

## SHAKESPEARE AND SENECA TRAGEDY

Shakespeare's tragic characters have often been seen as forerunners of modern personhood. It has been assumed that Shakespeare was able to invent such lifelike figures in part because of his freedom from the restrictions of classical form. Curtis Perry instead argues that characters such as Hamlet and King Lear have seemed modern to us in part because they are so robustly connected to the tradition of Senecan tragedy. Resituating Shakespearean tragedy in this way – as backward looking as well as forward looking – makes it possible to recover a crucial political dimension. Shakespeare saw Seneca as a representative voice from post-republican Rome: in plays such as *Coriolanus* and *Othello* he uses Senecan modes of characterization to explore questions of identity in relation to failures of republican community. This study has important implications for the way we understand character, community, and alterity in early modern drama.

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CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press & Assessment  
978-1-108-79161-8 — Shakespeare and Senecan Tragedy  
Curtis Perry  
Frontmatter  
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Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom  
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA  
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103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

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[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)  
Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781108791618](http://www.cambridge.org/9781108791618)

DOI: 10.1017/9781108866316

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First published 2021  
First paperback edition 2022

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

ISBN	978-1-108-49617-9	Hardback
ISBN	978-1-108-79161-8	Paperback

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## *Acknowledgments*

The first time I ever read a word of Seneca was in the context of an introductory class I was teaching on the history of drama as an assistant professor at Arizona State University in ca. 1995–1996. I remember the shock of that encounter vividly, and I am still grateful to the superb students who shared it with me as well as to E. F. Watling, whose elegant translation of *Thyestes* made it possible. This book would not have happened had not that initial encounter with Senecan tragedy rearranged everything I thought I knew about Shakespeare and early modern tragedy.

In terms of material, institutional support: the composition of this book started during teaching-release time provided by the Department of English and the College of LAS at the University of Illinois in ca. 2006–2007, and a funded sabbatical some time later was absolutely instrumental in getting me back into the book after a longish stint as an administrator. Research funding provided by the university has also facilitated the project in innumerable ways. No less importantly, I have been very fortunate in my early-modernist colleagues at both ASU and UIUC. I have learned from all of them in ways that are obvious to me in the book I have written: Jean Brink, Cora Fox, Catharine Gray, Robert Markley, Feisal Mohamed, Lori Humphrey Newcomb, Andrea Stevens, Scott Manning Stevens, Ayanna Thompson, and Melissa Walter. Ayanna, in particular, read several chapters in draft and made some crucial suggestions that significantly changed the course of my own research and argumentation for the better. This would have been a much less ambitious project without a push from her. Others who read chapters in progress and offered valuable feedback include Lauren Goodlad, Patrick Fadely, and John Watkins, as well as three exceptionally cogent and diligent anonymous readers for the press. I am very grateful to the UIUC Classics Department, too, for being so consistently welcoming and collegial to this oddball from across the quad.

In addition to workshopping papers related to my evolving thinking about Seneca and early modern drama at a great number of conferences

over the years, I have had the privilege of presenting aspects of this book's argument at mini-conferences on research topics relevant to its focus held at Cambridge University, Harvard, and UIUC. I have also presented aspects of this argument at Harvard's Mahindra Humanities Center, at Northeastern University, and as a plenary speaker at the annual Ohio Valley Shakespeare Conference in 2016. I am very grateful to the colleagues who arranged these events and extended invitations to me: Antony Augoustakis, Erica Boeck, Clara Bosak-Schroeder, Patrick Cheney, Philip Hardie, Coppélia Kahn, Carol Mejia-LaPerle, Rhodri Lewis, Angeliki Tzanetou, and Brian Walters. The conversations that have happened around these talks and conferences have been sustaining and improving. I am also conscious over the years of having benefitted enormously from the intelligence and generosity of a large community of scholars – locally, at conferences, and on Twitter (hello there, Twepys!). There are literally hundreds of people to whom I am personally grateful, therefore, for engaging with my ideas or for sharing their own at key moments along the way. I hope you know who you are.

An earlier version of part of Chapter 3 was published as “Seneca and the Modernity of *Hamlet*,” *Illinois Classical Studies* 40.2 (2015): 407–429. I'd like to thank Angeliki Tzanetou, who edited that issue, for providing the opportunity, for editing my work, and for generally being a wonderful and supportive colleague. Some pieces of my chapter on “Seneca and English Political Culture” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Age of Shakespeare* (R. Malcolm Smuts, ed. [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016], 306–321) are repurposed in Chapter 5 here. Malcolm was an exemplary editor, and that superb volume is well worth careful attention from front to back as a result. I am also grateful to Scott Garner for his valiant, emergency indexing help!

My mom, Ruth Perry, would undoubtedly have read chapters had I allowed her to, but alas I am still too much of an adolescent for that. She is the very model of energetic generosity, and I try to live up to that spirit in my own way every day. I would also like to acknowledge here the people who have lived most closely with me during this project's long, slow development. They are my kids, Vikram and Roshan, and my wife, Jaya. I can be obsessive and solipsistic, especially when I'm trying to write, and the completion of this project owes as much to their steadying and loving patience with me as to my own talent for self-isolating perseverance. I love you guys, and you know that.

## *Note on Texts*

When quoting from unedited early modern texts, I have silently modernized i/j and u/v, including in titles. In some cases, I have consulted copies of early modern books in the University of Illinois Rare Book and Manuscript Library, but in most cases I have consulted the copies of early modern books available online via the *Early English Books Online* database (<https://search.proquest.com/eebo/index>).

References to the OED are drawn from the online version of the *Oxford English Dictionary*: [www.oed.com/](http://www.oed.com/).

Unless otherwise noted, all quotations and references to Shakespeare's texts come from the second edition of *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works* (Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, *et al.* eds., [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005]). Citations referring to this text will be given parenthetically throughout.

For the Roman writers I engage with throughout this book – Seneca, of course, but also Cicero, Ovid, and Virgil, I use both the Latin text and the English translation from the following Loeb Classical Library volumes unless otherwise noted, and citations will be given parenthetically:

- Cicero, *De Officiis*, trans., Walter Miller, Loeb Classical Library 30 (1913, rpt. edition, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).  
 Ovid, *Heroides. Amores*, trans., Grant Showerman, rev. G. P. Goold, Loeb Classical Library 41 (2nd edition, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977).  
 Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 2 vols., trans., Frank Justus Miller, rev. G. P. Goold, Loeb Classical Library 42&43 (rev. editions, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977, 2004).  
 Ovid, *Tristia. Ex Ponto*, trans., A. L. Wheeler, rev. G. P. Goold, Loeb Classical Library 151 (rev. edition, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996).  
 Seneca, *Epistles*, trans., Richard M. Gummere, 3 vols., Loeb Classical Library 75–77 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1917–1925).  
 Seneca, *Moral Essays*, trans., John W. Basore, 3 vols., Loeb Classical Library 214, 254, 310 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1928–1935).



Seneca, *Natural Questions*, trans., Thomas H. Corcoran, 2 vols., Loeb Classical Library 450, 457 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971–1972).

Seneca, *Tragedies*, ed. and trans., John G. Fitch, 2 vols., Loeb Classical Library 62, 78 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002–2004).

Virgil, *Eclogues. Georgics. Aeneid: Books 1–6*, trans., H. Rushton Fairclough, Loeb Classical Library 63 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1916).

Virgil, *Aeneid: Books 7–12. Appendix Vergiliana*, trans., H. Rushton Fairclough, Loeb Classical Library 64 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1918).