

**Prof. Dr. Stefan Horlacher**

**Transgression and Taboo in the Elizabethan  
and Jacobean Age**

**Wed (2) GER 52**

HS: 7 KP  
SiH: 3 KP } requirements to be announced in class  
1 KP }

Focusing on the notions of taboo and transgression in relation to the genre of tragedy, this seminar will give a comprehensive introduction to Elizabethan and Jacobean drama as well as to the socio-economic background. After discussing the concept and function of taboos in human societies, we will concentrate on the genre of the revenge tragedy, which has long been viewed as containing exemplary instances of transgression. The Puritan Philip Stubbes, for example, wrote in his *Anatomie of Abuses* (1583) that the genre of tragedy lends itself to the teaching of vices, since it deals almost exclusively with "anger, wrath, immunity, cruelty, injury, incest, murder (*sic*), & such like." And in fact, starting with Thomas Kyd, a whole series of plays dealing with unbound revenge, hopeless situations, poisonings, stabbings, brutal murders, ghosts and rape, became popular between 1590 and 1630. In our seminar, we will examine the major revenge tragedies, define the Elizabethan conventions for this genre, consider why it was so popular at this point in time, analyze the socio-economic background of the period and probe into the enormous ethical problems of revenge.

Active participation is expected.

The primary texts to be purchased and read *before* the beginning of the semester are:

Cyril Tourneur. *The Atheist's Tragedy. The New Mermaids*. London: W.W. Norton, 1976.

John Webster. "The White Devil" and "The Duchess of Malfy." In: *Five Jacobean Tragedies*. Ware: Wordsworth Classics, 2001.

William Shakespeare. *Titus Andronicus*. London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2004.

John Ford. "'Tis Pity She's a Whore". In: *'Tis Pity She's a Whore and Other Plays by John Ford*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.