

The Spanish Tragedy, Thomas Kyd

Elements of revenge tragedy

- Avenger keen on bringing revenge on group of people who committed a form of crime against avenger's close family members – typically murder/rape
 - Acts to revenge because state cannot or will not right the wrong
 - Hieronimo believes the king wouldn't act against his nephew
 - Social order is implicated in the crimes committed
 - Cynicism within play suggests the playwright is criticising the social justice system within Elizabethan government and society
 - Does not benefit from carrying out revenge – dies as a result
 - Those responsible for Horatio's murder is killed (avenged)
- Victim and villain
- Staged violence – stabbings, hangings and tongue bitten out
- Ghost/physical token of dead
- Meta theatrical device – play within a play device – dumb show/disguise
- Transgressive sexual activity – adultery, rape, incest – Bel Imperia has transgressive sexual appetite as she has a thing for lower class males
- Madness – real/feigned

Francis Bacon – 'On Revenge' – The more men take revenge they need to rethink it – "revenge is a kind of wild justice"

Tragedy genre blurs boundary of whether avenger should pursue justice through revenge or leave it to God to punish wicked

Handkerchief becomes a symbol of revenge – given to Don Andrea from Bel Imperia as a sign of love, picked up by Horatio when PA is killed which implies their friendship, picked up by Horatio's father which becomes the symbol of revenge – a whole group of opposite ideas

Robert Watson – world of revenge tragedy is a human world – rule is to do unto others as you have been done to – God is absent from such plays – but does refer to classical Gods than the Christian God – are the Classical Gods more realistic than the Christian one?

Act 1 Scene 3 – "Fortune is blind"

Viceroy grieving as a father foreshadows Hieronimo's grievance

Invention of printing allowed Greek/Roman texts to become available – aware of ancient history such as Aristotle's ideas about tragedy – influential in defining genre

Kyd was influenced by Seneca who was an advisor to Nero and wrote plays based on Greek stories

Seneca's knowledge of plays informed Elizabethan playwrights – took violence that happened offstage in Seneca's performances and made it onstage

- Thomas Kyd
 - Little knowledge of his life
 - 1593, he was arrested during investigations over inciting violence; aesthetic tracts discovered; under torture he accused Christopher Marlowe of atheism
 - Author of missing Ur-Hamlet – original story of Hamlet
- *The Spanish Tragedy*