

Name _____

Date _____

Antonio's Revenge

A play brimming with linguistic superfluity and spectacular gore, John Marston's *Antonio's Revenge* (1599) has been portrayed by critics as everything from a brilliant burlesque of revenge tragedies to a grotesquely overwrought literary disaster. While the play is, as the title might suggest, a revenge tragedy, the degree to which its author intended it to be seriously received as one is a matter of persistent critical contention. Part of this confusion lies in the play's notorious excesses in language, characterization, and violence. The play's bizarre ending is especially problematic: in the final act, Antonio and his friends not only torture and kill the villainous Piero, they also murder and cook an innocent child. Instead of being punished, however, these revengers are heaped with praise and offered rewards before announcing their plans to become religious hermits.



While some critics argue that this ending reveals Marston's own personal sadistic bent, others simply see it as evidence of his lack of skills as a dramatist. T.S. Eliot, for example, has noted that this play, along with its predecessor *Antonio and Mellida*, "give the effect of work done by a man who was so exasperated by having to write in a form he despised that he deliberately wrote worse than he could have written, in order to relieve his feelings." Eliot's notion of Marston writing "to relieve his feelings" is not without merit; Antonio spends the entirety of *Antonio's Revenge* either describing his feelings in melodramatic ecstasy or "relieving" them through murder. Because Antonio is one of the most overtly emotional characters in Renaissance drama, *Antonio's Revenge* is, at least in part, a play about the physical dangers of excess emotion.

Antonio's Revenge presents emotion as a corruptive force by continually linking it with the human body. According to Renaissance philosophy, the human body was the seat of sin and decay—a sordid counterpart to the virtuous soul. In *Antonio's Revenge*, the connection between corrupt emotion and the corrupt body is present in both language and action. References to the body in this play are almost always negative: corpses rot, bloody wounds cry out, and ribcages burst with anguish. Because the human body is both the cause and conduit of this pain, emotions that arise from the body, such as rage or lust—both of which were thought to come from the liver—are also necessarily negative. This link between the emotional and the physical is reinforced throughout the play. In promising to avenge his father's death, for example, Antonio vows that his heart will "beat on" vengeance—that is, it will be both fixated on and be powered by the thought of revenge.

Encouraged by the ghost of his murdered father, Antonio further swears: "May I be numbed with horror and my veins / Pucker with singeing torture, if my brain / Digest a thought but of dire vengeance! / May I be fettered slave to coward chance, / If blood, heart, brain, plot aught save vengeance!" (III.ii.85-92). In these lines, Antonio urges his blood, heart, and brain to be wholly consumed with revenge. He imagines that his brain will "digest" his thoughts, creating a doubly corporeal image. Furthermore, the consequences he imagines for himself—being "numbed with horror" and having his veins "pucker with singeing torture" emphasize the physicality of his promise to revenge his father's murder.

Avenging his father's death thus becomes not only an act of justice, but also an act of bodily necessity. By committing all of his major organs to the cause of revenge, Antonio makes revenge part of his physiology. In binding vengeance to the human body, Antonio builds on traditional early modern concepts of the dichotomy between the body and the soul, using the theory of the corrupt body to justify all of the ghastly violence that follows.

- 1) This passage would most likely be found in
 - A. the editorial section of a newspaper
 - B. an encyclopedia article about playwright John Marston
 - C. a scholarly journal about English literature
 - D. the book review section of a popular magazine
 - E. the playbill for an upcoming performance

- 2) In the first paragraph, the author states that many critics find the ending of John Marston's 1599 play *Antonio's Revenge* confusing because
 - A. it is uncharacteristically violent
 - B. the "heroic" characters act like villains and are not punished for their crimes
 - C. the entire play itself is actually a parody of other revenge tragedies
 - D. the arrival of a group of religious hermits at the end of the play causes great disorder
 - E. the language becomes especially difficult to understand

- 3) The author notes that critics have attributed the play's strange ending to the fact that John Marston
 - I. actually hated writing plays
 - II. had a cruel nature
 - III. was an incompetent playwright
 - A. I only
 - B. II only
 - C. I and II only
 - D. II and III only
 - E. I, II, and III

- 4) As used in paragraph 3, which is the best antonym for **sordid**?
 - A. violent
 - B. contrary
 - C. pure
 - D. beloved
 - E. calm

5) In paragraph 3, the author describes the line in which Antonio imagines his brain “digesting” his thoughts. If corporeal means relating to the body, then this particular line is said to present “a doubly corporeal image” because

- A. the stomach is usually understood to be the organ involved in digestion, but instead the brain takes on this task
- B. in the Renaissance, negative emotions like rage and lust supposedly arose from the liver, not the brain
- C. the brain was traditionally thought of as the location of the soul, which was supposedly virtuous
- D. Antonio is wholly committing himself to the act of revenge, an act that he imagines will require the involvement of all his body parts
- E. the imagery in this line is especially vivid and disgusting

6) It can be inferred that in *Antonio’s Revenge*, the character Piero

- A. becomes a religious hermit at the end of the play
- B. has murdered Antonio’s father
- C. is an innocent child
- D. ultimately becomes the hero of the play
- E. represents the author himself

7) According to the argument in the final paragraph, Antonio links his desire for vengeance to the human body in order to

- A. explain the philosophical underpinnings of the body/soul dichotomy to the audience
- B. provide a vivid link between revenge and the liver
- C. highlight the superiority of the virtuous soul
- D. rationalize his murderous actions
- E. counter Renaissance notions about the corrupt nature of the body

8) Using your own words, explain how Renaissance philosophers understood the relationship between the body and the soul.

Answers and Explanations

1) C

Core Standard: **Integration of Knowledge**

In the first paragraph, the author writes, “A play brimming with linguistic superfluity and spectacular gore, John Marston’s *Antonio’s Revenge* (1599) has been portrayed by critics as everything from a brilliant burlesque of revenge tragedies to a grotesquely overwrought literary disaster.” We can see that phrases like “linguistic superfluity,” “brilliant burlesque” and “grotesquely overwrought literary disaster” are all geared toward a well-read, scholarly audience because of the high-level vocabulary they effectively utilize. This passage gives a detailed, argumentative analysis of a play. It is written for an audience of literary scholars who are likely to be familiar with English drama, the author, and the time period. Using this information, we can understand that this passage would most likely be found in a scholarly journal about English literature. Therefore **(C)** is correct.

Editorial sections of newspapers often contain opinion articles and letters to the editor. This passage gives a detailed, argumentative analysis of a play, which the author supports with evidence rather than opinion. In addition, the information in this passage is more specific than we would expect in a newspaper. An editorial piece on *Antonio’s Revenge* would give a general overview of and opinion about the play, rather than analyze it so specifically. Using this information, we can see that this passage would most likely not be found in the editorial section of a newspaper. This means **(A)** is incorrect.

Encyclopedia articles contain general overviews about various topics. An encyclopedia article about John Marston is likely to mention his plays, and might go into a general summary of his most popular works, but it would not contain the sort of detailed literary analysis found in this passage. For this reason, we can see that this passage would most likely not be found in an encyclopedia article about playwright John Marston, so **(B)** is incorrect.

Popular magazines do not typically review literature that was written in the 16th century, since they need to appeal to a general audience. Also, *Antonio’s Revenge* is a play, not a book, so it would not fit in a book review section. Using this information, we can see that this passage would most likely not be found in the book review section of a popular magazine. This lets us know that **(D)** is incorrect.

Playbills generally give the setting of various acts and/or scenes in a play, a breakdown of the cast of characters, and maybe some other general notes from the director. A playbill would not contain the sort of detailed, literary analysis presented in this passage. A playbill is meant to prepare us to see a play, but this passage is more appropriate for analyzing the play after we have seen it. Using this information, we can see that this passage would most likely not be found in the playbill for an upcoming performance, so **(E)** is incorrect.

2) B

Core Standard: **Key Ideas and Details**

In the first paragraph, the author writes that the play's ending is "especially" problematic because: "Antonio and his friends not only torture and kill the villainous Piero, they also murder and cook an innocent child. Instead of being punished, however, these revengers are heaped with praise and offered rewards before announcing their plans to become religious hermits." Since Antonio and his friends are the play's heroes, and their behavior at the end of the play—murder, torture, cooking a child—is villainous, we can understand that the author states that many critics find the ending of John Marston's 1599 play *Antonio's Revenge* confusing because the "heroic" characters act like villains and are not punished for their crimes. This makes choice **(B)** correct.

While we might find murder, torture and cooking a child—aspects of the play described in the first paragraph—uncharacteristically violent, the author does not state that many critics find the ending of John Marston's 1599 play *Antonio's Revenge* confusing because it is uncharacteristically violent. The confusion, according to critics, has more to do with the unpunished, criminal actions of the supposed heroes. Using this information, we can see that **(A)** is incorrect.

In the first paragraph, the author writes, "While the play is, as the title might suggest, a revenge tragedy..." Although the author classifies this play as a "revenge tragedy," there is no evidence in the first paragraph that the author states that many critics find the ending of John Marston's 1599 play *Antonio's Revenge* confusing because the entire play itself is actually a parody of other revenge tragedies. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect.

At the end of the first paragraph, the author mentions that Antonio and his friends, "announc[e] their plans to become religious hermits." This is the only mention of "religious hermits" in the first paragraph. Using this information, we can see that there is no evidence, in the first paragraph that the author states that many critics find the ending of John Marston's 1599 play *Antonio's Revenge* confusing because the arrival of a group of religious hermits at the end of the play causes great disorder. This lets us know that **(D)** is incorrect.

Although in the first paragraph the author states that, "part of the confusion lies in the play's notorious excesses in language, characterization, and violence," the author does not argue that many critics find the ending confusing because the language becomes especially difficult to understand. Therefore **(E)** is incorrect.

3) E

Core Standard: **Integration of Knowledge**

In paragraph 2, the author quotes T.S. Eliot writing, “[the *Antonio* plays] give the effect of work done by a man who was so exasperated by having to write in a form he despised that he deliberately wrote worse than he could have written, in order to relieve his feelings.” Since these plays are the product of writing “in a form he despised,” we can see that John Marston hated writing plays.

Therefore, the author notes that critics have attributed the play’s strange ending to the fact that John Marston actually hated writing plays. This supports **option (I)**.

In paragraph 2, the author writes that “some critics argue that this ending reveals Marston’s own personal sadistic bent.” A sadistic bent is another way of saying cruel nature. Using this information, we can see that the author notes that critics have attributed the play’s strange ending to the fact that John Marston had a cruel nature. This supports **option (II)**.

In paragraph 2, the author writes, “others simply see [the ending of *Antonio’s Revenge*] as evidence of his lack of skills as a dramatist.” If Marston is said to lack skills—be incompetent—as a dramatist, and dramatist means playwright, we can understand that critics have attributed the play’s strange ending to the fact that John Marston was an incompetent playwright. This supports **option (III)**. Therefore **(E)** is correct.

4) C

Core Standard: **Craft and Structure**

sordid (*adjective*): demonstrating the worst aspects of human nature; dirty or disgusting.

In paragraph 3, the author describes the body as “a sordid counterpart to the virtuous soul.” We can use context clues to help us arrive at a close definition of sordid. If the soul and the body are thought of as opposites—counterparts—and the soul is virtuous, then the body is disgusting or demonstrates the worst aspects of human nature. We are looking for the word that most nearly means the opposite of sordid, however, so we are looking for a word that nearly means virtuous, clean or pure. *Pure* means free from any contamination, so we can see that is the best antonym for sordid. Therefore **(C)** is correct.

Violent means characterized by uncontrolled, rough force. This is not a close opposite to a word meaning disgusting or demonstrating the worst aspects of human nature, since something sordid might also be described as violent. Using this information, we can see that violent is not the best antonym for sordid, which rules out choice **(A)**.

Contrary means opposite in nature or character. This is not a close opposite to a word meaning disgusting or demonstrating the worst aspects of human nature, since contrary is a somewhat negative adjective, and we need an adjective that nearly means pure and virtuous. Using this information, we can see that contrary is not the best antonym for sordid, so **(B)** is incorrect.

Beloved means greatly loved. Although this adjective expresses an opposite quality to sordid, it is not the best choice for an antonym because someone evil might find sordid things beloved. Beloved reflects the way that a person receives or feels about something, rather than the true nature of the thing itself. For this reason, we can see that beloved is not the best antonym for sordid, and **(D)** is incorrect.

Calm means tranquil and relaxed. This is not a close opposite to a word meaning disgusting or demonstrating the worst aspects of human nature. While calm describes something differently than sordid, we can see that calm is not a full enough expression of the opposite of sordid. For this reason, calm is not the best antonym for sordid, and **(E)** is incorrect.

5) A

Core Standard: **Integration of Knowledge**

We know that *corporeal* means relating to the body. In the lines cited in paragraph 3, Antonio describes his brain as “digesting” his thoughts. Digestion is a process normally attributed to the stomach. This image takes a process usually handled by one body part—the stomach—and relocates it to a different body part—the brain; as a result, two body parts are implicitly mentioned (implied) even though only one is explicitly (directly) mentioned. Therefore, the line in which Antonio imagines his brain “digesting” his thoughts is said to present “a doubly corporeal image” because the stomach is usually understood to be the organ involved in digestion, but instead the brain takes on this task. Using this information, we can understand that **(A)** is correct.

In paragraph 3, the author writes, “emotions that arise from the body, such as rage or lust—both of which were thought to come from the liver—are also necessarily negative.” So we can see that it is true that in paragraph 3 the author notes that emotions like rage and lust supposedly arose from the liver, but this fact does not explain why the particular line in which Antonio imagines his brain “digesting” his thoughts is said to present “a doubly corporeal image.” Using this information, we can rule out **(B)**.

In paragraph 3, the author briefly mentions the “virtuous soul.” Despite this mention, there is no information in paragraph 3 to indicate that the line in which Antonio imagines his brain “digesting” his thoughts is said to present “a doubly corporeal image” because the brain was traditionally thought of as the location of the soul, which was supposedly virtuous. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect.

In paragraph 4, the author writes, “By committing all of his major organs to the cause of revenge, Antonio makes revenge part of his physiology.” Despite the fact that this choice presents a true statement, based on information in the passage, it does not come from paragraph 3. Also, we are asked to consider why the line presented in paragraph 3, in which Antonio imagines his brain “digesting” his thoughts, is said to present “a doubly corporeal image;” the fact that Antonio is wholly committing himself to the act of revenge, an act that he imagines will require the involvement of all his body parts, does not effectively explain the “doubly corporeal image.” This lets us know that **(D)** is incorrect.

While the imagery in the lines above could be accurately described as especially vivid and disgusting, the line in which Antonio imagines his brain “digesting” his thoughts does not present “a doubly corporeal image” because the imagery in the line is especially vivid and disgusting. Instead of the nature of the imagery being the cause of the “doubly corporeal image,” the effect has more to do with the two types of organs implied; so **(E)** is incorrect.

6) B

Core Standard: **Key Ideas and Details**

In the first paragraph, the author states that the revengers “torture and kill the villainous Piero.” Antonio is noted to be one of the “revengers.” In paragraph 3, the author writes, “In promising to avenge his father’s death, for example, Antonio...” In this line and then again in the final paragraph, the author reveals that Antonio’s goal—his promise—is to avenge his father’s death. Since Antonio is a revenger and Piero is the villain that he kills, we can infer that in *Antonio’s Revenge*, the character Piero has murdered Antonio’s father. Therefore **(B)** is correct.

In the first paragraph, the author writes that Antonio and his friends have, “plans to become religious

hermits.” Despite these plans, the author provides no information in the passage for us to infer that in *Antonio’s Revenge*, the character Piero becomes a religious hermit at the end of the play. In fact, paragraph one states that Antonio and his friends “torture and kill the villainous Piero.” This rules out choice **(A)**.

In the first paragraph, Piero is described as “villainous.” Using this information, we cannot infer that in *Antonio’s Revenge*, the character Piero is an innocent child, since people described as villainous are not also thought of as innocent. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect.

The passage does not provide any information for us to infer that in *Antonio’s Revenge*, the character Piero ultimately becomes the hero of the play. Instead, the title implies that Antonio is the hero. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect.

The passage does not provide any information for us to infer that in *Antonio’s Revenge*, the character Piero represents the author himself. Therefore **(E)** is incorrect.

7) D

Core Standard: **Key Ideas and Details**

In the final paragraph, the author writes, “In binding vengeance to the human body, Antonio builds on traditional early modern concepts of the dichotomy between the body and the soul, using the theory of the corrupt body to justify all of the ghastly violence that follows.” Using this information, we can see that by linking his desire for revenge with his physical body, Antonio provides a rationale for murder; these lines indicate that he thinks his corrupt body is, in essence, making him avenge his father’s death. Thus, Antonio links his desire for vengeance to the human body in order to rationalize his murderous actions. This means **(D)** is correct.

In the final paragraph, the author explains the body/soul dichotomy to us. This information does not, however, explain how Antonio utilizes this dichotomy to rationalize his actions in the play. Therefore, we can see that according to the argument in the final paragraph, Antonio does not link his desire for vengeance to the human body in order to explain the philosophical underpinnings of the body/soul dichotomy to the audience. Instead, Antonio's making the link is an example the author uses to teach us this dichotomy, so **(A)** is incorrect.

There is no information in the final paragraph to indicate that Antonio links his desire for vengeance to the human body in order to provide a link between revenge and the liver. This link is mentioned in paragraph 3. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect.

There is no information in the final paragraph to indicate that Antonio links his desire for vengeance to the human body in order to highlight the superiority of the virtuous soul. This eliminates choice **(C)**.

In the final paragraph, when the author links Antonio's desire for vengeance to the human body, Renaissance notions about the corrupt nature of the body are not countered; they're actually supported, because most people would see a desire for revenge as a corrupt desire. Using this information, we can see that according to the argument in the final paragraph, Antonio does not link his desire for vengeance to the human body in order to counter Renaissance notions about the corrupt nature of the body. Therefore **(E)** is incorrect.