

Name: Scott O'Neil
Affiliation: University of Rochester (Ph.D. Student)
Paper Title: "O, he hath a patent of immunities": Foolish Madness and Disguise in Marston's *Antonio Plays*

One of the few unbreakable rules of a Renaissance revenge tragedy is that the revenger cannot survive his bloody act. For the revenger, there are no horizons in the future. One notable exception to this rule is John Marston's *Antonio's Revenge*. In Marston's play, the titular revenger survives, despite following through with his revenge plot and announcing to the audience his awareness of what should have been his fate. The critical history of *Antonio's Revenge* is generally focused on explaining this apparent flaw in the generic structure of the play. Charles and Elaine Hallett sum up the critical consensus when they argue that "certainly it has not startled readers of this essay to hear again that the last act of *Antonio's Revenge* does not work" (180).

There is another, largely neglected aspect of *Antonio's Revenge* that sets it apart from other revenge tragedies. It is a sequel to the Marston tragicomedy, *Antonio and Mellida*. Building on the Halletts' work on revengers and madness and particularly on Kevin Quarmby's recent work on the changing theatrical functions of disguised rulers, my paper looks at the more problematic elements of *Antonio's Revenge* by reading the two plays as a contiguous work.

My paper will argue that Antonio's decision to disguise himself as a fool in the revenge tragedy was actually just the latest in a series of disguises going back to the earlier play. By reading these disguises as an ongoing attempt by the title character to contain the excess passion that marks him as a mad revenger, I will attempt to explain the problematic ending of *Antonio's Revenge*. I will ultimately argue that the ending, seemingly so incompatible for a stand alone revenge tragedy, is not problematic at all when viewed as a clear extension of the earlier play that serves as both its past and prologue.