

The Shakespeare Club of Stratford-upon-Avon

The Shakespeare Club's 944th meeting was held virtually on Tuesday 8 February 2022. The speaker was Dr Darren Freebury-Jones, his subject *Thomas Kyd: Shakespeare's Tutor*.

An injustice, he said, had been done to Thomas Kyd. It is a tragedy that Christopher Marlowe was killed in 1593 aged only 29, but it is also a tragedy that so few people have mourned his friend and colleague Thomas Kyd's death a year later at the age of 35. Dr Freebury-Jones aimed to help right this wrong.

Born in 1558, Kyd was the son of a London scrivener and it's thought that he may have followed his father's profession. His known canon of work is small, a puzzle since in his lifetime he was known to be prolific, described as "industrious Kyd". His plays seem to have inspired Shakespeare's. The Spanish Tragedy, 1587, was a blockbuster and one of the first revenge tragedies using black comedy, a play within a play, and a Machiavellian villain. His next play Soliman and Perseda anticipates tragedies of love like Romeo and Juliet and Othello. It also contains a woman dressing as a man, one of Shakespeare's most popular devices.

It's also thought Kyd wrote the early version of Hamlet. There are several references to this play that made Hamlet a byword for tragic drama before Shakespeare wrote his play. However, in common with four fifths of plays performed in the period it has not survived.

There are many echoes of The Spanish Tragedy in Shakespeare, and the speaker suggested it could be explained by Shakespeare acting in the play and, magpie-like recalling favourite phrases.

Dr Freebury-Jones suggested a "Restored Canon of Kyd", including other plays from 1589-93: King Leir, Arden of Faversham, Fair Em, 1 Henry VI and Edward III. He explained how, during the writing of these plays, Kyd changed from being Shakespeare's inspiration to being a full collaborator.

Edward III, like Pericles, may have been omitted from the First Folio of Shakespeare's works because it was not entirely Shakespeare's work. Academic research is now showing that collaboration was normal at a time when plays were written at speed. In playwriting, as in other trades, a master craftsman would bring in an apprentice. Perhaps we should see Kyd as the master craftsman under whom Shakespeare developed his skills, his tutor.

The meeting was viewed 169 times.