I like to leave some of the contents of the course open to negotiation, so the following is just a list of works that I think should play a part in our deliberations. In previous years participants have been keen to explore material beyond the early modern, and with that in mind, I’d like to include a brief look at the origins of theatrical revenge: where it all began with the ancient Greeks, and a token bit of medieval drama too. So, the agenda might look something like this:

Week 2: The Oresteia of Aeschylus, and the York Crucifixion play.
(For the Aeschylus, I’d like you to read a ‘straight’ translation – Penguin, World’s Classics or the Chicago for instance – but also the version Tony Harrison produced for the National Theatre production, directed by Peter Hall in 1981; copies of this will be available in my ‘cage’ by the middle of week 10 of the autumn term). We shall pay particular attention to the first play of the trilogy, the Agamemnon.

Week 3: Thomas Kyd, The Spanish Tragedy; Shakespeare, Titus Andronicus

Week 4: Hamlet. For this you will need to read a standard scholarly edition, but you will also receive a photocopy of the first ‘bad’ quarto.

Week 5: Marlowe, Edward II

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Week 7: John Marston’s The Malcontent; Thomas Middleton (?), The Revenger’s Tragedy

Week 8: Thomas Heywood, A Woman Killed With Kindness; John Webster, The Duchess of Malfi

Week 9: Shakespeare, Twelfth Night (comedy has revenge in it too)

Week 10: Something else! We could do more Jacobean carnage, look ahead to the Restoration, or go somewhere completely different.

Most of these plays are available in New Mermaid or Revels editions, and if we venture into unfamiliar territory photocopies will be provided. I don’t want you to be misled by the abundance of poor critical work that this subject has generated, and I think it’s better to focus entirely on primary texts for a while. I shall prepare reading lists of secondary materials for you as and when your written projects begin to take shape.

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