

**RALF HAEKEL (Georg-August-Universität Göttingen):**

***The Image of Spain in the Early Modern English Revenge Tragedy***

Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* is the first English Revenge Tragedy and thus the role model for one of the most successful Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatic sub-genres. When exactly the play was written is a matter of scholarly debate, but nevertheless crucial to an understanding of its politics. First published in 1592, the play could not have been composed earlier than 1585. Furthermore, it is highly unlikely that the play was written after 1588, since there is no mention of the Armada in the tragedy.

The *Spanish Tragedy* reflects the transition of the political image of Spain in England during the 1580s. By the beginning of the decade, Spain had become England's most important rival, by its close the conflict ended in open war and the seemingly miraculous scattering of the Spanish Armada. Andrew Gurr claims that the unification of the Iberian Peninsula in 1580 is the background for the play's gruesome plot. The play reflects the fear of political consequences of the unification of Spain and Portugal, yet at the same time it is also the first dramatic indicator of the general political change – the transition from a medieval feudal world to a contingent Early Modern world in which different models of political legitimacy compete. In my talk I want to take a look at the *Spanish Tragedy* in the light of the political circumstances of the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, but I will also ask why the play, detached from these immediate political circumstances, stayed to be one of the most popular stage plays for half a century throughout Europe.