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Nathanael Richards, Jacobean Playgoer

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I. *The Revenger's Tragedy* and "Death's Masqueing Night"

That the poems of Nathanael Richards have never been reprinted since 1641 is not, on the whole, a cause for regret. It does seem worthwhile, however, to call attention to one item from Richards' second and final volume of verse, *Poems Sacred and Satyricall*.[1] The piece that I have in mind is called "Death's Masqueing Night," and its interest lies in its connection with a play that has achieved belated critical prestige in our own time: *The Revenger's Tragedy*. Although Richards' poem is, for the most part, an undistinguished if somewhat anachronistic product of the *danse macabre* tradition, its central portion transcends mediocrity by virtue of extensive plagiarism from that play's most famous passage:[2]

> Wher's then? the mighty Madams flareing Pride?
> *Oyles, Powders, Paintings*? all are laid aside.
> Gold glittring *Glory, Cloath* of *Silver silke*,
> Forgetfull Feasts, their sinfull *Baths* of Milke
> (When many a poore soule sterves, wanting the food)
> Of their supurfluous out-side) pamper'd blood
> *Curles, Purles, Perfumes*, Court complements, visites,
> Hot-stirring *Dishes*, soule bewitching Minuts,
> All *Pompe* on *Earth*, ambitious mad desires,
> Revells and *Lust-burnt Midnights* unchast fires,
> All are husht then; Beggers and Kings, all must,
> Take a poore lodging in a bed of dust. (174-75)

These lines, of course, evoke Vindice's address to the poisoned, painted skull of his beloved Gloriana, the "bony lady" with whom

he has arranged a fatal assignation for the Duke who murdered her:

> Does the silkworm expend her yellow labors
> For thee? for thee does she undo herself?
> Are lordships sold to maintain ladyships
> For the poor benefit of a bewitching minute?
> . . . . . .
> Does every proud and self-affecting dame
> Camphire her face for this? and grieve her Maker
> In sinful baths of milk, when many an infant starves,
> For her superfluous outside—all for this?—
> Who now bids twenty pounds a night, prepares
> Music, perfumes, and sweetmeats?—All are hush'd;
> Thou may'st lie chaste now! It were fine, methinks,
> To have thee seen at revels, forgetful feasts.[3]

It will be noticed that Richards incorporates the stolen material by means of a patchwork technique; thus, not surprisingly, other contexts in *The Revenger's Tragedy* are relevant to the passage in question. For instance, the "hot-stirring dishes" (i.e., aphrodisiacs), which Richards haphazardly combines with Vindice's "bewitching minute" to produce a fractured and virtually meaningless line, are appropriated from Spurio's soliloquy on his bastardizing: "some stirring dish / Was my first father" (I.ii.180-81).

I have quoted Vindice's lines above not because anyone will need to be reminded of them but because a comparison of the original with its dubious revision in "Death's Masqueing Night" provides a textbook example of the virtues of great dramatic poetry; for, divorced from its dramatic context, Vindice's speech loses most of its power. Yet at the same time our recollection of the original context undoubtedly enhances the effectiveness of Richards' poem. The address to the poisoned skull is *par excellence* an actor's speech, composed for delivery from a stage; inflections and modulations of the voice as well as histrionic gestures contribute to its impact. The first part of it, as is characteristic of this poet's verse, moves at a hectic pace, with ever-accelerating momentum. At its climax Vindice is like a grotesque auctioneer when, pointing at the skull, he asks the audience, "Who now bids twenty pounds a night?" In "Who now . . . prepares / Music, perfumes, and sweetmeats?" he is not so much asking a question as issuing imaginary orders for some macabre festivity, some necrophiliac orgy. The flow of his own rhetoric, articulating his demonic vision, seems to

have intoxicated him. But the skull asserts its mute finality, and this frenetic tempo modulates to the dead calm of "All are hush'd." Something similar occurs in Richards' version of the passage, where these rhythmic effects are mechanically reproduced. But what happens next is beyond imitation. Vindice, who began by addressing the skull ("for thee?"), then turned to the audience ("for this?"), turns once more to the skull and quietly remarks, "Thou may'st lie chaste now." This is the closest that Vindice ever comes to tenderness, though not without an overtone of bitter irony. It is, in a way, the most poignant moment in the play, for surely Vindice at this point has suddenly remembered *whose* skull it is that he is about to prostitute to his vendetta against the Duke—not that of some "proud and self-affecting dame" but that of the chaste Gloriana whom he did, after all, love. The words "Thou may'st lie chaste now" serve to link Gloriana with the rape victim, Antonio's wife, "who ever liv'd / As cold in lust as she is now in death" (I.iv.34-35), and with the embattled virgin Castiza, the personification of Chastity who "lies a-cold" (II.i.222). Muriel Bradbrook has remarked that the skull stands for "all the betrayed women" of the play:[4] a point that I once saw effectively dramatized in Robert Brustein's 1970 production at Yale, in which Gloriana (wearing a death-mask) and Antonio's wife (raped in dumb-show) were both mimed by the same dancer. The implication is that chastity, in the morally corrosive atmosphere of this court, is a condition compatible only with death. Thus the language of Vindice's skull-speech extrudes fibers of meaning throughout the play, contributing powerfully to the organic integrity for which this Jacobean masterpiece has so often been praised. The skull-speech focuses the poet's imaginative vision so intensely that it seems, more than any other speech, to crystallize the major themes of the play. Moreover, the visible presence of the skull itself in its dual function as symbol and stage prop is essential to this effect, for the skull provides its own dumb answer to Vindice's rhetorical questions.

Beyond the foregoing observations, I have no wish to comment further on what is perhaps the most overanalyzed passage of verse in the non-Shakespearean drama of this period. My point is that, far from being a detachable purple passage, it derives its resonance from the context of the dramatic situation. In Richards' adaptation, there is no literal skull and no situation; the evocative range of the images and phrases, cast adrift from their context, is accordingly diminished. Furthermore, by disintegrating the fabric of the

speech and re-stringing its phrases piecemeal, Richards sometimes deprives them of any meaning whatever. "Forgetfull Feasts," treated as a discrete entity by Richards, becomes a mere linefiller. But to suggest, as Vindice did, that it would be a good idea to display a death's-head at such "forgetful feasts" is to impregnate the words with meaning in the very act of speaking them. Finally, and most damagingly, Richards' "mighty Madam," even when plastered with cosmetics and bedizened in all the borrowed frippery of a Jacobean stage-court, remains a mere abstraction, a hypothetical target of the author's misogynistic rage and not a potent literal and symbolic presence like her counterpart, the poisonous costumed skull of *The Revenger's Tragedy*.

Still, it must be admitted that "Death's Masqueing Night" does take on some of the verve and impetuosity of those rhythms that it echoes, as befits a *danse macabre*. Moreover, it achieves a certain metaphorical consistency, if nothing like the imaginative cohesion of the play. Perhaps the best lines in the poem are those immediately following the ones quoted previously. "Death is a dreadfull Antimasque," writes Richards:

> *Figures* and *Footings*, practiz'd to intrance
> Spectators *Eyes*, Deaths interposing *Dance*,
> Dissolves to darkenesse, in a Moments space. (175)

In Jonsonian masque the threatening, amorphous forces of the antimasque, which is the vehicle of mutability, are routed off the stage by the idealized emblematic personages of the masque proper, so that the very form of the genre enables the poet to affirm the triumph of harmony and order over their opposites.[5] Death, Richards' metaphor suggests, reverses this process: its cacophonous music dissolves into confusion the elaborate choreography of the masque that is courtly life. Surely Richards derived the inspiration for this stroke, too, from *The Revenger's Tragedy*. Anyone who has seen that play performed will be aware that its finale is contrived as a *danse macabre*. Vindice and his fellow-conspirators, disguised in masqueing costumes, "interpose" themselves between the official masquers and the stage spectators to bring about the apocalyptic catastrophe, a "dreadfull antimasque" which involves the wholesale massacre of court and courtiers. If, as I believe, the lines quoted above are the best that Richards has to offer, then we can assume that his imagination caught fire from *The Revenger's Tragedy*.[6]

Indeed, it may be said that this play was the dominant influence on all of Richards' writing. Although "Death's Masqueing Night" was not included in his first volume of verse, *The Celestiall Publican* (1630), that volume nevertheless alluded repeatedly to *The Revenger's Tragedy*. Richards' satires against the court, in particular, are pervaded with the atmosphere, as well as much of the language, of the tragedy—so much so that one might say that the target of these satires is not the real-life Jacobean (or Caroline) court itself but the stage-court that the playwright had imagined. One modern editor of *The Revenger's Tragedy* has written that "No contemporary allusion to the play . . . is known to survive."[7] But if quotations and imitations be considered allusions, that statement must be revised in view of Richards' continual reference to the earlier work. Parallel passages abound; two lines from Vindice's skull-speech, for instance,

> Are lordships sold to maintain ladyships
> For the poor benefit of a bewitching minute?

undergo a series of variations: "Ruine their Fortunes; prove the slaves to Fooles / For an alluring minutes trifling joy" (40); "Sell all, whole Lordships to maintaine a Whore" (sig. G4^{v}); "Sell not faire *Lordships* to keepe *Ladiships*, / Nor sucke damnation from a *Strumpets* lips" (88). Vindice's "seduction" speech to Castiza seems to have provided Richards with some notion of the atmosphere of courts:

> the stirring meats
> Ready to move out of the dishes,
> That e'en now quicken when they're eaten;
> Banquets abroad by torchlight, musics, sports.
> (II.i.196-99)

These lines were seldom far from Richards' mind when writing his court satires. Thus in "Sinnes Impudence" we read of "Banquets by *Torch-lights*, and bloud stirring dishes" (73), and in "The Vicious Courtier" we encounter such passages as these: "*Musicke, Masques, Baudie Banquets, Midnight-Reuels* . . . th' Excesse / Of stirring Meates" (sig. G3^{v}-G4); "There shalt thou Masques, such midnight Reuel finde / Such Musicke, Banquets, to alure thy minde" (sig. [G8]). Striking phrases from the play reverberate throughout Richards' works. Both authors describe liquor as "wet damnation" (III.v.59; p. 56), and both speak of discontent as "the nobleman's consumption" (I.i.127; p. 168). Both use the phrase

"nimble in damnation" (IV.iv.35; sig [G6]); both write of a sin that "picks open Hell" (I.ii.174; p. 34). In a rare (for both) jubilant mood, Richards exults, "Angels for ioy, clap their Celestiall Wings" (sig. C4^{v}), just as Vindice had exclaimed, "O angels, clap your wings upon the skies" (II.i.239).

But Richards' favorite passage in *The Revenger's Tragedy* was the following: "A drab of state, a cloth o' silver slut, / To have her train borne up, and her soul trail i'th' dirt" (IV.iv.72-73). What attracted Richards' attention was not the striking metaphor in the latter half of the passage but the pair of epithets that precede it. They provided Richards with a theme on which he played endless—though monotonous—variations. In "Sinnes Impudence" we read of "Sinne . . . now in *Triumph* like a Drab of State" (71); and in "The Vicious Courtier" (his principal satire on the court) we find such lines as "Turne *Baud* at midnight, (*Pander* to the Itch / Of an *Adulterate Cloth* of siluer Witch)" (sig. [G6]); "A *Drab* of *State*, is a consuming Flame" (sig. H2); "A Cloth of siluer *Slut*, Times Tissue *Trull*, / Can with close *Cleopatra's* Kisses *Gull* / The greatest *Kings* and *Dukes*" (sig. H^{v}-H2). Finally, in Richards' Roman tragedy *Messallina* (where such epithets are especially appropriate to the nymphomaniacal Empress) these lines are characteristic: "a drab / Of state, a cloth of Silver slut, the tricks / Of a tempting Tissue Trull."[8] Similar epithets, such as "state strumpet" and "court concubine," are ubiquitous in Richards' works. Indeed, the foregoing collection of parallels does not pretend to be exhaustive but does give some idea of the pervasive extent to which Richards' verse reflects the vision of sin projected by *The Revenger's Tragedy* in the very language that had expressed that vision.

If Richards were a more eclectic plagiarist, his incursions upon *The Revenger's Tragedy*, though striking, would be of little significance. It is clear, however, that his commonplace book was not a representative anthology of Jacobean dramatic verse but rather an index to his private obsessions, whose nature is indicated both by the type of material he borrowed and by his characteristic treatment of it. A minor borrowing from Chapman's *Bussy D'Ambois* illustrates this point; the Friar, acting as a go-between in Bussy's affair with Tamyra, justifies adultery thus:

> You know besides that our affections' storm,
> Rais'd in our blood, no reason can reform.[9]

The Friar's speech is anti-humanistic; it puts naturalistic doctrine to the service of a libertine argument: our blood shall take its

course in spite of Stoic efforts to restrain it. In other words, sexual desire must be fulfilled at all costs. In contrast, consider Richards' rehandling of Chapman's lines in "Prayers Paradise":

> We all are sinners: sinne raises such a storme
> In our base blood, reason can ne're reforme. (4)

Apart from the fact that it stigmatizes our blood as "base" and regards natural desires as sinful, this is close enough to the position of Chapman's Friar. But Richards continues:

> Vrge reason to us, it will doe no good,
> Fervent Prayer onely masters flesh and blood.

This is to take one's stand on the far side of the chasm that was gradually separating faith from reason, to retreat from the Friar's naturalism to the kind of desperate fideism that typifies so much religious writing of the time—that of Donne, for instance.

A more interesting and important borrowing is from Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*—a reference hitherto unrecorded in collections of early allusions to Shakespeare. In the original, Ulysses cynically appraises Cressida:

> Ther's a language in her eye, her cheeke, her lip;
> Nay, her foote speakes, her wanton spirites looke out
> At euery ioynt, and motiue of her body.

Richards' "The Flesh" completely alters the tone of this observation:

> There's not a ioynt about her that shall faile
> To catch at Man; be Icie cold as stone,
> Shee'l finde a Tricke to melt affection.
> In each behauiour liues a Venome snare,
> There's language in the curling of her haire,
> Eyes, Cheeks, Lips, Hands, no motiue Limme so
> weake
> But serues to tempt; her very foot shall speake.[10]

As usual, Richards manages to dissipate the verbal force of his model; in this case, for instance, he sunders the expressive Shakespearean doublet "joint and motive" by some five lines. Richards' tone, in comparison to that of Shakespeare, verges on hysteria. From Ulysses' detached point of view, Cressida was a "spoil of opportunity," a convenient object of sexual exploitation by the

Greek soldiery (a view that goes far toward explaining, if not justifying, her behavior in the Greek camp). To Richards, however, she is a super-temptress equipped with "venom snares"—another apparition of the "mighty madam" and the "drab of state." This passage continues with an amusingly explicit description of her provocative "body language": she invitingly crosses and uncrosses her legs while the hapless poet, in horrified fascination, watches her "with itching thighes & knees / Open and shut the passage by degrees" (sig. [F8v]).

Richards, in his own way, was a man of his time: as *Angst*-ridden as Marston, as self-divided as Donne. Flesh and spirit war furiously within him. His recurrent theme is sexual temptation, its potential destructiveness, and the impossibility of successfully resisting it without the timely intervention of divine grace. Understandably, he was acutely troubled by such contemporary fashions as the "topless" gowns that we see in some of Inigo Jones's costume designs for Jonson's masques. Why, he asks, must the "*Drab* of *State* . . . Suffer her naked *Breasts* lie open bare?" (sig. H2). In "The Celestiall Publican" he prays, poignantly, "nor let the loose desire / Of womans naked Paps, burne out mine Eyes / With sencelesse gazing" (sig. [B6v-B7]). (His inability to avert his eyes without supernatural assistance is painfully obvious.) In one memorable short poem he portrays himself in what must have been a characteristic situation: sitting at a play but distracted from the performance by a girl in the audience:

> Behold her Breasts are bare, O sight, O spell,
> Satan ne're sent a stronger Charme from Hell:
> Plumpe panting Globes of pleasure how ye please
> My erring Eyes. (sig. L4v)

Here he follows his own prescription ("Fervent Prayer onely masters flesh and blood") and appeals to God: "Help Heau'n least gazing on those Naked Twinnes / I do in thought commit a thousand sinnes." The modern reader can hardly suppress a smile at this self-portrait of the shy schoolmaster shrinking, Prufrock-like, in panic from the object of his desires; or at the obvious fact that it is too late for prayer, however fervent, to prevent him from sinning *in thought* with those "plumpe panting Globes of pleasure." But Richards' very candor in acknowledging his plight is engaging; he is hardly the first or the last man to have fallen afoul of Matthew 5:28. Against this background "Death's Masqueing Night" looks like an attempt to exorcise the demons that tormented the poet,

for Death in that poem is liberator as well as avenger: it "deads the hot desire / of *Naked Brests*; Death tames Lusts raging fire" (175).

All of this suggests a plausible explanation for Richards' parasitical dependence on the distorted, though compelling, vision of reality that he found in *The Revenger's Tragedy*. Clearly, Richards as a poet—though full of passion—was deficient in both creative imagination and constructive power. As a satirist, he belongs to the neo-Juvenalian, or rather Marstonian, school; invective is his habitual mode of expression, and he often hurls his second-hand epithets indiscriminately. His religious poetry is virtually unreadable; as effusive as Crashaw, he nevertheless lacks Crashaw's imaginative daring and verbal magic. This lack of invention and control, this inability to create and shape with words a vision or a world of his own made him peculiarly susceptible to the influence of a poet to whom no critic, however unfavorable, has denied that very ability. Furthermore, in view of Richards' sexually oriented neuroses coupled with a religious sensibility which, unexpressed, must have threatened to overwhelm his psyche, it is clear that the "world" he needed was of a special type. It was a *world* where the *devil* constantly baited his traps with *flesh*; it was, in short, the archetypal, hyperbolical, pseudo-Italian court of *The Revenger's Tragedy*—the realm of pure vice. That this was the most narrowly, and yet the most intensely, conceived of possible worlds made it all the more suitable to Richards' psychic needs.

The *DNB* suggests that Richards was Master of St. Alban's School in London; this seems entirely plausible. I imagine him as a man who lived remote from the court but who frequented the playhouses. Excluded from the strangely fascinating world of the court, he found in the Jacobean theater a means of vicariously taking part in its forbidden pleasures and sins. The hyperbolical court of *The Revenger's Tragedy*, in particular, became for Richards not only his conception of courtly life as such but also his paradigm of the world at large. The violence with which he recoiled from sexual involvement was counter-violence, generated by the very strength of the attraction exerted on him. Courtiers, he thought, were people who knew how "to mixe with perilous *Art* / The deadly *Poyson* with the amorous Dart" (sig. [G6]). Figuratively, this is just what Vindice had done in his ingenious revenge against the lecherous Duke.[11] Vindice's poisoned, painted skull thus became, for Richards, a necessary image whose recurrence in his work may be regarded as compulsive: for was not every kiss potentially the kiss of death, and were not all beautiful faces painted

skulls with poisonous lips? It was therefore appropriate that in "Death's Masqueing Night," where he envisioned the annihilation of the court (his metaphor for the sin-sick world), he should have recalled so vividly Vindice's address to the skull of Gloriana. It was not Swinburne or T. S. Eliot who first testified to the strange power of this speech and of the play in which it occurs; it was Nathanael Richards.[12]

II. *Sejanus*, "The Vicious Courtier," and the Overbury Case

The world of Jacobean tragedy seems to have affected Nathanael Richards in much the same way that the very different world of chivalric romance affected Don Quixote: it became his inner reality and proved more compelling than his immediate environment. But at least one actual event at the court of James I must have seemed to Richards, as it did to others, to confirm his view of the court as a realm of pure evil whose inhabitants masqueraded in the most seductive disguises. That event was the murder of Sir Thomas Overbury in the Tower of London, where he had been imprisoned through the machinations of the powerful Howard family and with the acquiescence of his erstwhile friend and protector, the King's favorite Robert Carr. The circumstances of this story are too well known to be repeated here. The notoriety of the crime and the publicity attendant upon the trials of the various accessories—especially those of Carr himself, now the Earl of Somerset, and his Countess, the former Frances Howard—produced, according to Beatrice White, "a generous crop of contemporary verse."[13] Among such verse must be included Richards' satire "The Vicious Courtier."

I have already indicated the extensive use that Richards made of *The Revenger's Tragedy* in developing the atmosphere and background of his attack on the court. But he relied equally, in this case, on another Jacobean tragedy to fill out his picture of courtly life: Ben Jonson's *Sejanus*. It was by altering certain passages of Jonson's play in such a way as to give them topical application—a practice that would have infuriated Jonson—that Richards contrived to make his satire allude to the Overbury case without actually mentioning names. Thus, from the expository dialogue with which *Sejanus* opens, Richards took these lines:

> These can lie,
> Flatter, and swear, forswear, deprave, inform,
> Smile, and betray; make guilty men; then beg

> The forfeit lives, to get the livings; cut
> Men's throats with whisp'rings. . . .[14]

and rewrote them thus:

> Be a stampt *Villen*, learne to temporize,
> Sweare, and forsweare, depraue, informe, and lie,
> . . . . . .
> They'l make men guilty, then betray e'm first,
> These are the onely spies, that gape for prey,
> Cut-throates in silence, smile, and then betray.
> Intrap th' unskilfull, beg *their forfeit Liues*
> To graspe their States; thus the vile Villen thriues.
> (sig. [G5^{v}]; sig. [G7^{v}])

Jonson's lines are syntactically dense and present a rapid, crowded sketch of the contortions of sycophants and informers at the Tacitean imperial court that serves as the setting of *Sejanus*. Richards, here as elsewhere, explodes his model and then reconstitutes it in jerrybuilt fashion, with the result that Jonsonian fragments are scattered throughout the poem; the quoted passage contains an unusually high concentration of such material. Richards' vicious courtier is the antithesis, the countertype, of Castiglione's exemplary courtier, and the poem as a whole is a typical Jacobean study in the decay of a Renaissance ideal. While the quoted passage is intended to typify the vicious courtier's behavior and thus has no specific bearing on the Overbury case, it does introduce themes of delation and betrayal which pertain to that affair.

It would appear that Richards transcribed the conversation of Jonson's expository characters into his commonplace book at some length, for it surfaces from time to time in his poem. Jonson's characters speculate on the assassination of the popular hero Germanicus:

> When men grow fast
> Honored and loved, there is a trick in state,
> Which jealous princes never fail to use,
> How to decline that growth with fair pretext
> And honorable colors of employment,
> Either by embassy, the war, or such,
> To shift them forth into another air,
> Where they may purge, and lessen. So was he;
> . . . . . .

All which snares
When his wise cares prevented, a fine poison
Was thought on, to mature their practices. (I.159-74)

Richards saw a parallel between the fate of Germanicus and that of Overbury; this time he assimilated Jonson's passage virtually intact, with the exception of some unusually subtle and significant changes:

There is a *Tricke*, such neuer faile to vse
In which their dearest *Friends*, they'l most abuse
With faire pretext of Honorable *Loue*,
In secure cunning, onely to remoue
And shift him forth into another *Ayre*,
To purge, and lessen, least his *Vertues* rare
Should merit Kingly Fauour, make him hie,
Aduanc'd in state to greatest Dignitie.
The Iealious thought whereof, to mischiefe bent,
Doth sund'ry secret practizes inuent
How to decline that growth, if none take roote
Swift *Mercurie*, a suddaine dramme must doo't.
(sig. [G6^{v}-G7])

Jonson was following Tacitus, who had implicated Tiberius, by innuendo, in the death of Germanicus. The first change that Richards makes is to obviate any hint of royal complicity in the murder of Overbury. This he does by attributing the "trick" of getting rid of popular rivals by devious means not to "jealous princes" but to "dearest friends"; Richards is alluding, of course, to the intimate friendship between Overbury and Carr. The exoneration of James is reinforced by the alleged motive for Overbury's removal: "least his *Vertues* rare / *Should merit Kingly Fauour*." That is, Overbury is seen as a dangerous competitor not by James himself (as Tiberius had seen Germanicus) but by the Howards who, through Frances, were seeking to control Carr and thus insure their own access to kingly favor. The King appears here as a detached arbiter of virtue, oblivious to the amoral intrigues of his courtiers—in contrast to Tiberius, who encouraged toadying. But while Richards thus takes pains to differentiate the English King from the Roman Emperor, he idealizes Overbury by stressing the parallels between him and Germanicus. The enemies of both men attempted to purge them from court by the offer of foreign embassies, "To shift them forth into another air"—in Overbury's

case the frigid air of Russia. After declining the embassy, Overbury became—like his Roman counterpart—the target of various "practices" which culminated in the poisoning of both. But whereas Jonson refers only to "a fine poison," Richards by means of a grim pun—"Swift *Mercurie*"—specifies the poison that, according to evidence produced in the trials, killed Overbury: mercury sublimate.

Thus far, the Overbury allusions cited are a matter of inference and conjecture. Their validity is confirmed, however, by a later passage. Richards has shifted the emphasis of his satire from the vicious courtier to his favorite target, the "drab of state," of whom he writes:

> Still, their high Towring lofty daring Pride
> (*Like Lust restrain'd*) Liues neuer satisfide.
> If checkt for it; straight swiftest *Mercury*
> Strikes dead th'opposing Foe to *Venerie*:
> Like (sometimes) that sad most Lamented Knight
> Who di'd by a Tricke; in such a wofull plight
> (By Sugar Candid Poysons) workt in Paste
> (*From Sinne and Murder sent*,) whose delicate Taste,)
> Vnder the fein'd pretence, of seeming good,
> Consum'd and burnt, his vitall Crimson blood,
> Such is the *Mighty-Madams-Murdring spight*,
> Court *Concubines* ne'r kill, but with delight.
> (sig. [G8^{v}]-H)

Overbury ("that sad most Lamented Knight") emerges here as one of Richards' special heroes; he was "Foe to *Venerie*" and in that role a martyr to the cause of chastity. It is simplistic to suppose that restraint of lust was the politically oriented Overbury's sole, or even primary, motive for attempting to "check" his friend's affair with Frances Howard; but such an interpretation makes him a more effective foil, within the context of the satire, for Richards' vicious courtier, who is to be identified—at least up to a point—with Robert Carr, Earl of Somerset.

The vicious courtier, the foe to venery, and the court concubine: it is for the third member of this triangle—Frances, Countess of Somerset—that Richards has reserved his choicest invective. Apparently, the lethal dram of mercury sublimate was administered in a clyster by an apothecary's apprentice, but Richards assumes, naturally enough, that it was contained in the famous tarts ("Sugar

Candid Poysons") that Frances sent to Overbury in the Tower. (On one occasion an unsuspecting delivery boy is said to have sampled the syrup from these tarts at the cost of his hair and fingernails.) In Richards' satiric scheme these poisoned sweetmeats symbolize the evil that hides beneath "the fein'd pretence, of seeming good"—that is, the specious surface of courtly life, its glittering facade. The real cleverness of the poem emerges in its linkage of Overbury and Carr as common victims of Frances, who kills "with delight": she killed Overbury with poisoned tarts, and she used sexual pleasure to destroy Carr. "A *Drab* of *State*, is a consuming Flame," raves Richards, because she "Poysons the bloud, and fils the braine with madnesse" (sig. H2).

Pursuing his theme of evil camouflaged beneath "seeming good," the poet asks:

> Why should she else, with painting seeme more faire?
> Suffer her naked *Breasts* lie open bare?
> Why vse false coulour'd haire, Embost with *Gold*?
> Pownc'd with Perfumes, Lockes curled to behold?
> Why Oyles? Waters for Teeth? Why void of Grace?
> With spots (like *Rats-Dung*) to blacke patch the face?
> Or why (in *Baths* of *Milke*) wash her proud skin?
> (sig. H2-H2^{v})

The reader will be aware that we are once more in the presence of Gloriana's poisoned and painted skull and that, although Richards began "The Vicious Courtier" with imitations of *Sejanus*, by the end of the poem *The Revenger's Tragedy* has re-asserted its peculiar dominance over his sensibility; for Richards is a poet possessed by another man's imagination. The close resemblance between this attack on the "mighty madam" and the passage from "Death's Masqueing Night" with which the present study began ("Wher's then? the mighty Madams flareing Pride?") indicates that the latter poem may have been conceived as a sequel to "The Vicious Courtier." If so, the fact that "Death's Masqueing Night" appeared in the 1641, rather than the 1630, volume strongly suggests that its occasion was the death of Lady Somerset in 1632. The horrible circumstances under which that event was popularly supposed to have occurred would have seemed to Richards appropriate retribution for her sins: rumor had it that she was grievously afflicted "in that very member she had so much delighted in and abused."[15]

"The Vicious Courtier," then, focuses finally not on the courtier himself but on the drab of state, the mighty madam who

lured him to his fall from that pristine state of grace which Richards always posits for his male characters.[16] Thus the poem concludes by urging man to flee "the Glit'ring Strumpet" (sig. H3v) who is not only the Countess of Somerset but also, more abstractly, the court itself personified. This ambivalent figure embodies all of Richards' *femmes fatales*—such as Messallina, Cleopatra, Jezebel, and the Whore of Babylon—as well as the archetype of them all, that painted skull whose kiss is death and damnation. Thus the imagery of *The Revenger's Tragedy*, once again, fuses Richards' vision of the court with his theatrical experiences. We may conclude that, for Richards, reality—in this case the bizarre murder of Overbury—had to be filtered through the medium of those experiences.[17] The crime itself and the actions of those who committed it or participated in it became intelligible to him in the light of what he had learned from *Sejanus* and, especially, from *The Revenger's Tragedy.* It is the intensity of Richards' response to these powerful plays that makes his poetry a uniquely sensitive gauge for registering the impact of Jacobean tragedy on the consciousness of its contemporary audience.

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NOTES

1 This volume appeared in 1641. Richards' other major publications were *The Celestiall Publican* (1630; re-issued in 1632 as *Poems Divine, Morall, and Satyricall*) and *The Tragedy of Messallina the Roman Emperesse* (1640). Although Richards has not been positively identified, the *DNB* now concedes that he was probably not, as was once supposed, a Devonshire clergyman but rather a London schoolmaster who may have belonged to a Richards family of Rowling, Kent. For a summary of such biographical data as may be inferred from his works and other sources, as well as information about his theatrical connections, see G. E. Bentley, *The Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, V (Oxford: Clarendon, 1956), 999-1002. The only previous discussion of Richards' non-dramatic poetry, so far as I know, is by A. R. Skemp in his edition of *Messallina* (Louvain, 1910), pp. 2-27. Since *Poems Sacred and Satyricall* is paginated whereas *The Celestiall Publican* is not, the former will be cited hereafter by page numbers and the latter by signatures.

2 I refrain from attributing *The Revenger's Tragedy* to Cyril Tourneur. Indeed, Richards himself provides a clue (see Note 8 below) to the celebrated mystery of its authorship.

3 *The Revenger's Tragedy*, ed. Lawrence J. Ross (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1966), III.v.71-74; 83-90. All subsequent references are to this edition.

4 *Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1935), pp. 169-70.

5 This is an oversimplification, but so is Richards' metaphor. See Stephen Orgel, *The Jonsonian Masque* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1965), p. 73; also p. 138: "The universe of the main masque is a Platonic one," writes Orgel, whereas that of the anti-masque consists of "everything that, in the sublunary world, denies and threatens the ideal."

6 Richards is unlikely to have seen the original production of the play by the King's Men at the Globe, probably in 1606. In the absence of any information about its early stage history, it is impossible to say whether it remained in the repertory or was ever revived during Richards' theater-going days–unless, of course, we take its obvious impact on him as presumptive evidence that he must have seen it actually performed. In any case it is certain that he owned, or had access to, a copy of the 1607-1608 quarto, the only early edition.

7 Ross, p. xiii.

8 *Messallina*, 1778-1780 (Skemp ed.). The phrase "drabs of state" also appears in Richards' commendatory verses on *Women Beware Women*; see *The Works of Thomas Middleton*, ed. A. H. Bullen, VI (London, 1885), 235. These lines provide a tantalizing sidelight on the question of Middleton's authorship of *The Revenger's Tragedy*, for we can assume that Richards knew whether or not his favorite play was the work of his "familiar acquaintance," as he calls Middleton. In context, the borrowed phrase is linked with the play's central image of "a venom kiss"; taken together, the phrase and the image may constitute an oblique allusion to *The Revenger's Tragedy*, an earlier success by the playwright whom Richards considers "amongst the best / Of poets in his time."

9 George Chapman, *Bussy D'Ambois*, ed. Robert J. Lordi (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1964), II.ii.140-41.

10 *Tro.* 2612-2614 in *The First Folio of Shakespeare: The Norton Facsimile*, ed. Charlton Hinman (New York: Norton, 1968), p. 608. Richards' lines are quoted from the 1630 version of "The Flesh" (sig. [F8^{v}]). When Richards revised the poem for inclusion in his 1641 volume, he omitted this passage. Had the theft, perhaps, been detected?

11 The occurrence of this phrase in the immediate context of two specific borrowings–"*Cloth* of siluer Witch" and "Such sudden Fellowes, nimble in Damnation"–clearly indicates that Richards' image was inspired by the play.

12 Swinburne's essay on Tourneur in *The Age of Shakespeare* (1887) anticipated the modern enthusiasm for *The Revenger's Tragedy*. In "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919) Eliot quoted the skull-speech as "a passage which is unfamiliar enough to be regarded with fresh attention" (*Selected Essays* [New York: Harcourt, 1960], p. 9).

13 *Cast of Ravens* (New York: George Braziller, 1965), p. 220. For information about the Overbury case I am indebted to this excellent book and to G. P. V. Akrigg's *Jacobean Pageant* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1962), pp. 177-204.

14 Ben Jonson, *Sejanus*, ed. Jonas A. Barish (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1965), I.27-31.

15 Quoted by White, p. 178.

16 This is seen most clearly in *Messallina*, a play of Strindbergian misogyny, where Richards re-interprets the Tacitean narrative in a very tendentious manner, his purpose being to whitewash Caius Silius, who was Messallina's accomplice in the marriage-plot against Claudius. His simplistic view of their relationship is graphically illustrated on the title page of the quarto (which, incidentally, is famous for its depiction of a Renaissance stage): under the portrait of Messallina appears the emblem of a goat, symbolizing lust; Silius' emblem is a sheep, symbolic of innocence. Moreover, Silius, like all of the male characters seduced by Messallina, is regarded as being not only inherently virtuous but also –in stark contrast to the demoniacally possessed Empress–redeemable. The fact that he dies in the arms of his saintly wife Silana, with promises that they will be re-united in a Christian heaven, suggests that the play is a religious allegory: Messallina, the false strumpet, is the Whore of Babylon (i.e., Rome) while the long-suffering, forgiving wife is the True Church. Such a reading would be consistent with the fierce anti-papist sentiments expressed elsewhere by Richards–especially in his satire "The Jesuite."

17 Richards' habit of casting his notorious contemporaries in roles invented by the playwrights is seen also in his treatment of Father Garnett (whom he regarded as the mastermind of the Gunpowder Plot) as a real-life Claudius who can "Smile, and yet be a villaine" ("The Jesuite," in *PS&S*, p. 50): proof that Richards, as well as Hamlet, found it "meet" to set down that observation in his "tables."