



The Sibling Revenge Pattern in 16th - 17th Century Revenge Tragedies

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Background

Revenge Tragedies

- ❖ Type of tragic drama developed by Seneca the Younger
- ❖ Popular style during the Renaissance period

Senecan Model for Revenge Tragedies

- ❖ Secret murder, typically of a benign ruler
- ❖ Ghostly visitation of the murder victim to a kinsman
- ❖ Period of intrigue, disguise, or plotting in which the murderer and avenger scheme against each other
- ❖ Descent into either real or feigned madness by the avenger or an auxiliary character
- ❖ Eruption of general violence, often accomplished by a feigned masque or festivity
- ❖ Catastrophe that decimates the dramatis personae, including the avenger

Research Questions

- ❖ Is there a relationship between family structure and plot in revenge tragedies?
- ❖ Can a Senecan model be developed for female characters in revenge tragedies?

Plays Studied

Main Focus

- ❖ *Hamlet*, William Shakespeare
- ❖ *The Revenger's Tragedy*, Anonymous
- ❖ *The Spanish Tragedy*, Thomas Kyd

Supporting Plays

- ❖ *Titus Andronicus*, William Shakespeare
- ❖ *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois*, George Chapman
- ❖ *The Atheist's Tragedy*, Cyril Tourneur
- ❖ *The Duchess of Malfi*, John Webster

Findings

Every revenge tragedy studied includes the murder of a sister's lover carried out or ordered by her brother as a central element of the plot

Hamlet

- ❖ Ophelia's brother murders her lover Hamlet in a duel as revenge for the suicide of Ophelia and the murder of her father

The Revenger's Tragedy

- ❖ Brothers Vindice and Hippolito set out to murder the Duke but, after killing him in Act III, spend the remainder of the play seeking revenge on Lussurioso, who pursued their chaste sister

The Spanish Tragedy

- ❖ Bel-Imperia's suitor Balthazar and her brother Lorenzo violently kill her lover while she is forced to watch – an action that drives the remainder of the play

Explanations

Brother's Desire to Protect

- ❖ Familial affection
- ❖ Familial honor

Female Sexuality Norms

- ❖ Obedience, chastity, silence
- ❖ Protection correlated with adherence to norms

Period Emphasis on Family

Inheritance/Marital Expectations of Brother



Future Areas of Study

- ❖ Further study into sibling relationships in the time period
- ❖ Patterns involving supporting family members' roles in the revenge act
- ❖ Parent relationships in revenge tragedies
- ❖ Interactions between large and small families
- ❖ Family structure in 16th – 17th century life

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