2011

Seneca to Shakespeare: Tracking the Influence of Tragedy

David Wiley

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Senior Project submitted to
The Division of Languages and Literature
of Bard College

By

David Wiley

Annandale on Hudson, New York
May 2011

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Introduction

From comedies to tragedies, William Shakespeare's compositions were highly dramatic and contained the unsurpassed quality of language of the Elizabethan period. Those influenced by Shakespeare's writings range from John Milton, Charles Dickens, and even Virginia Woolf. However, the playwright who most influenced Shakespeare's tragedies was from a much earlier era. Lucius Annaeus Seneca was a Roman playwright who wrote many tragedies including *Agamemnon, Thyestes,* and *Oedipus.* His powerful themes of revenge affected Shakespeare's later plays, *Titus Andronicus* and *Hamlet.* Even Seneca's high rhetoric influenced Shakespeare's famous and beautiful soliloquies. Seneca predates Shakespeare by over fifteen hundred years, but the impact of the Roman playwright was nonetheless strong on the English poet.

The first translations of Seneca into English were made my Jasper Heywood in the mid sixteenth century. By 1581, all ten of Seneca's tragedies were published in a single volume titled, *Seneca, his tenne tragedies translated into English.* Although Shakespeare would have studied Latin in grammar school, Seneca's language would be too complicated for young Shakespeare to understand. The classical Greek texts of Euripides, Aeschylus, and Sophocles were not translated into English during Shakespeare's time. In *Shakespeare and the Uses of Antiquity,* Charles Martindale writes, "Seneca was the closest Shakespeare ever got to Greek tragedy, but, to a man who could always make a silk purse out of a sow's ear, that was quite close enough." (Martindale 44). Shakespeare was not privy to the influences of the Greek tragedians, but Seneca's compositions were directly based on many of the Greek tragedies. Seneca's *Oedipus* is established on Sophocles' iconic *Oedipus Rex.* Seneca's *Agamemnon* is even influenced on Aeschylus' own *Agamemnon* from his tragic *Oresteia.* Seneca uses common plots from his Greek predecessors. He does, however, change the focus of his tragedies. His plays center on the

mortal aspect of the characters. There are little to no references to the Gods or religion. Seneca was one of the earliest playwrights to have entire works concentrated on free will. His *Oedipus* focuses more on the protagonist's ability to choose than his cursed fate. Seneca's influence from the original Greek playwrights directly relates to Shakespeare's own influence from Seneca.

I concentrate on three Shakespearean tragedies ranging from different points of his career. *Titus Andronicus* is the first of his tragedies written in 1594, *Hamlet* is a midway tragedy from 1600, and *Macbeth* is one of the final works written in 1605. Some elements of these compositions are entirely parallel to many of Seneca's plays. For instance, parts of *Titus Andronicus* and Seneca's *Thyestes* are very similar. For the most part, though, Shakespeare enhances the simpler tragedies of his Roman predecessor. He uses many of the same themes such as revenge, vaulting ambition, and destiny. Like Seneca, Shakespeare amplifies the drama and develops the psychology of the title character, thereby making his works stronger and more spectacular.

Aeschylus' and Seneca's *Agamemnon*

Seneca composed two plays based on the tragedy of the House of Pelops: *Thyestes* and *Agamemnon.* The story of Agamemnon is legendary. The Greek hero returns from Troy after 10 years only to be murdered by his wife in his own palace. Seneca's bold play depicts the tragedy of Agamemnon, but the story was originally written by another Greek tragedian. Aeschylus wrote a trilogy of tragedies called The Oresteia. The first play in this set is *Agamemnon.* Aeschylus' Oresteia was first performed in Athens in 458 B.C. Seneca's plays are composed nearly five hundred years later. His dates are somewhat dubious, but it is thought that he was born in 5 B.C. Although centuries separate the two versions of *Agamemnon,* both portray the same story. However, Seneca made some additions and omissions from Aeschylus' renowned original.

The first noticeable difference between Aeschylus' and Seneca's Agamemnon is the opening. Aeschylus' classic begins with a watchman seeing a beacon from afar signaling Agamemnon's return. The play begins with a scene of action. This differs greatly from Seneca's opening which serves as a prologue to the action. This prologue begins with the Ghost of Thyestes foreshadowing the events to come. Seneca uses this prologue in the majority of his plays. The opening scene usually shows the title character considering his current predicament in a dramatic monologue. In Seneca's *Thyestes,* the ghost of Tantalus enters to witness the actions of his heirs. The ghost adds a dramatic element to the play. Thyestes' ghost is just one of many additions Seneca makes to Aeschylus' original play.

One of the most recognizable differences between the two plays is the role of the chorus. Early in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon,* the chorus already has a pronounced role in the text. They have a stronger voice and actually interact with primary characters such as Clytemnestra and

Cassandra. Seneca does not use the chorus to the extent that Aeschylus does. He mainly uses them to transition between scenes. They rarely have any dialogue with other characters in the play. This is a major difference between the Greek playwrights and Seneca. Seneca keeps the action within the primary characters. If he uses dialogue in a scene, it will be between two protagonists. The chorus has very few interactive lines. The chorus' secondary role in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* is to give contextual information. Throughout the play, they give detailed stories of the aftermath of the Trojan War, details on Cassandra's curse, Atreus' revenge upon Thyestes, as well as Agamemnon's dilemma in sacrificing Iphigenia. Each one of these anecdotes is very descriptive and spoken with a quality of high rhetoric. The language used by the chorus is very rich and sensational. It resembles Seneca's own powerful language. Seneca's language is considered to be heavy for his time. It is melodramatic and at times very gruesome. However, in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon,* there is a distinct similarity between the chorus' language and Seneca's later dramatic monologues.

The brief tales that the chorus tells revisit past tragedies in the characters' lives. The reader experiences Agamemnon's greatest conflict of sacrificing his own daughter to the Gods in order to be granted a favorable wind to initially journey to Troy. In Seneca's *Agamemnon,* however, these brief stories are not included. There are allusions to Agamemnon's daughter: Iphigenia. There are references to Aegisthus' father: Thyestes, but there is never a complete story to accompany the connection. By including these small episodes of previous tragedies, Aeschylus sets up the major tragedy at the end of the play. He includes a brief tale on how Cassandra's curse befell her moments before her death in the following scene. These narratives of the past allow the reader to become more attached to the characters, which deepens the tragedy when that character dies. This is an effective means in creating tragedy, yet Seneca

chooses to omit the accounts of past events. This is true of all Seneca's tragedies. There are very few references to the past, and they are very brief segments no more than one or two lines. The events always concentrate on the present tragedy. Seneca's plays center on affairs at hand thereby focusing his tragedy. I believe Seneca did not want his works to linger on the past. He did not want the present tragedy to be greatly affected by past events. However, this is slightly inconsistent, since Clytemnestra's motive for revenge is because of Agamemnon's past incident. Aeschylus is more effective than Seneca in this manner. His references to past events do not take away from the primary action of the play. Rather, the tales contribute to the characters' development and intensify the tragedy.

The greatest difference between the two versions of *Agamemnon* is how differently each character is used. The principle characters in this tragedy are Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, and Cassandra. However, in Seneca's *Agamemnon,* Aegisthus also has an important role. He enters the action in Act II to persuade Clytemnestra to kill her husband. However, in Aeschylus' tragedy, Aegisthus does not appear until the final moments of play, after Clytemnestra has murdered Agamemnon. Aegisthus' only purpose in Aeschylus is to reveal that it was he who plotted the murder of Agamemnon. There is no actual scene from Aeschylus showing Aegisthus planning the murder, though. It is Aegisthus who plots the crime, but it is Clytemnestra who executes it. In the original *Agamemnon,* Clytemnestra is unflinching in her act of vengeance. After she kills her husband she declares:

> You may be as you choose, glad or sorry; I am jubilant. And were it seemly over a dead man to pour the thank offering for safe journey, sure Justice here allows it, here demands it; so enriched a draught of evil did this man store in his house, and now returned, he drains his own cursed cup to the last dregs. (1393-1398)

She is not only without remorse; Clytemnestra is jubilant in her husband's death. Her dialogue with the chorus continues in the same manner through the rest of play. She does not express regret or doubt at any time. In Seneca's *Agamemnon,* Clytemnestra is more uncertain of what path to take. This is why Aegisthus has an extended part in Seneca's play. He is essential to the plot, because he must sway Clytemnestra to dispatch her husband. She is not as steadfast as in Aeschylus' tragedy. When Aegisthus presses her to do the deed, Clytemnestra responds, "Dost think that I would leave a king of kings And stoop to wed an outcast wretch like thee?" (287-288). She displays anger towards Agamemnon, but she does not have the solid resolve as in the original play. Seneca diminishes her tenacity but amplifies Clytemnestra's internal conflict. This additional scene between lovers magnifies the psychology of Seneca's characters. He correctly portrays the tenseness and anxiety between a man and a woman pondering a dilemma. His perception of the thoughts and emotions of his characters are genuine. Clytemnestra is angry because her husband sacrificed their daughters to the Gods, yet she still eagerly awaits his return from the decade long war at Troy. Seneca adequately portrays Clytemnestra's dilemma and conflict of emotions. Aeschylus' Clytemnestra may be more confident, but Seneca's Clytemnestra is more authentic because of her significant sentiments.

Seneca does not only alter characters from Aeschylus' *Agamemnon.* He adds characters to the text that Aeschylus did not have in the original. As I mentioned before, the play opens with the Ghost of Thyestes who gives warning of events to come. Clytemnestra also has a nurse in Seneca's rendition who serves as Clytemnestra's foil. Additionally, in Act V of Seneca's *Agamemnon,* Orestes, Electra and the foreign king Strophius all have minor roles. In his preface to *Agamemnon*, Frank Justus Miller writes, "Many of Seneca's changes and innovations are significant, and are motivated in part by a desire for expansion rather than simplification,"

(Miller, Agamemnon 714). Each added character expands the drama in Seneca's tragedy. Orestes is a very significant addition since he later returns to Argos to avenge his fallen father. In Aeschylus, Orestes is said to be "in Phocis, as a guest of Strophius" (880). However, in Seneca's *Agamemnon,* Orestes, Strophius, and Electra have their own, albeit brief, scene. Electra is trying to arrange safe passage in order for her younger brother to flee Argos with the help of Strophius. In Act V Scene IV, Strophius gives Orestes the palm of victory: "My lad Wear this wild-olive wreath upon thy brow/…And hold above thy head this leafy branch, the palm of victory," (936-937). The Romans rewarded champions of the games and celebrated military successes with palm branches. In his essay, "Seneca's Agamemnon", William M. Calder proposes that granting Orestes a palm branch foreshadows his future "victory" in vengeance: "Orestes is crowned with olive and given the victor's frond of palm. Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, and Aegisthus, by the measures of their own value, are losers…Orestes will return [as a] victor of a different sort." (Calder 34). The addition of Orestes gives Seneca's *Agamemnon* another dramatic character and scene. It is powerful to see Orestes as a young child, since Seneca's Roman audience would know of his infamous return. Seneca gives the reader an unexpected portrayal of a legendary character.

The utmost disparity between character roles in the Agamemnon plays is in the character Cassandra. Cassandra has perhaps the most important part in *Agamemnon* because she foretells the deaths of Agamemnon as well as Clytemnestra much later. Her role is expanded in Seneca's *Agamemnon* compared to her part in Aeschylus. On the subject of Cassandra, Calder writes, "If Seneca has reduced the roles of the Aeschylean Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, is there a character whose role he has expanded? Cassandra obviously." (Calder 32). In Aeschylus' *Agamemnon,* Cassandra relays her prophecies to the chorus. In one of her fits of madness, she

begins choking as she foretells Agamemnon's death as it is happening: "To die is sad; sadder to know death pre-ordained." (1321). Moments after this incident, she enters the palace and is killed alongside Agamemnon. It is exciting to see Cassandra make a prediction as it is happening. However, her early death is somewhat disappointing. She is such a potentially dramatic character, but Aeschylus cuts her out of the play early. Calder writes, "Aeschylus' Cassandra is a brilliant substitute for a messenger." (Calder 32). Cassandra's role is functional in Aeschylus, but Seneca uses her to more remarkable effect.

In Seneca's *Agamemnon,* Cassandra is represented as a mad woman that nobody believes. She is not seen in the same sympathetic light as her counterpart in the earlier play. That being said, Cassandra has some of the strongest lines in Seneca's play. She has clever banter with Agamemnon leading up to his death, "[Agamemnon]: What can a victor fear? [Cassandra]: What he least fears." (739). She also utters the final couplet with Clytemnestra to end the play, "Maddened wretch, thy death I wait to see./ [Cassandra]: A fateful madness waits as well for thee." (1011-1012). In this final couplet, the "fateful madness" is a reference to Orestes' madness waiting for Clytemnestra. To a Roman audience, Aeschylus' *Oresteia* would be common knowledge, and they would recognize this clever irony that Seneca ends the play with. Seneca's ending contrasts greatly with the final line in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*: "You and I, as joint rulers, will put this house in order." (1673). This final line is spoken by Clytemnestra to Aegisthus. It is a very direct finish in comparison to Cassandra's enigmatic closing. On the topic of both plays closing lines, Miller writes, "The two sentiments epitomize the varying conceptions of the two dramatists." (Miller, Agamemnon 714). Aeschylus' direct ending reflects the straightforwardness of his play. Seneca's ending is melodramatic signifying the heavy drama in his tragedies.

Seneca's use of the early Greek tragedies resembles Shakespeare's influence from Seneca's own plays. Seneca did not rewrite the plot of tragedy he based his work on. Instead, he loosely followed the context of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* and added his own touches to the composition. Frank Justus Miller argues, "[Seneca's] attempt to rework a Greek masterpiece has resulted in a play not only inferior to the Greek model but less successful than most of his other tragedies." (Miller, Agamemnon 713). Seneca's *Agamemnon* may not have the same epic status as Aeschylus', but it is not an inferior tragedy. His play explores new depths in characters' psychology and dramatization that Aeschylus' tragedy did not ponder. Both plays are fantastic tragedies in their own right, but each contributes to the art of tragedy in a different way.

Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* and Seneca's *Oedipus*

Sophocles is the second of three Greek tragedians whose work has survived. Euripides is earlier than Sophocles, and Aeschylus is after. Sophocles' most well known work is the tragedy of *Oedipus Rex.* The tale contains the familiar theme of predestination. The Delphic Oracle foretells that the son of King Laius and Queen Jocasta will kill his father and marry his mother. Naturally, the king and queen take measures to avoid this terrible situation. They leave their son, Oedipus, to die on Mount Cithaeron. However, it is not in man's power to overcome the power of fate. Although he is banished and left for dead, Oedipus returns to the kingdom of Thebes and unknowingly kills his father and marries his mother. Sophocles' tragedy is tremendous. Seneca's *Oedipus* is not a rewrite of Sophocles' great play but has its own independence apart from the original. In his introduction to Seneca's *Oedipus,* Frank Justus Miller writes, "The omissions and additions which [Seneca] made are valuable for the light they throw upon his conception of tragedy and his attitude toward the original." (Miller, Oedipus 671). Seneca brings his own conception of drama and tragedy to the well known tale of Oedipus. Seneca's *Oedipus* draws from the original play and intensifies the tragedy.

Unlike his *Agamemnon,* which adds extra characters from the original play, Seneca's *Oedipus* keeps the primary cast in his tragedy. The only addition is Tiresias' daughter, Manto. She serves as her father's eyes, as Tiresias is portrayed as blind in Seneca's version. Seneca's opening to the play begins with Oedipus speaking to the audience alone. This is not unlike Sophocles' beginning where Oedipus and a priest are discussing the plight of the city. However, Seneca's introduction begins with a dark monologue full of foreboding. The reader already sees Oedipus questioning fate: "Fate,/ That seemest good, how many ills lie hid/ Behind thy smiling face!" (6-8). This is only the sixth line of play. Contextually, this passage is not directed at

Oedipus' misfortune, but rather of the ongoing plague of Thebes. However, the start of the play opens with the infamous Oedipus doubting fickle fate. This is an example of Seneca using the knowledge of his audience to his advantage. Like *Agamemnon, Oedipus* is a well known tale that his Roman audience would be familiar with. The reader sees Oedipus struggling with fate early in the play. This enhances the tragedy of *Oedipus* as this struggle lasts throughout the tragedy until Fate overcomes Oedipus.

Seneca's objective for the Greek tragedies is not to add plot or contextual references to the existing plays; it is to heighten the existing drama and tragedy of the work. A simple example of this is shown in the scene between Tiresias and Oedipus. In Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex,* Tiresias is a seer that is described as "Truth Incarnate" (299). On Oedipus' orders, Tiresias enters to reveal the murderer's identity. The interesting aspect of Sophocles' Tiresias is that the prophet already knows the truth. His opening words are "To be wise is to suffer," (317). He knows that Oedipus is the killer before he even confronts the king. Throughout the dialogue with Oedipus, Tiresias continues to hint at the truth: "You are deluded,/ I refuse to utter the heavy secrets of my soul – and yours." (328-329). Tiresias refuses to tell Oedipus his fate until he is physically threatened, and only then does he reveal the truth. Oedipus, though, does not believe Tiresias. He sees it as a ploy of Creon and does not heed the prophet's words.

The scene between the prophet and the king is interesting, but it lacks drama. True, it is dramatic that Tiresias reveals Oedipus' predestined fate to him and the audience. However, the manner in which Tiresias presents the information is bland. Seneca's version is more powerful. He does not present Tiresias as omniscient. Instead, Seneca depicts Tiresias as something of a mystic or sorcerer. He sacrifices a heifer and, with the help of his daughter, Tiresias translates the shapes of smoke and patterns of blood to signify different details of prophecy. This ceremony

gives Seneca an opportunity to impart some of his heavy rhetoric: “These unblest rites some dreadful ills portend./ But come, describe the trusty markings of the viscera.” (323-324). The more interesting aspect of this ritual is that the prophet is learning Oedipus’ fate at the same pace as the audience. Unlike Sophocles’ play, Tiresias does not enter the action knowing the truth. Instead, he goes through the dramatic process of sacrificing a cow and interpreting the flames to determine the identity of the killer. This gives a feeling of suspense to the action. The killer’s identity is not revealed through the ritual. The drama turns to chilling tension as Oedipus still does not know of his true fate by the end of the sacrifice. Tiresias suggests that he should attempt to raise Laius’ ghost from the dead in order to find the true identity of the murderer. This scene ends with Oedipus on a steady path determined to reveal who the killer is. The fact that he has yet to doubt himself adds to the anticipation of the tragedy.

In Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex,* Oedipus instantly assumes that Creon is behind Tiresias’ prophecy of revealing that Oedipus is the unknown murderer. The same is not quite true of Seneca’s *Oedipus.* Tiresias does not know Oedipus’ story until he raises Laius’ ghost from the grave. He does this offstage accompanied by Creon. It is somewhat odd that Seneca chooses to have the ceremony of raising the deceased Laius from the dead offstage. True to his form, though, Seneca’s tragedy stays in the present with the primary character. Throughout his tragedies, Seneca rarely diverts attention to past events or minor characters. He maintains chief focus on Oedipus. When Creon brings him the news of his guilt, Oedipus reacts by banishing Creon from Thebes. In this scene, Sophocles’ Oedipus has a stronger reaction against Creon: “*Creon:* What do you want then? Would you banish me?/ *Oedipus:* Not at all. I would have you dead, not banished.” (622-623). Sophocles’ Oedipus wants to kill Creon instantly after hearing his accusation. He is ready to kill him and actually has to be restrained by the chorus members.

In Seneca's version, however, this sequence is completely omitted. Oedipus does not mention a single word about punishing Creon with death. The primary reason for this omission is that the sequence focuses on a conflict between Oedipus and Creon. In Seneca's play, Creon's role is diminished. His only part in the play is to accuse Oedipus of being the murderer of the former king, and then he is immediately banished. In Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex,* Creon's role is much more adequate. He returns after his banishment at the end of the play to exile Oedipus. Seneca on the other hand chooses not to bring back Creon after Oedipus wrongly banishes him. Creon remains offstage even though he was right to accuse Oedipus. Sophocles' play has three scenes between Oedipus and Creon, while Seneca's play has only one. Seneca draws the drama away from Creon and focuses on the tragic relationship between Oedipus and Jocasta.

Seneca uses the character of Jocasta much more liberally than Sophocles. In *Oedipus Rex,* Jocasta only has two scenes with Oedipus. Her first entrance is relatively late in the play: after Oedipus has spoken with Tiresias. Sophocles presents Jocasta as an equal partner to Oedipus. She is the one that consoles Oedipus as he describes his frustration and paranoia about Tiresias' foretelling. Sophocles' Jocasta is also on stage when the shepherd tells Oedipus of his parentage. After the shepherd reveals Oedipus' fate, Jocasta desperately says, "What does it matter, What man he means? It makes no difference now,/ Forget what he has told you./ It makes no difference." (1056-1058). Jocasta is in a fit of denial as she pleads with Oedipus to disregard the shepherd's words. This scene between Oedipus and Jocasta marks the beginning of the two characters' realization of Oedipus' true identity. This passage is moving and evokes a deep sorrow from the reader. It is slightly disappointing that Seneca did not include it in his version of *Oedipus,* but again, his use of Jocasta is much different than his predecessor's.

In Seneca's *Oedipus,* Jocasta enters the action immediately after Oedipus' opening

soliloquy. Oedipus and Jocasta are the only two characters in the opening scene. Seneca shows the reader early on that this play will focus on the tragedy between Oedipus and his wife/mother. Jocasta attempts to soothe her husband's preoccupation over fate in her first lines:

> For I think, indeed, This very thing is regal to endure adversity and all the more to stand with heart more valiant and with foot more sure, when the weight of empire totters to its fall. For tis not manly to present thy back To fortune's darts. (80-87)

Jocasta serves as a voice of reason to contrast with Oedipus' worrisome state. She warns Oedipus not to tempt fate and fortune. However, by undergoing the search for the unknown killer, Oedipus provokes fate and produces his own undoing. After this scene, Jocasta leaves the action until the very end of the play. She is not present after Oedipus banishes Creon. She has a very brief scene prior to Oedipus discovering his true identity from the shepherd. However, after the truth is revealed to Oedipus, Jocasta is again offstage. Seneca creates distance between Oedipus and his wife throughout the action of the play. By maintaining this distance, Seneca draws attention towards his thrilling conclusion of *Oedipus.* From the standpoint of the reader or audience, we see Oedipus' fate revealed to him, but we do not see Jocasta receive this information. This omission does not reduce the tragedy, but it actually creates dramatic tension building to the conclusion where Jocasta confronts Oedipus for the last time.

The endings of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* and Seneca's *Oedipus* are distinctly different. In both conclusions, Oedipus indeed blinds himself to atone for his sins. However, the act of blinding occurs at different points of each play and is done so in a different manner. In Sophocles' play, Oedipus blinds himself after finding Queen Jocasta dead in her room: "Her dress was pinned with golden brooches, which the king snatched out/ And plunged, from full arm's length into his eyes," (1268-1269). His self-blinding is achieved *after* he discovers that the

queen has hung herself. Seneca's portrayal of the blinding is very different. When Oedipus blinds himself in his play, the queen is not yet dead. Oedipus is about to kill himself, but he then decides that dying is too quick a penalty:

> His impious hand he laid Upon the hilt and drew his glittering sword. And dost thou, then, with this brief punishment Expect to pay thy mighty debt of guilt, And with one blow wilt balance all thy sins? Thy death would satisfy thy murdered father; But what to appease thy mother wilt thou do, And those children shamefully begot?" (705-712)

Oedipus almost slays himself, but holds his hand, deeming it too brief a punishment. He takes responsibility for his actions, acknowledging that suicide would be an easy way out. His act would satisfy the murder of his father but not his mother, who is still living at this point in the play. Oedipus blinds himself after he stops his sword. Seneca's depiction of the self-blinding is much more heavy and grotesque than Sophocles': "Deep in with hooked fingers he explores,/ And rends his eyeballs from their deepest roots/…And tears the hollow sockets with his nails," (966-969). The language here has a chilling tone that makes the reader squirm as Seneca describes Oedipus tearing at his eye sockets with his fingernails. Not only is the language more brutal than Sophocles', the fact that Oedipus blinds himself with his bare hands rather than Sophocles' golden brooches adds drama to the entire scene.

The final scene in Seneca's *Oedipus* is completely different than Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex.* In Sophocles, Creon returns and becomes king. He sees Oedipus one last time in order to banish him from Thebes. This scene, however, is dramatically flat especially in comparison to the rest of the play: "*Oedipus:* I have your promise then? *Creon:* What promise?/ *Oedipus:* To send me away. *Creon:* The gods will decide it, not I." (517-518). Creon does not expel Oedipus from his kingdom in a fit of anger. Oedipus politely asks to be banished, and Creon obliges.

There is no drama or tragedy in this scene. This end scene does not fit in with the previous action of the play. If anything, it is more of an epilogue. Sophocles seems to have wanted to wrap up the loose end of Thebes being without a king. Therefore, he brought back Creon to serve the role. This final scene is a tool of function. It does not add to the tragedy of *Oedipus Rex* in any way. This conclusion lessens the drama and tragedy.

Seneca's finish is completely different; Jocasta is still alive and has not yet confronted Oedipus about his true identity. She enters in a confused and sorrowful state saying, "What shall I call thee? Son? Dost shun that name?/ Thou art my son; thy shame confesseth it." (984-985). Even after this tragic revelation, Jocasta attempts to console Oedipus: "What thou deplores is the fault of fate./ A fated crime can leave no stain of sin." (1021-1022). Jocasta begs Oedipus to forgive himself. He was predestined to murder his father and marry his mother. Jocasta wants Oedipus to see that the events of fate were not his fault. Oedipus, however, cannot come to accept his mother's wise words. He refuses to recognize his predestination. He still believes that he had complete control over his destiny and therefore must be punished for his crimes. He displays a naïve portrayal of power over his own destiny. Fate is represented as an absolute force in *Oedipus.* After Oedipus refuses to accept the uncontrollability of his actions, Jocasta throws herself on Oedipus' sword, killing herself onstage. This is the first death on stage in Seneca's plays as well as any early classical play. Generally, a character will die offstage, and then their death will be described by a messenger later in the action. For example, In Seneca's own *Thyestes,* the murder of the Thyestes' sons is described to the chorus in grotesque detail after the event. Seneca's choice to kill Jocasta onstage intensifies the already brilliant tragedy in *Oedipus.* Deaths onstage are not seen in literature for several years until William Shakespeare has many characters die onstage, often in the same scene.

After Jocasta kills herself, Oedipus is left alone on the stage. The play ends with a soliloquy very similar to Oedipus' solo speech that started the tragedy. In this monologue, Oedipus cries, "My father only was I doomed to slay;/ But now, twice patricide and past my fears,/ Have I been guilty, and my mother slain./ For tis by sin of mine that she is dead./ O lying Phoebus, now have/ I outdone the impious fates." (1044-1049). Oedipus' realization is both accurate and tragic. His predestination was to kill his mother and marry his mother. However, due to his mother's free will in her act of suicide, Jocasta dies as well as Laius. Seneca ends the play with a dramatic conclusion of matching predestination with free will. The theme of free will is not heavily referenced throughout the play, but it is present nonetheless. In her essay, "Seneca's Tragedies: A New Interpretation", Berthe Marti writes, "Upon reading the play, we see that predestination is by no means the only agent [of tragedy], however, that [Oedipus] is actually responsible for his fate by making the wrong choice." (Marti 234). The wrong choice that Marti refers to is Oedipus' choice to pursue the identity of Laius' killer. If he had chose not to hunt down the unknown name, Oedipus would not have provoked his own demise. The presence of free will in *Oedipus* increases the level of tragedy in Seneca's play. Jocasta chooses to kill herself in front of her son. Now Oedipus must walk in exile contemplating the deaths of both his father and mother who died as in result of his actions.

As with Seneca's *Agamemnon,* Seneca's *Oedipus* has also received criticism of not living up to the high standards his predecessors. In his book, *Oedipus Tyrannus: Tragic Heroism and the Limits of Knowledge,* Charles Segal critiques, "Seneca's combination of psychology, horror, and the underworld dissolves the subtle Sophoclean relations between character, chance, and destiny." (Segal 22). What Segal fails to acknowledge is that Seneca's *Oedipus* is not simply a rewrite of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex.* Seneca' play focuses on the Roman's own conception of

tragedy and drama. The character, chance, and destiny of Sophocles' original are not lost in Seneca's play. They are just reworked to fit his own thematic interests. Seneca's *Oedipus* is a brilliant adaptation to the well known *Oedipus Rex.* Seneca deepens the tragedy and intensifies the drama in his Roman rendition.

Euripides' *Hippolytus* and Seneca's *Phaedra*

Seneca's adaptation of Euripides' *Hippolytus* completes his cycle of interpretations of the great Greek tragic writers. Seneca reworked Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* as well as Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex.* The plot of Euripides' *Hippolytus* centers on the young hero Hippolytus and later on his father Theseus. In the original, Phaedra is not portrayed as the lusty housewife that Seneca depicts. She is represented as sickly and shameful. Seneca completely reverses her characterization, presenting Phaedra as a hungry woman yearning for Hippolytus. Both Euripides' *Hippolytus* and Seneca's *Phaedra* are great tragedies, but Euripides' play is tamer than Seneca's. The conception of tragedy is completely different in both plays. Seneca's *Phaedra* takes the original plot and amplifies its drama and tragedy.

Seneca's largest omission from the original play is the absence of the goddesses: Aphrodite and Artemis. Euripides' *Hippolytus* opens with a monologue spoken by Aphrodite. In this speech, she foretells the tragedy to come. Euripides' play actually begins as a revenge plot motivated by Aphrodite. In her opening address, she says, "Hippolytus, the son of Theseus, says that I am the vilest of the gods./ It is Artemis, sister of Phoebus and daughter of Zeus,/ That he honors, holding her greatest of the gods." (10-12). Aphrodite is presented as both angry with Hippolytus and jealous of Artemis. Therefore, Aphrodite provokes the tragic love that Phaedra feels for Hippolytus leading into the tragedy: "Phaedra, the noble wife of his father,/ Saw him and through my designing/ A terrible love seized her heart." (26-28). This is vastly different from Seneca's play. Here, Aphrodite claims responsibility for Phaedra's afflicted love. Therefore, the ensuing tragedy is Aphrodite's blame. Depicting the gods as characters in plays is a common Greek device. It is not surprising that Euripides has Aphrodite play such a crucial role in *Hippolytus.* It is also surprising that Seneca omits such an essential character completely from

the text.

By excluding Aphrodite, Seneca focuses his play on the mortal characters. In his introduction to Phaedra, Frank Justus Miller writes, “Seneca, by omitting Artemis and Aphrodite from the action, keeps the play entirely on the human level and stresses the psychology of his main characters.” (Miller, Phaedra 623). Seneca concentrates his play on the mortal level. The action remains with the primary characters. Unlike Euripides, Seneca’s Phaedra is responsible for her own passion for Hippolytus. The affliction is not adequately explained, but the reason behind her lust is not important. Seneca begins to develop Phaedra’s character into a maddened wretch. She fully recognizes her desire for Hippolytus, and unlike her Euripidean counterpart, Seneca’s Phaedra is not ashamed of her passions: “Raging passion forces me to take the path of sin./ Full consciously/ My soul goes headlong on its downward way,” (176-178). Here, Phaedra knowingly admits that her love for Hippolytus is leading to a tragedy. However, she tells her nurse that she cannot avoid her yearning and attempts to ensnare the young Hippolytus.

Euripides’ description of Phaedra is far chaster than Seneca’s character. Euripides portrays her as a sickly martyr who is frightened of her newfound affliction. This makes sense in the original play, because Aphrodite is the one responsible for Phaedra’s lust, not Phaedra herself. Euripides’ Phaedra admits that she is even ashamed of her passion: “I hate those women who lay claim to virtue/ But in secret dare to commit shameful deeds.” (412-413). This passage is interesting because the very woman that Phaedra claims to hate is essentially Seneca’s depiction of Phaedra. Seneca’s representation of Phaedra creates a more deceptive character. In his essay titled “Treatment of Character in Euripides and Seneca”, Sten G. Flygt writes, “Whereas Euripides portrays a good woman who is ruined by circumstances over which she has no control, Seneca portrays a woman whose lust brings destruction upon others and finally upon

herself." (Flygt 513). Flygt makes the point that because Phaedra is a puppet of Aphrodite in Euripides, she is naturally a good person ruined by circumstance. Seneca's Phaedra, however, has full control of her actions and choices. She knowingly accepts tragedy by seeking to attain Hippolytus. The multidimensional Phaedra is not only lusting for Hippolytus, but she is conceiving a plan in which she can obtain her desire safely.

In both Euripides' and Seneca's plays, Phaedra eventually attempts to allure Hippolytus to her. However, the manner in which Phaedra enacts this proposal is widely different in both plays. In Euripides, Phaedra is embarrassed of her feelings toward Hippolytus and therefore reluctant to even try to persuade him. It is Phaedra's nurse who coaxes her to make a move. The nurse first attempts to assuage Phaedra's woes: "You are in love – what is so surprising about that?/ So are many other mortals." (438-439). The nurse tries to relieve Phaedra of her worries, saying that there is nothing wrong with being in love. The nurse's coercing then continues more noticeably with, "I would never have led you on to this point for the sake of your own sexual pleasure/ But as things are, there is much at stake. /We are playing for your life,/ And no one should think ill of us for this." (494-497). Euripides' mild-mannered Phaedra is mortified by the nurse's suggestion. The nurse is depicted as deceptive and crafty. She tries to make Phaedra believe that she must bed Hippolytus for the benefit of her health. The whole plot to attract Hippolytus is the nurse's idea. Seneca's portrayal of the nurse and Phaedra is exactly the opposite. Phaedra is the one hungering for Hippolytus without a thought of consequence, and her nurse is the one trying to lessen Phaedra's desires by being the voice of reason. When Phaedra tells her nurse of her predicament, she wisely replies: "Such vain conceits the love-mad soul adopts, love's goddess feigns,/ And Cupid's bow. Whoe'er too much enjoys the smiles of fortune and in ease/ Is lapped is ever seeking unaccustomed joys." (205-207). The nurse says that

Phaedra is tempting fate by seeking an unattainable goal. She is walking naively towards tragedy, but Phaedra does not care. In the following scene Phaedra propositions Hippolytus regardless of the nurse's wise words.

The entire tragedy of *Phaedra* and *Hippolytus* is based on the scene of Phaedra confessing her desires to Hippolytus. However, Euripides' depiction of this scene is anticlimactic. The scene prior to the climax ends with the nurse mysteriously telling Phaedra, "Do not worry, my girl. I shall set this matter right." (521). The nurse takes complete control of the situation and convinces Phaedra to allow her to confront Hippolytus. Phaedra is listening outside the door as the nurse propositions Hippolytus. While she is listening from afar, Phaedra says, "Hippolytus cries out, heaping dreadful insults on my servant/…Yes it is clear—he calls her 'bawd of viciousness', 'betrayer of her master's bed'." (581..590). Phaedra relays what she hears between the nurse and Hippolytus. There is no more to the confrontation than this brief speech. The dialogue between the nurse and Hippolytus is completely cut out. Instead, the reader stays with Phaedra who is merely listening at the door. Moreover, Phaedra is not the one to confront Hippolytus. Her nurse does everything. In Euripides' play, Phaedra is never even in the same scene as Hippolytus. It is very strange that in a tragedy based on the forbidden desire of Phaedra for Hippolytus that the two are never onstage at the same time. Seneca's *Phaedra* rectifies this oversight.

Seneca's confrontation between Phaedra and Hippolytus is completely unique to his own play. It is a highly dramatic scene in which Phaedra first gently approaches Hippolytus and eventually tells him exactly what she wants. The beginning of this scene is not unlike Euripides' original. The nurse is the first to encounter Hippolytus, but in Seneca's version the reader is privy to the dialogue at hand. The nurse begins by coaxing, "Dissolve in pleasures that grim

mood of thine,/ And snatch the passing joys; let loose the reins." (450-451). The nurse tries to tempt Hippolytus to indulge himself. Hippolytus, though, is steadfast in his purity and chastity and is not swayed by the nurse's suggestion. After the nurse speaks with Hippolytus, Phaedra enters the action. She feigns falling to the ground, and kind Hippolytus catches her. Phaedra graciously thanks her hero and begins to provoke Hippolytus' sensitivities. Phaedra proposes to Hippolytus in a deliberate and almost aggressive manner: "But me receive into thy arms,/ And there protect thy slave and suppliant./ My widowhood relieve." (621-623). Phaedra confronts Hippolytus directly and outright asks him to take her. Her actions are blatant and unabashed. Seneca does not present Phaedra as the weak sickly woman that Euripides depicts. Seneca's Phaedra is obvious and even reckless in her actions. Miller postulates that Seneca is the first playwright to put Hippolytus and Phaedra onstage together saying that the scene is "an intensely human scene and one that brings out fully the pathos of Phaedra's situation." (Miller, Phaedra 624). Seneca revolutionizes the tragedy by creating a direct confrontation between Phaedra and Hippolytus. His addition to the action is innovative. The additional scene portrays a unity between Phaedra and Hippolytus that is lost in Euripides. Phaedra's confrontation with Hippolytus escalades the drama in the tragedy.

After his quarrel with Phaedra, Hippolytus flees the scene. He is moments away from slaying the unchaste Phaedra, but Hippolytus flings his sword away and bolts into the forest. Phaedra has a 'fainting fit' when Hippolytus exits, leaving the nurse to wrap up the climax. Seneca's nurse acts in the best interest of her queen and yells: "Behold Hippolytus, With vile adultery, attacks the queen!/ He has her in his power! He threatens death!/ At point of sword he storms her chastity!" (722-725). Seneca's loyal nurse acts on Phaedra's behalf as she deliberately lies to protect Phaedra's honor. Interestingly though, it is far more plausible that a younger man

would attempt to entice the older queen than vice versa. Euripides' portrayal of this scene is very different from Seneca's rendition. Halfway through *Hippolytus,* Phaedra hangs herself and leaves a tablet tied around her wrist indicating Hippolytus' guilt. Phaedra does not live to see the return of her husband Theseus. Theseus returns home to find his wife dead. In Seneca's play, Theseus has two scenes with Phaedra before she dies. In Euripides, however, Theseus' only communication with Phaedra is through reading the tablet she left him in death: "[*Theseus*]: Hippolytus has dared to lay violent hands on the partner of my bed:/ He has flouted the holy eye of Zeus./ O father Poseidon, you once promised me three prayers. With one of them destroy my son." (886-889). Theseus instantly reacts upon hearing that Hippolytus attempted to rape his wife. He beseeches Poseidon to destroy Hippolytus, and the god abides.

One similarity between Euripides' and Seneca's play is Hippolytus' attack and mutilation. He is attacked offstage by a monstrous bull creature that Theseus sets upon him. His assault is then described to Theseus by a messenger later in the play. In the conclusion of Seneca's *Phaedra,* the messenger retrieves Hippolytus' corpse and presents it to Theseus. This happens while Phaedra is still alive. This scene in Euripides' tragedy, however, is far different. When the messenger arrives to tell Theseus of his son's death, he answers sarcastically, "How did he die?/ Someone whose wife he raped as he raped his father's didn't come to blows with him. I trust?" (1164-1165). Theseus knows that he is responsible for his son's death, but he does not care. He asked Poseidon to end his son's life. He is not surprised by the messenger's report. Before the messenger wheels in Hippolytus' body, though, Artemis appears to Theseus to reveal the truth: "Theseus, why do you rejoice at this, you hard man,/ When you have sacrilegiously killed your son,/ By the lying words of your wife persuaded to believe what was not visible?" (1286-1288). Euripides' *Hippolytus* ends with the goddess Artemis just as it began with

Aphrodite. Aphrodite provokes the tragedy, but Artemis enters to quell the catastrophe. She reprimands Theseus for believing his wife's words so easily without conducting any sort of investigation on Hippolytus' behalf.

After Artemis admonishes Theseus, Hippolytus enters, barely alive. Hippolytus is very weak but still manages to have one last dialogue with his father and the goddess Artemis. Theseus is devastated now that he knows the truth. Hippolytus declares that it was not his fault though: "One goddess—I see it now—has destroyed the three of us." (1404). Hippolytus acknowledges the tragedy as Aphrodite's doing. In Euripides' play, the tragedy indeed occurs because of Aphrodite. However, the fact that the characters discover Aphrodite's involvement diminishes the level of tragedy. Hippolytus and Theseus accept the role of the gods in their life. They now know that they could not have done anything to prevent the course of action since Aphrodite is a powerful goddess and they are mere mortals. They accept their place in their own world and demonstrate recognition of the God's powers. Euripides' play ends very similarly to Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex.* The final scene is little more than an epilogue. Artemis comes down from the heavens to tell Theseus the truth and reconcile him with his son. On Artemis' request, Hippolytus willingly forgives Theseus: "I free you from the guilt of my death," (1449). *Hippolytus* ends silently. Hippolytus does not even die. It is implied that he is dying, but he is still drawing breath when the play ends. Euripides' addition of the Gods reduces the drama and tragedy of the mortals. Seneca's *Phaedra* completely omits the Gods, thereby focusing the tragedy on the human characters within the play.

Seneca's ending to *Phaedra* is far more sorrowful and tragic than its predecessor. The most interesting change that Seneca applies to his play is how he presents the deaths of Phaedra and Hippolytus. Like Euripides, Theseus returns home from his travels. However, instead of

finding his wife dead, Theseus finds his wife waiting for him. In the scene that follows, Phaedra slyly tells Theseus that she is bent on death because her honor is defiled. When Theseus asks who has done this, Phaedra replies, "Whom thou wouldst least expect../This sword shall tell/ Which in his terror at our loud laments, the adulterer left, fearing the citizens." (897-899). When Phaedra presents Theseus with his son's sword, he immediately knows the identity of the adulterer. Seneca presents Phaedra as quite clever. She expertly pretends to be reluctant to Theseus' queries. Therefore, once Phaedra gives in to his inquiries, Theseus is under the impression that he cajoled the information from his wife, when in fact Phaedra just played him. Theseus prays to his father Poseidon and besets the bull-like beast against his son.

As in Euripides, a messenger vividly describes Hippolytus' death to the king. In the final scene of Seneca though, Hippolytus' mangled corpse is laid in front of Theseus and Phaedra. Hippolytus is not simply wounded, but he dies, and what is more, his corpse is laid onstage in the center of the action. Phaedra begins weeping above Hippolytus' corpse, and Theseus asks, "Why these loud laments?/ Why weepest thou above the hated corpse?" (1157-1158). It is heartbreaking that Theseus still does not know the truth. He lives to see his own son's death, and he maintains the attitude that it was justified. In the following action, Phaedra prepares to kill herself with Hippolytus' sword. Right before she kills herself, she confesses her crime to Theseus: "The crime, which I myself within my heart,/ With passion mad, conceived,/ I basely charged to him. An empty vengeance hast thou wrought upon thy son;" (1192-1195). Like Seneca's Jocasta from *Oedipus,* Phaedra dies onstage. Frank Justus Miller suggests that *Oedipus* was one of Seneca's first tragedies, and *Phaedra* was most likely one of his last. Thus, Phaedra's onstage death is not Seneca's first, but it is still a highly dramatic moment in early tragedy. Phaedra selfishly waits until the moment before she dies to confess her crime. Therefore, she

does not have to answer to any negative consequences. However, her death leaves Theseus completely distraught having now lost his son and wife by no fault of his own.

Seneca chooses not to reconcile Theseus and Hippolytus as Euripides does through use of Artemis. Theseus does not get the chance to apologize to his son or even speak to his son after he learns the truth. This difference heightens the tragedy ending the play with a very sorrowful tone. Theseus curses his situation in his closing lines: "Was it for this that I returned?/ Was heaven's light restored to me that/ I might see two funerals,/ A double death?" (1209-1212). Theseus concludes the play in a somber tone. The reader feels great empathy for Theseus and his situation. The play ends at the pinnacle of tragedy. Flygt, however, criticizes Seneca's use of Theseus: "The Roman [Theseus] shows the same trait of acting without due reflection when he invokes the curse…He is a far baser character." (Flygt 510). I disagree with Flygt in this claim. Theseus intensifies the tragedy in Seneca. He is left in complete solitude as he is forced to bury both his wife and son. Theseus' sorrowful conclusion makes the tragedy.

Seneca's omission of the Gods focuses the play on the three principle mortals: Hippolytus, Phaedra, and Theseus. Phaedra is responsible for Hippolytus' misjudged guilt, not Aphrodite. As in his *Oedipus,* Seneca again gently uses the theme of free will. In his essay, "Human and Divine Action in Euripides' Hippolytus, Jerker Blomqvist writes, "We assume that Euripides regarded the freedom of will as an illusion and that this is what he is trying to demonstrate in *Hippolytus.*" (Blomqvist 404). Euripides' use of the Gods diminishes the role of free will and amplifies the object of fate. Seneca's characters, on the other hand, create the tragedy through their actions. There are no outside forces to be accounted for. With the object of fate and the gods excluded from the play, each character's destiny is their own making. Euripides' *Hippolytus* delivers the complete tale of misfortune in the lives of Phaedra,

Hippolytus, and Theseus. Seneca does not regurgitate the same plot of his predecessor, but reinvents it. By adding simple twists in theme and characters, Seneca creates a dramatic tragedy that is completely his own.

Shakespeare's influence in *Titus Andronicus*

Titus Andronicus marks Shakespeare's first tragedy. Compared to his later works, *Titus Andronicus* can be perceived as sloppy. However, it is still a prominent play and a cornerstone to Shakespearean tragedy. It is one of his most gruesome and brutal tragedies, heaped with gore, mutilation, and death. This play is undoubtedly influenced by Seneca. The structure of the revenge is very similar to Seneca's own *Thyestes.* Both revengers cook their nemesis' children in feasts and attempt to feed them to their victims. *Andronicus* is not only influenced from *Thyestes*; Seneca's *Phaedra* also contributes to the characterization of one villain.

. The primary antagonist of the play is Tamora: The Queen of the Goths. Tamora is captured by Titus Andronicus prior to the action of the play. Early in Act I, Tamora vows that she will kill Titus' entire family: "I'll find a day to massacre them all/ And race their faction and their family,/ The cruel father, and his traitorous sons," (I.I.453-455). Her motive for this brutal vengeance is because Titus votes to execute her oldest son. Here, the theme of excess in revenge surfaces. One of Tamora's three sons is killed, yet she strives to kill Titus' entire family. This resonates with Atreus' excess in revenge. In Act II of *Thyestes,* Atreus tells his attendant that simply killing Thyestes would not be enough. Atreus wants more: "[Attendant:] What weapon then shall arm such hate as thine?/ [Atreus:] Thyestes' self (258-259)… The father, hungrily, with joy shall tear/ His children, and shall eat their very flesh;/ Tis well, it is enough. This punishment is so far pleasing." (277-280). Seneca's gory language reflects Atreus' obsession with revenge. Death would be too easy and quick. Atreus wants to savor the vengeance just as Tamora does.

Act II of *Titus Andronicus* introduces the most manipulative character in the play: Aaron the Moor. Aaron is an interesting character because he completely controls the revenge in the

play. However, because he is dark-skinned, he is looked down upon. Aaron is the instigator of the plot. The scheme for vengeance may be Tamora's idea, but it is Aaron who orchestrates everything. In his essay, "Metamorphosis of Violence in Titus Andronicus", Eugene Waith writes, "Aaron becomes, in a sense, the projection of Tamora's revenge. Tamora is the swordsman, but Aaron is the sword." (Waith 46). Aaron is truly the master of manipulation in *Titus Andronicus.* He draws a parallel with Seneca's manipulative Phaedra. The tragedy in *Phaedra* is structured much differently than *Titus Andronicus.* However, the manipulators of the two plays are very similar. Like Aaron, Phaedra is demeaned not because of her skin color, but because she is a woman. Also similarly to the moor, Phaedra has a forbidden desire for her step-son Hippolytus. Aaron is the consort of Tamora. Unlike Hippolytus, Tamora willingly loves Aaron, but there is still the comparable theme of prohibited love.

As *Titus Andronicus* progresses, Aaron's qualities begin to differ from Phaedra's. However, both characters maintain the same selfish trait of doing anything to achieve their goals regardless of the consequences. Phaedra infamously lies to her husband Theseus causing him to wrongly kill his son. Phaedra shows no signs of remorse until the final scene of the play when she kills herself. Aaron shows a similar rash behavior. In Act III of *Titus Andronicus,* Aaron demands that Titus cut off his hand in exchange for his two younger sons' lives. Unbeknownst to Titus, his sons are already dead, yet Aaron seeks to extend Titus' anguish by mutilating him. Like Phaedra's lie to her husband, Aaron's act of hatred in unnecessary. Phaedra could have told Theseus the truth before he sent a beast to kill his son. Aaron's reason for asking for Titus' hand was to manipulate a feud between the Andronici and Saturnius. Aaron, though, could have achieved this feat in a far tamer fashion, but instead chose and act of pure malice. Phaedra and Aaron both exemplify unremorseful manipulation in their vengeful acts.

Aaron's first action is to provoke Tamora's sons, Chiron and Demetrius, to kill Lavinia's lover: Bassanius. This murder incites one of the most tragic events of the play: Lavinia's rape and mutilation. The two brothers defile Lavinia offstage, but in Act II Scene IV, she enters with her hands cut off and her tongue cut out. Demetrius and Chiron begin to chide Lavinia, using blatant puns: "So, now go tell, and if thy tongue can speak…/ Write down thy mind/ …Go home, call for sweet water, wash thy hands," (II.IV.1-6). These puns are cruel in nature as Lavinia cannot tell, write, or call because of her dreadful disfigurement. The puns in this passage are similar to the puns Atreus uses to mock his brother in Seneca's *Thyestes.* Thyestes has just unknowingly consumed his own sons' flesh and asks Atreus where his sons are. Atreus responds by saying, "Believe thy sons are here in thy embrace,/ No single part of the love offspring shall be lost to thee/…I'll satisfy the father with his sons," (976-980). Seneca's puns have the same obvious quality as Shakespeare's. This passage occurs before Atreus reveals his vengeful act to his brother. Therefore the puns are clear to the reader, but still insignificant to Thyestes.

Act III begins with Aaron cutting off Titus' hand in exchange for his sons' lives. When Aaron exits to supposedly fetch Titus' sons, he says, "I go, Andronicus, and for thy hand/ Look by and by to have thy sons with thee./ [Aside] Their heads, I mean. O, how this villainy/ Doth fat me with the very thoughts of it!" (III.I.200-203). This passage strikes another parallel with *Thyestes.* After Atreus feeds Thyestes his own flesh, Thyestes asks, "Come children, your unhappy father calls;/ Come, might I see you all this woe would flee./ Whence come these voices?" (1002-1004), and Atreus responds, "Father, spread wide thy arms, they come, they come,/ Dost thou indeed now recognize thy sons?" (1005-1006). At this moment, Atreus reveals the sons' decapitated heads on a platter. Both Titus and Thyestes are completely blindsided. Titus earnestly believes that Aaron is fetching his sons due to the gory transaction he just made.

Thyestes is perhaps more skeptical for he calls himself "unhappy father". Although he might have suspected Atreus' treachery, Thyestes had no way of knowing that he just ate his sons' flesh. The revealing of the heads is the final climax in *Thyestes.* However, in *Titus Andronicus,* this similarly gory scene comes in Act III. It is a climactic moment, but it is not *the* climax. The revealing of his sons' heads serves as a counter motive for Titus. After this blow, he begins to formulate a plot against Saturnius, Tamora, and Aaron.

The end of scene III in *Titus Andronicus* offers a subtle similarity to Seneca's *Thyestes.* Act III scene II occurs immediately after Titus has his hand cut off and is rewarded by receiving his sons' decapitated heads. In this scene, Lucius' son enters the action. He asks his grandfather Titus, "Good grandsire, leave these bitter deep laments./ Make my aunt merry with some pleasing tale." (III.II.46-47). The boy manifests purity and naivety towards the terrible tragedy that just befell his family. He wants his grandfather to overcome his agonizing grief as if it were a trivial matter. In Act III of *Thyestes,* Thyestes' son Tantalus displays a similar attitude. Thyestes is relaying his skepticisms on returning to his brother's kingdom, and Tantalus says, "Whatever thwarts or hinders thee, o'ercome; see what rewards/ Are waiting thy return. Thou mayst be king." (440-441). Young Tantalus sees only the positive aspects of Thyestes' return. His young mind does not yet understand betrayal and treachery. It is interesting that Shakespeare adapts this subtlety to his brutal tragedy. Seneca clearly influenced Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* in regard to the major themes of revenge and obsession. However, Shakespeare also includes this smaller scene between a boy and his father/grandfather. Although the scene is minor, it amplifies the later tragedy. In Seneca, the reader sees Thyestes ready to turn around, but his son coaxes him to reunite with Atreus. It is a painful scene as Thyestes begrudgingly goes to Atreus suspecting his brother's sword to fall on his own neck, not his sons. Shakespeare uses his

rendition of the scene similarly. The scene between the boy and Titus is moving. The boy innocently asks his grandfather to forget his woes. Although Titus cannot do this, the reader begins to see a more sensitive side to him as he playfully interacts with his grandson. This intensifies the tragedy when Titus inevitably dies at the end of the play.

Act V of *Titus Andronicus* delivers the culmination of revenge for Titus. The act begins when Tamora and her two sons disguise themselves as personifications of Revenge, Murder, and Rape. They believe Titus to be mad, but Titus is only feigning madness. Shakespeare uses this device frequently, perhaps most famously in *Hamlet* when the protagonist feigns madness in order to mislead his enemies. Titus accepts the three strangers into his household, but unbeknownst to them, Titus recognizes their true identities. Tamora, or Revenge, exits on Titus' command saying that she is leaving in order to set up a plot against his foes. When she exits, Titus reveals to Chiron and Demetrius that he knows who they are. Before cutting their throats, Titus enters a soliloquy in which he states:

> You know your mother means to feast with me, And calls herself Revenge, and thinks me to be mad. Hark, villains, I will grind your bones to dust, And with your blood and it I'll make a paste, And of the paste a coffin I will rear, And make two pasties of your shameful heads, And bid that strumpet, your unhallowed dam, Like to the earth, swallow her own increase, This is the feast I have bid her to.. (V.II.185-192).

Like *Thyestes,* the climax of *Titus Andronicus* will transpire at a cannibalistic feast. Shakespeare uses the device of the feast in the same manner as Seneca. The feast is not the typical meeting of friends and family. It is the meeting of enemies and betrayers. The feast is the instrument of revenge for Titus just as it was for Atreus. Shakespeare however distinguishes his vengeful feast from Seneca's through the use of his characters. In *Thyestes,* it is Atreus the antagonist who devises the scheme in which Thyestes feasts on his own children. In *Titus Andronicus,* however,

it is Titus the protagonist who conceives the plot against Tamora in which she devours her two sons. The feast itself is essentially the same in both plays, but the characters are on different sides of the table so to speak.

During the feast, Saturnius has a similar line as Thyestes does. Titus reveals to Tamora that he knows that Chiron and Demetrius raped and mutilated Lavinia. Saturnius responds with "Go fetch them hither to us presently./ [Titus]: Why, there they are, both baked in this pie,/ Whereof their mother daintily hath fed,/ Eating the flesh that she herself hath bred./ Tis true, Tis true; witness my knife's sharp point." (V.III.59-63). At the end of this line, Titus reaches across the table and stabs Tamora. This passage is clearly influenced from *Thyestes* where Thyestes asks where his sons are and Atreus replies, "Believe thy sons are here in thy embrace," (976). Atreus is punning on Thyestes' doom, but Titus is less enigmatic than Atreus. He plainly tells Tamora that she has just consumed her flesh and blood wanting her to know the truth before he kills her.

Shakespeare's first tragedy begins the tradition of having multiple deaths at the end of the play. Titus first stabs Tamora, then Saturnius stabs him, and finally Lucius stabs Saturnius. This brutal exchange takes place in the space of five lines. (V.III.62-67). Seneca was the first Roman playwright and perhaps even the earliest classical playwright to have onstage deaths in his tragedies. In his plays *Oedipus* and *Phaedra,* Jocasta and Phaedra both commit suicide onstage. This undoubtedly influenced Shakespeare's tragedy where characters do not only die onstage, but die frequently and in succession to one another. After Titus, Tamora, and Saturnius die, Lucius is made king. Aaron, who was not present during the feast, is also still alive. In order to punish the culprit, Lucius says, "Set him breast-deep in earth, and famish him./ There let him stand and rave and cry for food./ If anyone relieves or pities him, for the offense he dies."

(V.III.179-181). Lucius' retribution against Aaron is vicious. Not only is Aaron forced to starve, but anyone who offers help to him will be killed. This shows another parallel between Aaron and Phaedra. Phaedra dies at the end of Seneca's tragedy, and like Aaron, she is utterly loathed. Both Theseus and Lucius show no signs of regret as they speak to their doomed victims. Theseus' final couplet of the play is spoken to Phaedra's corpse: "Let earth on her be spread,/ And may it rest upon her head." (1279-1280). Theseus does not bury his dead wife. Nobody mourns Phaedra just as nobody cares about Aaron. Although Aaron is not killed, it is implied that he will eventually starve to death. It is also an ironic penalty as Tamora ate her own sons, but Aaron is now forced to starve. Aaron's punishment is also a reference to the opening scene in *Thyestes.* In this scene the ghost of Tantalus is led from the underworld in order to witness the events of *Thyestes.* Tantalus' infamous tale is that he was invited to dine at Zeus' table, but he stole nectar and ambrosia to give to his friends. The Gods punished him by placing him in Hades. There, he lived near a lake that he was unable to drink from as well as fruit trees that he could not eat from. Tantalus shares in Aaron's ironic punishment.

Titus Andronicus often receives criticism for being an unnecessarily gory and chaotic play. T.S. Eliot infamously called the tragedy one of the most stupid works ever written. The overall chaos certainly gives *Titus Andronicus* an uncontrolled quality, but that is not necessarily a negative feature. In his preface to *Titus Andronicus,* Russ McDonald writes, "Revenge tragedy takes upon itself to dramatize the lack of control that humans fell in a chaotic world." (McDonald 1216). *Titus* reflects the human psychology of revenge tragedy. Seneca could be criticized similarly. His plays lack the influence of the Gods but focus on mortal action and free will. Therefore, his plays could be perceived as chaotic, but they are still considered to be highest drama. The same can be said of the gore in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus.* The tragedy is

undoubtedly filled with death and mutilation. However, Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* as well as Andrew Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* are also very gruesome plays, yet they are held in high regard. A surplus of gore does not signify a lack of polish. Contrarily, it signifies massive tragedy and drama. *Titus Andronicus* is one of Shakespeare's most unique works. In *Shakespeare and the Uses of Antiquity,* Charles Martindale writes, "*Titus* should be regarded, not so much as a crude precursor of the Roman plays, but as a work of an altogether different type; in some ways its most obvious links are with *Lear.*" (Martindale 143). *Titus* and *King Lear* are highly different tragedies. However, they both share a quality that completely separates them from Shakespeare's other plays. *Titus Andronicus* is an unpolished Shakespearean tragedy, but it is also one of his most fantastically dramatic compositions.

Cannibalistic Soliloquies

In the closing speech of Act V Scene II in *Titus Andronicus,* Titus delivers his most well known soliloquy of the play. This is the scene prior to the bloody conclusion of the tragedy. Titus has just confessed that he was only feigning madness to his foes that cruelly defiled his daughter: Chiron and Demetrius. Before he brutally cuts their throats, Titus tells the two brothers what terrible fate awaits them through Shakespeare's beautiful verse. This dramatic soliloquy resembles Seneca's *Thyestes* not only in plot, but also in theme and language. Atreus, like Titus, finds vengeance by cooking the sons of his nemesis. Atreus has two monologues in *Thyestes* that both contribute to Titus' climactic soliloquy. The first is in Act II, lines 263-286, when Atreus is plotting with his attendant about how to punish Thyestes. The second is in Act V, lines 1051-1069, when Atreus confesses his crime to his brother. These two passages are a great deal shorter than Titus' soliloquy, yet they still provide the dramatic elements of language that Shakespeare uses to create his tragic monologue.

Early in the action, it seems that Tamora is the character obsessed with revenge in *Titus Andronicus.* Following Lavinia's rape, however, it is clear that Titus is the one who is obsessed with vengeance. He is therefore analogous to Atreus who scrutinizes over every detail in order to maximize Thyestes' pain. Both Titus' and Atreus' monologues reflect their obsession with revenge. Seneca's Atreus is perhaps more perceived as mad, whereas Titus is merely fixated. However, both share the unquenchable desire to see their enemy suffer. Both Shakespeare's and Seneca's speeches have grotesque imagery as Titus and Atreus revel in describing the gruesome act of killing their victims. Titus addresses Chiron and Demetrius by saying, "This one hand yet is left to cut your throats/ Whiles that Lavinia 'tween her stumps doth hold/ The basin that receives your guilty blood." (180-183). Titus references both the mutilation of his daughter at the

hands on the two brothers as well as his own loss of a limb. This passage is comparable to Atreus' later monologue where he says, "I'd have rather poured the hot blood fresh from their wounds/ Down your retching throat that you could have/ Drunk the gore of your still-living sons." (1053-1055). Atreus' remark comes at the peak of his madness. Both Titus and Atreus refer to the grisly image of the flowing blood of their victims. Additionally, since this is the height of vengeance for both Titus and Atreus, neither character shows any remorse in their words or actions. The depictions of Lavinia holding a blood filled basin with her stumped arms as well as Atreus pouring blood down his brother's throat are horrific, yet neither character flinches in their monologue.

Shakespeare's grotesque language continues in Titus' soliloquy: "Hark, villains, I will grind your bones to dust,/ And with your blood and it I'll make a paste,/ And of the paste a coffin I will rear,/ And make two pasties of your shameful heads," (186-189). The rhythm in this passage is very slow and deliberate. The reader can almost hear the pauses between the lines as Titus explains in grotesque detail how he will cook Chiron and Demetrius. Seneca displays the same measured language in Atreus' speech: "I drove my sword into their bodies there at the altar./ They died at once/…They could not see me tear their bodies apart, didn't watch as I stuck their livers on spits and roasted them over the fire," (1058-1062). This passage is very similar to the soliloquy in *Titus Andronicus.* Atreus tells Thyestes exactly what he did to his sons just as Titus tells Chiron and Demetrius exactly what he will do to them. There is no detail omitted in their gory description. Both protagonists illustrate gruesome scenes with their heavy language. In his book, *The Influence of Seneca on Elizabethan Tragedy,* John Cunliffe writes: "No detail of physical horror is spared; from beginning to end the stage reeks with blood, and the characters vie with one another in barbarity. Even the gentle Lavinia helps to prepare the Thyestean

banquet;" (Cunliffe 69). Seneca's influence is blatant in Titus' soliloquy as he goes into immense detail describing the gore of his vengeance.

Both *Thyestes* and *Titus Andronicus* reach their climaxes at a cannibalistic feast. Titus and Atreus reference the feast to come in their separate monologues. In his book, *Shakespeare and Classical Tragedy,* Robert Miola writes, "Atreus serves as a model for Titus, murderous founder of the feast." (Miola 25). Miola's point is true contextually as well as within the language. Both Atreus and Titus use the cannibalistic feast as their instrument of revenge. However, both characters also describe the use of the feast in detailed description. In his soliloquy, Titus says, "This is the feast that I have bid [Tamora] to,/ And this the banquet she shall surfeit on,/ For worse than Philomel you used my daughter,/ And worse than Procne I will be revenged." (192-195). Shakespeare again uses a deliberate tone showing that Chiron and Demetrius cannot escape their fate. Titus will have his revenge, and the young brothers will die at his hand. Atreus also indicates that he will use a feast as means for his revenge:

> In Thrace, they say, there was once an unspeakable sacrifice and a feast of infamy beyond man's imagination. I speak of Philomel, Procne, and the evil king they repaid, serving so well. Their rage is what now fills my soul, as I will fill Thyestes' belly full. (273-279)

Titus and Atreus both reference a bold feast in which they will achieve their revenge. Interestingly, the two revengers also refer to the story of Procne and Philomel. Procne was the wife of Tereus, who raped and mutilated his wife's sister: Philomel. In order to avenge his act, Procne killed her son Itys and fed him to Tereus. This tale is directly from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In Ovid, Procne and Philomel both transform into birds after Tereus consumes his son. Shakespeare references this specific tale of Ovid heavily in *Titus Andronicus.* In his essay titled "The Roman Background of Titus Andronicus", Robert Adger Law wrote, "A

skillful fusion of the Thyestes and Philomela stories gave Shakespeare his main plot, accounting for the rape and mutilation of Lavinia and for Titus' terrible revenge in the Thyestean banquet served to Tamora." (Law 145). *Titus Andronicus* reflects the mythology of Procne and Philomel both in the rape of Lavinia and the final feast. Although there is no rape in *Thyestes,* Seneca still refers to the infamous feast that Procne served to Tereus. It is significant that both tragedies reference an important myth in similar monologues.

Titus' soliloquy at the close of Act V Scene II incorporates Atreus' two shorter monologues at the beginning and end of *Thyestes.* Seneca's language in these monologues is very heavy and grotesquely detailed, illustrating the height of tragic drama. Shakespeare's influence from Seneca's monologues is clear in this soliloquy, yet he still manages to make Titus' speech completely unique. The reader follows the action of Titus and his family. After Titus severs his hand due to Aaron's trick, Titus begins to plan a course of vengeance. However, the reader does not see any part of this plot until this famous soliloquy. In *Thyestes,* the reader knows what is coming in the final act of the play. In the act prior, a messenger interacts with the chorus and tells in detail how Atreus killed and baked Thyestes' sons. However, in *Titus Andronicus,* the cannibalistic feast is a complete surprise. The reader receives no hints of what is to happen until Titus blatantly tells Chrion and Demetrius that he will kill and cook them. This astonishment gives a dramatic twist to Shakespeare's first tragedy. The infamous soliloquy builds up the feast in the final scene. Shakespeare ends the soliloquy with a Senecan element of tragic drama. Titus cuts the throats of Chiron and Demetrius and says, "So, now bring them in, for I'll play the cook/ And see them ready against their mother comes." (204-205).

Titus Andronicus Act V Scene II Lines 166-205

Come, come, Lavinia; look, thy foes are bound.
Sirs, stop their mouths, let them not speak to me;
But let them hear what fearful words I utter.
O villains, Chiron and Demetrius!
Here stands the spring whom you have stain'd with mud,
This goodly summer with your winter mix'd.
You kill'd her husband, and for that vile fault
Two of her brothers were condemn'd to death,
My hand cut off and made a merry jest;
Both her sweet hands, her tongue, and that more dear
Than hands or tongue, her spotless chastity,
Inhuman traitors, you constrain'd and forced.
What would you say, if I should let you speak?
Villains, for shame you could not beg for grace.
Hark, wretches! how I mean to martyr you.
This one hand yet is left to cut your throats,
Whilst that Lavinia 'tween her stumps doth hold
The basin that receives your guilty blood.
You know your mother means to feast with me,
And calls herself Revenge, and thinks me mad:
Hark, villains! I will grind your bones to dust
And with your blood and it I'll make a paste,
And of the paste a coffin I will rear
And make two pasties of your shameful heads,
And bid that strumpet, your unhallow'd dam,
Like to the earth swallow her own increase.
This is the feast that I have bid her to,
And this the banquet she shall surfeit on;
For worse than Philomel you used my daughter,
And worse than Procne I will be revenged:
And now prepare your throats. Lavinia, come,
Receive the blood: and when that they are dead,
Let me go grind their bones to powder small
And with this hateful liquor temper it;
And in that paste let their vile heads be baked.
Come, come, be every one officious
To make this banquet; which I wish may prove
More stern and bloody than the Centaurs' feast.
He cuts their throats
So, now bring them in, for I'll play the cook,
And see them ready 'gainst their mother comes.

Thyestes Lines 263-286

Something huge and awful
I cannot yet imagine, but I can feel it
growing in my hands that tingle with it.
My lively fingers quiver. I cannot name it,
but it calls out to something in my soul
that answers, "Yes, so be it! Let Atreus do
what his brother has deserved. Let each perform
his part in the dreadful rite." In Thrace, they say,
There was once an unspeakable sacrifice and a feast
of infamy beyond man's imagination.
I speak of Philomel, Procne, and the evil
king they repaid, serving so well. Their rage
is what now fills my soul, as I will fill
Thyestes' belly full. Let the father tear
the flesh from his sons' bodies and let him drink
the blood of his blood and gnaw the bone of his bone.
This *amuse gueule* I'll prepare for him, so that he
may carry out with his own gory hands
my dire sentence. Then let him hate himself
with something like my own hot hatred.

Thyestes Lines 1051-1069

A crime ought to have limits beforehand. I agree with you there.
But this is repayment of crime, is vengeance, is different,
and even this isn't enough. I'd have rather
poured the hot blood fresh from their wounds
down your retching throat that you could have drunk
the gore of your still-living sons. I hurried.
It was all too quick, too easy. I drove my sword
into their bodies there at the altar. They died
at once—never knew what happened after.
They could not see me tear their bodies apart,
didn't watch as I stuck their livers on spits
and roasted them over the fire, could not hear
the sputtering sounds of cooking. And neither did you!
I should have preferred that you watch me prepare your banquet,
slicing the meat and arranging it there on the platter.
I should have delighted to see you chew and swallow
knowing what food you were eating.

Seneca's Influence on *Hamlet*

Hamlet is considered by many to be William Shakespeare's greatest tragedy. The play is a classic revenge tragedy: a man kills his brother the king in order to assume the throne. Shakespeare also explores ambivalence of character with his young protagonist Hamlet. Hamlet's thoughts and actions signify a strong presence and psychology. The characterization of Hamlet is not unlike Seneca's tragic *Oedipus.* In her introduction to *Seneca: The Tragedies*, Dana Giola writes, "Senecan revenge tragedy gave shape to Shakespeare's innovative psychological drama, *Hamlet.*" (Giola xiii). Seneca's influence is prominent throughout *Hamlet,* but most noticeably within the mind of the title character.

Hamlet famously begins with the entrance of the ghost of Hamlet's late father. This is an immediate reference to Seneca. Both *Thyestes* and *Agamemnon* begin with the appearance of a ghost. However, Shakespeare's use of the ghost is far different than Seneca. Seneca uses the ghost to set up a plot. The ghost acts as an instigator or even as a framing device for the story to come. In *Thyestes,* the ghost of Tantalus is led out of the underworld to bear witness to the events about to unfold to the members of his house. Tantalus does not have a role in the tragedy itself; he simply sets up the drama to come. In *Agamemnon,* the ghost of Thyestes has a stronger role. In the opening act, he awakens his illegitimate son Aegisthus and calls for revenge: "Aegisthus, rouse yourself./ Your father is come to cheer you on in your dread purpose—for this one deed/ I begat you, this one moment/ I did a terrible thing to my poor daughter. Think of her!/ Think, even, of me and rouse yourself to dare the terrible thing!" (56-61). This passage precedes

the action of the play. After this monologue, Aegisthus and Clytemnestra begin to plot the murder of Agamemnon. Thyestes motivates the act of vengeance, but he is still restricted to the opening act. The ghost of Hamlet is similar to Thyestes. He too calls for revenge. However, he interacts on a higher level than any of Seneca's ghosts. In the first place, he does not only appear to young Hamlet. In the first scene of the play, the ghost appears to the night watchmen as well as Horatio. Shakespeare could have easily had the ghost appear solely to Hamlet in the first scene of the play, yet he chose to have the ghost interact with Hamlet's friends first. In this first scene, the ghost does not speak. It appears then disappears at daybreak. The fact that the purpose of the ghost is not initially clear heightens the mystery and drama in *Hamlet.* Unlike Seneca's ghosts, the ghost of Hamlet is not restricted to a single scene. He indeed is the instigator of the plot, but that is not his only role.

In Act I Scene II, Horatio goes to Hamlet and tells him of the ghost. Hamlet then accompanies Horatio at night and bears witness to the ghostly image of his father. Hamlet addresses the ghost, yet it still does not speak. However, it does beckon to Hamlet. Hamlet follows his deceased father and finally speaks with it in Act I Scene V. This scene is interesting because Shakespeare presents an active dialogue between Hamlet and the ghost. In Seneca's tragedies, the ghosts would speak but not interactively. For example, in *Agamemnon* Thyestes addresses Aegisthus in a long monologue, but his son does not respond. In *Hamlet,* the ghost holds a conversation with his son. It is in this scene that the ghost calls for revenge: "Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder/…But know, thou noble youth,/ The serpent that did sting

thy father's life/ Now wears his crown." (I.V. 25-40). This passage provokes the action of the play. The ghost presents Hamlet with the information of who killed him and how he performed the act. It is now up to Hamlet to revenge his father. This precedent of revenging the father displays similarities to Seneca's *Oedipus.* At the beginning of his tragedy, Oedipus too sets out to find his father's killer. Of course, he does not yet realize that his father's murderer is himself, but the situation is comparable. Both Hamlet and Oedipus isolate themselves by seeking out their father's murderer. In his book, *Shakespeare and Classical Tragedy,* Robert Miola writes, "Shakespeare expands the individuality of the revenger, depicting him as an isolated figure, as one cut off from the comforts of historical necessity as he is from the world around him. Hamlet must make his own destiny;" (Miola 35-36). Oedipus, like Hamlet, is also in control of his own destiny. Although both protagonists control their own fates, Hamlet and Oedipus face a lonely journey as neither has a close friend to confide in. Hamlet does have Horatio, yet Horatio is not privy to everything Hamlet discovers. Hamlet's isolation leads into the ambivalence he begins to feel when pondering the vow of vengeance he made to his father's ghost.

In Act II, Hamlet begins to feign madness. The act of pretending to be mad fools Hamlet's adversaries as well as gives him time to make his decision regarding his father's request for revenge. Hamlet indeed wants to achieve vengeance for the death of his father. However, the ghost of Hamlet Senior still insists that Hamlet kill his step-father. Therefore, by feigning madness, Hamlet has plenty of time to reach a choice. Through his guise of madness, Hamlet has humorous dialogues with the king's advisor Polonius. Polonius is characterized as

somewhat of a foil to Hamlet. Where Hamlet is clearly intelligent and sophisticated, Polonius is very pedantic and pompous. When he speaks, the reader can see that Polonius regards himself very highly. In one of his brief conversations with Hamlet, Polonius says, "The best actors in the world, either for tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral; scene individable, or poem unlimited. Seneca cannot be too heavy, nor Plautus too light. For the law of writ and the liberty, these are the only men." (II.II. 339-344). In this passage, Polonius pretentiously lists two of Shakespeare's greatest influences: Seneca and Plautus. It is amusing and ironic that the ostentatious Polonius is the character that alludes to the two playwrights that had the greatest effect on Shakespeare's plays.

The most important element of Act II is that is the introduction of Hamlet's ambivalence in character. The end of Act II contains Hamlet's first soliloquy of many voicing his self doubt and internal conflict. Hamlet begins to question his own motives: "What's Hecuba to him, or he to her,/ That he should weep for her? What would he do/ Had he the motive and the cue for passion/ That I have?" (II.II. 597-500). The appearance of his father's ghost supplied Hamlet with an explanation for his father's death as well as the identity of the man who committed the murder. However, Hamlet is confused and conflicted. The ghost is not only asking for revenge, but is asking Hamlet to kill another man. Hamlet may have a clear motive for vengeance, but that does not mean he is willing to take a life. It is because of his ambivalence that Hamlet stages the Mousetrap play. He will not kill Claudius solely on the word of the ghost of his father. He will judge his uncle's guilt for himself through the use of the play within a play: "The play's the thing/ Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king." (II.II 543-544).

Act III continues Hamlet's hesitant behavior. The "To be or not to be" passage may be Shakespeare's most well known soliloquy. However, it is also crucially derived from Seneca's own portrayal of Oedipus. Hamlet begins the soliloquy with a simple query: "To be, or not to be – that is the question:/ Whether tis nobler in the mind to suffer/ The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune/ Or to take arms against a sea of troubles/ And by opposing end them." (III.I. 56-60). Here, Hamlet is noticeably struggling with the dilemma of action versus inaction. This internal conflict is parallel to Oedipus' own conflict at the beginning of Seneca's *Oedipus.* Thebes is undergoing a terrible plague and Oedipus is trying to decide what he should do. His physical problem of plague, though, grows into the much greater conflict of discovering his true identity. Oedipus attempts to discover the former king's killer. On this quest, however, Oedipus begins to suspect himself: "My life at home was innocent,/ I say; my effort was forever to obey the laws of Nature./ But when what you fear is so enormous, though it may appear impossible, you shudder all the time:/ Can I, could I commit this dreadful crime?/ Yes, Fate's concocting something just for me," (24-30). Early in the play, Oedipus already displays suspicion and fear in his situation. His ambivalence is very similar to Hamlet's. Although Oedipus faces several moments of conflicting decisions, he courageously strives forward. He begins to realize that Laius was killed by Oedipus' own hand: "Worries and fears are spinning in my head./ Through no one's deed but mine is Laius dead,/ Or so the gods of heaven and hell proclaim." (783-785). These doubts and fears burden Oedipus, but he still chooses to act and find the true identity of Laius' killer. Like Oedipus, Hamlet is repeatedly faced with an internal conflict. Should he act or should he not act? The question plagues Hamlet throughout the tragedy much like the question of

true identity afflicts Oedipus.

Act III contains the *Mousetrap* play within a play in which Hamlet is finally convinced of his uncle's guilt. After the play, Queen Gertrude calls for Hamlet. In Act III scene IV, the ghost reappears in Gertrude's bedroom in his nightgown. The ghost does not only re-enter but speaks a few lines to Hamlet as well. It is very odd for a ghost to return to the action of a play. Seneca's ghosts clearly set up the action of a tragedy. However, after their initial appearance, they would not reappear. Shakespeare uses the ghost of Hamlet to set up the plot, but in act III he also has the ghost reappear to remind Hamlet of their first talk: "Do not forget./ This visitation is but to whet thy almost blunted purpose." (III.IV. 110-111). The ghost comes back at this moment in order to prompt Hamlet. However, unlike Horatio, Gertrude cannot see or hear the ghost. This makes Shakespeare's use of the ghost slightly inconsistent. Another possibility is that the ghost is not actually present during this scene. The ghost calls for revenge early in the action of *Hamlet.* However, Hamlet has yet to act on his deceased father's words. The reappearance of the ghost in Act III can implicitly be a projection of Hamlet's guilt. In her introduction to *Hamlet,* Ann Thompson writes, "When Hamlet's father died, he could not but feel guilty, so his grieving was contaminated by guilt and a manufactured idolization of the missing parent. Thus the story of Oedipus could have been a source for *Hamlet*," (Thompson 63). Oedipus, like Hamlet, suffers from the guilt of losing a parent. Of course, Oedipus was directly responsible for his own father's death, yet the factor of guilt is similar to Hamlet. Hamlet's guilt is further evidence of his ambivalence in character. Shakespeare's use of the ghost is therefore multilayered.

Functionally, he uses it as a character to Hamlet in order to encourage his motive for vengeance. However, he also uses the ghost to show Hamlet's guilt as well as prove his madness in the eyes of Gertrude.

Act IV begins with Hamlet having to account for the death of Polonius. He is sent away to England because the King and Queen still believe him to be mad. The death of Polonius has a tragic yet ironic effect on both of his children. In Act IV Scene V, the Queen finds Ophelia singing to herself in a state of lunacy. It is ironic that Ophelia is genuinely mad while Hamlet has been faking madness for the majority of the play. Shortly after this segment, Laertes reenters the action to find his father dead and his sister insane. Laertes leaves the play early in Act I well before Hamlet has even met with his father's ghost. However, he returns to find a family in ruins. From Laertes' standpoint, Hamlet is clearly to blame. He vows vengeance against Hamlet for his father's death: "To this point I stand, that both the worlds I give to negligence,/ Let come what comes, only I'll be revenged/ Most thoroughly for my father." (IV.V. 133-136). Laertes' situation is parallel to Hamlet's own conflict. Both characters intend to avenge their fathers' untimely deaths. The main difference is that the murder of Hamlet's father was pre-meditated while Hamlet killed Polonius unknowingly. Although they share similar circumstances, Laertes is very active and full of purpose whereas Hamlet is still doubtful and poorly motivated. Hamlet may be the title character, but Laertes' story is just as tragic as Hamlet's. Laertes' tragedy deepens when Ophelia dies at the end of act IV. The Queen enters in act IV scene VII to tell Laertes that Ophelia has drowned. It is unusual that Shakespeare does not have Ophelia's death

onstage. In most every Shakespearean tragedy, the protagonists die onstage. Shakespeare's influencer, Seneca, was perhaps the earliest playwright to depict characters' deaths onstage. While he did not show every death, Seneca did have his female characters die onstage. In *Phaedra,* Phaedra kills herself with Hippolytus' sword at the close of the play. Also, in *Oedipus,* Jocasta kills herself after learning the true identity of her husband and son. Shakespeare, however, does not show Ophelia's death. She is one of Shakespeare's more enigmatic female characters. Her death does accurately show that catastrophe can strike at any time. It is sudden and unexpected, but it does, however, lead in to the tragic final act of *Hamlet.*

Act V begins with two clowns digging a grave for Ophelia. As they dig, they have a pedantic dialogue concerning the cause of Ophelia's death:

> For here lies the point: if I drown myself wittingly, it argues an act, and an act hath three branches – it is to act, to do, to perform. Argal, she drowned herself wittingly…But if the water come to him and drown him, he drowns not himself. Argal, he that is not guilty of his own death shortens not his own life. (V.I. 9-19)

It is ironic that two clowns are debating over matters of life and death. Shakespeare noticeably uses his fools or clowns to poise as the voice of reason. In this passage, he cleverly uses their dialogue to return to the theme of action versus inaction. The premise of action pertains to both Ophelia and Hamlet in this case. The cause of Ophelia's death is peculiar. Shakespeare does not make it clear as to whether she drowned herself in a fit of madness or drowned by accident. This dilemma also applies to Hamlet. After the Mousetrap play within a play, Hamlet is fully convinced of his uncle's guilt. However, he still has not avenged his father even though he

pledged that he would. Hamlet's internal conflict distresses him as he cannot find a meaningful purpose in his plot for vengeance. Unlike Laertes, Hamlet does not rush towards immediate action. Throughout his soliloquies, the reader sees Hamlet contemplate the effects and consequences of his actions. He maturely contemplates the effects his actions will bring. This deep deliberation perhaps makes Hamlet Shakespeare's most dynamic character.

In the final scene of the play, Hamlet accepts a challenge from Laertes to duel. Laertes dips the tip of his foil in poison in an attempt to kill Hamlet. The instrument of murder stays consistent throughout the play. Claudius kills his brother by pouring poison into his ear. In the final act of the play, poison resurfaces as the implement that kills Claudius, Gertrude, Laertes, and Hamlet. Through deliberation in his many soliloquies, Hamlet finally resolves to act in the final scene. He participates in the duel and exacts his vengeance. However, because of his choice to take part, he indirectly causes the death of his mother and his self. Throughout the play, Hamlet repeatedly doubts and questions his actions and motive. At the end of the play, though, his uncertainties prove to be important. He does what the ghost of his father bade him to do, but in his choice to act, Hamlet loses another parent. He does die shortly after his mother's death, but his act of killing Claudius is almost undone by leading to his mother's own death.

Shakespeare's greatest tragedy draws several parallels with one of Seneca's most prestigious works: *Oedipus. Hamlet* and *Oedipus* are not only contextually alike. Both plays display a complex psychology within their character. Oedipus and Hamlet exhibit ambivalence

and intelligence in their respective situations. Each character faces a difficult choice of action. Both choose to act, and both inevitably cause their own tragedy.

Ambivalent Soliloquies

Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Seneca's *Oedipus* share the quality of ambivalence in their title characters. Oedipus is faced with the matter of destiny. He is prophesied to kill his father and marry his mother. In Seneca's tragedy, Oedipus struggles against fate and tries to evade his bitter fortune. Hamlet is also confronted with a difficult internal battle. When the ghost of his father encounters Hamlet, he appeals to his son for vengeance. Hamlet vows to take his uncle's life, but suffers from doubt and distrust. Both Hamlet and Oedipus face a difficult inner struggle as they attempt to make their own destinies. Hamlet first shows his ambivalence in the first soliloquy of *Hamlet.* The "Rogue and Peasant Slave" soliloquy is located in Act II, Scene II shortly after Hamlet meets the ghost of his father and promises revenge.

This first soliloquy is directly influenced from the first monologue in Seneca's *Oedipus.* Hamlet and Oedipus have vastly different situations, but their instability of character is similar. The opening lines of the passages each portray the respective character's ambivalence. Hamlet's soliloquy begins with, "O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!/ Is it not monstrous that this player here,/ But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,/ Could force his soul so to his own conceit," (485-488). Hamlet starts his soliloquy by disparagingly calling himself a rogue and peasant slave. He immediately questions his own personal status in the state of Denmark. Hamlet then continues by comparing his motives to those of the actors that just performed for him. He clearly has a strong purpose with complicated conditions, yet he insists on weighing his situation against the actions of performers. It is not a logical comparison, but it is one that Hamlet makes, thereby

deepening his ambiguity in character.

Oedipus also begins his first monologue ambivalently. Before he even brings up the topic of the plague, Oedipus says, “Rising resignedly through smears of grey,/ The sun slinks back to drive the dark away.” (1-2). These opening lines have an indistinct quality to them. The phrases: “rising resignedly” and “smears of grey” give the sense that nothing is clear to Oedipus. He is suffering from the same uncertainties as Hamlet. At the positions of both soliloquies in their respective plays, neither character knows what is true and what is not. Hamlet and Oedipus are searching for clarity in their dilemmas. Hamlet does not know if the ghost is legitimate and therefore if Claudius actually killed his father. Oedipus is unsure as to why a terrible plague is afflicting his kingdom. These two soliloquies start the protagonists on a journey to find truth and motivation to act.

Although the two monologues are based on separate events, they are structured similarly. After their ambivalent beginnings, Oedipus and Hamlet both begin to portray self doubt. Hamlet is not only doubtful, but he even begins to deprecate himself: “Yet I/ A dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak/ Like John-a-dreams, unpregnant of my cause,/ And can say nothing.” (501-504). In this passage, Hamlet further shows his lack of motivation. However, he also displays scorn and contempt at himself. The word: “muddy-mettled” references a poor-spirited man, but the words can also literally signify a dirty or low-class man. Hamlet is not only doubtful, but self-pitying as well. In this first soliloquy, Hamlet refers to himself as a “rogue and peasant slave” and “a muddy-mettled rascal”. He is the prince of Denmark, but because of his uncertainties, Hamlet

perceives himself as no more than a slave or rascal.

Oedipus shares Hamlet's doubts from a position of power. Oedipus is the king of Thebes, but he displays the same misgivings as Hamlet: "Who would want to be a king,/ I ask-- horrors heaped behind a grinning mask!/ Rocks that jut out into the open sea are drubbed by breakers on the quietest day,/ Vulnerable and naked as a king daily exposed to every passing thing." (6-11). Oedipus asks ruefully, "who would want to be king?" Early in his tragedy, Oedipus already displays fear of his position. As a king, he feels vulnerable and naked. Since this play takes place in Thebes, Oedipus already knows what fate the Delphic Oracle has predicted of him. In her introduction to the Senecan Tragedies, Dana Giola writes, "Seneca's tragic vision admits no escape from evil, no defense against the mindless brutality of fate." (Giola xlii). Seneca portrays fate as a vicious inevitability. Oedipus therefore begins to show a subtle fear that perhaps this devastating plague is indirectly caused by his cursed destiny. He and Hamlet share insecurity from their elevated positions. Both characters have everything to lose: their status, their lives, and their families. It is because of these stakes that both Oedipus and Hamlet deliver such fearful and doubtful soliloquies.

The similarities between Oedipus and Hamlet's soliloquies continue when they reach their culmination points. Each character builds their ambivalent speeches towards a question that they pose to themselves. Hamlet famously says, "No, not for a king/ Upon whose property and most dear life/ A damned defeat was made. Am I a coward?" (504-506). Hamlet's wavering voice sets up a query regarding his own bravery. His intelligence and deliberation make him one of the most dynamic Shakespearean characters. But because of his hesitation in avenging his

father, Hamlet begins to question his own motives or lack thereof. Oedipus is not so different from Hamlet when he also questions his actions. Towards the end of his opening monologue Oedipus says, "But when your fear is so enormous,/ Though it may appear impossible,/ You shudder all the time:/ *Can I, could I commit this dreadful crime*? [1]" (26-29). The dreadful crime Oedipus refers to his incestuous offense of killing his father and marrying his mother. This question is ironic because Oedipus has already made an action to avoid his cruel destiny. He left his home and supposed family and journeyed to Thebes. This action, though, led Oedipus to fulfill his terrible destiny. Oedipus is still possessed with the fear that his fate will come true. Oedipus and Hamlet have the same insecurities that lead them to question themselves. Both characters are noticeably clever, yet they still doubt and fear the outcome of their actions.

Oedipus and Hamlet share an uncertain mentality regarding their situations. Their actions and choices are layered with complex consequences. For instance, Oedipus' decision to leave Corinth leads to the fulfillment of the prophecy as he unknowingly kills his father and marries his mother. Hamlet chooses to fight Laertes in a duel that indirectly leads to the deaths of his mother and himself. These tragic choices are carefully considered in Hamlet's first soliloquy and Oedipus' opening monologue. Hamlet and Oedipus portray a thoughtful ambivalence in their respective speeches. Ironically, both characters choose to move forward and inevitably instigate their own tragedies.

[1] Italics are used within the edition.

Hamlet Act II Scene II Lines 485-516

O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!
Is it not monstrous that this player here,
But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,
Could force his soul so to his own conceit
That from her working all his visage wann'd,
Tears in his eyes, distraction in's aspect,
A broken voice, and his whole function suiting
With forms to his conceit? and all for nothing!
For Hecuba!
What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba,
That he should weep for her? What would he do,
Had he the motive and the cue for passion
That I have? He would drown the stage with tears
And cleave the general ear with horrid speech,
Make mad the guilty and appal the free,
Confound the ignorant, and amaze indeed
The very faculties of eyes and ears. Yet I,
A dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak,
Like John-a-dreams, unpregnant of my cause,
And can say nothing; no, not for a king,
Upon whose property and most dear life
A damn'd defeat was made. Am I a coward?
Who calls me villain? breaks my pate across?
Plucks off my beard, and blows it in my face?
Tweaks me by the nose? gives me the lie i' the throat,
As deep as to the lungs? who does me this?
Ha!
'Swounds, I should take it: for it cannot be
But I am pigeon-liver'd and lack gall
To make oppression bitter, or ere this
I should have fatted all the region kites
With this slave's offal: bloody, bawdy villain!
Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain!

Oedipus Lines 1-31

Rising resignedly through smears of grey,
the sun slinks back to drive the dark away.
To houses stricken with this ravenous plague
it brings a lurid light:
each dawn uncovers wreckage from last night.
Who would want to be a king, I ask--
horrors heaped behind a grinning mask!
Rocks that jut out into the open sea
are drubbed by breakers on the quietest day,
vulnerable and naked as a king
daily exposed to every passing thing.
I shunned the scepter that my sire would leave me.
Exiled and bold, without a care to grieve me,
I wandered; and—I swear it by the sky!--
blindly stumbled into royalty.
Oh God, unspeakable the things I fear--
by my own hand somehow to kill my sire,
or so the Delphic oracle gives out.
And something even worse is hinted at
than murdering my father—some vile curse
too foul to speak of. Phoebus in my eyes
flashes the bed where my own father lies!
This threatening image made me leave the place.
My life at home was innocent, I say;
my effort was forever to obey
the laws of Nature. But when what you fear
is so enormous, though it may appear
impossible, you shudder all the time:
Can I, could I commit this dreadful crime?
Yes, Fate's concocting something just for me,
now, now this instant!

Shakespeare's influence in *Macbeth*

Macbeth is one of Shakespeare's greatest works. Unlike *Titus Andronicus* or *Hamlet, Macbeth* is not a revenge tragedy. The prominent themes in this play are vaulting ambition as well as the power of fate. The structure of this play is similar to Seneca's *Agamemnon.* Lady Macbeth coaxes her husband to kill the king in order to seize power. This basic plot is undoubtedly parallel to Aegisthus and Clytemnestra's infamous scheme to murder Agamemnon when he returns home. Although the two are comparable, they have vastly different endings. Shakespeare also uses the premise of fate and destiny notably in *Macbeth.* This is a very odd device, as Shakespeare rarely uses the external forces of religion or fate in his plays. Like Seneca, Shakespeare portrays his characters with the power of free will. Therefore, the instrument of fate is hardly used. However, both Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and Seneca's *Oedipus* use the themes of free will and fate to create dramatic tragedy. *Macbeth* is one of Shakespeare's most unique plays, and it draws from two of Seneca's most dramatic tragedies.

Act I introduces a pivotal element of the play: the witches. The witches deliver the prophecies to Macbeth that later cause his demise. They are similar to the prophets in Seneca's *Oedipus.* King Laius and Queen Jocasta first go to the Delphic Prophet to ask for the fortune of their son. When they discover that Oedipus' destiny is to kill his father and marry his mother, they cast him away to Mount Cithaeron. Due to Laius and Jocasta's actions inspired by the words of a prophet, the events of *Oedipus* follow this decision. The prophet indirectly instigates the action of Seneca's *Oedipus* just as Shakespeare's witches do in *Macbeth.* The reader does not

see Macbeth until later in the act. In Act I, Scene II, a captain describes Macbeth, "For brave Macbeth – well he deserves that name – Disdaining Fortune," (I.II. 17-18). This is an important line in the play, because the captain plainly says that Macbeth disdains fortune. It is crucial to see how Macbeth reacts to fate. Throughout the play, he maintains the attitude that he has the power to control his own fate, even if he does not, which again references *Oedipus.* When Oedipus learns of the same prophecy that cause his parents to abandon him, he chooses to leave his adopted parents. It is through his illusion of free will that he comes to kill his father Laius in passing, and upon arriving in Thebes, he marries his mother. Both Macbeth and Oedipus share the false impression of choice. In *Oedipus* and *Macbeth,* the power of fate is absolute. Once an event has been fated to happen, it will happen regardless of any individual's actions. Macbeth and Oedipus are both doomed into thinking that they control their own destiny.

Act I, Scene III introduces the character Banquo. Banquo is perhaps the most important character, because he causes Macbeth's unraveling. In *Shakespeare and Classical Tragedy,* Robert Miola writes, "Although he lives in a world foul with supernatural beings, Macbeth is free to choose or not choose evil. Shakespeare underlines this freedom by portraying Banquo, as a blameless man who staunchly resists temptation." (Miola 99). Banquo proves to be a foil of Macbeth. Where Macbeth insists on shaping his own destiny with his free will, Banquo remains steadfast and faithful in regard to his prophesied fate. This scene is the first time Macbeth sees the Weird sisters and receives his prophecy. The witches greet Macbeth as king. Banquo, however, does not initially receive any prophecy pertaining to him. He asks the sisters for

information regarding him. Perhaps, if Banquo had never asked for his fate, the events of *Macbeth* would have taken different course. The witches tell Banquo that he will not be king, but his sons will. It is this prediction that later makes Macbeth jealous and power hungry. Those who come into power fear nothing more than losing that power. Although the witches readily answer Banquo's query, when Macbeth poses the question of how they come to know this, the witches vanish. This is a further 'slap in the face' to Macbeth. Additionally, it shows that how the witches know what they know is not important. The what is more important than the how. Macbeth and Banquo enter this act as close friends. But when the element of power is introduced, Macbeth begins to envy Banquo. The prophecies in this scene motivate the following tragedy.

Banquo later refers to the witches as "the instruments of darkness," (I.III. 124). The theme of inner darkness is prominent throughout *Macbeth.* Macbeth fears his dark ambition, "Let not light see my black and deep desires," (I.IV. 51). He willingly admits his ambition, but he also fears it. Early in the play though, Macbeth keeps his vaulting ambition in check: "If chance will have me as king, why, chance may crown me/ Without my stir." (I.III. 143-144). Macbeth reasons that if what the witches said proves true, he will become king without provoking anything. This is a rational statement, but clearly, things do not happen this way. The witches say Macbeth would be king, but they fail to mention how this would happen.

Act I, Scene V, introduces Lady Macbeth. Lady Macbeth is interesting because she is not so much the woman behind the man as she is Macbeth's partner in greatness. He sees his wife as

an equal even when he becomes king. She has a similar characteristic as Aegisthus from *Agamemnon* in that they are both greedy for power. Like Aegisthus, she does not have the prestigious stature that her husband has, so she must achieve it through vile deeds. Lady Macbeth knows of her husband's black desires and provokes him, "Your hand, your tongue; look like th' innocent flower,/ But be the serpent under't," (I.V. 64-65). Prior to the murder of Duncan, Lady Macbeth not only persuades her husband, but she mocks his manhood. Even in this passage, she is insulting Macbeth, saying his hand is like the innocent flower. This comparison has an undertone of femininity. Lady Macbeth taunts and coaxes her husband through use of mockery. On the subject of Lady Macbeth, Miola writes, "Like Atreus or Aegisthus, Lady Macbeth urges transcendent self-creation through terrible action." (Miola 101). She uses every tool at her disposal to manipulate her husband. She knows that Macbeth wants to seize the throne and she presses him towards this end. Macbeth, however, is not completely convinced. He remains wary of the consequences just as his Senecan parallel: Clytemnestra.

In Seneca's play *Agamemnon,* Clytemnestra and her lover, Aegisthus, have a similar exchange as Macbeth and his wife. Aegisthus tries to coerce Clytemnestra to kill her husband. Aegisthus wants to seize power. However, like Lady Macbeth, Aegisthus is low in status. He is the illegitimate son of the Agamemnon's uncle: Thyestes. Aegisthus is not even royalty. Therefore, Clytemnestra is somewhat reluctant of Aegisthus' plan to kill Agamemnon, "Dost think that I would leave a king of kings/ And stoop to wed an outcast wretch like thee?" (287-288). She is right in questioning Aegisthus. While he has everything to gain from this act of bloodshed, she gains nothing. Her social status does not rise or fall. The only thing she does gain

is vengeance against Agamemnon for sacrificing their daughter. In Act I Scene VII, Macbeth similarly voices his concerns, "We but teach bloody instructions, which, being taught, return to plague the inventor. This evenhanded justice commends the ingredients of our poisoned chalice to our own lips," (I.VII. 9-12). Macbeth recognizes that every action has an equal reaction. He knows that the path of murder will grow messy and treacherous. Given the outcome of the play, it is interesting that Macbeth acknowledges the dangers of murdering Duncan. However, Macbeth allows his wife to manipulate him and prepares to kill Duncan in Act II.

Macbeth murders Duncan in Act II. It is in this act that Macbeth has his first vision as well. He sees a bloody dagger pointing towards Duncan's room. The visions that Macbeth have represent his guilty conscience. Macbeth is never fully resolved to kill Duncan, but he does so whether or not he's ready to face the repercussions. In Act II, Scene II, Macbeth tells Lady Macbeth that the deed is done. He is not triumphant in announcing this; he expresses guilt and is even sorrowful. King Duncan's death is a tragic incident. Duncan just promoted Macbeth to Thane of Cawdor, and Macbeth repays this kindness with a dagger to his throat. In Act II, Scene III, the murder is realized when Macduff finds the king's corpse. Macbeth readily admits killing Duncan's chamber men, but claims that he did it in a blind rage: "The expedition of my violent love outrun/ The pauser, reason." (II.II 108-109). The other lords swallow this explanation easily. Nobody seems to find it convenient that the suspected murderers/witnesses are all dead. Duncan's two sons: Malcolm and Donalbain are afraid that they will be suspected, so they flee the country. Ironically, it is because they flee that they are suspected. The other lords admit that the chain of events is indeed strange. Ross goes on to say, "Gainst nature still./ Thriftless

ambition," (II.IV. 27-28). The sons fleeing the crime seem to make them the ideal suspects. However, Ross is correct in analyzing it as thriftless ambition. Malcolm would eventually become king through time. Why murder his father now? Act II ends with a rhyming couplet spoken by the old man: "God's benison go with you, and with those/ That would make good of bad, and friends of foes." (II.IV. 40-41). This well known couplet foreshadows events to come in Act III where Macbeth turns on his friend Banquo.

Banquo is the first to realize that Macbeth killed the king. However, he adequately determines that it will not last long because of the prophecy, "Yet it was said/ It should not stand in thy posterity," (III.I. 3-4). Conversely, Macbeth also suspects that Banquo knows of his guilt, "Our fears in Banquo stick deep,/ And in his royalty of nature reigns that/ Which would be feared/… He hath a wisdom that doth guide his valor/ To act in safety," (III.I. 49-54). This is the beginning of the rift between Macbeth and Banquo. They are friends, and each knows the other quite well. Their situation echoes that of Oedipus and Creon in Seneca's *Oedipus.* Similarly to Banquo, Creon is the first to learn of Oedipus' true identity and act of murder. However, when he confronts the king, Oedipus responds with, "Hence, away with him; deep in some rocky dungeon let him stay,/ While I unto the palace take my way." (706-708). Oedipus banishes Creon from Thebes. Like Macbeth, Oedipus is reluctant to accept the clear truth. He exhibits denial as he exiles Creon, just as Macbeth does when he kills Banquo. Macbeth disregards his own fortune and allows his jealousy of Banquo's part in the prophecy to get the better of him:

> They hailed him father to a line of kings. Upon my head they
> placed a fruitless crown And put a barren scepter in my grip,
> Thence to be wrenched with an unlineal hand, No son of mine

> succeeding. If't be so, For Banquo's issue have I filed my mind;
> For them the gracious Duncan have I murdered. (III.I. 60-66)

Macbeth is not thankful for his blessed part of the prophecy. He does not want the kingdom to end with him, but wants his and Banquo's fates to combine. This is the first instance of Macbeth showing naivety towards the prophecy. He has seen the Weird Sisters' predictions come true for him. Therefore, he must also realize that their foresight towards Banquo will also reign true. However, Macbeth refuses to believe this and attempts to change fate. This illusion of control is influenced by Seneca's *Oedipus.* Oedipus leaves his home of Corinth to avoid the prophecy that the Delphic Oracle bestowed on him, but it is through this evasion that Oedipus causes his own tragedy. Oedipus and Macbeth each think they can outsmart Fate. However, in both Shakespearean and Senecan tragedies, fate is an infallible force. It cannot be manipulated or eluded. Although fate is manifested as an absolute power, Oedipus and Macbeth still struggle to accept their destinies.

Macbeth has Banquo murdered, but is plagued by his ghost in Act III, Scene IV. This is another of Macbeth's visions provoked by his guilty conscience. The ghost of Banquo is much different than Seneca's ghosts. Although Seneca does use the instrument of the ghost frequently, it is only in the opening of the play. Seneca's ghosts function as framing devices, but in *Macbeth,* Banquo is a projection of Macbeth's guilt. When Macbeth sees the ghost sitting at his place at the table, Macbeth is instantly accusatory: "Which of you have done this?" (III.IV. 50). He assumes that one of his lords knows that he murdered Banquo and is playing a trick on him.

Macbeth's encounter with Banquo's ghost leaves him shaken. He decides to go to the Weird Sisters again and ask for further predictions of his kingdom. Macbeth is still under the false impression that he can control his own fate. In act IV, he resolves to call on the prophets for no other reason than to receive more beneficial prophecies. The Weird Sisters show him three prophecies by way of three separate visions. The prophecies roughly are: Beware Macduff, No one born of woman can harm Macbeth, and the king shall not be vanquished until Birnam Wood reaches Dunsinane Hill. Macbeth likes these prophecies, because in his eye, they signify a long fruitful reign of kingship. He takes the second prophecy to mean that no man can kill him. Macbeth understands the third prophecy to mean that it will be several years until his rule ends. He exhibits foolishness as he chooses to accept the prophecies that benefit him yet ignores those that impair him. This is similar to the tone both Agamemnon and Clytemnestra take towards Cassandra's prophecies in *Agamemnon.* Cassandra was given the gift of foresight, but she was also burdened with the curse that nobody would believe her word. In act III of *Agamemnon,* Cassandra says, "I warn ye, fear the fruit/ Of stolen love; that rustic foundling soon/ Shall overthrow your house. Beware the Queen!" (729-732). Cassandra plainly tells Agamemnon what is about to unfold on his return home. Agamemnon believes, however, that he has nothing to worry about, that Cassandra is just a raving mad woman. Macbeth's attitude is not disbelieving. Actually, he believes every word the witches say, but still shows the same carefree outlook as Agamemnon. His attitude is more than blind belief; it is naïve optimism. He sees the three warnings only as beneficial. Macbeth does not explore the possible hidden meaning behind the witches' words. He simply accepts them as positive reinforcement.

By Act V, all of the lords know that Macbeth is guilty of murdering Duncan. Angus says, "Now does he feel his secret murders sticking on his hands." (V.II. 16). In Act V, Scene III, the English army is literally on Macbeth's doorstep, yet he does not show any sign of fear. Macbeth does not believe he has anything to fear. Birnam Wood is still miles away, so Macbeth thinks he is invincible. He continues to portray his ignorance of fate and misconstrue the meaning of the prophecies. Act V Scene IV, shows the militia tearing down boughs from the trees to hide their numbers. This gives the appearance of Birnam Wood moving up the hill meaning that Macbeth is soon to be vanquished. The final scene of the play shows the battle between Macbeth and Macduff. He tells Macbeth that he was untimely ripped from his mother's womb, making him a man not born of woman. Macbeth sees all three warnings culminate before his eyes, yet he still does not surrender, "I will not yield,/ To kiss the ground before young Malcolm's feet," (V.VIII. 27-28). Macbeth defiantly continues fighting although he already knows what the outcome will be. Macduff slays Macbeth and ends the tyranny.

Agamemnon is a strong precursor of *Macbeth* in all ways but one. The ending is far different between the two tragedies. In *Agamemnon,* Clytemnestra and Aegisthus successfully kill Agamemnon and assume the throne. The usurpers remain in power at the end of the play. In *Macbeth,* though, justice is done as Macbeth is slain by Macduff. This is an interesting discrepancy, for Clytemnestra and Aegisthus are practically exact parallels of Macbeth and his wife. But the Senecan usurpers remain, where their Shakespearean counterparts are slain. Macbeth and Agamemnon both find their tragedies due to their ignorance of fate. Agamemnon chooses to ignore Cassandra's warning to beware his return to Clytemnestra. On the other hand,

Macbeth indeed listens to the prophecies of the Weird Sisters, but he only concerns himself with the predictions that are advantageous to his position. In both Shakespeare and Seneca there is a large omission of the Gods or the institution of religion. In these two tragedies, though, playwrights use fate as an absolute power. Macbeth's ignorance of fate leads him to his own demise just as it did to Oedipus and Agamemnon.

Macbeth's Mindful Soliloquy

Macbeth's first soliloquy is located at the end of the first act, prior to the murder of Duncan. In Act I Scene VII, Macbeth portrays a man fully aware of the consequences of bloodshed. He recognizes his own potential ambition, but he reasons that killing Duncan would only lead to his own demise. This soliloquy is completely unique given the tragic outcome of the play. Like Clytemnestra in Seneca's *Agamemnon,* Macbeth convinces himself to take the peaceful road and not harm Duncan. It is not until Lady Macbeth enters at the end of his soliloquy that Macbeth wavers and allows himself to be manipulated. Aegisthus and Lady Macbeth both provoke their significant others with a series of mocking insults. They control their other halves in order to obtain the throne and power.

The position of this soliloquy is very important and interesting within the action of the play. By this time, Macbeth has met with the two great instigators of the plot: the witches and Lady Macbeth. The witches prophesied that he would rein as king in Act I Scene III. In Scene V, though, Lady Macbeth suggests that he should kill Duncan and seize the throne. Therefore, at the time of his soliloquy, Macbeth is torn between the two paths he could possibly take. He could feasibly do nothing, and the kingship would fall into his lap, or he could act, and take the throne aggressively and immediately. The opening lines of his soliloquy capture this dilemma: "If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well/ It were done quickly. If th' assassination/ Could trammel up the consequence," (1-3). In this passage, Macbeth openly admits that if there were no repercussions, he would instantly assassinate the king. Here, the reader sees Macbeth's inner dark ambition. This ambition is what Lady Macbeth later coaxes in order to convince her husband to murder Duncan. However, it is important to note that the aspiration is entirely Macbeth's. Lady Macbeth does not force him to do something he does not want to do. He indeed

wants the throne but is extremely wary of the consequences.

Macbeth's awareness of the situation continues in the next lines of the soliloquy: "Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return/ To plague the inventor. This evenhanded justice/ Commends th' ingredients of our poisoned chalice/ To our own lips." (9-12). In this passage, Macbeth again demonstrates recognition of the dangers in killing the king. In a way, he foretells his own downfall by saying "bloody instructions return to plague the inventor." Macbeth knows full well what can happen if he murders Duncan. There will be suspicions, doubts, and betrayals. Early in the play, it is ironic to see the inevitable tragic Macbeth realize the consequences his own actions will have.

As the soliloquy goes on, Macbeth speaks of Duncan as a virtuous king. He has faithfully just appointed Macbeth as Thane of Cawdor. Macbeth acknowledges the disgust he has with himself in plotting the king's murder: "as his host,/ Who should against his murderer shut the door,/ Not bear the knife myself." (14-16). Through the course of the soliloquy, the reader sees Macbeth progress towards the decision of not killing the king. He first concedes that killing Duncan to obtain the throne is what he desires. But he then goes on to distinguish the repercussions of murder, and finally in this passage, he appreciates what Duncan has done for him. In *Shakespeare and Classical Tragedy,* Robert Miola writes: "At times Macbeth speaks in the stridently self assertive monotone of Seneca's tyrants; at others in a voice that sings eloquently and sadly of everyman's struggle with sin." (119). In this soliloquy, Macbeth is showing his struggle with sin. He is battling the manipulation of his wife as well as his own ambition. He may waver, but as this soliloquy draws to a close, it becomes evident that Macbeth is leaning towards not killing the king. His choice is made clear in the final lines of the soliloquy: "I have no spur/ To prick the sides of my intent, but only/ Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps

itself/ and falls on th'other-" (25-28). Macbeth openly admits that all he has is vaulting ambition. He even goes on to say that his ambition tends to overleap itself. Macbeth displays incredible intelligence and awareness of his own black desires. He reasons through his soliloquy that killing Duncan would only have negative repercussions on him. Although he admits his own aspirations for power, by the end of this soliloquy, he chooses not to slay Duncan.

As Macbeth utters the final words of his speech, Lady Macbeth enters and begins to coax and manipulate him. It is important to note that prior to his wife's entrance, Macbeth has reached a decision to not kill Duncan. However, as his wife chides and demoralizes him, Macbeth is swayed towards his own dark ambition. This dialogue between husband and wife is very similar to the conversation between Clytemnestra and her lover Aegisthus from Seneca's *Agamemnon.* When Lady Macbeth enters, Macbeth bluntly states: "We will proceed no futher in this business./ He hath honored me of late," (31-32). The reader sees Macbeth cumulatively reach a decision through reason. In this passage, he plainly tells his wife that he wants nothing more to do with their plot. Clytemnestra has a similar line when speaking to Aegisthus: "My husband's love has met and conquered me./ Let us retrace our steps, while still there's room," (236-237). Like Macbeth, Clytemnestra is steadfast in her decision. She has considered the possibility of exacting vengeance and killing Agamemnon, but here, she admits that she still loves him. This is a pivotal point in both *Macbeth* and *Agamemnon*. The two protagonists have resolved to take the non-violent route. It is now up to the lovers and manipulators to persuade their other halves.

Lady Macbeth and Aegisthus both achieve their goals by way of insulting their partners. They each attack the weaknesses of Clytemnestra and Macbeth. In *Agamemnon,* Aegisthus says, "Apollo's priestess holds the king in thrall./ And wilt thou meekly share thy lord with her?/ But she will not- A wife's last infamy--/ To see her rival ruling in her stead." (252-255). In this

passage, Aegisthus strikes at Clytemnestra's jealousy. She is aware that Agamemnon is bringing the prophet Cassandra home with him. Aegisthus provokes Clytemnestra's jealousy and plants a seed of doubt suggesting that Cassandra may even usurp Clytemnestra's own status. He subtly hints that Cassandra will eventually take her place, and therefore makes it seem that her only course of action is to kill Agamemnon. Lady Macbeth similarly irks her husband by insulting his manhood:

> What beast was't then/ That made you break this enterprise to me?/ When you durst do it, then you were a man;/ And to be more than what you were, you would/ Be so much more the man. Nor time nor place/ Did then adhere, and yet you would make both./ They have made themselves, and that their fitness now/ Does unmake you. (47-54)

Lady Macbeth's rant against her husband demoralizes Macbeth. She combines a cold sense of disappointment with a deep feeling of shame. She is not just calling Macbeth less than a man. She instigates the thought that he was once a man, but has now lost his manhood by deciding not to kill Duncan. Like Aegisthus, she assaults Macbeth in a vulnerable area of his ego. She knows that openly mocking his manhood will yield prompt results. In her essay, "His Fiend Like Queen" Moelwyn Merchant writes: "Lady Macbeth has presumed to judge her husband, reversing the customary moral categories and taking his humane scrupulosity as merely ineffectual weakness." (Merchant 77). Macbeth is expressing a deep sense of thought and awareness of the effects his actions will have. Lady Macbeth, though, takes his struggle and turns it into a negative judgment. By insulting his manhood, she makes Macbeth feel weak and thereby begins to manipulate his course of action.

The turning point of *Macbeth* occurs quickly after he finishes his opening soliloquy. It is ironic to see Macbeth analyze his situation and decide not to kill Duncan, only to have Lady

Macbeth enter and persuade him to kill the king in the space of a few lines. Macbeth demonstrates both his intellect and his irrationality. He applies logic to his initial dilemma concluding that killing Duncan would earn him the throne, but would ultimately lead to his demise. However, he also shows his weakness in allowing his wife to easily manipulate his outlook through the simple use of insult. The soliloquy captures Macbeth's sense, but the following dialogue exposes his naivety. In due course, it is his naivety that outweighs his intellect as he kills the king and later absurdly believes himself to be invincible by misreading the witches' prophecies. But for one brief moment, the reader sees Macbeth's sensible state in a completely rational soliloquy.

Macbeth Act I Scene VII Lines 1-59

MACBETH
If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well
It were done quickly: if the assassination
Could trammel up the consequence, and catch
With his surcease success; that but this blow
Might be the be-all and the end-all here,
But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,
We'ld jump the life to come. But in these cases
We still have judgment here; that we but teach
Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return
To plague the inventor: this even-handed justice
Commends the ingredients of our poison'd chalice
To our own lips. He's here in double trust;
First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,
Strong both against the deed; then, as his host,
Who should against his murderer shut the door,
Not bear the knife myself. Besides, this Duncan
Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been
So clear in his great office, that his virtues
Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against
The deep damnation of his taking-off;
And pity, like a naked new-born babe,
Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubim, horsed
Upon the sightless couriers of the air,
Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,
That tears shall drown the wind. I have no spur
To prick the sides of my intent, but only
Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself
And falls on the other.

Enter LADY MACBETH
…

MACBETH
We will proceed no further in this business:
He hath honour'd me of late; and I have bought
Golden opinions from all sorts of people,
Which would be worn now in their newest gloss,
Not cast aside so soon.
…

LADY MACBETH
What beast was't, then,
That made you break this enterprise to me?
When you durst do it, then you were a man;
And, to be more than what you were, you would
Be so much more the man. Nor time nor place
Did then adhere, and yet you would make both:
They have made themselves, and that their fitness now
Does unmake you. I have given suck, and know
How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:
I would, while it was smiling in my face,
Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums,
And dash'd the brains out, had I so sworn as you
Have done to this.

Agamemnon Act II Scene II Lines 236-257

CLYTEMNESTRA
My husband's love has met and conquered me.
Let us retrace our steps, while still there's room,
To that estate whence we should ne'er have come;
Let even now fair fame be sought again;
For never is it over late to mend.
Who grieves for sin is counted innocent.
AEGISTHUS
What madness is this? Dost thou believe or hope
That Agamemnon will be true to thee?
Though no grave fears, of conscious guilt begot,
Annoyed thy soul with thoughts of punishment;
Still would his swelling, o'er-inflated pride,
Create in him a dour and headstrong mood.
Harsh was he to his friends while troy still stood;
How, think'st thou, has the fall of troy pricked on
His soul, by nature harsh, to greater harshness?
Mycenae's king went; he will return
Her tyrant. So doth fortune foster pride.
With how great pomp this throng of rivals comes!
But one of these, surpassing all the rest,
Apollo's priestess, holds the king in thrall.
And wilt thou meekly share thy lord with her?
But she will not. A wife's last infamy-
To see her rival ruling in her stead.
No throne nor bed can brook a rival mate.

Conclusion

Seneca undoubtedly influences Shakespeare in the realms of plot, theme, and language. Shakespeare's rich rhetoric and fervent creativity amplifies his Roman predecessor's simple themes of vengeance, ambition, and destiny. Seneca's omission of the Gods strengthens his characters giving them a compelling psychology. Shakespeare creates multilayered complex characters with Hamlet, Macbeth, and Titus Andronicus just as Seneca does with Oedipus, Clytemnestra, and Atreus. Shakespeare recognizes the elements of tragedy that Seneca uses to create high drama. He takes these tools of rhetoric, conflict, and irony and enhances them to create his own unique tragedy. Seneca's monologues make way for Shakespeare's soliloquies, and Shakespeare develops Seneca's original onstage deaths into having multiple characters die onstage. The final product is tragedy at its finest. Shakespeare allows his influence from Seneca to shape his works, but he perfects them with his high language and style.

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