

T. S. ELIOT

---

Essays on Elizabethan Drama

A HARVEST BOOK  
Harcourt, Brace and Company  
New York

# Table of Contents

---

<a href="#">Title Page</a>
<a href="#">Table of Contents</a>
<a href="#">Copyright</a>
<a href="#">Dedication</a>
<a href="#">Preface</a>
<a href="#">Seneca in Elizabethan Translation (1927)</a>
<a href="#">Christopher Marlowe (1919)</a>
<a href="#">Ben Jonson (1919)</a>
<a href="#">Thomas Middleton (1927)</a>
<a href="#">Thomas Heywood (1931)</a>
<a href="#">Cyril Tourneur (1930)</a>
<a href="#">John Ford (1932)</a>
<a href="#">Philip Massinger (1920)</a>
<a href="#">John Marston (1934)</a>
<a href="#">About the Author</a>
<a href="#">Footnotes</a>

All rights reserved, including the right to reproduce this book or portions thereof in any form.

For information about permission to reproduce selections from this book, write to Permissions, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 215 Park Avenue South, New York, New York 10003.

[www.hmhco.com](http://www.hmhco.com)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication data is on file.

eISBN 978-0-544-35704-4  
v1.0214

---

IN MEMORIAM  
DONALD BRACE

## Preface

---

When it was suggested that I should make, for inclusion in the Harvest series, a selection of essays from the selection of my essays published under the title of *Selected Essays*, my first thought was to reprint a small selection published many years ago in England, called *Elizabethan Essays*. With this aim in view, it seemed prudent to reread these essays, at most of which I had not looked, I suspect, since I read the proof for that book. The result was somewhat surprising.

Two of the essays were concerned with Shakespeare: *Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca* and *Hamlet and His Problems*. A third was entitled *Four Elizabethan Dramatists* with the somewhat pretentious subtitle "Preface to an Unwritten Book." All three of these essays on re-examination embarrassed me by their callowness, and by a facility of unqualified assertion which verges, here and there, on impudence. The *Hamlet*, of course, had been kept afloat all these years by the success of the phrase "objective correlative"—a phrase which, I am now told, is not even my own but was first used by Washington Alston. These three essays were the first to be reread; and when I had read them I turned with trepidation to reread my essays on Shakespeare's contemporaries. I was astonished to find that these essays struck me as very good indeed.

What is the reason for my forming such different judgments on different essays? I believe that the explanation is at least partly to be found in the fact that Shakespeare is so much greater than any of his contemporaries. About Marlowe, or Ford, or even Ben Jonson, it is possible for a young man (and I was a very young man, or an immature youngish man, when I wrote these essays) to have something to say with which he will still find himself in agreement thirty years or more later. It may even be that a youthful sensibility is the most desirable qualification for writing about these minor poets and dramatists. Mature wisdom, and much experience of men and books, is perhaps unnecessary for the appreciation of their work. But, for the understanding of Shakespeare, a lifetime is not too long; and Shakespeare, the development of one's opinions may be the measure of one's development in wisdom.

However this may be, I have rejected these three essays in compiling this book. Instead, I have included *Seneca in Elizabethan Translation*, which seems to me to deserve its place as the first "essay in Elizabethan drama." Like the other essays, it contains some good quotations. And that perhaps is another reason why it is easier to write about minor Elizabethan and Jacobean drama than about Shakespeare: an essay can be worth reading for the quotations alone. Quotations from Shakespeare are too well known; it is not enough to quote well; the critic must have something worth saying about his quotations from Shakespeare.

I call the attention of students of Elizabethan drama to the fact that the date of each essay is given in the Table of Contents. This is a practice I like to observe in printing any collection of essays; but it is peculiarly important where the critical judgments may depend on the conclusions of current scholarship. It may well be that later scholarly research has disproved assumptions which I then accepted. On the other hand, if in discussing any dramatist I have ignored any work of scholarship with which I should have been acquainted when I wrote about him, I shall expect my criticism to be marked down accordingly.

On the whole, I think that these essays do provide a helpful introduction to the study of the poetic drama of the age of Elizabeth I and James I, and to the very interesting differentia of temperament and technique between the dramatists. There are two conspicuous omissions. I do not so much regret the absence of an essay on the work of John Webster: a great deal has been written on this subject, two of his plays are very well known and are from time to time performed, and I have alluded constantly to Webster in discussing other dramatists. But I very much regret the fact that I did not, during that period of my life at which these essays were written, have occasion to write about the work of that

very great poet and dramatist, George Chapman. It is too late now: to attempt to repair such a gap, after many years' neglect, would be almost as futile as to attempt to remove the blemishes (of which one is aware) in one's early poems. The most remarkable appreciation of Chapman in my time (work of scholarship apart) is to be found in *The Lion and the Fox* by Wyndham Lewis.

I have included one essay, that on John Marston, which was written just too late for inclusion in *Elizabethan Essays*. I have dedicated the present book to the friend and publisher who introduced *Selected Essays* to the American reader in 1932; but I should like to express a debt of gratitude also to the late Charles Whibley, who commissioned *Seneca in Elizabethan Translation* as an introduction in the Tudor Translation Series; and to Sir Bruce Lyttelton Richmond, at whose behest, when he was editor of *The Times Literary Supplement*, I wrote most of the essays on individual dramatists.

T.S.

*December 1955.*

No author exercised a wider or deeper influence upon the Elizabethan mind or upon the Elizabethan form of tragedy than did Seneca. To present the Elizabethan translations of the tragedies in their proper setting, it is necessary to deal with three problems which at first may appear to be but slightly connected: (1) the character, virtues, and vices of the Latin tragedies themselves; (2) the directions in which these tragedies influenced our Elizabethan drama; (3) the history of these translations, the part they played in extending the influence of Seneca, and their actual merit as translation and as poetry. There are here several questions which, with the greater number of important Tudor translations, do not arise. Most of the better-known translations are of authors whose intrinsic merit is unquestioned, and the translations derive some of their prestige from the merit and fame of the author translated; and most of the better-known prose translations have an easy beauty of style which arrests even the least prepared reader. But with the Elizabethan translations of the *Tenne Tragedies* (for they are by several hands) we are concerned first of all with a Latin poet whose reputation would deter any reader but the most curious; with translations of unequal merit, because by different scholars; and with translation into a metre—the “fourteener”—which is superficially a mere archaism, and which repels readers who have not the patience to accustom their ears and nerves to its beat. The translations have, as I hope to show, considerable poetic charm and quite adequate accuracy, with occasional flashes of real beauty; their literary value remains greater than that of any later translations of Seneca’s tragedies that I have examined, either in English or French. But the appreciation of the literary value of these translations is inseparably engaged with the appreciation of the original and of its historical importance; so that although at first sight a consideration of the historical problems may appear irrelevant, it should in the end enhance our enjoyment of the translations as literature.

### I

In the Renaissance, no Latin author was more highly esteemed than Seneca; in modern times, few Latin authors have been more consistently damned. The prose Seneca, the “Seneca morale” of Dante, still enjoys a measure of tepid praise, though he has no influence; but the poet and tragedian receives from the historians and critics of Latin literature the most universal reprobation. Latin literature provides poets for several tastes, but there is no taste for Seneca. Mackail, for instance, whose taste in Latin literature is almost catholic, dismisses Seneca with half a page of his *Short History of Latin Literature*, and a few of the usual adjectives such as rhetorical. Professor Mackail is inclined by his training to enjoy the purer and more classical authors, and is inclined by his temperament to enjoy the most romantic: like Shenstone or some other eighteenth-century poets, Seneca falls between. Nisard, in his *Poètes Latins de la décadence*, devotes many pages and much patience to the difference of conditions which produced great tragedy in Athens, and only rhetorical declamation in Rome. Butler, after a more detailed and more tolerant examination from a more literary point of view (*Post-Augustan Poetry*), commits himself to the damaging statement that “to Seneca more than to any other man is due the excessive predominance of declamatory rhetoric, which has characterised the drama throughout Western Europe from the Renaissance down to the latter half of the nineteenth century.” The most recent critic, Mr. F. L. Lucas (*Seneca and Elizabethan Tragedy*), admits “the exasperatingly false rhetoric of the Senecan stage, with its far-fetched and frigid epigrams.” Yet this is a dramatist whom Scaliger preferred to Euripides, and whom the whole of Europe in the Renaissance delighted to honour. It is obviously a task of some difficulty to disentangle him from his reputation.

We must admit, first, that the tragedies of Seneca deserve the censure that has been directed upon

them. On the other hand, it may be true—I think it is true—that the critics, especially the English critics, have been often biased by Seneca's real and supposed bad influence upon the Renaissance, though they have included the demerits of his admirers in his own faults. But before we proceed to what redemption of his fame is possible, it is expedient to resume those universally admitted strictures and limitations which have become commonplaces of Senecan criticism. First, it is pretty generally agreed that the plays of Seneca were composed, not for stage performance, but for private declamation.<sup>1</sup> This theory attenuates the supposed "horrors" of the tragedies, many of which could hardly have been represented on a stage, even with the most ingenious machinery, without being merely ridiculous; the Renaissance assumption to the contrary gave licence to a taste which would probably have been indulged even without Seneca's authority. And if the plays were written to be declaimed, probably by a single speaker ("elocutionist" is really the word), we can account for other singularities. I say "account for," I do not say without qualification that this peculiar form was the "cause"; for the ultimate cause was probably the same Latin temper which made such an unacted drama possible. The cause lies in the Latin sensibility which is expressed by the Latin language. But if we imagine this unacted drama, we see at once that it is at one remove from reality, compared with the Greek. Behind the dialogue of Greek drama we are always conscious of a concrete visual actuality, and behind that of a specific emotional actuality. Behind the drama of words is the drama of action, the timbre of voice and voice, the uplifted hand or tense muscle, and the particular emotion. The spoken play, the words which we read, are symbols, a shorthand, and often, as in the best of Shakespeare, a very abbreviated shorthand indeed, for the acted and felt play, which is always the real thing. The phrase, beautiful as it may be, stands for a greater beauty still. This is merely a particular case of the amazing unity of Greek, the unity of concrete and abstract in philosophy, the unity of thought and feeling, action and speculation, in life. In the plays of Seneca, the drama is all in the word, and the word has no further reality behind it. His characters all seem to speak with the same voice, and at the top of it; they recite in turn.

I do not mean to suggest that the method of delivery of a play of Seneca was essentially different from that of Greek tragedy. It was probably nearer to the declamation of Greek tragedy than was the delivery of Latin comedy. The latter was acted by professional actors. I imagine that Seneca's plays were declaimed by himself and other amateurs, and it is likely that the Athenian tragedies were performed by amateurs. I mean that the beauty of phrase in Greek tragedy is the shadow of a greater beauty—the beauty of thought and emotion. In the tragedies of Seneca the centre of value is shifted from what the personage says to the way in which he says it. Very often the value comes near to being mere smartness. Nevertheless, we must remember that "verbal" beauty is still a kind of beauty.

The plays are admirably adapted for declamation before an imperial highbrow audience of crude sensibility but considerable sophistication in the ingenuities of language. They would have been as unactable on the Greek stage as they are on the English. Superficially neat and trim, they are, for the stage, models of formlessness. The Athenians were accustomed to long speeches from Messengers, speeches which embarrass both the modern actor and the modern audience; this was a convention with practical advantages; their other long speeches usually have some dramatic point, some place in the whole scheme of the play. But the characters in a play of Seneca behave more like members of a minstrel troupe sitting in a semicircle, rising in turn each to do his "number," or varying their recitations by a song or a little back-chat. I do not suppose that a Greek audience would have sat through the first three hundred lines of the *Hercules Furens*. Only at the 523rd line does Amphitryon detect the sound of Hercules' tread, ascending from Hell, at which inopportune moment the chorus interrupt for two or three pages. When Hercules finally appears, he seems to be leading Cerberus, who presently evaporates, for he is not on the stage a few minutes later. After Amphitryon has in a rather roundabout way, but more briefly than might have been expected, explained to Hercules the pressing

danger to his family and country, Hercules makes off to kill Lycus. While Hercules is thus engaged in a duel on the result of which everybody's life depends, the family sit down calmly and listen to a long description by Theseus of the Tartarean regions. This account is not a straight monologue, as Amphitryon from time to time puts leading questions about the fauna, and the administration and system of justice, of the world below. Meanwhile, Hercules has (contrary to the usual belief that Seneca murders all his victims in full view of the audience) despatched Lycus off-stage. At the end of the play, when Juno has stricken Hercules with madness, it is not at all clear whether he destroys his family on-stage or off. The slaughter is accompanied by a running commentary by Amphitryon, whose business it is to tell the audience what is going forward. If the children are slain in sight of the audience, this commentary is superfluous. Amphitryon also reports the collapse of Hercules; but presently Hercules comes to, certainly onstage, and spies his dead wife and children. The whole situation is inconceivable unless we assume the play to have been composed solely for recitation; like other of Seneca's plays, it is full of statements useful only to an audience which sees nothing. Seneca's plays might, in fact, be practical models for the modern "broadcasted drama."

We need not look too closely into the conditions of the age which produced no genuine drama, but which allowed this curious freak of non-theatrical drama. The theatre is a gift which has not been vouchsafed to every race, even of the highest culture. It has been given to the Hindus, the Japanese, the Greeks; the English, the French, and the Spanish, at moments; in less measure to the Teutons and Scandinavians. It was not given to the Romans, or generously to their successors the Italians. The Romans had some success in low comedy, itself an adaptation of Greek models, but their instinct turned to shows and circuses, as does that of the later race which created the *Commedia dell'Arte*, which still provides the best puppet shows, and which gives a home to Mr. Gordon Craig. No cause can be assigned, for every cause demands a further cause. It is handy to speak of "the genius of the language," and we shall continue to do so, but why did the language adopt that particular genius? At any rate, we should discourage any criticism which, in accounting for the defects and faults of the plays of Seneca, made much of the "decadence" of the age of Nero. In the verse, yes, Seneca is unquestionably "silver age," or more exactly he is not a poet of the *first* rank in Latin, he is far inferior to Virgil; but for tragic drama, it would be a gross error to suppose that an earlier and more heroic age of Rome could have produced anything better. Many of the faults of Seneca which appear "decadent" are, after all, merely Roman and (in the narrower sense) Latin.

It is so with the characterization. The characters of Seneca's plays have no subtlety and no "private life." But it would be an error to imagine that they are merely cruder and coarser versions of the Greek originals. They belong to a different race. Their crudity is that which was of the Roman, as compared with the Greek, in real life. The Roman was much the simpler creature. At best, his training was that of devotion to the State, his virtues were public virtues. The Greek knew well enough the idea of the State, but he had also a strong traditional morality which constituted, so to speak, a direct relation between him and the gods, without the mediation of the State, and he had furthermore a sceptical and heterodox intelligence. Hence the greater efficiency of the Roman, and the greater interest of the Greek. Hence the difference between Greek Stoicism and Roman Stoicism—the latter being the form through which Stoicism influenced later Europe. We must think of the characters of Seneca as offspring of Rome, more than we think of them as offspring of their age.

The drama of *Antigone*—which Seneca did not attempt—could hardly have been transposed for Roman sentiment. In the drama of Seneca there are no conflicts, except the conflict of passion, temper, or appetite with the external duties. The literary consequence, therefore, is the tendency which persists in modern Italy; the tendency to "rhetoric"; and which, on such a large scale, may be attributed to a development of language exceeding the development of sensibility of the people. If you compare Catullus with Sappho, or Cicero with Demosthenes, or Thucydides with a Latin historian, you

find that the genius is the genius of a different language, and what is lost is a gift of sensibility. So with Seneca and the Greek dramatists. Hence we should think of the long ranting speeches of Seneca, the beautiful but irrelevant descriptions, the smart stichomythia, rather as peculiarities of Latin than as the bad taste of the dramatist.

The congeniality of Stoicism to the Roman mind is no part of my duty to analyse; and it would be futile to attempt to decide what, in the dialogue and characterization of Seneca's plays, is due to Stoicism, what due to the Roman mind, and what due to the peculiar form which Seneca elected. What is certain is the existence of a large element of Stoicism in the plays, enough to justify the belief that the plays and the prose are by the hand of the same Seneca. In the plays, indeed, the Stoicism is present in a form more quickly to catch the fancy of the Renaissance than in the prose epistles and essays. Half of the commonplaces of the Elizabethans—and the more commonplace half—are of Senecan origin. This ethic of sententious maxims was, as we shall see, much more sympathetic to the temper of the Renaissance than would have been the morals of the elder Greek dramatists; the Renaissance itself was much more Latin than Greek. In the Greek tragedy, as Nisard and others have pointed out, the moralising is not the expression of a conscious "system" of philosophy; the Greek dramatists moralise only because morals are woven through and through the texture of their tragic idea. Their morals are a matter of feeling trained for generations, they are hereditary and religious, just as their dramatic forms themselves are the development of their early liturgies. Their ethics of thought are one with their ethics of behaviour. As the dramatic form of Seneca is no growth, but a construction, so is his moral philosophy and that of Roman Stoicism in general. Whether the Roman scepticism was, as Nisard suggests, the result of a too rapid and great expansion and mixture of races cancelling each other's beliefs, rather than the product of a lively inquiring intelligence, the "beliefs" of Stoicism are a consequence of scepticism; and the ethic of Seneca's plays is that of an age which supplied the lack of moral habits by a system of moral attitudes and poses. To this the natural public temper of Rome contributed. The ethic of Seneca is a matter of postures. The posture which gives the greatest opportunity for effect, hence for the Senecan morality, is the posture of dying: death gives his characters the opportunity for their most sententious aphorisms—a hint which Elizabethan dramatists were only too ready to follow.

When all reserves have been made, there is still much to be said for Seneca as a dramatist. And I am convinced that the proper approach to his appreciation and enjoyment is not by comparison and contrast—to which, in his case, criticism is violently tempted—but by isolation. I made a careful comparison of the *Medea* and the *Hippolytus* of Seneca—perhaps his two best plays—with the *Medea* of Euripides and the *Phèdre* of Racine respectively; but I do not think that any advantage would be gained by reporting the results of this inquiry, by contrasting either the dramatic structure or the treatment of the title figures. Such comparisons have already been made; they magnify the defects and obscure the merits of the Senecan tragedy. If Seneca is to be compared, he should rather be compared for versification, descriptive and narrative power, and taste, with the earlier Roman poets. The comparison is fair, though Seneca comes off rather ill. His prosody is monotonous; in spite of a mastery of several metres, his choruses fall heavily on the ear. Sometimes his chorus rhythms seem to hover between the more flexible measures of his predecessors and the stiffer but more impressive beat of the mediaeval hymn.<sup>2</sup> But within the limits of his declamatory purpose, Seneca obtains, time after time, magnificent effects. In the verbal *coup de théâtre* no one has ever excelled him. The final cry of Jason to Medea departing in her car is unique; I can think of no other play which reserves such a shock for the last word;

*Per alta vada spatia sublimi aethere;  
testare nullos esse, qua veheris, deos.*<sup>3</sup>

Again and again the epigrammatic observation on life or death is put in the most telling way at the most telling moment. It is not only in his brief ejaculations that Seneca triumphs. The sixteen lines addressed by the chorus to the dead sons of Hercules (*Hercules Furens*, I. 1135 ff.), which are exquisitely rendered by the Elizabethan translator, seem to me highly pathetic. The descriptive passages are often of great charm, with phrases which haunt us more than we should expect. The lines of Hercules,

*ubi sum? sub ortu solis, an sub cardine  
glacialis ursae?*

must have lain long in the memory of Chapman before they came out in *Bussy d' Ambois* as

*fly where men feel  
The cunning axle-tree, or those that suffer  
Under the chariot of the snowy Bear.*

Though Seneca is long-winded, he is not diffuse; he is capable of great concision; there is even a monotony of forcefulness; but many of his short phrases have for us as much oratorical impressiveness as they had for the Elizabethans. As (to take an unworn example) the bitter words of Hecuba as the Greeks depart:

*concidit virgo ac puer;  
bellum peractum est.*

Even the most sententious sayings of stoical commonplace preserve their solemnity in that Latin language which carries such thoughts more grandly than could any other:

*Fatis agimur; cedit fatis.  
non sollicitae possunt curae  
mutare rati stamina fusi.  
quidquid patimur mortale genus,  
quidquid facimus venit ex alto,  
servatque suae decreta colus  
Lachesis nulla revoluta manu.  
omnia secto tramite vadunt  
primusque dies dedit extremum.*

(*Oedipus*, 980 ff.)

But to quote Seneca is not criticism; it is merely to offer baits to a possible reader; it would indeed be bad criticism if we left the impression that these and such as these are moments in which Seneca excels himself, and which he could not sustain. An essential point to make about Seneca is the consistency of his writing, its maintenance on one level, below which he seldom falls and above which he never mounts. Seneca is not one of those poets who are to be remembered because they now and then rise to the tone and the vocabulary of greater poets. Seneca is wholly himself; what he attempted he executed, he created his own genre. And this leads us to a consideration which we must keep in mind in considering his later influence: whether we can treat him seriously as a *dramatist*. Critics are

inclined to treat his drama as a bastard form. But this is an error which critics of the drama are in general apt to make; the forms of drama are so various that few critics are able to hold more than one or two in mind in pronouncing judgment of “dramatic” and “undramatic.” What is “dramatic”? If one were saturated in the Japanese Noh, in Bhasa and Kalidasa, in Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, Aristophanes and Menander, in the popular mediaeval plays of Europe, in Lope de Vega and Calderon as well as the great English and French drama, and if one were (which is impossible) equally sensitive to them all, would one not hesitate to decide that one form is more dramatic than another? And Seneca’s is definitely a “form.” It does not fall within either of the categories of the defectively dramatic. There are the “closet dramas” which are mostly simply inferior dramas: the plays of Tennyson, Browning, and Swinburne. (Whether a writer expected his play to be played or not is irrelevant, the point is whether it is playable.) And there is another, more interesting type, where the writer is trying to do something more or something different from what the stage can do, but yet with an implication of performance, where there is a mixture of dramatic and extra-dramatic elements. This is a modern and sophisticated form: it contains *The Dynasts*, Goethe’s *Faust*, and possibly (not having seen it played I cannot speak with confidence) *Peer Gynt*. Seneca’s plays do not belong to either of these types. If, as I believe, they are intended for *recitation*, they have a form of their own; and I believe that they were intended for recitation because they are perfectly adapted for recitation—they are better recited than read. And I have no doubt—though there is no external evidence—that Seneca must have had considerable practice himself in reciting the plays. He would have been, therefore, a playwright of as practical experience as Shakespeare or Molière. His form is a practical form; it is even, I suggest, a form which might be interesting to attempt in our own time, when the revival of the theatre is obstructed by some of the difficulties which made the stage an impossibility in the age of Seneca.

What lessons the Elizabethans learnt from Seneca, and whether they were the same as those which we might learn ourselves, is the next subject to consider. But whether they profited by the study, or whether they admired him and pillaged him to their own detriment, we must remember that we cannot justly estimate his influence unless we form our own opinion of Seneca first, without being influenced by his influence.

## II

The influence of Seneca upon Elizabethan drama has received much more attention from scholars than from literary critics. The historical treatment has been very thorough. The admirable edition of the works of Sir William Alexander, Earl of Stirling, by Kastner and Charlton (Manchester University Press, vol. i, 1921), has a full account of this influence both direct and through Italy and France; in this introduction also will be found the best bibliography of the subject. Dr. F. S. Boas, especially in his edition of Kyd’s Plays, has treated the matter at length. Professor J. W. Cunliffe’s *Influence of Seneca on Elizabethan Tragedy* (1893) remains, within its limits, the most useful of all books, and Mr. Cunliffe has handled the question in a more general way in his *Early English Classical Tragedies*. Indirect Senecan influences have also been studied in detail, as in Professor A. M. Witherspoon’s *Influence of Robert Gamier on Elizabethan Drama*. And work which is now being done on the earlier drama (see Dr. A. W. Reed’s recent *Early Tudor Drama*, 1926) will enable us to understand better the junction of the Senecan influence with the native tradition. It is not fitting that a literary critic should retrace all this labour of scholarship, where either his dissent or his approval would be an impertinence; but we may benefit by this scholarship to draw certain general conclusions.

The plays of Seneca exerted their influence in several ways and to several results. The results are of three main types; (1) the popular Elizabethan tragedy; (2) the “Senecal” drama, pseudo-classical,

composed by and for a small and select body of persons not closely in touch or in sympathy with the popular drama of the day, and composed largely in protest against the defects and monstrosities of that drama; (3) the two Roman tragedies of Ben Jonson, which appear to belong between the two opposed classes, to constitute an attempt, by an active practising playwright, to improve the form of popular drama by the example of Seneca; not by slavish imitation but by adaptation, to make of popular drama a finished work of art. As for the ways in which Seneca influenced the Elizabethans, it must be remembered that these were never simple, and became more complicated. The Italian and the French drama of the day was already penetrated by Seneca. Seneca was a regular part of the school curriculum, while Greek drama was unknown to all but a few great scholars. Every schoolboy with a smattering of Latin had a verse or two of Seneca in his memory; probably a good part of the audience could recognise the origin of the occasional bits of Seneca which are quoted in Latin in some of the popular plays (*e.g.* several times by Marston). And by the time that *The Spanish Tragedy* and the old *Hamlet* had made their success, the English playwright was under the influence of Seneca by being under the influence of his own predecessors. Here the influence of Kyd is of the greatest importance: if Senecan Kyd had such a vogue, that was surely the path to facile success for any hard-working and underpaid writer.

All that I wish to do is to consider certain misconceptions of the Senecan influence, which I believe are still current in our opinions of Elizabethan drama, although they do not appear in works of scholarship. For such a purpose the contemporary translations possess a particular value: whether they greatly affected the conception of Seneca, or greatly extended his influence, they give a reflection of the appearance of Seneca to the Englishman of the time. I do not suggest that the influence of Seneca has been exaggerated or diminished in modern criticism; but I believe that too much importance has been attached to his influence in some directions, and too little to his influence in others. There is one point on which every one is agreed, and hardly more than one: the five-act division of the modern European play is due to Seneca. What I chiefly wish to consider are, first, his responsibility for what has been called since Symonds' day the Tragedy of Blood—how far Seneca is the author of the horrors which disfigure Elizabethan drama; second, his responsibility for *bombast* in Elizabethan diction; and third, his influence upon the *thought*, or what passes for thought, in the drama of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. It is the first which I think has been overestimated, the second misconstrued, the third undervalued.

Certainly, among all national dramas, the Elizabethan tragedies are remarkable for the extent to which they employ the horrible and revolting. It is true that but for this taste and practice we should never have had *King Lear* or *The Duchess of Malfy*; so impossible is it to isolate the vices from the virtues, the failures from the masterpieces of Elizabethan tragedy. We cannot reprehend a custom but for which one great experiment of the human spirit must have been left unmade, even if we cannot like it; nor can we wholly deplore anything which brings with it some information about the soul. And even leaving Shakespeare apart, the genius of no other race could have manipulated the tragedy of horror into the magnificent farce of Marlowe, or the magnificent nightmare of Webster. We must therefore reserve two measures of comparison: one, that between the baser tragedy of the time and the best tragedy of the time, the other (which is perhaps a moral measure, the application of which would lead us too far for the present discussion) between the tragedy of the time as a whole and another tragedy of horror—we think of Dante's Ugolino and the Oedipus of Sophocles—in which, in the end, the mind seems to triumph. Here, the question of Seneca's influence is capital. If the taste for horror was a result of being trained on Seneca, then it has neither justification nor interest; if it was something inherent in the people and in the age, and Seneca merely the excuse and precedent, then it is a phenomenon of interest. Even to speak of Seneca as offering a precedent and excuse is probably to falsify; for it implies that the Elizabethans would otherwise have been a little uneasy in conscience a

indulging such taste—which is ridiculous to suppose. They merely assumed that Seneca's taste was like their own—which is not *wholly* untrue; and that Seneca represented the whole of classical antiquity—which is quite false. Where Seneca took part is in affecting the type of plot; he supported one tendency against another. But for Seneca, we might have had more plays in *The Yorkshire Tragedy* mould; that is to say, the equivalent of the *News of the World* murder report; Seneca, and particularly the Italianised Seneca, encouraged the taste for the foreign, remote, or exotic. No doubt *The Jew of Malta* or *Titus Andronicus* would have made the living Seneca shudder with genuine aesthetic horror but his influence helped to recommend work with which he had little in common.

When we examine the plays of Seneca, the actual horrors are not so heinous or so many as are supposed. The most unpleasantly sanguinary is the *Thyestes*, a subject which, so far as I know, was not attempted by a Greek dramatist. Even here, if the view that the tragedies were intended only for recitation is true, the cultivated Roman audience were listening to a story which was part of their Hellenic culture, and which is in fact a common property of folklore. The story was sanctified by time. The plots of Elizabethan tragedy were, so far as the audience were concerned, novelties. This plot of *Thyestes* is not employed by any Elizabethan, but the play has undoubtedly more in common with the Tragedy of Blood, especially in its early form, than any other of Seneca's. It has a particularly tedious Ghost. It has, more emphatically than any other, the motive of Revenge, unregulated by any divine control or justice. Yet even in the *Thyestes* the performance of the horrors is managed with conventional tact; the only visible horror is the perhaps unavoidable presentation of the evidence—the children's heads in a dish.

The most significant popular play under Senecan influence is of course *The Spanish Tragedy*, and the further responsibility of Kyd for the translation of the pseudo-Senecan *Cornelia* of Garnier has marked him as the disciple of Seneca. But in *The Spanish Tragedy* there is another element, not always sufficiently distinguished from the Senecan, which (though it may have relations among the Italian Renaissance progeny of Seneca) allies it to something more indigenous. The Senecan apparatus, it is true, is impressive. The Ghost, and Revenge, who replace the Tantalus and the Fury of the *Thyestes*, use all the infernal allusions—Acheron, Charon, and the rest—so dear to Seneca. Temporary insanity is an expedient well known to Seneca. But in the type of plot there is nothing classical or pseudoclassical at all. "Plot" in the sense in which we find plot in *The Spanish Tragedy* does not exist for Seneca. He took a story perfectly well known to everybody, and interested his auditors entirely by his embellishments of description and narrative and by smartness and pungency of dialogue; suspense and surprise attached solely to verbal effects. *The Spanish Tragedy*, like the series of Hamlet plays, including Shakespeare's, has an affinity to our contemporary detective drama.<sup>4</sup> The plot of Hieronimo to compass his revenge by the play allies it with a small but interesting class of drama which certainly owes nothing essential to Seneca: that which includes *Arden of Feversham*<sup>5</sup> and *The Yorkshire Tragedy*. These two remarkable plays are both based on contemporary or recent crimes committed in England. Unless it be the hint of divine retribution in the epilogue to *Arden*, there is no token of foreign or classical influence in these two plays. Yet they are bloody enough. The husband in *The Yorkshire Tragedy* kills his two young sons, throws the servant downstairs and breaks her neck, and nearly succeeds in killing his wife. In *Arden of Feversham* the wife and her conspirators stab the husband to death upon the stage—the rest of the play being occupied by a primitive but effective police inquiry. It is only surprising that there are not more examples of this type of play, since there is evidence of as lively a public interest in police court horrors as there is today. One of the pieces of evidence is associated with Kyd; it is a curious little account of a poisoning case, *The Murder of John Brewen*. (A little later, Dekker was to supply the deficiency of penny journalism with his Plague Pamphlets.) In Kyd, whether *Arden* be by him or by an imitator, we find the union of Senecan with native elements, to the advantage of both. For the Senecan influence is felt in the structure of the play

—the structure of *The Spanish Tragedy* is more dramatic than that of *Arden* or *The Yorkshire Tragedy*, whilst the material of *The Spanish Tragedy*, like that of the other two plays, is quite different from the Senecan material, and much more satisfying to an unlettered audience.

The worst that can be urged against Seneca, in the matter of responsibility for what is disgusting in Elizabethan drama, is that he may have provided the dramatist with a pretext or justification for horrors which were not Senecan at all, for which there was certainly a taste, and the taste for which would certainly have been gratified at that time whether Seneca had ever written or not. Against my use of *The Yorkshire Tragedy*, it may be said that this play (the crime in question was committed only in 1603) and *Arden* also were written after the success of *The Spanish Tragedy*, and that the taste for horrors developed only after it had received Senecan licence. I cannot *prove* the contrary. But it must be admitted that the greater number of the horrors are such as Seneca himself would not have tolerated. In one of the worst offenders—indeed one of the stupidest and most uninspired plays ever written, a play in which it is incredible that Shakespeare had any hand at all, a play in which the best passages would be too highly honoured by the signature of Peele—in *Titus Andronicus*<sup>6</sup>—there is nothing really Senecan at all. There is a wantonness, an irrelevance, about the crimes of which Seneca would never have been guilty. Seneca's Oedipus has the traditional justification for blinding himself, and the blinding itself is far less offensive than that in *Lear*. In *Titus*, the hero cuts off his own hand in view of the audience, who can also testify to the mutilation of the hands and the tongue of Lavinia. In *The Spanish Tragedy*, Hieronimo bites off his own tongue. There is nothing like this in Seneca.

But if this is very unlike Seneca, it is very like the contemporary drama of Italy. Nothing could better illustrate the accidental character of literary “influence”—accidental, that is, with reference to the work exercising the influence—than the difference between Senecan drama in Italy and in France. The French drama is from the beginning restrained and decorous; to the French drama, especially to Garnier, the Senecan drama of Greville, Daniel, and Alexander is allied. The Italian is bloodthirsty in the extreme. Kyd knew both; but it was to the Italian that he and Peele yielded themselves with sympathetic delight. We must remember, too, that Italy had developed stagecraft and stage machinery to the highest point—for the most sumptuous masques in England, Italian managers, engineers and artists were brought over; that the plastic arts were much more important in Italy than elsewhere, and that consequently the spectacular and sensational elements of drama were insisted upon; that Italian civilisation had, in short, everything to dazzle the imagination of unsophisticated northerners emerging into a period of prosperity and luxury. I have no first-hand acquaintance with Italian plays of this epoch; it is a library which few readers would penetrate in pursuit of pleasure; but its character and influence in England are well attested. It is possible to say that Seneca hardly influenced this Italian drama at all; he was made use of by it and adopted into it; and for Kyd and Peele he was thoroughly Italianised.

The Tragedy of Blood is very little Senecan, in short, though it made much use of Senecan machinery; it is very largely Italian; and it added an ingenuity of plot which is native.

If we wished to find the reason for the sanguinary character of much Elizabethan drama—which persists to its end—we should have to allow ourselves some daring generalizations concerning the temper of the epoch. When we consider it, and reflect how much more refined, how much more *classical* in the profounder sense, is that earlier popular drama which reached its highest point in *Everyman*, I cannot but think that the change is due to some fundamental release of restraint. The tastes gratified are always latent: they were then gratified by the drama, as they are now gratified by crime reports in the daily press. It is no more reasonable to make Seneca responsible for this aspect of Elizabethan drama than it is to connect Aeschylus or Sophocles with *Jude the Obscure*. I am not sure that the latter association has not been made, though no one supposes that Hardy prepared himself by close application to the study of Greek drama.

It is pertinent to inquire, in this context, what was the influence of Seneca, in the way of horrors, upon the small body of "Senecal" dramatists who professionally imitated him. But this collation is relevant also to the question of Seneca's influence upon language; so that before making the comparison we may consider this latter question next. Here, the great influence of Seneca is unquestionable. Quotation after quotation, parallel after parallel, may be adduced; the most conspicuous are given in Cunliffe's *Influence of Seneca*, others in Lucas's *Seneca and Elizabethan Tragedy*. So great is this influence that we can say neither that it was good nor that it was bad; for we cannot imagine what Elizabethan dramatic verse would have been without it. The direct influence is restricted to the group of Marlowe and to Marston; Jonson and Chapman are, each in his own way, more sophisticated and independent; the later or Jacobean dramatists, Middleton, Webster, Tourneur, Ford, Beaumont and Fletcher, found their language upon their own predecessors, and chiefly upon Shakespeare. But none of these authors hesitated to draw upon Seneca when occasion served, and Chapman owes much, both good and bad, of his dramatic style to his admiration for Seneca. No better examples can be found, however, of plays which, while not Senecan in form, are yet deeply influenced by Seneca in language, than the *True Tragedy of Richard Duke of York*, and the Shakespearean *Richard II* and *Richard III*. These, with the work of Kyd and that of Marlowe and of Peele, and several of the plays included in the Shakespeare Apocrypha, have a great deal in common.

The precise pilferings and paraphrases have been thoroughly catalogued by the scholars I have mentioned, and others; hardly a dramatist, between Kyd and Massinger, is not many times indebted to Seneca. Instead of repeating this labour, I prefer to call attention to his universal influence. Not only the evolution of the dramatic structure, but the evolution of the blank verse cadence, took place under the shadow of Seneca; it is hardly too much to say that Shakespeare could not have formed the verse instrument which he left to his successors, Webster, Massinger, Tourneur, Ford, and Fletcher, unless he had received an instrument already highly developed by the genius of Marlowe and the influence of Seneca. Blank verse before 1600, or thereabouts, is a crude form of music compared to blank verse after that date; but its progress in fifteen years had been astonishing. In the first place, I believe that the establishment of blank verse as the vehicle of drama, instead of the old fourteener, or the heroic couplet, or (what might have happened) a particular form of prose rhythm, received considerable support from its being obviously the nearest equivalent to the solemnity and weight of the Senecan iambic. A comparison of the trotting metre of our translations with Surrey's translation of Virgil will show, I think, that while the former has undeniable poetic charms of its own, the latter would reveal more resources to the ear of the dramatist. The pre-Marlowe versification is competent, but extremely monotonous; it is literally a *monotone*, containing none of the musical counter-rhythms which Marlowe introduced, nor the rhythms of individual speech which were later added.

*When this eternal substance of my soul  
Did live imprison'd in my wanton flesh,  
Each in their function serving other's need,  
I was a courtier in the Spanish court:*

(Prologue, *Spanish Tragedy*, xxx.)

But to illustrate the early use of this metre under Senecan influence, a worse play serves our purpose better; the Senecan content justifies our quoting at some length from *Lochrine*, an early play<sup>Z</sup> of no merit whatever. Here is the Revival of Learning in the brain of a fourth-rate playwright:

HUMBER.

*Where may I find some desert wilderness,*

*Where I may breathe out curses as I would,  
And scare the earth with my condemning voice;  
Where every echo's repercussion  
May help me to bewail mine overthrow,  
And aid me in my sorrowful laments?  
Where may I find some hollow uncouth rock,  
Where I may damn, condemn, and ban my fill  
The heavens, the hell, the earth, the air, the fire,  
And utter curses to the concave sky,  
Which may infect the airy regions,  
And light upon the Brittain Lochrine's head?  
You ugly sprites that in Cocytus mourn,  
And gnash your teeth with dolorous laments:  
You fearful dogs that in black Lethe howl,  
And scare the ghosts with your wide open throats:  
You ugly ghosts that, flying from these dogs,  
Do plunge yourselves in Puryflegiton:  
Come, all of you, and with your shrieking notes  
Accompany the Brittain's conquering host.  
Come, fierce Erynnys, horrible with snakes;  
Come, ugly Furies, armed with your whips;  
You threefold judges of black Tartarus,  
And all the army of you hellish fiends,  
With new-found torments rack proud Lochrine's bones!  
O gods, and stars! damned be the gods and stars  
That did not drown me in fair Thetis' plains!  
Curst be the sea, that with outrageous waves,  
With surging billows did not rive my ships  
Against the rocks of high Cerannia,  
Or swallow me into her wat'ry gulf!  
Would God we had arriv'd upon the shore  
Where Polyphemus and the Cyclops dwell,  
Or where the bloody Anthropophagi  
With greedy jawes devours the wand'ring wights!*

Enter the ghost of ALBANACT

*But why comes Albanact's bloody ghost,  
To bring a corsive to our miseries?  
Is't not enough to suffer shameful flight,  
But we must be tormented now with ghosts,  
With apparitions fearful to behold?*

GHOST.

*Revenge! revenge for blood!*

HUMBER.

*So nought will satisfy your wand'ring ghost  
But dire revenge, nothing but Humber's fall,  
Because he conquered you in Albany.  
Now, by my soul, Humber would be condemned  
To Tantal's hunger or Ixion's wheel,  
Or to the vulture of Prometheus,  
Rather than that this murder were undone.  
When as I die I'll drag thy cursed ghost  
Through all the rivers of foul Erebus,  
Through burning sulphur of the Limbo-lake,  
To allay the burning fury of that heat  
That rageth in mine everlasting soul.*

GHOST.

*Vindicta, vindicta.* [Exeunt.]

This is the proper Eracles bombast, ridiculed by Shakespeare, Jonson, and Nashe. From this, even to *Tamburlaine*, is a long way; it is too absurdly distorted to serve even as a burlesque of Seneca; but the metre has something Senecan about it. From such verse there is a long distance to the melodies of

*Now comes my lover tripping like a roe,  
And brings my longings tangled in her hair.*

or

*Welcome, my son: who are the violets now  
That strew the green lap of the new-come spring?*

or

*But look, the morn, in russet mantle clad,  
Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastern hill:*

that is to say, to the *lyrical* phase of blank verse, before Shakespeare had analysed it into true dramatic differentiation; it belongs to the first or *declamatory* phase. But this declamation is in its impulse, if not in its achievement, Senecan; and progress was made, not by rejection, but by dissociating this type of verse into products with special properties.

The next stage also was reached with the help of a hint from Seneca. Several scholars, Butler in particular, have called attention to a trick of Seneca of repeating one word of a phrase in the next phrase, especially in stichomythia, where the sentence of one speaker is caught up and twisted by the next. This was an effective stage trick, but it is something more; it is the crossing of one rhythm pattern with another.

—*Sceptrone nostro famulus est potior tibi?*  
—*Quot iste famulus tradidit reges neci.*  
—*Cur ergo regi seruit et patitur iugum?*

(*Hercules.*)

Seneca also gets a kind of double pattern by breaking up lines into minimum antiphonal units:

*Rex est timendus.*  
                                  *Rex meus fuerat pater.*  
*Non metuis arma?*  
                                  *Sint licet terra edita.*  
*Moriere.*  
                                  *Cupio.*  
                                  *Profuge.*  
                                  *Paenituit fugae.*  
*Medea,*  
                                  *Fiam.*  
                                  *Mater es.*  
                                  *Cui sim vides.*  
                                  *(Medea, 168 ff.)*

A man like Marlowe, or even men with less scholarship and less genius for the use of words than he, could hardly have failed to learn something from this. At any rate, I believe that the study of Seneca had its part in the formation of verse like the following:

—*Wrong not her birth, she is of royal blood.*  
—*To save her life, I'll say she is not so.*  
—*Her life is safest only in her birth.*  
—*And only in that safety died her brothers.*

It is only a step (and a few lines further) to the pun:

*Cousins, indeed; and by their uncle cozen'd.*

Some of the effects in such plays as *Richard II* and *Richard III* are indeed of pre-Marlowe origin, as:

*I had an Edward, till a Richard kill'd him;*  
*I had a Henry, till a Richard kill'd him;*  
*Thou hadst an Edward, till a Richard kill'd him;*  
*Thou hadst a Richard, till a Richard kill'd him.*

which is already in even *Lochrine*, as:

*The boisterous Boreas thundreth forth Revenge,*  
*The stony rocks cry out on sharp revenge,*  
*The thorny bush pronounceth dire revenge,*

but in the following lines from Clarence's Dream we see an immense advance over *Lochrine* in the use of infernal machinery:

*I pass'd, methought, the melancholy flood,*

*With that grim ferryman which poets write of,  
Unto the kingdom of perpetual night.*  
*The first that there did greet my stranger soul,  
Was my great father-in-law, renowned Warwick;  
Who cried aloud, "What scourge for perjury  
Can this dark monarchy afford false Clarence?"*<sup>8</sup>

The "kingdom of perpetual night" and the last two lines are a real approximation in English to the magnificence of Senecan Latin at its best; they are far from being a mere burlesque. The best of Seneca has here been absorbed into English.

In *Richard II*, which is usually dated a little earlier than *Richard III*, I find such interesting variations of versification that I am convinced that it is a slightly later play,<sup>9</sup> or else that there is more of Shakespeare in it. There is the same play of words:

*Give Richard leave to live till Richard die.*

*A brittle glory shineth in his face;  
As brittle as the glory is the face.*

but there is less stichomythia, less mere repetition, and a dexterity in retaining and developing the same rhythm with greater freedom and less obvious calculation. (See the long speeches of Richard in Act III, sc. ii and sc. iii, and compare with the more carefully balanced verses of Queen Margaret's tirade in *Richard III*, Act IV, sc. iv.)

When blank verse has reached this point, and passed into the hands of its greatest master, there is no need to look for fresh infusions of Seneca. He has done his work and the one influence on later dramatic blank verse is the influence of Shakespeare. Not that later dramatists do not make great use of Seneca's plays. Chapman uses him, and employs the old machinery; but Seneca's influence on Chapman was chiefly on Chapman's "thought." Jonson uses Seneca deliberately; the superb prologue of *Envy* and *Sylla's Ghost* are adaptations of the Senecan ghost-prologue form, not an inheritance from Kyd. Massinger, a most accomplished dramatist and versifier, sometimes falls back most lamentably upon ghosts and spectacles. But the verse is formed, and Seneca no further responsible for its vices or virtues.

Certainly, Elizabethan bombast can be traced to Seneca; Elizabethans themselves ridiculed the Senecan imitation. But if we reflect, not on the more grotesque exaggerations, but on the dramatic poetry of the first half of the period, as a whole, we see that Seneca had as much to do with its merits and its progress as with its faults and its delays. Certainly it is all "rhetorical," but if it had not been rhetorical, would it have been anything? Certainly it is a relief to turn back to the austere, close language of *Everyman*, the simplicity of the mysteries; but if new influences had not entered, old orders decayed, would the language not have left some of its greatest resources unexplored? Without bombast, we should not have had *King Lear*. The art of dramatic language, we must remember, is as near to oratory as to ordinary speech or to other poetry. If the Elizabethans distorted and travestied Seneca in some ways, if they learned from him tricks and devices which they applied with inexpert hands, they also learned from him the essentials of declaimed verse. Their subsequent progress is a process of splitting up the primitive rhetoric, developing out of it subtler poetry and subtler tones of conversation, eventually mingling, as no other school of dramatists has done, the oratorical, the conversational, the elaborate and the simple, the direct and the indirect; so that they were able to write plays which can still be viewed as plays, with any plays, and which can still be read as poetry, with

any poetry.

It is improper to pass from the questions of Seneca's influence upon the Tragedy of Blood and upon the language of the Elizabethans without mentioning the group of "Senecal" plays, largely produced under the aegis of the Countess of Pembroke. The history of this type of play belongs rather to the history of scholarship and culture than to the history of the Drama: it begins in a sense with the household of Sir Thomas More, and therefore is doubly allied to the present subject by Jasper Heywood; it is continued in the conversations at Cambridge of Mr. Ascham, Mr. Watson, and Mr. (later Sir John) Cheke. The first to attack openly the common stage was Sir Philip Sidney, whose words are well known:

"Our Tragedies and Comedies (not without cause cried out against), observing rules neither of honest civility nor of skilful Poetry, excepting *Gorboduc* (again, I say, of those that I have seen), which notwithstanding, as it is full of stately speeches and well sounding Phrases, climbing to the height of Seneca his style, and as full of notable morality, which it doth most delightfully teach, and so obtain the very end of Poesie, yet in troth it is very defectious in the circumstances, which grievet me, because it might not remain as an exact model of all Tragedies. For it is faulty both in place and time, the two necessary companions of all corporal actions. . . . But if it be so in *Gorboduc*, how much more in all the rest, where you shall have Asia of the one side, and Afric of the other, and so many other under-kingdoms, that the Player, when he cometh in, must ever begin with telling where he is: else the tale will not be conceived? Now ye shall have three Ladies walk to gather flowers, and then we must believe the stage to be a Garden. By and by, we hear news of shipwrack in the same place, and then we are to blame if we accept it not for a Rock."

It was after Sidney's death that his sister, the Countess of Pembroke, tried to assemble a body of wits to compose drama in the proper Senecan style, to make head against the popular melodrama of the time. Great poetry should be both an art and a diversion; in a large and cultivated public like the Athenian it can be both; the shy recluses of Lady Pembroke's circle were bound to fail. But we must not draw too sharp a line of separation between the careful workman who laboured to create a classic drama in England and the hurried purveyors of playhouse successes: the two worlds were not without communication, and the work of the earlier Senecals was not without fruit.

With the part played by the *Tenne Tragedies* in this Senecan tradition I shall deal in the next section of this essay. Here, I wish only to call attention to certain characteristics of Senecal Tragedy in its final form, in the work of Greville, Daniel, and Alexander. I would only remind the reader that these final Senecal plays were written after any real hope of altering or reforming the English stage had disappeared. In the early Elizabethan years appeared a succession of tragedies, mostly performed by the Inns of Court, and therefore not popular productions, which might in favourable circumstances have led to a living Senecan drama. Notably, *Gorboduc* (mentioned by Sidney above), *Jocasta*, and *Gismond of Salerne* (three of the four plays contained in Cunliffe's *Early English Classical Tragedies*). When *The Spanish Tragedy* appeared (with, as I have suggested, its particularly non-classical element) these feeble lights were snuffed out. I pass on to the finished Senecal product, because I am only concerned to elicit the effect of Seneca upon his sedulous admirers and imitators who professed to be, and were, men of taste and culture.

The Monarchic Tragedies of Alexander, Earl of Stirling, are the last on our list, composed under the auspices of the scholarly King James I. They are poor stuff: I imagine that they are more important in the history of the Union than in the history of the Drama, since they represent the choice, by a Scotsman of accidental eminence, to write verse in English instead of in Scots. Their faults are the faults of the other plays of the group; but they have not the virtues of the others. The two plays of

Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke, the friend and biographer of Sidney, have some magnificent passages, especially in the choruses; Greville had a true gift for sententious declamation. But they have much dullness also; and they do not imitate Seneca nearly so faithfully as either those of Alexander or those of Daniel. Greville not only cannot stick to one chorus, but will introduce, on one occasion, a chorus of "Bashas or Caddies," and after the next act, a chorus of "Mahometan Priests"; he introduces the still more doubtful practice of supernatural figures, a "dialogue of Good and Evil Spirits," or even a chorus of two allegorical figures, "Time and Eternity" (ending indeed with the fine line spoken by Eternity: *I am the measure of felicity*). The best, the best sustained, the most poetic and the most lyrical, are two tragedies of Samuel Daniel: *Cleopatra* and *Philotas*. They contain many lovely passages, they are readable all through, and they are well built.

Now, in comparison with the supposed influence of Seneca on the barbarity of Elizabethan tragedy and his supposed bad influence upon the language, what do we find in the plays of those who took him as their model in their attack upon the popular stage, in that attack in which Daniel, in his dedication of *Cleopatra* to the Countess of Pembroke, declared himself the foe of "Gross Barbarism"? Deaths there are, of course, but there is none of these tragedies that is not far more restrained, far more discreet and sober, not only than the Tragedy of Blood, but than Seneca himself. Characters die so decently, so remote from the stage, and the report of their deaths is wrapped up in such long speeches by messengers stuffed with so many moral maxims, that we may read on unaware that any one concerned in the play has died at all. Where the popular playwrights travestied Seneca's melodrama and his fury, the Senecals travesty his reserve and his decorum. And as for the language, that, too, is a different interpretation of Seneca. How vague are our notions of bombast and rhetoric when they must include styles and vocabularies so different as those of Kyd and Daniel! It is by opposite excesses that the Senecals and popular dramatists attract the same reproach. The language of Daniel is pure and restrained; the vocabulary choice, the expression clear; there is nothing farfetched, conceited, or perverse.

CLEOPATRA.

*What, hath my face yet power to win a Lover?  
Can this torne remnant serve to grace me so,  
That it can Caesar's secret plots discover,  
What he intends with me and mine to do?  
Why then, poor beauty, thou hast done thy last,  
And best good service thou could'st do unto me;  
For now the time of death reveal'd thou hast,  
Which in my life did'st serve but to undo me.*

The first two lines are admirable; the rest are good serviceable lines; almost any passage from *Cleopatra* is as good, and some are far better. The whole thing is in excellent taste. Yet we may ponder the fact that it would not have made the slightest difference, to the formation of our Augustan poetry, if Daniel and his friends had never written a line; that Dryden and Pope are nearer allied to—Cowley; and that they owe more to Marlowe than to the purest taste of the sixteenth century. Daniel and Greville are good poets, and there is something to be learned from them; but they, and Sir John Davies who somewhat resembles them, had no influence. The only one of Lady Pembroke's heroes who had influence is Edmund Spenser.

Within the limits of an essay it is impossible to do more than touch on the influence of Seneca upon the "thought" of the Elizabethans, or more exactly, upon their attitude toward life so far as it can be

formulated in words. I would only say enough, at this point, to remind the reader that Seneca's influence upon dramatic form, upon versification and language, upon sensibility, and upon thought, must in the end be all estimated together; they cannot be divided. How the influence of Seneca is related, in the Elizabethan mind, with other influences, perhaps those of Montaigne and Machiavelli, do not know; and I think it is a subject still to be investigated. But the frequency with which a quotation from Seneca, or a thought or figure ultimately derived from Seneca, is employed in Elizabethan plays whenever a moral reflection is required, is too remarkable to be ignored; and when an Elizabethan hero or villain dies, he usually dies in the odour of Seneca. These facts are known to scholars; but if known, they are usually ignored by literary critics. In a comparison of Shakespeare with Dante, for instance, it is assumed that Dante leant upon a system of philosophy which he accepted whole, whereas Shakespeare created his own: or that Shakespeare had acquired some extra- or ultra-intellectual knowledge superior to a philosophy. This occult kind of information is sometimes called "spiritual knowledge" or "insight." Shakespeare and Dante were both merely poets (and Shakespeare a dramatist as well); our estimate of the intellectual material they absorbed does not affect our estimate of their poetry, either absolutely or relatively to each other. But it must affect our vision of them and the use we make of them, the fact that Dante, for instance, had behind him an Aquinas, and Shakespeare behind him a Seneca. Perhaps it was Shakespeare's special role in history have effected this peculiar union—perhaps it is a part of his special eminence to have expressed an inferior philosophy in the greatest poetry. It is certainly one cause of the terror and awe with which he inspires us.

*Omnia certo tramite vadunt  
primusque dies dedit extremum,  
non illa deo vertisse licet  
quae nexa suis currunt causis.  
it cuique ratus prece non ulla  
mobilis ordo.  
multis ipsum timuisse nocet.  
multi ad fatum venere suum  
dum fata timent.*

Compare with *Edward III*, Act IV, sc. iv (see Cunliffe, *Influence of Seneca*, p. 87, and with *Measure for Measure*, Act III, sc. i. And

*Men must endure  
Their going hence, even as their coming hither,  
Ripeness is all.*<sup>10</sup>

### III

The *Tenne Tragedies* were translated and printed separately over a space of about eight years, with the exception of the *Thebais*, which was translated by Newton in 1581 to complete the work for his edition of the whole. The order and dates of the several translations are of interest. The first and best of the translators was Jasper Heywood:<sup>11</sup> his *Troas* was printed in 1559, his *Thyestes* in 1560, his *Hercules Furens* in 1561. The *Oedipus* by Alexander Nevyle (translated 1560) was printed in 1563. In 1566 appeared the *Octavia* of Nuce, the *Agamemnon*, *Medea*, and *Hercules Oetaeus* of Studley in 1566, and the *Hippolytus* of Studley probably in 1567. About fourteen years then elapsed before Newton

produced his complete edition, and it may be presumed that he translated the *Thebais* for that purpose.<sup>12</sup>

It has never been supposed, in spite of the acid taunt of Nashe, that any of the Elizabethan dramatists owe any great debt to these translations.<sup>13</sup> Most of the playwrights, as I have intimated before, may be supposed to have had a smattering of Seneca at school; two of the popular dramatists who exercised a decisive influence at an important moment—Kyd and Peele—were acquainted with several languages, and therefore themselves subjected to several influences. But if we look at the date we cannot overlook the probability that these translations helped to direct the course of events. They (all but one) appeared between 1559 and 1566. The first plays of Senecan form which could be called popular were Sackville and Norton's *Gorboduc*, which appeared in 1561, Gascoyne's *Jocasta* in 1566 and *Gismond of Salerne* in 1567. We must also take account, of course, of the fact that plays of Seneca, and plays in imitation of Seneca, were being produced in Latin at the Universities.<sup>14</sup> The *Troades* was performed in Latin at Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1551. Trinity resumed its enterprise in 1559—the year of Heywood's *Troas*—and between 1559 and 1561 the College produced in Latin four plays of Seneca. And during the 'sixties the two Universities first, and the Inns of Court subsequently, composed and performed a number of Latin plays on the Senecan model. This would have occurred, no doubt, even had Heywood never translated Seneca at all. But there can be little doubt that his translations indicate a nascent interest in a new vernacular drama to vie with classical drama, and that they in turn stimulated the beginning of this drama. At the same busy moment took place another event of capital importance, which combined with this Senecan work to produce English tragedy. In 1557 came the publication of Surrey's translation of Book II of the *Aeneid*, in the new "blank verse," the instrument without which the Elizabethan drama would have been impossible. The first-fruits, *Gorboduc*, are inconsiderable; but this play marks a new epoch; there is no clearer division in the whole of English literature.

We have, in fact, within a period of about forty years, three distinct phases in the development of English tragedy; the first, from 1559 to some time in the early 'eighties, is announced by Heywood's translations; the second is the period in which flourished Kyd and Peele, both of whom came to be influenced by the sudden and soon extinguished genius of Marlowe; the third is the period of Shakespeare up to his culminating tragedies. Then follows a period of Jacobian drama which belongs not so much to Shakespeare, although Shakespeare's last plays fall within the first years of it, as to Beaumont and Fletcher: it is the period, not typically of tragedy, but of tragicomic romance.

In the preceding section I insisted upon the difference between Seneca's influence upon popular drama and his influence upon those fastidious spirits, the Senecals, who tried to observe his dramatic laws. But this difference of tendency is hardly apparent in the first period, or until the appearance of Kyd and Peele. During this period the fashions set at the Universities were followed at the Inns of Court. The plays produced by the legal wits were sometimes acted at the Queen's Court, with which, indeed, the Inns had a kind of formal connection. And in turn the plays produced at the Royal Court affected the more popular drama.<sup>15</sup> *Gorboduc* is followed by *Gismond of Salerne*, and *Gismond* later by the popular and atrocious *Lochrine* (in which Peele almost certainly had a heavy hand); *The Misfortunes of Arthur* was probably too tardy to play much part in the transition. Another play of importance, which shows the persistence of the influence from the Universities upon popular drama, Legge's *Richardus Tertius*, a Latin chronicle play acted at St. John's College, Cambridge, in 1573, and apparently repeated in 1579 and 1582. This play is the parent of *The True Tragedy of Richard III*, and consequently of the entire brood of chronicle plays.

Another point which I have already considered, but which must be mentioned here in a different context, is the relation of Seneca to *Italian* Seneca, and of both to the native tendencies of the time.

- **[A Cold Day in Hell \(Hellcat, Book 3\) pdf](#)**
- [download online Watching YouTube: Extraordinary Videos by Ordinary People here](#)
- [click Polyphenols, wine and health : proceedings of the Phytochemical Society of Europe, Bordeaux, France, 14th-16th April, 1999](#)
- [download online The Complete Book of Fun Maths: 250 Confidence-boosting Tricks, Tests and Puzzles pdf, azw \(kindle\)](#)
  
- <http://www.freightunlocked.co.uk/lib/A-Cold-Day-in-Hell--Hellcat--Book-3-.pdf>
- <http://qolorea.com/library/Watching-YouTube--Extraordinary-Videos-by-Ordinary-People.pdf>
- <http://qolorea.com/library/Polyphenols--wine-and-health---proceedings-of-the-Phytochemical-Society-of-Europe--Bordeaux--France--14th-16th->
- <http://diy-chirol.com/lib/The-Complete-Book-of-Fun-Maths--250-Confidence-boosting-Tricks--Tests-and-Puzzles.pdf>