

The Literature and Cinema of Revenge

HON 493 (2D), EH 492 (2D) – 3 credit hours

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UAB Honors Program

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Course Description: This course will explore the moral and aesthetic tenets of revenge passion as represented in Western literature and film. In addition to viewing such cinematic works as *The Godfather* and *Dead Man Walking*, we will be reading Greek and Renaissance drama, passages from *The Bible*, Romantic poetry and philosophy, and essays concerned with contemporary instances of revenge. We will be particularly interested in the historical shift from family- and clan-oriented societies to those based on national judicial systems, as well as in the emotional price we continue to pay in moving from the one type of satisfaction to the other.

Texts

Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*

Aeschylus, *The Oresteia*

Euripides, *Medea*

Kyd, *The Spanish Tragedy* (or Four Revenge Tragedies, ed Katharine Maus)

Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy & The Genealogy of Morals*

Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*

Shelley, *The Cenci*

Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49*

Syllabus

Date	Topic
7 Jan	Introduction, handouts for discussion
9 Jan	Personal touches: students share their suppression, their wrath (2-page Personal narratives due, to be noted w/ comments by me, but not graded)
14 Jan	Shakespeare, <i>Hamlet</i> (Acts I – III)
16 Jan	<i>Hamlet</i> (Acts IV - V)
21 Jan	Vengeance & the Legal System (handouts, guest lawyer Richard Stockham)
23 Jan	Passages from <i>The (Judeo-Christian) Bible</i> (handout)"
27 Jan	Showing of <i>The Godfather I</i> , 8:00 p.m. Honors House
28 Jan	<i>The Godfather I</i> (film)
30 Jan	Thomas Kyd, <i>The Spanish Tragedy</i>
4 Feb	Aeschylus, <i>The Oresteia</i> (intro + Agamemnon)
6 Feb	<i>The Oresteia</i> (<i>The Libation Bearers & The Eumenides</i>)
10 Feb	Showing of <i>The Godfather II</i> , 8:00 p.m. Honors House
13 Feb	Euripides, <i>Medea</i>

18 Feb	Shakespeare, <i>The Merchant of Venice</i> (Acts I – III)
20 Feb	<i>The Merchant of Venice</i> (Acts IV – V)
21 Feb	Recitation in my office of Portia's speech on mercy (IV.i.181-89) or Shylock's on being a Jew (III.i. "He hath disgraced...humility? Revenge.")
24 Feb	Showing of <i>Dead Man Walking</i> , 8:00 p.m. Honors House
25 Feb	<i>Dead Man Walking</i> (film)
27 Feb	Simon Weisenthal, from <i>The Murderers Among Us</i> ; Gerry Spence, "O.J.: The Last Word"; Michael Ignatieff, "Digging Up the Dead" (on Council of Truth & Reconciliation in S.A.); M. L. King, "Letter from Birmingham Jail"
28 Feb	First essay (5-7 pages) due in my office by end of day
4-13 Mar	Student-groups meet w/ me in my office
4 Mar	Nietzsche, <i>The Genealogy of Morals: Preface & First Essay</i>
6 Mar	<i>The Genealogy of Morals: Second Essay</i> (1, 11, 12, 23)
10 Mar	Showing of <i>Betrayal</i> , 8:00 p.m. Honors House
11 Mar	Harold Pinter, <i>Betrayal</i> (film)
13 Mar	Michel Foucault, from <i>Discipline and Punish</i> (handout)
14 Mar	Revisions of first essay due in my office by end of day
18 Mar	Group presentations on modern political situations & issues*
20 Mar	Group presentations (cont')
25 Mar	Freud, <i>Civilization and its Discontents</i> (I – IV)
27 Mar	<i>Civilization and its Discontents</i> (V – VIII)
8 Apr	Poe, "The Cask of Amontillado" & "The Tell-Tale Heart"; Faulkner, "Barn Burning" (all handouts)
10 Apr	No Class (2-page film review due in my office by end of day)
15 Apr	Percy Bysshe Shelley, <i>The Cenci</i>
17 Apr	Thomas Pynchon, <i>The Crying of Lot 49</i> (reading quiz)
22 Apr	<i>The Crying of Lot 49</i> (cont')
24 Apr	Conclusion, wrap-up, second essay (10-12 pages) due by end of day
1 May	10:45 – 1:15 our final exam , here in the Honors House

*possible topics for group presentations include Rwanda, Bosnia, Israel/Palestine, South Africa, Gandhi, M. L. King, the prosecution of Nazi war criminals, the American legal system, America's "war on terrorism."

Grades:

20% first essay (5-7 page)

30% second essay (10-12)

20% final exam (essay style)

10% student group-presentations

5% 2-page film review

5% the two recitations of either Portia's or Shylock's speech

10% class participation (can't hurt, can help) & attendance (can't help, can hurt)

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