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# Revenge Tragedy and Classical Philosophy on the Early Modern Stage

Christopher Crosbie

**Examines the influence of classical philosophy on revenge narratives by Shakespeare and his contemporaries**

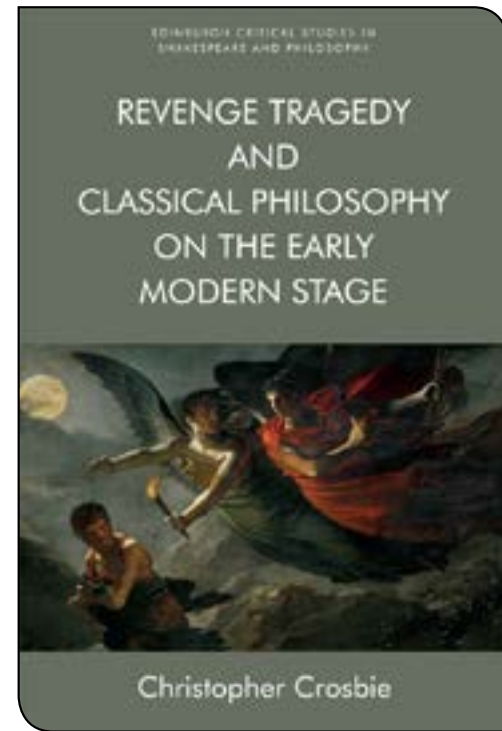
This book discovers within early modern revenge tragedy the surprising shaping presence of a wide array of classical philosophies not commonly affiliated with the genre. By recovering the pervasive influence of Aristotelian faculty psychology on *The Spanish Tragedy*, Aristotelian ethics on *Titus Andronicus*, Lucretian atomism on *Hamlet*, Galenic pneumatics on *Antonio's Revenge* and Epictetian Stoicism on *The Duchess of Malfi*, Crosbie reveals how the very atmospheres and ontological assumptions of revenge tragedy exert their own kind of conditioning dramaturgical force. The book also revitalises our understanding of how the Renaissance stage, even at its most lurid, functions as a unique space for the era's practical, vernacular engagement with received philosophy.

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Post-modern interpretations tend to live positively with these contradictions. If Hamlet feels he is in a play, but is uncertain of the genre, then like all humanity he is nothing but a product of words and victim of their uncertainties'? Maurice Charney, for example, notes what he terms Shakespeare's 'Pirandellism', the way that the play Hamlet explores and plays with the fictive nature of reality, especially the 'fictions of passion'.<sup>8</sup> That is, he posits a Shakespeare with the modernist, or indeed post-modernist, intention to reveal that what was once assumed to be 'human nature' is revealed...<sup>8</sup> He is a stage revenger deferring to his tragedy, and a tragic hero condemned to defer to his revenge. The genre of revenge tragedy is a modern invention, developed as a means of explaining early modern tragedies that maintain a theme or motif of revenge in varying degrees. Classification of the revenge tragedy is at times contentious, as with other early modern theatrical genres. Shakespeare's First Folio.<sup>8</sup> A fifth and final act where many characters are killed (multiple corpses on the stage). Degeneration of a once-noble protagonist. In later Jacobean and Caroline revenge tragedies, the protagonist is more often a villain than a hero (though this is subjective). In later revenge tragedies, there is often more than one character who seeks revenge. Significant revenge tragedy playwrights[edit]. Two opposing philosophical positions on time in the Early Modern period were championed by Sir Isaac Newton and Gottfried Leibniz. After a long lull, the nature of time once again became a point of philosophical contention during the 17th and 18th Century, the so-called Age of Enlightenment or Age of Reason.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, Newton's great rival Gottfried Leibniz firmly believed that time does NOT refer to any actual existing dimension that "flows" and that events and objects move through in some way. Rather, the anti-realist view of time claims that it is merely a convenient intellectual concept (like space and number) that enables us to sequence and compare events.