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Doing Kyd

Essays on The Spanish Tragedy

edited by

Nicoleta Cinpoeş

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Nicoleta Cinpoes

Manchester University Press

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Doing Kyd



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For Philip Edwards, in memoriam

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GENERAL EDITORS' PREFACE

Since the late 1950s the series known as The Revels Plays has provided for students of the English Renaissance drama carefully edited texts of the major Elizabethan and Jacobean plays. The series includes some of the best-known drama of the period and has continued to expand, both within its original field and, to a lesser extent, beyond it, to include some important plays from the earlier Tudor and from the Restoration periods. The Revels Plays Companion Library is intended to further this expansion and to allow for new developments.

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So wide a range of material necessarily precludes the standard format and uniform general editorial control which is possible in the original series of Revels Plays. To a considerable extent, therefore, treatment and approach are determined by the needs and intentions of individual volume editors. Within this rather ampler area, however, we hope that the Companion Library maintains the standards of scholarship that have for so long characterised The Revels Plays, and that it offers a useful enlargement of the work of the series in preserving, illuminating and celebrating the drama of Elizabethan and Jacobean England.

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Introduction

Nicoleta Cinpoeş

'Vindicta mihi!' are two of the most famous words of the 1590s. Some Elizabethans would have heard them uttered from the pulpit (Romans 12:19); others, cried out from the stage, with renewed pathos and urgency, by Hieronimo, father and Knight Marshal, whose only son has fallen victim to the murderous hands of the very power he faithfully serves. The play was Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, the boxoffice and print success of its day. In the four months of Lord Strange's Men's first season at Philip Henslowe's Rose, the play – recorded by Henslowe as *Jeronymo* – was performed an extraordinary nineteen times, sometimes in tandem with a partner piece, 'the comodey of Jeronymo', and by 1597 had seen twenty-nine performances."

Among the top three plays of the 1590s (along with Marlowe's The Jew of Malta and the now lost The Wise Men of West Chester), The Spanish Tragedy is a play which Shakespeare, a young, recent arrival in the capital, must have taken a good note of. It not only ran in repertoire with his Henry VI ('harey the vi') at the Rose but, being the blockbuster of the day, it served as a benchmark, informed his imagination and entered his theatrical vocabulary. Its shadow stretches through Titus Andronicus and Richard III, down to Hamlet. The track record of Kyd's dramatic masterpiece was impressive both on the stage and on the page. Between 1592 and 1604, it was put on by four of the most reputable theatre companies of the day: Lord Strange's Men, Lord Pembroke's Men, the Lord Admiral's Men and the Lord Chamberlain's Men (who later became the King's Men),2 and the lead role, Hieronimo, was performed by the stars of the time - Edward Alleyn and, most likely, Richard Burbage. After the 1592 edition, the earliest survivor of the printed versions, but clearly not the play's first, as it boasts to be 'newly corrected and amended of such grosse faults as passed in the first impression', The Spanish Tragedy appeared in

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As its title announces, this book was born out of 'doing' Kyd. Back in 2005, this meant just designing the first open-access, interactive website on Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, a project which has grown into a textual, critical, stage and bibliographical electronic resource that led the way in online playscript close reading and performance archiving. Since then, Kyd and his *Spanish Tragedy* have acquired a number of friends, out of whose willingness to share their 'doings' the current collection has taken shape. They include editors, translators, performance critics, screen playwrights, e-learning designers, directors, actors, stage designers, students, researchers, theatre archivists, librarians, readers and, last but not least, the publisher – Manchester University Press. My thanks go first to all these contributors to the volume, in each and every sense of the word: without them, *Doing Kyd* couldn't have happened.

Several institutions and people have aided Kyd and my journey in different but equally important ways. I am indebted to the University of Warwick for the opportunity to develop *The Jacobethans* open-access website and conduct the workshop 'Doing Kyd' in 2006, and to the University of Worcester for the encouragement and time granted to develop and complete this volume. For their unfailing support and patience, I am grateful to Gavin Clarke at the National Theatre Archives, to Susan Brock at The Capital Centre, to Helen Hargest at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, and to Matthew Frost at Manchester University Press. To my students, for their comments and proactive curiosity which have spurred me on, I owe special thanks. Finally, and most of all, I thank my family: your love and help have sustained me throughout.

ten separate quarto editions before 1633, a record unsurpassed by any Shakespeare play. Some of these editions followed the 1592 text, others, particularly those which came out after 1602, advertised a play '[n]ewly corrected, amended, and enlarged with new additions of the Painters part, and others', an announcement which has sparked centuries of debate regarding the authorship of the Additions, with Jonson, Webster and William Shakespeare amongst the contenders.³

Apart from its huge stage success, the measure of the play's importance lies in its impact on Elizabethan playwriting. Though it drew on both Seneca and the Tudor morality play, The Spanish Tragedy was a singularly innovative play in its astonishing stage craft engaging the full potential of the public playhouses and launching a new vogue for revenge tragedy. Kyd's theatrical imagination influenced Christopher Marlowe, his writing partner, room-mate and star of the early Elizabethan stage, as well as several generations of playwrights, including Shakespeare, Webster, Middleton, Tourneur and Ford. Seminal at home, Kyd's oeuvre was also influential abroad. Well into the seventeenth century The Spanish Tragedy was on the boards in Germany, in the Low Countries and in Prague.4 By the end of the Caroline period its popularity had turned it into a handy subject for pastiche and critique (by Nashe, Jonson), a kind of prolonged life with a comic twist. During the closure of the playhouses (1642-61), like all plays, The Spanish Tragedy disappeared from view. Its return can be traced through a brief entry in Pepys's diary: '24 February 1667/68 at the Nursery Theatre in Hatton Garden'. Lukas Erne comments on this Restoration revival noting a shift in status, from a 'play [...] performed by the leading actors on London's main stages for about half a century' to one 'played in a marginal and temporary playhouse by mediocre actors'.5 After this, both Kyd and The Spanish Tragedy disappear from view and sink into anonymity.

Anonymity continued to be their fate until 1773, when Kyd's name was (re)connected with the play and its title restored; the discoverer was Thomas Hawkins, who paid attention to Heywood's (passing) reference to 'M. Kid, in the Spanish Tragedy'. The late nineteenth-century interest in the medieval and Tudor periods resurrected the play for an academic reading public and attracted the interest of editors. Only in 1921 did it return to the stage owing to the enthusiasm of an amateur troupe, the Birkbeck Players (at Birkbeck College, University of London), who staged it again in 1931. Next followed a spate of Oxford productions: 1932 at Christ Church, 1937 at St Edmund Hall, 1951 at St John's College. Productions, put on by university dramatic societies, as the special correspondent of The Times noted, aimed