

What's Love got to do with Kyd?

Andrew Power

Romeo and Juliet's shared sonnet (1.5.92-106) is one of the best known and oft quoted moments in Shakespeare's genre-busting love tragedy. However it is not the first sonnet shared between doomed lovers in early modern tragedy. Neither is Othello's errant handkerchief the first symbolically laden love token in the genre. This short paper looks at two other shared sonnets (or near sonnets) in early modern tragedies: one in the Inns of Court play *Tancred and Gismunda* (arguably the first English tragedy of love) and the second in Thomas Kyd's more famous revenge play, *The Spanish Tragedy*.

Kyd's work is more famous for its place in the history of the genre of revenge tragedy, but Kyd's work also reveals an interest in the potential role of love in tragedy. This is particularly clear in the chorus scenes of *Soliman and Perseda* similar in kind to those involving Revenge in *The Spanish Tragedy*. In that play, Love, Fortune, and Death dispute the "fittest person / To serve for Chorus to [the] tragedy" (1.1.16-17) and Love vows to "make it known [...] to the world / What interest Love hath in tragedies" (31-32). Taking my cue from that question this paper asks what influence Kyd had on the development of the subgenre of love tragedy.

Andrew Stesienko

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SAA 2021 Abstract

“Both a Revenger and a Gentlewoman: Early Modern Affect, Revenge, and Women’s Humor ”

This presentation contends that revenge plays, because they traffic in blood, offer a site through which to investigate the early modern period’s vexed understanding of female physiology and affect. Because humoral theory posited that the female body was colder than the male body and therefore more susceptible to sudden changes in affect that influenced behavior, female avengers may illustrate period stigmas about women’s quickness to irrationality and irascibility. These “physiological absolutes” were intertwined with unflattering cultural depictions of angry revenging women, traceable back to the Greek Furies. Because early modern women were negatively circumscribed by humoral theory and gendered stereotypes, scholars including Janet Clare contend that it is nigh impossible for stage productions to reconcile sympathetic femininity and bold revenge.

However, revenge plays leave limited room for the idea that, like men, women have access to behaviors and practices that counteract physiological influences on feeling, allowing them to transcend the perceived limitations of their bodies and consciously, productively, and even sympathetically manage excess affect. I survey three revenge plays (*Titus Andronicus*, *The Spanish Tragedy*, and *Hoffman*) to analyze female avengers who implement these practices while negotiating their desires for revenge. *Hoffman*’s Martha models the most impressive affective governance, successfully managing her grief and ire in a way that accommodates the demands of both the revenger and the gentlewoman. Resisting the grotesque image of the angry, irrational female avenger, Martha instead transforms revenge by synthesizing it with her maternal empathy and respect for her community. More broadly, her example illustrates that despite the humoral system’s misogynist conceits, the psychosomatic link between the mind and body endowed the early modern subject with a powerful potential for self-determination.

Bruce Young

Title: Endless Revenge in *The Spanish Tragedy*

Revenge was a contested issue in the theater of early modern England, with some plays favoring revenge, at least as part of the theatrical experience, and some showing its evils and dangers. Some, like *Hamlet*, seem to be tugging in both directions at once. As one of the earliest and most popular of revenge tragedies, *The Spanish Tragedy* has usually been placed on the pro-revenge side of the controversy. I argue that it shares much of the ambivalence of *Hamlet* and that, in some respects, it may justifiably count as an anti-revenge play.

René Girard's analysis of revenge (including in *Hamlet*) can be helpful in illuminating this aspect of *The Spanish Tragedy*, as can Emmanuel Levinas's discussion of hatred and torture, which helps explain why some of the play's violence is drawn out, perhaps for the benefit of both the characters and the audience.

Despite the speeches justifying and encouraging revenge, the action of the play, with its multiple, interconnected rival pairs, its double, even triple, betrayals and revenges, and its seemingly endless string of imitative (and sometimes displaced) desire and violence, objectively demonstrates the power of revenge to effect psychic and social damage, damage serious enough to threaten total collapse. And despite the apparent satisfaction announced at the end by Andrea and Revenge, I argue that this is a case of a resolution in which nothing is truly resolved.

Title: Thomas Kyd, William Shakespeare, and Ferdinando Lord Strange.
David George

My paper will be about Kyd, Shakespeare, and Lord Strange's Men. Kyd died in 1594 aged about 36, and may have written the earlier version of *Hamlet*. Recent research has revealed that he worked as a secretary to Ferdinando Lord Strange, son of Henry, fourth earl of Derby. Beginning in 2003, with the revival of the details of the existence of a playhouse at Prescott (three or four miles from Earl Henry's seat at Knowsley Hall), Shakespeare has also been associated with Lord Strange's company of players through four early plays that they owned (*1, 2, 3 Henry VI*, and *Titus Andronicus*). In the plague year of 1593, Lord Strange's men stayed at Knowsley Hall and Lathom House, both Stanley seats in Lancashire.

Probably, however, Kyd worked for Lord Strange in London, where the Stanleys had a townhouse, and there became acquainted with Shakespeare. They may have collaborated on *Titus Andronicus*, usually dated 1592-4. I will be using the new research on Kyd's career, and looking at the linguistic evidence for the two dramatists' collaboration. What Shakespeare learned from *The Spanish Tragedy*, its enormous theatrical popularity, especially its use of soliloquies and justifiable revenge, will form the conclusion of my paper.

Jessica Apolloni
SAA 2021 “The Spanish Tragedy and its Afterlives”

Transnational Law in the Genre of Revenge Tragedy

The paper I will present at our 2021 seminar is a part of my larger book project on literature’s influential role in comparative legal history. In this paper on *The Spanish Tragedy*, I specifically focus on the immense comparative influences (such as classical Roman or continental literary forms) prevalent in Early Modern English Inns of Court that are an important part of the history of the revenge tragedy genre. While scholars have often noted the debt revenge tragedy owes to these earlier legal plays, little critical attention has been made to the significance of this genre’s beginnings within the environment of the Inns. I demonstrate how the socio-legal space of the Inns created a perfect setting for the precedents of revenge literature that culminated in the more official ‘revenge tragedy’ genre on the popular English stage in Kyd’s *Spanish Tragedy*. In this intertextual approach, I aim to trace the origins of the revenge tragedy genre and consequently its preoccupation with legal concepts and overall influence in the understanding of law and justice dramatized on stage. This research builds from my overall book manuscript which examine how concepts of law, justice, and authority travel in literary texts across diverse geographies and legal systems.

Judy Hefferan
University of Southern Queensland
PhD Candidate
Abstract

El Grito de Sangre: revenge in *The Spanish Tragedy*

Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* is arguably the first Renaissance revenge tragedy and it has often been lauded for its possible influence on Shakespeare as the precursor of *Hamlet*. It reflects its Senecan roots both through the play's framing device of the ghost of Andrea and Revenge and its preoccupation with parading before the audience, a slew of bloody corpses. It is undeniably a play shrouded in blood. However, scholars have read blood in this play in metonymic and metaphorical ways. In the denouement of *The Spanish Tragedy*, when explaining the carnage on the stage, Hieronimo hearkens back to the moment he held his recently murdered son in his arms and exclaims, "He shrieks; I heard, and yet methinks I hear/His dismal outcry echo in the air" (108-09). This dismal outcry cannot be Horatio's, who died soundlessly, but Hieronimo insists throughout that the cry originated with his son. I contend that audiences, fully cognisant of the preternatural power of blood, could associate this doleful cry with 'the cry of the blood', an aspect of cruentation where a corpse would bleed in the presence of the murderer. To premodern audiences, blood, which was thought to contain the living spirit of man, was perceived as highly powerful and had magical powers of transference. In a play where blood is such a crucial, critical element, surely, it's time to examine this bodily fluid within an early modern English cultural context. By exploring the properties of blood revealed in contemporary medical and philosophical treatises as well as contemporary drama, I hope to question if the preternatural properties of blood would have been seen as capable of producing the 'dismal outcry' echoing in the air, exhorting Hieronimo to avenge the death of his son.

Katharine Goodland

Abstract

“Ay these were spectacles to please my soul!”:
Retribution and Pleasure in Thomas Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy*

I turn to the tradition of dream visions of Hell, particularly *The Vision of Thurkill*, which has a number of resonances with *The Spanish Tragedy* in order to explore what Kyd might be up to with his dream vision frame. I consider Andrea’s pleasure from the standpoint of the tenet of Christian dogma which held that the joy of the saved was increased when they saw the suffering of the damned, which is also feature of dream visions of hell. I find a disjunction in tone between the play’s otherworldly dream vision frame and the tragedy of Hieronimo, and suggest that the crux of the play might not be eschatological but generic. I think might we have a tragedy, not wrapped in enigma, but in satire.

Sean Levenson

14 February 2021

“When in Toledo there I studied”: Reading Hieronimo’s Scholarly Background in Thomas Kyd’s
The Spanish Tragedy

In *The Spanish Tragedy*, Hieronimo and his family’s social status is undermined by the prospect of a new alliance between Portugal and Spain. In context of his diminishing social power, I argue that Hieronimo is forced to draw on scholarly elements of his *habitus* to avenge his son. Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus* helps explain how a person’s lived experience shapes patterns of thought and senses of objective perception. While Hieronimo suggests his background as a university scholar in his allusion to studies in Toledo, one can find further evidence of Hieronimo’s scholarly *habitus* throughout the play when Hieronimo performs acts influenced by that scholarly background. In particular, I focus on the character’s use of classical allusions; his reading practices; and also his association with courtly entertainment and writing. Though critics have long explored many of these points in the text, reading these factors together as elements of a scholarly *habitus* not only suggests the subversive potential of scholars and scholarliness but also illustrates how social change impacts politics and justice.