



Oregon
Shakespeare
Festival.

2022 Study Guide



**VAMPIRE COWBOYS
THEATRE COMPANY**

Spring of 2000: Vampire Cowboys was founded by Qui Nguyen and Robert Ross Parker at Ohio State University.

- 2002: they moved to NYC.
- 2006: awarded the Caffe Cino Award by the New York Innovative Theatre Awards honoring them for “consistently producing outstanding work.”
- 2007: they officially became a 501(c)(3) tax-deductible nonprofit organization and opened *The Battle Ranch*, their Brooklyn studio housing the company’s office and rehearsal studios.
- 2010: they won the prestigious Village Voice OBIE Award Grant.
- 2019: *Revenge Song* was commissioned as part of the Geffen Playhouse’s New Play Development Program.
- 2020: *Revenge Song* World Premiere at Geffen Playhouse in Los Angeles.

Revenge Song A Vampire Cowboys Creation by Qui Nguyen



Qui Nguyen, Playwright

Vampire Cowboys’ mission:

To create and produce new works with an emphasis on action/adventure and dark comedy with a comic-book aesthetic. To deliver shows that actively mix multiple genres, styles, and forms. To be a theatre that is soaked in the cultural bloodstream of the now.



2022 costume design for Julie D'Aubigny in *Revenge Song*, by Ulises Alcalá

Julie D'Aubigny:

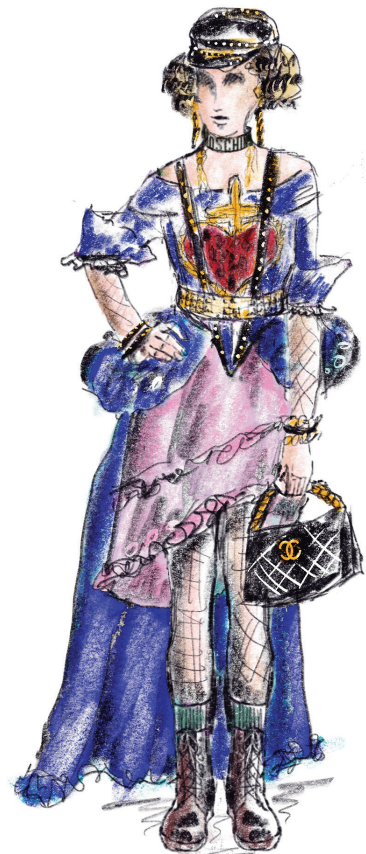
- Lived in France - 1673 - 1707
- Julie grew up in and around King Louis’s stables. Her father was a secretary to Louis’s Master of the Horse.
- Learned dancing, reading, drawing, and fencing as part of her upbringing.
- Julie was an opera singer.
- Julie worked at the Paris Opera from 1690 to 1705.
- Julie was pardoned by King Louis not just once, but **twice!**



Julie D'Aubigny, by Aubrey Beardsley
Wikimedia Commons

Before seeing/reading the play

1. Define “revenge.” What motivates people to want to seek revenge? What are the dangers of seeking revenge? What price might people pay to achieve revenge? What are people willing to sacrifice for it? How far will people go to exact revenge? What are the consequences of revenge? When, if ever, is revenge justified?
2. Define “song.” What are the several definitions of song? What are the most popular topics for songs? How might revenge become a song?
<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/song>
<https://www.aimm.edu/blog/most-popular-themes-in-songs>
3. Research the playwright Qui Nguyen. What is his writing style? What are some of the themes of his plays, TV shows, and movies? These and other websites provide information:
<http://quinguyen.com/bio.html>
<https://pwcenter.org/news/interview-qui-nguyen>
http://www.tcg.org/publications/at/oct10/comedy_nguyen.cfm
<https://www.latech.edu/2021/02/15/qui-nguyen-99-helps-define-the-newest-era-of-disney-princesses/>



2022 costume design for Emily in *Revenge Song*, by Ulises Alcalá

4. Research Vampire Cowboys. How did they start? What are their goals regarding theatre productions? What elements do they like to include in their productions? These and other websites provide information:
<https://www.vampirecowboys.com/>
<https://www.geffenplayhouse.org/blog/meet-the-vampire-cowboys/>

Listen, you're the one in charge of you. No one gets to choose who you love or who you should be with. That's all on you.

Julie

5. Julie D'Aubigny is a real-life historical figure who *Revenge Song* is based upon. Research Julie D'Aubigny. Where did she live? What jobs did she have during her life? What jobs did women at that time traditionally do? Who were the influential people in her life? What were their jobs and titles? How did the time, the place she lived, and the people she knew influence her choices? These and other websites provide information:
<https://www.encyclopedia.com/women/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/maupin-daubigny-c-1670-1707>
<https://headstuff.org/culture/history/julie-la-maupin-daubigny-swashbuckling-opera-singer/>
<https://kellygardiner.com/fiction/books/goddess/the-real-life-of-julie-daubigny/>
<https://www.news.com.au/lifestyle/real-life/true-stories/the-wild-life-of-17th-century-sword-fighting-bisexual-opera-singer-julie-daubigny/news-story/bb4f3f32c4058a32c8d3632d746919c3>
6. Research the culture and politics of 17th-century France. Who was the king during Julie D'Aubigny's lifetime? How did he influence the culture of his time and today? What palace did he live in? What was important to him during his reign? What jobs were available to women during this time? These and other websites provide information:
<https://www.britannica.com/place/France/French-culture-in-the-17th-century>
<https://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/france-in-the-seventeenth-century/france-in-the-seventeenth-century/>
<https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/bnf/bnfo005.html>

7. Playwright Qui Nguyen states that *Revenge Song*'s time and setting are “An extremely unrealistic portrayal of late 17th-century France that looks and feels far more like downtown Los Angeles circa the 1990s than 1690s Paris.” Research the culture of the 1990s in the United States of America. Who was the president in the latter half of the decade? How did culture influence his presidency? What were the driving forces of culture during this time? These and other websites provide information:
<https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20150205-the-1990s-never-ended>
<https://www.history.com/news/90s-technology-changed-culture-internet-cellphones>
<https://www.history.com/topics/us-presidents/bill-clinton>
8. Playwright Nguyen states that he uses poetic license in telling Julie's story. What is poetic license? Why is poetic license important?
<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/poetic-licence>
9. Julie D'Aubigny was known as a gifted swordfighter who engaged in riotous living and went against civil authority. The play takes place in parts of France but is inspired by downtown Los Angeles. Interestingly, in both France and LA, riots have taken place in their past. What were the events surrounding the 1992 Los Angeles riots? What trial eventually caused the LA riots to start? What were the events surrounding the Fronde in 17th-century France? These and other websites provide information:
<https://www.history.com/topics/1990s/the-los-angeles-riots>
<https://www.britannica.com/event/The-Fronde>



2022 costume design for Albert in *Revenge Song*, by Ulises Alcalá

After seeing/reading the play

1. Refer to your definitions and discussions about “revenge” and “song.” The play is called *Revenge Song: A Vampire Cowboys Creation*. How does the title reflect the events of the play? In what way is Julie's life a revenge song?
2. Refer to your research on the playwright. How does Nguyen use music in the play to establish and/or alter the atmosphere of the scene? How does he use different types of music and lyrics as instruments of storytelling?
3. Refer to your discussion about revenge and the life of Julie D'Aubigny. In the play, what price does Julie pay for her revenge? What other characters seek revenge? What prices do they pay?
4. Serannes says to Julie in the first line of the play, “By now you should know there is no running from your past.” How does this foreshadow the events of the play? What does this line tell us about Julie? How does the play honor Julie's real past?
5. Refer to your research of Julie D'Aubigny and poetic license. Madame de Senneterre states that “Though we have taken some poetic license, these are the events of her life.” What are the major differences in Julie's life versus her life in the play? What poetic license has the production taken in portraying her? What poetic license has it taken with other figures in her life? In what ways does the poetic license contribute to the character of Julie and the arc of the play?
6. Refer to your research on 17th-century France and Los Angeles in the 1990s. Compare and contrast 17th-century France and LA in the 1990s. How were their cultures similar? How were they different? How does the relationship between 17th-century France and downtown Los Angeles in the 1990s enhance Julie's story? How does blending the two places and time periods add to the story?
7. Refer to your research of Julie and the culture and politics of the 17th century. Julie sings, “Ain't no one here asking for your permission.” Independence, permission, and the ability to choose one's own job/life is a huge desire for Julie in the play. Who gives permission in the play? Who do they give permission to? What are they asking permission for? When does Julie take charge and give herself permission?

8. Explore the theme of boy meets girl in this play. How does the play subvert the theme? When, where, and how does it embrace it? How is Albert changed by meeting Julie? How are other men changed by Julie? How is Julie responsible or not for the changes of these characters? Who are the winners and losers of the fight at the end of the play and why?
9. Consider the theme of heroism in the play. Who are the heroic figures in the story? How do they wrestle with their heroism during the play? Who wants to be rescued and why? Who doesn't want to be rescued and why? Who are the villains in the play and why? What characters could be seen as heroic and villainous and why?
10. Consider the theme of power in the play. Which characters have the most power in the play? Who do they have power over? How do the characters react to those in power? What characters choose to be freed as opposed to having the choice made for them? Does this give them more or less power and why?
11. Compare and contrast Julie's lovers and partners. In what way does Julie affect their lives? In what way do they affect her life?
12. Love is a theme in the play. Which characters are able to express love and what characters are not? Which characters use love as a weapon? Who might be the best match for Julie and why?
13. Julie and Emily sing, "Past, present, future—you're not what I pictured." What parts of the play are about the future? The past? Explain what character best embodies the past. Which character best embodies the present and why? Explore what character best embodies the future.
14. Refer to the definition of poetic license. This production uses puppets, projections, and poetic license. How do puppets, projections, and/or poetic license help set the tone for the scene(s) they are used in? Who is "pulling the strings" in the puppet scene? How are the projections used to help the audience? How does using these three things help enhance the play? Why is poetic license important for this particular play and story?
15. Toward the end of the play there is a large fight involving the whole company of actors. How and why did this fight start? Using your research about the riots in LA and France, how and why did those riots start? Compare and contrast those two riots and the fight at the end of the play. Who were the winners and losers of those riots? Who are the winners and losers of the fight at the end of the play and why?
16. If you are seeing *The Tempest*: In what ways do Prospero and Miranda's relationship as father and daughter mirror Gaston and young Julie? In what ways are they different? What are the similar issues that both Miranda and Julie face? What concerns do both Prospero and Gaston have for their daughters? How do they help or hinder their children?
17. If you are seeing *The Tempest*: Compare and contrast Julie and Prospero's revenge journey. How is revenge a motivator in their lives? What are the outcomes for each character?
18. If you are seeing *Once on This Island*: Compare and contrast the journeys of Julie and Ti Moune. How are their views on love the same or different? How do they fight against the expectations of their communities?
19. If you are seeing *Once on This Island*: How do these shows use music to tell the story? When and why is the music used?
20. Refer to your research on Vampire Cowboys. How does the ending of the play fit in with their core mission? How does their telling of Julie's story fit within their mission?



Mademoiselle Maupin d'Opéra,
Julie D'Aubigny, from the Michel
Hennin Collection

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