

# EARLY MODERN LITERARY STUDIES



## ‘Take up the Body’: Early Modern English Translations of Seneca’s Corpses

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For years, scholars have demonstrated the debt that Kyd, Marlowe, Shakespeare, and others owe to Seneca for his plot devices, stock figures, language, and form.<sup>1</sup> While many have noted Seneca’s sensational ‘stage indecencies’ — including the ‘horrible and bloody acts’ that T. S. Eliot claimed had influenced the Elizabethan ‘Tragedy of Blood’ — few have looked to the aftermath of such violence, namely the presence and staging of the corpse in Seneca.<sup>2</sup> This lack of critical attention to Seneca’s corpses is more apparent when one looks

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<sup>1</sup> As far back as 1893, John W. Cunliffe had traced many of the direct borrowings; see *The Influence of Seneca on Elizabethan Tragedy* (Hamden: Archon Books, 1893). Recent scholarship has reconsidered Seneca’s influence on early modern subject construction, such as Catherine Belsey, ‘Senecan Vacillation and Elizabethan Deliberation: Influence or Confluence?’ *Renaissance Drama* 6 (1975), 65–88; Robert S. Miola, *Shakespeare and Classical Tragedy: The Influence of Seneca* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); and A.J. Boyle, *Tragic Seneca: An Essay in the Theatrical Tradition* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> This essay does not have the space or the scope to address the issue of whether Seneca’s dramas were produced during his lifetime. For more on that argument, see George W. M. Harrison (ed.), *Seneca in Performance* (London: Duckworth, 2000). Although modern scholars debate whether Seneca wrote for the stage, sixteenth-century readers of Seneca believed that the plays were originally written for performance and evidence of their production in England reflects such an approach to the texts. For example, Alexander Neville prefaces his translation of *Oedipus* in Newton’s anthology as ‘meant for tragicall and Pompous shewe upon the stage,’ and both John Northbrooke in his *Treatise Against Dicing, Dancing, Plays, and Interludes with Other Idle Pastimes* (1577) and Philip Stubbes’ *Anatomy of Abuses* (1583) defend the use of Seneca in performance as ‘very honest and commendable exercises’ seeing the stage as an educational instrument (Sv-6). However, in subsequent editions Stubbes removes his defense of Seneca to fulminate against all theatrical productions. For the Elizabethan stage-history of Seneca, see Bruce R. Smith, ‘Toward the Rediscovery of Tragedy: Productions of Seneca’s Plays on the English Renaissance Stage’, *Renaissance Drama* 9 (1978), 3–37. It is important to note that Seneca in English has seen modern successful performances including Ted

to the early modern English translations of Seneca's plays, which stylistically emphasise the dead body and afford it an agency beyond its death. As I will argue, these English translators' embellishments of Seneca afford the corpse additional theatrical efficacy in that it acts beyond its death, thereby revealing an early modern sensitivity to what is nascent in Seneca — that is, the performative power of the corpse as achieved through its physical and active presence on the stage. In this way, early modern translators dramatise the contentious stability of the body after death, which ultimately reflects early modern England's cultural fascination over the corpse.<sup>3</sup>

The body is a fascinating subject to both early modern audiences and scholars of the period. The sixteenth and seventeenth-centuries in England are situated uneasily between two distinct epistemologies of the body: a dying, if not defunct, sacramental theology, and a nascent and dim scientific empiricism.<sup>4</sup> The rise of the commercial theatre in the sixteenth century coincides with a period in which the body's meanings were being called into doubt and the theatre becomes the cultural site where it is possible to revisit, test, challenge, and transform religious, scientific, cultural, and political ideologies concerning the body.

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Hughes' brilliant adaptation of *Oedipus* at the Old Vic Theatre in London (1968) and Caryl Churchill's translation of *Thyestes* for the Royal Court Theatre in London (1994).

<sup>3</sup> Despite the obvious thematic modifications to the original texts, most early twentieth-century scholars of the English translations attend to issues of style, diction, and meter found in Newton's collection. However, more recently, some critics have looked to the motifs emphasized in the translators' work such as Kiefer's study of revenge and fortune in the collection, Daalder's exploration of madness in Heywood's work, and Norland's thorough investigation of the Christian moral perspectives found in the 1581 collection. See Frederick Kiefer, 'Seneca Speaks in English: What the Elizabethan Translators Wrought,' *Comparative Literature Studies* 15.4 (1978) 372–87; Daalder, 'Madness in Jasper Heywood's 1560 Version of Seneca's *Thyestes*', *Classical and Modern Literature* 16.2 (1996) 119–29, and Norland, 'Adapting to the Times: Expansion and Interpolation in the Elizabethan Translations of Seneca', *Classical and Modern Literature* 16.3 (1996), 241–63 and reprinted in the larger work, *Neoclassical Tragedy in Elizabethan England* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2009). Like these scholars, my aim here is not to chart Heywood and Studley's manipulations and modifications of Seneca, but to focus specifically on the possible intent and attendant effects of such modifications.

<sup>4</sup> In a Post-Reformation culture that sought to distance itself from Catholic ideologies of the body and practices of burial and mourning, the dead body in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries posed several ontological problems regarding life after death and the nature of the material self. As Carol Walker-Bynum has written regarding the debate over the resurrection from the late medieval period through the modern, 'much of the debate about the resurrection of the body and about the relationship of body and soul revolved not around a soul/body contrast... but around the issue of bodily continuity.' See, 'Material Continuity, Personal Survival, and the Resurrection of the Body: A Scholastic Discussion of Its Medieval and Modern Contexts', *History of Religions* 3.1 (1990), 51–84 (p. 64).

Scholars have investigated how the religious and political upheavals of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries resulted in a heightened awareness of the body's signifying capacities. The work of Susan Zimmerman and Hillary Nunn specifically endeavours to demonstrate how Protestantism, anatomy, and drama were engaged over the meaning attached to the material body, focusing their studies on the corpse's relationship to early modern conceptions of subjectivity through Renaissance anatomical treatises and modern psychoanalytic theory.<sup>5</sup> My analysis of the English translations of Seneca's corpses extends to that conversation in that it provides an early foundational text that inspired the playwrights discussed by Nunn and Zimmerman and illustrates both the legacy of classical drama as well as the influence of a culture very much concerned with how bodies signify through performance on and off the stage.

Originally published in the 1560s and reprinted collectively in the 1580s, the early modern English translations of Seneca adapt, alter, and embellish the Roman poet's dramas and, in doing so, emphasise the theatrical corpse and its material significance. While I will consider several of the plays translated by Jasper Heywood and John Studley, my analysis here will pay particular attention to *Thyestes* (translated by Heywood and originally published in 1560) and *Hippolytus* (Seneca's *Phaedra*, translated by Studley and originally published in 1567), both of which reappear in Newton's 1581 anthology, *Seneca His Tenne Tragedies Translated into English*.<sup>6</sup> I concentrate on these plays specifically because of their immense influence on later early modern dramatists and because they focus on the violent treatment of bodies, thereby highlighting the early modern English translators' compulsion to elaborate upon Seneca's treatment of the corpse<sup>7</sup>. My study begins with a consideration of bodies in Seneca's plays. Then, I provide a brief overview of translation during the early modern period before fully examining Heywood's and Studley's adaptations and extensions of the corpse in their translations of Seneca.

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<sup>5</sup> See Susan Zimmerman, *The Early Modern Corpse and Shakespeare's Theatre* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005) and Hilary Nunn, *Staging Anatomies: Dissection and Spectacle in Early Stuart Tragedy* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).

<sup>6</sup> There are several editions of Newton's 1581 collection. The most accessible is Thomas Newton, ed., *Seneca His Tenne Tragedies*, 2 vols. (London: Constable and Co., Ltd., 1927), famously introduced by T. S. Eliot's essay on 'Seneca in Elizabethan Translation'. All quotations here, referring to volumes and page numbers, are taken from this edition and appear parenthetically.

<sup>7</sup> For example, while Shakespeare's cannibalistic banquet scene is clearly indebted to *Thyestes*, linguistically *Titus Andronicus*' fragmentary quotations of Latin originate in *Phaedra*.

In Seneca's dramas there is an undeniable focus on the body, its inner and outer parts, as well as their penetration and dismemberment; the ideal of self-containment juxtaposed with the chaotic fracturing of the body. For example, in *Oedipus* there is a gruesome attention to physical deformity, organs, and their disease that reflects an emphasis on the corporeal.<sup>8</sup> However, what is especially fascinating about Seneca's focus on the body's physicality is the manner in which the playwright treats the corpse: Seneca conceals the physical violence that creates the corpse, yet eventually exposes the carnage at the end of the play. While this approach of narrating violence that occurs off-stage adheres to Hellenic models and standards of Roman practice, Seneca's ensuing revelation of the result of violence onstage breaks many rules of classical dramaturgy. As Horace articulated approximately forty years before Seneca:

*...non tamen intus  
digna geri promes in scaenam, multaque tolles  
ex oculis, quae mox narret facundia praesens;  
ne pueros coram populo Medea trucidet,  
aut humana palam coquat exta nefarius Atreus,  
aut in avem Procne vertatur, Cadmus in anguem.  
quodcumque ostendis mihi sic, incredulus odi.*<sup>9</sup>

Do not bring upon the stage what should be performed behind the scenes, keep much from our eyes that which an actor's ready tongue will relate immediately in our presence; Medea should not butcher her children before the public, nor wicked Atreus cook human flesh in the open, nor Procne be turned into a bird, nor Cadmus into a snake. If you show these things to me, I will disbelieve and loath them.<sup>10</sup>

Horace 'loathes' such gruesome spectacles of stage violence, aligning the violated human body with meat, the 'butchering' and 'cooking' of animal carcasses. However, Horace also 'disbelieves' such spectacles; he refuses to accept that they are true. The use of the Latin

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<sup>8</sup> The world of *Oedipus* is consumed by plague. The land, animals, citizens, and even the air is infected by this 'foul gore.'

<sup>9</sup> Horace, 'Ars Poetica', in *Satires, Epistles, and Ars Poetica*, trans. by H. Rushton Fairclough (Cambridge, MA: Loeb Classical Library, 1926), pp. 442–89 (ll. 182–88).

<sup>10</sup> My translation.

word ‘*incredulus*’ insinuates not only disbelief, but also mistrust and doubt. According to Horace, bodily annihilation depicted on stage disrupts mimesis because that which is presented on stage is not what it appears to be, and in fact such depictions call attention to their lack of similitude.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, this *disbelief* that results from the rupture of mimesis is centered upon the corpse and its physicality on the stage. It is precisely this rupture of dramatic stability that is achieved by Seneca’s corpses. Despite Horace’s warnings, such spectacular corporeal annihilations are common in Seneca.<sup>12</sup> While the corpses in Seneca are described in grotesque detail by a messenger who controls and moderates the audience’s perception of the violated corpse, that corpse is later revealed theatrically onstage, often precluding any restorative ending.

The early modern reception of Seneca in England occurred in two distinct phases.<sup>13</sup> The first of these took place in the 1560s with the translation of Seneca into English by Jasper Heywood, Alexander Neville, and John Studley. The second phase occurred in 1581 when Thomas Newton compiled and reprinted these earlier translations along with others into the anthology *Seneca His Tenne Tragedies Translated into English*.<sup>14</sup> At first sight it would

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<sup>11</sup> The gap between appearance and reality that theatre creates, or highlights, was a source of anxiety for Greeks, Romans, and Elizabethans. However, most of this changed in the Roman Empire as dissembling became a survival strategy. See Anne Duncan, *Performance and Identity in the Classical World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). For the Elizabethan equivalent, see Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

<sup>12</sup> Medea breaks Horace’s prescriptions by killing her children on stage; although the messenger narrates the cooking of Thyestes’ son’s flesh, their severed heads are displayed on stage by Atreus in the final act; and Jocasta commits suicide on stage at the end of *Oedipus*, just as Phaedra does in *Hippolytus* — a bloody act that is compounded by Theseus’ attempt to reassemble the scattered fragments of his son’s corpse, and while there is speculation as to whether Hercules kills any of his children on stage, the Chorus at the end of *Hercules Furens* addresses their dead bodies and his wife’s beheaded corpse, which are brought on stage in the final act.

<sup>13</sup> For more on the stages of Senecan influence in England, including translation and performance history, see H. B. Charlton, *The Senecan Tradition in Renaissance Tragedy, a Re-Issue of an Essay Published in 1921* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1946), pp. 138–47 and more recently Jessica Winston, ‘Seneca in Early Elizabethan England’, *Renaissance Quarterly* 59 (2006), 29–58.

<sup>14</sup> It is during this second phase that Kyd, Shakespeare, and Marlowe began adapting elements of Senecan drama into their own, original works. Newton was the chief instrument in bringing about the general translation of Seneca in English and translated one tragedy himself, Seneca’s unfinished *Thebais*. Besides translating and writing Latin elegiacs, Newton studied and practiced medicine, translating many medical texts. Perhaps Seneca’s attention to the body resonated with Newton’s own medical interests and inspired his aspirations to publish the anthology. While Seneca in Latin was readily available and likely read by Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Kyd, it is generally acknowledged that they also knew Newton’s *Tenne Tragedies*. As M. L.

seem that the translators whose versions were collected in the *Tenne Tragedies* in 1581 merely rendered Seneca's plays into the current vernacular for the benefit of those that 'never yet could Latin understand', as the ghost of Seneca says to translator Jasper Heywood in a dream. However, Elizabethan translators did not conceive of their work as a restoration of dismembered fragments into an original unity — as Theseus says in *Hippolytus*, to 'patch up his body rent' — but a refashioning of Seneca's fragments into a new, and newly problematic, whole.

Sixteenth-century English translations provide us with versions of Seneca's plays that were not only influential to early modern playwrights, but, as Joost Daalder argues, can be studied as thoroughly *English* plays in their own right: 'from a literary point of view, the style of the translations establishes them as artistic creations rather than perfunctory renderings.'<sup>15</sup> For example, some of the translations included in Newton's collection of Seneca amend the plays with additional scenes (in the case of Heywood's *Thyestes*), alter the style (such as Neville's choruses in *Oedipus*), or elaborate upon speeches (as John Studley does for Phaedra in *Hippolytus*). Howard B. Norland points to the translations in Newton's collection as making Seneca more accessible to a larger, non-educated, audience but also 'directed how Seneca was perceived by emphasizing particular qualities of his drama' such as the omission of pagan ritual in order to 'introduce Christian doctrine as they interpret particular figures and situations as 'mirrors' or cautionary *exempla* of morality.'<sup>16</sup> Among these 'particular qualities' emphasised in an English manner is the sensational corpse found in Seneca.

The goal for Tudor translators was not to accurately replicate the original text and the author's intent, but rather to appropriate the text being translated for the needs of the target culture. This appropriation is best expressed by the term *translatio*, which does not necessarily mean 'translation,' but 'transfer.' As Hugo Friedrich explains:

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Stapleton notes, the anthology was 'probably Shakespeare's crib for his Latin.' See M. L. Stapleton, "'Shine It Like a Comet of Revenge": Seneca, John Studley, and Shakespeare's Joan La Pucelle', *Comparative Literature Studies* 31.3 (1994), 229–50 (p. 231). On the availability of Seneca in England, see Charlton. For the popularity of *Seneca His Tenne Tragedies*, see E. M. Spearing, *The Elizabethan Translations of Seneca's Tragedies* (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, Ltd., 1912), pp. 4–7.

<sup>15</sup> Daalder, 'Madness', p. 119.

<sup>16</sup> Norland, pp. 271–2.

This approach is based on the premise that the purpose of translation is to go beyond the appropriation of content to a releasing of those linguistic and aesthetic energies that heretofore had existed only as pure possibility in one's own language and had never been materialized before. The beginning of this premise can be traced back to Quintilian and Pliny; it was to become the dominant characteristic of European translation theories of the Renaissance. Its most striking hallmark is its effort to 'enrich' (*enrichir, arricchire, aumentar*). Again, one does not move toward the original in this case. The original is brought over in order to reveal the latent stylistic possibilities in one's own language that are different from the original.<sup>17</sup>

In other words, the translator captures the spirit of the original text and combines it with the spirit of the target culture in such a way to make the translation a *new* work. The altering of the original text is, as Massimiliano Morini declares, 'something that the Elizabethan translator does with amazing *sprezzatura*,' one that reveals the translator's sensibility to the vocabulary, diction, metaphors, and prosody of the translated text, thereby modifying it in order to accommodate the translator's notions of what that text *should* be.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, the translations of Heywood and Studley are both literary and cultural texts that indicate not only literary style, but also cultural significance.

The early modern English translators of Seneca were well aware of their modifications. For example, in his translation of *Troas* Heywood admits 'diverse and sundrie additions' in his work. In his preface 'To the Reader', Heywood presents his view of Seneca as well as his treatment of the text, specifically his procedure of translation and the nature of his alterations:

Now as concerninge sondry places augmented and some altered in  
thys my translacion. Fryst forasmuch as thys worke seemed unto me,  
in some places unperfytted...I have for my slender learninge  
endeavored to kepe touche with the Latten, not woorde for woorde or

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<sup>17</sup> Hugo Friedrich, 'On the Art of Translation' in *Theories of Translation: An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida*, ed. by Rainer and John Biguenet Schulte (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 13.

<sup>18</sup> Massimiliano Morini, *Tudor Translation in Theory and Practice* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), p. 22.

verse for verse as to expounde it, but neglectynge the placinge of the wordes, observed their sence (7–8).<sup>19</sup>

Insisting that he has ‘observed’ the ‘sense’ of the words, Heywood declares that his alterations and augmentations occur where he finds the text ‘unperfect.’ As I will demonstrate, for Heywood, one of the ‘unperfect’ places is the moment in the original text where the corpses have an agency beyond their deaths, which Heywood works to expand and make more explicit in his translation of Seneca, most notably *Thyestes*.<sup>20</sup>

Similarly, although in his prefaces to his earlier published work Studley insists on the didactic use of Seneca, most of his expansions enhance the sensational, violent effects of the original texts. A particularly vivid example can be found in *Agamemnon* where Cassandra describes her detailed vision of Agamemnon’s murder, culminating in his mismanaged decapitation when, after several strokes, Seneca writes that ‘There the still moaning head lies.’<sup>21</sup> Studley translates this stunning, vicious image as ‘...there the head doth lye,/ With wallowing, bobbling, mumbling tongue’ (134). While Studley’s line loses some of Seneca’s vivid poetic brutality, it does add an active disposition to the severed head that is merely subtle in Seneca. While such moments may only be seen to provide opportunities for indulging in sensational violence, I am interested as to *why* Studley would have such interests and *why* he manifests them in his translations of Seneca. In his preface to *Medea*, Studley informs the reader ‘by cause that all thynge might be to the better understanding and commodyte of the unlearned, as in some places I do expound at large the dark sense of the Poet.’<sup>22</sup> Studley’s justification for altering the text is for clarification and convenience. However, it is clear that for Studley it is the *elaboration* of the ‘dark sense’ of Seneca that is necessary for such clarity of understanding. As Studley himself articulates, it is the ‘dark sense’ of Seneca that speaks most to him — and his audience — and where he

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<sup>19</sup> None of Heywood’s prefaces are to be found in Newton’s 1581 collection, however they do appear with the individually published octavos. For a convenient reprint of these original publications, see Henry de Vocht (ed.), *Materialien Zur Kunde Des Älteren Englischen Dramas*, 44 vols. (Vaduz, Liechtenstein: Kraus Reprint, 1963). All quotations of Heywood’s prefaces here are taken from Vocht’s edition and appear parenthetically.

<sup>20</sup> While the most vivid, *Thyestes* is not the only example of Heywood’s revived corpses: in his translation of *Troas*, Heywood animates the dead Achilles, thereby adding a scene in which the warrior’s ghost appears to demand the sacrifice of Polyxena.

<sup>21</sup> *pendet exigua male/ capu amputatum parte et hinc trunco cruor/ exundat, illinc ora cum fremitu iacent* (lines 901–3).

<sup>22</sup> This preface ‘To The Reader’ and the dedicatory letter were not reprinted in Newton’s 1581 collection and only appear in the original 1566 publication of the translation.



fixates his adaptations. The performative power of the corpse is a nascent element in Seneca's tragedies and Studley's translation — undertaken during a time and within a culture of increased corpse-consciousness — emphasises the active role of the corpse acutely observed in his translation of *Phaedra*. The translators discover the corpse in Seneca's works to be a compelling element of the drama which prefigures the early modern public theatre's use of the corpse not only as an important element of dramaturgy, but as a device for articulating the body's potential for action and meaning after death.

**'And so dreadful a thnyg beseemes': Jasper Heywood's *Thyestes***

Heywood's original preface to his 1560 translation of *Thyestes* emphasises the body as an element in the process of translation. The preface takes the form of a dream vision in which the ghost of Seneca visits Heywood and demands him to translate his work:

And here I come to seeke some one  
that might renewe my name  
And make me speake in straunger speche  
and sette my woorks to sight,  
And skanne my verse in other tongue  
then I was woont to wright (99).

For Heywood the act of translation is a physical one, involving the material organs of eyes and tongues, not merely the actions of reading and writing. This process of translation comes to fully affect Heywood when he awakes from his dream and finds himself alone, to which he cries out to the furious muse Megaera to help him in his task of translating *Thyestes*:

Enspyre my pen: with pensyvenes  
this Tragedie t'endyght,  
And as so dredfull a thnyg beseemes,  
with dolefull style to wryght.  
This sayd, I felte the furies force  
enflame me more and more,  
And ten tymes more how chafte I was  
then ever yet before.

My heare stoode up, I waxed woode,  
my synewes all did shake,  
And as the furye had me vext,  
my teeth began to ake.  
And thus enflamde with force of hir,  
I said it shoulde be doon,  
And downe I sate with pen in hande,  
and thus my verse begoon (120).

Heywood's experience of poetic inspiration is an embodied — and painful — experience. His catalogue of bodily symptoms includes not only supernatural effects (his hair on end), but also symptoms of illness (shaking sinews and aching teeth). This preface foreshadows the attention to the body found throughout Heywood's translation of *Thyestes*. As Heywood's preface suggests, the only way that the 'doleful style' of this 'dreadful' tragedy can be translated successfully is by embodying it fully and, by doing so, Heywood affects a similar response in his audience — much like the affective power of the staged corpses.<sup>23</sup>

The destructive nature of the corpse is established in Seneca through the account of the ritual sacrifice of Thyestes' sons and it is here that Heywood focuses his most elaborate additions. The messenger relates the events as he witnessed them to the Chorus and the audience and describes how 'deck'd are the altars' (62), how the children's heads 'about he bound with purple bands' (64), how 'There wanted no frankincense, nor yet the holy wine, / Nor knife to cut the sacrifice' (65–66), in fact 'no rites were left of sacrifice undone' (73). Despite all these careful preparations, Atreus' sacrifice is a mocked one. The Chorus asks the messenger, 'who doth his hand on sword then set?' (69), and they are surprised when they learn that it is Atreus who takes the sacrifice of his nephews upon himself, as no god or oracle has ordained it:

He is himself the priest and he himself the deadly verse  
With prayer dire for mouth doth sing and oft rehearse

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<sup>23</sup> Accord to early modern literature on the passions, like Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), feelings of fear were contagious: 'Men, if they but see another man tremble, giddy, or sick of some fearful disease, their apprehensions of fear is so strong, that they will have the same disease' (I.2.3.5). For more on early modern concepts of embodiment and contagion of fear, see Allison Hobgood's recent essay, 'Feeling Fear in *Macbeth*' in *Shakespearean Sensations: Experiencing Literature in Early Modern England* ed. by Katharine A. Craik and Tanya Pollard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 29–46.

And he at th'altar stands himself; he them assign'd to die  
Doth handle, in order set and to the knife apply (79).

This use of 'rehearse' is Heywood's own addition to the text (Seneca uses '*canit*' — sings). Daadler notes that it is 'likely a pun on "re-hearse," viz. "repeatedly bury with funeral rites"' (*Thyestes* 61 n.70). However, Daadler misses the very clear performance aspects of the word.<sup>24</sup> Heywood views Atreus' ritual sacrifice not only as a gross imitation of a holy rite — but also as a *theatrical performance*. In fact, much of *Thyestes* is a metatheatrical performance that focuses upon the body: the bodies of the children become the props of spectacular ritual sacrifice, as they later become the stage props in his revenge-tragedy. Heywood's addition of 'rehearse' emphasises the blasphemous nature of Atreus' actions and calls attention to the perverse manipulation of religion for private motives.

Seneca's messenger continues the detailed account as to how Atreus kills each of Thyestes' three sons and Heywood consistently alters the text to emphasize the active agency of the corpses. For example, in the original Seneca:

... *educato stetit*  
*ferro cadaver, cumque dubitasset div*  
*hac parte an illa caderet, in patrum cadit*<sup>25</sup>

[...When the sword was pulled out the corpse still stood erect; after long hesitation whether to fall this way or that, it fell upon his uncle]

Meanwhile, in Heywood's translation Atreus, 'gripping fast/ His throat in hand, he thrust him through' and then removes the sword from the boy so that:

...long the body had upheld itself in doubtful stay  
Which was to *fall*, at length upon the uncle down it *falls*...

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<sup>24</sup> According to the *OED*, 'rehearse' as a transitive verb meaning 'to recite or repeat aloud in a formal manner' was in use since the fourteenth century. However, the use of the word to connote a preparation for a formal, public performance became current around the same time as Heywood's translation.

<sup>25</sup> Seneca, *Tragedies*, vol. II, trans. by John G Fitch (Cambridge, MA: Loeb Classical Library, 2004), pp. 217–325 (ll. 723–25). All subsequent quotations from Seneca come from Vol. I (2002) or Vol. II (2004) and will be referenced parenthetically.

The carcass *headlong falls* to the ground:  
A piteous thing to see (80, my emphases).

The repetition of ‘falls’, not found as frequently in the original — along with Heywood’s ironic addition of ‘headlong’ — is an alteration of Seneca’s original wording, ‘the head rolled away’, which intensifies the dramatic movement of the corpse.<sup>26</sup> Heywood also includes the sympathetic commentary, ‘a piteous thing to see’, that addresses the audience’s response to such an act. Heywood’s additions emphasise Seneca’s attention to both the corpses’ post-mortem efficacy as well as the ritualistic performance and, in so doing, connect the two: the corpses, because they are created via ritual, now contain and transmit ritual power and violence.

The messenger’s narration culminates in the horrific account of the boys’ disemboweling; the organs are viewed as a text to interpret — by examining the interiors of his victims Atreus hopes to discover his future. Seneca writes:

*erepta vivis exta pectoribus tremunt  
spirantque venae corque adhuc pavidum salit;  
at ille fibras tractat ac fata inspicit  
et adhuc calentes viscerum venas notat* (II: 755-58)

[Torn from the living breasts the entrails breathe, the heart beats in  
terror. But he handles the entrails and takes note of the still warm veins]

Since these entrails are objects of augury they possess an agency beyond their bodily function, an aspect of terror that Heywood explores even further in his translation:

From bosoms yet alive outdrawn the trembling bowels shakes,  
The veins yet breathe, the fearful heart doth yet both pant and quake:  
But he the strings doth turn in hand and destinies behold,  
And of the guts the signs each one doth view not fully cold (81).

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<sup>26</sup> Seneca reads: “*colla percuss amputat;/ cervice caesa truncus in pronum ruit,/ querulum cucurri murmure incerto caput*” (727–29).

For Heywood, the hearts are ‘fearful,’ they ‘pant’ and ‘quake’; the bowels ‘tremble’ and ‘shake.’ The disemboweled and dismembered bodies retain their autonomy; like the organs viewed as augury, these sacrifices to the ritual fire also have agency:

Some of the guts are broach’d, and in the fires that burn full slow  
They drop; the boiling liquor some doth tumble to and fro  
In mourning cauldron... The liver makes great noise upon the spit;  
Nor eas’ly wot I if the flesh or flames they be that cry  
But cry they do (81–82).

For Heywood, the boys’ corpses ‘perform’; they ‘speak’ their pain: the liver making a noise on the fire causing either the flesh or the flames to ‘cry’ at the act. The children’s corpses become objects of violent sacrifice in the messenger’s account, and this accrued performative agency is recalled in the final scene when they later ‘appear’ as ‘wicked meat.’

Because the boys’ corpses are afforded such theatrical power off-stage, they continue to convey theatrical ‘presence’ on-stage. Before Atreus reveals the heads of Thyestes’ children at the banquet he calls attention to the absent, whole bodies of the dead boys: ‘Even in thine arms, thy children *present be/ For here they are and shall be here*; no part of them from thee/ Shall be withheld’ (89, my emphasis). Atreus not only builds dramatic tension for the eventual gruesome revelation, but he attends to the stage presence created by the physical absence of Thyestes’ children. It is the sons’ absence — and the audience’s awareness of their gruesome deaths and the nature of the feast — that fills the scene with the weight of their ‘presence.’ While the corpses of Thyestes’ sons are created linguistically through the messenger’s narration of their sacrifice in Act 4, their remains are spectacularly revealed in the final scene where they function as proof of the crime and property of the performance. Once Thyestes realises what has become of his sons, he continues to describe their mutilated state: ‘Their heads cut off, and hands off torn, I from their bodies see,/ And wrenched feet from broken thighs I here behold again’ (89). Here — unlike the messenger’s account — the linguistic description is experienced and expressed at the same time as the physical representation of the corpses’ heads are displayed on stage. The on-stage theatrical corpses of the children embody the off-stage performance of torture and now serve as conduits for chaos and horror.

The result of this simultaneous narration and visualisation is Thyestes' own annihilation and fragmentation, which requires Heywood to amend an additional scene to the original play. Heywood's wholly original final scene draws upon similar endings in Seneca, such as those found in *Oedipus* and *Hippolytus*, where characters express the wish to be part of the underworld and receive appropriate punishment for their crimes. For Heywood, the additional scene emphasises the body as the site of monstrosity thereby extending the horrors of the Thyestean feast. In his lamentation, Thyestes repeatedly draws attention to his body as 'a more than monstrous womb, / That is of his unhappy brood, become a cursed tombe' (94). Thyestes invites the 'foulest fiends of Hell' as well as his grandfather Tantalus to 'come see these gluttoned guts of mine,' 'my paunch is now replete with food,' 'my belly is extent,' 'my growing gutts,' eventually praying that 'filthy fowles and snawing gripes' will use their 'clinchin' claws' to tear at his 'monstrous maw' and 'gluttoned gorge' (94). Heywood's final scene increases the horrors of the banquet by revealing the destructive monstrosity not only of Thyestes' act of eating his children, but also of his grotesque body.

Heywood develops the verbal and visual tensions that are nascent in Seneca's original text. While A. J. Boyle views Heywood's additional scene as an attempt by the translator to 'multiply revenge' as it heralds the vengeance to come, he also declares the added scene to be 'decidedly un-Senecan' as it moves towards an ending of 'moral order and social reintegration... indicating a concern to return the audience to the more comforting world of conventional morality and law'.<sup>27</sup> Norland seems to agree with Boyle's view, as he sees Heywood's modification as an imposition of a 'Christian perspective of retributive justice'.<sup>28</sup> However, while Heywood's elaboration of the Senecan text may not be 'Senecan,' it *is* decidedly early modern in that it embellishes the theatrical efficacy of Seneca's corpses. In doing so, Heywood focuses upon the agency of the boys' corpses by extending their influence beyond their existence as narrative objects and asserting their presence in the banquet scene when they are revealed to their father. This enhancement by Heywood illustrates the early modern translator's sensitivity to what is implicit in Seneca: the corpses' performative power as achieved through the tension of verbal narration and visual presentation.

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<sup>27</sup> Boyle, pp. 180 and 184.

<sup>28</sup> Norland, 'Adapting', p. 147.

## Expounding ‘the dark sense of the Poet’: Studley’s *Phaedra*

Studley’s translation of Seneca’s ‘most ruthless tragedy,’ *Phaedra* (or *Hippolytus*) offers several salient additions and original elaborations to the violated corpse. For example, the messenger details the destruction of Hippolytus’ body by Poseidon’s sea-bull:

His blood begoes the ground:  
And ding’d agaynst the rugged rocks his head doth oft rebound:  
The brambles rent his haled hayre: the edged flinty stones,  
The beauty batter of his Face, and breake his crashing bones:  
At Mouth his blaring tongue hangs out with squeased eyne out  
dasht,  
His Jawes and Skull doe crack, abrode his spurting Braynes are  
pasht (176).

Studley’s translation of *Phaedra* contains the first occurrence of the word ‘pasht,’ a variation of the word ‘pashed,’ meaning ‘crushed; smashed.’ It also appears in his translation of Seneca’s *Medea*: ‘Leave not thy hovering hande to strike with firey flake / Upon my pasht and crushed corpse’ (26).<sup>29</sup> In both cases the word is explicitly associated with the annihilation of the corpse. This annihilation is also figured rhetorically within the messenger’s narration both in the original Latin and in Studley’s translation, as body parts are transformed from nouns (‘his head,’ ‘his hayre,’ ‘his Face,’ ‘mouth,’ ‘Jawes and Skull,’) into modified nouns, (such as ‘blaring tongue,’ ‘squeased eyne’ and ‘spurting Braynes’), connoting violent action. As the account progresses, this narrative of dismemberment continues:

His cursed beauty thus desoiled with many wound is spent:  
The jotting wheels do grind his guts, and drenched limbs they rent.  
At length a stake with trunchion burnt his ripped paunch hath caught,  
From rived groin to the navel stead with his womb it raught,  
The cart upon his master paused against the ground and crushed.  
The phillies stuck within the wounds, and out at length they rushed:  
So both delay and Master’s limbs are broke by stress of wheels:

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<sup>29</sup> The word also occurs in Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida*: ‘waving his beam, / Upon the pashèd corpses of the Kings’. See William Shakespeare, *The Complete Works*, ed. by Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2007), pp. 1456–1535. (5.5.10).

His dragling guts then trail about the winching horses heels.  
They thumping with their horny Hooves against his Belly kick,  
From bursten Paunch on heapes his blouddy bowels jumble thick (176).

Overall, the messenger's narratives in both Seneca and Studley's translation contain vivid action, serving to verbally fracture Hippolytus' body with the repetition of 'his' emphasizing that Hippolytus is only referred to in association with body parts ('his guts,' 'his womb,' etc.), each of which is systematically destroyed. However, this violent destruction is emphatically extended in Studley when Hippolytus' corpse is brought on stage at the start of the final act.

While in Seneca's play Phaedra languishes upon the corpse, Studley supplements Seneca's original treatment of Phaedra's mourning and the presence of the corpse by augmenting Phaedra's lament over the dead Hippolytus; Studley adds approximately twenty lines to her character. But more than mere extension, Studley's elaborations emphasise the physicality of the two bodies on stage both visually — as Phaedra throws herself upon the body — and verbally as she directs her speech at the corpse: 'Sweete Hippolytus, thus I behold thy battered face' (179). In her final moments on stage, Phaedra continues to narrate the dismemberment of Hippolytus, in spite of the corpse's gruesome presence on stage: 'lims so torne,' 'rackt and rent' (179). While Seneca does have Phaedra offer to kill herself, Studley inserts his own physical details regarding her desire to substitute Hippolytus' body with her own. Studley adds:

Lo here I am content, to yeelde thee mine with bloody knife.  
If ghost may here be given for ghost, and breath may serve for breath,  
Hippolytus take thou my soule, and come againe from death.  
*Behold my bowles yet are safe my lims in lusty plight,*  
Would God that as they serve for me, thy body serve they might,  
*Mine eies* to render kindly light until thy Carkasse ded,  
Lo for thy use *this hand of mine* shall pluck them from my hed,  
And set them in these empty cells and vacant holes of thine (180).

Phaedra's reaction to Hippolytus' mangled remains — like Thyestes' response to eating his butchered sons — is self-annihilation. The theatrical corpse, once brought on stage, maintains the destructive potential it collected in its off-stage narrative existence. Phaedra directs attention to her 'safe bowles' and her 'lims in lusty plight' in contrast to Hippolytus'



mangled 'Carkasse'. She offers to dismember herself in order to bring him back to life: to rip out her heart, to donate her eyes. The linguistic organ transplant juxtaposes the whole body of Phaedra with the fractured body of Hippolytus, emphasising the power of the on-stage theatrical corpse to engender annihilation.

This juxtaposition is sustained when Phaedra eventually kills herself over the corpse of Hippolytus. While the remainder of the act is concerned with the state and disposal of Hippolytus' corpse, there are two bodies on stage: Phaedra's intact body and Hippolytus' mangled remains; both visually challenge the integrity of the body after death. As Theseus orders that his son's body be reassembled, the visual contrast of the intact corpse with the fractured corpse contributes to the denial of dramatic resolution that closes the play. In Seneca, Hippolytus' mangled state makes it difficult for Theseus to recognize his son:

*Huc, huc, reliquias vehite cari corporis  
pondusque et artus temere congestos date.  
Hippolytus hic est? (I:1247–1249)*

[Here, here, are the remains of that dear body; that mass of limbs heaped heavily together, give them to me. Is this Hippolytus?]

However, in Studley's translation of Seneca, Theseus is more sure of his son:

The shreadings of this deare beloved carkasse bring to mee,  
His mangled members hether bring on heapes that tombled be:  
This is Hippolytus (182).

'This is Hippolytus' expresses with certainty that the 'shreaded' 'carkasse' is indeed a person. Echoing an epitaph, Theseus's statement asserts how the young man will be remembered and interred. Yet Theseus' vision of a unified, and recognisable Hippolytus must be a constructed memory since he must first *physically* reconstruct his son's body:

These scattered scraps of body torne. O Syre in order set,  
The straying gobbetts bring agayne, here was his right hand set:  
His left hand here instructed well to rule the reigns must be.  
His left side ribs... as yet alas are lost and wanting still

I doubt if this of thee be piece, a piece it is of thee:  
Here, lay it here, in the empty place, here let it be lay'd be.  
Although perhaps it lie not right:  
(aye me) is this thy face? (183)

Like Seneca, Studley's Theseus attempts to rejoin 'the straying gobbetts' of Hippolytus despite the physical depiction of the dismembered corpse on stage. However, in a deviation from Seneca's text, Studley inserts 'here' repeatedly, indicating that the pieces are scattered. This repetition also serves as instructions to others to gather the pieces of his son, thereby reconstructing the 'scene' of the crime — 'his left hand here instructed well to rule the reigns' — hoping that if he recognises the parts, he will understand the whole. However, the end of the play never realises an intact Hippolytus. Despite both Phaedra's and Theseus' insistence on identifying the mangled corpse as Hippolytus, the final image of a stage littered with body parts furthers the idea that the image of the violated corpse will never be successfully reintegrated into the imagination of the audience.

Studley's translation of *Hippolytus* fixates upon the physicality of the corpse by calling attention to its mutilated state and emphasizing its disfigurement. The messenger's account of Hippolytus' dismemberment repeatedly engages the mind to visualise the whole body slaughtered and scattered into fragments; however, once the corpse — in its mangled state — is revealed on stage Studley continues to emphasise its fractured nature by juxtaposing the intact body of Phaedra with the disjointed corpse of Hippolytus. While such attention to the corpse is inherent in the original text, Studley extends such awareness resulting in an investment in the theatrical corpses' power to perform. Studley's impulse for such elaboration betrays an early modern fascination with the power of the corpse's physical presence on stage. Studley is interested in emphasising the corpse's mutilated state and how its presence affects the other characters, resulting in either their own annihilation or in their failed attempts at reconstruction.

### **'Seneca...must needs die to our Stage': Exhuming Seneca's Corpus**

Writing in the late 1580s, Thomas Nashe describes contemporary playwrights as 'triviall translators' who do nothing more than copy the 'tragicall speeches' out of Seneca. He supposes that while 'English Seneca read by Candlelight yields many good sentences,' it results in 'swelling bombast of bragging blank verse.' Nashe objects to 'vaine glorious

Tragedians' who borrow from Seneca's corpus, arguing that, 'The Sea exhaled by droppes will in continuance bee drie, and Seneca, let blood line by line and page by page, at length must needs die to our Stage.'<sup>30</sup> It is decidedly *Senecan* that Nashe envisions his contemporaries' appropriation of Seneca as a slow, methodical bloodletting that leaves the Roman poet's drained corpse upon the stage.

According to Michael Neill, revenge tragedies — more than any other genre — speak to the 'anxieties produced by the painful transformation in relations with the dead' that occurred as a result of the Reformation.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, as Thomas Rist observes, revenge tragedy of the early modern period 'regularly enacts remembrances of the dead, drawing attention to the period's change in religious practice and deriving significance from them thereby.'<sup>32</sup> Neill's famous argument over the culture's 'anxiety of ending' points to the various ways in which writers — notably playwrights — delay endings because the end is 'what the tragic dramatist most wishes to bring about, but it is also what... he most dreads; it is both the end of his writing and the very thing it wishes to defer.'<sup>33</sup> I add to this that the active, dramatic corpses, first depicted in Seneca and then in English translations of Heywood and Studley, are a means to delay the inevitable death of the body and extend the potency of the theatre. In this way, Seneca's corpses in translation prefigure the early modern theatrical corpse not only as an important element of dramaturgy, but also as a device for articulating the body's capacity for action and meaning after death. The corpses found in these translations provide a material efficacy that is later appropriated for spectacular theatrical effect by playwrights such as Kyd, Shakespeare, Middleton, and Webster. Additionally, Newton's anthology serves as a testament to the contentious attitudes over the status of the dead body during the period.<sup>34</sup> In so doing, the English translations of Seneca's tragedies published in Newton's *Seneca His Tenne Tragedies* offer scholars a rich site to excavate the foundations of the corpse's performative power.

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<sup>30</sup> Ronald B. McKerrow (ed.), *The Works of Thomas Nashe*, 5 vols. (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, Ltd., 1904–10) 3: pp. 315–16

<sup>31</sup> Michael Neill, *Issues of Death: Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 245.

<sup>32</sup> Thomas Rist, *Revenge Tragedy and the Drama of Commemoration in Reforming England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), p. 6.

<sup>33</sup> Neill, p. 204.

<sup>34</sup> It is notable that the anthology includes Heywood — a Catholic forced to leave Oxford for Rome, where he became a Jesuit priest. He returned to England on a Jesuit mission in 1581 — the same year his translations were reprinted by Newton. Like Heywood, Studley was forced to leave his studies because of his religious affiliation — he left Cambridge because of his Calvinistic views.