

Artículo de investigación

“The Changeling” by T. Middleton and W. Rowley as a “tragedy of sin”

Пьеса Т. Мидлтона и У. Роули «Оборотень» как «трагедия порока»

La obra de T. Middleton y W. Rowley "El hombre lobo" como "la tragedia del vicio"

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Written by:

S.Yu. Budekhin²⁴⁶

ORCID ID: 0000-0002-0498-6976

https://elibrary.ru/author_items.asp?authorid=919020&pubrole=100&show_refs=1&show_option=0**O.V. Nizkoshapkina**²⁴⁷

ORCID ID: 0000-0001-6206-9140

https://elibrary.ru/author_items.asp?authorid=733414&pubrole=100&show_refs=1&show_option=0**I.N. Pakhomova**²⁴⁸

ORCID ID: 0000-0002-3838-5888

https://elibrary.ru/author_items.asp?authorid=756967&pubrole=100&show_refs=1&show_option=0**Abstract**

The article is devoted to the consideration of the motif of “lapse from virtue” based on the example of the heroine of the Renaissance revenge tragedy “The Changeling” (1622) by Thomas Middleton and William Rowley. The article identifies the key scenes of the tragedy, helping to understand the multidimensionality and allusiveness of the heroine. In the context of the relationship of the heroine to other characters in the tragedy, the authors determine and analyse the character metamorphosis and stages of the moral decay of Beatrice-Joanna. Examples of the subversion of the audience’s expectation are given. The authors examine scenes of the tragedy, which help to reveal the motifs of the double and shapeshifting, related to the image of the main character. The system of characters in the play by Middleton and Rowley is considered in the context of the most significant dramatic works of the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras.

Keywords: Renaissance revenge tragedy, motif of lapse from virtue, motif of shapeshifting, allusiveness, Petrarchism.

Аннотация

Статья посвящена рассмотрению мотива грехопадения на примере образа главной героини ренессансной кровавой трагедии мести Т. Мидлтона и У. Роули (Thomas Middleton, 1580-1627, and William Rowley, 1585-1626) «Оборотень» («The Changeling», 1622). В статье выявлены ключевые сцены драмы, помогающие понять неоднородность и аллюзивность образа главной героини. В контексте взаимоотношений героини с другими персонажами драмы авторы выявляют и анализируют метаморфозы характера и этапы нравственного разложения Беатрисы-Джоанны. Приведены примеры использования приема обмана зрительских ожиданий. Авторы рассматривают сцены из текста драмы, помогающие раскрыть мотивы двойничества и оборотничества, связанные с образом главной героини. Система персонажей пьесы Т. Мидлтона и У. Роули рассмотрена в контексте наиболее ярких драматических произведений Елизаветинской и Яковинской эпох.

Ключевые слова: Ренессансная кровавая драма мести, мотив грехопадения, мотив оборотничества, аллюзивность, Петrarкизм.

²⁴⁶ Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, Moscow, Russia

²⁴⁷ Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, Moscow, Russia

²⁴⁸ Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, Moscow, Russia

Resumen

El artículo está dedicado a la consideración del motivo de la caída con el ejemplo de la imagen de la heroína principal de la sangrienta tragedia renacentista de la venganza de T. Middleton y W. Rowley (Thomas Middleton, 1580-1627, y William Rowley, 1585-1626) "El hombre lobo" (1622). El artículo identifica escenas clave del drama que ayudan a comprender la no unidimensionalidad y la alusividad de la imagen del personaje principal. En el contexto de la relación de la heroína con otros personajes del drama, los autores revelan y analizan las metamorfosis del personaje y las etapas de degradación moral de Beatrice-Joanna. Se dan los ejemplos del uso de la recepción del engaño de las expectativas del público. Los autores consideran escenas del texto del drama que ayudan a descubrir los motivos de la dualidad y a trabajar en la imagen del personaje principal. El sistema de personajes de la obra de T. Middleton y W. Rowley se considera en el contexto de las obras dramáticas más llamativas de las épocas Isabelina y Yakoviana.

Palabras clave: Drama sangriento renacentista de venganza, el motivo de la caída, el motivo de la rebeldía, la alusión, el petrarquismo.

Introduction

In the system of current issues of modern literary studies, one of the key places is occupied by the study of those literary and artistic phenomena, which took place at the turning points of different cultural and historical periods. Such phenomena include the Renaissance revenge tragedy, whose aesthetics reflected the intensification of Mannerist sentiment and which gained particular popularity in the theatre of the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras. The philosophical thought of the 20th century repeatedly turned its attention to transitional phenomena in literature and culture in general. This problem was considered by M. Foucault (the idea of marginal transitional phenomena), Y.M. Lotman (the theory of cultural explosion), and M.M. Bakhtin (the law of border and transition). In their works, "border" is viewed as a philosophical concept, closely related to transitional events, a shift in socio-cultural paradigms, and marginal phenomena in culture.

English Renaissance theatre existed from 1562 to 1642. During this period, hundreds of plays of various dramatic genres were staged in London theatres. This list includes histories, comedies, pastorals, tragicomedies, morality plays, and tragedies. Revenge tragedies, or "tragedies of blood" were particularly popular. Depictions of the horrors of life, scenes of bloody violence, betrayal, and revenge, being an integral part of life, could not be ignored by the theatre. In general, theatricality was one of the principles of the Late Renaissance. The idea that "all the world's a stage" implied the interpenetration of these two spheres: human behaviour was considered in the role-playing aspect and theatre

was perceived as an analogy of existing reality. This explains the audience's attention to revenge tragedies as a theatrical embodiment of a real-life phenomenon.

English Renaissance revenge tragedy, like any other artistic phenomenon, was not static. This genre developed according to demands made by the audience, public morality, etc. One can trace the evolution of the genre at the beginning of the 17th century, primarily associated with the appearance of a large number of new plays, exploiting the subject of revenge. Such diversity allows for typologically classifying works of the period under study into several groups: "tragedy of duty", "tragedy of villainy", and "tragedy of sin" (Khaustova, 2012).

In this study, we consider the third and chronologically last group of revenge tragedies, consisting of so-called "tragedies of sin". In England in the first quarter of the 17th century, during the rule of King James I (1603-1625), man was no longer considered the centre of the universe and the concentration of creative beginnings. According to this sentiment, many famous playwrights of this period focused the audience's attention on depravity as one of the key features of their characters.

The theme of human depravity and motif of "lapse from virtue" became central in tragedies of sin at the time. This group includes such plays as "The Maid's Tragedy" (1611) by Francis Beaumont (1584-1616) and John Fletcher (1579-1625), "The Unnatural Combat" (1639) by Philip Massinger (1583-1640), and "The Changeling"

(1622) by Thomas Middleton (1580-1627) and William Rowley (1585-1626).

To determine the key features of the tragedy of sin poetics, we study the most famous work of this movement – “The Changeling” by Middleton and Rowley. Among the characters of English Renaissance revenge tragedy, female villains are less common than male. In the list of such plays by Shakespeare’s younger contemporaries, one can name the tragedy “The White Devil” (1612) by John Webster (1580-1634), as well as “The Changeling” (1622) co-written by Thomas Middleton and William Rowley.

Methods

The theoretical and methodological basis of this study relies on the methodology of historical poetics, including comparative historical, genetic, and historical typological approaches, presented in works by A.N. Veselovsky, O.M. Freidenberg, M.M. Bakhtin, S.N. Broymtan, V.Y. Khalizev, and Y.M. Lotman. Among works of Russian and foreign researchers devoted to the history of English Renaissance theatre, of particular importance for the study are works by I.A. Aksyonov, A.A. Anikst, A.V. Bartoshevich, A.N. Gorbunov, V.A. Lukov, N.E. Mikeladze, L.Y. Pinskiy, D.O. Khaustova, W. Adams, F. Boas, F. Bowers, B. Evans, and A. Gurr.

At present, historical poetics is considered one of the most productive methods of literary studies since understanding the history of artistic image, being the essence of historical poetics, allows for the accurate determination and understanding of general patterns of the development of literature.

Results

According to the title, the contrast between the imaginary and real is one of the most important principles of “The Changeling”. The play by Middleton and Rowley repeatedly subverts the audience’s expectation. The motif of erroneous perception intertwines with the hypocrisy and duplicity of the characters, creating the leitmotif of substitution, present throughout the play.

The plot consists of two separate storylines, which intersect only in the finale. The secondary storyline is based on a comical situation, in which “counterfeit” madmen try to get close to the

young wife of the jealous doctor. This situation partly parodies the key scenes of the main storyline, using the elements of Spanish Baroque comedy of intrigue, as well as characteristic features of the picaresque novel.

The connection with the picaresque novel is emphasised by the choice of setting – the Spanish port of Alicante. The features of the chronotope of the play are more pronounced in the background of the contemporary historical situation, as well as considering the traditions of English Renaissance theatre of the 16th-17th centuries. Spain and England had a tense political relationship, which is evidenced by the military conflict between the countries in 1587-1604, as well as the religious conflict between English Puritans and Spanish Catholics (Martin & Parker, 2002). The echoes of the conflict are reflected in the first revenge tragedy “The Spanish Tragedy” (1582) by Thomas Kyd (1558-1594). As a consequence, the English audience of the time perceived the Spanish as hostile, dangerous, and alien.

The main storyline begins with the scene where the heroine, Beatrice-Joanna, meets a young nobleman Alsemero. Alsemero, admiring her beauty, literally falls in love with the heroine at first sight. In her appearance, he sees the embodiment of heavenly purity. In the depiction of Alsemero’s feelings towards the heroine, the authors parody the interpretation of the image of the beloved, characteristic of Petrarchist poetry, in which the donna is always deified. For Alsemero, the name Beatrice becomes synonymous with true divine love. The beginning of the play makes the audience believe that it is presented with a classic romantic drama in the spirit of the Spanish cloak-and-sword comedy (Spanish “comedia de capa y espada”). At this point, the subversion of genre expectations begins.

The heroine’s name suggests possible allusions to Dante’s Beatrice, whose image plays a key role in the works of the Italian poet. However, Middleton and Rowley deliberately distort this sublime lyrical image in the process of plot development, subverting the audience’s expectation, borne by these allusions.

The audience witnesses the beginning of the character metamorphosis after the scene where the heroine meets Alsemero for the first time.

After discovering her feelings for Alsemero, she instantly forgets about her fiancé Alonzo and her responsibility to him and her father. Further, Beatrice becomes an increasingly complex and ambiguous character. The contradictions in her character are fully consistent with the traditional rules of any dramatic genre. As N.D. Tamarchenko writes in "Literary theory", "drama requires a contradiction between intention, initiative, and their result" (Tamarchenko, 2008). Beatrice's original intention (to be with her beloved), although seemingly irresponsible, is perfectly innocent. Her initiative, on the contrary, takes a tragic turn, leading to a disastrous result.

Unwilling to take responsibility, cause a scandal between families, face public scorn (which will undoubtedly follow the wedding cancellation), and most importantly, to overcome her pride and desire, Beatrice resorts to seeking help from a third party. All the while, she is followed by her father's servant, De Flores. The audience dislikes this character the moment he appears on stage: he is rude, cunning, and dishonest. De Flores appears ugly and repulsive (Beatrice calls him a basilisk and a toad). His appearance is in stark contrast with Beatrice's beauty.

De Flores' behaviour echoes that of Shakespeare's villains Iago ("The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice", 1604) and Aaron ("Titus Andronicus", 1594). These three characters are forced to serve and, for various reasons, cannot achieve the desired position in society (Middleton and Rowley, n. d.):

Though my hard fate has thrust me out to servitude,
I tumbled into th' world a gentleman.
[The Changeling, II, I]

They hate the society in which they live and seek vengeance, which has its own object for each of the characters. Iago wishes to destroy Othello while envying him. Aaron hates Titus Andronicus, seeing in him the embodiment of oppressive Rome. For De Flores, the beautiful and impulsive noblewoman Beatrice symbolises the unattainable position in society and its benefits.

All three characters are willing to endure humiliation in order to achieve their goals, showing devilish resourcefulness and guile.

However, unlike Shakespeare's characters, De Flores seeks not so much to attain the desired position in society – or destroy it – but to reduce Beatrice to his position, forcing her to live a double life and plunge into an abyss of vice with him. To him, Beatrice is similar to a beautiful flower, which he is going to tear out, disfigure, and corrupt, as his name directly indicates (to deflower – to deprive of virginity).

Carelessness and levity in Beatrice's behaviour are replaced with guile and cruelty, destroying her original image as a one-dimensional heroine in the spirit of romantic comedies. The audience is left to decide whether the sinister metamorphosis in the heroine's character occurred under De Flores' corrupting influence or Beatrice's sinful nature was waiting for a chance to reveal itself.

The tragedy of blood "The Changeling" can be attributed to a more general type of revenge tragedies only conditionally (Bowers, 1940) since in the play, for the most part, only Tomazo, the brother of murdered Alonzo, who is a secondary character, seeks revenge. Moreover, nobody cares about the death of Beatrice's fiancé, except for Tomazo. The authors intentionally distract the audience from the investigation of Alonzo's death by other events. Similar to Hamlet's father, this character is not meant to have a meaningful emotional connection with the audience. His violent death only serves to develop the plot: it represents a point of no return, where Beatrice's irreversible lapse from virtue begins.

It's important to emphasise that the decision to murder Alonzo is Beatrice's only free choice, the choice of her own destiny. This point of view is supported by the words of N.D. Tamarchenko: "at the moment of choice, the character shows a maximum of free initiative; but as soon as the choice is made, the further course of events becomes inevitable, subject to extra-personal machinations" (Tamarchenko, 2008).

As a proof of "work", De Flores presents the heroine with a severed finger with a ring, but Beatrice suddenly loses her composure and is terrified by his deed. In this scene, the audience involuntarily agrees with the villain De Flores, who exposes the heroine's hypocrisy. One can note the traditional motif of dismemberment for the tragedy of blood, which, according to "Historical Roots of the Wondertale" by V.Y. Propp, is associated with pan-European folklore (Propp, 2000). The popularity of this plot device

in European literature of different eras is evidenced by numerous examples. In Elizabethan drama, the motif of dismemberment was among the favourite stage techniques. W. Shakespeare in "Titus Andronicus" (1594) and C. Marlowe in "The Massacre at Paris" (1593) shocked the audience with severed arms, ears, and even a tongue. Scenes, where a character holding a skull of a long-dead person rhetorically addresses the remains, are characteristic of Renaissance tragedies as well. Such scenes are present in "Hamlet" and "The Revenger's Tragedy" by T. Middleton. In these cases – this is particularly relevant for "The Revenger's Tragedy" – the skull can be considered as a symbol of the futility of intentions (especially if they are related to vengeance) and, ultimately, the transience of human existence.

On the one hand, according to V.Y. Propp, such a device may serve part of the outcome of the plot. Thus, the severed finger is presented to one of the key characters as evidence of the committed or staged murder. In the latter case, the victim returns on stage to expose the villain. On the other hand, this typical folklore device is associated with the motif, related to robbers, who would not disdain to cut off their victim's finger for a ring.

In Middleton and Rowley's play, a combination of these two variants is observed: the villain commits a murder, cuts off the finger for the ring, and presents it as proof of his bloody work. Further, not Alonzo himself but his ghost appears on stage as a harbinger of the exposure of the villains.

Moreover, cutting off the finger with the ring symbolises the establishment of a flagitious union, a perverted engagement between Beatrice and De Flores. The ring, being a symbol of marriage, as a result of the treacherous crime, ends up in the hands of the villain, which leads to another substitution in the play: the murderer De Flores substitutes the fiancé.

The aforementioned scene reveals the true nature of Beatrice. Being a slave to her whims and desires, she is not capable of taking responsibility for her actions, much less repenting of them. It is much easier for her not to notice the harm she causes (she is glad to hear that her fiancé is dead but is horrified by the proof of his death).

Middleton and Rowley didn't name their heroine Beatrice-Joanna by accident. The double name indicates the contradiction between the heroine's angelic looks and sinful nature. Enamoured

Alsemero calls her by her second name not without reason. The authors emphasise that the character sees only one side to his beloved and ignores the other, associated with De Flores.

Two creatures coexist in the heroine – a careless and wilful noblewoman and a cruel and cunning villainess. This is evidenced by the scene with the severed finger where one side of the heroine is not aware of the true desires of the other. Thus, the theme of madness is introduced to the tragedy, which plays an important role in the secondary storyline.

The key to understanding the heroine and the duplicity of her character is possibly related to the allusiveness of her name, which may be considered as a reference to Dante's "Divine Comedy" (1321). The authors of "The Changeling" distort the image of the heroine. Beatrice guides Dante to heaven while Middleton and Rowley's Beatrice plunges herself to the very bottom of vice. Thus, her journey is more comparable to the first part of Dante's poem, in which the hero travels through the circles of hell, descending into its depths. The heroine of "The Changeling" sets off on a similar journey, in which her sinful desires irreversibly lead her to the fall.

The name "Beatrice" (Latin "beatrix") can be interpreted as "graceful", "one who makes one happy". In this case, it can be assumed that the authors deliberately mislead the audience as the heroine does not give anyone grace. On the contrary, she seeks pleasure only for herself.

The second name of the heroine, Joanna, being the feminine form of the name John, is connected with the Biblical image of John the Baptist, symbolising sacrifice. It is likely that the second name was intended to reinforce the already present motif of subverted expectation, exploiting the audience's expectation for the second time. As it becomes obvious later, there is nothing sacrificial in the behaviour of the heroine. In general, the duality of her name creates in the context of the play the idea of the sinfulness and duplicity of the female nature.

The motif of the double appears in the play in relation to the image of Beatrice-Joanna. In this case, the motif takes the form of shapeshifting: "the evil double emerges from the character itself – the character divides into two creatures, alternately taking on the appearance of one or the other" (Zalomkina, 2010). Moreover, Beatrice's shapeshifting is one of the main harbingers of all violent events in the play. In the work by S.Z. Agranovich and I.V. Samorukova devoted to the

motif of the double, one can find an idea applicable to the revenge tragedy as well: "All plots involving doubles are connected with the theme of death. The double challenges the autonomy of the individual. The dissolution of a person in the world is, in turn, equivalent to their death" (Zalomkina, 2010). Thus, Beatrice's deeds and vicious desires cause other people's deaths while the ambiguity and duality of her character lead her to her own downfall.

At first, Beatrice resists De Flores' demand, however, the servant insists, convincing her that they are equal now in their disgrace. De Flores voices the idea of Beatrice's ambivalence ("though thou writ'st maid, thou whore in thy affection") and the heroine is forced to pay a heavy price for her crime, surrendering herself to him.

The murder of Alonzo is essential for understanding further plot development. Beatrice reduces herself to De Flores' level with her actions. The heroine loses her halo of innocence, which until now served as an intangible barrier. From now on, they become accomplices, forced to hide, lie, and pretend together, as the exposure or death of one of them is bound to be the end for the other. This moment is a turning point for Beatrice. She shakes off her previously characteristic naivety and carelessness and realises the horror of her current position:

Vengeance begins;
Murder, I see, is followed by more sins.
Was my creation in the womb so curs'd
It must engender with a viper first?
[The Changeling, III, VI]

In other words, this scene plays a central role in Middleton and Rowley's tragedy. The mention of a viper is not accidental: the allusion to the Biblical images of Eve and the serpent tempter is clear. Beatrice's words once again emphasise her duplicity. The heroine senses the inevitability of retribution, but cannot realise that her own sins led to it. The authors combine in her behaviour the features of both the seducer and the seduced, emphasising that she herself is responsible for her misfortunes. Thus, Middleton and Rowley focus the attention of the audience on the heroine's fall.

In the next two acts, the dramatic tension does not weaken. Embarking on a path of deceit and hypocrisy, having paid her "debt" to De Flores in full, Beatrice continues her "hunt" for Alsemero. Similar to Shakespeare's Macbeth, Beatrice sets off on a bloody path, where one crime is

inevitably followed by another. De Flores only accelerates the inevitable process of the heroine's fall. He pushes Beatrice to murder the waiting-woman, who substituted the heroine on her wedding night with Alsemero.

Beatrice agrees to set the house on fire to get rid of the dangerous witness. Naturally, De Flores readily offers to commit a new atrocity. However, the moment the resourceful villain is about to act out the plan, the ghost of murdered Alonzo de Piracquo suddenly appears, according to the canons of the Elizabethan tragedy of blood.

Some ill thing haunts the house; 't has left behind it

A shivering sweat upon me: I'm afraid now.
This night hath been so tedious.
[The Changeling, V, I]

The appearance of the ghost on stage can be explained in two ways. On the one hand, the ghost warns Beatrice against the temptation to commit another murder. On the other hand, he appears as an omen of the inevitable retribution for both conspirators. A similar function of the ghost can be found in Shakespeare's tragedy "Macbeth" (1603), where Banquo's ghost appears at Macbeth's feast, warning him and foretelling the inevitable punishment.

Still, Beatrice once again ignores the voice of morality, does not repent of the evil she already committed, and, worst of all, receives the news about the death of her waiting-woman with relief and a measure of triumph. Thus, the young heroine plunges herself to the very bottom of vice, from where there is no way back. Beatrice's fate is sealed, as well as the fate of her seducer, De Flores.

The play ends with Beatrice's refusal to appear before a fair court. Until the very end, she does not want to overcome her pride and does not find the strength to repent of her terrible crimes. Beatrice's cruelty and guile are neither the result of lust for power, like Lady Macbeth, nor the desire for revenge, like Tamora ("Titus Andronicus"). Beatrice occupies a special place among Elizabethan "bloody" heroines: having become a slave to her own whims, desires, and passions, she signed her own sentence and, realising the hopelessness of the situation, executed it. De Flores follows her example, however, being a villain from birth, he rejoices at such a demise since he took everything he wanted from life. His death is similar to the death of Aaron from "Titus Andronicus", who in the

face of death did not beg for mercy and only regretted his unfulfilled crimes.

Discussion

In the tragedy where everything turned out to be not what it seemed at first glance (vice and ugliness, hiding under the mask of virtue and beauty; substituting the bride on the wedding night), only one key character stands by his principles and remains the same as he first appears on stage until the very end. This character is De Flores. Middleton and Rowley did not even attempt to disguise his role in the play, endowing him with a charactonym, which directly indicates the function he later performed. In the process of plot development, the image of the heroine undergoes a dramatic transformation. Her appearance gradually loses its appeal to Alsemero and each new scene reveals her moral deformity. Alsemero's unfulfilled dreams to find the earthly paradise with his beloved expose the failure of the Petrarchist tradition, replicated by Elizabethan love poetry. The play summarises the artistic and aesthetic findings of English Renaissance drama, which gradually destroyed the parallel "the donna – deity". "The Changeling" became one of the last dramatic works of the Elizabethan cultural era. The motif of lapse from virtue existed in English literature long before Middleton and Rowley. However, their achievement is associated with the depiction of the heroine, who surrendered herself to her own passions and sinful desires.

In modern Western criticism, the image of Beatrice and artistic features of "The Changeling" were considered in such works as "The Five Structures of 'The Changeling'" by A.L. Kistner and M.K. Kistner (1981), "Beatrice-Joanna and the Rhetoric of Love in 'The Changeling'" by S. Eaton (1984), "Middleton and Rowley's 'The Changeling': The Besieged Temple" by M. Kowsar (1986), and "The Closet Drama in 'The Changeling', V.III" by J. Daalder (1991). However, most of the works devoted to the problem under study, being written at the end of the 20th century, did not consider the methodology of historical poetics.

Conclusion

Let us note the most important characteristics comprising the essence of the type of revenge tragedy under study. The aesthetic and philosophical basis of the tragedy of sin is associated with its special ethical focus, caused by the increase in the role of Puritan morality in the English society of the time. In many works of

this group, the authors' attention to the theme of adultery and its exposure is observed (for example, in the tragedy "The Changeling"). The avenger is transformed into an insidious villain. The moral hero is deprived of the right to revenge personally; this right belongs only to those in power. In tragedies of blood comprising this group, the theme of revenge loses its dominant position: even noble motives for committing an act of vengeance are considered criminal and the avenger faces inevitable punishment.

It is important to emphasise the authors' focus on the issue of human depravity. The study of the essence of sin, its various manifestations, and the stages of the fall is one of the most characteristic features of the tragedy of sin. In addition, the authors of tragedies of sin adopted and significantly modified the tools of Kyd's revenge tragedy (appearance of ghosts, avenger's hesitation, appeal to justice, etc.) to achieve the maximum effect on stage.

The reign of the Tudor dynasty was marked by numerous conspiracies, rebellions, and coups. Naturally, the authorities could not afford to ignore such crimes. Instigators of conspiracies were declared enemies of the crown and subjected to the cruellest of punishments. In Late Renaissance England, justice in relation to such criminals fit the formula "hanged, drawn, and quartered" (Bellamy, 2014). During executions, crowds gathered at city squares. Exposure to bloody sights wasn't something unusual for the citizens of that time. For instance, when entering 16th-century London, people would face severed limbs hanging from walls, gates, etc. as a warning (Bellamy, 2014). Of course, this atmosphere shaped not only the morals of society but also its tastes. At the time, attending duels, tournaments, and the theatre was part of the daily life of the English. If executions guaranteed a bloody outcome while duels and tournaments implied it to various degrees, productions of tragedies of blood created an illusion of massacre and violence, which, in turn, allowed the audience to face its own hidden fears and desires.

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