

find the use of excerpts limiting, the range of texts edited and translated here, along with Rebhorn's meticulous detailing of the textual history of each selection, make *Renaissance Debates on Rhetoric* an excellent starting point for any examination of this subject.

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Simkin, Stevie, ed., *Revenge Tragedy* (New Casebooks), Houndsmill, Palgrave, 2001; hardback; pp. ix, 268; RRP £42.50; ISBN 0333922379.

The title of this anthology of previously published 'contemporary critical essays' ('contemporary', the general editors explain, in exhibiting the impact of 'modern critical theory') is in part misleading. Major revenge tragedies one would expect to see discussed are left out. Yet several of the small number of plays chosen as central are not primarily revenge tragedies. No less significantly, the essays often do not focus on revenge or issues specifically related to that. It would have been helpful to readers with an interest in the role of revenge in ancient Greek drama to use some such title as *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy 1587-1642*, which was used in 1940 by Fredson Bowers for what the editor acknowledges remains 'the most comprehensive survey' of revenge tragedies written in Renaissance England (p. 257). But though more specific, that title would still have been inaccurate for this book.

What about the English Renaissance plays *not* included? In note 10 on page 20 Simkin lists '[r]evenge tragedies not covered in this volume'. The list includes Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* and *Hamlet*, Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*, Marston's *Antonio's Revenge*, Chapman's *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois*, Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Maids Tragedy*, and Massinger's *The Duke of Milan*, as well as many other plays. It is not explained why these plays are omitted. To many people, *Hamlet* is, for all its oddities as a play in which the protagonist keeps postponing the task of revenge, the most famous revenge tragedy of all. Possibly yet more puzzling is the *inclusion* of most of the other plays. The main ones chosen are *The Spanish Tragedy* and *The Revengers Tragedy* – both of course excellent choices – and, strangely, *The Duchess of Malfi*, *The White Devil*, *The Changeling*, and *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*. Not one of these plays seems to me centrally preoccupied with revenge, either in action or in

theme. Even though Bowers does include all of them, he offers a definition of revenge tragedy which to some extent justifies his choice. Simkin offers no definition of what he takes to be 'revenge tragedy' at any point, nor any reasons why *The Changeling* is a more logical play to include than *Hamlet*.

Inasmuch as discussion of *The Changeling* might have concentrated on such an element of revenge as occurs within that play, one is disappointed to find that, instead, the essays chosen (by Cristina Malcolmson and Deborah Burks) deal predominantly with feminist issues. These issues do not appear to me to be the central ones in *The Changeling*, although they certainly are significant in that play. In general, feminist criticism looms large in much of the volume, and such questions as one traditionally associates with Elizabethan and Jacobean revenge tragedy (Does the revenger have an adequate incentive for his revenge? Is revenge seen as good or evil? Is it supernaturally sanctioned?) are not extensively dealt with.

Much the best essay here, to my mind, is Michael Neill's on *'Tis Pity*, first published in 1988. He concentrates on one important moment, that of Giovanni's spectacular entry, at the end of the play, with his sister's heart impaled upon a dagger. Giovanni sees himself, triumphantly, as having succeeded in his 'revenge', though he is not very clear about just what he means by this. Neill exhaustively, knowledgeably, and penetratingly analyses the significance of the moment, discussing both the general cultural context within which it is located and its critical function within the play. His is an essay which, from any point of view, makes a truly significant addition to our understanding, and will, I predict, be of permanent value. Even so, though this is also an essay which can justifiably be included in a book on revenge tragedy, it does not lead one to think (and neither should it) that *'Tis Pity* is best seen as primarily concerned with revenge. One attraction of Neill's contribution is that, although he does incorporate 'modern critical theory' within his approach, he is not overwhelmed by it and uses it to his advantage.

If simply considered as essays rather than as parts of a book, the various papers differ greatly in quality. Karin Coddon's essay on *The Revengers Tragedy* (1994) also focuses on a startling moment in the play, i.e. the Duke's kissing of the poisoned skull of Gloriana, which, it is contended, is an act of necrophilia. It is not, for the Duke does not know, when inflamed with lust, that he is about to kiss anything other than a living woman; therefore, much of this confused and confusing discussion is simply beside the point. By contrast, Jonathan Dollimore's essay from his *Radical Tragedy* (1984), on the same play, is clear and remarkably

free from jargon, though his argument is onesided and simplistic. Katherine Maus's piece on *The Spanish Tragedy* (1995) is in many ways a very good one indeed. But some narrowly conceived feminist essays in this book, such as those by Ania Loomba, Malcolmson and Burke, are unfortunately very predictable: women are the victims of an evil patriarchal system. Such a sweeping political approach, however accurate within its limits, ultimately obscures major differences between the characters of – for example – the Duchess in *Malfi* and Beatrice in *The Changeling*.

But then, it is not an accident that the first essay in the book is taken from J.W. Lever's *The Tragedy of State* (1971), which as the editor approvingly asserts (p. 37) is based on a conviction that art is inseparable from politics. And the study of 'character "psychology', we are amazingly told by Simkin on p. 255, is 'now out of date' – as though modern critical theory can settle such a matter once and for all, with scientific certainty.

All in all, this anthology is inadequate as one that purports to deal with revenge tragedy. Readers interested in that genre had better turn to such works as Bowers', Eleanor Prosser's *Hamlet and Revenge*, and John Kerrigan's recent *Revenge Tragedy*. These studies, whatever their shortcomings, at least raise the major issues. The present book does provide a reasonable indication of the concerns and methods of 'modern critical theory'. The quality of the essays is uneven, but that, I fear, ultimately has more to do with the differences between individual critics than the virtues or vices of particular methodologies.

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Spolsky, Ellen, *Satisfying Skepticism: Embodied Knowledge in the Early Modern World*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2001; cloth; pp. 248; 18 b/w illustrations; RRP £39.50; ISBN 0754603741.

Ellen Spolsky has written a thought-provoking book exploring how various artists and writers dealt with the scepticism of the Early Modern period by creating fiction and paintings which produce satisfaction of the senses denied by the philosophy of the day. Her fresh approach is based on the notion that modern cognitive and neurological understandings of brain functioning can explain how people react to their environments. The evolutionary advantage of the flexibility of the human brain allows it to compensate for the inadequacy