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Domesticating Seneca

Stephen Orgel

From the late seventeenth century, Seneca has had a bad press in England. Heavily rhetorical and declamatory, the plays were repeatedly declared unsuited to the stage. For the Elizabethan and Jacobean theater, however, Seneca was a model for drama, an essential resource. The plays were taught in school, and translations of all ten plays attributed to Seneca appeared between 1560 and 1581. Not only the early Shakespeare, especially *Titus Andronicus*, but even plays like *King Lear* and *Othello* reflect Seneca's influence. This is largely invisible to us because our way of performing Shakespeare renders soliloquies meditative rather than declamatory, and strives for naturalism rather than stylization.

Keywords: *Oedipus*, Seneca, Translation, Revenge, Performance

I

For modern drama, the essential classic model of tragedy has been Sophocles's *Oedipus Tyrannos*, largely under the influence of Freud. The drama of unperceived guilt, forbidden desire, and revelation has seemed to us to have a universal application. Moreover, Aristotle in the *Poetics* uses the play several times as a model for tragedy, confirming its timeless relevance. To the Renaissance, however, the Oedipus story looked quite different from the version we derive from Sophocles and Freud. Its center was not the supplanting of the father in the mother's bed, but the defeat of the murderous sphinx through the solving of a riddle – a characteristic gloss on Oedipus from 1613 is "a riddle-reader of Thebes": that was the essential Oedipus (du Bartas 1613, sig. Iii7v). In fact, Sophocles's play was not widely known in Renaissance England (nor was Aristotle's *Poetics*). Versions of the story were based principally on the mythographers, and the dramatic source was Seneca's *Oedipus*, not Sophocles's. Sophocles came late to England: the first English translation of a Sophocles play was Charles

Wase's *Electra*, published in 1649, with a dedication to Charles I's daughter Elizabeth – in the year of the king's execution, the play had an obvious political relevance. The first English Sophocles appeared only in the eighteenth century[1].

Seneca, however, was studied by English schoolboys throughout the sixteenth century, and translations of the plays were published from the mid-century onward. It was Seneca who provided the model for tragedy; the first English *Oedipus* to be based on Sophocles rather than Seneca was John Dryden and Nathaniel Lee's version of 1679, which was both hugely popular and criticized for being too bloodthirsty. Indeed, although it follows the plot, in the course of adapting Sophocles to the Restoration stage it violates all the classical canons, and not only that of time. It concludes with a number of violent murders committed onstage – including, once, an actual one: at a performance in 1692, the actor playing Creon mistakenly used a real dagger instead of a retractable one, and mortally wounded the actor playing Adrastus. (Dramatically, this was a multiple error: in the play, Adrastus kills Creon, and is himself killed by soldiers.) In fact, Dryden and Lee were no closer to Sophocles than to Seneca.

For the English, in short, Sophocles was an eighteenth – and nineteenth-century dramatist – and, of course, an uncompromisingly modern one. Nevertheless, even to modern eyes *Oedipus* sometimes hit too close to home. When the death of Polybus, whom Oedipus believes to be his father, is revealed, Jocasta says "fear not that you will wed your mother. Many men before now have slept with their mothers in dreams" (*Oedipus* 980-81, trans. R. C. Jebb) – the Oedipus complex for Sophocles was not some deeply buried secret, but plain common knowledge. Yeats translating the play in 1928, however, omitted the passage – Sophocles was too Freudian

1 An anonymous 1715 translation of *Oedipus King of Thebes* appears to have been by Lewis Theobald. The publisher Jacob Lintott had commissioned a complete Sophocles translation by Theobald in 1715, but if it was delivered it was never issued; an *Electra* and an *Oedipus King of Thebes* were, however, published anonymously in 1714 and 1715, and reprinted respectively in 1780 and 1765 credited to Theobald. See Walton 2009, 103-10. For the medieval legend of Gregorius modeled on Oedipus, see Aue, Zeydel and Morgan 1955; and also Mann 1951. A complete Sophocles translation by George Adams appeared in 1729, and one by Thomas Francklin in 1758.

for Yeats. The Oedipus story, in fact, has for us required a good deal of interpretation and adaptation; if Yeats found it shocking, modern taste tends to find it uncomfortably tame. Peter Brook, staging Ted Hughes's translation of Seneca's *Oedipus* in 1968, at the play's climax had the cast parade through the audience in the wake of a giant phallus, celebrating Oedipus's expulsion from Thebes by singing "Yes, we have no bananas"[2]. It was a celebration of Oedipus's expulsion, but also a jolt to the audience's expectations for a solemn final catharsis, and a reminder of the purported fertility ritual roots of classical tragedy.

Dryden in his *Oedipus* explains the decision to turn for a source to Sophocles rather than Seneca by criticizing Seneca's rhetorical elaboration, "always running after pompous expression, pointed sentences, and Philosophical notions, more proper for the Study than the Stage". (Dryden and Lee 1679, Preface, sig. A2v). This quality, however, was precisely what the sixteenth century (and Roman readers) prized in Seneca. Dryden and Lee duly added to Sophocles what their stage required, not only the concluding blinding and deaths but a good deal of stage business, including two appearances of the ghost of Laius, guilt made manifest, with appropriately ominous effects: "Peal of Thunder; and flashes of Lightening; then groaning below the stage" (38).

II

Despite the pervasiveness of the classics in education, the English produced relatively little in the way of classical scholarship during the sixteenth century. The only editions of Greek drama published in England were Euripides's *Trojan Women*, published by John Day in 1575, and Aristophanes's *Knights* published by Joseph Barnes in 1593. In the 1550s Jane, Lady Lumley translated Euripides's *Iphigenia in Aulis* into prose – the translation was apparently done with the

2 Hughes did not know Latin, and relied on a prose translation provided to the National Theatre by David Turner, and on the nineteenth-century American translation of Frank Justus Miller published in the Loeb Library Seneca. Hughes was apparently embarrassed by his lack of classical learning, and repeatedly lied about it, but his copy of the Loeb Seneca shows the English translation copiously annotated and not a mark on the Latin text. See Stead 2013, 88-104.

assistance of Erasmus's Latin version[3]. It remained unpublished until 1909. George Peele translated one of the *Iphigenia* plays, which was performed by Paul's Boys sometime in the 1570s, and is now lost. The first translation of a Greek play to be published in English was George Gascoigne and Francis Kinwelmersh's *Jocasta*, a version of Euripides's *Trojan Women*, performed in 1566 and printed in 1573. The authors do certainly purport to be translating Euripides – their title reads *Jocasta: A Tragedie writtein in Greeke by Euripides. Translated and digested into Acte, by George Gascoigne and Francis Kinwelmersh* – though in fact they are working quite faithfully from a recent Italian version by Lodovico Dolce, which itself is based on a Latin translation. Queen Elizabeth studied Greek with Roger Ascham and was said to have translated a play of Euripides, of which nothing more is known. Considering the prestige of Greek in the educational system the lack of editions may seem surprising, but texts published on the continent were easily available, and presumably English publishers did not anticipate a sufficient market to justify domestic editions.

The works here cited joined a very small number of translations and adaptations of classical drama throughout the sixteenth century in England. Thomas Watson's Latin *Antigone* appeared in 1581; the play had apparently been performed – Gabriel Harvey saw it in London, or perhaps in Cambridge. A Latin edition of Seneca's *Hercules Furens* was published by Henry Sutton in 1561. As for English translations, in 1533 Roger Ascham compiled his *Floures of Latine Spekynge* out of Terence; the Roman dramatist was here treated as a basis not for domestic drama but for Latin conversation – the volume became a standard school text, and was reprinted throughout the century. The interlude *Jack Juggler*, published in 1565, declares itself based on the *Amphitruo* of Plautus; and the other mid-century comedies *Gammer Gurton's Needle* and *Ralph Roister Doister* are similarly modeled on Roman comedy. All ten of the plays attributed to Seneca were published in translation between 1560 and 1581. *Gorboduc*, the most overtly Senecan of sixteenth-century plays in English, is in fact Senecan only on the page: in performance it was punctuated by long dumb-shows between the acts; thus to a spectator, it would have looked very much like a traditional English tragedy. A translation of Plautus's *Menaechmi* by one "W.W." was issued in

3 See Greene 1941, 537-47; Findlay 2014, 133-201.

1595 by Thomas Creede, who advertised it as "chosen purposely from out the rest, as least harmefull, and yet most delightfull"[4].

For Renaissance England the key Senecan drama was not *Oedipus*, with its focus on individual guilt, responsibility, and self-knowledge, but *Thyestes*, the tragedy of endless and inexorable revenge. The English taste for revenge drama was especially powerful in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; and in fact, one might say that, for the history of theater as its surviving examples allow us to construct it, revenge is the originary subject of drama, and is perhaps the reason drama exists at all. Aeschylus's *Oresteia* trilogy, in showing how society has moved beyond revenge, acknowledged revenge to be a perpetual subject. The final play in the sequence, *The Eumenides*, shows individual revenge being aborted by the gods and judicial punishment reserved to the state; but this conclusion meant that individual revenge could therefore never be satisfied. One social solution beginning in the Middle Ages was the institutionalization of duelling, a practice that continued almost till modern times despite continued official attempts to suppress it. We may also feel that revenge was endemic in an age when resentment was an inescapable consequence of the political system – indeed, perhaps this is true of any political system: some group always has to lose.

Dryden's pejorative account of the rhetorical character of Senecan drama has been on the whole the predominant one, supported by the assumption that the plays were written not for performance but for declamation. This appears to be the case; the evidence for it is both negative and positive. There are no ancient references to the plays being performed and no Roman actors celebrated for their interpretations of Senecan roles; and the heavily rhetorical nature of the plays themselves seems to preclude performance. But as I have argued elsewhere, only the former evidence is really persuasive; the latter reflects only changes in taste, and suggests, on the contrary, that Renaissance performances of Senecan plays were perfectly feasible. I am here quoting myself: James I's favorite play, George Ruggle's *Ignoramus*, presented before him twice at Clare College, Cambridge, has very long speeches in Latin and took six hours to perform. Walter Montagu's *The Shepherd's Paradise*, written for performance by Queen Henrietta Maria

4 For a more detailed account, see Orgel 2021.

and her ladies, had even longer speeches in English. There were complaints about the length from the aristocratic performers, but only the queen's opinion mattered, and the project went ahead. It was eventually performed in a somewhat cut version, but still lasted "seven or eight hours", according to a member of the audience writing after midnight on the night of the event[5]. In both these cases, taste is an issue, but popular taste is not – and if Nero had wanted to see Seneca's plays performed, they would have been performed[6].

For English readers, T. S. Eliot made Seneca respectable again with two essays, "Seneca in Elizabethan Translation" and "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca," both published in 1927. These essays on the whole adhere to the traditional view of the heavily rhetorical Seneca, but diverge from it in conceiving Senecan rhetoric a strength, not a weakness. Nevertheless, crucial points depend not on the power of Senecan declamation, but on sudden extremely economical *coups de théâtre*:

> Antony says, "I am Antony still," and the Duchess, "I am Duchess of Malfy still"; would either of them have said that unless Medea had said *Medea superest*? (Medea survives). (Eliot 1950b, 113.)

Elsewhere Eliot cites the "shock" of Jason's final lines in *Medea*:

> *Per alta vada spatia sublimi aethere,*
> *Testare nullos esse, qua veheris, deos*. (Eliot 1950a, 59.)
> (Go through the high reaches of thin air,
> Bear witness that where you fly there are no gods.)

(Or "Bear witness where you fly that there are no gods": the Latin may be construed either way; does the play conclude by denying all religion?) There is, too, the often quoted response of Thyestes to his brother Atreus, serving Thyestes's murdered sons to him at a bloody banquet:

> Atreus
> *natos ecquid agnoscis tuos?*
> Thyestes
> *Agnosco fratrem.* (Seneca 1917, 1005-06)

5 John Beaulieu to Sir Thomas Puckering, January 10, 1632/3. Birch 1848, 2:216.

6 For the full argument, see Orgel 2021, 129-32.

(Atreus
Do you indeed recognize your sons?
Thyestes
I recognize my brother.)

Arguably, however, the power of these moments depends precisely on their brevity within the surrounding rhetoric. Suddenly the orators are left without words.

III

Early Shakespearean tragedy is imbued with Seneca, as the long rhetorical passages in the *Henry VI* trilogy and in *Richard III* testify. But the most obviously Senecan Shakespeare play is *Titus Andronicus*. The fortunes of this tragedy, indeed, parallel the fortunes of Seneca in the critical literature. In its own time it was one of Shakespeare's most popular plays, the first to be published, in 1594, reissued four times before 1640, translated into Dutch and German and performed on the continent. It is also the only Shakespeare play of which a depiction survives from his lifetime, the Peacham drawing, dating anywhere from 1595 to 1614-15[7]. However, the play barely survived the closing of the theaters; Edward Ravenscroft, adapting it to the post-restoration stage, declared it "the most incorrect and indigested piece in all [Shakespeare's] works […] rather a heap of Rubbish then a Structure" and considered it unlikely that Shakespeare had in fact written it. Ravenscroft revived it, he said, in the wake of the Popish Plot, to show "the treachery of Villains, and the Mischiefs carry'd on by Perjury, and False Evidence; and how Rogues may frame a Plot that shall deceive and destroy both the Honest and the Wise". In doing so, however, Ravenscroft declared that he had greatly improved the drama:

> Compare the Old Play with this, you'l finde that none in all that Authors Works ever receiv'd greater Alterations or Additions, the Language not only refin'd, but many Scenes entirely New: Besides most of the principal Characters heighten'd, and the Plot much encreas'd.

7 See Jonathan Bate's discussion in Bate 1995, 38-43.

The reviser's efforts were duly rewarded: "The Success answer'd the Labour"; despite "the foolish and Malicious part of the Nation […] it bore up against the Faction and is confirm'd a Stock-Play," (Ravenscroft 1687, sig. A2r-v.), performed regularly (though in fact not often) as part of the acting company's repertoire.

Titus Andronicus has no known source; nevertheless it is a very literary play. At its center is a book; the story of Philomela, Procne, and Tereus in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is both a model for action and a principle of explanation. The heroine Lavinia, deprived of the power of speech, locates the Philomela story in a copy of Ovid, and names her attackers in writing. The concluding act of revenge, the sons served up to their parents at a banquet, comes directly from Seneca's *Thyestes.* Instead of the Senecan linguistic *coups de théâtre* of the "*Agnosco fratrem*" sort, the play stages a mounting series of outrages – murders, mutilations, severed limbs, beheadings, finally the cannibal banquet. These were not subtle, but they undeniably made for exciting theater. Moreover, the contradictory qualities that for later ages rendered the play unsophisticated were surely for its original audiences high points of the drama: the long, passionate, heavily ornate speeches of Aaron, Tamora, and Titus, and especially Marcus's famous extended ekphrasis upon discovering the mutilated Lavinia:

> Alas, a crimson river of warm blood,
> Like to a bubbling fountain stirred with wind,
> Doth rise and fall between thy rosèd lips…
> (*Titus Andronicus*, II.iii.21ff.)[8].

For modern readers and directors these speeches are a theatrical problem: what happens onstage during all this rhetoric; what is Lavinia to do while Marcus declaims? The speech continues for almost fifty lines. But surely this is just the sort of thing Shakespeare's audiences came to hear: passionate, ornate oratory. The point is made succinctly by an illustration in G. P. Trapolin's tragedy *Antigone* of 1581 (Figure 1).

8 Quotations from *Titus Andronicus* are from Bate 1995.

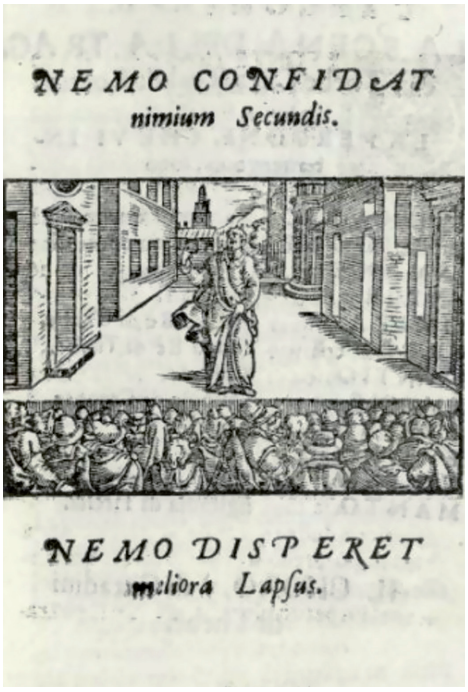


Fig. 1 G. P. Trapolin, the Chorus in *Antigone: tragedia* (Padova, 1581), p. 8. Folger Shakespeare Library, 169-641q.

A choral figure stands at the front of the stage addressing the audience – there is no "fourth wall," and despite the perspective setting, no pretense of realism. The motto of the image is a quotation from Seneca's *Thyestes*,

> Let no one be too sure of good fortune, Let no one despair that better will not come. (Seneca 1917, 614-15. Author's translation)

Peter Brook's famous production of *Titus Andronicus* in 1957, starring Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh, dealt with the theatrical problem simply by cutting Marcus's speech. Jonathan Bate, in the Arden 3 edition of the play, defends the cut by saying that Brook replaced it with some stylized pantomime, but it is clear that Brook simply did not trust the text. Brook also, surely disingenuously, expressed surprise that critics had praised him for saving a bad play, asserting that "it had not occurred to any of us in rehearsal that the play was so bad" (Bate, ed. 1995, 1). Presumably nobody in the company had

read any Shakespeare criticism either; Eliot was echoing centuries of critical contempt when he declared *Titus* "one of the stupidest and most uninspired plays ever written, a play in which it is incredible that Shakespeare had any hand at all" (Eliot 1950a, 67). Ravenscroft's strictures, cited above, were standard from the late seventeenth century to the mid-twentieth.

The fact that the play is no longer considered bad is surely due in large measure to the success of Brook's production. By 1971, the distinguished classical scholar Reuben Brower could call *Titus Andronicus* "the perfect exhibit of a typical Roman play" (Brower 1971, 173) – clearly it no longer needed a defense. Marcus's ekphrasis, in fact, is profoundly revealing about the nature of Shakespeare's stage. It not only parallels and glosses the action, it effectively pre-empts it:

> But sure some Tereus hath deflowered thee
> And, lest thou shouldst detect him, cut thy tongue.
> (*Titus Andronicus*, II.iii.26-7)

Marcus makes the connection with the Tereus/Philomela story immediately. Lavinia later finding the passage in Ovid merely confirms his perception. Language here is both action and interpretation.

The drama itself is as much writing as action, and in fact, the written word is strikingly emphasized throughout the play. Much of the plotting depends on letters: Aaron's forged letter about Bassianus's death, the letters shot to heaven by Titus's sons, Titus's threatening letter delivered by the clown, even Aaron's extraordinary claim to have dug up corpses and carved on their skins "in Roman letters, 'Let not your sorrow die'" (V.i.140). The Roman letters are there to serve as an eternal reproach specifically to Romans; but the tragic admonition is addressed as well to the literate spectators: English Renaissance education was conducted largely in Latin; moreover, English, of course, is written in Roman letters. Bodies here become texts, just as Lavinia with her tongue cut out is immediately identified as a literary allusion. Demetrius and Chiron knowingly "re-write" the Tereus and Philomela *locus classicus* by cutting off Lavinia's hands as well as her tongue, to prevent her from weaving or embroidering a representation of her rape and mutilation, as Philomela does in *Metamorphoses* VI.

Writing in the play is both action and testimony, and handwriting is always implicitly believed. All Saturninus has to do is show Titus a letter to convince him that his sons are guilty of Bassianus's murder. But letters in Shakespeare are as likely as not to be forged: if handwriting constitutes proof, it also as easily constitutes perjury. What, then, is the real truth of drama? Tamora says that Titus found the letter proving his sons' guilt, and he agrees that he did (II.ii.294-95); but in fact he did not – this is a case where the character (i.e. the text) lies about the action we have seen taking place. The play follows its own rules, and rewrites itself. What, then, is the truth? Aaron's villainy has been self-evident throughout the play, but it only becomes evident to the other characters when a soliloquy of his is overheard – and even this is reported, not dramatized. This is a little epitome of theater: what actors do, after all, is not perform actions but recite lines from scripts. And what audiences know is only what is addressed to them and what they overhear.

Seneca wrote *Thyestes* for an audience that already knew the plot; it turned a familiar narrative into drama. *Titus Andronicus*, a play without a source, constituted a series of unexpected calamities – until, of course, a spectator returned to see it again; for surely its popularity indicates that audiences saw it over and over. Shakespearean drama in this way created its own history.

IV

Tastes change, and theatrical tastes change rapidly. Jasper Heywood's translation of *Thyestes*, adapting Latin hexameters to English fourteeners, maintains the verse rhythm rigidly, with no variation for dramatic effect. Here, in modern typography, is Heywood's version of the "*agnosco fratrem*" moment:

> Thyestes
> …Whence murmure they?
> Atreus
> With fathers armes embrace them quickely nowe,
> For here they are loe come to thee: dooste thou thy children knowe?
> Thyestes
> I know my brother: suche a gylt yet canst thou suffre well
> ô earth to beare? nor yet from hence to Stygian lake of hell…
> ([Newton] 1581, fol. 37^{v}.)

The revelation is buried in the metrics. Figure 2 shows this moment as it appears in the original edition of 1560. The typography effectively hides the rhetorical *coup*. In Thomas Newton's edition of 1581 (Figure 3), the regularity of the typography is even more constraining. In contrast, Figure 4 shows the same moment translated a century later by John Wright, with the drama radically distorting the verse.

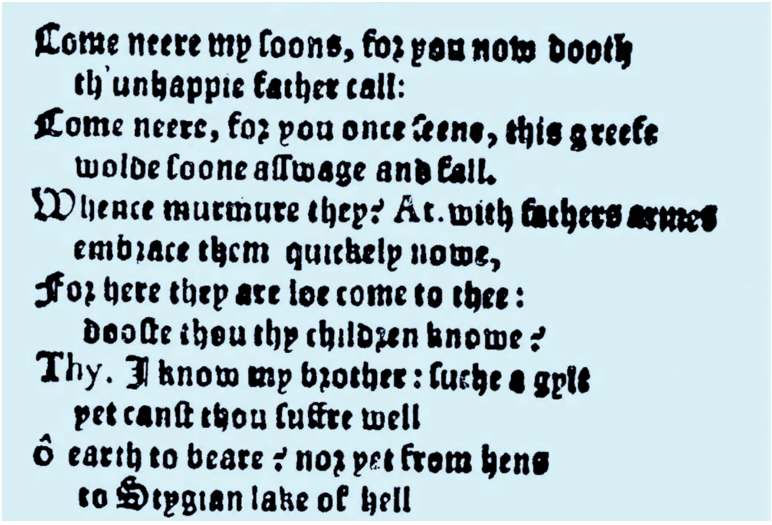
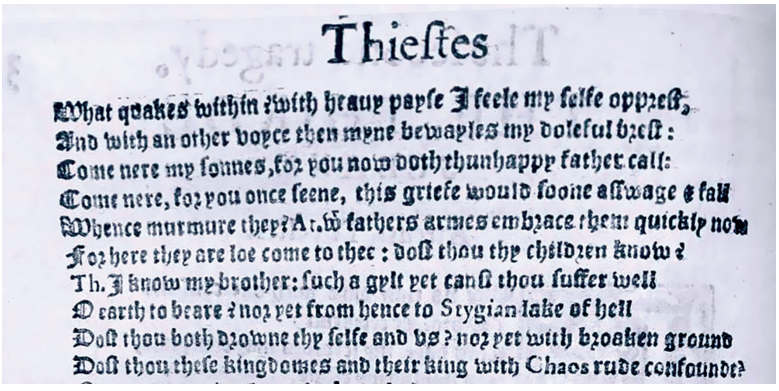

Come neere my ſoons, for you now dooth
th'unhappie father call:
Come neere, for you once ſeene, this greefe
wolde ſoone aſſwage and fall.
Whence murmure they? Ar. with fathers armes
embrace them quickely nowe,
For here they are loe come to thee:
dooſte thou thy children knowe?
Thy. I know my brother: ſuche a gylt
yet canſt thou ſuffre well
ô earth to beare? nor yet from hens
to Stygian lake of hell

Fig. 2 Heywood 1560, fol. D8^{r} (detail). Huntington Library, San Marino, CA, 5196.


Thieſtes

What quakes within? with heauy payſe I feele my ſelfe oppreſt,
And with an other voyce then myne bewayles my doleful breſt:
Come nere my ſonnes, for you now doth thunhappy father call:
Come nere, for you once ſeene, this griefe would ſoone aſſwage & fall
Whence murmure they? Ar. w fathers armes embrace them quickly now
For here they are loe come to thee: doſt thou thy children know?
Th. I know my brother: ſuch a gylt yet canſt thou ſuffer well
O earth to beare? nor yet from hence to Stygian lake of hell
Doſt thou both drowne thy ſelfe and vs? nor yet with broaken ground
Doſt thou theſe kingdomes and their king with Chaos rude confounde?

Fig. 3 [Newton] 1581, fol. 37^{v} (detail).

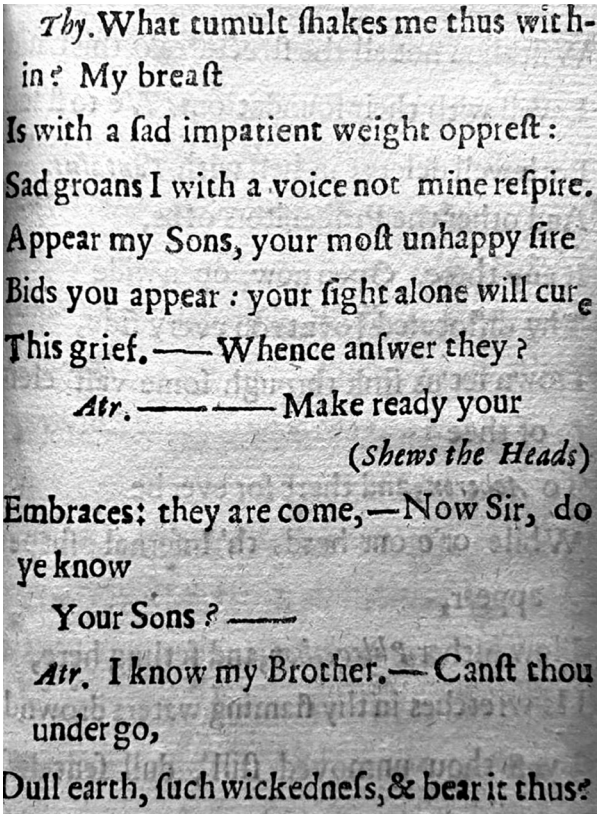

Thy. What tumult ſhakes me thus with-
in? My breaſt
Is with a ſad impatient weight oppreſt:
Sad groans I with a voice not mine reſpire.
Appear my Sons, your moſt unhappy ſire
Bids you appear: your ſight alone will cure
This grief. —— Whence anſwer they?
Atr. —— —— Make ready your
(*Shews the Heads*)
Embraces: they are come, —Now Sir, do
ye know
Your Sons? ——
Atr. I know my Brother. — Canſt thou
undergo,
Dull earth, ſuch wickedneſs, & bear it thus?

Fig. 4 Wright 1684, 87.

John Crowne's contemporary play *Thyestes* (1681) is not a translation of Seneca, and therefore is not bound by Seneca's dramaturgy, but, except for an added love-plot between Thyestes's son, here named Philisthenes, and an invented daughter of Atreus named Antigone, it follows Seneca's narrative closely. Crowne's revelation of the murder of Philisthenes (in the play Thyestes has only one son) is conveyed not by rhetoric, but by stage effects, as the father consumes wine mixed with his son's blood: "Thyestes drinks; a clap of Thunder, the Table oversets, and falls in pieces; all the lights go out" (Crowne 1681, 49). As for Ravenscroft's *Titus Andronicus*, though the drama is heavily rationalized and the language, as Ravenscroft says, "refined", the climax is nevertheless far more bloodthirsty than Shakespeare's, including, as a backdrop to the banquet, Aaron the Moor being tortured on the rack and stubbornly refusing to confess his villainy.

V

Revenge tragedy was an enormously popular genre partly through satisfying the sadistic tastes of the audience – this was, after all, the same audience for which public executions constituted both a moral spectacle and entertainment – but probably equally because it provided a new kind of protagonist, the hero/villain, the justified murderer. Since as a Christian you believed that murder was never justified and vengeance belonged only to God, Elizabethan revenge plays always have it both ways: they serve as moral sermons on the evils of revenge – the revenger does always lose in the end (though you might say he dies happy) – but audiences have the pleasure of seeing the revenge enacted. The effect is achieved, however, not through the moralizing effects of the drama – nobody in *Titus Andronicus* argues against revenge except Tamora, who is obviously being disingenuous – but through all the action that works against the morality: the thrill of horror at the cunningly planned murders, the actual, physical shock of the violence and its attendant blood, the emotional satisfaction at seeing the villains paid off – these are the most direct effects the plays work with.

In 1589 Thomas Nashe, in his preface to Robert Greene's *Menaphon*, sneered at playwrights "that could scarcelie latinize their neckeverse if they should have neede" – prisoners condemned to be hanged could save their necks by reading a Latin verse, thus showing that they were literate; but these playwrights were not even that literate in Latin.

Nevertheless, Nashe continues,

> English *Seneca* read by candle light yeeldes manie good sentences, as *Bloud is a begger,* and so foorth: and if you intreate him faire in a frostie morning, he will affoord you whole *Hamlets,* I should say handfulls of tragical speaches. (in Smith 1904, 1.312.)

Uneducated playwrights find plenty of good Senecan effects in translation; and the particular example is *Hamlet*, which Nashe finds especially egregious. There was, then, a *Hamlet* being performed in 1589 that sounded like Seneca – the *Hamlet* familiar to us dates from 1601. The old play must have been popular, since it appears again in the theater manager Philip Henslowe's records as still being performed in 1594. This *Hamlet* was long credited to Thomas Kyd be-

cause Nashe's account makes it sound like *The Spanish Tragedy*, but it is now widely considered to be a very early version of the play by Shakespeare, surviving in some form in the first quarto of *Hamlet*, published in 1603[9]. Did Shakespeare, then, read his Seneca in translation? Many years later Ben Jonson, the most learned of English poets, would write of Shakespeare that he had "small Latin and less Greek" – did Shakespeare's Latin not extend as far as the Seneca studied in school? In that case, Shakespeare's Seneca was the Seneca of Jasper Heywood and the other translators published by Thomas Newton in *Seneca His Tenne Tragedies, Translated into Englysh* in 1581.

Hamlet appears to us more ruminative than declamatory, but that is largely a consequence of our way of performing it. When Hamlet delivers his soliloquies on the modern stage he does so as if he is thinking aloud, speaking only to himself. In the beautiful 1948 film, Olivier's Hamlet did not even speak the speeches, but remained lost in thought while the soliloquies were recited in a voice-over. But look again at the actor in Figure 1, the Chorus in a sixteenth-century tragedy: he is at the front of the stage, addressing the audience directly. The Hamlet of 1601 did not think his soliloquies, he declaimed them, arguing, haranguing, justifying himself, persuading the audience of the rightness of his cause and the wickedness of his enemies. Indeed, he accuses himself of overdoing it, "cursing like a very drab". If we think about performing styles, the declamatory Seneca is manifest not merely in the early Shakespeare of *Henry VI* and *Richard III*, but in the tremendous invective of *King Lear* and *Coriolanus*, the passion of *Othello*, both Prospero's rages and his philosophizing.

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9 Bourus 2014 – following, notably, Cairncross 1936 – makes a persuasive case for the first quarto of *Hamlet* being the ur-*Hamlet*, a view shared by, among others, Harold Bloom, Hardin Craig, Peter Alexander, and myself. See also Urkowitz 1992, 257-291; Serpieri 1997.

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