

Revenge Drama in the English Renaissance

מחזות נקמה ברנסנס האנגלי

MA Seminar

Dr. Noam Reisner

Course no.: 626444801 Fall term 2017/18, 4hr credit for MA

Monday and Thursday, 12-14, Webb 101

Reception hours: Monday, 14:00-15:00 or by appointment, Webb 506

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Seminar Description

In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, one of the most popular forms of theatrical entertainment on the London commercial stage was the revenge drama of blood. Many of the revenge plays which were so popular in Elizabethan and Jacobean times seem today distasteful and crude, and most of them are justly obscured by the towering fame of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* – perhaps the most famous revenge drama (or anti-revenge drama) of all time. However, Shakespeare conceived of *Hamlet* within the evolving popular conventions of revenge drama, and in this seminar we will study a range of contemporary revenge plays as we explore this unique genre and discover the complex world of the renaissance 'revenger' – a dark, turbulent world of passion, violence, and extreme pathos. We will try and identify and understand the particular mode of theatre revenge drama generates, and reflect on its unique forms of engagement with its intended audience, and the corresponding sense of enjoyment it generates. We will try and understand why were these plays so popular? What was their special appeal and underlying ethical effects in performance? What are the various philosophical, theological, and theoretical questions underpinning the concept of revenge explored in these plays? How do different dramatists transform conceptually and poetically the impossible ethical plight of the revenger into cathartic theatrical spectacle? What finally is the appeal of these plays today, and what are some of the cultural and ethical elements of the genre that carry over into modern treatments of revenge in fiction, film and television?

Seminar Reading

The seminar will focus on the close textual reading and analysis of a selection of plays from the period, best representing the unique sub-genre of English renaissance revenge drama: Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Thomas Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy*, George Chapman's *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois*, John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*, and John Ford's *Tis Pity She's a Whore*. Wider suggested reading includes: Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*, Cyril Tourneur's *The Atheist's Tragedy*, Thomas Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness* and Middleton and Rowley's *The Changeling*.

* See bibliography below for a list of editions and edited anthologies of revenge plays for use in this seminar.

Seminar Requirements

Attendance: attendance is compulsory. Students who accumulate more than 3 unjustified absences will lose 5% of the final grade per absence. Students who miss more than 30% of the classes, regardless of circumstances, will not be able to complete the seminar.

Active class participation and preparation: to allow for productive class discussions, students must come prepared for class having read beforehand the relevant play and other assigned materials. Students must also have with them in class a text of the play under discussion for reference.

Take-home midterm assignment (20% of grade): there will be a single midterm take-home assignment, posted through the moodle website. Students will have two weeks to write and submit the assignment through moodle. Late submissions will not be accepted. **IMPORTANT**: it is not possible to complete the seminar with a failed or incomplete midterm grade. Further information about the assignment will be given closer to the time on moodle and in class.

Final referat or seminar paper (80% of grade): the deadline for submitting final papers follows the dates and guidelines as published in the Yedion. As per faculty regulations, all papers must be submitted on or before the stated deadline in hard-copy to the department's office. I also request that students send a corresponding electronic version to me by email.

Late submissions will not be accepted. Requests for extensions must be processed through the proper channels before the expiration of the deadline.

IMPORTANT: I must approve all topics for final papers (see schedule below). I will not accept papers whose topics I did not previously approve. Students who wish to submit a seminar rather than a referat paper must notify me of their intention to do so at least two weeks before the end of term so I can provide proper guidance and instruction.

Detailed Schedule

*please note that this schedule is tentative and may be subject to change

Introduction

23.10.17 – The revenge paradigm from Aeschylus to the Western

26.10.17 – Thinking about revenge from the Bible to Renaissance humanism

30.10.17 – Thinking about revenge from the Bible to Renaissance humanism

2.11.17 – Staging revenge: generic expectations and permutations

6.11.17 – Staging revenge: rhetoric, poetic excess and the Senecan model

9.11.17 – Staging revenge: the ethics and aesthetics of stage violence

The Elizabethan revenger

13.11.17 – Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*

16.11.17 – Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*

20.11.17 – Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*

23.11.17 – Shakespeare's *Hamlet*

27.11.17 – Shakespeare's *Hamlet*

30.11.17 – Shakespeare's *Hamlet* ***Midterm assignment posted on moodle**

Jacobean revengers after *Hamlet*

4.12.17 – Thomas Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy*

7.12.17 – Thomas Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy*

11.12.17 – Thomas Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy*

14.12.17 – George Chapman's *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois*

***Midterm assignment due**

18.12.17 – George Chapman's *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois*

21.12.17 – George Chapman's *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois*

Revenge and madness in later Jacobean and Caroline theatre

25.12.17 – John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*

28.12.17 – John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*

1.1.18 – John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*

4.1.18 – John Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* –

8.1.18 – John Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*

11.1.18 – John Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*

***one-page outlines for final paper due in**

15.1.18 – Screening of the National Theatre's production of *The Duchess of Malfi*

18.1.18 – Private consultation meetings with students to discuss paper topics

Bibliography

Editions

*please obtain prior to the course whichever combination of these texts to allow for coverage of the course material. These editions are all available to buy rather cheaply through websites like bookdepository.com which offer free worldwide shipping (allow up to 4 weeks for arrival of books). Please avoid using unannotated, online html texts of the plays as these are almost completely useless for the purposes of this seminar.

It is possible to cover all the syllabus of the seminar, with the exception of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, by buying only two books (for *Hamlet* please use a good single-play edition. See below):

Four Revenge Tragedies, ed. Katherine Eisman Maus (part of Oxford English Drama series, Oxford, 1995) – this affordable anthology contains three of the plays on our syllabus: *The Spanish Tragedy*, *The Revenger's Tragedy* and *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois*, and is the only modern edition of the latter play by Chapman (*Please avoid getting Penguin's comparable anthology, *Five Revenge Tragedies* as it contains only two of the above plays)

John Webster and John Ford: The Duchess of Malfi, The White Devil, The Broken Heart and 'Tis Pity She's a Whore, ed. Jane Kingsley-Smith (London: Penguin, 2015)

Alternatively, if you're in the market for more fully annotated single-play editions of the above plays these are your options:

The Arden Shakespeare and the Arden Early Modern Drama series – there are Arden annotated single editions for the following plays on the syllabus: The Spanish Tragedy, Hamlet, The Duchess of Malfi, 'Tis Pity She's a Whore. The Arden editions are the best scholarly editions available, containing fulsome notes and lengthy and richly informative introductions. These editions are also quite expensive however.

New Mermaids series – You can find most of the plays on our syllabus in these excellent editions aimed for college students. These editions are also not as expensive as the Arden (but also not as heavily annotated). You can find New Mermaid editions for: The Spanish Tragedy, The Revenger's Tragedy, The Duchess of Malfi, and 'Tis Pity She's a Whore

Secondary sources

The following is a very selective list of major studies on various aspects of early modern English revenge drama. I will supplement this list as the term progresses. Only items marked with () are available to borrow/download from Soraski. I will post excerpts from longer works and articles on moodle throughout the term.

Allman, Eileen Jorge. *Jacobean Revenge Tragedy and the Politics of Virtue*. Newark, Delaware: University of Delaware Press, 1999.

Bowers, Fredson. *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy, 1587-1642*. 1940. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966. *

Broude, Ronald. "Revenge and Revenge Tragedy in Renaissance England," *Renaissance Quarterly* 28.1 (1975): 38-58. *

Burnett, Anne Pippin. *Revenge in Attic and Later Tragedy*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998. *

Clare, Janet. *Revenge Tragedies of the Renaissance*. Horndon: Northcote House, 2006.

Grimmett, Roxanne. "'By heaven and hell': Re-evaluating Representations of Women and the Angel/Whore Dichotomy in Renaissance Revenge Tragedy," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 6.3 (2005): 31-39. *

Griswold, Wendy. *Renaissance Revivals: City Comedy and Revenge Tragedy in the London Theatre, 1576-1980*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1986. *

Hallett, Charles A. and Elaine S. Hallett. *The Revenger's Madness: A Study of Revenge Tragedy Motifs*. Lincoln: Nebraska University Press, 1980.

- Hill, Eugene D. "Revenge Tragedy", in Arthur F. Kinney, ed., *A Companion to Renaissance Drama*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. 326-35.
- Kerrigan, John. *Revenge Tragedy: Aeschylus to Armageddon*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996. *
- Keyishian, Harry. *The Shapes of Revenge: Victimization, Vengeance and Vindictiveness in Shakespeare*. Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1995.
- Rist, Thomas. *Revenge Tragedy and the Drama of Commemoration in Reforming England*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008.
- Simkin, Stevie. ed. *Revenge Tragedy*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001.
- Woodbridge, Linda. *English Revenge Drama: Money, Resistance, Equality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. *