll trust no man" (5.5.76-7).
- "The chiefest secret for a man of state / Is to live senseless of a strengthless hate" (5.5.82-3)

Sign of a new kind of universe: the conventional signs and structures of the tragic universe are INTERRUPTED by FRIENDSHIP and OPENNESS:

"there is a whirl of fate comes tumbling on; the castle's captain stands for me, the people pray for me, and the Great Leader of the just stands for me" (89-92)

THE EMPTY BOX: REVERSAL: DEATH → LIFE

Apparent pattern of ESCAPE from conventional consequences:

- Aurelia: the "fallen" woman is redeemed;
- Pietro: the usurper is ejected to a more appropriate space;
- Ferneze: "reborn" from the infection of the court;
- Malevole: reinstated, rather than extirpated as a revenger or embodiment of "wild justice."

BUT each suffers a SYMBOLIC death:

- Aurelia: banished and reaccepted into a new "court";
- Pietro "dies" and is reborn AS his disguise;
- Ferneze: partial rehabilitation;
- Malevole: "reborn" 2X: when he "dis-covers" his true identity; when he "dies" from the fake poison of the empty box.

The Tragicomic Universe: the Masque of Mercury

Enter MERCURY with loud music (5.6.56 s.d.)

WHO PLAYS MERCURY?

WITSO the appearance of an actual god of the Roman/Greek pantheon on the stage during this "treacherous entertainment?"

Mercury/Hermes:

- Patron of THIEVES;
- Patron of MUSCIANS;
- PSYCHOPOMP: leads the dead to the afterlife;
- Helper of heroes: (Hercules, Perseus);
- Revenger: the murder of his son by Pelops.

WITRB the appearance of this figure and the state of the universe at the end of the play?

MACHIAVELLI REDEFINED

Altofronto refuses to kill Mendoza because he is like a "peasant":

- "For such thou art, (*To Pietro and Aurelia*) since birth doth ne'er enrol / A man 'mong monarchs, but a glorious soul" (5.6.135-36).

WITSO his characterization of the deposed Dukes as "peasants?"

WITRB

- "Let them remember that th' inconstant people / Love many princes merely for their faces / And outward shows" (5.6.143-45)

And

- "Yet thus much let the great ones still conceit. / When they observe not heaven's imposed conditions, / They are no kings, but forfeit their commissions" (5.6.147-49).
