

Renaissance Revenge Drama

“I’ll be revenged on the whole pack of you.”
Malvolio, *Twelfth Night*

In this seminar, we will begin to understand why the concept of revenge has been so important to literary production, from Seneca’s *Thyestes* to William Shakespeare and from John Webster to Quentin Tarantino’s *Pulp Fiction*. Focusing on Renaissance drama, but looking backward to *Thyestes* and forward to *Pulp Fiction*, students will examine nine revenge plays and begin to place them within a cultural context that takes into consideration religion, politics, and other social forces that contribute to the appeal of the literary genre. Questions that we will consider during the semester might include what is the role of violence in revenge drama? Where is pleasure located in the spectacle of revenge? What is the relationship between comedy and tragedy in revenge drama? What is the role of spectacle in the production of meaning in Renaissance revenge drama? Does gender matter in revenge drama? By including Seneca and *Pulp Fiction* as bookend texts, students can begin to assess how the Renaissance was unique in its development of revenge drama.

During the semester, students will also read selections of contemporary literary theory and criticism designed to help frame approaches to the literary texts and to the concept of revenge. Students will present a 15-20 minute presentation on a single play, lead discussion on a theorist / critic under consideration, and write an article length essay (18-20 pages).

Selected Plays (subject to change)

Seneca, *Thyestes*
Tarantino, *Pulp Fiction*
Shakespeare, *Hamlet* and *Titus Andronicus*
Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi*
Ford, *Tis’ Pity She’s a Whore*
Beaumont and Fletcher, *The Maid’s Tragedy*

Maus, Katherine. *Four Revenge Tragedies : The Spanish Tragedy; The Revenger's Tragedy; The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois; and The Atheist's Tragedy* (Oxford World's Classics) (Paperback)