

**‘THE RESTLESS MIND THAT WOULD NEVER  
RAGING LEAVE’:**

**Jasper Heywood’s *Thyestes***

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Part of the fascination of the material I am presenting here lies in the difficulty of settling exactly which text to regard as definitive, and also to decide how that — if it can be defined — can be fitted into a context or contexts. The texts of *Thyestes* interlock in a number of ways. Seneca probably wrote his play in about 62–3 AD, perhaps during a period of withdrawal from Nero’s imperial court, where he had been a significant influence as the emperor’s erstwhile tutor.<sup>1</sup> Initially he had been a moderating force upon Nero, but after the treason trials and the murder of the latter’s wife Octavia in 62 AD as well as the deaths of his mother and half-brother, Seneca lost ground. As an author Seneca was well known in the Middle Ages, though perhaps not so much for his tragedies as for his moral and philosophical preoccupations, which it became important to reconcile with Christianity.<sup>2</sup> The tragedies attracted early printing, the first edition being by Andreas Bellfortis at Ferrara in 1484. This was followed by a considerable number of editions in the sixteenth century in several European countries, including a contribution from Erasmus (1514). The next step was translation: there is a record of a translation of *Hercules Furens* by John Sheprey at Oxford between 1530 and 1541.<sup>3</sup> Jasper Heywood’s version of the *Thyestes*, printed in 1560, is one of the first to have survived. He also translated the *Troas* (1559) and *Hercules Furens* (1561). His work on these three of the ten reputed tragedies was subsequently supplemented by other scholars, and some twenty or so years later in 1581 a composite volume called *The Tenne Tragedies* was edited and introduced by Thomas Newton, though Heywood had taken up other interests by then and had no direct influence upon the collected volume.

And so we come to Joost Daalder’s edition of Heywood’s *Thyestes* which paid special attention to Seneca himself, Heywood’s methods as translator, and the presentation of a text.<sup>4</sup> This edition brought together the skills of classical scholarship as well as an understanding of Heywood’s personal context and as such it remains a valuable resource in assessing ways in which Seneca’s plays came alive again in the sixteenth century. However there is one important limitation to Daalder’s edition: in accordance with

the editorial policy of the New Mermaids series, it is rendered into modern English so that some of Heywood's linguistic choices and skills are somewhat obscured and one has to go back either to the 1560 edition, or to its close reprint in the 1581 collection, to appreciate Heywood's work more fully.

Thus I am concerned with a number of interlocking perspectives: Seneca's life and work in imperial Rome as a political figure; the history of editing and printing his work at the Renaissance; the nature and purpose of the translations by Heywood and others; performance issues comparing what went on in Rome and what happened in sixteenth-century England; and, perhaps most intriguing of all, Heywood's methodology and the reasons why he undertook his translations, which were a significant literary and cultural step. However, I do not intend to elaborate all of these here: it is perhaps enough merely to indicate that such perspectives need to be borne in mind. I shall concentrate instead upon certain features of the translation of *Thyestes*: a profile of Heywood at the time of the translation together with a consideration of some language features of the translation, and Heywood's most significant additions to the text; some aspects of Stoicism in Seneca and its relation to tragedy; and an assessment of the emphasis Heywood puts upon what he found in Seneca.

## I

Born in 1535, Jasper was the son of John Heywood the dramatist who, though a committed Catholic, survived in or near to the English royal Court for most of his long life, in spite of the changes in religious orientation from the reign of Henry VIII to that of Elizabeth I. Jasper was a page to the Princess Elizabeth and, being sent to Oxford in 1547, aged 12, became a fellow of Merton College in 1554. An unknown event caused him to lose this appointment but he was immediately elected to a Fellowship at All Souls, and it was while he was there that he undertook the translations of three plays by Seneca.

We can only make guesses about his character and disposition. He seems to have been very bright, as his academic progress suggests, and he may well have inherited or been stimulated by his father's wit, whether it be pure intelligence or perhaps an interest in playing with words. No doubt John's Catholic devotion, which is identifiable through many aspects of his plays, played a part in Jasper's upbringing.<sup>5</sup> We should perhaps recall that in 1544, when Jasper was about nine years old, John

was tried and condemned for his part in a conspiracy against Cranmer and had to make a public recantation at St Paul's. Jasper's later life may well bear out the intensity of his religious involvement in that he left England not long after his translations, became a Jesuit priest, and eventually led a Jesuit mission to England in the 1580s. After his arrest he was initially condemned to death but this was changed to a sentence of exile. Some accounts of his disposition suggest that he was contentious and mentally unstable in later life. He experienced apparitions of the devil and he was noted for the emotional intensity of his devotion.<sup>6</sup> All this may give some indication of why Seneca might have had a special appeal to him. Such a profile may be considered in relation to two contrasting aspects of Seneca's attraction for Heywood: his interest in the intense emotional predicaments affecting many of the characters in his plays, as against the ideal detachment which characterises his stoicism. However one looks at it, the later storms of Jasper's life cannot have directly affected the translations: but his interest in working on these texts may in part be accounted for through preoccupations in the plays which in some ways can be matched with reported aspects of his temperament.

At the same time we should not overlook the national political and religious context at the time of the translations. John Heywood was deeply committed to Mary Tudor, both during her youth when she was rejected by Henry VIII, and later when she was queen, a period which was marked by much religious strife including the burning of Protestants. The violence in public life often associated with religious faction had been momentous for a generation or more. It is tempting to draw a parallel with the violence of first-century imperial Rome. Perhaps Seneca's portrayal and representation of the inhuman deeds of Atreus and others had allowed an expression of the repressed horror arising from what was exhibited in public places in Rome, whether it was real-life violence or spectacle offered as 'entertainment'.<sup>7</sup> As such his work may have attracted the attention of Tudor writers on much the same grounds of repression and repulsion.

After Mary's death John Heywood remained in Elizabeth's England for a while, until he left for Flanders in 1564, the year of the Act of Uniformity. Similarly William Rastell, John's brother-in-law, who had printed most of his pro-Catholic plays in the 1530s and had subsequently become a judge, fled in 1562. Jasper Heywood's active interest in Seneca thus falls at the beginning of Elizabeth's reign when the transition to the new régime might have been the cause for apprehension on the part of Catholics and in his own family in particular. The latter had to some

extent participated in and been affected by the religious conflicts played out in the public arena — John Heywood was related by marriage to Sir Thomas More (executed 1535). Ascertainable in the *Thyestes*, the concern with the rôle of the monarch and the possibility of tyranny might well have been an issue, a matter to which we shall return later in the context of Seneca's original composition. However, as we shall see, direct reference to Catholic doctrine is wanting in the play.

Let us now turn to some linguistic and textual aspects of Jasper's translation. His father's plays are full of wordplay and there are many passages of witty dialogue in them. In these the rapport between characters is often a notable feature. Though John always used a comic mode, Jasper no doubt found in Seneca passages which contained similar intense exchanges, albeit with a tragic intent. But, as Gary Meltzer has suggested, the Senecan text has much black humour embedded within it.<sup>8</sup> The following passage between Atreus and his servant (Satelles), full of tension and foreboding about the way Atreus intends to torment his brother, may stand as an example:

- S. What sworde?  
 A. To litle that.  
 S. What fire?  
 A. And that is yet to light.  
 S. What weapon then shall sorow suche fynde fit to worke thy wyll?  
 A. Thyestes selfe.  
 S. Then yre it self yet thats a greater yll.  
 S. *Ferrum?*  
 A. *Parum est.*  
 S. *Quid ignis?*  
 A. *Etiamnunc parum est.*  
 S. *Quonam ergo telo tantus utetur dolor?*  
 A. *Ipsa Thyeste.*  
 S. *Maius ira est hoc malum.* 2. 82-4/257-9<sup>9</sup>

This device of breaking lines up between speakers (*antilabe*) is a feature of Seneca's work, as indeed is the stichomythia: both are used frequently at tense moments, and in highly emotional passages. As Gordon Braden has noted, there is much closely argued cut and thrust in such exchanges.<sup>10</sup> Heywood responds also in his translation to another related device in Seneca's work. The technique of making dialogue interlock tightly is enhanced by picking up one word and repeating it at the beginning of the

next speech, as in the word 'know' (*agnoscis/agnosco* in the original) in this passage:

Atr. ... With fathers armes embrace them quickly nowe  
 For here they are loe come to thee: dooste thou thy children knowe?  
 Thy. I know my brother.  
 Atr ... *Expedi amplexus, pater,*  
*Venere. — gnatos ecquid agnoscis tuos?*  
 Thy. *Agnosco fratrem.* 5: 3. 35–7/1004–6

This is the moment when Thyestes sees the heads of the children whose bodies he has just unknowingly consumed and he recognises, not only the children but also his brother's part in the catastrophe which has befallen him. I suggest that this word 'know', simple though it is, is heavy with meaning and its concentrated use here is typical of what might have attracted Tudor readers of Seneca. Call it 'pithy' perhaps, an indication of the wit which was so compelling. It is a nice question whether it is the emotion or the rhetorical expression of it which is the main attraction. Indeed, as Alessandro Schiesaro pointed out, Seneca's drama is alien to realistic forms of representation.<sup>11</sup> Heywood closely follows Seneca's virtuoso expression and, in exploiting the power of its language, ingeniously endowed it with detailed suggestive images.

In its turn, this wittiness is related to Seneca's known skill in the composition of aphorisms. Once again Heywood follows, recreating them in his own language, as in:

It is the mynde that onely makes a kyng.  
*Mens regnum bona possidet.* 2. Chor. 44/380

But we should also see the wit in the Seneca text as a means of evoking other layers of meaning. In this example we have the painful but arresting image of the stricken body of Thyestes' son Tantalus.<sup>12</sup> Bereft of life the body hesitates as to which way to fall:

... The swoorde then drawne away  
 When long the body had uphelde it selfe in doubtfull staye,  
 Whiche way to fall, at lengthe vppon the vnckle downe it falles.  
 ... *educto stetit*  
*ferro cadauer: cumque dubitasset diu*  
*hac parte an illa caderet, in patrum cadit.* 4. 101–3/723–5

The critical thing is that the body falls upon Atreus himself, thus undermining, or perhaps inverting, his punctilious and ritualistic attention to the slaughter of the children, which he had been enacting as a sacrificial act on an altar. Though Atreus achieves his fateful objective with an obsessive drive, Seneca brings out also an underlying failure which helps in his condemnation. This is especially apparent in the scene where Atreus tells Thyestes about the meal:

But now my wrathe to lyghtly ended is.  
He rent his soons with wycked gumme, himselfe yet wotyng nought,  
Nor they therof.

*cecedit in cassum dolor.*  
*Scidit ore natos impio, sed nesciens,*  
*sed nescientes.*

5: 3. 98–100/1066–8

Perhaps Heywood did not quite get the succinct force of Seneca's play on *nesciens*, pointed up by the repetitive *sed* and shifting neatly from singular to plural, but you can see and hear him trying in 'wotyng nought'. Atreus regrets that he was not able to make Thyestes, as well as his sons, conscious of what was happening at the very moment when Thyestes was eating them. Of course it was impossible for Atreus to effect this: but to want it to be possible is a symptom of the madness or the anger possessing him.

These aspects of Heywood's adaptation of characteristics of Seneca's language need to be seen against two other matters: his attention to the Latin text, and his metrical choices. In his Preface he is careful to discuss both the overall problem of rendering the fine language and style of Seneca into English, a preoccupation which was a commonplace in the sixteenth century, and also the nature of the text which was the base for his translation. Daalder has made it clear that that this was taken from the edition of Gryphius printed at Lyons in 1541.<sup>13</sup> This is made more likely because in his translation of *Hercules Furens* Heywood actually printed a facing Latin text and there is no doubt that this was taken from Gryphius. However, it appears from Daalder's analysis that Heywood edited the Latin text of *Hercules Furens* so that the final version he printed is substantially his own redaction rather than simply a fair copy of Gryphius. Indeed De Vocht points out that he incorporated readings from at least four of the known editions besides his primary reliance upon Gryphius.<sup>14</sup>

A further interesting aspect of his editorial preliminaries arises in the Preface to *Thyestes*. Daalder indicates that Heywood used notes from the

edition by Ascensius (Paris, 1513), but it is not mentioned in the Preface. Instead there are references to editions by Avantius (Venice, 1517: i.e. the Aldine edition) and Colinëus (not traced, and possibly fictitious).<sup>15</sup> This suggests that whilst Heywood was certainly exercising some scholarly discrimination, he was also anxious to cover his tracks, though the exact objectives of these manoeuvres remains open to conjecture.

The commonest metre of Heywood's translation is fourteeners couplets. In the printing of the 1560 text these lines were divided into 8 + 6, but as Daalder (xlviii–xlix) convincingly shows, this was a convenience for the printer working to a small page, rather than a prosodic decision by Heywood. For the 1581 reprinting the lines were not divided. This allows us to see more clearly that the pauses in the long lines came at various points and are not consonant with a systematic 8 + 6 break, as the following lines suggest:

The sights amasde all other men, but stedfast yet alway  
 Of mynde, unmoued Atreus stands, and euen the godds dothe fray  
 That threaten him, and all delay forsaken by and bye  
 To thaulters turnes, and therwithall a syde he lookes awrye.

*Mouere cunctos monstra, sed solus sibi  
 Immotus Atreus constat atque ultro deos  
 Terret minantes: iamque dimissa mora  
 Assuilit<sup>16</sup> aris, toruum et obliquum intuens.*

4. 81–4/703–6

This metre is used for dialogue and for long speeches including the Messenger's narration and the final soliloquy of Thyestes which Heywood himself composed and added to the original. Such fourteeners were the standard rhythm for most of the interludes for many years in the sixteenth century. For the set pieces by the Chorus, however, the metre is in contrasting pentameter quatrains rhyming abab, no doubt in imitation of the contrast in Seneca. For all the different types of dramatic speech used in the play, Heywood frequently employs alliteration, especially in moments of high emotion.<sup>17</sup>

Turning to Heywood's additions to the text, the extensive Preface of 342 lines, which was not reprinted in the 1581 edition, gives some of the most important insights into the translator's intention. It is conceived, in a fashion which we may regard as both ancient and medieval, as a dream vision. The author is overawed to find that he is visited by Seneca, who encourages him to continue the good work of translation begun in *Troas*. The visitor is clad in a scarlet gown, wears a garland of bays, and carries a

book, which turns out to be the tragedies. In recognizing him Heywood speaks of his 'woondrous wit and regall stile' (36). Without delay Seneca encourages him to continue and in terms which indicate Heywood's interest in his task: that he finds appropriate metres for it, and that he uses his native language so that his works might be revived. This word *revive* (41) suggests that Heywood aimed at making the plays living, and he also uses the word *renew* (42). However, Heywood modestly suggests that there are plenty of other poets, clustered at the Inns of Court, who could do the work better; and after giving a list, he refers to the style of the tragedies in a different way: 'Repleate with sugred sentence sweete and practise of the pen' (112).<sup>18</sup>

Heywood's Seneca goes on to describe the abode of the Muses on Mount Helicon. It is a lyrical affair with a good deal of scenic description, and with appealing and interestingly specific details of the buildings. It appears that the Muses have recently enlarged their property to make room for portraits of newly arrived English poets (271-4). In the midst of this is a paradisal stream, surrounded — believe it or not — by a wall of *jasper* stone:

In mydst of all this woorthy woorke there runns a pleasant spryng  
That is of all the paradyse the most delycious thyng,  
That rounde about enclosed is, with wall of Jasper stone.

Pref. 275-7

Seneca then opens his book at the *Thyestes* and he summarizes the story. Heywood is transfixed by this, but he is also enraged by the carelessness of the printers mentioned earlier and which will be amended in his own book.<sup>19</sup> Seneca's departure at this point is followed by a strangely emotional passage in which Heywood laments the disappearance passionately. He creates similes to convey the sense of deprivation:

Somtyme I curst, somtyme I cryde, lyke wight that waxed woode,  
Or Panther of hir pray depryude, or Tygre of her broode.

Pref. 327-8

It is almost as though he is deliberately whipping up the emotional tempo in conscious preparation for what is to come. This heightening of the emotional pitch makes a bridge to the beginning of Seneca's text. Prompted by the Fury Megaera, who appears in the first scene of the play, Heywood takes up his pen and begins to translate.



The other major addition by Heywood is Act 5 Scene 4, the last scene of the play, comprising a soliloquy of 62 fourteeners by Thyestes. This innovation naturally increases the protagonist's effect upon the audience. As we shall see, in his first appearance Thyestes had shown some characteristics of Stoic detachment from earthly success, but here the passion is raised high. Heywood makes him review comparatively the horrors surrounding his inheritance from his grandfather Tantalus, and also other terrible aspects of hell such as the vultures who daily consume parts of Tityus, and the wheel of Ixion (5: 4. 32-40). All these, says Thyestes, pale before his monstrous deed. This gives an opportunity for Heywood to write in high rhetoric. From an idea Seneca expressed earlier in the play in the fourth Chorus (Chorus 4. 1-9), he develops the conceit that the gods have fled in face of the horrible deed, as have all the heavenly and supernatural elements: 'The Sun, the starrs, the light, the day, the Godds, the ghosts be gone' (5: 4. 52). But this annihilation, Thyestes urges, must also come to him. He calls upon these powers to revenge themselves upon him for causing their flight and asserts that he will follow them always demanding that their revenge in the form of a thunderbolt may fall upon himself, as he conceives he deserves:

By seas, by lands, by woods, by rocks, in darke I wander shall:  
And on your wraathe, for right rewarde to due deserts wyll call.

5: 4. 59-60

Thus Heywood's addition matches his overriding interest in the elaboration of rhetorical devices, especially in a situation of high emotion. Seneca's original ending, without the addition, is much more a matter of the unresolved conflict between the two brothers, each seeking to prolong the torment of the other, and speaking of revenge (5: 3. 142/1110-11). In neither case is there any sense of tragic resolution, so that in this respect Heywood is in tune with his original. It is also worth noting that in his Preface and in his new ending Heywood does not seek to impose a specifically moral interpretation upon the play. This contrasts markedly with the remarks by Thomas Newton in his Epistle dedicatory to the 1581 collection in which he praises the moral supremacy of Seneca among heathen writers in that he 'beateth down sinne, loose lyfe, dissolute dealinge, and vnbyrdled sensuality'. Here we must recall that the translations were made at a time of stress for Heywood and yet it is remarkable that he does not impose a Christian or specifically catholic

gloss upon the play. Indeed he follows and develops Seneca's interests, including that in Stoicism, as we shall see.

II

In this section I should like to discuss some aspects of Seneca's work with particular reference to *Thyestes*. For many of these Heywood follows his original closely, and it would appear that his incorporation of these features occurred because he saw in them reflections of his own time and its needs. We may begin this with a consideration of the way Seneca's interest in Stoicism is managed in the play. His approach has been characterised as eclectic and that of a popularizer, but there is no doubt that elements reflecting Stoic assumptions can be derived from such prose works as the *Epistolae Morales* and they can be traced in *Thyestes* and other plays.<sup>20</sup> The heart of this seems to be the need to preserve a strategy against disaster, a detachment from worldly values and aspirations, and the supremacy of reason over the passions. The Stoic position is set out in three places in the play, but it is apparent that the dramatic form allows different aspects of it to be subject to extensive and telling modifications. However, these passages do not necessarily represent a deliberate undermining of Stoicism: it is rather a matter of how the multivalent voices of a tragedy allow the emergence of contrasting views. These occur in close proximity to one another in Act 2 and 3, forming in advance, one might suggest, a theoretical framework for the catastrophic events of Acts 4 and 5, and they follow hard upon the grim account of how the Fury Megaera will undermine the descendants of Tantalus. Interestingly they are expressed in differing dramatic modes: the dialogue between Atreus and the Servant, the Choric Ode at the end of Act 2, and Thyestes' opening soliloquy followed by the dialogue with his son Phylisthenes in Act 3. Atreus tells the Servant of his hostility towards his brother Thyestes, against which the Servant offers a calmer and more virtuous approach, especially with regard to the good will of the people:

Doothe fame of people nought  
Aduerse thee feare? 2: 28-9

*Fama te populi nihil*  
*Adversa terret?* 2: 204-5

and to virtuous intention:

And where that shame is none,  
Nor care of right, faythe, pietie nor holines none staythe,  
That kyngdome swarues.

*Vbi non est pudor,  
Nec cura iuris sanctitas pietas fides,  
Instabile regnum est.*

2: 40–2/14–16

But these pleas, described as ‘respectable Stoic concepts’,<sup>21</sup> are useless and the dynamic of the scene shows the Servant giving way to the passionate intention of Atreus, so that he eventually joins with his master in details of the plotting, and swears himself to secrecy.

Peter J. Davis has noted that the Chorus, in spite of its philosophical intention, is far out of touch with the essential drama of Atreus’ plot and of the passions which underlie it. Instead, in the Ode after Act 2, it is still hoping that piety will prevail, in spite of what we have seen of the Fury’s initial prompt and the cruelty of Atreus’ intentions.<sup>22</sup> Initially the Chorus seems to criticise the emergence of passion in relation to kingship, which is in itself a significant focus of this song. But it emphatically makes the point that it is not riches, renown, garments, ‘lofty look’, nor the crown which make for kingship. Instead

A kyng he is that feare hath layde asyde,  
And all affects that in the brest are bred:  
Whome impotent ambition dothe not guyde,  
Nor fickle fauour hathe of people led.

*Rex est, qui posuit metus  
Et diri mala pectoris:  
Quem non ambitio impotens  
Et nunquam stabilis fauor  
Vulgi praecipitis mouet.*

2: Chor. 13–16/348–52

Later in the same song they move from worldly temptations to the necessary inner peace shared by kings and commoners:

A kyng he is that feareth nought at all.  
Eche man him selfe this kyngdome geeues at hande.  
Let who so lyst with myghtie mace to raygne,  
In tyckle toppe of court delyght to stande  
Let me the sweete and quiet rest obtayne.  
So sette in place obscure and lowe degree,  
Of pleasaunt rest I shall the sweetnes knoe.

My lyfe vnknowne to them that noble be,  
Shall in the steppe of secret sylence goe.

*Rex est qui metuit nihil.*<sup>23</sup>  
*Hoc regnum sibi quisque dat.*  
*Stet, quicumque uolet potens*  
*Aulae culmine lubrico;*  
*Me dulcis saturet quies;*  
*Obscuro positus loco*  
*Leni perfruar otio,*  
*Nullis nota Quiritibus*  
*Aetas per tacitum fluat.*

2: Chor. 52–60/388–97

But this beautiful language conceals the darker purpose of the inclusion of these passages, for the actions of Atreus and their consequences are at odds with the wisdom encapsulated here. Nevertheless we should notice that the dramatic mechanism, with its action followed by a contrasting statement and then the consequences of the action, are arranged so that both the events and the Chorus's theory are active in the minds of the audience.<sup>24</sup>

This Chorus is followed immediately by the first appearance of Thyestes at the beginning of Act 3. In his initial speech he quickly shows himself to be in two minds. Once again Seneca was quick to exploit dramatic form through its capacity to show conflict. At this point Thyestes' doubt is about his fear of returning to Argos and the riches which await him. Perhaps he ought to seek the company of animals and avoid the flattery which he sees as endemic in the court to which he is now returning. Though urged by his son, Thyestes longs for the freedom from care which he has known. In spite of the pleas about duty and piety drawing him to the crown he persists in desiring the quiet life: 'And poore estate the sweetenes feeles of rest and quyet lyfe' (*rebusque paruis alta*<sup>25</sup> *praestatur quies*: 3: 1. 69/469).

The scene ends with his admission that it is his son who leads and not himself. In the events which follow Thyestes ignores the wisdom he has outlined here. He does in fact give way to the beguiling claims of kingship and in doing so he becomes a victim of Atreus' plan. Seneca has constructed this in such a way as to suggest that Thyestes betrays himself and ignores his own perception of virtue, replacing it with unworthy ambition. At the end of the scene, in spite of his conscience, still

protesting his desire for a quiet life (5: 2. 42–5/531–3), he allows himself to be crowned by Atreus.

Besides these examples of Stoic attitudes, however undermined and contextualized within the dramatisation, there are other significant elements. One is the presence of violent emotions, as we find in Atreus. His bitter intentions are made clear in his first speeches, and in the way in which he prevails upon the Servant in Act 2, a clear case of passion overcoming reason.<sup>26</sup> A more intriguing episode, however, is the description of his killing of the children and the cooking of their bodies as described by the Messenger in Act 4. This is seen not only in the details of the compulsive or obsessive ways in which he conducts the horror as though it were a sacrificial rite, attending meticulously to formalities, but also in the language of the description by the Messenger making the bestiality of Atreus so clear. Though he is in the part of a priest (4: 69), he appears first as a tiger of the Ganges (4: 85–91/707–13), then:

As long maend Lyon feerce amid the wood of Armenie,  
The droue pursues and conquest makes of slaughter many one ...

*Silua iubatus qualis Armenia leo*  
*in caede multa uictor armento incubat ...* 4: 110–11/732–3

In both these comparisons Seneca makes sure to mention the *ira* of the beasts, and Heywood follows (713, 735). It might also be noted that this indirect account, the conventional narrating of stupendous events occurring offstage, allows the particular gloss of the observer's description to be added to the scene. Even though it is reported, recounting such events and interpreting them remains intensely dramatic.

Thyestes' yielding to passion is portrayed partly by his behaviour in the last Act before he realises the nature of the meal he is consuming. In defiance of Stoic restraint he shakes off the cares of previous years and rejects sorrow (5: 2. 1–2, 14–16/920–1, 933–4). But Seneca, once again exploiting dramatic contrast, at the same time also puts uncertainty into Thyestes' heart, with a 'trembling terror' which anticipates the horrors which will be revealed to him. This is made more poignant because the audience has already heard the Messenger's report in Act 4 and Thyestes has not.

The Stoic intention, as expressed by Seneca elsewhere, was to offer a defence against disaster, and one of the chief ways of doing this was to turn injury to advantage.<sup>27</sup> But Thyestes fails to do this at the crisis in the last Act. When Atreus reveals the outcome of his actions and taunts him with

what he has eaten, the despair of Thyestes is vigorously presented, especially in his cries for annihilation. His determination to plague the gods until they destroy him is a manifestation of uncontrolled passion:

Mee stryke! With triple edged toole thy brande of flamyng fyre  
Beate through this brest!

*Me pete: trisulco flammeam telo facem  
per pectus hoc trans mitte.*

5: 3. 121–2/1089–90<sup>28</sup>

I think we need to modify our inclination to think that it not so surprising that he is suicidal, that perhaps he is a victim to be pitied. The underlying strength of the commitment to Stoicism directs us rather to an appreciation of how he has lost control and how he has declined from the humbler if vulnerable detachment which was the keynote of his first appearance. In this way Seneca exploits the tragic predicament of Thyestes: it is tragic, but there is also a consciousness of Stoic attitudes which is interwoven with the development of the tragedy. The sense that the gods have withdrawn in horror of what has happened, and also that in a sinister way Thyestes has become one with his children, both serve to intensify the bleakness of the outcome. This is not a tragedy which offers reconciliation. Instead, if there is an ideological programme, it is to point to Stoic values in an inverse way. Such a dialectical approach may indeed leave some questions about how far the play is purely and entirely Stoic, if such a thing can be envisaged.

### III

Jasper Heywood's approach to the play does not endorse the moral interpretation of Seneca and of tragedy in general which was voiced in the sixteenth century. In spite of Newton's prefatory comments noted above, such an approach appears in neither of the two lengthy passages Heywood composed to go with his translation: the Preface, and Thyestes' speech which adds a concluding scene to the play (5: 4). In the former his admiration for Seneca is the leading theme, together with what we might characterize as 'literary' appreciation of his work — its style and its methods — which is expressed especially in terms of the influence of the Muses and Heywood's own aspirations. The passionate ending to the Preface in which Heywood portrays his own grief — however excessive it may seem — is a fitting prelude to the play, but it also reveals an emotional response on Heywood's part which is far from being a moral or even a

Christian one. Mostly the gods in the Preface are pagan (8, 94, 166), but contemporary Christian belief is reflected in the concern for the departed soul of the son of Heywood's dedicatee, Sir John Mason (151–89).

The additional scene is rich in stylistic devices, including alliteration and imagery designed to intensify the horrors of Thyestes' mental state. Heywood uses paradoxes and word-play which recall those occurring earlier in the play as though fascinated by the rhetorical ingenuity they embody:

... a more then monstrous wombe

That is of his vnhappy broode, become a cursed tombe. 5: 4. 19–20

Speaking of Atreus losing his own sons, Thyestes contrasts his own predicament:

I coulde thy famyne better beare, my panche is now repleate

With foode: and with my children three, my belly is extent. 5: 4. 30–1

... foure wombes enwrapt in one. 5: 4. 34

There is thus a diversity of interests underlying Heywood's undertaking. Some further light may be shed on these from the fortunate survival of eight of his poems which were reprinted in Richard Edwardes' *The Paradise of Dainty Devices* (1576, and reprinted eight times until 1606).<sup>29</sup> By the time these were published Heywood had left England, and one may suppose that these poems had been circulating in manuscript, but the original dates are unknown. Three of these poems are entirely Catholic in spirit and persuasion: *Easter Day* (10) celebrates the Resurrection; *The Complaint of a Sorrowful Soul* (126) looks ahead to Judgement Day when he hopes that his good works will deflect the pleas against him by his vices; and *Alluding his state to prodigall child* (126) sees himself as the one who has erred. This last, however, gives a hint of his self-knowledge in its reference to his 'restlesse minde [that] would neuer raging leaue' and the 'Fonde fancies [that] stuft my braine' (127: 26, 28). Others have no conspicuous religious connotation and some give hints of Stoic interest. Two of them are concerned with wisdom. *Who mindes to bring his shippe to happy shore* (12) is composed of wise sayings, some of them acknowledging Cato's *Distichs*. *A wittie and pleasaunt conceite* (124) offers the proposition that the wise man should avoid unthinking activity. This appears to have two possible interpretations: that thoughtless behaviour is undesirable, and that being thoughtful means that one is taking proper care about one's life. Even closer perhaps is *Looke or you leape* (96) which

consists largely of proverbs and has the refrain: 'Se all, saie nought, holde thee content' for each of the four verses. Possibly this poem reflects the influence of his father who, starting in 1562, published a series of *Dialogues* consisting largely of proverbs.

The poem closest to the tragedies, however, and one which contains strong Stoic themes is no. 100, the one whose title is the following couplet:

Who wayteth on this wauering world, and veweth each estate,  
By tryall taught shall learne it best, to liue in simple rate.

This poem gives us the value to be gained from suffering, the advantage of a simple life, and a focus upon the power of Fortune. There is a series of examples to show how those who stand above others are vulnerable to a fall. The poem is entirely classical in its allusions, and carries conventional references to Jove's thunderbolts and to the salutary examples of Icarus and Phaeton. This may suggest that Heywood was drawn to translating the plays by an interest in classical thought rather than a purely Christian interpretation or accommodation. In spite of his Catholic upbringing he may not, at the time of the translations, have yet made the commitment which was to come later when he entered the Jesuit priesthood. A further attraction would seem to be associated with literary aspiration which was spurred by his reaction to the strength and variety of Seneca's style. But in the end we find that there is a division between the Catholic belief which was no doubt important to Jasper Heywood, as a few of the poems show, and his response to the dazzling rhetoric of Seneca which clearly moved him to admiration and imitation, and perhaps also impressed him by its philosophy by its psychological and emotional turmoil.

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## NOTES

- 1 Seneca's *'Thyestes'* edited R.J. Tarrant (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1985) 13.
- 2 Manuscripts of Seneca's tragedies are traceable at the Augustinian Friary at York in 1370, Bury St Edmunds in 1410, Oxford 1439, and King's College, Cambridge 1452: see *Dramatic Texts and Records of Britain: A Chronological Topography to 1558* edited Ian Lancashire (Toronto UP, 1984), nos. 1558, 243, 1248, and 436.
- 3 Lancashire *Dramatic Texts and Records of Britain*, no. 1276.



- 4 In the New Mermaids Series (London: Ernest Benn, 1982).
- 5 For specifically Catholic aspects of John Heywood's plays see *The Plays of John Heywood* edited Richard Axton and Peter Happé (Cambridge: Brewer, 1991) 16–27.
- 6 For details of Heywood's later life see D. Flynn "Out of Step": Six Supplementary Notes on Jasper Heywood' in *The Reckoned Expense: Edward Campion and the Early English Jesuits* edited T.M. McCoog (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1996) 179–92.
- 7 C. Segal 'Boundary Violation and the Landscape of the Self in Senecan Tragedy' in his *Interpreting Greek Tragedy: Myth, Poetry, Text* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986) 335–6 note.
- 8 'Dark Wit and Black Humour in Seneca's *Thyestes*' *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 118 (1988) 309–30.
- 9 Because of the complexity of the text I give references to Daalder's edition which is numbered separately within scenes, followed by the through line numbers from the Latin text in Seneca *Tragedies I*, edited and translated John G. Fitch, 2 vols (Loeb; Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2002). The quotations themselves, however, are transcribed from the sixteenth-century editions: the English from Heywood's *Thyestes* (London: Thomas Berthelet, 1560) and the Latin from the text published by Gryphius: *L. Annaei Senecae Cordubensis Tragoediae Septem* (Lyons: Seb. Gryphius, 1541).  
*ira est hoc*] Gryphius: *hoc ira est* Fitch.
- 10 Gordon Braden *Renaissance Tragedy and the Senecan Tradition: Anger's Privilege* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985) 36. For the epigrammatic and antithetic aspects see C.D.N. Costa 'The Tragedies' in his *Seneca* (London: Routledge, 1974) 96–115 at 101.
- 11 *Passions in Play: 'Thyestes' and the Dynamics of Senecan Drama* (Cambridge UP, 2003) 16.
- 12 Tantalus is the name of Thyestes' grandfather and also of one of his sons in Seneca. In the Gryphius edition the son, who has a speaking part, is called Phylisthenes: Heywood follows Gryphius.
- 13 See note 9 above. This edition was also used by John Studley for his translations of *Agamemnon* and *Medea*, included in *The Tenne Tragedies*.
- 14 H. De Vocht *Jasper Heywood and his Translations of Seneca's Troas, Thyestes and Hercules Furens* (Materialien zur Kunde des älteren Englischen Dramas 41; Louvain: Uystpruyst, 1913) XXV–XXVI.
- 15 Daalder *Thyestes* page 20 and the Appendix pages 83–8, where there is a full discussion of the Latin texts used by Heywood.
- 16 *Assiluit*] Gryphius: *adsistit* Fitch.

- 17 For a fuller discussion of the flexibility of Seneca's prosody see Seneca's *Thyestes* edited R.J. Tarrant 27–9.
- 18 After leaving All Souls, Heywood went to Gray's Inn, before he departed for France; De Vocht *Jasper Heywood and his Translations* IX.
- 19 There is no Latin text accompanying Heywood's translation of *Thyestes*, but from this decision we may conclude that at some stage he meant to include one, as he did for *Hercules Furens*.
- 20 For an overall view see G.M. Ross 'Seneca's Philosophical Influence' in *Seneca* edited C.D.N. Costa (London: Routledge, 1974) 116–65. Specific passages in the *Epistolae Morales* are noted by Norman T. Pratt 'The Stoic Base of Senecan Drama' *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 79 (1948) 1–11, especially *Epistolae Morales* 9: 13 (wisdom and self-sufficiency), 91: 15 (mental discipline against Fortune), 98: 2 (self-possession), and 98: 12 (benefit derived from overcoming adversity).
- 21 Alessandro Schiesaro *Passions in Play* 160.
- 22 See Peter J. Davis 'The Chorus in Seneca's *Thyestes*' *Classical Quarterly* 39 (1989) 412–35 at 426–9; and *The Shifting Song: The Chorus of Seneca's Tragedies* (Hildesheim: Olms-Weidmann, 1993) 172–3.
- 23 Fitch adds *rex est qui cupiet nihil*.
- 24 Alessandro Schiesaro links the deception of the Chorus with that of Thyestes, thus increasing the tragic irony, *Passions in Play* 166.
- 25 *alta*] Gryphius: *magna* Fitch.
- 26 C.J. Herrington 'Senecan Tragedy' in *Essays on Classical Literature* edited Niall Rudd (Cambridge: Heffer, 1972) 170–219 at 202.
- 27 See note 20 above.
- 28 This passage matches closely the point made by C. Segal in his discussion of the self-centredness of some of Seneca's protagonists, especially Medea: 'Boundary Violation and the Landscape of the Self in Senecan Tragedy' 317.
- 29 Edited Edward Rollins Hyder (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1927).