

THE CONSCIOUS ARTIST:  
LANGUAGE AND ARTIFICE IN JAMES SHIRLEY'S  
THE TRAITOR AND THE CARDINAL

by

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B. A., Concordia College, 1973

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A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree

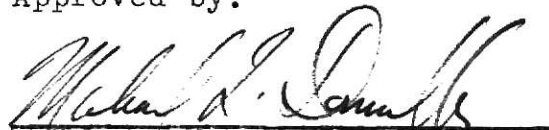
MASTER OF ARTS

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James Shirley was the most prominent, and one of the most prolific, of the Caroline dramatists. Altogether, we have thirty complete plays by him, and one (The Arcadia) that may be his. He edited in 1647 the first folio collection of Beaumont and Fletcher, and was intimate with many of the great writers of his day, including Chapman and Ford. Yet the critical bibliography of Shirley remains minute, and until 1966, when Russell and Russell issued a photographic reprint of Gifford and Dyce's 1833 collection, the whole of his work was difficult for the general reader to obtain. In the late nineteenth century, Edmund Gosse produced a volume containing six of Shirley's plays for the Mermaid series. Still, there are good modern editions only of The Cardinal and The Traitor, while one or two of the comedies turn up occasionally, lightly or not at all annotated, in anthologies.

There are a number of reasons for this continuing neglect of a playwright so well known in his own day. Probably the single most important one is the picture of Shirley that Dryden presented in Mac Flecknoe. Addressing Shadwell, "Who stands confirmed in full stupidity," Flecknoe pronounces:

Heywood and Shirley were but types of thee,  
Thou last great Prophet of Tautology.

Such utter damnation in a poem almost universally read and admired has had, we may be sure, a considerable effect on Shirley studies. This, coupled with the general unavailability of his work, has made Shirley one of the best known of the unread seventeenth-century playwrights.

In the first three decades of our century, however, three book-length studies of Shirley (two of them dissertations) have been published: A. H. Nason's James Shirley, Dramatist; R. S. Forsythe's The Relations of Shirley's Plays to Elizabethan Drama; and S. J. Radtke's James Shirley: His Catholic Philosophy of Life. These are the only full-length studies and, as criticism, each of them has serious shortcomings. Nason's is largely a descriptive survey of all of Shirley's work; the bulk of Forsythe's book is devoted to the enormous task of finding a source (or, more often, many sources) for each scene in each of Shirley's plays; and Radtke deals, as his title indicates, with a very limited aspect of Shirley's work. All three works refrain from attempting any thematic, structural, or linguistic analyses of any of the plays. More recently, Fredson Bowers in his Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy has given perhaps the best treatment of Shirley's work in that class of drama to date.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Arthur Huntington Nason, James Shirley, Dramatist; A Biographical and Critical Study (New York: A. H. Nason, 1915); Robert Stanley Forsythe, The Relations of Shirley's Plays to the Elizabethan Drama (1914; rpt. New York: Benjamin Blom, 1965), hereafter cited as Forsythe; S. J. Radtke, James Shirley: His Catholic Philosophy of Life (Washington, D. C.; no pub., 1929); Fredson T. Bowers, Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy: 1587 - 1642 (1940; rpt. Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1959), hereafter cited as Bowers.

One aspect of Shirley's two major tragedies that has gone largely unexamined, despite the significance it holds for our understanding of Shirley's use of artifice, is the prominent contrast in linguistic style between The Traitor and The Cardinal. The Traitor presents a style that is fast-paced, largely devoid of metaphor and complex rhetorical device, and adheres closely throughout to a simple, everyday level of speech. The Cardinal, written some eleven years later, presents a wholly opposite case: its language is heavily image-laden, rhetorically complex, and at times almost tortuous. The effect in the earlier play is a rapid tempo and an approach to verisimilitude, while the later work is far more self-consciously theatrical and even artificial. Both plays are highly effective as drama, but they succeed in very different ways. The picture of Shirley that results from both is that of a highly skilled employer of artifice: a dramatist whose chief concern is less the imitation of nature than the creation of gripping theater. In most dramatists, of course, these two concerns are not distinct, and it would be a mistake to say that Shirley wholly excludes nature; but we can discern in his plays the conscious use of language as a device purely for stage effect.

### THE TRAITOR

Some index to the abiding value of The Traitor (though by no means an infallible one) is to be found in the fact that it and The Cardinal are the only tragedies by Shirley in carefully edited modern editions. John Stewart Carter, who edited

The Traitor recently, says its success is due to its "highly professional polish."<sup>2</sup> Bowers, too, praises the play for its construction.<sup>3</sup> To a modern reader, perhaps the most immediately striking aspect of the play is the surprising clarity (one almost calls it modernity) of its language. Carter notes that "the vocabulary is very rarely arresting, and there are few words that have to be glossed even for twentieth-century readers" (p. xiii). Metaphors and images are kept at a bare minimum, and the presence of an everyday level of speech throughout adds to the fast pace. Juliet McGrath sees this as Shirley's "radical distrust of language," and believes he abandoned all but the simplest of dialogue "in favor of more accurate (albeit more primitive) means of communication through action."<sup>4</sup>

And it is true that language is subordinated to action in the play. The Traitor employs a full subplot and a sizeable number of intrigues and counter-intrigues, but the language (as will be seen) clarifies and heightens the pace of the action by its very simplicity, and contributes to the quick delineation of character.

<sup>2</sup>John Stewart Carter, ed., "Introduction," The Traitor, by James Shirley (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), Regents Renaissance Drama Series, p. xii. Further references to Carter's introduction will be documented within the text, as will all references to The Traitor, which are also to this edition.

<sup>3</sup>Bowers, pp. 226-7.

<sup>4</sup>Juliet McGrath, "James Shirley's Uses of Language," Studies in English Literature, 6 (1966), p. 331.

The main plot concerns Lorenzo, the traitor of the title, and his machinations to overthrow the Duke, whose lust renders him an easy prey. The Duke desires Amidea, and Lorenzo attempts to procure her for him, at the same time coaxing her hot-headed brother, Sciarrha, into revenging his family honor by murdering the Duke. The subplot concerns the more pathetic than tragic story of Pisano, who switches his allegiance in love from Amidea to another woman, Oriana, successfully, but on his wedding day is murdered by Sciarrha. The subplot thus is tightly connected to the central story, by the importance of Sciarrha and Amidea in each.

The main plot ends in calamity for all. Sciarrha is forced by Lorenzo to deliver his sister to the Duke; this he must do to repay Lorenzo for arranging his immunity from trial on the charge of killing Pisano. If he doesn't deliver her, Lorenzo tells him, she will be taken anyway. Sciarrha tells Amidea he must either give her to the Duke or slay her, and she, to save him from this crime, pretends to assent to the Duke's will; to save her from dishonor, Sciarrha kills her. As she dies, she explains she had only assented to gain time; she declares her death a suicide. In a fury, Sciarrha places her corpse on a bed and sends word for the Duke to meet with her there. The Duke enters unsuspectingly, and discovers to his horror the dead body of Amidea. Lorenzo and a henchman, having followed the Duke, enter and murder him. At this point Sciarrha enters, and when Lorenzo tries to make him take the blame for the Duke's death, the two fight. Sciarrha kills Lorenzo, and then, having been stabbed in the struggle, dies.

At the close, we see Cosmo, the heir to the dukedom, enter and have the bodies borne away. Cosmo can almost be seen as providing a kind of frame for the story, for we see him at the outset, giving up Oriana's hand in order to save himself, and at the play's close, inheriting the kingdom. That Cosmo is so sparingly used in the play exemplifies Shirley's economy: we are given two brief glimpses of a coward; he re-appears at the end to take over. Thus Cosmo himself stands as a kind of structural device, one which points up the moral climate of Shirley's Florence.

Before leaving the subject of plot as such, we should note that in The Traitor (as in The Cardinal) Shirley inserts a comic scene precisely in the center of the play. The connection between this scene and the rest of the play in The Traitor is readily apparent: Depazzi's mock trial recalls the trial for treason Lorenzo underwent in Act 1, Scene 2, and anticipates the masque in 3.2, which presents a mock revenge. Depazzi, an abject coward who deserts Lorenzo, mirrors Cosmo, a more careful and politic coward who deserts Oriana. Partly because he is humorous, partly because he is a less coldly plotting figure than Cosmo, Depazzi is a more sympathetic character than is Cosmo. And when he finally gets quit of Lorenzo, "to return to the dunghill from whence [he] came" (4.1.274), it is with a sense of relief that we watch him escape the ensuing catastrophe.

The plot of The Traitor is a rather complex one, and the above summary is only meant to point out the more vital aspects



of it. The focus of the play is on plot, and language is used only as a means of furthering the plot; the very plainness of the language maintains that focus.

This is not to say, however, that The Traitor is devoid of poetry and poetic devices. By paring down the number of images we would expect in drama of the period, Shirley focuses attention on the one recurrent image of the play: the stars. The image first occurs early, in the machiavel Lorenzo's lines:

The throng of stars  
The rout and common people of the sky,  
Move still another way than the sun does  
That gilds the creature. (1.2.61-4)

The use of metaphor comes unexpectedly, and thereby draws attention to itself. We are made, thus, to focus on Lorenzo's character: here he flatters the Duke, expressing a nearly contemptuous attitude for the common people. The contrast between this attitude and the one he expresses to Sciarrha is acute:

Heaven knows how I have counselled [the Duke]  
By virtue to prevent his fate, and govern  
With modesty. Oh, the religious days  
Of commonwealths! We have outliv'd that  
Blessing. (2.1.91-4)

The metaphor, then, by virtue of the plain speech all around it, draws attention to itself and to the sentiment expressed, so that when Lorenzo expresses an opposite sentiment, we see him immediately for what he is. Lorenzo refers again to the stars in this scene with Sciarrha, and again he uses the image in the service of flattery. He says to Sciarrha:

My genius  
And thine are friends. I see they have convers'd,  
And I applaud the wisdom of my stars

That made me for his friendship who preserves  
The same religious fire. (2.1.115-19)

Lorenzo uses the image twice, once to express an aristocratic viewpoint, once to support his republicanism. Shirley thus draws in two brief strokes his machiavel; henceforth the audience is in no danger of taking anything Lorenzo says at face value.

By conserving his imagery, Shirley is able to delineate his characters more economically. One further example will suffice to illustrate the technique. Cosmo, attempting to break off his engagement to Oriana, expresses himself this way:

Let us examine all the creatures, read  
The book of nature through, and we shall find  
Nothing doth still the same. The stars do wander  
And have their divers influence, the elements  
Shuffle into innumerable changes,  
Our constitutions vary, herbs and trees  
Admit their frosts and summer: and why then  
Should our desires . . .  
Be such staid things within us, and not share  
Their natural liberty? (2.2.41-51)

Cosmo gives up Oriana, ostensibly out of friendship for Pisano, but (as we learn later in lines 115-6) more in order to save himself from Lorenzo: Cosmo is a coward, and by expressing himself in imagery, he spotlights the changeable, faithless aspect of his character. Shirley seems here to be echoing Shakespeare's Ulysses, and deliberately inverting the thought:

The heavens themselves, the planets, and this centre  
Observe degree, priority, and place . . .  
. . . But when the planets  
In evil mixture to disorder wander,  
What plagues, what portents, what mutiny,  
What raging of the sea, shaking of earth,  
Commotion in the winds, frights, changes, horrors,  
Divert and crack, rend and deracinate

The unity and married calm of states  
Quite from their fixture?<sup>5</sup>

Cosmo's speech, by claiming man should be inconstant because the stars are, perverts the standard Elizabethan view of the cosmos; his use of imagery which recalls one of the greatest expressions of that view calls attention to the speciousness of his argument. Again, character is quickly revealed by Shirley through the spare use of metaphorical speech; the power of the metaphor resides in its drastic contrast with the prevailing type of language in the play. It is mistaken to go no further than Juliet McGrath does when she writes that "there seems to be a sameness and lack of linguistic vitality about many of [Shirley's] tragedies;"<sup>6</sup> the above analysis indicates that this sameness has its positive effects, and is not due to any poverty of invention on Shirley's part.

Shirley's use of plain language has a second effect: it quickens the pace of the action. The individual speeches of the characters are brief to the point of terseness, and Lorenzo has the only soliloquy in the play. This twenty-five line speech occurs at the opening of the fourth act, and its main function seems to be to heighten the suspense. Lorenzo's schemes are not working and his speech simply shows him casting about for new ideas. We expect the soliloquy to serve as a

<sup>5</sup>William Shakespeare, Troilus and Cressida, in Alfred Harbage, ed., The Complete Works (Baltimore: Penguin, 1969), 1.3.85-101, p. 985.

<sup>6</sup>McGrath, op. cit., p.323.

means of character development or exposition, but Shirley uses it only as a means for halting the action and creating further suspense about the outcome.

Indeed, character development is minimal in The Traitor; Shirley uses instead stock figures, and the language of the play underlines this: each character speaks the words appropriate to his type. We have seen, above, language indicate the duplicity of Lorenzo, the machiavel. Sciarrha is also a stock figure, the proto-typical revenger corrupted by his revenge. When Amidea asks why she should give in to the Duke and reside with him at court, Sciarrha replies bitterly, adopting the conventional phrases of satiric anti-court raillery:

Enjoy the pleasures of the world, dance, kiss  
The amorous lords, and change court breath, sing loose  
Belief of other heaven, tell wanton dreams,  
Rehearse your sprightly bed scenes, and boast which  
Hath most idolators, accuse all faces  
That trust to the simplicity of nature,  
Talk witty blasphemy . . . (2.1.184-90)

and he employs the conventional test of his sister's virtue:

Come, I find your cunning.  
The news does please. The rolling of your eye  
Betrays you, and I see a guilty blush  
Through this white veil upon your cheek. (2.1.207-10)

However, he is convinced of Amidea's faithfulness, closing the test with "I did but try your virtues" (2.1.262). A similar test of a sister's virtue occurs at the same point (the first scene of the second act) in The Revenger's Tragedy. In short, Sciarrha is entirely a stage creature, whose norms are those of a type, the vengeful, jealous brother, and he acts in conventional, expected ways throughout.

Amidea is herself a stock figure, the woman whose virtue is more important to her than her life. When she pretends to give in to Sciarrha's request that she go to the Duke, she simultaneously reveals that this is only pretense, that her virtue is still intact:

Forgive me, heaven and witness I have still  
My virgin thoughts. (5.1.126-7)

And of course the pretense itself is for the noble purpose of saving Sciarrha from the burden of guilt he would acquire if he killed her:

. . . 'Tis not to save my life,  
But his eternal one. (5.1.127-8)

This figure of a woman more heroic, more noble than the men at whose hands she suffers is a familiar one, used frequently in Jacobean tragedy; one thinks immediately of the Duchess of Malfi and Beaumont and Fletcher's Aspatia.

The main characters of The Traitor, then are stock figures who act in quite predictable ways, and whose lines are the proper ones for such figures. But we should not fault Shirley for a lack of originality. Rather, we should see him as a highly self-conscious artist who here subordinates the elements of language and character to the plot itself. He is an artist who stays within the bounds of the dramatic tradition as it has been handed down to him and who has thoroughly assimilated that tradition. The use of stock types rather than rounded characters points to the sheer theatricality of The Traitor. We have seen the most impressive element of the play to be its plot, and we have seen the elements of language and characterization serve only to further the plot itself. Every artifice

has been employed for the sake of heightening the effects of the action as action. The Traitor is a masterpiece of plot.

### THE CARDINAL

With The Cardinal (1641) we come to the last great Caroline play, and one of the highest levels revenge tragedy ever attained. Bowers calls it "Shirley's greatest tragedy . . . presenting in a brilliant fashion a clear-cut, coherent Kydian revenge tragedy, polished and simplified in his best manner."<sup>7</sup>

Bowers goes on to point out what he sees are many parallels to The Spanish Tragedy, saying that an "outline of The Cardinal fits almost point for point into the outline of Kyd's play." And Charles R. Forker, following Dyce, notes a great number of parallels, both in situation and imagery, to The Duchess of Malfi.<sup>8</sup> Forker, however, has what is no doubt the last word on Shirley's source or model:

Shirley invented almost nothing fundamentally new, but he seems to have been highly original in his manipulation of old materials, and his plots especially are skillful syntheses or composites of familiar elements, complicated and refined upon with extraordinary ingenuity. It is in this sense that

<sup>7</sup>Bowers, p.228.

<sup>8</sup>Charles R. Forker, ed., "Introduction," The Cardinal, by James Shirley (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964), pp. xlviii ff. Further references to Forker's introduction will be documented in parentheses within the text, as will all references to The Cardinal, which are also to this edition.

one may expect to find behind The Cardinal innumerable "influences" and yet no single determinative source. (pp.xlvii-iii)

It is interesting to note that prior to this time, Shirley had almost totally eliminated any trace of Senecan elements--the very elements which are so important for Kyd. The Senecan emphasis on the supernatural, on elaborate rhetorical speeches, and on stoicism form no part of Shirley's work: Shirley stands apart from Seneca and Kyd in stage devices, style, and philosophic import in his earlier experiments with revenge tragedy. But The Cardinal is exceptional in a number of ways.

One important way in which The Cardinal differs from Shirley's previous work is in its language. It would be possible to see Shirley, between 1626 and 1631, developing a style all his own: earlier plays, like The Maid's Revenge, presented nothing exceptional in language, nothing unlike what we would expect to find in a play of its period. With The Traitor, we saw Shirley accomplish something exceptional indeed in his taut, spare style. But if he had in view a plain style, he abandoned this aim with The Cardinal.

The play begins with a dispute over the marriage of Rosaura, the Duchess, who is recently widowed. She loves Count d'Alvarez, but the Cardinal wants her to marry his nephew, Columbo, in order to increase his own power in the kingdom. While Columbo is away at war, the Duchess writes to him, asking him to release her from their wedding engagement. Columbo consents, but returns on the wedding night of the Duchess and her



lover. Disguised as a masquer, Columbo murders d'Alvarez; instead of fleeing, Columbo stands his ground and tries to justify his act. His victory in the war and his great reputation as a soldier convince the King to pardon him. Columbo then informs Rosaura that he will murder any other lover she tries to take.

Trapped, the Duchess finds an ally in Hernando, a colonel who pities her situation, and who hates Columbo, having been falsely and publicly accused of cowardice by the general. He fights an honorable duel with Columbo, and slays him. Rosaura meanwhile has been kept in the custody of the Cardinal, and has feigned madness to gain time till she can free herself from the betrothal to Columbo. When the Cardinal learns of Columbo's death he resolves to be revenged by raping and murdering Rosaura. When he attempts it, however, Hernando (who has come to the Duchess after the duel and, hearing the Cardinal approach, hides behind a curtain) bursts upon him, stabs him, and then kills himself.

The remainder of the scene is, in its construction, the high point of the entire play. The King and attendants enter, and the wounded Cardinal, certain he is dying, confesses his schemes. He feigns penitence, and claims he has given Rosaura poison earlier; he wants now, he says, to administer an antidote as a token of his desire to undo some of the wrongs he has perpetrated. After the Cardinal drinks some to prove his good faith, Rosaura drinks the antidote. But the 'antidote' is in fact poison. Yet the Cardinal has not won out, for he discovers his wound wasn't mortal after all. Rosaura and the Cardinal





construction in this drama than in any ten of the rest.<sup>9</sup>

Indeed, Shirley's syntax is also confusing--another problem never found in The Traitor. Columbo, defending himself for the murder of d'Alvarez says:

. . . Take my head off,  
Examine then which of your silken lords,  
As I have done, will throw himself on dangers;  
Like to a floating Iland move in blood;  
And where your great defence calls him to stand  
A bullwark, upon his bold brest to take  
In death, that you may live: but souldiers are  
Your valiant fools, whom when your own securities  
Are bleeding, you can cherish, but when once  
Your state and nerves are knit, not thinking when  
To use their surgery again, you cast  
Them off, and let them hang in dusty armories,  
Or make it death to ask for pay. (3.2.238-49)

Forker explains in a note to this passage that "to take" is part of the predicate of which "silken lords" is the subject. He also notes that Shirley here slips into a mixed metaphor, with armor performing surgery. The metaphors are many in this brief passage, as Columbo in his passion flings out one strong image after another: a habit, and a style of speech, not observable in any characters in The Traitor.

The explanation for Shirley's use of a very different style of language is rather simple: with The Cardinal, Shirley's intention was to revive an older style of drama and with it, of language. The play is intended to be a period piece. Forker

<sup>9</sup>William Gifford and Alexander Dyce, eds., The Dramatic Works and Poems of James Shirley (1833; rpt. New York: Russell and Russell, 1966), Vol. 5, p.300.

calls it "the conscious revival of an old fashioned form" (p.lxi). In 1641, Chapman, Marston and Webster had been dead seven years, and the great age of revenge tragedy was over. The motifs and the themes of the genre had become standardized even by the time of The Maid's Revenge, Shirley's first revenge play. Forsythe notes that by 1625 the drama

had begun to receive its inspiration chiefly from earlier plays and from established convention rather than from the realism of observation or imagination. . . . Two courses were open to the dramatists of this period: to carry on the established traditions or to seek out new material. Ford did the latter; almost all other dramatists did the former.<sup>10</sup>

Yet to see The Cardinal as simply a work which uses established conventions would be misleading. It is, in 1641, a deliberate anomaly, both in genre and style: it brings back to the stage an old form, once immensely popular, much as our own decade has seen the revival of musical comedy as it was in the 1930's. As such, the play is not only the last of the great revenge tragedies, but is something of a recapitulation as well.

But this view of the play should not keep us from seeing it as a serious work of art, in some ways Shirley's best. Bowers discusses the play at some length, noting that "the Cardinal with his ambitious schemes is the real villain,"<sup>11</sup> but that the other characters for the most part are not merely stock figures. Hernando's hatred of Columbo is clearly and

<sup>10</sup>Forsythe, p. 49.

<sup>11</sup>Bowers, p. 231.

realistically motivated: he has been publicly accused of cowardice by Columbo, and has watched him viciously mistreat the Duchess, a woman he admires and even loves. Columbo, too, motivated by his jealousy and goaded on by the Cardinal, is by no means a stock villain. Bowers notes:

Columbo is not wholly an evil but more an overrough and cruel man who lacks entirely the finer sensibilities which would have released Rosaura from her painful contract.<sup>12</sup>

Forker discusses at some length the strong similarities between the characters of Shirley's play and those of Webster's Duchess, finding that

the similarities between the two heroines extend beyond the parallel circumstances of their plight, for Shirley's Duchess seems to have inherited something of her predecessor's feminine naivete and deceptiveness. If one thinks simply in terms of general function, even the secondary characters may be thought of as parallel, Alvarez corresponding to Webster's Antonio, the powerless lover, and Hernando to Bosola, avenger of the Duchess. (p.xlix)

Again we see Shirley assimilating and re-forming elements from previous works. Here it is not a case of using stock figures, as in The Traitor, but of modelling his characters directly on one earlier set of characters.

The plot of The Cardinal is examined and praised by both Bowers and Forker. The one factor that remains constant in both of these tragedies by Shirley is the comic scene in the third act. Here the interlude is tightly knit to the action, for we move from the servants' humorous rehearsal directly to the bloody banquet where d'Alvarez is murdered. Act 2, Scene 2

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p.231.

contains both comedy and horror. Yet it does little harm to the play's unity by virtue of its very brevity, and by the masque's coming so soon upon its heels. It adds to the overall effect of the masque, of course, by its contrasting tone: the horrible murder of d'Alvarez is all the more powerful, as it catches the audience off guard. The use of a masque and banquet in Jacobean tragedy is a subject that has not been dealt with by critics. The devices occur, sometimes together, as here, in many plays of the period. The gruesome banquet is of course an important device in Seneca's Thyestes, but the British dramatists, including Shirley, make it serve a special function--that of a memento mori. In revenge tragedy, from Kyd to Ford to Shirley, violence, often particularly horrifying, takes place at a banquet or masque: in the midst of worldly plenty and luxury the skull reveals its presence. We can get some idea of the effect this must have had on an audience by visualizing the splendor of Rosaura's wedding celebration disrupted by the sudden appearance of the corpse of her husband. The masque and banquet as used by the revenge playwrights point up the moralistic bent of the genre.

That Shirley uses the device in both The Traitor and The Cardinal underlines once again how tradition-conscious a writer he is: a less didactic playwright would be difficult to find, yet Shirley makes use of what once must have been a powerfully moralistic device, and he uses it here primarily because of its frequent appearance in many other works in the genre of revenge tragedy.

There is another and greater reason for Shirley's use of the device, and this is no doubt the same reason he was continually drawn back to revenge tragedy itself: both the device and the genre are occasions for spectacle. The high-pitched emotions, the fast-paced action, the violence: all these elements make for great theatre, for an engrossing spectacular entertainment. There is no more fitting close for the era of revenge tragedy than the last scene of The Cardinal, where the deaths of the Cardinal and Rosaura are drawn out as long as possible, and the pathos of the scene is expanded, even lingered over: no potential emotion is allowed to go without being played to the utmost. Revenge tragedy presents the very essence of theatricality, and there is no question that this was the aspect of the genre that most attracted Shirley. It was the genre most suited to a playwright who valued plot over all other elements of the drama, the genre most thick with device and convention and hence most likely to appeal to an artist whose talents lay in his faculty for assimilating and re-using the elements of his dramatic tradition.

But Shirley's talents also lay in his ability to use language in the way best suited to his desired effect. The contrast shown here between the styles of these two plays is a striking one, and this contrast illustrates Shirley's flexible manipulation of very different linguistic resources in the service of his dramatic effects: a complex but clear and fast-paced plot, and a skillful use of traditional stock characters. That both plays are of the same genre makes the contrast even

more surprising: The Cardinal takes us back to the early Jacobean stage in both formula and style, and Shirley uses the anachronistic elements to his benefit; in The Traitor, he writes more directly of and for his time, and here too he succeeds. A comparison of Shirley's use of language and his conscious employment of artifice and convention strongly suggests that his concern as a playwright centered on technique, and on artifice for art's sake.

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AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

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Department of English

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY

Manhattan, Kansas

1975



## ABSTRACT

The great difference in level of style between The Traitor and The Cardinal has not been noted in previous Shirley studies. The Traitor presents a style that is fast-paced, largely devoid of metaphor and complex rhetorical device, and that holds closely throughout to a simple level of speech. Paring down the language in this way, Shirley is able to increase the pace of the action and focus greater attention on the one image complex he sparingly employs. Language reveals that the characters are stock figures, and that character, like language, is secondary for Shirley: his main concern is plot. In contrast, The Cardinal is heavily image-laden and rhetorically complex. Here Shirley's language is deliberately anachronistic, and The Cardinal is seen as a carefully constructed period piece, an intentional anomaly. The characters here are modelled on earlier ones in the drama of the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, but they are realistically motivated to the extent that they go beyond being mere stock figures. The contrast in style between the two plays is probably greater than we would find in any other Jacobean dramatist. It illustrates Shirley's facility with language and the skill with which he employs artifice to achieve his dramatic ends.