

Elizabethan Tragedy: Revenge and Over Reachers

by David Hamilton (September 2012)

The great period of English tragic drama was the Elizabethan period when Queen Elizabeth I was on the throne. There were two principle forms: Revenge and Over Reachers tragedies. I examine two of each to introduce a new audience to these great plays.

The Spanish Tragedy by Thomas Kyd is a neglected masterpiece but began the fashion for one of the two principle forms of Elizabethan tragic drama the Revenge play. The other was the Over Reacher and begun coterminously by Christopher Marlowe. *Spanish Tragedy* is very theatrical and uses highly formalised language in a line by line movement of blank verse for the sinister parts and prose for the comic patches. It is not hum drum because of the theatrical action presented and the dramatic declamatory speeches. The use of rhyme would have made the form humdrum, but not the action. The dramatic method is primitive but the plotting is ingenuous. Public executions were popular at the time and often carried out in theatres.