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978-0-521-51937-3 - The Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Tragedy

Edited by Emma Smith and Garrett A. Sullivan

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THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO  
ENGLISH RENAISSANCE TRAGEDY

Featuring essays by major international scholars, this *Companion* combines analysis of themes crucial to Renaissance tragedy with the interpretation of canonical and frequently taught texts. Part I introduces key topics, such as religion, revenge and the family, and discusses modern performance traditions on stage and screen. Bridging this section with Part II is a chapter which engages with Shakespeare. It tackles Shakespeare's generic distinctiveness and how our familiarity with Shakespearean tragedy affects our appreciation of the tragedies of his contemporaries. Individual essays in Part II introduce and contribute to important critical conversations about specific tragedies. Topics include *The Revenger's Tragedy* and the theatrics of Original Sin, *Arden of Feversham* and the preternatural, and *The Duchess of Malfi* and the erotics of literary form. Providing fresh readings of key texts, the *Companion* is an essential guide for all students of Renaissance tragedy.

EMMA SMITH is Fellow and Tutor in English at Hertford College, University of Oxford.

GARRETT A. SULLIVAN JR is Professor of English at Penn State University.

*A complete list of books in this series is at the back of this book.*

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## PREFACE

A 1619 elegy on the death of the tragic actor Richard Burbage mourns: ‘He’s gone, and with him what a world are dead / Which he revived, to be revived so!’, playing on the multiple ironies of memorialising a man renowned for dying and reviving, over and over again. That tragedy thrives on these paradoxical impulses towards death and animation, and that tragedy manages simultaneously to codify its own time and to transcend that time, are key to our interests in this *Companion to English Renaissance Tragedy*. The contributors to this volume of newly commissioned essays attest to the lively world of early modern tragedy, and to the ongoing lives in performance and criticism of a genre often overshadowed by Shakespeare’s reputation.

Part I moves through the formal and cultural coordinates of early modern tragedy, identifying the variety of its forms and its engagement with early modern literature and cultures: judicial, social, political, theatrical and intellectual. Renaissance tragedies are not merely interesting historically, however: we also include important new essays on modern performance on stage and film. Contributors to this section draw on a range of familiar and less-familiar texts with the aim of situating specific plays within broader interpretative contexts. In Part II the focus shifts to readings of specific plays. We have deliberately chosen those plays most anthologised, most studied and most available, and commissioned essays which combine a close textual study and up-to-date scholarship in demonstrating modes of reading that can be assimilated and applied to different plays.

What emerges from this collection is a sense of tragic range: chronological, from Mike Pincombe’s work on medieval antecedents right up to Lois Potter’s analysis of contemporary theatre; methodological, from Patrick Cheney’s use of Longinus on the sublime to Pascale Aebischer on Kristeva via Mary Beth Rose on Hobbes; and spatial, from ideas of the nation in Andrew Hadfield’s essay to the household in Catherine Richardson’s. Generic questions about tragedy and religion get specifically historicised answers in essays by Mary Floyd-Wilson and Alison Shell; an attention



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to plural tragedies over tragedy marks out Lucy Munro's contribution. Performance, play and metatheatricality are key to the work of Heather Hirschfeld, Gregory Semenza and Tanya Pollard; Judith Haber and Gordon McMullan's texts each anatomise the genre of tragedy itself; Mark Burnett makes verbal detail speak to wider concerns. Shakespeare appears in essays by Emma Smith, Garrett Sullivan and Emily Bartels, but doesn't steal the scene: his work provides us with a reference point rather than an unexamined ideal.

Lamenting the dearth of early modern tragedies in contemporary cinema, Alex Cox, director of *Revenge Tragedy* (2002), remarks on the appetite of modern stage audiences for these plays 'because they're sexually charged, violent, dramatic, political, fearless, and funny – often all at once'.<sup>1</sup> In taking advantage of the exciting scholarship and theatre of the last two decades, we hope that this *Companion* will develop these, and other attractions of Renaissance tragedy.

Unless otherwise cited, references to Shakespeare are taken from the *Oxford Shakespeare*, ed. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (2nd edn, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005). All websites were accessed on 2 May 2009.

NOTE

- 1 Alex Cox, 'Stage Fright', *The Guardian*, 9 August 2002.

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## CHRONOLOGY OF ENGLISH RENAISSANCE TRAGEDY

This chronology lists selected tragic plays of the Elizabethan (1558–1603), Jacobean (1603–1625) and Caroline (1625–1642) theatres discussed in this volume. Where possible we have dated the composition or first performance of the play rather than its publication, but dating is often necessarily approximate. For further reference, a fuller listing is in Alfred Harbage's *Annals of English Drama 975–1700*, revised by Sylvia Stoler Wagonheim (London: Routledge, 1989).

- 1560 Thomas Preston, *Cambyses*  
Jasper Heywood, *Thyestes*
- 1560–1 Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville, *Gorboduc*
- 1567 John Pickering, *Horestes*
- 1567–8 *Gismond of Salerne*
- 1570 Thomas Preston, *Clyomon and Clamydes*
- 1587–8 Christopher Marlowe, 1 and 2 *Tamburlaine the Great*
- 1587–90 Thomas Kyd, *The Spanish Tragedy*
- 1588–93 Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*  
Christopher Marlowe and Thomas Nashe, *Dido Queen of Carthage*
- 1589 Anon., *A Warning for Fair Women*  
Robert Greene, *A Looking Glass for London and England*
- c. 1590 Thomas Kyd (?), *The Tragedy of Soliman and Perseda*  
Anon., *The Chronicle History of King Leir*
- 1591 Anon., *Lochrine*  
Anon., *The True Tragedy of Richard III*

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- 1591–2 William Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus*  
Anon., *Arden of Faversham*  
Christopher Marlowe, *Edward II*
- 1592 William Shakespeare, *Richard III*
- 1593 Christopher Marlowe, *The Massacre at Paris*
- 1595–6 William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*  
William Shakespeare, *Richard II*
- 1599 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*
- 1599–1600 William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*
- 1600 John Marston, *Antonio's Revenge*
- 1601 Robert Yarrington, *Two Lamentable Tragedies*
- 1601–2 Anon., *Timon*
- 1602 Henry Chettle, *The Tragedy of Hoffman*
- 1603 Thomas Heywood, *A Woman Killed with Kindness*  
Ben Jonson, *Sejanus, His Fall*  
John Marston, *The Malcontent*
- 1603–4 William Shakespeare, *Othello*
- 1604 George Chapman, *Bussy D'Ambois*
- 1605 Thomas Middleton (?), *A Yorkshire Tragedy*  
William Shakespeare, *King Lear*  
William Shakespeare and Thomas Middleton, *Timon of Athens*
- 1606 Thomas Middleton, *The Revenger's Tragedy*  
William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*  
William Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*  
George Wilkins, *The Miseries of Enforced Marriage*
- 1607 Thomas Heywood, *The Rape of Lucrece*
- 1607–8 Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, *Cupid's Revenge*
- 1608 William Shakespeare, *Coriolanus*  
George Chapman, *Byron's Conspiracy*
- 1610 George Chapman, *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois*

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- 1610–11 John Marston, *The Insatiate Countess*  
Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, *The Maid's Tragedy*  
Robert Daborne, *A Christian Turned Turk*
- 1611 Thomas Middleton, *The Second Maiden's Tragedy*  
Cyril Tourneur, *The Atheist's Tragedy*  
Ben Jonson, *Catiline, His Conspiracy*
- 1612 John Webster, *The White Devil*
- 1613 Elizabeth Cary, *The Tragedy of Mariam*
- 1614 John Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi*
- 1615–20 Thomas Middleton, *Hengist, King of Kent*
- 1620 John Webster, *The Devil's Law Case*
- 1621 Thomas Middleton, *Women Beware Women*
- 1622 Philip Massinger, *The Duke of Milan*  
Thomas Middleton and William Rowley, *The Changeling*
- 1624 Joseph Simons, *Mercia*
- 1624–6 John Webster, *Appius and Virginia*
- 1626 James Shirley, *The Maid's Revenge*
- 1627–31 John Ford, *The Broken Heart*
- 1631 Philip Massinger, *Believe as You List*
- 1633 John Ford, *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*
- c. 1638 William Heminges, *The Fatal Contract*
- 1641 James Shirley, *The Cardinal*