The Sibling Revenge Pattern in 16th – 17th Century Revenge Tragedies

Charlotte Kupsh ❖ English ❖ Blugold Fellowship ❖ University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire

Findings

Every revenge tragedy studied includes the murder of a sister’s lover carried out or ordered by her brother as a central element of the plot

Hamlet
❖ Ophelia’s brother murders her lover Hamlet in a duel as revenge for the suicide of Ophelia and the murder of her father

The Revenger’s Tragedy
❖ Brothers Vindice and Hippolito set out to murder the Duke but, after killing him in Act III, spend the remainder of the play seeking revenge on Lussurioso, who pursued their chaste sister

The Spanish Tragedy
❖ Bel-Imperia’s suitor Balthazar and her brother Lorenzo violently kill her lover while she is forced to watch — an action that drives the remainder of the play

Explanations

Brother’s Desire to Protect
❖ Familial affection
❖ Familial honor

Female Sexuality Norms
❖ Obedience, chastity, silence
❖ Protection correlated with adherence to norms

Inheritance/Marital Expectations of Brother
❖ Further study into sibling relationships in the time period
❖ Patterns involving supporting family members’ roles in the revenge act
❖ Parent relationships in revenge tragedies
❖ Interactions between large and small families
❖ Family structure in 16th – 17th century life

References


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