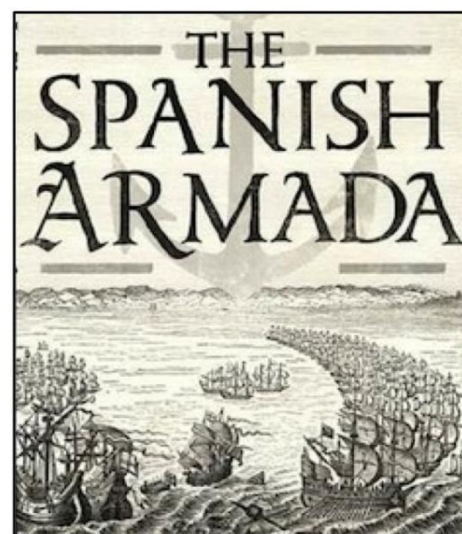


In this chapter we are going to discuss Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy, or Hieronimo is Mad Again*, an [Elizabethan tragedy](#) written by [Thomas Kyd](#) between 1582 and 1592. Highly accepted and prominent in its time, *The Spanish Tragedy* established a new [genre](#) in English drama, the [revenge play](#) or revenge tragedy. Its plot contains numerous violent murders and comprises as one of its [characters](#) a [personification](#) of [Revenge](#). *The Spanish Tragedy* was often referred to (or [parodied](#)) in works written by other Elizabethan playwrights, including [William Shakespeare](#), [Ben Jonson](#), and [Christopher Marlowe](#). Many elements of *The Spanish Tragedy*, such as the [play-within-a-play](#) used to entrap a murderer and a ghost intent on vengeance, emerge in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. (Thomas Kyd is frequently proposed as the author of the hypothetical [Ur-Hamlet](#) that may have been one of Shakespeare's primary sources for *Hamlet*.)

Date

In the "Induction" to his play [Bartholomew Fair](#) (1614), [Ben Jonson](#) alludes to *The Spanish Tragedy* as being "five and twenty or thirty years" old. If taken literally, this would yield a date range of 1584–89 – a range that has the same opinion with what also is known about the play. However, the precise date of composition is unknown, though it is conjectured that it was composed somewhere between 1583 and 1591. Most evidence indicate to a completion date before 1588, mentioning that the play makes no reference to the [Spanish Armada](#), and because of possible allusions to the play in [Nashe's Preface to Greene's Menaphon](#) from 1589 and *The Anatomie of Absurdity* from 1588–89. Due to this evidence, the year 1587 remains the most likely year for completion of the play. T.W. Baldwin places the date as early as 1583-84, while Philip Edwards, John Dover Wilson and W.W. Greg prefer a date at the other end of the scale in 1590 or 1591. F.S. Boas suggests 1585-87, and Freeman found his suggestion plausible. None of their suggestions are irrefutable, reasoned conjectures and tentative conclusions are only possible. Freeman, for instance, finds the tone of the Spanish allusions a 'pre-Armada tone (before 1588),' because it is 'a trifle shrill' rather than, as it would have been after the victory, confident and even patronising; yet he admits this gives him only a modest excuse for dating the play before 1588.



Publication

Kyd's play was entered into the [Stationers' Register](#) on 6 October 1592 by the bookseller [Abel Jeffes](#). The play was published in an undated [quarto](#), almost certainly before the end of 1592. This [first quarto](#) was printed by [Edward Allde](#), and published not by the copyright holder Jeffes, but by another bookseller, [Edward White](#). On 18 December that year, the [Stationers Company](#) ruled that both Jeffes and White had broken the guild's rules by printing works that belonged to the other; both men were fined 10 shillings, and the offending books were destroyed, so that Q1 of *The Spanish Tragedy* survives in only a single copy. Yet the Q1 title page refers to an even earlier edition which was probably by Jeffes, and no known copy exists.

The popular play was reprinted in 1594; in an apparent negotiation between the competing booksellers, the title page of [Q2](#) credits the edition to "Abell Jeffes, to be sold by Edward White." On 13 August 1599, Jeffes transferred his copyright to William White, who issued the third edition that year. White, in turn, transferred the copyright to [Thomas Pavier](#) on 14 August 1600 and Pavier issued the fourth edition (printed for him by William White) in 1602. This 1602 Q4 featured five additions to the pre-existing text. Q4 was reprinted in 1610, 1615 (two issues), 1618, 1623 (two issues), and 1633.

Performance

The [Admiral's Men](#) discovered Kyd's original play on 7 January 1597, and performed it twelve times to 19 July; they hold another performance conjointly with [Pembroke's Men](#) on 11 October the same year. The records of Philip Henslowe suggest that the play was on stage again in 1601 and 1602. English actors performed the play on tour in Germany (1601), and both German and Dutch adaptations were made.

Authorship

All of the early editions are anonymous. The first indication that the author of the play was Kyd was in 1773 when Thomas Hawkins, the editor of a three-volume play-collection, cited a brief quotation from *The Spanish Tragedy* in [Thomas Heywood's Apology for Actors](#) (1612), which Heywood attributes to "M. Kid". The style of *The Spanish Tragedy* is considered such a good match with Kyd's style in his other extant play, *Cornelia* (1593), that scholars and critics have universally recognised Kyd's authorship.

Sources & Influences

Did the story of the play exist outside the brain of Kyd? The exact source of the play is quite difficult to ascertain, though the story might have been inspired by the Soliman – Perseda story. This story featured in a volume called *Courtlie Controversie of Cupids Cautels*, a collection five stories related to a company of ladies and gentlemen by some Henry Wotton in 1578. The story relates how Soliman, the great emperor of Turks, fell overwhelmingly in love with the fair Perseda, a beautiful Greek taken prisoner at the capture of Rhodes. But he finds out that his valiant friend Erastus, who had to leave in consequence of a duel, and had fled Constantinople, was the beloved of Perseda, and thus he magnanimously withdraws

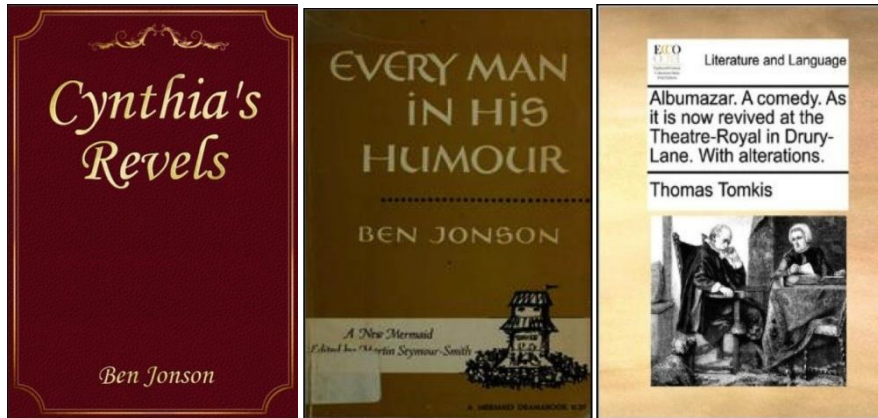
his suit and gives her up to his friend. However, through the institution of his cousin Brusor, 'Bellerbeck' of Servia, Soliman does not adhere to his resolution, and even causes Erastus to be treacherously murdered. This step, however, does not remove him further from his goal; for Perseda defiantly puts herself and Rhodes in a state of defence, and prefers death to a union with Soliman. In another version of the story, we find that Perseda is killed by a shot, but not before Soliman is killed by a fatal kiss planted on him by her. In Kyd's play, Bellimperia – personating Perseda kills Soliman/Balthazar by the more simple and straightforward way of stabbing him.

Many writers have influenced *The Spanish Tragedy*, notably [Seneca](#) and those from the [Medieval](#) tradition. The play is presumably Senecan with its bloody outline, rhetoric of the terrible, the character of the Ghost and characteristic revenge subjects. The characters of the Ghost of Andrea and Revenge form a chorus that reminds one that of Tantalus and Fury in Seneca's [Thyestes](#). The Ghost narrates his journey into the underworld and calls for penalty at the end of the play that bears influences from [Thyestes](#), [Agamemnon](#) and [Phaedra](#). The use of onomastic rhetoric is also Senecan, with characters playing upon their names, as [Hieronimo](#) does repeatedly. Hieronimo also refers to the Senecan plays, *Agamemnon* and *Troades*, in his monologue in Act 3, scene 13, and the character of the Old Man, Senex, is seen as a direct reference to Seneca.

The play also undermines Senecan qualities particularly in the employment of the ghost character. In Kyd the Ghost is part of the chorus, unlike in *Thyestes* where the Ghost departs after the prologue. Also, the Ghost is not an operative prologue as he does not impart the audience any information about the larger action on stage nor about its conclusion.^{[8]:33} The Ghost here is comparable to those in metrical (meaning in meter form) medieval plays who come back from the grave to talk about their demise and put forward commentary on the action. Revenge is parallel to a medieval character that acts as a guide for those on a journey.^[11] Whereas Senecan plays are largely verbal, Kyd's drama is decisively of the theatre; 'behind the drama of words', to borrow Eliot's phrase, 'is the drama of action.'

Allusions

The Spanish Tragedy was extremely influential, and references and allusions to it abound in the literature of its era. [Ben Jonson](#) mentions "Hieronimo" in the Induction to his [Cynthia's Revels](#) (1600), and quotes from the play in [Every Man in His Humour](#) (1598), Act I, scene iv. In [Satiromastix](#) (1601), [Thomas Dekker](#) suggests that Jonson, in his early days as an actor, himself played Hieronimo. Allusions continue for decades after the play's origin, including references in [Thomas Tomkis's Albumazar](#) (1615), [Thomas May's The Heir](#) (1620), and as late as [Thomas Rawlins's The Rebellion](#) (c. 1638). In modern times, [T. S. Eliot](#) quoted the title and the play in his poem [The Waste Land](#). The play also appears in [Orhan Pamuk's](#) novel [Snow](#).



Dramatis Personæ

Figures in the Frame

The ghost of Don Andrea

An embodiment of Revenge

Spain

The Spanish King

The Duke of Castile, Don Cyprian, the King's brother

Don Lorenzo, the Duke of Castile's son

Bel-imperia, the Duke of Castile's daughter

Pedringano, Bel-imperia's servant

Christophil, Don Lorenzo's servant

Don Lorenzo's Page boy

Don Hieronimo, Knight Marshal of Spain

His wife, Isabella

Don Horatio, their son

A Servant to Don Hieronimo

Isabella's Maid

Don Bazuto, an elderly man

General of the Spanish army

Three Watchmen

A Deputy

A Hangman

A Messenger

Three Citizens

Portugal

The Portuguese Viceroy

Prince Balthazar, his son

Don Pedro, brother to the Viceroy

Alexandro and Villuppo, Portuguese noblemen

The Portuguese Ambassadors

Serberine, Balthazar's serving-man
Two Noblemen of Portugal
Two Portugese citizens (Portingales)

Plot

Before the play commences, the Viceroy of [Portugal](#) has rebelled against Spanish rule. A battle has taken place in which the Portuguese were overpowered and their leader, the Viceroy's son Balthazar, detained; but the Spanish officer Andrea has been slain by none other than the captured Balthazar. His ghost and the spirit of Revenge (present onstage throughout the entirety of the play) serve as chorus and, at the beginning of each act, Andrea bewails the series of discriminations that take place before being comforted by Revenge that those deserving will get their comeuppance. There is a subplot concerning the antagonism of two Portuguese noblemen, one of whom attempts to persuade the Viceroy that his opponent has executed the missing Balthazar.

The King's nephew Lorenzo and Andrea's best friend Horatio quarrel over who captured Balthazar, and though it is made clear early on that it is in fact Horatio that defeated him while Lorenzo basically bamboozles his way into taking partial acclaim, the King leaves Balthazar in Lorenzo's custody and splits the spoils of the victory between the two. Horatio comforts Lorenzo's sister, [Bel-imperia](#), who was in love with Andrea against her family's wishes; despite her former feelings for Andrea, Bel-imperia soon falls for Horatio. Her courtship with Horatio is motivated moderately by her desire for revenge. Bel-imperia intends to agonise an amorous Balthazar, the assassin of her former lover.

As Balthazar is in love with Bel-imperia, the royal family concludes that their marriage would be an admirable way to refurbish the peace-process with Portugal. Horatio's father, the Marshal [Hieronimo](#), stages an entertainment for the Portuguese ambassador; Lorenzo, suspecting that Bel-Imperia has found a new lover, induces her servant Pedringano and realizes that Horatio is the man. He persuades Balthazar to help him murder Horatio during an rendezvous with Bel-Imperia; Hieronimo and his wife Isabella find the body of their son hanged and stabbed, and Isabella is driven mad.

What outcries pluck me from my naked bed,
And chill my throbbing heart with trembling fear,
Which never danger yet could daunt before?
Who calls Hieronimo? Speak, here I am.
I did not slumber; therefore 'twas no dream,
And here within this garden did she cry,
And in this garden must I rescue her.-
But stay, what murd'rous spectacle is this?
A man hang'd up and all the murderers gone!
And in my bower, to lay the guilt on me!
This place was for pleasure, not for death.

(He cuts him down.)

Revisions made to the original play supplement the scene with Hieronimo briefly losing his wits as well.

Lorenzo locks Bel-Imperia away, but she succeeds in transporting Hieronimo a letter, written in her own blood, informing him that Lorenzo and Balthazar were Horatio's murderers. He queries and attempts to see Bel-Imperia influence Lorenzo that he knows something; afraid that Balthazar's servant Serberine has betrayed the plot, Lorenzo convinces Pedringano to murder him, then arranges for Pedringano's arrest in the hopes of silencing him too. Hieronimo, appointed judge, sentences Pedringano to death; Pedringano expects Lorenzo to procure his pardon, and Lorenzo, having written a fake letter of pardon, lets him trust this right up until the hangman drops Pedringano to his death.

Lorenzo manages to prevent Hieronimo from seeking justice by convincing the King that Horatio is alive and well. Furthermore, Lorenzo does not allow Hieronimo to see the King, claiming that he is too busy. This, combined with his wife's suicide, which happens just prior to Hieronimo's appeal to the King, pushes Hieronimo past his bound. He rants ramblingly and digs at the ground with his dagger. Lorenzo goes on to tell his uncle, the King, that Hieronimo's odd behaviour is due to his inability to deal with his son Horatio's newfound wealth (Balthazar's ransom from the Portuguese Viceroy), and he has gone mad with jealousy. Regaining his senses, Hieronimo, along with Bel-Imperia, feigns reconciliation with the murderers. The two plan to put on a play together, *Soliman and Perseda*. Under cover of the play they stab Lorenzo and Balthazar to death in front of the King, Viceroy, and Duke of Castile (Lorenzo and Bel-Imperia's father); Bel-Imperia kills herself, and Hieronimo tells his audience of his motive behind the murders, but refuses to reveal Bel-Imperia's complicity in the plot. He then bites out his own tongue to prevent himself from talking under torture, after which he kills the Duke and then himself. Andrea and Revenge are satisfied, delivering suitable eternal punishments to the guilty parties.

This brief analysis of the play proves that in Kyd a dramatist had arisen capable of devising a well-sustained plot. He was not so bold an innovator as Marlowe, and his machinery was mainly borrowed from the Senecan school. It was from it that he drew the ghost and the Messenger, or his equivalent; under its influence he frequently employed the Chorus (though under the name of an individual), and put classical quotes into the mouth of his characters. Thus much of his verse has the monotonous rhythm distinctive of all the plays written after the roll of golden periods. But his dialogue, at its best, has the quality of passionate directness and simplicity essential to the highest dramatic achievement. The love-scenes, short as they are, between Bellimperia and Horatio touch a responsive chord in our hearts, and the mingled agony and range of Hieronimo are rendered with masterly power. In this complex delineation of character Kyd made a notable step forward, and he may just claim to be pioneer of introspective tragedy in England. Yet the moral basis of the play is crude in the extreme. A wild insatiable fury of revenge is the role animating impulse of all the chief personages, and suffices to condone every atrocity, even the murder of the innocent Duke of Castile. But, in spite of defects, *The Spanish Tragedy* is an organic creation, and fully deserved its widespread influence. It holds a unique place in dramatic literature, reaching back to *Gorboduc*, and forward to Shakespeare's plays, probably even to *Hamlet* and *King Lear*.

The 1602 additions

As seen above, the White/ Pavier Q4 of 1602 added five passages, totalling 320 lines, to the existing text of the preceding three quartos. The most considerable of these five is an intact scene, frequently called the painter scene since it is dominated by Hieronimo's conversation with a painter; it is often designated III, xiia, falling as it does between scenes III, xii and III, xiii of the original text.

Henslowe's Diary accounts two payments to Ben Jonson, dated 25 September 1601 and 22 June 1602, for accompaniments to *The Spanish Tragedy*. Yet most scholars snub the observation that Jonson is the author of the 1602 additions. The literary style of the additions is analysed to be non-Jonsonian; Henslowe paid Jonson several pounds for his additions, which has seemed an excessive sum for 320 lines. And [John Marston](#) emerges to parody the painter scene in his 1599 play [Antonio and Mellida](#), indicating that the scene must have been in continuation and known to audiences by that time. The five additions in the 1602 text may have been made for the 1597 revival by the Admiral's Men. Scholars have proposed various identities for the author of the revisions, including Dekker, [John Webster](#), and Shakespeare.

Themes and motifs

A long time argument among scholars has been the moral status of revenge. Because revenge is the most apparent theme of the play, a lot of debate has been made over it. One can make judgments on the morality of Hieronimo based on his revenge-focused goals but the question many scholars face is whether the fault of his objectives is truly his. Steven Justice discourses that the judgment of the play falls less on Hieronimo than on a society in which the tragedy results from a way of life. It is argued that Kyd used the revenge tragedy to give personification to popular images of Catholic Spain. Kyd tries to make Spain the villain in that he shows how the Spanish court gives Hieronimo no acceptable option. The court turns Hieronimo to revenge in quest of justice, when in reality it is quite unlike. Some critics claim that Hieronimo's attitude is what central Christian tradition calls the Old Law, the Biblical notion of an "eye for an eye". Hieronimo's passion for justice in society is revealed when he says, "For blood with blood shall, while I sit as judge, / Be satisfied, and the law discharg'd" (III.vi.35–36).

The nature of murder and death, performed and as natural events is also questioned. Smith thinks the decade of the play germane to the use of hangings, murders, and near deaths throughout the play. Several characters are killed or nearly killed throughout the play. Horatio is hanged, Pedringano is hanged, Alexandro is nearly burnt at the stake, and Villuppo is assumed tortured and hanged. Kyd consistently refers to damage, torment, and casualty, beginning early in the play when the ghost of Don Andrea describes his stay in the underworld: "And murderers groan with never killing wounds, / And perjured wights scalded in boiling lead, / And all foul sins with torments overwhelmed" (I.i.68–70). He intensely depicts in these lines as well as others the occurrence of murder and torture in the underworld. Murder and death make up the tragedy theme that holds true through the last scene of the play.

The central theme is essentially revenge. The given title explains that there is some kind of harm that has been put on the main character to make him want to seek revenge. Revenge, however, is not the only theme. One key theme is that of Wealth and Power. This theme is apparent exclusively in the actions of Balthazar. He kills Horatio in the beginning to achieve power that in turn gives him wealth. This is also clear with the character of Lorenzo. Towards the end of the play he tries to convince the king to get rid of Hieronimo. Lorenzo knows that in the absence of Hieronimo, he will become more powerful and closer to the king.

The play also has a theme of revenge in historical context. The play in a way re-enacts the conflict between Spain and England. Kyd takes this opportunity to patronise the [Spanish Armada](#) and to make a political joke. This is very popular in Elizabethan and Greek tragedies. The play is used as a sort of defence mechanism for the English.

Structure

Keeping in mind the play's central concern, Kyd has structured the play masterfully. Not only are the ironies brilliantly cultivated, but episodes are contrived with striking skill to reflect and balance each other. Viceroy's mourning for his son anticipates and expands Hieronimo's mourning, both weep the death of a son and protest fortune's adversaries; the subtleties of the Elizabethan sub-plot are also predicted. Andrea's revenge, the Viceroy's revenge on Alexandro or Villuppo, Lorenzo's witty disposal of Pedringano, Hieronimo's revenge for his son – these serve like angled mirrors to the fundamental structure of 'play within a play'. The play begins with the conditions of why Hieronimo wants to seek revenge. He is seen as a minor character and ultimately leads up to being the protagonist to add to the revenge plot. When he becomes the main character, the plot begins to unfurl and become the revenge story that it is. Kyd integrates the build up to the revenge as a way to show the internal and external struggles of the characters. The actual revenge takes place during the play that Hieronimo stages, making this the climax of the play. The decision is fundamentally the justification to the king of what has happened. The play within the play is not described until the actual play is performed, intensifying the climax, and the resolution is short due to the explanations that have already occurred.

Critics declare that *The Spanish Tragedy* bears a resemblance to a Senecan Tragedy: it carries the Senecan flavour both on the body and spirit. The style is heightened and passionate to meet the requirements of the Senecan plays: the division of acts, the emphasised bloody climax, and the revenge itself, make this play look like some of the most famous ancient plays. By means of soliloquies, Kyd added to the play already abounding in action and intrigue something which was designed to provide a complement, as it were, to the theatrically effective world of outward event and action, of unheard conspiracies, murders, and tangled enmities; he added the inward drama which is played out in the soul of protagonist. Kyd does admit his relations to Senecan Tragedies by using Latin directly in the play but also causes Christianity to conflict with pagan ideals. We also see Kyd's use of Seneca through his referencing of three Senecan plays in *The Spanish Tragedy*. It is said that this play was the originator of the style for many "Elizabethan revenge tragedies, most notably Hamlet".

Modern performances

The [Royal Shakespeare Company](#) staged a production of the play in 1996–1998, directed by [Michael Boyd](#).^[20] The cast included Peter Wight as Hieronimo, [Jeffrey Wickham](#) as the King of Spain, Paul Bentall as the Duke of Castille, [Siobhan Redmond](#) as Bel-imperia, and Deirdra Morris as Isabella.

An amateur production of *The Spanish Tragedy* was performed 2–6 June 2009 by students from [Oxford University](#), in the second quad of [Oriel College, Oxford](#). Another amateur production was presented by the Hyperion Shakespeare Company 21–30 October 2010 with students from [Harvard University](#) in Harvard's New College Theatre. In November 2012, Perchance Theatre in association with Cambridge University's [Marlowe Society](#) staged a site-specific production in [King's College Chapel](#), Cambridge. In October/November 2013, the [Baron's Men](#) of Austin, TX performed the work in a near-uncut state, with period costumes and effects, at [Richard Garriott's](#) Curtain Theater, a mini replica of the Globe Theater. Other professional performances include a modern-dress production staged at the [Arcola Theatre](#) in London in October–November 2009, directed by Mitchell Moreno, with Dominic Rowan as Hieronimo, as well as a production in [Belle Époque](#) era costume, staged by [Theatre Pro Rata](#) in Minneapolis in March 2010, directed by Carin Bratlie.

But the play has never been filmed or staged on television.

Questions:

Long-answer type:

1. Discuss Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* as a Revenge tragedy.
2. Discuss the importance of play-within-a-play in Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*.

Middle answer type:

1. Write a note on the structure of the play.
2. Write a note on the theme of power and wealth in the play.

Short answer type:

1. Narrate the scene where Hieronimo discovers his son's dead body.
2. Write briefly on the play's influence.