



*EDUCATION
GUIDE*



*The
Spanish
Tragedy*

*written by Thomas Kyd
directed by Chelsea Phillips and Alice Dailey*

Villanova University Theatre Department
Education Guide for

The Spanish Tragedy

By Thomas Kyd

Directed by Chelsea Phillips and Alice Dailey

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How to Use This Guide

This Education Guide is intended to help guide and inspire conversation, reflection and further research connected to Villanova Theatre's production of *The Spanish Tragedy* by Thomas Kyd. It contains a series of Prompts and Extensions organized around the work itself, Villanova Theatre's production concept, and the broader themes of the Augustinian Cultural Seminar related to identity, culture, and community. They are designed to be used in any order, and can be approached as singular topics for reflection or in combination with one another to support a more nuanced conversation about identity, culture and inclusion.

Content Warnings

Villanova Theatre Department's *The Spanish Tragedy* contains the following:

- Depictions of Death by Suicide
- Depiction of Capital Punishment - Death by Hanging
- Depictions of Murder
- Gun Violence
- Self-Dismemberment
- Loss of an adult child

About *The Spanish Tragedy*

Basic Summary

Don Andrea, a Spanish Courtier, dies in battle and enters the afterlife where he is accompanied by the personification of Revenge, who promises that Andrea's lover, Bel-Imperia will kill the Portuguese prince, Balthazar who killed him in battle. In the Spanish court, Balthazar lives comfortably as a noble prisoner, and seeks Bel-Imperia's hand in marriage, though she has fallen in love with another courtier, Horatio, who was Andrea's friend. Balthazar kills Horatio, whose father Hieronimo, joins with Bel-Imperia to seek revenge. Hieronimo and Bel-Imperia put on a play in which they actually kill Balthazar and Lorenzo onstage, Bel-Imperia kills herself, and Hieronimo reveals the truth to the audience before biting out his own tongue and killing himself.

About the Playwright

(Taken from [Dramaturgy Website](#))



Thomas Kyd was born in 1558 (baptized on November 6th, 1558) in London. The son of a scrivener, Kyd attended Merchant Taylors School to potentially follow in his father's footsteps. There is no evidence to show that Kyd went on to get an education at the university level, which became a sticking point when playwright Thomas Nashe seemed to lambast Kyd in the Preface to Robert Greene's *Menaphon*. Nashe's anger seems to be born from jealousy of Kyd's success. *The Spanish Tragedy* was a smash hit, being hailed by scholars as the originator for the revenge tragedy genre on the early modern stages. Kyd went on to translate Robert Garnier's *Cornéille* from its original French and a lost work scholars call *Ur-Hamlet* believed to be a potential inspiration for Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. In 1593, while rooming with Christopher Marlowe, Kyd was arrested for having alleged materials that spoke against Protestant values. Kyd was imprisoned and tortured, only released by expressing he believed the papers belonged to Marlowe. This led to Marlowe's arrest and for some time, this was all we knew of Kyd's personal life. Kyd later died penniless and allegedly from complications of his tortures in 1594.

Meet the Directors



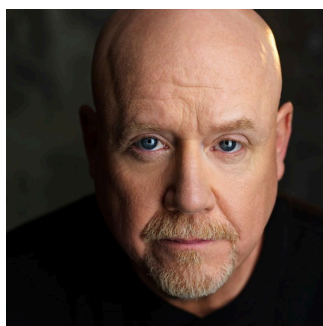
Chelsea Phillips, PhD (Director) is a dramaturg, theatre historian, and Associate Professor at Villanova University. Long ago, she was also an actor. Favorite roles include the Citizen's Wife from *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* and Dogberry from *Much Ado About Nothing*. As a dramaturg, she has worked with Pulitzer Prize-winner Michael R. Jackson, New Dramatist resident writer C. Julian Jimenez, Manhattan Shakespeare Project, the for/word company, Uncut Pages Theatre and artists from the Royal Shakespeare Company, Folger Shakespeare Theatre, and the American Shakespeare Center. At Villanova, she has helped develop and produce new works by Owen McCafferty, Douglas Carter Beane, Kathryn Petersen, Julia Izumi, Michael Hollinger and Pulitzer Prize-winner James Ijames. As an academic, her research interests include women, celebrity, Shakespeare and early modern and eighteenth-century theatre. She is the author of *Carrying All Before Her: Celebrity Pregnancy and the London Stage, 1689-1800* (University of Delaware Press, 2022).

Celebrity Pregnancy and the London Stage, 1689-1800 (University of Delaware Press, 2022).

Alice Dailey, PhD (Director) is Professor of English and Director of Faculty Affairs at Villanova, where she specializes in early modern literature and death studies. In conjunction with a course titled "Shakespeare in Performance," she has co-directed three student stage productions: *Taming of the Shrew*, *Twelfth Night* and *The Merchant of Venice*. She has published over a dozen articles on literature, performance and art in journals including *Shakespeare Quarterly*, *Shakespeare Survey*, *Shakespeare Bulletin*, *Critical Survey* and *Word & Image*. She is author of two scholarly books, *The English Martyr from Reformation to Revolution* (Notre Dame, 2012) and *How to Do Things with Dead People: History, Technology, and Temporality from Shakespeare to Warhol* (Cornell University Press, 2022). Her first book of creative nonfiction, a hybrid-form memoir titled *Mother of Stories: An Elegy*, is forthcoming from Fordham University Press in June 2024. She is currently editing Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* for the Arden Shakespeare Fourth Series.



Meet our Artist in Residence



James Keegan (Hieronimo/Text Coach) is a professor of English and Theater in the University of Delaware Associate in Arts Program. He was a resident company member at The American Shakespeare Center for 16 repertory seasons, where favorite roles included title roles in *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, *Titus Andronicus*, and *Tamburlaine*; Iago in *Othello*; Falstaff in *Henry IV, Parts 1 & 2* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*; Prospero in *The Tempest*; Claudius and the Ghost in *Hamlet*; Mark Antony in *Antony and Cleopatra*; Leontes in *The Winter's Tale*; Bosola in *The Duchess of Malfi*; Henry II in *The Lion in Winter*; and Lady Bracknell in *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Favorites at other theaters include Pistol in *Henry V* at The Folger and James Tyrone in *Long Day's Journey into Night* at American Stage. He is delighted to be part of this

Villanova Theatre production working with friends old and new.

Meet our Dramaturgs



Sydney E. Curran (Dramaturg) (she/they) is a second-year student in the Villanova Theatre Masters Program and is a full-time scenic/ lighting assistant. They are overjoyed to be working on this production as its dramaturg. Last year, Sydney had the privilege to appear on the Villanova stage as Dorothea in *Chrysalis* and as Ina in *Sometimes the Rain, Sometimes the Sea*. Sydney earned her BA in Theatre Production and Design along with a BA in Creative Writing from Susquehanna University. While enrolled, Sydney acted as Susquehanna University's Lead Electrician with two mainstage lighting design

credits: John Cariani's *Almost, Maine* and Paula Vogel's *The Mineola Twins*. After graduating in 2018, Sydney worked as a production fellow at SPARC- Richmond, a Youth Performing Arts organization and as an Electrics assistant at Syracuse Stage. Sydney will be attending the University of Wisconsin - Madison this upcoming fall semester to pursue their PhD in Interdisciplinary Theatre Studies.

Emma Drennen (Bel-Imperia/ Education Dramaturg)

(she/her) is a second-year student in the Villanova Theatre Masters Program and is a tuition scholar working in production management. Previous Villanova credits include Leonor in *House of Desires* and Bessie in *Sometimes the Rain, Sometimes the Sea*, both directed by James Ijames, as well as Lydia/Hannah in *Posterity* directed by Ed Sobel. She has a BA in Theatre as well as a BA in French from Saint Michael's College in Colchester, Vermont, where favorite acting credits include Helena in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Blanche in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Her favorite local credits include the 2021 Philadelphia Fringe Festival production of *Lovers and Madmen: Visions of a Midsummer Night's Dream* as well as over five years as a company member of The ShakesPEER Group, where favorite credits include Rosalind in *As You Like It*, and Katherine in *The Taming of the Shrew*.



Topics for Discussion

Detailed Summary and Who's Who in Villanova's Production

Don Andrea begins the play from the afterlife, telling us the tale of how he was killed in battle against Portugal. **Don Andrea** had chosen to participate in this battle in the hopes that military success could elevate his social status, which would make him a worthy suitor for his lover, **Bel-Imperia**, who is the niece of **the Queen**. Unfortunately, he was killed in battle. When he descended to the underworld, Proserpine (also known as Persephone) decides that Andrea should return to watch the fallout of the battle unfold, accompanied by the personification of **Revenge**. **Revenge** promises **Don Andrea** that he will see the Portuguese prince who killed him, **Balthazar**, killed by **Bel-Imperia**. And so, **Andrea and Revenge** sit and watch the Spanish Court as the story unfolds.

In the Spanish Court, after Spain successfully conquered Portugal, **Lorenzo (Bel-Imperia's brother)** and **Horatio** (Don Andrea's best friend), enter court with **Balthazar** prisoner. The Queen thanks the pair for their efforts, and **Horatio** is commended by his father, **Hieronimo**. Because **Lorenzo** is higher class than **Horatio**, **the Queen** decides that **Balthazar** should stay at **Lorenzo's** estate, where he lives with his father, **The Duke of Castile**, and his sister, **Bel-Imperia**. Upon hearing of her lover, **Andrea's**, death, **Bel-Imperia** asks **Horatio** to tell her the details of how he died. **Horatio** explains that **Balthazar** killed **Andrea** brutally, and **Bel-Imperia** determines that **Balthazar** behaved dishonorably, and that **Andrea** was unfairly murdered. **Horatio** tells **Bel-Imperia** that he properly buried **Andrea**, which **Bel-Imperia** is moved by. She tells **Horatio** to keep the scarf that she had given **Andrea** as tribute. When **Horatio** leaves, **Bel-Imperia** realizes that she has fallen in love with him.

Meanwhile, **Balthazar** tells **Lorenzo** that he has fallen in love with **Bel-Imperia**, but that she has no interest in him. **Lorenzo** suggests that this may be because she is in love with someone else. He calls upon **Bel-Imperia's** servant, **Pedringano**, who reveals that **Bel-Imperia** and **Horatio** are in love. **Balthazar** and **Lorenzo** spy on **Bel-Imperia** and **Horatio**, who promise to meet at **Horatio's** home (where he lives with his father, **Hieronimo**, and his mother, **Isabella**), to consummate their love. On the night they meet, **Pedringano** accompanies them, and lets **Lorenzo**, **Balthazar**, and **Balthazar's** servant, **Serberine**, into the garden, where they brutally kill **Horatio** in front of **Bel-Imperia**. **Lorenzo** then imprisons **Bel-Imperia** in their home. **Hieronimo** and **Isabella** come outside to find their son murdered, and are distraught, but decide not to seek justice from **The Queen**, hoping instead to find out who killed **Horatio** on their own. **Lorenzo** orchestrates a plot to ensure that **Pedringano** and **Serberine** both are killed, so as to ensure that they do not reveal what happened to **Horatio**.

All this time, the **Viceroy** of Portugal has believed that his son, **Balthazar**, must be dead if he has been taken prisoner by the Spanish. His brother, **Alexandro**, receives letters stating that **Balthazar** is alive and well cared for in the Spanish Court. The two make way for Spain, where they are greeted by **The Queen**. **Bel-Imperia** and **Lorenzo's father, Don Cyprian/The Duke of Castile**, agrees, along with **The Queen** and **The Viceroy**, that **Bel-Imperia** should be

married to **Balthazar**. While **Bel-Imperia** was imprisoned, she wrote a letter in blood to **Hieronomo**, revealing that it was **Lorenzo** and **Balthazar** who killed **Horatio**. **Isabella** kills herself out of grief for her lost son.

Hieronomo reveals a plan to **Bel-Imperia**, that they should perform a play for the Spanish Court, which **Lorenzo** and **Balthazar** would also take part in. Instead of pretending to kill the two in the play, **Hieronomo** and **Bel-Imperia** actually murder **Balthazar** and **Lorenzo**. **Bel-Imperia** also stabs herself out of grief. **Hieronomo** reveals the dead body of **Horatio**, and explains that he has orchestrated his revenge for the death of his son. **The Queen** demands that **Hieronomo** be tortured, but he bites out his own tongue before revealing any more. He takes a pen and kills **Lorenzo** and **Bel-Imperia's father, The Duke of Castille**, before killing himself.

Don Andrea and **Revenge** have been watching the whole time, periodically interjecting. **Andrea** reveals his satisfaction with this outcome, and appoints suitable afterlives for all those who died.

Onstage among the dead bodies, **Bel-Imperia** stands up, having faked her own suicide. She says goodbye to the corpse of **Horatio**, and flees the court to start a new life.

Discussion Questions:

- Villanova Theatre decided to add the twist that **Bel-Imperia** survives. Why might we have added this to the play?
- The original play has a King of Spain rather than a Queen. How might our version with a Queen impact the overall story differently?
- Why did **Hieronomo** bite out his own tongue before revealing any more about his motivations for revenge?

Understanding Early Modern Verse: Tips and Tricks

When watching this play, it is likely that it will sound very similar to Shakespeare. This is because, like most Shakespeare plays, it is written *in verse*. Specifically, it is written in *iambic pentameter*, which means that it is ten syllables per line (or five “feet”), with a “stressed, unstressed” speech pattern. This meter is said to imitate the sound of a human heartbeat.

When watching this play, or many other Elizabethan plays, it can be difficult to understand what’s being said. The poetic style of speech along with uncommon or dated vocabulary words can make the dialogue extremely hard to follow. Here are some tips for what to do when watching an Elizabethan drama that will help you understand what’s going on and enjoy the play more.

Tips and Tricks for watching Elizabethan Drama:

- Read a plot summary ahead of time.
 - When possible, it can be very helpful to read a summary of the plot before seeing the play. There are no “spoilers” to worry about for Elizabethan drama! Understanding the plot before seeing the play can help create a good starting point for understanding what will unfold. If you’d prefer to try to follow the plot as you watch the play, it can be helpful to simply look up a list of characters and their descriptions to help you follow the story. If you didn’t have time to look anything up ahead of time, look inside your program! There is usually plenty of helpful information inside.
- Take a big-picture approach.
 - It’s very unlikely that you’ll understand every line of dialogue being said. In fact, it’s very possible that there will be large sections of dialogue that are hard to understand. Don’t panic when this happens, even experts debate the meaning behind certain Early Modern lines! Instead of trying to follow every word, it can be more helpful to ask yourself big picture questions like:
 - Who seems to be the protagonist and who is the villain?
 - Which characters appear onstage together frequently? Which characters don’t?
 - Which characters seem to be intended for comedic relief and which characters seem to be more dramatic?
 - Which characters have romantic relationships? Family relationships? Friendships? Remember, some of this might not be understood just by listening, but the way characters interact with one another.
- Look for clues in costumes and set that might help you follow the story.
 - In many productions, the costume designer will come up with colors to identify specific groups of characters by rank, family, or other allegiance. For example, in *Romeo and Juliet*, often the Montague and Capulet families are identified by different colors. Additionally, it is a common directing technique to have certain

groups of characters only enter or exit from certain sides of the stage. This can help clarify which characters are aligned with one another.

- Relax and enjoy the show, you'll understand the important parts!
 - Most importantly, if you get lost while watching the play, don't worry! The nice thing about most Early Modern drama is that usually the climax of the show will help you understand everything that's happened. Even if you get to the end of the play having no clue what's happened, it's likely that the climax will include some sort of fight, tragic death, or marriage when the conflict of the play is resolved. These big moments where almost the entire cast is onstage are usually much easier to follow visually and can help shed light on what has happened.

Discussion Questions:

- Have you seen an Early Modern play (like Shakespeare) before, and what was your experience? Did you understand more or less than you expected?
- In Villanova Theatre's production of *The Spanish Tragedy*, you'll notice that costume and set are used to establish different character groupings. Can you think of how this technique could be used in *The Spanish Tragedy* to help establish the plot?
- What other techniques might help you as an audience member to follow the plot of the play? What could the director or production team do to help the audience experience?

Legacies of Revenge

The Spanish Tragedy is often credited as being the catalyst for revenge tragedy on early modern stages. Though it is not produced frequently, its influence on the genre of revenge tragedy can still be seen in contemporary entertainment. Below are some very popular revenge tragedy stories in contemporary media. When engaging with historical stories, it's fascinating to imagine the legacy that the story has left in its wake. In the case of *The Spanish Tragedy*, the legacy created by this play reaches far beyond what Thomas Kyd could have ever predicted. Our production dramaturg puts it perfectly, saying, "Scholars point to *The Spanish Tragedy* for influencing the popularity of plays-within-plays and characters, like Bel-Imperia, inspiring famous female roles such as Lady Macbeth...many usually point to the above plays when the genre is mentioned. However, the beauty of this production will revitalize the significance of this script to this incredible lineage. *The Spanish Tragedy* is worthy of its own legacy and we will add to it through this piece."



Discussion Questions:

- Do you have a favorite piece of media that is a story of revenge? Can you see the influence of *The Spanish Tragedy* in any of your favorite revenge stories, even indirectly?
- Our dramaturg points out that *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* tend to get more attention than *The Spanish Tragedy* when discussing revenge tragedy, though both those plays came later and were directly influenced by Kyd's play. Why do you think it may be that *The Spanish Tragedy* does not get as much attention as Shakespeare's plays?
- Now that you know more about the story of the play, what technical challenges do you think the play poses that might make it difficult to produce? Might this contribute to why it is not performed frequently? How might you address some of these technical challenges?

Additional Resources

[The Spanish Tragedy Academic Symposium](#)

[The Spanish Tragedy Dramaturgy Website](#)

[More about James Keegan, Artist in Residence](#)

[Villanova Counseling Services](#) 610-519-4050

[988 A Direct Link for Suicide Prevention and Crisis Support](#) 988

PA Support & Referral Helpline: 1-855-284-2494

Crisis Text Line: Text PA to 741741

Villanova Public Safety: 610-519-4444

Campus Ministry: 610-519-4080

Residence Life: Your R.A. / 610-519-4154