

CALL FOR PAPERS

Workshop: Revisiting Revenge. New Perspectives for the Study of Revenge Tragedies (late 16th–early 18th century)

Ghent University (Belgium), 16-17 September 2021

Keynote speaker: Prof. Russ Leo (Princeton University)

In the early modern period, revenge tragedies and related Senecan plays dealing with revenge flooded the European theatres, especially in England (*The Spanish Tragedy*, *Titus Andronicus*, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, *Hamlet*), but also in the Dutch Republic (*Wraeckgierigers treur-spel*, *Aran en Titus*, *De veinzende Torquatus*, *Medea*) and Germany (*Ermordete Majestät*, *Rache zu Gibeon*, *Cleopatra*). Because of the plays' abundant display of horror, audiences flocked to them in large numbers, rendering the revenge tragedy the most popular dramatic genre of its time. Yet, revenge tragedies have for a long time only reluctantly been allowed to join the established canon of classical works, since they were considered gross, decadent, gratuitous, sensationalist and markedly commerce-oriented plays. Only in the past few decades, literary scholars have attempted to adjust this one-sided image of the genre by suggesting that revenge plays informed (aspects of) the cultural-historical force field that helped shape them.

Bearing this suggestion in mind, we would like to invite scholars working on the subject to submit case studies exploring the ways in which European revenge plays participate in contemporary political, religious, philosophical, legal, economic and gender discourses, in order to make clear the genre's broader cultural relevance – both in terms of its historical moment and of our analysis of that moment. Possible topics include, but are not limited to:

- The relationship between revenge plays and the Christian (Catholic/Protestant) discourse on revenge. How do revenge tragedies interrogate the biblical message not to take revenge yourself, but to leave it to the Lord? And more generally, how do these plays interrogate divine providence as such?
- The political topicality of early modern revenge drama: how did English revenge plays help shape the discourse concerning e.g. the unstable dynastic position of the Tudors? How did Dutch 'wraaktragedies' participate in the fierce discussions about the position of the stadtholder in the Dutch Republic? And how do German revenge plays relate to Ferdinand II's attempt to impose imperial absolutism?
- The relationship between revenge plays and gender. Early modern revenge plays feature both male and female stage avengers. Are there substantial differences in how female stage revengers avenge themselves compared to their male counterparts? And how do these differences inform our understanding of early modern gender roles?

- Revenge plays and their relation to the system of legal justice in early modern Europe. With most stage revengers taking recourse to ‘a kind of wild justice’ (Francis Bacon), in what way does revenge drama provide an interrogation of the legal system of its time?
- The dramatic representation of revenge itself. How is revenge depicted in the early modern revenge play? And how does dramatic revenge relate to other depictions of revenge in related art forms, like the *opera seria*?

We also invite participants to reflect in their presentations more explicitly on the arbitrariness of the classification of the revenge tragedy as a genre as such. We look forward to receiving your abstracts, and to a productive meeting in September.

Practical:

- The workshop will take place in Ghent on 16 and 17 September 2021 (precise location TBA).
- Proposals for a twenty-minute presentation (given in English) are expected by March 1st, 2021 and should be sent to tom.laureys@ugent.be. Proposals should include your name, academic affiliation and a brief curriculum vitae.
- Submissions are expected as Word documents (max. 300 words).
- Notification of acceptance will be provided by April 1st, 2021.
- The programme will be finalized by May 1st, 2021.
- A selection of contributions will be published in a peer-reviewed volume to be submitted to an international publisher.
- We hope that you will support our efforts by notifying your colleagues and students about the conference. You are most welcome to contact the organisers for further details.
- All this information can also be found on our website: www.revisitingrevenge.ugent.be

This conference is an initiative of the research groups GEMS (<https://gemsugent.wordpress.com/>) and THALIA (<https://aogthalia.wordpress.com/>), and is part of the BOF-funded research project *Radical Revenge? Revenge tragedy and providential thinking in the Dutch Republic 1638-1678*.

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